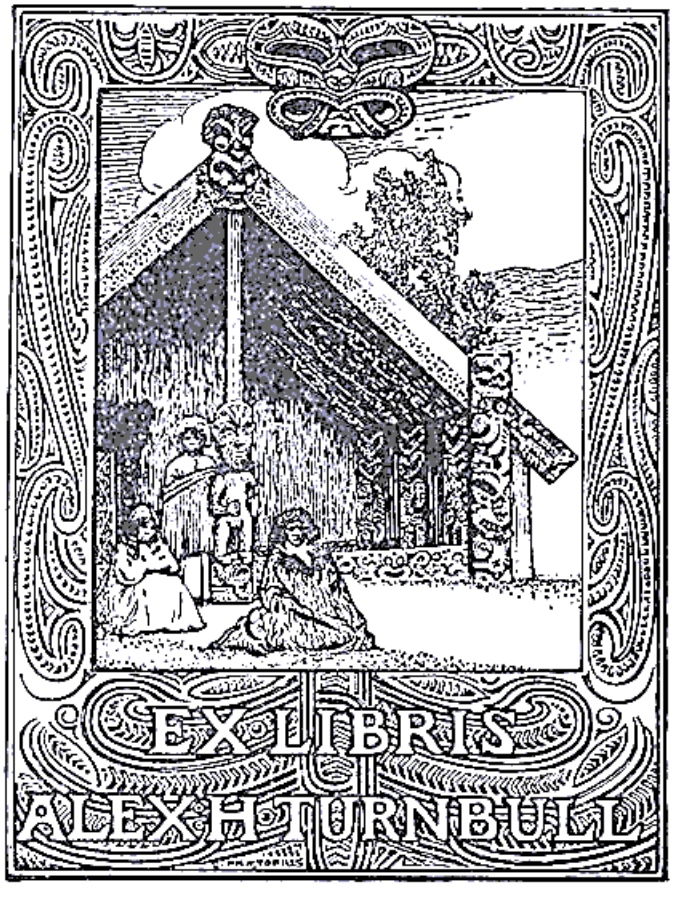
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By Passion Driven.

a Story of a WASTED LIFE.

BY

GILBERT BOOK

J. WILKIE & Co., DUNFERMLINE.

By Passion Driven:

A STORY OF A WASTED LIFE.

BY

GILBERT ROCK.

"Misled by fancy's meteor ray,
By passion driven."

—BURNS.

Dunedin, N.Z.:
J. WILKIE & CO., PRINTERS, STATIONERS, &c., PRINCES STREET.

1888.

Ruby Howard

TO

THE COLONIAL PRESS,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF

KIND ENCOURAGEMENT.

Wellington

INCIDENTS.

"Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are."

—George Eliot.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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A TALE OF AUSTRALIA.

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CHAPTER I.

Oh sea! I love to hear thy voice
When all around is still;
Thou speakest such a diverse tone:
To mortal ears thou leav'st unknown
The purpose of the will,
That makes thy heart rejoice.

Oh sea! the secrets of thy breast
Are yet unknown to man;
Thy vast and never-ageing face,
That smiles or frowns throughout the space
Of universal span,
Is fraught with strong unrest.

Oh sea! I fain would learn the tale
Hid in thy inmost heart.
I hear thy voice, but cannot know
The thoughts that move thee to and fro:
Nor does thy face impart
The story of thy wail.

Oh sea! thy wonders all supreme
Are in thy bosom deep;
But still I see thy marv'lous power.
Thy constant course from hour to hour,
At Nature's laws I peep,
And praise becomes my theme.

"Come, Harry, make haste, or we shall miss this tram!"

These words were spoken in a tone which indicated full consciousness of the fact that the speaker had performed the extraordinary feat of "dressing" in less time than her companion of the opposite sex, and was now standing waiting for him, pulling on her gloves as she spoke.

Harry Williams was on a visit to his Uncle and Aunt Bruce in Dunedin, and on this particular afternoon had arranged to take his cousins Lizzie and Flora to the beach at St. Clair.

Lizzie, the speaker who sought to hasten her cousin's coming, was the younger of the sisters, but in general was put before her elder sister, she being a tall, handsome girl, full of life and spirit, fond of all kinds of fun, not without some of the reputation of a flirt, and not anxious to deserve a better. As she stood in the hall performing the last act which completed her preparation for the outing, she was a perfect picture of the health and loveliness characteristic of New Zealand girls, and gave the observer every indication that she possessed that independence of character and capacity for taking care of herself to which the majority of colonial maidens can justly lay claim.

Flora was almost the antithesis of her sister. Older by four years, she was "the baby" when Mr. and Mrs. Bruce arrived in Dunedin, nearly twenty years ago. Somewhat diminutive in stature as compared with her sister, and extremely staid and elderly in all her ways, she had earned the *sobriquet* of "mother" amongst her companion school-fellows, which, now that she had more scope for the exercise of motherly attributes, did not seem much out of place in its application. Although not exactly delicate, she gave the impression of having been the subject of more than one attack of illness. Flora showed not the slightest desire for active amusement, and nothing delighted her more than to get away to her own room, where she could pass the afternoon alone with a book.

The inclination to seek solitary perusals of the latest successful novel, or the last number of a fashionable journal, is one to which most young girls are extremely prone—one, too, of which insufficient parental notice is taken. The

inclination soon becomes a habit destructive of all desire for more profitable reading, even injurious to health, and interfering with the proper training of mind and body in the more useful and important duties of life. When the excursion to St. Clair was planned, Flora had been found hard at work with a periodical called *Week by Week*, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she could be persuaded to lay it aside and join her sister and cousin in their holiday. Long before Lizzie's voice was heard, Flora had completed all she thought necesssry in her apparel, and resumed her reading.

Harry lost no time in joining his companion after the warning she had given.

"Here I am; but where is Flora? Is she not coming after all?"

Lizzie ran off, and soon returned with her sister.

"Surely you're not going to take that rubbish out to the beach with you?" said Harry, on seeing Flora still clinging to the much-prized journal.

"Oh! yes I am; and I'm going to read it, too."

"Well, I never saw such a girl; think of the insult you offer to Nature in preferring such company to the grandeur she unfolds before you at the seaside. But come, let us be off, or Lizzie will be deprived of another half-hour at the beach."

The cousins then hurried down to the tram, and were just in time to get seats in the 2.45, by which they reached St. Clair half-an-hour later. The day was all that could be desired for such an excursion—calm and mild as only a Dunedin autumn afternoon can be.

St. Clair, whither the cousins went, had only lately become a fashionable Saturday afternoon promenade. It was a lovely spot at the extreme south-western end of a long open beach. Sheltered by high hills and a rugged,

jutting cliff, the few houses lately erected there nestled snugly at the foot of the slope, free from the keen south-west breezes of the locality. Distant about three miles from Dunedin, and connected by a line of horse-tramway, it had become a favourite summer resort. Shortly before the occasion with which we are interested, a swimming bath had been hewn out of the rock, over which the sea washed at high water, and being self-supplying and freshened by every flow of the tide, this bath had become much frequented by swimmers and those desirous of learning the art. The promotion of some swimming tournaments by the local refreshment vendors had added to the popularity of the pastime, and increased the crowds who flocked to the seaside on holiday excursions.

The beach, on the arrival of the cousins, presented a somewhat animated appearance. It was ebb tide, and the sands were crowded with children skipping about and running in and out of the water, to the no small amusement, and sometimes consternation, of their mothers and nurses.

The bath, too, was liberally patronised, while a considerable number of loungers were gathered upon the rocks overlooking it, indulging in a peep at Nature unadorned, and passing opinions on the merits of the different swimmers. It was remarkable to see so many ladies, who would blush to be accused of peeping at a bare ankle or uncovered calf, calmly gazing at the numerous bathers arrayed only in the scantiest of bathing trunks. But such was the fact there disclosed, and such too is a very important fact in human history, that acts which in the individual are looked upon as wrong or reprehensible, become fashionable in the mass, and lose all the attributes of ill. A solitary murder sets all the nation astir with feelings of horror and dismay, while we quietly read in our morning paper, without the slightest interference with our

appetite, of whole battalions being slaughtered to uphold a paltry sentiment, or of thousands of human beings butchering each other without understanding or even enquiring the cause of the strife.

"One murder makes a villain, millions a hero.
Princes are privileged to kill, and numbers sanctify the crime."

Union serves to display the strength and virtues of mankind, but it also tends to exaggerate their weaknesses and to exhibit traits that the individual would strive hard to hide. This was the direction of Harry's thoughts as he silently accompanied his cousins along the path which leads round the cliff to the picturesque beach beyond the St. Clair bath. Here the cousins sought out and seated themselves upon a jutting rock, which enabled them to get close down to the breakers, so that each succeeding wave seemed to break its strength nearer and nearer to the spot on which they sat. A few minutes of delightful silence followed—silence, at least so far as they were concerned; for talking seems an idle pleasure when accompanied by the roar of the restless ocean, or the continual splashing and turning of the tide.

"See, girls," said Harry, presently, pointing to a rock on the right, "watch how the waves break over that corner," and for some moments longer the three sat silently contemplating the grand rush of water down the sides of an isolated rock over which every second or third wave larger than its fellows dashed with majestic strength, as if conscious of its resistless force.

"Well, Flo, are you not wasting time neglecting your book for this idle pleasure?"

She blushed, and seemed lost in thought. Lizzie answered for her.

"Oh! 'mother' has moments of delightful dreamy-do-

nothingness which almost fit her for a philosopher. You must leave her to herself, but," she added with a mischievous smile, "you have me to talk to."

Harry good-naturedly took the hint.

"Very well, tell me what are your usual thoughts by the seaside?"

"Oh! I don't know. All sorts," Lizzie replied, laughing.

"But surely you must have some that constantly recur in the association of the waves and the beach."

"Well, yes, there are some, I suppose. I generally think of delightful afternoon holidays gathering shells and seaweed, and rambling over cliffs and rocks."

"Yes, and what more?"

"And of crowds of happy children playing on the sandy beach."

"Yes."

"And of the great number of ships and steamers, and ——and——and——" seeing Harry watching her—"Oh! how tiresome you are. Do you want me to say, 'I wonder where all the water comes from, and how much salt it takes to keep it fresh?'"

"Well, no, not exactly that," said Harry, quietly. "Salt for keeping the water fresh is something like a 'bull.' But pardon my seeming persistency," he continued; "there are some thoughts that always rise in my mind at the seaside, and I wished to know if you shared any of them."

"Tell us some of them," said Flora, who had been a silent listener for the last few minutes, and appeared to take a peculiar interest in Harry's words and to understand his manner.

"I don't know that they are worth listening to," he said; "but I often think that to the reflective mind the ocean is fraught with messages, and that community wit

Nature is most perfect by the seaside. Why can we not see in every wave tidings from friends on other shores, and follow the great moving water from the time it licked the sands of distant countries that hold those most dear to us, until we receive its greetings by our own sea-beach? Although we cannot join hands across the ocean, we must recognise that a stretch of water seems to link us more intimately with friends beyond the seas, and makes us feel more within their reach than we should with the same distance of land between us. It may be that this is only an idea grown up in association with the progress of our navigation, or identified with our constant commerce on the sea; but when we go on a sea voyage we find ourselves so comfortably housed, that, forgetting our surroundings, we can feel perfectly at home. Then, think what grand ideas the sea itself gives rise to! Do we not see in its every movement a majestic embodiment of conscious power? See with what grandeur of silent force it seems to throw its mighty arms in an encircling embrace around the island of which this spot forms part, advancing and receding, as if conscious that it washes the shores of the proudest and most fertile country in civilization with the same freedom as it dashes against the most barren rock in the abode of barbarism, and deems itself not unworthy to hold fellowship with man in his grandest form of social life!"

"Why! Harry, how you talk? You have even made 'mother' lay down her book!"

Harry thus having his attention directed to Flora, saw that she had indeed been listening to his words, and finding herself made the centre of attraction, would fain have resumed her reading without remark. Had he been able to read her thoughts, or comprehend her inner consciousness, he would have learned that there was then awakening

in her young life a new existence—that there was springing up within her the mysterious feeling that there is some object of desire beyond ourselves which tends to purify and ennoble human nature, and which, while yet akin to the instincts of all animal life, forms the chief line of advance man shows over the other beings of creation. He would have seen that, unconsciously he had been the cause of aspirations in a young soul which, once kindled, burn with all-consuming fervour until realised or turned aside by a stronger passion. Seeing only, however, that she had been giving more than usual attention to what had been passing around her, and seemed now to be ashamed of the fact, his finer instincts prompted him not to regard her with curiosity, but to allow her to be the first to speak of her feelings.

Turning to Lizzie, he said that it was time for them to move homewards, whereupon she rose with the remark—

"Come, 'mother,' dreaming again! Shall we have to leave you with your book?"

Flora rose in silence, and, without appearing to look at them or to be interested in their doings, followed them closely for some distance along the path. After a moment or two, perceiving that Harry and Lizzie were engaged in conversation, she walked up by the side of the former as if more desirous of being close to him than of joining in the talk. In this way they reached the tram, and save for the attempt to sit between her companions on entering the car, in which she was foiled by Lizzie, Flora gave no outward evidence of being interested in their proceedings. A close observer might have seen, however, that while engaged with her book and pretending to read, she was eagerly bent on seeing and hearing all that passed between her sister and cousin.

CHAPTER II.

She never told her love;
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought;
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat, like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

—*Twelfth Night.*

When Flora arrived home she went at once to her own room, and casting herself upon her bed sobbed for fully ten minutes without once looking up; then she rose, and, standing before the mirror, exclaimed vehemently—

"No! she shall not! she must not! It has always been so. Lizzie has always come between me and everything that I wished for. She has always been the favoured one; but in this I mean to win. She shall not have Harry's love! He shall belong to me only. Do I not love him most? Have I not a mind fit to mate with his? Lizzie's a wild and frivolous girl, and shall not be his wife! Is it that she is taller and fairer than I that she must take away from me my love? No! I may not be her equal in stature, but I have that within me which says I'm fitter than she to be Harry's wife."

Then she cast herself again upon the bed, and burst out into a fresh fit of tears. Tears, the welling eloquence of a woman's soul, soon had a soothing effect on her mind. After a few minutes her sobbing ceased, and, rising calmly from the bed, she murmured, "Why should I give way thus? Is it by crying and passion that I shall win him?

For he must be mine! I must prove myself a woman, and not a silly, passionate girl. No! I must not show my feelings and allow Lizzie to gloat over my misery. Rather let me be up and doing to take advantage of every chance that comes to me. I must devise some plan to make him love me, and not let him fall a victim to the allurements Lizzie is throwing out for him."

Then she sat absorbed in thought, gazing intently at her image in the glass, and was found in that position some minutes later when the housemaid knocked at the door asking her to come to the evening meal.

Flora knew that she must not arouse curiosity by sending an excuse, and therefore lost no time in joining the family in the dining room, where she found them already seated at the table. Lizzie and Harry were sitting together, the latter occupying the place to which Flora was accustomed. Her first impulse was to ask her cousin to give up the seat, and thus enable her possibly to separate him and her sister, but it instantly occurred to her that this would be a noticeable exhibition of feeling, so she contented herself with the chair opposite Harry, but made no effort to join in the talk. The meal was particularly uninteresting to Flora, though her parents kept up a continual conversation, and even questioned Harry as to the afternoon at the beach. Lizzie was moderately talkative, and she and Harry seemed to be in the best of spirits, which only tended to increase Flora's annoyance, and make her if possible more morose. As soon as she could do so without attracting attention, she left the table and went at once to her room, where she sat communing with her own thoughts far into the night, even her book being for once entirely neglected.

After dinner Lizzie and Harry were left alone in the dining room, and for the first hour they spent the time at

the piano, Lizzie playing to her cousin such pieces as he cared to choose. She played her best, and did the utmost to please her cousin, for she felt instinctively that there were on his mind at that time thoughts of more than ordinary interest to her. We must not blame her, therefore, if at that critical moment she determined that anything she could do to avoid stemming the current of Harry's feelings and intentions with regard to herself should not be left undone. The usages of society as at present constituted prevent a young girl from openly avowing her affection for one of the opposite sex, and drive her to avail herself of every art that will cause the object of her attachment to reveal his mind. She is thus compelled to resort to many not overworthy devices in order to make it apparent to her lover that his advances will not be regarded as disagreeable. When it is not looked upon as unwomanly or improper for the sex whose interest in a good marriage is certainly equal to, if not greater than, that of the man's, and whose future life and happiness are more intimately bound up in the union, to make known the state of her feelings towards the object of her love; when the privileges now monopolised by the sterner sex shall be universally conceded to both; and when the years of youth and love shall be something more than one long season of leap years; then indeed will the marriage union be more often what it should be, "Two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one;" and the experience of mankind will excite feelings of wonder that men and women should so long have married and been given in marriage under a system which forbade one of the parties to proclaim her own wishes.

After Harry and Lizzie had spent some time as already indicated, it became inevitable that the thoughts upon their minds should seek an outlet. Lizzie was the first to

speak. Turning on the music stool, after playing an arrangements of airs from "Maritana," she said—

"Well, have you not had enough music?"

"Enough music!" he echoed. "Can we ever have enough? You remember the words of the Duke in the opening scene of 'Twelfth Night'? 'If music be the food of love, play on; give me excess of it, that surfeiting the appetite may sicken and so die."

"Yes, I remember," she rejoined, continuing the quotation, "'that strain again, it hath a dying fall.' But is music the food of love?" she enquired, archly.

"Undoubtedly it is. Do you not find that those who are passionately fond of music are always the fondest lovers? Why is the lover in history made to sigh out his soul through the harp or the guitar? Do we not see the same principle pervading all literature where the lover is almost invariably represented as bringing music to aid him in his pursuit of happiness?"

"Lovers are always in pursuit of happiness: you are quite right there. It is not happiness so long as the lover's desire is not gratified."

"True," Harry said; "hope is generally said to be more pleasant than realisation, but this seems to be a striking exception."

"Yes, but is the realisation of lovers' hopes not often less of happiness than their cherished expectations? But come, surely we are getting beyond our depth in this question." And Lizzie descended to the practical by enquiring bluntly, "What are you going to do to-morrow?"

"Much the same as I've done to-day," replied Harry, smiling; "to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, each day more pleasant than the other, until the hour comes for my return home."

"Oh! surely you're not thinking of going home yet?"

"Well, my holiday is nearly over; but tell me, Lizzie, will you be sorry when I go?"

"Why, yes, of course I shall."

"But will you miss me very much?" he said, coming closer to her on the sofa, an article of furniture which has been called one of the grandest aids to love-making that art has produced.

Lizzie did not reply at once, but when the answer came, a simple "Yes," whispered with downcast eyes, and accompanied by the sweetest of blushes, it was not surprising that Harry came still closer to her, and took her hand in his before he spoke again.

"And would you long for my return?" he enquired, as if determined to push to the utmost the advantage he had gained.

"Yes, I think I should," Lizzie said softly, seeking to withdraw the hand which her cousin held.

"Lizzie, do you think you could always look forward to my coming—that you could expect me to come some day after which we should always be together, that I should be the one to share your journey through life—the one for you to lean upon at all times? Tell me, Lizzie darling, may I be that one?"

The answer came softly, nothing more than a whisper inaudible to all but lovers' ears; but what it meant was not left long in doubt; for on the instant she was clasped in his arms, and one long lingering kiss told plainly that the electricity of love had shot a sympathetic current through two hearts beating in unison, and the two simple words "my darling" spoke an infinity of eloquence to Lizzie's ears; then came those moments of highest ecstasy when two human beings feel the pulsation of a happiness too great for words, and the silent delight of their newly-formed relation was a joy far beyond anything in their most pleasant experiences.

After the lovers had sat for some time wrapped as it were in the bliss of their own thoughts, and oblivious to all else but themselves and their new happiness, Lizzie started up with the exclamation—

"But oh! Harry, what will mamma say?"

"Well, darling, what can she say? Will she not be satisfied to entrust you to my keeping? She won't object to me, will she?"

"Oh no, Harry! I'm sure she likes you, but then we must speak to mamma and papa at once, you know."

"Certainly we must, dearest. We must seek their consent and approval. I'll speak to uncle to-morrow morning before he goes to his office," Harry said, with the seeming determination that there was no room for any possible objection. Then the lovers sat and talked long and earnestly, discussed the sweet and cheerful themes of young and trusting hearts, formed many plans of future joys, and dipped into the coming years with their fair and unclouded horizon undimmed by any feeling of doubt or misgiving as to the fate in store for them; doubly happy that the new-born love which was to enter so largely into each young life had come to them both unsought, and so mutually distinct and satisfactory.

Thus time wore on, and neither felt the parting hour was near when Mrs. Bruce sent for Lizzie and expressed surprise when she found that Flora had not been with them all the evening.

Lizzie, full of her new possession, quickly volunteered to seek her sister, and bursting into Flora's room found her sitting apparently lost in thought; nor did Flora look up on her sister's entrance, but seemed utterly unconscious of her presence. When Lizzie spoke, Flora only turned upon her with a gaze of the strongest disregard and scorn.

"Oh! 'mother,' I've such grand news for you. I'm

sure you'll be glad to hear it. Harry and I are engaged; he asked me to-night. Why! 'mother,' what is the matter with you?" for Flora, on hearing her sister's words, had turned first white, then red, and cast upon her questioner such a look of dismay and hatred that it made Lizzie almost tremble with fear; then starting up, Flora advanced until close to where her sister stood, and facing her, burst out—

"Lizzie! listen to me—I hate you. You have come between me and my happiness; you have thwarted me in the one desire of my soul, and blighted the only hope of my life. You have, with your bold and forward manner, taken Harry from me. Don't tell me that Harry loves you; I'll not believe it! You have acted like a base, wicked girl, and thrown yourself in Harry's way, so that he could not help himself."

"Oh! Flora, how can you say that? You know it is not true."

But Flora, now thoroughly mad with passion, was deaf to all appeal.

"It *is* true," she cried; "you had no right to take him from me. You knew that I loved him, and that he would have been mine, but you came between us with your false face and seductive manners, and cast a spell upon him. You have always done your best to ruin every hope and frustrate every desire of my life. Not content with taking our parents' love from me, you now step in between me and Harry. You are a bad, wicked, deceitful girl, and I hate you!"

Here Flora paused, but Lizzie, too much taken aback to speak, would fain have left the room. She could only, however, silently gaze upon the flushed face and flashing eyes of her sister, who broke out again—

"Curse your fair face and winning ways; you have

always been my foe—always stepping before me in everything, but in this you shall not have your own way! No! Rather than see you Harry's wife would I strike him dead at your feet! If you persist in taking him from me, I have nothing to live for; I will kill you! so beware how you trifle with my love."

Lizzie, seeing that it would be in vain to make any attempt to pacify her sister, turned and left her without saying a word, and closed the door as she went out. On rejoining her mother, she made sufficient excuses for Flora to prevent any further enquiries, and stole silently to her room.

Flora, left alone with her passion, fairly broke down and burst into a fit of sobbing, which soon became hysterical, and presently wore her out so completely that she fell asleep; but she was not to get the rest her mind and body so much needed.

CHAPTER III.

I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain phantasy.

—*Romeo and Juliet.*

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.

—*Byron.*

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH was crowded, but Flora, as she entered, on her father's arm, failed to recognise a single face among the large assemblage. Where were all the friends she would have wished to witness her happiness? Was she to be deprived of the satisfaction of seeing the evidences of surprise and dismay on the faces of those who never expected her good fortune? Was she not about to realise her dearest wishes, to crown with success the object of her deep scheming and plotting for happiness? How much of the gratification she has hoped for is wanting if she can only enjoy her triumph in solitude despite the crowd!

When she entered, the clergyman was already waiting, and Harry was there to receive her. How her heart throbbed! As the Archdeacon began the marriage service she heard every word of the introductory remarks, and followed to the full the meaning of the language which proclaims marriage to be an honourable estate instituted of God in the time of man's innocence, signifying the mystical union of the church, and commanded not to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; with what

feelings of fear and trembling she listened to the dread summons so generally regarded as only a mere empty form—"If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace." Then came a slight pause, as the clergyman turned towards them to continue the service. But who can measure the depth of Flora's feeling of apprehension during this pause, or comprehend the weight removed from her mind when she heard the next words of the service? Every word of the solemn charge fell with remarkable distinctness upon her ears; but she felt completely secure now, although she heard the clergyman say "That any that are coupled together other than as God's Word doth allow, are not joined together by God, nor is their matrimony lawful." What cared she now that she was about to steal her sister's lover? What did it matter now if she was not entitled to stand where she did, the answer that would bind her indissolubly to her cousin would soon be spoken, and then she would be safe. Another short pause, as if for mere form's sake, and the words began again—"Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony?" Then a voice rang distinct and clear—"Stop!" All eyes but Flora's were turned in the direction whence the sound came, and the further words were uttered in calm but determined tones—"Stop! I forbid this marriage!" Flora had heard enough. Sinking down upon the floor, she fell into a deep dreadful nightmare, from which she seemed to awake after some minutes and find herself alone in the cold quiet church—alone with her great sorrow and disappointment. Then she heard the stillness of the church dispelled by the majestic tones of the organ breaking forth into Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," following upon which came a joyous

procession clad in garments of gladness moving cheerfully up the aisle towards the altar stairs, where they arranged themselves as if for a marriage ceremony; then another procession followed in the same manner, and Flora was almost horrified to see that the central figure of the latter procession was Lizzie leaning upon her father's arm. Turning her eyes towards the other group, she saw that her cousin was the bridegroom. Her heart beat fast to see the look of satisfaction that lit up his face. She seemed transfixed with dismay, and could not move during the whole of the service that followed; and, although she strove time after time to call out and forbid the marriage, she failed utterly in each attempt to articulate, and was compelled to remain idly by while the ceremony proceeded. Then the company began to file down the church towards the door, and past the spot where Flora stood apparently quite obscured from view; for no one seemed to notice her, or even look in her direction. Presently Harry and Lizzie, now man and wife, just beginning to taste the happiness of which they had robbed her, came by where she was, and stood for a moment almost within reach of her hand; then it was that the whole force of her disappointment and hate took possession of her; the demon they produced was at work within her, and its mad impulse had full sway. At the moment when her sister's joy seemed realised, and she stood within her reach, a happy smiling bride, a wild shriek rang through the church; and with one blow that seemed to bear all the pent-up energy of her feeling, Flora struck Lizzie on the temple and felled her to the floor; then, with a stifled groan, as if her whole being had been exhausted in that one blow, she fell fainting by her sister's side.

After what might have been an infinity of blankness, the sound of the organ filled her ears, and Flora recognised

the awful tones of the "Dead March." Looking about her in dismal wonderment, she beheld the church all draped in black and white, the altar being pure white. A movement at the door caused her to look in that direction, when there met her gaze the solemn lines of a funeral procession, which, coming closer, revealed to her that her father and Harry were the chief mourners.

The procession moved slowly up the church, and when the service for the dead began, Flora, listening intently, learned that her sister's body was encoffined there—a bride of a few brief minutes, struck down in the very plentitude of her happiness,—mourned by a loving parent and a husband widowed in the first hour of his wedded bliss.

Then the cruel fact came to her that she was guilty of her sister's death; that she had cast desolation upon her father's home, and blighted the life of the man she loved so passionately; that she had stained her soul with the gravest sin which had entered as a curse in manhood's history, and was a murderess. Then she thought the organ caught up the story of her crime, and kept repeating, "See the murderess! There she is! See the murderess!" until, in the monotony of the iteration, there came to her a dull unconsciousness a thousand times preferable to the living agony, through which, slowly reviving, she heard the steady tread as of an officer coming to take her for the crime, and the sound of knocking at the door as he demanded admittance, to lead her forth to pay the penalty that justice demanded.

Gradually awakening, she found herself in her bedroom with the sunlight streaming through the window, at which stood the form of her mother drawing up the blind. Dazed, and still uncertain that the hideous nightmare, not yet faded from her mind, was not a reality, it was some time before she could quite comprehend the scene around her, and she was only restored to calmness of

mind by the warm imprint of a maternal kiss, and the sound of her mother's voice, as she asked her to dress without delay, the breakfast being all but ready.

Making a desperate effort to forget her dream, Flora asked her mother where Lizzie was, and getting the reply that she had been walking in the garden for the last half-hour, made all haste to comply with her mother's request, and get down to breakfast. It was Sunday morning, and already the air of the still, calm day was made musical with the tones of the different church bells. At ordinary times Flora loved to sit silently listening to the clear, full tones of the bells as they called the worshippers to church. She had often spent many pleasant moments drinking in the solemn, soul-satisfying sounds; but on this morning how discordant seemed every tone. Bells which, under other circumstances gave her much delight, to-day grated unmusically upon her unresponsive ear. Music at other times, became mere din and noise now, and she was glad when she could leave her room to go down to breakfast.

It was with difficulty, however, that she could even assume the appearance of composure, and several times during the meal her absent manner required that she should be addressed more than once before she replied—a circumstance which could be passed over lightly, owing to her usually quiet and reserved manner, and did not therefore receive the notice it otherwise would have done.

Who can tell how much of grief might have been avoided by the family had a little more observation been then exercised. The influence of a few words of kindly direction and advice, spoken at the right moment, is sufficient to turn the whole current of our thoughts, and bend our resolutions in the proper direction for good.

CHAPTER IV.

He cannot be a perfect man,
Not being tried and tutored in the world:
Experience is by industry achieved,
And perfected by the swift course of time.

—*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

EDWARD BRUCE might be considered a self-made man. At least he was generally so styled, and it was in that light he looked upon and felt proud of himself. He had come to Dunedin in the golden days which introduced the element of diversity into the population, and gave to the country what was termed the "new iniquity," in contra-distinction to the stolid Scotch settlers dignified by the name of "Old Identities."

The Settlement of Otago, being founded by emigrants sent out under the auspices of the Free Church of Scotland, became in fact a Scotch colony, and many stories are told of the thorough Scottish prejudice that existed in the early days; how many new-comers made every effort to pass as "brither Scots," to that end even swallowing brose and porridge without even so much as a wry face; and how some went so far as to prefix their names with the national Mac, until such names as MacSolomon and MacMurphy were reported to be elbowing the MacDonalds and MacGregors out of their wonted places, while the energetic John Chinaman became of necessity a clansman of the MacTartan.

In these much-sighed-for "good old days," Mr. Bruce, with his wife and one daughter, arrived in Dunedin, and being possessed of very little capital, but much enterprise, he began at once to work out a career for himself. In these days of gold-seeking, when nearly the whole population rushed to the diggings in search of a golden harvest, more prudent spirits saw that the work of supplying the diggers with the necessaries of life and work opened up a more certain, if sometimes less profitable, occupation.

Mr. Bruce at once set himself to work carrying supplies to the goldfields, and from very humble beginnings gradually became the owner of a large store in Dunedin, with branch establishments in more than one digging neighbourhood. Conducting his business with prudent foresight, strict integrity, and persistent application, he continued to prosper, and now that the field of operations was widely different from the early days, he found himself at the head of one of the largest wholesale establishments in the colony.

Endowed with great energy, and a goodly supply of common sense, he was able to make up for any deficiency in education. Experience supplied the teaching that early training had failed to provide, so that, by constant application to business, he had acquired more than a mere independence, and was accounted one of the wealthiest men in the city. A neat villa residence on the picturesque slope of the west side of George Street had been his home for many years. Of late he had not devoted himself too closely to business, merely giving it that supervision which was necessary to have it well looked after by a confidential manager and a staff whose interest it was to advance his affairs; for Mr. Bruce had learned that true co-operation was a principle which could be well carried out in every department of trade, and materially tended to the advantage of employer and employé alike.

As has already been shown, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce were blessed with the possession of two daughters; a third child, a son, had been theirs, but an accident on the football field, when he was about 16 years of age, had brought on a serious illness, and notwithstanding that everything had been done for him, the parents were dealt the sad blow of his death. This bereavement had fallen on the parents when their son was of an age full of promise, and endowed mentally and physically with all the elements of a long and useful life. He was beginning to prove a companion to his father, and to receive the early training necessary to fit him for the active commercial life he would have led as his father's successor. The blow fell with double force on Mr. Bruce, as his hopes for many years had been to build up a successful business and powerful commercial house with which his name and that of his son would be associated for years to come, and which, beginning almost with the inception of commerce in Dunedin, would keep pace with the progress of events, growing as it did in the productive soil of probity and honour.

Cherishing such hopes, Mr. Bruce was not without some feeling of desire that there might be a chance of taking his nephew Harry into the business, should he exhibit any aptitude for commercial pursuits, or evince qualities in other respects fitting him for the position his dead cousin would have filled. Some such thought had crossed the merchant's mind when he first welcomed Harry on the present visit, and nothing had yet transpired to put it aside. It cannot be said, however, that he was in any way prepared for the purport of the interview Harry had planned for that morning. Mr. Bruce was not a man of many words. Accustomed to concentrate all his thoughts upon his business concerns, he was generally quiet and reserved in his intercourse with friends and acquaintances.

Not being fitted by training or inclination to take part in politics or public affairs, he had persistently declined all requests that he should offer his services for any public position. The loss of his son, and consequent blighting of many cherished hopes, acting on such a nature, added greatly to his reserve, and somewhat tinged his life with melancholy.

As was his habit after breakfast, Mr. Bruce had been reading the morning paper. He had just laid it aside, and risen to leave for his office, when Harry, who had been waiting, came forward and asked if he might say a few words to him before he went out.

"Certainly, my son; what is it?" Then seeing that Harry hesitated, he continued, "We are quite private here; sit down and tell me what it is."

Harry seemed at a loss how to proceed, and, seeing that his uncle was watching him intently, he felt particularly embarrassed, and began to wish he had written what he desired to say. He had not expected to feel thus with his uncle. He knew that there was no occasion for it, but at the last moment words seemed to refuse their aid. Presently he managed to say—

"It's about Lizzie, sir. She and I love one another, and I want you to consent to our being engaged."

"What! Lizzie? Why! Harry, my boy, she is but a child."

"She's nineteen, uncle, and I'm sure she's not childish in her ways."

"Evidently not," said Mr. Bruce, with a meaning smile; "you have brought me good proof of that; but are you sure that this is not too precipitate? Why! how old are you?"

"Twenty-three," replied Harry, shortly.

"And what are your means of keeping a wife?"

Harry did not immediately reply to this. It was the first time the practical side of the question had been presented to him. Probably he had never once cast his thoughts beyond the immediate future; had never considered the full bearing of the fact that he and his cousin had determined to be man and wife; or that, beyond the dreams of love and affection in which their young hearts were at present wrapped, existed the practical region of the matter-of-fact work-a-day world, where the hard facts of support and maintenance have to be grappled and dealt with, or where the question of ability to furnish and keep up a house is of importance, perhaps not equal, but second only, to the state of feeling entertained by the young people towards each other.

Harry therefore could only reply that he and Lizzie did not expect to get married until he was in a position to support a wife.

Mr. Bruce rose, and taking Harry's hand, looked him straight in the face with a kindly smile, and said—

"Well, Harry, my son, I will be open and candid with you. In my opinion there are grave objections to the marriage of cousins, but I do not say they are all-powerful. While you have been here I have watched you closely, and so far as I can see you would prove a worthy husband for my young girl, but you must not press for an immediate reply. I promise you to consider the matter favourably, and not to keep you waiting long for an answer. Your aunt, too, must be consulted. Are you contented with that?"

"Oh! quite content, sir," replied Harry, whereupon he wished his uncle "Good morning," and left the room. And Mr. Bruce, after imparting to his wife a knowledge of what had passed between Harry and himself, proceeded at once to his office.

That same evening, after dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce discussed the question of what answer should be given to Harry and Lizzie, with the result that if Harry's parents consented he was to take a place at once in his uncle's office, while he and Lizzie were to recognise no nearer relationship than that of cousins for at least a year, when, if they were both still of the same mind, and nothing had occurred to interfere with present plans, an engagement would be sanctioned.

Harry would continue an inmate of his uncle's house, and there would be expected from him the duties of a son towards his uncle and aunt, that strict filial obedience which Mr. Bruce declared was the foundation of all virtue. A letter was at once written to Harry's parents asking their consent to the arrangement, and the young folks felt keenly happy, their whole future to their vision being tinged with the brilliant roseate hues that true love casts over all the actions of young lives. Flora was the only one who felt that her future welfare had in no measure been consulted in the doings of the present time, and she seemed more than ever to seek a life of solitude with her all-consoling novels, deeply sensitive, but constrainedly unconcerned. To all outward appearance she gave no evidence of the bitter feelings at work within her. In the current of events she seemed alike heedless and unheeded.

CHAPTER V.

To business that we love, we rise betime,
And go to it with delight.

—*Antony and Cleopatra.*

HARRY had not long been installed in his uncle's office (his parents had gladly consented, and appeared greatly pleased with the proposal made by Mr. Bruce) ere he became quite a favourite with the majority of the clerks, and especially so with Mr. Small, the manager.

Thomas Small was quite a character in his way. He had been one of the chief landmarks in connection with the establishment of Bruce and Co. for upwards of ten years, and had occupied the position of confidential clerk for fully half that time.

Short, thin, and wiry-looking, he walked with quick, short steps, his eyes continually cast forward, as if he were intent on reaching some distant object which would elude him if he once took his eyes from their close, attentive gaze.

Trained to the position of a mercantile clerk, he had acquired such habits of fastidious punctuality and close application to business, that his office stool had almost become a necessary part of his existence. It was whispered that in his younger days his heart had been softened by feelings of the tender passion, but whether he had been crossed in love or suffered some great disappointment never became known for a certainty; all that could be

definitely ascertained was that he now regarded womankind as a harmless necessary evil, whose existence never seemed to make the remotest impression upon him one way or the other.

So far as could be observed, Small had never any further dealings with the opposite sex than was unavoidable in his fixed periodical settlements with his landlady at his lodgings, or an occasional discussion with his laundress over some article of his linen which had been returned "done up" in a state not altogether to his liking, for the busy little man was particularly difficult to please in connection with his collars and cuffs, and plumed himself not a little on a superior taste in these matters.

Small was deeply devoted to his employer, and studied his interests in every possible way. He was allowed almost entire control of the office arrangements, and all the clerks were subject to his direction and supervision. With unfailing regularity every morning since he assumed his present position he had opened the office, and was the last to leave after seeing everything in order when the clerks had gone each evening. To have been two minutes late, or to have found any of the clerks waiting for him, he would have considered an everlasting disgrace. The keys of the different safes were in his keeping, and except the one held by the cashier and his assistant which gave access to one safe only, he never allowed any hand but his own to touch them. The position of assistant-cashier and book-keeper was the one allotted to Harry, to effect which it became necessary to supplant the clerk then holding the office, who was transferred to another post.

The young man thus displaced, Herman Lane, had not been long in the employment of the firm, but he had displayed an aptitude for his work which was particularly gratifying to Small, and led to his being trusted in

many ways he could not otherwise so soon have expected. When it became necessary that Herman Lane should make way for Harry, it might have been noticed that the transfer was anything but agreeable to him, and a close observer of his manner would have seen that he cherished towards Harry feelings the reverse of friendly, although he did his best to disguise them. During the few days on which he continued to discharge his old duties, he seemed more than ever engrossed in his work, and went about the office without appearing to notice any of his fellow clerks.

One morning, after Harry had been about three weeks in the office, Mr. Bruce had just entered his private room, and begun to look over the letters lying on his table, when Small entered quietly, and shut the door. Accustomed to these interviews with his manager, Mr. Bruce did not give any attention to him, but went on reading the letter before him. When he had finished this and taken up another, he looked at Small, who stood on the opposite side of his table. Observing at once that Small had something of unusual importance to communicate, he held out his hand for the letter which he saw in his manager's hand. It ran thus—

41, Little Collins Street, E.,
Melbourne, 14th May, 1885.

MESSRS. BRUCE AND CO., Dunedin.

Dear Sirs,—

Your letter to us of the 6th inst., the contents of which considerably surprised us, reached here yesterday. No such order as that mentioned in your letter was ever forwarded by us, nor can we accept the draft you have made on us. We need scarcely add that we will afford you all the assistance in our power towards clearing up this matter.

We are, yours faithfully,
WHITE, SHAW, AND CO.

"Why, Small, what is this? What was the order?"

"An order for about £400 worth of wheat, accompanied

by a remittance for £100, and a request to draw for the balance and all charges. Here is the letter. The signature seems the same, although there is nothing else beyond the use of the firm's paper to establish the *bona fides* of the order."

Mr. Bruce examined and compared both letters. They were written on similar sheets of paper, but in different handwriting, while the signatures seemed alike. After a moment's reflection he said—

"Well, Small, what's to be done? Have you thought over the matter?"

"No, sir, I haven't considered fully yet. At first I thought we should at once put the police here in possession of the facts, then it occurred to me that possibly the better plan would be to get White, Shaw, and Co. to employ a detective in Melbourne. Probably we should consult the authorities here."

"It is evident we have no bungling apprentices at the work to deal with. It would be well to act at once."

After some further consultation it was agreed to submit the letters that afternoon to Mr. Goodend, the chief of the Dunedin police, and act by his advice.

Small accordingly waited on Mr. Goodend, and placed all the facts before him, when it was determined that nothing further should be said about the matter, but that arrangements should be made to get a detective not generally known in Melbourne to enter the office of Messrs. White, Shaw, and Co. as a clerk for the purpose of dealing with the case. Mr. Goodend explained that if the affair were a well-planned fraud, it was possible that further orders would be sent, in which case he was to be communicated with at once.

That same day as the office was being closed for the lunch hour, Herman Lane accosted Harry as he passed

into the street, and asked if it was he who had cleared the P.O. box of the Melbourne mail.

"Yes, I got the letters last night. I was at the office with Mr. Small, and went along directly the mail came in."

"Did you get any letters for me?"

"No, there were only letters addressed to the firm."

"Oh! a small mail then?"

"Yes, three letters, I think. I gave them at once to Mr. Small."

"Who cleared the box this morning?"

"I did; there were no more Melbourne letters."

Evidently disappointed, Harry's questioner offered no further remark, and presently they parted, the one to pursue his way along Princes Street, the other to lunch hastily at a restaurant and then find his way to a hotel in Rattray Street, where his visit was evidently expected by two young men, whose appearance betokened their connection with the class whose dealings are most frequently at the card table, and whose intellectual recreation consists in the perusal of books of such a nature that each can claim to be the author of his own.

"Well, my boy," began the taller and better-looking of the two, as Herman entered the room, "you see we are waiting patiently for you. Are you going to redeem your bits of paper to-day?" taking from his pocket a number of I.O.U's.

"No, not all; but here is £10. Give me the papers for that."

"And when may we expect more?" with a knowing wink at his companion.

"Don't be afraid, I wont keep you waiting long. I expect enough by next mail to clear off everything."

"Right you are, we'll not be too pushing."

The other man, who had remained silent during the foregoing transaction, now approached Herman, and clapping him on the shoulder, said—

"Come, old man, don't think of going till you've had your revenge. Let us have a quiet half-hour before you go back to business."

Not receiving any reply, he acted on the assumption, as he well knew, that he had a willing victim. The door of the room was locked, and until considerably after the time at which Herman should again have been at the office the shuffling and dealing of cards occupied his whole attention, with the result that when he rose to leave, the I.O.U.'s so lately redeemed had found their way back again to the pocket of his friend, and taken with them a companion to bear evidence of the fact that in the brief space of thirty minutes he had lost at cards more than would become his legitimate earnings during the next three weeks.

When Herman reached the office, Small was calling for him, and he accounted for his lateness with the explanation that one of the boarders at his lodgings was ill, and had asked him to call round and get the doctor to go up to the house at once.

CHAPTER VI.

To wilful men
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters.

—*King Lear.*

How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done.

—*King John.*

Rain was falling with particular intensity, and a sharp south-westerly wind blowing along Princes and George Streets made walking the reverse of pleasant. The Town Hall clock had just produced those melodious chimes which indicated that the hour of seven had arrived. It was Monday night, and as Harry Williams emerged from his uncle's house, and made quickly along George Street, there was on his face a look of calm resolve and firmness of purpose which revealed that he was bent upon some duty not altogether to his liking. Well wrapped up in waterproof overcoat, and protected from the beating wind and rain by a stout umbrella, he allowed more than one tramcar to pass him without seeking the temporary shelter from the storm that they would have afforded. Pursuing his way as quickly as possible, he had, without seeing any person who would be likely to wonder at his errand to town at this particular hour, reached and crossed the Octagon, this geometrical term being the name given to a disorderly reserve of that shape

laid off in the centre of the town. It is intersected by the main thoroughfare of the city, and forms the point where the street changes its name from Princes to George Street. Harry pushed on with such speed, and was so absorbed in the purpose of his walk, that he did not notice another young man in front of him, and was only made aware of his presence when his umbrella came forcibly into contact with the other pedestrian's hat and knocked it off his head.

"Confound you for a stupid fool!"

The words reached Harry's ears, and he recognised the voice as that of Herman Lane, whom of all others he would have wished to avoid. Instinctively he mumbled an apology, and drew his umbrella closely down over his head to avoid recognition, a precaution rendered unnecessary by the other's endeavour to at once find his hat. Harry thereupon hurried on, thankful that he had not been known, and that he would be well out of the way before any effort could be made to overtake him.

Aware now that no further precaution than haste was necessary to enable him to keep out of Herman's way, he redoubled his pace, and shortly stood before and knocked at a door in Liverpool Street giving access to the Post Office Buildings.

Harry's visit was evidently not unexpected, for the door was immediately opened by an official of the Post Office, whom he followed through several passages more or less dark, until they reached the sorting room. Here a scene of considerable bustle and order met his view. The Australian mail had just come in, and the process of sorting having been practically completed during its transit by train from the Bluff, the work of distribution and delivery into the private boxes was about to begin.

Everything having been evidently pre-arranged, Harry

was conducted to the back of the boxes, where he placed himself in such a position as enabled him to obtain a clear view of the passage in front, and from which he could see distinctly if any person opened the box of Bruce and Co. After ascertaining the best position to occupy, he took from his pocket a letter addressed to the firm; this he deposited in the box, and then prepared himself for waiting.

At the best of times, waiting is no very pleasant proceeding, if anything so passive can be dignified by that name. But when, added to the suspense of waiting, is the feeling that you are on the eve of having some dreaded revelation made, or many dark suspicions verified, the state of mind the inactivity of waiting produces is the reverse of enviable. The imagination is allowed full play, and many mental pictures are formed, presaging events of the most uncommon nature, the bearing and portent of which are magnified to such an extent as to fill the mind with feelings of apprehension and alarm. On the full height of expectation the horizon of imagination becomes greatly extended, and prediction asserts more than her lawful prerogatives.

Not long after Harry had taken up his position of observation, he saw what seemed to give colour to his suspicions and justify the action he had taken. Shortly after the clock had struck the half-hour, Herman Lane hurriedly entered the passage, and, after looking nervously around, proceeded directly to the box which formed the central point of Harry's watching, took a key from his pocket, and opened the box. He hastily drew forth and read the address on the only letter there, the one left by Harry, which he immediately threw back with a contemptuous sign of impatience, and re-locked the box. Casting a hasty look at the board which indicates what mails are sorted, he left the Post Office as quickly as he had entered it.

So far a part of Harry's suspicion was justified. Herman Lane possessed and used a key of the letter box to which he had no right. Why did he not take the only letter there? Was he expecting something else? Would he return? Apparently Harry decided the latter questions in the affirmative, for he did not stir from his position, but set himself to the task of further watching.

What was the cause of this detective duty that Harry had placed upon himself, and what did he suspect?

During the past week, and since the receipt of the letter from Messrs. White, Shaw, and Co., Small had discovered that some letters containing remittances from Auckland had gone astray. To effect sufficient enquiries concerning them it became necessary to make known the state of affairs either to the cashier or Harry, and Small chose the latter. Immediately on learning what had taken place, and connecting the facts with the enquiries made by Herman Lane on the occasion of the last Melbourne mail, Harry could not resist the feeling that there was room for some investigations in that direction. Acting on this impulse he determined to begin at once to work out his ideas, and as the Melbourne mail would be in on Monday night, he made some secret arrangements, with the result that we have just seen, and leading up, as he now felt convinced, to his being made the possessor of some important facts, if not put on the direct path of discovery.

Before another half-hour had elapsed, Herman Lane again entered the department of the private boxes; this time more cautiously than before, for a number of persons were now coming and going. Proceeding directly up the passage, eagerly surveying each of those present, he lost no time in again unlocking the box, only to suffer the disappointment of finding nothing but the same letter, which he carefully examined, and placing it in his pocket

he quickly left the building, and hurried down the darker side of the steps. Having ascertained that the letter was really gone from the box, Harry got the letters for the firm, and, bidding good-night to the officials, he left the Post Office, making his way round towards the night entrance to the boxes.

As it was certain that Lane would at least pay another visit to the box before finally abandoning his purpose for the night, Harry concealed himself in the shadow of the Colonial Bank Building opposite, to await this further visit. Fortunately, he had not long to wait. Some time after nine o'clock Herman Lane came quietly round from Bond Street, and entered the Post Office. He emerged again almost immediately, and, coming down the steps on the lower side, crossed the street, and passed hurriedly by where Harry was. Assured that Lane was now giving up the idea of obtaining anything from the Post Office that night, Harry immediately followed him until he saw him enter the hotel, to which we traced him on the occasion of his card experiences several days previously. Not considering it prudent to attempt to learn anything more that night, Harry at once proceeded homewards.

The following morning Herman Lane was at the office with remarkable punctuality, and Harry, being full of his previous night's experiences, found it difficult to avoid doing something which would betray his knowledge.

The impulse to make immediate use of what he had learned was so strong that it required all his determination to resist it, but he knew that he had not sufficient grounds for more than suspicion. So far, the letter he had placed in the box last night was still in Lane's possession, but there was yet plenty of time before that circumstance should become remarkable. At luncheon hour he contrived to leave the office at the same time as Lane, and walked with

him for a few minutes. Before speaking, he searched in his pocket; then remarked quietly—

"Lane, I've come away without the post key. Lend me yours, to save my going back for it."

His companion gave a slight start, but immediately overcoming any feeling of surprise, replied—

"I have no key of the box, and you know it." The latter words in a tone of bitterness, mingled with ill-nature.

With a smiling apology for his apparent forgetfulness, Harry turned as if to go towards the office, but only proceeded a few yards, when he resumed his walk home, meditating on the additional link of evidence that tended to confirm his suspicion.

"Herman Lane has a key of the office box, and wishes to conceal the fact. What has he done with the letter he took away last night?"

CHAPTER VII.

My nature is subdued to what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
—*Shakespeare's Sonnets.*

We lost sight of Herman Lane on the evening he had so frequently visited the Post Office, at the door of a hotel in Rattray Street, the same in which he had, the week previously, given several I.O.U.'s for money won from him at cards. Let us now follow him, and learn the purpose of his visit.

Entering the hotel, he proceeded at once up a narrow, damp-looking staircase, and knocked at a door at the end of a dark landing—giving two distinct knocks on the top panel of the door, and one near the middle of the lower panel. The door was opened by one of the two men with whom we became acquainted on his former visit. This young man greeted Herman warmly with the remark—"Come along, Lane, old man, what has kept you so late? Let me introduce my friend Carter, from Christchurch." Then, turning to "his friend Carter," he explained that Herman was an acquaintance of his, who had lately come over from Melbourne. The only other occupant of the room, to whom Lane nodded as he entered, was the other of the two card-players. The three men had been engaged playing before Lane's entry, and it was agreed that they should finish the game then in progress. The table used was a long, narrow one, and Carter was seated at one end,

the other two, on opposite sides near the other. Lane sat down nearly opposite Carter, in a position which enabled him to see every motion of his two opponents. Noticing this, one of them laid down his cards, and took a well-filled cigar case from his pocket.

"Here, old man, have a weed, and smoke it by the fire while we are finishing." Without the slightest hesitation, Lane took the cigar and changed his position, never once suspecting that the other had a strong motive for his removal.

The play then proceeded, during which Lane had an opportunity of scrutinizing the players—a process it might be interesting to follow.

Carter was a young man, of medium height, stout and strongly built, with florid complexion, a slight moustache and whiskers of dull brown, with hair of a somewhat lighter colour. He was, evidently, one accustomed to all the luxuries of life, and not required to work, either mind or body, for their procurement; a soft, sleepy look about his dark blue eyes, betokened that he had been lately indulging in drink; and a careless movement of his shoulders and head, indicated that he had not had the best of the game he was now pursuing. His companions were both dark; the smaller, known as Richard Mote, a slightly-built young man, of medium height, and somewhat gentlemanly appearance; his dark hair and moustache, prominent black eyes, and thick-set, well-formed lips, made him rather a good-looking youth. The other had something of the bull-dog look about him, and the manner in which he dressed his beard somewhat intensified that appearance—his upper lip was set off with coarse hair, cropped short, while his chin was clean shaved, and supported on each side by a closely-cut whisker, which displayed the rough, but sickly, white skin beneath; a shaggy eyebrow, and deep-set, dark

eye, formed no relief to the other features, while a wide nostril, and flattened bridge to his nose did not entitle that organ to be called "a thing of beauty." These features, and a head of hair, short and bristly, surmounting a short, thick neck, formed the distinguishing features of John Samson's personal appearance. The manner of these two men as they sat playing formed a marked contrast to that of their opponent. Cool and sober, they watched every movement of his hands, or change of expression on his face, so that, with their experience, they held him at considerable disadvantage, without taking into account the other means to which they would resort if necessary to gain their ends.

Herman Lane watched the play with much interest, but from where he sat was not able to see all the movements of the different players.

On the table stood a decanter, and two or three bottles. The glasses of the different players told distinctive tales; that of Carter had just been re-filled by Mote from the decanter for the fourth or fifth time; those of his companion and himself were entirely guiltless of having contained any of the same liquor, and still held more than half of their first supply.

A glass was filled and handed to Lane, he tasted the contents, and laid down the glass on the table near Mote, the latter quietly, and apparently in an abstracted manner, moved it close to Carter's glass. He was angling for, and playing with, only one fish then, and an increase of bait might not prove ineffective. The play proceeded for some minutes in silence. Carter was all excitement, he had lost repeatedly; this time, however, owing to the bad play of Mote, he was accorded a different fortune, and some encouragement to continue the game.

When the hands had been played out, Samson turned to

Lane, "Come on, Lane, old man, join in, and show your mettle."

No second request was necessary, and Herman took his seat at the table opposite Carter. The play was then continued for some time without remark; but what need is there to follow its course. Lane and Carter were against the other two players. Whether it was due to superior play, better fortune in the cards held, or to a pre-arranged code of signals, the inevitable result followed—that the less-experienced speedily became indebted to the others in no small sum. This result was not brought about by a continual run of winning on the part of Mote and his companion. At first, luck seemed to favour their opponents, until they had become thoroughly engrossed in the game, and were prepared to continue it to any extent; then their fortune changed, and the others, taking full advantage of every chance, soon had them entirely at their mercy. Meanwhile they had been very liberal in supplying drink, and almost imperceptibly Lane had drunk glass after glass, until he became quite excited, and, playing recklessly, increased the stakes far beyond the dictates of prudence. At last the final loss came. Carter and he played unsuccessfully hands which seemed to them a certainty of winning.

"Damn it all!" cried the former, excitedly; "I won't play any more; you fellows play too well together." As he spoke, he rose from the table and banged his cards down, overturning one of the half-filled glasses in the act.

Samson stooped, without remark, and picked up the glass. Mote endeavoured to conciliate Carter.

"Come, old man, don't give in yet; you must play on, and take your revenge."

Carter, although considerably under the influence of the drink he had taken, was not to be persuaded to resume the game, and the others reluctantly gave up their play. A

settling up was then entered into; the sums lost by Carter and Lane were something considerable, and to the latter, at least, much more than he could hope to pay for many months to come, in the regular course of his earnings. Mote speedily penned I.O.U.'s for the amounts, and obtained the signatures of the losers.

Lane was becoming more and more engulfed in his indebtedness to these men. He must speedily experience the danger of a contest so unequal as his feeble wit against the unscrupulous action of such sharpers.

To enter into a scratching match with a tiger, because he is only an enlarged cat, may betoken a knowledge of Natural History, but it is not evidence of a correct judgment.

Finding it impossible to persuade his victims to resume playing, Mote ordered more drink, and requested them to take a cigar, and enjoy a smoke. This, with the stimulation they had already received, they were nothing loth to do, and the four men sat down to a conversation that were better not recorded here. Repeated efforts were made to induce Carter and Lane to "have just another game," but the former remained obdurate, and when the night had worn well on towards a close, he declared his intention of going home.

The card-players, therefore, had no alternative but to break up the party.

CHAPTER VIII.

Attempt the end, and never stand to doubt;
Nothing's so hard but search will find it out.

—*Herrick.*

THE day after Harry's detective duty at the Post Office, the letter he had seen Lane take from the box was replaced there. It bore no evidence of having been opened, so that no opportunity was given him to say anything on the subject.

Days grew into weeks, weeks became months, and months threatened to accumulate into half-a-year at least, still no tidings were received of any result to the investigations being made into the fradulent order for wheat made in the name of White, Shaw, and Co., of Melbourne.

One evening Mr. Bruce was surprised to receive a visit at his private house from his manager.

Small had been at the office in the evening, and, opening the letters received by the Northern mail, discovered one from a correspondent of the firm in Auckland replying to a second request for a cheque which was payable some weeks previously; with the intimation that the cheque had been sent, and a receipt returned that week. This knowledge Small felt it his duty to impart to his employer without delay: hence his present visit.

Coming on the top of the discovery in connection with the Melbourne fraud, this was most unwelcome news to Mr. Bruce.

His house had hitherto been particularly free from anything of this sort, but now to find not "single spies," but "battalions" of these occurrences was the reverse of agreeable. He could not help connecting this as a most unfortunate omen for his nephew's prospects. These troubles had followed closely on the heels of Harry's entrance into the office, and were in some degree connected with the department in which he was engaged. For some moments after realising the position of this last discovery, Mr. Bruce sat lost in thought. Small, too, gave way to silence, and engaged in a consideration of the case. The merchant was the first to speak.

"Why! Small, this seems to be a more serious offence than the other?"

"It is, indeed, sir."

"Have you any suspicions on the subject?"

"None whatever; I'm really at a loss what to think."

"Have you questioned any of the clerks? But of course you cannot, having only got the letter to-night."

"That is all; nor would I know how to act."

"Whose duty is it to clear the post box?" enquired Mr. Bruce, quietly.

"Your nephew Harry, sir, has the only key besides mine."

"And before him it was in the possession of Lane, was it not?" continued Mr. Bruce.

"Yes, that is so. Lane surrendered it to Harry."

"Has there been anything worthy of note in Lane's conduct since my nephew displaced him?"

Small replied to the effect that for some weeks Lane had not been so punctual in his attendance at the office, and that he fancied there was something about his conduct which indicated that he must sometimes forego a large portion of his proper nightly sleep.

After a brief conference between the merchant and his

manager it was arranged that the former should make some personal enquiries into the matter, and that meanwhile Small should keep silent on the subject. Whereupon the latter wished his employer "Good night," and Mr. Bruce accompanied Small to the door in order to avoid making his visit known to Harry.

For some considerable time after Small's departure Mr. Bruce occupied his chair in apparent idleness, but he was actively thinking over the revelation just made to him, and considering how best to set about his enquiries.

Then he rang the bell, and asked that his nephew be sent to him.

On Harry's entrance his uncle greeted him kindly, and said he wished a few minutes' conversation on the subject of the office.

Harry took a seat opposite his uncle's table, and the latter addressed him at once—

"Harry, a valuable letter to the firm has miscarried since you got possession of the key of the post box. Can you suggest any possible explanation of it?"

Thus directly appealed to, Harry saw that he could not conceal the knowledge he had gained of Lane's possessing a key. He, therefore, told his uncle what had occurred, and of his discovery of Lane's visit to the post box.

This was confirmatory of Mr. Bruce's suspicions. He was glad to find any doubts of his nephew's innocence thus speedily dispelled.

What was to be done? Was Lane the instrument of both crimes? Clearly nothing must be done rashly. There must be little doubt of his clerk's guilt before making any accusation against him.

That night Mr. Bruce did not obtain much sleep. For hours he lay awake thinking what course was best to pursue—wondering what these discoveries would lead to.

As usual, imagination took full sway and played some fantastic tricks with his thoughts. He pictured himself the accuser, and Lane the accused, and visions of Courts of Justice and criminal trials floated across his mind. Half dreaming, half thinking, he spent the greater part of the night on the borderland between consciousness and oblivion, which leaves both mind and body exhausted rather than refreshed by the hours spent in bed. While the wronger doubtless slept peacefully and well, his victim was a prey to all kinds of distracting thoughts. Conscience makes no impression on the one, while imagination acts as a dreadful demon to the other.

Mr. Bruce did not reach his office next morning until considerably after the usual hour. Immediately he was seated in his private room, he called for his manager, and interrogated him as to whether any fresh discoveries had been made on the subjects which had disturbed the even current of the business of Bruce and Co.

Small had not learned anything further.

"Is Lane in the office?"

"Yes, but he was again late this morning."

"You had better send him to me. I'll speak to him."

"I think, sir, it would be well for some further enquiries to be made before you speak to him. You are not yet in a position to prove anything; and if he denies all, he may be able to do further mischief before we can bring this home to him."

"Perhaps you are right, Small. Had we not better see the police on the subject?"

"Yes, sir, that would be wise. I think, however, that you should see the Inspector yourself."

Mr. Bruce adopted this suggestion of his manager, and as soon as he had disposed of his correspondence, he had an interview with the Inspector of Police. The Auckland

firm were written to for the receipt which had been forwarded on behalf of Bruce and Co.

This proved to be a letter of only ten or twelve words, merely acknowledging receipt of the cheque. On comparing it with the different handswriting of his clerks, Mr. Bruce was astonished to find that it more nearly resembled his nephew's than any other. Could it be possible that, after all, Harry was the culprit?

These doubts completely unnerved Mr. Bruce, and paralysed the vigorous efforts he otherwise would have made to get at the truth. If his nephew were to be proved a forger and a thief, he must avoid enlisting outside aid in the process. He would rather lose ten times the amount than have the world know his confidence had been abused by a relative. His feelings towards Harry had strengthened as his acquaintance ripened, and now he regarded him in the light of a son for whom he would do anything in his power. If his sister's child was guilty of this wrong, he was bad in every respect, and was playing a part of the deepest hypocrisy and criminality,—so deep indeed, that Mr. Bruce looked upon it as impossible in one so young and inexperienced. With pride and satisfaction the merchant had seen in his relative evidences of great shrewdness and ability, but withal he did not, and could not, credit him with the cleverness and knowledge of the world necessary to have planned and executed the frauds he was investigating. Circumstances, however, seemed to point to him, and he was at a loss to explain their bearing in the light of his nephew's innocence.

In the midst of all these doubts and perplexities he took the best possible course to turn Harry from the career of a criminal, if, indeed, he were embarking on that rough sea. He called him in and spoke to him quietly and openly, disclosed to him the facts which pointed to him as the

guilty party, and told him he expected open and unreserved confidence and truth.

Then it was that Harry told his uncle all that he knew of Lane's conduct—that he feared Lane was in the habit of spending his nights in company the reverse of desirable. Harry denied all knowledge of the letter acknowledging receipt of the cheque from Auckland, and Mr. Bruce believed implicitly from his manner that his nephew was speaking the truth. The only explanation he could arrive at, therefore, was that Lane had copied Harry's handwriting with the view to throw suspicion on him, and so escape the imputation himself.

Mr. Bruce determined to make what enquiries he could as to Lane's course of life, and with this object in view he instructed Detective Fane to watch the movements of his clerk for some evenings, and to report from time to time as to how and in what company he spent his nights.

CHAPTER IX.

O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free;
Far as the breeze can bear the billows foam,
Survey our empire, and behold our home.

—*Byron.*

MEANWHILE, in what way has time passed over the heads of Harry's cousins? Have these weeks, so full of meaning, and fraught with events bearing such danger to him, been mere breezes of circumstance to Lizzie and her sister?

Of course, they had no knowledge of the occurrences at the office, and Harry's duties prevented him giving much time to them. Save for an occasional Saturday afternoon picnic, or a long walk on Sunday, they saw nothing of him alone. The three young people frequently spent Saturday afternoon at St. Clair, and Flora had so far overcome her moodiness and chagrin at the relations of her sister and cousin, that she was able to join them in rambling excursions on the rocks and beach, and take an interest in the discovery of shells and seaweed. On one of these occasions Lizzie suggested that they should climb the rocks known as the "Cliffs"—a high, steep, rugged, and almost barren, promontory, overhanging where the rushing waves dashed wildly and majestically upon the rocks, with which the beach is studded. These rocks are covered at high water; but when the tide is out, leave only occcasional channels through which the water pours with swelling force, swaying to and fro the heavy marine growth of kelp and seaweed.

Flora declined to accompany the others on this exploit. She said she would wait at the bottom of the cliff until they returned. Lizzie was not very anxious for her sister's company in the climb, and consequently did not press her. Flora sat down on a rock under the cliff, and was soon deeply engrossed in the pages of the latest number of the *Family Herald*.

Harry and Lizzie then began the ascent of the cliff. It proved harder work than they had anticipated. However, by dint of great care, and resting frequently, they soon made considerable progress up the face of the hill. On, on they went up the cliff, then to its summit, where they sat and gazed far out upon the sea. The ocean's bosom moved slowly as with the pulsation of a regular breathing. All seemed quiet and tranquil, as if in its inmost heart the huge Pacific was at peace with all the universe.

It gave no token of the resistless fury of which it is capable, and save where it fringed the shore, signs only of serenity existed. Taking an omen from their peaceful surroundings, the lovers sat and gazed in silence on the heaving waters—gazed away into the distance and futurity. Calmness only in their environment, what wonder that joy and peace were in their hearts; that hope held sway in the breasts of both; and that no clouds seemed to overhang the horizon of their love.

To the right were the verdant slopes of the hill once covered with beautiful Native bush, now the pasture ground of many a dairy farm. The ruthless destructive hand of man had been at work, clearing from the face of the earth monuments of Nature's handiwork.

To the left was the long stretch of beach which formed such a delightful promenade for Dunedin citizens, and the magnificent breathing place which no enterprising engineer can ever destroy. Beyond that, the evergreen Peninsula,

where again trees which Nature had been long years in providing fell before the axe and fire of the settlers. Man is nothing, if not destructive. The ordinary pioneer sees no utility in trees which Nature has taken so much time to place there: down they must come to make way for the spade and the plough. Axe and fire are set to work, and land is cleared even to the last tree, so that crops may grow and cows may graze where it stood. To have left anything standing that the hand of man could lay low would be leaving his work incomplete; so that nothing remains to tell the tale or provide a shelter for man or beast.

Does the ordinary mortal ever consider the effect of his destruction; ever reflect that what takes him so short a time to destroy has been the work and care of Nature's providence far back into other years; that man may undo, but cannot create?

Then lying away to the west of where the lovers sat was the picturesque city they had left. Dunedin, the Edinburgh of the Antipodes, possesses beauties to charm lovers of scenery far beyond her parent of the Northern Hemisphere. While Edinburgh is rich in historical interest, her youthful Colonial daughter boasts the possession of natural beauties. The long, irregular bay, at the head of which the city is situated, is hemmed in by gently sloping hills, clad with natural forest, where the hand of man has not displaced that by fertile fields or modest Colonial residences, and extends from the Port of Otago for eight or nine miles westwards, until it is merely separated from the ocean by a narrow neck of low-lying sandy soil.

Skirting the head of this long bay, the town is built from there up the slopes of many hills, extending upwards and outwards in several directions. The pioneers of this city made ample provision for recreation, and a large

reserve, many hundreds of acres in extent, creeps round the more populous parts of the town. Beyond this, connected by numerous lines of cable and horse tramways, lie the suburban boroughs.

The majority of the business streets are formed on land which the hand of industrious man has reclaimed from the waters of the bay, and below these are the wharves, where intercolonial and coastal steamers are coming and going every day. To the eye of the stranger landing there for the first time, Dunedin presents the appearance of having outgrown its strength. Its palatial hotels and lofty warehouses seem more in keeping with a city of centuries in age. They are, however, only monuments of Colonial enterprise—not what the carping pessimist would sneer at as being built for show. Solid and substantial as its founders, Dunedin stands as a typical Colonial city, and an index of the improving tendency of the sturdy race to which it owes its being.

As they sat, the lovers discussed the scenery around them, the advantages of life by the seaside, and that never-ending topic of conversation—the weather.

Harry spoke of his experiences in his uncle's office, and of his liking for commercial pursuits. He was careful, however, not to refer in any way to the events of the last month or two, or to give any idea of the troubles through which he had gone.

After spending some time thus, Harry proposed that they should go still further up the hill and return by way of the road.

"It's much safer and easier," said he.

"What! are you afraid to go back the way we came?"

"Afraid! no! but it's better not."

"Better for you?" asked Lizzie, with a mischievous smile.

"No! better for you! It's not so easy to go down the hill as to come up."

"Oh! I'm not afraid!" and Lizzie, as she spoke, rose hurriedly from her seat and started off down the cliff.

Harry called to her to stop; she waited for him to overtake her; then he tried hard to persuade her to come back by the road. More out of bravado—more to show him she was without fear, with nothing but a desire to tease him—she flatly refused. He must perforce give way, and so silently accompanied her on her return down the cliffs. For some distance descent was easy, but presently they found the face more difficult to negotiate than even Harry had imagined. Lizzie carried no encumbrances, so was able to make every use of her hands. Harry went first, and pointed out the most accessible way for her. Presently she sat down.

"I'll go no further; you shouldn't have brought me this way."

"But, Lizzie, 'twas you compelled me to come."

"Well, you shouldn't have followed me; you should have started by the road, and I would have followed you."

This was an unanswerable assertion, so Harry remained silent and watched the breakers play upon the beach.

Presently he turned to his companion—

"Come, Lizzie, the sun is getting low. We must get homewards."

Sulkily, but in silence, Lizzie obeyed. She saw that Harry was patient with her, and his patience and silence exasperated her. Again the descent proceeded. Neither spoke, but gave all their attention to the work in hand. A slight sudden breeze caught Lizzie's hat, and it went rolling down the cliff before them, rolling and jumping as if certain to reach the waters below. As it was carried from her head, Lizzie gave a startled scream, which drew

her companion's attention to the accident; too late, however, to arrest the flight of the hat. It was carried down until it rested on the edge of the cliff overhanging the seething waves.

"Never mind, we'll reach it when we get down. Come along," and Harry held out his hand towards his cousin.

Down again they went with increasing difficulty, but, under the care exercised by Harry, without accident or slip.

When they had neared the base of the cliff, Lizzie sat down, and said, "Now I'll wait here until you get my hat."

"No. Come down first to where Flora is; I can get it easier from below."

"Indeed I won't. I'll wait until you go for it, if I have to sit here all night. I'm tired, and won't go any further without a rest."

Harry saw it was best to comply. To reach the hat was no easy matter, but he must needs try. Down he went towards the spot, carefully picking his way. Step by step he drew nearer to the hat. It was resting on a ledge near the bottom of the cliff where it overhung the rolling waters below. Firmly grasping the stones which formed his hold, he stooped over and got possession of the article he sought. Lizzie sat watching him, and as he neared the spot held her breath and closed her eyes with nervous apprehension that he was in danger. Opening her eyes again, she saw that he had grasped her hat. A throb of relief and satisfaction sped through her breast, and she felt that he was safe. She saw him rest a moment before turning to re-ascend; saw him move his hold of the stones and plant his foot firmly, as if to swing round where he stood; saw him grasp the jutting rock, and crouch, as if for a spring upwards. Then, oh! horror! the stone h

held gave way, and before he could recover his balance he had fallen backwards on the face of the rock. With a wild scream Lizzie rose and strained every muscle of her body in the gaze towards her cousin as she saw him roll down the cliff towards the sea. Oh! Heaven! will nothing save him! Must he be hurled into eternity by this awful fall upon the rocks below? Her strained and terror-stricken vision saw him roll down, down the awful stones, down towards the end. Another dreadful scream rent the air as she saw him dash over the edge, and knew that he must be lost for ever in the rolling waters beneath. Shriek upon shriek was uttered as he disappeared from view.

Far above the din of the waters Lizzie's shrieks had been heard. Flora, seated on the rocks below, heard her sister's terrified screams. They awoke her to the dreadful reality of a possible accident, suggested to her that perhaps she could do something to avert the doom of anyone falling over the rocks above her. Starting up, Flora saw the form of her cousin fall over the cliff near the rock on which she stood. Instantly she prepared to render help. Fortunately Harry's fall had not been far; he was not hurt by the rocks, and in the water had all his senses about him. Where he fell, the water washed through a channel almost filled with a thick undergrowth of kelp. This broke the force of his fall, and buoyed him up in the water. Realising his position, he carefully nursed his strength, and awaited the next breaker which might carry him up the face of the rock. As the rolling water touched him he struck out on its summit, but could not reach the ledge. The wave merely tossed him further up amongst the kelp. To this he still clung with desperate hands. Flora saw his position. She had around her shoulders a stout woollen shawl. Could she reach him with that? Hurrying towards the edge of the rock she called to Harry

to hold on firmly. He heard, and hope revived within him. Firmly grasping the corner of her shawl, she threw it from her as far as her strength aided her. Too short! Harry could not reach it. What could she do? The merciless waves were fast wearing out his strength, while by no unaided effort of his could he ever reach a place of safety. He called to Flora—

"Tear your shawl in strips, and tie them firmly together; it'll reach then."

Flora obeyed him, and proceeded to tear the fabric. It was heavy and well-made, and required all her strength to rend it.

Harry called more feebly—

"Quick, Flora, quick; tie the knots firm."

With nervous haste she proceeded. The shawl was torn into four strips and tied together.

Trembling with apprehension, Flora went towards the edge of the rock and again threw the end of the line towards Harry. Oh! horror! it still fell short. What could she do? All his efforts to reach it had been futile, and each succeeding wave seemed to leave him feebler than before. Presently a greater rush of water was heard, and Harry, glancing round, saw a breaker coming which must engulf him and dash him against the cruel rocks.

With a prayerful sigh he felt that he had looked his last upon the earth, and gave himself up to his doom. He felt himself rising on the crest of the water and impelled fiercely forward. He did not lose his presence of mind, but doubted if any chance of escape was possible. Before him, curling up in the foam, was a dark object at which he clutched as he was being driven madly past. This proved to be the end of Flora's shawl. She had watched it in the breaker, and dimly realised that Harry had grasped it. Holding firmly to the shawl, and planting her feet strongly on the ledge, she felt the line tighten.

The big wave spent its strength upon the adjoining rock, and the water rushed back slowly. Harry had been borne against another bed of kelp, and was now receding with the body of water. With a frantic effort Flora held firmly to her life-line. It did not yield, and Harry's backward course was stayed. Getting clear of the avalanche of water, he was borne towards the rock on which Flora stood, and with her aid drawn up clear of the surrounding kelp, from which he was able to scramble up the rock, saved. The reaction overcame Flora, and she fainted by his side.

The interval between Flora's being seated quietly upon the rock reading her book and the moment when Harry saw her fall fainting as he scrambled from the water was only a few brief moments, but how full of events had it been—in less time than it takes the reader to scan the relation, her cousin had been hovering on the brink of a watery grave. The acts she had performed to save his life had been within the compass of a few deep breaths; yet what an eternity of events had been comprehended in those moments! The first throbbing of her consciousness, free from the excitement which had sustained her, was the signal for oblivion to come to her relief. As Harry realised that his cousin had fainted, weak though he was, he hurried to her aid. As he did so, Lizzie, ignorant of the danger she was in, and heedless of the difficulty, rushed down, she knew not how, over the cliff, and joined him. She, too, had come through a great danger; she, too, had been in peril of her life; her nerves were unstrung, and she gave way to tears and laughter—tears and laughter, twin children of a great joy,—for her lover's life had been spared to her; her maiden heart had escaped the widowhood of a desolation fraught with the awful reality that her mad foolish act had sent her lover to his death. Her waywardness had placed him in the danger from which her sister's coolness and courage had saved him.

CHAPTER X.

A mother is a mother still,
The holiest thing alive.

—*Coleridge.*

The first great mental excitement through which Flora and her sister had gone affected each of them differently. Lizzie speedily overcame the hysterical outburst which she could not control on first seeing Harry safe, and was able to give her cousin some assistance in attending to Flora. With the elder sister, however, the case was much different. She was of a highly-strung, nervous temperament, and the reaction on her after Harry was rescued from the water had produced unconsciousness. For some minutes she gave no sign of revival, then she slowly opened her eyes and stared abstractedly at her companions. No sign of recognition was at first apparent. Gazing wildly around her, she seemed to be looking into nothingness with a mind all a blank.

Silently the others watched her—watched anxiously for a return of some evidence of intelligence to her face. Neither spoke to her or the other, but patiently allowing Nature to work her own cure, sat mute, their hearts beating high with hope and excitement. Then they saw Flora start up. Clutching wildly at Harry's arm, with eyes fixed and starting, she pointed nervously at some object in the water conjured up in her over-heated brain, and cried—

"Oh! save him, save him! See! he is sinking fast! Will nobody save him?"

Then Flora covered her face with her hands as if to hide from her vision some dreadful event, and uttered shriek after shriek, until her feeble strength gave way, and she again relapsed into semi-unconsciousness.

Harry and Lizzie made all haste to get her home, and half-carrying, half-leading her, they succeeded in getting round the beach to the township, Flora muttering incoherently all the time, her mind being excited by the scenes through which she had just gone.

Fortunately they found a cab disengaged, so that they were enabled to speedily get home, and at once had Flora put to bed.

She continued in a state of excitement until completely worn out and overtaken by sleep. In the necessity to give his attention to his cousin, Harry forgot all about his own adventure, nor was he questioned on the subject, for his aunt did not notice his drenched state in the excitement occasioned by the care of her daughter. No after ill effects visited either Harry or Lizzie, so that their adventures were completely overshadowed by Flora's illness.

In relating to his aunt and uncle what had occurred, Harry made light of his own part, and explained Flora's fright as due to over-nervousness rather than to what had actually happened.

The next morning saw little or no improvement in Flora's condition. Mr. Bruce, therefore, decided to call in the family doctor, and remained at home until after Dr. Bright's visit.

The doctor at once explained to Mr. and Mrs. Bruce that their daughter had gone through a severe mental strain, and that absolute quiet and careful nursing would be requisite for her restoration.

From Mrs. Bruce Flora certainly obtained all the doctor wished, and the anxious parents soon had the satisfaction of seeing their daughter undergo great improvement.

To Lizzie, the period of her sister's convalescence was a time of much anxiety. Wild and wayward though she was, she recognised that the danger to which her cousin and sister had been exposed was due to her conduct—that she had been instrumental in subjecting her lover to a narrow escape from the sea and her sister to a lengthened illness. Her mind, therefore, was far from easy, and until she saw Flora once more out of bed she submitted herself to many bitter reproaches on the subject.

The evening of the first day on which Flora was able to leave her bed, Harry and Lizzie were seated before the fire in the dining room. Mr. Bruce was busy in his study, and his wife was engaged in making Flora comfortable for the night. For some time after being left alone the young people sat and gazed into the firelight.

There is about the expiring embers of a fireside a peculiar prompting to meditation and dreaminess, a strong invitation, as it were, to silently contemplate the action of the fire and recall past events, or dream in cosy security of the eventualities of the future, with a sober satisfaction that peaceful years will continue to cast an influence over our lives.

The full strength of this feeling was at work with Lizzie and her cousin as they sat gazing into the bright glow of the half-consumed coal. Their thoughts busy with the past, were equally busy with the future. The warmth and comfort of the room and the soft glowing heat of the fire gave them a feeling of contentment unmixed with concern.

Delightful as silence was, it could not last for ever, and at length Lizzie could no longer leave her mind unburdened.

"Oh! Harry, what a terrible time I have given you all by my folly at the beach last Saturday!"

Harry knew that his cousin's self-condemnatory frame of mind was the best possible state for her—that a lesson

such as it might prove would not be thrown away on her if she showed sincere regret. He did not, therefore, wish to make too light of what had happened, and replied quietly—

"We must be thankful that it has ended so fortunately. How much worse it might have been!"

His companion received the remark in silence. She had discernment enough to see that Harry would not allow himself to be too sympathetic. She deserved that, however, and would not resent it.

"Harry," she said, after a somewhat lengthened pause, "you do not bear me any ill will because I was so obstinate on Saturday? You forgive me, don't you?"

"Of course I do. It was not your fault that such terrible results followed. No one could foresee any of them."

Lizzie was satisfied. Her mind had been considerably disturbed, more with a contemplation of what might have been, than what actually was. She felt now that Harry did not attach to her any blame for what had followed on her wilfulness.

The fact was that he felt for her the more deeply since she could reproach herself with her sister's illness, but he reluctantly constrained himself to disguise his true feeling so that she should receive the full benefit of the lesson.

Harry sat so long over the fire, so long under the influence of thoughtful moments, that he felt speech an effort. Lizzie, too, now that she had spoken to her cousin on the subject which expressed her mind, relapsed into silence.

Presently Mrs. Bruce returned to the room.

"Come, young people," she said, kindly, "is it not time you had retired?"

Harry at once took the hint. Wishing his aunt and cousin "Good night," he went to his room.

As soon as the door closed on Harry, Lizzie turned to her mother, threw her arms around her neck, and burst into a fit of sobbing. All the pent-up feelings of her nature burst forth at the sight of her mother's quiet but anxious face. The consciousness of her own fault could have calmly withstood the blame or reproaches of others, but to see in silence the care and anxiety of her loved parent was beyond her strength.

"Oh! mother, mother, it was all my fault!"

"What was all your fault, Lizzie?"

Lizzie only continued her weeping. Her mother caressed her brow gently, and let her cry on without interruption for some moments. When she had become calmer Mrs. Bruce inquired—

"Tell me, Lizzie, what you mean? What is the matter?"

"Oh! mother, it was all my doing. It was I who nearly got Harry drowned and gave Flora this fright. I wouldn't do as the others wanted me, and Harry fell into the sea and was nearly drowned."

"Come, Lizzie, tell me all about it."

Then her daughter told her everything that had happened, not sparing herself in the recital. When this had ended, and Mrs. Bruce was in possession of all the facts, she gently embraced her daughter, kindly assuring her that she had done well to tell her all. Then Mrs. Bruce conducted Lizzie to her own room, and sat chatting cheerfully until she was snugly in bed.

On leaving Lizzie's room, the anxious mother quietly proceeded to the bedside of her other daughter. She found Flora sleeping peacefully, and at once left, closing the door gently as she went out. As Mrs. Bruce walked

along the passage towards her husband's study she saw the glimmer of a light through the doorway of Harry's room. She stopped and tapped gently at the door. Receiving no answer, she knocked still louder, with the same result. Opening the door noiselessly, she entered the room.

Harry had been reading, and had fallen asleep without putting out his light. The book had dropped from his hand and lay upon the counterpane. The bedclothes were thrown back from the sleeper's chest, and the light of his candle fell softly on his face. Something in his appearance attracted the attention of Mrs. Bruce, and she stood for some time gazing at the fair young face before her—gazing and wondering what it was that seemed to keep her fixed to the spot. Then it was that she saw something in his face which reminded her of her own dead son. She had often stood thus watching her boy asleep, and now as she gazed on her nephew, thoughts of her bereavement came to her—sad thoughts, but not without a comforting accompaniment: her boy had been taken from her, but he had left her no thoughts of a wasted existence, no reproaches on his account ever visited her mind. He had been a worthy son, and left a cherished memory.

Silently the bereaved mother stood watching the sleeping form; long and wistfully she gazed upon the peaceful face. The great wave of her feelings brought to the shore of memory sublime and precious images she would fain nurse in her maternal bosom, joyous recallings that would never fade from her heart. Thoughts came and went, and as a great yearning filled her soul, she scarce could resist the impulse to stoop and embrace the form before her. Tears filled her eyes, but in her heart was the deep satisfaction that she could still give some of her pent-up maternal affection to the relative before her. A prayer,

devout though unexpressed, formed within her mind that she might find in her nephew a worthy successor to the son she had loved and mourned so deeply. She could not tear herself away from her nephew's bedside, and longed even that he might awake, so that she could show him the wealth of affection that seemed welling up within her. His hand lay outstretched upon the coverlet. A desire to grasp it in hers took possession of her, and she stooped forward in obedience to the impulse. At that instant she became conscious of another presence in the room, and as she turned, her husband's arm stole gently around her waist. Without a word he drew her head kindly upon his shoulder, and kissed her brow. There was no need of words between those two smpathetic hearts. Each knew the feelings that animated the other, and for some time they stood thus by their nephew's bed, both filled with recollections of the past and aspirations for the future. Then, without breaking the holy and sympathetic silence, they extinguished Harry's candle, and passed quietly from the room. The wife and mother afterwards learned that her husband had for some nights past gone to the bedside of his sleeping nephew to indulge in holy memories of his own son in the presence of another's, who might some day help to soften, although he could never efface their deep feeling of bereavement.

CHAPTER XI.

The world is grown so bad
That wrens may prey where eagles dare not perch.
—*Richard III.*

SMALL had been at the office one night on the arrival of a northern mail. It brought several letters containing remittances in cheques, drafts, &c. These he locked away in the cashier's safe. Harry also was at work getting his books posted and some invoices copied for the mail the following day. The manager had asked Lane to come back that evening to copy the invoices, but on his pleading as an excuse his attendance at a private mathematical class of which he was a member, Harry, overhearing, had volunteered to do this work for him.

In the safe in which Small locked the remittances was a considerable sum of money in notes which had been paid at the office during that afternoon too late for banking. The following morning Small was at the office quite half an hour earlier than usual, and had not been long at his desk when Lane entered.

Herman at once asked the manager if the invoices he required early that day had been copied. He had come, he said, at that hour so that he might get on with them if necessary. Small found that Harry had them all ready, but he gave Lane some letters to answer, and these were set about at once. The manager was considerably impressed by the circumstance of Lane's early appearance, and his

anxiety to get the work completed he had been asked to do the previous evening. His apparent desire not to cause inconvenience by his inability to come to the office when requested by the manager, pleased the latter more than his attendance then could possibly have done.

As the clerks dropped in one by one, and proceeded quietly to their respective posts, the office began to present a very busy appearance. Harry, as soon as he had performed some preliminary duties, proceeded to the Post Office, and shortly returned with the morning letters, which he handed to Small.

Presently the cashier opened his safe for the purpose of entering up some money just received, and came upon the letters left there by the manager the night before. On seeing them he spoke to Small, and was informed as to when and by whom they had been placed where he found them. He then set about his work of entering the different cheques and drafts, and was surprised to find that one envelope contained a draft in addition to the cheque it expressed to cover, but as the letter referring to this vagrant draft was almost the next one opened, he concluded that Small had displaced it on receipt of the letters. On completing the entry of the different cheques, he placed them in the drawer of his desk, and proceeded with the posting of his books.

Mr. Bruce shortly after entered his room, and when he had read the letters on his table visited the counting-house; after having a few minutes' conversation with his manager, he returned to his chair.

Immediately afterwards Lane approached Small and asked permission to return to his lodgings. He had forgotten, he said, to bring with him an important private letter which must be posted that morning. Having finished the most urgent part of his day's work, he could be spared

for an hour or so. Small made no objection, and Lane left the office. As he passed into the street Mr. Bruce was talking to a friend in the doorway. Lane looked back several times before he got out of sight of the warehouse to see if Mr. Bruce was still standing there. When he got some distance away he saw that his employer had left the building, and was coming along the street in the same direction. Lane quickly proceeded down a side street, and, under the shadow of a convenient doorway, waited until Mr. Bruce had passed the end of that street; then the clerk returned, and watched still in the direction the merchant had taken, until he passed from view.

Shortly after Mr. Bruce and Lane had gone out, Detective Fane entered the office of Bruce and Co., and enquired for the principal. Small saw the detective enter, and ascertaining that Mr. Bruce had not returned, he requested the officer to enter his private room.

"Will Mr. Bruce be long?" enquired the detective, as soon as the door was closed on them.

"I think not," replied the other. "Will you wait for him?"

"Afraid I can't."

"Will you leave any message?"

"No."

"You need not be afraid to say anything to me; I'm in Mr. Bruce's confidence."

"Would rather not."

The detective was a man of few words. Trained to conceal his thoughts, he had also acquired the art of expressing them shortly. There was nothing circumlocutory about any of his speeches. If he had to convey a negative, there was nothing to his mind so appropriate as a direct and brief word. This officer had been connected with the service in Dunedin for many years, and was a well-known

figure there. His tall, wiry frame, small, dark eyes, clean-shaved, mobile face, long bony hands and muscular arms were characteristics peculiarly adapted to the profession he had chosen. Behind his reserved and seemingly expressionless exterior was a kindly nature and a fund of humour that would have surprised most physiognomists, who would have read his character quite differently. His large experience had provided him with a reserve from which he could draw a rich profusion of anecdote, and many good stories which found circulation in the local press or other less diffusive channels, could have been traced to the lips of Detective Fane in the moments of his relaxation, or when smoking a pipe with some more than usually favoured companion. To Small, the detective was known only by sight. His refusal, so shortly expressed, to give any inkling of his business to the manager somewhat nettled that little gentleman. This, however, he managed to conceal; at least, so he thought; and to an eye of less discernment than Fane's this would have been the case.

Small was unwilling to be so easily disposed of by the detective, so he continued—

"Does your visit relate to Lane?"

This question satisfied the detective that his questioner knew something of the subject, but did not put him off his guard.

"Yes."

"Have you discovered anything?"

"Yes."

Fane gave a direct answer as being better than any evasion, while it conveyed nothing. He determined, however, that there should be no further enquiries, and, drawing his watch from his pocket, continued—

"Will Mr. Bruce be in at three o'clock? I'll return then," and without waiting for an answer the detective left the office.

As he strode quickly along the street, and neared the Colonial Bank, he saw Herman Lane leave that building, hurry down past the Telegraph Office, and disappear round that corner into Bond Street. As this was not a proceeding out of keeping with his office duties, the detective did not further notice it.

Lane returned to the office in less than an hour, and resumed his work.

It was part of Harry's duty to make the payments to the bank each afternoon. Shortly after he had returned from lunch, the cashier handed him the bank slip, together with a number of cheques and drafts, and a roll of notes bound with an elastic band. Harry ran over the cheques mentioned on the slip, and was about to count the notes when the cashier addressed him—

"Oh, you needn't open the notes; I counted them twice before rolling them up; they haven't been touched since."

This satisfied Harry, and he set off to the bank.

The banking room was considerably crowded when he entered, and he had a few minutes to wait; then he handed the bundle of notes and the other documents to the teller, who first marked off the cheques, entering each in his book as he did so. Removing the elastic band from the roll, he straightened it out, looking about him as he did so, and then turned to count the notes. With a look of surprise and dismay he turned to Harry—

"Why! what is this?" and he directed the other's attention to the roll, which consisted of a number of slips of paper in size and colour not unlike bank notes, carefully rolled up within a genuine £20 note.

This was all that represented a total on the slip of £400.

Harry was too much overcome to speak. With a countenance which displayed great consternation, he gazed in wonder on the fraudulent bundle before him. The teller

again spoke. He felt alarmed at the dismay depicted on the face opposite him, and hoping to put Harry more at ease, said—

"Who's playing larks with you? Why didn't you look at the money before you came away?"

This suggestion somewhat reassured Harry, but did not put his mind at ease. He replied—

"I hope it *is* only a joke." Then stretching out his hand for the bundle, he continued—"You keep the cheques while I see about this."

Harry then left the bank and rushed towards his uncle's warehouse. Bounding into the office, he laid the false roll before the cashier, and demanded—

"What do you mean by that?"

"By what!" asked the other, in blank astonishment.

Harry replied by pointing to the roll, and then spreading the papers before the eyes of his questioner. His manner was wild and excited.

The dismay and amazement with which Harry had seen the roll exhibited by the teller at the bank was nothing to that displayed by the cashier of Bruce and Co. His jaw fell; his face turned deadly pale; with eyes starting and mouth open, he looked first at Harry, then at the heap of papers before him; speechless and utterly thunderstruck, he looked and looked again. Were his senses deceiving him, or was Harry?

At this moment Small, having seen Harry rush into the office, and judging from his excited action as he displayed the roll to the cashier that something was amiss, rose from his seat and approached them.

"What is it, Harry? What is wrong?"

He received no reply in words. Harry merely pointed to the spurious roll. The face of the other told a tale of serious import.

"Come with me," and Small led the way into Mr. Bruce's private room. The others followed him quietly. Small shut the door, and continued—"Now tell me what has happened?"

Harry then related his knowledge of the occurrence, turning to the cashier as he finished.

"When did you count the money?" enquired Small of that gentleman.

"Yesterday when I received it, and again when I rolled it up with the elastic band and locked the safe."

This was the first time the cashier had spoken since he became aware of the robbery. His voice was broken and husky, and grated terribly, even on his own ears.

Mr. Bruce then entered the room. He was surprised to see his clerks there, and their anxious, troubled faces disconcerted him not a little. He approached Small, who briefly told him what had occurred.

Mr. Bruce questioned the cashier and Harry as to the particulars already recorded, and then dismissed them to their desks with injunctions not to reveal what had happened.

Then turning to Small, he said with troubled tones—

"Good gracious! Small, where is this going to end? We cannot afford to remain longer inactive."

"It's really a terrible business. What can we do?"

"Do! Somebody must be arrested at once."

Mr. Bruce spoke with warmth and determination; spoke also with haste and without thought. The impulse to do something had taken possession of him, and, as usual in such an event, it promised to lead to error. To do something in cases of emergency or events unprepared for is an impulse inherent in the human breast. To act, whether rightly or wrongly, and leave the result to chance is a principle too often adopted and too often abused.

The theory that everything is pre-ordained is frequently productive of much ill, inasmuch as it prevents the due exercise of the reflective faculties in man. It is a comforting solution of many events, but it would be better for him if he could realise that he has some responsibility for and in his surroundings, and that the star of his destiny will be obscured or bright in so far as he provides an unclouded firmament in his acts; that the man who can so train his mind and regulate his life as to make the most of his advantages will be able to meet and overcome all difficulties, and so far shelter himself behind the armour of his own character as to allow the rude winds and buffetings of the world to pass by him, secure and uninjured in his own stronghold.

Small told his employer of the expected visit of Detective Fane at three o'clock. Mr. Bruce consulted his watch, and found it was already that time. He determined to await the officer's coming, and, dismissing Small, sat down to reflect over passing events.

Such a crowd of misfortunes was sufficient to disturb the strongest nature. At first, when the novelty of a fraud on his house presented itself, accompanied as it necessarily was with perplexity and doubt, Mr. Bruce was all patience and forbearance. Now, however, having suspicions as to the perpetrator, he felt strongly prompted towards punishment, and would make suspicion take the place of proof. A man confronted by ill fortune cannot be expected to exhibit refinement either of sense or of feeling, and Mr. Bruce found battling with himself his greatest difficulty.

He sat pondering and undecided until the entry of the detective aroused him.

Without enquiring if the officer had anything to report, Mr. Bruce communicated to him what was uppermost on his mind, and put him in possession of the details as far as

they were known to him. Then the detective pulled out his notebook and made a memorandum of the occurrence, of which he had learned the particulars.

"Can I see the cashier?" he asked, when he had done.

"Yes, certainly. Will you speak to him here now?"

"Yes."

Mr. Bruce touched his bell, and Harry entered. On seeing him, the merchant addressed the detective—

"This is the clerk who took the roll to the bank. Will you ask him anything?"

Fane interrogated Harry as to how the discovery was made, noting the most important particulars. When this had ended he asked abruptly—

"Have you a key of the safe?"

"No," replied Harry, promptly.

"Ever had?"

"Yes."

"Had it long in your possession at one time?"

"Never more than an hour or so."

"Ever had it all night?"

"No."

"Show me all the keys you have?"

Harry at once produced the keys in his possession, and handed them to the detective.

"Describe them all."

Without hesitation Harry mentioned what each key was.

The detective paused and considered a moment, then turning to Mr. Bruce, said—

"That will do; call in the cashier."

Mr. Bruce told Harry to send the cashier, and not to say anything further. When his nephew left the room, he turned to the detective—

"Would you not rather speak to the cashier in private?"

"No, you remain."

The cashier then entered. On seeing Fane he felt considerably disconcerted. He approached the table at which his employer sat. This brought him directly in front of the officer.

Mr. Bruce told him that he had been called in to answer some enquiries that Detective Fane would make respecting the missing money.

The detective spoke immediately.

"You counted the lost money more than once?"

"Yes, twice; once on receiving it, and again on placing it in the safe."

"Do you remember the value of the notes?"

"Yes, distinctly; 4 fifties, 5 twenties, and 10 tens."

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite certain."

"And on what bank were they?"

"The fifties and twenties were on the Bank of Australasia; the others I am not sure about."

The detective carefully noted all these particulars. Pursuing his enquiries further, he elicited some other minor information, and then requested the cashier not to speak of the robbery in any way, after which he was sent to his desk. Mr. Bruce and the officer remained together for some time, and arrangements were made for a vigorous prosecution of investigations.

CHAPTER XII.

You have no cause to hold my friendship doubtful;
I never was nor never will be false.

—*Richard III.*

Detective Fane at once set about his enquiries. From the investigations he had already made, he started with a preconception as to who was the guilty party. His first place of enquiry was at the Bank of Australasia, as to the notes. He called there without delay, and found that three £20 notes had that morning been changed for gold, but he could not ascertain by whom. Another had been received in the exchanges from the Colonial Bank, but no fifties had as yet come to hand. Enquiries at the Colonial Bank led to the discovery that the £20 note received through that institution had been paid into the account of Harry Williams. This fact did not bear out the detective's theory. Pushing his enquiries further, he found that this £20 had been paid in by Harry himself. This information the detective thought it wise to impart to Mr. Bruce immediately. Calling at the warehouse, he found that gentleman engaged, but the officer waited a few minutes and saw him.

They concluded that it was best to speak to Harry at once, and he was called in and addressed by his uncle.

"Harry, where did you get that £20 note you paid into your banking account to-day?"

"I didn't pay in £20 to-day, uncle."

"When was it then?" asked the detective, opening his pocket book and producing the bank slip.

"I haven't paid in since last salary day."

Fane handed the slip to Mr. Bruce; the latter passed it to his nephew.

"Then what does this mean, Harry?"

"It's some mistake, sir; I never saw this before."

Harry spoke firmly, and with evident truthfulness. There was no hesitation or want of candour in his manner.

"Is not that your handwriting?" enquired Fane.

"No. It's certainly like mine, and intended to pass for it." Then, turning to his uncle, Harry continued—"This is evidently the same forger as copied the Auckland letter."

Detective Fane was puzzled. He had no ordinary thief to deal with, and he must have his ground made sure at every step."

"Were you at the office last night?" continued Fane.

"Yes," replied Harry, "with Mr. Small."

"Did you leave together?"

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"It struck half-past ten as we passed the Telegraph Office."

"Did you lock up everything on leaving?"

"Yes."

"And nobody had any business there after that?"

"No. I walked with Mr. Small as far as his lodgings, and then went home myself."

The detective was getting these particulars because he had noticed a light in the office of Bruce and Co. between 11 and 12 o'clock that night. This fact he kept to himself, however. His duty and object in this instance was to get information, not to give it.

After obtaining from Harry a few more unimportant

particulars, the detective told him he did not further require him.

That same evening Fane resumed his task of watching Herman Lane, and supplemented his own exertions by putting on a man to ascertain in what manner the cashier passed his leisure time.

Fane was not surprised to find that Herman's first hours of freedom were spent at the old rendezvous in Rattray Street. Thither he went alone, but it was an easy conjecture as to whom he met there, and what served to pass the time. The detective knew what enquiries he could make at this hotel without fear of his visit being spoken of. The barman was a young man who had been brought up in the town, and was known extensively as sensible and trustworthy. To him, therefore, Fane addressed his questions as to whether any big Bank of Australasia notes had been changed in the house. He found that one for £10 had been changed for smaller notes during the day by John Samson.

This was only a slight matter, but it helped to piece out the detective's theory.

With an eagerness begotten of long professional practice, the detective seized upon every circumstance which tended to justify his already-formed hypothesis as to the crime he was dealing with. Strict impartiality in the enquiries of the detective department would be an impossibility. Every officer, to be worth his salt, must soon adopt some hypothesis as to the case he has in hand, and if enquiries are to be pursued with any vigour, they must necessarily be directed towards the support of this. That this frequently leads them off on a wrong track is undeniable; but the process of throwing light upon any one path must cast some reflection upon each branching way, and lead to the discovery of any important divergence. No officer who

flounders along in the general quagmire, in preference to first exhausting the leadings of the different pathways, will ever be a success in his profession.

The patience with which Fane waited for the appearance of Herman Lane was eventually rewarded by the latter's emerging from the hotel in company with Mote and Samson. His face was flushed, as if from recent drinking, but there was no indication of it in his gait or manner. The men stood for a few minutes in front of the doorway, engaged in earnest conversation, then they separated, Samson proceeding up Rattray Street, and the others walking leisurely along in the direction of Princes Street. Here Lane and Mote stood for some minutes conversing, the burden of their talk evidently being of an appointment to meet later on at some rendezvous. Then Mote started off along Princes Street, leaving Lane, who, crossing the street, proceeded towards Bond Street, and made all haste along that street until he arrived opposite the warehouse of Bruce and Co. Here he stopped, and after making sure that the office was unoccupied, crossed over towards the door, where he stood and looked around him to ascertain if anybody was in the street. Not seeing any one about, he hastily unlocked the door, passed in, and closed it behind him. The detective came quickly across to one of the front windows, and stood waiting under it expecting a light to appear. In this, however, he was disappointed; Lane was evidently not using a light for what had brought him there. Fane then stood upon the window sill, but found that from there he could not see beyond Mr. Bruce's private room, while it was in the public office that Lane was at work. The detective tried another window with like result, and was forced to give up that idea and return to his post of observation opposite. He had not been there long until Lane came out into the street, and, without

turning or looking round, hurried again along Bond Street, the officer following. He walked quickly along Princes Street, through the Octagon, and joined Mote in front of the Town Hall. Together they hastened down a narrow right-of-way off George Street, and their follower saw them stop and knock at one of a row of small cottages well known to the police. Having seen them enter this, the detective concluded that there would not be much chance of either of them coming out again that night, and he therefore terminated his investigations for the present, and proceeded home to "think out" the information he had gained.

Seated in his armchair, Detective Fane indulged in a mental unravelling of the mysteries of the case upon which he was engaged. With the assistance of an old companion, in the shape of a well-coloured meerschaum pipe, which he had constantly between his teeth when seated in his well-worn chair, he turned over and over the different phases of the events he had brought to light. Piecing together, after fully reviewing separately all the little items of evidence collected, he reasoned out the different theories he could suggest as solutions of the mystery, and finally made up his mind that one course, and one only, lay before him.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he removed his pipe from his mouth, and further thought being then almost impossible, he went to bed.

With Detective Fane, going to bed meant only one thing. All his actions were the result of long and careful training. When he determined to do anything he did it. To lie down to sleep meant going to sleep almost immediately. At whatever time he wished to wake in the morning he made up his mind beforehand, and wake he would precisely at that hour, and without fail—so unfailingly, in fact, that he had often declared he needed no other test by which to adjust

his watch. He regulated his hours of sleep by the exigencies of the work he had in hand. On this occasion there was no need for early rising, so he took full advantage of the time at his disposal, and slept well into the following morning.

After arranging his programme for the day, he made a call on Mr. Bruce. He had not yet interviewed Small, so he went to him in his private room, and got from the manager all the information in his possession. He then reported to Mr. Bruce the result of his proceedings on the previous night, and explained the course he thought advisable to pursue. The object of Lane's visit to the office at night he had not been able to conjecture, nor was explanation forthcoming there. So far no discovery had been made. Lane had no right whatever with an office key, and must have obtained it surreptitiously.

After determining the course to take, the detective left the office, and Mr. Bruce engaged in the business before him. The merchant was oppressed with conjectures as to what the immediate future had in store for him, and could not dismiss from his mind apprehensions on the subject of the inquiries being made by the detective, and dark forebodings as to the results likely to flow from them.

Herman was at the office as usual that morning, and had apparently no idea or suspicion of what was going on around him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered.
—*Cymbeline.*

The following morning Herman Lane did not appear at the office. Detective Fane had arranged that any unusual circumstance should at once be communicated to him. Small lost no time in informing him of this fact, and Harry was despatched to Lane's lodgings to ascertain if he were there. No tidings could be got of him; he had not been home the previous night. Harry obtained permission to go to his room, and found that it presented the appearance of everything having been packed up. A large trunk with Lane's name on was there, locked. Trying this, he concluded that it was empty. On Harry's returning to the detective with this information, that astute officer at once drew his own conclusion, and proceeded to act with vigour. He despatched a somewhat lengthy telegram to a colleague on the line of the Southern express, with the result that before the train reached Clinton the guard had passed through with a telegram addressed to Herman Lane purporting to come from John Samson, to inform him that suspicion had been directed to him.

Taken unawares, Lane immediately acknowledged himself as the person to whom the message was addressed, and at Clinton the guard was able to point him out to the officer, who arrested him as soon as he stepped upon the platform.

This clever manœuvre of the detective was not unnecessary, for Lane had by two or three simple changes in his appearance made so radical an alteration that the brief description given in the telegram would not have served to identify him.

By the ordinary irresponsible mind the anxiety under which the detective laboured between the despatch of his message and his receipt of a reply would scarcely be believed, nor indeed would the satisfaction with which he viewed the success of his scheme when he read his colleague's reply—

"All right; nabbed Lane at Clinton."

He must be pardoned, therefore, if his first act on receipt of this was to proceed with the good news to Mr. Bruce and Small, his manager. That they did not regard his news with equal satisfaction would have surprised him less if he had known the full strain of anxiety through which these gentlemen had passed in connection with the occurrences so full of professional interest to him.

The detective met the train on arrival at Dunedin, and accompanied Lane to the quarters he was to occupy. The following morning he was brought before the Justices, and at the request of the police remanded until the next day. His application for bail was refused. The next day Detective Fane led such evidence against him as satisfied the Bench that a *prima facie* had been made out.

The cashier was the chief witness, and was able to identify one of the notes that had been traced to Lane, owing to a peculiar blot over the figures on its face.

Lane saw the effect of this evidence, and turned a very malignant look at the witness as he left the box.

The prisoner reserved his defence, and was committed for trial at the next session of the Supreme Court. He was admitted to bail, and with the assistance of his friends,

Mote and Samson, who, to their credit, did not desert him, he was able to secure the necessary securities. The period to elapse between the committal and trial of Lane being nearly three months, Detective Fane thought it desirable to have some attention paid to his movements, so he was the subject of considerable watching on the part of the police.

The house of Bruce and Co. experienced an immunity from any similar irregularity after the arrest of Lane.

The affair of the bank notes served to draw Harry and the cashier into closer bonds of friendship, and they became constant companions. Both delighted in walking excursions, and from that time forward did many a good stretch in company.

On some of these expeditions they discussed the approaching trial of Lane. The cashier confided to Harry that one of Lane's friends had approached him with a proposal that he should modify his evidence in favour of the accused so as to give him a chance of escape. The feeling of scorn and contempt with which his companion spoke of the proposition satisfied Harry that there was little chance of its being accepted. He therefore felt that there was no necessity for anything further being said on the subject.

The twelve months' probation in the matter of Harry's engagement with his cousin was drawing to a close. Both he and Lizzie had instinctively felt for some time past that all feeling of objection or doubt in the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce had been entirely removed, and that now their desires with regard to each other found a more than welcome response in the parental breasts. Both his uncle and aunt had shown in many ways that they already regarded Harry as a son, and would have regretted in the extreme any circumstance which would have prevented a consummation of the young folks' wishes.

The more apparent this became, the greater was the resentment shown on the subject by Flora. While there was a distant probability of anything interfering between her sister and cousin, she did not exhibit any very active feeling, but now that there appeared no sign of any disturbing influence, she became more and more determined on intervention.

She had repeatedly reproached and reviled her sister with her designing character, and accused her of throwing toils around her cousin, so that he was not a free agent.

Lizzie, conscious of her own feelings, and assured of her lover's affection, esteem, and regard, had borne patiently her sister's reproaches, a circumstance which all the more galled Flora, and increased her determination to molest her sister.

Flora had repeatedly declared that no matter what it cost her, or what art or action she had to employ, she would prevent Lizzie from ever becoming the wife of Harry Williams.

Lizzie had grown accustomed to these wild threats, and disregarded them almost entirely.

On the last occasion she had fairly exasperated her sister by good-humouredly laughing at her as she vowed vengeance in this manner, and smilingly asking her what she could do to prevent her marriage.

"Do!" cried Flora, mad with passion. "I would shoot him at the altar before you, rather than see him lead you out of the church as his wife."

The intensity of her sister's avowal and the terribly passionate tone of her voice alarmed Lizzie, and she burst into tears.

Flora had just been reading in the columns of a popular journal a story of the most sensational type, where the heroine is described as shooting a false lover as he stood

before the altar with his newly-wedded bride. The suggestion of such a terrible expedient would never otherwise have arisen in her mind.

Seeing her sister's tears, Flora continued—

"Yes, you may well hide your shame in tears; you may well cry when the truth is brought home to you in this way: but your crying won't alter the position. If you persist in this course of deceitful obstinacy, I swear to prevent it."

"You have no right to speak like that. You know that Harry never did and never could care for you. He loves me only."

"Loves you!" retorted Flora, with a sneer of the greatest contempt. "You! a baby-faced, brainless doll! What have you to offer any man in return for his affection?"

Lizzie was not a match for her sister in a discussion of this nature. Her only refuge was her willing tears, and to these she had recourse.

In the midst of her weeping she broke out, "Flora, you are a bad, wicked girl!" and hurriedly left the room.

The strength of Flora's passion was nearly spent; she was almost exhausted by the strain, and after her sister's exit, she too gave way to a paroxysm of weeping,—weeping in which subdued anger, the expiring embers of the fierce flame of passion which had been consuming her, co-mingled with grief and disappointment at the hopeless outlook for her love—that deep, absorbing desire for her cousin's affection which had taken entire possession of her being, and threatened to deprive her of reason.

Flora's love was no ordinary girlish passion. It was the full outpouring of a highly sensitive and deeply sympathetic nature: an insatiable longing for another being; a strong desire for her cousin's companionship; an outgoing of her soul which could not be controlled.

The subject of such a love as Flora's required fullest pity. She was rended and tortured by the violence of her

passion, and her present life became to her a period of extreme misery.

The hopelessness of her love, and the consequent misdirection of her thoughts, prompted her to give full play to the bitterness of her feelings against her sister. Reason found no resting place in her being, asserted no influence over the fierce flame burning within her, which alone held sway.

To attain her own desire was, she knew, impossible; but she must direct all her thoughts towards preventing the hated union of her sister and cousin.

The utter selfishness of a love which had no thought for the happiness of its object, or the narrowness of the passion which, when thwarted, rushes to the opposite extreme, did not suggest itself to the warped feelings and disordered imagination of this poor girl.

For many days after the passionate outburst against her sister, Flora did not exchange a word with her; she had, as it were, cut herself off from companionship with the rest of the world, and she spent every moment she could command in converse with her never-failing books.

Flora read, not as other girls of her age do, for mere amusement; the action of the story she was devouring had more than a passing influence upon her mind. She became tinged for the time being with the loves and passions of the characters she met in her reading, threw all the sympathy of her nature into their history, and gave way to the excitement produced by their surroundings. She made the acquaintance of real men and women, and lived with them in mutual feeling, was joyful as their fortunes brightened, sad with them in their gloom, and entered so fully into their hopes and fears, loves, disappointments, and misfortunes, that she was often unfit for any other exercise of her mental faculties, and so overcome by the influence of this spurious life that her health and vigour suffered greatly. This constant poring over her

books was fostered rather than checked by the action of her parents. Mr. Bruce was a great reader. Nearly every new novel that came out was to be found on his shelves. A local bookseller sent him every work of fiction as it arrrived, and very few were returned. He had encouraged habits of reading in his children, thinking that they could not go far wrong with such a pastime. He overlooked the necessity for careful selection of what they read, and was satisfied to see that they were fond of books, without enquiring of what nature the books were. Thus it was that Flora had gradually developed a taste for novels of the most sensational kind. Stories of strong passion and excitement she eagerly devoured. When her constitution required that she should be taking active exercise in the open air, she would be found in her own room engrossed in some over-drawn love story. To such an extent had this gone, that the stimulation of an exciting novel was necessary to her existence, and like the indulger in opiates, she knew no rest without it. Her life, when she had not the absorbing interest of some story in progress, was a wretched blank, and as soon as one book was finished, a powerful craving possessed her to begin another. She dwelt ever thus in the unhealthy atmosphere of an artificial and unreal world, with imaginary characters as her constant companions, and improbable events shedding an influence over her life.

What wonder then, that with such feelings existing in her breast, because of her thwarted affections, she flew to the only consolation open to her, and more eagerly gave herself up to her favourite indulgence? Books, however pernicious in their influence, were honest companions. There was no falsehood or dissimulation in the world over which they ruled, no fear of a rebuff if she gave her best hours to their society, or of a refusal or slighting when she sought their companionship.

CHAPTER XIV.

Oh that a man might know
The end of this day's business, ere it come;
But it sufficeth that the day will end,
And then the end is known.

—*Julius Cæsar.*

The date of the Criminal Sessions of the Supreme Court at Dunedin crept gradually nearer and nearer. There had been no event of note in connection with the house of Bruce and Co., nor in the history of any of the persons in whom we have taken an interest. With the exception of the formal acknowledgment by Mr. and Mrs. Bruce of the engagement of Harry and Lizzie, things had gone on in a sober, methodical way. Harry's intimacy with the cashier had increased with time, and ripened into a friendship begotten of mutual regard. Of late they had only once reverted to the case of Lane, and that was when the cashier had informed Harry of the expedients that were being used by the friends of the accused to prevent his giving evidence in support of the charge. They had resorted to hints of violence, and one of them had distinctly threatened that the day on which Lane was convicted on his evidence, would see him a dead man. These circumstances could not fail to make some impression on the mind of any man, and Harry was not surprised to find that his companion felt considerably troubled over them. Harry advised him to speak to Mr. Small on the subject, and this he accordingly did, when it was agreed that if any further

molestation of the kind occurred, he would report the matter to Detective Fane, and seek his assistance.

Flora's sullen manner had become intensified after the declaration of her sister's engagement, and Lizzie passed her days in mortal dread of some awful outbreak of her sister's pent-up passion. Flora had steadily refused to speak to Lizzie in any companionable or sisterly way, and had caused her mother great uneasiness because of her conduct. Unfortunately Mrs. Bruce did not speak to her husband on the subject, so that his elder daughter's manner towards her sister escaped the knowledge of Mr. Bruce.

The trial of Lane was only some eight or ten days distant. The sessions were to begin the following week. The calendar for the ensuing sittings was published in the *Evening Star*, and the same paper which contained the list of persons for trial contained also the following paragraph :—

We regret to record the painfully sudden death of Mr. William Johnston, the cashier at the establishment of Messrs. Bruce and Co., Bond Street. The deceased gentleman had been at work at the office last evening, and walked home in company with a fellow-clerk named Williams, who parted from him at the door of his lodgings about 11 o'clock. Awaiting him at the house were Herman Lane (against whom deceased was one of the chief witnesses on a criminal charge to be investigated next week) and another young man whose name we have not been able to ascertain. These young men remained fully half an hour with Johnston, and a lodger, whose room adjoins his, heard some high words pass between them. Lane's companion left some moments before him, and after Lane's departure, Johnston appears to have gone at once to bed. This morning he was found by the maid-servant, who went to call him to breakfast, lying quite dead and cold in his bed. On his table were found the peel of an orange he appears to have eaten just before retiring, and an empty tumbler which seems to have contained water. Deceased was a trusted and valued servant of the firm of Bruce and Co., in whose employment he had been for upwards of four years. An inquest will be held to-morrow afternoon.

When Johnston failed to appear at the office, Harry proposed to go up to his lodgings to enquire for him, and

was just about to set off with that object when he met a policeman, who asked for him, and informed him of the sad event. The intelligence caused great surprise and consternation in the office, and the sudden death of his companion was a severe shock to Harry.

Later in the day, Harry was informed that he would be required as a witness at the inquest—a piece of news anything but welcome to him.

Next day the inquest was held. Harry gave evidence of having been at the office with the deceased, and walking home with him on the evening of his death. There had been nothing unusual in his appearance, nor did he give any indication of either mental or bodily weakness. The peel found in his bedroom was doubtless that from an orange which Harry had given him while walking home from the office. Harry had received two from his cousin before setting out for the office, and had shared them with his companion. The facts already mentioned regarding Lane's visit to Johnston's lodgings were proved by the landlady. The only other witnesses called were Dr. Wilson and Professor Bust, who had conducted a *post mortem* examination on the deceased.

Lane was not examined, for reasons which will be made apparent later on. The medical testimony was somewhat startling, and came with the suddenness of a shock. It went to show that Johnston's death was the result of poison. His stomach contained some particles of strychnine, and there were unmistakeable evidences that his death was due to that cause.

After hearing the evidence given by the medical men, and their statement that arrangements had been made for a further analysis of the parts containing poison, the coroner's jury returned a verdict to the effect that "Deceased had died from the effects of poison, how or by whom administered there was no evidence to show."

The news of this tragedy cast quite a gloom over the city, and formed the chief topic of conversation for some days. Johnston was a young man widely known amongst the business men; and although he had no relations in Dunedin, he had made a large circle of firm friends, who felt his death very acutely, all the more so that it had been brought about in this tragic and mysterious way.

The suggestion that the cashier had committed suicide did not find much acceptance. Our old friend Detective Fane had formed quite a different theory on the subject, which he at once proceeded to work out. He interviewed Small at the office, and subsequently had a long talk with Harry. From the latter he got particulars of the endeavours made by Lane and his companion to divert the evidence to be given by the cashier in the robbery case, and following up the hints these and the other circumstances gave him, he shortly afterwards arrested Lane on the more serious charge of having caused the death of Johnston.

With such charges as were already made against him, the finger of the law naturally pointed to Lane as the criminal guilty of the cashier's death. Of necessity the disclosure of the murder and the arrest of Herman Lane produced a profound sensation in Dunedin. The other charge against him was quite overshadowed by the graver crime, although the facts of his awaiting trial for the robbery, and the cashier being one of the chief witnesses, tended to convince the public of his guilt.

The preliminary investigation at the Police Court was, of course, only a formal matter. Lane's counsel offered no objections to the committal, but reserved his defence for the higher court. The barrister secured for Lane's defence in the robbery case, and who now appeared for him in the murder charge, was a young man of somewhat dazzling, if not brilliant, attainments in his profession. He

was an intimate acquaintance of Mote and Samson, and it was through their advice and assistance that Lane had obtained his aid. Imbued with a tolerably good opinion of himself, Mr. Lyttelton Coke had never shown any inclination to hide his light under a bushel. That he did not stand very high in the estimation of his professional brethren was not for lack of effort in that direction on his part. He had a strong desire to be "all things to all men," and it was only amongst those who most intimately knew him that his predilection for "running with the hare and hunting with the hounds" was appreciated at its true worth. Where want of knowledge and ability became a disadvantage with Mr. Lyttelton Coke (and these occasions were not few), he had a plentiful supply of assurance to draw upon to make up the deficiency, and it often happened that he would publicly assert most positively some proposition of law, and as soon as the occasion had passed would ask the first "learned friend" he met what was the law on the point. We have nothing to do with the barrister's moral character, which is fortunate, unless we are of the mind to enjoy an altogether fruitless enquiry; but of his sincerity we can judge from his expressions when Mote asked him to undertake the defence of Lane.

"Who is he? Is he any use to us?"

"He's a young fellow with some money and not much brains. *We're* found him profitable."

"Oh!" and Lyttelton Coke indicated by the elevation of his eyebrows that he understood his friend's meaning. "Then you want him to get off, do you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Acquittal will pay better than conviction?"

"Most assuredly."

"Then I'll see what can be done. How much is there in it?"

"Oh! 50 quid at anyrate"

"You're sure of that?"

Mote replied in the affirmative, and Lyttelton Coke forthwith considered himself retained for the defence of Lane.

"Have you made much out of him?" enquired the barrister of his friend in a tone indicating that he was not asking from mere idle curiosity, after he had received all the particulars of the case Mote could give him.

"Not a great deal; but there are chances of more. He seems to get money from Melbourne."

"Do you think he is guilty of this robbery?" continued Coke.

"Yes, I'm sure of it, but I don't think it can be proved, and you've a good hand to play in his defence with the young fool, a nephew of the old man he was with."

After this Mote entered into a discourse on the opportunities afforded to the counsel for the defence of blackening the character of the prosecuting witnesses, a course of procedure his "learned friend" was not likely to be slow to adopt.

What mattered it to the legal gentleman that he might thus be casting a stigma upon an unspotted reputation? What mattered it that he should be blackening innocent people whose misfortune it was to be placed in the witness box before him? Blacken them he could and would, if the process would lessen or help to obscure the dark stains upon the armour of his client, or prove profitable to himself.

CHAPTER XV.

Oh life, thou art a galling load,
Along a rough, a weary road,
To wretches such as I!

—*Burns.*

The day of the trial of Herman Lane for the wilful murder of William Johnston dawned at last. Harry Williams had not slept well during the previous night. He had lain awake at first thinking over the part he had to play in the tragic life drama on the following day, oppressed with all kinds of wild conjectures on the subject, and filled with nervous misgivings as to the momentous issues of the approaching trial. That he had to form an element in the case to be made out, a link in the chain of evidence to be offered against the life of a fellow creature, was a circumstance fraught with disturbing influences to his young mind. He could not regard lightly the terrible responsibility under which it placed him, nor dismiss from his mind the strong sense of apprehension which had lately taken possession of him.

The night was far gone ere he sank to rest, and with daylight he was again awake, and for a time lay thinking over the immediate future. He then left his bed and started for a brisk walk. Passing up towards that part of the Town Belt overlooking his uncle's house, he came out on the Queen's Drive, and continued along that delightful thoroughfare, through the wooded glens and beautiful

shaded nooks known as "Cosy Dell," thence up through the picturesque suburb of Roslyn, and along the summit of the hill overlooking the city.

The morning was calm and bright. Not more than half an hour of light had smiled upon the hills over which Harry passed, and he had reached the highest point of his walk before the beams of the rising sun, like long golden streaks, proclaimed the desire of the orb of day to flood the city and suburbs with his glorious light.

With a being aflame with youth and health, Harry for a time forgot the mental anxiety which had brought him hither, and stood still, contemplating the panorama before him. From where he stood, he could see the sun rise over the placid waters of the bay, on each side of which the green fields and partially wooded slopes of the hills, now being tinged with the rays of the early morning sun, formed a landscape worthy of the brush of any artist.

Nestling calmly at the foot of the hill on which Harry stood, lay the city in which the events which form the materials for our story had occurred.

The smoke from many chimneys now began to ascend, and gave evidence of the awakening to life and business of the citizens. It curled slowly and peacefully up for some distance, and then hung like a pall over the lower portions of the town—hung there, as it were, conscious of the events in store for Harry, and in sympathy with his feelings as he stood and gazed. As he watched, he could hear the noise of busy life beginning to throb, and the first pulsations of the reviving heart of the town as it broke forth into daylight and work. Then the sun's warmth dispelled the mist and smoke which overhung the town, and the dull cloud cleared away as if to warn the citizens that the time for work had arrived, and the day of action had begun. Near him the birds made the morning musical with their

notes of gladness. Content with the shelter of their natural homes, and knowing no cares such as oppressed the higher being who heard them, they made all around them happy and cheerful with their song. As Harry stood and gazed upon the prospect before him, a wave of thankfulness filled his breast. He felt grateful that he had the faculties to enjoy the beauties which Nature had provided for him. The busy crowd of labourers flocking towards the city in a constant stream warned him that he must put a period to his quiet enjoyment, and return to the house.

With a dull foreboding he turned homewards, and the sense of satisfaction he had experienced faded from his being.

The Court was crowded when Harry reached it. The portion set apart for the public was filled with eager and curious listeners. Some were there from interest in the prisoner, some from a feeling of sympathy for the witnesses; many out of a necessity for a pastime, and many out of morbid curiosity and a craving for a sensational excitement,—idle loungers who delighted in the proceedings because the issue was so momentous.

The Judge was on the Bench and the prisoner in the dock. The Registrar was in the act of calling over the names of those good men and true whose duty it was to stand between the accused and the Crown. This having been completed, and the jury being all seated, the prisoner became the centre of observation to every eye in Court. Conscious of the situation he formed, Herman Lane stood with downcast eyes and averted face. Restless, yet reserved and subdued, he stood as if possessed of entire command of himself, and while knowing his dreadful position, secure in his own strength.

To the charge, that he did kill and murder one William

Johnston, preferred against him with all the formalities of legal lore, and read to him with the usual mechanical solemnity, he pleaded with firm and well-controlled voice—

"Not guilty."

The plea of the prisoner having been recorded, the prosecuting barrister rose and proceeded with his address.

Without any show of oratory, with no straining of points or seeking for effect, he stated the case to be made out for the Crown.

He dwelt upon the impossibility of adducing any direct proof in cases of the kind, and laid before the jury briefly all the circumstances surrounding the death of the cashier which indicated the guilt of the prisoner. He pointed out the strong motive that would exist in the mind of a man situated as the prisoner was for the removal of the chief witness against him, and referred to the threats which had been made against the deceased, of which some evidence might be given. With a request that the jury would, what no jury possibly could do, dismiss from their minds all conceptions of the case already formed, and proceed to try it solely by the evidence to be brought before them, and free from any sympathy or bias, the opening address of the prosecutor concluded.

The first witness for the Crown was Detective Fane, who detailed the steps he had taken which led up to the arrest of the prisoner in connection with the minor charge then impending against him, the subsequent surveillance under which the accused was placed, and the circumstances which came to his knowledge and led to his arresting Lane for the murder.

In the preliminary part of this examination, the prisoner did not appear to take much interest, and never once looked at the witness. It was different, however, when he came to that portion of his evidence bearing on the murder, then

Lane seemed to straighten himself up, as if bracing for a struggle, and directly faced the detective, as if determined not to lose a word or sign. Fane noticed the alteration in the prisoner's manner, and paused a moment to contemplate him. He then proceeded with his evidence, and brought his story down to the arrest of the accused, and the subsequent enquiries he had made.

The prisoner's counsel then rose to cross-examine the detective.

Mr. Coke stated at the outset that he would only trouble the witness with two or three questions, and smiled blandly upon him as he spoke in a careless manner, as if the question at issue was of such insignificance as not to be worth the trouble the Court was being put to.

"You have had considerable experience in criminal trials, Mr. Fane?"

"Yes, some."

"When you heard of the sudden death of Mr. Johnston, you at once formed a theory on the subject?"

"No."

"No! When then?"

"After the inquest."

"Immediately?"

"Almost."

"Will you tell the jury your theory?"

"Do you particularly wish it?"

"Yes, if you please, Mr. Fane."

"In what way will it benefit them?"

"Never mind that. I wish you to state what your theory was."

"I do not see wherein the evidence is relevant, Mr. Coke," remarked the Judge, looking up from his notes.

"If your Honor will pardon me, my next question or two will show the relevancy of this."

"Oh! very well then. The witness will answer the question."

Detective Fane turned his gaze from the Judge, and looked at the prisoner's counsel.

"You will please state your theory to the jury, Mr. Fane. What was it?"

"That the poison had not been self-administered," replied Fane promptly.

This was not exactly what Mr. Coke had expected. He turned at once to the Judge.

"I submit," your Honor, "the witness is trifling with the question."

"No, Mr. Coke, you cannot say that. What the witness's theory was, is only known to himself."

The cross-examination had to take another course, so Mr. Coke asked—

"When did you form the idea of the prisoner's guilt?"

"When I learned of his visit to the deceased immediately before his death."

"And you never made investigations to connect anybody else with the crime?"

"All my enquiries were general."

"And all pointed to the prisoner as the murderer?"

"Yes."

After a few more unimportant questions were asked, Detective Fane left the box. Small was the next witness. His evidence was unimportant, until he recorded the conversation he had with the deceased on the subject of the threats made by Lane's companions.

To this evidence Mr. Coke objected. The prisoner was not present at any such interview, nor was he directly referred to as making threats.

The Crown did not press the point, and Small was only examined as to the relations between the prisoner and deceased in the office.

The landlady at Johnston's lodgings proved the visit of Lane to deceased on the night of his death, and of his having gone to Johnston's room while waiting.

The lodger who occupied the adjoining room, deposed as to hearing angry tones at the time of Lane's visit. Harry Williams was next called. He answered all the questions shortly and distinctly, and gave in evidence the information he had already imparted to Detective Fane. He stated all the facts without hesitation; and did not vary his evidence in the slightest under a rigid examination by prisoner's counsel. The maid-servant proved the finding of deceased's body; and a policeman, who was called in immediately, described the position of the body, and appearance of the room. The medical witnesses then repeated the evidence they had previously given, and detailed the results of their analysis.

This concluded the evidence, and after ascertaining that the defence would not call witnesses, the Crown Prosecutor proceeded to review the evidence.

This he did very briefly, merely pointing out the strong motive the prisoner had for getting rid of Johnston's evidence; the fact that he was the last person known to have seen deceased alive, and the evidence of a quarrel between the men in their last conversation; the opportunities of placing the poison in such a way that the deceased must swallow it were afforded to Lane by his being left in Johnston's room previous to their meeting.

The prosecuting barrister added that his duty was an official one, and as unpleasant to him as that of the jury would be to them; but he asked them to consider the evidence and weigh the circumstances carefully, no matter how repugnant the duty might be, and to deliver their verdict in accordance with their consciences.

Mr. Lyttelton Coke then rose to address the jury on

behalf of the prisoner. He claimed their indulgence, owing to the great weight of responsibility under which he laboured. The issue of the trial, involving as it did, the life of his client, made the performance of his duty a severe task to him. He further claimed their consideration because this was the first occasion in his experience when he had to address himself to the task of defending the life of a fellow creature. Then entering into the evidence for the prosecution, he warned the jury that it was their duty to see that the evidence before them left no doubt in their minds as to the prisoner's guilt. It was not sufficient that it proved him to be a criminal, that the death of Johnston was due to poison, and that the prisoner had opportunities and might have administered it. They must be satisfied beyond the shadow of a doubt that the prisoner did give, and no other person could have given, the deceased the poison which caused his death. Was it established beyond a doubt that the poison had not been self-administered? This was a strong presumption that the Crown had not met. Before they convicted the prisoner of murder they must be sure, aye, even to absolute certainty, that the cashier had not taken the poison by inadvertence. This was a possible solution of his death with which the Crown had not dealt, and which in itself was sufficient to raise a doubt, the exercise of which would acquit the man in the dock.

Then he invited them to carefully note the action of Detective Fane. That able officer had, as soon as he knew the man's death was due to poison, started out with the preconceived notion that nobody but the prisoner could have killed him. It was easy to further blacken a man already under the stigma of a vague and unproved charge of robbery, and this seemed the most natural course to the detective mind; no other suggestion was listened to. Lane

was guilty, and all the energies of the force must be devoted to proving him so.

Was the evidence of a quarrel between Johnston and the prisoner to carry any weight? The witness called to prove that was not able to identify a single word, and therefore the jury had only his opinion to justify them in attaching any importance to the circumstance. What he heard might be a quarrel, might be high and angry words or loud and immoderate laughter, just as the ear that caught the sounds might decide. If the motive, of which the Crown had adduced evidence, was sufficient to induce a man in the prisoner's position to slay a fellow creature to get free from the weight of his evidence, was it likely that he would take a companion with him when he set about the crime? Was it not a more reasonable supposition that the two men visited the deceased for the purpose of convincing him that the accusation of robbery was unfounded, and that his evidence must be misleading.

Why was it that the witness Harry Williams had not also been accused of the murder? It had been proved that he had given Johnston an orange. Was it not possible that the fruit had been poisoned? This was the last thing deceased was known to have eaten. Had the orange peel been preserved and analysed? Why did the authorities not exhaust every possible theory consistent with the prisoner's innocence, instead of exercising themselves only to prove his guilt? Was the life of a fellow creature so light a thing that fanciful theories such as that advanced in this case were sufficient to destroy it? Was the prisoner at the bar to forfeit his life to satisfy or verify the theories of experts and the opinions of careless witnesses? The case was not one where a doubt had been raised as to the prisoner's guilt; it was a case where the Crown had utterly failed to establish its position.

Mr. Coke concluded by impressing upon the jury that they were sworn to try the case and render justice according to the evidence. With such positive want of proof he felt satisfied that there could not be any doubt as to the issue. The prisoner's life was safe in their hands, and with a perfect confidence as to the result he could leave the issue with them, conscious that he had done his duty to his client to the utmost of his poor ability.

The matter of Mr. Coke's address was much better than the manner. There was about it too much self-assertion to make a good impression on the jury, and a critical observer would have noticed that it created in their minds some feeling of repulsion. Had the defending counsel been less desirous of showing off his own powers and exhibited less self-confidence—been, in fact, less of the dictator and more of the advocate,—his client's cause would have been considerably advanced.

When the prisoner's counsel resumed his seat there were some moments of painful silence in the Court. The Judge turned over the pages of his notes, nervously read and re-read certain portions of the evidence, and then with much hesitation proceeded with his summing-up. After reviewing the necessity for the establishment of the prisoner's guilt beyond any doubt, he commented on the evidence, and suggested the direction proof should take. He pointed out to the jury wherein the presence of a strong motive might be sufficient to weigh heavily as against the evidence of anything like positive proof; and after exhibiting the strong and weak parts in the evidence, he told them to disregard the issue raised by prisoner's counsel as to the duty of the authorities to search for possible explanations of the crime consistent with the innocence of the prisoner. If the evidence established beyond a doubt that the deceased had been poisoned by the hand of another,

and that the circumstances left it without dispute that the prisoner's, and none other's, was that hand, then their duty was clear.

With some further remarks on the direction of their duty, the Judge concluded, and the jury retired to consider their verdict.

Herman Lane, who had during the course of his counsel's address worn a somewhat cheerful aspect, became thoroughly depressed on the retirement of the jury. As they left the Court the Judge rose and went to his room. Mr. Lyttelton Coke moved towards the prisoner and addressed to him a few cheering words. This action was not prompted by kindness towards him, for it was not until he had discussed in his own mind the effect it would have on the immense audience in Court that the barrister had acted in this way. The influence of this on Lane was very striking. It seemed to turn his attention away from himself and produce a feeling that he was not yet entirely an outcast from humanity, or despised and rejected of all men.

It was not expected that the deliberations of the jury would occupy any great length of time. The evidence had not been voluminous, and the points of direction were few. The attendants of the Court did not therefore leave the building, and in about half an hour the jury intimated that they had agreed. The Judge entered the Court and took his seat. A solemn silence fell upon all as the jury filed into the box, looking subdued and troubled. The formal preliminaries were gone through and listened to with vast impatience by every ear. A deep, troubled look overspead the face of the prisoner. A nervous twitching of his hands and a faint tremor of his whole frame betokened the dreadful battle going on within.

As the mechanical and monotonous voice of the Registrar asked the question—

"How say you, gentlemen of the jury, is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

The awful silence allowed the tones to re-echo through the building, and the terrible period, though brief, was oppressive to every soul within hearing.

As the foreman of the jury replied in a dull and choking voice, a wave of awful solemnity went over all—

"*Guilty.*"

At the word a terrible sensation overspread the Court. Every heart seemed to stand still; every eye seemed bent on the prisoner.

Clutching the sides of the dock, Lane's head fell forward on his chest, and a dull low groan escaped him.

In mercy the Judge sat silent for some moments, then said quietly—

"Call on the prisoner, Mr. Registrar."

"Prisoner, have you anything to say why sentence of the law should not be passed upon you?"

Another pause followed, as if there was not to be an answer to the question; then the wretched man moved forward in the dock, and replied, with a low sob—

"I am innocent of the murder."

His voice was thick and trembling; his spirit was entirely broken. The result of the trial came upon him like a thunderclap, and struck all animation from his soul.

The Judge sat silent for some moments. When the verdict was given his face had exhibited astonishment. Presently he gazed towards the ceiling of the Courthouse, and addressed Lane—

"Prisoner at the bar, you have been found guilty by a jury of your fellow citizens of the wilful murder of a fellow creature. You have had the advantage of a careful trial and a most able defence, and it is not for me to intensify the dreadful and painful position in which you now stand

by any remarks on the subject of your crime. My duty is to pass sentence upon you."

Then another of the many time-honoured but stupid and unreasonable forms which bulk so large in all legal proceedings, had to be observed by the Judge. To intensify the formal solemnity of the occasion he had to cover his head with black. Having done so, he continued—

"The sentence of the law is that you, Herman Lane, be taken from the place where you now are to the prison whence you came, and thence to the place of execution, there to be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and may God have mercy on your soul."

The prisoner was then removed from the dock, after which the Judge thanked and discharged the jury.

CHAPTER XVI.

We know what we are, but we know not
What we may be.

—*Hamlet.*

The trial and conviction of Herman Lane for the murder of his fellow clerk was a most discomforting experience to Mr. Bruce. Up to the very last he had hoped to see it proved that, bad although he undoubtedly was, this wretched youth was not guilty of a capital crime. When this last hope was dispelled by the verdict of the jury, Mr. Bruce felt the result so keenly that he did not notice the effect on the other members of his household. He sought and obtained permission to visit the condemned man, and returned from the painful interview considerably saddened. With the utmost kindness he approached Lane, and very speedily had so entirely convinced him that the visit was prompted by a genuine feeling of interest, that the prisoner opened his heart entirely to his late employer.

He related to Mr. Bruce his personal history, and obtained from him a promise to write to his widowed mother, and break to her as kindly as possible his terrible fate. He confided to the merchant the true position of matters relating to the frauds practised on his business. Lane was the tool of a couple of swindlers in Melbourne, and carried out his robberies and forgeries under their instigation and direction. On the subject of the murder, however, the unfortunate man was firm in the assertion of

his innocence. He declared that the visit to the cashier on the eve of his death was with the intention of persuading or frightening him into making his evidence less convincing in the charge of robbery of the notes; but he never for a moment contemplated taking the man's life, nor did he do anything to further his death.

Lane declared his innocence with such an air of truth, with manner so convincingly sincere, and with such recognition of the fact that he must meet his doom, that his listener was compelled to acknowledge his belief, and told the wretched being that while he could not hold out any hope of an alteration of his fate, he would do what he could to avert the extreme penalty of the law. The painful scene which followed on this declaration almost unnerved Mr. Bruce. The doomed man seemed utterly overcome. Grasping the hand of his visitor, he fell on his knees before him and implored forgiveness for the wrongs he had done while in his office; then, bursting into a terrible fit of weeping, he sobbed out a prayer that, for his poor mother's sake, the ignominy of a death on the scaffold would be spared him.

He wished to live, he said, if only that he might some day convince his mother that while he had gone astray, and was no longer deserving of her love and forgiveness, he was not a murderer in thought or deed.

Terrible as were these thoughts to the prisoner, the expression of them was an experience which no man could possibly prolong, and Mr. Bruce had to tear himself away. He left the gaol satisfied that his original conviction was a correct one, and that the condemned man was not guilty of the crime of which twelve men had, after a careful enquiry and deliberation, convicted him.

Taking his proof from the lips and action of the condemned, this one man dared to set up his judgment and

opinion against the deliberate and responsible finding of twelve jurymen whose duty it was to hear and weigh the evidence, and form a correct conclusion after every possible guidance and investigation.

Being convinced that Lane's sentence was undeserved, Mr. Bruce determined that nothing in his power to do in the direction of affecting a reprieve, or getting the sentence commuted, should be left undone. His first step he took at once, and called upon Mr. Lyttelton Coke to offer his influence and assistance on the prisoner's behalf. He was not a little disappointed and even disgusted to find that the prisoner's counsel showed little desire to lend any aid to this project. Mr. Coke gave abundant indication that notwithstanding his efforts in Court on his client's behalf, he had accepted the general verdict on the subject of his guilt, and considered him unworthy of any further exertion. Moreover, he made it manifest to Mr. Bruce that as any such action as he proposed would not be in full view of the public, and therefore could not serve to display or advertise the man of law, he would not be a party to it.

Mr. Bruce left the lawyer's presence without having his good opinion of him or his profession increased. He felt profoundly surprised that any man laying claim to the attributes of humanity, or pretending to worthily follow an honourable and learned profession, should be so lacking in true interest in the life and well-being of an unfortunate fellow creature. If the tenets of the legal profession taught or inculcated such narrow, selfish, and uncharitable principles or feelings, it was no wonder that the law as a following was despised or derided. Reflecting, however, that there are miserable exceptions in every walk of life, and distorted and disfigured sheep in every flock, Mr. Bruce dismissed his hard thoughts of the profession, and proceeded

vigorously to work out the poor convict's salvation in his own way. The necessity for an active exercise of his mind in the task he had set himself proved highly beneficial to Mr. Bruce, inasmuch as it kept him from brooding over the events of the past. At the same time, it prevented him from realising the position into which it threw the other members of his household, and in this manner perhaps opened a way for events which, although not foreseeing, he might by a different bearing have avoided.

After making all possible efforts on the prisoner's behalf in Dunedin, Mr. Bruce found that to do most effectively what he wished, it would be advisable for him to go to Wellington, the seat of the Executive Council. Having decided that this was the best course, the merchant was not the man to delay, so he informed his wife of his purpose, and said he would require to go the following day.

"Oh! Edward," returned Mrs. Bruce, with a tone of deep surprise and sorrow, "must you go away just now?"

"Yes, dear; it is necessary. Why do you ask in that way?"

"Because I feel that you are needed at home. I cannot make out what has come over Flora."

"Why! what is the matter?" asked her husband, with genuine concern.

"I really cannot tell, but during the last week she has acted most strangely. You know that she had always been reserved and distant, and continually reading in her spare moments; but lately she has not spoken to anybody in the house, and sits for hours in her own room doing nothing, not even reading. Yesterday she met Lizzie in the passage between their rooms, and at the sight of her screamed out with such a frightened cry, and rushed to her room. When I went to her she was lying on the bed with her face buried

in her hands, and it was nearly an hour before I could get her even to look at me. I really can't understand it at all, and fear we must get the doctor to her. I do wish you hadn't to go."

"Nonsense! my dear. It's only the terrible anxiety we have all gone through over this trial; she'll be all right soon."

"No, Edward, I'm sure it's not that. I'm sure Flora knows nothing of the trial."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, certain. No one ever spoke of it before her, and I took care she never got any of the papers containing the report. She hasn't been out alone for weeks. No, I'm quite sure she knows nothing of the case."

"Then what can it be that has disturbed her? It is sure enough something wrong with her nerves. It can't be the effects of that beach fright yet?"

"No, it's something I can't make out. I really think we should see the doctor."

"Well, if she doesn't improve while I'm away, get Dr. Bright to have a look at her. I don't think you should worry about her. If you let her alone it will wear off."

With this comforting assurance Mr. Bruce dismissed the subject, and his wife's attention was diverted towards the necessary preparations for his journey.

The "let-alone" policy is as often as not a proper and successful one in cases of the kind Mr. Bruce thought he was dealing with, but it is not therefore one to be handled with impunity, or by any rule of thumb.

More evil is perhaps wrought by wrong action than by want of action; but there is a time when vigorous measures are called for, and the neglect of them becomes a crime.

> "Diseases, desperate grown,
> By desperate appliances are relieved,
> Or not at all."

That Mr. Bruce did not regard his daughter's state as "desperate," or, indeed, in any degree dangerous, was due to the fact that the whole course of her conduct from childhood upwards had been a peculiar one, and a gradual falling off from the beaten tracks of girlhood's life. She had imperceptibly to herself and her parents acquired habits of seclusion, which more and more unfitted her for converse with the other members of the household, and seemed to induce as little desire in them for intercourse with her as she evinced towards all. Thus it was that her present state seemed to the busy mind and unobservant eye of Mr. Bruce to be merely the crossing of a very narrow line from that of the immediate past.

The following day, therefore, Mr. Bruce left for the northern capital—left home on an errand of mercy, leaving disregarded a clearer duty.

It was with no feeling of carelessness or want of concern for his daughter that Mr. Bruce overlooked the pressing need for his attention to his own household, while he went abroad to do a good action.

The same feeling in a different degree leads beneficent folks to the endeavour to christianise the benighted heathen, and, in so doing, cast their laudable efforts for good right over the heads of degraded and suffering humanity at their own doors.

CHAPTER XVII.

Oh, now, for ever,
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
—*Othello.*

As Mr. Bruce was about to step on board the Union Steam Ship Company's favourite steamer "Wairarapa" at Lyttelton, on his way to Wellington, the following telegram from his wife was handed to him:—

"Return, if possible, at once. Flora missing since yesterday afternoon."

The news contained in this message threw him into a condition of severe anxiety. Since leaving Dunedin the previous evening he had had leisure to reflect on the last conversation he had with his wife, and his thoughts did not tend to calm the tumult rising within his breast at the information Mrs. Bruce had then given him. He had passed his waking hours on the steamer in a state of mind bordering on fear for his daughter's future.

Now that his attention had been drawn to the subject, and he had given it some thought, he resolved to take active steps on his return home with a view to bringing his daughter's course of life more under the control of reason and parental care. During the day of the steamer's detention in Lyttelton, he had business which took him up to Christchurch, and occupied his mind fully; but while returning to Lyttelton in the train his thought had reverted

to the somewhat troublesome topic, and when the telegram was placed in his hands he was not without some premonition of evil.

Of course, Mr. Bruce lost no time in returning to Dunedin. He had to wait for the morning train. A reply to his telegram to Mrs. Bruce did not bring him any reassuring intelligence, and the hours of suspense passed in the railway carriage were not calculated to prepare him for the information on his arrival that no trace of his daughter could be found.

She had evidently left the house while Mrs. Bruce was seeing her husband off in the steamer, and without giving any indication of where she was going.

None of the servants had seen her leave, nor was her absence noticed until her mother returned, and went to her room for the purpose of speaking to her. Search had been made wherever there was any likelihood of her having gone, and with the assistance of Detective Fane, to whom Harry went in their extremity, vigorous enquiries were made in several directions. Mr. Bruce felt acutely that during his absence the uneasiness of his wife should be so soon justified, and lost no time in setting about what enquiries he could make that night. He considered it wise to enlist the full assistance of the police, and soon had the satisfaction of knowing that no effort was wanting in the search.

Mr. and Mrs. Bruce retired that night with heavy hearts to seek the rest so much needed by both after the previous sleepless nights. On his mind were the constant thoughts that he had made light of his wife's warning—that he had regarded with too much indifference the motherly instincts which had given her a presaging of evil, and caused her to speak as she did regarding their daughter. That he had entirely neglected his wife's forebodings was the first

reproach that seized him. Far into the night he lay awake thinking over plans of search, forming resolutions as to how he would meet his daughter and act towards her on her recovery; then worn out with worry and anxiety, he dropped off into a troubled, dreamy sleep, and woke the following morning rested but not refreshed, his mind alive with anticipations of the day's events.

Leaving his wife still sleeping, he hurried to the police station and such other centres of enquiry where tidings might be gained of the search, but only to return disappointed to meet the anxious face of the sorrowing mother without affording her the only consolation she desired. Mrs. Bruce wore a sad and worried expression; tears filled her eyes as she met and embraced her husband, and seeing no gleam of hope on his countenance, her lips quivered, and her trembling frame spoke eloquently to the husband and father of the struggle going on within the breast of his cherished partner. Together they sat down to a dull and silent breakfast, their hearts too full of grief and sympathy for words. After the meal began, and Mrs. Bruce had handed her husband his cup, she broke out into tears, and he knew that the best medicine for her tortured mind was being administered by the hand of beneficent Nature. For some moments Mr. Bruce let his wife's tears fall in silence, then, rising from his seat, he approached her, and as she rose to meet him he gently laid her head upon his shoulder, and uttered a few consoling words.

Then she spoke. "Oh! Edward! something terrible has happened. I dreamt last night of Flora."

"What did you dream, dear?" he said, sympathetically leading her again to a seat, and standing with his arm around her neck.

Then she told her dream. In a voice quivering with emotion, she said—

"I saw Flora dressed in bridal robes being led to the altar, where a bridegroom, whose face I could not see, stood waiting for her. When the bride approached, a bright light shone all around him, and seemed to envelop her also in its transcendent glory. After a moment it became brighter and brighter, and seemed to gather the bride and bridegroom in an embrace of flame, and waft them away from my sight, leaving the church so dark that the terrible feeling which came over me at the change caused me to start and call out for help. So dreadful were my feelings that I seemed to wish for light, and nothing could give it; and then gradually the darkness became less dense, and a vapoury mist was left, through which I looked, and saw floating away in the distance a vision, which I recognised as Flora, being borne from me on the wings of a form, like nothing I had ever seen before, enveloped in a fiery globe. This, as I gazed, seemed to go from my sight gradually, as if fading into an infinity of distance, and finally disappeared from view. Then, as I looked around me, I found myself alone in the still, quiet church, and the bridal veil which Flora had worn was torn and mangled at my feet. When I took this in my hand it seemed to fall to pieces at my touch, and each part of it crumbled into dust as I grasped it. When I looked again towards the altar I saw two figures, one on each side of it, as of cherubim, one of whom smilingly pointed heavenwards, while the other, with saddened face and slowly moving finger, motioned as if commanding me to look towards a certain window of the church. On turning my head in this direction, my gaze met the clear cold lines of the stone erected over the grave of our dear lost son. At the sight of this I seemed to faint gradually away, and remembered nothing more until I awoke trembling and excited."

When Mrs. Bruce finished telling her dream, she broke out afresh into a flood of tears—tears of such soothing influence that her husband was glad to let her cry on, convinced that her trouble needed, and would be softened by, this comforting outlet.

Then Mr. Bruce dried his wife's tears, and offered her such consolation as could be drawn from the fact that every effort was being made to find her daughter. He was now himself going to aid in the search, and felt convinced he would shortly return with some good news on the subject.

The morning was dull and wet, everything being enveloped in a thick fog, so that nothing of the surrounding scenery could be seen beyond a distance of a few hundred yards. At frequent intervals through the fog, showers of fine but quickly-wetting rain fell, and the city and suburbs were experiencing what is designated a "Scotch mist."

* * * * * *

At the Forbury racecourse active training was going on for an approaching meeting; and some trainers, when the course is wet, take advantage of the firm sands of the adjacent beach on which to exercise their horses.

On that morning two riders were out early, and starting from the further end of the beach, galloped smartly in the direction of St. Clair. Both were intent on watching their horses, and rode closely and carefully, "extending" the animals gradually to racing speed.

As they drew towards the rocks at St. Clair, the horse nearest the breakers swerved and jumped suddenly as if to avoid some obstacle on the sand, nearly throwing his rider. With an effort the youth recovered himself, however, and the riders pulled up almost immediately, and turned their horses for the return ride.

Walking for some distance, they saw in front of them what appeared to be the object which had startled the animal. Reclining on the sand, as if waiting for the incoming tide to wake it, lay what in the distance appeared to be a sleeping seal.

This was what suggested itself to one of the riders, as he said to his companion—

"Steady, Tom; there's a bloomin' seal lyin' dry on the beach. Here, take my moke, an' see if I can't get it."

Then he jumped from his horse and handed the reins to his companion, who stood still, to give him a chance to get close to the seal without noise.

"Lend me your whip, Tom, it's got a heavy knob; mine's too light."

Having procured the heavier whip, he proceeded quietly towards the object.

His companion saw him approach between it and the water, close up to where it lay, and then stand gazing intently at it. Then he beckoned towards him, and, as he approached, called out—

"It's a dead girl!"

The other went up hurriedly, and together they stood silently contemplating the stiff cold figure before them. One touched the small white hand which lay upon the motionless breast, felt it cold and damp, and shuddered as he then pressed his hand on the chest, which would no more respond in faint heaving to the touch of mortal fingers.

"She's stone dead!" he said, turning to his companion; "what'll we do, Tom?"

"You stay here, and I'll ride up for Sergeant Murphy," was the ready reply.

This course was agreed upon, so Tom started off to report matters to the nearest policeman, leaving the other to watch by the unconscious form they had found.

Who can measure the thoughts that sped through the mind of this rough youth as he kept his silent vigil by the wasting clay, once warm and active as himself, with life and being.

The reverence which takes possession of the roughest nature in the hallowed presence of the dead, shed its influence over him, and he became for the time a different being to the careless, happy-go-lucky mortal who so lately bestrode, in thoughtlessness and mirth, the animal he held by the bridle.

Thus it was that the lost daughter was found; thus that the anxious and sorrowing parents were made aware of the fate of their child, and their long suspense terminated in a certainty of the worst.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions.

—*Hamlet.*

It was Saturday morning when Flora's body was found upon the beach. The necessary inquiry was held that same afternoon, and preparations made for her funeral the following day.

Sunday morning saw her lying cold and quiet in her coffin, ready for interment. Her hands had been gently folded upon her breast, and her face, now free from the effects of contact with the cruel sea, bore an expression of peacefulness and calm. The bereaved parents together visited for the last time the silent frame so soon to be returned to dust. Lizzie and Harry entered and stood in sorrowing sympathy, gazing upon the calm cold face. Tears came naturally to their young eyes, and relieved the aching hearts. They stood in mute meditation for some minutes, and then at a sign from Mr. Bruce turned quietly and left the father and mother alone with their dead. Mr. Bruce, his heart heaving and a dull choking in his throat, bent over and kissed the senseless face. He held his wife's hand in his, and pressed it lovingly as he stood by the bedside, then the other arm stole around her waist, and as he drew her towards him the tears, which had hitherto refused to flow, came welling forth, and she felt relieved

from the strongest oppression of her grief. The great pain at her over-burdened heart seemed lessened, and a soothing sweetness suffused her soul.

Her thoughts were carried back over the brief years of life which her daughter had known, and a great peace filled her heart as she knew the angel spirit was now at rest.

As the husband and wife stood and looked long and lovingly upon the form and features of their dead daughter, the church bells began to toll their sweet and solemn music. The still, clear air of the peaceful Sabbath was peculiarly receptive of the full, deep notes, as they floated quietly to the ears of the numerous church-goers.

One heart that was wont to be made glad at their sounds was stilled. One soul that had felt the softening influence of their melody now listened to the music not heard of mortal ears. In the same room where Flora had often sat listening to the bells she loved so much, lay her cold and spiritless body, now soon to be hidden from human eyes.

The solemn notes of the bells still floated to her ears, but the receptive spirit had fled. The eyes seemed closed, as if she were listening to the sounds, but it was only the sad, cruel mockery of death. While the bells rang on, the parents of this now senseless clay could not tear themselves away with a last loving look. They were now about to leave for ever the form that had as a small tiny bud given them the first taste of parental joys, to consign to the dust the being whose care came to their lives as a blissful possession in the early years of their love and hope, and to look their last upon those lips that had first murmured to them the holy names of "Father" and "Mother."

What wonder, then, that the silent, saddening influence of their grief bade them stay—bade them not hastily turn aside from the memory of the past, nor shut from their

hearts the solemn satisfaction of a last lingering look at the still, bloodless face. Then the last notes of the bells died away, and with a mutual feeling of fitness these saddened souls turned for ever from the mortal being of their lost child.

That same afternoon when he returned from the funeral, Mr. Bruce found his wife in her daughter's room. She was turning over some of the things which had belonged to Flora, and locking away numbers of articles as sacred to her bereavement. Without interrupting her he stood watching, and presently began looking at the different books in the room. From a shelf over the head of the bed he took down a book which was apparently the last Flora had read. As he turned over the leaves, a paper fell out, which he took up, and opening, saw it was in his daughter's handwriting. He read the first few words, and was startled to find the heading—

"Confession of My Crime."

Hastily closing it, so as not to attract his wife's attention, he returned it to the book, and shortly afterwards made an excuse to go to his study.

Then he opened the paper with trembling hands, and read the following dreadful recital :—

"I have just seen the report of the trial of Herman Lane, and become aware of the fact that he is suffering for a crime of which he is innocent. How can I ever face the world again with a knowledge of my sin in my heart, knowing that another is now pining for the crime I have committed, for I am guilty of the murder of William Johnston, although I never imagined his death. Still what I did was a guilty, cruel murder, and only found another victim to that I intended. How can I ever write the words which brand me as the most fiendish of mortals? The cannibal in his most brutal thirst for blood is not more devilish than I, and has ampler excuse.

"What possessed me I know not. I did not think of the enormity of my act—did not know what I did. The full depth of my sin is now only made known to me; now only do I know the dreadful crime I

have committed. When I found that Lizzie had entirely won Harry's love, I knew no peace. Why could I never gain his affection? Was Lizzie always to thwart me? Then as time wore on and I saw their satisfaction with each other, it fairly maddened me, and I schemed and plotted out how I could supplant her in Harry's love. Think how I would, I could not arrive at any course. Then Lizzie came and laughed at me for my stupid love of him, scorned me for daring to aspire to his affection, and I felt the murderous instincts of the tigress within me. Still I could not do more than threaten: no course of action ever came to me.

"One day I read this book, and I found in it a woman whose love was slighted, whose affection was turned to bitterest hate, and my whole soul went out in sympathy towards her. She was plotting to destroy her wronger. What else was I living for? I sought nothing better than a means of killing Lizzie's self-confidence of affection from and for her cousin. This woman's wrongs showed me a way. She poisoned fruit, and gave it as a peace offering to her wronger. I followed her example. Getting some strychnine that I knew was in the house, I put some into an orange, and left it and another for Lizzie in her room, feeling certain in her selfishness she would eat them both.

"I could not bear to look at her after this, and avoided all faces, knowing what I had done, and what must be the consequences. Days passed and became more than a week, and still nothing occurred, and I grew callous and indifferent to all, but still could not bear the sight of my sister. To my books I flew for forgetting, and heard nothing of the death of William Johnston. To-day I saw a paper with the report of the trial, and eagerly devoured it. Harry's evidence told me the awful truth. These oranges Lizzie had given to him, and the one he had given to the cashier was poisoned. Oh! God! forgive me? I am guilty of his death! My blind, mad act has recoiled upon myself, and I am lost for ever. How can I ever face anybody again. I have only one course open to me—death and oblivion.

"My love for Harry has been my ruin. It has led me by wrong paths to my destruction. I will go to the place where the fatal powerful passion was born, and by the great sea perhaps a forgetting may come. The waves are kind, and may take me to their bosom and blot out the memory of my sin.

"Father! mother! forgive me; I cannot see you again! Forgive! forgive! as no one else can, and do not curse my memory! What I have written is the naked truth. It is hurriedly written, but too dreadful to read over.

"Father, mother, forgive your deeply-loving, but erring daughter,

"FLORA.

"Harry, think of me in kin——."

What she would have written to her cousin was obliterated.

When Mr. Bruce finished reading these terrible words, the paper fell from his grasp, and he sank back in horror into his chair. Then he thought of his wife. He must keep this knowledge from her; so he nerved himself to the task of appearing calm, took up the confession, and replacing it in the book, locked it away in the drawer of his table.

Then he started out for a walk in his garden, so that he might, under the influence of the cool air, decide what was best to do. The book he had locked away was the last Flora had read. It was called *Lucretia's Revenge; or, A Story of Love and Hate,* and heavy pencil lines had been drawn in the margin opposite the following passages:—

Philip Douglas coolly sat down opposite his companion. He had nerves of iron, and nothing disturbed him. Had he not won for his wife the girl he loved so madly? What mattered it to him what hearts he had broken? What mattered it what loves he had despised? What mattered it what lives he had ruined? Was not love a feeling to be enjoyed? Were not hearts things to be used? Was not life a time for change and excitement?

No one who saw him sipping his wine and whispering soft things could have believed that this man had once stood to his companion in the light of more than a lover, and had filled her breast with hopes and expectations, only to be rudely crushed at the first palling of his feelings, or lightly encouraged at the next opportunity.

Lucretia, on the other hand, was far from calm.

She had made strong efforts to appear so, but she had at length given up the attempt in despair.

Her eyes were wildly bright; her cheeks flushed, not with health, but with excitement; her bosom rose and fell pantingly and unevenly; her parched lips burned with feverish heat, as she partook sparingly of the fruit before her.

Yet he noticed not these signs, except as signs of natural emotion.

"Lucretia," he said, "why could not this have been without all the terrible scenes through which we have both passed? Why could

we not agree to be firm friends, instead of implacable and remorseless foes? Oh! what a happy, peaceful place this seems after all I have suffered?"

"It is, indeed," she murmured, as she drank some wine, and poured out a large glass for him, handed it to him, and nestled up closer to him.

His head dropped on her shoulder.

The balmy evening breeze began to freshen, and the shadows began to fall.

Yet still they sat there, and at length Philip Douglas, yielding to the soporific influence of evening, or the more deleterious influence of a drug, fell off to sleep.

Lucretia watched him eagerly.

"Sleep has come at last!" she murmured, triumphantly.

Then gradually she moved his head from her shoulder, so that it rested upon the back of the seat.

Rising, she gazed at him for some moments in anxious expectation.

But he woke not.

"I must finish this quickly, or my strength will fail me," she said, shudderingly.

Forth from its concealment in the soft bosom, upon which Philip Douglas had hoped to rest his head for many a weary hour, she drew a packet, and quickly opening it, she made an opening in one of the largest and rosiest apples, placing a quantity within, firmly pressed together the luscious edges of the fruit, and placed it on his plate before him.

Then taking with her the wine and all the other fruit, she turned and fled, tripping nimbly over the grass, and passing noiselessly as a snowflake. On entering the house she went into a back room, and seating herself at a window, whence she could command a view of the chestnut grove, she called a servant.

"Louie," she said to a sprightly French girl, who was anticipating a pleasant and easy time of it with the newly-married couple, "you can go into town now. Do not be too late."

The girl went at once.

She did not start much too soon.

Scarcely had her tripping feet left the house when Lucretia saw Philip Douglas awake.

He woke with a start, and sprang up.

Then, as if devoured by fever, he looked about for the wine which Lucretia had carefully removed, but seeing nothing but the apple, he seized that, and ate it ravenously to appease his thirst.

For a moment he stood still and erect.

But it was only for a moment.

In another instant his features were contracted as with internal agony, his frame quivered, and after swaying to and fro like the bough of a great tree, the strong man fell prone to the ground.

"He is dead!" cried Lucretia, her face lighting up with a terrible triumph; "I am free now for life!"

Within half an hour afterwards she, having collected all her jewels and money, was speeding along in a first-class railway carriage towards Paris.

Mr. Bruce paced to and fro in a secluded path of his garden, consumed with anxious thoughts. The terrible secret he had learned almost unmanned him. He saw clearly that only one course was open to him. This, too, was the best for him, as it required immediate action, and would divert his thoughts from the awful truth. He must at once take steps to have Herman Lane set free. There must be no half measures: the effort must be complete. He could now assure the authorities of the convict's innocence, but at what a terrible cost? Could he achieve this end and still avoid the dreadful secret being made public? Could he keep it from the anxious wife and mother? At all risks justice must be done, and Lane's life saved. Such a revelation as had come to him would kill Mrs. Bruce. If no other means could be adopted, he must take her away on a lengthened tour, and in the change of scene probably active interest would avoid the knowledge, or, if learned, help to soften its effect.

His mind was made up, and he returned to the house. With a feeling of calm resolve at his heart, he sought his wife's presence, without exhibiting any sign of the painful struggle that had so lately gone on within him.

CHAPTER XIX.

Oh welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,
Thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings!

—*Milton.*

The Minister of Justice happened to be a personal friend of Mr. Bruce. He was expected to visit Dunedin on the Wednesday following Flora's funeral. An appointment, therefore, was made by telegram for an interview with him immediately on his arrival.

Mr. Bruce nerved himself for the painful ordeal through which he had to go in disclosing his daughter's crime to the Minister of Justice. He knew it was not possible to account for the poisoning by misadventure: nothing short of a full disclosure and production of the confession would be effective.

The blow dealt by Flora's death had been a heavy one for the loving mother, and Mr. Bruce was not surprised to see many evidences of its severity on his wife's face. What would it be if he could not hide from her the awful fact of Flora's crime?

The interview with the Minister did not prove so formidable to Mr. Bruce as it would have been had be been addressing a stranger. He was received kindly, and when the terrible truth was made known, the Minister assured him that the fact would not be given further publicity than was necessary. It must, however, be laid before the Judge who presided at the trial, and subsequently before a

meeting of the Executive Council, so that proper action in connection with Lane's conviction could be taken. Together the Minister and Mr. Bruce waited on the Judge, and soon enlisted his sympathy and assistance.

When Mr. Bruce mentioned to them his desire to keep from his wife a knowledge of the facts, and referred to his intention to take her from home if necessary, they both advised him to adopt this plan, assuring him that in absence lay the greatest security. Certain formalities would necessitate his remaining for at least a week, and probably his presence in Wellington would be required.

Mr. Bruce found that by taking the New Zealand Shipping Company's steamer "Kaikoura," he could leave New Zealand in less than a fortnight, and that arrangements could be made to get his signature to any necessary documents while in Wellington, the final port of departure of the steamer.

When he broached the subject of a trip home to Mrs. Bruce, she eagerly fell in with the suggestion, and was not disinclined to start at once.

Mr. Bruce therefore visited Lane, and told him that evidence had been discovered which accounted for the cashier's death, and would conclusively prove his innocence; that the necessary steps were being taken to obtain his release; and that he would shortly be set at liberty entirely, the other charges against him having been withdrawn. It would be necessary and desirable that he should leave New Zealand as soon as his release was accomplished.

The effect of this interview on the unfortunate prisoner was somewhat startling. For a time he seemed quite overcome, as if doubting the truth of what he heard, or that the conversation was not the product of his over-wrought brain.

Then when he began to realise the true position, his

intelligence seemed to receive a sad shock, and he broke out into a fit of hysterical weeping, culminating in a lethargic, dull stupidity, from which Mr. Bruce had a difficulty in arousing him. Nature, ever kind, had tempered the effect of too much joy by taking away for a time a portion of his consciousness.

Three days afterwards, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce, and their only surviving daughter, left Dunedin for the purpose of joining the "Kaikoura." Harry Williams went as far as Wellington, and was to stay a few days at his parents' home when returning.

The necessary steps for Lane's release, in which the assistance of Mr. Bruce was required, were speedily taken, and before the "Kaikoura" left the decision of the Executive was made to declare his innocence immediately after the departure of the steamer.

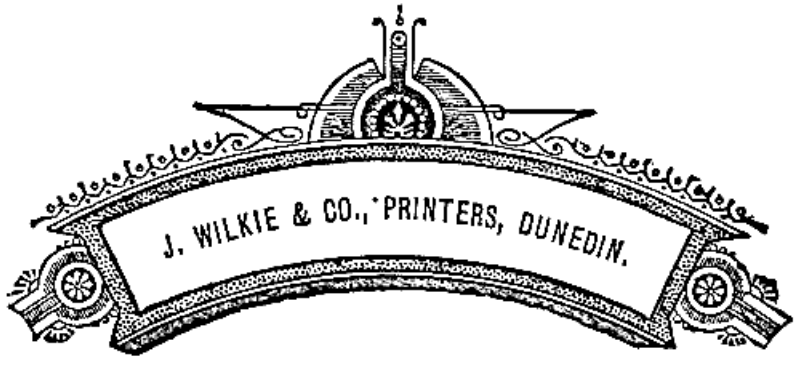
With saddened face and dulled heart, Harry saw the great boat steam away. A long period of lonely waiting was before him, at the end of which he hoped to reap his reward in Lizzie's love and companionship.

On board the steamer the three friends leaving him had their regrets mingled with varying degrees of chastening sorrow. One large heart was full almost to repletion with a great dread and apprehension lest he could not keep a heavy grief from the companion of his life.

Then the open sea took the big steamer unto its bosom, and the widening horizon gave new hopes to the sorrowing hearts, and bade them forget the dark past in the promise of a brighter dawn.

Herman Lane took the bitter lesson to his heart, and in the new scenes of after years saw his path clear before him, and guarded well against acts which might mar his life, or leave regrets in his new experience.

THE END.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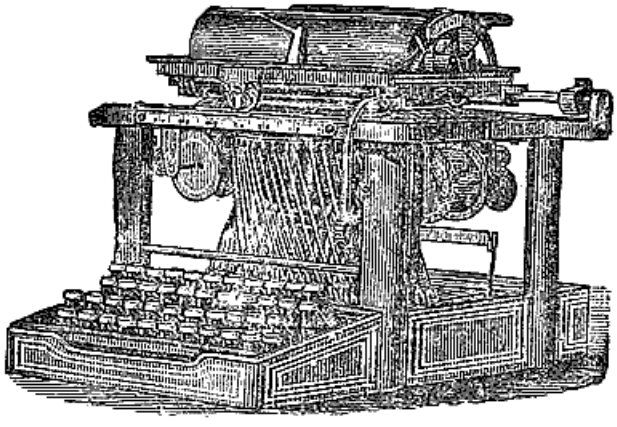

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