

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: At His Gates, Volume 1

Date of first publication: 1872

Author: Margaret Oliphant

Date first posted: December 16, 2012

Date last updated: December 16, 2012

Faded Page ebook #20121222

This ebook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Mary Meehan & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

(This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive/American Libraries.)

AT HIS GATES.

A Novel.

BY MRS OLIPHANT,
AUTHOR OF 'CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1872.

[All rights reserved]

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

AT HIS GATES.



CHAPTER I.

Mr and Mrs Robert Drummond lived in a pretty house in the Kensington district; a house, the very external aspect of which informed the passer-by who they were, or at least what the husband was. The house was embowered in its little garden; and in spring, with its lilacs and laburnums, looked like a great bouquet of bloom—as such houses often do. But built out from the house, and occupying a large slice of the garden at the side, was a long room, lighted with sky windows, and not by any means charming to look at outside, though the creepers, which had not long been planted, were beginning to climb upon the walls. It was connected with the house by a passage which acted as a conservatory, and was full of flowers; and everything had been done that could be done to render the new studio as beautiful in aspect as it was in meaning. But it was new, and had scarcely yet begun, as its proprietor said, to 'compose' with its surroundings. Robert Drummond, accordingly, was a painter, a painter producing, in the mean time, pictures of the class called *genre*; but intending to be historical, and to take to the highest school of art as soon as life and fame would permit. He was a very good painter; his subjects were truly 'felt' and exquisitely manipulated; but there was no energy of emotion, no originality of genius about them. A great many people admired them very much; other painters lingered over them lovingly, with that true professional admiration of 'good work' which counteracts the jealousy of trade in every honest mind. They were very saleable articles, indeed, and had procured a considerable amount of prosperity for the young painter. It was almost certain that he would be made an Associate at the next vacancy, and an Academician in time. But with all this, he was well aware that he was no genius, and so was his wife.

The knowledge of this fact acted upon them in very different ways; but that its effect may be fully understood, the difference in their characters and training requires to be known. Robert Drummond had never been anything but a painter; attempts had been made in his youth to fix him to business, his father having been the senior clerk, much respected and utterly respectable, of a great City house; and the attempt might have been successful but that accident had thrown him among artists, a kind of society very captivating to a young man, especially when he has a certain command of a pencil. He threw himself into art, accordingly, with all his soul. He was the sort of man who would have thrown himself into anything with all his soul; not for success or reward, but out of an infinite satisfaction in doing good work, and seeing beautiful things grow under his hand. He was of a very sanguine mind, a mind which seldom accepted defeat, but which, with instinctive unconscious wisdom, hesitated to dare the highest flights, and to put itself in conflict with those final powers which either vanquish a man or assure his triumph. Perhaps it was because there was some hidden possibility of wild despair and downfall in the man's mind, of which only himself was aware, that he was thus cautious of putting his final fortune to the touch. But the fact was that he painted his pictures contentedly, conscientiously, doing everything well, and satisfied with the perfection of his work as work, though he was not unaware of the absence from it of any spark of divinity. He did not say it in so many words, but the sentiment of his mind was this:—'It is good work, work no man need be ashamed of. I am not a Raphael, alas! and I cannot help it. What is the good of being unhappy about a thing I cannot mend? I am doing my best; it is honest work, which I know I don't slight or do carelessly; and I can give her everything she wants except that. I should be too happy myself if she were but content.' But she was not content, and thus his happiness was brought down to the moderate pitch allowed to mortal bliss.

She was very different from her Robert. She had been a young lady of very good connections when she first met the rising young artist. I do not say that her connections were splendid, or that she made an absolute *mésalliance*, for that would be untrue. Her people, however, had been rich people for several generations. They had begun in merchandise, and by merchandise they had kept themselves up; but to have been rich from the time of your great-grandfather, with never any downfall or even break in the wealth, has perhaps more effect on the mind than that pride which springs from family. Well-descended people are aware that every family now and then gets into trouble, and may even fall into poverty without sacrificing any of its pretensions. But well-off people have not that source of enlightenment. When they cease to be very well off, they lose the great point of eminence on which they have taken their stand; and, consequently, success is more absolutely necessary to them than it is to any other class in the community. Helen Burton besides was very proud, very ambitious, and possessed of that not unusual form of *amour propre* which claims distinction as a right—though she had not anything particular in herself to justify her claim. She had, or believed she had, an utter contempt for that money which was the foundation of her family pride; and she was, at the same time, too well endowed in mind, and too generous in temper, to be able to give herself up sincerely to worship of that rank, which, as their only perpetual superior, tantalizes the imagination of the plebeian rich, and thrusts itself constantly before them. Helen could have married the son of a poor lord, and become the Honourable Mrs Somebody, with her mother's blessing, had she so willed. But as her will took a totally different direction, she had defied and alienated her mother, who was also a woman

of high spirit, and only some seventeen years older than her only child; the consequence was that when Mrs Burton found herself abandoned and left alone in the world, she married too, as truly out of pique as a girl sometimes does when deserted by her lover; and at her death left everything she had to her husband and the two small babies, one of them younger than Helen's little Norah, whom she left behind. So that a little tragedy, of a kind not much noted by the world, had woven itself around the beginning of her married life. The mother's second marriage had not been a success, but was Helen to blame for that? Nobody said she was, no one around her; but sometimes in the silence of the night, when she alone was awake, and all her household slept so peacefully—Robert, good Robert, was not a success either, not such a man as she had hoped. She loved him sincerely, was grateful to him for his love, and for his constant regard to her wishes. But yet, in the depths of her heart,—no, not despised him, the expression is too strong,—but felt a minute shade of indignation mingled in her disappointment with him for not being a great genius. *Why* was he not a Raphael, a Titian? She had married him with the full understanding that he was such, that he would bring her sweet fame and distinction. And why had not he done it? Every time she looked at his pictures she found out the want of inspiration in them. She did not say anything. She was very kind, praising the pretty bits of detail, the wonderful perfection of painting; but Robert felt that he would rather have the President and all the Hanging Committee to pass judgment on his pictures than his wife. Her sense that he had somehow defrauded her by not mounting at once to the very height of his profession, seemed to endow her with a power of judgment a hundred-fold more than was justified by her knowledge of art. She saw the want of any soul in them at the first glance, from under her half-closed eyelids—and it seemed to Robert that in her heart she said: 'Another pretty piece of mediocrity, a thing to sell, not to live—with no genius, no genius in it.' These were the words Robert seemed to himself to hear, but they were not the real words which, in her heart, Helen uttered. These were rather as follows:—'It is just the same as the last. It is no better, no better. And now everybody says he is at his best. Oh! when his worst begins to come, what will become of us?' But she never said an uncivil word. She praised what she could, and she went her way languidly into the drawing-room. She had come down out of her sphere to give herself to him, and he had not repaid her as she expected. He had given her love—oh, yes; but not fame. She was Mrs Drummond only; she was not pointed out where she went as the wife of the great painter. 'Her husband is an artist' was all that anybody ever said.

The effect of this upon poor Robert, however, was much worse even than it was upon his wife. Some time elapsed, it is true, before he discovered it. It took him even years to make out what it was that shadowed his little household over and diminished its brightness. But gradually a sense of the absence of that sympathetic backing up which a man expects in his own house, and without which both men and women who have work to do are so apt to pine and faint, stole over him like a chill. When anything was said against his pictures outside, a gloom in his wife's face would show him that worse was thought within. He had no domestic shield from adverse criticism. It was not kept in the outer circle of his mind, but was allowed to penetrate down to his heart, and envelop him in a heavy discouragement. Even applause did not exhilarate him. '*She* does not think I deserve it,' was what he would say to himself; and the sense of this criticism which never uttered a word weighed upon the poor fellow's soul. It made his hand unsteady many a day when his work depended on a firm touch—and blurred the colours before his eyes, and dulled his thoughts. Two or three times he made a spasmodic effort to break through his mediocrity, and then the critics (who were very well pleased on the whole with his mediocrity) shook their heads, and warned him against the sensational. But Helen neither approved nor condemned the change. To her it was all alike, always second-rate. She did her very best to applaud, but she could not brighten up into genuine admiration the blank composure in her eyes. What could she do? There was something to be said for her, as well as for him. She could not affect to admire what she felt to be commonplace. Nature had given her a good eye, and intense feeling had strengthened and corrected it. She saw all the weakness, the flatness, with fatal certainty. What, then, could she say? But poor Robert, though he was not a great artist, was the most tender-hearted, amiable, affectionate of men; and this mode of criticism stole the very heart out of him. There is no such want in the world as that want of backing up. It is the secret of weakness and failure, just as strong moral support and sympathy is the very secret of strength. He stood steady and robust to the external eye, painting many pictures every year, getting very tolerable prices, keeping his household very comfortable, a man still under forty, healthy, cheerful, and vigorous; but all the time he was sapped at the foundations. He had lost his confidence in himself, and it was impossible to predict how he would have borne any sudden blow.

It was about this time that Mr Reginald Burton, a cousin of Helen's, who had once, it was supposed, desired to be something nearer to her, found out the house in Kensington, and began to pay them visits. The circumstances of her marriage had separated her from her own people. The elder among them had thought Helen unkind to her mother; the younger ones had felt that nothing had come of it to justify so romantic a story. So that when Reginald Burton met the pair in society it was the reopening of an altogether closed chapter of her life. Mr Burton was a man in the City in very

extensive business. He was chairman of ever so many boards, and his name, at the head of one company or another, was never out of the newspapers. He had married since his cousin did, and had a very fine place in the country, and was more well off still than it was natural for the Burtons to be. Helen, who had never liked him very much, and had not even been grateful to him for loving her, received his visits now without enthusiasm; but Drummond, who was open-hearted like his kind, and who had no sort of jealousy about 'Helen's friends,' received him with a cordiality which seemed to his wife much too effusive. She would not accept the invitation which Mrs Burton sent to pay a long visit to Dura, their country place; but she could not be less than civil to her cousin when he insisted upon calling, nor could she openly resist when he carried off her husband to City dinners, or unfolded to him the benefits of this or that new society. Drummond had done very well in his profession, notwithstanding Helen's dissatisfaction with his work; and also notwithstanding her dissatisfaction, she was a good housewife, doing her duty wisely. She had a hundred a year of her own, which Drummond had taken care to have settled upon herself; but since they had grown richer he had insisted upon letting this accumulate as 'a portion for Norah,' and the two had laid by something besides. For painter-folk it will be readily seen they were at the very height of comfort—a pretty house, one pretty child, a little reserve of money, slowly but pleasantly accumulating. And money, though it is an ignoble thing, has so much to do with happiness! Drummond, who had been quite content to think that there was a portion saving up for Norah, and to whom it had not occurred that his little capital could be made use of, and produce twenty and a hundred-fold, gradually grew interested, without being aware of it, in the proceedings of Mr Burton. He began to talk, half laughingly, half with intention, of the wonderful difference between the slowly-earned gains of labour and those dazzling results of speculation. 'These fellows seem simply to coin money,' he said, 'half in jest and whole in earnest;' 'everything they touch seems to become gold. It looks incredible——' and he wound up with a nervous laugh, in which there was some agitation. Helen had all a woman's conservatism on this point.

'It *is* incredible, you may be sure,' she said. 'How can they invent money? Some one will have to pay for it somewhere;' which was a sentence of profound wisdom, much deeper than she thought.

'So one would say,' said Drummond, still laughing; 'but nobody seems to suffer. By Jove! as much as—not to say I, who am one of the rank and file—but as Welby or Hartwell Home get for one of their best pictures, your cousin will clear in five minutes, without taking the slightest trouble. When one sees it, one feels hugely tempted'—he added, looking at her. He was one of those men who like to carry their people's sympathy with them. He wanted not acquiescence simply, but approval; and notwithstanding that he was very well used to the absence of it, sought it still. She would not—could not, perhaps—enter warmly into the subject of his pictures; but here was a new matter. He looked up at her with a certain longing—ready, poor fellow, to plunge into anything if she would but approve.

'I hope you won't let yourself be tempted to anything, Robert, that you don't see the end of,' she said; but so gently that her husband's heart rose.

'Trust me for that,' he said joyously, 'and you shall have the first fruits, my darling. I have not as fine a house for you as your cousin can give to his wife, but for all that——'

'For all that,' she said, laughing, 'I would not change with Mrs Reginald Burton. I am not tempted by the fine house.'

'I have thought how we can make this one a great deal better,' he said, as he stooped to kiss her before he went out. He looked back upon her fondly as he left the room, and said to himself that if he wished for gain it was for her sake—his beautiful Helen! He had painted her furtively over and over again, though she never would sit to him. A certain shadow of her was in all his pictures, showing with more or less distinctness according as he loved or did not love his temporary heroine: but he knew that when this was pointed out to her she did not like it. She was anxious that everybody should know she did not sit to him. She was very indignant at the idea that a painter's wife might serve her husband as a model. 'Why should a painter's profession, which ought to be one of the noblest in the world, be obtruded upon the outer world at every step?' she said. But yet as he was a painter, every inch of him, his eye caught the *pose* of her head as she moved, and made a mental note of it. And yet she was not, strictly speaking, a beautiful woman. She was not the large Juno, who is our present type of beauty; she was not blazing with colour—red, and white, and golden—like the Rubens-heroinettes of the studio; nor was she of the low-browed, sleepy-eyed, sensuous, classic type. She was rather colourless on the contrary. Her hair was olive brown, which is so harmonious with a pale complexion; her eyes hazel-grey; her colour evanescent, coming and going, and rarely at any time more than a rose tint; her very lips, though beautifully formed, were only rose—not scarlet—and her figure was slight and deficient in 'grand curves.' Her great characteristic was what the French call *distinction*; a quality to which in point of truth she had no claim—for Helen, it must be remembered, was no

long-descended lady. She was the produce of three generations of money, and a race which could be called nothing but Philistine; and from whence came her highbred look, her fanciful pride, her unrealisable ambition, it would be difficult to say.

She went over the house with a little sigh after Robert was gone, professedly in the ordinary way of a housewife's duty, but really with reference to his last words. Yes, the house might be made a great deal better. The drawing-room was a very pretty one—quite enough for all their wants—but the dining-room was occupied by Drummond as his studio, according to an arrangement very common among painters. This, it will be perceived, was before the day of the new studio. The dining-room was thus occupied, and a smaller room, such as in most suburban houses is appropriated generally to the often scanty books of the family, was the eating-room of the Drummonds. It was one of those things which made Helen's pride wince—a very petty subject for pride, you will say—but, then, pride is not above petty things; and it wounded her to be obliged to say apologetically to her cousin—'The real dining-room of the house is Mr Drummond's studio. We content ourselves with this in the mean time.' 'Oh, yes; I see; of course he must want space and light,' Reginald Burton had replied with patronising complacency, and a recollection of his own banquetting-hall at Dura. How Helen hated him at that moment, and how much aggravated she felt with poor Robert smiling opposite to her, and feeling quite comfortable on the subject! 'We painters are troublesome things,' he even said, as if it was a thing to smile at. Helen went and looked in at the studio on this particular morning, and made a rapid calculation how it could be 'made better.' It would have to be improved off the face of the earth, in the first place, as a studio; and then carpeted, and tabled, and mirrored, and ornamented to suit its new destination. It would take a good deal of money to do it, but that was not the first consideration. The thing was, where was Robert to go? She, for her part, would have been reconciled to it easily, could he have made up his mind to have a studio apart from the house, and come home when his work was done. That would be an advantage in every way. It would secure that in the evening, at least, his profession should be banished. He would have to spend the evening as gentlemen usually do, yawning his head off if he pleased, but not professional for ever. It would no longer be possible for him to put on an old coat, and steal away into that atmosphere of paint, and moon over his effects, as he loved to do now. He liked Helen to go with him, and she did so often, and was tried almost beyond her strength by his affectionate lingerings over the canvas, which, in her soul, she felt would never be any better, and his appeals to her to suggest and to approve. Nothing would teach him not to appeal to her. Though he divined what she felt, though it had eaten into his very life, yet still he would try again. Perhaps this time she might like it better—perhaps——

'If he would only have his studio out of doors,' Helen reflected. She was too sure of him to be checked by the thought that his heart might perhaps learn to live out of doors too as well as his pictures, did she succeed in driving them out. No such doubt ever crossed her mind. He loved her, and nobody else, she knew. His mind had never admitted another idea but hers. She was a woman who would have scorned to be jealous in any circumstances—but she had no temptation to be jealous. He was only a moderate painter. He would never be as splendid as Titian, with a prince to pick up his pencil—which is what Helen's semi-Philistine pride would have prized. But he loved her so as no man had ever surpassed. She knew that, and was vaguely pleased by it; yet not as she might have been had there ever been any doubt about the matter. She was utterly sure of him, and it did not excite her one way or another. But his words had put a little gentle agitation in her mind. She put down her calculation on paper when she went back to the drawing-room after her morning occupations were over, and called Norah to her music. Sideboard so much, old carved oak, to please him, though for herself she thought it gloomy; curtains, for these luxuries he had not admitted to spoil his light; a much larger carpet—she made her list with some pleasure while Norah played her scales. And that was the day on which the painter's commercial career began.

CHAPTER II.

Drummond's first speculations were very successful, as is so often the case with the innocent and ignorant dabbler in commercial gambling. Mr Burton instructed him what to do with his little capital, and he did it. He knew nothing about business, and was docile to the point of servility to his disinterested friend, who smiled at his two thousand pounds, and regarded it with amused condescension. Two thousand pounds! It meant comfort, ease of mind, moral strength, to Drummond. It made him feel that in the contingency of a bad year, or a long illness, or any of the perils to which men and artists are liable, he would still be safe, and that his wife and child would not suffer; but to the rich City man it was a bagatelle scarcely worth thinking of. When he really consented to employ his mind about it, he made such use of it as astonished and delighted the innocent painter. All that his simple imagination had ever dreamed seemed likely to be carried out. This was indeed money-making he felt—Trade spelt with a very big capital, and meaning something much more splendid than anything he had hitherto dreamt of. But then he could not have done it by himself or without instruction. Burton could not have been more at a loss in Drummond's studio than he would have felt in his friend's counting-house. Mr Burton was 'a merchant,' a vague term which nevertheless satisfied the painter's mind. He was understood to be one of the partners in Rivers's bank, but his own business was quite independent of that. Money was the material he dealt in—his stock-in-trade. He understood the Funds as a doctor understands a patient whose pulse he feels every day. He could divine when they were going to rise and when they were going to fall. And there were other ways in which his knowledge told still more wonderfully. He knew when a new invention, a new manufacture, was going to be popular, by some extraordinary magic which Drummond could not understand. He would catch a speculation of this sort at its tide, and take his profit from it, and bound off again uninjured before the current began to fall. In all these matters he was knowing beyond most men; and he lent to his cousin's husband all the benefit of his experience. For several years Drummond went on adding to his store in a manner so simple and delightful, that his old way of making money, the mode by which months of labour went to the acquisition of a few hundred pounds, looked almost laughable to him. He continued it because he was fond of his art, and loved her for herself alone; but he did it with a sort of banter, smiling at the folly of it, as an enlightened old lady might look at her spinning-wheel. The use of it? Well, as for that, the new ways of spinning were better and cheaper; but still not for the use, but for the pleasure of it!—So Drummond clung to his profession, and worked almost as hard at it as ever. And in the additional ease of his circumstances, not needing to hurry anything for an exhibition, or sacrifice any part of his design for the fancy of a buyer, he certainly painted better than usual, and was made an Associate, to the general satisfaction of his brethren. These were the happy days in which the studio was built. It was connected with the house, as I have said, by a conservatory, a warm, glass-covered, fragrant, balmy place, bright with flowers. 'There must always be violets, and there must always be colour!' he had said to the nurseryman who supplied and kept his fairy palace in order, after the fashion of London. And if ever there was a flowery way contrived into the thorny haunts of art it was this. It would perhaps be rash to say that this was the happy time of Drummond's married life, for they had always been happy, with only that one drawback of Helen's dissatisfaction with her husband's work. They had loved each other always, and their union had been most true and full. But the effect of wealth was mollifying, as it so often is. Prosperity has been railed at much, as dangerous and deadening to the higher being; but prosperity increases amiability and smooths down asperities as nothing else can. It did not remove that one undisclosed and untellable grievance which prevented Mrs Drummond's life from attaining perfection, but it took away ever so many little points of irritation which aggravated that. She got, for one thing, the dining-room she wanted—a prosaic matter, yet one which Helen considered important—and she got, what she had not bargained for, that pretty conservatory, and a bunch of violets every day—a lover-like gift which pleased her. Things, in short, went very well with them at this period of their existence. Her discontents were more lulled to sleep than they had ever been before. She still saw the absence of any divine meaning in her husband's pictures; but she saw it with gentler eyes. The pictures did not seem so entirely his sole standing-ground. If he could not grow absolutely illustrious by that or any personal means of acquiring fame, he might still hold his own in the world by other means. Helen sighed over her Titian-dream, but to a great extent she gave it up. Greatness was not to be; but comfort and even luxury were probable. Her old conditions of life seemed to be coming back to her. It was not what she had dreamed of; but yet it was better to have mediocrity with ease and modest riches, and pleasant surroundings, than mediocrity without those alleviations. To do her justice, had her husband been a great unsuccessful genius, in whom she had thoroughly believed, she would have borne privation proudly and with a certain triumph. But that not being so, she returned to her old starting-ground with a sigh that was not altogether painful, saying to herself that she must learn to be content with what she had, and not long for what she could not have.

Thus they were happier, more hopeful, more at their ease. They went more into society, and received more frequent

visits from their friends. The new studio made many social pleasures possible that had not been possible. Of itself it implied a certain rise in the world. It gave grace and completeness to their little house. Nobody could say any longer that it was half a house and half a workshop, as Helen, under her breath, in her impatience, had sometimes declared it to be. The workshop phase was over, the era of self-denial gone—and yet Robert was not driven from the art he loved, nor prevented from putting on his old coat and stealing away in the evenings to visit the mistress who was dearer to him than anything else except his wife.

This was the state of affairs when the painter one day entered Helen's drawing-room in a state of considerable excitement. He was full of a new scheme, greater than anything he had as yet been engaged in. Rivers's bank, which was half as old as London, which held as high repute as the Bank of England, which was the favourite depository of everybody's money, from ministers of state down to dressmakers, was going to undergo a revolution. The Riverses themselves had all died out, except, indeed, the head of the house, who was now Lord Rivers, and had no more than a nominal connection with the establishment which had been the means of bringing him to his present high estate. The other partners had gradually got immersed in other business. Mr Burton, for instance, confessed frankly that he had not time to attend to the affairs of the bank, and the others were in a similar condition:—they had come in as secondaries, and they found themselves principals, and it was too much for them. They had accordingly decided to make Rivers's a joint-stock bank. This was the great news that Drummond brought home to his wife. 'I will put everything we have into it,' he said in his enthusiasm, 'unless you object, Helen. We can never have such another chance. Most speculations have a doubtful element in them. But this is not at all doubtful. There is an enormous business ready made to our hands, and all the traditions of success and the best names in the City to head our list—for of course the old partners hold shares, and will be made directors of the new company—And—you will laugh, Helen, but for you and the child I feel able to brave anything—I am to be a director too.'

'You!' cried Helen, with a surprise which had some mixture of dismay. 'But you don't know anything about business. You can't even——'

'Reckon up my own accounts,' said the painter placidly—'quite true; but you see it is a great deal easier to calculate on a large scale than on a small scale. I assure you I understand the banking system—at least, I shall when I have given my mind to it. I shouldn't mind even,' he said laughing, 'making an effort to learn the multiplication table. Norah might teach me. Besides, to speak seriously, it doesn't matter in the least: there are clerks and a manager to do all that, and other directors that know all about it, and I shall learn in time.'

'But, then, why be a director at all?' said Helen. She said this more from a woman's natural hesitation at the thought of change, than from any dislike of the idea; for she belonged to the race from which directors come by nature. Poor Drummond could not give any very good reason why he desired this distinction; but he looked very wise, and set before her with gravity all the privileges involved.

'It brings something in,' he said, 'either in the way of salary, or special profits, or something. Ask your cousin. I don't pretend to know very much about it. But I assure you he is very great upon the advantages involved. He says it will be the making of me. It gives position and influence and all that—'

'To a painter!' said Helen: and in her heart she groaned. Her dream came back like a mist, and wove itself about her head. What distinction would it have given to Raphael or to Titian, or even to Gainsborough or Sir Joshua Reynolds, to be made directors of a bank? She groaned in her heart, and then she came back to herself, and caught her husband's eyes looking at her with that grieved and wondering look, half aware of the disappointment he had caused her, humbled, sorry, suspicious, yet almost indignant, the look with which he had sometimes regarded her from among his pictures in the day when art reigned alone over his life. Helen came abruptly to herself when she met that glance, and said hurriedly, 'It cannot change your position much, Robert, in our world.'

'No,' he said, with a glance of sudden brightness in his eyes which she did not understand; 'but, my darling, our world may expand. I should like you to be something more than a poor painter's wife, Helen—you who might be a princess! I should not have ventured to marry you if I had not hoped to make you a kind of princess; but you don't believe I can; do you?' Here he paused, and, she thought, regarded her with a wistful look, asking her to contradict him. But how could she contradict him? It was true. The wife of a pleasant mediocre painter, Associate, or in time Academician—that was all. Not a thorough lady of art such as—such as——Such as whom? Poor Andrea's Lucrezia, who ruined him? That was the only painter's wife that occurred to Helen.

'Dear Robert,' she said earnestly, 'never mind me: so long as I have you and Norah, I care very little about princesses. We are very well and very happy as we are. I think you should be careful, and consider well before you make any change.'

But by this time the brightness that had been hanging about him came back again like a gleam of sunshine. He kissed her with a joyous laugh. 'You are only a woman,' he said, 'after all. You don't understand what it is to be a British director. Fancy marching into the bank with a lordly stride, and remembering the days when one was thankful to have a balance of five pounds to one's credit! You don't see the fun of it, Helen; and the best of the whole is that an R.A. on the board of directors will be an advantage, Burton says. Why, heaven knows. I suppose he thinks it will conciliate the profession. We painters, you see, are known to have so much money floating about! But anyhow, he thinks an R.A.——'

'But, Robert! you are not an R.A.'

'Not yet. I forgot to tell you,' he added, lowering his voice, and putting on a sudden look of gravity, which was half real, half innocently hypocritical. 'Old Welby died last night.'

Then there was a little pause. They were not glad that old Welby was dead. A serious shade came over both their faces for the moment—the homage, partly natural, partly conventional, that human nature pays to death. And then they clasped each other's hands in mutual congratulation. The vacant place would come to Drummond in the course of nature. He was known to be the first on the list of Associates. Thus he had obtained the highest honours of his profession, and it was this and not the bank directorship which had filled him with triumph. His wife's coldness, however, checked his delight. His profession and the public adjudged the honour to him; but Helen had not adjudged it. If the prize had been hers to bestow, she would not have given it to him. This made his heart contract even in the moment of his triumph. But yet he was triumphant. To him it was the highest honour in the world.

'Poor old Welby!' he said. 'He was a great painter; and now that he is dead, he will be better understood. He was fifty before he entered the Academy,' the painter continued, with half-conscious self-glorification. 'He was a long time making his way.'

'And you are more than ten years younger,' said Helen. Surely that might have changed her opinion if anything could. 'Robert, are you to be put upon this bank because you are an R.A.?'

'And for my business talents generally,' he said, with a laugh. His spirits were too high to be subdued. He would not hear reason, nor, indeed, anything except the confused delightful chatter about his new elevation, in which the fumes of happiness get vent. He plunged into an immediate revelation of what he would do in his new capacity. 'It will be odd if one can't make the Hanging Committee a little more reasonable,' he said. 'I shall set my face against that hideous habit of filling up "the line" with dozens of bad pictures because the men have R.A. at their names. Do you remember, Helen, that year when I was hung up at the ceiling? It nearly broke my heart. It was the year before we were married.'

'They were your enemies then,' said Helen, with some visionary remnant of the old indignation which she had felt about that base outrage before she was Robert Drummond's wife. She had not begun to criticise him then—to weigh his pictures and find them wanting; and she could still remember her disgust and hatred of the Hanging Committee of that year. Now no Hanging Committee could do any harm. It had changed its opinion and applauded the painter, but she—had changed her opinion too. Then this artist-pair did as many such people do. By way of celebrating the occasion they went away to the country, and spent the rest of the day like a pair of lovers. Little Norah, who was too small to be carried off on such short notice, was left at home with her governess, but the father and mother went away to enjoy the bright summer day, and each other, and the event which had crowned them with glory. Even Helen's heart was moved with a certain thrill of satisfaction when it occurred to her that some one was pointing her husband out as 'Drummond the painter—the new R.A.' He had won his blue ribbon, and won it honestly, and nobody in England, nobody in the world, was above him in his own profession. He was as good as a Duke, or even superior, for a Duke (poor wretch!) cannot help himself, whereas a painter achieves his own distinction. Helen let this new softness steal into her soul. She even felt that when she looked at the pictures next time they would have a light in them which she had not yet been able to perceive. And the bank, though it was so much more important, sank altogether into the background, while the two rowed down the river in the summer evening, with a golden cloud of pleasure and glory around them. They had gone to Richmond, where so many happy people go to realise their gladness. And were the pair of lovers new betrothed, who crossed their path now and then without seeing them, more blessed than the elder pair? 'I wonder if they will be as happy ten years hence?' Helen said, smiling at them with that mingling of sweet regret and superiority with which we gaze at

the reflection of a happiness we have had in our day. 'Yes,' said the painter, 'if she is as sweet to him as my wife has been to me.' What more could a woman want to make her glad? If Helen had not been very happy in his love, it would have made her heart sick to think of all her failures towards him; but she was very happy; and happiness is indulgent not only to its friends, but even to itself.

CHAPTER III.

Mr Burton, however, was soon restored to pre-eminence in the affairs of the Drummonds. The very next day he dined with them, and entered on the whole question. The glory which the painter had achieved was his own affair, and consequently its interest was soon exhausted to his friend, who, for his part, had a subject of his own, of which the interest was inexhaustible. Mr Burton was very explanatory, in his genial, mercantile way. He made it clear even to Helen, who was not above the level of ordinary womankind in her understanding of business. He had no difficulty in convincing her that Robert Drummond, R.A., would be an addition to the list of directors; but it was harder to make the reasons apparent why 'Rivers's' should change its character. If it was so firmly established, so profitable, and so popular, why should the partners desire to share their good fortune with others? Mrs Drummond asked. Her husband laughed with the confidence of a man who knew all about it, at the simplicity of such a question, but Mr Burton, on the contrary, took the greatest pains to explain all. He pointed out to her all the advantages of 'new blood.' The bank was doing well, and making enormous profits; but still it might do better with more energetic management. Mr Burton described and deplored pathetically his own over-burdened condition. Sometimes he was detained in the City while the guests at a state dinner-party awaited him at home. His carriage had waited for him for two hours together at the railway, while he was busy in town, toiling over the arrears of work at Rivers's. 'We have a jewel of a manager,' he said, 'or we never could get on at all. You know Golden, Drummond? There never was such a fellow for work—and a head as clear as steel; never forgets anything; never lets an opportunity slip him. But for him, we never could have got on so long in this way. But every man's strength has its limits. And we must have "new blood."'

Thus Helen gradually came to an understanding of the whole, or at least thought she did. At all events, she understood about the 'new blood.' Her own Robert was new blood of the most valuable kind. His name would be important, for the business of 'Rivers's' was to a considerable extent a private business. And his good sense and industry would be important too.

'Talk about business talent,' Mr Burton said; 'business talent means good sense and prudence. It means the capacity to see what ought to be done, and the spirit to do it; and if you add to this discretion enough not to go too far, you have everything a man of business needs. Of course, all technical knowledge has to be acquired, but that is easily done.'

'But is Robert so accomplished as all this?' Helen said, opening her eyes. She would not, for all England, have disclosed to her cousin that Robert, in her eyes, was anything less than perfect. She would not, for her life, have had him know that her husband was not the first of painters and of men; but yet an exclamation of wonder burst from her. She was not herself so sure of his clear-sightedness and discretion. And when Robert laughed with a mixture of vanity and amusement at the high character imagined for him, Helen flushed also with something between anger and shame.

'Your own profession is a different thing,' she said hastily. 'You have been trained for that. But to be an R.A. does not make you a man of business—and painting is your profession, Robert. More will be expected from you now, instead of less.'

'But we are not going to interfere with his time, my dear Helen,' said her cousin cheerfully. 'A meeting of directors once a week or so—a consultation when we meet—his advice, which we can always come to ask. Bless my soul, we are not going to sweep up a great painter for our small concern. No, no; you may make yourself quite easy. In the mean time Drummond is not to give us much more than the benefit of his name.'

'And all his money,' Helen said to herself as she withdrew to the drawing-room, where her little Norah awaited her. His money had increased considerably since this new era in their lives began. It was something worth having now—something that would make the little girl an heiress in a humble way. And he was going to risk it all. She went into the conservatory in the twilight and walked up and down and pondered—wondering if it was wise to do it; wondering if some new danger was about to swallow them up. Her reasonings, however, were wholly founded upon matters quite distinct from the real question. She discussed it with herself, just as her husband would discuss it with himself, in a way common to women, and painters, and other unbusiness-like persons, on every ground but the real one. First, he had followed Reginald Burton's advice in all his speculations, and had gained. Would it be honourable for him to give up following his advice now, especially in a matter which he had so much at heart? Secondly, by every means in his power, Reginald Burton took occasion to throw in *her* face (Helen's) the glories and splendour of his wife, and of the home he had given her, and all her high estate. Helen herself was conscious of having refused these glories and advantages. She had chosen to be Robert Drummond's wife, and thrown aside the other; but still the mention of Mrs Burton and her

luxuries had a certain stinging and stimulating effect upon her. She scorned, and yet would have been pleased to emulate that splendour. The account of it put her out of patience with her own humility, notwithstanding that she took pride in that humility, and felt it more consistent with the real dignity of her position than any splendour. And then, thirdly, the thought would come in that even the magic title of R.A. had not thrown any celestial light into Robert's pictures. That very morning she had stood for half an hour, while he was out, in front of the last, which still stood on his easel, and tried to reason herself into love of it. It was a picture which ought to have been great. It was Francesca and Paolo, in the story, reading together at the crisis of their fate. The glow and ardour of suppressed passion had somehow toned down in Drummond's hands to a gentle light. There was a sunset warmth of colour about the pair, which stood in place of that fiercer illumination; and all the maze of love and madness, all the passion and misery and delight, all the terror of fate involved, and shadow of the dark, awful world beyond, had sunk into a tender picture of a pair of lovers, innocent and sweet. Helen had stood before it with a mixture of discouragement and longing impossible to put into words. Oh, if she could but breathe upon it, and breathe in the lacking soul! Oh, if she could but reflect into Drummond's eyes the passion of humiliation and impatience and love which was in her own! But she could not. As Helen paced up and down the pretty ornamented space, all sweet with flowers, which her husband's love had made for her, this picture rose before her like a ghost. He who painted it was an R.A. It was exquisitely painted—a very miracle of colour and manipulation. There was not a detail which could be improved, nor a line which was out of drawing. He would never do anything better, never, never! Then why should he go on trying, proving, over and over, how much he could, and how much he could not do? Better, far better, to throw it aside for ever, to grow rich, to make himself a name in another way.

Thus Helen reasoned in the vehemence of her thoughts. She was calm until she came to this point. She thought she was very calm, reasonable to the highest pitch, in everything; and yet the blood began to boil and course through her veins as she pursued the subject. Sometimes she walked as far as the door of the studio, and pausing to look in, saw that picture glimmering on the easel, and all the unframed canvases about upon the walls. Many of them were sketches of herself, made from memory, for she never would sit—studies of her in her different dresses, in different characters, according as her husband's fond fancy represented her to himself. She could not see them for the darkness, but she saw them all in her heart. Was that all he could do? Not glorify her by his greatness, but render her the feeble homage of this perpetual, ineffectual adoration. Why was not he like the other painters; like—Her memory failed her for an example; of all the great painters she could think of only Rubens' bacchanalian beauties and that Lucrezia would come to her mind. It was about the time of Mr Browning's poem, that revelation of Andrea del Sarto, which elucidates the man like a very ray from heaven. She was not very fond of poetry, nor anything of a critic; but the poem had seized upon her, partly because of her intense feeling on the subject. Sometimes she felt as if she herself was Andrea—not Robert, for Robert had none of that heart-rending sense of failure. Was she Lucrezia rather, the wife that goaded him into misery? No, no! she could not so condemn herself. When her thoughts reached this point she forsook the studio and the conservatory, and rushed back to the drawing-room, where little Norah, with her head pressed close against the window to take advantage of the last glimmer of light, was reading a book of fairy tales. Great painters had not wives. Those others—Leonardo, and Angelo, and the young Urbinese—had none of them wives. Was that the reason? But not to be as great as Michel Angelo, not to win the highest honours of art, would Robert give up his wife and his child. Therefore was it not best that he should give up being a painter, and become a commercial man instead, and grow rich! Helen sat down in the gathering darkness and looked at the three windows glimmering with their mist of white curtains, and little Norah curled up on the carpet, with her white face and her brown curls relieved against the light. Some faint sounds came in soft as summer and evening made them, through the long casement, which was open, and with it a scent of mignonette, and of the fresh earth in the flower-beds, refreshed by watering and dew. Sometimes the voices of her husband and cousin from the adjoining room would reach her ear; but where she was all was silent, nothing to disturb her thoughts. No, he would never do better. He had won his crown. Helen was proud and glad that he had won it; but in her heart did not consent. He had won and he had not won. His victory was because he had caught the *banal* fancy of the public, and pleased his brethren by his beautiful work; but he had failed because—because—Why had he failed? Because he was not Raphael or Leonardo—nor even that poor Andrea—but only Robert Drummond, painting his pictures not out of any inspiration within him, but for money and fame. He had gained these as men who seek them frankly so often seem to do. But it was better, far better, that he should make money now, by legitimate means, without pursuing a profession in which he never could be great.

These were not like a wife's reasonings; but they were Helen's, though she was loyal to her husband as ever woman was. She would have liked so much better to worship his works and himself, as most women do; and that would have done him good more than anything else in earth or heaven. But she could not. It was her hard fate that made her eye so keen and so true. It felt like infidelity to him, to come to such a conclusion in his own house, with his kind voice sounding in her ear. But so it was, and she could not make it different, do what she would. He was so pleased when he found she did

not oppose his desires, so grateful to her, so strongly convinced that she was yielding her own pleasure to his, that his thanks were both lavish and tender. When their visitor had left them, and they were alone, he poured out his gratitude like a lover. 'I know you are giving in to me,' he said, 'my love, my self-forgetting Helen! It is like you. You always have given up your pleasure to mine. Am I a brute to accept it, and take my own way?'

'I am not making any sacrifice, Robert. Don't thank me, please. It is because I think you have judged right, and this is best.'

'And you think I am so blind and stupid not to see why you say that,' he said in his enthusiasm. 'Helen, I often wonder what providence was thinking of to give you only such a poor fellow as I am. I wish I was something better for your sake, something more like you; but I have not a wish or a hope in the world, my darling, except for you. If I want to be rich, Helen, it is only for you. You know that, at least.'

'And for Norah,' she said, smiling.

'For Norah, but most for Norah's mother, who trusted me when I was nobody, and gave me herself when I had little chance of being either rich or great,' said Drummond. He said it, poor fellow, with a swelling of his heart. His new dignity had for the moment delivered him even from the chill of his wife's unexpressed indifference to his work. With a certain trustful simplicity, which it would have been impossible to call vanity, he accepted the verdict of his profession—even though he had doubts himself as to his own eminence, they must know. He had won the greatness he wanted most, he had acquired a distinction which could not but vanquish his own doubts and hers. And as he was now, he would not change positions with any man in England. He was great, and please God, for Helen's sake, he would be rich too. He put his arm round his wife and drew her into the open conservatory. The moon was up, and shone down upon them, lighting up with a wan and spiritual light the colourless silent flowers. It was curious to see them, with all their leaves silvered, and all their identity gone, yet pouring forth their sweet scents silently, no one noting them. 'How sweet it is here,' said the painter, drawing a long breath in his happiness. It was a moment that lived in his mind, and remained with him, as moments do which are specially happy, detaching themselves from the common tenor of life with all the more distinctness that they are so few.

'Yes, it is the place I love best,' said Helen, whose heart was touched too, 'because you made it for me, Robert. The rest is ordinary and comfortable, but this is different. It is your sonnet to me, like that we were reading of—like Raphael's sonnet and Dante's angel.' This she said with a little soft enthusiasm, which perhaps went beyond the magnitude of the fact. But then she was compunctious about her sins towards him; and his fondness, and the moonlight, and the breath of the flowers, moved her, and the celestial fumes of Mr Browning's book of poetry had gone to Helen's head, as the other influences went to her heart.

'My darling! it will be hard upon me if I don't give you better yet,' he said. And then with a change in his voice—cheerful, yet slightly deprecating, 'Come and have a look at "Francesca,"' he said.

It was taking an unfair advantage of her; but she could not refuse him at such a moment. He went back to the drawing-room for the lamp, and returned carrying it, drawing flecks of colour round him from all the flowers as he passed flashing the light on them. Helen felt her own portrait look at her reproachfully as she went in with reluctant steps following him, wondering what she could say. It made her heart sick to look at his pet picture, in its beauty and feebleness; but he approached it lovingly, with a heart full of satisfaction and content. He held up the lamp in his hand, though it was heavy, that the softened light might fall just where it ought, and indicated to her the very spot where she ought to stand to have the full advantage of all its beauties. 'I don't think there is much to find fault with in the composition,' he said, looking at it fondly. 'Give me your honest opinion, Helen. Do you think it would be improved by a little heightening of those lights?'

Helen gazed at it with confused eyes and an aching heart. It was his diploma picture, the one by which most probably he would be known best to posterity, and she said to herself that he, a painter, ought to know better than she did. But that reflection did not affect her feelings. Her impulse was to snatch the lamp from his hand, and say, 'Dear Robert, dearest husband, come and make money, come and be a banker, or sweep a crossing, and let Francesca alone for ever!' But she could not say that. What she did say faltering was—'You must know so much better than I do, Robert; but I think the light is very sweet. It is best not to be too bright.'

'Do you think so?' he said anxiously. 'I am not quite sure. I think it would be more effective with a higher tone just here;

and this line of drapery is a little stiff—just a little stiff. Could you hold the lamp for a moment, Helen? There! that is better. Now Paolo's foot is free, and the attitude is more distinct. Follow the line of the chalk and tell me what you think. That comes better now?"

'Yes, it is better,' said Helen; and then she paused and summoned all her courage. 'Don't you think,' she faltered, 'that Francesca—is—almost too innocent and sweet?'

'Too innocent!' said poor Robert, opening his honest eyes. 'But, dear, you forget! She was innocent. Why, surely, you are not the one to go in for anything sensational, Helen! This is not Francesca in the Inferno, but Francesca in the garden, before any harm had come near her. I don't like your impassioned women.' He had grown a little excited, feeling, perhaps, more in the suggestion than its mere words; but now he came to a stop, and his voice regained its easy tone. 'The whole thing wants a great deal of working up,' he said; 'all this foreground is very imperfect—it is too like an English garden. I acknowledge my weakness; my ideal always smacks of home.'

Helen said no more. How could she. He was ready laughingly to allow that England came gliding into his pencil and his thoughts when he meant to paint Italy: a venial, kindly error. But candid and kind as he was, he could not bear criticism on the more vital points. She held the lamp for him patiently, though it strained her arm, and tried to make what small suggestions she could about the foreground; and in her heart, as she stood trembling with pain and excitement, would have liked to thrust the flame through that canvas in very love for the painter. Perhaps some painter's wife who reads this page, some author's wife, some woman jealous and hungry for excellence in the productions of those she loves, will understand better than I can describe it how Helen felt.

When he had finished those fond scratches of chalk upon the picture, and had taken the lamp from her hand to relieve her, Drummond was shocked to find his wife so tremulous and pale. He made her sit down in his great chair, and called himself a brute for tiring her. 'Now let us have a comfortable talk over the other matter,' he said. The lamp, which he had placed on a table littered with portfolios and pigments, threw a dim light through the large studio. There were two ghostly easels standing up tall and dim in the background, and the lay figure ghostliest of all, draped with a gleaming silvery stuff, pale green with lines of silver, shone eerily in the distance. Drummond sat down by his wife, and took her hand in his.

'You are quite chilly,' he said tenderly; 'are you ill, Helen? If it worries you like this, a hundred directorships would not tempt me. Tell me frankly, my darling—do you dislike it so much as this?'

'I don't dislike it at all,' she said eagerly. 'I am chilly because the night is cold. Listen how the wind is rising! That sound always makes me miserable. It is like a child crying or some one wailing out of doors. It affects my nerves—I don't know why.'

'It is nothing but the sound of rain,' he said, 'silly little woman! I wonder why it is that one likes a woman to be silly now and then? It restores the balance between us, I suppose; for generally, alas! Helen, you are wiser than I am, which is a dreadful confession for a man to make.'

'No, no, it is not true,' she said with indescribable remorse. But he only laughed and put his arm round her, seeing that she trembled still.

'It is quite true; but I like you to be silly now and then—like this. It gives one a glimmer of superiority. There! lean upon me and feel comfortable. You are only a woman after all. You want your husband's arm to keep you safe.'

'What is that?' said Helen with a start. It was a simple sound enough; one of the many unframed, unfinished drawings which covered the walls had fallen down. Robert rose and picked it up, and brought it forward to the light.

'It is nothing,' he said; and then with a laugh, looking at it, added, '*Absit omen!* It is my own portrait. And very lucky, too, that it was nothing more important. It is not hurt. Let us talk about the bank.'

'Oh, Robert, your portrait!' she said with sudden unreasonable terror, clutching at it, and gazing anxiously into the serene painted face.

'My portrait does not mind in the least,' he said, laughing; 'and it might have been yours, Helen. I must have all those fastenings seen to to-morrow. Now, let us talk about the bank.'

'Oh, Robert,' she said, 'let us have nothing to do with it. It *is* an omen, a warning. We are very well as we are. Give up all these business things which you don't understand. How can you understand them? Give it up, and let us be as we are.'

'Because a nail has come out of the wall?' he said. 'Do you suppose the nail knew, Helen, or the bit of painted canvas? Nonsense, dear. I defy all omens for my part.'

And just then the wind rose and gave a wailing cry, like a spirit in pain. Helen burst into tears which she could not keep back. No; it was quite true, the picture could not know, the wind could not know what was to come. And yet——

Drummond had never seen his wife suffer from nerves or fancies, and it half-amused, half-affected him, and went to his heart. He was even pleased, the simple-minded soul, and flattered by the sense of protection and strength which he felt in himself. He liked nothing better than to caress and soothe her. He took her back to the drawing-room and placed her on a sofa, and read the new book of poetry to her which she had taken such a fancy to. Dear foolishness of womankind! He liked to feel her thus dependent upon his succour and sympathy; and smiled to think of any omen that could lie in the howling of the wind, or the rising of a summer storm.

CHAPTER IV.

It is needless to say that Helen's superstition about the fall of the picture and the sighing of the wind vanished with the night, and that in the morning her nervousness was gone, and her mind had returned to its previous train of thought. Her passing weakness, however, had left one trace behind. While he was soothing her fanciful terrors, Robert had said, in a burst of candour and magnanimity, 'I will tell you what I will do, Helen. I will not act on my own judgment. I'll ask Haldane and Maurice for their advice,' 'But I do not care for their advice,' she had said, with a certain pathos. 'Yes, to be sure,' Robert had answered; for, good as he was, he liked his own way, and sometimes was perverse. 'They are my oldest friends; they are the most sensible fellows I know. I will tell them all the circumstances, and they will give me their advice.'

This was a result which probably would have come whether Helen had been nervous or not; for Haldane and Maurice were the two authorities whom the painter held highest after his wife. But Helen had never been able to receive them with her husband's faith, or to agree to them as sharers of her influence over him. It said much for her that she had so tolerated them and schooled herself in their presence that poor Drummond had no idea of the rebellion which existed against them in her heart. But both of them were instinctively aware of it, and felt that they were not loved by their friend's wife. He made the same announcement to her next morning with cheerful confidence, and a sense that he deserved nothing but applause for his prudence. 'I am going to keep my promise,' he said. 'You must not think I say anything to please you which I don't mean to carry out. I am going to speak to Haldane and Maurice. Maurice is very knowing about business, and as for Stephen, his father was in an office all his life.'

'But, Robert, I don't want you to ask their advice. I have no faith in them. I would rather a hundred times you judged for yourself.'

'Yes, my darling,' said Robert; 'they are the greatest helps to a man in making such a decision. I know my own opinion, and I know yours; and our two good friends, who have no bias, will put everything right.'

And he went out with his hat brushed and a new pair of gloves, cheerful and respectable as if he were already a bank director, cleansed of the velvet coats and brigand hats and all the weaknesses of his youth. And his wife sat down with an impatient sigh to hear Norah play her scales, which was not exhilarating, for Norah's notions of time and harmony were as yet but weakly developed. While the child made direful havoc among the black notes, Helen was sounding a great many notes quite as black in her inmost mind. What could they know about it? What were they to him in comparison with herself? Why should he so wear his heart upon his sleeve? It raised a kind of silent exasperation within her, so good as he was, so kind, and tender, and loving; and yet this was a matter in which she had nothing to do but submit.

These two cherished friends of Robert's were not men after Helen's heart. The first, Stephen Haldane, was a Dissenting minister, a member of a class which all prejudices were in arms against. It was not that she cared for his religious opinions or views, which differed from her own. She was not theological nor ecclesiastical in her turn of mind, and, to tell the truth, was not given to judging her acquaintances by an intellectual standard, much less a doctrinal one. But she shrank from his intimacy because he was a Dissenter—a man belonging to a class not acknowledged in society, and of whom she understood vaguely that they were very careless about their h's, and were not gentlemen. The fact that Stephen Haldane was a gentleman as much as good manners, and good looks, and a tolerable education could make him, did not change her sentiments. She was too much of an idealist (without knowing it) to let proof invalidate theory. Accordingly, she doubted his good manners, mistrusted his opinions, and behaved towards him with studied civility, and a protest, carefully veiled but never forgotten, against his admission to her society. He had no right to be there; he was an intruder, an inferior. Such was her conclusion in a social point of view; and her husband's inclination to consult him on most important matters in their history was very galling to her. The two had come to know each other in their youth, when Haldane was going through the curious incoherent education which often leads a young man temporarily to the position of Dissenting minister. He had started in life as a Bluecoat boy, and had shown what people call 'great talent,' but not in the academical way. As a young man he had loved modern literature better than ancient. Had he been born to an estate of ten thousand a year, or had he been born in a rank which would have secured him diplomatic or official work, he would have had a high character for accomplishments and ability; but he was born only of a poor Dissenting family, without a sixpence, and when his school career was over he did not know what to do with himself. He took to writing, as such men do, by nature, and worked his way into the newspapers. Thus he began to earn a little money, while vaguely playing with a variety of careers. Once he thought he would be a doctor, and it was while in attendance at an anatomical class that he

met Drummond. But Haldane was soon sick of doctoring. Then he became a lecturer, getting engagements from mechanics' institutions and literary societies, chiefly in the country. It was at one of these lectures that he fell under the notice of a certain Mr Baldwin, a kind of lay bishop in a great Dissenting community. Mr Baldwin was much 'struck' by the young lecturer. He agreed with his views, and applauded his eloquence; and when the lecture was over had himself introduced to the speaker. This good man had a great many peculiarities, and was rich enough to be permitted to indulge them. One of these peculiarities was an inclination to find out and encourage 'rising talent.' And he told everybody he had seldom been so much impressed as by the talents of this young man, who was living (innocently) by his wits, and did not know what to do with himself. It is not necessary to describe the steps by which young Haldane ripened from a lecturer upon miscellaneous subjects, literary and philosophical, into a most esteemed preacher. He pursued his studies for a year or two at Mr Baldwin's cost, and at the end of that time was promoted, not of course nominally, but very really, by Mr Baldwin's influence, to the pulpit of the flourishing and wealthy congregation of which that potentate was the head.

This was Stephen Haldane's history; but he was not the sort of man to be produced naturally by such a training. He was full of natural refinement, strangely blended with a contented adherence to all the homely habits of his early life. He had not attempted, had not even thought of, 'bettering' himself. He lived with his mother and sister, two homely Dissenting women, narrow as the little house they lived in, who kept him, his table, and surroundings, on exactly the same model as his father's house had been kept. All the luxuries of the wealthy chapel folks never tempted him to imitation. He did not even claim to himself the luxury of a private study in which to write his sermons, but had his writing-table in the common sitting-room, in order that his womankind might preserve the cold fiction of a 'best room' in which to receive visitors. To be sure, he might have been able to afford a larger house; but then Mrs Haldane and Miss Jane would have been out of place in a larger house. They lived in Victoria Villas, one of those smaller streets which copy and vulgarize the better ones in all London suburbs. It was close to St Mary's Road, in which Drummond's house was situated, and the one set of houses was a copy of the other in little. The arrangement of the rooms, the shape of the garden, the outside aspect was the same, only so many degrees smaller. And this, it must be allowed, was one of the reasons why the Haldanes were unpalatable neighbours to Mrs Drummond; for, as a general rule, the people who lived in St Mary's Road did not know the inferior persons who inhabited Victoria Villas. The smaller copied the greater, and were despised by them in consequence. It was 'a different class,' everybody said. And it may be supposed that it was very hard upon poor Helen to have it known that her husband's closest friend, the man whose opinion he asked about most things, and whom he believed in entirely, was one who combined in himself almost all the objectionable qualities possible. He was a Dissenter—a Dissenting minister—sprung of a poor family, and adhering to all their shabby habits—and lived in Victoria Villas. The very address of itself was enough to condemn a man; no one who had any respect for his friends would have retained it for an hour. Yet it was this man whom Robert had gone to consult at the greatest crisis of his life.

The other friend upon whom poor Drummond relied was less objectionable in a social point of view. He was a physician, and not in very great practice, being a crotchety man given to inventions and investigations, but emphatically 'a gentleman' according to Helen's own sense of the word. This was so far satisfactory; but if he was less objectionable, he was also much less interesting than Stephen Haldane. He was a shy man, knowing little about women and caring less. He lived all by himself in a great house in one of the streets near Berkeley Square, a house twice as big as the Drummonds', which he inhabited in solitary state, in what seemed to Helen the coldest, dreariest loneliness. She was half sorry for, half contemptuous of him in his big, solemn, doubly-respectable hermitage. He was rich, and had nothing to do with his money. He had few friends and no relations. He was as unlike the painter as could be conceived; and yet in him too Robert believed. Their acquaintance dated back to the same anatomical lectures which had brought Haldane and Drummond together, but Dr Maurice was a lover of art, and had bought Robert's first picture, and thus occupied a different ground with him. Perhaps the irritating influence he had upon Helen was greater than that exercised by Haldane, because it was an irritation produced by his character, not by his circumstances. Haldane paid her a certain shy homage, feeling her to be different from all the women who surrounded himself; but Maurice treated her with formal civility and that kind of conventional deference which old-fashioned people show to the wishes and tastes of an inferior, that he may be set at his ease among them. There were times when she all but hated the doctor, with his courtesy and his silent air of criticism—but the minister she could not hate.

At the same time it must be allowed that to see her husband set out with his new gloves to ask the opinion of these two men, after all the profound thought she had herself given to the subject, and the passionate feeling it had roused within her, was hard upon Helen. To them it would be nothing more than a wise or unwise investment of money, but to her it was a measure affecting life and honour. Perhaps she exaggerated, she was willing to allow—but they would not fail to underrate its importance; they could not—Heaven forbid they ever should!—feel as she did, that Robert, though an R.A.,

had failed in his profession. They would advise him to hold fast by that profession and leave business alone, which was as much as condemning him to a constant repetition of the despairs and discontents of the past; or they would advise him to accept the new opening held out to him and sever himself from art, which would be as good as a confession of failure. Thus it is evident, whatever his friends might happen to advise, Helen was prepared to resent.

At this moment Mrs Drummond's character was the strangest mixture of two kinds of being. She was, though a mature woman, like a flower bursting out of a rough husk. The old conventional nature, the habits and prejudices of the rich *bourgeois* existence to which she had been born, had survived all that had as yet happened to her in life. The want of a dining-room, which has been already noted, had been not a trivial accident but a real humiliation to her. She sighed when she thought of the great dinner-parties with mountains of silver on table and sideboard, and many men in black or more gorgeous beings in livery to wait, which she had been accustomed to in her youth; and when she was obliged to furnish a supper for a group of painters who had been smoking half the night in the studio, and who were not in evening dress, she felt almost disgraced. Robert enjoyed that impromptu festivity more than all the dinner-parties; but Helen felt that if any of her old friends or even the higher class of her present acquaintances were to look in and see her, seated at the head of the table, where half a dozen bearded men in morning coats were devouring cold beef and salad, she must have sunk through the floor in shame and dismay. Robert was strangely, sadly without feeling in such matters. It never occurred to him that they could be a criterion of what his wife called 'position,' and he would only laugh in the most hearty way when Helen insisted upon the habits proper to 'people of our class.' But her pride, such as it was, was terribly wounded by all such irregular proceedings. The middle-class custom of dining early and making a meal of 'tea,' a custom in full and undisturbed operation round the corner in Victoria Villas, affected her with a certain horror as if it had been a crime. Had she yielded to it she would have felt that she had 'given in,' and voluntarily descended in the social scale. 'Late dinners' were to her as a bulwark against that social downfall which in her early married life had seemed always imminent. This curious raising up of details into the place of principles had given Helen many an unnecessary prick. It had made her put up with much really inferior society in the shape of people of gentility whose minds were all absorbed in the hard struggle to keep up appearances, and live as people lived with ten times their income, while it cut her off from a great many to whom appearances were less important, and who lived as happened to be most convenient to them, without asking at what hour dukes dined or millionnaires. The dukes probably would have been as indifferent, but not the millionnaires, and it was from the latter class that Helen came. But in the midst of all these all-important details and the trouble they caused her, had risen up, she knew not how, a passionate, obstinately ideal soul. Perhaps at first her thirst for fame had been but another word for social advancement and distinction in the world, but that feeling had changed by means of the silent anguish which had crept on her as bit by bit she understood her husband's real weakness. Love in her opened, it did not blind, her eyes. Her heart cried out for excellence, for power, for genius in the man she loved; and with this longing there came a hundred subtle sentiments which she did not understand, and which worked and fermented in her without any will of hers. Along with the sense that he was no genius, there rose an unspeakable remorse and hatred of herself who had found it out; and along with her discontent came a sense of her own weakness—a growing humility which was a pain to her, and against which her pride fought stoutly, keeping, up to this time, the upper hand—and a regretful, self-reproachful, half-adoration of her husband and his goodness, produced by the very consciousness that he was not so strong nor so great as she had hoped. These mingled elements of the old and the new in Helen's mind made it hard to understand her, hard to realise and follow her motives; yet they explained the irritability which possessed her, her impatience of any suggestion from outside, along with her longing for something new, some change which might bring a new tide into the life which had fallen into such dreary, stagnant, unreal ways.

While she waited at home with all these thoughts whirling about her, Robert went out cheerfully seeking advice. He did it in the spirit which is habitual to men who consult their friends on any important matter. He made up his mind first. As he turned lightly round the corner, swinging his cane, instead of wondering what his friend would say to him, he was making up his mind what he himself would do with all the unusual power and wealth which would come to him through the bank. For instance, at once, there was poor Chance, the sculptor, whose son he could find a place for without more ado. Poor Chance had ten children, and was no genius, but an honest, good fellow, who would have made quite a superior stonemason had he understood his own gifts. Here was one immediate advantage of that bank-directorship. He went in cheerful and confident in this thought to the little house in Victoria Villas. Haldane had been ill; he had spent the previous winter in Italy, and his friends had been in some anxiety about his health; but he had improved again, and Robert went in without any apprehensions into the sitting-room at the back, which looked into the little garden. He had scarcely opened the door before he saw that something had happened. The writing-table was deserted, and a large sofa drawn near the window had become, it was easy to perceive, the centre of the room and of all the interests of its inhabitants. Mrs Haldane, a homely old woman in a black dress and a widow's cap, rose hastily as he came in, with her

hand extended, as if to forbid his approach. She was very pale and tremulous; the arm which she raised shook as she held it out, and fell down feebly by her side when she saw who it was. 'Oh, come in, Mr Drummond, he will like to see *you*,' she said in a whisper. Robert went forward with a pang of alarm. His friend was lying on the sofa with his eyes closed, with an ashy paleness on his face, and the features slightly, very slightly, distorted. He was not moved by the sound of Robert's welcome nor by his mother's movements. His eyes were closed, and yet he did not seem to be asleep. His chest heaved regularly and faintly, or the terrified bystander would have thought he was dead.

Robert clutched at the hand which the old lady stretched out to him again. 'Has he fainted?' he cried in a whisper. 'Have you had the doctor? Let me go for the doctor. Do you know what it is?'

Poor Mrs Haldane looked down silently and cried. Two tears fell out of her old eyes as if they were full and had overflowed. 'I thought he would notice you,' she said. 'He always was so fond of you. Oh, Mr Drummond, my boy's had a stroke!'

'A stroke!' said Drummond under his breath. All his own visions flitted out of his mind like a shadow. His friend lay before him like a fallen tower, motionless, speechless. 'Good God!' he said, as men do unawares, with involuntary appeal to Him who (surely) has to do with those wild contradictions of nature. 'When did it happen? Who has seen him?' he asked, growing almost as pale as was the sufferer, and feeling faint and ill in the sense of his own powerlessness to help.

'It was last night, late,' said the mother. Oh, Mr Drummond, this has been what was working on him. I knew it was never the lungs. Not one of us, either his father's family or mine, was ever touched in the lungs. Dr Mixwell saw him directly. He said not to disturb him, or I would have had him in bed. I know he ought to be in bed.'

'I'll go and fetch Maurice,' cried Robert. 'I shall be back directly,' and he rushed out of the room which he had entered so jauntily. As he flew along the street, and jumped into the first cab he could find, the bank and his directorship went as completely out of his mind as if they had been a hundred years off. He dashed at the great solemn door of Dr Maurice's house when he reached it and rushed in, upsetting the decorous servant. He seized the doctor by the shoulder, who was seated calmly at breakfast. 'Come along with me directly,' he said. 'I have a cab at the door.'

'What is the matter?' said Dr Maurice. He had no idea of being disturbed so unceremoniously. 'Is Mrs Drummond ill? Sit down and tell me what is wrong.'

'I can't sit down. I want you to come with me. There is a cab at the door,' said Robert panting. 'It is poor Haldane. He has had a fit—come at once.'

'A fit! I knew that was what it was,' said Dr Maurice calmly. He waved his hand to the importunate petitioner, and swallowed the rest of his breakfast in great mouthfuls. 'I'm coming; hold your tongue, Drummond. I knew the lungs was all nonsense—of course that is what it was.'

'Come then,' cried Robert. 'Good heavens, come! don't let him lie there and die.'

'He will not die. More's the pity, poor fellow!' said the doctor. 'I said so from the beginning. John, my hat. Lungs, nonsense! He was as sound in the lungs as either you or I.'

'For God's sake, come then,' said the impatient painter, and he rushed to the door and pushed the calm physician into his cab. He had come to consult him about something? Yes, to be sure, about poor Haldane—not to consult him—to carry him off, to compel, to drag that other back from the verge of the grave. If there was anything more in his mind when he started Drummond had clean forgotten it. He did not remember it again till two hours later, when, having helped to carry poor Haldane up-stairs, and rushed here and there for medicines and conveniences, he at last went home, weary with excitement and sympathetic pain. 'I have surely forgotten something,' he said, when he had given an account of all his doings to his wife. 'Good heavens! I forgot altogether that I went to ask somebody's advice.'

CHAPTER V.

Mr Burton called next morning to ascertain Drummond's decision, and found that he had been sitting up half the night with Stephen Haldane, and was wholly occupied by his friend's illness. The merchant suffered a little vexation to be visible in his smooth and genial aspect. He was a middle-aged man, with a bland aspect and full development, not fat but ample. He wore his whiskers long, and had an air that was always jovial and comfortable. The cleanness of the man was almost aggressive. He impressed upon you the fact that he not only had his bath every morning, but that his bath was constructed on the newest principles, with water-pipes which wandered through all the house. He wore buff waistcoats and light trousers, and the easiest of overcoats. His watch-chain was worthy of him, and so were the heavy gold buttons at his sleeves. He looked and moved and spoke like wealth, with a roll in his voice, which is only attainable in business, and when business goes very well with you. Consequently the shade of vexation which came over him was very perceptible. He found the Drummonds only at breakfast, though he had breakfasted two hours before, and this mingled in his seriousness a certain tone of virtuous reproof.

'My dear fellow, I don't want to disturb you,' he said; 'but how you can make this sort of thing pay I can't tell. I breakfasted at eight; but then, to be sure, I am only a City man, and can't expect my example to be much thought of at the West-end.'

'Is this the West-end?' said Robert, laughing. 'But if you breakfasted at eight, you must want something more by this time. Sit down and have some coffee. We are late because we have been up half the night.' And he told his new visitor the story of poor Stephen and his sudden illness. Mr Burton was moderately concerned, for he had married Mr Baldwin's only daughter, and was bound to take a certain interest in his father-in-law's *protégé*. He heard the story to an end with admirable patience, and shook his head, and said, 'Poor fellow! I am very sorry for him,' with due gravity. But he was soon tired of Stephen's story. He took out his watch, and consulted it seriously, muttering something about his appointments.

'My dear good people,' he said, 'it may be all very well for you to spend your time and your emotions on your friends, but a man of business cannot so indulge himself. I thought I should have had a definite answer from you, Drummond, yes or no.'

'Yes,' said Robert with professional calmness. 'I am very sorry. So I intended myself; but this business about poor Haldane put everything else out of my head.'

'Well,' said Mr Burton, rising and walking to the fireplace, according to British habit, though there was no fire, 'you know best what you can do. I, for my part, should not be able to neglect my business if my best friend was on his death-bed. Of course you understand Rivers's is not likely to go begging for partners. Such an offer is not made to every one. I am certain that you should accept it for your own sake; but if you do not think it of importance, there is not another word to say.'

'My dear fellow,' cried Robert, 'of course I think it of importance; and I know I owe it to your consideration. Don't think me ungrateful, pray.'

'As for gratitude, that is neither here nor there,' said the merchant; 'there is nothing to be grateful about. But we have a meeting to-day to arrange the preliminaries, and probably everything will be settled then. I should have liked to place your name at once on the list. To leave such things over, unless you mean simply to abandon them, is a great mistake.'

'I am sure I don't see any particular reason why we should leave it over,' Robert said, faltering a little; and then he looked at his wife. Helen's face was clouded and very pale. She was watching him with a certain furtive eagerness, but she did not meet his eye. There was a tremulous pause, which seemed like an hour to both of them, during the passing of which the air seemed to rustle and beat about Helen's ears. Her husband gazed at her, eagerly questioning her; but she could not raise her eyes—something prevented her, she could not tell what; her eyelids seemed heavy and weighed them down. It was not weakness or fear or a desire to avoid the responsibility of immediate action, but positive physical inability. He looked at her for, perhaps, a full minute by the clock, and then he said slowly, 'I see no reason to delay. I think Helen and I are agreed. This matter put the other out of my head; but it is natural you should be impatient. I think I will accept your kind offer, Burton, without any more delay.'

How easy it is to say such words! The moment they were spoken Robert felt them so simple, so inevitable, and knew that

all along he had meant to say them. But still he was somewhat excited; a curious feeling came into his mind, such as a king may feel when he has crossed his neighbour's frontier with an invading army. Half-a-dozen steps were enough to do it; but how to get back again? and what might pass before the going back! The thought caught at his breath, and gave him a tremendous thrill through all his frame.

'Very well,' said Burton, withdrawing his hands from under his coat-tails, and drawing a slightly long breath, which the other in his excitement did not observe. Mr Burton did not show any excitement, except that long breath, which, after all, might have been accidental; no sign or indication of feeling had been visible in him. It was a great, a very great matter to the Drummonds; but it was a small matter to one who had been for years a partner in Rivers's. 'Very well. I will submit your name to the directors to-day. I don't think you need fear that the result will be doubtful. And I am very glad you have come to such a wise decision. Helen, when your husband is rich, as I trust he soon will be, I hope you will fancy a little house at Dura, and be our neighbour. It would be like old times. I should like it more than I can say.'

'I never was fond of Dura,' said Helen, with some abruptness. This reference to his greatness irritated her, as it always did; for whatever new-comer might take a little house at Dura, he was the lord of the place, supreme in the great house, and master of everything. Such an allusion always stirred up what was worst in her, and gave to her natural pride a certain tone of spitefulness and envy, which disgusted and wounded herself. But it did not wound her cousin, it pleased him. He laughed with a suppressed enjoyment and triumph.

'Well,' he said, 'Dura is my home, and a very happy one, therefore, of course, I am fond of it. And it has a great many associations too, some of them, perhaps, not so agreeable. But it is always pleasant to feel, as I do, that everything that has happened to one has been for the best.'

'The conversation has taken a highly edifying tone,' said Robert with some surprise. He saw there was more meant than met the eye, but he did not know what it was. 'We shall all be thanking Providence next, as people do chiefly, I observe, in celebration of the sufferings of others. Well, since you think I am on the fair way to be rich, perhaps I had better thank Providence by anticipation. Must I go with you to-day?'

'Not to-day. You will have full intimation when your presence is wanted. You forget—nothing is settled yet,' said Mr Burton; 'the whole arrangement may come to nothing yet, for what I know. But I must be going; remember me to poor Haldane when he is able to receive good wishes. I hope he'll soon be better. Some of these days I'll call and see him. Good morning, Helen. Good-bye, Drummond. I'm glad you've made up your mind. My conviction is, it will turn out the best day's work you ever did in your life.'

'Is he true, I wonder?' Helen said to herself as the two men left the room, and stood talking in the hall. It was the first time the idea had crossed her mind, and now it took its origin more from the malicious shaft her cousin had shot at herself than from any indication of double-dealing she had seen in him. It was against all the traditions of the Burtons to imagine that he could be anything but true. They had been business people as long as they had been anything, and commercial honour had been their god. It went against her to imagine that 'a relation of mine!' could be other than perfect in this particular; and she sighed, and dismissed the idea from her mind, blaming herself, as she often did now, for ill-temper and suspiciousness. 'It was mean to make that allusion to the past, but it is meaner of me to doubt him on that account,' she said to herself, with a painful sigh. It was so hard in her to overcome nature, and subdue those rebellious feelings that rose in her unawares. 'Why should I care?' she thought, 'it is my vanity. I suppose if the man had never got over my rejection of him I should have been pleased. I should have thought better of him! Such a man as that! After all, we women must be fools indeed.' This was the edifying sentiment in her mind when Robert came back.

'Well, Helen, the die is cast,' he said, half cheerfully, half sadly. 'However we come to shore, the ship has set out. If it were not for poor Stephen I should make to-day a holiday and take you somewhere. This day ought to be distinguished from the rest.'

'I hope he is true. I wonder if he is true?' Helen repeated to herself, half unconsciously, beneath her breath.

'Whom? Your cousin!!' said Robert, with quite two notes of admiration in his tone. 'Why, Helen, what a cynic you are growing. You will suspect me next.'

'Am I a cynic?' she said, looking up at him with a sudden tear in her eye. 'It is because I am beginning to be so wretchedly doubtful about myself.'

This admission burst from her she could not tell how. She had no intention of making it. And she was sorry the moment the words were said. But as for Robert, he gazed at her first in consternation, then laughed, then took her in his kind arms with those laughing accusations of love which are more sweet than any eulogy. 'Yes,' he said, 'you are a very suspicious character altogether, you know so much harm of yourself that it is evident you must think badly of others. What a terrible business for me to have such a wife!'

Thus ended the episode in their lives which was to colour them to their very end, and decide everything else. They had been very solemn about it at the beginning, and had made up their minds to proceed very warily, and ask everybody's advice; but, as so often happens in human affairs, the decision which was intended to be done so seriously had been accomplished in a moment, without consideration, almost without thought. And, being done, it was a weight off the minds of both. They had no longer this disturbing matter between them to be discussed and thought over. Robert dismissed it out of simple light-heartedness, and that delightful economy of sensation which is fortunately so common among the artist class: 'It is done, and all the thinking in the world will not make any difference. Why should I bother myself about it?' If this *insouciance* sometimes does harm, heaven knows it does a great deal of good sometimes, and gives the artist power to work where a man who felt his anxieties more heavily would fail. Helen had not this happy temper; but she was a woman, more occupied with personal feelings than with any fact, however important. The fact was outside, and never, she thought, could vanquish her—her enemies were within.

Time passed very quietly after this great decision. There was a lull, during which Stephen Haldane grew better, and Mrs Drummond learned to feel a certain friendliness and sympathy for the lonely mother and sister, who were flattered by her inquiries after him. She came even to understand her husband's jokes about Miss Jane, the grim and practical person who ruled the little house in Victoria Villas—whom she sometimes laughed at, but whom little Norah took a violent fancy for, which much mollified her mother. And then, in the matter of Rivers's bank, there began to rise a certain agreeable excitement and importance in their life. 'Drummond among the list of bank directors! *Drummond!* What does it mean?' This question ran through all the studios, and came back in amusing colours to the two who knew all about it. 'His wife belongs to that sort of people, and has hosts of business connections,' said one. 'The fellow is rich,' said another: 'don't you know what a favourite he is with all the dealers, and has been for ever so long?' 'His wife has money,' was the judgment of a third; 'take my word for it, that is the way to get on in this world. A rich wife keeps you going till you've made a hit—if you are ever going to make a hit—and helps you on.' 'It is all that cousin of hers,' another would say, 'that fellow Burton whom one meets there. He bought my last picture, so I have reason to know, and has a palace in the country, like the rest of those City fellows.' 'What luck some men have!' sighed the oldest of all. 'I am older than Drummond, but none of these good things ever came my way.' And this man was a better painter than Drummond, and knew it, but somehow had never caught the tide. Drummond's importance rose with every new report. When he secured that clerkship for Bob Chance, Chance the sculptor's son, he made one family happy, and roused a certain excitement in many others; for poor artists, like poor clergymen and other needy persons, insist upon having large families. Two or three of the men who were Robert's contemporaries, who had studied with him in the schools, or had guided his early labours, went to see him—while others wrote—describing promising boys who would soon be ready for business, and for whom they would gladly secure something less precarious than the life of art. These applications were from the second class of artists, the men who are never very successful, yet who 'keep on,' as they themselves would say, rambling from exhibition to exhibition, painting as well as a man can be taught to paint who has no natural impulse, or turning out in conscientious marble fair limbs of nymphs that ought, as the only reason for their being, to have sprung ethereal from the stone. And these poor painters and sculptors were often so good, so kindly, and unblamable as men; fond of their families, ready to do anything to push on the sons and daughters who showed 'talent,' or had any means offered of bettering themselves. How gladly Robert would have given away a dozen clerkships! how happy it would have made him to scatter upon them all some share of his prosperity! but he could not do this, and it was the first disagreeable accompaniment of his new position. He had other applications, however, of a different kind. Those in the profession who had some money to invest came and asked for his advice, feeling that they could have confidence in him. 'Rivers's has a name like the Bank of England,' they said; and he had the privilege of some preference shares to allot to them. All this advanced him in his own opinion, in his wife's, in that of all the world. He was no longer a man subject to utter demolition at the hands of an ill-natured critic; but a man endowed with large powers in addition to his genius, whom nobody could demolish or even seriously harm.

Perhaps, however, the greatest height of Drummond's triumph was reached when, the year having crept round from summer to autumn, his friend Dr Maurice came to call one evening after a visit to Haldane. It was that moment between the two lights which is dear to all busy people. The first fire of the year was lit in Helen's drawing-room, which of itself

was a little family event. Robert had strayed in from the studio in his painting coat, which he concealed by sitting in the shade by the side of the chimney. The autumn evenings had been growing wistful and eerie for some time back, the days shortening, yet the season still too mild for fires—so that the warm interior, all lit by the kindly, fitful flame, was a novelty and a pleasure. The central figure in the picture was Norah, in a thick white piqué frock, with her brown hair falling on her shoulders, reading by the firelight. The little white figure rose from the warm carpet into the rosy firelight, herself less vividly tinted, a curious little abstract thing, the centre of the life around her, yet taking no note of it. She had shielded her cheek with one of her hands, and was bending her brows over the open book, trying to shade the light which flickered and danced, and made the words dance too before her. The book was too big for her, filling her lap and one crimsoned arm which held its least heavy side. The new-comer saw nothing but Norah against the light as he came in. He stopped, in reality because he was fond of Norah, with a disapproving word.

'At it again!' he said. 'That child will ruin her eyesight and her complexion, and I don't know what besides.'

'Never fear,' said Drummond, with a laugh, out of the corner, revealing himself, and Helen rose from the other side. She had been invisible too in a shady corner. A certain curious sensation came over the man who was older, richer, and felt himself wiser, than the painter. All this Drummond had for his share, though he had not done much to deserve it—whereas in the big library near Berkeley Square there was no fire, no child pushing a round shoulder out of her frock, and roasting her cheeks, no gracious woman rising softly out of the shadows. Of course, Dr Maurice might have been married too, and had not chosen; but nevertheless it was hard to keep from a momentary envy of the painter who could come home to enjoy himself between the lights, and for whom every night a new pose arranged itself of that child reading before the fire. Dr Maurice was a determined old bachelor, and thought more of the child than of the wife.

'Haldane is better to-day,' he said, seating himself behind Norah, who looked up dreamily, with hungry eyes possessed by her tale, to greet him, at her mother's bidding. 'Nearly as well as he will ever be. We must amuse him with hopes of restoration, I suppose; but he will never budge out of that house as long as he lives.'

'But he will live?' said Robert.

'Yes, if you can call it living. Fancy, Drummond! a man about your own age, a year or two younger than I am—a man fond of wandering, fond of movement; and yet shut up in that dreary prison—for life!'

A silence fell upon them all as he spoke. They were too much awed to make any response, the solemnity being beyond words. Norah woke up at the pause. Their voices did not disturb her; but the silence did.

'Who is to be in the dreary prison?' she said, looking round upon them with her big brown wondering eyes.

'Hush! Poor Mr Haldane, dear,' said the mother, under her breath.

Then Norah burst into a great cry. 'Oh, who has done it—who has done it? It is a shame—it is a sin! He is so good.'

'My child,' said the doctor, with something like a sob, 'it is God who has done it. If it had been a man, we would have throttled him before he touched poor Stephen. Now, heaven help us! what can we do? I suppose it is God.'

'Maurice, don't speak so before the child,' said Robert from a corner.

'How can I help it?' he cried. 'If it was a man's doing, what could we say bad enough? Norah, little one, you don't know what I mean. Go back to your book.'

'Norah, go up-stairs and get dressed for dinner,' said Helen. 'But you cannot, you must not be right, doctor. Oh, say you are sometimes deceived. Things happen that you don't reckon on. It is not for his life?'

Dr Maurice shook his head. He looked after Norah regretfully as she went out of the room with the big book clasped in her arms.

'You might have let the child stay,' he said reproachfully. 'There was nothing that could have disturbed *her* in what I said.'

And then for a moment or two the sound of the fire flickering its light about, making sudden leaps and sudden downfalls like a living thing, was the only sound heard; and it was in this pensive silence, weighted and subdued by the neighbourhood of suffering, that the visitor suddenly introduced a subject so different. He said abruptly—

'I have to congratulate you on becoming a great man, Drummond. I don't know how you have done it. But this bank, I suppose, will make your fortune. I want to venture a little in it on my own account.'

'You, Maurice? My dear fellow!' said Robert, getting up with sudden enthusiasm, and seizing his friend by both his hands, '*you* going in for Rivers's! I never was so glad in my life!'

'You need not be violent,' said the doctor. 'Have I said anything very clever, Mrs Drummond? I am going in for Rivers's because it seems such a capital investment. I can't expect, of course, to get put on the board of directors, or to sit at the receipt of custom, like such a great man as you are. Don't shake my hands off, my good fellow. What is there wonderful in this?'

'Nothing wonderful,' said Robert; 'but the best joke I ever heard in my life. Fancy, Helen, I was going to him humbly, hat in hand, to ask his advice, thinking perhaps he would put his veto on it, and prevent me from making my fortune. And now he is a shareholder like the rest. You may not see it, but it is the best joke! You must stay to dinner, old fellow, and we will talk business all the evening. Helen, we cannot let him go to-night.'

And Helen smiled too as she repeated her husband's invitation. Robert had been wiser than his friends, though he had asked nobody's advice but hers. It was a salve to her often-wounded pride. The doctor did not like it half so much. His friend had stolen a march upon him, reversed their usual positions, gone first, and left the other to follow. He stayed to dinner, however, all the same, and pared apples for Norah, and talked over Rivers's afterwards over his wine. But when he left the door to go home, he shrugged his shoulders with a half-satisfied prophecy. 'He will never paint another good picture,' Maurice said, with a certain tone of friendly vengeance. 'When wealth comes in good-bye to art.'

CHAPTER VI.

It was on an October day, mellow and bright, when Robert Drummond, with a smile on his face, and a heavy heart in his breast, reached the house in Victoria Villas, to superintend poor Stephen's return to the sitting-room, as he had superintended his removal to his bed. The sitting-room was larger, airier, and less isolated, than the mournful chamber up-stairs, in which he had spent half the summer. It was a heart-rending office, and yet it was one from which his friend could not shrink. Before he went up-stairs the painter paused, and took hold of Miss Jane's hand, and wept, as people say, 'like a child;' but a child's hot thunder-shower of easily-dried tears are little like those few heavy drops that come to the eyes of older people, concentrating in themselves so much that words could not express. Miss Jane, for her part, did not weep. Her gray countenance, which was grayer than ever, was for a moment convulsed, and then she pushed her brother's friend away. 'Don't you see I daren't cry?' she said, almost angrily, with one hard sob. Her brother Stephen was the one object of her life. All the romance of which she was capable, and a devotion deeper than that of twenty lovers, was in her worship of him. And this was what it was coming to! She hurried into the room which she had been preparing for him, which was henceforward to be his dwelling day and night, and shut the door upon the too sympathetic face. As for Robert, he went into his friend's little chamber with cheery salutations: 'Well, old fellow, so you are coming back to the world!' he said. Poor Haldane was seated in his dressing-gown in an easy-chair. To look at him, no chance spectator would have known that he was as incapable of moving out of it as if he had been bound with iron, and everybody about him had been loud in their congratulations on the progress he was making. They thought they deceived him, as people so often think who flatter the incurable with hopes of recovery. He smiled as Robert spoke, and shook his head.

'I am changing my prison,' he said; 'nothing more. I know that as well as the wisest of you, Drummond. You kind, dear souls, do you think those cheery looks you have made such work to keep up, deceive me?'

'What cheery looks? I am as sulky as a bear,' said Robert. 'And as for your prison, Maurice doesn't think so. You heard what he said?'

'Maurice doesn't say so,' said poor Haldane. 'But never mind, it can't last for ever; and we need not be doleful for that.'

The painter groaned within himself as they moved the helpless man down-stairs. 'It will last for ever,' he thought. He was so full of life and consolation himself that he could not realise the end which his friend was thinking of—the 'for ever' which would release him and every prisoner. When they carried the invalid into the room below he gave a wistful look round him. For life—that was what he was thinking. He looked at the poor walls and commonplace surroundings, and a sigh burst from his lips. But he said immediately, to obliterate the impression of the sigh, 'What a cheerful room it is, and the sun shining! I could not have had a more hopeful day for my first coming down-stairs.'

And then they all looked at each other, heart-struck by what seemed to them the success of their deception. Old Mrs Haldane fell into a sudden outburst of weeping: 'Oh, my poor boy! my poor boy!' she said; and again a quick convulsion passed over Miss Jane's face. Even Dr Maurice, the arch-deceiver, felt his voice choked in his throat. They did not know that their patient was smiling at them and their transparent devices, in the sadness and patience of his heart. The room had been altered in many particulars for his reception, and fitted with contrivances, every one of which contradicted the promises of restoration which were held out to him. He had known it was so, but yet the sight of all the provisions made for his captivity gave him a new pang. He could have cried out, too, to earth and heaven. But what would have been the good? At the end all must submit.

'Now that you are comfortable, Stephen,' said his sister, with a harsh rattle in her voice, which made her appear less amiable than ever, and in reality came out of the deep anguish of her heart, 'there is some one waiting to see you. The chapel people have been very kind. Besides the deputation that came with the purse for you, there are always private members asking how you are, and if they can see you, and how they miss you—till you are able to go back.'

'That will be never, Jane.'

'How do you know? How can any one tell? It is impious to limit God's mercies,' cried Miss Jane harshly; then, suddenly calming down, 'It is Mr Baldwin's son-in-law who has called to-day. They are in the country, and this Mr Burton has come to carry them news of you. May he come in?'

'That is your cousin—your director?' said the invalid with some eagerness. 'I should like to see him. I want you to invest my money for me, Drummond. There is not much; but you must have it, and make something of it in your new bank.'

Mr Burton came in before Drummond could answer. He came in on tiptoe, with an amount of caution which exasperated all the bystanders who loved Stephen. He looked stronger, richer, more prosperous than ever as he sat down, sympathetically, close to Stephen's chair. There he sat and talked, as it were, smoothing the sick man down. 'We must have patience,' he said soothingly. 'After such an illness it will take so long to get up your strength. The sea-side would have been the best thing, but, unfortunately, it is a little late. I am so glad to hear your people are showing you how much they prize such a man as you among them; and I hope, with one thing and another—the pension, and so forth—you will be very comfortable? I would not venture to ask such a question, if it were not for Mr Baldwin. He takes so much interest in all your concerns.'

'I am very glad you have spoken of it,' said Haldane, 'for I want to invest what little money I have in this bank I hear so much of—yours and Drummond's. I feel so much like a dying man—'

'No, no,' said Mr Burton in a deprecating tone, 'nothing half so bad. Providence, you may be sure, has something different in store for you. We must not think of that.'

'At all events, I want to make the best of the money, for my mother and sister,' said Stephen. And then he entered into business, telling them what he had, and how it was invested. His mind had been very full of this subject for some time past. The money was not much, but if he died, it would be all his mother and sister would have to depend upon, and the purse which his congregation had collected for him would increase his little, very little capital. Dr Maurice had gone away, and the two women, though they heard everything, were withdrawn together into a corner. Mrs Haldane had attempted several times to interrupt the conversation. 'What do we care for money!' she had said, with tears in her eyes. 'Let him alone, mother, it will make him happier,' Miss Jane had said in the voice that was so harsh with restrained emotion. And Stephen, with his two visitors beside him, and a flush upon his wan face, expounded all his affairs, and put his fortune into their hands. 'Between you, you will keep my poor little nest-egg warm,' he said, smiling upon them. His illness had refined his face, and gave him a certain pathetic dignity, and there was something that affected both in this appeal.

'I will sit on it myself sooner than let it cool,' Drummond had said with a laugh, yet with the tears in his eyes, with an attempt to lighten the seriousness of the moment. 'Dear old fellow, don't be afraid. Your sacred money will bring a blessing on the rest.'

'That is all very pretty and poetical,' said Mr Burton, with a curious shade passing over his face; 'but if Haldane has the slightest doubt on the subject, he should not make the venture. Of course, we are all prepared in the way of business to win or to lose. If we lose, we must bear it as well as we can. Of course, I think the investment as safe as the Bank of England—but at the same time, Drummond, it would be a very different thing to you or me from what it would be to him.'

'Very different,' said Drummond; but the mere suggestion of loss had made him pale. 'These are uncomfortable words,' he went on with a momentary laugh. 'For my part, I go in to win, without allowing the possibility of loss. Loss! Why I have been doing a great deal in ways less sure than Rivers's, and I have not lost a penny yet, thanks to you.'

'I am not infallible,' said Burton. 'Of course, in everything there is a risk. I cannot make myself responsible. If Haldane has the least doubt or hesitation——'

'If I had, your caution would have reassured me,' said the invalid. 'People who feel their responsibility so much, don't throw away their neighbour's money. It is all my mother has, and all I have. When you are tempted to speculate, think what a helpless set of people are involved—and no doubt there will be many more just as helpless. I think perhaps it would exercise a good influence on mercantile men,' he added, with perhaps a reminiscence of his profession, 'if they knew something personally of the people whose lives are, so to speak, in their hands.'

'Haldane,' said Mr Burton hastily, 'I don't think we ought to take your money. It is too great a risk. Trade has no heart and no bowels. We can't work in this way, you know, it would paralyse any man. Money is money, and has to be dealt with on business principles. God bless me! If I were to reflect about the people whose lives, &c—I could never do anything! We can't afford to take anything but the market into account.'

'I don't see that,' said the painter, who knew as much about business as Mr Burton's umbrella. 'I agree with Haldane. We should be less ready to gamble and run foolish risks, if we remembered always what trusts we have in our hands,—the honour of honest men, and the happiness of families.'

He was still a little pale, and spoke with a certain emotion, having suddenly realised, with a mixture of nervous boldness and terror, the other side of the question. Mr Burton turned away with a shrug of his shoulders.

'It suits you two to talk sentiment instead of business,' he said, 'but that is not in my line. So long as my own credit is concerned, I find that a much greater stimulant than anybody else's. Self-interest is the root of everything—in business; and if you succeed for yourself, which of course is your first motive, you succeed for your neighbours as well. I don't take credit for any fine sentiments. That is my commercial creed. Number one includes all the other numbers, and the best a man can do for his friends is to take care of himself.'

He got up with a slight show of impatience as he spoke. His face was overcast, and he had the half-contemptuous air which a practical man naturally assumes when he listens to anything high-flown. He, for his part, professed to be nothing but a man of business, and had confidence enough in his friends' knowledge of him to be able to express the most truculent sentiments. So, at least, Haldane thought, who smiled at this transparent cynicism. 'I suppose, then, we are justified in thinking anything that is bad of you, and ought not to trust you with a penny?' he said.

'If you trust anything to me personally, of course I shall take care of it,' answered the merchant. 'But what we were talking of was Rivers's—business, not personal friendship. And business cannot afford such risks. You must examine into it, and judge of its claims for yourself. Come, let us dismiss the subject. I will tell Mr Baldwin I found you looking a great deal better than I hoped.'

'But I don't want to dismiss the subject,' said Haldane. 'I am satisfied. I am anxious——'

'Think it over once more, at least,' said the other hastily; and he went away with but scant leave-taking. Mrs Haldane, who was a wise woman, and, without knowing it, a physiognomist, shook her head.

'That man means what he says,' she said with some emphasis. 'He is telling you his real principles. If I were you, Stephen, I would take him at his word.'

'My dear mother, he is one of the men who take pleasure in putting the worst face on human nature, and attributing everything to selfish motives,' said the sick man. 'I very seldom believe those who put such sentiments so boldly forth.'

'But I do,' said his mother, shaking her head with that obstinate conviction which takes up its position at once and defies all reason. Her son made no answer. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. The momentary excitement was over, the friends were gone, and the new and terrible Life settled down upon him. He did not say a word to indicate what was passing through his mind, but he thought of the ship which drifted between the sunset and the mariner, and the nightmare Life-in-Death casting her dies with the less appalling skeleton. It was she who had won.

In the mean time the two directors of Rivers's bank walked out together; one of them recovering all his self-confidence the moment he left the house, the other possessed by a certain tremulous excitement. The idea of risk was new to the painter. He felt a certain half-delightful, half-alarming agitation when he made his first ventures, but that had soon yielded to his absolute confidence in the man who now, with his own lips, had named the fatal word. Robert's imagination, the temperament of the artist, which is so often fantastically moved by trifles, while strong to resist the presence of fact and certainty, had sustained a shock. He did not say anything while they walked up the road under the faded autumnal leaves which kept dropping through the still air upon their heads. In this interval he had gone over within himself all the solid guarantees, all the prestige, all the infallibility (for had it not attained that point?) of Rivers's. Sure as the Bank of England! Such were the words that rose continually to everybody's lips on hearing of it. Robert propped himself up as he went along with one support or another, till he felt ashamed that he could be capable of entertaining a shadow of doubt. But the impression made upon his nerves was not to be overcome by simple self-argument. Time was wanted to calm it down. He felt a certain thrill and jar communicated through all the lines of life. The sensation ran to his very finger-points, and gave a sharp electric shock about the roots of his hair. And it set his heart and his pulse beating, more likely organs to be affected. Loss! That was to say, Helen and the child deprived of the surroundings that made their life so fair; driven back to the poor little lodgings, perhaps, in which his career began, or to something poorer still. Perhaps to want, perhaps to——'What a fool I am!' he said to himself.

'Do you really object to Haldane as one of our shareholders?' he said, with a certain hesitation, at last.

'Object—the idiot!' said Mr Burton. 'I beg your pardon, Drummond, I know he's a great friend of yours; but all that nonsense exasperates me. Why, God bless me, his body is sick, but his mind is as clear as yours or mine. Why can't he

judge for himself? I am quite ready to give him, or you, or any one that interests me, the benefit of my experience; but to take you on my shoulders, Drummond, you know, would be simply absurd. I can't foresee what may happen. I am ready to run the risk myself. That's the best guarantee I can give, don't you think? but I won't run any sentimental risks. You may, if you like; they are out of my line.'

'I don't know what you mean by sentimental risks.'

'Oh, as for that, it is easy to explain. The man is very ill: he will never be of any use in life again, and loss would be destruction to him. Therefore I won't take the responsibility. Why, there may be a revolution in England next year for anything I can tell. There may be an invasion. Our funds may be down to zero, and our business paralysed. How can I tell? All these things are within the bounds of possibility, and if they happened, and we went to smash, as we should infallibly, what would Haldane do?'

'If there is nothing to alarm us closer at hand than a revolution or an invasion—' said Drummond with a smile.

'How can we tell? If I were asked to insure England, I should only do it on a very heavy premium, I can tell you. And look here, Drummond, take my advice, always let a man judge for himself, never take the responsibility. If you do, you'll be sorry after. I never knew a good man of business yet who went in, as I said, for sentimental risks.'

'I fear I shall never be a good man of business,' said the painter, with a certain sickness at his heart. 'But tell me now, suppose you were guardian to orphans, what should you do with their money? I suppose that is what you would call a very sentimental risk.'

'Not so bad as Haldane,' said Burton. 'They would be young and able to make their way if the worst came to the worst. If they were entirely in my own hands I should invest the money as I thought best; but if there were other guardians or relations to make a fuss, I should put it in the Three per Cents.'

'I really—don't—quite see what—difference that would make—' Robert commenced, but his companion stopped him almost roughly.

'The question won't bear discussing, Drummond. If I go in with you, will your wife give me some lunch? I have lost my whole morning to please my father-in-law. Don't you bother yourself about Haldane. He is a clear-headed fellow, and perfectly able to judge for himself.'

Then no more was said. If a passing cloud had come over the rich man, it fled at sight of the table spread for luncheon, and the sherry, upon which poor Robert (knowing almost as little about that as he did about business) prided himself vastly. Mr Burton applauded the sherry. He was more conversational even than usual, and very anxious that Drummond should look at a country-house in his neighbourhood. 'If you can't afford it now you very soon will,' he said, and without referring to Rivers's kept up such a continued strain of allusions to the good fortune which was about to pour upon the house, that Robert's nerves were comforted, he could scarcely have told how. But he went and worked all the afternoon in the studio when the City man went off to his business. He laboured hard at Francesca, fixing his whole mind upon her, not even whistling in his profound preoccupation. He had been absent from the studio for some time, and the *feel* of the old beloved tools was delightful to him. But when the early twilight came and interrupted his work, he went out and took a long walk by himself, endeavouring to shake off the tremor which still lingered about him. It was in his veins and in his nerves, tingling all over him. He reasoned with himself, shook himself up roughly, took himself to task, but yet did not get over it. 'Bah! it is simple sensation!' he said at last, and with a violent effort turned his thoughts in another direction. But the shock had left a tremor about him which was not quite dissipated for days after; for a man who is made of fanciful artist-stuff, is not like a business man with nerves of steel.

CHAPTER VII.

Nothing happened, however, to justify Drummond's fears. The success of Rivers's in its new form was as great and as steady to all appearance as that of its ancient phase. People vied with each other in rushing into it, in crowding its coffers and its share lists. Stephen Haldane, 'left to himself,' according to Mr Burton's instructions, had long since deposited all he had in its hands; and almost all of Robert's professional friends who had any money to invest, invested it in the bank which had an R.A. upon the roll of directors. People came to him to ask his advice who in other times would have given him theirs freely, with no such respect for his judgment. But though this was the case, and though ignorant persons in society sometimes wondered how he could make the two occupations compatible, and carry on business and art together, yet the fact was that business and Robert had very little to do with each other. He went to the meetings of the directors now and then. He was blandly present sometimes at an auditing of accounts. He listened at times to the explanations given by Mr Golden, the manager, and found them everything that was reasonable and wise. But beyond that he cannot be said to have taken much part in the management. For this mild part he was abundantly rewarded—so abundantly that he sometimes felt half ashamed, reflecting that the clerks in the offices actually contributed more to the success of the place than he did, though they did not profit half so much. He felt himself justified in taking a nice house in the country, though not at Dura, at the end of the first season, and he gave his wife a pretty little carriage with two ponies on her birthday, in which she drove about with a pleasure perhaps more real than that which any other circumstance of their prosperity gave her. They did not leave their house in St Mary's Road, for it was dear to them in many ways, and still satisfied all their wants; and Robert could not tolerate the idea of another painter using the studio he had built, or another woman enjoying the conservatory which had been made for Helen. 'However rich we may grow—even if we should ever be able to afford that house in Park Lane—we must keep this,' he said; 'no profane foot must come in, no stranger intrude upon our household gods; and Norah must have it after us, the house she was born in.' Thus they planned their gentle romance, though they had been a dozen years married and more, and bought the house they loved with their first disposable money. And Robert still loved his work and kept to it, though he did not need now to trouble about the exhibitions and push on his picture, working from the early morning down to twilight to get it ready. He got a little lazy about finished pictures, to tell the truth. Even Francesca, though he loved her, had been put aside on the spare easel, and never completed. 'I will get up early and set to work in earnest to-morrow,' he always said; but to-morrow generally found him like the day before, making a study of something—sketching in now one subject, now another—tormenting his wife with questions as to which was best. She had a good deal to put up with in this period; but she kept up under it and bore it all smilingly. And Robert, like so many more, made his sketches much better than his pictures, and put ideas upon his canvas which, if he could but have carried them out, might have been great.

Thus two years passed over the pair; and there were times when Helen thought, with a leap of her heart, that ease and leisure had done what care and toil could not do—had roused a spark of divine genius in her husband's breast. Now and then he drew something that went right to her heart, and it was she who had always been his harshest critic. When she said to him one day suddenly, without purpose or meaning, 'I like that, Robert,' he turned round upon her all flushed and glowing, more radiant than when he was made an R.A. It was not that he had supreme confidence in her knowledge of art, but that her backing of him, the support which he had longed for all these years, was more than the highest applause, and invigorated his very soul. But he was so pleased to have pleased her, that he set up his sketch upon a bigger canvas, and worked at it and improved it till he had improved the soul out of it, and Helen applauded no more. He was much mortified and disappointed at this failure; but then in his humility he said to himself, 'What does it matter now? I am an R.A., which is the best I could be in my profession, so far as the world is concerned, and we have something else to stand upon besides the pictures.' Thus he consoled himself, and so did she.

And, in the mean time, Norah kept growing, and became a more distinct feature in the household. She was a feature more than an agent still; though she was nearly twelve, not much was heard of her except the scales, which she still rattled over dutifully every morning, and the snatches of songs she would sing in the lightness of her heart as she went or came. On most ordinary occasions she simply composed such a foreground to the family picture as Maurice had seen that October night. She sat on a stool or on the floor somewhere, with a book clasped in her arms, reading; in summer she and her book together crouched themselves against the window in the room, getting the last gleam of daylight, and in winter she read by the firelight, which crimsoned her all over with a ruddy glow, and scorched her cheeks. Perhaps it was because she was kept conscientiously at work all day that Norah thus devoured all the books she could lay hands on in the evenings. She sat in her corner and read, and heard what was going on all the same, and took no notice. She read everything, from Grimm's Tales and the Arabian Nights to Shakspeare, and from Shakspeare to Tennyson, with an

undiscriminating, all-devouring appetite; and as she sat in a dream, lost in one volume after another, the current of life flowed past, and she was aware of it, and heard a hundred things she was unconscious of hearing, yet remembered years after. She heard discussions between her father and mother which she was supposed to pay no attention to. And she did not pay any attention to them: but only innocently—an unconscious eavesdropper—heard everything, and received it into her mind. This was the child's position in the house; she was the centre of the picture—everything somehow bore a reference to her; she alone was silent in the midst. The other two—who loved her, talked of her, planned for her, contrived that everything that was pretty and pleasant and sweet should surround her waking and sleeping—had yet no immediate need of Norah. They were each other's companions, and she was the third—the one left out. But she was too young to feel any jealousy, or to struggle for a place between them. She had her natural place, always in the foreground, a silent creature, unconsciously observing, laying up provision for her life.

'Are you not afraid to talk of everything before your daughter?' Mr Golden said one day when she had left the room. 'You know the old proverb, "Little pitchers have long ears."' "

'Afraid of—Norah?' said Robert. The idea was so extraordinary that he laughed first, though the moment after he felt disposed to be angry. 'My child understands what honour is, though she is so young,' he said with paternal pride, and then laughed, and added, 'That is high-flown of course, but you don't understand her, Golden; how should you? She is a thousand times too deeply occupied to care for what we are saying. Pardon me, but the suggestion, to one who knows her, is so very absurd.'

'Ah, you never know where simplicity ends and sense begins,' said the bank manager. He had become a frequent guest at St Mary's Road. He was a man of Mr Burton's type, but younger, slightly bald, perfectly brushed, clean, and perfumed, and decorous. He was a little too heavy for the *rôle* of a young man in society: and yet he danced and flirted with the best when an opportunity offered. He never spoke of the City when he could help it: but he spoke a great deal about Lady So-and-so's party, and the fine people he knew. It was difficult to make out how he knew them; but yet he visited, or professed to visit, at a great many of what are called 'good houses.' As manager of the bank he had every man's good opinion—he was at once so enterprising and so prudent, with the most wonderful head for business. There was no one like him for interpreting the 'movements' on the Stock Exchange, or the fluctuations of the Funds. He explained business matters so lucidly that even Drummond understood them, or at least thought he did. But there were a good many people who did not like Mr Golden. Helen for one had a natural antipathy to the man. She allowed that she had no reason for it; that he was very civil, sometimes amusing, and had never done anything she could find fault with. But she disliked him all the same. Norah was more decided in her sentiments, and had a clearer foundation for them. He had insisted on disturbing her from her book one afternoon to shake hands with her; on another he had offered to kiss her, as a child, and she nearly twelve! 'But then you are so little of your age, Miss Norah. I dare say the gentleman took you for nine,' said the maid—an explanation which did not render Norah more favourably inclined towards the manager. And now he was trying to libel her, to traduce her to her father! Even Robert himself was moved by this enormity; it shook his opinion of his counsellor. 'That is all he knows,' Drummond said to himself; and he resumed his conversation more distinctly than ever when Norah came back.

In the mean time the Haldanes had thriven too, in their way. Stephen was as helpless, as far from any hope of moving, as ever; but he was well off, which alleviates much suffering. The walls of his room were hung with Drummond's sketches, half a dozen of them, among which were two pictures of Norah. He lived in an arm-chair elaborately fitted with every possible contrivance, with a reading-desk attached to its arm, and a table close by, which could be raised to any height: and his helpless limbs were covered with a silken quilt of Mrs Haldane's own working. There he passed the day and night without change: but thanks to Miss Jane and her mother, no strange eye had looked upon the helpless man's humiliation; they moved him from his chair to his bed, and did everything for him. The bed was closed up by day, so that no stranger might suspect its existence; and the room was kept airy and bright by the same unwearied watchers. Here he lived, making no complaint. Whatever his feelings might be, whatever the repinings in his mind, he said nothing of them to mortal ear. A shade of weariness the more upon his face, a deeper line than usual between his eyes, were the only tokens that now and then the deep waters overflowed his soul. And as for the mother and sister, who were his slaves and attendants, they had forgotten that there was anything unusual in his condition—they had become accustomed to it. It seemed to them in some sort the course of nature. And God knows whether unconsciously a feeling that it was 'for the best' might not sometimes steal into their minds. He was theirs for ever; no one could step in between them, or draw his heart from their love. Had it been suggested to Miss Jane that such a sentiment was possible, she would have rejected it with horror; and yet in the depths of her heart it was there, out of her own sight.

And he had an occupation in his seclusion which was a blessing to him. He had become the editor of a little magazine, which belonged to his 'denomination,' before he fell ill, and he had been allowed to retain the post. This was the refuge of his mind in his trouble. Poor Stephen, he pleased himself with the idea of still influencing somebody, of preserving his intercourse with the outer world. It had been a very homely little publication when it came into his hands—a record of what the 'denomination' was doing; the new chapels it was building; the prayer-meetings gathered here and there, which might grow into congregations; and the tea-parties, which furnished at once intellectual and social enjoyment for the people. But Stephen had changed that; he had put his mind into it, and worked it into a sort of literary organ. There were reviews in it, and essays, and a great deal of discussion of the questions of the day. These were approached from the standing-ground of the denomination, it is true, but the discussions were often far from being denominational. Up to this time, however, the community gave no signs of disapproval. Mr Baldwin favoured the magazine, and the writer of it was still popular, and not yet forgotten. They gave him some fifty pounds a year for this hard though blessed work which kept his mind alive; and his late congregation gave him fifty pounds; and the money in Rivers's bank had last quarter paid ten per cent. of profit. He was well off, he was indeed rich for his wants, though he was not rolling in wealth like Drummond. Money makes no man happy, but how much good it does! Nothing could make this poor man happy, rooted thus in his immovable calm; but his ten per cent. kept him in comfort, it gave him worship in the eyes of his people, who were not fond of poverty; it procured to him his only consolation. He had no need to be indebted to any one; he could even help the poor people of his former flock, and feel himself independent. He could buy books, and give such quiet comforts and pleasures as they could enjoy to the women who were so good to him. All these were great alleviations of the sick man's lot. But for Rivers's how different would his position have been! He would have been subject to the constant inspection of deacons and brethren; he would have been interfered with in respect to his magazine. All the comfort and freedom which remained to him were the result of the little more which made him independent and put him above criticism. What a poor thing money is, which cannot buy either health or happiness! and yet what a great thing! only the poor know how great.

This time of prosperity had lasted for two years, when Mr Burton withdrew from the direction of the bank. He had enlarged his business greatly in another way, and had no longer time to bestow upon this; and, indeed, he had professed all along his desire to be free. This had been the object of the old company in taking in 'new blood,' and now the new company was able to proceed alone upon its triumphant way.

'It is your turn to get into harness, Drummond,' he said, with a glance in which there was some contempt. Robert did not see the scorn, but he laughed with perhaps a little gentle confidence in his own power to be of use if he should choose to exert himself.

'I must put myself into training first,' he said.

'Golden will do that for you. Golden is the best coach for business I have ever come across,' said Mr Burton. 'He will put you up to everything, good and bad—the dodges as well as the legitimate line. Golden is not a common man of business—he is a great artist in trade.'

There was a certain elation in his air and words. Was he glad to have shaken off the bonds of Rivers's, though they were golden bonds? This was the question which Helen asked herself with a little surprise. The two men were dining at St Mary's Road on the night after Burton's withdrawal, and she was still at table, though they had begun to talk of business. As usual, she who took no part was the one most instructed by the conversation. But she was bewildered, not instructed, by this. She could not make out what it meant. She knew by the best of all proofs that the bank was profitable and flourishing. Why, then, did her cousin show such high spirits? What was his elation about? Long after, she remembered that she had noted this, and then was able to divine the mystery. But now it only surprised her vaguely, like a foreign phrase in the midst of the language she knew.

'The dodges are amusing,' said Mr Golden. 'The legitimate drama is more dignified and imposing, but I rather think there is more fun in the work when you are living on the very edge of ruin. The hairbreadth escapes one has—the sense that it is one's own cleverness that carries one through—the delight of escaping from the destruction that seemed down upon you! There is nothing like that,' he said with a laugh, 'in the steady platitudes of ordinary trade.'

And Mr Burton laughed too, and a glance passed between them, such as might have passed between two old soldiers who had gone many a campaign together. There was a twinkle in their eyes, and the 'Do you remember?' seemed to be on their very lips. But then they stopped short, and went no further. Helen, still vaguely surprised, had to get up and go away to the drawing-room; and what more experiences these two might exchange, or whether her husband would be any the

wiser for them, she was no longer able to see. Norah waited her in the other room. She had just come to the end of a book, and, putting it down with a sigh, came and sat by her mother's side. They were alike in general features and complexion, though not in the character of their faces. Norah's hair was brighter, and her expression less stately and graceful than Helen's—she had not so much *distinction*, but she had more life. Such a woman as her mother she was never likely to be, but her attractions would be great in her own way.

'How nice your velvet gown is, mamma!' said Norah, who was given to long monologues when she spoke at all. 'I like to put my cheek upon it. When I am grown up, I will always wear black velvet in winter, and white muslin in summer. They are the nicest of all. I do not think that you are too old for white. I like you in white, with red-ribbons. When I am a little bigger I should like to dress the same as you, as if we were two sisters. Mayn't we? Everybody says you look so young. But, mamma, ain't you glad to get away from those men, and come in here to me?'

'You vain child!' said Helen. 'I can see you whenever I like, so it is no novelty to me; while papa's friends—'

'Do you think they are papa's friends? I suppose there are no villains now-a-days, like what there are in books?' said Norah. 'The world is rather different from books somehow. There you can always see how everything happens; and there is always somebody clever enough to find out the villains. Villains themselves are not very clever, they always let themselves be found out.'

'But, my dear, we are not talking of villains,' said Helen.

'No, mamma, only of that Mr Golden. I *hate* him! If you and I were awfully clever, and could see into him, what he means—'

'You silly little girl! You have read too many novels,' said Helen. 'In the world people are often selfish, and think of their own advantage first; but they don't try to ruin others out of pure malice, as they do in stories. Even Norah Drummond sometimes thinks of herself first. I don't know if she is aware of it, but still it happens; and though it is not always a sin to do that, still it is the way that most sins come about.'

This purely maternal and moral turn of the conversation did not amuse Norah. She put her arm round her mother's waist, and laid her cheek against the warm velvet of Helen's gown.

'Mamma, it is not fair to preach when no one is expecting it,' she said in an injured tone; 'and just when I have you all to myself! I don't often have you to myself. Papa thinks you belong to him most. Often and often I want to come and talk, but papa is so greedy: you ought to think you belong to me too.'

'But, my darling, you have always a book,' said Helen, not insensible to the sweet flattery.

'When I can't have you, what else am I to do?' said crafty Norah; and when the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, the two were still sitting together, talking of a hundred things. Mr Golden came up, and tried very hard to be admitted into the conversation, but Norah walked away altogether, and went into her favourite corner, and Mrs Drummond did not encourage his talk. She looked at him with a certain flutter of excited curiosity, wondering if there was anything under that smooth exterior which was dangerous and meant harm; and smiled at herself and said, No, no; enemies and villains exist only in books. The worst of this man would be that he would pursue his own ends, let them suffer who might; and his own ends could not harm Drummond—or so at least Helen thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was in the summer of the third year of his bank directorship that Robert made his first personal entry into business. The occasion of it was this. One of his early friends who had been at school with him, and with whom he had kept up a precarious and often interrupted intercourse, came to him one morning with an anxious face. He was in business himself, with a little office in one of the dreary lanes in the City, a single clerk, and very limited occupation. He had married young, and had a large family; and Drummond was already aware that while the lines had fallen to himself in pleasant places, poor Markham's lot had been hard and full of thorns. He was now at the very crisis of his troubles. He gave a glance round the painter's handsome studio when he entered, at the pictures on the walls and the costly things about, and the air of evident luxury that pervaded everything, and sighed. His own surroundings were poor and scant enough. And yet he could and did remember that Drummond had started in life a poorer man, with less hopeful prospects than himself. Such a contrast is not lively or inspiring, and it requires a generous mind to take it kindly, and refrain from a passing grudge at the old companion who has done so much better for himself. Poor Markham had come with a petition, on which, he said, all his future life depended. He had made a speculation which would pay him largely could he only hold out for three months; but without help from his friends this was impossible. It was a large sum that he wanted—more than any private friend would be likely to give him—something between two and three thousand pounds. The welfare of his family, his very existence in a business point of view, and the hopes of his children depended on his ability to tide those three months over. For old friendship's sake, for all the associations of their youth, would Drummond help him? Robert listened with his kindly heart full of sympathy. Long before the story was done, he began to calculate what he had at his disposal, how much he could give; but the sum startled him. He could not produce at a moment's notice a sum of nearly three thousand pounds. With a troubled heart he shook his head and said it was impossible—he had not so much money at his disposal—he could not do it. Then Markham eagerly explained. It was not from his friend's own purse that he had hoped for it; but the bank! On Drummond's introduction, the bank would do it. Rivers's could save him. No such request had ever been made to Robert before. Very few of his friends were business men. Their needs were private needs, and not the spasmodic wants of trade. There were people who had borrowed from himself personally, and some who had been helped by him in other ways; but this was the first appeal made to his influence in the bank. He was startled by it in his innocence of business habits. It seemed to him as if it was like asking a private favour, turning over his own petitioner to a third person. 'He is my friend, give him three thousand pounds.' It seemed to him the strangest way of being serviceable to his neighbour. But poor Markham had all the eloquence of a partially ruined man. He made it clear to Robert, not only that such things were, but they happened continually, and were in the most ordinary course of nature. The end was that they went out together, and had an interview with Mr Golden at the bank. And then Robert found that his acquaintance had not exaggerated, that the matter was even easier than he had represented it, and that there would not be the slightest difficulty in 'accommodating' the man who was Mr Drummond's friend. Markham and he parted at the door of the bank, the one with tears of gratitude in his eyes, blessing God and Robert for saving him, and the other with a bewildered sense of power which he had not realised. He had not known before how much he could do, nor what privileges his directorship put in his hands, and he was confused by the discovery. It bewildered him, as a man might be bewildered to know that he could bestow fertility or barrenness on his fields by a glance: how strange the power was, how sweet in this instance, how—dangerous! Yes, that was the word. He felt afraid of himself as he went home. If such complaints came to him often, it would be so difficult to resist them; and then a kind of horrible dread came over his mind. Would the money ever be paid back that he had got so easily? The thought made his hand shake when he went back to the peaceable work at which no such bewildering risks were run.

When the three months were over, Markham's money was not paid; on the contrary he had fled to Australia, he and all his children, leaving nothing but some wretched old furniture behind him. Poor Drummond was nearly beside himself. He rushed to the bank when he heard the news, and protested that the loss must be his. It was his fault, and of course he must repay it. Mr Golden smiled at him with a genuine admiration of his simplicity. He told him in a fatherly way of a speculation which had been very successful, which had cleared nearly the same sum of money. 'Putting the one to the other, we are none the worse,' he said; 'every commercial concern must make some bad debts.'

Drummond went away with more bewilderment still, with many new thoughts buzzing in his head, thoughts which troubled the composure of his life. He himself being but an artist, and not a merchant, was afraid of money. He touched it warily, trafficked in it with a certain awe. He knew how much labour it required to earn it, and how hard it was to be without it. He could not understand the levity with which Burton and Golden treated that potent thing. To them it was like common merchandise, sugar or salt. A heap of it, as much as would make a poor man's fortune, melted away in a

moment, and the bland manager thought nothing of it—it was a bad debt. All this was so strange to him, that he did not know what to make of it. He himself was guilty, he felt, of having thrown away so much which belonged to other people. And every other director on the board had the same power which he had with a painful pleasure discovered himself to have. And they knew better about it than he did; and what check could there be upon them? If every other man among them had been art and part in losing three thousand pounds, what could Robert say? It would not be for him to throw the first stone. He felt like Christian in the story, when, upon the calm hill-side, he suddenly saw a door through which there appeared, open and visible, the mouth of hell. It occurred to Robert to go down to the next meeting of directors, to tell them his own story, and beg that the money lost through his means should be subtracted from his private share of the capital, and to beg all of them to do likewise. He quite made up his mind to this in the first tumult of his thoughts. But before the time for that meeting came, a sense of painful ridicule, that bugbear of the Englishman, had daunted him. They would call him a fool, they would think he was 'canting,' or taking an opportunity to display his own disinterestedness. And accordingly he accepted the misfortune, and was content to permit it to be called a bad debt. But the enlightenment which it threw on the business altogether gave Robert a shock which he did not easily recover. It seemed to show him a possible chasm opening at his very feet, and not at his only, but at the feet of all the ignorant simple people, the poor painters, the poor women, the sick men like Haldane, who had placed their little seed-corn of money in Rivers's bank.

These thoughts were hot in his heart at the time of this misadventure with Markham; and then there came a lull, and he partially forgot them. When no harm is visible, when the tranquil ordinary course of affairs seems to close over a wrong or a blunder, it is so difficult to imagine that everything will not go well. He said as little as possible to Helen on the subject, and she did not take fright fortunately, having many things to occupy her now-a-days. There was her own enlarged and fuller household; the duties of society; her charities, for she was very good to the poor people near Southlees, their house in the country, and kept watch over them even from St Mary's Road. And she had now many friends who came and occupied her time, and carried her off from her husband; so that he had not that resource of talking about it which so often lightens our anxiety, and so often deepens it. In this instance, perhaps, it was as well that he could not awaken her fears to increase and stimulate his own.

And thus everything fell into its usual quietness. Life was so pleasant for them. They had so much real happiness to cushion the angles of the world, and make them believe that all would always be well. Those who have been experienced in pain are apt to tremble and doubt the continuance of happiness when they attain it; but to those who have had no real sorrows it seems eternal. Why should it ever come to an end? This the Drummonds felt with an instinctive confidence. It was easier to believe in any miracle of good than in the least prognostic of evil. The sun was shining upon them; summer was sweet and winter pleasant. They had love, they had ease, they had wealth, as much as they desired, and they believed in it. The passing cloud rolled away from Robert's mind. He reflected that if there was danger there, there was danger in everything; every day, he said to himself, every man may be in some deadly peril without knowing it. We pass beneath the arch that falls next moment; we touch against some one's shoulder unaware, whose touch of infection might be death; we walk over the mined earth, and breathe air which might breed a pestilence, and yet nothing happens to us. Human nature is against everything violent. Somehow she holds a balance, which no one breaks down, though it is possible to be broken down at any moment. The directors might ruin the bank in a week, but they would not, any more than the elements, which are ever ready for mischief, would clash together and produce an earthquake. Such things might be: but never—or so seldom as to be next to never—are.

In the early autumn of that year, however, another shock came upon the ignorant painter. His wife and Norah were at Southlees, where he himself had been. Business had brought him up against his will, business of the gentler kind, concerning art and the Academy, not the bank. He was alone at St Mary's Road, chafing a little over his solitude, and longing for home and the pleasant fields. London, the London he knew and cared for, had gone out of town. August was blazing upon the parks and streets; the grass was the colour of mud, and the trees like untanned leather. The great people were all away in their great houses, and among his own profession those who could afford it had started for Switzerland or some other holiday region, and those who could not had gone for their annual whiff of sea-air. Robert was seated by himself at breakfast, mournfully considering how another day had to be got over, before he could go home, when a hansom dashed up to the door, and Mr Golden, bland and clean as ever, but yet with a certain agitation in his face, came in. He explained eagerly that he had come to Drummond only because the other directors were out of town. 'The fact is,' he said, 'I want you to come with me, not to give you much trouble or detain you long, but to stand by me, if you will, in a crisis. We have had some losses. Those people in Calcutta who chose to stop payment, like fools, and the Sullivans' house at Liverpool.—It is only temporary.—But the Bank of England has made itself disagreeable about an advance, and I want you to come with me and see the governor.'

'An advance! Is Rivers's in difficulties? is there anything wrong? You take away my breath.'

'There is no occasion for taking away your breath,' said Mr Golden; 'it is only for the moment. But it is an awkward time of the year, for everybody is out of town. I should not have troubled you, knowing you were not a business man, but of course the presence of a director gives authority. Don't be alarmed, I beg. I will tell you all about it as we drive along.'

But what Mr Golden told was very inarticulate to Robert, what with the wild confusion produced in his own mind, and the noise and dust of the sultry streets. It was the most temporary difficulty; it was not worth speaking of; it was a simple misunderstanding on the part of the authorities of the Bank of England. 'Why we are worth twenty times the money, and everybody knows it,' said Mr Golden. His words, instead of making Robert confident, made him sick. His sin in that matter of Markham came darkly before him; and, worse even than that, the manager's words recalled Markham's to him. In his case, too, it was to have been merely a temporary difficulty. Drummond's imaginative mind rushed at once to the final catastrophe. He saw ruin staring him in the face—and not only him.

The interview with the authorities of the Bank of England did not make things much clearer to the amateur. They talked of previous advances; of their regret that the sacred name of 'Rivers's' should be falling into mist and darkness; of their desire to have better securities, and a guarantee which would be more satisfactory: to all of which Robert listened with consternation in his soul. But at last the object was attained. Mr Golden wiped the moisture from his forehead as they left the place. 'That has been a tough battle,' he said, 'but thank Heaven! it is done, and we are tided over. I knew they would not be such fools as to refuse.'

'But, good God!' said Robert, 'what have you been doing? What is the meaning of it? Why do you require to go hat in hand to any governor? Is Rivers's losing its position? What has happened? Why don't you call the shareholders together and tell them if anything is wrong?'

'My dear Mr Drummond!' said Mr Golden. He could scarcely do more than smile and say the words.

'Don't smile at me,' said Drummond in the ardour of his heart. 'Do you consider that you have the very lives of hundreds of people in your hands? Call them together, and let them know what remains, for God's sake! I will make good what was lost through me.'

'You are mad,' said Golden, when he saw that his gentle sneer had failed; 'such a step would be ruin. Call together the shareholders! Why, the shareholders—Mr Drummond, for heaven's sake, let people manage it who know what they are about.'

'For heaven's sake! for hell's sake, you mean,' said Robert in his despair. And the words reverberated in his ears, rang out of all the echoes, sounded through the very streets, 'It would be ruin!' Ruin! that was the word. It deafened him, muttering and ringing in his ears.

And yet even after this outburst he was calmed down. Mr Golden explained it to him. It was business; it was the common course of affairs, and only his own entire inexperience made it so terrible to him. To the others it was not in the least terrible, and yet he had no right to conclude that his colleagues were indifferent either to their own danger, or to the danger of the shareholders of whom he thought so much. 'The shareholders of course know the risks of business as well as we do,' Mr Golden said. 'We must act for the best, both for them and for ourselves.' And the painter was silenced if not convinced. This was in the autumn, and during the entire winter which followed the bank went on like a ship in a troubled sea. After a while such a crisis as the one which had so infinitely alarmed him became the commonest of incidents even to Drummond. Now that his eyes had been once enlightened, it was vain to attempt any further concealment. One desperate struggle he did indeed make, when in the very midst of all this anxiety a larger dividend than usual was declared. The innocent man fought wildly against this practical lie, but his resistance was treated as utter folly by the business board, who were, as they said, 'fighting the ship.' 'Do you want to create a panic and a run upon us?' they asked him. He had to be silent, overpowered by the judgment of men who knew better than himself. And then something of the excitement involved in that process of 'fighting the ship' stole into his veins. Somehow by degrees, nobody had been quite aware how, the old partners of Rivers's had gone out of the concern. It was true there had been but three or four to start with; now there was but one left—Lord Rivers, the head of the house, who never took any share in the business, and was as ignorant as the smallest shareholder. The new directors, the fighting directors, were men of a very different class. As the winter went on the ship laboured more and more. Sometimes it seemed to go down altogether, and then rose again with a buoyancy which almost seemed to justify hope. '*Tout peut se rétablir,*' they said to each other.

'After all we shall tide it over.' And even Robert began to feel that thrill of delight and relief when a danger was 'tided over,' that admiration, not of his own cleverness, but of the cleverness of others, which Golden had once described. Golden came out now in his true colours; his resources were infinite, his pluck extraordinary. But he enjoyed the struggle in the midst of his excitement and exertion, and Drummond did not enjoy it, which made an immense difference between them.

Things became worse and worse as spring came on. By that time, so far as Drummond was concerned, all hope was over. He felt himself sucked into the terrible whirlpool whence nothing but destruction could come. With a heart unmanned by anxiety, and a hand shaking with suppressed excitement, how could he go into his peaceable studio and work at that calmest work, of art? That phase of his existence seemed to have been over for years. When he went into the room he loved it looked to him like some place he had known in his youth—it was fifty years off or more, though the colour was scarcely dry on the picture which stood idly on the easel. When he was called to Academy meetings, to consultations over an old master, or a new rule, a kind of dull amazement filled his soul. Did people still care for such things—was it still possible that beauty and pleasantness remained in life? There were people in these days who felt even that the painter had fallen into bad ways. They saw his eyes bloodshot and his hand trembling. He was never seen with his wife now when she drove her ponies through the park—even in society Helen went sometimes out alone. And they had been so united, so happy a pair. 'Drummond will have nothing ready in April,' the painters said to each other—'even his diploma picture has never been finished—prosperity has not agreed with *him*.' When he was visible at all, his vacant air, his tremulous look, the deep lines under his eyes, frightened all his friends. Dr Maurice had spoken to him very seriously, begging that he would be candid and tell his ailments. 'You cannot go on like this,' he said. 'You are killing yourself, Drummond.' 'How much can a man go through without being killed, I wonder?' poor Robert asked, with an unsteady smile, and even his friend stopped short in dismay and perplexity. Was it dissipation? Was it some concealed misery? Could his wife have anything to do with it? These suggestions flitted vaguely through the doctor's mind without bringing any certainty with them. Once he seemed to be getting a clue to the mystery, when Robert rushed in upon him one day, and with a show of levity suggested that Haldane's money should be taken out of the bank. 'I know a better investment, and he should have the very best that is going,' said Drummond. Dr Maurice was somewhat startled, for he had money in Rivers's too.

'Where is there a better investment?' he asked.

'In the Three per Cents.,' said Robert, with a hoarse laugh.

Was he mad? Was he——drunk? The doctor took a day to consider it, to think whether there could be anything in it. But he looked at the dividend papers, showing that Rivers's that year had paid ten per cent. And he called upon Dr Bradcliffe, and asked him to go with him privately, *accidentally*, one of these days, to see a friend whose brain was going, he feared. The two physicians shook their heads, and said to each other mournfully how common that was becoming. But Fate moved faster than Dr Maurice, and the accidental call was never made.

CHAPTER IX.

The life which Helen Drummond lived during this winter would be very hard to describe. Something wrong had happened, she saw, on that rapid visit to town which Robert had made on Academical business in October, leaving her at Southlees. No anxiety about business matters connected with the bank had ever been suggested to her mind. She had long ago accepted, as a matter of course, the fact that wealth was to come from that source, with an ease and regularity very different from the toilsome and slow bread-winning which was done by means of art. She was not surprised by it as Robert was; and enough of the *bourgeois* breeding was left in her to make her pleased that her husband should see the difference between the possibilities of his profession and of the commerce which she had been wont to hear lauded in her youth. She was almost proud that Trade had done so much for him. Trade came from her side, it was she who had the hereditary connection with it; and the innate idealism of her mind was able to cling to the old-fashioned fanciful conception of beneficent commerce, such as we have all heard of in our educational days. But her pride was not sensitive on this point. What really touched her was the praise or the blame which fell upon him as a painter, and the dread that instantly sprang into her mind was that he had met with something painful to him in this respect—that his opinion had not been received as of weight in the deliberations of the Academy, or his works been spoken of with less respect than they ought to have secured. This was the foolish fancy that took hold of her mind. She questioned him about the Academy meeting till poor Robert—his thoughts occupied about things so very different—grew sick of the subject. Yet he was almost glad of some subject on which to vent a little of his excitement. Yes, they were a set of old fogies, he said, with audacious freedom. They potted about things they did not understand. They puzzled and hesitated over that Rembrandt, which any one with half an eye could see had been worked at by some inferior hand. They threw cold water upon that loveliest Francia which nobody could see without recognising. They did what they ought not to do, and neglected what was their duty. 'We all do that every day of our lives,' said Helen; 'but what was there that specially vexed you, Robert?' 'Nothing,' he said, looking up at her with eyes full of astonishment; but there was more than astonishment in them. There was pain, dread, anxiety—a wistful, restless look of suffering. He will not tell me: he will keep it to himself and suffer by himself, not to vex me, Helen said in her own thoughts. And though the autumn was lovely, Robert could not be happy at Southlees that year. He had been very happy the two previous summers. The house was situated on the Thames beyond Teddington. It was rustic and old, with various additions built to it; a red-brick house, grown over with all manner of lichens, irregular in form and harmonious with its position, a house which had grown—which had not been artificially made. The family had lived on the lawn, or on the river, in those halcyon days that were past. There was a fringe of trees at every side except that, shutting in the painter's retirement; but on the river side nothing but a few bright flower-beds, and the green velvet lawn, sloping towards the softly flowing water. One long-leaved willow drooped over the stone steps at which the boat was lying. It was a place where a pair of lovers might have spent their honeymoon, or where the weary and sick might have come to get healing. It was not out of character either with the joy or the grief. Nature was so sweet, so silent, so meditative and calm. The river ran softly, brooding over its own low liquid gurgle. The stately swans sailed up and down. The little fishes darted about in the clear water, and myriads of flying atoms, nameless insect existences, fluttered above. Boating parties going down the stream would pause, with a sigh of gentle envy, to look at the group upon the lawn; the table with books and work on it, with sometimes a small easel beside it or big drawing pad supported on a stand; a low chair with Helen's red shawl thrown over it, and Norah, with her red ribbons, nestled on the sunny turf. They sat there, and worked, and talked, or were silent, with an expansion of their hearts towards everything that breathed and moved; or they spent long days on the river, catching the morning lights upon those nooks which are only known to dwellers on the stream; or pursuing water-lilies through all the golden afternoon in the back-waters which these retired flowers love. The river was their life, and carried them along, day after day. Such a scene could not but be sweet to every lover of nature; but it is doubly sweet when the dumb poetic imagination has by its side that eye of art which sees everything. The painter is a better companion even than the poet—just as seeing is better than saying that you see. Robert was not a genius in art; but he had the artist's animated, all-perceiving eye. Nothing escaped him—he saw a hundred beautiful things which would have been imperceptible to ordinary men—a dew-drop on a blade of grass at his feet charmed him as much as a rainbow—his 'Look, Helen!' was more than volumes of descriptive poetry. They were out and about at all times, 'watching the lights,' as he said in his pleasant professional jargon: in the early mornings, when all was silvery softness and clearness, and the birds were trying over their choicest trills before men woke to hear; in the evening when twilight came gently on, insinuating her filmy impenetrable veil between them and the sunset; and even at full noon, when day is languid at the height of perfection, knowing that perfectness is brother to decadence. The painter and his wife lived in the middle of all these changes, and took them in, every one, to the firmament in their hearts.

Why do we stop in this record of trouble to babble about sunset skies and running waters? Is it not natural? The 'sound as of a hidden brook in the leafy month of June' comes in, by right, among all weird, mysterious harmonies of every tragical fate. 'The oaten pipe and pastoral reed' have their share even in the hurly-burly of cities and noisy discord of modern existence. Robert Drummond had his good things as well as his evil things. For these two summers never man had been more happy—and it is but few who can say so much. His wife was happy with him, her old ghosts exorcised, and a new light suffusing her life. It seemed a new life altogether, a life without discontents, full of happiness, and tranquillity, and hope.

But this autumn Robert was not happy at Southlees. He could not stay there peaceably as he had done before. He had to go to town 'on business,' he said, sometimes twice a week. He took no pleasure in his old delights. Though he could not help seeing still, his 'Look, Helen!' was no longer said in a tone of enthusiasm; and when he had uttered the familiar exclamation he would turn away and sigh. Sometimes she found him with his face hidden in his hands, and pressed against the warm greensward. It was as if he were knocking for admission at the gates of the grave, Helen thought, in that fancifulness which comes of fear as much as of hope. When she questioned him he would deny everything, and work with pretended gaiety. Every time he went to town it seemed to her that five years additional of line and cloud had been added to the lines on his forehead. His hair began to get grey; perhaps that was no wonder, for he was forty, a pilgrim already in the sober paths of middle age, but Helen was nearly ten years younger, and this sign of advancing years seemed unnatural to her. Besides, he was a young man in his heart, a man who would be always young; yet he was growing old before his time. But notwithstanding his want of enjoyment in it he was reluctant that his wife should leave Southlees sooner than usual. He would go into town himself, he declared. He would do well enough—what did it matter for a few weeks? 'For the sake of business it is better that I should go—but the winter is long enough if you come in the end of the month. No, Helen, take the good of it as long as you can—this year.'

'What good shall I get of it alone, and how can I let you live for weeks by yourself?' said Helen. 'You may think it is fine to be independent; but you could not get on without Norah and me.'

'No,' he said, with a shudder. 'God knows life would be a poor thing without Norah and you! but when it is a question of three weeks—I'll go and see my friends; I'll live a jovial bachelor life——'

'Did you see the Haldanes,' she asked, 'when you were in town last?'

It was the most innocent, unmeaning question; but it made him grow pale to the very lips. Did he tremble? Helen was so startled that she did not even realise how it was he looked.

'How cold the wind blows,' he said, with a shiver. 'I must have caught cold, I suppose, last night. The Haldanes? No; I had no time.'

'Robert, something worries you,' she said earnestly. 'Tell me what it is. Whatever it is, it will not be so heavy when you have told me. You have always said so—since ever we have been together.'

'And truly, my darling,' he said. He took her hand and held it tenderly, but he did not look at her. 'I cannot tell you of worries that don't exist, can I?' he added, with an exaggerated cheerfulness. 'I have to pay a little attention to business now the other men are out of town. And business bores me. I don't understand it. I am not clever at it. But it is not worth while to call it a worry. By-and-by they will come back, and I shall be free.'

When he said this he really believed it, not being then fully aware of the tormenting power of the destruction which was about to overwhelm him. He thought the other directors would come back from their holidays, and that he himself would be able to plunge back into that abyss of ignorance which was bliss. But Helen did not believe it: not from any true perception of the state of affairs, but because she could not believe it was business at all that troubled him. Was Robert the kind of man to be disturbed about business? He who cared nothing for it but as a means, who liked money's worth, not money, whose mind was diametrically opposite to all the habits and traditions of trade? She would as soon have believed that her cousin Reginald Burton would be disturbed by a criticism or troubled to get a true balance of light and shade. No, it was not that. It was some *real* trouble which she did not know of, something that struck deeper than business, and was more important than anything that belonged to bank or market. Such were Helen's thoughts,—they are the thoughts that come most natural to a woman,—that he had been betrayed into some wrong-doing or inadvertent vice—that he had been tempted, and somehow gone astray. This, because it was so much more terrible than anything about business, was the bugbear that haunted her. It was to save her pain, as he thought, that poor Robert kept his secret from

her. He did as so many men do, thinking it kindness; and thus left her with a host of horrible surmises to fight against, any one of which was (to her) harder than the truth. There is no way in which men, in their ignorance, inflict more harm upon women than this way. Helen watched in her fear and ignorance with a zealous eagerness that never lost a word, and gave exaggerated importance to many an idle incident. She was doubly roused by her fear of the something coming, against which her defences would not stand, and by her absolute uncertainty what this something was. The three weeks her husband was in town by himself were like three years to her. Not that a shade of jealousy or doubt of his love to herself ever crossed her mind. She was too pure-minded, too proud, to be jealous. But something had come on him, some old trouble out of the past—some sudden horrible temptation; something, in short, which he feared to tell her. That money could be the cause of it, never crossed her thoughts.

And when she went home, things were no better; the house looked bare to her—she could not tell why. It was more than a month before she found out that the Botticelli was gone, which was the light of her husband's eyes; and that little Madonna of the Umbrian school, which he delighted to think Raphael must have had some hand in, in his youth. This discovery startled her much; but worse had come before she made sure of that. The absence of the pictures was bewildering, but still more so was the change in her husband's habits. He would get up early, breakfast hurriedly before she had come down, and go out, leaving a message with the servants. Sometimes he went without breakfast. He avoided her, avoided the long evening talks they had loved, and even avoided her eye, lest she should read more in his face than he meant her to see. All this was terrible to Helen. The fears that overwhelmed her were ridiculous, no doubt; but amid the darkness and tragic gloom which surrounded her, what was she to think? Things she had read in books haunted her; fictitious visions which at this touch of personal alarm began to look real. She thought he might have to bribe some one who knew some early secret in his life, or some secret that was not his—something that belonged to his friends. Oh, if he would but tell her! She could bear anything—she could forgive the past, whatever it might be. She had no bitterness in her feelings towards her husband. She used to sit for hours together in his deserted studio, imagining scenes in which she found out, or he was driven to confide to her, this mystery; scenes of anguish, yet consolation. The studio became her favourite haunt. Was it possible that she had once entered it with languid interest, and been sensible of nothing but disappointment when she saw him working with his heart in his work? She would go all round it now, making her little comment upon every picture. She would have given everything she had in the world to see him back there, painting those pictures with which she had been so dissatisfied—the Francesca, which still stood on its easel unfinished; the sketches of herself which she had once been so impatient of. The Francesca still stood there behind backs; but most of the others had been cleared away, and stood in little stacks against the walls. The place was so orderly that it went to her heart to see it; nothing had been done, nothing disturbed, for weeks, perhaps months; the housemaid was free to go and come as if it had been a common parlour. All this was terribly sad to the painter's wife. The spring was coming on before she found the two sketches which afterwards she held so dearly. They bewildered her still more, and filled her with a thousand fears. One represented a pilgrim on a hilly road, in the twilight of a spring evening. Everything was soft in this picture, clear sky and twinkling stars above; a quiet rural path over the grass; but just in front of the pilgrim, and revealing his uplifted hands and horror-stricken countenance, the opening of a glowing horrible cavern—the mouth of Hell. The other was more mysterious still. It was a face full of anguish and love, with two clasped hands, looking up from the depths of a cave or well, to one blue spot of sky, one star that shone far above. Helen did not know what these sketches meant; but they made her shiver with wonder and apprehension. They were all that he had done this year.

And then something else, of a different kind, came in to bewilder her. Robert, who avoided her, who of evenings no longer talked over his affairs with her, and who probably had forgotten all her wants, let the quarter-day pass without supplying her, as he was in the habit of doing. So great a host of fears and doubts were between the two, that Helen did not remind him of his negligence. It pained her, but in a degree so different. What did that matter? But time went on, and it began to matter. She took her own little dividends, and kept silence; making what use of them she could to fill up the larger wants. She was as timid of speaking to him on this subject as if she had been a young girl. He had never obliged her to do so. She had been the general treasurer of the household in the old days; and even in recent times, he, who was so proud of his wife, had taken care to keep her always supplied with what she wanted. She never had needed to go to him to ask money, and she did not know how to begin. Thus they both went their different way; suffering, perhaps, about equally. His time seemed to himself to be spent in a feverish round of interviews with people who could supply money, or wildly signing his name to papers which he scarcely understood—to bills which he could never dream of paying; they would be paid somehow when the time came, or they could be renewed, or something would be done, he was told. He had carried everything he could make money by away before this time; the title-deeds of his house, his pictures, even, and—this was done with a very heavy heart—his policies of life insurance. Everything was gone. Events went faster as the crisis approached, and Drummond became conscious of little more than his wife's pale face wondering at him, with

questioning eyes more pathetic than words, and Golden's face encouraging, or trying to encourage. Between the two was a wild abyss of work, of despair, of tiding over. Every escape more hairbreadth than the last! The wild whirl growing wilder! the awful end, ruin and fell destruction, coming nearer and more near!

It happened at length that Helen one day, in desperation, broke the silence. She came before him when he was on his way out, and asked him to wait, in a hollow voice.

'I don't want to trouble you,' she said, 'since you will not trust me, Robert. I have been trying not to harass you more; but—I have no money left—I am getting into debt—the servants want their wages. Robert—I thought you had forgotten—perhaps——'

He stood and looked at her for a moment, with his hat in his hand, ready to go out. How pale he was! How the lines had contracted in his face! He looked at her, trying to be calm. And then, as he stood, suddenly burst, without warning, into momentary terrible tears, of a passion she could not understand.

'Robert! oh, what is the matter?' she cried, throwing her arms round him. He put his head down on her shoulder, and held her fast, and regained control over himself, holding her to him as if she had been something healing. In her great wonder and pity she raised his head with her hands, and gazed wistfully into his face through her tears. 'Is it money?' she cried, with a great load taken off her heart. 'Oh, Robert, tell me! Is that all?'

'All!' he said: 'my God!' and then kissed her passionately, and put her away from him. 'To-morrow,' he said hoarsely, 'perhaps—I hope—I will tell you everything to-morrow.' He did not venture to look at her again. He went out straight, without turning to the right or left. 'The end must be near now,' he said to himself audibly, as he went out like a blind man. To-morrow! Would to-morrow ever come? 'The end must be near now.'

The end was nearer than he thought. When he reached the bank he found everything in disorder. Mr Golden was not there, nor any one who could give information to the panic-stricken inquirers who were pouring in. It was said the manager had absconded. Rivers's was at an end. For the first ten minutes after Drummond heard the news that awaited him, it was almost a relief to know that the worst had come.

CHAPTER X.

It was a relief for ten minutes, as every catastrophe is; the terrible suspense is cut short—the worst at least is known. But after those ten minutes are over, when the reality suddenly seizes upon the sufferer—when all the vague speechless terrors which he had pushed off from him, with the hope that they might never come, arrive in a flood, and place themselves in one frightful circle round him, like furies, only not merciful enough to have a Medusa among them to freeze him into stone; when every shadowy, gloomy prevision of evil which ever flashed across his mind, to be put away with a shudder, returns with the right of fact, to remain; when not only that thing has happened which has been his dread by day and the horror of his dreams, but a host of other things, circumstances which penetrate to every detail of his life, and affect every creature and every thing he loves, have followed in its train—when all this rushes upon a man after the first tranquillising stupor of despair, who or what is there that can console him? Poor Drummond was helpless in the midst of this great crash of ruin; he was so helpless that the thunder-stricken shareholders and excited clerks who had fallen upon him at first as the only authority to be found, let him slip from among them, hopeless of any help from him. They had driven him wild with questions and appeals—him, a poor fellow who could explain nothing, who had never been of much use except to denude himself of everything he possessed, and pledge his humble name, and be swept into ruin; but they soon saw the uselessness of the appeal. As soon as he could disengage himself he stole away, drawing his hat over his eyes, feeling as if he were a criminal, with the sensation as of a hot fire burning in his heart, and buzzing and crackling in his ears. Was he a criminal? was it his doing? He was stunned by this terrible calamity; and yet, now that it had come, he felt that he had known it was coming, and everything about it, all his life. His whole existence had tended to this point since he was a boy; he knew it, he felt it, he even seemed to remember premonitions of it, which had come to him in his dreams from his earliest days. He went out into the streets in that dumb quiescent state which is so often the first consequence of a great calamity. He offered no remonstrance against his fate. He did not even say to himself that it was hard. He said nothing to himself, indeed, except to croon over, like a chorus, one endless refrain, 'I knew this was how it would be!'

He wandered along, not knowing where he went, till he came to the river, and paused there, looking over the bridge. He did not even know what made him pause, until all at once the fancy jumped into his brain that it would be best to stop there, and cut in one moment the knotted, tangled thread which it was certain no effort of his could ever unravel. He stopped, and the suggestion flashed across him (whether out of his own mind, whether thrown at him by some mocking demon, who could tell?), and then shook his head sadly. No; it was broad day, and there would be a commotion, and he would be rescued—or if not, he, at least his body, would be rescued and carried to Helen, giving her a last association with him which it was insupportable to think of. No, no, he said to himself with a shudder, not now. Just then a hand was laid upon his shoulder; he turned round with the start of a man who feels that nothing is impossible, that everything that is terrible has become likely. Had it been a policeman to arrest him for having murdered somebody he would scarcely have been surprised. But it was not a policeman: it was Mr Burton, fresh and clean and nicely dressed, newly come up from the country, in his light summer clothes, the image of prosperity, and comfort, and cleanliness, and self-satisfaction. A certain golden atmosphere surrounded the man of wealth, like the background on which early painters set a saint; but there was nothing saintly about that apparition. Poor Drummond fell back more than he would have done had it been an arrest for murder. He gave an involuntary glance at himself, feeling in contrast with Mr Burton, as if he must look to the external eye the beggar he was, as if he must be dirty, tattered, miserable, with holes in his shoes and rags at his elbows. Perhaps his woebegone, excited face startled the smooth Philistine at his side as much as if those outward signs of wretchedness had been there.

'Good God, what have you been doing with yourself?' he cried.

'Nothing,' said Drummond vaguely, and then by degrees his senses returned to him. 'If you had been in town yesterday you might have helped us; but it does not matter. Shenken in Liverpool stopped payment yesterday,' he went on, repeating drearily the dreary legend which he had heard at the bank. 'And Rivers's—has stopped payment too.'

'Good God!' said Mr Burton again. It was a shock to him, as every event is when it comes. But he was not surprised. As for Robert, it did not occur to him to consider whether the other was surprised or not, or to be curious how it affected him. He turned his head away and looked at the river again. What attraction there remained for him in this world seemed to lie there.

'Drummond,' said the merchant, looking at him with a certain alarm, 'are you sure you know what you are saying? My

God! Rivers's stopped payment! if you had said there had been an earthquake in London it would scarcely be as bad as that.'

Robert did not make any reply. He nodded his head without looking round. What interested him was something black which kept appearing and disappearing in the middle of the turbid muddy stream. It was like a man's head, he thought, and almost felt that he might have taken the plunge without knowing it, and that it might be himself.

'I have felt this was coming,' said Burton. 'I warned Golden you were going on in the wildest way. What could be expected when you fellows who know nothing about money would interfere? Good heavens! to think what a business that was; and all ruined in three years! Drummond! are you mad? Can't you turn round and speak to me? I am one of the shareholders, and I have a right to be answered how it was.'

'Shall you lose much?' said Drummond dreamily, and he turned round without meaning anything and looked in his companion's face. His action was simply fantastical, one of those motiveless movements which the sick soul so often makes; but it was quite unexpected by the other, who fell a step back, and grew red all over, and faltered in his reply.

'Much? I—I—don't know—what you call much. Good heavens, Drummond! are you mad? have you been drinking? Where is Golden?—he at least must know what he is about!'

'Yes,' said the painter fiercely, 'Golden knows what he is about—he has gone off, out of reach of questions—and you—oh—hound!' He gave a sudden cry and made a step forward. A sudden light seemed to burst upon him. He gazed with his dilated bloodshot eyes at the flushed countenance which could not face him. The attitude of the two men was such that the bystanders took note of it; two or three lingered and looked round holding themselves in readiness to interfere. The slight figure of the painter, his ghastly pale face and trembling hand, made him no antagonist for the burly well-to-do merchant; but English sentiment is always on the side of the portly and respectable, and Mr Burton had an unmistakable air of fright upon his face. 'Now, Drummond!—now, Drummond!' he said, with a certain pleading tone. The painter stood still, feeling as if a horrible illumination had suddenly flashed upon the man before him, and the history of their intercourse. He did in that moment of his despair what he could not have done with his ordinary intelligence. He made a rapid summary of the whole and saw how it was. Had he been happy, he would have been too friendly, too charitable, too kind in his thoughts to have drawn such a conclusion. But at this moment he had no time for anything but the terrible truth.

'I see it all,' he said. 'I see it all! It was ruined when you gave it over to us. I see it in every line of your face. Oh, hound! hounds all of you! skulking, dastardly demons, that kill a crowd of honest men to save yourselves—your miserable selves. I see it all!'

'Drummond! I tell you you are mad!'

'Hound!' said Robert again between his clenched teeth. He stood looking at him for a moment with his hands clenched too, and a sombre fire in his eyes. Whether he might have been led into violence had he stood there a moment longer it would be impossible to say. But all the habits of his life were against it, and his very despair restrained him. When he had stood there for a second, he turned round suddenly on his heel without any warning, and almost knocking down a man who was keeping warily behind him ready for any emergency, went away in the opposite direction without saying a word. Burton stood still gazing after him with a mixture of consternation and concern, and something very like hatred. But his face changed when the spectators drew round him to wonder and question. 'Something wrong with that poor gentleman, I fear, sir,' said one. Mr Burton put on a look of regret, sighed deeply, put his hand to his forehead, shook his head, murmured—'Poor fellow!' and—walked away. What could he do? He was not his brother's keeper, much less was he responsible for his cousin's husband—the paltry painter-fellow she had preferred to *him*. What would Helen think of her bargain now? Mad or drunk, it did not matter which—a pleasant companion for a woman. He preferred to think of this for the moment, rather than of the other question, which was in reality so much more important. Rivers's! Thank heaven he was no money loser, no more than was respectable. He had seen what was coming. Even to himself, this was all that Mr Burton said. He hurried on, however, to learn what people were saying of it, with more anxiety in his mind than seemed necessary. He went to the bank itself with the air of a man going to a funeral. 'The place I have known so long!' he said to another mournful victim who had appeared on the field of the lost battle, but who was not mad like Robert. 'And to think that Golden should have betrayed your confidence! A man I have known since he was *that* height—a man I could have answered for with my life!'

Meanwhile Drummond strayed on he knew not where. He went back into the City, into the depths of those lanes and

narrow streets which he had left so lately, losing himself in a bewildering maze of warehouse walls and echoing traffic. Great waggons jammed him up against the side, loads dangled over his head that would have crushed him in a moment, open cellars yawned for his unsteady feet; but he walked as safe through all those perils as if he had borne a charmed life, though he neither looked nor cared where he was going. His meeting with Burton was forced out of his mind in a few minutes as if it had not been. For the moment it had startled him into mad excitement; but so strong was the stupor of his despair, that in five minutes it was as if it had never been. For hours he kept wandering round and round the scene of his ruin, coming and going in a circle, as if his feet were fast and he could not escape. It had been morning when he left his house. It was late afternoon when he got back. Oh why was it summer and the days so long? if only that scorching sun would have set and darkness fallen over the place. He stole in under cover of the lilac trees, which had grown so big and leafy, and managed to glide down the side-way to the garden and get to the studio door, which he could open with his key. He had been doing nothing but think—think—all the time; but 'now, at least, I shall have time to think,' he said to himself, as he threw himself down on a chair close to the door—the nearest seat—it no longer mattered where he placed himself or how. He sat huddled up against the wall as sometimes a poor model did, waiting wistfully to know if he was wanted,—some poor wretch to whom a shilling was salvation. This fancy, with a thousand others equally inappropriate, flashed across his mind as he sat there, still with his hat pulled down on his brows in the sunny luxurious warmth of the afternoon. The mere atmosphere, air, and sky, and sunshine would have been paradise to the artist in the poorest time he had ever known before, but they did not affect him now. He sat there in his stupor for perhaps an hour, not even able to rouse himself so far as to shut the door of communication into the conservatory, through which he heard now and then the softened stir of the household. He might have been restored to the sense of life and its necessities, might have been brought back out of the delirium of his ruin at that moment, had any one in the house known he was there. Helen was in the drawing-room, separated from him only by that flowery passage which he had made for her, to tempt her to visit him at his work. She was writing notes, inviting some half-dozen people to dinner, as had been arranged between them, but with a heavy and anxious heart, full of misgiving. She had risen from her writing table three or four times to go to the window and look out for her husband, wondering why he should be so long of coming—while he sat so near her. Mrs Drummond's heart was very heavy. She did not understand what he said to her in the morning—could not imagine how it could be. It must be a temporary cloud, a failure of some speculation, something unconnected with the ordinary course of life, she said to herself. Money!—he was not a business man—it could not be money. If it was only money, why that was nothing. Such was the course of her thoughts. And she paused over her invitations, wondering was it right to give them if Robert had been losing money. But they were old friends whom she was inviting—only half a dozen people—and it was for his birthday. She had just finished the last note, when Norah came dancing into the room, claiming her mother's promise to go out with her; and after another long gaze from her window, Helen made up her mind to go. It was her voice speaking to the maid which roused Robert. 'If Mr Drummond comes in before I return,' he heard her say, 'tell him I shall not be long. I am going with Miss Norah to the gardens for an hour, and then to ask for Mr Haldane; but I shall be back by half-past six.' He heard the message—he for whom it was intended—and rose up softly and went to his studio window, and peeped stealthily out to watch them as they went away. Norah came first, with a skip and gambol, and then Helen. His wife gave a wistful look back at the house as she opened the little gate under the leafy dusty lilacs. Was it with some premonition of what she should find when she came back? He hid himself so that he could not be seen, and gazed at the two, feeling as if that moment was all that life had yet to give him. It was his farewell look. His wife and child disappeared, and he could hear their footsteps outside on the pavement going farther and farther away on their harmless, unimportant walk, while he——He woke up as if it had been out of sleep or out of a trance. She would return by half-past six, and it was now approaching five. For all he had to do there was so little, so very little time.

So he said to himself, and yet when he said it he had no clear idea what he was going to do. He had not only to do it, whatever it was, but to make up his mind, all in an hour and a half; and for the first five minutes of that little interval he was like a man dreaming, stretching out his hands to catch any straw, trying to believe he might yet be saved. Could he leave them—those two who had just left the door—to struggle through the rest of life by themselves? Helen was just over thirty, and her daughter nearly twelve. It was a mature age for a woman; but yet for a woman who has been protected and taken care of all her life, how bitter a moment to be left alone!—the moment when life is at its fullest, demands most, feels most warmly, and has as yet given up nothing. Helen had had no training to teach her that happiness was not her right. She had felt it to be her right, and her whole soul rose up in rebellion against any infringement of that great necessity of being. How was she to live when all was taken from her, even the support of her husband's arm? Robert had never known so much of his wife's character before, but in this awful moment it became clear to him as by an inspiration. How was she to bear it? Credit, honour, money, living—and her husband, too, who could still work for her, shield her. He went to his easel and uncovered the half-finished picture on it, and gazed at it with something that was in

reality a dumb appeal to the dumb canvas to help him. But it did not help him. On the contrary, it brought suddenly up before him his work of the past, his imperfect successes, and Helen's kind, veiled, hidden, but unconcealable dissatisfaction. The look of suppressed pain in her face, the subdued tone, the soft languid praise of some detail or accessory, the very look of her figure when she turned away from it, came all before him. Her habit was, when she turned away, to talk to him of other things. How clearly that oft-repeated scene came before him in his despair! She was dutiful, giving him her attention conscientiously as long as was needful; but when he fell back into the fond babble of the maker, and tried to interest her in some bit of drapery, or effect of light, or peculiarity of grouping, she would listen to him sweetly, and—change the subject as soon as possible. It all returned to him—he remembered even the trivial little words she had spoken, the languid air of half fatigue which would come over her. That—along with the meagrest poverty, the hardest homely struggles for daily bread. Could she bear to go back to it? She would lose everything, the house and all that was in it, everything that could be called hers or supposed hers. The only thing that could not be taken from her would be her £100 a year, her little fortune which was settled on her. 'They could live on that,' poor Drummond went on in his dreary miserable thoughts. 'They could exist, it is possible, better without me than with me. Would they be happier to have me in prison, disgraced, and dishonoured, a drag hanging about their neck—or to hear the worst at once, to know that everything was over, that at least their pittance would be theirs, and their peace respected? Everything would be over. Nobody could have any pretext for annoying her about it. They would be sorry for her—even they would be sorry for me. My policies would go to make up something—to clear my name a little. And they would let her alone. She could go to the country. She is so simple in her real tastes. They could live on what she has, if they were only rid of me.' A sigh that was almost a sob interrupted him in his musing. He was so worn out; and was it the grave-chill that was invading him already and making him shiver? He took the canvas on the easel and held it up to the light. 'The drawing is good enough,' he said to himself, 'it is not the drawing. She always owns that. It is—something else. And how can I tell after this that I could even draw? I could not now, if I were to try. My hand shakes like an old man's. I might fall ill like poor Haldane! Ah, my God!' The canvas fell out of his hands upon the floor—a sudden spasm contracted his heart. Haldane! It was the first time that day that he had thought of him. His ruin would be the ruin of his friend too—his friend who was helpless, sick, and yet the support of others. 'Oh, my God, my God!' he wailed with a cry of despair.

And there was no one near to hear him, no one to defend him from himself and from the devil, to lay hands upon him, to bid him live and hope and work, and help them to exist whom he had helped to ruin. He was left all alone in that moment of his agony. God, to whom he had appealed, was beyond the clouds, beyond that which is more unfathomable than any cloud, the serene, immeasurable, impenetrable blue, and held out no hand, sent no voice of comfort. The man fell down where his work had fallen, prone upon the ground, realising in a moment all the misery of the years that were to come. And it was his doing, his doing!—though consciously he would have given himself to be cut to pieces, would have toiled his life out, to make it up now to his friend,—how much more to his wife! What passed in his mind in that awful interval is not to be told. It was the supreme struggle between life and despair, and it was despair that won. When he rose up his face was like the face of an old man, haggard and furrowed with deep lines. He stood still for a moment, looking round him vaguely, and then made a little pilgrimage round the room, looking at everything, with a motive, without a motive, who can tell? his whole faculties absorbed in the exaltation, and bewildering, sombre excitement of such a crisis as can come but once to any man. Then he sat down at his writing-table, and sought out some letter-paper (there were so many scraps of drawing-paper that came first to hand), and slowly wrote a few lines. He had to search for a long time before he could find an envelope to enclose this, and his time was getting short. At last he put it up, and, after another pause, stole through the conservatory, walking stealthily like a thief, and placed the white envelope on a little crimson table, where it shone conspicuous to everybody who should enter. He did more than that; he went and bent over the chair which Helen had pushed away when she rose from it—the chair she always sat on—and kissed it. There was a little bright-coloured handkerchief lying on the sofa, which was Norah's. He took that up and kissed it too, and thrust it into his breast. Did he mean to carry it with him into the dark and silent country where he was going? God knows what was the thought in his mind. The pretty clock on the mantelpiece softly chimed the quarter as he did this, and he started like a thief. Then he took an old great-coat from the wall, an old travelling hat, which hung beside it, and went back to the studio. There was no more time for thought. He went out, leaving the door unlocked, brushing stealthily through the lilacs. The broad daylight played all around him, revealing him to every one, showing to the world how he stole away out of his own house. He had put up the collar of his coat and drawn his hat down over his brows to disguise himself in case he met any one he knew. Any one he knew! It was in case he met his wife, to whom he had just said farewell for ever, and his child, whose little kerchief he was going to take with him into this dismal ruin, into the undiscovered world.

All this might have been changed had he met them; and they were crossing the next street coming home, Helen growing

more and more anxious as they approached the door. Had he been going out about some simple everyday business, of course they would have met; but not now, when it might have saved one life from destruction and another from despair. He had watched for a moment to make sure they were not in sight before he went out; and the servants had caught a glimpse of a man whom they did not recognise hiding among the bushes, and were frightened; so, it turned out afterwards, had various other passers-by. But Drummond saw no one—no one. The multitudes in the noisier streets upon which he emerged after a while, were nothing to him. They pushed against him, but he did not see them; the only two figures he could have seen were henceforward to be invisible to him for ever.

For ever! for ever! Was it for ever? Would this crime he was about to commit, this last act of supreme rebellion against the will of that God to whom he seemed to have appealed in vain, would it sever him from them not only in this world, but in the world to come? Should he have to gaze upward, like poor Dives, and see, in the far serene above him, these two walking in glory and splendour, who were no longer his? perhaps surrounded by angels, stately figures of the blessed, without a thought to spare in the midst of that glory for the poor soul who perished for love of them. Could that be true? Was it damnation as well as death he was going to face? Was it farewell for ever, and ever, and ever?

So the awful strain ran on, buzzing in his ears, drowning for him the voices of the crowd—for ever, for ever, for ever. Dives forlorn and far away—and up, up high in the heavens, blazing above him, like a star—

Like that star in the soft sky of the evening which came out first and shone down direct upon him in his wretchedness. How it shone! How she shone!—was it she?—as it grew darker drawing a silver line for him upon the face of the darkening water. Was that to be the spot? But it took years to get dark that night. He lived and grew old while he was waiting thus to die. At last there was gloom enough. He got a boat, and rowed it out to that white glistening line, the line that looked like a silver arrow, shining where the spot was—

The boat drifted ashore that night as the tide fell. In that last act, at least, Nature helped him to be honest, poor soul!

CHAPTER XI.

'The studio door is open, mamma,' said little Norah dancing in before her mother, through the lilac bushes. The words seemed to take a weight off Helen's heart.

'Then papa must have come in,' she said, and ran up the steps to the door, which was opened before she could knock by an anxious, half-frightened maid. 'Mr Drummond has come in?' she said, in her anxiety, hasting to pass Jane, who held fast by the door.

'No, ma'am, please, ma'am; but Rebecca and me see a man about not five minutes ago, and I can't find master's topcoat as was a-hanging in the hall—Rebecca says, ma'am, as she thought she see—'

'Papa has not been home after all,' Helen said to her little daughter; 'perhaps Mr Drummond wore his great-coat last night, Jane. Never mind just now; he will tell us when he comes in.'

'But I see the man, and George was out, as he always is when he's wanted. Me and Rebecca—' said Jane.

'Never mind just now,' said Helen languidly. She went into the drawing-room with the load heavier than ever on her heart. What could have kept him so long? What could be making him so miserable? Oh, how cruel, cruel it was not to know! She sat down with a heart like lead on that chair which poor Robert had kissed—not fifteen minutes since, and he was scarcely out of reach now.

'Oh, mamma,' cried Norah, moving about with a child's curiosity; 'here is a letter for you on the little red table. It is so funny, and blurred, and uneven. I can write better than that—look! isn't it from papa?'

Helen had not paid much attention to what the child said, but now she started up and stretched out her hand. The name on the outside was scarcely legible, it was blurred and uneven, as Norah said; and it was very clear to see, could only be a message of woe. But her worst fears, miserable as she felt, had not approached the very skirts of the misery that now awaited her. She tore the envelope open, with her heart beating loud in her ears, and her whole body tingling with agitation. And this was what she read:—

'MY HELEN, MY OWN HELEN,—I have nothing in the world to do now but to bid you good-bye. I have ruined you, and more than you. If I lived I should only be a disgrace and a burden, and your little money that you have will support you by yourself. Oh, my love, to think I should leave you like this! I who have loved you so. But I have never been good enough for you. When you are an angel in heaven, if you see me among the lost, oh, bestow a little pity upon me, my Helen! I shall never see you again, but as Dives saw Lazarus. Oh, my wife, my baby, my own, you will be mine no longer; but have a little pity upon me! Give me one look, Helen, out of heaven.

'I am not mad, dear. I am doing it knowing it will be for the best. God forgive me if I take it upon me to know better than Him. It is not presumption, and perhaps He may know what I mean, though even you don't know. Oh my own, my darlings, my only ones—good-bye, good-bye!'

There was no name signed, no stops to make the sense plain. It was written as wildly as it had been conceived; and Helen, in her terrible excitement, did not make out at first what it could mean. What could it mean? where was he going? The words about Dives and Lazarus threw no light upon it at first. He had gone away. She gave a cry, and dropped her hands upon her lap, with the letter in them, and looked round her—looked at her child, to make sure to herself that she was not dreaming. Gone away! But where, where, and why this parting? 'I don't understand it—he has gone and left us,' she said feebly, when Norah, in her curiosity, came rushing to her to know what it was. 'I don't know what it means. O God, help us!' she said, with an outburst of miserable tears. She was confused to the very centre of her being. Where had he gone?'

'May I read it, mamma?' little Norah asked, with her arms round her mother's neck.

But Helen had the feeling that it was not fit for the child. 'Run and ask who brought it,' she said, glad to be alone; and then read over again, with a mind slowly awakening to its reality, that outburst of love and despair. The letter shook in her hands, salt tears fell upon it as she read. 'If I lived:—*I am doing it, knowing.*' God, God, what was it he had gone to do? Just then she heard a noise in the studio, and starting to her feet rushed to the conservatory door, crying, 'Robert!'

Robert!' She was met by Jane and Norah, coming from it; the child was carrying her father's hat in her arms, with a strange look of wonder and dismay on her face.

'Mamma, no one brought the letter,' she said in a subdued, horror-struck tone; 'and here is papa's hat—and the picture is lying dashed down on the floor with its face against the carpet. It is all spoiled, mamma,' sobbed little Norah—'papa's picture! and here is his hat. Oh, mamma, mamma!'

Norah was frightened at her mother's face. She had grown ghastly pale. 'Get me a cab,' she said to the maid, whose curiosity was profoundly excited. Then she sat down and took her child in her arms. 'Norah, my darling,' she said, making a pause between every two words, 'something dreadful has happened. I don't know what. I must go—and see. I must go—and find him—O my God, where am I to go?'

'And me, too,' said the child, clinging to her fast; 'me, too—let us go to the City, mamma!'

'Not you, Norah. It will soon be your bedtime. Oh, my pet, go and kneel down and pray—pray for poor papa.'

'I can pray just as well in the cab,' said Norah; 'God hears all the same. I am nearly twelve—I am almost grown up. You shall not, shall not go without me. I will never move nor say a word. I will run up and get your cloak and mine. We'll easily find him. He never would have the heart to go far away from you and me.'

'He never would have the heart,' Helen murmured the words over after her. Surely not. Surely, surely, he would not have the heart! His resolution would fail. How could he go and leave the two whom he loved best—the two whom alone he loved in this world. 'Run, then, dear, and get your cloak,' she said faintly. The child seemed a kind of anchor to her, holding her to something, to some grasp of solid earth. They drove off in a few minutes, Norah holding fast her mother's hand. They overtook, if they had but known it, and passed in the crowd, the despairing man they sought; and he with his dim eyes saw the cab driving past, and wondered even who was in it—some other sufferer, in the madness of excitement or despair. How was he to know it was his wife and child? They drove to the City, but found no one there. They went to his club, to one friend's house after another, to the picture-dealers, to the railway stations. There, two or three bystanders had seen such a man, and he had gone to Brighton, to Scotland, to Paris, they said. Coming home, they drove over the very bridge where he had been standing waiting for the dark. It was dark by that time, and Helen's eye caught the line of light on the water, with that intuitive wish so common to a painter's wife, that Robert had seen it. Ah, good Lord! he had seen and more than seen. The summer night was quite dark when they got home. Those gleams of starlight were lost in clouds, and all was gloom about the pretty house. Instead of the usual kindly gleam from the windows, nothing was visible as they drew up to the door but the light of a single candle which showed its solitary flame through the bare window of the dining-room. No blind was drawn, or curtain closed, and like the taper of a watcher shone this little miserable light. It chilled Helen in her profound discouragement and fatigue, and yet it gave her a forlorn hope that perhaps he had come. Norah had fallen fast asleep leaning against her. It was all she could do to wake the child as they approached the door; and Jane came out to open the gate with a scared face. 'No, ma'am, master's never been back,' she answered to Helen's eager question; but Dr Maurice, he's here.'

Mrs Drummond put Norah into the woman's arms, and rushed into the house. Dr Maurice met her with a face almost as white as her own, and took her hands compassionately. 'You have heard from him? What have you heard? where is he?' said poor Helen.

'Hush, hush!' he said, 'perhaps it is not so bad as it appears. I don't understand it. Rest a little, and I will show you what he has written to me.'

'I cannot rest,' she said; 'how can I rest when Robert——Let me see it. Let me see it. I am sure to understand what he means. He never had any secrets before. Oh, show it me—show it me!—am not I his wife?'

'Poor wife, poor wife!' said the compassionate doctor, and then he put her into an easy-chair and went and asked for some wine. 'I will show it you only when you have drunk this,' he said; 'only when you have heard what I have to say. Drummond is very impulsive you know. He might not do really as he said. A hundred things would come in to stop him when he had time to think. His heart has been broken by this bank business; but when he felt that it was understood he was not to blame——'

'Give me your letter,' she said, holding out her hand to him. She was capable of no more.

'He would soon find that out,' said the doctor. 'Who could possibly blame *him*? My dear Mrs Drummond, you must take this into account. You must not give him up at once. I have set on foot all sorts of inquiries——'

'The letter, the letter!' she said hoarsely, holding out her hand.

He was obliged to yield to her at last, but not without the consciousness which comforted him that she had heard a great deal of what he had to say. She had not listened voluntarily; but still she had not been able to keep herself from hearing. This was not much comfort to poor Helen, but it was to him. He had made her swallow the wine too; he had done his best for her; and now he could but stand by mournfully while she read her sentence, the words which might be death.

'Maurice, I want you to go to my wife. Before you get this, or at least before you have got to her, I shall be dead. It's a curious thing to say, but it's true. There has been a great crash at the bank, and I am ruined and all I care for. If I lived I could do no good, only harm; but they will be sorry for her if I die. I have written to her, poor darling, to tell her; but I want you to go and stand by her. She'll want some one; and kiss the child for me. If they find me, bury me anywhere. I hope they will never find me, though, for Helen's sake. And poor Haldane. Tell him I knew nothing of it; nothing, nothing! I would have died sooner than let them risk his money. God help us, and God forgive me! Maurice, you are a good fellow; be kind to my poor wife.'

There was a postscript which nobody read or paid any attention to: that is to say, they read it and it died from their minds for the moment as if it meant nothing. It was this, written obliquely like an after-thought——

'The bank was ruined from the first; there was never a chance for us. I found this out only to-day. Burton and Golden have done it all.'

These were the words that Helen read, with Dr Maurice standing mournfully behind watching her every movement. She kept staring at the letter for a long time, and then fell back with a hysterical sob, but without any relief of tears. Dr Maurice stood by her as his friend had asked him. He soothed her, adding every possible reason he could think of (none of which he himself believed in the smallest degree) to show that 'poor Drummond' might change his mind. This was written in the first impulse of despair, but when he came to think——Helen did not listen; but she heard what Dr Maurice said vaguely, and she heard his account of what he had done; he had given information at once to the police; he had engaged people everywhere to search and watch. News would be heard of him to-morrow certainly, if not to-night. Helen rose while he was speaking. She collected herself and restrained herself, exerting all the strength she possessed. 'Will you come with me?' she said.

'Where? where? Mrs Drummond, I entreat you to believe I have done everything——'

'Oh, I am sure of it!' she said faintly; 'but I must go. I cannot——cannot rest. I must go somewhere——anywhere——where he may have gone——'

'But, Mrs Drummond——'

'You are going to say I have been everywhere. So we have, Norah and I——she fell asleep at last, poor child——she does not need me——I must go——'

'It is getting late,' he said; 'it is just ten; if news were to come you would not like to be out of the way. Stay here and rest, and I will go to-morrow; you will want all your strength.'

'I want it all now,' she said, with a strange smile. 'Who thinks of to-morrow? it may never, never come. It may——You are very kind——but I cannot rest.'

She was in the cab again before he could say another word. But fortunately at that moment one of his messengers came in hot haste to say that they thought they had found some trace of 'the gentleman.' He had come off to bring the news, and probably by this time the others were on their way bringing him home. This intelligence furnished Maurice with a

weapon against Helen. She allowed herself to be led into the house again, not believing it, feeling in her heart that her husband would never be brought back, yet unable to resist the reasonable conclusion that she must stay to receive him. The short summer darkness passed over her thus; the awful dawn came and looked her in the face. One of the maids sat up, or rather dozed in her chair in the kitchen, keeping a fire alight in case anything might be wanted. And Helen sat and listened to every sound; sat at the window gazing out, hearing carriage wheels and footsteps miles off, as it seemed to her, and now and then almost deceived into hope by the sound of some one returning from a dance or late party. How strange it seemed to her that life should be going on in its ordinary routine, and people enjoying themselves, while she sat thus frozen into desperation, listening for him who would never come again! Her mind was wandering after him through every kind of dreadful scene; and yet it was so difficult, so impossible to associate him with anything terrible. He, always so reasonable, so tender of others, so free from selfish folly. The waking of the new day stole upon the watcher before she was aware; those sounds which are so awful in their power, which show how long it is since last night, how life has gone on, casting aside old burdens, taking on new ones. It was just about ten o'clock, when the morning was at its busiest outside, and Helen, refusing to acknowledge the needs of the new day, still sat at the window watching, with eyes that were dry and hot and bloodshot, with the room all in mournful disorder round her, when Dr Maurice's brougham drew up to the door. He sprang out of it, carrying a coat on his arm; a rough fellow in a blue Jersey and sailor's hat followed him. Maurice came in with that look so different from the look of anxiety, that fatal air, subdued and still and certain, which comes only from knowledge. Whatever might have happened he was in doubt no more.

Helen's long vigil had worn her into that extremity of emotion which can no longer avail itself of ordinary signs. She had not even risen to meet the news. She held out her hand feebly, and gave him a piteous look of inquiry, which her dry lips refused to sound. She looked as if it were possible that she had grown into an idiot as she sat there. He came forward to her, and took her hand in his.

'Dear Mrs Drummond,' he said, 'you will need all your courage; you must not give way; you must think of your child.'

'I know,' she said; her hand dropped out of his as if by its mere weight. She bowed her head as if to let this great salt bitter wave go over her—bowed it down till it sank upon her lap hidden in her clasped hands. There was nothing to be said further, not a word was necessary. She knew.

And yet there was a story to tell. It was told to her very gently, and she had to listen to it, with her face hidden in her hands. She shuddered now and then as she listened. Sometimes a long convulsive sob escaped her, and shook her whole frame; but she was far beyond the ordinary relief of weeping. It was poor Robert's coat which Dr Maurice had brought with him, making all further doubt impossible. The gentleman had thrown it off when he took that boat at Chelsea. It was too warm, he said; 'and sure enough it was mortal warm,' the man added who had come to verify the mournful story. The gentleman had taken a skiff for a row. It was a clear, beautiful night, and he had been warned to keep out of the way of steamers and barges. If any harm came to him, the boatman said, it was not for want of knowing how to manage a boat. The little skiff had drifted in bottom up, and had been found that morning a mile down stream. That was all. Jane, who was the housemaid, went away crying, and drew down all the blinds except that of the room in which her mistress was. 'Surely missis will have the thought to do that,' she said. But poor Helen had not the thought.

And thus it all came to an end—their love, their prosperity, and that mitigated human happiness which they had enjoyed together—happiness not too perfect, and yet how sweet! Norah still slept through the bright morning, neglected by her usual attendant, and tired out by her unusual exertions on the previous night. 'She ought to know,' the maids said to each other, with that eagerness to make evil tidings known which is so strangely common; but the old nurse, who loved the child, would not have her disturbed. It was only when Helen rejected all their entreaties to lie down and rest that Martin consented to rouse the little girl. She came down, with her bright hair all about her shoulders, wrapped in a little white dressing-gown, flying with noiseless bare feet down the staircase, and, without a word of warning, threw herself upon her mother. It was not to console her mother, but to seek her own natural refuge in this uncomprehended calamity. 'Oh, mamma!' said Norah; 'oh, mamma, mamma!' She could find no other words of consolation. Torrents of youthful tears gushed from the child's eyes. She wept for both, while Helen sat tearless. And the blinds were not down nor the shutters closed in that room, as the servants recollected with horror, and the great golden light of morn shone in.

Thus they were left undisturbed in the full day, in the sweet sunshine; scarcely knowing, in the first stupor of misery, how it was that darkness had gathered in the midst of all their world of light.

CHAPTER XII.

Helen had not remarked that postscript to her husband's letter, but Dr Maurice had done so, to whom it was addressed; and while she was hiding her head and bearing the first agony of her grief without thought of anything remaining that she might yet have to bear, many things had been going on in the world outside of which Helen knew nothing. Dr Maurice had been Robert's true friend; and after that mournful morning a day and night had passed in which he did not know how to take comfort. He had no way of expressing himself as women have. He could not weep; it even seemed to him that to close out the cheerful light, as he was tempted to do (for the sight of all that brightness made his heart sick), would have been an ostentation of sorrow, a show of sentiment which he had no right to indulge in. He could not weep, but there was something else he could do; and that was to sift poor Robert's accusation, if there was any truth in it; and, if there was, pursue—to he could not tell what end—the murderers of his friend. It is the old savage way; and Dr Maurice set his teeth, and found a certain relief in the thought. He lay down on the sofa in his library, and ordered his servant to close his doors to all the world, and tried to snatch a little sleep after the watch of the previous night. But sleep would not come to him. The library was a large, lofty room, well furnished, and full with books. It was red curtained and carpeted, and the little bit of the wall which was not covered with book-cases was red too, red which looked dark and heavy in the May sunshine, but was very cozy in winter days. The one spot of brightness in the room was a picture of poor Drummond's—a young picture, one of those which he was painting while he courted Helen, the work of youth and love, at a time when the talent in him was called promise, and that which it promised was genius. This little picture caught the doctor's eye as he lay on his sofa, resting the weary frame which had known no rest all night. A tear came as he looked at it—a tear which flowed back again to its fountain, not being permitted to fall, but which did him good all the same. 'Poor fellow! he never did better than that,' Dr Maurice said to himself with a sigh; and then he closed up his eyes tight, and tried to go to sleep. Half an hour after, when he opened them again, the picture was once more the first thing he saw. 'Better!' he said, 'he never did so well. And killed by those infernal curs!' The doctor took himself off his sofa after this failure. It was of no use trying to sleep. He gathered his boots from the corner into which he had hurled them, and drew them on again. He thought he would go and have a walk. And then he remarked for the first time that though he had taken his coat off, the rest of his dress was the same as he had put on last night to go out to dinner. When he went to his room to change this, the sight of himself in the glass was a wonder to him. Was that red-eyed, dishevelled man, with glittering studs in his shirt, and a head heavy with watching and grief—was that the trim and irreproachable Dr Maurice? He gave a grin of horror and fierce mockery at himself, and then sat down in his easy-chair, and hid his face in his hands; and thus, all contorted and doubled up, went to sleep unawares. He was good for nothing that day.

The next morning, before he could go out, Mr Burton called upon him. He was the man whom Dr Maurice most wanted to see. Yet he felt himself jump as he was announced, and knew that in spite of himself his countenance had changed. Mr Burton came in undisturbed in manner or appearance, but with a broad black hatband on his hat—a band which his hatter had assured him was much broader than he had any occasion for—'deep enough for a brother.' This gave him a certain air of solemnity, as it came in in front of him. It was 'a mark of respect' which Dr Maurice had not thought of showing; and Maurice, after poor Haldane, was, as it were, Robert's next friend.

'I have come to speak to you about poor Drummond,' said Mr Burton, taking a chair. 'What a terrible business this has been! I met with him accidentally that morning—the very day it happened. I do not know when I have had such a shock!'

'You met him on the day he took his life?'

'The day he—died, Dr Maurice. I am his relative, his wife's nearest friend. Why should we speak so? Let us not be the people to judge him. He died—God knows how. It is in God's hands.'

'God knows I don't judge him,' said Dr Maurice; and there was a pause.

'I cannot hear that any one saw him later,' said Mr Burton. 'I hear from the servants at St Mary's Road that he was not there. He talked very wildly, poor fellow. I almost thought—God forgive me!—that he had been drinking. It must have been temporary insanity. It is a kind of consolation to reflect upon that *now*.'

The doctor said nothing. He rustled his papers about, and played impatiently with the pens and paper-cutter on his table. He bore it all until his visitor heaved a demonstrative sigh. That he could not bear.

'If you thought he spoke wildly, you might have looked after him a little,' he said. 'It was enough to make any man look

wild; and you, who knew so well all about it——'

'That is the very thing. I did not know about it. I had been out of town, and had heard nothing. A concern I was so much interested in—by which I am myself a loser——'

'Do you lose much?' said Dr Maurice, looking him in the face. It was the same question poor Robert had asked, and it produced the same results. An uneasy flush came on the rich man's countenance.

'We City men do not publish our losses,' he said. 'We prefer to keep the amount of them, when we can, to ourselves. You were in yourself, I believe? Ah! I warned poor Drummond! I told him he knew nothing of business. He should have taken the advice of men who knew. How strange that an ignorant, inexperienced man, quite unaware what he was doing, should be able to ruin such a vast concern!'

'Ruin such a vast concern!' Dr Maurice repeated, stupefied. 'Who?—Drummond? This is a serious moment and a strangely-chosen subject for a jest. I can't suppose that you take me for a fool——'

'We have all been fools, letting him play with edge tools,' said Mr Burton, almost sharply. 'Golden tells me he would never take advice. Golden says——'

'Golden! where is he?' cried Maurice. 'The fellow who absconded? By Jove, tell me but where to lay my hands on him ——'

'Softly,' said Mr Burton, putting his hand on Maurice's arm, with an air of soothing him which made the doctor's blood boil. 'Softly, doctor. He is to be found where he always was, at the office, making the best he can of a terribly bad job, looking fifteen years older, poor fellow. Where are you going? Let me have my ten minutes first!'

'I am going to get hold of him, the swindler!' cried Maurice, ringing the bell furiously. 'John, let the brougham be brought round directly. My God! if I was not the most moderate man in existence I should say murderer too. Golden says, forsooth! We shall see what he will say before a jury——'

'My dear Dr Maurice—listen a little—take care what you are doing. Golden is as honourable a man as you or I——'

'Speak for yourself,' said the doctor roughly. 'He has absconded—that's the word. It was in the papers yesterday morning; and it was the answer I myself received at the office. Golden, indeed! If you're a friend of Drummond's, you will come with me and give that fellow into custody. This is no time for courtesy now.'

'How glad I am I came!' said Mr Burton. 'You have not seen, then, what is in the papers to-day? Dr Maurice, you must listen to me; this is simply madness. Golden, poor fellow, has been very nearly made the victim of his own unsuspecting character. Don't be impatient, but listen. When I tell you he was simply absent on Tuesday on his own affairs—gone down to the country, as I might have been myself, if not, alas! as I sometimes think, sent out of the way. The news of Shenken's bankruptcy arrived that morning. Well, I don't mean to say Drummond could have helped that; but he seized the opportunity. Heaven knows how sorry I am to suggest such a thing; it has nearly broken Golden's heart. But these are the facts; what can you make of them? Maurice, listen to me. What did he go and do *that* for? He was still a young man; he had his profession. If he could have faced the world, why did he do *that*?'

Dr Maurice replied with an oath. I can make no excuse for him. He stood on his own hearth, with his hand clenched, and blasphemed. There are moments in which a man must either do that, or go down upon his knees and appeal to God, who now-a-days sends no lightning from heaven to kill the slayer of men's souls where he stands. The doctor saw it all as if by a gleam of that same lightning which he invoked in vain. He saw the spider's web they had woven, the way of escape for themselves which they had built over the body of the man who was dead, and could not say a word in reply. But his friend could not find a word to say. Scorn, rage, stupefaction, came upon him. It was so false, so incredible in its falsity. He could no more have defended Robert from such an accusation than he would have defended himself from the charge of having murdered him. But it would be believed: the world did not know any better. He could not say another word—such a horror and disgust came over him, such a sickening sense of the power of falsehood, the feebleness of manifest, unprovable truth.

'This is not a becoming way in which to treat such a subject,' said Mr Burton, rising too. 'No subject could be more painful to me. I feel almost as if, indirectly, I myself was to blame. It was I who introduced him into the concern. I am a busy man, and I have a great deal on my hands, but could I have foreseen what was preparing for Rivers's, my own

interest should have gone to the wall. And that he should be my own relation too—my cousin's husband! Ah, poor Helen, what a mistake she made!

'Have you nearly done, sir?' said the doctor fiercely.

'I shall have done at once, if what I say is received with incivility,' said Mr Burton, with spirit. 'It was to prevent any extension of the scandal that I came here.'

'There are some occasions upon which civility is impossible,' said Maurice. 'I happen to know Robert Drummond; which I hope you don't, for your own sake. And, remember, a great many people know him besides me. I mean no incivility when I say that I don't believe one word of this, Mr Burton; and that is all I have to say about it. Not one word ____'

'You mean, I lie!'

'I mean nothing of the sort. I hope you are deceived. I mean that this fellow Golden is an atrocious scoundrel, and *he* lies, if you will. And having said that, I have not another word to say.'

Then they both stopped short, looking at each other. A momentary doubt was, perhaps, in Burton's mind what to say next—whether to pursue the subject or to let it drop. But no doubt was in Maurice's. He stood rigid, with his back to the vacant fireplace, retired within himself. 'It is very warm,' he said; 'not favourable weather for walking. Can I set you down anywhere? I see my brougham has come round.'

'Thanks,' said the other shortly. And then he added, 'Dr Maurice, you have taken things in a manner very different from what I expected. I thought you would take an interest in saving our poor friend's memory as far as we can—'

'I take no interest in it, sir, whatever.'

'And the feelings of his widow,' said Mr Burton. 'Well, well, very well. Friendship is such a wide word—sometimes meaning so much, sometimes so little. I suppose I must do the best I can for poor Helen by myself, and in my own way.'

The obdurate doctor bowed. He held fast by his formula. He had not another word to say.

'In that case I need not trouble you any longer,' said Mr Burton. But when he was on his way to the door he paused and turned round. 'She is not likely to be reading the papers just now,' he said, 'and I hope I may depend on you not to let these unfortunate particulars, or anything about it, come to the ears of Mrs Drummond. I should like her to be saved that if possible. She will have enough to bear.'

'I shall not tell Mrs Drummond,' said the doctor. And then the door opened and closed, and the visitor was gone.

The brougham stood before Dr Maurice's window for a long time that morning. The old coachman grumbled, broiling on the box; the horses grumbled, pawing with restless feet, and switching the flies off with more and more impatient swingings of their tails. John grumbled indoors, who could not 'set things straight' until his master was out of the way. But the doctor neglected them all. Not one of all the four, horses or men, would have changed places with him could they have seen him poring over the newspaper, which he had not cared to look at that morning, with the wrinkles drawn together on his forehead. There was fury in his soul, that indignation beyond words, beyond self-command, with which a man perceives the rise and growth of a wrong which is beyond his setting right—a lie which he can only ineffectively contradict, struggle, or rage against, but cannot drive out of the minds of men. They had it in their own hands to say what they would. Dr Maurice knew that during all the past winter his friend had been drawn into the work of the bank. He had even cautioned Robert, though in ignorance of the extent of his danger. He had said, 'Don't forget that you are unaccustomed to the excitements of business. They will hurt you, though they don't touch the others. It is not your trade.' These words came back to his mind with the bitterest sense of that absence of foresight which is common to man. 'If I had but known!' he said. And then he remembered, with a bitter smile, his visit to Dr Bradcliffe, his request to him to see poor Drummond 'accidentally,' his dread for his friend's brain. This it was which had affected poor Robert, worse than disease, worse than madness; for in madness or disease there would have been no human agency to blame.

The papers, as Burton had said, were full of this exciting story. Outside in the very streets there were great placards up with headings in immense capitals, '*Great Bankruptcy in the City.—Suicide of a Bank Director.*' The absconding of the manager, which had been the news the day before, was thrown into the background by this new fact, which was so much

more tragical and important. 'The latest information' was given by some in a Second Edition, so widespread was the commotion produced by the catastrophe; and even those of the public who did not care much for Rivers's, cared for the exciting tale, or for the fate of the unhappy professional man who had rashly involved himself in business, and ruined not only himself, but so many more. The story was so dramatically complete that public opinion decided upon it at once. It did not even want the grieved, indignant letter which Mr Golden, injured man, wrote to the *Times*, begging that the report against him should be contradicted. This letter was printed in large type, and its tone was admirable. 'I will not prejudge any man, more especially one whose premature end has thrown a cloud of horror over the unfortunate business transactions of the bank with which I have had the honour of being connected for fifteen years,' Mr Golden wrote, 'but I cannot permit my temporary, innocent, and much-regretted absence to be construed into an evidence that I had deserted my post. With the help of Providence, I will never desert it, so long as I can entertain the hope of saving from the wreck a shilling of the shareholders' money.' It was a very good letter, very creditable to Mr Golden; and everybody had read it, and accepted it as gospel, before Dr Maurice got his hand upon it. In the *Daily Semaphore*, which the doctor did not see, there was already an article on the subject, very eloquent and slightly discursive, insisting strongly upon the wickedness and folly of men who without capital, or even knowledge of business, thus ventured to play with the very existence of thousands of people. 'Could the unfortunate man who has hidden his shame in a watery grave look up this morning from that turbid bed and see the many homes which he has filled with desolation, who can doubt that the worst and deepest hell fabled by the great Italian poet would lose something of its intensity in comparison?—the ineffectual fires would pale; a deeper and a more terrible doom would be that of looking on at all the misery—all the ruined households and broken hearts which cry out to-day over all England for justice on their destroyer.' Fortunately Dr Maurice did not read this article; but he did read the *Times* and its editorial comments. 'There can be little doubt,' that journal said, 'that the accidental absence of Mr Golden, the manager, whose letter explaining all the circumstances will be found in another column, determined Drummond to his final movement. It left him time to secure the falsified books, and remove all evidence of his guilt. It is not for us to explain by what caprice of despair, after taking all this trouble, the unhappy man should have been driven to self-destruction. The workings of a mind in such an unnatural condition are too mysterious to be discussed here. Perhaps he felt that when all was done, death was the only complete exemption from those penalties which follow the evil-doer on this earth. We can only record the fact; we cannot explain the cause. The manager and the remaining directors, hastily summoned to meet the emergency, have been labouring ever since, we understand, with the help of a well-known accountant, to make up the accounts of the company, as well as that can be done in the absence of the books which there is every reason to suppose were abstracted by Drummond before he left the office. It has been suggested that the river should be dragged for them as well as for the body of the unhappy man, which up to this time has not been recovered. But we doubt much whether, even should such a work be successful, the books would be legible after an immersion even of two or three days. We believe that no one, even the persons most concerned, are yet able to form an estimate of the number of persons to whom this lamentable occurrence will be ruin.'

Dr Maurice put down the paper with a gleam in his face of that awful and heart-rending rage which indignation is apt to rise into when it feels itself most impotent. What could he do to stop such a slander? He could contradict it; he could say, 'I know Robert Drummond; he was utterly incapable of this baseness.' Alas! who was he that the world should take his word for it? He might bring a counter-charge against Golden; he might accuse him of abstracting the books, and being the author of all the mischief; but what proof had he to substantiate his accusation? He had no evidence—not a hair's-breadth. He could not prove, though he believed, that this was all a scheme suggested to the plotters, if there were more than one, or to Golden himself, if he were alone in his villany, by the unlooked-for chance of Drummond's suicide. This was what he believed. All the more for the horrible *vraisemblance* of the story, could he see the steps by which it had been put together. Golden had absconded, taking with him everything that was damning in the way of books. He had lain hidden somewhere near at hand waiting an opportunity to get away. He had heard of poor Drummond's death, and an opportunity of a different kind, a devilish yet brilliantly successful way of escape, had suddenly appeared for him. All this burst upon Dr Maurice as by a revelation while he sat with those papers before him gnawing his nails and clutching the leading journal as if it had been Golden's throat. He saw it all. It came out before him like a design in phosphorus, twinkling and glowing through the darkness. He was sure of it; but—what to do?

This man had a touch in him of the antique friendship—the bond for which men have encountered all odds and dared death, and been happy in their sacrifice. But even disinterestedness, even devotion, do not give a man the mental power to meet such foes, or to frame a plan by which to bring them to confusion. He grew himself confused with the thought. He could not make out what to do first—how he should begin. He had forgotten how the hours went—what time of the day it was—while he pondered these subjects. The fire in his veins, instead of acting as a simple stimulant, acted upon him like intoxication. His brain reeled under the pressure. 'Will you have lunch, sir, before you go out?' said John, with

restrained wrath, but a pretence of stateliness. 'Lunch!—how dare you come into my room, sir, before I ring!' cried his master, waking up and looking at him with what seemed to John murderous eyes. And then he sprang up, tore the papers into little pieces, crammed them into the fireplace, and, seizing his hat, rushed out to the carriage. The coachman was nodding softly on the box. The heat, and the stillness, and the monotony had triumphed even over the propriety of a man who knew all London, he was fond of saying, as well as he knew his own hands. The coachman almost dropped from his box when Maurice, throwing the door of the little carriage open, startled him suddenly from his slumber. The horses, which were half asleep too, woke also with much jarring of harness and prancing of hoof and head.

'To the *Times* office,' was what the doctor said. He could not go and clutch that villain by the throat, though that might be the best way. It was another kind of lion which he was about to beard in his den.

CHAPTER XIII.

None of the persons chiefly concerned in this history, except himself, knew as yet whether Reginald Burton was good or bad. But one thing is certain, that there were good intentions in his mind when he startled Dr Maurice with this extraordinary tale. He had a very busy morning, driving from place to place in his hansom, giving up so many hours of his day without much complaint. He had expected Maurice to know what the papers would have told him, had he been less overwhelmed with the event itself of which they gave so strange a version, and he had intended to have a friendly consultation with him about Mrs Drummond's means of living, and what was to be done for her. Something must be done for her, there was no doubt about that. She could not be allowed to starve. She was his own cousin, once Helen Burton; and, no doubt, by this time she had found out her great mistake. It must not be supposed that this thought brought with it any lingering fondness of recollection, any touch of the old love with which he himself had once looked upon her. It would have been highly improper had it done anything of the kind. He had a Mrs Burton of his own, who of course possessed his entire affections, and he was not a man to indulge in any illegitimate emotion. But still he had been thinking much of Helen since this bewildering event occurred. It was an event which had taken him quite by surprise. He did not understand it. He felt that he himself could never be in such despair, could never take 'a step so rash'—the only step a man could take which left no room for repentance. It had been providential, no doubt, for some things. But Helen had been in his mind since ever he had time to think. There was a little glitter in his eye, a little complacent curl about the corners of his mouth, as he thought of her, and her destitute condition, and her helplessness. What a mistake she had made! She had chosen a wretched painter, without a penny, instead of himself. And this was what it had come to. Now at least she must have found out what a fool she had been. But yet he intended to be good to her in his way. He vowed to himself, with perhaps some secret compunction in the depths of his heart, that if she would let him he would be very good to her. Nor was Helen the only person to whom he intended to be good. He went to the Haldanes as well, with kindest sympathy and offers of help. 'Perhaps you may think I was to blame in recommending such an investment of your money?' he said to Stephen, with that blunt honesty which charms so many people. 'But my first thought was of you when I heard of the crash. I wish I had bitten my tongue out sooner than recommended it. The first people who came into my head were my cousin Helen and you.'

Dismay and trouble were in the Haldanes' little house. They had not recovered from the shock. They were like three ghosts—each endeavouring to hide the blackness from each other which had fallen upon their souls.—Miss Jane and her mother, however, had begun to get a little relief in talking over the great misery which had fallen upon them. They had filled the room with newspapers, in which they devoured every scrap of news which bore on that one subject. They sat apart in a corner and read them to each other, while Stephen closed his poor sad eyes and withdrew into himself. It was the only retirement he had, his only way of escape from the monotonous details of their family life, and the constant presence of his nurses and attendants. This man had such attendants—unwearying, uncomplaining, always ready whatever he wanted, giving up their lives to his service—as few men have; and yet there were moments when he would have given the world to be free of them,—now and then, for half an hour, to be able to be alone. He had been sitting thus in his oratory, his place of retirement having shut his doors, and gone into his chamber by that single action of closing his eyes, when Mr Burton came in. The women had been reading those papers to him till he had called to them to stop. They had made his heart sore, as our hearts are being made sore now by tales of wrong and misery which we cannot help, cannot stop, can do nothing but weep for, or listen to with hearts that burn and bleed. Stephen Haldane's heart was so—it was sore, quivering with the stroke it had sustained, feeling as if it would burst out of his breast. People say that much invoked and described organ is good only for tough physical uses, and knows no sentiment; but surely such people have never had a *sore heart*.

Poor Stephen's heart was sore: he could feel the great wound in it through which the life-blood stole. Yesterday he had been stupefied. To-day he had begun to wonder why, if a sacrifice was needed, it should not have been him? He who was good for nothing, a burden on the earth; and not Robert, the kindest, truest—God bless him! yes, God bless him down yonder at the bottom of the river, down with Dives in a deeper depth if that might be—anywhere, everywhere, even in hell or purgatory, God bless him! this was what his friend said, not afraid. And the women in the corner, in the mean while, read all the details, every one—about the dragging of the river, about the missing books, about Mr Golden, who had been so wronged. Mrs Haldane believed it every word, having a dread of human nature and a great confidence in the newspapers; but Miss Jane was tormented with an independent opinion, and hesitated and could not believe. It had almost distracted their attention from the fact which there could be no question about, which all knew for certain—their own ruin. Rivers's had stopped payment, whoever was in fault, and everything this family had—their capital, their

income, everything was gone. It had stunned them all the first day, but now they were beginning to call together their forces and live again; and when Mr Burton made the little sympathetic speech above recorded it went to their hearts.

'I am sure it is very kind, very kind of you to say so,' said Mrs Haldane. 'We never thought of blaming—you.'

'I don't go so far as that,' said Miss Jane. 'I always speak my mind. I blame everybody, mother; one for one thing, one for another. There is nobody that has taken thought for Stephen, not one. Stephen ought to have been considered, and that he was not able to move about and see to things for himself like other men.'

'It is very true, it is very true!' said Mr Burton, sighing. He shook his head, and he made a little movement of his hand, as if deprecating blame. He held up his hat with the mourning band upon it, and looked as if he might have wept. 'When you consider all that has happened,' he said in a low tone of apology. 'Some who have been in fault have paid for it dearly, at least——'

It was Stephen's voice which broke in upon this apology, in a tone as different as could be imagined—high-pitched, almost harsh. When he was the popular minister of Ormond Street Chapel it was one of the standing remarks made by his people to strangers, 'Has not he a beautiful voice?' But at this moment all the tunefulness and softness had gone out of it. 'Mr Burton,' he said, 'what do you mean to do to vindicate Drummond? It seems to me that *that* comes first.'

'To vindicate Drummond!' Mr Burton looked up with a sudden start, and then he added hurriedly, with an impetuosity which secured the two women to his side, 'Haldane, you are too good for this world. Don't let us speak of Drummond. I will forgive him—if I can.'

'How much have you to forgive him?' said the preacher. Once more, how much? By this time Mr Burton felt that he had a right to be angry with the question.

'How much?' he said; 'really I don't feel it necessary to go into my own business affairs with everybody who has a curiosity to know. I am willing to allow that my losses are as nothing to yours. Pray don't let us go into this question, for I don't want to lose my temper. I came to offer any assistance that was in my power—to you.'

'Oh, Mr Burton, Stephen is infatuated about that miserable man,' said the mother; 'he cannot see harm in him; and even now, when he has taken his own life and proved himself to be——'

'Stephen has a right to stand up for his friend,' said Miss Jane. 'If I had time I would stand up for him too; but Stephen's comfort has to be thought of first. Mr Burton, the best assistance you could give us would be to get me something to do. I can't be a governess, and needlework does not pay; neither does teaching, for that matter, even if I could do it. I am a good housekeeper, though I say it. I can keep accounts with anybody. I am not a bad cook even. And I'm past forty, and never was pretty in my life, so that I don't see it matters whether I am a woman or a man. I don't care what I do or where I go, so long as I can earn some money. Can you help me to that? Don't groan, Stephen; do you think I mind it? and don't you smile, Mr Burton. I am in earnest for my part.'

Stephen had groaned in his helplessness. Mr Burton smiled in his superiority, in his amused politeness of contempt for the plain woman past forty. 'We can't let you say that,' he answered jocosely, with a look at her which reminded Miss Jane that she was a woman after all, and filled her with suppressed fury. But what did such covert insult matter? It did not harm her; and the man who sneered at her homeliness might help her to work for her brother, which was the actual matter in hand.

'It is very difficult to know of such situations for ladies,' said Mr Burton. 'If anything should turn up, of course—but I fear it would not do to depend upon that.'

'Stephen has his pension from the chapel,' said Miss Jane. She was not delicate about these items, but stated her case loudly and plainly, without even considering what Stephen's feelings might be. 'It was to last for five years, and nearly three of them are gone; and he has fifty pounds a year for the Magazine—that is not much Mr Burton, for all the trouble; they might increase that. And mother and I are trying to let the house furnished, which would always be something. We could remove into lodgings, and if nothing more is to be got, of course we must do upon what we have.'

Here Mr Burton cast a look upon the invalid who was surrounded by so many contrivances of comfort. It was a compassionate glance, but it stung poor Stephen. 'Don't think of me,' he said hoarsely; 'my wants, though I look such a burden upon everybody, are not many after all. Don't think of me.'

'We could do with what we have,' Miss Jane went on—she was so practical, she rode over her brother's susceptibilities and ignored them, which perhaps was the best thing that could have been done—'if you could help us with a tenant for our house, Mr Burton, or get the Magazine committee to give him a little more than fifty pounds. The work it is! what with writing—and I am sure he writes half of it himself—and reading those odious manuscripts which ruin his eyes, and correcting proofs, and all that. It is a shame that he has only fifty pounds——'

'But he need not take so much trouble unless he likes, Jane,' said Mrs Haldane, shaking her head. 'I liked it as it was.'

'Never mind, mother; Stephen knows best, and it is him that we have got to consider. Now, Mr Burton, here is what you can do for us—I should not have asked anything, but since you have offered, I suppose you mean it—something for me to do, or some one to take the house, or a little more money for the Magazine. Then we could do. I don't like anything that is vague. I suppose you prefer that I should tell you plain?'

'To be sure,' said Mr Burton; and he smiled, looking at her with that mixture of contemptuous amusement and dislike with which a plain middle-aged woman so often inspires a vulgar-minded man. That the women who want to work are always old hags, was one of the articles of his creed; and here was an illustration. Miss Jane troubled herself very little about his amusement or his contempt. She did not much believe in his good-will. But if he did mean it, why, it was best to take advantage of his offer. This was her practical view of the subject. Mr Burton turned from her to Stephen, who had taken no part in the talk. Necessity had taught to the sick man its stern philosophy. He had to listen to such discussions twenty times in a day, and he had steeled his heart to hear them, and make no sign.

'What would you say to life in the country?' he said. 'The little help I came to offer in these sad circumstances is not in any of the ways Miss Jane suggests. I don't know anybody that wants to take just this kind of house:' and he glanced round at it with a smile. He to know a possible tenant for such a nutshell! 'And I don't know any situation that would suit your sister, though I am sure she would be invaluable. My father-in-law is the man to speak about the Magazine business. Possibly he could manage that. But what I would offer you if you like, would be a lodging in the country. I have a house down at Dura, which is of no use to me. There is good air and a garden, and all that. You are as welcome as possible if you like to come.'

'A house in the country,' said Mrs Haldane. 'Oh, my boy! Oh, Mr Burton! he might get well there.'

Poor soul! it was her delusion that Stephen was to get well. She took up this new hope with eyes which, old as they were, flashed out with brightness and consolation. 'What will all our losses matter if Stephen gets well?' she went on, beginning to cry. And Miss Jane rose up hastily and went away with a tremulous harshness, shutting her lips up tight, to the other side of the room, to get her work, which she had been neglecting. Miss Jane was like a man in this, that she could not bear tears. She set her face against them, holding herself in, lest she too might have been tempted to join. Of all the subjects of discussion in this world, Stephen's recovery was the only one she could not bear; for she loved her brother like a poet, like a starved and frozen woman who has had but one love in her life.

The old mother was more manageable to Mr Burton's mind than Miss Jane. Her tears and gratitude restored him to what he felt was his proper place,—that of a benefactor and guardian angel. He sat for half an hour longer, and told Mrs Haldane all about the favour he was willing to confer. 'It is close to the gates of my own house, but you must not think that will be an annoyance to us,' he said. 'On the contrary, I don't mean to tell my father-in-law till he sees you there. It will be a pleasant surprise for him. He has always taken so much interest in Haldane. Don't say anything, I beg. I am very glad you should have it, and I hope it will make you feel this dreadful calamity less. Ah yes; it is wretched for us; but what must it be for my poor cousin? I am going to see her now.'

'I don't know her,' said Mrs Haldane. 'She has called at the door to ask for Stephen, very regular. That I suppose was because of the friendship between——but I have only seen her once or twice on a formal call. If all is true that I hear, she will take it hard, being a proud woman. Oh! pride's sinful at the best of times; but in a time like this——'

'Mother!'

'Yes, Stephen, I know; and I am sure I would not for the world say a word against friends of yours; but——'

'I must go now,' said Mr Burton, rising. 'Good-bye, Haldane. I will write to you about the house, and when you can come in. On second thoughts, I will not prevent you from mentioning it to Mr Baldwin, if you please. He is sure to ask what you are going to do, and he will be glad to know.'

He went out from Victoria Villas pleased with himself. He had been very good to these people, who really were nothing to him. He was not even a Dissenter, but a staunch Churchman, and had no sympathy for the sick minister. What was his motive, then? But it was his wife who made it her business to investigate his motives, and we may wait for the result of her examination. All this was easy enough. The kindness he had offered was one which would cost him little, and he had not suffered in this interview as he had done in that which preceded it. But now he had occasion for all his strength; now came the tug of war, the real strain. He was going to see Helen. She had been but three days a widow, and no doubt would be in the depth of that darkness which is the recognized accompaniment of grief. Would she see him? Could she have seen the papers, or heard any echo of their news? On this point he was nervous. Before he went to St Mary's Road, though it was close at hand, he went to the nearest hotel, and had a glass of wine and a biscuit. For such a visit he required all his strength.

But these precautions were unnecessary. The shutters were all closed in St Mary's Road. The lilacs were waving their plummy fragrant branches over a door which no one entered. Mrs Drummond was at home, but saw no one. Even when the maid carried his message to her, the answer was that she could see no one, that she was quite well, and required nothing. 'Not even the clergyman, sir,' said the maid. 'He's been, but she would not see him. She is as white as my apron, and her poor hands you could see the light through 'em. We all think as she'll die too.'

'Does she read the papers?' said Mr Burton anxiously. He was relieved when the woman said 'No.' He gave her half-a-crown, and bade her admit none to the house till he came again. Rebecca promised and curtsied, and went back to the kitchen to finish reading that article in the *Daily Semaphore*. The fact that it was 'master' who was there called 'this unfortunate man' and 'this unhappy wretch,' gave the strongest zest to it. 'La! to think he could have had all that on his mind,' they said to each other. George was the only one who considered it might be 'a made-up story,' and he was believed to say so more from 'contrariness,' and a desire to set up for superior wisdom, than because he had any real doubt on the subject. 'A person may *say* a thing, but I never heard of one yet as would go for to put it in print, if it wasn't true,' was Rebecca's comment. 'I'm sorry for poor master, all the same,' said Jane the housemaid, who was tender-hearted, and who had put on an old black gown of her own accord. The servants were not to get mourning, which was something unheard of; and they had all received notice, and, as soon as Mrs Drummond was able to move, were to go away.

For that matter, Helen was able to move then—able to go to the end of the earth, as she felt with a certain horror of herself. It is so natural to suppose that physical weakness should come in the train of grief; but often it does not, and the elastic delicate strength of Helen's frame resisted all the influences of her sorrow. She scarcely ate at all; she slept little; the world had grown to her one great sea of darkness and pain and desolation: and yet she could not lie down and die as she had thought she would, but felt such a current of feverish energy in all her veins as she had never felt before. She could have done anything—laboured, travelled, worked with her hands, fought even, not like a man, but like twenty men. She was conscious of this, and it grieved and horrified her. She felt as a woman brought up in conventional proprieties would naturally feel, that her health ought to have been affected, that her strength should have failed her. But it had not done so. Her grief inflamed her rather, and set her heart on fire. Even now, in these early days, when custom decreed that she ought to be incapable of exertion, 'keeping her bed,' she felt herself in possession of a very flood of energy and excited strength. She was miserable, but she was not weak. She shut herself up in the darkened house all day, but half the night would walk about in her garden, in her despair, trying to tame down the wild life which had come with calamity. Poor little Norah crept about everywhere after her, and lay watching with great wide-open eyes, through the silvery half-darkness of the summer night, till she should come to bed. But Norah was not old enough to understand her mother, and was herself half frightened by this extraordinary change in her, which affected the child's imagination more than the simple disappearance of her father did, though she wept and longed for him with a dreary sense that unless he came back life never could be as of old, and that he would never, never come back. But all the day long Mrs Drummond sat in her darkened room, and 'was not able to see any one.' She endured the vigil, and would have done so, if she had died of it. That was what was called 'proper respect:' it was called the conventional necessity of the moment. Mr Burton called again and again, but it was more than a fortnight before he was admitted. And in the mean time he too had certain preparations to go through.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr Burton was a man who was accustomed in his own house to have, in a great degree, his own way; but this was not because his wife was disinclined to hold, or incapable of forming, an opinion of her own. On the contrary, it was because he was rather afraid of her than otherwise, and thought twice before he promulgated any sentiments or started any plan which was likely to be in opposition to hers. But he had neither consulted her, nor, indeed, thought much of what she would say, in the sudden proposal he had made to the Haldanes. He was not a hasty man; but Dr Maurice's indignation had made an impression upon him, and he had felt all at once that in going to the Haldanes and to Helen, he must not, if he would preserve his own character, go with merely empty sympathy, but must show practically his pity for them. It was perhaps the only time in his life that he had acted upon a hasty idea without taking time to consider; and a chill doubt, as to what Clara would say, was in his mind as he turned his face homewards. Dura was about twenty miles from town, in the heart of one of the leafiest of English counties; the station was a mile and a half from the great house, half of which distance, however, was avenue; and Mr Burton's phaeton, with the two greys—horses which matched to a hair, and were not equalled in the stables of any potentate in the county—was waiting for him when the train arrived. He liked to drive home in this glorious way, rousing the village folks and acting as a timepiece for them, just as he liked the great dinner-bell, which the old Harcourts sounded only on great occasions, to be rung every day, letting the whole neighbourhood know that their local lord, their superior, the master of the great house, was going to dinner. He liked the thought that his return was an event in the place almost justifying the erection of a standard, as it was erected in a royal castle not very far off, when the sovereign went and came. Our rich man had not gone so far as yet, but he would have liked it, and felt it natural. The village of Dura was like a collection of beads threaded on the long white thread of road which ran from the station to the house—and occupied the greater part of the space, with single houses straggling at either end, and a cluster in the middle. The straggling houses at the end next the station were white villas, built for people whose business was in town, and who came home to dinner by the same train which brought Mr Burton, though their arrival was less imposing; but where the clump of dwelling-places thickened, the houses toned down into old-fashioned, deeply-lichened brick, with here and there a thatched roof to deepen, or a white-washed gable to relieve, the composition. At the end nearest the great house the village made a respectful pause, and turned off along a slanting path, which showed the tower of the church behind over the trees. The rectory, however, a pretty house buried in shrubberies, fronted the high road with modest confidence; and opposite it was another dwelling-place, in front of which Mr Burton drew up his horses for a moment, inspecting it with a careful and anxious eye. His heart beat a little quicker as he looked. His own gate was in sight, and these were the very grounds of Dura House, into which the large walled garden of this one intruded like a square wedge. In front there were no shrubberies, no garden, nothing to divide it from the road. A double row of pollard limes—one on the edge of the foot-path, one close to the house—indicated and shaded, but did not separate it from the common way. The second row of limes was level with the fence of the Dura grounds, and one row of white flagstones lay between them and the two white steps, the green door, and shining brass knocker of the Gatehouse. It was a house which had been built in the reign of the first George, of red brick, with a great many windows, three-storied, and crowned by a pediment, with that curious mixture of the useful and (supposed) ornamental, which by this time has come to look almost picturesque by reason of age. It had been built for the mother of one of the old Harcourts, a good woman who had been born the Rector's daughter of the place, and loved it and its vicinity, and the sight of its comings and goings. This was the origin of the Gatehouse; but since the days of Mrs Dunstable Harcourt it had rarely been inhabited by any of the family, and had been a trouble more than an advantage to them. It was too near the hall to be inhabited by strangers, and people do not always like to establish their own poor relations and dependents at their very gates. As the Harcourts dwindled and money became important to them, they let it at a small rate to a maiden household, two or three old ladies of limited means, and blood as blue as their own. And when Dura ceased, except on county maps, to be Harcourt-Dura, and passed into the hands of the rich merchant, he, too, found the Gatehouse a nuisance. There had been talk of pulling it down, but that would have been waste; and there had been attempts made to let it to 'a suitable tenant,' but no suitable tenant had been found. Genteel old ladies of blue blood had not found the vicinity of the Burtons a comfort to them as they did that of the Harcourts. And there it stood empty, echoing, void, a place where the homeless might be sheltered. Did Mr Burton's heart glow with benevolent warmth as he paused, drawing up his greys, and looked at it, with all its windows twinkling in the sun? To one of these windows a woman came forward at the sound of his pause, and, putting her face close to the small pane, looked out at him wondering. He gave her a nod, and sighed; and then flourished his whip, and the greys flew on. In another moment they had turned into the avenue and went dashing up the gentle ascent. It was a pretty avenue, though the trees were not so old as most of the Dura trees. The sunset gleamed through it, slanting down under the lowest branches, scattering the brown mossy undergrowth with lumps of gold. A little pleasant tricky wind shook the branches and dashed little mimic showers of

rain in the master's face: for it had been raining in the afternoon, and the air was fresh and full of a hundred nameless odours; but Mr Burton gave forth another big sigh before he reached the house. He was a little afraid of what his wife would say, and he was afraid of what he had done.

He did not say anything about it, however, till dinner was over. The most propitious moment seemed that gentle hour of dessert, when the inner man is strengthened and comforted, and there is time to dally over the poetic part of the meal—not that either of the Burtons were poetical. They were alone, not even the children being with them, for Mrs Burton disapproved of children coming to dessert; but all the same, she was beautifully dressed; he liked it, and so did she. She made very little difference in this particular between her most imposing dinner parties and those evenings which she spent *tête-à-tête* with her husband. When her aunts, who had old-fashioned ideas about extravagance, remonstrated with her, she defended herself, saying she could afford it, and he liked to see her well dressed. Mr Burton hated to have any scrap of capital unemployed; and the only interest you could get from your jewels was the pleasure of wearing them, and seeing them worn, he said. So Mrs Burton dined with her husband in a costume which a French lady of fashion would have considered appropriate to a ball or royal reception, with naked shoulders and arms, and lace and ornaments. Madame la Duchesse might have thought it much too fine, but Mrs Burton did not. She was a pale little woman, small and thin, but not without beauty. Her hair was not very abundant, but it was exquisitely smooth and neat. Her uncovered shoulders were white, and her arms round and well-formed; and she had clear blue eyes, so much brighter than anybody expected, that they took the world by surprise: they were cold in their expression, but they were full of intelligence, and a hundred times more vivid and striking than anything else about her, so that everybody observed and admired Mrs Burton's eyes.

'What has been going on to-day? What have you been doing?' she asked, when the servants went away. The question sounded affectionate, and showed at least that there was confidence between the husband and wife.

'Very much as usual,' Mr Burton said, with colloquial ease; and then he stopped and cleared his throat. 'But for my own part I have done something rather foolish,' he said, with an almost imperceptible tremor in his voice.

'Indeed?' She gave a quick glance up at him; but she was not excited, and went on calmly eating her strawberries. He was not the kind of man of whose foolish actions a wife is afraid.

'I have been to see the Haldanes to-day,' he said, once more clearing his throat; 'and I have been to Helen Drummond's, but did not see her. The one, of course, I did out of regard for your father; the other—I was so distressed by the sight of that poor fellow in his helplessness, that I acted on impulse, Clara. I know it's a foolish thing to do. I said to myself, here are two families cast out of house and home, and there is the Gatehouse——'

'The Gatehouse!'

'Yes, I was afraid you would be startled; but reflect a moment: it is of no use to us. We have got nobody to occupy it. You know, indeed, how alarmed you were when your aunt Louisa took a fancy to it; and I have tried for a tenant in vain. Then, on the other hand, one cannot but be sorry for these poor people. Helen is my cousin; she has no nearer friend than I am. And your father is so much interested in the Haldanes——'

'I don't quite understand,' said Mrs Burton, with undisturbed composure; 'my father's interest in the Haldanes has nothing to do with the Gatehouse. Are they to live there?'

'That was what I thought,' said her husband, 'but not, of course, if you have any serious dislike to it—not if you decidedly object——'

'Why should I decidedly object?' she said. 'I should if you were bringing them to live with me; but otherwise——It is not at all suitable—they will not be happy there. It will be a great nuisance to us. As it is, strangers rather admire it—it looks old-fashioned and pleasant; but if they made a squalid place of it, dirty windows, and cooking all over the house——'

'So far as *my* cousin is concerned, you could have nothing of that kind to fear,' said Mr Burton, ceasing to be apologetic. He put a slight emphasis on the word *my*; perhaps upon this point he would not have been sorry to provoke his wife, but Clara Burton would not gratify her husband by any show of jealousy. She was not jealous, she was thinking solely of appearances, and of the possible decadence of the Gatehouse.

'Besides, Susan must stay,' he continued, after a pause; 'she must remain in charge; the house must be kept as it ought to be. If that is your only objection, Clara——'

'I have made no objection at all,' said Mrs Burton; and then she broke into a dry little laugh. 'What a curious establishment it will be—an old broken-down nurserymaid, a Dissenting minister, and your cousin! Mr Burton, will she like it? I cannot say that I should feel proud if it were offered to me.'

His face flushed a little. He was not anxious himself to spare Helen's feelings. If he had found an opportunity, it would have been agreeable to him to remind her that she had made a mistake; but she was his own relation, and instinct prompted him to protect her from his wife.

'Helen is too poor to allow herself to think whether she likes it or not,' he said.

His wife gave a sharp glance at him across the table. What did he mean? Did he intend to be kind, or to insult the desolate woman? Clara asked herself the question as a philosophical question, not because she cared.

'And is your cousin willing to accept it from you, after—that story?' she said.

'What story? You mean about her husband. It is not my story. I have nothing to do with it; and even if I had, surely it is the man who does wrong, not the man who tells it, that should have the blame; besides, she does not know.'

'Ah, that is the safest,' said Clara. 'I think it is a very strange story, Mr Burton. It may be true, but it is not like the truth.'

'I have nothing to do with it,' he exclaimed. He spoke hotly, with a swelling of the veins on his temples. 'There are points of view in which his death was very providential,' he said.

And once more Clara gave him a sharp glance.

'It was the angel who watches over Mr Golden that provided the boat, no doubt,' she answered, with a contraction of her lips; then fell back into the former topic with perfect calm. 'I should insist upon the house being kept clean and nice,' she said, as she rose to go away.

'Surely—surely; and you may tell your father when you write, that poor Haldane is so far provided for.' He got up to open the door for her, and, detaining her for a moment, stooped down and kissed her forehead. 'I am so much obliged to you, Clara, for consenting so kindly,' he said.

A faint little cold smile came upon her face. She had been his wife for a dozen years; but in her heart she was contemptuous of the kiss which he gave her, as if she had been a child, as a reward for her acquiescence. It is to be supposed that she loved him after her fashion. She had married him of her free will, and had never quarrelled with him once in all their married life. But yet had he known how his kiss was received, the sting would have penetrated even through the tough covering which protected Reginald Burton's *amour propre*, if not his heart. Mrs Burton went away into the great drawing-room, where her children, dressed like little princes in a comedy, were waiting for her. The Harcourts in the old days, had made a much smaller room their family centre; but the Burtons always used the great drawing-room, and lived, as it were, in state from one year's end to another. Here Clara Burton dwelt—a little anonymous spirit, known to none even of her nearest friends. They were all puzzled by her 'ways,' and by the blank many-sided surface like a prism which she presented to them, refusing to be influenced by any. She did not know any more about herself than the others did. Outside she was all glitter and splendour; nobody dressed so well, nobody had such jewels, or such carriages, or such horses in all the county. She used every day, and in her homeliest moments, things which even princes reserve for their best. Mrs Burton made it a boast that she had no best things; she was the same always, herself—and not her guests or anything apart from herself—being the centre of life in her house and in all her arrangements. The dinner which the husband and wife had just eaten had been as varied and as dainty, as if twenty people had sat down to it. It was her principle throughout her life. And yet within herself the woman cared for none of these things. Another woman's dress or jewels was nothing to her. She was totally indifferent to the external advantages which everybody else believed her to be absorbed in. Clara was very worldly, her aunts said, holding up their hands aghast at her extravagance and costly habits; but the fact was, that Clara made all her splendours common, not out of love for them, but contempt for them: a thing which nobody suspected. It is only a cynical soul that could feel thus, and Mrs Burton's cynicism went very deep. She thought meanly of human nature, and did not believe much in goodness; but she seldom disapproved, and never condemned. She would smile and cast about in her mind (unawares) for the motive of any doubtful action, and generally

ended by finding out that it was 'very natural,' a sentence which procured her credit for large toleration and a most amiable disposition, but which sprang really from the cynical character of her mind. It did not seem to her worth while to censure or to sermonize. She did not believe in reformation; and incredulity was in her the twin-brother of despair; but not a tragical despair. She took it all very calmly, not feeling that it was worth while to be disturbed by it; and went on unconsciously tracking out the mean motives, the poor pretensions, the veiled selfishness of all around her. And she was not aware that she herself was any better, nor did she claim superiority—nay, she would even track her own impulses back to their root, and smile at them, though with a certain bitterness. But all this was so properly cloaked over that nobody suspected it. People gave her credit for wisdom because she generally believed the worst, and was so very often right; and they thought her tolerant because she would take pains to show how it was nature that was in fault, and not the culprit. No one suspected the terrible little cynic, pitiless and hopeless that she was in her heart.

And yet this woman was the mother of children, and had taught them their prayers, and was capable at that or any other moment of giving herself to be torn in pieces for them, as a matter of course, a thing which would not admit a possibility of doubt. She had thought of that in her many thinkings, had attempted to analyze her own love, and to fathom how much it was capable of. 'As much as a tiger or a bear would do for her cubs,' she had said to herself, with her usual smile. The strangest woman to sit veiled by Reginald Burton's fireside, and take the head of his table, and go to church with him in the richest, daintiest garments which money and skill could get for her! She was herself to some degree behind the scenes of her own nature; but even she could not always discriminate, down among the foundations of her being, which was false and which was true.

She went into the drawing-room, where her little Clara and Ned were waiting. Ned was thirteen, a year older than Norah Drummond. Mr Burton had determined that he would not be behind the cousin who refused him, nor allow her to suppose that he was pining for her love, so that his marriage had taken place earlier than Helen's. Ned was a big boy, very active, and not given to book-learning; but Clara, who was a year younger, was a meditative creature like her mother. The boy was standing outside the open window, throwing stones at the birds in the distant trees. Little Clara stood within watching him, and making her comments on the sport.

'Suppose you were to kill a poor little bird. Suppose one of the young ones—one of the baby ones—were to try and fly a little bit, and you were to hit it. Suppose the poor papa when he comes home——'

'Oh, that's enough of your supposes,' said the big boy. 'Suppose I were to eat *you*? But I don't want to. I don't think you would be nice.'

'Ned!' said a voice from behind Clara, which thrilled him through and through, and made the stones fall from his hands as if they had been suddenly paralyzed, and were unable to grasp anything. 'I know it is natural to boys to be cruel, but I had rather not have it under my own eyes.'

'Cruel!' cried Ned, with some discontent. 'A parcel of wretched sparrows and things that can't sing a note. They have no business in our trees. They ought to know what they would get.'

'Are boys always cruel, mamma?' said little Clara, laying hold upon her mother's dress. She was like a little princess herself, all lace and embroidery and blue ribbons and beautifulness. Mrs Burton made no answer. She did not even wait to see that her boy took no more shots at the birds. She drew a chair close to the window, and sat down; and as she took her seat she gave vent to a little fretful sigh. She was thinking of Helen, and was annoyed that she had actually no means of judging what were the motives that would move her should she come to Dura. It was difficult for her to understand simple ignorance and unsuspectingness, or to give them their proper place among the springs of human action. Her worst fault philosophically was that of ignoring these commonest influences of all.

'Mamma, you are thinking of something,' said little Clara. 'Why do you sigh, and why do you shake your head?'

'I have been trying to put together a puzzle,' said her mother, 'as you do sometimes; and I can't make it out.'

'Ah, a puzzle,' said Ned, coming in; 'they are not at all fun, mamma. That beastly dissected map Aunt Louisa gave me—by Jove! I should like to take the little pieces and shy them at the birds.'

'But, mamma,' said Clara, 'are you sure it is only that? I never saw you playing with toys.'

'I wonder if I ever did?' said Mrs Burton, with a little gleam of surprise. 'Do you remember going to London once, Clara,

and seeing your cousin, Norah Drummond? Should you like to have her here?'

'She was littler than me,' said Clara, promptly, 'though she was older. Papa told me. They lived in a funny little poky house. They had no carriages nor anything. She had never even tried to ride; fancy, mamma! When I told her I had a pony all to myself, she only stared. How different she would think it if she came here!'

Her mother looked at the child with a curious light in her cold blue eyes. She gave a little harsh laugh.

'If it were not that it is natural, and you cannot help it,' she said, 'I should like to whip you, my dear!'

CHAPTER XV.

Next morning the family at Dura paid a visit to the Gatehouse, to see all its capabilities, and arrange the changes which might be necessary. It was a bright morning after the rain, and they walked together down the dewy avenue, where the sunshine played through the network of leaves, and the refreshed earth sent up sweet odours. All was pleasant to sight and sound, and made a lightsome beginning to the working day. Mr Burton was pleased with himself and everything surrounding him. His children (he was very proud of his children) strolled along with their father and mother, and there was in Ned a precocious imitation of his own walk and way of holding himself which at once amused and flattered the genial papa. He was pleased by his boy's appreciation of his own charms of manner and appearance; and little Clara was like him, outwardly, at least, being of a larger mould than her mother. His influence was physically predominant in the family, and as for profounder influences these were not much visible as yet. Mrs Burton had a *toilette fraîche* of the costliest simplicity. Two or three dogs attended them on their walk—a handsome pointer and a wonderful hairy Skye, and the tiniest of little Maltese terriers, with a blue ribbon round its neck such as Clara had, of whose colours her dog was a repetition. When she made a rush now and then along the road, herself like a great white and blue butterfly, the dogs ran too, throwing up their noses in the air, till Ned, marching along in his knickerbockers, with his chest set out, and his head held up like his father's, whistled the bigger ones to his masculine side. It was quite a pretty picture this family procession; they were so well off, so perfectly supplied with everything that was pleasant and suitable, so happily above the world and its necessities. There was a look of wealth about them that might almost have seemed insolent to a poor man. The spectator felt sure that if fricasseed bank-notes had been good to eat, they must have had a little dish of that for breakfast. And the crown of all was that they were going to do a good action—to give shelter and help to the homeless. Many simple persons would have wept over the spectacle, had they known it, out of pure delight in so much goodness—if Mrs Burton, looking on with those clear cold blue eyes of hers, had not thrown upon the matter something of a clearer light.

The inspection was satisfactory enough, revealing space sufficient to have accommodated twice as many people. And Mr Burton found it amusing too; for Susan, who was in charge, was very suspicious of their motives, and anxious to secure that she should not be put upon in any arrangement that might be made. There was a large, quaint old drawing-room, with five glimmering windows—three fronting to the road and two to the garden—not French sashes, cut down to the ground, but old-fashioned English windows with a sill to them, and a solid piece of wall underneath. The chimney had a high wooden mantelpiece with a little square of mirror let in, too high up for any purpose but that of giving a glimmer of reflection. The carpet, which was very much worn, was partially covered by a tightly strained white cloth, as if the room had been prepared for dancing. The furniture was very thin in the legs and angular in its proportions; some of the chairs were ebony, with bands of faded gilding and covers of minute old embroidery, into which whole lives had been worked. The curtains were of old-fashioned, big-patterned chintz—like that we call Cretonne now-a-days—with brown linings. Everything was very old and worn, but clean and carefully mended. The looker-on felt it possible that the entrance of a stranger might so break the spell that all might crumble into dust at a touch. But yet there was a quaint, old-fashioned elegance—not old enough to be antique, but yet getting venerable—about the silent old house. Mr Burton was of opinion that it would be better with new red curtains and some plain, solid mahogany; but, if the things would do, considered that it was unnecessary to incur further expense. When all the necessary arrangements had been settled upon, the family party went on to the railway station. This was a very frequent custom with them. Mr Burton liked to come home in state—to notify his arrival by means of the high-stepping greys and the commotion they made, to his subjects; but he was quite willing to leave in the morning with graceful humility and that exhibition of family affection which brings even the highest potentates to a level with common men. When he arrived with his wife and his children and his dogs at the station, it was touching to see the devotion with which the station-master and the porters and everybody about received the great man. The train seemed to have been made on purpose for him—to have come on purpose all the way out of the Midland Counties; the railway people ran all along its length as soon as it arrived to find a vacant carriage for their demigod. 'Here you are, sir!' cried a smiling porter. 'Here you are, sir!' echoed the station-master, rushing forward to open the door. The other porter, who was compelled by duty to stand at the little gate of exit and take the tickets, looked gloomily upon the active service of his brethren, but identified himself with their devotion by words at least, since nothing else was left him. 'What d'ye mean by being late?' he cried to the guard. 'A train didn't ought to be late as takes gentlemen to town for business. You're as slow, you are, as if you was the ladies' express.'

Mr Burton laughed as he passed, and gladness stole into the porter's soul. Oh, magical power of wealth! when it laughs, the world grows glad. To go into the grimy world of business, and be rubbed against in the streets by men who did him

no homage, must be hard upon such a man, after the royal calm of the morning and all its pleasant circumstances. It was after just such another morning that he went again to St Mary's Road, and was admitted to see his cousin. She had shut herself up for a fortnight obstinately. She would have done so for a year, in defiance of herself and of nature, had it been possible, that all the world might know that Robert had 'the respect' due to him. She would not have deprived him of one day, one fold of crape, one imbecility of grief, of her own will. She would have been ill, if she could, to do him honour. All this was quite independent of that misery of which the world could know nothing, which was deep as the sea in her own heart. That must last let her do what she would. But she would fain have given to her husband the outside too. The fortnight, however, was all that poor Helen could give. Already stern need was coming in, and the creditors, to whom everything she had belonged. When Mr Burton was admitted, the man had begun to make an inventory of the furniture. The pretty drawing-room was already dismantled, the plants all removed from the conservatory; the canvases were stacked against the wall in poor Robert's studio, and a picture-dealer was there valuing them. They were of considerable value now—more than they would have been had it still been possible that they should be finished. People who were making collections of modern pictures would buy them readily as the only 'Drummond' now to be had. Mr Burton went and looked at the pictures, and pointed out one that he would like to buy. His feelings were not very delicate, but yet it struck a certain chill upon him to go into that room. Poor Drummond himself was lying at the bottom of the river—he could not reproach any one, even allowing that it was not all his own fault. And yet—the studio was unpleasant to Mr Burton. It affected his nerves; and in anticipation of his interview with Helen he wanted all his strength.

But Helen received him very gently, more so than he could have hoped. She had not seen the papers. The world and its interests had gone away from her. She had read nothing but the good books which she felt it was right to read during her seclusion. She was unaware of all that had happened, unsuspecting, did not even care. It had never occurred to her to think of dishonour as possible. All calamity was for her concentrated in the one which had happened, which had left her nothing more to fear. She was seated in a very small room opening on the garden, which had once been appropriated to Norah and her playthings. She was very pale, with the white rim of her cap close round her face, and her hair concealed. Norah was there too, seated close to her mother, giving her what support she could with instinctive faithfulness. Mr Burton was more overcome by the sight of them than he could have thought it possible to be. They were worse even than the studio. He faltered, he cleared his throat, he took Helen's hand and held it—then let it drop in a confused way. He was overcome, she thought, with natural emotion, with grief and pity. And it made her heart soft even to a man she loved so little. 'Thanks,' she murmured, as she sank down upon her chair. That tremor in his voice covered a multitude of sins.

'I have been here before,' he said.

'Yes, so I heard; it was very kind. Don't speak of *that*, please. I am not able to bear it, though it is kind, very kind of you.'

'Everybody is sorry for you, Helen,' he said, 'but I don't want to recall your grief to your mind——'

'Recall!' she said, with a kind of miserable smile. 'That was not what I meant; but—Reginald—my heart is too sore to bear talking. I—cannot speak, and—I would rather not cry—not just now.'

She had not called him Reginald before since they were boy and girl together; and that, and the piteous look she gave him, and her tremulous protest that she would rather not cry, gave the man such a twinge through his very soul as he had never felt before. He would have changed places at the moment with one of his own porters to get out of it—to escape from a position which he alone was aware of. Norah was crying without restraint. It was such a scene as a man in the very height of prosperity and comfort would hesitate to plunge into, even if there had not risen before him those ghosts in the newspapers which one day or other, if not now, Helen must find out.

'What I wanted to speak of was your own plans,' he said hastily, 'what you think of doing, and—if you will not think me impertinent—what you have to depend upon? I am your nearest relation, Helen, and it is right I should know.'

'If everything has to be given up, I suppose I shall have nothing,' she said faintly. 'There was my hundred a year settled upon me. The papers came the other day. Who must I give them to? I have nothing, I suppose.'

'If your hundred a year was settled on you, of course you have that, heaven be praised,' said Mr Burton, 'nobody can touch that. And, Helen, if you like to come back to the old neighbourhood, I have part of a house I could offer you. It is of no use to me. I can't let it; so you might be quite easy in your mind about that. And it is furnished after a sort; and it would be rent free.'

The tears which she had been restraining rushed to her eyes. 'How kind you are!' she said. 'Oh, I can't say anything, but

you are very, very kind.'

'Never mind about that. You used to speak as if you did not like the old neighbourhood——'

'Ah!' she said, 'that was when I cared. All neighbourhoods are the same to me now.'

'But you will get to care after a while,' he said. 'You will not always be as you are now.'

She shook her head with that faint little gleam of the painfulest smile. To such a suggestion she could make no answer. She did not believe her grief would ever lighten. She did not wish to feel differently. She had not even that terrible experience which teaches some that the broken heart must heal one way or other—mend of its wound, or at least have its wound skinned over; for she had never been quite stricken down to the ground before.

'Anyhow, you will think of it,' Mr Burton said in a soothing tone. 'Norah, you would like to come and live in the country, where there was a nice large garden and plenty of room to run about. You must persuade your mother to come. I won't stay now to worry you, Helen, and besides, my time is precious; but you will let me do this much for you, I hope.'

She stood up in her black gown, which was so dismal and heavy, without any reflection of light in its dull blackness, and held out to him a hand which was doubly white by the contrast, and thin with fasting and watching. 'You are very kind,' she said again. 'If I ever was unjust to you, forgive me. I must have a home—for Norah; and I have nowhere—nowhere to go!'

'Then that is settled,' he said with eagerness. It was an infinite relief to him. Never in his life had he been so anxious to serve another. Was it because he had loved her once? because he was fond of her still? because she was his relation? His wife at that very moment was pondering on the matter, touching it as it were with a little sharp spear, which was not celestial like Ithuriel's. Being his wife, it would have been natural enough if some little impulse of jealousy had come across her, and moved her towards the theory that her husband did this out of love for his cousin. But Mrs Burton had not blood enough in her veins, and she had too clear an intelligence in her head, to be jealous. She came to such a very different conclusion, that I hesitate to repeat it; and she, too, half scared by the long journey she had taken, and her very imperfect knowledge of the way by which she had travelled, did not venture to put it into words. But the whisper at the bottom of her heart was, 'Remorse! Remorse!' Mrs Burton herself did not know for what, nor how far her husband was guilty towards his cousin.

But it was a relief to all parties when this interview was over. Mr Burton went away drawing a long breath. And Helen applied herself courageously to the work which was before her. She did not make any hardship to herself about those men who were taking the inventory. It had to be, and what was that—what was the loss of everything in comparison——The larger loss deadened her to the smaller ones, which is not always the case. She had her own and Norah's clothes to pack, some books, a few insignificant trifles which she was allowed to retain, and the three unfinished pictures, which indeed, had they not been given to her, she felt she could have stolen. The little blurred sketch from the easel, a trifling subject, meaning little, but bearing in its smeared colours the last handwriting of poor Robert's despair; and that wistful face looking up from the depths, up to the bit of blue sky far above and the one star. Was that the Dives he had thought of, the soul in pain so wistful, so sad, yet scarcely able to despair? It was like his letter, a sacred appeal to her not on this earth only, but beyond—an appeal which would outlast death and the grave. 'The door into hell,' she did not understand, but she knew it had something to do with her husband's last agony. These mournful relics were all she had to take with her into the changed world.

A woman cannot weep violently when she is at work. Tears may come into her eyes, tears may drop among the garments in which her past is still existing, but her movements to and fro, her occupations, stem the full tide and arrest it. Helen was quite calm. While Norah brought the things for her out of the drawers she talked to the child as ordinary people talk whose hearts are not broken. She had fallen into a certain stillness—a hush of feeling. It did her good to be astir. When the boxes were full and fastened she turned to her pictures, enveloping them carefully, protecting the edges with cushions of folded paper. Norah was still very busy in finding the cord for her, and holding the canvases in their place. The child had rummaged out a heap of old newspapers, with which the packing was being done. Suddenly she began to cry as she stood holding one in her hand.

'Oh, mamma!' she said, looking up with big eyes in Helen's face. Crying was not so rare in the house as to surprise her mother. She said—

'Hush, my darling!' and went on. But when she felt the paper thrust into her hand, Helen stopped short in her task and looked, not at it but at Norah. The tears were hanging on the child's cheeks, but she had stopped crying. She pointed to one column in the paper and watched her mother with eyes like those of Dives in the picture. Helen gave a cry when she looked at it, 'Ah!' as if some sharp blow had been given to her. It was the name, nothing but her husband's name, that had pierced her like a sudden dagger. But she read on, without doubting, without thinking. It was the article written two days before on the history of the painter Drummond, 'the wretched man,' who had furnished a text for a sermon to the *Daily Semaphore*.

Norah had read only a sentence at the beginning which she but partially understood. It was something unkind, something untrue about 'poor papa.' But she read her mother now instead, comprehending it by her looks. Helen went over the whole without drawing breath. It brought back the blood to her pale cheeks; it ran like a wild new life into every vein, into every nerve. She turned round in the twinkling of an eye, without a pause for thought, and put on the black bonnet with its overwhelming crape veil which had been brought to her that morning. She had not wanted it before. It was the first time in her life that she had required to look at the world through those folds of crape.

'May I come too, mamma?' said Norah softly. She did not know where they were going; but henceforward where her mother was there was the place for Norah, at home or abroad, sleeping or waking. The child clung to Helen's hand as they opened the familiar door, and went out once again—after a lifetime—into the once familiar, the changed and awful world. A summer evening, early June, the bloom newly off the lilacs, the first roses coming on the trees; the strange daylight dazzled them, the sound of passing voices buzzed and echoed as if they had been the centre of a crowd. Or rather, this was their effect upon Helen. Norah clinging to her hand, pressed close to her side, watched her, and thought of nothing more.

Dr Maurice was going to his solitary dinner. He had washed his hands and made himself daintily nice and tidy, as he always was; but he had not changed his morning coat. He was standing with his back against the writing-table in his library, looking up dreamily at poor Drummond's picture, and waiting for the sound of the bell which should summon him into the next room to his meal. When the door bell sounded instead impatience seized him.

'What fool can be coming now?' he said to himself, and turned round in time to see John's scared face peeping into the room before he introduced those two figures, those two with their dark black dresses, the one treading in the very steps of the other, moving with her movement. He gave a cry of surprise. He had not seen them since the day after Drummond's death. He had gone to inquire, and had left anxious kind messages, but he, too, had conventional ideas in his mind and had thought the widow 'would not be able' to see any one. Yet now she had come to him—

'Dr Maurice,' she said, with no other preliminary, coming forward to the table with her newspaper, holding out no hand, giving him no salutation, while Norah moved with her step for step, like a shadow. 'Dr Maurice, what does this mean?'

CHAPTER XVI.

I would not like to say what despairing thought Dr Maurice might have had about his dinner in the first moment when he turned round and saw Helen Drummond's pale face under her crape veil, but there were many thoughts on the subject in his household, and much searchings of heart. John had been aghast at the arrival of visitors, and especially of such visitors, at such a moment; but his feelings would not permit him to carry up dinner immediately, or to sound the bell, the note of warning.

'I canna do it, I canna do it—don't ask me,' he said, for John was a north-country-man, and when his heart was moved fell back upon his old idiom.

'Maybe the lady would eat a bit herself, poor soul,' the cook said in insinuating tones. 'I've known folks eat in a strange house, for the strangeness of it like, when they couldn't swallow a morsel in their own.'

'Don't ask me!' said John, and he seized a stray teapot and began to polish it in the trouble of his heart. There was silence in the kitchen for ten minutes at least, for the cook was a mild woman till driven to extremities; but to see fish growing into wool and potatoes to lead was more than any one could be expected to bear.

'Do you see that?' she said in despair, carrying the dish up to him, and thrusting it under his eyes. John threw down his teapot and fled. He went and sat on the stairs to be out of reach of her remonstrances. But the spectre of that fish went with him, and would not leave his sight; the half-hour chimed, the three-quarters—

'I canna stand this no longer!' John said in desperation, and rushing up to the dining-room, sounded the dinner-bell.

Its clang disturbed the little party in the next room who were so differently occupied. Helen was seated by the table with a pile of papers before her; her hands trembled as she turned from one to another, but her attention did not swerve. She was following through them every scrap that bore upon that one subject. Dr Maurice had procured them all for her. He had felt that one time or other she must know all, and that then her information must be complete. He himself was walking about the room with his hands in his pocket, now stopping to point out or explain something, now taking up a book, unsettled and unhappy, as a man generally looks when he has to wait, and has nothing to do. He had sought out a book for Norah, to the attractions of which the poor child had gradually yielded. At first she had stood close by her mother. But the contents of those papers were not for Norah's eye, and Helen herself had sent her away. She had put herself in the window, her natural place; the ruddy evening light streamed in upon her, and found out between the black of her dress and that of her hat, a gleam of brown hair, to which it gave double brightness by the contrast; and gradually she fell into her old attitude, her old absorption. Dr Maurice walked about the room, and pondered a hundred things. He would have given half he possessed for that fatherless child who sat reading in the light, and forgetting her childish share of sorrow. The mother in her mature beauty was little to him—but the child—a child like that! And she was not his. She was Robert Drummond's, who lay drowned at the bottom of the river, and whose very name was drowned too in those bitter waters of calumny and shame. Strange Providence that metes so unequally to one and to another. The man did not think that he too might have had a wife and children had he so chosen; but his heart hankered for this that was his neighbour's, and which no magic, not even any subtle spell of love or protecting tenderness, could ever make his own.

And Helen, almost unconscious of the presence of either, read through those papers which had been preserved for her. She read Golden's letter, and the comment upon it. She read the letter which Dr Maurice had written, contradicting those cruel assertions. She read the further comments upon that. How natural it was; how praiseworthy was the vehemence of friends in defence of the dead—and how entirely without proof! The newspaper pointed out with a cold distinctness, which looked like hatred to Helen, that the fact of the disappearance of the books told fatally against 'the unhappy man.' Why did he destroy those evidences which would no doubt have cleared him had he acted fairly and honestly? Day by day she traced the course of this controversy which had been going on while she had shut herself up in the darkness. It gleamed across her as she turned from one to another that this was why her energy had been preserved and her strength sustained. She had not broken down like other women, for this cause. God had kept her up for this. The discussion had gone on down to that very morning, when a little editorial note, appended to a short letter—one of the many which had come from all sorts of people in defence of the painter—had announced that such a controversy could no longer be carried on 'in these pages.' 'No doubt the friends of Mr Drummond will take further steps to prove the innocence of which they are so fully convinced,' it said, 'and it must be evident to all parties that the columns of a newspaper is not the place for a prolonged discussion on a personal subject.' Helen scarcely spoke while she read all these. She did not hear

the dinner-bell. The noise of the door when Dr Maurice rushed to it with threatening word and look, to John's confusion, scarcely moved her. 'Be quiet, dear,' she said unconsciously, when the doctor's voice in the hall, where he had fallen upon his servant, came faintly into her abstraction. 'You rascal! how dare you take such a liberty when you knew who was with me?' was what Dr Maurice was saying, with rage in his voice. But to Helen it seemed as if little Norah, forgetting the cloud of misery about her, had begun to talk more lightly than she ought. 'Oh, my child, be quiet,' she repeated; 'be quiet!' all her soul was absorbed in this. She had no room for any other thought.

Dr Maurice came back with a flush of anger on his face. 'These people would think it necessary to consider their miserable dishes if the last judgment were coming on,' he said. He was a kind man, and very sorry for his friend's widow. He would have given up much to help her; but perhaps he too was hungry, and the thought of the spoiled dishes increased his vehemence. She looked at him, putting back her veil with a blank look of absolute incomprehension. She had heard nothing, knew nothing. Comfort, and dinners, and servants, and all the paraphernalia of ordinary life, were a hundred miles away from her thoughts.

'I have read them all,' she said in a tone so low that he had to stoop to hear her. 'Oh, that I should have lost so much time in selfish grieving! I thought nothing more could happen after. Dr Maurice, do you know what I ought to do?'

'You!' he said. There was something piteous in her look of appeal. The pale face and the gleaming eyes, the helplessness and the energy, all struck him at a glance—a combination which he did not understand.

'Yes—me! You will say what can I do? I cannot tell the world what he was, as you have done. Thanks for that,' she said, holding out her hand to him. 'The wife cannot speak for her husband, and I cannot write to the papers. I am quite ignorant. Dr Maurice, tell me if you know. What can I do?'

Her gleam of wild indignation was gone. It had sunk before the controversy, the discussion which the newspapers would no longer continue. If poor Robert had met with no defenders, she would have felt herself inspired. But his friends had spoken, friends who could speak. And deep depression fell over her. 'Oh!' she said, clasping her hands, 'must we bear it? Is there nothing—nothing I can do?'

Again and again had he asked himself the same question. 'Mrs Drummond,' he said, 'you can do nothing; try and make up your mind to it. I hoped you might never know. A lady can do nothing in a matter of business. You feel yourself that you cannot write or speak. And what good would it do even if you could? I say that a more honourable man never existed. You could say, I know, a great deal more than that; but what does it matter without proof? If we could find out about those books——'

'He did not know anything about books,' said Helen; 'he could not even keep his own accounts—at least it was a trouble to him. Oh, you know that; how often have we—laughed——Oh, my God, my God!'

Laughed! The words brought the tears even to Dr Maurice's eyes. He put his hand on her arm and patted it softly, as if she had been a child. 'Poor soul! poor soul!' he said: the tears had got into his voice too, and all his own thoughts went out of his mind in the warmth of his sympathy. He was a cautious man, not disposed to commit himself; but the touch of such emotion overpowered all his defences. 'Look here, Mrs Drummond,' he said; 'I don't know what we may be able to do, but I promise you something shall be done—I give you my word. The shareholders are making a movement already, but so many of them are ruined, so many hesitate, as people say, to throw good money after the bad. I don't know why I should hesitate, I am sure. I have neither chick nor child.' He glanced at Norah as he spoke—at Norah lost in her book, with the light in her hair, and her outline clear against the window. But Helen did not notice, did not think what he could mean, being absorbed in her own thoughts. She watched him, notwithstanding, with dilating eyes. She saw all that at that moment she was capable of seeing in his face—the rising resolution that came with it, the flash of purpose. 'It ought to be done,' he said, 'even for justice. I will do it—for that—and for Robert's sake.'

She held out both her hands to him in the enthusiasm of her ignorance. 'Oh, God bless you! God reward you!' she said. It seemed to her as if she had accomplished all she had come for, and had cleared her husband's name. At least his friend had pledged himself to do it, and it seemed to Helen so easy. He had only to refute the lies which had been told; to prove how true, how honest, how tender, how good, incapable of hurting a fly; even how simple and ignorant of business, more ignorant almost than she was, he had been; a man who never had kept any books, not even his own accounts; who had a profession of his own, quite different, at which he worked; who had not been five times in the City in his life before he came connected with the Rivers's. After she had bestowed that blessing, it seemed to her almost as if she were making

too much of it, as if she had but to go herself and tell it all, and prove his whitest innocence. To go herself—but she did not know where.

Dr Maurice came down with a little tremulousness of excitement about him from the pinnacle of that resolution. He knew better what it was. Her simple notion of 'going and telling' resolved itself, in his mind, to an action before the law-courts, to briefs, and witnesses, and expenditure. But he was a man without chick or child; he was not ruined by Rivers's. The sum he had lost had been enough to give him an interest in the question, not enough to injure his powers of operation. And it was a question of justice, a matter which some man ought to take up. Nevertheless it was a great resolution to take. It would revolutionize his quiet life, and waste the substance which he applied, he knew, to many good uses. He felt a little shaken when he came down. And then—his dinner, the poor friendly unfortunate man!

'Let Norah come and eat something with me,' he said, 'the child must be tired. Come too and you shall have a chair to rest in, and we will not trouble you; and then I will see you home.'

'Ah!' Helen gave an unconscious cry at the word. But already, even in this one hour, she had learned the first hard lesson of grief, which is that it must not fatigue others with its eternal presence—that they who suffer most must be content often to suffer silently, and put on such smiles as are possible—the ghost must not appear at life's commonest board any more than at the banquet. It seemed like a dream when five minutes later she found herself seated in an easy-chair in Dr Maurice's dining-room, painfully swallowing some wine, while Norah sat at the table by him and shared his dinner. It was like a dream; twilight had begun to fall by this time, and the lamp was lighted on the table—a lamp which left whole acres of darkness all round in the long dim room. Helen sat and looked at the bright table and Norah's face, which turning to her companion began to grow bright too, unawares. A fortnight is a long age of trouble to a child. Norah's tears were still ready to come, but the bitterness was out of them. She was sad for sympathy now. And this change, the gleam of light, the smile of her old friend—his fond, half-mocking talk, felt like happiness come back. Her mother looked on from the shady corner where she was sitting, and understood it all. Robert's friend loved him; but was glad now to pass to other matters, to common life. And Robert's child loved him; but she was a child, and she was ready to reply to the first touch of that same dear life. Helen was growing wiser in her trouble. A little while ago she would have denounced this changeableness, and struggled against it. But now she understood and accepted what was out of her power to change.

And then in the pauses of his talk with Norah, which was sweet to him, Dr Maurice heard all their story—how the house was already in the creditors' hands, how they had prepared all their scanty possessions to go away, and how Mr Burton had been very kind. Helen had not associated him in any way with the assault on her husband's memory. She spoke of him with a half gratitude which filled the doctor with suppressed fury. He had been very kind—he had offered her a house.

'I thought you disliked Dura,' he said with an impatience which he could not restrain.

'And so I did,' she answered drearily, 'as long as I could. It does not matter now.'

'Then you will still go?'

'Still? Oh, yes; where should we go else? The whole world is the same to us now,' said Helen. 'And Norah will be happier in the country; it is good air.'

'Good air!' said Dr Maurice. 'Good heavens, what can you be thinking of? And the child will grow up without any one to teach her, without a—friend. What is to be done for her education? What is to be done—Mrs Drummond, I beg your pardon. I hope you will forgive me. I have got into a way of interfering and making myself ridiculous, but I did not mean _____'

'Nay,' said Helen gently, half because she felt so weary, half because there was a certain comfort in thinking that any one cared, 'I am not angry. I knew you would think of what is best for Norah. But, Dr Maurice, we shall be very poor.'

He did not make any reply; he was half ashamed of his vehemence, and yet withal he was unhappy at this new change. Was it not enough that he had lost Drummond, his oldest friend, but he must lose the child too, whom he had watched ever since she was born? He cast a glance round upon the great room, which might have held a dozen people, and in his mind surveyed the echoing chambers above, of which but one was occupied. And then he glanced at Norah's face, still bright, but slightly clouded over, beside him, and thought of the pretty picture she had made in the library seated against the window. Burton, who was their enemy, who had been the chief agent in bringing them to poverty, could give them a

home to shelter their houseless heads. And why could not he, who had neither chick nor child, who had a house so much too big for him, why could not he take them in? Just to have the child in the house, to see her now and then, to hear her voice on the stairs, or watch her running from room to room, would be all he should want. They could live there and harm nobody, and save their little pittance. This thought ran through his mind, and then he stopped and confounded Burton. But Burton had nothing to do with it. He had better have confounded the world, which would not permit him to offer shelter to his friend's widow. He gave a furtive glance at Helen in the shadow. He did not want Helen in his house. His friend's wife had never attracted him; and though he would have been the kindest of guardians to his friend's widow, still there was nothing in her that touched his heart. But he could not open his doors to her and say, 'Come.' He knew if he did so how the men would grin and the women whisper; how impertinent prophecies would flit about, or slanders much worse than impertinent. No, he could not do it; he could not have Norah by, to help on her education, to have a hand in her training, to make her a child of his own. He had no child. It was his lot to live alone and have no soft hand ever in his. All this was very ridiculous, for, as I have said before, Dr Maurice was very well off; he was not old nor bad-looking, and he might have married like other men. But then he did not want to marry. He wanted little Norah Drummond to be his child, and he wanted nothing more.

Helen leaned back in her chair without any thought of what was passing through his heart. That her child should have inspired a *grande passion* at twelve had never entered her mind, and she took his words in their simplicity and pondered over them. 'I can teach her myself,' she said with a tremor in her voice. This man was not her friend, she knew. He had no partial good opinion of her, such as one likes one's friends to have, but judged her on her merits, which few people are vain enough to put much trust in; and she thought that very likely he would not think her worthy of such a charge. 'I *have* taught her most of what she knows,' she added with a little more confidence. 'And then the great thing is, we shall be very poor.'

'Forgive me!' he said; 'don't say any more. I was unpardonably rash—impertinent—don't think of what I said.'

And then he ordered his carriage for them and sent them home. I do not know whether perhaps it did not occur to Helen as she drove back through the summer dusk to her dismantled house what a difference there was between their destitution and poverty and all the warm glow of comfort and ease which surrounded this lonely man. But there can be no doubt that Norah thought of it, who had taken in everything with her brown eyes, though she said little. While they were driving along in the luxurious smoothly-rolling brougham, the child crept close to her mother, clasping Helen's arm with both her hands. 'Oh, mamma,' she said, 'how strange it is that we should have lost everything and Dr Maurice nothing, that he should have that great house and this nice carriage, and us be driven away from St Mary's Road! What can God be thinking of, mamma?'

'Oh, Norah, my dear child, we have each other, and he has nobody,' said Helen; and in her heart there was a frenzy of triumph over this man who was so much better off than she was. The poor so often have that consolation; and sometimes it is not much of a consolation after all. But Helen felt it to the bottom of her heart as she drew her child to her, and felt the warm, soft clasp of hands, the round cheek against her own. Two desolate, lonely creatures in their black dresses—but two, and together; whereas Dr Maurice, in his wealth, in his strength, in what the world would have called his happiness, was but one.

CHAPTER XVII.

The pretty house in St Mary's Road—what a change had come upon it! There was a great painted board in front describing the desirable residence, with studio attached, which was to be let. The carpets were half taken up and laid in rolls along the floor, the chairs piled together, the costly, pretty furniture, so carefully chosen, the things which belonged to the painter's early life, and those which were the product of poor Drummond's wealth, all removed and jumbled together, and ticketed 'Lot 16,' 'Lot 20.' 'Lot 20' was the chair which had been Helen's chair for years—the one poor Robert had kissed. If she had known that, she would have spent her last shilling to buy it back out of the rude hands that turned it over. But even Helen only knew half of the tragedy which had suddenly enveloped her life. They threaded their way up-stairs to their bed-room through all those ghosts. It was still early; but what could they do down-stairs in the house which no longer retained a single feature of home? Helen put her child to bed, and then sat down by her, shading the poor little candle. It was scarcely quite dark even now. It is never dark in June. Through the open window there came the sound of voices, people walking about the streets after their work was over. There are so many who have only the streets to walk in, so many to whom St Mary's Road, with its lilacs and laburnums and pretty houses, was pleasant and fresh as if it had been in the depths of the country. Helen saw them from the window, coming and going, so often two, arm in arm, two who loitered and looked up at the lighted house, and spoke softly to each other, making their cheerful comments. The voices sounded mellow, the distant rattle of carriages was softened by the night, and a soft wind blew through the lilacs, and some stars looked wistfully out of the pale sky. Why are they so sad in summer, those lustrous stars? Helen looked out at them, and big tears fell softly out of her eyes. Oh, face of Dives looking up! Oh, true and kind and just and gentle soul! Must she not even think of him as in heaven, as hidden in God with the dead who depart in faith and peace, but gone elsewhere, banished for ever? The thought crossed her like an awful shadow, but did not sting. There are some depths of misery to which healthy nature refuses to descend, and this was one. Had she *felt* as many good people feel on this subject, and as she herself believed theoretically that she felt, I know what Helen would have done. She would have gone down to that river and joined him in his own way, wherever he was, choosing it so. No doubt, she would have been wrong. But she did not descend into that abyss. She kept by her faith in God instinctively, not by any doctrine. Did not God *know*? But even the edge of it, the shadow of the thought, was enough to chill her from head to foot. She stole in from the window, and sat down at the foot of the bed where Norah lay, and tried to think. She had thought there could be no future change, no difference one way or other; but since this very morning what changes there were!—her last confidence shattered, her last comfort thrust from her. Robert's good name! She sat quite silent for hours thinking it over while Norah slept. Sometimes for a moment it went nigh to make her mad. Of all frantic things in the world, there is nothing like that sense of impotence—to feel the wrong and to be unable to move against it. It woke a feverish irritation in her, a *sourd* resentment, a rage which she could not overcome, nor satisfy by any exertion. What could she do, a feeble woman, against the men who had cast this stigma on her husband? She did not even know who they were, except Golden. It was he who was the origin of it all, and whose profit it was to prove himself innocent by the fable of Robert's guilt! It was the most horrible farce, a farce which was a tragedy, which every one who knew him must laugh at wildly among their tears. But then the world did not know him; and the world likes to think the worst, to believe in guilt as the one thing always possible. That there were people who knew better had been proved to her—people who had ventured to call out indignantly, and say, 'This is not true,' without waiting to be asked. Oh, God bless them! God bless them! But they were not the world.

When the night was deeper, when the walkers outside had gone, when all was quiet, except now and then the hurried step of a late passer-by, Helen went to the window once more, and looked out upon that world. What a little bit of a world it is that a woman can see from her window!—a few silent roofs and closed windows, one or two figures going and coming, not a soul whom she knew or could influence; but all those unknown people, when they heard her husband's name, if it were years and years hence, would remember the slander that had stained it, and would never know his innocence, his incapacity even for such guilt. This is what gives force to a lie, this is what gives bitterness, beyond telling, to the hearts of those who are impotent, whose contradiction counts for nothing, who have no proof, but only certainty. What a night it was!—like Paradise even in London. The angels might have been straying through those blue depths of air, through the celestial warmth and coolness, without any derogation from their high estate. It was not moonlight, nor starlight, nor dawn, but some heavenly combination of all three which breathed over the blue arch above, so serene, so deep, so unfathomable; and down below the peopled earth lay like a child, defenceless and trustful in the arms of its Maker. 'Dear God, the very city seems asleep!' But here was one pair of eyes that no sleep visited, which dared not look up to heaven too closely lest her dead should not be there; which dared not take any comfort in the pity of earth, knowing that it condemned while it pitied. God help the solitary, the helpless, the wronged, those who can see no

compensation for their sufferings, no possible alchemy that can bring good out of them! Helen crept to bed at last, and slept. It was the only thing in which there remained any consolation; to be unconscious, to shut out life and light and all that accompanies them; to be for an hour, for a moment, as good as dead. There are many people always, to whom this is the best blessing remaining in the world.

The morning brought a letter from Mr Burton, announcing that the house at Dura was ready to receive his cousin. Helen would have been thankful to go but for the discovery she had made on the previous day. After that it seemed to her that to be on the spot, to be where she could maintain poor Robert's cause, or hear of others maintaining it, was all she wanted now in the world. But this was a mere fancy, such as the poor cannot indulge in. She arranged everything to go to her new home on the next day. It was time at least that she should leave this place in which her own room was with difficulty preserved to her for another night. All the morning the mother and daughter shut themselves up there, hearing the sounds of the commotion below—the furniture rolled about here and there, the heavy feet moving about the uncarpeted stairs and rooms that already sounded hollow and vacant. Bills of the sale were in all the windows; the very studio, the place which now would have been sacred if they had been rich enough to indulge in fancies. But why linger upon such a scene? The homeliest imagination can form some idea of circumstances which in themselves are common enough.

In the afternoon the two went out—to escape from the house more than anything else. 'We will go and see the Haldanes,' Helen said to her child; and Norah wondered, but acquiesced gladly. Mrs Drummond had never taken kindly to the fact that her husband's chief friend lived in Victoria Villas, and was a Dissenting minister with a mother and sister who could not be called gentlewomen. But all that belonged to the day of her prosperity, and now her heart yearned for some one who loved Robert—some one who would believe in him—to whom no vindication, even in thought, would be necessary. And the Haldanes had been ruined by Rivers's. This was another bond of union. She had called but once upon them before, and then under protest; but now she went nimbly, almost eagerly, down the road, past the line of white houses with their railings. There had been much thought and many discussions over Mr Burton's proposal within those walls. They had heard of it nearly a fortnight since, but they had not yet made any formal decision; that is to say, Mrs Haldane was eager to go; Miss Jane had made a great many calculations, and decided that the offer ought to be accepted as a matter of duty; but Stephen's extreme reluctance still kept them from settling. Something, however, had occurred that morning which had added a sting to Stephen's discouragement, and taken away the little strength with which he had faintly maintained his own way. In the warmth and fervour of his heart, he had used his little magazine to vindicate his friend. A number of it had been just going to the press when the papers had published Drummond's condemnation, and Haldane, who knew him so well—all his weakness and his strength—had dashed into the field and proclaimed, in the only way that was possible to him, the innocence and excellence of his friend. All his heart had been in it; he had made such a sketch of the painter, of his genius (poor Stephen thought he had genius), of his simplicity and goodness and unimpeachable honour, as would have filled the whole denomination with delight, had the subject of the sketch been one of its potentates or even a member of Mr Haldane's chapel. But Robert was not even a Dissenter at all, he had nothing to do with the denomination; and, to tell the truth, his *éloge* was out of place. Perhaps Stephen himself felt it was so after he had obeyed the first impulse which prompted it. But at least he was not left long in doubt. A letter had reached him from the magazine committee that morning. They had told him that they could not permit their organ to be made the vehicle of private feeling; they had suggested an apology in the next number; and they had threatened to take it altogether out of his hands. Remonstrances had already reached them, they said, from every quarter as to the too secular character of the contents; and they ventured to remind Mr Haldane that this was not a mere literary journal, but the organ of the body, and intended to promote its highest, its spiritual interests. Poor Stephen! he was grieved, and he writhed under the pinch of this interference. And then the magazine not only brought him in the half of his income, but was the work of his life—he had hoped to 'do some good' that way. He had aimed at improving it, cutting short the gossip and scraps of local news, and putting in something of a higher character. In this way he had been able to persuade himself, through all his helplessness, that he still possessed some power of influence over the world. He had been so completely subdued by the attack, that he had given in about Mr Burton's house, and that very day the proposal had been accepted; but he had not yet got the assault itself out of his head. All the morning he had been sitting with the manuscripts and proofs before him which were to make up his new number, commenting upon them in the bitterness of his heart.

'I suppose I must put this in now, whether I like it or not,' he said. 'I never suspected before how many pangs ruin brings with it, mother; not one, but a legion. They never dreamt of interfering with me before. Now look at this rabid, wretched thing. I would put it in the fire if I dared, and free the world of so much ill-tempered folly; but Bateman wrote it, and I dare not. Fancy, I *dare* not! If I had been independent, I should have made a stand. And my magazine—all the little comfort I had—'

'Oh, Stephen, my dear! but what does it matter what you put in if they like it? You are always writing, writing, wearing yourself out. Why shouldn't they have some of the trouble. You oughtn't to mind——'

'But I do mind,' he said, with a feeble smile. 'It is all I have to do, mother. It is to me what I am to you; you would not like to see me neglected, fed upon husks, like the prodigal.'

'Oh, Stephen dear, how can you talk so?—you neglected!' said his mother with tears in her eyes.

'Well, that is what I feel, mother. I shall have to feed my child with husks—tea-meetings and reports of this and that chapel, and how much they give. They were afraid of me once; they dared not grumble when I rejected and cut out; but—it is I who dare not now.'

Mrs Haldane wisely made no reply. In her heart she had liked the magazine better when it was all about the tea-meetings and the progress of the good cause. She liked the bits of sectarian gossip, and to know how much the different chapels subscribed, which congregation had given its minister a silver teapot, and which had given him his dismissal. All this was more interesting to her than all Stephen's new-fangled discussions of public matters, his eagerness about education and thought, and a great many other things that did not concern his mother. But she held this opinion within herself, and was as indignant with the magazine committee as heart could desire. The two fell silent for some time, he going on with his literature, and she with her sewing, till the only servant they had left, a maiden, called *par excellence* 'the girl,' came in with a tray laden with knives and forks to lay the cloth for dinner. The girl's eyes were red, and a dirty streak across one cheek showed where her tears had been wiped away with her apron.

'What is the matter?' said Mrs Haldane.

'Oh, please, it's Miss Jane,' cried the handmaid. 'She didn't ought to speak so; oh, she didn't ought to. My mother's a seat-holder in our chapel, and I'm a member. I'm not a-going to bear it! We ain't folks to be pushed about.'

'Lay the cloth, and do it quietly,' said the old lady. And with a silent exasperation, such as only a woman can feel, she watched the unhandy creature. 'Thank heaven, we shall want no girl in the country,' she said to herself. But when her eye fell on Stephen, he was actually smiling—smiling at the plea for exception, with that mingled sadness and bitterness which it pained his mother to see. The girl went on sniffing and sobbing all the same. She had already driven her other mistress almost frantic in the kitchen. Miss Jane had left a little stew, a savoury dish such as Stephen's fanciful appetite required to tempt it, by the fire, slowly coming to perfection. 'The girl' had removed it to the fender, where it was standing, growing cold, just at the critical moment when all its juices should have been blending under the gentle, genial influence of the fire. Common cooks cannot stew. They can boil, or they can burn; but they never catch the delicious medium between. Only such persons as cook for love, or such as possess genius, can hit this more than golden mean. Miss Jane combined both characters. She did it *con amore* and *per amore*; and when she found her fragrant dish set aside for the sake of 'the girl's' kettle, her feelings can be but faintly imagined by the uninitiated. 'I wish I could beat you,' she said, with natural exasperation. And this to 'a joined member,' a seat-holder's daughter! Stephen laughed when the tale was repeated to him, with a laugh which was full of bitterness. He tried to swallow his portion of the stew, but it went against him. 'It is the same everywhere,' he said; 'the same subjection of the wise to the foolish, postponing of the best to the worst. Rubbish to please the joined members—silence and uselessness to us.'

'Oh, Stephen!' said Mrs Haldane, 'you know I am not always of your way of thinking. After all there is something in it; for when a girl is a church member, she can't be quite without thought; and when she neglects her work, it is possible, you know, that she might be occupied with better things. I don't mean to say that it is an excuse.'

'I should think not, indeed,' said Miss Jane. 'I'd rather have some one that knew her work, and did it, than a dozen church members. A heathen to-day would have been as much use to me.'

'That may be very true,' said her mother; 'but I think, considering Stephen's position, that such a thing should not be said by you or me. In my days a person stood up for chapel, through thick and thin, especially when he had a relation who was a minister. You think you are wiser, you young ones, and want to set up for being liberal, and think church as good as chapel, and the world, so far as I can make out, as good as either. But that way of thinking would never answer me.'

'Well, thank heaven,' said Miss Jane in a tone of relief, 'in the country we shall not want any "girl."'

'That is what I have been thinking,' said Mrs Haldane with alacrity; and in the painful moment which intervened while

the table was being cleared and the room put in order, she painted to herself a fancy picture of 'the country.' She was a Londoner born, and had but an imperfect idea what the word meant. It was to her a vague vision of greenness, parks and trees and great banks of flowers. The village street was a thing she had no conception of. A pleasant dream of some pleasant room opening on a garden, and level with it, crossed her mind. It was a cottage of romance, one of those cottages which make their appearance in the stories which she half disapproved of, yet felt a guilty pleasure in reading. There had been one, an innocent short one, with the gentlest of good meanings, in the last number of Stephen's magazine, with just such a cottage in it, where a sick heroine recovered. She thought she could see the room, and the invalid chair outside the door, in which he could be wheeled into the garden to the seat under the apple-tree. Her heart overflowed with that pleasant thought. And Stephen might get well! Such a joy was at the end of every vista to Mrs Haldane. She sat and dreamed over this with a smile on her face while the room was being cleared; and her vision was only stayed by the unusual sound of Helen's knock at the door.

'It will be some one to see the house,' said Miss Jane, and she went away hurriedly, with loud-whispered instructions to the girl, into 'the front drawing-room,' to be ready to receive any applicant; so that Miss Jane was not in the room when Helen with her heart beating, and Norah clinging close to her as her shadow, was shown abruptly into the invalid's room. 'The girl' thrust her in without a word of introduction or explanation. Norah was familiar in the place, though her mother was a stranger. Mrs Haldane rose hastily to meet them, and an agitated speech was on Helen's lips that she had come to say good-bye, that she was going away, that they might never meet again in this world,—when her eye caught the helpless figure seated by the window, turning a half-surprised, half-sympathetic look upon her. She had never seen poor Stephen since his illness, and she was not prepared for this complete and lamentable overthrow. It drove her own thoughts, even her own sorrows, out of her mind for the moment. She gave a cry of mingled wonder and horror. She had heard all about it, but seeing is so very different from hearing.

'Oh, Mr Haldane!' she said, going up to him, forgetting herself—with such pity in her voice as he had not heard for years. It drove out of his mind, too, the more recent and still more awful occasion he had to pity her. He looked at her with sudden gratitude in his eyes.

'Yes, it is a change, is it not?' he said with a faint smile. He had been an Alp-climber, a mighty walker, when she saw him last.

Some moments passed before she recovered the shock. She sat down by him trembling, and then she burst into sudden tears—not that she was a woman who cried much in her sorrow, but that her nerves were affected beyond her power of control.

'Mr Haldane, forgive me,' she faltered. 'I have never seen you since—and so much has happened—oh, so much!'

'Ah, yes,' he said. 'I could cry too—not for myself, for that is an old story. I would have gone to you, had I been able—you know that; and it is very, very kind of you to come to me.'

'It is to say good-bye. We are going away to the country, Norah and I,' said Helen; 'there is no longer any place for us here. But I wanted to see you, to tell you—you seem—to belong—so much—to the old time.'

Ah, that old time! the time which softens all hearts. It had not been perfect while it existed, but now how fair it was! Perhaps Stephen Haldane remembered it better than she did; perhaps it might even cross his mind that in that old time she had not cared much to see him, had not welcomed him to her house with any pleasure. But he was too generous to allow himself even to think such a thought, in her moment of downfall. The depths were more bitter to her even than to him. He would not let the least shadow even in his mind fret her in her great trouble. He put out his hand, and grasped hers with a sympathy which was more telling than words.

'And I hope your mother will forgive me too,' she said with some timidity. 'I thought I had more command of myself. We could not go without coming to say good-bye.'

'It is very kind—it is more than I had any right to expect,' said Mrs Haldane. 'And we are going to the country too. We are going to Dura, to a house Mr Burton has kindly offered to us. Oh, Mrs Drummond, now I think of it, probably we owe it to you.'

'No,' said Helen, startled and mystified; and then she added slowly, 'I am going to Dura too.'

'Oh, how very lucky that is! Oh, how glad I am!' said the old lady. 'Stephen, do you hear? Of course, Mr Burton is your cousin; it is natural you should be near him. Stephen, this is good news for you. You will have Miss Norah, whom you were always so fond of, to come about you as she used to do—that is, if her mamma will allow her. Oh, my dear, I am so glad! I must go and tell Jane. Jane, here is something that will make you quite happy. Mrs Drummond is coming too.'

She went to the door to summon her daughter, and Helen was left alone with the sick man. She had not loved him in the old time, but yet he looked a part of Robert now, and her heart melted towards him. She was glad to have him to herself, as glad as if he had been a brother. She put her hand on the arm of his chair, laying a kind of doubtful claim to him. 'You have seen what they say?' she asked, looking in his face.

'Yes, all; with fury,' he said, 'with indignation! Oh my God, that I should be chained here, and good for nothing! They might as well have said it of that child.'

'Oh, is it not cruel, cruel!' she said.

These half-dozen words were all that passed between them, and yet they comforted her more than all Dr Maurice had said. He had been indignant too, it is true; but not with this fiery, visionary wrath—the rage of the helpless, who can do nothing.

When Miss Jane came in with her mother, they did the most of the talking, and Helen shrunk into herself; but when she had risen to go away, Stephen thrust a little packet into her hand. 'Read it when you go home,' he said. It was his little dissenting magazine, the insignificant brochure which she would have scorned so in the old days. With what tears, with what swelling of her heart, with what an agony of pride and love and sorrow she read it that night!

And so the old house was closed, and the old life ended. Henceforward, everything that awaited her was cold and sad and new.

END OF VOL. I.

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

[The end of *At His Gates, Volume 1* by Margaret Oliphant]