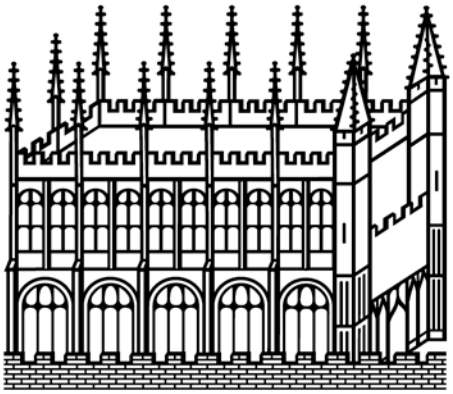

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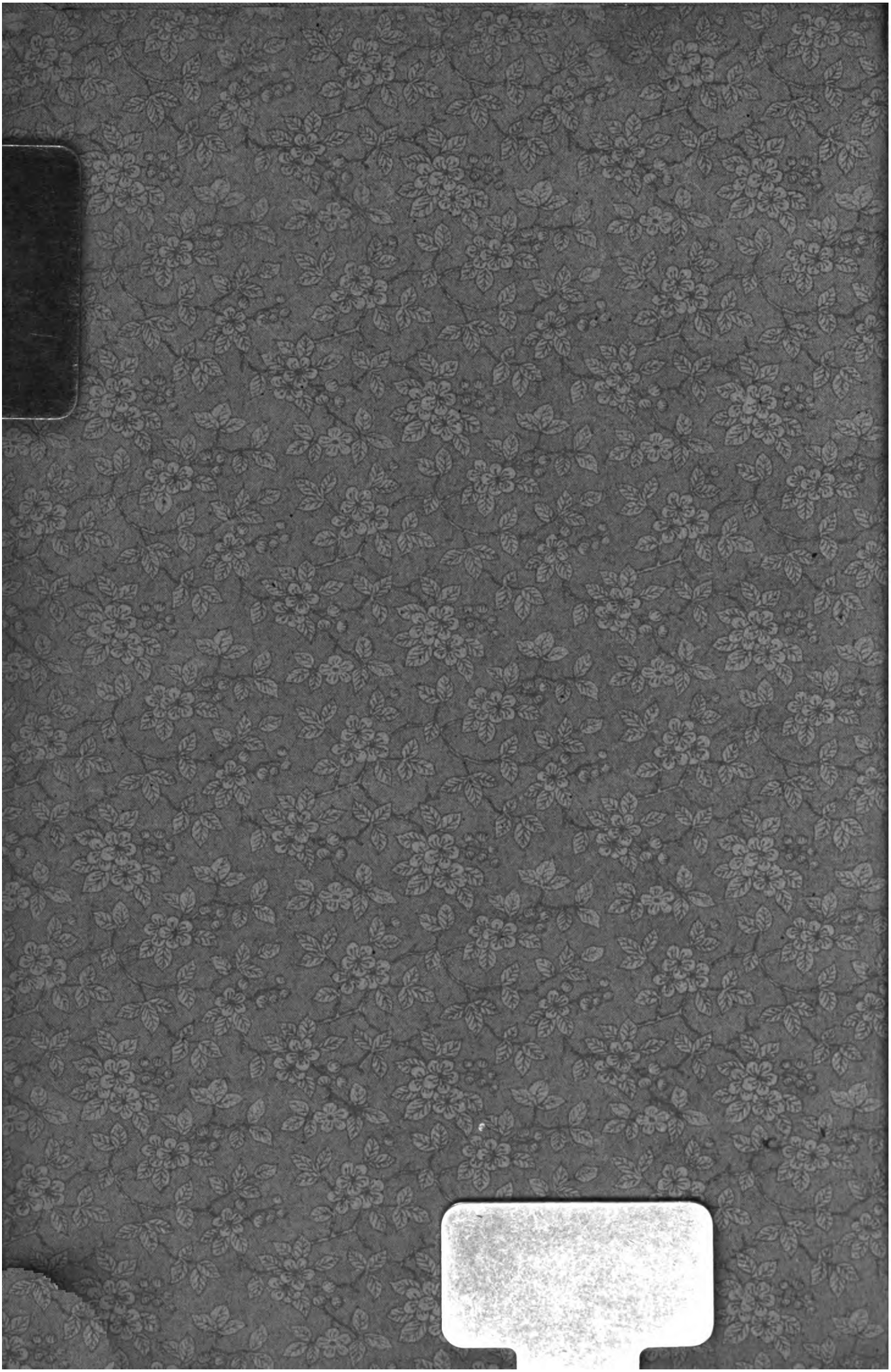
DOUGLAS ARCHDALE

A TALE OF LUCKNOW.

By

C. M. K. Phipps.



DOUGLAS ARCHDALE.

A TALE OF LUCKNOW.

CLEANSING FIRES.

Let thy gold be cast in the furnace,
  Thy red gold, precious and bright,
Do not fear the hungry fire
  With its caverns of burning light.
And thy gold shall return more precious,
  Free from every spot and stain,
For gold must be tried by fire,
  As a heart must be tried by pain.

In the cruel fire of sorrow,
  Cast thy heart, do not faint or wail;
Let thy hand be firm and steady,
  Do not let thy spirit quail;
But wait till the trial is over,
  And take thy heart again,
For, as gold is tried by fire,
  So a heart must be tried by pain!

I shall know by the gleam and the glitter
  Of the golden chain you wear,
By your heart's calm strength in loving,
  Of the fire they have had to bear.
Beat on true heart for ever;
  Shine bright strong golden chain;
And bless the cleansing fire,
  And the furnace of loving pain.

Legends and Lyrics by A. A. Proctor.

DOUGLAS ARCHDALE.

A Tale of Lucknow.

BY

C. M. K. PHIPPS,

Author of "The Sword of De Bardwell," and "Who is the Victor?"

"Though sharpest anguish hearts may wring,
Though bosoms torn may be,
Yet suffering is a holy thing;
Without it, what were we?"

Richard Chenevix Trench.

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DOUGLAS ARCHDALE.

A TALE OF LUCKNOW.

CHAPTER I.

THE Manor House of Gowanbrae, near Dunkeld, has for centuries been the abode of the Archdale family. The entrance hall was a long low narrow room, with quaintly carved oak ceiling, massive beams, huge old-fashioned open fire place, and wainscoted walls, on which hung various trophies of the chase, and antiquated implements of warfare, together with numerous curiosities brought from lands beyond the sea. It was a favourite haunt of the younger members of the family, and they were all assembled there upon the summer evening of the year 1856, on which my tale commences.

The three sons and three daughters of the

house were grouped around their lovely cousin, Sylvia Earle, who, seated in the midst upon a quaint old oaken chair, looked like a queen encircled by her loyal subjects. Sylvia's faultless form and features seemed indeed to justify the glances of admiring admiration cast on her by her eldest cousin, Douglas Archdale, who stood at a short distance from her chair. Her small and shapely head, crowned with an aureola of golden hair, was delicately poised upon a long and slender throat; her sapphire eyes gleamed through the curtain of their long dark lashes; the faintest blush-rose tinge relieved the pearly whiteness of her skin; and two tiny rows of ivory teeth glistened between a pair of perfect lips. Douglas, himself, was clothed with every attribute of youthful strength and manly beauty. His tall and well knit figure showed the signs of military training, his dark chestnut curls clustered around a clear and open brow, his dark grey eyes beamed with intelligence, kindliness and courage. To his sister Meta, who sat near him, the epithets *winsome* and *bonnie* might most fitly be applied. Of her, as of Scott's heroine, it might well be said:

"Not Katrine in her bosom blue
Gives back the shaggy banks more true
Then every free-born glance expressed,
The guileless movements of her breast.

And, as will be seen hereafter, of Meta (as of her prototype) it might be added:

"One only passion unrevealed,
With maiden pride the maid concealed,
Yet not less purely felt the flame."

The other members of the group will play less prominent parts in my story and may therefore be dismissed with briefer notice. Janet grave and gentle, Lennox studious, dreamy and retiring, Angus the merry mischievous young middy, watching Meta's nimble fingers as they twisted up his flies; and golden-haired blue-eyed Flossie, the youngest of the party, the pet and plaything of the family.

"Then you all agree to Thursday in next week on which our picnic can take place?" said Douglas, in a tone between assertion and enquiry. His words were addressed generally, but the appealing glance directed to his cousin,

Sylvia, plainly showed whose approbation he most wished to gain.

She, however, made no answer; and at last Meta said gently: "Yes, I think so." You see Sylvia leaves us early in the following week, and I suppose you and the boys will not remain much longer."

"Nor Mr. Elton either," Sylvia interposed with something like a sneer. "I wonder, Meta, you forgot to mention that important item."

"Well, your departure is only too good a reason," Douglas answered quietly. "Then the only other question is, where shall we go? Would you prefer Loch Tummel, or the Falls of Bran?"

"Oh, the lake!" cried Angus eagerly. "Donald would let me have his boat and we could get a famous row! You and Ralph could take an oar, and Meta steers as well as any coxswain."

"Let the ladies give the first opinion," Douglas interposed. "What do *you* wish, Sylvia," he continued, earnestly.

"*Not* for a trip in such a dirty craft as Donald's coble," she returned ungraciously. "I

think I should prefer the Falls of Bran, with which we might combine a visit to Dunkeld."

"Just like her!" muttered Angus into Flossie's ear. "She knows how we all hate the stupid town."

"Hush dear," Meta said reprovingly. "It is not kind to speak like that. You will get some fishing, Angus, near the Falls, and we may ramble in the woods, and so be independent of the town."

"Oh, *you* always make the best of everything," the boy rejoined somewhat mollified. "But it *is* a shame, even you must allow that!"

"Never mind!" resumed his sister, "we will get our row another day—you and I and Floss —and either Ralph or Douglas,"—she stopped abruptly, feeling the tell-tale colour rising in her cheeks, just as Douglas said somewhat doubtfully:

"Do you really care so much about it Sylvia? We hardly know them; nor was I much drawn to either of them."

"It is shortish notice for such strangers," Janet said musingly. "What do you think

Meta? Sylvia wishes Captain Lester and his sister to be asked to join our party."

"Mother wants to show them some civility," said Meta, whilst Angus and Flossie muttered angrily:

"Horrid stuck up Londoners! who will spoil everything!"

"I think we had best ask mother," Meta went on gently. "She will settle it."

"What will the mother settle, dears?" interposed a quiet voice, as a gentle fragile-looking lady, with kind brown eyes, and soft grey hair drawn smoothly back under her snowy cap, appeared amidst the excited group. It was some minutes before Mrs. Archdale could obtain an answer to her question; all her children being busy in providing for her comfort, drawing out a chair, placing a cushion for her head, and a stool for her feet. When the commotion had subsided, she repeated her enquiry, "What is that I am to settle for you, dears?"

"You see," Douglas explained, "we want to make an expedition to the Falls of Bran, whilst we are all at home. We thought of fixing on the Thursday in next week, and Sylvia sug-

gested that the Lesters should be asked to join the party."

"Oh mother, don't let's have them; they will only spoil our fun!" Angus and Flossie cried impetuously.

A grave expression passed over Mrs. Archdale's gentle face, as, turning to her niece, she said with quiet firmness:

"I am sorry to refuse anything you ask my dear, especially when your time with us is drawing to a close. But we do not know enough of Captain Lester to ask him to this kind of party, at which neither I or your uncle can be present."

"They are twice as pleasant as those stupid Eltons," Sylvia grumbled, "and they are friends of Aunt Carew's, who wished me to make their acquaintance."

"I am aware of that, my dear," her aunt replied, "and I am quite prepared to carry out her wishes, although not quite in the manner you propose. The Thursday in next week you said, I think?" she added, turning to her son. "Then suppose we ask the Lesters to dine here that evening? I daresay Ralph and

Annie Elton would remain to meet them."

"Make it Wednesday instead, mother," Douglas pleaded, "then we need not hurry home, and the drive by moonlight is the best part of the entertainment."

"Very well," his mother acquiesced. "It only takes one day from the notice. Perhaps your father can send Sandy with a note this evening."

"I will ride to Birkenholt to-morrow, and arrange everything with Elton. Perhaps one of you girls will come with me? Are we to ask him and Miss Elton to dine here on Wednesday?" Douglas enquired.

"Yes," said his mother. "But I will write to Annie. They had better sleep here on the Wednesday night;—the boys can join them in the morning."

So everything was settled, to the general satisfaction, although Sylvia still seemed somewhat discontented.

Ten years before this time Sylvia, then a sickly child of eight, had been sent from India to find a home at Gowanbrae. From the hour of her arrival, Douglas Archdale had been the

chief companion, friend and champion of the spoiled and wayward little maiden. He it was who had protected her against the rough, though not unkindly jests and tricks practised on her by his younger brothers; had given her his assistance in her tasks, and had persuaded her to yield obedience to the household rules, and had generously borne the blame of many escapades caused by her wilfulness or heedlessness.

Whilst the two were almost children, Mr. and Mrs. Archdale were content to watch with quiet and indulgent smiles, the pretty arts by which the tiny tyrant bound her chains on her submissive vassal. But, as time passed on and changed the sturdy boy into a stalwart stripling and the sickly child into a lovely girl, anxious apprehensions forced themselves upon their minds. Sylvia's father, Mr. Earle, was an East Indian Banker and reputed millionaire, little likely to approve of an engagement between his only child and heiress and her comparatively ill-endowed cousin.

Mr. and Mrs. Archdale, therefore, strove quietly to lessen the intimacy between their son and Sylvia, sanctioning the prolongation of the

former's absence from his home by continental tours, shared with his friend and former schoolfellow, Ralph Elton, now a busy curate in a London parish; and arranging that Sylvia's annual visit to her mother's sister should coincide as far as possible with Douglas's brief stay at home. This fateful summer was, however, doomed to frustrate all their former efforts. Ralph was spending his brief holiday at Birkenholt, and there seemed no reason why his friend should not also stay at home. Sylvia was to have returned to India by the August mail. But on the day when Douglas was expected, Mrs. Archdale heard that Sylvia's chosen escort, Colonel and Mrs. McGhirkin, were detained in London by an attack of gout which had seized the former, and necessitated waiting for the next mail. There was no time for making fresh arrangements; the next three weeks were spent in boating, fishing, riding, sketching, picnicing, &c. The result may easily be guessed, Douglas and Sylvia were almost always to be found together, whilst an equally instinctive and irresistible attraction seemed to draw Ralph Elton to the side of Meta Archdale.

Ralph was the only man with whom Sylvia Earle had come in contact who had *never* owned her sovereign sway, nor bowed to her caprices. Her feelings towards him were in consequence somewhat akin to those which Haman held for Mordecai. But this summer with the consciousness of the unbounded power she had over the heart of Douglas, the spoiled beauty could almost regard with toleration the presence at their gatherings of "the inevitable Eltons."

Recently the arrival, at a neighbouring moor, of Captain Lester and his sister, had provided her with a fresh source of pleasurable excitement. By encouraging this stranger's somewhat marked attentions, she could arouse her cousin's jealousy. Hence her anxiety that he should be invited to the picnic; and her anger at his exclusion from it, which was only half-appeased by the dinner suggested by her aunt.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. ARCHDALE'S invitations were, both of them in due course, accepted; and on the appointed evening the expected guests assembled in the pretty drawing-room opening out of the hall which has already been described.

Captain Lester, a tall, showy looking man, with jet black hair, heavy moustache and whiskers, loud voice and self-asserting manner, seemed to patronise the whole assembly. Douglas was the especial object of this somewhat offensive patronage, the elder man affecting to instruct him in those professional matters, on which the young Highlander must of necessity be ignorant. This tone, coupled with the Captain's somewhat ostentatious admiration of Miss Earle, was very galling to the high-souled lad with whom he had to deal. Miss Lester was a somewhat faded London beauty, affecting gushing admiration for "the charms of country

life and mountain scenery," only kept in check by a wholesome dread of slippery stones and awkward stiles, steep paths, rough roads, and muddy lanes.

At dinner Sylvia was in her glory. Seated between her cousin and the Captain, she bewildered and enchained them both by her alternate smiles and chilling glances; nor, to judge by the bright smile lighting up Ralph Elton's thoughtful face, was he less satisfied with the fate which placed him between Meta and her sister Janet. Mr. Archdale gallantly endeavoured to fulfil the duty of a courteous host by Miss Lester, to whom, as the chief female stranger, the post of honour at his right had been accorded. But when the London lady turned to address his son, it was with a feeling of relief that he exchanged her silly platitudes and affected witticisms for the quiet, if somewhat homely, conversation of his other neighbour, Annie Elton.

"It was very good of your father to spare both you and Ralph to us this evening," he began with evident sincerity. "You so seldom leave him that we were almost afraid to count on such a pleasure."

"He will have the boys to-night," said Annie simply, "and John and Elsie will arrive early to-morrow. So I do not think he will be lonely. He is looking forward with so much pleasure to their visit; and we are all so glad that they will come in time to catch a glimpse of Ralph."

"Yes, it *is* fortunate," acquiesced her host, "you must bring them here to call on Mrs. Archdale. She and I grow very lazy now as to leaving home, but we are delighted when any of our friends will come to us. Our good neighbours spoil us you see, Miss Lester," he added turning to her again, "and I am afraid to strangers we seem to be as rude and rugged as our rocky roads."

"Oh, Mr. Archdale!" she exclaimed with an affected titter, "how can you say such things? Really I don't think anyone could expect elderly people, such as you and Mrs. Archdale, to rumble over these wretched roads. And then country calls are always stupid things. Gentlemen are sure to hate them. I know my brother is quite naughty on the subject. As for me, though I adore the scenery in this neighbourhood, I must own the narrow and

dangerous paths quite make me shudder, and wish myself back again in London. Too shocking! isn't it. But you will not betray me?"

At the other end of the table the conversation had become more general.

"Our boys are looking forward immensely to to-morrow's expedition," Ralph Elton said, addressing Mrs. Archdale. "They are making formidable preparations for the attack upon the finny tribe; but, I do not suppose they will do much execution. It is a rare treat for them, as, since John and I have been so much away, my father has neglected to obtain from the Duke a renewal of his permission to angle in his waters. To-morrow, however, they will shelter themselves under Mr. Archdale's name."

"But Annie tells me that your brother and his wife will arrive at Birkenholt to-morrow," put in Janet. "Do they remain there long?"

"Yes, for six weeks at least," he replied. "I am glad that I shall just catch them before I return to London next week."

"You will find London very empty will you not?" here interposed the loud voice of Captain

Lester. "I pity anyone who goes back there at the end of August."

"The times and seasons of fashionable society make little difference to East-end parsons and their flocks," Ralph answered with a quiet smile, "and I need hardly tell *you*, sir, that a good soldier does not complain that his appointed post is dull and disagreeable."

"Plenty of *us* do at any rate," muttered the Captain.

"Well," said Ralph, overhearing him, "I at any rate shall follow their example. I have always found sufficient interest in the discharge of my duties to banish every feeling of dulness, and I shall now, I trust, return invigorated by the fresh breezes of my native hills, and cheered by the secret hope I carry back with me," he added in a voice so low as only to be caught by Meta. "To-morrow's expedition will be a crowning pleasure," he concluded in a louder tone.

"What is this delightful expedition of which I hear everyone talking?" Captain Lester asked, turning to Sylvia, and lowering his tone as much as possible. "How unkind of you,

Miss Earle, not to have procured an invitation for me."

"I tried to do so," she replied, but my aunt's old-fashioned sense of propriety forbade the admission of such a formidable stranger into her flock, especially when neither she nor uncle was at hand to guard the tender innocents."

"The parson is admitted," Lester said, with a supercilious glance in Ralph's direction. "Is that in virtue of his sombre coat?"

"Oh, *he!*" retorted Sylvia, "he is privileged, adopted *d'avance* as a son of the house," she added in a meaning tone.

"I see!" returned the Captain fixing his eyes on Ralph and Meta, who were, however, happily unconscious of the attention they excited, "but all this time, Miss Earle, you have not satisfied my curiosity about the object—I mean the destination of your expedition."

"The Falls of Bran," said Sylvia, "one of the most picturesque spots in the Duke of Athol's wide desmene. If you have not seen them, they are well worth a visit."

"I do not doubt it," began the Captain. But at this moment the signal was given for the

departure of the ladies, and all conversation was, for the moment, brought to an abrupt conclusion.

The evening was enlivened by music. Sylvia played a slight but lively Morceau, Miss Lester executed a brilliant *fantasia*, to which Flossie and Angus listened with such ill-concerned impatience, that Meta hastened to console them with their favourite "Cam' ye by Athole, lad wi' the Philibeg," the local allusions in which elicted the most rapturous applause. Then Mr. Archdale asked for "Bonnie Dundee" in honour, as he said, of the hero of Killiecrankie. Douglas performed the solo with suitable spirit, and almost all the company joined, with more goodwill than art, it may be, in the stirring chorus, under cover of which Captain Lester contrived to say:

"*You* would not be offended I hope, Miss Earle, if I took the *earliest* opportunity of gratifying my sister's passion for the picturesque, by driving her to the Falls of which you spoke in such temptingly laudatory terms?"

"I! oh no! why should I be?" she answered hurriedly. "That part of the park is open to

the public. Neighbours, visitors and tourists are alike admitted."

"Yet without your permission," he began, but, breaking off hurriedly, "the song is coming to an end—I think you understand me?"

"Bravo!" cried the laird, "that is what I call a spirit-stirring strain. Ah, my little Sylvia! I missed your voice, but you will let us hear it now. Captain Lester must not engross you altogether."

"I am afraid I do not sing Scotch music well uncle," replied Sylvia. "Come, Meta, help me with 'I would that my love!'"

Then there was a call for "Oh wert thou in the cauld blast!" in which Meta, rather to her confusion, found her trembling notes supported by Ralph Elton's manly tones, but any defects in the execution of the duet, were atoned for by the evident earnestness which the young clergyman breathed into the promise "I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee!"

"Bravo Elton," cried Douglas enthusiastically. "You sang like one inspired! I had no idea that you were a musician!"

"Nor had I," returned the other briefly.

There was no more music after this, and shortly afterwards the Lesters took their leave, the Captain pressing Sylvia's hand, said with significance, "*Au revoir*, then, dear lady, you will not forget our conversation? A thousand thanks."

CHAPTER III.

THE following morning dawned clear, and bright, and warm, *too* bright almost for the true lovers of the "gentle craft." Sylvia, in a most becoming dress of blue and white, showed an amount of interest in the day's proceedings, which delighted Douglas. To him she was particularly gracious, *suggesting*, nay, *insisting* that he should drive her in the pony carriage to the selected spot. Annie Elton found a place in the large waggonette with Janet and her sisters (Ralph taking his place upon the box), whilst Angus and Lennox joined their friends Jamie and Duncan in the Birkenholt conveyance, Mrs. Archdale standing at the door to see the start, noticed the arrangement with an anxious heart, but would not say a word to damp the pleasure of her "bonnie boy."

The drive to the romantic falls was most delightful. The scene of the repast had been

judiciously selected; shaded by a grove of larch trees, and with a full view of the foaming waters. Merry peals of laughter easily awakened shouts of pleasure, innocent jests and such ejaculations as the following, accompanied the opening of the hampers.

"Hand *me* the salad Archdale!—I'll mix you such a sauce as we were wont to have at college!—Where's the salt and pepper Annie?—Cut off a bit of Duncan's jacket!—That's the true Oxford mixture!—Have a care Angus!—you'll upset the cream!"—and Meta happily contrived to stop the fall before the precious jar had emptied its contents on Sylvia's dainty dress.

The meal over, all lay or sat upon the grass, no one wishing to be first to move; Ralph pressing Meta to sketch the group, and give him the drawing as a memorial of the day, she protesting that her skill was far too small, yet evidently far from disinclined to yield.

All at once their attention was attracted by a large dark object rapidly approaching. It proved to be a well-appointed phaeton, from the driving-seat of which Captain Lester sprang, close to our group, exclaiming, on "the lucky

chance," which had procured them this *rencontre* with their friends.

"The very luckiest hit by jove," he said, turning to help his sister to alight. It should encourage one to do goodnatured deeds. I had planned to spend the day in tramping across the moors, but when my sister saw the brilliant weather she persuaded me to drive her here. Little did I think how my dutiful obedience was to be rewarded! Miss Earle, you look, if that be possible, more lovely than you did last night!"

However much the Archdales might dislike the intrusion of those unbidden and unwelcome guests, they were, of course, obliged to keep their feelings to themselves. Douglas especially felt that for him, at any rate, the brightness had departed from the day. Instead of leading Sylvia into some sequestered glade (as he had fondly hoped to do), he could only follow her with jealous, miserable watchfulness, as she led Captain Lester to each favourite point of view. Miss Lester, too, had fastened herself upon him, so that he could not relieve his feelings by a hearty grumble. Even Meta seemed to have

deserted him, and was sketching a most lovely bit of fern-clothed bank, to give to Ralph instead of the now broken and disenchanted group. The younger lads and Flossie had produced their fishing tackle; Janet and her friend sat near them to maintain some order, whilst Ralph had found his way to Meta's side.

"Poor Douglas!" Meta said, he had so looked forward to the day! "Are you not sorry for him?"

"Very, dear," he answered, "especially when I contrast my lot with his. And yet this disappointment *might* preserve him from much worse unhappiness."

"What do you mean?" Surely you cannot think that Sylvia seriously prefers the Captain to my brother?"

"I rather doubt, dear," Ralph replied, "whether Sylvia cares enough for either of them, to be said seriously to prefer one to the other. In my opinion she cares little for anyone or anything except her own fair self, is perhaps incapable of doing so, and is quite unworthy of the love which Douglas lavishes upon her, is *prepared* to lavish rather, for as yet he is

I think, only dazzled by her beauty ; and that is why I hope that her flirtation with the Captain, by revealing her true character, may preserve him from much future sorrow."

"But Ralph," said Meta, timidly, "are you sure you do not judge her over harshly. She has never been quite fair to you ; she is vain and fond of admiration ; and ——"

"And cannot bear that even I should escape her toils, and set my heart upon a very different object ? For *that* I bear her no ill-will. But Douglas is *your* brother, and *my* friend, dear to me alike in either character, and I cannot bear to see him waste his love upon a shallow, selfish, heartless flirt ! "

"Oh, Ralph," cried Meta pleadingly, "do not use such strong terms ! Think how young she is, how soon she lost her mother ! "

"She is but one year younger than yourself," Ralph answered stubbornly, "and Mrs. Archdale has been like a mother to her."

"But when first she came from India she was shy and sickly, and we were obliged to humour her, and now that she has grown so lovely ——"

"She has taken advantage of your gentleness, unselfishness, and courtesy, and has assumed most unbecoming and unwarrantable airs of sovereignty," said Ralph. "I do not say that *no* excuses can be made for her—and you are a skilful pleader, Meta—but I cannot think union with her could give your brother lasting happiness, and I own I should be glad if anything could free him from her fascination. But they are calling us for tea! How fast the time has fled!"

"And I have left all the work to the others; and have not even finished this little sketch," said Meta, penitently. "I shall have to work it up at home. I suppose we shall meet again before you go from Birkenholt."

"Most certainly," he answered, "I must see Mr. Archdale and ask for his consent to our engagement."

"I do not think he will be much surprised," said Meta, shily, "and he loves you, Ralph, almost as though you were indeed his son."

"Then," proceeded Ralph, "do you think you and Douglas could dine with us either on Tuesday or Wednesday? I must return to

London on Thursday, and my father is anxious to welcome his new daughter."

"I should think we could," said Meta, "Sylvia leaves us on Tuesday morning, so, if it makes no difference to your father, perhaps Wednesday would be the better day."

By this time they had rejoined their party, who were grouped around the gipsy-like kettle which was singing merrily. The conversation was hardly so free and unconstrained as at the earlier meal; the boys' account of their feats in fishing, and Captain Lester's rather boisterous jests scarcely sufficing to conceal the anxious annoyance which others of the party tried in vain to repress. There was now little inclination to loiter when the meal was over. But when the hampers were re-packed, and the carriages made ready, Douglas was doomed to experience a fresh disappointment.

As it would have entailed a considerable *détour* had the Birkenholt carriage gone round by Gowanbrae, it had been arranged that Ralph and Annie should now change places with Angus and Lennox. But Douglas had fondly hoped that this would be the only modification in the

ordering of the party, and had looked forward to his evening drive with Sylvia as some compensation for the annoyances of the afternoon. But to his surprise and chagrin, when he was about to hand his cousin to the pony-chaise, Captain Lester interposed with a rather nonchalant "Oh, my dear fellow, Miss Earle has kindly promised to let me drive her home; that is, if Miss Archdale is good enough to provide my sister with a place."

In vain Janet and Meta remonstrated with Sylvia. She was deaf to all advice, and there was no one present with authority to enforce compliance. So no course was left them but to *faire bonne mine à mauvais jeu*, and receive Miss Lester with all possible courtesy into the waggonette, whilst Meta, in the pony-carriage, did her best to soothe and mollify her brother's wounded feelings.

CHAPTER IV.

THE halcyon summer holiday was almost ended. On the very next morning Sylvia was to leave the home of her childhood and early youth for ever. Lady Carew's confidential maid had arrived that afternoon, to escort her mistress's niece to London.

The evening meal was over, and the family was once more assembled in the drawing-room. Mr. and Mrs. Archdale, in their easy chairs beside the empty hearth, were soon slumbering peacefully, the one over his newspaper, the other with her knitting; Lennox, with his book, ensconced himself in a secluded corner; Janet kept a careful watch over the somewhat boisterous sports of Angus and Flossie; whilst Meta, for once self-absorbed, sat by the open window, looking out with dreamy far-off gaze, while a new light of love and happiness shone in the clear depths of her large brown eyes.

This had been, to her, a most eventful day. Early in the morning Ralph had walked over from Birkenholt, and his interview with Mr. Archdale had been satisfactorily accomplished.

"You are asking for the very sunshine of the house, my boy," the elder man had said, "but I believe that you know how to prize and guard the treasure you have won. But you must not plant our daisy-blossom in the London smoke. She would pine and wither for the want of the fresh breezes of her native moors."

"I will not, sir," the young man answered earnestly. "A college friend has promised me a living on the southern coast, which must shortly be vacant—the present incumbent being about to accept another benefice. It is a large fishing village standing on the edge of broad open downs. The fine old church is built on the top of a lofty cliff, and for centuries has been a beacon to the storm-tossed mariner. An instructive parable, would men but mark the teaching," he added, in a lower voice.

"Sermons in stones; eh, Ralph," returned Mr. Archdale, kindly. "My boy, select your subjects, as your great Master did, from the

sights and scenes by which you are surrounded. So will you best win the hearts of those who hear you. God help you and our Meta in your new life and work. There is none to whom I would more gladly trust my darling. But she will be a sore loss to us all, especially to Douglas, who, I fear, poor lad, has just now another heavy cross to bear." And the father looked enquiringly at Ralph, who could but say with simple earnestness,

"I am afraid he has, sir."

"Ah!" continued Mr. Archdale, "his mother and I strove hard to save him from this temptation, but old McGhirkin's ill-timed gout upset our calculations. But you do not care to listen to my prosing, whilst Meta is waiting to hear how you have sped. Go to her lad, God's blessing on you both."

The young man, it will be easily believed, waited for no second bidding. The remainder of the morning was spent by him and Meta in a ramble on the moor.

Thus, in the evening, Meta was hardly as alive as usual to the wishes and wants of her companions; and Sylvia, who had surveyed the

position somewhat ruefully, needed little persuasion to induce her to accompany Douglas into the moon-lit garden. It was a lovely evening, suiting well the sweet serenity of that woodland scene. The cousins wandered side by side beneath the leafy arches of the birchen boughs, Sylvia expatiating upon the scenes of splendour and amusement upon which, as she believed, she was about to enter, whilst her companion listened to her with mingled pain and exultation, until she at last exclaimed, "Yes, I mean to be a power, Douglas. The Queen of Hearts. A Leader in Society! You must come out, and see me in my glory!"

Then the young man's feelings could no longer be restrained!

"Oh, Sylvia," he cried, "how can I bear to part with you? Oh, can you not love me? Say, at least, that you will not forget me!"

He bent down his handsome head, and strove to read in his companion's lustrous eyes her answer to his passionate appeal.

Sylvia gave a light laugh, which, perhaps, concealed some inward agitation, and faintly strove to free herself from his encircling arm.

"Forget you, Douglas," she repeated, "Oh, no. I am not ungrateful enough to do that! And, of course, I love you, my cousin, though you must not be too vehement! Have we not always been the best of friends from the time when you defended me from Angus's big dog. But you should not be so very vehement!"

"But Sylvia, dearest," he began again, more shyly, "surely you understand me; you know *what* love it is which I would crave. Oh surely, surely you do not prefer that fellow Lester?"

"Captain Lester," she repeated, with a merry peal of rippling laughter. "Oh no, I care nothing for *him*. His compliments are pleasant enough till one grows tired of them, and it is delightful to sit behind his fast-trotting bay. But as for caring for the man himself—bah!"

Then she went off again into ecstatic visions of the glories which she saw awaiting her in her far-off home; and it was some time before Douglas was able to say, yet more shyly, whilst a crimson flush overspread his honest face, "Here is a little token, cousin, if you would but accept it!" and to produce a tiny turquoise ring, shaped like a forget-me-not flower.

"Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed Sylvia, with genuine girlish admiration for the pretty trinket; and, heiress though she were, she had as yet but few such ornaments. "Thank you so much, dear cousin. I shall always wear and prize it," and, with evident satisfaction, she placed the token on her finger.

Just then Mrs. Archdale's voice was heard recalling them, reminding them that dew was falling, and that Sylvia had to take a long day's journey on the morrow. They hurried in to find the laird asking for his evening's music, and so the time passed cheerfully away, the concert being closed by "Auld Lang Syne," in which all joined with natural emotion, thinking of the various changes which were coming into their lives.

Sylvia and her companion had to leave Gowanbrae at an early hour on the following morning, but the whole family was downstairs to bid her farewell, and Douglas found no opportunity for a renewal of their *tête-à-tête.* Sylvia showed some emotion at parting from the aunt whose care and affection had scarcely permitted her to feel the loss of the motherly

love—which she had never known. Her adieux to Meta and Janet were interspersed with many promises of constant correspondence. Quite at the last she turned to Douglas, and, holding out the hand which wore the ring which he had given her, said half lightly, half imperiously,

"Good-bye, dear cousin, or rather *au revoir;* for remember *you* are to come out and see me in my glory."

Then, with another wave of her hand to the group which stood at the old hall door, she leaped lightly into the carriage, gave one long lingering glance at the home which could be hers no longer, until a turn in the road hid it from her sight; and that chapter in her life was closed. The Archdales slowly and sadly turned into the house, with that feeling of dreary desolation which always attends the break-up of a pleasant party.

It was not until they were driving home from Birkenholt upon the following evening that, under cover of the friendly darkness, Douglas confided to his favourite sister, Meta, the hopes and fears, the doubts and aspirations which his last interview with Sylvia had awakened in his

mind; and she, listening with trembling affectionate sympathy, which her own great happiness rendered more intense, yet with the recollection of Ralph's words of warning and foreboding ever present to her mind, could but hope that, for once, her lover's judgment might prove to be at fault.

CHAPTER V.

THE library in Mr. Earle's luxurious residence in Calcutta was a spacious apartment, well provided with every invention and contrivance for mitigating the intense heat of the Indian climate. The windows were shaded by well-watered cuscus matting, waving punkahs, and blocks of ice, while tiny fountains of perfumed water, combined to render the atmosphere as cool and fragrant as possible.

Yet the countenance of the great banker was flushed and heated on the calm October evening on which we first make his acquaintance, and he turned frequently to a tray, covered with decanters and glasses of various shapes and sizes, as though to allay an intolerable burning thirst.

"Well, Ryan," he said at length, "I will examine thoroughly into this matter, and you shall have the best advice which I can give you.

I own that I am not myself fond of such speculative ventures; they seldom find favour in old established firms like ours. However, as I said, I will examine the papers, and let you have my best opinion on the matter."

He placed a packet of business-like documents in his desk, and looked across at his companion, a small, slight young man of five or six and twenty, with sallow complexion, straight black hair, small beady eyes, and restless shifting glance, which never seemed able to meet that of any interlocutor.

"Thank you, sir," he said, "I hope you *will* approve of the prospectus; Messrs. Goldenby and Flashly recommend it strongly."

"Goldenby and Flashly," repeated Mr. Earle, as though the names did not inspire him with implicit confidence. "Hum—ha—well—we shall see. Come to my office on—say Thursday morning—the day after to-morrow—will that suit you? Or, better still, will you dine with me to-morrow evening?"

"A thousand thanks, my dear sir," replied the young civilian, "I should be delighted, but,"—with some hesitation—"my sister has

just come to live with me, and I hardly like to leave her by herself so soon."

"Bring her with you," replied the great man, genially, "bring her with you, by all means. My little girl will have arrived from England, and she will be delighted to make Miss Ryan's acquaintance. My *little* girl I call her," he added, with affected carelessness, "but she must be a *great* girl now, and, report says, passably good-looking."

"We shall be charmed to accept your hospitality, and to welcome Miss Earle to India. Half-past seven is your hour, I think?"

"Yes. Then meanwhile I will read over the papers carefully. What? Must you go? Good-bye, then. We shall meet you, I suppose, at the Governor's grand ball next week?"

Yes, *I* must put in an appearance, although I seldom dance. My sister is in mourning for the aunt who brought her up, and she avoids such public entertainments for the present."

"Well, it is my daughter's *debût*, so I suppose *I* am doomed to the whole evening. She has led a quiet life in Scotland with my sister, and I suppose she will be eager for any excitement

which can be offered. What, you must go? Good-bye, then, or rather *au revoir*. We shall expect you to-morrow."

The two men parted with every appearance of cordial friendship, but when the door had closed behind the departing guest, a dark cloud of anger, or anxiety, overspread the banker's handsome face. He set his teeth firmly together, and brought his clenched hand heavily down upon the desk beside him.

"Intolerable," he muttered, "perfectly intolerable; to be so near success, and to fall instead into utter and disgraceful ruin. Had I complete command of capital for a few more months, or even weeks, my plans would have been matured, and the grandest *coup* the mercantile world has known for years would have been securely made. But if Ryan holds to his present intention of withdrawing from our charge the sum of which he spoke, all will be lost 'The attempt and not the deed' will then 'confound me quite.' Delay is now my only chance, to set this subtle intriguer on some other scheme, to sow suspicion in his mind with regard to Goldenby and Flashly—to gain time,

at any rate, perhaps to turn him entirely from his purpose. If he could but be brought to fall in love with Sylvia! She is beautiful, Flora says, wilful, and fond of admiration. He, much less highly favoured by nature than by fortune, proclaims himself to be a misogynist, scarcely speaks to any woman, and has never been known to single *any* out for special admiration. All the more triumph to the one who conquers this determined cynicism. *That*, if I judge my daughter's character rightly, will be a powerful motive to induce her to assist my scheme. She has lived so quietly in Scotland that I hope there can be no premature entanglement in that quarter. Bah! the brilliant life which she will here enter would soon drive all such thoughts from her head. This ball at Government House comes most opportunely. I begged Lady Carew to select a suitable dress for her for that occasion, one in which she may outshine all her compeers, and I can trust her ladyship in a matter of that kind. Then there will be her mother's jewels, with which she may make herself still more fine. And Ryan will have the advantage of being the first to welcome her to her new home. I

wonder what this sister of his is like, and whether she will aid or thwart me in my plans?"

If Mr. Earle did not actually embody his thoughts in these or similar words, the substance of them was certainly present to his mind, as he sat on moodily awaiting his daughter's arrival—now turning over the pages of a ponderous ledger, now sorting or examining various bundles of business-like papers, then throwing them hastily aside with an impatient exclamation, sometimes even rising from his seat to pace the room with agitated footsteps.

At length a slight commotion announced the arrival of the traveller. The door was opened, and the silent, soft-footed native servant ushered in a vision of beauty and of grace, which, for the moment, transported Mr. Earle back to the days of love, and youth, and happiness, and his long-lost wife seemed to live once more in her child.

"Sylvia!" he cried, "Good God! you are your mother's image."

He spoke with genuine emotion. For the moment the merchant was forgotten in the man; and as he clasped his daughter to his breast,

and realised her wonderful and varied charms, he failed, at the instant, to connect them with the furtherance of his own ulterior plans.

Sylvia, on her side, looked her very best. Excitement, astonishment at all she saw, some slight shyness at this first meeting with her practically unknown parent, lent to her beautiful countenance that soft glow of natural emotion, that tenderness of womanly timidity, which were the only graces it habitually lacked.

It was not until a short time later, when Sylvia had retired to her own room, to remove the signs of travel and prepare herself for the evening meal, that Mr. Earle, half unconsciously, murmured to himself: "I am surely saved if she but prove compliant. Ryan were more than human to resist such peerless charms."

The grand saloon of Government House showed like fairy-land as Sylvia entered it on the evening of the ball. The draperies were all of richest cashmere, countless coloured lamps gleamed amongst broad-leaved palms, ferns and foliage of luxuriant growth. The company assembled was as brilliant and as varied as the surroundings amidst which they met. Turbaned

princes and nobles in their rich attire, decked with glistening jewels, paid reluctant homage to the representative of Feringhee rule; newly-landed English youths, war-worn veterans, and hoary-headed counsellors, whose brows were furrowed with deep lines of anxious care and earnest thought, in their picturesque and gorgeous uniforms, mingled with dames and demoiselles in shimmering silk or glistening gauze. Sylvia, arrayed in flowing robes of blue and silver, was conscious that the eyes of all were attracted by her wondrous beauty. Women gazed on her with envy, men with admiration. His Excellency himself, when her father presented her to him, expressed, in flattering terms, his sense of the acquisition which his court and capital had made.

"May I have the pleasure of this dance, Miss Earle?" asked a tall fair-haired youth in the uniform of the —th Bengal Light Infantry—the son of her father's junior partner.

"I think and hope that Miss Earle is engaged to me," said another voice; and Sylvia recognised the young civilian she had met at her father's table on the night after her arrival. "If you

remember, Miss Earle, you promised *me* the first dance of the evening."

"Was it not the first quadrille?" asked Sylvia, who thought the officer would prove the better partner. "I thought you would prefer that arrangement," she added, with a beaming smile, as though to atone for any seeming lack of courtesy. "We shall have much more time for conversation."

"As you please, of course," said Ryan, somewhat stiffly, drawing back to allow his rival to approach his partner.

Mr. Earle watched the retreating footsteps of the couple with ill-disguised displeasure. "She is an inexperienced girl," he said, turning to Ryan with a sickly smile. "No wonder she is dazzled by this brilliant scene."

"It is not needful to apologise," answered the other, still rather stiffly—he was unused to see his advances disregarded. "Beautiful woman has a right to any amount of charming changeable caprice."

"Who would have expected to hear such a statement from the lips of Mr. Ryan?" interposed stout Lady Chili, who, gorgeous in ruby

velvet, strewn with diamonds, had approached the speakers. "*Who* has effected this conversion? But I need hardly ask! Your daughter, Mr. Earle, makes desperate havoc with our *jeunesse dorée!*"

Thus the evening wore away. Mr. Ryan managed to secure a second dance and to escort his charmer to the supper table. Sylvia had by this time better learned to estimate the worth of his attentions, marking the envy they excited in the breasts of other maidens. But they were not by any means the only ones which she received.

From the chief of His Excellency's Staff, to the youngest griffin in the room, every dancing man was at her feet. She felt that her desire was within her grasp,—the Queenship of Society awaited her acceptance.

"Dine with us to-morrow, Ryan?" Mr. Earle said as they left the room. And perhaps your sister would go with my daughter to hear the band?"

"Many thanks," replied the other. "We shall be delighted."

On the way home, the banker said, in tones

of mingled triumph and admonition: "Well, my little girl, you have achieved a great success. But you must not encourage Eric Randall! He has nothing but an empty purse, an empty head, and a smart jacket. Yet his father *is* my partner, and I could not conveniently quarrel with him openly. Mr. Ryan's attentions, on the other hand, do you the greatest honour, and have my entire approval. All the ladies in Calcutta have paid court to him in vain. He is well thought of in the very highest quarters. Yes, you have achieved a great success."

CHAPTER VI.

AT Birkenholt and Gowanbrae, meanwhile, the reduced family parties had resumed their ordinary course of daily duties. Ralph had returned to London, where he waged the battle against sin and suffering, all the more vigorously because he knew that in her northern home a bonnie brown-eyed bird was waiting for him.

Douglas, whilst studying the rudiments of his profession, was weaving "bright fancies of the rainbow's hue," dreaming of an impossible future, enshrining an ideal Sylvia, invested with imaginary virtues, in the recesses of his honest heart, wasting on this idol of his own imagination, all the fresh sweetness of his young affection. Wasting? Nay! Surely the poet spoke eternal truth who said:

"Talk not of wasted affection, affection never was wasted,

If it enrich not the heart of another, its waters returning
Back to their springs, like the rain, shall fill them full of refreshment;
That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the fountain;
Sorrow and silence are strong, and patient endurance is God-like."

Douglas Archdale may never attain the bliss his heart now craves; the pangs of disappointed love may be his destined portion, yet if his heart be true and steadfast, he may cast it without doubt or fear into the fiery furnace of affliction; and, waiting till the trial time be over, he shall receive it purified and strengthened, and in the far off future he may learn to

"Bless the cleansing fire, and the furnace of living pain."

The first Indian mail which could convey the earliest news of Sylvia's safe arrival was anxiously awaited. It brought two letters; one to Mrs. Archdale, from her brother, one from Sylvia to her cousin Meta. The first, in fervid

terms, described the admiration which his daughter's beauty had excited, and expressed his grateful sense of all the care bestowed upon her.

Sylvia's letter shall be given in *extenso.*

"Papa is writing to Aunt Flora, so *my* first letter must be sent to you, dear Meta. Our voyage out was smooth and quick, but rather dull. Mrs. McGhirkin was either sick or sulky all the time, and would not leave her cabin. Positively she wished me to stay there with her, but that *I* declined. Happily, the Colonel was quite free from gout, and willing to do anything I wished. He was rather a nice old boy (and there were no young ones on board worth speaking of), so we became great friends. Papa's carriage met us at the quay. It looks rather strange at first to see the coachman and the other servants in transparent muslin tunics, but one soon gets used to it. They have gorgeous girdles and turbans of various colours, indicating to whose service they belong—in fact, a sort of livery. A Mr. Ryan and his sister dined here on the evening after my arrival.

He is a small sallow-faced man, a great favourite with the Governor-General, and very wealthy, so everyone runs after him. We met him last night at the great ball at Government House, and all the girls were mad with jealousy at the attention which he paid to me. His sister seems a good, quiet little thing, with rather a religious twist. She was brought up by an aunt— the widow of a missionary, or something of that sort—who has given her all sorts of queer notions about caring for the natives, so that she even speaks to the bheesties (water-carriers), who are a very low lot altogether. Her brother disapproves very much of these ridiculous fancies. He has been appointed Resident or Collector—I forget which it is called—at some place in Oude. Papa is calling for my letter, so I must conclude without giving you any account of last night's ball, or of my dress, which was generally admired.

"With love to Aunt Flora and you all,

"Ever your affectionate cousin,

"SYLVIA EARLE."

Meta read and re-read this letter, seeking in

vain for some token of her cousin's loving remembrance of her early home. The reference to Mordaunt Ryan jarred against her delicate sense of right, but did not awaken any jealous apprehension. She could not see in *him* a formidable rival to her peerless brother. Meta's thoughts were, moreover, much engaged by another letter which the same post had brought, the purport of which will be discovered in the following note, which she enclosed with Sylvia's letter to her brother.

"DEAREST DOUGLAS,

"I send you Sylvia's letter, just received, feeling sure you will be interested in her first impressions of her Indian home. Uncle Earle speaks enthusiastically of the admiration her beauty has excited, how could it fail to do so? She was evidently hurried at the conclusion of her letter or, no doubt, her messages would have been more full and tender.

"Now I have a bit of news to tell you which concerns myself. The living of L——, S. Martin, has been definitely offered to Ralph, and he has determined to accept it; and hopes

that now our marriage may take place before the end of January. You will, I hope, be able to get leave for a few days? Forgive me for thus troubling you about my own affairs, and with best love from all,

"Believe me, always

"Your very affectionate sister,

"META ARCHDALE."

In his turn, Douglas read and re-read Sylvia's letter, striving vainly to combat his own vague sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction with its tone.

"Poor Mrs. McGhirkin," he muttered, "no doubt it would be hard for Sylvia to accommodate herself to the fancies of a hypochondriacal invalid, and yet;"—Mordaunt Ryan, I am afraid, he classed, with slender grounds for the assumption, as "a cad"—"a low, quill-driving, purse-proud snob, without even the 'good looks and military bearing of that fellow Lester,' in his favour."

The description of Miss Ryan's character he passed by with as little attention as could be bestowed on anything which came from Sylvia's

hand. "Love to Aunt Flora and *you all.*" Those words and the signature by which they were succeeded, were pressed with fondest fervour to his lips. Then at last he took up Meta's tender little effusion:

"'Sure to feel interested in her impressions of her Indian home.' There could be little doubt of that. 'Admiration which her beauty had excited.' The darling! They were hardly worthy to look upon her charms. 'Hurried at the conclusion of her letter. The messages would have been more full and tender.' What need to tell *him that.* Did he not know his darling's truth? Ah! what is this: 'Living definitely offered to Ralph. Hopes our wedding may take place before the end of January.' What luck some fellows have! Well, Ralph is a good sort—and Meta, poor dear little Meta. How we shall miss her. Heigh ho! I suppose I must scrawl a line to wish her joy." And drawing a blotting-book towards him, he wrote as follows:

"DEAREST META,

"Many thanks for your note and for its invaluable enclosure. I congratulate you and

Elton on his great good fortune, and shall try to be at home for the important day. Best love to all.

"Your ever loving brother,

"DOUGLAS ARCHDALE.

"P.S.—I retain Sylvia's letter—as you of course intended that I should. Elton's letters are enough for you."

CHAPTER VII.

ON the very evening on which the Indian mail arrived at Gowanbrae, Mr. Earle was once more seated at his library table, with a ponderous open ledger laid before him. These last few weeks seem to have deepened the lines of care traced upon the banker's handsome face; and a dark cloud of anxiety rests upon it now, whilst he pores over the closely-written columns. From week to week, on various pretexts, he had been able to persuade Mordaunt Ryan to postpone the contemplated alteration in the investment of his property. But the time had come when this temporising policy was no longer possible, when the young millionaire must decide either to accept the tempting offer made to him, at once, or else reject it altogether. And the great banker was, if possible, still less inclined to see so large a sum withdrawn from the bank of which he was the head,

than he had been when the idea was first presented to his notice; the rate of his expenses having rapidly increased since his daughter's arrival in Calcutta.

On the other hand, Mr. Earle's scheming for securing his hold upon the young civilian, through the influence of Sylvia's beauty, has been but partially successful. Ryan's admiration for the banker's daughter is undoubted and outspoken; but no definite proposal has as yet been made, and the capricious coquetry with which Sylvia treats her rich admirer drives her father to exasperation.

"What can the girl be thinking of? What does the girl want?" he mutters, impatiently, as he thinks of the stability which a projected alliance between his daugher and the young millionaire would give to his own position. "What *can* any girl want more than such a husband?" he adds, impatiently. "Qui hi," he calls aloud, clapping his hands, and when the dark-skinned, silent servant enters, bids him ask Miss Earle to come to him at once. The man withdrew with a profound salaam; and in a few minutes Sylvia stood beside her father; if

possible more beautiful than ever, in a perfectly fitting robe of light blue cashmere, setting off her graceful figure, ivory skin, and golden hair. There was a steely glitter in her wondrous eyes, a cruel look about her well shaped mouth, which to a close observer might have betrayed the gradual but steady deterioration of her character.

She touched her father's forehead lightly with her lips, before sinking gracefully into an easy chair, she unfolded and gently swayed a large blue fan, which was suspended to her girdle.

"What are you going to do this evening? Do you attend the band?" enquired her father.

"I believe so," she answered, rather languidly. "I think I promised Miss Ryan that I would take her there."

"I am glad to hear it! *Very* glad," responded Mr. Earle, emphatically. "Do you know whether her brother will be on the ground?"

"I believe he is going to do us the honour to come with us," said Sylvia, carelessly. "I hope so, I am sure, for if the Burra Sahib's conversation be not brilliant, it is at least a few degrees more lively than his saintly sister's."

"Sylvia," exclaimed her father, "I will not have you talk of the Ryans in this ridiculous manner. Mr. Ryan is a man of large fortune, good position, and very considerable ability. He has honoured you with marked attentions—attentions which have my highest approbation, and I must insist that no girlish folly shall prevent your receiving them in a suitable and grateful manner."

"But papa," began Sylvia, dropping her fan, and twisting her turquoise ring round her finger; "but papa, if I do not care for Mr. Ryan, if his attentions are distasteful to me?"

"Pshaw, Sylvia!" said the banker, angrily. "It is useless for you to affect the fancies of a love-sick and romantic maiden. I know you better, girl! You are by no means indifferent to the silks and satins, the gold and gewgaws which set off your beauty to advantage. These Mordaunt Ryan could and would bestow on you in abundance, together with all the luxuries and conveniences of life—carriages, horses, servants, a good position, a comfortable home."

"A dull, insignificant husband, and a stiff, Puritanical sister-in-law," concluded Sylvia,

calmly. "Well, papa, perhaps you may be right, in your, not over-flattering, estimate of your daughter's taste. At any rate, I will do my best to land this big fish for you, were it only for the enjoyment of seeing all the envious glances of those who have angled for him in vain. But I must pursue the sport after my own fashion. Flattery and adulation have begun to pall upon him. A little apparent coolness serves to whet his ardour."

"Well, well," her father said, impatiently, "perhaps you may know best! But I should like to have the business settled; and at all events, I must insist that you contrive to put a stop to the absurd pretensions of young Eric Randall!"

"Poor Eric!" Sylvia said, affectedly. "He dances well, and he is so good-looking. He reminds me rather of my cousin Douglas. But no! I suppose it would not do. So here's for Ryan, and rupees! Eh, papa?"

"You foolish girl, what can you wish for more? The best match in the place, and the admiring envy of all your contemporaries? The consciousness that you have saved your father's

honour, and the reputation of an old-established firm!"

The audience which assembled round the band that evening, consisted chiefly of the English residents. The native nobles were but scantily represented; but there were many dusky ayahs, with their pale-faced youthful charges, and native soldiers strolled beneath the trees. These latter were of English type, selected as it seemed, to make the exiled European feel as though an English park had been transported to Bengal.

Sylvia, lounging gracefully upon the softly-cushioned seat, returned the salutations of her numerous acquaintances. The coachman skilfully selected a position near the band, the grooms desisted from the ceaseless shouts which had hitherto cleared the passage from pedestrians, and proclaimed their master's dignity. Many of the younger officers, amongst them Eric Randall, crowded round the carriage and paid homage to the reigning beauty. Sylvia, however, seemed quite satisfied with the society of her companions, and quietly dismissed the rest of her admirers, some of whom appeared

astonished at this seemingly capricious conduct.

The judicious reader, after this, will scarcely be surprised by learning that the promising speculation proposed to Mordaunt Ryan was declined by him upon the following day; and that a rumour was soon current in the social and commercial world that a close alliance would shortly be concluded between "the rising young civil servant and wealthy gentleman, Mr. Mordaunt Ryan, the recently appointed Resident Commissioner of Shahjehanpore, and the only daughter and heiress of Reginald Earle, Esquire, the senior partner in one of our oldest and most respected mercantile and banking firms. We understand," added the *Calcutta Chronicle*, "that Mr. Ryan is about to become the fortunate possessor of a valuable share in the house of his future father-in-law; whilst of the beauty and accomplishments of the fair bride it is superfluous to speak. Mr. Ryan is to be heartily congratulated on the prize which he has won in the matrimonial lottery."

CHAPTER VIII.

"ANOTHER Highland cheer! Nis, nis, nis!" cried Angus Archdale, his boyish voice ringing out shrill and clear above the manlier tones of his companions; whilst the travelling carriage bore Ralph Elton and his bride swiftly and smoothly over the fast frozen ground; until the winding road hid it from view. Then the loving watchers at the doorway turned into the house, lingering in the hall, and gazing listlessly at many a long familiar relic, the pike that had been used at Bannockburn, the claymore which was bent at Killicrankie, the white cockade stained with the blood of him who gave up home and friends and life itself, at the call of loyalty, and "Charlie."

"Is it not very long since you have heard from Sylvia?" Douglas asked, some secret chord of memory or association prompting the question.

"She herself has only written once," Janet replied, "but mother heard from Uncle Earle last month, saying that she was well and very gay. I see another mail has just arrived, it may perhaps ——"

"Hullo!" broke in Angus. Why what a grand affair! But she has not got much the start of Meta, though she thought herself so fine!"

"Who do you mean? What are you speaking of?" cried Douglas, Lennox, and Janet, almost in one breath.

"Of dainty Mistress Sylvia," answered Angus, all unconscious of the bomb-shell he was launching. "She was married at Calcutta, last November, by the Bishop of the diocese ——. Now, what's that for?" he asked, as Douglas snatched the paper from his hand, exclaiming:

"It cannot be! It is a base calumniation!"

"See for yourself," the lad retorted, sullenly, and pointing to the line: "On the 2nd of November, at St. George's, by the Lord Bishop of Calcutta, assisted by the Rev. Ambrose Auriol, the Rev. Matthew Mempriss, and the Rev. Silas Smoothby, Charles Mordaunt Ryan,

British Resident at Shahjehanpore, to Sylvia Flora, only child of Reginald James Earle, Esquire, of Calcutta."

Douglas gazed blankly at the fatal lines, repeating, quite mechanically, "It is not true! It cannot be! She could not be so cruel!"

Mrs. Archdale, entering at the moment, found her eldest son pale with pain and anger, crushing a paper in his grasp, whilst Angus gazed at him with somewhat sullen, half-defiant wonder. "What *is* the matter, dears?" she asked. "What has disturbed them, Janet?"

"Sylvia's marriage, I suppose," said Janet, with serene unconsciousness. "Angus read the announcement in *The Scotsman*. It seems that she was married last November. It is strange that she did not write to us, but why should Douglas care so much about the matter? He was hardly ever here with Sylvia!"

"Sylvia had, perhaps, too little time to write," said Mrs. Archdale, quietly ignoring Janet's later words. "No doubt by the *next* mail we shall know all particulars. Douglas, dear, I came to call you to my little room. I think you said you must go back to-morrow, and I should

like to have a chat with you. Now we have lost our Meta, you must make a confidante of your old mother."

Never had that "little room" of Mrs. Archdale's seemed so like a welcome haven, as it did to him, whose wounded heart was now to feel the truth of the comparison which likens the Divine compassion to the tenderest of all earthly ties: "As one whom *his mother* comforteth, so will I comfort you."

Evening was drawing in apace, and the small room was only lighted by the bright wood fire blazing upon the hearth. Douglas was thankful for the semi-darkness which concealed his agitation. He sank in a chair beside the table, hiding his face between his hands and moaning, "Mother! mother! Oh, how could she do it?"

Mrs. Archdale laid her hand with a caressing touch upon his chestnut curls, "My poor laddie," she said, softly. Brief and simple words which yet, through their tone, conveyed the fullest and most loving sympathy.

"Oh, mother, mother," he repeated, "I loved her so! I trusted her so utterly—and to give

me up without a word. To leave me for a fellow of whom she herself could write like *this!* See here," he pointed to the lines in Sylvia's all too-cherished letter, where she described her first impressions as to Mordaunt Ryan. "And *he* is now her husband!" Douglas added, with a sigh.

Mrs. Archdale perused the passage silently. "Sylvia is very young," she said, at last, "and first impressions are not always to be trusted. We must not judge till we hear more details. Douglas, dear, my heart is full of love and sympathy for you! I and your father were afraid of this; we strove in vain to save you from this sorrow. Yes (as she marked his start of questioning wonder) we were afraid that you might grow too fond of Sylvia!"

"You were afraid?" he queried, "yet *you* loved her well?"

"She is my brother's child," replied his mother, "and as dear to me, almost, as though she were my own. Yet she is no fit wife for you, my boy; nor could we wish our son to wed the heiress who had been committed to our care."

"Mother!" he cried, indignantly, "Sylvia's fortune was the last thing in my thoughts."

"*I* know that, dear," she answered, smiling sadly, "but *others* and, perhaps, your uncle, might have been more incredulous. Had things turned out differently, had Sylvia really cared for you, had she proved to be all your fancy represented her to be, and had her father listened to your suit, you never should have heard a word of our misgivings. But as it has been ordered, I must say, except for your sore heart, my boy, I could not wish it otherwise."

Little more was said, but mother and son sat for a long time in the quiet fire-lit room; feeling the subtle sweet soul-communing which lies too deep for speech. Douglas never forgot that hour, and its effect on his sore spirit found its first expression in the following brief epistle to his sister, which she found awaiting her at the close of one of the first stages of her bridal journey.

"Dearest Meta,

"I enclose the notice of our cousin Sylvia's marriage. Mother knows all, and has been very

kind. Thank God that there *are* such as you and she to keep our faith in, women pure and bright. Have no fears for me. I am taking up life's work in earnest, a sadder, but, I trust, a wiser man. My love to Ralph. Tell him, from me, that he has won a pearl indeed. May he know how to prize it properly. I am glad that you and he can look back with unsullied pleasure to our halcyon holiday. God bless you both.

"Your loving brother,

"DOUGLAS ARCHDALE."

CHAPTER IX.

THE Residency of Shahjehanpore, a spacious bungalow, surrounded by a verandah overgrown with passion flower and other creeping plants, had been carefully adorned for the reception of its master's bride. The pretty drawing-room was supplied with every costly article of comfort or luxury; yet Sylvia lying on a softly-cushioned sofa, and attired in most becoming garments, appeared far from happy, her lovely brow was darkened by an angry frown, her silvery voice was raised to a discordant pitch in her ineffectual efforts to arouse an inattentive or oblivious servant.

At length, a lady, plainly dressed, with bands of smooth black hair, framing a pleasing countenance, lit up by large dark eyes, entered the room, exclaiming hastily:

"What *is* the matter, Sylvia? Are you ill? Can I get you anything?"

"*You*, Edith?" answered Sylvia, languidly. "No, thanks. I am not ill, except it be with heat, annoyance and surprise. That tiresome Hassan has forgotten my iced coffee. I have called till I am hoarse, but my summons has been quite unheeded. Whilst Mordaunt is away they think they can do as they like, but they may find themselves mistaken. As soon as he returns I shall insist upon their being punished —Hassan especially."

"Poor Hassan!" Edith interposed, as Sylvia paused. "Let me plead for him for this time, dear. His little boy, to whom he is most tenderly attached, is seriously ill. Thank God, the worst seems over now, and he has fallen quietly asleep. Neither I nor his father have left him all the morning."

"*You*, Edith!" Sylvia almost screamed, "you have been watching by the dark-skinned urchin, and you come here to me, knowing how nervously I dread infection! Was anybody ever so selfishly inconsiderate?"

"I do not think there is the slightest danger," Edith said, quietly, "the illness is of no infectious character; but if you really wish it, I will

change my dress. Had I not better see about your coffee first, however? Why, here it is! Hassan must have brought it in while we were talking. Come, you need not be afraid of it in any case; it is a powerful disinfectant."

Sylvia sipped the long-expected dainty, grumbling all the while about defects in its decoction, about the dulness of the station, the heat, and all the other crumpled rose-leaves in her lot. In the midst of this tirade Hassan, silent and submissive, came to take away the cup.

"Oh yes, take it away!" his mistress said, disdainfully. "Horrid stuff! I wonder, Hassan, you were not ashamed to bring it to me. When the sahib comes you shall be punished for this and all your negligence."

"When do you think he *will* return?" asked Edith, whilst the servant silently withdrew.

"He ought to be here now," said Sylvia, fretfully. "He promised that he would return to-day, but it seems Sir Henry has been much alarmed by the reports from Delhi and Meerut, and wants to have a meeting of the Country Residents, to know whether Talookdars and

Zemindars can be trusted. Besides, he holds a Durbar for a Native Prince called Nana Sahib, who is now at Lucknow. I only wish that I were there; I would have worn my silver tissue with—— But you are not listening. Are you pondering over Hassan's child? You *are* a nice companion, certainly."

Edith felt that the reproach was partly merited. The mention of disquieting reports from Delhi and Meerut reminded her of certain incidents which, in her morning walk, she had observed, but which had since almost escaped her memory; and she had really lost the thread of Sylvia's speech.

Brought up from childhood by her aunt, Mrs. Jackson (the widow of a Bombay chaplain), Edith had been taught to treat the members of the subject races with a courteous kindness, very different from the usual bearing of the Anglo-Indian ladies. Her reward lay in the almost universal feelings of respectful gratitude with which she was regarded. But for some days past a subtle change had passed over her coloured friends, a timid hesitation being evident in the greeting even of those who knew her

best. Could these be, indeed, premonitory signals of a rising storm—tokens of a wide-spread disaffection towards the English Rule? She dared not breathe a word of these alarms in Sylvia's hearing, but she longed impatiently to see her brother, and to learn whether there were or not real causes for apprehension.

Hastily excusing herself for her momentary abstraction, she, with her usual gentle patience, listened to the details of the dress which Sylvia *would* have worn had she been present at the fête in honour of the Nana, little thinking of the fearful notoriety that name would soon acquire.

When Edith left the room soon afterwards, she, with some surprise, saw Hassan leave the house by a side door, which, as she knew, was seldom used. Moved by a sudden impulse, she resolved to follow him, if possible, unrecognised. She donned a long and loose burnous, the hood of which partly concealed her face, and, in her turn passed through the grove of flowering shrubs skirting their compound, and dividing it from the other gardens. She reached a gate opening upon the road, and leading to the town.

Hassan's turbaned figure was still dimly visible, and she followed in its wake until she reached an open space. A group of peons, sepoys, budmashes, and others, were gathered here around a travelling Fakir.

It was a striking scene, which might have charmed a less pre-occupied observer. The cloudless canopy of heaven, studded with countless stars, illumined by the brilliant eastern moon, the group of Indians in their picturesque costumes, their dusky countenances showing tokens of the passions which the orator excited. Edith, however, was unable to appreciate the the beauty of the prospect. The vague fears which she had previously experienced were confirmed and strengthened as she watched the gestures of the speaker, and the evident effect which his oration had upon the feelings of his audience. Of the speech itself she understood but little, it being spoken in an unfamiliar native dialect. To increase her apprehensions she perceived a sign of recognition pass between Hassan and the orator. Seeing a sheltering tree a little to the rear of the position which the former had appropriated, and somewhat on

the outskirts of the motley group, she resolved to make an effort to recall him to his duty.

Drawing the hood and cloak around her, she approached him silently; then in a low, clear, penetrating tone pronounced his name.

Hassan looked round, startled, but resumed his posture of attention, without taking any notice of the shrouded figure.

"Hassan, Hassan!" Edith said again, after a momentary pause, "think of what you are doing! Will you shed the blood of those whose salt you eat? Hassan! pause before it be too late!"

Again the man looked round but she had now withdrawn herself behind the tree already mentioned. As in a dream he heard the peroration of the speech, in which the devotee bade his auditors to "Wait for the Green Standard of the Prophet, which should soon be reared, a signal for the close of the Feringhee rule, and for the coming of the promised chieftain; for the hour of vengeance and of triumph." Through it all he seemed to listen for that other voice—"Hassan, Hassan! what are you about? Pause while there is time!

Will you imbrue your hands in blood?"

Suddenly the speaker waved his hands, and at the signal for dispersion, the crowd seemed quietly to melt away till only Hassan and the Mudir stood upon the place. The former seemed absorbed in gloomy meditation.

"Well, friend," the Mudir said, breaking the silence, which began to be oppressive. Well, friend, you seem quite lost in thought! Have you any news to tell me? Has your Sahib yet returned?"

"N-no!" replied Hassan half mechanically. "No! but he is expected—so the Mem Sahib said this afternoon."

The other broke into a harsh derisive laugh. "Expected," he retorted. "Yes, no doubt, but he will *not* return at present. The Burra Sahib of the English all unwittingly is doing honour to the great avenger of our nation's wrongs. Nana Sahib is at Lucknow feasting with his future victims. Ryan Sahib will *not* soon return. Have you nothing else to tell me?"

"Nothing, learned Pundit, nothing worthy of your high consideration."

"Then you had better go back to the bunga-

low before our intercourse has been observed. Until the hour of vengeance dawns it will enable you to serve us better if our connection can remain a secret."

"Vengeance!" repeated Hassan, vengeance upon *all* Feringhees.!"

"What else could you desire?" enquired the other scornfully.

"Can there be no exception!" Hassan pleaded. Think, I have eaten of their salt for years. I have received much kindness at their hands. Ay, one of them even to-day sat by the bedside of my boy! I cannot shed her blood!"

"Of whom speak you?" asked the Fakir, "is it for the Sahib's *wife* that you would plead?"

He paused, astonished at the sudden change which passed over the Kitmagar's countenance: "Of *her*," he hissed, of the Mem Sahib? No; but of another and a nobler heart. To save the creamy skin of the Mem Sahib, Hassan would not stretch out his little finger. No! it is Miss Edith for whom I care. The Mem Sahib! she who dared to threaten me with punishment, degrading punishment, for the neglect of one of

her capricious fancies. She! who cares nothing whether I and mine, be sick or well, alive or dead. For her I plead not!"

"Well, then, brother," said the Moulvie, soothingly, all may yet be well. The name of Edith Ryan is well known to many of our brethren. It may be we can meet your wishes. Go back to your bungalow. Be secret and be vigilant. Should you have anything to tell me, seek me in the cave beside the lion-stone. You know the signal? Once more, fare you well!"

They parted. Hassan went back to his master's home, whither Edith had preceded him. As the ladies sat that night at dinner, they little thought how every word they uttered swayed the heart of their soft-stepping silent servant, moving it alternately to dreams of vengeance, and to softer thoughts of passionate devotion. True, indeed, it is that:—

"Words are lighter than the cloud-foam
Of the restless ocean spray,
Vainer than the trembling shadow
That the next hour steals away."

But no less true, and far more important to

remember, is it that they are also powerful living influences for good or evil:—

"Serpents with their venomous stings,
Or, bright angels hovering o'er us,
With heaven's light upon their wings.
Every word has its own spirit
True or false, that never dies.
Every word man's lips have uttered
Echoes in God's skies."

CHAPTER X.

ON another lovely evening about a week after the occurrence of these events, Edith Ryan and her brother stood in the broad verandah of their home, evidently debating some important question. Mordaunt had returned from Lucknow, with but an imperfect sense of the grave turn affairs were taking, yet anxious to place his young wife in comparative security in the Residency of the Capital, where a refuge was offered to both her and Edith, through the kindness of Sir Henry Lawrence.

Sylvia hailed the prospect with extreme delight, but to Mordaunt's great surprise, Edith expressed much doubt and hesitation, "You must go, Edith," he at last said, angrily. "Indeed, I cannot think why you demur. Sylvia is eager for the change, I shall have to be constantly away about the district—and it is not fit

that you and she should be left here alone. It is unlike you to be so obstinate."

"I cannot bear the thought of leaving you in danger, Mordaunt," said his sister, meekly, "and indeed I hardly think you realize the disaffection which exists among the people here. Even our own servants are affected by it. Last week a travelling Fakir attracted quite a concourse, and Hassan was among his auditors."

"Ha! has that wretch been here?" exclaimed her brother, "then it is indeed high time that you were gone, and if Hassan is meddling in such matters, it would be safer to remove him from the place. He shall go as chief of your attendants, and if you have any further reason to suspect his treachery, you can give a hint to some of the authorities at Lucknow. But among fresh surroundings he will probably be on his good behaviour.

With this assurance Edith was perforce obliged to be content, feeling indeed that her own personal influence was the best security for Hassan's truth. Her anxiety was indeed almost entirely for her brother, in his lonely home, amid a disaffected population; no one, at that

time, realising the awful storm which was about to break upon that City of Palaces, the Capital of Oude.

At this juncture too, the colloquy was interrupted :

"Mordaunt," cried Sylvia, who, reclining in a hammock, was at the further end of the verandah, "Mordaunt, when you and Edith have finished that prolonged discussion, you might give *me* some of your attention."

Mordaunt, still very much in love with his young wife, hastened to her side, with many protestations of unalterable affection, and profuse apologies for his involuntary neglect.

"There, there! That will do," she answered peevishly. "Don't, Mordaunt! don't, you only worry me. I want to know when we shall start for Lucknow? And, Edith, would you mind just telling Hira to bring down my dresses? You might help her, dear. I want to see what I shall have to order for this visit."

Mordaunt, despite his ardent love, shuddered a little at this ominous announcement which, as he too well knew, presaged an order on the

amount of several hundreds of rupees on the Calcutta firm which Sylvia honoured with her custom. He even ventured on a mild remonstrance.

"My dear," he said, "you shall have everything you wish, of course. But, do you not think your present wardrobe would suffice for *this* occasion. There is not much gaiety at Lucknow at this time. Sir Henry takes a gloomy view of things—and, then, everything you wear becomes you so. That which you have on just now, for instance. Could anything possibly be more bewitching?"

Sylvia was not softened—even by this compliment. She could not brook the slightest check on her caprices.

"Really, Mordaunt, you are too ridiculous," she said. "To hear you, anyone would think that I was most extravagant; and, I am sure no woman in India can spend less upon her dress than I do. But the idea that dresses bought for a poky little country town like this could be suitable for wearing in the capital is too absurd. And, as to there being little going on just now, did you not say yourself that Sir

Henry constantly invited all the English to his table? Besides, the magnificent festivities for the Nana. I wish I had been there in time for them. Edith, are you ever going to fetch Hira? or, must *I* summon her myself?"

With a heart heavier than she could herself account for, Edith obeyed the mandate. She soon returned, followed by the dark-skinned Ayah, in her rich and picturesque attire. They were both heavily laden with the contents of Sylvia's wardrobe, silks, and satins of rich quality and varied hue. Muslins, "fine as spider webs," cashmeres of the softest texture, gold and silver tissues, delicate embroidery—forming as it seemed a perfect and complete collection of every article of feminine array. Yet, at the end of the inspection, Mordaunt's fears were fully realised, for the list of things Sylvia declared, "she *could* not do without," might have furnished a fresh trousseau.

The other preparations for the ladies' journey were carried on with wonderful celerity; Edith strengthened Hassan's attachment to herself, by selecting his wife as her own personal attendant, and thus securing to him the company of his

darling boy. Hira, of course, accompanied her mistress.

The palanquins were brought, surrounded by a numerous train of native servants, under Hassan's superintendence, and they started on the journey, which Sylvia, in the wildest spirits, looked on as a holiday excursion; and, even Edith, although her attention had been more awakened to the grave nature of the situation, was far, indeed, from any adequate prevision of the dire events awaiting her in the doomed capital. It was not given to her, it is not given to any, even in this enlightened age:

> "To read the book of fate,
> And see the revolutions of the time
> Make mountains level, and the continent,
> Weary of solid firmness, melt itself
> Into the ocean."

or to mark:

> "How chances mock
> And changes fill the cup of alterations,
> With divers colours."

And, surely, never was there instance, in

which it was more emphatically *well* that the sheltering veil which hides the future from our ken should be kept closely drawn; for had the happiest Anglo-Indian, at that time, been privileged "to feel the future in the instant," he would, indeed,

"Have shut the book and laid him down to die."

But the threads of this little domestic drama are now becoming entangled with those of one of the most terrific tragedies of modern history, and the development of the strange plot upon a wider stage must be reserved for the commencement of another chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

A recent traveller[1] has said of Lucknow, that "there are few towns in India which, by their first appearance, more captivate the stranger. A spacious park, interspersed with fine lawns of turf, in which a thousand rivulets wind, surrounds the city on all sides, while its innumerable monuments display their fantastic outlines above the trees."

On the fair May morning on which Sylvia approached its gates, the City of Palaces wore an aspect even more imposing. The Residency, now the ruined but most interesting memorial of an heroic effort, rarely, if ever paralleled, then shone with all the brightness of oriental splendour. It stood upon a hill, sloping gently towards the river. Its flat roof was surrounded by an Italian balustrade, and from this coign of

[1] M. Louis Roupelet.

vantage the most comprehensive view could be obtained of the strange, and in some respects, incongruous city.

Seen from a distance, Lucknow seemed a vast chaotic mass, which gradually resolved itself into a congeries of narrow streets and twisting lanes, cupolas and columns, gilded domes and terraced roofs, rising in picturesque confusion above the rich foliage of surrounding groves and gardens, flanked by the huge frowning pile of the Muchee Bhowun citadel, behind which flowed the charming Gumti, the most sinuous river in the world, passing through the bright cornfields, scattered hamlets and mango topes, which gave to Oude the attractive appellation of the Garden of India.

For more than fifteen months this fertile province had enjoyed the firm but gentle rule of Henry Lawrence, one of the few Anglo-Indians in a prominent position capable of taking an enlightened view of his responsibilities, and of entering into all the wants and feelings of the various races he was called upon to govern. He was also one of the very few who could discern the signs of an approaching storm, and

he had striven with a holy zeal to redress the grievances, and disarm the vengeance of a people suffering from the faults and failings of their former rulers.

As our travellers entered Lucknow, they noticed with admiring eyes the beautiful grounds surrounding the Alumbagh, the Charbagh, and Dilkoosha Palace. In the streets which immediately surrounded the Residency itself, signs of unusual stir and agitation attracted their attention. A strong body of European troops, having in its midst a number of women, children, and invalided comrades, was entering the imposing edifice. The townspeople watched the movements of this band with sullen rage and discontent; in fact, upon this memorable 14th of May, 1857, the radical defect in the military arrangements of the place was partially corrected through the persevering insistance of the Financial Commissioner, Martin Gubbins, who had at length persuaded Sir Henry Lawrence to summon a company of the 32nd Regiment from the distant cantonments to which all the European troops had hitherto been relegated, and to confide to them instead of to

the native force to which it had been previously committed, the important charge of his official residence. At the same time (but this our travellers only heard much later) the remainder of the 32nd was sent to watch the native troops in the cantonment of Mariaon, and the Muchee Bhowun was placed under the guardianship of Europeans and carefully selected sepoys.

Sir Henry received the ladies with the utmost cordiality. A suitable apartment was placed at their disposal, and they were hospitably invited to the Chief Commissioner's own table. In after years, when Edith reviewed the incidents of those eventful days, she loved to picture to herself the scene on that first evening of her intercourse with men, whose names were soon to be enrolled among the first ranks of their country's heroes; men with whom she herself became connected by the close ties of common interest, common suffering, common anxiety and common grief, common hope and common courage, nerving all to common labour in the common cause.

Foremost among her recollections were the grand features of her noble host clouded with

anxious care, yet bright with that serenity which no earthly cause can give or take away—the token of a mind at rest. In strange contrast was the restless, keen, rather dissatisfied demeanour of the Finance Commissioner, also destined to display his signal talents in the course of this momentous drama. There were also the bronzed countenances of the veteran soldiers, Banks and Inglis, Lawrence's selected successors in his almost super-human task; young George Lawrence, Sir Henry's aide-de-camp and nephew; his military secretary, Captain Wilson, who was with him when the shell exploded which cut short that noble life. These, and many others less known to fame, but worthy still of fair remembrance, were seated round that hospitable board.

Edith's neighbour was the Residency Chaplain, a grave, thoughtful man, who seemed delighted with his sympathetic listener, and who enlarged upon his various plans for the improvement and advantage of the native races. Edith was really interested in hearing of "La Martiniere," the school which had been founded by the eccentric originator of the town, and of

the orphanage for soldiers' children, recently established by the Chief Commissioner. Then they spoke of the strange glimmering light of truth which now and then illuminated the darkness of the Hindoo creed; of the mysterious Supreme Being, Om, or Brahm, to whom they raise no statue, and from whom, as they believe, the life of gods and men is equally derived; of the Paradise thus described in their religious books: "Encircled by rivers, rolling waves of pure gold, is a forest, every tree of which diffuses sweet perfumes, and in the centre of it is that mysterious tree of magic powers, adored by gods and men—the tree of immortality." Then Edith told many interesting details of the Parsee faith which she had learned to know during her residence in Bombay, and of the wide-spread charity of its professors.

In such conversation time slipped pleasantly away, whilst in her post of honour at her host's right hand, Sylvia, to her disgust, found that all her artifices failed to win anything from him beyond his usual grave, stately courtesy.

Later in the evening, Sir Henry, finding himself by Edith's side, was prompted to lay

bare his inmost thoughts to an unusual degree, and to utter words which almost seemed prophetic, and which were indelibly imprinted on her memory.

"We are, I fear," he said, "on the brink of a most fearful crisis; and although I trust, by God's great mercy, that the English rule may, in the end, come forth victorious, it will only be after searching trial, and who shall see the end there is none but He who knows. We shall be tried by fire!"

The following fortnight passed quietly away, and the ladies employed the time in visiting the numerous curious, gorgeous, and sometimes fantastic buildings which the town contained—the Muchee Bhowun, with the great Isambara, that great piece of Indian architecture which is enclosed within its walls; the Kaiser Bagh, and the Dilkoosha Palace, surrounded by its lovely garden.

Then the storm broke with fearful violence. On the last day of May, Sir Henry and his staff dining at the Cantonment Residency of Mariaon, the ladies' meal was served to them in their own apartment, where Hassan waited

on them in his usual silent, noiseless manner.

Sylvia fretfully complained of dulness. "I might as well be at Shahjehanpore as this," she said.

Suddenly a blaze of light burst into the room, and lit with fiery flame the whole horizon. Piercing shrieks rang out, almost at the moment, as the frightened inmates of the Residency rushed, with one accord, on to the roof, to see what had occurred. Edith would have followed their example, but Sylvia clung to her with nervous terror, and implored her not to leave her. So they waited for some minutes, which appeared like hours, until Hassan, pale and agitated, with quick hurried step, strangely at variance with his usual stately gravity, entered the room, exclaiming:

"The officers' bungalows are on fire, Miss Edith; the sepoys have risen in revolt; there has been murder done!"

To describe the terror which this announcement awakened in the trembling women would be impossible. The night was spent in agitation and suspense, more trying than any certainty. Then, however, their worst fears were, for the

time, relieved by hearing that Sir Henry's moral force had quelled the mutineers, whilst the prompt precautions he had taken prevented the disturbance from extending to the city. By dawn the danger was, for the moment, past.

CHAPTER XII.

IT soon became evident that the respite could be only temporary. Sir Henry writing to Lord Canning said indeed: "We are now positively better off than we were. We know our friends and enemies;" and in the town itself order was maintained for about a month. But from outlying stations tales of mutiny, sedition, flight and death came pouring in. Edith's anxiety for her brother was extreme. Nor had she even the melancholy satisfaction of mingling her tears and prayers for him with her who should have shared them so entirely. For Sylvia repelled every attempt at sympathy with passionate exclamations on the cruelty of mentioning such a subject in her presence. Sir Henry's thoughtful kindness was the young girl's chief support. Despite his failing health, and ever increasing weight of care, his thoughtful kind

considerate care for *all* remained unchanged. Not even the misguided sepoys were neglected by it, he still hoped that some at least would remain faithful to their salt; and steadily resisted Gubbins' proposals for the general disarmament of the native force. At length complete prostration forced Sir Henry to lay down the reins of government, and the Financial Commissioner prevailed upon the council to dismiss the soldiers till the following November. But when Sir Henry heard what had been done, he set to work to counteract it instantly, dissolved the council, and recalled as many sepoys as were willing to return. Five hundred answered his appeal, and these, with eighty pensioners summoned to rejoin their ancient flag, and the little band of English heroes afterwards maintained a struggle which for exalted courage and enduring fortitude may vie with any tale on the historic page.

About a month was spent in efforts to improve the defences of the Residency and Muchee Bhowun, and in providing stores and ammunition. Then, on the 29th of June, the unhappy sortie to the Korkrail rivulet was made, and the dis-

astrous defeat of Chinhut sustained. These events precipitated the commencement of the siege. It was found impossible to retain the Muchee Bhowun, which was abandoned and destroyed; the troops which had been stationed there, joining their comrades in the Residency, a movement happily effected without loss.

But on the following day another crushing blow fell on the garrison. On July 1st, Sir Henry Lawrence was writing and dictating in his room, when a shell exploded at his feet. Yielding to the entreaties of his staff, he promised on the following day to change his quarters. But tired with his early round he put off the fulfilment of his promise, and was lying on his bed explaining some instructions to his secretary, Captain Wilson, when another shell came crashing through the wall with deafening noise and blinding clouds of smoke and dust. "Sir Henry, are you hurt?" cried Wilson, anxiously, then waited breathless through the momentary pause before the low faint answer came, "I am killed."

It was too true. Returning light revealed a shattered form, a blood-stained quilt. Surgeons could only strive to lighten the last agony,

which for two days was borne with Christian fortitude. By the death-bed of this great and gallant man, Edith Ryan commenced the noble self-devoted work which she and many other ladies carried on throughout that dreadful siege. Never, through all her after life, were the incidents of those two awful days effaced from Edith's memory. Never could she forget the patience of that dying hero, his deep humility, his steadfast faith, his boundless charity. His death deprived her of a powerful stay, a noble, kind, considerate friend and guardian, but beside that pattern of unselfish thoughtfulness for others, she could not, even in her own mind, dwell upon her private grief. How should they do without him? This was her only thought, save how to alleviate the pain no art could cure.

The touching tribute of respectful love paid to his high qualities by the men who came to bear his honoured body to its final resting place, is so well known that it need not be repeated here, but the effect his influence had on one of the personages of our own simple story may be now recorded.

In compliance with his earnest prayer, Hassan

had been allowed to help Miss Ryan in her ministrations on Sir Henry. Edith had now well-nigh forgotten the suspicions which at Shahjehanpore had been aroused concerning the fidelity of the Khansamah; and she was glad to avail herself of his deft dexterous and devoted service. The Mussulman could comprehend the silent fortitude which, without murmur or complaining, bore the sharpest pangs of pain and anguish; but the all-embracing charity, which extended even to those who had caused the torture, and which could breathe forth sublimest words of pity and compassion; the deep humility which asked for pardon from the meanest person whom the dying felt that he *might* have unintentionally wronged; these were virtues which excited his profoundest wonder. "Missee," he said to Edith, "*you* had shewn me that your faith made women angels, but it remained for Lawrence Sahib's death to teach me that it could make men more than heroes. Let the traditions of my fathers perish. Hassan will become a Christian!"

Surely this was no unmeet memorial for the man whose grand and simple character is briefly

summarised in the touching words which he himself selected as his epitaph:

"Here lies Henry Lawrence, who tried to do his duty; may the Lord have mercy on his soul."

Major Banks and Colonel Inglis took up the arduous task which Lawrence had commenced. A fortnight the Chief Commissioner had thought to be the utmost time during which the struggle could be maintained. It passed, no sign of succour came, yet not a member of the garrison ever thought of yielding. Men and women, young and old, natives and Europeans, seemed alike inspired with that bold spirit of resistance, which, in a former age, had raised the cry of "No Surrender" in the Irish town. Like the brave boys of Londonderry, too, this brave and devoted band sought for strength from a more than mortal source. Daily prayers went up from many a lonely outpost, and from many an inner room, and week by week the church's services were held with all the reverence which circumstances rendered possible.

The women had their share of toil and suffering. Some waited on the sick and wounded, others undertook the menial tasks which the general

desertion of the native servants had imposed upon them, one and all endured with uncomplaining patience all the hardships and privations of the siege. Hira (Sylvia's ayah) was among the first to flee, and it taxed all Edith's powers of persuasion to induce Hassan's wife to wait on the Mem Sahib. Edith herself proved one of the most skilful and devoted of the band of nurses who attended in the hastily improvised hospital.

On July the 21st, Banks died a soldier's death; but Inglis and his brave companions still maintained the desperate struggle. On the night succeeding Banks' death, a ray of hope broke through the darkness which environed them. A pensioner, named Ungud, made his way to Havelock's camp, and now returned to tell his anxious comrades that the column of relief was on its way, that succour was at hand. These cheering promises were more than once renewed, only, alas, to lead to repeated disappointment. Days grew to weeks, and weeks to months. More than one effort had been made to storm the post. Disease, privation, and fatigue ravaged the scanty garrison; the prospects of relief appeared as far away as ever, yet the cry was still,

Death rather than surrender. On the first occasion, when the rebels strove to storm the post, Hassan, whilst working at a battery, saw one of the besieging leaders, with a green flag in his hand, leap with marvellous audacity into a deep ditch just before the guns. He was cut down almost immediately, and in his livid and contorted features Hassan, with what feelings may be easily imagined, recognised those of the Mudir who had visited Shahjehanpore.

The siege had lasted sixty seven days, when the news arrived that Havelock had retired to Cawnpore. The letter which brought this discouraging intelligence contained the words, "Do not negotiate! but rather perish sword in hand!"

The advice fell on comprehending ears. The English officers declared that before their wives should fall into the hands of rebels, they themselves would slay them, and then perish fighting.

Meanwhile, among these seemingly tardy helpers, Douglas Archdale was advancing, to keep, under these strangely altered circumstances, the tryst which Sylvia had appointed in the moonlit glades of Gowanbrae.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE cloud of sorrow and anxiety which, throughout that dreadful summer, hung over many a happy home in England, nowhere threw its shadow more deeply than at Gowanbrae, and in the quiet vicarage of L—— S. Martin. The peril in which Sylvia stood was hardly realised by her relations; and it must in any case have been forgotten in their great anxiety concerning Douglas. With trembling hands and throbbing hearts they searched the fatal lists of killed and wounded, breathing earnest thanksgivings each time they realised the absence of their loved one's name. Meta bravely struggled to repress her feelings, and to go about her daily duties undisturbed by the dark cloud which had fallen so early on her new found bliss. But with keen-sighted love Ralph marked the effect which sorrow and anxiety were exercising

on her health, and he resolved, if he could find a fitting *locum tenens*, to take her down to Gowanbrae, where she would be amidst kindred sympathising hearts. A further project, which he hardly breathed as yet, was to go on himself to India, and seek some news of him, who, alike as Meta's brother and his own chosen friend, possessed so strong a claim upon his heart's affections.

The opportunity he sought was found more readily than he could have imagined to be possible. At a dinner-party one evening he happened to mention to a friend (and former brother curate) that he was trying to find some one who would undertake his duties for some months. "I suppose *you* know of no one who could do so?" he added.

"I only wish I could accept the post myself," came back the unexpected answer, "but I fear it is impossible. My only sister is so ill I cannot bear to leave her. But I have been appointed chaplain to a troopship ordered to Calcutta, and we must start next week. A sojourn in this part of England *might* restore her; or, at any rate——" The poor fellow broke off, unable to conceal his deep emotion.

But his words had startled Ralph in an unlooked for manner. "Chaplain to a troop-ship going to Calcutta," he repeated. "Would it, could it be possible to effect an exchange?" And in hurried words he told his friend what urgent reasons prompted *him* to seek the voyage from which the other naturally recoiled.

"I hardly know," Mr. Morton said at length. "The captain is a kind, considerate man, with whom I have some slight acquaintance. I will gladly write to him, and see if he can do anything to further *your*, or I should say *our*, wishes. It would be almost life to me and my sister."

"And scarcely less to me and my wife," returned Ralph, earnestly. "I forgot the pang of parting with me though," he added to himself, "but she will be with her own people, and will be more at ease concerning Douglas."

Two days later, having received the following note from his friend Morton, Ralph revealed his project to his wife, who surprised him by proposing to go with him to Calcutta.

"I could stay at uncle Earle's," she pleaded,

"and I should be close at hand if you or Douglas needed anything."

"My dearest," exclaimed Ralph, "I hardly know how to let you encounter such a risk, even if it be possible to arrange the matter, which I rather doubt. Troopships are not contrived for carrying ladies."

"I shall be with *you*," she pleaded, "Oh, Ralph, try and manage it! I will bear any hardship, any roughness, only, if possible, let me go with you. I will not say 'I could not bear to let you go without me,' I will not be selfish in my love; only, if it may be, take me with you, dear."

"My darling," he replied, much moved, "for my sake, and for Douglas's, I cannot choose, but wish it could be so. But we cannot decide till I have seen this Captain Jackson, and I had better start as soon as possible to-morrow."

For Mr. Morton's note was in these terms:

"DEAR ELTON,

"I have heard to-day from Captain Jackson, who is now at Portsmouth, and who is very willing to effect, if possible, the exchange which

we so much desire. He would wish to have an interview with you before deciding. Could you go to Portsmouth for the day?

"Yours very truly,

"THOMAS MORTON.

"The ship must start on Thursday week."

Ralph went to Portsmouth on the following day; Meta awaiting his return in an agony of suspense, she found it difficult to keep under due control. He came at length, and, before he spoke, his calm, brave, earnest face appeared to give her strength and hope.

"Well, dear," he said, seeing she could not bear suspense, "I think it may be as you wish. The captain has been very kind, and though the proceeding is not regular, he will do his utmost to procure the necessary license; and, under the special circumstances, he thinks it will not be refused. But, my Meta, we must also get your parents' sanction, or Mr. Archdale may well think me most unworthy of the trust which he reposed in me."

"Oh, they will give me leave!" Meta cried, with more of the old brightness in her tone than

Ralph had heard there now for many days. "Oh, Ralph," she added, "to go with you! To be within reach of Douglas should he need me. Oh, can I ever show my gratitude?"

He held her in his arms, breathing an earnest prayer that she might be preserved through all the dangers she went out to meet with such a brave unfaltering heart. The preparations for the voyage were at once commenced. There was, indeed, no time to lose, since Ralph, at any rate, must be prepared to start the following week, and if she were not able to go with him, Meta, after accompanying him to Portsmouth, must make her own way north with Lennox, who, in that case, as she knew, would come to meet them. So the letters home were written, and in due course the answers were received, together with a letter from the captain enclosing the solicited permission.

After a prosperous voyage our travellers reached Calcutta, but when they asked for Mr. Earle they met with looks of blank dismay. "The bank," they were hesitatingly informed, "had broke, and Mr. Earle,"—the Hindoo merchant who retailed the news looked doubtfully

at Meta, ere he added in a lower tone to Ralph, —"was *dead*. Some said he had died by his own hand; others maintained that grief and shame had caused his end. His daughter? She who married Ryan Sahib, the rich young Resident of Shahjehanpore? Nothing was known of her, but there had been great slaughter in that province. What, had the Sahib boy not heard of Havelock and Outram's entry into Lucknow? Yes, he could find the papers presently! No, they must go to no Traveller's Bungalow! His house was placed at their disposal! They wished to go on to the seat of war? The regiment their ship had brought would, no doubt, proceed at once to join Sir Colin Campbell. They could not have a better escort. Yes, he could procure them horses. Or would the lady like a palanquin? No doubt, if she could ride, that would be best."

All this Meta heard as if in a dream. Walking by her husband's side through this strange Eastern city, where all was unfamiliar to her gaze, everything seemed unreal, and she only felt that she was near her brother. Passing through a paved courtyard, they were conducted

to a spacious room with closely curtained windows. After, what appeared to her, interminable delay, the promised newspapers were brought. Hurriedly she seized them, glancing through the account of the Relief of Lucknow, only noticing the part the Highlanders had played in that achievment, her eyes sought the fatal list of killed and wounded. "Not killed! Thank God!" she cried. "But, oh, Ralph, see!" She pointed to the line, "Lieutenant Archdale, 78th Highlanders, severely wounded in the head and shoulder."

"Dearest!" Ralph said, encouragingly, "do not despair! See, in a later paper, it says he is doing well. If we are to start to-morrow you must try to bear up bravely."

Somewhat reassured, Meta consented to try the effect of rest and food, whilst Ralph sought the commander of the regiment, and readily obtained permission to accompany his march. "But we must start before dawn, and travel rapidly, which will be a trial for the lady. When we join Sir Colin! Ah, *then* my authority will cease. But you are Scotch, and on your way to nurse a wounded Highlander. *That*,

if anything, will win his favouring notice!"

Ralph went back to Meta satisfied that he had done his best to make arrangements for their further progress. And, in the anticipation of an early start and great fatigue, they soon retired to rest.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE now return to the beleaguered garrison at Lucknow. At about the time the Eltons were preparing to forsake their pretty English home and all its comforts, Edith Ryan in the ante-room to one of the improvised wards, turned, with the sick distaste springing from utter weariness, against the food which Hassan had prepared for her. "Missee sick and ill herself," the faithful fellow cried, in his affectionate alarm. "If she stay here then she will die!"

He had but too much cause for his anxiety. Three months of constant and increasing labour for the sick and wounded, added to the trivial trials Sylvia's selfishness and indolence daily inflicted on her, and anxiety concerning Mordaunt's safety, had severely tried the young girl's strength. She had early won a prominent

position in the band of nurses. Her deftness, tact, and gentleness, her unaffected piety, and, above all, her intimate acquaintance with the natives' tone of thought, had rendered her invaluable. Chaplains and doctors were equally thankful for her help. So zealously did she perform her work that, but for Hassan's watchful care her own most pressing needs would frequently have been forgotten.

September now was nearly over, and the garrison had made another effort to communicate with Havelock.

"Listen, Missee," Hassan said, "three, four, five times Ungud has safely passed the rebel lines. Hassan can do the same. He knows their secret signs! Ah, if Missee would but trust herself to Hassan. He would take her safely through! Only she must be disguised in one of Kunda's dresses. Then she could seek the Sahib!" Hassan added, thinking he had advanced a powerful argument. In fact, for the moment, it did almost conquer Edith's resolution. But the thought of those dependent on her care returned with double force. She could not leave them—even for her brother's sake.

"No, Hassan, no," she said, "it must not be. I cannot tell you how I value the fresh proof of your devoted love. But *here* my duty lies, and *here* I must remain!"

"Missee, Missee," he entreated, "do not decide at once. Let Kunda leave her dress in Missee's room, Then, any time, should Missee change her mind, she can but put it on, and go down to the terrace at the hour of prayer, and if she claps her hands three times, Hassan will hear the signal."

Edith shook her head. "It is useless, my good friend," she said. "I shall not change. Besides by this time Havelock *must* be near, and then——."

Here they were interrupted by a messenger, sent in hot haste to recall Miss Ryan to the bedside of some patient, and when she obeyed the summons, Hassan also left the room.

Hardly had they departed before Sylvia cautiously issued through the curtained entrance of the room she shared with Edith. A mocking smile was on her beautiful lip as she gazed at the door through which her sister-in-law had passed. "What a fool she must be," she

muttered, "to refuse a chance like *that!* And a *selfish* fool, too, not to offer it to me. Ah! friend Hassan, how would you like the exchange? Not much, I fancy, but perhaps we may contrive it yet, without consulting you. Let me see. Kunda was to leave the dress in Edith's room. Then at the hour of prayer Hassan would wait beneath the terrace listening for her signal. Well, I think *I* can manage *that* as well as Edith. My hair and skin? Oh, they can be concealed beneath my veil. Besides, it will be almost night. At any rate, *I* will not lose the chance. *If* it succeeds, then hey for life and liberty." And thus ruminating selfish schemes for her own safety, Sylvia, in her turn, left the room.

The following day passed monotonously. The increased restlessness of a sick man in her charge caused Edith to remain almost all night beside his bed, and it was not until the following morning that she discovered Sylvia's absence, to which her attention was attracted by the evident surprise of Kunda, who, entering the room, exclaimed, "Missee, you here still! But then, who? how? where? Why, the

Mem Sahib must have gone with Hassan!"

Utterly bewildered, Edith asked for explanation, and was told that, by her husband's orders, Kunda on the previous day had placed one of her dresses where Edith could not fail to see it, and had waited with him in the appointed place. They had, they thought, been fortunate beyond their fondest hopes, for punctual to a moment, a shrouded figure on the terrace had given the preconcerted signal, and had been conducted forth by Hassan, who believed that he had thus secured the safety of his dear Miss Edith! And it was the Mem Sahib all the time, Kunda concluded, Hassan will be vexed.

There was little doubt that she was right. But at this moment a strange sound arose, jubilant, though confused, which checked all further conversation, whilst maid and mistress hurried out to hear the news.

"Ungud! Deliverance! Outram! Havelock! Close at hand!" broke in disjointed words upon their ears.

But soon the joyful tidings were made plain. Once more their messenger had returned, and this time the relieving force was really close at

hand. The suffering and privation so heroically borne were nearly over! Had Sylvia only waited!

The two next days were passed between anxiety and hope, and eager listening to the sounds of distant firing. On the evening of the second, Edith, watching by her patients, was astonished to see Hassan enter, followed by six men in European uniform, who carried an apparently lifeless body.

"Missee," said Hassan, "we have brought this English Sahib! He is badly hurt and needs your care!"

Then, whilst his comrades laid their burden down upon an empty doolie, he continued, in a lower tone:

"Oh, Missee! Missee! How could you deceive me so? It was not the Mem Sahib whom I wished to save!"

CHAPTER XV.

"MRS. ELTON, yours is a true Highland heart! You should have been a soldier's bride," exclaimed Sir Colin Campbell, marking, with admiring gaze, the cheerful courage and unmurmuring patience with which Meta bore the hardships and privations of the march to Lucknow. "And you need not have changed the man," he added, glancing at Ralph's stalwart form and manly mien. "*He* would have made a soldier, and a good one."

"He *is* one," answered Meta, in a tone of loving pride, adding, rather to herself than to her auditor, "My Red Cross Knight, Christ's warrior against sin and Satan."

Sir Colin made no answer; at the time, perhaps, he scarcely realised the full deep meaning of his favourite's remark. But, on the following Sunday, when—during the mid-day halt—with

his permission, Elton held a service in the camp and addressed the men with brief stirring words which went to every heart, the General said to Meta:

"Yes, you were right! Your husband *is* a soldier, and a good one. True to his cause, his colours, and his leader. He knows the way to reach the soldier's heart. Would that more of our chaplains had that secret."

As will be perceived, the Eltons had obtained permission to pursue their journey with the army under Sir Colin Campbell. Meta bore all the trials of the march, not only uncomplainingly but cheerfully, feeling that every day's march brought her nearer to her goal—nearer to Lucknow, and to Douglas.

The halt before they reached the city was a trial to her patience. But, even here, she met with unexpected consolation. For the native who accompanied the daring messenger, Kavanagh, was no other than our old friend Hassan, and was able to assure her and her husband of the English Sahib's safety, since he himself had placed him in the care of his beloved Miss Edith!

The days of actual fighting could not but be spent in much anxiety and earnest prayer. But they were followed by the shout of triumph and the song of praise. Then, while victorious generals exchanged well merited congratulations, and met in grave discussion, on the fate of nations and of armies, Ralph and Meta, led by Hassan, made their way to the now nearly ruined Residency. There, a gentle grave-eyed girl received them with the comforting assurance that their loved one was progressing towards recovery.

"He is still very weak, of course," she said. "But the fever is subsiding, and I hope that he will soon be well enough to hear of your arrival. But we must consult the doctor, and prepare him gently for your visit, as excitement might be dangerous."

The bearer of such tidings of her well-loved brother must, in any case, have had the strongest claim on Meta's loving gratitude. And Edith had, besides, contributed in no slight degree to bring about the good result she thus announced. But there was, moreover, Meta felt instinctively, a sympathetic chord between the natures of

these pure and high-souled women, through whose influence the firm hand-clasp interchanged upon the threshold of that Oriental chamber became the first link in a solid chain of life-long friendship, which proved a powerful stay in both their lives, a source of profit and enjoyment to them both.

It was found expedient to postpone Meta's meeting with her brother for a little longer than had been at first thought probable. With the other wounded he was moved to the Dilkoosha Palace on the day succeeding the arrival of the rescuing force. They were followed by the scanty remnants of the gallant garrison who, with extreme reluctance, left the battered walls they had defended so heroically. Though the move was very carefully effected, it could not but occasion great fatigue, and some return of fever; and, until this was brought under, it was not thought safe to tell the patient of his sister's presence. But Meta was allowed to see him whilst he slept, and more than once she shared in Edith's vigil by his couch.

Her letters home were full of cheering hope and bright anticipations of her brother's res-

toration, mingled with the warm acknowledgment of all they owed to her who, under God, had saved his life.

"I knew that you would like her," Meta wrote, "and, should she ever visit Scotland, I am sure that you would wish to thank her for yourselves, for all that she has done for Douglas. She is very gentle, thoughtful, and considerate. There is a shade of sadness on her brow, and this cannot be wondered at when we remember all the scenes of suffering through which she has so lately passed. During the siege I hear that her exertions have been simply wonderful."

A few days later Edith told her friend that Dr. H——, thinking his patient well enough to see his sister, had commissioned her, Edith, to prepare him for the visit.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THERE, Captain Archdale! Is that comfortable?" asked Edith, when her patient was, for the first time, seated in an easy chair, his wounded arm supported by a sling her skilful fingers had arranged. "How do you feel this evening? Better, I trust, for I have news to tell you, which I think will please you."

The sick man strove to smile in answer to her question. But, he was feeling weary, even with the slight exertion which he had just made, and half despondent with the consciousness of his own weakness which thus forced itself upon him.

"You are very kind to me," he said, in rather faltering tones. "I never shall be able to repay the debt I owe you. And yet, save for my parents and my sisters, I could wish your care had been bestowed upon some worthier

object; since I can only be a helpless, useless cripple all my days."

"No, no!" she cried. "You must not speak in this desponding tone. Your progress, hitherto, has been as favourable as circumstances would permit, and we have every hope that you may, bye-and-bye, recover all your former health. And, even if this were not so, many paths of usefulness and happiness would still be open to you. But you have not yet heard my news! Do you think that you are strong enough to receive a visit from a friend, a lady, a relation, one who,—

She stopped, alarmed by the effect of her own words. The sick man's eyes glowed with a feverish light, his pallid cheeks were flushed, his breath came short and quick, as he exclaimed:

"It was not then a dream! It *was* herself I saw! Sylvia, my only love, are you then near me? Shall I see you once again? Then life *is* worth preserving!"

Edith's heart sank within her at these words. Who was the Sylvia whom he spoke of in such glowing words? Could it be her brother's

wife? Was it for this that she had rescued him from death?

"I scarcely understand you," she said, faintly, "and I am afraid that I have managed very badly. It is your sister, Mrs. Elton, that I spoke of, and, I think, *her* name is Meta. She and her husband have come out to nurse you."

"Meta!" he said, and though his tone was tender it was tinged with disappointment. "Meta, dear little Meta, and that good old fellow, Ralph! How kind of them to come! And, so the other *was* a dream! It seemed scarcely possible, in such a garb! And yet, could any other eyes have shone so brightly? Well, it is just as well; for, I remember, she is mine no longer. She is married to another!"

Every word he spoke sank in the listener's heart like lead, deepening her sad suspicion that *his* Sylvia was indeed her brother's wife. His *wife*, or else his widow? For no news had been received of Mordaunt Ryan's safety, and his sister feared the worst.

She was awakened from her reverie.

"*When* will Meta and her husband come to me, Miss Ryan?" Douglas said. "It will be

like a breath of my own mountain air to see them."

"I will go and fetch them!" she replied, glad of the excuse to leave the room, and seek at any rate to know the truth.

She went first to the sitting room she shared with Sylvia, but which was now unoccupied, and took a portrait from an album on the table. Then she went in search of Meta, whom she found with Ralph.

"Your brother is prepared to see you, Mrs. Elton," she exclaimed, somewhat abruptly. "He is waiting for you with impatience, and for Mr. Elton also. Will you go at once? It is not good, perhaps, to keep him waiting. You will remember, he is very weak, and must be spared excitement and fatigue?"

"Will *you* not come with us, dear," said Meta. "You will best know how to care for him."

"Nay, I will not intrude upon the interview," Edith replied. "Besides," she added, "I have other work to do. I must first see *Sylvia*."

"Sylvia?" repeated Meta, with surprise.

"Yes," answered Edith, "my brother's wife.

The name appears familiar to you. Your brother also mentioned it just now."

"It is that of a cousin who was brought up with us from her childhood," Meta answered. "She left us only eighteen months ago, when she returned to India, to her father. Shortly afterwards we heard that she was married."

"*This* is the portrait of my brother's wife," Edith said, quietly, placing the photograph in Meta's hand. "She is considered very beautiful, and it is a striking likeness."

Meta examined it attentively, and passed it on to Ralph.

"There can be little doubt," she said. "It is the same. How very strange, and how unfortunate."

"I thought so," Edith quietly observed. "Will you tell Captain Archdale, please, that he was *not* mistaken; and that I feel almost sure Sylvia will come to see him very soon? Now, you must really go, he will be tired of waiting. Only, be careful to avoid excitement."

"But," said Meta, with embarrassment, "are you sure that this is wise? Perhaps you do

not know that Douglas—Sylvia—that there was once—"

She looked at Ralph as though imploring him to help her out of her perplexity.

"He has asked for her," Edith answered, simply, "and—yes, I think I understand what you would say. But, they *must* meet—sooner or later—and I feel that it is better that there should be no concealment."

"You are right," said Ralph, emphatically. "Meta, dear, I do not think you need distress yourself so much. Douglas can be trusted, he is true and honourable. Come, dear, we must not keep him waiting any longer."

They left the room together, Edith following them with a wistful glance, ere she addressed herself to the hard task which lay before her.

CHAPTER XVII.

"META, my little Meta! Dear old Douglas! Ah, Ralph, how good of you to bring her here! Archdale, dear boy, how glad I am to see you!"

Brief and seemingly prosaic greetings, covering a vast amount of inarticulate feeling. Then there was a silence, during which Elton noticed lines upon the pallid face, which, when he last had seen it, was so bright and boyish; lines which only mental suffering could have traced.

Douglas was the first to break the silence.

"It is strange," he said, "that *thus* we three should meet again! We little dreamed of such a meeting when we parted on the steps of Gowanbrae. Tell me about the dear old place, and all our loved ones."

Then followed a quick interchange of question and reply. The parents' health, Lennox's suc-

cessful studies, Angus's last voyage, and the life at L—— S. Martin were all enlarged upon. At last Ralph left Meta with her brother, and she seated herself on a cushion near him, leaning her head against his knee.

Once more Douglas was the first to speak. Nervously playing with his sister's hair, he said, shily, "Dear, it was very good of you to come to me. But do you know, when I first heard of your arrival, I was almost disappointed. The fact is I expected—some one else."

"Some one it would have pleased you *more* to see?" asked Meta, in a tone of pained surprise. "Then," she added, "did you mean the mother, dear? She could not have endured the journey."

"I know that, dear," he answered. "No! It was a very foolish fancy, and it only lasted for a moment. But just before I was knocked down I thought that I had seen our cousin Sylvia—beautiful as ever—but dressed in strange attire, and, I thought, I hoped that *she* was coming to me."

"Dear Douglas," Meta said, with gentle sadness, "I trusted you had overcome these

feelings. Remember Sylvia is no longer free."

"I know that," Douglas answered, rather fretfully, "and, for that reason, it is just as well that there was no foundation for my foolish notion. Still, she *is* our cousin, and I should have liked to see her once again."

"*Could* you meet her as a *cousin?*" Meta asked. "Then listen, dear. It was no idle fancy, you *did* really see her, at least I suppose so, for she is in Lucknow. She is Edith Ryan's sister, at least, her brother's wife."

"Sylvia here!" Douglas repeated, in bewilderment, "no idle fancy. *She* Miss Ryan's sister! Meta, are you sure of this?"

"Quite sure," she answered, "I have seen her photograph. There can be no mistake, and Edith hopes that she will come and see you very soon. She is speaking to her of it even now."

"Miss Ryan's brother Sylvia's husband," he repeated, "can it be she of whom Sylvia wrote so coldly?"

"I suppose so, for I think there is no other sister, and I know that Edith lived with them. She is most anxious now about her brother's safety. They have heard nothing from him

since the outbreak of the mutiny, though many fugitives from country districts have come in to Lucknow. But they bring no news of him."

There was an interval of silence, during which Meta watched her brother anxiously. At last he spoke:

"Meta," he said, "long, long ago, I thought that I had overcome my love for Sylvia. But when I saw her the old feelings seemed to rise again and overpower my resolution. But yet I think, I trust, I should be stronger now. I am prepared, you know; and, yes, God helping me, I do believe that I should meet her with the full remembrance of my duty towards her husband, and of all the gratitude I owe *his* sister, and could treat her with pure cousinly affection."

"God help you, dear," said Meta, lovingly, bending to kiss her brother's brow. "I think that you will see her very soon. Both Ralph and Edith say that it is best you should."

"Now, dear," said Douglas, "will you fetch Miss Ryan? I cannot do without my gentle nurse."

In the meantime a very different scene had been proceeding in another room of the vast

palace. After parting with the Eltons Edith had gone back to her sitting room, where she *now* found Sylvia seated in a lounging chair, her attitude of indolent contentment, contrasting with the hurried step and agitated mien of the new comer.

"Sylvia!" cried Edith, as she entered, "I have news to tell you!"

"So I should suppose," Sylvia returned, surveying her with almost insolent indifference through her half-closed eyelids. "News of importance is inscribed on every line of your delightful countenance. Does it concern dear Mordaunt?" uttering the last words with a slight but noticeable sneer.

"No, alas!" said Edith, sadly. "Sylvia, how can you speak of the poor fellow in that tone? Do you remember that he is your husband? Sometimes I wonder if you have a heart."

"Very kind of you, dear, I am sure," Sylvia replied, unmoved. "Yes," (placing her hand upon her side), "yes, I distinctly feel it throbbing. But, I imagine, this profound discussion is beside the present question. Am I not to hear your startling news?"

"Your cousin would be glad to see you," Edith said, abruptly.

"Marvellous proof of cousinly affection," Sylvia retorted. "But by whom is it displayed? For I believe that I have two or three of such relations now in Lucknow. Is it good little Meta who would like to see me? No, she is otherwise engaged. And it can hardly be her husband, though I suppose he is my cousin also. Ralph, the sententious, could not be expected to remember my insignificant existence. So it must be Douglas? Yes, I see that I am right. Poor fellow, we were always friends,—and might have been—but that's no matter now! Oh, yes, I will go and see him. It will be an agreeable variety; that is, if he is not disfigured horribly."

Edith looked at her in unfeigned amazement. "Disfigured," she repeated. "Captain Archdale? oh, no, not at all. But I cannot understand you, Sylvia. Your indifference to poor Mordaunt's fate, and the cool way in which you speak of such a man as Captain Archdale."

"Such a man as Captain Archdale," cried Sylvia. "I am not quite sure I know what sort

of *man* he is. When I knew him, he was *rather* a nice boy ; a little over vehement, perhaps, but *that*, no doubt, has been knocked out of him. What kind of man *is* Captain Archdale, Edith ? Good gracious, how you blush ! Any one might think you were in love with him."

"Sylvia," cried Edith, red with shame and indignation. The cry broke from her quite involuntarily.

Sylvia had spoken at a venture, but she now raised herself, and fixed her beautiful yet cruel eyes full on her victim's face, saying, in a cold, deliberate tone, which made each word fall like a separate stroke,

"I do believe that I am right. Our Santa Philomena, falling in love like any school-girl—not waiting even to be asked. Fie ! oh, fie ! What will 'dear Mordaunt' say ? "

"Sylvia ! " the tortured girl exclaimed, as with a moan of pain she sank upon a chair, hiding her crimson face behind her hands, "Sylvia, how can you be so cruel ? Have you no feeling of compassion ? No——"

"No *heart*, dear ! That includes it all," said Sylvia, calmly. "Well, I shall certainly keep a

strict watch upon you when we visit this sick knight together."

"You surely cannot think that I shall go with you," said Edith.

"I do not think at all about it," answered Sylvia, coolly. "I *mean* that you should do so; and as you are completely in my power, you must resign yourself to do my bidding. I require a witness to assure 'dear Mordaunt' of the complete decorum of my conduct. Besides, *someone* must listen to Ralph Elton's tedious platitudes. You *can* perform both offices, and *will*, unless you wish to force me to reveal that which you probably may wish—"

"Sylvia, have you no pity?" Edith moaned once more.

"Perhaps it would have been wiser," Sylvia said, significantly, "if you had not provoked me, knowing that you also had a secret to conceal. But what is done cannot be undone. You must make the best of a bad bargain, dear! I suppose I may count on your *unqualified* submission? Stay! There is some one at the door! Come in. Ah, Meta, is it you?" she added, greeting her cousin

with a quiet coolness which astonished Edith.

"I came in search of *you*, Miss Ryan," Meta said, glancing from one to the other, and scarcely answering Sylvia's words. "My brother would be glad if you could go to him. Something about his bandage troubles him, and he reposes little confidence in me—or rather in my skill. Can you go to him? He hopes to see you also, Sylvia, in a day or two."

"So Edith tells me," answered Sylvia, calmly. "Oh, yes, she will go with you, and I will go to-morrow. Shall it be to-morrow, Edith? Very soon, at any rate. Tell him so, with my love,—my *love* remember! Bye-bye, Edith! Adieu, Meta, or rather, *au revoir*."

When they had left the room, Meta took Edith's trembling hand within her own, and looked with tenderest sympathy into the now pallid agitated face.

Edith returned the pressure gratefully, but shook her head, and whispered faintly,

"No, dear, I cannot speak of it, even to you. But your affection is my greatest consolation."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE little party which assembled shortly afterwards in Douglas Archdale's room was not composed of very harmonious elements. Between Ralph and Sylvia, as has been already intimated, a mute antagonism had long existed; Sylvia herself, though in her recent colloquy with Edith, she had spoken very confidently, was somewhat nervous as to how her injured cousin might receive her. Meta looked forward to the meeting with anxiety, fearing the influence which Sylvia's fascination might exert upon her brother. He himself waited for his former love with mingled sensations of excitement, curiosity and fear. Edith's feelings were more complicated still. Through every fibre of her being passed the thrill of shame, which each pure woman feels, who knows, or thinks she knows, that she has given her love unasked,

unsought. She, alas! knew, besides, that her dread secret remained no longer in her own safe keeping, but was in the power of an unscrupulous antagonist. Yet through all the pain and shame and dread, she felt an almost guilty consciousness of rapture in the presence of the man she loved, a consciousness which, at once, intensified her sense of shame and stilled its anguish.

"Well," said Douglas, "it was not thus we thought to meet, when you bade me come and see you in your glory, was it, Sylvia? How many things are changed since those old days; you and Meta married, I a helpless cripple."

"Nay, Captain Archdale," Edith interposed, "you are fast recovering health and strength."

"It is to *you* I owe it, then," he answered, turning to her with an earnestness which sent the hot blood to her cheeks and throat, and darkened Sylvia's brow with sudden anger. "How shall I ever show my gratitude?"

"By taking up your life's work bravely, under whatever altered circumstances," she answered, with recovered calmness.

"Come, Edith," Sylvia called out petulantly,

"for goodness' sake do not begin to preach! If we have need of sermons, Ralph can give us plenty, 'tis his trade. I suppose I *may* call Mr. Elton Ralph, may I not, Meta?"

"Certainly you may," Ralph answered for himself, "but I am sorry that you stopped Miss Ryan so abruptly. Her suggestion to your cousin was both wise and true. Douglas can in no better way express his gratitude to her, the human instrument of his recovery, and to God the giver of all good, than by carrying on his life's work bravely, under whatever altered circumstances."

"Oh! I cry you mercy, good and learned teachers," Sylvia exclaimed, stifling a tiny yawn behind her fan. "I am but a poor ephemeral butterfly, but I think I might amuse poor Douglas with the fluttering of my wings. He must be a little weary, I should think, of Edith's wisdom! Come, confess, good cousin, was not that the reason why you sent for me?"

"Nay," Douglas answered, smiling half involuntarily, "remember, Sylvia, but for Miss Ryan's care I should have had no power to send for you or any one."

"Oh, every one admires Edith as a *nurse*," said Sylvia, slightingly. "As a companion, I should think,—however, I, no doubt, am wrong, as usual,—she might be a little tiresome. But tastes differ, as we know. Now let us talk of something livelier. Tell us of your adventures, Douglas."

"Sylvia," Edith said, in warning tones, "remember Captain Archdale is still weak. Too much excitement might be dangerous."

"What a tyrant a good nurse can be," said Sylvia, *sotto voce*, yet taking care Edith, at any rate, should hear the words. "Especially," she added, "one who labours *con amore*."

At this juncture Hassan entered with the tidings that a Sahib wished to see Miss Ryan. Little surprise was caused by this announcement, since, although the enemy's attacks had well-nigh ceased, the deadly ravages of sickness still gave ample scope for Edith's skill and kindness, which were frequently resorted to. She rose at once and bade a hasty farewell to her friends, then followed Hassan from the room, hardly knowing whether or no she were well pleased with this release.

In her sitting room she found a man, in semi-European dress, seated upon a pile of cushions, in an attitude denoting either utter weariness or deep dejection. His head was bowed upon his breast, his face was partially concealed by the long lank black hair which fell across it. All that could be seen of it looked pale and haggard.

"I am afraid that you are ill," Edith said, finding that the stranger did not speak. "Can *I* do what you want, or shall I send for——"

She broke off in wonder, as her visitor, raising his head and throwing back his hair, exclaimed:

"Do you not know me, Edith?"

"Mordaunt! brother!" she answered, throwing her arms around his neck and weeping hysterically on his breast. "Are you indeed alive? Have you come back to us at last? Now God be praised."

"Come, come," Mordaunt said, gruffly, hiding, perhaps, some deeper feeling of which he was half ashamed; "come, you need not choke a fellow just to show that you are glad to see him. Yes, I *am* alive, after a fashion; and it *is I*, or all of me at any rate, that you are likely to see again; but whether there's much cause for thankfulness—

Ah, here's Hassan, with some dinner. A good move that, worth all your sentiment!"

Whilst the returned wanderer satisfied his hunger from the smoking dishes Hassan brought, Edith noted with anxiety and pain the change which suffering and exposure had effected in her brother. His cheeks were hollow; his eyes sunken in their sockets; lines of care were traced upon his forehead, and his hair looked ragged and unkempt. It was the instinct of affection which had enabled *her* to recognise him instantly; how would it be with Sylvia? For, alas! Edith knew, all too well, that Sylvia's love for Mordaunt was not, to state the matter in the mildest form, *all* that a woman ought to give her husband.

Absorbed in these reflections, Edith started, as though waking from a dream, when the inevitable enquiry came, "And where is Sylvia all this time? Has she been very anxious for my reappearance? How has she borne the hardships of the siege? Does she know of my arrival?"

"Sylvia is quite well now," said Edith, answering the easiest question first. "Of course,

we all had to endure privations during those terrible months of siege; but she is quite well now. I left her with her cousins, Captain Archdale, and his sister, Mrs. Elton; I do not think she knows that you are here. Hassan only said 'a Sahib wanted me'; and we thought that it was some sick person."

"Wherein you were not much mistaken," Mordaunt muttered; adding aloud and in a gentler tone: "You were always one to help the sick and suffering, Edie."

The words and tone brought tears of sweet emotion to her eyes. Oh, if Sylvia would but meet him kindly, lovingly!

"And who are these newly discovered cousins?" he asked, rather querulously.

"Captain Archdale," answered Edith, "came with Sir Henry Havelock's column, and was wounded at the Cawnpore gate. His sister and her husband have come out to him. I believe Sylvia was brought up with them in her childhood."

"Humph," returned Mordaunt, not entirely satisfied, "I am not sure I quite approve of her paying them these lengthy visits. Still, her

absence is convenient in some ways, for there is something which I want you to tell her gently. Poor girl! I am afraid that she will feel it deeply! I am ruined, Edith!"

She started back in horror! "Oh, Mordaunt, say not so. It cannot be," she cried. "There must be some mistake. You cannot mean it."

"Whatever I may *mean* or *say*, unhappily the fact remains the same," he answered bitterly. "My office may, perhaps, be safe, if I have health to do the work, or I may get some kind of pension. But, except a pittance which was guarded by my mother's settlement, my private fortune is entirely lost."

"Oh, Mordaunt, how?"

"Earle's bank has broken," he replied, succinctly, "and I, like a fool, had trusted all my eggs to that one basket. But I wonder, Edith, *you* are so distressed about this matter. I thought that you good people looked on wealth as, at the best, a doubtful blessing. Besides, your £200 a year is safe enough, secured by the same settlement of which I spoke just now."

"Oh, Mordaunt, can you think that it was for myself I cared?" she said, in pained re-

proachful tones. "It was of you and Sylvia that I thought. How will she ever bear the change?"

"It is her father's fault," he answered, moodily. "At least in a great measure. I suppose that these late troubles gave the bank its *coup de grace*, but it has long been in a shaky state. Earle must have known it, and he ought to have given me notice."

"And are you sure, *quite* sure?" she asked again.

"Yes; there's no room for doubt, unhappily. I heard some rumours in Nepaul, where I at first took refuge, and, as soon as it was possible, I set off for Calcutta. All was over then. The bank smashed up. Earle dead—or disappeared."

"Poor, poor, Sylvia!" cried Edith, sorrowfully. "How will she ever bear it? Though she must never know the worst. But how much will you have, do you think, altogether, Mordaunt? Of course, you will reckon my two hundred pounds."

"About five hundred pounds a year of private income," he said, grimly; then added, in a different tone, "But, Edith, Sylvia and I have not deserved this kindness at your hands. You

are a noble girl, and think of every one except yourself. But we——"

"Mordaunt, dear," she answered, gently, "when you were rich you made me welcome to your home; now, that reverses come, it is but just that I should share them with you."

"God bless you, dear," he said, with evident emotion. "But surely Sylvia's visit to her cousins must have lasted long enough. Can you not go and fetch her?"

"I am afraid I must," she said, with much reluctance, "Captain Archdale is scarcely strong enough as yet for such prolonged excitement."

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER Edith had left Douglas Archdale's room, Sylvia seemed to recover all her self-possession, and even to assume command of the position. To his own half-amused annoyance, and to his wife's mischievous amusement, Ralph found himself ministering to her comfort in obedience to her peremptory commands.

"Just bring that chair here, close to Douglas's side! Thank you. And would you fetch that cushion, and the footstool? unless Meta wants to use it. Thanks. Now, Douglas, we are all attention. Do tell the tale of your adventures."

But here Ralph protested. "In Miss Ryan's absence," he remarked, "I must remind you of her warning. Douglas is still an invalid, for whom excitement might be dangerous."

"Oh, that was only Edith's fidget," Sylvia began. "Now, I am sure——"

But Douglas interrupted her. "Miss Ryan's anxiety was kind and like herself," he said; but, Elton, I am stronger than she thinks. I can, at any rate, commence my narrative, though, like the princess in the Eastern tale, I may be forced to leave it in the middle."

"We left Allahabad, in pouring rain, at the beginning of July, many of the people scowling at us as we passed, and others shrinking from us in dismay, with none to bid us 'God speed.' We trudged through mud and slush, passing by ruined smoking villages, and gibbets with their ghastly burdens—traces of Renaud's passage—he had preceded us by some four days. Sir Henry tried at first to moderate the pace, for there were many untried soldiers in his little force, but soon news reached him which compelled him to press on, and, on the 12th, we overtook our pioneers, and marched with them to the close neighbourhood of Futtchpore. There we were told to halt for breakfast,—a most welcome sound, for we were weary with our six days' march. The cavalry (all volunteers) went on to reconnoitre, and we were sitting, lying, cooking, and smoking, when we saw them reappear,

closely pursued by white-clad troopers of the enemy. At the sight, weariness and hunger were forgotten. All sprang to arms at once. It was our first encounter with the foe; the first time, too, our general had his wish and led a British force to victory. I scarcely know how I behaved myself. I scarcely can recall my own sensations. I hardly *think* I was afraid; and I believe, like all the rest, I tried to do my duty. The day was won, and not a British soldier fell. I was also carried safely through the fights of Aong, Pandee, Nuddee, and endured the cruel march beneath the burning sun. At last we neared Cawnpore. You must have heard the share we of the 78th had in *that* great engagement; how we competed with the 64th in honourable contest for our chief's approval. We gained the field, and marched into the town; to find a sight which might make angels weep. We were too late to save the wretched captives. The cruel Nana had destroyed them all. Torn shreds of women's garments, silky locks of hair, the toys and shoes of little children, lay scattered on the blood-stained ground, and, oh! that fearful well."

Douglas paused, shuddering at the recollection. After a few moments' silence, he continued:

"Methuen, one of the fellows in the 64th, who died of cholera upon the march, had one he loved among those wretched captives. This little Prayer-book, he had given it to her, was the only relic of her that he could find. When he, too, was dying, I was by him, and he gave it to me. Look at the touching record it contains: 'June 27th, left the boats. July 7th, prisoners to the Nana. Fatal day!' Well, they are re-united now!"

Again he paused, a prey to strong emotion. Then he continued:

"I dare not tell you what went on within the city. The story is not suited for your ears. Our soldiers were like men possessed, a savage longing for revenge had taken hold of them, so that the general, who had lately praised their courage and endurance, had to rebuke them sharply."

"But, Douglas," Sylvia asked, "reaching Cawnpore so early as you say you did, why did you not come on to our relief?"

"We tried to do so *twice*," he answered, sadly,

"but with our little column weakened by disease, more even than by shot and steel, it would have been impossible to do so; and our chief was brave enough to recognise the fact! Yes, *brave* enough. By that two-fold retirement he perilled more, much more, than life!—his military reputation. Nothing, so his son told me, ever cost him half so much. It was the hardest duty of a life guided entirely by duty. The bravest and the noblest action of a brave and noble heart. Even *we* misjudged him at the time; we could not see the reason for retiring from a foe whom we had always conquered. But he was right! He was a gallant chief whom it will always be an honour to have followed, even at a distance."

"Archdale," Ralph broke in, "you are growing flushed and tired. You had better leave the rest of your recital for another time. Ah! here comes Miss Ryan to enforce the order!"

Edith had indeed returned, pale with excitement, from her meeting with her brother. "Oh, Sylvia," she began, "I come to fetch you! You are wanted in our room immediately! But, Captain Archdale, what has happened?" she continued, in a different tone, "what have you

been about? What is the matter?" She looked at Meta with enquiring wonder.

"I am afraid we *have* been most imprudent," Meta answered, humbly. "Douglas has been telling us about the march, and we forgot your warning."

With quick decision Edith mixed a cordial in a glass, and, placing it in Meta's hand, said, rather hurriedly, "Let him take this, and then, if Mr. Elton will be kind enough to help him, he had better get to bed. Here is the lotion for his shoulder. You will find a bandage in that drawer. Now, Sylvia, we must go at once."

She spoke with such an accent of command, that Sylvia listened with astonishment. "What can have come to her?" she asked herself. "What does she mean by saying, *I* am wanted? Is it a trick to get me from the room? No! She would hardly venture upon *that* after the other evening's lesson. But what a tone she takes. Well, I suppose that I had better go with her."

Outside the door she said, with mock humility, "May I ask the meaning of this strange and sudden summons?"

"Oh, Sylvia," Edith answered, breathlessly, "*He* is come back to us! *He* is here!"

"Succinct, if not explicit," Sylvia retorted with a sneer, "Who may this wondrous *He* be, who has come?"

"Can you not guess? Does not your own heart tell you? Mordaunt, your husband, is returned, as from the grave."

Sylvia stood still, utterly bewildered. "Mordaunt!" she gasped, "*here*, in this palace, in our sitting room? And you have been alone with him all this time? What have you told him of my secrets?"

It was Edith's turn to show amazement *now*.

"*Nothing!*" she answered, proudly. "How can you think I would? And at the first moment, too,—amid the joy of seeing him again. But, oh! he looks so ill, and worn, and changed. Oh, Sylvia, meet him kindly, tenderly!"

Sylvia laughed; a harsh unpleasant laugh. "Kindly, tenderly! Oh, yes," she said, "so far as he deserves. Looking ill, and worn, and changed! I suppose you mean that he is older and uglier than ever? Well, I must dree my

weird! Happily the pill is gilded. It is a bitter one, heaven knows."

An ominous conclusion to the ears of one who knew what Edith had so lately learned. But this was clearly no fit time for explanations of such difficulty, and having reached the door of their apartment, Edith left Sylvia by herself with Mordaunt, trusting they might thus attain a better understanding. She, herself, meanwhile, sought in the solitude of her own chamber for the silence and repose which she so greatly needed after all the various emotions and events which had marked the last few hours.

CHAPTER XX.

THROUGH many days of pain and restlessness Douglas paid the price of that exciting evening. Meta and Ralph were now his constant and almost his sole attendants and companions. Sylvia was rigidly excluded from the room; nor did Edith enter it, though *she* was pressed to do so. "My brother," she told Meta, "needs me constantly, and there are other invalids less fortunate than Captain Archdale, who has you and Mr. Elton to attend upon him. He requires me less than others."

"But you *will* come and see him soon?" Meta persisted, "He is always asking for you, and expressing wonder at your absence."

"He is very kind," Edith replied, with some embarrassment. "Oh, yes, by-and-bye, when he is better, and more fit for company. But you will then be leaving Lucknow? You must be

eager to return to England! Hassan will miss his kind instructor."

For, at Edith's instance, Ralph had undertaken to prepare the Hindoo neophyte for Holy Baptism. Edith was generally present during his instructions, to obviate any difficulty which might have arisen from Hassan's imperfect knowledge of the English language.

"Yes," Meta said, "the doctor hopes Douglas may be fit to go in the next party of the convalescent. And I believe that one will start in about ten days. I suppose we shall have to wait at Calcutta for a while; but, of course, Ralph is anxious to get home as soon as possible. He has been very good about it, but he must miss his parish and its interests. And what about your own plans, dear? Shall you return to your old home?"

"I hardly know," Edith answered, sadly. "*My* plans, you see, depend entirely on Mordaunt's. In many ways it would be well if he *could* resume his old appointment. But I fear his health would scarcely stand the work. And Sylvia, I can see, is most averse to going there. I suppose it would be trying for them to adopt

the altered style of living, which is now so needful, in the very place where things were once so different. We may, perhaps, go for a time to England. My home, in any case, will be with them."

"Well, if you are in England you must come and see us, either at Gowanbrae or L—— S. Martin, you will be always sure of hearty welcome. Nay, never thank *me!* What can be enough for us to do to show our gratitude to *you?*"

Later in the same day Meta was sitting with her brother, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"How is it that we never see Miss Ryan now?" I hope she is not ill, and that we have not offended her in any way?"

"Oh no," Meta said, "I do not think either of these causes have been the reason or her absence. She is a great deal with her brother, and with other invalids, who have no sister to attend on them."

"Her brother? Sylvia's husband?" Douglas asked. "Is he in Lucknow? Have you seen him, Meta?"

"Scarcely. But Ralph has, and he rather

likes him," Meta answered. "He seems very ill, and must have suffered terribly. He is a little like his sister, but without her brilliant eyes and sweet expression. She seems tenderly attached to him, and is very anxious now about his health."

"Poor fellow," Douglas said. "Well, he could not have a better nurse. But I think she might spare *me* a little of her time! Could you not ask them all to come and spend an evening with us soon?"

"I will see what I can do," said Meta, gently. And then, anxious to divert his thoughts to other matters, she began to talk of various incidents of daily life; of Hassan's lessons, amongst others. "And do you know, Douglas," she concluded, "it was he who placed you under Edith's care? He was at the Cawnpore gate (with Sylvia, who was trying to escape) and saw you fall."

Douglas passed his hand across his brow. "I have but a dim recollection of the circumstance," he said. "I thought I saw a native woman struggling with an angry sepoy, and I sprang to help her. Then, from beneath her veil, flashed out those eyes I never could forget. I heard

a voice cry, 'Look behind you, Sahib,' and sprang aside instinctively; then felt a heavy blow upon my head, a sharper and more stinging pain in my right shoulder. After that, comes a long blank, through which I seemed to feel that gentle hands were tending me. It was long before I learned to whom they belonged."

Then they spoke of the probability of his being soon able to commence the homeward journey; a prospect in which he seemed to take less interest than his sister had expected him to show, until she mentioned "that it was possible the Ryans also might be leaving India, at least temporarily."

Then the excitement which he displayed almost alarmed her. "I only wish," she said afterwards to Ralph, "I only wish I were quite sure it was for Edith that he cared. That would be too delightful! But I am so afraid that serpent, Sylvia, may wind herself about his heart again."

"My dear child," Ralph answered, smiling, "remember Sylvia has another husband. She is, I verily believe, a selfish, vain coquette, but scarcely the *Dea ex Machina*, the malignant fairy, that you seem to think her."

"My dear Ralph," Meta retorted, "she is the kind of woman who will never willingly relinquish *any* power which she has gained; and one of those you men find it very difficult to resist. I only wonder that *you* never yielded to her charms yourself."

"Do you, really, dear?" said Ralph, drawing her closer to him, and turning up the candid childlike face till he could gaze straight down into the depths of the large liquid eyes. Do you really wonder about *that*? Perhaps I loved my own 'wee modest crimson-tipped' mountain daisy far too well to care for all the 'flaunting flowers our gardens yield.' No, Meta, Sylvia's toils were spread in vain for me. And I think that *now* Douglas is safely extricated from them also."

"Yes," persisted Meta, "but Sylvia may persuade Edith that he *is* entangled in them. Why else does *she* persistently avoid his presence? And I am certain Sylvia had been bullying her in some way that first day I went in search of her."

"You may be right in that respect," Ralph answered gravely, "but all this time alone can

show. Do not try to force events, dear Meta. The future is not yours, but God's. If Edith and your brother truly care for one another, all Sylvia's arts will not avail to keep them separate. Meanwhile, by all means, convey to all the party your brother's invitation to his room. It is well, in any case, that he and Ryan should associate together upon friendly terms."

CHAPTER XXI.

DOUGLAS'S second party passed off far more pleasantly, to most of the persons who composed it, than the first had done. In her husband's presence, Sylvia dared not make such a determined attempt to secure her cousin's exclusive attention to herself, as she had done in in his absence; nor did Douglas himself show any disposition to be thus appropriated. He greeted Mordaunt with frank manly congratulations upon his escape from the dangers by which he had been surrounded, delicately including Sylvia and Edith in these felicitations, and saying, how truly he and Meta sympathised with them in the relief given to their anxiety by the arrival of the absent one. Then the conversation rolled on pleasantly upon subjects of general interest; the stirring events which had so recently occurred; the characters and careers of

the several heroes with whom different members of the party had been drawn into relations of greater or less intimacy—Sir Henry Lawrence, Sir Henry Havelock, Sir Colin Campbell, and Sir James Outram, with whom Ralph had become acquainted since his arrival at Lucknow.

Sylvia took little or no part in the discussion, and Mordaunt only occasionally interposed with some allusion to his earlier intercourse with Sir Henry Lawrence, whose noble character he regretted that he had not better understood. He was looking ill, subdued, and sad, and the contrast between Edith's gentle unobtrusive solicitude concerning him, with Sylvia's almost openly expressed indifference, was very striking. At last, when speaking of the great Commissioner's death, Edith mentioned the effect which his heroic patience had produced on Hassan's mind.

This reminded Douglas of the circumstances attending his own wound. "Fancy, Sylvia," he exclaimed, turning to her, "I mistook your faithful servant for an angry sepoy, from whose hands I was about to rescue you. I hear he anticipated Elton's teaching and returned good

for my intended evil, by placing me beneath Miss Ryan's kind and skilful care."

"Ah, I remember," Sylvia said, languidly, "he wanted me to remain hidden in the wretched refuge to which he had taken me, and I refused. I saw an officer spring towards us, and then fall, but I did not know that it was you. I remember, too, that Hassan left me all alone, which was most neglectful of him; and, Mordaunt, I hope you will rebuke him properly."

"After all this time, dear? And when his efforts saved your cousin's life?" Mordaunt expostulated. "But I do not quite understand, Edith. Was Hassan really helping Sylvia to escape, leaving *you* here in danger? I should have thought your safety would have been his first consideration."

Edith glanced at Sylvia, and paused a moment, as though expecting *her* to answer. Then she said, quietly: "Hassan's first wish *was* to facilitate my escape. But I had duties here, I could not leave."

Then the conversation turned to the probability of Douglas's speedy removal from Lucknow.

"I envy you," Sylvia exclaimed, "going to dear bright Calcutta."

"Not very bright just now, I fancy," he replied, with a rather melancholy smile, "and I should not be able to enjoy its gaiety in any case. But Dr. H——, and my good nurses, think me equal to the journey, and, as several other wounded men are to be sent next week, we can all go together. Then, when I am rested, and there is an opportunity for the further voyage, Ralph, I know, will be eager to return to England. It has been a hard trial to him to be so long away from all his well-loved interests and occupations, and he knows that I am grateful."

"Archdale," exclaimed Ralph, with English dislike of being thanked, "as if I hesitated for a moment when I knew that you had need of me. Besides, Miss Ryan has provided me with a most interesting task, which I shall be sorry to relinquish."

"Hassan's instructions?" Mardaunt asked. "Then, perhaps, you may be able to continue it a little longer than you think. I find we must go to Calcutta soon. I ought to consult

a really good physician, and, besides, I must see the chief authorities, and find out whether or no I can retain my post under the new régime. That is, of course, if I am able to perform its duties; a question which the doctors must decide."

"I am sure I have no desire to return to Shahjehanpore," cried Sylvia. "I always thought it a most odious place, and now one will not even feel that one is safe. Those treacherous natives! They may rise again at any time."

"Well, we are not going there at present, anyhow," Mordaunt answered, mildly.

"*I* am not going there at all," she repeated, in her most peremptory tones, "if you do. Edith may go with you if she likes. I shall stay in Calcutta with my father."

A glance of apprehension—almost consternation—passed between Mordaunt and his sister; Meta, too, and Ralph showed some embarrassment.

"I suppose you are all shocked at my plain speaking," Sylvia went on, defiantly, "but I will not be buried alive again for any of you.

I shall stay with my father, if Mordaunt goes to Shahjehanpore."

"I am afraid you will be obliged to alter your intention, dear," Mordaunt said, wearily. "However, we need not discuss the matter now, and I think, with our kind host's permission, we will retire to our own apartments. She *must* be told the truth, Edith," he added to his sister. "We have been wrong to keep it from her."

When they were gone, Douglas sat some time in silent meditation, which his companions would not interrupt. The past twelve months had been an epoch in the young man's life. Sylvia's words contained a deeper truth than she herself intended or imagined. When she left Scotland Douglas had been really "a nice *boy*," and not a *man*. Open, generous, truthful, trusting, and impetuous, even his love for her had in it more of quick impulsive passion, and of boyish admiration for her beauty, than of the deep-seated solid lasting love which springs from the esteem of well considered judgment. Had Sylvia been in truth all that his fancy painted her, this love would no doubt have deepened as his character

gained force. But she deceived him, and deserted him, and in a heartless way, which, but for the counteracting influence of Meta and his mother, might, nay, *must*, have "turned his wholesome nature all to gall." This heart sorrow was the crisis of his life. Upon that winter evening he became a *man*, and, happily, a good and true one.

The work begun within his mother's little room, was carried on almost unconsciously during the trials of the mutiny, and it was furthered in no slight degree by the example of Sir Henry Havelock, whom he had learned to look upon with almost filial reverence and respect.

Then, amid the strangest circumstances, he had been brought once more into close intercourse with his former idol. For a brief period, whilst his faculties were weakened by disease, it seemed as though he would have been once more a captive to her will. But the danger was of short continuance. His stronger faculties of mind and heart were able to contrast her now with one in many points her opposite; one to whom he was drawn by every chord of gratitude, esteem, respect; one who, although he

himself was scarcely conscious of the fact, was taking in his heart that foremost place which Sylvia's image once had occupied.

"Yes," he said at length, seeming to carry on a train of previous thought. "Yes, she is a noble creature, not beautiful like Sylvia, but very good to look upon. And with a mind and heart to make the happiness of any good man's life. If I could dare to hope?"

He stopped abruptly, as if just remembering his companions' presence, and Meta quietly divining his sensations, turned the conversation into another channel.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE journey to Calcutta was safely accomplished; the ladies and the invalids travelling in palanquins, whilst Ralph rode with the soldiers who escorted them. There was, therefore, little opportunity for intercourse between the various members of the party, except during the necessary haltings for repose, when Douglas and Ryan were generally too much wearied out to enjoy it greatly.

Ryan's interview at Government House convinced him that the post of Commissioner at Shahjehanpore would be continued to him, should the state of his health admit of his accomplishing its duties. But the doctors strongly recommended him to try the effect of a sea voyage and a somewhat prolonged residence in England before once more taking up his abode in the trying climate of that province.

He had little difficulty in procuring leave of absence, and permission for his party to travel in the steamer which was about to convey a party of wounded officers and soldiers back to England. The Eltons also were allowed to accompany Douglas upon it—Ralph gladly undertaking to officiate as chaplain. But the question where to go after their arrival in the native land, which he had left so many years before, caused Ryan much perplexity.

"India has been my only home," he said to Ralph, "and the few friends I left in England will have forgotten all about me. Nor is it as if I were returning home wealthy and prosperous. I do not know whither we can turn our steps."

"They would be as welcome to us at L—— S. Martin, in their poorest as in their richest days," Meta said, when Ralph repeated this remark. "But I fear our simple mode of life would not be much to Sylvia's taste."

"I wonder whether she would be happier at Gowanbrae," suggested Douglas, in whose room the talk took place. "It would have the charm of old association, and we may be sure my

mother would delight in welcoming Miss Ryan."

"Yes," assented Meta, heartily. "Of *that* there can be little doubt. Well, we might suggest it to them, and if *they* seem to fancy the idea, we could get my mother to confirm the invitation. I think Lennox or Angus are almost sure to meet us when we land, and perhaps Janet or Flossie also. Anyhow they could write or telegraph."

"Very well, dear," Douglas acquiesced. "Then will you speak to Sylvia? I suppose that hers will be the casting vote, but I hope Miss Ryan will not dislike the notion. By-the-bye, what will Ryan think of it? The life will be so different from what he is accustomed to, and how will he and the father suit each other?"

"You and Ralph must see to Mr. Ryan," Meta said.

"Poor Ralph," interposed Douglas, smiling, "when he was just hoping to get back to his beloved parishioners."

"Besides both the parents will be sure to make allowance for his state of health, and he

is not really difficult to deal with. Sylvia is much more given to be exacting. And, of course," she added, answering his remark, "of course we shall go home with you at first, and afterwards *you* will have to do the work yourself unless one of the boys can help you."

"Well, that is settled then, so far as that the scheme should be suggested to the Ryans, and, with their acquiescence, written of to my mother. I am afraid you must do that also, Meta, my left-hand writing is not good enough for such a weighty document."

The invitation was received in various manners by the three included in it. To Mordaunt's mind it seemed to bring untold relief.

Sylvia, who had now been obliged to learn her husband's altered circumstances, said somewhat ungraciously that:—"She supposed it was the best thing they could do. It would be very dull of course—not a shop near at hand, no single neighbour worth the trouble of a visit. Still, if they were the beggars Mordaunt seemed to think, they knew the proverb, and it would be well to take the little good provided for them."

Edith spoke with gentle gratitude, yet with evident embarrassment:

"It is very kind of you to plan it for us," she said to Meta, "but will Mr. and Mrs. Archdale like to have strangers in the house when first their son goes back. Sylvia is of course like one of yourselves, but I——"

"Dear Edith, who could be more welcome to us all, than you to whom we owe so much?" asked Meta, tenderly.

"Nay, you over-estimate the small service which I rendered Captain Archdale," Edith said earnestly. "It would, I trust, have been performed with equal zeal for any one whose need had been as great."

"Still you will let *us* show our sense of gratitude," Meta rejoined, "and I hope you will, in some degree, enjoy your visit?"

"That I am sure to do, only too much," the other said, impulsively. Then, fearing that she had betrayed her secret, she added, hurriedly, "shall *you* be there, dear Meta?"

"For a little while," Meta replied. "Then we shall have to go to our own home. But, by that time, you will have learned to know my

mother and my sisters who will be charmed to welcome you among them."

"I am *sure* she cares for Douglas," Meta said to Ralph, "and I believe he also cares for her. If Sylvia would but let them meet in peace!"

"Well, said Ralph, "a voyage is supposed to give facilities for the development of such affections. But let things take their course, and don't turn match-maker, my little wife."

Ralph found it rather hard to bear in mind his own wise doctrine when, somewhat later in the evening, entering Douglas's room, he found that wounded hero in a state of evident excitement and perplexity.

"What is wrong, old fellow?" Elton asked, seating himself as he was wont to do, when, in their school-days, he had been the mentor of his impulsive junior.

"Oh! I don't know, said Douglas," gloomily. "I believe that I have acted like a fool, and an ungrateful brute besides, and have given Miss Ryan great offence."

"Indeed!" said Ralph, "that would be very serious! But how did it occur?"

"I tell you, I don't know," Douglas replied. "She came in—rather unexpectedly—as you know Meta has asked them all to Gowanbrae—well, I said something—of my hope of seeing more of her than I had lately done, both here and on the voyage."

"Well," said Ralph, "did she express much pleasure at the prospect?"

"N-no," said Douglas, "she was gentle and considerate of course, spoke much of Meta's friendship, and my mother's kindness; said that she was sure Sylvia would have great pleasure in revisiting the scenes in which her early years were spent; but when I tried to win from her some expression of her personal opinion in the matter, she grew silent and reserved, and somehow made me feel that *I* was nothing to her (and of course I *am*). Then I grew angry and said something, what I am ashamed to think—that she was right, a wounded soldier could be nothing to her but an object for compassion. She gave me *such* a look, and said, with gentle dignity, 'I seem to have offended you. I know not how, but I am very sorry.' Then she left the room, and I—looked after her."

"Well!" said Ralph, "I suppose you *have* made rather a mess of it. Still I do not think it is as bad a case as you imagine. You had better talk to Meta on the subject. Women can manage these affairs better than we can. They understand each other."

Meta received her brother's confidence in a manner which surprised him greatly.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she cried, throwing her arms around him and embracing him ecstatically.

"What about?" he answered, peevishly. "Have you too lost your head? What is there to be glad about—your brother's acting like a fool?"

"No, dear, not about that, of course," said Meta, somewhat incoherently, "but I am very glad that he is going to give me just the sister I would choose."

"But I tell you she cares nothing for me, and besides I have offended her," persisted Douglas. "How hard it is to show the best of women that she is mistaken!"

"How impossible it is to make the wisest man follow the windings of a woman's will,"

retorted Meta. "My dear, I am quite sure that you can easily appease all Edith's anger."

"And you really think there still is hope for me?" he enquired, anxiously.

"I am a *very* woman," she retorted, gaily, turning his own words against him, "and therefore cannot own myself mistaken."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IT is not my purpose to describe minutely the various details of the homeward voyage. Meta, Sylvia, and Edith were the only female passengers, but there were many wounded officers and soldiers. Every exertion had been made to secure the comfort of our party, whose connection with the gallant defence of Lucknow made them the objects of especial interest. A cosy little cabin sitting-room, was allotted to their use, and there Douglas and Ryan spent the greater portion of the day, as did, generally, Meta and Edith. Ralph, meanwhile, exercised his ministrations among such of the passengers or crew as sought his aid, and Sylvia amused herself after her favourite fashion, strolling on deck with any of the officers who would accompany her, utterly regardless of Mordaunt's disapproval.

Some of the party went on shore at Malta, and, amongst others, Sylvia, Mordaunt, and Edith. It was thought better for Douglas to remain on board (though he was just recovering health and strength), and Meta stayed with him. When the rest returned, Meta saw at once that something had occurred, Ralph looked grave and anxious, Mordaunt worn and harrassed, Edith weary and depressed, whilst Sylvia was in the wildest spirits.

"Who *do* you think that we have met, Douglas?" she cried, on entering the cabin, "our old friend Captain Lester! He is a colonel now, and seemed so glad to see—*us!*" (The pause before, and emphasis upon, the final word, clearly intimating that "to see *me*," had been in the speaker's thoughts.) "I wanted him to come on board and see you both—but the higher powers forbade—his *wife* would not allow him."

"His wife?" asked Douglas, in a tone of some surprise.

"Yes! he *is* married," answered Sylvia. "She is what most people call a 'fine, handsome woman,' with large dark eyes, a lot of coarse

black hair, and rosy cheeks. She had *intrinsic* charms as well, which have not melted, happily for him, like those of *others*," and she cast a scornful glance at Mordaunt, who, looking pained, said quietly:

"I hardly think, my dear, that these details can interest your cousins."

"You forget," she answered, "Colonel Lester was their neighbour at Gowanbrae! An old *friend*, or shall I say a *rival*, Douglas? How he used to anger you at times!"

"I was young and foolish then," said Douglas, colouring hotly.

"And you are wiser now?" she queried. "I told the colonel I was sure you would have liked to see him! He is little altered; rather stout and coarse perhaps, but evidently kept in perfect order. He dare hardly call his life his own—at least in Madame's hearing."

"*That* must be a change indeed!" Douglas answered lightly. "I could hardly fancy *his* standing in awe of anyone. Well, Ralph, did you see the antiquities you sought? Miss Ryan, you look very tired, let me offer you this seat—I am not invalid enough to need it always."

Edith took his offer with a grateful glance, and noticing that Ralph, speaking to Meta, had not heard the former query, answered in his stead:

"Yes, Mr. Elton took me to St. Paul's bay, and the Castle of La Valette, whilst the others were at Colonel Lester's."

"The scene of that old siege, must have reminded you of Lucknow, and the heroic deeds in which you shared so recently," said Douglas.

"Which I have witnessed," she corrected, modestly. "Yes, I like to feel that the old knightly spirit is not dead."

Later in the evening, Elton said to Meta:

"For once, dear, I am glad you were not with us. Even at the risk of quarrelling with your cousin, I must have kept you from that fellow's house! Happily Miss Ryan did not know him."

"So you were able to remove her?" Meta answered. I *was* glad to hear it. But how very ill poor Mr. Ryan seems!"

"And *is*, I fear," Elton replied. "He tells me he gets hardly any sleep without the aid of opiates, which are very bad for him. I am

afraid Sylvia's manner must have worried him to-day. She flirted with the Colonel quite outrageously."

In fact, as days went on, Mordaunt seemed to lose the little strength he had possessed, and he, alas! had ever more and more recourse to the dangerous and momentary relief obtained from opiates.

He replied to all remonstrances which Ralph and Edith urged against the practice with a melancholy, "Surely a few drops more of laudanum cannot do me half the harm this restless tossing to and fro must effect!" And when Edith spoke to Sylvia, she only met with the gibe of "You seem to have made a careful study as to the *heart-affections* of the family!"

One morning, two unusual events occurred; Sylvia made *her* appearance at the breakfast-table, whilst Mordaunt's place was vacant during all the meal.

"You and Mr. Ryan must have changed your *rôles*, this morning," Meta said, as Sylvia followed her and Edith to the cabin where they sat. "It is not often *he* is late, I trust he is not ill?"

"Ill? no, not more than usual," Sylvia

answered, carelessly. "His sleeping-draught last night, seemed to take no effect; he tossed about till four o'clock this morning, when he took a second dose, which proved so efficacious that he had not stirred when I got up this morning."

Edith looked up in evident alarm. "Oh, Sylvia!" she exclaimed, "how could you let him act so rashly?"

"Let him, indeed? My dear, when you are married, you will find your husband will not wait for *your* permission to do as he thinks best. But, in this instance, I was glad enough to get a chance of quiet sleep myself."

"But when you knew that Dr. H——"

"You and Dr. H—— reason at your ease on things in which you have had no experience. If your rest were broken, night by night, as mine has been for some weeks past, you would soon come round to my opinion."

Edith was silenced, but by no means satisfied. After a pause, she made one effort more:

"Will you not go to him and see if he needs anything?" she asked, "or will you let *me* do so? Surely he must be awake by this time!"

"By no means," said Sylvia, coldly. "What should he need? And he knows where to find us. If he is awake, and up, he must have gone out on the deck to breathe the morning air. But very likely he is still asleep, making up for lost arrears."

Hour after hour passed by. At length the summons to the mid-day meal assembled all the other members of the party, yet still Mordaunt made no sign.

Douglas and the Eltons now supported the renewed appeal which Edith made, and to their united arguments Sylvia was obliged to yield. Slowly, and with no apparent interest in the matter, she moved languidly towards her husband's cabin; Edith, with anxiety depicted on her face, followed closely in her footsteps.

The others stood irresolute, until a piercing cry broke the oppressive silence. Then all rushed forward. Douglas, Ralph, and Meta, being among the first.

In the cabin a strange spectacle awaited them. Edith knelt beside her brother's bed, clasping his hand within her own. Sylvia stood gazing at them with a strange expression in her clear

but cruel eyes. One glance sufficed to show that Mordaunt Ryan's sleep had passed into that quiet calm repose, which in this world can know of no awaking. An empty phial and a wine-glass were beside him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE advent of the king of terrors cannot fail to bring a hush of at least momentary awe and reverence, under whatever aspect it may appear. But in this case the unexpected nature of the stroke intensified these feelings. Many, nay, most of those assembled in that little room, had seen strange accidents by field and flood; had perilled life and limb in battle, siege, or storm; had silently assumed the vacant post in which a comrade had been stricken down. But that had been amid the din of fight, or the excitement of impending peril; *this* was different. Here in the midst of colourless monotony, one had been taken from them, as it seemed, without a moment's warning, one who but yesterday had shared with them in all the kindly offices of daily life. This was, indeed, a sight to make the bravest spirit quail; to bid the thoughtless pause awhile and ponder.

"This is a very sad occurrence, gentlemen," the captain of the vessel said, approaching Ralph and Douglas. "I presume that *you* will act for Mrs. Ryan?"

"*Captain Archdale* will, no doubt," Ralph answered, hastily. "*I* will *assist* him to the best of my ability."

"Well," pursued the captain, "I have sent to call our surgeon. His skill can be of no avail, of course, but he must enquire into the cause of death."

"There can be little doubt concerning *that*," said Ralph, glancing sadly at the empty phial.

"You are right," replied the captain. "But all forms must be observed. Meanwhile, were it not better that the ladies left the room?"

Douglas started as from a trance. "Yes, certainly," he said, "I had forgotten. Meta, dear," he added, turning to his sister, "try to persuade Sylvia and Miss Ryan to go with you to the sitting room—to your own cabin—anywhere, away from here. They shall return a little later, if they wish to do so."

With a dull dazed sense of what his words implied, Meta addressed herself to do his bidding.

She approached Sylvia first and laid a gentle hand upon her arm, saying, softly, "Sylvia, dear cousin, will you come with me? By the memory of our early days, will you not let me try to help, to comfort you?"

"Comfort me—*you?*" Sylvia enquired, with a harsh mirthless laugh. "You cannot even understand my feelings."

"I did not know him whom you mourn, you mean?" Meta asked, gently; "then come to Edith, dear. She, at least, can fully share your grief. She suffers from the self same stroke which has fallen on you. Come to her, dear, and add your prayers to mine, that she will leave this room and come with us."

Sylvia shook off her cousin's hand, and glared round wildly at her. "Edith," she cried; "yes, *she* may listen to you. She can understand your sickly sentimental cant! She can speak your language! Go to her, then! I need you not! Leave me in peace!"

"Mrs. Ryan," Ralph exclaimed, "you overstep even the privilege such grief as yours confers, when you address such language to your cousin. Go to Miss Ryan, dear," he added,

turning to his wife, "you can do nothing here. Douglas and I must undertake the task."

"It will be useless so far as you are concerned, Ralph Elton," Sylvia began. "You have always thwarted and opposed me, and—" She stopped, cowed by the steady, sorrowful, yet commanding glance he fixed upon her.

"I have, I trust, done nothing of the sort," he said gravely, but courteously; "at any rate, my heart's desire is to assist you now in this great trial."

"I tell you I need none of you!" she answered fiercely, "can *you*, at least, not leave me to myself?"

Ralph made a sign to Douglas to approach, and try his power. "Dear cousin," Douglas said, persuasively, "I know how hard it seems to ask you thus to leave all that remains to you of him you loved. I would not do it if——"

"Him, I loved," she broke in wildly; "*Him*, Mordaunt Ryan! And *you* say that! *you?*"

"Hush!" he said, in tones of pity, horror, and command. "Hush! you know not what you say. The very wildness of your words proves the expediency of what we urge. The

shock has been too much for you, and you must leave this room. Come with me, my *cousin.*"

"With *you* then, not with *them*," she answered, glancing round at Edith, who having yielded, half instinctively, to Meta's gentle pleading, had now risen to her feet, and stood trembling, supported by her friend. "Not with *them*," Sylvia repeated. Take me to your sofa; I will go with *you!*"

Douglas was thankful to have gained the important point. "You will act for me, Elton, till I can return," he said, "and, Meta, you had better take Miss Ryan to her own room." Then he led his cousin gently out, and stayed with her until she fell asleep upon the sofa.

Then, at last, he was at liberty to muse on all that had occurred, and to assume the part so suddenly and strangely thrust upon him. The necessary formalities were gone through with little difficulty. There was no doubt about the cause of death. Anxiety, exposure and fatigue had sorely tried a slender store of strength. Unhappily, Mordaunt Ryan had persisted in the use of opiates, in spite of all advice. The surgeon of the ship fully confirmed the previ-

ously expressed opinion, that his state of health made such a practice highly dangerous. The verdict, given upon this evidence, run thus: "Died from heart disease, accelerated by the use of opium, which he administered with his own hand, without suicidal intention."

CHAPTER XXV.

IT was over! With every token of respectful sympathy Mordaunt Ryan's mortal frame had been committed to the Deep; the "sign of our Baptismal Birth"; the great mysterious, ever moving, changeless Sea,—in "sure and certain hope"—looking for the resurrection of the body (when the sea shall give up her dead), and the "life of the world to come."

It was over! In brief, stirring sentences, Ralph Elton had enforced the lesson, which this strange and awful incident conveyed. But all was over now, and to the greater part of those on board the *Orient*, life had resumed its ordinary course, and the sudden advent of the king of terrors seemed like the half forgotten memory of a dream.

With those in whom we are concerned, however; with Douglas, Meta, Ralph, and Sylvia,

and especially with Edith Ryan, it was otherwise. Their plans seemed shaken to the very centre. Even the projected visit to Gowanbrae had to be postponed. For Meta, divining that the festivities that were sure to greet Douglas's home coming, could scarcely fail to jar upon the wounded feelings of her friend, had proposed that Edith and Sylvia should spend their first few weeks with her and Ralph at L—— S. Martin. "We can go to Gowanbrae together when their gaieties are over," she concluded.

Edith's glad acceptance of this offer showed the relief which it afforded her. "But I am sorry *you* should miss the gladness of the welcome to your brother, and for our sake," she added.

"Oh, never think of *that*," Meta said, cheerily, "Ralph will be only too delighted to get back so much sooner to his parish. And we shall all enjoy a quiet visit later!" She looked at Sylvia (who had not yet spoken) as though asking for her acquiescence in this sentiment.

"Oh, leave *me* out of your fine schemes," her cousin answered, fretfully, "*I* have not the least desire to go to L—— S. Martin; neither sickly

sentiment nor constant preaching being to my taste. If the foolish fancies of the family keep me from Gowanbrae whilst anything is going on, I shall make my own arrangements."

Even Meta's sunny sweetness was scarcely proof against this unprovoked attack. "As you please, of course," she said, in tones of gentle dignity and pain. "I doubt not, at our landing, we shall find a cordial confirmation from my mother, of the invitation, which, in happier times, I pressed on your acceptance. Of course, you will be at perfect liberty to make what use of it you like. *I* thought that in these altered circumstances,—— But, as I said, it shall be as you please."

"In *that* and other matters I intend it should," Sylvia retorted, in a tone of much significance, arousing Meta's anxious apprehensions.

"It has been most unfortunate," she said afterwards to Ralph, "that Douglas should have been thrown so much with her of late. No; I knew he could not help it; and I don't believe he really cares for her! But it *is* most unfortunate."

In fact, since Mordaunt Ryan's death, Doug-

las's time and attention had been almost monopolised by his cousin. Sylvia turned with almost open scorn from Edith's gently proffered sympathy. She accepted Meta's services with silent indifference, yielded a somewhat sullen obedience to Ralph's calm admonitions, but really owned no influence save her cousin's. She claimed his escort in the daily walk which was thought necessary for her health, and exacted from him various other slight attentions, which not only made great inroads on his time, but also, as he felt with sorrow, sensibly increased and strengthened the icy and impenetrable barrier which had arisen silently between him and the object of his later and wiser choice; for such, he doubted not that Edith Ryan was. Unhappily, she, firmly believing in his love for Sylvia, looked forward with vague apprehension, to her own lonely, loveless, future life.

"I have no one now to live with or to lean on," she said one day to Meta. "Mordaunt's death has left me utterly alone."

"You would be always welcome, dear, to make your home with us," Meta began, "until," (you find a happier one yourself, she would have

said, but, fearing to suggest too much, changed the expression to) "until your plans are more decided."

"Nay, why should I encroach upon your kindness?" Edith asked. "I, who have no claim upon you."

"*No* claim? You have the very strongest claim," said Meta. "And Ralph would make you useful, never fear. Why, your skill in nursing would be quite a blessing in the parish."

It happened that, a few day afterwards, Douglas, who had of late exerted himself more than his recently recovered strength quite justified, complained of renewed pain and inflammation in his shoulder.

"Then you had better remain here quietly," said Ralph, in his decisive tones, "Mrs. Ryan must accept *my* escort for to-day."

Sylvia dared not openly resist this mandate. "Meta must come with us, then," was all the protest upon which she ventured; adding, *almost* audibly, "a *tète-à-tète* with him would be too terrible!"

Perhaps Meta thought it *would*, for Ralph; perhaps she had forgotten that Edith was to seek

her in the cabin at about this hour; at any rate, she readily acceded to her cousin's proposition, and Douglas, for a time, was left alone. Bodily pain and mental weariness rendered his meditations somewhat melancholy. The voyage now was nearly over, and he had as yet found no good opening for his wished-for explanation with Miss Ryan. Her gentle courtesy had never varied, but he could not fail to see how carefully she avoided being left alone with him. Must it be always so? Could he never even *ask for*, much less gain, a better place in her affections than he held already? Must he wait till Meta brought her friend to Gowanbrae? He longed to know his fate at once.

"Meta!" a voice said at the door, "I fear that I am rather late. Oh, Captain Archdale, pray forgive me! I did not think that you were here! I came to look for Meta."

He started up in glad surprise, stretching out both his hands in welcome. "It is, indeed, an unexpected treat," he said. "Pray do not go! I have so longed to see you!"

Whether she would have yielded to his *words* alone, I cannot tell, but at this moment a sharp

twinge of pain forced him to fall back almost fainting on the couch, whence he had risen at her entrance. In an instant she was at his side, thinking only how his sufferings could be best relieved.

"This is like old times," he murmured, gratefully, as she moved his cushions, and bathed his aching temples with soft, soothing touch. "Yes, I have had a bout of the old pain, and Ralph would not allow me to go on the deck. He and Meta are with Sylvia now."

"Captain Archdale," Edith said, with some embarrassment, "as I have thus intruded on your solitude, let me pay a debt of gratitude which has been all too long deferred already. What—I—we— should have done without your help and Meta's during these sad weeks I cannot tell."

"Do not speak so," he said, "I, at least, have but striven, imperfectly, alas, to show my sense of all I owe to you, my kind and patient nurse, my life's preserver; and my sorrow for the petulance which once called down on me your just rebuke."

"Nay, *I* have quite forgotten that," she

answered, with a sweet sad smile. "My memory holds nothing but thoughts of kindness, as regards both you and Meta. May your future lot be happy, in the well-earned affection of the object of your love." She spoke the last words firmly, but with evident emotion.

"The object of my love!" Douglas repeated, wonderingly. "Miss Ryan! Edith! Who? What do you mean?"

"Must I speak more distinctly?" she queried, sadly. "I hoped you would have spared me; it would have been more generous. But *you* have not been treated generously; yet I do not think my brother knew that he was wronging you! However, that is past and over now. Sylvia is free, and soon, I trust, your happiness and hers may be complete."

"Sylvia!" he exclaimed, "you think that I love Sylvia?"

"Surely," she answered, "do you not remember Lucknow, and the terms in which you spoke of her? No, do not misunderstand me! I am sure that in all truth and honesty you have striven to repress your feelings. But there is now no cause why you should do so. Sylvia

is free. The barrier which her fortune raised between you has been levelled. She does, she must, return the love you bear her. Surely no impediment need bar your perfect happiness—and hers."

"Neither would be accomplished by our union," he responded, firmly. "Listen to me, Edith,—let me call you by that name, at least this once—I *did* love Sylvia, with the fond impetuous passion of a boy; and, with a boy's impatience of restraint, I told her of my love before she left my father's roof. In that, I now perceive, I was to blame. I believed that she returned my passion, and, when the tidings arrived that she was married to another, I felt as though my very heart were killed. Thank God it was not so. The wound was deep and sore, but it is healed completely now. My soul is set on new desires, but whether I attain to them or no, the infatuation of the past is gone for ever."

"Dare you call it by that name?" exclaimed an unexpected voice, at which he started, dropping Edith's hand, which he had seized in his excitement, and looking up, he met the wrathful glance of Sylvia, who had entered unperceived,

and now stood glaring at them from the open door. "Ah! you are silent, in *my* presence," she continued, mockingly. "This, then, was your design—this, the occasion of your sudden illness! Go on, at any rate, show that you have, at least, the courage of your opinions. Place this bauble on the finger of the freshest object of your fickle fancy! Do not stop to tell her how it once was pressed on *my* acceptance! Why should *she* care for such fond follies of the past?" And, with ungovernable passion, Sylvia flung the turquoise ring, which she still wore, before her cousin's feet. Then turning fiercely round on Edith, she continued, "As for *you*, you seeming saintly hypocrite, who think to triumph over me,——"

But here Douglas interposed. "Stop, Sylvia," he exclaimed. "Urge what reproaches against *me* you will—and I will strive to bear them with all patient courtesy. But, in my presence, neither you nor any one shall address Miss Ryan rudely. *That* privilege I assume at once. Anything further waits for her decision."

"Which is so *very* doubtful!" Sylvia retorted, with a sneer. "Pshaw! she has been in love

with you for weeks! No!" as he made a warning gesture, "I am not addressing *her*. You will not listen? Ah, well; I have done! Make the most of your fool's paradise, it will not content you long!" And with a look of baffled rage, and envious spite, at Edith, Sylvia turned and left the room.

Then Douglas took the trembling fingers gently in his own. "Dearest," he said, in tones of deepest, tenderest reverence, "I cannot tell you how concerned I am that you should be exposed to such a scene. But may I, dare I, hope, that it is true, that you, in some degree, return my love?"

Bewildered by conflicting feelings, scarcely understanding what he said, Edith looked at him for a moment in mute wonder.

He mistook her meaning, and said, sadly, "Nay, forgive me, if I have presumed too far, I will not seek to force an answer from you."

"Captain Archdale," she exclaimed, raising her eyes to his.

There was no longer any room for doubt, and in a moment she was folded in his arms.

"And so you will desert us, after all?" Ralph

said, with simulated anger. "What are we to do without you?"

"That which you have not had, you cannot miss," retorted Douglas. "But you shall not lose her altogether. The winter winds at Gowanbrae might be too keen for this frail Indian plant, so we, perhaps, may make a winter home near you. How say you, dearest?"

This proposition was received with general approbation, and the remainder of the evening was spent by the quartette in picturing pleasant prospects for the future.

Sylvia, meanwhile, revolved in her own cabin upon the downfall of her schemes, and pondered on her plans. She would not, even were it possible, go to Gowanbrae, nor to L—— S. Martin. No! she would not grace the triumph of her rival. Her aunt, Lady Carthew, was, she supposed, in London, *She* had always flattered her caprices, and indulged her in her foibles. With *her* she would be sure to find a fitting home, until she captivated some fresh admirer. To her she was resolved to go as soon as she reached England.

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER all, Edith did not visit Gowanbrae until the following summer, when she went there as a bride. Mrs. Archdale met her children on their landing, and, after a long consultation with her daughter, suggested that the fêtes prepared for Douglas's reception, should be postponed, as far as possible, till they could also celebrate his marriage.

The wedding was at L—— S. Martin, where Edith spent the intervening period, and was quiet, owing to the recent mourning of the bride. But the reception of the happy couple in their northern home, was the heartiest Highland hands and hearts could give.

Sylvia declined the invitation which was sent her. She still resided with her aunt, where she found that her position differed widely from the one which she had occupied on the occasion of her former visits.

Whilst she was reading Flossie's letter, with the account of the reception given to Douglas, she heard a strident voice call:

"Sylvia! Sylvia! Has anybody seen Mrs. Ryan? In her room? Then tell her to come here directly! Oh, here you are. I wish you would contrive to be more punctual. Jettine is waiting for her walk. You should have started long ago. It gets so hot for her, poor darling. Have you her chain? Now take care of her! Good-bye, my pet!" This last to the fat black poodle which Sylvia had to take out for its daily airing.

Once out of ear-shot, Sylvia, tugging sharply at the chain, dragged the panting beast along the hot streets to the Park. "Horrid little brute!" she said. "To think that *I* should have to bear this bondage, and to hear that Edith ——"

"Mrs. Ryan? Is it possible? You here, and alone? Have you forgotten Eric Randall?"

She looked up in astonishment. Could this tall, military-looking man, be the lank boy who at Calcutta had been deemed beneath her

notice? Had he come for her deliverance?"

"It is so long since we have met," she murmured, "and so much as happened. You are greatly changed—changed for the better."

"Is Miss Ryan with you," he continued, "May I call upon you? I have heard of your bereavement!"

"Miss Ryan?" Sylvia said in colder tones, "Edith is married to my cousin, Captain Archdale, and she is *not* in London. I am staying with my aunt, Lady Carthew. She sees but little company, but ——" She paused as if in doubt, and he broke in with eager tones:

"Do you not think she will admit me—*us*. I am so anxious you should know my wife. And could you give me Miss Ryan's, Mrs. Archdale's, address? Your old servant, Hassan, has come over with us, and he is wild to see her."

"His wife! Then he was married too, and could not help her." This was Sylvia's silent commentary. Aloud, she said, "Hassan's impatience must, I fear, be curbed a little. My cousin and his bride are now in Scotland."

"Poor fellow! I am sorry for him (Hassan, I mean!") Eric Randall answered, with a laugh,

"I should congratulate Captain Archdale did I know him. Do you know, Mrs. Ryan, Hassan has suffered awfully since you left India? All his people turned against him when he was baptized. Then his child died, and some said it was a judgment on him. Even his wife forsook him after that."

"I am afraid I must be going," Sylvia said, abruptly. "No, I cannot ask you to come with me. My aunt might not be pleased. She is—peculiar! My best regards to Mrs. Randall," and with a faint resumption of her former graceful languor, Sylvia swept along the path, drawing reluctant Jettine after her.

"Poor thing!" said Eric Randall, musingly. "She is lovely still, but what a change for her! Well, my little woman is a charming wife—but Sylvia Ryan is a peerless beauty."

Six months later, Edith Archdale sat beside a cheery little fire in her pretty drawing-room at L——, an open book lay on her lap, her eyes were fixed upon the flame, she seemed immersed in thought. Douglas entering at the moment laid his hand upon her shoulder, saying pleasantly:

"What is my Edith pondering so deeply?"

She looked up in his face with clear brown eyes, from which the light of happy love had long since banished every shadow of past suffering.

"On this poem," she said, "it brought back to my mind some well nigh *prophetic* words Sir Henry Lawrence spoke on the first evening which I spent at Lucknow. We were talking of the future, of the English rule in India, of the coming troubles, and he said:—'We stand, I fear, upon the brink of a great crisis—what the end will be God only knows—I trust the English rule may stand, but we must all be tried by fire.' Then, too, I think these verses have a bearing on our own life-history—upon yours especially."

Douglas took the book, and read the poem carefully. (It was Miss Procter's "Cleansing Fires," from which I have already quoted more than once.) "Yes," he said, repeating the last lines aloud, "I have indeed good cause to 'Bless the cleansing fire and the furnace of living pain,' which taught me to discriminate between the false love and the true, and gained for me

the treasure of my life. May you, dearest, always have equal cause to know, 'By my heart's calm strength in loving, of the fire it has had to bear."

She raised her eyes to his in grateful love and perfect confidence. Then, looking once more at the book, she said, rather doubtfully, as if hardly able to express her meaning:

"But sorrow does not always sanctify. Think of all that Mordaunt had to bear; and Sylvia!—Even now, I fear, that hers is not a happy lot."

A cloud of sadness darkened Archdale's brow. "Dearest," he said, gravely, "the fire which purifies the gold, consumes the baser metal. Sylvia has, I fear, too little of the gold of pure unselfish love to win the blessing suffering is designed to bring. 'If we bear our cross unwillingly, we do but make a new burden for ourselves and thus increase our load, yet miss the prize.'"

"And Mordaunt?" Edith said again in pleading tones.

Very gently Douglas drew her towards him saying:

"Dearest, short and slight as was my acquaintance with your brother, I cannot but believe that suffering did its blessed work on him, and that—

'To add greater honour to his name,
Than man could give him, he died fearing God.'"

"It is good of *you* to speak thus of him!" she said, gratefully. "But Meta, with her heart of gold, her sunny countenance, surely she may be spared this fiery crucible."

"Meta!" Douglas spoke in tones of tender reverence. "Meta appears to me one of those rare sweet souls—

'Who seem to dwell,
Above this earth, so rich a spell,
Floats round their steps where'er they move
From hopes fulfilled, and mutual love.'

Trials no doubt she has encountered and will meet again, and always with the same bright spirit, which conceals them from the sight even of those who know and love her best.

Happy alike in work and play, she wears—

'The white flower of a blameless life,
Before a thousand peering littleness.'

"But here she comes with Ralph!" he added, in an altered tone. "You are late but ever welcome visitors," he continued, turning to the new arrivals. "You will stay to dinner?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," Ralph replied, "although we only came to bring a friend of former days to see you both."

"A very warm admirer of *yours*, Edith," added Meta.

"Who can it be?" said Edith, wonderingly. "An old friend who admires me! I can think of no one!"

Douglas laughed and said, "This is becoming serious! *I* have never heard of this admirer."

"Oh, yes, you have," Meta retorted, "*heard* of him, and *seen* him, *noticed* his devotion!"

"Meta!" cried Edith, "surely you cannot mean—no! he is not in England! It cannot be Hassan?"

"Hassan it *is*," said Ralph. "He came to England with a Major Randall, who it seems

knew Sylvia well in former days. He is at Folkestone now, and Hassan walked to L—— on Sunday, heard me preach, and knowing I could tell him your address, he came to me to-day, and we have brought him here. You will see him, I suppose?"

"Certainly," Douglas answered, rising, "I will go and fetch him. Where did you leave him? In the hall? Come, Hassan! Mrs. Archdale will be pleased to see you."

After the first glad greetings, Edith marked, with pain, changes, which something more than time had wrought on her old faithful follower's countenance.

"Yes, Missy," he replied, "Hassan has had much to bear since you left India. It is not easy for us to turn Christian. All our people are against us. The good chaplain, with whom Elton Sahib left me, taught me well and brought me to the font. Then the strife began. My brother came to me, he asked how I could leave our father's faith, and do dishonour to the spirits of our ancestors, saying, 'that if I did, a curse would rest upon me. I should have no son to do the last great rites for me.' Well, I stood

firm, thank God, and, as I hoped, my wife—Missy remembers Kunda?—held with me. She let our boy be christened. She herself received instruction. I hoped for peaceful days at home, at any rate. Then came the crushing blow! Our boy was taken! People said that I had murdered him; that the curse my brother spoke had fallen upon me. Kunda believed them; and she cursed me, too; then fled from me for ever."

Overcome by this remembrance, Hassan paused—his listeners sharing in his grief. At last he broke the silence:

"There is little more to tell," he said. "The kind, good chaplain, took me to his house, where my present master saw me. When *he* had heard my story, he enquired if I would go with him to England. I consented. I had nothing more to stay for in my native land; and here, I hoped, I might find you. In the summer Major Randall met the Mem Sahib, but she did not give him your address, and so I knew not where to find you till I met with Elton Sahib. Now, Missy, I have seen you. You are happy. I can die in peace."

"Tried by fire, indeed," said Douglas, looking at his wife. "Poor Hassan! Yet not poor! Blessed rather in the sufferings which he has so patiently endured."

That evening, as Ralph and Meta wended their homeward way beneath the star-lit sky, their hearts full of all which they had heard, Meta whispered timidly:

"Do you know, dear Ralph, when I think of all which others have to bear, I am almost frightened at the calm uninterrupted brightness of *my* lot."

He looked down tenderly into her upturned face, then upward to the starry heaven, ere he replied:

"One star differeth from another star in glory. Trials and gifts are severally apportioned to us all, as everyone hath need. Only hold fast the Father's hand, and trust His guidance, and you will be safe. By pleasant paths, or rugged wilderness ways, alike, you will be led Safe home at last. Cheerfulness and brightness in God's service are great gifts, and powerful in bringing others nearer to Him. These are yours, my Meta, in large measure, take them thankfully

and use them, as you have already done, to bring the Sunshine of His Presence to the darkened room of sorrow and of sickness. Then you shall not fail to find a rich reward. For,

"Everywhere we find our suffering God
And where He trod,
May set our steps. The cross on Calvary,
Uplifted high,
Beams on the Martyr host. A beacon light,
In open fight."

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