YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

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BY

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"No man can redeem his brother."—Ps. xlix. 7.

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YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

CHAPTER I.

NELLO'S JOURNEY.

RANDOLPH MUSGRAVE drove from the door of his father's house with a sigh of relief, yet of anxiety. He had not done what he meant to do, and affairs were more critical than when he went to Penninghame a few weeks before; but it was something at least to be out of the troubled atmosphere, and he had arranged in his own mind what he should do, which was in its way a gain, as soon as the breath was out of the old man's body—but when would that be? It was not to be desired, Randolph said to himself piously, that his father should linger long; his life was neither of use nor comfort to any one, and no pleasure, no advantage to himself. To lie there speechless, motionless,

as much shut out of all human intercourse as if he were already in his coffin—what could any one desire but that, as soon as might be, it should come to an end?

He did not pay very much attention to his small companion.

having been thus secured and brought within his power, had no further importance, and Randolph sat with knitted brows pondering all he was to do, without any particular reference to the child. Nello had left the Castle easily enough; he had parted from Mary and from Lilias without any lingering of emotion, getting over it as quickly as possible. When it came to that he was eager to be off, to set out into the world. The little fellow's veins were full of excitement; he expected to see, he did not know what wonderful things, what objects of entrancing interest, as soon as he got outside the little region where everything was known to him. "Good-bye, Mary—good-bye, Lily," he said, waving his hand. He had his own little portmanteau with his name on it, a new little silver watch in his pocket—what could child want more? Lily, though she was his sister, was not a sensation like that watch. He took it out, and turned it round and round, and opened the case, and wound it up—he had

wound it up twice this morning already, so that one turn of the key was all that was practicable. Nothing at the Castle, nothing in the society of Lily, was equal to this. He compared his watch with the clock at the druggist's in the village and found it fast: he compared it with the clock at the station and found that slow. He did not take any notice of his uncle, nor his uncle of him; each was indifferent, though partly hostile, to the other. Randolph was at his ease because he had this child, this troublesome atom, who might do harm though he could do no good, in his power; but Nello was at his ease through pure indifference. He was not at the moment frightened of his uncle, and no other sentiment in regard to him had been developed in his mind. As calm as if Randolph had been a cabbage, Nello sat by his side and looked at his watch. The watch excited him, but his uncle——. Thus they went on, an unsympathetic pair. Nello stood about on the platform and looked at everything, while Randolph took the tickets. He was slightly hurt to hear that a half-ticket was still enough for himself, and moved away at once to the other side of the station, where the locomotive enthralled him. He stood and gazed at it with transport.

What he would have given to have travelled there with the man who drove it, and left Uncle Randolph behind! But still Nello took his place in the train with much indifference to Uncle Randolph. He was wholly occupied with what was going on before and about him: the rush across country, trees and fields flying by, and the stations where there was always something new, the groups of people standing about, the rush of some for the train, the late arrival just as the doors were shut of those who were too late. These last made Nello laugh, their blank looks were so funny—and yet he was sorry for them; for what a thing it must be, he thought, to see other people go rushing out over the world to see everything, while you yourself were left dull at home! He remembered once himself being left with Martuccia in the still, deserted house when all the others had gone to the *festa;* how he thought the day would never end—and Martuccia thought so too. This made him sorry, very sorry, for the people who had lost their train. It did not occur to Nello that it might be no *festa* he was going to, or they were going to. What could any one want more than the journey itself? If you wearied of seeing the trains rush past, and counting the

houses, now on one side, now on another, there was the endless pleasure of dashing up to one station after another, where Nello could look down with fine superiority on the people who were not going, on the children above all, who looked up envious, and envied him, he felt sure.

By and by, however, though he would not confess it to himself, the delights of the journey began to pall: his little eyes grew fatigued with looking, and his little mind with the continuous spectacle of those long, flying breadths of country; and even the stations lost their charm. He would have liked to have somebody to talk to, and cast one or two wistful glances to see whether Uncle Randolph was practicable, but found no encouragement in that countenance, pre-occupied, and somewhat lowering by nature, which appeared now and then in the wavering of the train, over the newspaper his uncle was reading. What a long time it took to read that paper! How it crackled when it was opened out! How tired Nello grew of seeing it opposite to him! And he began to grow cramped with sitting; his limbs wanted stretching, his mind wanted change; and he began to be hungry. Randolph, who scorned the poor refreshments of

the railway, and thought it better to wait for his meal till he reached home, did not think of the difference between himself and the child. They travelled on and on through the dulness of the afternoon. Nello, who had been so excited, felt disposed to sleep, but was too proud to yield to it; and then he began to think of his sister and the home he had left. It is natural, it is selfish, to remember home when we miss its comforts: but if that is not of the higher nature of love, it is yet the religion of the weak, and not despised by the great Succourer who bids men call upon Him in time of trouble. Nello's heart, when he began to feel tired and famished, recurred, with a pathetic trust in the tenderness and in the certainty of the well-being that abode there, to his home.

When they stopped at a lively, bustling junction to change their direction, things mended a little. Nello ventured to buy himself a cake, his uncle not interfering, as they waited. "You will spoil your stomach with that sweet stuff," Randolph said, but he allowed the child to munch. And they had half-an-hour to wait, which of itself was something. Nello walked about, imitating Randolph's longer stride, though he did not

accompany his uncle; and though he felt forlorn and very small among the crowd, marched about and looked at everything as the gentlemen did, recovering his spirits a little. And suddenly, with a great glow of pleasure all over him, Nello spied, among the strangers who were hurrying to and fro, a face he had seen before; it is true it was only the face of the countryman who had accosted him in the Chase, and with whom he had but a small acquaintance, but even this was something in the waste of the unknown that surrounded him. The boy rushed up to him with a gleam of joy upon his small countenance. "I say, have you come from—home?"

"Yes, my little gentleman," said Wild Bampfylde. "I'm taking a journey like you, but I like best to tramp on my two legs. I'm going no further in your carriages, that give you the cramp. I reckon you're tired too."

"A little," said Nello; "but that's no matter. What have you in your basket?—is it another rabbit? I gave mine to Lily. They would not let me bring it, though I wanted to bring it. School you know," said the boy, seriously, "is not like home. You have to be just like as if you were grown up there. Little—you cannot help being little; but you

have to be like as if you were grown u there."

"Ay, ay, that's the way to take it," said the countryman, looking down with a twinkle in his eye, half smiling, half sad, at the small creature beside him. "The thing is to be a man, and to mind that you must stand up like a man, whatever happens. If one hits you, you must hit him again, and be sure not to cry."

"Hit me!" said Nello—"cry? Ah, you do not know the kind of school I am going to—for you are not a gentleman," he added, looking with superb condescension at his adviser. "I like you just the same," said Nello, "but you are not a gentleman, are you? and how can you know?"

"The Lord forbid!" said Bampfylde, "one's enough in a family. It would be ill for us, and maybe for you too, if I were a gentleman. Look you here, my little man. Look at the bonnie bird in this basket—it's better than your rabbit. A rabbit, though it's one o' God's harmless creatures, has little sense, and cannot learn; but this bonnie thing is of use to God and man, as well as being bonnie to look at. Look at him! what a bonnie head he has, and an eye as meaning as your own."

"A pigeon!" said Nello, with a cry of delight. "Oh, I wish I might have him! Do you think I might have him? I could put him under the seat, and nobody would see the basket; and then when we got there——"

"Ay, that's the question—when you got there?"

"I would say—it was my—fishing-basket," said Nello. "*He* said they went fishing; and nobody would know. I would say Mary had —put things in it: nobody would ever find out, and I would keep it in my room, and buy seed for it and give it water, and it would live quite comfortable. And it would soon come to know me, wouldn't it? and hop about and sit on my shoulder. Oh, let me have it; won't you let me have it? Look here, I have a great deal of money," cried Nello, turning out his pocket; "five shillings to spend, and a sovereign Mary gave me. I will give you money for it, as much money as ever you please——"

"Whisht, my little lad; put back your money and keep it safe, for you'll have need of it. I brought the bird to give you. If they're kind folks they'll let you keep him. You must keep him safe, and take care he has his meat every day; and if they're unkind to you or treat

you bad, put you his basket in the window and open the lid, and, puff! he'll flee away and let your friends know."

"But I should not like him to flee away. I would like him to stay with me always, and sit on my shoulder, and eat out of my hand."

"My little gentleman," said Bampfylde. "I'm afraid your uncle will hear us. Try to understand. If you're ill-used, if they're unkind, let the bird fly, and he'll come and tell us. Mind now, what I'm saying. He'll come and tell us. Did you never read in your storybooks——"

"Then it is an enchanted bird," said Nello, looking down, very gravely, into the basket. Lily had read to him of such things. He was not very much surprised: but a bird that some day would turn into a young prince did not attract him so much as one that would hop on his shoulder without ulterior object. He looked down at it very seriously, with more respect perhaps, but not so warm an interest. His little face had lost its animation. How Lily would have glowed and brightened at the thought! But Nello was no idealist. He preferred a real pigeon to all the enchanted princes in the world.

"Nay," said Bampfylde, with a gleam of a

smile across his dark face, "it's no fairy, but it's a carrier. Did you never hear of that? And when you let it fly it will fly to me, and let me know that you are wanting something—that they're not kind to you, or that you're wanting to be away."

"Oh, they'll be kind," said Nello, carelessly; "I would rather he would stay with me, and never, never fly away."

"I'll put him in the carriage for you," said Bampfylde, hurriedly, "for here's somebody coming. And don't you let any one know that you were speaking to me, or ever saw me before. And God bless you, my little gentleman!" said the vagrant, suddenly disappearing among the crowd.

While Nello stood staring after him, Randolph came up, and tapped him sharply on the shoulder.

"What are you staring at? Have you seen any one you know?"

It was Nello's first lesson in deceiving.

"I—I was looking at a man—with wild beasts," he said.

"With wild beasts!—in the station?—here?"

"Yes, white rabbits and pigeons—and things; at least," said Nello to himself, "he

once had a white rabbit, if he hasn't got one now."

"Rabbits!" said Randolph. "Come along, here is our train. It is late; and before I have got you settled, and got back here again, and am able to think of myself, it will be midnight, I believe. You children don't know what a trouble you are. I shall have lost my day looking after you. I should have been at home now but for you; and little gratitude I am likely to get, when all is done."

This moved Nello's spirit, for of all things in the world there is nothing that so excites opposition among great and little, as a claim upon our gratitude. Anything and everything else the mind may concede, but even a child kicks against this demand. Nello's feelings towards his uncle were not unkind; but, little as he was, instinct woke in him an immediate resistance.

"It was not me that did it," he said; "it was you. I should have stayed at home, and when the old gentleman is better he would have come out and played with me. And Mary would have let me stay. I like home," said Nello, "and perhaps I shall not like school; but if I don't like it," he added, brightening and forgetting the secret he had

been so sworn to keep, "I know how to get away."

"How shall you get away?" said Randolph. But he was so sure of this matter, which was in his own hands, that he did not wait for any answer. "They will take care of that at school," he said; "and it will be the worse for you, my boy, if you make yourself disagreeable. Come along, or we shall miss the train."

Nello saw that the basket had been placed under his seat as he got in; and as the train swept away from the station, he caught a glimpse of the lonely figure of his new friend, standing among the little crowd that watched the departure. Bampfylde made a warning gesture to the child, who, forgetful of precaution, nodded and waved his hand in reply.

"Who is that?" cried Randolph, suspiciously, getting up to cast a searching look behind.

"Oh, it is the man with the wild beasts," Nello said.

And then came another silent sweep through the green smooth country, which was not like the hilly north. It was all Nello could do to keep himself from pulling his basket from beneath the seat, and examining his new

treasure. He could hear it rustling and fluttering its wings against the wickerwork. Oh, to be able to take it out, to give it some crumbs of biscuit which were still in his pocket, to begin to train it to know him! Nello only restrained himself painfully, by the thought that if he betrayed his own secret thus, his pigeon might be taken from him. How eager he was now to be there! "Are there many more stations?" he asked, anxiously; then counted them on his fingers—one, two, three. And how delighted he was when they came at last to the little place, standing alone in a plain, with no other house visible that Nello could see (but he did not look; he was so anxious about his pigeon), which was their journey's end. A kind of farmer's shandry, half cart, half gig, with a rough horse, and a rougher driver, was in waiting. Nello got his basket out with his own hands, and put his little great-coat over it, so that no one could see. His heart beat loudly with fright, lest his uncle should hear the sounds beneath the cover—the rustle and flutter. But Randolph's mind was otherwise engaged. As for the boy, he thought of nothing but this treasure, which he was so happy to feel in his arms. He could carry it so, quite comfortably, with the little

great-coat over it; he neither remarked the rudeness of the jolting vehicle, nor the bare country, with here and there a flat line of road running between turnip and potato fields. When they came to the house—a new, square house, in the middle of the fields—Nello thought nothing about it one way or another. He thought, "I wonder which will be my window; I wonder where I can keep the bird." That was all. His little soul, all eagerness after his new delight, had room for nothing more.

Randolph and his charge were taken into a plain room, very simply furnished and not over-dainty in point of cleanness, where the principal of the school, a man in rusty black, came to receive them. There was nothing repulsive in his looks, nothing more in any way than the same plain unvarnished rusticity and homeliness which showed in his house. The school was intended for farmers' sons, and the education was partly industrial—honest, simple training, without either deceit or villany involved, though not at all suitable for Nello. It was with reluctance even that so young a boy had been accepted at all; and the schoolmaster looked at him with doubtfulness, as the slim little curled darling, so different

from his other pupils, came in, hugging his basket.

"He's young, and he's small," said Mr. Swan.

"Very young, and small for his age," Randolph echoed. "All the more reason why he should lead an out-of-door life, and learn that he is a boy, and will one day be a man."

Then Nello was put into the hands of the principal's wife, while Randolph gave further directions.

"His case is quite peculiar," the uncle said. "He is an orphan, or as good as an orphan, and I took him from the hands of ladies who were making a fool of the boy. What he wants is hardening. You must not be led away by his delicate looks; he is a strong boy, and he wants hardening. Send him out to the fields, let him learn to work like the rest, and don't listen to any complaints. Above all, don't let him send complaints home."

"I never interfere with what they write home," said honest Mr. Swan.

"But you must in this case. If he sends home a complaining letter, his aunt will rush here next morning and take him away. I am his uncle, and I won't permit that—and a family quarrel is what will follow, unless you

will exercise your discretion. Keep him from writing, or keep him from grumbling. You will be the saving of the boy."

"It is a great responsibility to undertake. I should not have undertaken it, had I known——"

"I am sure you have too serious a sense of the good that can be done, to shrink from responsibility," said Randolph; "but, indeed, are we not all responsible for everything we touch? If you find him too much for you, write to me. Don't write to what he calls 'home.' And do not let him be taken away without my authority. I have to protect him from injudicious kindness. A parcel of women —you know what harm they can do to a boy, petting and spoiling him. He will never be a man at all, if you don't take him in hand."

With these arguments, Randolph overcame the resistance of the schoolmaster, and with redoubled injunctions that it was himself that was to be communicated with, in case of anything happening to Nello, went away. He was in haste to get back for his train; and "No, no," he said, "you need not call the boy —the fewer partings the better. I don't want to upset him. Tell him I was obliged to hurry away."

And it would be impossible to describe with what relief Randolph threw himself into the clumsy shandry, to go away. He had got the boy disposed of—for the moment at least —where no harm could happen to him, but also where he could do no harm. If his grandfather regained his consciousness, and, remembering that freak of his dotage, called again for the boy, it would be out of Mary's power to spoil everything by humouring the old man, and reviving all those images which it would be much better to make an end of. And when the Squire's life was over, how much easier to take all those measures which it was so advisable to take, without the little interloper about, whom foolish people would no doubt insist on calling the heir. The heir! Let him stay here, and get a little strength and manhood, to struggle for his rights, if he had any rights. More must be known of him than any one knew as yet, Randolph said to himself, before he, for one, would acknowledge him as the heir.

Nello was taken into Mrs. Swan's parlour, and there had some bread and butter offered to him, which he accepted with great satisfaction. The bread was dry and the butter salt, but he was hungry, which made it very agreeable.

"You'll have your tea with the rest at six," said Mrs. Swan; "and now come, I'll show you where you are to sleep. What is that you're carrying?"

"A basket," said Nello, in the mildest tone; and she asked no further questions, but led him up stairs, not however to the little bedroom of which the child had been dreaming, where he could keep his new pet in safety, but to a long dormitory, containing about a dozen beds.

"This is yours, my little man, and you must be tidy and keep your things in order. There are no nurses here, and the boys are a bit rough; but you will soon get used to them. Put down your things here; this chair is yours, and that washing-stand, and——"

"Must I sleep there?" cried Nello. It was not so much the little bed—the close neighbourhood of the other boys—that appalled him; but where was there a window for his bird? "Mayn't I have that bed?" he said, pointing to one which stood near the window at the end of the room.

"I daresay," said Mrs. Swan; "why that is for the head boy, and you are the least, and the last. It is only by a chance that there is room for you at all here."

"But I don't want to be here," said Nello. "Oh, mayn't I be by the window? The head boy hasn't got a——. What would it matter to him? but I want to be there. I want to be at the window."

"My little master, you'll be where I choose to place you," said Mrs. Swan, becoming irritated. "We allow no self-will, and no rebellion here."

"But what shall I do with my——." Nello did not venture to name the name of the bird. He crept up to the head of the little bed which was to be allotted to him, and surveyed the blank wall tearfully. There was but a very little space between him and the next bed, and he was in the middle of the room, the darkest part of it. Nello began to cry. He called upon Mary, and upon Martuccia, in his heart. Neither of them would suffer him to be treated so. "Oh, mayn't I go to another room where there is a window?" he cried, through his tears.

"My word, that one is a stubborn one; you will have your hands full with him," said Mrs. Swan, leaving Nello to have his cry out, which experience had taught her was the best way. She found her husband very serious, and full of care, thinking over the charge he had received.

"It's a gentleman's son, not one of the commoner sort," he said; "but why they should have brought him to me—such a little fellow—is more than I can see."

Nello sat by his little bed and cried. His heart was full, and his little frame worn out. In the state of depression which had followed upon the delight of the morning, novelty had departed, and strangeness had come in its place—a very different matter; everything was strange wherever he turned; and no place to put his pigeon! By and by the vacant spaces would fill, and boys—boys whom he did not know—big boys, rough boys, and that head boy, who had the window—would pour in; and he had no place to put his bird.

Nello's tears fell like summer rain upon the precious basket, till the storm had worn itself out. Then, first symptom of amelioration, his ear was caught by the rustle of the bird in the cage. He took it up, and placed it in his lap, then opened the cover a little way, and, entrancing moment! saw it—the glossy head, the keen little eye gleaming at him, the soft, ruffled feathers. It made a small dab at him as he peered in—and oh, how delighted, how miserable, how frightened was Nello! He drew back from the tiny assault, then approached

his head closer, and took from his pocket a bit of his bread and butter, which he had saved on purpose. Then he sat down on the floor, a small creature, scarcely visible, hidden between the beds, betraying himself only by the reverberation of the sobs which still shook his little bosom from time to time, entranced over his bird. The pigeon gurgled its soft coo, as it picked up the crumbs. The little boy, after his trouble, forgot everything but this novel delight; a thing all his own, feeding from his hand already, looking up at him sidelong, with that glimmer of an eye, with a flutter towards him if it could but have got loose. No doubt when he set it free it would come upon his shoulder directly. Nello lost himself and all his grief in pleasure. He forgot even that he had not a window in which to hang his bird.

By and by, however, there came a rush and tramp of feet, and eleven big boys, earthy and hot from the field where they had been working, came pouring in. They filled the room like a flood, like a whirlwind, catching Nello upon their surface as the stream would catch a straw. One of the big, hobnailed fellows stumbled over him as he sat on the floor.

"Hallo, what's here?" he cried; "what little kid are you?" seizing the child by the

shoulders. He did not mean any harm, but grasped the little boy's shoulder with the grip of a playful ploughman. Then there was a rush of the whole band to see what it was. The new boy! but such a boy—a baby—a gentleman baby—a creature of a different order.

"Let's see him," they cried, tumbling over each other, while Nello, dragged to his feet, stood shrinking, confronting them, making trial of all the manhood he possessed. He would not cry; he drew back against his bed, and doubled his little fist, his heart heaving, his lip quivering.

"I have done no harm," said Nello, with a sob in his voice; and the head boy called out, good-humouredly enough, though the thunder of his boyish bass sounded to Nello like the voice of doom, to "let him be."

"What's he got there?" he asked.

The basket was snatched from the child's hand, notwithstanding his resistance. Nello gave a great cry when it was taken from him.

"Oh, my bird, my pigeon, my bird!—you are not to hurt my bird."

"Give it here," said the head boy.

But the first who had seized the treasure held it fast.

"I've got it, and I'll keep it," he cried.

"Give it here!" shouted the other.

The conflict and the cloud of big forms, and the rough voices and snatchings, filled Nello with speechless dismay. He leaned back against his bed, and watched with feelings indescribable the basket which contained his treasure pulled and dragged about from one to another. First the handle gave way, then the lid was torn off, as one after another snatched at it. Oh, why was Nello so small and weak, and the others so big and strong!

"Give it here!" shouted the head boy; but, in the midst of the scuffle, something happened which frightened them all—the bird got loose, carefully as it had been secured, flew up over their heads, fluttered for a moment, driven wild by the cloud of arms stretched out to catch it, and then, with a sweep of its wings, darted out though the open window, and was seen no more.

CHAPTER II.

A CHILD FORLORN.

NELLO sobbed himself to sleep that night, scarcely conscious of the hubbub that was going on around him. He had watched with a pang unspeakable the escape of his bird, then had rushed blindly among the culprits, fighting and struggling in a passion of tears and childish rage, raining down harmless blows all round him, struggling to get out after it, to try to bring it back. Then Nello had been caught, too desperate to know who held him, in the hands of the head boy, who paid no more attention to his kicks and struggles than to his cries, and held him until, half dead with passion and misery, the poor little fellow sank exhausted, almost fainting, in the rough hands of his captors. Then the boys, who were not cruel, laid him on his bed and summoned Mrs. Swan. They all crowded round her to tell their story. Nobody had meant any harm.

They had taken his basket to look at it, and the pigeon had got loose. "And it was a carrier!" the head boy said, regretfully. They were as sorry as Nello could be, though by this time, under the combined influences of loneliness, desolation, homesickness, weariness, and loss, poor little Nello was almost beyond feeling the full extent of his troubles. "He's a mammy's boy," said Mrs. Swan, who was rough, but not unkind. "He has never been at school before. A spoiled child, by all I can see." But why had a spoiled child been sent here? This was what the good woman could not understand.

Nello slept and forgot his woes; and when he was awoke in the morning by the tumult, all the eleven jumping out of bed at once, performing their noisy but scanty ablutions, tossing boots about, and scrambling for clothes, the child lay trembling yet anxious, and half amused in spite of himself. The rough fun that was going on tempted Nello to laugh, though he was miserable. He shrank from them all, so big, so loud, so coarsely clothed, and in such a hurry; but he was tickled by their horse-play with each other—the hits and misses with which their missiles went and came. When the head boy was caught by a pillow straight in the face as he

approached to execute justice upon one of the laggards, Nello could not restrain a little broken chuckle, which attracted the attention of the combatants. This, however, drew upon him the arrest of fate. "I say, little one, ain't you going to get up ?—bell's rung !" said his next neighbour. The head boy was aggrieved by the poor little laugh. "Get up, you lazy little beggar !" he cried. "I say, let's toss him !" cried another, with sudden perception of fun to be had easily. The boys meant no particular harm; but they made a simultaneous rush at the little trembling creature. Nello felt himself seized, he knew not for what purpose. Then the noise, and the rude, laughing faces—which looked to him in his fright like demons—all swam in giddy uncertainty round him, and the poor little fellow came down upon the floor, slipping out of their rough and careless hands, faint and sick and sore, his head turning, his little bones aching. But though in his giddiness and faintness he scarcely saw anything—even the faces turning into misty spectres—Nello's spirit survived for a moment the collapse of his little frame. He got to his feet in a frenzy, and struck out at them with his white little childish fists. "I will kill you !" cried Nello, through his teeth;

and a great horse-laugh got up. But this was soon extinguished in dismay and horror when the little fellow fell back fainting. They all gathered round, horror-stricken. "Lift him on his bed," said the head boy almost in a whisper. They did not know anything about faints; they thought the child was dead. Then there was a pause. In their horror it occurred to more than one inexperienced imagination to hide the little body and run away. "What can they do to us?" said another, awe-stricken. "We didn't mean it." For a moment the boys had all that thrill of horrible sensation which ought to (but, it would seem, does not always) accompany homicide. At the end, however, humanity prevailed over villanous panic, and Mrs. Swan was called to the rescue. The boys were too glad to troop away, already subject to punishment on account of being late, and, huddling together, went down to the school-room in a band, where vengeance awaited them—though not for Nello's murder, as some of them thought.

Nello came to himself at last, after giving Mrs. Swan a great deal of trouble; and there was nothing for it but to leave him in bed all day; for the child was bruised with the fall, aching in every limb, and too resentful and

wretched to make any effort. He lay and cried and brooded, what between childish plans of vengeance and equally childish projects of escape. Oh, the pangs of impotence with which the small boy wronged contemplated the idea of those big fellows who had been so cruel to him! How should weakness be aware that strength does not intend to be cruel? Nello could not be tolerant, or understanding, at his age, even if there had not been his aching bones to prove the wickedness of his assailants. He hated them all. How could he help hating them? He lay and planned what he would do to them. But Nello's dreams were not malicious. At the last moment, when they had suffered torments of dread in prospect of the punishment which he permitted them (in his fancy) to see approaching, Nello's vengeance suddenly turned into magnanimous contempt. He would not condescend to reprisals; he would crush them with forgiveness as soon as they saw his power. Such were the plans which the child lay and concocted, and which amused him, though he was not aware of it. But when the boys came in Nello shrank to the farther side of his bed; he would not look at them; he would not listen to the rough inquiries. When they went

away again, however, and he was left alone, a sudden fit of longing came over him. Oh, to see somebody he knew!—somebody that was kind! Schemes of vengeance pall, like every other amusement. He gazed round upon the bare walls, the range of beds, the strange, ugly, desolate place. He could not tell if it was worse when the savages were there, filling it with noise, stumblings of heavy feet, cries of rough voices, or when the sounds all died away, and he was left lonely, not a soul to speak to him; no kind hand to touch his hot little head; nobody to give him a drink, though he wanted it so much. Nello had to clamber out of bed, to pour himself out a cup of water from the great brown jug, which he could scarcely lift—and fell upon his bed again, utterly heartsick and desolate. Nobody to give him a drink! How they used to pet him when he had a headache! How Martuccia would croon over him, and bathe his head, and kiss his hands, and bring him everything she could think of to please him! And Mary would come and stand by his side, and put her cool, white hand upon his head—that hand which he had once called "as soft as snow." Nello remembered the smile that came on Mary's face when he had called her hand "as

soft as snow." He did not himself see the poetry of the phrase, but he thought he could feel again that mingled coolness, and softness, and whiteness. And Lily! Lily would sit by him all day long, and read to him, or sing to him, or tell him stories, or play when he got a little better and could play. A great lump came in Nello's throat. "Oh, my Lily!" he cried, with a lamentable cry. He had no mother to appeal to, poor child—not even the imagination of a mother. Lily had been everything. Nothing had ever been so bad with him but could be borne when Lily was there. Naturally he had not so much felt the want of Lily when it was pleasure (as he thought) that he was going to. He could part with her without much emotion in the excitement of novelty and childish hope; but now——. Nello turned his face to the wall and sobbed. The lonely place—all the lonelier for bearing traces of that rude multitude—held him, a little atom, in its midst. Nobody heard his crying, or cared. He tore the bedclothes with his little frantic hands, with that sense of the intolerable which comes so easily to a child. But what did it matter that it was intolerable? Little Nello, like older people, had to bear it all the same.

It was best to leave the child quiet, the Swans thought. They were not unkind, but they were not used to take much trouble. The boys who came to them generally were robust boys, able to take care of themselves, and to whom it did no harm to be hustled about — who enjoyed the scrimmages and struggles. Mrs. Swan had her own children to look after. "I've left him to himself; he's better to be quite quiet," she said to her husband, and the husband approved; "far better for him to be quiet." Attempts to amuse a child, in such circumstances, would have been foolish, they thought, and as for petting and sympathising with him, far better that he should get accustomed to it, and make up his mind to put up with it like the rest. They could not make any difference between one and another; and if he had a day's rest, and was allowed to lie in bed, what could the child want more? There was no imagination in the house lively enough to *envisager* the circumstances from Nello's point of view, or to understand what chills of terror, what flushes of passion, came over the child, when the others poured in to bed again in the evening, driving him desperate with fear and wild with anger. Who could imagine anything so

vehement in the mind of such a little boy? But Nello was not molested that next evening; they were disposed rather to be obsequious to him, asking, in their rough way, how he was, and offering him half-eaten apples and bits of sticky sweetmeats, by way of compensation. But Nello would not listen to these clumsy overtures. He turned his face to the wall persistently, and would have nothing to say to them. Even the tumult that was going on did not tempt him to turn round, though, after the first moment of fright, the crowd in the room was rather comforting than otherwise to Nello. The sound of their voices kept him from that melancholy absorption in himself.

Next morning he had to get up, though he was still sick and sore. Nello was so obstinate in his refusal to do so, that the master himself had to be summoned. Mr. Swan would stand no nonsense.

"Get up, my boy," he said, "you'll get no good lying there. There has nothing happened to you more than happens to new boys everywhere. Come, you're not a baby to cry. Get up, and be a man."

"I want to go home," said Nello.

"I daresay you do; but you're not going home. So your plan is to make the best of it,"

said the schoolmaster. "Now come, I let you off yesterday; but I'll send a man to take you out of bed if you don't get up now. Come along, boy. I see you want to be a baby, as your uncle said."

"I am no baby," cried Nello, furious; but the schoolmaster only laughed.

"I give you half-an-hour," he said; and in half-an-hour, indeed, Nello, giddy and weak, managed to struggle down to the schoolroom. His watch was no longer going. He had forgotten it in the misery of the past day; it lay there dead, as Nello felt—and his bird was flown. He stumbled down stairs, feeling as if he must fall at each step, and took his seat on the lowest bench. The lessons were not much, but Nello was not equal to them. The big figures about seemed to darken the very air to the boy—to darken it, and fill it up. He had no room to breathe. His hand shook, so that he could not write a copy, which seemed a simple matter enough. "Put him at the very bottom; he knows nothing," Mr. Swan said to his assistant; and how this galled the poor little gentleman, to whom, in his feebleness, this was the only way left of proving a little superiority, what words could say? Poor little Nello! he cried over the copy, mingling his tears with the ink, and blurring the blurred

page still more. He could not get the figures right in the simplest of sums. He was self-convicted of being not only the least, but the very last, the dunce of the school. When the others went out to play, he sat wretched in a corner of the wretched schoolroom, where there was no air to breathe. He had not energy enough to do anything or think of anything; and it was only the sight of another boy, seated at a desk writing a letter, which put it into his head that he too might find a way of appeal against this cruelty. He could not write anything but the largest of large hands. But he tore a leaf out of the copybook, and scrawled a few lines across it. "I am verrey meeserble," he wrote; "Oh, Lily, ask Mary to kome and take me home."

"Will you put it into a cover for me?" he said to the boy who was writing, who proved to be the very head boy who reigned over Nello's room. "Oh, please, put it into a cover. I'll forgive you if you will," cried Nello.

The head boy looked at him with a grin.

"You little toad, don't you forgive me without that? I never meant to hurt you," he said; but melting, he added, "give it here." Nello's epistle, written across the lined paper, in big letters, did not seem to require any

ceremony as a private communication. The head boy read it and laughed. "They won't pay any attention," he said; "they never do. Little boys are always miserable. And won't you catch it from Swan if he sees it!"

"It is for my sister Lily; it is not for Mr. Swan," cried the child, upon which the head boy laughed again.

That letter never reached Penninghame. The schoolmaster read it according to his orders, and put it into the fire. He wrote himself to the address which Nello had given, to say that the little gentleman was rather homesick, but pretty well; and that perhaps it would be better, in the circumstances, not to write to him till he had got a little settled down, and used to his new home. He hoped his little pupil would soon be able to write a decent letter; but he feared his education had been very much neglected hitherto, Mr. Swan wrote. Thus it came to pass that Nello lived on, day after day, eagerly expecting some event which never happened. He expected, first of all, Mary to arrive in a beautiful chariot, such as was wont to appear in Lily's stories, with beautiful prancing horses—(where they were to come from, Nello never asked himself, though he was intimately acquainted with the two

brown ponies and the cob, which were all the inhabitants of the Squire's stables), and with an aspect splendid, but severe, to proceed to the punishment of his adversaries. Nello did not settle what deaths they were to die; but all was arranged except that insignificant circumstance. Mary would come; she would punish all who had done wrong; she would give presents to those who had been kind; and all the boys who had laughed at little Nello would see him drive away glorious behind those horses, with their arching necks, and high-stepping, dainty feet. Then after a few days, which produced nothing, Nello settled, with a pang of visionary disappointment, that it was Mr. Pen who would come. He would not make a splendid dash up to the door like Mary in her chariot; but still he would deliver the little captive. Another day, and Nello, coming down and down in his demands, thought it might at least be Martuccia, or perhaps Miss Brown, who would come for him. That would not be so satisfactory to his pride, for he felt that the boys would laugh and jeer at him, and say it was his nurse who had come; but still even Miss Brown would be good to see in this strange place. At the end of the week, however, all Nello's courage fled.

He thought then faintly of a letter, and watched when the postman came with packets of letters for the other boys. He could not read writing very well; but he could make it out if they would only write to him. Why would not they write to him? Had they forgotten him altogether, clean forgotten him, though he had been but a week away?

Nello did what he was told to do at school; but he was very slow about it, being so little, and so unused to work—for which he was punished; and he could not learn his lessons for brooding over his troubles, and wondering when *they* would come, or what they could mean; and naturally he was punished for that too. The big boys hustled him about; they played him a hundred tricks: they laughed at his timid, baby-washings, his carefulness, the good order to which he had been trained. To toss everything about, to do everything loudly, and noisily, and carelessly, was the religion of Mr. Swan's boys, as everything that was the reverse of this had been the religion in which Nello was trained. Poor little boy, his life was as full of care as if he had been fifty. He was sent here and there on a hundred errands; he had impositions which he could not write, and lessons which he could not learn; and not

least, perhaps, meals which he could not eat; and out-of-door tasks quite unsuitable for him, and which he could not perform. He was for ever toiling after something he ought to have done. He grew dirty, neglected, unkempt, miserable. He could not clean his own boots, which was one thing required of him; but plastered himself all over with mysterious blacking, in a vain attempt to fulfil this task, he who had scarcely dressed himself till now, scarcely brushed his own hair. He kept up a struggle against all these labours, which were more cruel than those of Hercules, as long as he had the hope within him that somebody must come to deliver him; for, with a childish jump at what he wished, he had believed that some one might come "to-morrow," when he sent, or thought he sent, his letter away. The to-morrow pushed itself on and on, hope getting fainter, and misery stronger, yet still seemed to gleam upon him, a possibility still. "Oh, pray God send Mary," he said, every night and morning. When a week was over, he added a more urgent cry, "Oh, pray God send *some one*, only some one! Oh, pray God take me home!" the child cried. He repeated it one night aloud, in the exhaustion of his disappointment, with an irrepressible moanin-

and crying: "Oh, pray God, take me home!" He was very tired, poor little boy; he was half wrapped in his little bit of curtain, to hide him as he said his prayers, and he had fallen half asleep while he said them, and was struggling with drowsiness, and duty, and a hope which, though now falling more and more into despondency, still gave pertinacity to his prayer. He was anxious, very anxious to press this petition on God's notice. Repetition; is not that the simplest primitive necessity of earnest supplication? Perhaps God might not take any notice the first time, but He might the next. "Oh, take me home. Oh, pray God take me home!" God too, like Mary and the rest, seemed to pay no attention; but God did not require written letters or directions in a legible hand: He could be approached more easily. So Nello repeated and repeated, half-asleep, yet with his little heart full of trouble, and all his cares awake, this appeal to the only One who could help him, "Oh, pray God, pray God, take me home!"

But in this trance of beseeching supplication, half asleep, half conscious, poor little Nello caught the eye of one of his room-fellows, who pointed out the spectacle to the rest. "Little beggar! pretending to say his

prayers; and much he cares for his prayers, going to sleep in the middle of them," they said. Then one wag suggested, "Let's wake him up!" It was a very funny idea. They got his waterjug, a small enough article indeed, not capable of doing very much harm. Had poor little Nello been less sleepy in his half-dream of pathetic appeal, he must have heard the titterings and whisperings behind him; but he was too much wrapt in that drowsy, painful abstraction, to take any notice, till all at once he started bolt upright, crying and gasping, woke up and drenched by the sudden dash of cold water over him. A shout of laughter burst from all the room, as Nello turned round frantic, and flew at the nearest of his assailants with impotent rage. What did the big fellow care for his little blows? he lay back and laughed and did not mind, while the small creature in his drenched nightgown, his face crimson with rage, his little frame shivering, his curly locks falling about his cheeks, flew at his throat. The head boy, however, awakening to a sense of the indiscretion, and perhaps touched by a pang of remorse at sight of the misery and fury in the child's face, got hold of Nello in his strong arms, and plucked the wet garment off him,

and threw him into his bed. "Let the child alone, I tell you. I won't have him meddled with," he said to the others—and covered him up with the bedclothes. Poor little Nello! he wanted to strike at and struggle with his defender. He was wild with rage and misery. His small heart was full, and he could bear no more.

After this, however, the boys, half ashamed of themselves, got quickly to bed; and darkness, and such silence as can exist in the heavy atmosphere where twelve rustics sleep and snore, succeeded to the tumult and riot. Nello, exhausted, sobbed himself to sleep under the bedclothes; but woke up in the middle of the night to remember all his wrongs and his misery. His cup was full; even God would not pay any attention to him, and it seemed to Nello that it would be better to die than to bear this any longer. Though the dark frightened him, it was less alarming than the rough boys, the hard lessons, the pangs of longing and waiting for a deliverance which never came. He had still the sovereign which Mary gave him, and the watch he had been so proud of, though that was dead now, and he had not spirit enough left to wind it up. It was October, and the nights were long.

Though it was but in reality between two and three o'clock in the morning, Nello thought it would soon be time for all these savage companions to get out of bed again, and for the noisy dreadful day to begin. He got up very quietly, trembling at every sound. There was a window at the end of the room through which the moon shone, and the light gave him a little consolation. He kept his eye fixed upon it, and groped for his clothes, and put them on very stealthily. If any one should hear him, he would be lost; but Neilo's little rustlings, like a bird in the dark, what were they to break the slumbers of all those out-door lads, who slept violently, as they did everything else! No one stirred; the snoring and the breathing drowned all the little mis-adventures which chilled Nello with terror, as when his boots dropped out of his hand, or the buttons on his trousers struck shrilly against the chair. Nothing happened; nobody stirred, and Nello crept out of the room, holding his breath with the courage of despair. He got down stairs, trembling and stumbling at almost every step. When he got to the lower story, that kind moon, which had seemed to look at him through the window, almost to smile at him in encouragement and cheerful

support, showed him a little window which had been left open by some chance. He clambered through, and found himself in the garden. There was a great dog in front of the house, of which Nello was in mortal terror; but here at the back there was no dog, only the kitchen garden, with the tranquil breadth of a potato field on the other side of the hedge. It was not easy to get through that hedge; but a small boy not quite nine years old can go through gaps which would scarcely show to the common eye. It scratched him, and tore his trousers; but there was nothing in such simple accidents to stop the little fugitive. And what it was to feel himself outside, free and safe, and all his tormentors snoring! Nello looked up at the moon, which was mellow and mild, not white as usual, and which seemed to smile at him. The potato-field was big and black, with its long lines running to a point on either side of him; and the whole world seemed to lie round him dark and still; nothing stirred, except now and then a rat in the ditch, which chilled Nello with horror. Had he known it was so early, the child would have been doubly frightened; but he felt that it was morning, not night, which encouraged him. And how big the world was! how vast, and silent, and

solitary! only Nello, one little atom, with a small heart beating, a little pulse throbbing in the midst of that infinite quiet. The space grew vaster, the stillness more complete, the distance more visionary, and there was a deeper sable in the dark, because of Nello's little heart beating so fast, and his eyes that took everything in. What was he to do, poor little soul, there by himself in the open country, in the unknown world, all in the middle of the night?

CHAPTER III.

A CRISIS AT PENNINGHAME.

All this time the old Squire lay in the same stupor of death in life. He did not rally. Sometimes there was a look in his eyes—a quiver as of meaning, between the half-closed lids. But they could not tell what it meant, or indeed if it was anything but vague reflection of the light that would break in through a drawn curtain or raised blind. There he lay, day after day, wearing out all his nurses. If he ever slept, or ever was awake, no one could tell; but this old man, in the grip of deadly disease, lay there motionless, and tired out all the younger people who watched over him. A nurse had been got for him from the nearest town, and Mary was rarely out of the sick-chamber. Both of these attendants were worn to death as the monotonous days and nights went past; but the Squire lay just the same. They grew pale and

hollow-eyed, but he apparently had stopped short at the point where he was when their vigil began.

In these circumstances all the world flocked to Penninghame to inquire for Mr. Musgrave. Rural importance shows in such circumstances. He was "by rights" the greatest man in the district, though superior wealth had come in and taken his pre-eminence from him—but everybody recollected his pretensions now. Inquiries came for him daily from every one near who could pretend to be anything. The great great people, and the small great people, the new families and the old, the clergy (who were as good as anybody), and all who sought for a place among the gentry, with whatever hope or right, all interested themselves about the invalid. "His eldest son is still living, I believe. And what will happen when Mr. Musgrave dies?" the people asked. And all who had any possibility of knowing, all who had any right to know, exerted themselves to supply answers to this question. One had it on the best authority, that John Musgrave was waiting, ready to come home, and that there would be another trial immediately. Some, on the other hand, were certain that John Musgrave never would come home at all to tempt

Providence. "There will be an effort made to pass him over, and make his little son heir instead," they said; and some believed it to be certain that the other brother would pension him off, so that the house might not be shamed by a convict squire.

Naturally, Mary knew nothing about these discussions. She spent her time in her father's room, relieving the nurse when her hours for sleep came, resting herself only when she could no longer bear up against the fatigue, seeing nobody but Mr. Pen and Lilias. Mary took little notice now of Nello's departure, and the schoolmaster's letter. It had all been done against her will, but she was too much occupied, now that it was done, to dwell upon it. It was very shameful that he was so backward, and perhaps Mr. Pen and Randolph were right in sending him to school. Her mind was too much pre-occupied for the moment to give anything but this half-angry, reluctant assent to what had been done. And perhaps it would be better *now* if Lilias could go to school too, out of this melancholy house, out of the loneliness which was so hard upon the child. But Lilias was the only consolation Mary herself had; she had grown to be part of herself during this long year. It might be doing the

child injustice, as she feared; but how could she send her only companion, her consoler and sympathiser, away? As for Lilias, though she was deeply moved by Nello's departure, the want of news of him did not move her much. Her father never wrote, never communicated with the child. They had not the custom of letters. It was very dreary, no doubt, but still when he came back unexpectedly, perhaps just at the moment he was most wanted, stepping in, with all the delight of surprise added to the pleasure of again seeing the absent, that was worth waiting for. This was the philosophy of the family. It was not their habit to write letters. Lilias accepted her own loneliness with resignation, not thinking of any possible alleviation; and she watched, sitting at the door of the old hall, for every one who might come along the road. It was October—the days getting short, the air more chilly, the sun less genial. The woods began to put on robes of colour, as if the rosy sunset clouds had floated down among them. The air blew cold in her face, as she sat outside the hall door. Martuccia within, in the background, shivered, and drew her shawl more closely across her ample shoulders. But Lilias did not feel the cold. She was

looking out for some one—for papa, who might come all at once, at any time—for Mr. Geoff, who might bring news of papa—for something to come and break the monotony of this life. Something Lilias felt sure must be coming; it could not go on like this for ever.

"Nello was always company for his sister," Mary said. Though she assented, she could not but complain. She had come out to breathe the air, and was walking up and down, Mr. Pen by her side. "It is very hard upon Lily, just at this moment, when everything is hanging in the balance, that her little brother should have been sent away."

"It would be very well," said Mr. Pen, "if you would send her away too. Nello wanted it. He would never have learned anything at home. He will come back so much improved. If he is to be received as the heir of everything——"

"If, Mr. Pen?"

"Well; I would not go against you for the world; but there is truth in what Randolph says. Randolph says there must be certificates of his birth, and all that; quite easy—quite easy to get—but where is your brother John to look after it all? He ought to be here now."

"Yes, he ought to be here. But would it be safe for him to come, Mr. Pen?"

"Miss Mary, I can't help wondering about that," said Mr. Pen, with troubled looks—had he grown unfaithful to John?—"if he is innocent, why shouldn't he come *now?* No jury would convict——"

Mary stopped him with a motion of her hand. "Randolph has been gaining you over to his side," she said. They were walking up and down the road close to the house. Just where the great gates ought to be—if the Musgraves were ever rich enough to restore the courtyard of the old Castle—was the limit of their walk. Mary could not allow herself to be out of reach even for an hour. She was here, ready to be called, in case her father should come to any semblance of himself. "I do not say he has not some reason on his side, now that my father is—as he is. Everything seems to have grown so much nearer. It is dreadful not to know where John is, not to be able to communicate with him. I wrote to the last place where they were living—the place the children came from—but I have never had any answer. When my poor father goes—as go he must, I suppose—what am I to do?"

"You must let Randolph manage for you.

Randolph must do it. God knows, Miss Mary, I don't want to go against you——"

"But you do," she said with a half smile. She smiled at it, but she did not like it. It is hard, even when a dog who has been your special follower turns away and follows some one else. "You never did it before since we have known each other, Mr. Pen."

Poor Mr. Pen felt the reproach. He was ready to weep himself, and looked at her with wistful, deprecating eyes; but was it not for her sake?

"I don't know what else to say to you. It breaks my heart to go against you," he said. "Whatever pleases you seems always best to me. But Randolph says—and I cannot deny it, Miss Mary, there's truth in what he says."

"Yes, there's truth in what he says. He has got the child away, and placed him out of reach, with your help, Mr. Pen; and he will push the father away, out of his just place, and make all the difficulties double. He has put you against him already that was his friend, and he will put other people against him. I begin to see what he is aiming at!" cried Mary, clasping her hands together, with indignant vehemence.

Mr. Pen did not know what to say or do to soothe her. He was full of compunction, feeling himself guilty. He to have turned against her! He felt all the horror of it to his very heart.

"We should be just to Randolph too," he said, tremulously; "he means to do what is right. And if I seem to cross you, 'tis but to serve you, Miss Mary. How could you stand in the breach, and bear all that will have to be borne? If Randolph does not come to do what has to be done, you would have to do it; and it would be more than should be put upon you."

"Have I ever shrunk from what has to be done?" she said, with again a half smile of pained surprise.

Mr. Pen had no answer to make; he knew very well she had not failed hitherto; and in his heart he was aware that Randolph's motives were very different from Mary's. Still, he held with a gentle obstinacy to the lesson he had learned. It was going against her, but it was for her sake. They took one or two turns together in silence, neither saying any more. As they turned again, however, towards the house for the third time, Eastwood met them, hurrying from the door. Nurse had sent down stairs for

Miss Musgrave, begging her to come without delay. The urgent message, and the man's haste and anxious, eager looks, frightened Mary. The household generally had come to that state of expectation which welcomes any event, howsoever melancholy, as a relief to the strain of nerve and strength which long suspense produces. Eastwood was eager that there might be some change—if for the better, so much the better—but that was scarcely to be looked for—anyhow a change, a new event. The same thrill of anticipation ran through Mary's veins. Was it come now—the moment of fate, the crisis which would affect so many? She bade Mr. Pen to follow her, with a movement of her hand. "Wait in the library," she said, as she went up stairs.

While Mary took the air in this anxious little promenade up and down, Lilias sat at the hall door, looking out upon the road, looking far away for the something that was coming. She did not know that the rider on the pale horse was the most likely passenger to come that way. Happier visitors were in Lilias' thoughts—her father himself to clear up everything, who would go and fetch Nello back, and put all right that was wrong; or Mr. Geoff, who was not so good, but yet very

comforting, and between whom and Lilias there existed a link of secret alliance, unknown to anybody, which was sweet to the child. Lilias was looking out far upon the road, vaguely thinking of Geoff, for he was the most likely person to come—he who rode along the road so often to ask for the Squire : far more likely than her father, who was a hope rather than an expectation. She was looking far away, as is the wont of the dreamer, pursuing her hope to the very horizon whence it might come—when suddenly, all at once, Lilias woke to the consciousness that there was some one standing near her, close to her, saying nothing, but looking at her with that intent look which wakes even a sleeper when fixed upon him, much more a dreamer, linked to common earth by the daylight, and all the sounds and touches of ordinary life. She rose to her feet with a start—frightened yet satisfied—for here was something which had happened, if not the something for which she looked. But Lilias' eyes enlarged to twice their size, and her heart gave a great jump, when she saw that the figure standing beside her was that of the old woman whom she had met in the Chase.

'Lizabeth had come up unobserved from the water-side. She was dressed exactly as she

had been when Lilias saw her before, with the hood of her grey cloak over her white cap—a stately figure, notwithstanding the homely dress.

Lilias gave a cry at the sight, and ran to her. "Oh, old woman!" she cried—"oh, I want to ask you—I want to ask you so many things."

"Honeysweet!" said 'Lizabeth, with a glow in her dark eyes. She did not for the moment think either of what she had come to say, or of the risk that attended her communications with her daughter's child. She thought only of the face she saw reflected in that other face, and of the secret property she had in the child who was so beautiful and so sweet. This was 'Lizabeth's heiress, the inheritor of the beauty which the old woman had been conscious of in her own person, and still more conscious of in the person of her daughter. Lilias was the third in that fair line. Pride filled the old woman's heart, along with the warm gush of tenderness. No one had ever looked at Lilias with such passionate love and admiration. She did not venture to take the child into her arms as she had done in the solitude of the woods, but she looked at her with all her heart in her eyes.

Lilias seized her by the hand and drew her to the seat from which she had herself risen. "Come!" she said eagerly. "They say you know everything about papa—and I have a right to know; no one has so good a right to hear as I. Oh, tell me! tell me! Sit down here and rest. I once went up the hill, far away up the hill, to go to you, but there I met Mr. Geoff. Do you know Mr. Geoff? Come, come, sit down here and tell me about papa——"

"My darling," said 'Lizabeth, "blessings on your bonnie face! but I dare not stay. Some time—soon, if it's God's will, you'll hear all the like of you could understand, and you'll get him back to enjoy his own. God bless my bairn that would give me her own seat, and think no shame of old 'Lizabeth! That's like my Lily," the old woman said, with ready tears. "But listen, honey, for this is what I came to say. You must tell the lady to send and bring back the little boy. The bairn is in trouble. I cannot tell you what kind of trouble, but she must send and bring him back. My honey, do you hear what I say?"

"The little boy, and the lady?" said Lilias, wondering; then she exclaimed suddenly with a cry of pain, "Nello! my little brother!"

and in her eagerness caught 'Lizabeth's hands and drew her down upon the seat.

"Ay, just your little brother, my honey-sweet. My lad is away that would go and look after him, so you must tell the lady. No, no, I must not stay. The time will maybe come. But tell the lady, my darling. The little boy has need of her, or of you. He is too little a bairn to be away among strangers. I cannot think upon his name—nor I cannot think," said 'Lizabeth, with a gleam of grandmotherly disapproval, "what my Lily could be thinking of to give a little lad such an outlandish name. But tell the lady to send and bring him home."

"Oh, I will go, I will go directly. Wait till I tell you what Mary says," cried Lilias; and without pausing a moment, she rushed through the hall, her hair flying behind her, her face flushed with eagerness. The old woman stood for a moment looking after her with a smile; listening to the sound of the doors which swung behind the child in her rapid course through the passages which led to the inhabited part of the house. 'Lizabeth stood stately yet rustic in her grey cloak, with her hands folded, and looked after Lilias with a tender smile on her face. She had nothing

left to be proud of, she so proud by nature, and to whom it was the essence of life to have something belonging to her in which she could glory. 'Lizabeth's pride had been broken down with many a blow, but it sprang up again vigorous as ever on the small argument of this child. Her beauty, her childish refinement and ladyhood, gave the old woman a pleasure more exquisite perhaps than any she had ever felt in her life. There was little in her lot now to give her pleasure. Her daughter was dead, her days full of the hideous charge which she had concealed for so many years from all the world; and she was old, approaching the end of all things, with nothing better to hope for than that death might release her unfortunate son before herself. At this moment even a worse terror and misery was upon her; yet as she stood there, looking after the little princess who was of her blood, her representative, yet so much above anything that had ever belonged to 'Lizabeth, there was a glow through all her veins, more warm, more sweet than any she had ever felt in her life. Pride, and love, and delight swelled in her. Her child's child—heir of her face, her voice, all the little traits of attitude and gesture, which mark individuality—and yet the young lady of the Castle, born to a life so

different from hers. She stood so, gazing after Lilias till the sound of her feet and the door, closing behind her had died away. Her heart was so full that she turned to Martuccia sitting motionless behind with her knitting. "Oh, that her life may be as sweet as her face!" she said involuntarily. Martuccia turned upon her with a smile, but shook her head and said, "Not speak Inglese." The sound of the voice called 'Lizabeth to herself. The smile faded from her face. Little had she to smile for, less than ever at this moment. She sighed, coming to herself, and turned and walked away.

Lilias ran against Mary as she entered the house at Eastwood's call. "Oh!" she cried, breathless, "Nello! will you send for Nello? Oh, Mary, he is in trouble, the old woman says—he is ill, or he is unhappy, or I cannot tell you what it is. Will you send for him, will you send for him, Mary? What shall I do? for papa will think it was my fault. Oh, Mary, Mary, send for my Nello! Wait a moment, only wait a moment, and hear what the old woman says——"

"Speak to her, Mr. Pen," said Mary; "I cannot stay." She was going to her father, who must, she felt sure, want her more

urgently than Lilias could. Even then it went to Mary's heart to neglect the child's appeal. "Mr. Pen will hear all about it, Lilias," she said, as she hastened up stairs. But Mr. Pen paid very little attention to what Lilias said.

"An old woman! What old woman? My dear child, you cannot expect us at such a moment as this—" said the Vicar. He was walking up and down the library with his ears open to every sound, expecting to be called to the Squire's bedside, feeling in his pocket for his prayer-book. For it seemed to Mr. Pen that the hasty summons could mean only one thing. It must be death that had come—and it would be a happy release—what else could any one say? But death, even when it is a happy release, is a serious visitor to come into a house. He has to be received with due preparation, like the potentate he is. Not without services of solemn meaning, attendants kneeling round the solemn bedside, the commendatory prayer rising from authorised lips —not without these formulas should the destroying angel be received into a Christian house. He was ready for his part, and waiting to be called; and to be interrupted at such a moment by tales of an old woman, by the grumblings of a fretful child sent to school

against his will—even the gentle Mr. Pen rebelled. He would not hear what Lilias said. "Your grandfather is very ill, my dear," he told her solemnly, "very ill. In an hour or so you may have no grandfather, Lilias; he is going to appear in the presence of God——"

"Is he afraid of God, Mr. Pen?" asked Lilias with solemn eyes.

"Afraid!—you—you do not understand. It is a solemn thing—a very solemn thing," said the Vicar, "to go into God's presence; to stand before Him and answer——"

"Oh!" cried the little girl, interrupting him, "Nello is far worse, far worse. Would God do him any harm, Mr. Pen? But cruel people might do a little boy a great deal of harm. God is what takes care of us. The old gentleman will be safe, quite safe there; but my Nello! he is so little, and he never was away from me before. *I* always took care of him before. I said you were not to send him away, but you would not pay any attention. Oh, my Nello, my Nello, Mr. Pen!"

"Hush, Lilias, you do not know what you are speaking of. What can Nello's troubles be? Perhaps the people will not pet him as he has been petted; that will do him no harm

whatever—it will be better for him. My dear, you are too little to know. Hush, and let me listen. I must be ready when I am called for. Nothing that can happen to Nello can be of so much importance as this is now."

And the Vicar went to the door to look out and listen. Lilias followed him with her anxious eyes. She was awed, but she was not afraid for the old gentleman. Would God hurt him? but anybody that was strong could hurt Nello. She made one more appeal when the Vicar had returned, hearing nothing and leaving the door ajar.

"Mr. Pen! oh, please, please, think of Nello a little! What am I to do? Papa said, 'Lily, I trust him to you—you are to take care of him.' What shall I say to papa if he comes home and asks me, 'Where is my little Nello?' Papa may come any day. That is his way, he never writes to tell us, but when he can, he comes. He might come to-day," cried Lilias. "Mr. Pen, oh, send somebody for Nello. Will you not listen to me? What should I say to papa if he came home to-day?"

"My dear little Lilias," said Mr. Pen, shaking his head mournfully, "your papa will not come to-day. Heaven knows if he will ever be able to come. You must not think it is

such an easy matter. There are things which make it very difficult for him to come home; things of which you don't know——"

"Yes," said Lilias eagerly, "about the man who was killed; but papa did not do it, Mr. Pen."

Mr. Pen shook his head again. "Who has told the child?" he said. "I hope not—I hope not, Lilias; but that is what nobody knows."

"Yes," she cried, "Mr. Geoff knows; he told me. He says it was another man, and that papa went away to save him. Mr. Pen, papa may come any day."

"Who is Mr. Geoff?" said the Vicar; but he did not pay any attention to what the child was saying. There seemed to be a sound on the stairs of some one coming down. "Oh, run away, my dear! run away! Run and play, or do whatever you like. I have not time to attend to you now."

Lilias did not say a word more, or even look at him again, but walked away with a stately tread, not condescending even to turn her head towards him. In this solemn way she went back to the hall, expecting to find 'Lizabeth; but when she found that even the old woman was gone, in whom she put a certain

trust as the one person who knew everything, Lilias had a moment of black despair. What was she to do? She stood and gazed out into vacancy—her eyes intent, her mind passionately at work. It was to her after all, and not to Mary, that Nello had been intrusted, and if nobody would think of him, or attend to him, it was she who must interfere for her brother. She stood for a minute or two fixed—then turned hastily, paying no attention to Martuccia, and went to her room. Lilias, too, had a sovereign, which Mary had given her, and something more besides. She took her money out of its repository, and put on her hat and jacket. A great resolution was in her face. She had seen at last what was the only thing to do.

"I think, ma'am, there is a change," the nurse said, as Mary noiselessly but swiftly, as long nursing teaches women to move, came into the room. The nurse was an experienced person. When Miss Brown, and even Mary herself, had seen "a change," or fancied they had seen it, before, nurse had never said so. It was the first time she had called any one to the Squire's room, or made the slightest movement of alarm. She led the way now to the bedside. The patient was lying in much the

same attitude as before, but he was moving his hands restlessly, his lips were moving, and his head on the pillow. "He is saying something, but I cannot make out what it is," the nurse said. Mary put her ear close to the inarticulate mouth. How dreadful was that living prison of flesh!—living, yet dead—the spirit pent up and denied all its usual modes of utterance. Mary wrung her hands with a sense of the intolerable as she tried in vain to distinguish the words, which seemed to be repeated over and over again, though they could make nothing of them. "Cannot you help us?—can you make it out? Is there nothing we can do?" she cried; "no cordial to give him strength?" but the nurse could only shake her head, and the doctor when he came was equally helpless. He told Mary it was a sign of returning consciousness—which, indeed, was evident enough—but could not even say whether this promised for or against recovery. The nurse, it was clear, did not think it a good sign. He might even recover his speech *at the end*, she said. And hours passed while they waited, watching closely lest any faint beginning of sound should struggle through. The whole night was passed in this way. Mary never left the

bedside. It was not that he could say anything of great importance to any one but himself. The Squire was helpless as respected his estate. It was entailed, and went to his eldest son, whether he liked it or not; and his will was made long ago, and all his affairs settled. What he had to say could not much affect any one; but of all pitiful sights, it seemed to his daughter the most pitiful, to see this old man, always so entirely master of himself, trying to make some communication which all their anxiety could not decipher. Could he be himself aware of how it was that no response was made to him?—could he realize the horror of the position?—something urgent to say, and no way of getting to the ears of those concerned, notwithstanding their most anxious attention? "No, no," the nurse said; "he's all in a maze; he maybe don't even know what he's saying;" and the constant movement and evident repetition gave favour to this idea. Mary stood by him, and looked at him, however, with a pain as great as if he had been consciously labouring on one side to express himself as she was on the other to understand him, instead of lying, as was most probable, in a feverish dream, through which some broken gleam of

fancy or memory struggled. When the chilly dawn broke upon the long night, that dreariest and coldest moment of a vigil, worn out with the long strain, she dropped asleep in the chair by her father's bedside. But when she woke hurriedly, a short time after, while yet it was scarcely full day, the nurse was standing by her with a hand upon her shoulder. The woman had grasped at her to wake her. "Listen, ma'am! he says—'the little boy,'" she said; Mary sprang up, shaking off her drowsiness in a moment. The old man's face had recovered a little intelligence—a faint flush seemed to waver about his ashy cheeks. It was some time before, even, now she could make any meaning out of the babble that came from his lips. Then by degrees she gleaned, now one word, now another. "Little boy—little Johnny; bring the little boy." She could scarcely imagine even now that there was meaning in the desire. Most likely it was but some pale reflection, through the dim awakening of the old man's mind, of the last idea that was in it. It went on, however, in one long strain of mumbled repetition—"Little Johnny—little boy." There seemed nothing else in his mind to say. The nurse laid her hand once more on Mary's arm, as she stood

by her, listening. "If you can humour the poor gentleman, ma'am, you ought to do it," said the woman. She was a stranger, and did not know the story of the house.

What could Mary do? She sent out one of the servants to call Mr. Pen, who had stayed late on the previous night, always holding his book open with his finger at the place, but who got up now obedient at her summons, though his wife had not meant to let him be disturbed for hours. Then the feeble demand went on so continuously, that Mary in despair sent Miss Brown for Lilias, vaguely hoping that the presence of the one child, if not the other, might perhaps be of some use in the dim state of semi-consciousness in which her father seemed to be. Miss Brown went with hesitation and a doubtful look, which Mary was too much occupied to notice, but came back immediately to say that Miss Lilias had got up early and gone out. "Gone out!" Mary said, surprised; but she had no leisure to be disturbed about anything, her whole mind being pre-occupied. She went down stairs to Mr. Pen when he came. He had his prayer-book all ready. To dismiss the departing soul with all its credentials, with every solemnity that became such a departure,

was what he thought of. He was altogether taken by surprise by Mary's hasty address—

"Mr. Pen, you must go at once and bring Nello. I cannot send a servant. He would not, perhaps, be allowed to come. If you will go, you can fetch him at once—to-morrow, early."

"But, Miss Mary——"

"Don't say anything against it, Mr. Pen. He is asking for the little boy, the little boy! Nello must come, and come directly. You would not cross him in perhaps the last thing he may ever ask for?" cried Mary, the tears of agitation and weariness coming in a sudden gush from her eyes.

"Let me send for your brother," said the Vicar. "Let me send for Randolph. He will know best what to do."

"Randolph! what has he to do with it?" she cried. "Oh go, Mr. Pen; do not vex me now."

"I will go." Mr. Pen closed his book with regret and put it into his pocket. He did not like the idea that the old Squire should depart out of the world like any common man, uncared for. After his long connection with the family, that such a thing should happen with-

out him! Mr. Musgrave had not perhaps been so regardful as was to be desired of all the services of the Church, and Mr. Pen was all the more anxious, now that he could have everything his own way, that all should be done in order. But how could he resist Mary's will and wish? He put his book in his pocket with a sigh.

"I will do what you wish, Miss Mary; but —it is a journey of many hours—and trains may not suit. Do you think he will—go on —so long?"

"He is asking for the little boy," said Mary, hastily. "Come and see him, and it will go to your heart. How can I tell you any more? We do not know even whether he is to live or to die."

"Ah, you must not cherish false hopes," said the Vicar, as he followed her up stairs. The servants were peeping on the staircase and at the doors; they were half disappointed, like Mr. Pen, that the "change" was not more decided. They had hoped that all was nearly over at last.

The darkened room, where the night-light was still burning though full day broke in muffled through the half-shuttered windows, was of itself very impressive to Mr. Pen,

coming out of the fresh fullness of the morning light. He followed Mary, going elaborately on tiptoe round the foot of the great heavily-curtained bed. The Squire's head had been propped up a little. He had become even a little more conscious since Mary had left him. But his voice was so babbling and inarticulate that Mr. Pen, unused to it, and deeply touched by the condition in which he saw his old friend and patron, could not make out the words—"Bring the little boy—the little boy, not Randolph—little Johnny: bring the little boy." Thus he went murmuring on, and there had gradually come a kind of wish into the face, and a kind of consciousness of their presence. "I wanted to bring Lilias, but Lilias they tell me has gone out; I cannot tell where she can have gone," Mary whispered. "And he never took any notice of Lilias—it is the boy he wants—listen, Mr. Pen, always the boy."

"I cannot make anything of it," said Mr. Pen, moved to tears.

"Oh listen! He says 'Not Randolph, the boy!' It is the boy he wants. Look! I almost think he knows you. Oh, what is it he wants?" cried Mary.

The light which had been so nearly

extinguished was leaping up in the socket. A sudden convulsion seemed to run over the old man's frame: he made an effort to raise himself. His ashen face grew red, perspiration burst out upon his forehead. Ghost-like and rigid as he was, he moved himself upward as if to get from his bed. The nurse had put herself quietly at her post on one side and she called to Mary to go to the other, while poor Mr. Pen stood by helpless, as if he were assisting at a visible resurrection. "Don't get excited, ma'am," the nurse said steadily; "one moment! I hear the doctor coming up stairs."

The steady tread of some one approaching reassured the women as they half aided, half controlled, the spasmodic force of apparent recovery. The foot came nearer and nearer, thank God. The door opened and some one came in.

It was not the doctor. It was a tall man with light hair mingled with grey and a fair complexion turned brown. He came straight into the room like one familiar with the place. Miss Brown, who stood near the door, recoiled with a quivering cry, and Mr. Pen, whom he encountered next, fell back with the same quaver of consternation in his voice. He

went to where Mary stood, who alone had not looked at him, her eyes being intent on her father's face. He put her aside tenderly, taking her place. "This is my work as much as yours," he said.

CHAPTER IV.

NELLO'S RESCUE.

THE house was very still in the afternoon languor—all its life suspended. Between the sick-room, in which all the interest of the family existence was absorbed, and the servants' part of the house, in which life went on cheerfully enough under all circumstances, but without any intrusion into the still world above stairs, there was nothing going on. Little Lilias went up into her own room, and down all the long staircases and passages, without meeting or seeing any one. Martuccia was in the old hall, tranquilly knitting and waiting for her young lady's return; but the house was empty of all sound or presence, nobody visible. It was like the enchanted palace through which the young prince walks, meeting no one, until he reaches the one chamber in which the secret lies. This idea passed through the mind of Lilias, pre-occupied

as she was. Any one might come in—might pass from room to room, finding all deserted, until he had penetrated to the dim centre of the family life where death was hovering. She went down the oak staircase with her light foot, a little tremulous, but inspired with resolution. It was the afternoon of Nello's last day at school. He had not quite made up his mind, or been driven by childish misery, to the determination of running away when his sister set out to succour him. Had he waited, Lilias no doubt would have arrived in time to introduce a new element into the matter; but what could the little girl's arrival have effected? Who would have given any importance to that? They would have taken Lilias in, and made a little prisoner of her, and sent her back. As it was, neither knew anything of what the other was doing. Lilias had opened her most secret place, a little old-fashioned wooden box, in which she kept some special relics, little trinkets, half toys, half ornaments, which she had brought with her, and the remains of the money which her father had given her when he sent the little party away. There had been something over when they arrived, and Lilias had guarded it carefully. She took it out now, and put the purse con-

taining it within the bodice of her dress—the safest place. It might be wanted for Nello. He had the best right to everything; and if he was in trouble——Lilias did not try to think what kind of trouble the little boy could be in. She took her little store, and went away with her heart beating high. This time she would herself do it; she would not trust to any one. Mr. Geoff had undertaken to deliver her father, and stopped her; but he had not done it. Already a long time had elapsed, and nothing had happened. She would not trust to Mr. Geoff or any one this time. If old 'Lizabeth had not gone away before Lilias returned to the hall, she had thoughts of asking the old woman to go with her; and even a weak inclination to take Martuccia as a companion and support had crossed her mind. Martuccia would have been useless, but she would have made all the difference between a feasible expedition and an impossible one; but perhaps it was for this very reason that Lilias rejected the idea. No; this time she would be kept back by no advice. She would go to Nello's aid by herself. He should owe his deliverance to no one but his sister. Who could understand him so well—know so well what he must want? And it was to her

that papa had intrusted Nello. She made dismal pictures to herself of her little brother in trouble. What could "in trouble" mean? She thought of him as out in the cold, out in the rain, crying, with no place to go to; lost in a strange country, or perhaps ill with a fever, and nobody to sit by him, nobody to give him a drink when he wanted it, and tell him stories. What other kind of trouble was possible? That he might not be able to learn his lessons without her to help him, and that he might perhaps be whipped—could such an atrocity be?—just gleamed across the child's thoughts; but it made her heart beat so with rage and indignation, and her cheeks burn with such a flush, that she thrust the idea aside; but so long as he was unhappy, so long as he wanted her, was not that enough? She buttoned her little coat with a stout but trembling heart, and took a shawl over her arm (was not that how travellers always provided themselves?) and, with her sovereign in her hand for immediate expenditure, and her purse in her bosom, went down the silent stairs. How still, how deserted it seemed! Mr. Pen came out from the library door when he heard the step, to see who it was, but took no notice of her except a momentary glance of dis-

appointment. Thus she went out of the house brave and resolute, yet with a tremor of the unknown in her breast.

Lilias knew what to do: to walk to Pennington, where the railway station was, and then to take a ticket, and to get into a railway carriage. The walk along the highroad was long, but it was not so overwhelming as that early expedition she had made all alone up into the hills when she had met Geoff. How glad she had been to meet him, and to hear from him that she need go no further! Lilias had not ceased to believe in Mr. Geoff, but nothing had been done, and her heart was sick of the waiting. She did not want to meet him now; her little heart gave a jump when she saw any one riding towards her; but it was certain she did not want to meet Geoff, to have her mission again taken out of her hands. Nothing was more likely than that she should meet him, and her eyes travelled along the dusty line of road, somewhat wistfully looking out—in hopes not to see him—which much resembled the hope of seeing him, though it was differently expressed. And now and then a cloud of dust would rise—now and then a horseman would appear far off, skimming lightly over the long line of road, which

it took Lilias so much time to get over. Once a beautiful carriage dashed passed her, with the beautiful lady in it whom she had once seen, and who had kissed and cried over Nello without taking much notice of Lilias. Could it be that the beautiful lady had heard too that he was in trouble? Lilias mended her pace and pushed on. What fancies she met with as she plodded along the road! It was a long dusty highway, running for a little while in sight of the lake, then turning through the village, then striking across the country up and down, as even a highroad is obliged to do in the north country, where there is nothing but heights and hollows. It seemed to stretch into infinity before Lilias, mounting one brae after another, showing in a long level line here and there; appearing on the other side of that clump of trees, beyond that far-off farmhouse, looking as if it led without pause back to the end of the world. Lilias wove one dream after another as she went along from landmark to landmark. How vivid they were! So real, that the child seemed to enact every scene in them as they floated through her mind; far more real than the actual events of her life. She saw herself arriving, at a great spacious place, which was Nello's school—undefined,

yet lofty and wide and splendid, with marble pillars, and great colonnades and halls. She saw people coming to gaze and wonder at the little girl—the little wandering princess—who had come to seek her brother. "The girl looked at them all, and said 'Take me to Nello.' The girl turned round upon them, and her lip curled with scorn." (Lilias suited the action to the word; and her innocent lip did curl, with what version of fine disdain it could execute.) "What did she care for all they could do for her? 'It is my brother I want,' she said." This was how she carried on her parable. Perhaps her own little figure was too much in the front of all these visions. Perhaps her own fine indifference to all blandishments and devotion to Nello was the chief principle made apparent. This was how it ran on, however, accompanying and shortening the way. She made long dialogues between herself and the master, between herself and Nello. How he clung to her; how glad he was that she had come. "It is Lily; I knew Lily would come," she made him say. He would not be surprised; he would know that this was the most natural thing. If they had locked her up in prison to keep her away from him, what would it have mattered? Lilias would have found a way

to go to him when Nello was in trouble; and Nello knew that as well as she.

She was very tired, however, and it was dark when she arrived at Pennington. Lilias put on her grand air, but it was rather difficult to impose upon the station-master and porters. They all wanted to be very kind, to take care of her, and arrange everything for the little traveller. The station-master called her "my dear," and wanted Lilias to go to his house, where his wife would take care of her till the morning. "You are too little to travel by the night train," he said; and the porters were eloquent on the wickedness of sending a little lady like this by herself. "I am going to my brother, who is ill," Lilias said, with dignity. "And have you no mamma to go to him, my little miss?" said the porter, friendly, yet respectful. They were all very kind. No one knew her, and they asked many questions to find out who she was. They said to each other it was well seen she had no mother, and made Lilias's heart swell so, that she forgave them for treating her as a child, rather than as the little princess she had dreamed of being. Finally, they arranged for her that she should travel to the great junction where Nello had met Bampfylde at once—and that the guard

should take care of her, and put her in the night train, which arrived at a very early hour in the morning at the station she wanted to go to. All this was arranged for her with the kindest care by these rough men. They installed her in the little waiting-room till the train should go. They came and fetched her when it was going, and placed her in her corner. "Poor little lady!" they said. Lilias was half-humiliated, half-pleased by all these attentions. She submitted to them, not able to be anything but grateful to the men who were so kind to her, yet feeling uneasily that it was not in this homely way that she meant them to be kind. They did not look up to her, but looked down upon her with compassionate tenderness, as upon a motherless little girl—a child who recalled children of their own. Just so the good woman looked upon her who got into the train along with her. "All that way, and all alone, my poor little thing?" the woman said. It hurt Lilias's pride to be called a poor little thing, but yet it was pleasant to have some one to creep close to. The world did not seem to be as it is represented in books, for nobody was unkind. Lilias was very glad to sit close to her new acquaintance, feeling comfort unspeakable in

the breadth of the honest shoulder against which she leant as she travelled on in the dark. Those breadths of country which Nello had watched flying past the window were almost invisible now. Now and then a darker gloom in the air showed where the hills were high over the railway in a deep cutting. Sometimes there would be gleams of light visible here and there, which showed a village. Her companion dropped into a doze, but Lilias, leaning against her, was far too much excited for sleep. She watched the moon come out and shine over the breadth of country, reflecting itself in the little streams, and turning the houses to silver. It was late then, quite late, for the moon was on the wane. And the train was slow, stopping at every station, creeping (though when it was in motion it seemed to fly) across the plains and valleys. It was midnight when they got to the junction, and Lilias, with her great eyes more wide awake than ever, was handed out. There were only a few lights burning, and the place looked miserable and deserted, the cold wind sweeping through it, and the two or three people who got out, and the two porters who received them, looking like ghosts in the imperfect light. The guard, who lived there,

was very kind to the little girl before he went off to his house. He wanted to take her with him to make her comfortable till the morning, but Lilias could not be persuaded to wait. At last he established her in a corner, the least chilly possible, wrapping her shawl round her feet.

There she was left alone, with one lamp to bear her company, the long lines running into darkness at either side of her, blackness taking refuge in the high roof of the station, above the watchlight of that one lamp. How strange it was to sit all alone, with the chill of the air and gloom of midnight all around her! Nobody was stirring in the deserted place. The one porter had withdrawn to some warm refuge, to re-appear when the train came. But little Lilias sat alone in her corner, sole inhabitant of the big, chilly, desolate place. How her heart jumped to her mouth! What tremors and terrors at first every sigh of the wind, every creak of the lamp, gave her. But at last she perceived that nothing was going to happen, and sat still, and did not trouble except when imagination suggested to her a stealthy step, or some one behind in the darkness. How dreary it was! The night

wind sang a dismal cadence in the telegraph wires, the air coursed over the deserted platforms, the dark lines of way, and blew the flames of gas about even within the inclosure of the lamp. Just then Nello was creeping, stumbling, out of the window, making his way through the prickling hedge, standing alone eying the moon in the potato-field. Lilias could not even see the moon in her corner. Nothing was before her but the waning gleam of that solitary lamp.

At last the train came lumbering up through the darkness, and the porters re-appeared from corners where they had been attendant. One of them came for Lily, kind as everybody had been, and put her into a carriage by herself, and showed her how she could lie down and make herself comfortable. "You'll be there at five o'clock," the porter said. "Lie down, little miss, and get a sleep." Never in her life had Lilias been more wide awake, and there was no kind woman here with broad shoulders to lean upon and feel safe. The train swept through the night while she sat upright and gazed out with big, round unslumbering eyes.

Lilias watched and waked through the night, counting out the hours of darkness,

saying her prayers over and over, feeling herself lost in the long whirl of distance and gloom and confusing sound; but as the night began to tremble towards the dawning, she began to doze unawares, her eyes closing in spite of herself, and much against her will; and it was with a shiver that she woke up very wide awake, but feeling wretched, in consequence of her doze, at the little roadside station, one small house placed on the edge of a wide expanse of fields, chiefly pasture land, and with no character at all. A great belt of wood stretched to the right hand, to the left there was nothing but fields, and a long endless road dividing them, visible for miles with a little turn in it here and there, but nothing beside to break its monotony. Lilias clambered out of the carriage when she felt the jar and clang of the stoppage, and heard the name of the station drowsily called out. The man in charge of it gazed at her as though she had dropped from the clouds; he did not even see her till the train was in motion again, creaking and swinging away into the distance. To see her standing there with her great eyes gave him a thrill of strange sensation, almost of terror. Fatigue and excitement had made her face paler than usual,

and had drawn great circles round her eyes. She looked like a ghost standing there in the faint grey of the dawn, cold and trembling, yet courageous as ever. "Mr. Swan's? Oh yes, I can tell you the way to Mr. Swan's; but you should have spoken sooner. They've been and carried off your luggage." Lilias had not strength of mind to confess that she had no luggage, and indeed was too much confused and upset by her snatch of sleep to be sure what he was saying, and stumbled forth on the road, when he showed her how to go, half-dazed, and scarcely more than half-conscious. But the pinch of the keen morning air, and the sensation of strange stillness and loneliness, soon restored her to the use of her faculties. The benevolent railway man was loth to let her go. "It's very early, and you're very small," he said. "You're welcome to wait here, my little lady, till they send for you. Perhaps they did not expect you so early?" "Oh, it does not matter," said Lilias. "Thank you; I am quite able to walk." The man stood and watched her as she made her way in the faint light along the road. He dared not leave his post, or he would have gone with her out of sheer compassion. So young, and with

such a pale little beautiful face, and all alone at such an hour of the morning, while it was still night! "It will be one of them boyses sisters," he said to himself with singular discrimination. And then he recollected the pale little boy who had gone to Mr. Swan's so short a time before. This gave a clue to the mysterious little passenger, which set his mind at rest.

And Lilias went on along the darkling road. It was not possible to mistake the road—a long white streak upon the landscape, which was visible even in the dark; and it was not altogether dark now, but a ghostly, damp, autumnal glimmer of morning, before the sunrising. The hedges had mists of gossamer over them, which would shine like rainbow webs when the sun rose. The fields glimmered colourless still, but growing every moment more perceptible in the chill dreariness of the season—not cold enough for frost, yet very cold. Everything was grey, the few shivering half-grown trees in the hedgerows, the sky all banked with clouds, the face of the half-seen landscape. There was one cottage by the roadside, and that was grey too, all shut up and asleep, the door closed, the windows all black. Little Lilias, the one

moving atom in that great still landscape, felt afraid of it, and of herself, and the sound of her own steps, which seemed loud enough to wake a whole world of people. It seemed to Lilias that the kindly earth was dead, and she alone a little ghost, walking about its grave. None of her dreams, none of the poetry, nor anything out of her fairy lore could help her here. The reality was more than any dream. How still!—how very still it was!—how dark! and yet with that weird lightening which grew about her, making everything more visible moment by moment, as if by some strange magical clearing of her own tired eyes! She was so tired, so worn out; faint for want of food, though she was not hungry—and for want of rest, though she did not wish to go to sleep. Such an atom in all that great grey insensible universe, and yet the only thing alive!

No—not the only thing. Lilias' heart contracted with a thrill, first of relief, then of fear when she saw something else moving besides herself. It was in one of the great fields that stretched colourless and vast towards the horizon. Lilias could not tell what it was. It might be a spirit; it might be an enchanted creature bound by some spell to stay there

among the ploughed furrows; it might be some mysterious wild beast, the legendary monster, of whose existence children are always ready to be convinced. She concealed herself behind a bush, and looked anxiously down the long brown furrow. It was something very little—not so big as a man—smaller even than herself; something that toiled along with difficulty, stumbling sometimes, and falling in the soft earth. By and by a faint breath of sound began to steal towards her—very faint, yet carried far on the absolute stillness of the morning. Some one who was in trouble—some one who was *crying*. Lilias' bosom began to swell. She was very tired and confused herself; very lonely and frightened of the dead world, and of her own forlorn living-ness in it. But the sound of the feeble crying brought her back to herself. Did she divine already who it was? She scrambled through a gap in the hedge, jumped across the ditch, and plunged too into the yielding, heavy soil of the ploughed furrow. She was not surprised. There did not seem to be anything wonderful in meeting her brother so. Had she not been sent to him because he was in trouble? It was natural that he should be here in the cold, dim morning,

in the wild field, toiling along towards her, faintly crying in the last confusion and misery of childish weariness, his way lost, and his courage lost, and all his little bewildered faculties. She called out "Nello!"—cautiously, lest any one should hear—"Nello!" and then there was an outcry of amazement and joy—"Oh, Lily!" It was a half-shriek of incredulous happiness with which poor Nello, toiling through the field, weary, lost, forlorn, and afraid, heard the familiar sound of her voice. He was not so much surprised either. He did not think it was impossible, though nothing could have been more impossible to an elder mind. Children hold no such reckonings as we do with probability. He had been saying, "Oh, Lily! my Lily!" to himself—crying for her—and here she was! He had no doubt of it, made no question how she got there, but threw himself upon her with a great cry that thrilled the dim morning through and through, and made the sleep-bound world alive.

And they sat down together in the furrow, and clung to each other, and cried—for misery, but for happiness too. All seemed safe now they had found each other. The two forlorn creatures, after their sleepless, wintry night,

felt a sudden beatitude creep over their little weary bodies and aching hearts. Two—how different that is from one! They held each other fast, and kissed, and were happy in the dark furrow, which seemed big enough and dark enough to furnish them both with a grave.

CHAPTER V.

THE BABES IN THE WOOD.

"ARE you very hungry, Nello?"

"Oh, very, *very*. Are you? I have not had any breakfast. It was night, dark night when I came away. Have you had any breakfast, Lily?"

"How could I, when I have been in the railway all the night? Do you think you can get over the ditch? Jump! I jumped, and you always could jump better than I."

"You forget everything when you go to school," said Nello, mournfully, "and I am all trembling, I cannot help it. It is so cold. Oh Lily, if they come up—if they find us—you will not let them take me back?"

"Never, Nello! but let us get on, let us get on to the railway. Quick, it is not far off. If you would only jump. Now give me your hand. I am cold too, but we must get over it, we *must* get over it!" said Lilias, almost

crying. Poor Nello's limbs were cramped, he was chilled to the heart. He did not feel it possible to get on, all the courage was gone out of him. He had kept up until, after scrambling through many rough places, his poor little feet had sunk in that soft, newly-ploughed furrow. This had taken all the life out of him, and perhaps his meeting with Lilias, and the tumult of joyful emotion it caused, had not increased Nello's power of endurance. He had always had the habit of trusting to her. But Lily it was quite certain could not drag him over the ditch. He made an effort at last to jump and failed, and stuck in the mud. That accident seemed at the moment to make an end of them both in their utter weariness. They mingled their tears, Lilias hanging on upon the bank above, Nello in the heavy soil below. The cry relieved them however, and by and by, by the help of his sister's hand, he managed to scramble up the bank, and get through the scattered bushes on to the highroad. One of his feet was wet and clogged with the mud, and oh, how tired they both were, fit for nothing but to lie down and cry themselves to sleep.

"Oh, Nello, if you were at home, should you ever—ever want to go away again?"

Nello did not make any reply. He was too tired for anything but a dull little sob now and then, involuntary, the mere breathing of his weakness. And the highway looked so long, longer even than the fields. There was always some hope at the end of a field that deliverance might come round the corner, but a long unchangeable highway, how endless it was! They went on thus together for a little way in silence; then: "Oh, Lily, I am so hungry," said Nello. What could she do? She was hungry too, more hungry than he was, for she had eaten nothing since the afternoon of the previous day.

"I have a shilling in my pocket, but we cannot eat a shilling," said poor Lilias.

"And I have a shilling too—more than that—I have the golden sovereign Mary gave me."

"We must just hurry—hurry to the railway, Nello, for we cannot eat money, and the railway will soon take us home; or there is a place, a big station, where we could buy a cake. Oh!" cried Lilias, with a gleam of eager satisfaction in her eyes.

"What is it, Lily?"

"Look, only look!" She dragged him forward by the arm in her eagerness. "Oh, a

few steps further, Nello—only a few steps further—look!"

The roadside cottage which had been so blank as she passed had awoke—a woman stood by the door—but the thing that caught Lilias' eye was a few stale cakes and opaque glasses with strange confectionery in them. It was these that gave strength to her wearied feet. She hurried forward, while the woman looked at the strange little pair in wonder. "Oh, will you give us a little breakfast," she said, "a little milk to drink, and some bread and butter for this little boy?"

"Where have you come from, you two children, at this hour in the morning?" cried the woman in consternation.

"Oh, we are going to the train," said Lilias. "We are obliged to go; we must get the early train, and we don't know, we don't quite know when it goes; and my poor little brother has fallen into the mud—see! and—he got his breakfast so very early before he came away that he is hungry again. We have plenty of money," cried the little girl, "plenty of money! We will give you a shilling if you will give us some milk and bread."

"A shilling—two, three shillings," said Nello, interposing. He was so hungry; and what

was the good of shillings?—you could not eat them. The woman looked at them suspiciously. They were not little tramps; they were nicely-dressed children, though the little boy was so muddy. She did not see what harm it could do to take them in; likewise her heart was touched by the poor little things standing there looking up at her as though she was the arbiter of their fate.

"You may come in and sit by the fire; there's no train for two hours yet. It's not six o'clock. Come in, you poor little things, and rest, and I'll give you some nice hot tea. But you must tell me all the truth, for I know you've run away from somewhere," she said.

"No," said Lilias, looking her in the face. "Oh no, I have not run away from anywhere. My little brother was not happy, and I came to fetch him, that is all. I did not run away."

"And what sort of people was it that sent a baby like you?" said the woman. "Come in, you poor little things, and sit by the fire. What could your mother be thinking of to send you——"

"We have not got any mother." Nello took no share in this conversation. He was quite lost in the delight of the hard old

settle that stood by the fire. Nestling up into the corner he thought he should like to fall asleep there, and never move any more. "We have not got any mother," Lilias said, "and who could come but me? No one. I travelled all night, and now I am going to take him home. We are children without any mother." Lilias could not but know that these words were a sure passport to any woman's heart.

"You poor little things!" the woman said, with the tears in her eyes. Whether it has its origin in the self-complacency of womankind, it is difficult to say, but whereas men are generally untouched by the unhappiness of being fatherless, women are without defence in most cases before a motherless child. Such a plea has instant recognition with high and low. No mother!—everything is pardoned, everything conceded to a creature with such a plea. She was not quite satisfied with the story, which seemed to her very improbable, but she could not refuse her succour to the motherless children. Her little shop, such as it was, had no visitors till much later in the day, when the village children went past her door to school. She had made her own tea, which stood keeping itself hot upon the hob, and she came in hastily and put out cups and saucers, and

shared the hot and comfortable fluid, though it was very weak and would not have suited more fastidious palates than the children's. What life it seemed to pour into their wearied little frames! The bread was coarse and stale, but it tasted like bread from heaven. Nello in his corner of the settle began to blink and nod. He was even falling asleep, when suddenly a gig rattled past the windows. The child sprang up in a moment. "Oh, Lily, Lily!" he cried in horror, "they are after me! what shall I do?"

The woman had gone to the back of the house with the cups they had used, and so was not near to hear this revelation.

"Who is it?" cried Lilias, peering out of the window. She was restored to herself, and the name of an enemy, a pursuer, put her on her mettle. She had never encountered such a thing before, but she knew everything about it, how to behave. "Come, Nello, come," she said, "we will go out the back way while nobody is looking. Let us go away, let us go away before any one can come here."

Lilias seized some of the cakes which the woman had put in paper for them; wonderful productions, which nothing but a child's appetite could contemplate, and put down two shillings

in the centre of the table. On second thoughts it seemed better to her to go out at the front and get round under cover of the hedge to the wood on the other side of the station, which appeared temptingly near, rather than incur the risk of speaking to the woman. It did not occur to her that her own presence was enough to put any one completely off the scent who was seeking Nello. She got him away out of the house successfully, and through the gap behind the hedge where was a little footpath. "Now we must run—run! We must get past, while they are asking at the station. We must not say a word to the woman or any one. Oh, Nello, run—run!" Nello, still more anxious than she was, managed to run for a little way, but only for a little way. He broke down of all places in the world opposite to the station, where Mr. Swan was standing talking to the keeper. When Nello saw him through the hedge he turned round and clasped his sister convulsively, hiding his face on her shoulder. Lilias did not dare to say a word. They were hid from view, yet any movement might betray them, or any sound. She stood with trembling limbs, bearing Nello's weight upon her shoulder, and watched through the hawthorn bush.

"Nobody has been here, not a mouse, far less a little boy. The train is not due for two hours," said the station-keeper.

"A bit of a little fellow," said Mr. Swan. "I can't think he could have got so far; more likely he's lying behind a hedge somewhere; but I thought it best to try first here."

"He's not here," the station-keeper said again. He answered curtly, his sympathies being all with the fugitive, and he could not but give the troubled schoolmaster a corner of his mind. "It's only a month since you lost the last one," he said. "If it was my house the boys ran away from I should not like it."

"Talk of things you know something of," said Mr. Swan hotly; and then he added, shaking his head; "It is not my fault. My wife and I do everything we can, but it's those rough boys and their practical jokes."

"Little fellows, they don't seem to understand them kind of jokes," said the railway man.

Mr. Swan shook his head. It was not his fault. He was sorry and vexed, and ashamed. "I would rather have lost the money twice over," he said. Then he turned and gave a searching glance all round. Lilias quaked and her heart sank within her. She held her little

brother close to her breast. If he should stir, if he should cry, all would be over. She knew their situation well enough. Either their enemy would go away and get bloodhounds, and fierce wicked men to put on their track, during which time the fugitives would have time to get into some wonderful cave, or to be taken into some old, old house by some benevolent stranger, and so escape; or else he would come straight to the very place where they were, guided by some influence unfavourable to them. Lilias stood and held her breath. "Oh, be still, Nello, be still, he is looking!" she whispered into Nello's ear. Her limbs were nearly giving way, but she resisted fate and held out.

The schoolmaster made long inspection of all the landscape. "He was specially commended to me, too—I was warned—I was warned," he said. Then he turned to the station-keeper, giving him the most urgent injunctions. "If he comes here you will secure him at once," he said, filling Lilias with dismay, who did not see the shrug of the man's shoulders, and the look with which he turned aside. Thus their retreat was cut off, the little girl thought, with anguish indescribable; how then were they to get home? This

thought was so dreadful that Lilias was not relieved as she otherwise would have been by the sound of the wheels and the horse's hoofs as the gig turned, and their enemy drove away. He had gone in his own person, but had he not left a horrible retainer to guard the passage? And how, oh how was she to take Nello home? She did not know where the next station was. She did not know the way in this strange, desolate, unknown country. "Nello," she cried, in a whisper of despair, "we must get into that wood, it is the only thing we can do; they will not look for us there. I don't know why, but I feel sure they will not look for us there. And perhaps we shall meet some one who will take care of us. Oh, Nello, rouse up, come quick, come quick. Perhaps there may be a hermit living there, perhaps——. Come, Nello, can you not go a little further? Oh, try, try."

"Oh, Lily, I am so tired—I am so sleepy."

"I am tired too," she said, a little rush of tears coming to her eyes; and then they stumbled on together, holding each other up. The wood looked gay and bright in the early morning. The sun had come out, which warmed everything, and the bright autumn colour on the trees cheered the children as

a similar hour, and the beauty of the wild creature of the woods, cheered the poet :—

> " Sì che a bene sperar m'era cagione
> Di quella fera alla gaietta pelle
> L'ora del tempo, e la dolce stagione."

The trees seemed to sweep with a great luxuriance of shadow over a broad stretch of country. It must be possible to find some refuge there. There might be—a hermit, perhaps, in a little cell, who would give them nuts and some milk from his goat—or a charcoal burner, wild but kind, like those Lilias remembered to have seen in the forest with wild locks hanging over their eyes. If only no magician should be there to beguile them into his den, pretending to be kind! Thus Lilias mixed fact and fiction, her own broken remembrances of Italian woods sounding as fictitious among the English elms and beeches as the wildest visions of fancy. For this wood, though it had poetic corners in it, was traversed by the highroad from end to end, and was as innocent of charcoal-burners as of magicians. And it turned out a great deal further off than they thought. They walked and walked, and still it lay before them, smiling in its yellow and red, waving and beckoning in the breeze, which was less

chilly now that the sun was up. The sun reached to the footpath behind the hedge, and warmed the little wayfarers through and through—that was the best thing that had happened to them—for how good it is to be warmed when one is chilled and weary; and what a rising of hope and courage there is when the misty dawn disperses before the rising of the brave sun!

Nello almost recovered his spirits when he got within the wood. There were side-aisles even to the highroad, and deep corners in its depths where shelter could be had, and the ground was all flaked with shadow and sunshine; and there were green glades, half visible at every side, with warm grass all lit by the sun.

"Let us go and sit down, Lily. Oh, what a pretty place to sit down! Oh, Lily, I cannot —I cannot walk any more; I am so tired," cried Nello.

"I am tired too," she said, with a quiver in her mouth, looking vainly round for some trace of the charcoal-burner or of the hermit. All was silent, sunny, fresh with the morning, but vacant as the fields. And Lilias could not be satisfied with mere rest, though she wanted it so much. "How are we to get home, if we

dare not go to the railway? and there is no other way," she said. "Oh, Nello, it will be very nice to rest—but how are we to get home?"

"Oh, never mind; I am so tired," said weary little Nello. "Look, Lily, what a warm place. It is quite dry, and a tree to lean against. Let us stay here."

Never had a more tempting spot been seen; green soft turf at one side of the big tree, and beech-mast, soft and dry and brown, the droppings of the trees, on the other. The foot sank in it, it was so soft, and the early sun had dried it, and the thick boughs overhead had kept off the dew. It was as soft as a bed of velvet, and the little branches waved softly over it, while the greater boughs, more still, shaded and protected the children. They sat down, utterly worn out, and Lilias took out her cakes, which they ate together with delight, though these dainties were far from delicious; and there, propped up against each other, an arm of each round the other, Nello lying across Lilias' lap, with his head pillowed upon her; she, half seated, half-reclining, holding him, and held in her turn by a hollow of the tree: these babes in the wood first nodded, then dozed, and woke

and dozed again, and finally, the yellow leaves dropping now and then upon them like a caress of nature, the sun cherishing their little limbs, fell fast asleep in the guardianship of God.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW-COMER.

NOBODY in the sick-room said a word of the great consternation and wonder and fear that sprang to life in them at the appearance of the stranger. How could they, though their hearts were full of it? when all their care and skill were wanted for the patient, who, half-conscious, struggled with them to raise himself, to get out of bed. To find out what he wanted, to satisfy the hazy anxiety in his mind, and do for him the something, whatever it was, that he was so anxious to do, was the first necessity of the moment, notwithstanding the new excitement which was wild in their veins. Where did he come from? How had he got here?—familiar, unmistakable, as if he had been absent but a day. How did he know he was wanted? And was it he—really *he*—after all those dreary years? These questions surged through the minds of all the

bystanders, in an impetuous, yet secondary current. The first thing, and the most urgent, was the Squire. Brother and sister, friend and friend, had not leisure to take each other by the hand, or say a word of greeting.

Mary and her newly-arrived assistant stood side by side, touching each other, but could not speak or make even a sign of mutual recognition. *He* took her place in supporting, and, at the same time, restraining the patient. *She* held her father's hand, with which he seemed to be appealing to some one, or using, in dumb show, to aid some argument.

"The little boy," he said, hoarsely, "bring me the little boy."

"Is it Nello he means?" the stranger asked, in a low voice.

"I—think so—I—suppose so," said Mary, trembling, and wholly overcome by this strange ease and familiarity, and even by the sound of the voice so long silent in this place. But he took no notice—only followed his question by another.

"Why not bring the child then? That might satisfy him. Does he care for the child, or is it only a fancy, a wandering in his head? Anyhow, let them bring him. It might be of some use."

"Do you think he—knows? Do you think he understands—and—means what he is saying?"

Mary faltered forth these words, scarcely knowing what she said, feeling that she could not explain how it was that Nello was not near—and finding it so strange, so strange to be talking thus to—John; could it be really John? After all that had sundered them, after the miseries that had passed over him, the price still set upon his head, was it he who stood so quietly, assuming his household place, taking his part in the nursing of the old man? She could not believe her senses, and how could she talk to him, calmly as the circumstances required, gently and steadily, as if he had never been away?

"Most likely not," he said; "but something has excited his fancy, and the sight of my boy might calm it. Let some one bring Nello."

He spoke with the air of one used to be obeyed, and whom also in this particular it would be easy to obey.

"We sent him to school. I am very sorry—I was against it," said Mary, trembling more and more.

Mr. Pen was frightened too. It is one thing doing "for the best" with a little unprotected

parentless child, and quite a different thing to answer the child's father when he comes and asks for it. Mr. Pen paled and reddened ten times in a minute. He added, faltering—

"It was by my advice—John. I thought it was the best thing for him. You see I did not know——"

Here he broke off abruptly, in the confusion of his mind.

"Then it is needless saying any more," said the stranger, hastily, with a tone in which a little sharpness of personal disappointment and vexation seemed to mingle.

This conversation had been in an undertone, as attendants in a sick-room communicate with each other, without intermitting their special services to the patient. The Squire had been still in their hands for the moment, ceasing to struggle, apparently caught in some dim confused way by the sound of their voices. He looked about him confusedly, like a blind man, turning his head slightly, as if his powers were being restored to him, to the side on which John stood. A gleam of half-meaning, of interest, and wavering, half roused attention, seemed to come over his face. Then he sank back gently on his pillows, struggling no longer. The

paroxysm was over. The nurse withdrew her hand with a sigh of relief.

"Now," she said, "if we leave him perfectly quiet, he may get some sleep. I will call you in a moment if there is any change."

The woman saw, with her experienced eyes, that something more than could be read on the surface was in this family combination. She put them gently from the bedside, and shaded the patient's eyes from the light, for it was nearly noon by this time, and everything was brilliant outside. The corridor, however, into which they passed outside was still dark, as it was always, the glimmering pale reflections in the wainscot of the long narrow window on the staircase being its sole communication with the day.

Mary put out her hands to her brother as they emerged from the sick-room.

"Is it you—you, John?"

"Yes," he said, grasping them, "it is I. I do not wonder you are startled—I heard my father was worse—that there was a change—and came in without warning. So Nello has been sent away? May I see my little girl? You have been good to her, I am sure, Mary."

"I love her," said Mary, hastily, "as if she

were my own. John, do not take my little companion away."

He had been grave enough, and but little moved hitherto by the meeting, which was not so strange or unlooked for to him as to them. Now his countenance beamed suddenly, lighting all over, and a tender moisture came to his eyes.

"It is what I have desired most for her," he said, and took his sister's hands again and kissed her cheek. "But send for my little Lily," he added, with an indescribable softening in his voice.

Here Miss Brown, who had been following, came out from the dusk of the room behind. "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I did not like to tell you in your trouble; but I'm very uneasy about Miss Lily."

"Has she never come in yet? You said she had gone out for a walk."

"I said whatever I could think of to save you, Miss Mary. We none of us know where she's gone. I've sent everywhere. She is not at the Vicarage, nor she's not at the village; and—oh, what will Mr. John think of us?" cried the woman in tears. "Not one in the house has seen her since yesterday, and Martuccia, she's breaking her heart. She says

Miss Lily has gone after her brother; she says——"

"Is Martuccia here?"

"Yes, sir," said Miss Brown, with a curtsey. She could not take her eyes off him, as she afterwards said. More serious, far more serious than when he was a young gentleman always about the house, but the same man—still the same man.

"Then send her to me at once. It is you, Martha, the same as ever," he said, with a momentary smile in the midst of his anxiety. Just as Mr. John used to do—always a kind word for everybody, and a smile. She made him another curtsey, crying and smiling together.

"And glad, glad, sir, to see you come home," she said. There was this excuse for Miss Brown's lingering, that Mary had rushed off at once to find Martuccia. John bowed his head gravely. He had grown very serious. The habit of smiling was no longer his grand characteristic. He went down stairs and into the library, the nearest sitting-room in his way, the door of which was standing open. Eastwood was there lingering about, pretending to put things in order, but in reality waiting for news of the old Squire. Eastwood knew

that he had not let this man in. He had not got admission in any legitimate way. "I beg your pardon, sir," he began, not altogether respectfully, with the intention of demanding what he did there.

"What?" said the stranger, looking up with a little impatience.

Eastwood drew back with another "Beg your pardon, sir!" and his tone was changed. He did not know who it was, but he dared not say anything more. This was the strangest house in the world surely, full of suspicions, full of new people who did not come in at the front door.

When Martuccia came, her story, which had been almost inarticulate in her broken English, flowed forth volubly enough to her master, whom she recognised with a shriek of delight. She gave him a clear enough account of what had happened. How an old woman had come, a peasant of the country, and told Miss Lily that her little brother was in *trouble*. This word she transferred to her narrative without attempting to translate it, so that Mary, standing by, who did not understand the rest, seemed to hear nothing but this word recurring again and again. "Trouble!" it was an ominous word. Nothing but trouble seemed to surround them.

She stood and listened anxiously, though she did not understand.

"It is clear, then," said her brother, turning to her, "that Lily has gone after her little brother, supposed to be in some mysterious trouble. When did he go, and where did he go, and who persuaded you to send him away?"

"It was Randolph—Randolph has been here. I believe he wanted to be kind. He said Nello was being ruined here, and so did Mr. Pen. It was against my will—against my wish."

"Randolph!" he said. This alarmed him more than all the rest. "Both my children! I thought I should find them safe—happy in your hands, whatever happened to me——"

"Oh John, what can I say?" cried Mary, wringing her hands. No one could be more guiltless of any unkind intention, but, as was natural, it was she who bore the blame. A man may be pardoned if he is a little unjust in such circumstances. John was ready to rush out of the house again directly to go after his children, but what could be done unless the railway helped him? Mary got the time-tables and consulted them anxiously; and Mr. Pen came in and stood by, very serious

and a little crestfallen, as one of the authors of the blunder. And it was found, as so often happens, that nothing was to be done at the moment. The early train was going off as they talked, the next did not go till the evening, the same by which Lilias had travelled on the night before. And in the meantime, what might be happening to the little girl, who was wandering about the world in search of her brother? While the brother and sister consulted, Mr. Pen looked sorrowfully over their heads, which were bent over these time-tables. He did not himself pretend to understand these lines of mysterious figures. He looked from one face to another to read what they meant. He was too much abashed by his own share in the misfortune to put forward his advice. But when he saw that they were both at their wits' end, Mr. Pen suggested that the place where Nello was was nearer to Randolph than to themselves, and that he might get there that night if he was informed at once, and give them news, at least let them know whether Lilias had reached the house where her brother was. "And I will go by the first train," Mr. Pen said timidly. "Let me go, as I have had a hand in it. John knows I could not mean any harm to his boy——."

Nobody had meant any harm, but the fact that the two children were both gone, and one, a girl like Lilias, wandering by herself no one knew where, was as bad as if they had meant it a hundred times over. Who could it be who had beguiled her with this story of Nello's trouble? If John, who had suffered so much, and who had come from the country where feuds and vengeance still flourish, suspected an enemy in it, suspected even his brother who had never been his friend, who could wonder? They telegraphed to Randolph, and to Mr. Swan, and to the stations on the way, John himself hurrying to Pennington to do so. And then when all this was done, which made an exciting bustle for a moment, there was nothing further possible but to wait till evening for the train. Such pauses are due to the very speed and superior possibilities of modern life. A post-chaise was slower than the railway, but it could be had at once, and those long and dreary hours of delay, of time which one feels to be lost, and in which while we wait, anything fatal may happen, are the reverse side of the medal, the attendant disadvantage upon headlong speed and annihilation of distance. What a miserable house it was during all that eternal day!

Anxieties of every kind filled their minds—those which concerned life and the living coming uppermost and shutting out the solemn interest of the chamber over which death had been hovering. The Squire slept, but only his nurse, unmoved in professional calm, watched over him; and when he woke, still wrapped in a mist and haze of half-consciousness which subdued all his being, yet with an aspect less deathlike, Mary came and went to and from his room, in an enforced stillness almost beyond bearing, not daring to stay long in one place lest she should betray herself. She dared not allow herself to think of little Lilias, perhaps in evil hands, perhaps wandering alone. Her little Lily! Mary felt it would be impossible to sit still, impossible to endure at all if she did not thrust away this thought. A little woman-child, at that tender age, too young for self-protection, too old for absolute impunity from harm. Mary clasped her hands tightly together and forced her thoughts into another channel. There was no lack indeed of other channels for her anxieties; her father thus lying between life and death, and her brother with all the penalties of old on his head, going and coming without concealment, without even an attempt to disguise himself. It would have been

better even for John, Mary felt instinctively, if the Squire had been visibly dying instead of rallying. What if he should wake again to full consciousness, and order the doors of his house to be closed against his son as he had done before? What if, seeing this, and seeing him there without attempt at concealment, rejected by his own family, the old prosecution should be revived and John taken? After that—But Mary shuddered and dropped this thread of thought also. The other, even the other was less terrible. Thus passed this miserable day.

Randolph had been alarmed even before the family were, though in a different fashion. Almost as soon as he had seated himself at his respectable clergymanly breakfast-table, after prayers and all due offices of the morning, a telegram was put into his hand. This made his pulse beat quicker, and he called to his wife to listen, while a whole phantasmagoria of possibilities seemed to rise like a haze about the yellow envelope, ugliest of inclosures. What could it be but his father's death that was thus intimated to him—an event which must have such important issues? When he had read it, however, he threw it on the table with an impatient "Pshaw! The little boy,

always the little boy," he cried; "I think that little boy will be the death of me." Mrs. Randolph, who had heard of this child as the most troublesome of children, gave all her sympathy to her husband, and he contented himself with another message back again, saying that he had no doubt Mr. Swan would soon find the little fugitive, who had not come to him as the schoolmaster supposed. The day, however, which had begun thus in excitement, soon had other incidents to make it memorable. Early in the afternoon other telegrams came. The one he first opened was from Mr. Pen; this at least must be what he hoped for. But instead of telling of the Squire's death, Mr. Pen telegraphed to him an entreaty which he could not understand. "Lilias is missing too—for God's sake go at once to the school and ascertain if she is there." What did he mean—what did the old fool mean?

"Here is another, Randolph," said his wife, composing her face into solemnity. "I fear —I fear this at least must be bad news from the Castle."

In the heat of his disappointment and impatience Randolph was as nearly as possible exclaiming in over-sincerity, "Fear!—I hope it is, with all my heart." But when he opened

it he stood aghast; his brother's name stared him in the face—"John Musgrave." How came it there—that outlawed name? It filled him with such a hurry and ferment of agitation that he cared nothing what the message was; he let it drop and looked up aghast in his wife's face.

"Is it so?" she said, assuming the very tone, the right voice with which a clergyman's wife ought to speak of a death. "Alas, my poor dear husband, is it so? is he gone indeed?"

But Randolph forgot that he was a clergyman and all proprieties. He threw down the hideous bit of paper and jumped to his feet and paced about the room in his excitement. "He has come, confound him!" he cried.

Not gone! that would have been nothing but good news—but this was bad indeed, something unthought of, never calculated upon; worse than any misgiving he had ever entertained. He had been uneasy about the child, the boy whom everybody would assume to be the heir; but John—that John should return—that he should be there before his father died—this combination was beyond all his fears.

After he had got over the first shock he

took up the telegram to see what it was that "John Musgrave, Penninghame Castle,"—the name written out in full letters, almost with ostentation, no concealing or disguising of it, though it was a name lying under the utmost penalties of the law—had to say to him.

"*My little daughter has been decoyed away under pretence that her brother was in danger. You can reach the place to-day. I cannot. Will you serve me for once, and go and telegraph if she is safe?*" This was the communication. Randolph's breast swelled high with what he felt to be natural indignation. "I serve him! I go a hundred miles or so for his convenience! I will see him—hanged first!" Hanged—yes, that was what would happen to the fellow if he were caught, if everybody were not so weakly indulgent, so ready to defeat the law. And this was the man who ventured to bid his brother "serve him for once," treating him, Randolph, a clergyman, a person irreproachable, in this cavalier fashion. What had he to do with it if the little girl had been decoyed away? No doubt the little monkey, if all were known, was ready enough to go. He hoped in his heart they were both gone together, and would never be heard of more.

When he came as far as this, however, Randolph pulled himself up short. After all, he was not a bad man to rejoice in the afflictions of his neighbours; he only wished them out of his way, he did not wish any harm to them; and he felt that what he had just said in his heart was wicked, and might bring down a "judgment." To come the length of a wish that your neighbour may not thrive is a thing that no respectable person should allow himself to do; a little grudging of your neighbour's prosperity, a little secret satisfaction in his trouble, is a different matter, —but, articulately to wish him harm! This brought him to himself and made him aware of his wife's eyes fixed upon him with some anxiety. She was a gentle little believing sort of woman, without any brains to speak of, and she thought dear Randolph's feelings had been too much for him. Her eyes were fixed on him with devout sympathy. How much feeling he had, though he did not speak much of it; what strong affections he had! Randolph paused a little to calm himself down. These all-trusting women are sometimes an exasperation unspeakable in their innocence, but still, on the other hand, a man

must often make an effort not to dispel such belief. He said, "No, my dear, it is not what I thought; my father is not dead, but suffering, which is almost worse; and my brother whom you have heard of—who has been such a grief to us all—has come home unexpectedly."

"Oh, Randolph!" The innocent wife went to him and took his hand and caressed it. "How hard upon you! How much for you to bear! Two such troubles at once."

"Yes, indeed," he said, accepting her sympathy, "and the little boy whom I told you of, whom I took to school,—well, he has run away——"

"Oh, Randolph dear, what mountains of anxiety upon you!"

"You may say so. I must go, I suppose, and look after this little wretch. Put me up something in the little portmanteau—and from thence I suppose I had better go on to Penninghame again. Who knows what trouble may follow John's most ill-advised return?"

"And they all lean so on you," said the foolish wife. Notwithstanding these dozen

years of separation between him and his family, she was able to persuade herself of this, and that he was the prop and saviour of his race. There is nothing that foolish wives will not believe.

Randolph, however, wavered in his decision after he had made up his mind to go. Why should he go, putting himself to so much trouble at John's order? He changed his mind half a dozen times in succession. Finally, however, he did go, sending two messages back on his way, one to John, the other to Mr. Pen. To John he said: *I am alarmed beyond measure to see your name. Is it safe for you to be there? Know nothing about little girl, but hear that little boy has run away from school and am going to see.*" Thus he planted, or meant to plant, an additional sting in his brother's breast. And as he travelled along in the afternoon, going to see after Nello, his own exasperation and resentment became so hot within him, that when he arrived at the junction, he sent a message of a very different tenor to Mr. Pen. He did not perhaps quite know what he was doing. He was furious with disappointment and annoyance and confusion, feeling himself cheated, thrust

aside, put out of the place which he ought to have filled. Nello would have had harsh justice had be been brought before him at such a moment. "Little troublesome, effeminate baby, good for nothing, and now to be ruined in every way. But I wash my hands of him," Randolph said.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER HELPER.

On that same morning when so many things occurred, young Lord Stanton was seated in the library at Stanton, with a great deal of business to do. He had letters to write, he had the accounts of his agent to look over, and a hundred other very pressing matters which demanded his close attention. Perhaps it was only natural in these circumstances that Geoff should be unusually idle, and not at all disposed to tackle to his work. Generally he was so much interested in what was real work that he did it heartily, glad of the honest compulsion; but on this morning he was unsettled, and not in his usual mood of industry. He watched the leaves dropping from the trees outside, he listened idly to the sounds within; he scribbled on the margin of his accounts, now a bit of Latin verse (for Mr. Tritton was an elegant scholar), now a grotesque face, any-

thing but the steady calculations he ought to have made. Now and then a sudden recollection of something he had read would cross his mind, when he would get up in the middle of a letter to seek the book in which he thought it was and verify his recollection on the spot, a thing he would not have taken the trouble to do had that floating recollection had any connection with the work in which he professed to be engaged. In short, he was entirely idle, distracted, and *desœuvré*. Mr. Tritton was reading to Lady Stanton in her morning room. It was early; the household were all busy and occupied,—all except the young master of it, who could not settle to his work.

He was sitting thus when his easily distracted attention was caught by a movement outside, not like anything that could be made by bird or dog, the only two living creatures likely to be there so close to his window. It was the same window through which he had gone out the evening he made his night expedition to the hills. The sound caught his attention, as anything would have done that gave him an excuse for raising his head from the letters he was now trying to write, having given up the accounts in despair. When he saw a shadow skirt the grass, Geoff watched

with eager interest for what would follow—then there was a pause, and he had bent over the letter again, thinking it a mere trick of fancy, when a sound close to him made him start and look up. Some one was standing with his back to the morning light—standing across the window-sill with one foot within the room. Geoff started to his feet with momentary alarm. "Who are you? Ah! is it Bampfylde?" he said.

"Just me, my young lord. May I come in and speak a word?"

"Certainly—come in. But why not go to the front door and come in like any one else? You do not suppose I should have shut my doors on *you?*"

"Maybe, no; but I'm not a visitor for the like of you. I'm little credit about a grand house. I've not come here for nothing now, but to ask you a service."

"What is it, Bampfylde? If I can do anything for you I will."

"It's not exactly for me, but you can do it if you will, my young lord. It's something I'm hindered from doing. It's for the young ones at the Castle, that you know of. Both the bairns are in trouble, so far as I can judge. I gave the little boy a carrier to let off if he

wanted help. Me, and still more the old woman, we misdoubted that brother. And nigh a week ago the carrier came home, but I was away on—on a hard job, that I'm on still, and she did not understand. And when I saw her and told her yesterday what the sign was, what does the old woman do but tell the little lady—the little miss—and so far as I can hear *she's* away, the creature herself, a flower of a thing, no bigger than my arm, the very image of our Lily: her—that atom—she's away to deliver her brother, my young lord," said the vagrant, leaning against the window. "I'm most worn out by the same sort o' work. There's far too much of that been done among us one way and another, and *she's* away now on the same errand—to save her brother. It's laughable if you think on't," he said, with a curious gurgle in his throat of forlorn ridicule.

Geoff, who had leaned forward at the name of the children, saw that Bampfylde was very pale and worn, his clothes in less order than usual, and an air of utter weariness and harassment about him. He looked like a man who had not slept or undressed for days.

"Has anything new happened?" Geoff asked hurriedly. "Of course I will do what-

ever I can for the children—but tell me first—has anything happened with you?"

"Ay, plenty," said the rough fellow with a great sigh, which was not sentiment but fatigue. "If that will not vex you, my young lord, saving your presence, I'll sit down and rest my bones while I talk to you, for I'm near dead with tiredness. *He's* given us the slip—I cannot tell you how. Many a fear we've had, but this time it's come true. Tuesday was a week he got away, the day after I'd been to see about the little lad. We thought he was but hanging about the fells in corners that none but him and me know, as he once did before, and I got him back. But it's worse than that. Lord! there's many an honest man lost on the fells in the mists, that has a wife and bairns looking to him. Would it not be more natural to take the likes of him, and let the father of a family go free? I cannot touch him, but there's no law to bind the Almighty. But all that 's little to the purpose. He's loose ranging about the country and me on his heels. I've all but had him three or four times, but he's aye given me the slip."

"But this is terrible; it is a danger for the whole country," said Geoff. "The children!" The young man shuddered, he did not realize

that the children were at a distance. He thought of nothing more than perhaps an expedition among the fells for Lilias—and what if she should fall into the madman's hands? "You should have help—you should rouse the country," he said.

"I'll no do that. Please God I'll get him yet, and this will be the end," said Bampfylde solemnly. "She cannot make up her mind to it even now. She's infatuate with him. I thought it would have ended when you put your hand into the web, my young lord."

"It is my fault," said Geoff. "I should have done something more; but then Mr. Musgrave fell ill, and I have been waiting. If he dies, everything must be gone into. I was but waiting."

"I am not blaming you. She cannot bide to hear a word, and so she's been all this long time. Now and then her heart will speak for the others—them that suffer and have suffered—but it aye goes back to him. And I don't blame her neither," said Bampfylde. "It's aye her son to her, that was a gentleman and her pride." He had placed himself not on the comfortable chair which Geoff had pushed forward for him, but on the hard seat formed by the library steps, where he sat with his

elbows on his knees, and his head supported in his hands, thus reposing himself upon himself. "It's good to rest," he said, with something of the garrulousness of weakness, glad in his exhaustion to stretch himself out, as it were, body and soul, and ease his mind after long silence. He almost forgot even his mission in the charm of this momentary repose. "Poor woman!" he added, pathetically; "I've never blamed her. This was her one pride, and how it has ended—if it were but ended! No," he went on after a pause, "please God there will be no harm. He's no murdering-mad, like some poor criminals that have done less harm than him. It's the solitary places he flees to, not the haunts o' men; we're brothers so far as that's counting. And I drop a word of warning as I go. I tell the folks that I hear there's a poor creature ranging the country that is bereft of his senses, and a man after him. I'm the man," said Bampfylde, with a low laugh, "but I tell nobody that; and oh the dance he's led me!" Then rousing himself with an effort, "But I'm losing time, and you're losing time, my young lord. If you would be a help to them you should be away. Get out your horse or your trap to take you to the train."

"Where has she gone—by the train?"

"Ay—and a long road. She's away there last night, the atom, all by herself. That's our blood," said Bampfylde, with again the low laugh, which was near tears. "But I need not say our blood neither, for her father has suffered the most of all, poor gentleman—the most of all! Look here, my young lord," he said, suddenly rising up, "if I sit there longer I'll go to sleep, and forget everything; and we've no time for sleep, neither you nor me. Here's the place. There's a train at half-past eleven that gets there before dark. You cannot get back to-night; you'll have to leave word that you cannot get back to-night. And go now; go, for the love of God!"

Geoff did not hesitate; he rang the bell hastily, and ordered his dog-cart to be ready at once, and wrote two or three lines of explanation to his mother. And he ordered the servant, who stared at his strange companion, to bring some food and wine. But Bampfylde shook his head. "Not so," he said; "not so. Bit nor sup I could not take here. We that once made this house desolate, it's not for us to eat in it or drink in it. You're o'er good, o'er good, my young lord; but I'll not forget the offer," he added, the water

rushing to his eyes. He stood in front of the light, stretching his long limbs in the languor of exhaustion, a smile upon his face.

"You have overdone yourself, Bampfylde. You are not fit for any more exertion. What more can you do than you have done? I'll send out all the men about the house, and——"

"Nay, but I'll go to the last—as long as I can crawl. Mind you the young ones," he said; "and for all you're doing, and for your good heart, God bless you, my young lord!"

It seemed to Geoff like a dream when he found himself standing alone in the silent room among his books, with neither sight nor sound of any one near. Bampfylde disappeared as he had come, in a moment, vanishing among the shrubberies; and the young man found himself charged with a commission he did not understand, with a piece of dirty paper in his hand, upon which an address was rudely scrawled. What was he to do at this school, a day's journey off, about which he knew nothing? He would have laughed at the wild errand had he not been too deeply impressed by his visitor's appearance and manner to be amused by anything thus suggested. But wild as it was, Geoff was resolved to carry it out. Even

the vaguest intimation of danger to Lilias would have sufficed to rouse him, but he had scarcely taken that thought into his mind. He could think of nothing but Bampfylde, and this with a pang of sympathy and interest which he could scarcely explain to himself. As he drove along towards the Stanton station, the first from Pennington, his mind was entirely occupied with this rough fellow. Something tragic about him, in his exhaustion, in the *effusion* of his weakness, had gone to Geoff's heart. He looked eagerly for traces of him—behind every bush, in every cross road. And to increase his anxiety, the servant who accompanied him began to entertain him with accounts of a madman who had escaped from an asylum, and who kept the country in alarm. "Has he been seen anywhere? has he harmed any one?" Geoff asked, eagerly. But there were no details to be had; nothing but the general statement. Geoff gave the man orders to warn the game-keepers and out-door servants, and to have him secured if possible. It was scarcely loyal perhaps to poor Bampfylde, who had trusted him. Thus he had no thought but Bampfylde in his mind when he found himself in the train, rushing along on the errand he did not understand. It was a quick train, the one

express of the day; and even at the junction there were only a few minutes to wait: very unlike the vigil that poor little Lilias had held there in the middle of night under the dreary flickering of the lamp. Geoff knew nothing of this; but by dint of thinking he had evolved something like a just idea of the errand on which he was going. Lilias had been warned that her brother was not happy, and had gone like a little Quixote to relieve him. Geoff could even form an idea to himself of the pre-occupation of the house with the Squire's illness, which would close all ears to Lilias' appeal about Nello's fancied unhappiness. Little nuisance! Geoff himself felt disposed to say—thinking any unhappiness that could happen to Nello of much less importance than the risk of Lilias. But he had not, of course, the least idea of Nello's flight. He arrived at the station about five o'clock in the afternoon, adding another bewilderment to the solitary official there, who had been telegraphed to from Penninghame, and already that day had been favoured by two interviews with Mr. Swan. "A young lady? I wish all young ladies were—— Here's a message about her; and the schoolmaster, he's been at me, till I am sick of my

life. What young lady could there be here? Do you think I'm a-hiding of her?" he cried, with that instinctive suspicion of being held responsible which is so strong in his class. Geoff, however, elicited by degrees all that there was to find out, and discovered at the same time that the matter was much more serious than he supposed. The little boy had run away from school; the little girl, evidently coming to meet him, had disappeared with him. It was supposed that they must have made for the railway, as the woman in the cottage close by had confessed to having given them breakfast; but they had disappeared from her ken, so that she half thought they had been ghost-children, with no reality in them; and though the country had been scoured everywhere, neither they, nor any trace of them, were to be found.

This was the altogether unsatisfactory ground upon which Geoff had to work,—and at five o'clock on an October afternoon there is but little time for detailed investigation of a country. His eye turned, as that of Lilias had done, to the wood. It was the place in which she would naturally take refuge. Had the wood been examined? he asked. Yes, every corner of it. Geoff was at his wits' end,

and did not know what to do; he went down the road where Lilias had gone in the morning and talked to the woman, who told him a moving story of the tired pair, and declared that she would not have let them go, seeing very well that they were a little lady and gentleman, but that they had stolen away when her back was turned. Geoff stood at the cottage door gazing round him, when he saw something that no one else had noticed, a small matter enough. Caught upon the hedge, which reached close to the cottage, there was a shred of blue—the merest rag, a few threads, nothing more—such an almost invisible indication as a savage might leave to enable his companions to track him—a thing that could be seen only by instructed eyes. Geoff's eyes were inexperienced, but they were keen; and he knew the colour of Lilias' dress, which the other searchers were not aware of. He disentangled the threads carefully from the twig. One long hair, and that too was Lilias' colour, had caught on the same thorn. This seemed to him a trace unmistakable, notwithstanding that the woman of the cottage immediately claimed it. "Dear, I did not know that I had torn my best blue dress," she said, with genuine alarm. Geoff, however, left her

abruptly, and followed out his clue. He hastened by the footpath behind the hedge towards the wood. It was the natural place for Lilias to be. By this time the young man had forgotten everything except the girl, who was at once a little child appealing to all his tenderest sympathies, and a little visionary princess to whom he had vowed himself. She was both in the combination of the moment—a tired child whom he could almost carry away in his arms, who would not be afraid of him, or shrink from these brotherly arms; but, at the same time, the little mother-woman, the defender and protector of one more helpless than herself. Geoff's heart swelled with a kind of heavenly enthusiasm and love. Never could there have been a purer passion. He hurried through the wood and through the wood, searching in all its glades and dells, peering into the very hollows of the old trees. There was nothing: Was there nothing? Not a movement, not a sound, except the birds chirping, the rush of a rabbit or squirrel, the flutter of the leaves in the evening air. For it was evening by this time, that could not be denied; the last, long, slant rays of the sun were sloping along the trunks and roots of the trees, and the mossy greenness that

covered them. The day was over in which a man could work, and night—night that would chill the children to the heart, and drive them wild with fear—desolate, dark night, full of visionary terrors, and also real dangers, was coming. Geoff had made up his mind certainly that they were there. He did not think of a magician's cave or a hermit's cell, as Lilias had done, but only whether there was some little hut anywhere, where they could have found refuge,—a hollow, unknown to him, where they might have hid themselves, not knowing a friend was near. The sun had lit up an illumination in the west, and shone through the red and yellow leaves with reflections of colour softer and more varying, but still more brilliant, than their own. The world seemed all ablaze between the two, with crimson and gold—autumn sun above, autumn foliage below. Then tone by tone and colour by colour died out from the skies, and the soft yet cold grey of the evening took possession of all. The paths of the wood seemed to grow ghostly in the gathering dusk, the colour stole out of the trees, the very sky seemed to drop lower as the night gathered in. Geoff walked about in a kind of despair. He called them, but

there came no answer; he seemed to himself to poke into every corner, into the damp depths where the cold dew seemed to ooze out from the ground weighing down every leaflet. He was sure they were there. Must they spend the night in the dark, and be frozen and frightened to death before the morning? Geoff's heart was full of anxiety and pity. It seemed to him that he must stay there to keep them company, whether he could find them or not.

Then all at once he heard a sound like a low sob. It seemed to come from the ground, close to where he was standing, but he could see nothing but a little tangle of wild brambles, long branches with still a solitary berry here and there, the leaves scanty, scarlet and brown with the frost. They were all clustered about the trunk of a big tree, a little thicket, prickly and impregnable, but close to the path. And was it the breathing of the night air only, or some wild creature in the brushwood, or human respiration that came soft, almost indistinguishable in the soft murmur of the wood? He stood still, scarcely venturing himself to breathe, so intent was he to listen; and by and by he heard the sound again. A child's sob, the soft pathetic rever-

beration of a sob, such as continues to come after the weeping is over. With trembling eagerness, yet caution, Geoff put aside the long tangles of the bramble which fell in a kind of arch. It was a hard piece of work, and had to be done with caution not to disturb the poor little nestlings, if nestlings there were. There Geoff disclosed to the waning light the prettiest pathetic picture. It was not the same green hollow in which the children had first taken refuge. They had been roused by the sound of passengers through the wood, and the voices of the people who were searching for themselves, and had woke up in fright. When these noises ceased they had strayed deeper into the wood to another and safer shelter, Nello being too frightened and miserable to go on as Lilias wished. At last they had found this refuge under the bramble bushes where nobody surely could ever find them, meaning to lie there all day and creep out at night to continue their journey. Lilias had seated herself first, spreading out her skirt to protect her brother from the damp. There lying with his head and shoulders supported on her lap, he had gone to sleep again, while Lilias waked and pondered; very

anxious, frightened too, and dissatisfied with the loss of time, she sat erect, supporting Nello, and gazed up at the dark figure in the twilight with alarmed eyes, which seemed to grow larger and larger as they shone in a passion of terror through the long tangles of the bush. Lilias had covered her brother with her shawl—she drew it over him now, covering the white little face on her arm, "What do you want with me? I am only resting. There is no one here to do any harm," she said, with the sob coming again in spite of her. She thought it was the cruel schoolmaster, the more cruel uncle, who had condemned Nello to so many sufferings. She held her arms over him, protecting him—resolute not to let him be taken from her. "Oh, do not meddle with me!" she went on, growing more and more desperate. "I have some money I will give you, if you will only —only leave me alone. There is nobody—but me."

Oh that sob! if she could only swallow it down and talk to him, this robber chief, this Robin Hood, as if she were not afraid! for sometimes these men are kind and do not hurt the weak. Lilias gazed, nothing but her eyes

appearing, glowing through the gathering shade: then suddenly threw her brother off her lap in a transport of wild delight. "Oh Nello, Nello, Nello!" she cried, till the wood rang, "it is Mr. Geoff!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

Geoff took the children home without let or hindrance. There was no inn near where they could pass the night; and as he had no legitimate right to their custody, and was totally unknown and very young, and might not awaken any lively faith in the bosom of authority as against the schoolmaster or the uncle, he thought it wisest to take them away at once. He managed to get some simplest food for them with difficulty—a little bread and milk—and made them lie down propped amid the cushions of a first-class carriage, which was to be hooked on to the evening train when it arrived. Before they left the little station he had the satisfaction of seeing Randolph Musgrave arrive, looking sour and sullen. Geoff did not know that Randolph had done anything unkind to the children. Certainly it was none of his fault that Lilias

was there; but what good partizan ever entered too closely into an examination of the actual rights and wrongs of a question? Randolph might have been innocent—as indeed he was—of any downright evil intention; but this availed him nothing. Geoff looked out of the window of his own carriage as they glided away from the station, and gazed with intensest schoolboy pleasure on the glum and sour countenance of the churlish uncle, who, but for his own intervention, might have wrought destruction to those new babes in the wood. He shivered when he thought of the two helpless creatures lying under the brambles too frightened to move, and feeling to their hearts all the fantastic horrors of the darkness. Now, though still in movement, and undergoing still further fatigue, the absolute rest which had fallen upon their childish spirits from the mere fact that he was there, touched the young man to the heart. They were willing to let him take them anywhere; their cares were over. Nello had even made a feeble little attempt to shake his draggled plumes and swagger a little, sore and uncomfortable though he was, before he clambered into the carriage; and Lilias lay in the nest he had made for her, looking out with eyes of measureless content—

so changed from those great, wistful, unfathomable oceans of anxiety and fear which had looked at him through the brambles! She put her hand into his as he settled himself in his corner beside her—the little soft child's hand, which he warmed in his strong clasp, and which clung to him with a hold which did not relax even in her dreams; for she went to sleep so, holding him fast, feeling the sense of safety glow over her in delicious warmth and ease. Through all the night, even when she slept, at every movement he made, her soft fingers closed more firmly upon his hand. It was the child's anchor of safety; and this clinging, conscious and unconscious, went straight to Geoff's heart. In the dark, under the waning light of the lamp overhead, he watched the little face sinking into sleep, with now a faint little smile upon it—a complete relaxation of all the strained muscles—with a sensation of happiness which was beyond words. Sometimes, for the mere pleasure of it he would make a movement wantonly to feel the renewed clasp of the little hand and see the drowsy opening of the eyes. "Are you there, Mr. Geoff?" she said now and then, with a voice as soft (he thought) as the coo of a dove. "Yes, my Lily;" he would

say, with his heart swelling in his young bosom; and Lilias would drop to sleep again, smiling at him, with sleepy eyes, in what ease and infinite content! As for Nello, he snored now and then out of very satisfaction and slumbering confidence; little snores, something between a little cherub's trumpet and the native utterance of the tenderest of little pigs—at that age when even little piggies, by reason of babyhood, have something cherubic about them too.

At midnight, at the great junction, a tall, sunburnt, anxious-faced man walked along the line of carriages, looking in with eager looks. "Are these your children?" he said to Geoff, seeing the two little figures laid up among the cushions, and not remarking how young their companion was. He spoke abruptly, but taking off his hat with an apologetic grace, which Geoff thought "foreign," as we are all so apt to suppose unusual courtesy to be. A sudden inspiration seized the young man. He did not know who this was, but somehow he never doubted who it was the stranger sought. "They are the little Musgraves of Penninghame," he said, simply, "whom I am taking home."

The tall stranger wavered for a moment, as

though he might have fallen; then, in a voice half-choked, he asked, "May I come beside you?" He sat down in the seat opposite to Geoff. After an anxious inspection of the two little faces, now settled into profound sleep, "Thank God!" he said. "They are all I have in the world."

Who could it be? Geoff's ears seemed to tingle with the words—"all I have in the world." He sat in his dark corner and gazed at this strange new-comer, who was more in the light. And the new-comer gazed at him. Seeing, after a while, the child's hand clasped in his—a mark of trust which, sweet as it was, kept young Geoff in a somewhat forced attitude not comfortable for a long night journey, "I do not know you," he said, "but my little girl seems to put her whole trust in you, and that must make me your grateful servant too."

"Then you are John Musgrave?" cried the young man. "Oh, sir, I am glad — most glad, that you have come home! Yes, I think she likes me; and child or woman," cried young Geoff, clasping the little hand close with a sudden *effusion*, "I shall never care for any one else."

Serious, careworn, in peril of his life, John

Musgrave laughed softly in his beard. "This is my first welcome home," he said.

Geoff found a carriage waiting for him at Stanton. His first impulse having been to take the children to his mother, he gave them up now with a pang, having first witnessed the surprise of incredulous delight with which Lilias flung herself at her waking upon her father. The cry with which she hailed him, the illumination of her face, and, Geoff felt, her utter forgetfulness of his own claims, half-vexed the young man after his uncomfortable night; and it was with a certain pang that he gave the children up to their natural guardian. "Papa, this is Mr. Geoff," Lilias said; "no one has ever been so kind; and he knows about you something that nobody else knows."

John Musgrave looked up with a gleam of surprise and a faint suffusion of colour on his serious face. "Every one here knows about *me*," he said, with a sigh; and then he turned to the young guardian of his children. "Lily's introduction is of the slightest," he said. "I don't know you, nor how you have been made to take so much interest in them—how you knew even that they wanted help; but I am grateful to you with all my heart, all the same."

"I am Geoffrey Stanton," said the young man. He did not know how to make the announcement, but coloured high with consciousness of the pain that must be associated with his name. But it was best, he felt, to make the revelation at once. "The brother of Walter Stanton, whom ——. As Lilias says, sir, I know more about you than others know. I have heard everything."

John Musgrave shook his head. "Everything! till death steps in to one or another of the people concerned, that is what no one will ever know; but so long as you do not shrink from me, Lord Stanton—— You are Lord Stanton; is it not so?"

"I am not making any idle brag," said Geoff. "I know *everything*. It was Bampfylde himself—Dick Bampfylde himself—who sent me after the children. I know the truth of it all, and I am ready to stand by you, sir, whenever and howsoever you want me——"

Geoff bent forward eagerly, holding out his hand, with a flush of earnestness and enthusiasm on his young face. Musgrave looked at him with great and serious surprise. His face darkened and lighted up, and he started slightly at the name of Bampfylde. At last, with a moment's hesitation, he took Geoff's

outstretched hand, and pressed it warmly. "I dare not ask what it is you do know," he said, "but there is nothing on my hand to keep me from taking yours; and thank you a thousand times—thank you for *them*. About everything else we can talk hereafter."

In ten minutes after Geoff was whirling along the quiet country road on his way home. It was like a dream to him that all this should have happened since he last drove between those hedgerows, and he had the half-disappointed, half-injured feeling of one who has not carried out an adventure to its final end. He was worn out too, and excited, and he did not like giving up Lily into the hands of her father. Had it been Miss Musgrave he would have felt no difficulty. It was chilly in the early morning, and he buttoned up his coat to his chin, and put his hands in his pockets, and let his groom drive, who had evidently something to say to him which could scarcely be kept in till they got clear of the station. Geoff had seen it so distinctly in the man's face, that he had asked at once, "Is all right at home?" But he was too tired to pay much attention to anything beyond that. When they had gone on for about a quarter of an

hour, the groom himself broke the silence. "I beg your pardon, my lord——"

"What is it?" Geoff, retired into the recesses of his big coat, had been half asleep.

Then the man began an excited story. He had heard a scuffle and a struggle at a point of the road which they were about approaching when on his way to meet his master. Wild cries "not like a human being," he said, and the sound of a violent encounter. "I thought of the madman I was telling your lordship of yesterday." "And what was it?" cried Geoff, rousing up to instant interest; upon which the groom became apologetic.

"How could I leave my horse, my lord?—a young beast, very fresh, as your lordship knows. He'd have bolted if I'd have left him for a moment. It was all I could do, as it was, to hold him in with such cries in his ears. I sent on the first man I met. A man does not grapple with a madman unless he is obliged to——"

"But you sent the other man to do it," said Geoff, half-amused, half-angry. He sprang from the phaeton as they came to the spot which the groom pointed out. It was a little dell, the course of a streamlet, widening as it ascended, and clothed with trees. Geoff knew

the spot well. About half a mile further up, on a little green plateau in the midst of the line of sheltering wood which covered these slopes, his brother's body had been found. He had been taken to see the spot with shuddering interest when he was a child, and had never forgotten the fatal place. The wood was very thick, with rank, dark, water-loving trees; and, whether it was fancy or reality, had always seemed to Geoff the most dismal spot in the county. All was quiet now, or so he thought at first. But there was no mistaking the evidence of wet, broken, and trampled grass, which showed where some deadly struggle had been. The spot was not far from the road—about five minutes of ascent, no more—and the young man pressed on, guided by signs of the fray, and in increasing anxiety; for almost at the first step he saw an old game-pouch thrown on the ground, which he recognised as having been worn by Bampfylde. Presently he heard, a little in advance of him, a low groan, and the sound of a sympathetic voice. "Could you walk, with my arm to steady you? Will you try to walk, my man?" Another low moaning cry followed. "My walking's done in this world," said a feeble voice. Geoff hurried forward, stifling a cry of

grief and pain. He had known it since he first set foot on that fatal slope. It was Bampfylde's voice; and presently he came in sight of the group. The sympathiser was the same labouring man, no doubt, whom his groom had sent to the rescue. Wild Bampfylde lay propped upon the mossy bank, his head supported upon a bush of heather. The stranger who stood by him had evidently washed the blood from his face and unbuttoned his shirt, which was open. There was a wound on his forehead, however, from which blood was slowly oozing, and his face was pallid as death. "Let me be—let me be," he said with a groan, as his kind helper tried to raise him. Then a faint glimmer of pleasure came over his ghastly face. "Ah, my young lord!" he said.

"What is it, Bampfylde? What has happened? Is he much hurt?" cried Geoff, kneeling down by his side. The man did not say anything, but shook his head. The vagrant himself smiled, with a kind of faint amusement in the mournful glimmer of his eyes.

"Not hurt, my young gentleman; just killed," he said; "but you're back—and they're safe?"

"Safe, Bampfylde; and listen!—with their father. He has come to take care of his own."

A warmer gleam lighted up the vagrant's face. "John Musgrave here! Ah, but it's well timed," he cried feebly. "My young lord, I'm grieved but for one thing,—the old woman. Who will take care of old 'Lizabeth? and she's been a good woman—if it had not been her son that went between her and her wits. I'm sorry for her, poor old body; very, very sorry for her, poor 'Lizabeth. He'll never be taken now, my young lord. Now he's killed me, there's none will ever take him. And so we'll all be ended, and the old woman left to die, without one—without one——!"

"My cart is at the foot of the hill," said Geoff, quickly, addressing the labourer, who stood by with tears in his eyes; "take it, and bid the groom drive as fast as the horse will go—and he's fresh—for the first doctor you can find; and bid them send an easy carriage from Stanton—quick! For every moment you save I'll give you——"

"I want no giving. What a man can do for poor Dick Bampfylde, I will," cried the other as he rushed down the slope. The vagrant smiled feebly again.

"They're all good-hearted," he said. "Not

one of them but would do poor Dick Bampfylde a good turn; that's a pleasure, my young lord. And you—you're the best of all. Ay, let him go, it'll please you; but me, my hour's come."

"Bampfylde, does it hurt you to speak? Can you tell me how it was?"

The poor fellow's eyes were glazing over. He made an effort, when Geoff's voice caught him, as it were, and arrested the stupor. "Eh, my young lord? What needs to tell? Poor creature, he did not know me for a friend, far less a brother. And madness is strong—it's strong. Tell the old woman that—it was not *me* he killed—but—one that tried to take him. Ay—we were all playing about the beck, and her calling us to come in—all the family; him and—Lily—and me. I was always the least account—but it was me that would aye be first to answer;—and now we are all coming home—Poor old 'Lizabeth—Eh! what were you saying, my young lord?"

"Bampfylde! has he got clean off again, after this? Where is he? Can you tell me —for the sake of others if not for your own?"

"For mine!—Would it mend me to tell upon him?—Nay, nay, you'll never take him —never now—but he'll die—like the rest of us—that is what puts things square, my young

lord—death!—it settles all; you'll find him some place on the green turf—we were aye a family that liked the green grass underneath us—you'll find him—as peaceable as me."

"Oh, Bampfylde," cried Geoff, "keep up your courage a little, the men will come directly and carry you to Stanton."

"To carry me—to the kirkyard—that's my place; and put green turf over me—nothing but green turf. So long as you will be kind to old 'Lizabeth; she'll live—she's not the kind that dies—and not one of us to the fore! What did we do—we or our fathers?" said the vagrant solemnly. "But, oh, that's true, true—that's God's word: neither he did it nor his fathers—but that the works of God might be manifest. Eh, but I cannot see—I cannot see how the work of God is in it. My eyes—there's not much good in my eyes now."

Geoff kneeled beside the dying man not knowing what to do or say. Should he speak to him of religion? Should he question him about his own hard fate, that they might bring it home to the culprit? But Bampfylde was not able for either of these subjects. He was wading in the vague and misty country which is between life and death. He threw out his arms in the languor and restlessness of dying,

and one of them dropped so that the fingers dipped in the little brook. This brought another gleam of faint pleasure to his pallid face.

"Water—give me some—to drink," he murmured, moving his lips. And then, as Geoff brought it to him in the hollow of a leaf, the only thing he could think of, and moistened his lips and bathed his forehead, "Thank you, Lily," he said. "That's pleasant, oh, that's pleasant. And what was it brought you here—*you* here?—they're all safe, the young ones—thanks to——. Eh! it's not Lily—but I thought I saw Lily; it's you, my young lord?"

"Yes, I am here—lean on me, Bampfylde. What can I do for you, what can I do?" Geoff had never seen death, and he trembled with awe and solemn reverence, far more deeply moved than the dying vagrant, who was floating away on gentle waves of unconsciousness.

"Ay, Lily—d'ye hear her calling?—the house is dark, and the night's fine. But let's go to her—let's go; he was aye the last, though she likes him best." Bampfylde raised himself suddenly with a half convulsive movement. "Poor 'Lizabeth!—poor old 'Lizabeth—all gone—all gone!" he said.

And what an hour Geoff spent supporting the poor head, and moistening the dry lips of the man who was dead, yet could not die! He did not know there had been such struggles in the world.

CHAPTER IX.

A TRAITOR.

Mr. Pennithorne was at the Castle almost all the day during which so many things occurred. While the children wandered in the wood and young Lord Stanton went in search of them, the vicar could not leave the centre of anxiety. There was no possibility of going upon that quest till the evening, and good Mr. Pen thought it his bounden duty to stay with John to "take off his attention," to distract his mind if possible from the object of his anxieties. It was all John Musgrave could do, by way of consideration for an old friend, to put up with these attentions, but he managed to do so without betraying his impatience, and Mr. Pen thought he had performed the first duty of friendship. He suggested everything he could think of that might have happened; most of his suggestions going to prove that Lilias was in very great peril indeed, though

she might be saved by various ingenious ways. And he took Mary aside and shook his head, and said he was afraid it was a very bad business. He believed, good man, that he was of the greatest use to them both, and congratulated himself on having stayed to discharge this Christian duty. But Mrs. Pen at the vicarage got cross and nervous, and did not think her husband was doing his duty to his home. When a telegram came in the afternoon, she was not only curious but frightened —for telegrams she thought were always messages of evil. What could it tell but harm? Perhaps that her father had been taken ill (Mr. Pen himself had no family, nor anybody to speak of belonging to him); perhaps that the investment had gone wrong in which all their little money was. She tore it open in great agitation, and read as follows:—

"*John Musgrave is in the county and near you. Do you remember what is your duty as a magistrate, and what is the penalty of not performing it?*"

Mrs. Pen read this alarming missive two or three times over before she could understand what it meant. John Musgrave! By degrees it became clear to her. This was why her

husband deserted her, and spent his whole day at the Castle. He a magistrate, whose first duty it was to send John Musgrave to prison. The penalty—what was the penalty? The poor woman was in such a frenzy of agitation and terror that she did not know what to believe. What could they do to him if it was found out? She went to the window and looked for him; she went out and walked to the garden gate; she was not able to keep still. The penalty—what was it? Could they put him in prison instead of the criminal he allowed to go free? That seemed the most natural thing, and imagination conjured up before her the dreadful scene of Mr. Pen's arrest, perhaps when he was going to church, perhaps when the house was full of people—everybody seeing—everybody knowing it. Mrs. Pen saw her husband dragged along the road in handcuffs before she came to an end of her imaginations. Was there nothing she could do to save him? She was ready to put herself in the breach, to say, like a heroine, "Take me, and let him go free?" but it did not appear to her likely that the myrmidons of the law would pay any attention to such a touching interposition. Then it occurred to her to look who it was, a thing she had

not noticed at first, who had sent this kind warning. But this alarmed her more and more. It was some one who called himself "Friend," who had taken the trouble, from a distant place in the midland counties, to telegraph thus to Mr. Pennithorne. A friend —it was then an anonymous warning, a very alarming thing indeed to the vulgar mind. Mrs. Pen worked herself up into a state of intense nervous agitation. She sent for the gardener that she might send him at once to the Castle for her husband. But before he came another train of reflections came across her mind. John Musgrave was her William's friend. He was devoted to the family generally, and to this member of it in particular. Was he not capable of going to prison—of letting himself be handcuffed and dragged along the public road, and cast into a dungeon, rather than give up his friend to justice? Oh, what could the poor woman do? If she could but take some step—do something to save him before he knew.

All at once there occurred to Mrs. Pen a plan of action which would put everything right—save William in spite of himself, and without his knowledge, and put John Musgrave in the hands of justice without any action of

his which could be supposed unfriendly. She herself, Mrs. Pen, did not even know John, so that if she betrayed him it would be nothing unkind, nobody could blame her, not Mary Musgrave herself. When the gardener came, instead of sending him to the Castle for her husband, she sent him to the village to order the fly in which she occasionally paid visits; and she put on her best clothes with a quiver of anxiety and terror in her heart. She put the telegram in her pocket, and drove away—with a half satisfaction in her own appearance and half pride in bidding the man drive to Elfdale, to Sir Henry Stanton's, mingling with the real anxiety in her heart. She was frightened too at what she was about to do—but nobody could expect from her any consideration for John Musgrave, whom she had never seen; whereas, to save her husband from the consequences of his foolish faithfulness, was not that the evident and first duty of a wife? It was a long drive, and she had many misgivings as she drove along, with plenty of time to consider and reconsider all the arguments she had already gone over; but yet when she got to Elfdale she did not seem to have had any time to think at all. She was hurried in, before she knew, to Sir Henry

Stanton's presence. He was the nearest magistrate of any importance, and Mrs. Pen had a slight visiting acquaintance, of which she was very proud, with Lady Stanton. Had she repented at the last of her mission, she could always make out to herself that it was Lady Stanton she had come to visit. But it was Sir Henry whom she asked for, alarm for her husband at the last moment getting the better of her fears.

Sir Henry received her with a great deal of surprise. What could the little country clergyman's wife want with him? But he was still more surprised when he heard her errand. John Musgrave at home!—within reach—daring justice—defying the law! His wife had told him of some supposed discovery which she at least imagined likely to clear Musgrave, by bringing in another possible criminal, but that must be some merely nonsensical theory he had no doubt, such as women and boys are apt to indulge:—for if anything could be worse than women, Sir Henry felt it was boys inspired by women, and carrying out their fancies. Therefore he had paid very little regard to what his wife said. Mrs. Pennithorne had the advantage of rousing him into excitement. What! come back!—daring

justice to touch him—insulting the family of the man he had killed, and the laws of the country! Sir Henry fumed at the audacity, the evident absence of all remorse or compunction. "He must be a shameless, heartless ruffian," he said; and then he looked at the harmless little woman who had brought him this news. "It is very public-spirited to bestir yourself in the matter," he said. "Have you seen the man, Mrs. Pennithorne, or how have you come to know?"

"I have not seen him, Sir Henry. I don't know anything about him, therefore nobody could say that it was unkind in *me*. How can you have any feeling for a person you never saw? I got—the news—to-day when my husband was at the Castle—*he* did not tell me—he has nothing to do with it. He is a great friend of the Musgraves, Sir Henry; and I was told if he knew and did not tell it would bring him into trouble; so I came to you. I thought it was a wife's duty. I did not wait till he came in to show him the telegram, but I came straight on to you."

"Then you got a telegram?"

"Did I say a telegram?" she said, frightened. "Oh—I did not think what I was saying. But why should I conceal it? Yes, indeed,

Sir Henry, this afternoon there came a telegram. I have never had a moment's peace since then. I thought at first I would send for him and see what he would do, but then, I thought—he thinks so much of the Musgraves—no doubt it would be a trouble to him to go against them; and so I thought before he came in I would come to you. I would not do anything without consulting my husband in any ordinary way, indeed, I assure you, Sir Henry. I am not a woman of that kind; but in a thing that might have brought him into such trouble——"

"And is that telegram all you know, Mrs. Pennithorne?"

A horrible dread that he was going to disapprove of her, instead of commending her, ran through her mind.

"It is all," she said, faltering; "I have it in my pocket."

To show the telegram was the last thing in her mind, yet she produced it now in impetuous self-defence. Having made such a sacrifice as she had done, acted on her own authority, incurred the expense of the fly, absented herself from home without anybody's knowledge (though William was far too much wrapped up in the Musgraves to be aware of

that), it was more than Mrs. Pennithorne could bear to have her motives thus unappreciated. She held out the telegram without pausing to think. He took it, and read it, with a curious look on his face. Sir Henry took a low view of wives, and of women in general. If she belonged to him how he would put her down, this meddling woman! but he was glad to learn what she had to tell, and to be able to act upon it. To approve of your informant and to use the information obtained are two very different things.

"This is a threat," he said; "this is a very curious communication, Mrs. Pennithorne. Do you know who sent it? Friend! Is it a friend in the abstract, or does your husband know any one of the name?"

"I don't know who it is. Oh no, Sir Henry. William knows no one—no one whom I don't know! His friends are my friends. My husband is the best of men. He has not a secret from me. If I may seem to be acting behind his back it is only to save him, Sir Henry—only for his good."

"You are acting in the most public-spirited way, Mrs. Pennithorne; but it is very strange, and I wonder who could have sent it. Do you know any one at this place?"

"Nobody," she said, composing herself, yet not quite satisfied either, for public-spirited was but a poor sort of praise. She was conscious that she was betraying her husband as well as John Musgrave, and nothing but distinct applause and assurance that she had saved her William could have put her conscience quite at ease.

"It is very odd—very odd," he said; "but I am very much obliged to you for bringing this information to me, and I shall lose no time in acting upon it. For a long time, a very long time, this man has evaded the law; but it will not do to defy it—it never does to defy it. He shall find that it is more watchful than he thought."

"And, Sir Henry, of course it is of my husband I must think first. You will not say he knew? You will not let him get into trouble about it?—a clergyman, a man whom every one looks up to! You will save him from the penalty, Sir Henry? Indeed I have no reason to believe he knew at all; he has never seen this thing. I don't suppose he knows at all. But he might be so easily got into trouble! Oh, Sir Henry! you will not let them bring in William's name?"

"I shall take care that Mr. Pennithorne is

not mentioned at all," he said, with a polite bow; but he did not add, "You are a heroic woman and you have saved your husband," which was the thing poor Mrs. Pen wanted to support her. She put back her telegram in her pocket very humbly, and rose up, feeling herself more a culprit than a heroine, to go away. At this moment Lady Stanton herself came in hurriedly.

"I heard Mrs. Pennithorne was here," she said, with a half apology to her husband, "and I thought I might come and ask what was the last news from Penninghame—if there was any change. I am not interrupting —business?"

"No; you will be interested in the news Mrs. Pennithorne brings me," said Sir Henry, with a certain satisfaction. "Mr. Musgrave's son John, in whom you have always shown so much interest, Walter Stanton's murderer——"

"No, no," she said, with a shudder, folding her hands instinctively; "no, no!" The colour went out of her very lips. She was about to hear that he had died. He must have died on the very day she saw him. She listened, looking at her husband all pale and awe-stricken, with a gasp in her throat.

—"Is here," said Sir Henry, deliberately. "Here, where it was done, defying the law."

Mary uttered a great cry of mingled relief and despair.

"Then it was he—it was he—and no ghost!" she cried.

"What! you knew and never told me? I am not so happy in my wife," said Sir Henry, with a threatening smile, "as Mr. Pennithorne."

"Oh, was it he—was it he?—no spirit—but himself? God help him," cried Lady Stanton, with sudden tears. "No, I could not have told you, for I thought it was an apparition. And I would not, Henry," she added with a kind of generous passion, "I would not if I could. How could I betray an innocent man?"

"Happily Mrs. Pennithorne has saved you the trouble," he said, getting up impatiently from his seat. He resented his wife's silence, but he scorned the other woman who had brought him the news. "Do not let me disturb you, ladies, but this is too important for delay. The warrant must be out to-night. I trust to your honour, or I might arrest you both," he said with a sneer—"two fair prisoners—lest you should warn the man and defeat justice again."

"Henry, you are not going to arrest him—to *arrest* him—after what I told you? I told you that Geoff——"

"Geoff! send Geoff to your nursery, to play with your children, Lady Stanton," he cried, in rising wrath, "rather than make a puppet of him to carry out your own ideas. I have had enough of boys' nonsense and women's. Go to your tea-table, my lady, and leave me to manage my own concerns."

Then Lady Stanton—was it not natural?—with a white, self-contained passion, turned upon the other commonplace woman by her side, who stood trembling before the angry man, yet siding with him in her heart, as such women do.

"And is it you that have betrayed him?" she cried; "do you know that your husband owes everything to him—everything? Oh, it cannot be Mr. Pen's doing—he loved them all too well. If it is you, how will you bear to have his blood on your head? God knows what they may prove against him, or what they may do to him; but whatever it is, it will be a lie, and his blood will be on your head. Oh, how could you, a woman, betray an innocent man?"

Lady Stanton's passion, Sir Henry's lowering

countenance, the sudden atmosphere of tragedy in which she found herself, were too much for poor Mrs. Pen. She burst into hysterical crying, and dropped down upon the floor between these two excited people. Perhaps it was as good a way as any other of extricating herself out of the most difficult position in which a poor little, well-intentioned clergy-woman had ever been.

CHAPTER X.

THE MOTHER.

THE afternoon of the day on which poor Bampfylde died was bright and fine, one of those beautiful October days which are more lovely in their wistful brightness, more touching, than any other period of the year—Summer still lingering, the smile on her lip and the tear in her eye, dressed out in borrowed splendour, her own fair garniture of flowers and greenery worn out, but wearing her Indian mantle with a tender grace, subdued and sweet. The late mignonette overblown, yet fragrant, was sweet in the little village gardens, underneath the pale China roses that still kept up a little glow of blossom. Something had excited the village; the people were at their doors, and gathered in groups about. Miss Price, the dressmaker, held a little court. There was evidently something to tell, something to talk over more

than was usual. The few passengers who were about stayed to hear, and each little knot of people which had managed to secure a new listener was happy. They were all in full tide of talk, commenting upon and discussing some occurrence with a certain hush, at the same time, of awe about them, which showed that the news was not of a joyful character—when some one came down through the village whose appearance raised the excitement to fever point. It was the well-known figure of the old woman in her grey cloak—so well known up the water and down the water, which thus suddenly appeared among them—old 'Lizabeth Bampfylde! The gossips shrank closer together, and gazed at her with eager curiosity all, with sympathy some. They drew away from her path with a feeling which was half reverence and half fear. "Does she know—do you think she knows?" some of them asked; and exclamations of "Poor old body—poor woman," were rife among the kind-hearted; but all under their breath. 'Lizabeth took no notice of the people in her path; perhaps she did not even see them. She was warm with her long walk from the fells, and had thrown off her hood and knotted her red handkerchief

over her cap. She went along thus with the long swing of her still vigorous limbs, stately and self-absorbed. Whatever she knew, her mind was too much occupied to take any notice of the people in her way. She had walked far, and she had far to walk still. She went on steadily through the midst of them without a pause, looking neither to the right nor the left. There was a tragic directness in the very way she moved, going straight as a bird flies, at least as straight as the houses permitted, minding no windings of the road. The people in front of her stood back and whispered; the people behind closed upon her path. Did she know? Would she have had the fortitude to come walking down here all this long way had she known? Was she going to Stanton, where *they* were? Last of all, timidly, the people said among themselves, "Should not some one tell her?—some one should speak to her;" but by this time she had passed through the village, and they all felt with a sensation of relief that it was too late.

'Lizabeth walked on steadily along the water-side. It was a long way that she had still before her. She was going all the way down the water to Sir Henry Stanton's, as

Mrs. Pennithorne had gone the day before. The walk was nothing to her, and the long silence of it was grateful to her mind. She knew nothing of what had happened on the other side of the lake. Up in her little house among the hills, all alone in the strange cessation of work, the dead leisure which seemed to have fallen upon her, she had thought of everything till her head and her heart ached alike. Everything now seemed to have gone wrong. Her daughter dead in exile, and her daughter's husband still a banished man, all for the sake of him who was roaming over the country, a fugitive escaped from her care. The life of her son Dick had been ruined by the same means. And now the cycle of misfortune was enlarging. The little boy, who was the heir of the Musgraves, was lost too, because he had no one to protect him—Lily's child; and the other Lily, the little lady whom she felt to be her own representative as well as Lily's, who could tell what would become of her? It seemed to 'Lizabeth that this child was the most precious of all. All the rest had suffered for the sake of her madman; but the second Lily, the little princess, who had sprung from her common stock, nothing must touch. Yet

it cannot be said that it was for Lily's sake that she made up her mind at last; it was nothing so simple, it was a combination and complication of many motives. He was gone out of her hands who had been for years the absorbing occupation of her life. Dick was after him, it was true; but if Dick failed, how was he to be got without public help? and that help could not be given until the whole story was told. Then her own loneliness wrought upon her, and all the whispers and echoes that circled about the cottage, when he was not there. Her son, ill-fated companion, the ruin of all who had any connection with him, absorbed her so much in general, that she had no time to survey the surroundings and think of all that was, and had been, and might be. Was it he after all that was the cause of all the suffering? What did he know of it? The story of Lily and of John Musgrave was a blank to him. He knew nothing of what they had suffered, was innocent of it in reality. Had he known, would he not have given himself up a hundred times rather than the innocent should suffer for him? Was it he, then, or his mother, who was the cause of all? Several times, during their long agony, such thoughts had overwhelmed

'Lizabeth's mind. They had come over her in full force when the children came to the Castle, and then it was that she had been brought to the length of revealing her secret to young Lord Stanton. Now everything was desperate about her; the little boy lost, the madman himself lost; no telling at any moment what misery and horror might come next. She thought this over day after day as the time passed, and no news came; waiting in the great loneliness, with her doors all open, that he might come in if some new impulse, or some touch of use and wont should lead him back, her ears intent to hear every sound; her mind prepared (she thought), for anything; fresh violence, perhaps violence to himself; miserable death, terrible discovery. She thought she heard his wild whoops and cries every time the wind raved among the hills; if a mountain stream rushed down a little quicker than usual, swollen by the rain, over its pebbles, she thought it was his hurrying steps. It was always of him that her thoughts were, not of her other son who was pursuing the madman all about, subject to the same accidents, and who might perhaps be his victim instead of his captor. She never thought of that. But she was driven

at last to a supreme resolution. Nobody could doubt his madness, could think it was a feint put on to escape punishment, now. And God, who was angry, might be propitiated if at last she made Him, though unwillingly, this sacrifice, this homage to justice and truth. This was the idea which finally prevailed in her mind. She would go and tell her story, and perhaps an angry God would accept, and restore the wanderer to her. If he were safe, safe even in prison, in some asylum, it would be better at least than his wild career of madness among all the dangers of the hills. She had risen in the morning from her uneasy bed, where she lay half-dressed, always watching, listening to every sound, with this determination upon her. She would propitiate God. She would do this thing she ought to have done so long ago. She did not deny that she ought to have done it, and now certainly she would do it, and God would be satisfied, and the tide of fate would turn.

All this struggle had not been without leaving traces upon her. Her ruddy colour, the colour of exposure as well as of health and vigour, was not altogether gone, but she was more brown than ruddy, and this partial paleness and the extreme gravity of her

countenance added to the stately aspect she bore. She might have been a peasant-queen, as she moved along with her steady, long, swinging footstep, able for any exertion, above fatigue or common weakness. A mile or two more or less, what did that matter? It did not occur to her to go to Mr. Pennithorne, though he was nearer, with her story. She went straight to Sir Henry Stanton. He had a family right to be the avenger of blood. It would be all the compensation that could be made to the Stantons, as well as a sacrifice propitiating God. And now that she had made up her mind there was no detail from which she shrank. 'Lizabeth never remarked the pitying and wondering looks which were cast upon her. She went on straight to her end with a sense of the solemnity and importance of her mission, which perhaps gave her a certain support. It was no light thing that she was about to do. That there was a certain commotion and agitation about Elfdale did not strike her in the excited state of her mind. It was natural that agitation should accompany her wherever she went. It harmonized with her mood, and seemed to her (unconsciously) a homage and respectful adhesion of nature to what she was about to do.

The great door was open, the hall empty, the way all clear to the room in which Sir Henry held his little court of justice. 'Lizabeth had come by instinct to the great hall door—a woman with such a tragical object does not steal in behind-backs or enter like one of the unconsidered poor. She went in unchallenged, seeing nobody except one of the girls, who peeped out from a door, and retreated again at sight of her. 'Lizabeth saw nothing strange in all this. She went in, more majestically, more slowly than ever, like a woman in a procession—a woman marching to the stake. What stake, what burning could be so terrible? Two of the county police were at the open door; they looked at her with wondering awe, and let her pass. What could any one say to her? An army would have let her pass—*the mother!*—for they knew, though she did not know. 'Lizabeth saw but vaguely a number of people in the room—so much the better; let all hear who would hear. It would be so much the greater propitiation to an outraged heaven. She came in with a kind of dumb state about her, everybody giving way before her. "The mother!" they all said to each other with dismay, yet excitement. Some one brought

her a chair with anxious and pitying looks. She put it away with a wave of her hand, yet made a little curtsey of acknowledgment in old-fashioned politeness. It never occurred to her mind to inquire why she was received with such obsequious attention. She advanced to the table at which Sir Henry sat. He too looked pityingly, kindly at her, not like his usual severity. God had prepared everything for her atonement—was it not an earnest of its acceptance that He should thus have put every obstacle out of her way?

"Sir Henry Stanton," she said, "I've come to make you acquaint with a story that all the country should have heard long ago. I've not had the courage to tell it till this moment when the Lord has given me strength. Bid them take pen and paper and put it all down in hand of write, and I'll set my name to it. It's to clear them that are innocent that I've come to speak, and to let it be known who was guilty; but it wasna him that was guilty —it wasna him—but the madness in him," she said, her voice breaking for a moment. "My poor distracted lad!"

"Give her a seat," said Sir Henry. "My poor woman, if you have any information to give about this terrible event——"

"Ay, I have information—plenty information. Nay, I want no seat. I'm standing as if I was at the judgment-seat of God; there's where I've stood this many a year, and been judged, but aye held fast. What is man, a worm, to strive with his Maker?—but me, I've done that, that am but a woman. I humbly crave the Almighty's pardon, and I've made up my mind to do justice now—at the last."

The people about looked at each other, questioning one another what it was, all but two, who knew what she meant. Young Lord Stanton, who was close to the table, looked across at a tall stranger behind, by whom the village constable was standing, and who replied to Geoff's look by a melancholy half smile. The others looked at each other, and 'Lizabeth, though she saw no one, saw this wave of meaning, and felt it natural too.

"Ay," she said, "you may wonder; and you'll wonder more before all's done. I am a woman that was the mother of three; bonny bairns—though I say it that ought not; ye might have ranged the country from Carlisle to London town, and not found their like. My Lily was the beauty of the whole water; up or down, there was not one that you would look at when my lass was by. What

need I speak? You all know that as well as me."

The swell of pride in her as she spoke filled the whole company with a thrill of admiration and wonder, like some great actress disclosing the greatness of impassioned nature in the simplest words. She was old, but she was beautiful too. She looked round upon them with the air of a dethroned empress, from whom the recollection of her imperial state could never depart. Rachel could not have done it, nor perhaps any other of her profession. There was the sweetness of remembered triumph in the midst of the most tragic depths; a gleam of pride and pleasure out of the background of shame and pain.

"Ah! that's all gone and past," she went on with a sigh. "My eldest lad was more than handsome, he was a genius as well. He was taken away from me when he was but a little lad—and never came home again till—till the devil got hold of him, and made him think shame of his poor mother, and the poor place he was born in. I would never have blamed him. I would have had him hold his head with the highest, as he had a right—for had he not gotten that place for himself?—but when he came back to the water-side a

great gentleman and scholar, and would never have let on where he belonged to, one that is not here to bear the blame," said 'Lizabeth, setting her teeth—"one that is gone to his account—and well I wot the Almighty has punished him for his ill deeds—betrayed my lad. Some of the gentry were good to him—as good as the angels in heaven—but some were as devils, that being their nature. And this is what I've got to say:" here she made a pause, raised herself to her full height, and threw off the red kerchief from her head in her agitation. "I've come here to accuse before God, and you, Sir Henry, my son, Abel Bampfylde, him I was most proud of and loved best, of the murder of young Lord Stanton, which took place on the morning of the 2nd of August, eighteen hundred and forty-five—fifteen years ago and more."

The sensation that followed is indescribable. Sir Henry Stanton himself rose from his seat, excited by wonder, horror, and pity, beyond all ordinary rule. The bystanders had but a vague sense of the extraordinary revelation she made, so much were they moved by the more extraordinary passion in her, and the position in which she stood. "My good woman, my poor woman!" he cried, "this

last dreadful tragedy has gone to your brain —and no wonder. You don't know what you say."

She smiled—mournfully enough, but still it was a smile—and shook her head. "If you had said it as often to yourself as I have done —night and day—night and day; open me when I'm dead, and you'll find it here," she cried—all unaware that this same language of passion had been used before—and pressing her hand upon her breast. "The second of August, eighteen hundred and forty-five—if you had said it over as often as me!"

There was a whisper all about, and the lawyer of the district, who acted as Sir Henry's clerk on important occasions, stooped towards him and said something. "The date is right. Yes, yes, I know the date is right," Sir Henry said, half-angrily. Then added, "There must be insanity in the family. What more like the effort of a diseased imagination than to link the old crime of fifteen years ago with what has happened to-day?"

"Is it me that you call insane?" said 'Lizabeth. "Eh, if it was but me! But well I know what I'm saying." Then the wild looks of all around her suddenly impressed the old woman, too much occupied hitherto

to think what their looks meant. She turned round upon them with slowly awakening anxiety. "You're looking strange at me," she cried, "you're all looking strange at me! What is this you're saying that has happened to-day? Oh, my lad is mad!—he's roaming the hills, and Dick after him; he does na know that he's doing; he's out of his senses; it's no ill-meaning. Lads, some of you tell me, I'm going distracted. What has happened to-day?"

The change in her appearance was wonderful; her solemn stateliness and abstraction were gone. Here was something she did not know. The flush of anxiety came to her cheeks, her eyes contracted, her lips fell apart. "Tell me," she said, "for the love of God!"

No one moved. They looked at each other with pale, alarmed faces. How could they tell her? Geoff stepped forward and took her by the arm very gently. "Will you come with me?" he said. "Something has happened; something that will grieve you deeply. I—I promised Dick to tell you, but not here. Won't you come with me?"

She drew herself out of his grasp with some impatience. "There's been some new trouble," she said to herself—"some new trouble! No

doubt more violence. Oh, God, forgive him; but he does not know what he's doing. It's you, my young lord?—you know it's true what I've been saying. But this new trouble, what is it?—more blood? Oh, tell me the worst; I can bear it all, say, even if he was dead."

"'Lizabeth," said Geoff, with tears in his eyes—and again everybody looked on as at a tragedy—"you are a brave woman; you have borne a great deal in your life. He is dead; but that is not all."

She did not note, nor perhaps hear, the last words. How should she? The first was enough. She stood still in the midst of them, all gazing at her, with her hands clasped before her. For a moment she said nothing. The last drop of blood seemed to ebb from her brown cheeks. Then she raised her face upward, with a smile upon it. "The Lord God be praised," she said; "He's taken my lad before me."

And when they brought to her the seat she had rejected, 'Lizabeth allowed herself to be placed upon it. The extreme tension of both body and mind seemed to have relaxed. The look of tragic endurance left her face. A softened aspect of suffering, a kind of faint

smile, like a wan sunbeam, stole over it. The moisture came to her strained eyes. "Gone? Is he gone at last? On the hill-side was it?—in some wild corner, where none but God could be near, not his mother? And me that was dreading and dreading I would be taken first; for who would have patience like his mother? But after all, you know, neighbours, the father comes foremost; and had more to do with him—more to do with him—than even me."

"Take her away, Geoff," said Sir Henry. The men were all overcome with this scene, and with the knowledge of what remained to be told. Sir Henry was not easily moved, but there was something even in *his* throat which choked him. He could not bear it, though it was nothing to him. "Geoff, this is not a place to tell her all you have got to tell. Take her away—take her—to Lady Stanton."

"Nay, nay," she said; "it's my death-doom, but it's not like other sorrow—I know well what grief is—when I heard for certain my Lily was dead and gone, and me never to see her more. But this is not the same; it's my death, but I cannot call it sorrow; not like the loss of a son. I'm glad too, if you understand that. Poor lad!—my Abel! Ay, ay; you'll not tell me but what God under-

stands, and is more pitiful of His handiwork, say than the like of you or me."

"Come with me," said Geoff, taking her by the arm. "Come, and I will tell you everything, my poor 'Lizabeth. You know you have a friend in me."

"Ay, my young lord; but first let them write down what I've said, and let me put my name to it. All the more because he's dead and gone this day."

"Everything shall be done as you wish," said Geoff, anxiously; "but come with me—come with me—my poor woman; this is not a place for you."

"No," she said—she would not rise from her seat. She turned round to the table where Sir Henry and his clerk sat. "I must end my work now it's begun—I've another son, my kind gentlemen, and he will never forgive me if I do not end my work. Write it out and let me sign. I have but my Dick to think of now."

A thrill of horror ran through the little assembly: to tell her that he too was gone, who would dare to do it? John Musgrave, whom she had not seen, stood behind, and covered his face with his hands. Sir Henry, for all his steady nerves and unsympathetic

mind, fell back in his chair with a low groan. Only young Geoff, his features all quivering, the tears in his eyes, stood by her side.

"Humour her," he said. "Let her have her way. None of us at this moment surely could refuse her her way."

The lawyer nodded. He had a heart of flesh and not of stone; and 'Lizabeth sat and waited, with her hands clasped together, her head a little raised, her countenance beyond the power of painting. Grief and joy mingled in it, and relief and anguish. Her eyes were dilated and wet, but she shed no tears; their very orbits seemed enlarged, and there was a quivering smile upon her mouth—a smile such as makes spectators weep. "Here I and sorrow sit." There was never a king worthy the name but would have felt his state as nothing in this presence. But there was no struggle in her now. She had yielded, and all was peace about her. She would have waited for days had it been necessary. That what she had begun should be ended was the one thing above all.

A man came hurriedly in as all the people present waited round, breathless and reverential, for the completion of her testimony. Their business, whatever it was, was arrested

by force of nature. The kind old Dogberry from the village, who had been standing by John Musgrave's side by way of guarding him, put up his hand to his forehead and made a rustic bow to his supposed prisoner. "I always knowed that was how it would turn out," he said, as he hobbled off, to which John Musgrave replied only by a faint smile, but stood still, as motionless as a picture, though all semblance of restraint had melted away. But while all waited thus reverentially a sudden messenger came rushing in, and addressing Sir Henry in a loud voice, announced that the coroner had sent him to make preparations for the inquest. "And he wants to know what time it will be most convenient for the jury to inspect the two bodies; and if they are both in the same place; and if it's true."

There was a universal hush, at which the man stopped in amazement. Then his eye, guided by the looks of the others, fell upon the old woman in the chair. She had heard him, and she was roused. Her face turned towards him with a growing wonder. "She here! O Lord, forgive me!" he cried, and fell back.

"Two bodies!" she said. A shudder came over her. She got up slowly from her seat

and looked round upon them all. "Two—another, another!—oh, my unhappy lad!" She wrung her hands, and looked round upon them, "Maybe another house made desolate; maybe another woman—Will you tell me who the other was?"

Here the labouring man, who had been with Wild Bampfylde on the hill-side, and who was standing by, suddenly succumbed to the strange horror and anguish of the moment. He burst out loudly into tears, crying like a child. "Oh, poor 'Lizabeth, poor 'Lizabeth!" he cried; he could not bear any more.

'Lizabeth looked at this man with the air of one awakening from a dream. Then she turned a look of inquiry upon those around her. No one would meet her eye. They shrank one behind another away from her, and more than one man burst forth into momentary weeping like the first, and some covered their faces in their hands. Even Geoff, sobbing like a child, turned away from her for a moment. She held out her hands to them with a pitiful cry, "Say it's not that—say it's not that!" she cried. The shrill scream of anguish ran through the house. It brought Lady Stanton and all the women shuddering from every corner. They all knew what it was and how

it was. The mother! What more needed to be said? They came in and surrounded her, the frivolous girls and the rough women from the kitchen, altogether, while the men stood about looking on. Not even Sir Henry could resist the passion of horror and sorrow which had taken possession of the place. He cried with a voice all hoarse and trembling, "Take her away!—take her away!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAGEDY ENDS.

'Lizabeth Bampfylde went on to Stanton that same afternoon, where the remains of her two sons were lying. But she would not go in Lady Stanton's carriage.

"Nay, nay; carriages were never made for me. I will walk, my lady. It's best for me, body and soul."

She had recovered herself after the anguish of that discovery. Before the sympathisers round her had ceased to sob, 'Lizabeth had raised herself up in the midst of them like an old tower. The storm had raged round her, but had not crushed her. Her face and even her lips had lost all trace of colour, her eyes were hollow and widened out in their sockets, like caves to hold the slow welling out of salt tears. There was a convulsive trembling now in the pose of her fine head, and in her hands; but her strength was not touched.

"Oh, how can you walk?" Lady Stanton said; "you are not able for it."

"I am able for anything it's God's pleasure to send," she said; "though it's little even He can do to me now." The women stood round her with pitiful looks, some of them weeping unrestrainedly; but the tears that 'Lizabeth shed came one by one, slow gathering, rarely falling. She put on her red handkerchief over her cap again, with hands that were steady enough till that twitch of nervous movement took them. "It should be black," she said, with a half-smile; "ay, I should be a' black from head to foot, from head to foot, if there was one left to mind." Then she turned upon them with again her little stately curtsey. "I'm not a woman of many words, and ye may judge what heart I have to speak; but I thank ye all," and, with once more a kind of smile, she set out upon her way.

John Musgrave had been standing by; he had spoken to no one, not even to Lady Stanton, who, trembling with a consciousness that he was there, had not been able, in the presence of this great anguish, to think of any other. He, and his story, and his return, altogether had been thrown entirely into the background by these other events. He came

forward now, and followed 'Lizabeth out of the gate. "I am going with you," he said. The name "mother" was on his lips, but he dared not say it. She gave a slight glance at him, and recognised him. But if one had descended from heaven to accompany her, what would that have been to 'Lizabeth? It was as if they had parted yesterday.

"Ay," she said; then, after a pause, "it's you that has the best right."

The tragedy had closed very shortly after that penultimate chapter which ended with the death of Wild Bampfylde. When the carriage and its attendants arrived to remove him to Stanton he was lying on Geoff's shoulder, struggling for his last breath. It was too late then to disturb the agony. The men stood about reverentially till the last gasp was over, then carried the vagrant tenderly to the foot of the hill, with a respect which no one had ever shown him before. One of the party, a straggler, who had strayed further up the dell in the interval of waiting, saw traces above among the broken bushes, which made him call some of his comrades as soon as their first duty was done. And there on the little plateau, where Walter Stanton's body had been found fifteen years before, lay that of his

murderer, the madman who had wrought so much misery. He was found lying across the stream as if he had stooped to drink, and had not been able to raise himself. The running water had washed all traces of murder from him. When they lifted him, with much precaution, not knowing whether his stillness might mean a temporary swoon, or a feint of madness to beguile them, his pale marble countenance seemed a reproach to the lookers-on. Even with the aspect of his victim fresh in their eyes, the men could not believe that this had ever been a furious maniac or manslayer. One of them went to look for Geoff, and to arrest the progress of the other funeral procession. "There's another one, my lord," he said, "all torn and tattered in his clothes, but with the look of a king." And Geoff, notwithstanding his horror, could not but look with a certain awe upon the worn countenance. It might have been that of a man worn with great labours, with thought, with the high musings of philosophy, or schemes of statesmanship. He was carried down and laid by the side of his brother whom he had killed. All the cottagers, the men from the field, the passengers on the way, stood looking on, or followed the strange procession. Such a piece

of news, as may be supposed, flew over the country like wildfire. There was no family better known than the Bampfyldes, notwithstanding their humble rank. The handsome Bampfyldes: and here they had come to an end!

Old 'Lizabeth, as she made her way to Stanton, was followed everywhere by the same atmosphere of sympathy. The women came out to their doors to look after her, and even strong men sobbed as she passed. What would become of her, poor lonely woman? She gave a great cry when she saw the two pale faces lying peacefully together. They were both men in the full prime of life, in the gravity of middle age, fully devoloped, strongly knit, men all formed for life, and full of its matured vigour. They lay side by side as they had lain when they were children. That one of them had taken the life of the other, who could have imagined possible? The poacher and vagrant looked like some great general nobly dead in battle, the madman like a sage. Death had redeemed them from their misery, their poverty, the misfortunes which were greater than either. Their mother gave a great cry of anguish yet pride as she stood beside them. "My lads," she cried, "my two

handsome lads, my bonny boys!" 'Lizabeth had come to that pass when words have no meaning to express the depths and the heights. What could a woman say who sees her sons stretched dead before her? She uttered one inarticulate wail of anguish, as a dumb creature might have done, and then her overwrought soul reeling, tottered almost on the verge of reason, and she cried out in pride and agony, "My handsome lads! my bonny boys!"

"Come home with me," said John Musgrave. "We have made a bad business of it, 'Lizabeth, you and I. This is all our sacrifice has come to. Nothing left but your wreck of life, and mine. But come home with me. Where I am, there will always be a place for Lily's mother. And there is little Lily still, and she will comfort you——"

"Eh! comfort me!" She smiled at the word. "Nay, I must go to my own house. I thank you, John Musgrave, and I do not deserve it at your hand. This fifteen years it has been me that has murdered you, not my lad yonder, not my Abel. What did he know? And I humbly beg your pardon, and your little bairns' pardon, on my knees—but nay, nay, I must go home. My own house—there is no other place for me."

They came round her and took her hands, and pleaded with her too—Geoff, and his mother, with the tears streaming from her eyes. "Oh, my poor woman, my poor woman!" Lady Stanton cried, "stay here while *they* are here." But nothing moved 'Lizabeth. She made her little curtsey to them all, with that strange smile like a pale light wavering upon her face.

"Nay, nay," she said. "Nay, nay—I humbly thank my lady and my lord, and a' kind friends—but my own house, that is the only place for me."

"But you cannot go so far, if that were all. You must be worn out with walking only—if there was nothing more——"

"Me—worn out!—with walking!" It was a kind of laugh which came from her dry throat. "Ay, very near—very near it—that will come soon, if the Lord pleases. But good-day to you all, and my humble thanks, my lord and my lady—you're kind—kind to give them house-room; till Friday; but they'll give no trouble, no trouble!" she said, with again that something which sounded like a laugh. Laughing or crying, it was all one to 'Lizabeth. The common modes of expression were garments too small for her soul.

"Stay only to-night—it will be dark long before you can be there. Stay to-night," they pleaded. She broke from them with a cry.

"I canna bide this, I canna bide it! I'm wanting the stillness of the fells, and the arms of them about me. Let me be—oh, let me be! There's a moon," she added, abruptly, "and dark or light, I'll never lose my way."

Thus they had to leave her to do as she pleased in the end. She would not eat anything, or even sit down, but went out with her hood over her head into the gathering shadows. They stood watching her till the sound of her steps died out on the way—firm, steady, unfaltering steps. Life and death, and mortal anguish, and wearing care, had done their worst upon old 'Lizabeth. She stood like a rock against them all.

She came down to the funeral on Friday, as she had herself appointed, and saw her sons laid in their grave, and again she was entreated to remain. But even little Lilias, whom her father brought forward to aid the pleadings of the others, could not move her. "Honey-sweet!" she said, with a tender light in her eyes; but she had more room for the children when her heart was full of living cares. It was empty now, and there was no room. A

few weeks after, she was found dying peaceably in her bed, giving all kinds of directions to her children. "Abel will have your father's watch, he aye wanted it from a baby—and Lily gets all my things, as is befitting. They will set her up for her wedding. And Dick, my little Dick, that has aye been the little one—who says I was not thinking of Dick? He's been my prop and my right hand when a' deserted me. The poor little house and the little bit of land, and a' his mother has—who should they be for, but Dick?" Thus she died tranquilly, seeing them all round her; and all that was cruel and bitter in the lot of the Bampfyldes came to an end.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

JOHN MUSGRAVE settled down without any commotion into his natural place in his father's house. The old Squire himself mended from the day when Nello, very timid, but yet brave to repress the signs of his reluctance, was brought into his room. He played with the child as if he had been a child himself, and so grew better day by day, and got out of bed again, and save for a little dragging of one leg as he limped along, brought no external sign of his "stroke" out of his sick-room. But he wrote no more Monographs, studied no more. His life had come back to him as the Syrian lord in the Bible got back his health after his leprosy—"like the flesh of a little child." The Squire recovered after a while the power of taking his part in a conversation, and looked more venerable than ever with his faded colour and subdued forces.

But his real life was all with little Nello, who by and by got quite used to his grandfather, and lorded it over him as children so often do. When the next summer came, they went out together, the Squire generally in a wheeled chair, Nello walking, or riding by his side on the pony his grandpapa had given him. There was no doubt now as to who was heir. When Randolph came to Penninghame, after spending a day and a half in vain researches for Nello, life having become too exciting at that moment at the Castle to leave any one free to send word of the children's safety—he found all doubt and notion of danger over for John—and he himself established in his natural place. Whether the Squire had forgotten everything in his illness, or whether he had understood the story which Mary took care to repeat two or three times very distinctly by his bedside, no one knew. But he never objected to John's presence, made no question about him—accepted him as if he had been always there. Absolutely as if there had been no breach in the household existence at all, the eldest son took his place; and that Nello was the heir was a thing beyond doubt in any reasonable mind. This actual settlement of all difficulties had already come about when

Randolph came. His father took no notice of him, and John, who thought it was his brother's fault that his little son had been so unkindly treated, found it difficult to afford Randolph any welcome. He did not, however, want any welcome in such circumstances. He stayed for a single night, feeling himself coldly looked upon by all. Mr. Pen, who spent half his time at the Castle, more than any one turned a cold shoulder upon his brother clergyman.

"You felt it necessary that the child should go to school quite as much as I did," Randolph said, on the solitary occasion when the matter was discussed.

"Yes, but not to any school," the Vicar said. "I would rather——" he paused for a sufficiently strong image, but it was hard to find; "I would rather—have got up at six o'clock every day, and sacrificed everything—rather than have exposed Nello to the life he had there;—and you who are a father yourself."

"Yes; but my boy has neither a girl's name nor a girl's want of courage. He is not a baby that would flinch at the first rough word. I did not know the nature of the thing," said Randolph, with a sneer. "I have

no acquaintance with any but straightforward and manly ways."

The Vicar followed him out in righteous wrath. He produced from his pocket a hideous piece of pink paper.

"Do you know who sent this?" he asked.

Randolph looked at it, taken aback, and tried to bluster forth an expression of wonder—

"I—how should I know?"

"What did you mean by it?" cried the gentle Vicar, in high excitement;—"did you think I did not know my duty? did you think I was a cold-blooded reptile like—like the man that sent that? Do you think it was in me to betray my brother? I know nothing bad enough for him who made such a suggestion. And he nearly gained his point. The devil knows what tools to work with. He works with the weakness of good people as well as with the strength of bad," cried mild Mr. Pen, inspired for once in his life with righteous indignation. "Judas did it himself at least, bad as he was. He did not whisper treason in a man's ears nor in a woman's heart."

"I don't know what you mean," said Randolph, with guilt in his face.

"Not all, no; fortunately you don't know,

nor any one else, the trouble you might have made. But no less, though it never came to pass, was it that traitor's fault."

"When you take to speaking riddles I give it up," said Randolph, shrugging his shoulders.

But Mr. Pen was so hot in moral force that he was glad to get away. He slept one night under his father's roof, no one giving him much attention, and then went away, never to return again; but went back to his believing wife, too good a fate, who smoothed him down and healed all his wounds. "My husband is like most people who struggle to do their duty," she said. "His brother was very ungrateful, though Randolph had done so much for him. And the little boy, who had been dreadfully spoiled, ran away from the school when he had cost my husband so much trouble. And even his sister Mary showed him no kindness; that is the way when a man is so disinterested as Randolph, doing all he can for his own family, for their *real* good."

And this, at the end, came to be what Randolph himself thought.

Mrs. Pen, after coming home hysterical from Elfdale, made a clean breast to her husband, and showed him the telegram, and con-

fessed all her apprehensions for him. What could a man do but forgive the folly or even wickedness done for his sweet sake? And Mrs. Pen went through a few dreadful hours, when in the morning John Musgrave came back from his night journey and the warrant was put in force. If they should hang him what would become of her? She always believed afterwards that it was her William's intervention which had saved John, and she never believed in John's innocence, let her husband say what he would. For Mrs. Pen said wisely, that wherever there is smoke there must be fire, and it was no use telling her that Lord Stanton had not been killed; for it was in the last edition of the *Fellside History*, and therefore must be true.

When all was over Sir Henry and Lady Stanton made a formal visit of congratulation at Penninghame. Sir Henry told John that it had been a painful necessity to issue the warrant, but that a man must do his duty, whatever it is; and as, under Providence, this was the means of making everything clear he could not regret that he had done it now. Lady Stanton said nothing, or next to nothing. She talked a little to Mary, making stray little remarks about the children, and drawing Nello

to her side. Lilias, she was afraid of, with those great eyes. Was that child to be Geoff's wife? she thought. Ah! how much better, had he been the kind young husband who should have delivered her own Annie or Fanny. This little girl would want nothing of the kind; her father would watch over her, he would let no one meddle with her, not like a poor woman with a hard husband and stepdaughters. She trembled a little when she put her hand into John's. She looked at him with moisture in her eyes.

"I have always believed in you, always hoped to see you here again," she said.

"Come, Mary, the carriage is waiting," said Sir Henry. He said after that this was all that was called for, and here the intercourse between the two houses dropped. Mary could not help "taking an interest" in John Musgrave still, but what did it matter? everybody took an interest in him now.

As for Geoff, he became, as he had a way of doing, the sun of the house at Penninghame; even the old Squire took notice of his kind, cheerful young face. He neglected Elfdale and his young cousins, and even Cousin Mary, whom he loved. But it was not to be supposed that John Musgrave would allow a series

of love passages to go on indefinitely for years between his young neighbour and his daughter Lilias, as yet not quite thirteen years old. The young man was sent away after a most affecting parting, not to return for three years. Naturally, Lady Stanton rebelled much, she who had kept her son at home during all his life; but what could she do? Instead of struggling vainly she took the wiser part, and though it was a trial to tear herself from Stanton and all the servants, who were so kind, and the household which went upon wheels, upon velvet, and gave her no trouble, she made up her mind to it, and took her maid and Benson and Mr. Tritton and went "abroad" too. What is it to go abroad when a lady is middle-aged and has a grown-up son and such an establishment?—but she did it: "for I shall not have him very long!" she said, with a sigh.

Lilias was sixteen when Geoff came home. Can any one doubt that the child had grown up with her mind full of the young hero who had acted so great a part in her young life? When the old Squire died and Nello went to school, a very different school from Mr. Swan's, the idea of "Mr. Geoff" became more and more her companion. It was not love, perhaps,

in the ordinary meaning of the word; Lilias did not know what that meant. Half an elder brother, half an enchanted prince, more than half a hero of romance, he wove himself with every story and every poem that was written, to Lilias. He it was, and no Prince Ferdinand, whom Miranda thought so fair. It was he who slew all the dragons and giants, and delivered whole dungeons full of prisoners. Her girlhood was somewhat lonely, chiefly because of this soft mist of semi-betrothal which was about her. Not only was she already a woman, though a child, but a woman separated from others, a bride doubly virginal because he was absent to whom all her thoughts were due. "What if he should forget her?" Mary Musgrave would say, alarmed. She thought it neither safe nor right for the child, who was the beauty and flower of Penninghame, as she herself had been, though in so different a way. Mary now had settled down as the lady of Penninghame, as her brother was its lawful lord. John was not the kind of man to make a second marriage, even if, as his sister sometimes fancied, his first had but little satisfied his heart. But of this he said nothing, thankful to be able at the end to redeem some portion of the life thus swallowed

up by one of those terrrible, but happily rare, mistakes, which are no less wretched that they are half divine. He had all he wanted in his sister's faithful companionship and in his children. There is no more attractive household than that in which, after the storms of life, a brother and sister set up peacefully together the old household gods, never dispersed, which were those of their youth. Mary was a little more careful, perhaps, of her niece, a little more afraid of the troubles in her way, than if she had been her daughter. She watched Lilias with great anxiety, and read between the lines of Geoff's letters with vague scrutiny, looking always for indications of some change.

Lilias was sixteen in the end of October, the third after the previous events recorded here. She had grown to her full height, and her beauty had a dreamy, poetical touch from the circumstances, which greatly changed the natural expression appropriate to the liquid dark eyes and noble features she had from her mother and her mother's mother. Her eyes were less brilliant than they would have been had they not looked so far away, but they were more sweet. Her brightness altogether was tempered and softened, and kept within

that modesty of childhood to which her youthful age really belonged, though nature and life had developed her more than her years. Though she was grown up she kept many of her childish ways, and still sat, as Mary had always done, at the door of the old hall, now wonderfully decorated and restored, but yet the old hall still. The two ladies shared it between them for all their hours of leisure, but Mary had given up her seat at the door to the younger inhabitant, partly because she loved to see Lilias there with the sun upon her, partly because she herself began to feel the cool airs of the north less halcyon than of old. The books that Lilias carried with her were no longer fairy tales, but maturer enchantments of poetry. And there she sat absorbed in verse and lost to all meaner delights, on the eve of her birthday, a soft air ruffling the little curls on her forehead, the sun shining upon her uncovered head. Lilias loved the sun. She was not afraid of it nor her complexion, and the sun of October is not dangerous. She had a hand up to shade the book, which was too dazzling in the light, but nothing to keep the golden light from her. She sat warm and glorified in the long, slanting, dazzling rays.

Mary had heard a horse's hoofs, and, being

a little restless, came forward softly from her seat behind to see who it was; but Lilias, lost in the poetry and the sunshine, heard nothing.

"She wept with pity and delight,
She blushed with love and virgin shame,
And like the murmur of a dream
I heard her breathe my name.

"Her bosom heaved, she stepp'd aside
As conscious of my look she stept,
Then suddenly, with timorous eye,
She fled to me and wept."

Mary saw what Lilias did not see, the horseman at the foot of the slope. He looked and smiled, and signed to her over the lovely head in the sunshine. He was brown, and ruddy with health and travel, his eyes shining, his breath coming quick. Three years! as long as a lifetime—but it was over. Suddenly, "Lily—my little Lily," he cried, unable to keep silence more.

She sprang to her feet like a startled deer; the book fell from her hands; her eyes gave a great gleam and flash, and softened in the golden light of sunset and tenderness. The poetry or the life, which was the most sweet? "Yes, Mr. Geoff," she said.

THE END.