

bright face—even the dim lamp-light could not hide her happy looks—that her mother was struck by it. "You strange child," she said, "what are you made of? You look brighter than when we started."

"Dolly is made of a capital stuff called youth and good spirits," said John Morgan, kindly.

The rest of the journey was passed in shifting the windows to Mrs. Palmer's various sensations. They all parted hurriedly, as people do after a long day's pleasuring, only Dolly found time to give Rhoda a kiss. She felt more kindly toward her than she had done for many a day past. Rhoda looked curiously, and a little maliciously, into Dolly's face. But she could not read any thing more than she guessed already.

Mrs. Palmer was greatly disturbed to find herself driving home alone with Dolly in the hansom.

"I am afraid of cabmen. I am not accustomed to them. John Morgan should have come with me," Mrs. Palmer said. "I am sure the Admiral would not approve of this! Ah! he will be over. Dolly, darling, ask the man if he is sober. Dear me, I wish Robert was here."

Dolly, too, was wishing that Robert was there instead of herself. Her heart began to beat as she thought of what she had to say. She looked up at Mrs. Palmer's pale face in the bright moonlight through which they were driving homeward, through streets silver and silent and transformed. They come to the river and cross the bridge; the water is flowing, hushed and mysterious; the bridge throws a great shadow upon the water; one barge is slowly passing underneath the arch. The dim, distant crowd of spires, of chimneys, and slated roofs are illumined and multiplied by strange silver lights. Overhead a planet is burning and sinking where the sun set while they were still in the college garden. The soft moonwind comes sweeping fresh into their faces, and Dolly from this trance awakens to whisper, "Mamma, I have something to tell you—something that Robert—"

"He will throw us over! I know he will!" interrupts Mrs. Palmer, as the cab gave a jolt. "It is quite unsafe, Dolly, without a gentleman."

Poor Dolly forced herself to go on. She took her mother's hand: "Dear mamma, don't be afraid."

"He was not sober. I thought so at the time," cried Mrs. Palmer, with a nervous shriek, as they came off the bridge.

Then the cab went more quietly, and Dolly found words to tell her news.

So the hansom drove on, carrying many agitations and exclamations along with it. The driver from his moon-lit perch may have heard the sounds within. Mrs. Palmer spared herself and Dolly no single emotion.

She was faint; she was hysterical; she raved; she was overcome. Why had she not been told before? She had known it all along; she had mentioned it to the Admiral before her departure; he had sneered at her foolish dreams. Dolly would never have to learn the bitter deception of some wasted lives. Cruel boy! why had he not told her? why so reserved?

"He feared that it would agitate you," Dolly said, feeling that Robert had been right. "He told me to tell you now, dear."

"Dear fellow, he is so thoughtful," said Mrs. Palmer. "Now he will be my son, Dolly, my real son. I never could have endured any one of those Henley girls for him. How angry Lady Henley will be. I warned Robert long ago that she would want him for one of them. Dolly, you must not be married yet. You must wait till the Admiral returns. He must give you away."

When Dolly told her that Robert wanted to be married before he left for India, Mrs. Palmer said it was preposterous. He might have to sail any day—that Master told her so; the fat old gentleman in the white neck-cloth. "No, my Dolly, we shall have you till Robert comes back. Let the man keep the shilling for his own use."

They had reached the turnpike by this time, with its friendly beacon-fire burning, and the red-faced man had come out with three pennies ready in his hand. Then by dark trees, rustling behind the walls of the old gardens, past the palace avenue gates, where the sentry was pacing, with the stars shining over his head, they come to the ivy gate at home, and with its lamp burning red in the moonlight. Marker opened the door before they had time to ring.

"Softly, my dear," said Marker to Dolly, in a sort of whisper. "My lady is asleep; she has not been well, and—"

"Not well!" said Mrs. Palmer. "How fortunate she did not come. What should we have done with her? I am quite worn out, Marker; we have had a long day. Let Julie make me a cup of coffee, and bring it up to my room. Good-night, my precious Dolly. Don't speak to me, or I shall scream."

"Marker, is Aunt Sarah ill?" said Dolly, anxious, she knew not why.

"Don't be frightened, my dear," said Marker; "it is nothing—that is, the doctor says she only wants rest."

Dolly went up to her own room, fitting carefully along the passage, and shading her light. Lady Sarah's door was closed. Mrs. Palmer was safe for the night, with Julie in attendance. Dolly could hear their voices as she went by. In her own little room all was in order, and cool and straight for her coming. The window was open; the moonlight fell upon her little bed, where she had dreamed so many peaceful dreams, and Dolly set her light upon the window-seat and stood

looking out. She was half radiant still, half saddened. All the sights and sounds of that long, eventful day were passing before her still, ringing, dazzling, repeating themselves on the darkness..... Was it possible that he loved her—that she loved him? The trees rustled, the familiar strokes of the church-clock came striking twelve, swinging through darkness into silence. "Do I love him? I think so," said Dolly to herself. "I hope so." And with an honest heart she told herself that all should be well. Then she wondered if she should sleep that night; she seemed to be living over every single bit of her life at once. She longed to tell Aunt Sarah her wonderful story. A daddy-longlegs sailed in at the open window, and Dolly moved the light to save its straggling legs; a little wind came blowing in, and then Dolly thought she heard a sound as of a door below opening softly. Was her aunt awake and stirring? She caught up the light and crept down to see. She could hear Julie and Mrs. Palmer still discoursing.

There is something sacred about a sick-room at times. It seems like holy ground to people coming in suddenly out of the turmoil and emotion of life. Dolly's excitement was hushed as she entered and saw Lady Sarah lying quietly stretched out asleep upon a sofa. It had been wheeled to the window, which was wide open. The curtain was flapping; all the medicine bottles stood in rows on the table and along the shelves. There lay Sarah, with her gray hair smoothed over her brown face, very still and sleeping peacefully—as peacefully as if she was young still, and loved, and happy, with life before her; though, for the matter of that, people whose life is nearly over have more right to sleep at peace than those who have got to encounter struggles with others, and, most deadly of all, with that terrible shadow of self that rises with fresh might, striking with so sure an aim. What does the mystery mean? Who is the familiar enemy that our spirit is set to overcome and to struggle with all the night until the dawn? There lay poor Sarah's life-adversary, then, nearly worn, nearly overcome, sleeping and resting while the spirit was traveling I know not to what peaceful regions.

Dolly crept in and closed the door. Lady Sarah never stirred. A long time seemed to pass. The wind rose again, the curtain flapped, and the light flickered, and time seemed creeping slowly and more slowly to the tune of the sleeping woman's languid breath. It was a strange ending to the long, glittering day, but at last a flush came into Sarah Francis's cheeks, and she opened her eyes..... A strange new something was in that placid face—a look. What is it, that

first look of change and blur in features that have melted so tranquilly before us from youth to middle age, or from middle age to age, modulating imperceptibly? The light of Dolly's own heart was too dazzling for her to be in a very observant mood just then.

"Is that my Dolly?" said the sick woman. Dolly sprang forward. "Oh! I am so glad you are awake," said the girl. "Dear Aunt Sarah, has your sleep done you good? Are you better? Can you listen to something? Can you guess?" And she knelt down so as to bring her face on a level with the other; but she couldn't see it very plainly for a dazzle between them. "Robert says he loves me; and, indeed, if he loves me, I must love him," Dolly whispered; and her face fell hidden against the pillow, and the mist turned to haze. Some bird in the garden outside began to whistle in its sleep. A belated clock struck something a long way off, and then all was silence and darkness again.

Lady Sarah held Dolly close to her, as the girl knelt beside her.

"Do you care for him? Is it possible?" said Lady Sarah, bewildered.

Dolly was hurt by her doubt. "Indeed I do," she answered, beginning to cry once more from fatigue and excitement.

One of the two women in that midnight room was young, with the new kindling genius of love in her heart, and she was weeping; the other was old, with the first knell of death ringing in her ear, but when Dolly looked up at last she saw that her aunt was smiling very tenderly. Lady Sarah smiled, but she could not trust herself to speak. She had awakened startled, but in a minute she had realized it all. She had felt all along that this must be. She had not wished for it, but it was come. It was not only of Dolly and of Robert that Lady Sarah thought that night; other ghosts came into the room and stood before her. And then came every day, very real, into this dream-world—Marker, with a bed-chamber candlestick, walking straight into conflicting emotions, and indignant with Miss Dolly for disturbing her mistress. She had been shutting up, and seeing to Mrs. Palmer's coffee. She was scarcely mollified by the great news. Lady Sarah was awake; Dolly had awakened her.

"Let people marry who they like," said Marker; "but don't let them come chattering and disturbing at this time o' night when they should 'a known better."

CHAPTER XXVI.

GOOD-MORNING.

DOLLY passed through the sleeping house, crept by the doors, slid down the creaking stairs into the hall. The shutters were un-



A MORNING REVERIE.

opened as yet, the dawning day was bolted out, and the place was dark and scattered over with the shreds of the day before. The newspaper lying on the hall table, the pieces of string upon the ground, a crumpled letter, and the long brown paper coffin in which the silk for her new gown had come home the night before. Each day scatters its dust as it hurries by, and leaves its broken ends and scraps for the coming hours to col-

lect and sort away, dust of mind, and dust of matter. The great kaleidoscope of the world turns round once in its twenty-four hours; the patterns and combinations shift and change and disperse into new combinations. Perhaps some of us may think that with each turn the fragments are shaken up and mixed and broken away more and more, until only an undistinguishable uniform dazzle remains in place of the beautiful blue and

red and golden stars and wheels that delighted our youth.

Dorothea gave a cautious pull to the bolt of the outer door and opened it, letting a sudden sweet chill rush of light and fresh air into the closed house, where they had all been asleep through the night. What a morning! All her sudden fears seem lightened, and she jumped across the step on to the gravel-walk, and looked up and round and about. Dark green, gold, glistening bricks, slanting lights, and sweet tremulous shadows; the many crowding house-roofs and tree-tops aflame in the seven-o'clock sunshine, the birds flapping and fluttering, the mellow old church-clock striking seven: the strokes come in solemn procession across the High Street and the old brick-walled garden, and pass on I don't know to what distant blue realms in the vault overhead.

She stopped to look at a couple of snails creeping up among the nails in the wall. I think she then practiced a little mazourka along the straight garden walk. She then took off her hat, and stopped to pin back some of the russet of which I have spoken, then she looked up again and drew a great breath; and then, passing the green beech and the two cut yew-trees, she came to the placid pond in its stone basin at the end of the garden. There it lay in its darkness and light. There were the gold-fish wide awake, darting and gaping as they rose to the surface; and the water reflected the sky and the laurel-bushes, and the chipped stone edge of the basin. When Dorothea came and looked over the brink she saw her own smiling, disjointed face looking up at her. It was not so bright a face as her own, somehow. It looked up gray and sad from out of this trembling, mystical looking-glass. What was it? A cloud passing overhead, a little, soft, fleecy, white cloud bobbing along, and then some birds flying by, and then a rustle among the leaves. It was only a moment, during which it had seemed to her as if the throb of nature beat a little more slowly, and as if its rhythm had halted for an instant; and in that moment the trouble of the night before, the doubt of herself, came back to her. Sometimes Dorothea had wondered, as others have done before her, if there is such a thing as real happiness in nature. Do clouds love to sail quickly on the wind? Are pools glad to lie placid, refracting the sunshine? When the trees rustle, is it just a chatter and a quiver, or the thrill of life answering life? The thought of a living nature without consciousness had always seemed to her inexpressibly sad. She had sometimes thought how sad a human life might be that was just a human life, living and working and playing, and coming to an end one day, and falling to the ground. It was, in truth, not very unlike the life she

might have led herself, and now—now she was alone no longer. There was a meaning to life now, for Henley loved her. She thought this, and then, seeing a spider's web suddenly gleam with a long lightning flash, she turned with another glad spring of youth to the light.

On the table lay a letter sealed and stamped and addressed, "Miss Vanborough, Church House, Kensington." It was for her. There was no mistaking it. Her first love-letter. There it lay in black and in white, signed and dated and marked with a crest. Robert must have written it the night before after they had left.

A few minutes ago, in the fresh morning air, it had all seemed like a dream of the night; here were tangible signs and wonders to recall her to her allegiance.

Dolly took it up shyly, this first love-letter, come safe into her hands from the hands which had dispatched it. She was still standing reading it in the window when Lady Sarah, who had made an effort, came in, leaning on Marker's arm. The girl was absorbed; her pretty brown curly head was bent in the ivy-light that dazzled through the leaves; she heard nothing except the new voice speaking to her; she saw no one except that invisible presence which was so vividly before her. This was the letter:

"MY DEAREST DORA,—I write you one line, which will, I hope, reach you in the morning. You are gone, and already I wish you back again. Your sweetness, your trust in me, have quite overpowered me. I long to prove to you that I am all you believed me, and worthy of your choice. Do not fear to trust your happiness to me. I have carefully studied your character. I know you even better than you know yourself; and when you hesitated I could appreciate your motives. I feel convinced that we have acted for the best. I would say more, but I must write to your mother and to Lady Sarah by to-night's post. Write to me fully and without reserve. Ever yours, dearest Dora,
"R. V. H."

Inside Dolly's letter was a second letter, addressed to the Lady Sarah Francis, sealed and addressed in the same legible hand. This was not a love-letter; nobody could reasonably be expected to send two by the same post.

"MY DEAR LADY SARAH,—Dora will have informed you of what has occurred; and I feel that I must not delay expressing to you how sincerely I trust that you will not disapprove of the step we have taken. Although my appointment is not a very lucrative one, the salary is increasing; and I shall make a point of insuring my life before leaving England, for our dear girl's benefit. I do not know whether Dorothea is herself entitled to any of her father's fortune, or whether it has been settled upon George; perhaps you would kindly inform me upon this point, as I am most anxious not to overstep the line of prudence, and my future arrangements must greatly depend upon my means. You will have heard of my appointment to the presidency of the College of Boggleywollah. India is a long way off, but time soon passes to those who are able to make good use of it; and I trust that in the happiness of one so justly dear to you, you will find consolation for her absence. Believe me, my dear Lady Sarah, very truly yours,
R. HENLEY."
"P.S.—My widow would be entitled to a pension by the provisions of the Fund."

This was what Dolly, with so much agitation, put into her aunt's hand, watching her face anxiously as she read it.

"May I read it?" said Dolly.

"It is only business," said Lady Sarah, crumpling it up, and Dolly turned away disappointed, and began to pour out the tea.

It was a very agitated breakfast, happy and shy and rather silent, though so much had to be said.

Mrs. Palmer came drifting in, to their surprise, before breakfast was over, in a beautiful white wrapper with satin bows. She also had received a letter. She embraced Dolly and Lady Sarah.

"Well, what do you say to our news, Sarah? I have heard from our dear Robert," said she. "You may read his letter—both of you. Sarah, I am sorry to hear you have been ailing. If it would not be giving too much trouble—I have been so upset by all this agitation—I should prefer coffee this morning. I was quite frightened about myself last night, Dolly, after I left you Dear me, what memories come back to one. Do you remember our marriage, Sarah, and—"

"Pray ring again, Dolly," said Lady Sarah, abruptly; and she went to the door and called Marker, shrilly and impatient.

"There is no one but me," says Mrs. Palmer, pulling out her frills with a deep sigh, "who cares for those old stories. The Admiral can not endure them."

Dolly's cup of happiness, so full before, seemed overflowing now; it spread and spread. Happiness, like sorrow, overflows into other cups besides our own. John Morgan looked in opportunely to hear the news, and to ask how they all were; his hearty congratulations came with a grateful sense of relief. Dolly longed for sympathy in her happiness. She was glad to be a little stannied by the cheerful view he took of what must be so sad as well as so sweet. The news spread rapidly.

Old Sam came up with a shining face, and set down the copper coal-scuttle the better to express his good wishes. Eliza Twells tumbled down the kitchen stairs with a great clatter from sheer excitement; and when Marker, relenting, came up in her big flapping apron for orders, her round face was rippling with smiles.

"God bless you kindly, Miss Dolly, my dear," said the good old woman, giving her a kiss on each cheek. "I never took up with a husband myself, but I don't blame ye. It is well to have some one to speak our mind to. And did he give you a ring, my dear?"

Dolly laughed and held up her two hands. "No ring, Marker. I don't like rings. I wish one could be married without one."

"Don't say that, dearie," said Marker, gravely.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOVE LANE FROM KENSINGTON TO FULHAM.

ROBERT came up to town on the Tuesday, as he had promised Dolly as he came along. He told himself that he had deserved some reward for his patience in waiting. He had resisted many a sentimental impulse, not wishing to distract his mind until the summer term was over. He might almost have trusted himself to propose at Easter, and to go on calmly with his papers, for he was not like George, whose wandering attention seemed distracted by every passing emotion. Robert's stiff black face melted a little as he indulged in a lover-like dream. He saw Dolly as she would be one day, ruling his household, welcoming his guests, admired by them all. Henley had too good taste to like a stupid woman. Nothing would ever have induced him to think of a plain one. He wished for a certain amount of good-breeding and habit of the world.....All these qualifications he had discovered in his cousin, not to speak of other prospects depending on her aunt's good pleasure.

Old Sam opened the door, grinning his congratulations. Robert found Dolly sitting with her mother on the terrace. Philippa jumped up to meet him, and embraced him too with effusion.

"We were expecting you," she said. "I have *much* to say to you. Come with me." And clasping her hands upon his arm she would have immediately drawn him away into the house if Robert had not said, with some slight embarrassment, "Presently, my dear aunt, I shall be quite at your service; but I have not yet spoken to Dolly." Dolly did not move, but waited for Robert to come to her; then she looked up suddenly.

Dolly's manner was charming in those days—a little reserved, but confident and sympathetic, a little abrupt at times, but bright and melancholy at once. Later in life some of its shadows seemed to drown the light in her honest face; her mistakes made her more shy and more reserved; she caught something of Henley's coldness of manner, and was altered, so her friends thought.

I don't, for my own part, believe that people change. But it is not the less true that they have many things in them, many emotions and passing moods, and as days and feelings follow, each soul's experience is written down here and there, and in other souls, and by signs, and by work done, and by work undone, and by what is forgotten, as well as that which is remembered, by the influence of to-day, and of the past that is not over. Perhaps one day we may know ourselves at last, and read our story plainly written in our own and other people's lives.

Dolly, in those days, was young and confident and undismayed. It seems strange

to make a merit as we do of youth, of inexperience, of hardness of heart. Her untroubled young spirit had little sympathy for others more weary and wayworn. She loved, but without sympathy; but all the same the brightness of her youth and its unconscious sweetness spread and warmed and comforted those upon whom its influence fell.

Dorothea Vauborough was a woman of many changing emotions and sentiments; frank to herself, doubting herself all the while; diffident where she should have been bold, loving the right above all things, and, from very excess of scruples, troubled at times, and hard to others. Then came regret and self-abasement and reproach, how bitter none can tell but those who, like her, have suffered from many and complicated emotions—trusting, mistrusting, longing for truth, and, from this very longing, failing often. She loved because she was young and her heart was tender and humble. She doubted because she was young and because the truth was in her, urging her to do that which she would not have done, and to feel the things that she would not have felt. But all this was only revealed to her later, only it was there from the beginning. Dolly was very shy and very happy all these early days.

Frank Raban thought Dolly careless, hard in her judgment, spoiled by the love that was showered upon her; he thought she was not kind to Rhoda. All this he dwelt upon, nor could he forget her judgment upon himself. Poor Raban acknowledged that for him no judgment could be too severe, and yet he would have loved Dolly to be pitiful; although she could now never be any thing to him—never, so long as they both lived. When the news came of her engagement, it was a pain to him that he had long expected, and that he accepted. One failure in life was enough. He made no advance; he watched her; he let her go, foolish man! without a word. Sometimes Rhoda would talk to him about Dolly. Frank always listened.

"She does not mean to be cold. Indeed, I don't think so—I am so used to her manner that I do not think of it," Rhoda would say. "Dear Dolly is full of good and generous impulses. She will make Robert Henley a noble wife, if he only gives in to her in every thing. I would I were half as good as she is; but she is a little hasty at times, and wants every one to do as she tells them."

"And you do as every body tells you," said Raban.

And to do Rhoda justice, she worked her fingers to the bone, she walked to poor people's houses through the rain and mud; she was always good-tempered, she was a valuable inmate in the household. Zoe said she couldn't think how Rhoda got through half what she did. "Here, there, and every where," says Zoe, in an aggrieved voice, "before I have time to turn."

Notwithstanding the engagement, the little household at Church House went its usual course. Lady Sarah had followed her own beaten ways so long that she seemed, from habit, to travel on whether or not her interest went with her. Those old days are almost forgotten now, even by the people who lived in them. With a strange, present thrill Dolly remembers sometimes, as she passes through the old haunts of her early youth, a past instant of time, a past state of sentiment, as by-gone as the hour to which it belonged. Passing by the old busy corner of the church not long ago, Dolly remembered how she and Robert had met Raban there one day, just after their news had been made public. He tried to avoid them, then changed his mind and came straight up and shook hands, uttering his good wishes in a cold, odd manner that Dolly thought almost unkind.

"I am afraid my good wishes can add little to your happiness, but I congratulate you," he said to Robert. "And I wish you all happiness," he said to Dolly. And then they were all silent for a minute.

"You will come soon, won't you?" said Dolly, shyly.

"Good-by," said Frank Raban, walking away very quickly.

He had meant to keep away, but he came just as usual to Church House, and was there even more constantly. Lady Sarah was glad of his companionship for George, who seemed in a very strange and excited state of mind.

This summer of '54 was an eventful summer; and while Dolly was living in her own youthful world, concentrated in the overwhelming interests that had come of late, in old and the new ties, so hard to grasp, so hard to loose, armies were marching, fleets were sailing, politicians and emperors were pondering upon the great catastrophe that seemed imminent. War had been declared; with it the great fleets had come speeding across the sea from one horizon to another. The events of the day only reached Dolly like echoes from a long way off, brought by Robert and by George, printed in the paper. Robert was no keen politician. He was too full of his own new plans and new career. George was far more excited, and of a more fiery temper. Frank Raban and George and he used to have long and angry arguments. Raban maintained that the whole thing was a mistake, a surrender to popular outcry. George and Robert were for fighting at any price: for once they agreed.

"I don't see," said George, "what there is in life to make it so preferable to any thing else, to every sense of honor and of consideration, of liberty of action. Life, to be worth any thing, is only a combination of all these things; and for one or any of them I think I should be willing to give my life."

"Of course, if it were necessary," said Henley, "one would do what was expected of one. There is my cousin, Jonah Henley, joining his regiment next week. I confess it is on different grounds from you that I approve of this war. I do not like to see England falling in the—a—estimation of Europe: we can afford to go to war. Russia's pretensions are intolerable; and, with France to assist us, I believe the government is thoroughly justified in the course it is pursuing."

"I don't think we are ready," said Raban, in his odd, constrained voice. "I don't think we are justified. We sit at home and write heroic newspaper articles, and we send out poor fellows by rank and by file to be pounded and cut to mince-meat, for what? to defend a worn-out remnant of a past from the inevitable advance of the future. Suppose we put things back a hundred years, what good shall we have done?"

"But think of our Overland Route," said Henley; "suppose the future should interfere with the P. and O."

There were green lanes in those days leading from the far end of that lane in which Church House was built to others that crossed a wide and spreading country; it is not even yet quite overflowed by the waves of brick—that tide that flows out in long, strange furrows, and never ebbs away. Dolly and Henley went wandering along these lanes one fine afternoon; they were going they knew not where; into a land of Canaan, so Dolly thought it; green cabbages, a long, gleaming canal, hawthorn hedges, and a great overarched sky that began to turn red when the sun set. Now and then they came to some old house that had outstood storms and years, fluttering signals of distress in the shape of old shirts and clothes hung out to dry; in the distance rose Kensington spires and steeples; now and then a workman trudged by on his way home; distant bells rang in this wide, desolate country. Women come tramping home from their long day's work in the fields, and look hard at the handsome young couple, Dolly with cast-down eyes, Robert with his nose up in the air. The women trudge wearily home; the young folks walk step by step into life. The birds cross the sky in a sudden flight; the cabbages grow where they are planted.

They missed the Chelsea Lane. Dolly should have known the way, but she was absorbed and unobservant, and those cross-ways were a labyrinth except for those who were well used to them. They found themselves presently in the Old Brompton Road, with its elm-trees and old gable roofs darkening against the sunset. How sweet it was, with red lights burning, people slowly straggling like themselves, and enjoying the gentle ease of the twilight and of the soft

west wind. Dolly led Henley back by the old winding road, with its bends and fancies; its cottages, within close-built walls; and stately old houses, with iron scroll-work on their garden gates, and gardens not yet destroyed. Then they came to a rueful row of bricks and staring windows. A young couple stood side by side against the low rail in front of their home. Dolly remembered this afterward; for the sky was very splendid just then, and the young woman's violet dress seemed to blaze with the beautiful light, as she stood in her quaint little garden, looking out across the road to the well-remembered pond and some fields beyond. Along the distant line of the plains great soft ships of vapor were floating; the windows of the distant houses flashed; the pond looked all splendid and sombre in its shady corner. The evening seemed vast and sweet, and Dolly's heart was full.

"Are you tired?" said Robert, seeing that she lingered.

"Tired? no," said Dorothea. "I was looking at the sky, and wondering how it would have been if you had gone away and never—" She stopped.

"Why think about it?" said Robert. "You would have married somebody else, I suppose."

He said it in a matter-of-fact sort of way, and for a moment Dolly's eyebrows seemed to darken over her eyes. It was a mere nothing, the passing shadow of a thought.

"You are right," said Dolly, wistfully. "It is no use thinking how unhappy one might have been. Have you ever been very unhappy, Robert?"

Now that she was so happy, Dolly seemed, for the first time, to realize what sorrow might be.

"A certain young lady made me very unhappy one day not long ago," said Robert, "when she tried to freeze me up with a snow-ball."

This was not what Dolly meant: she was in earnest, and he answered her with a joke; she wanted a sign, and no sign was given to her.

They had just reached home, when Robert said, with his hand on the bell: "This has not been unhappy, has it, Dolly? We shall have a great many more walks together when I can spare the time. But you must talk to me more, and not be so shy, dearest."

Something flew by as he spoke, and went fluttering into the ivy.

"That was a bat," said Dolly, shrinking, while Robert stood shaking his umbrella-stick among the ivy leaves; but it was too dark to see any thing distinctly.

"I hope," said Robert, sentimentally, "to come and see you constantly when this term is over. Then we shall know more of each other, Dora."

"Don't we know each other?" asked Dolly, with one of her quick glances. "I think I know you quite well, Robert—better than I know myself almost," she added, with a sigh.

When they came into the drawing-room the lamp was alight, and George and Rhoda were there with Lady Sarah. George was talking at the very pitch of his melancholy voice, Lady Sarah was listening with a pale, fixed face like a person who has made up her mind.

Rhoda was twirling her work round and round her fingers. She had broken the wool, and dropped the stitches. It was by a strong effort that she sat so still.

"Here is George announcing his intentions," said Lady Sarah, as they came in. "Perhaps you, Robert, will be able to preach good sense to him."

"Oh, Aunt Sarah!" Dolly cried, springing forward; "at last he has told you.... Has Rhoda?"

Dolly's two hands were clasped in excitement. Lady Sarah looked at her in some surprise.

There was a crash, a scream from Rhoda. The flower-glass had gone over on the table beside her, and all the water was running about over the carpet.

"My dress—my Sunday best!" cried Rhoda. "Lady Sarah, I am so sorry."

Dolly bent over to pick up the table, and as she did so, Rhoda whispered, "Be silent, or you will ruin George."

"Ruined?" said Robert. "Your dress is not ruined, Rhoda. I speak from experience, for I wear a silk gown myself."

"George says he will not take my living," said Lady Sarah. "He wishes to be—What do you wish to be, George?"

George, somewhat confused, said he wished to be a soldier—any thing but a clergyman.

"You don't mean to say you are going to be such a—that you refuse seven hundred a year?" said Henley, stopping short.

"Confound it!" cried George; "can't you all leave a poor fellow in peace?" And he burst out of the room.

"Come here, Dolly," said Mrs. Palmer, from a distant corner of the room; "make this foolish darling do as his aunt wishes. I am sure the Admiral would quite feel as I do."

"Seven hundred a year," said Lady Sarah. "Wretched boy! I shall sell the presentation."

"Oh, Robert!" said Dolly; "he is right if he can't make up his mind. I know Aunt Sarah thinks so."

Dolly could not help being vexed with Robert. He shrugged his shoulders, said that George would regret his decision, and went on to talk of various plans that he himself had at heart, just as if George had never existed.

"I want you to trust Dolly to me for a few days," said he. "I want to take her down to Smokethwaite with my aunt. She must see Jonah before he leaves. They all write, and urge her coming."

Lady Sarah agreed, with a sigh, and her eyes filled with tears. She turned away abruptly to hide them.

Many and many were the tears she wiped away, for fear Dolly should see them. George's whole body was not so dear to her as Dolly's little finger. She blamed herself in vain afterward, when it was too late. Sometimes she could hardly bear to see her niece come into the room with her smiling face, and she scarcely answered when the sweet girl's voice came echoing and calling about the house. Could it be true that it was going, that sweet voice? Laughing, scolding, chattering, hour by hour—were the many footsteps going too, and the rustle of her dress, and the look of her happy eyes? Was the time already come for Dolly to fly away from the old nest that had sheltered her for so short a time? She seemed scarcely to have come—scarcely to have begun her sweet home song—and already she was eager to go!

But Rhoda had come up, looking very pale, to say good-night. As she said good-by, Dolly followed her out, and tried to put in some little word for George.

"Rhoda, he has been true to himself," she whispered; "that is best of all—is not it?"

"Let him be true to himself, by all means," said Rhoda.

She was thoroughly out of temper. Dolly had not improved matters by talking about them. George came out of the oak room prepared to walk back with her.

"No, thank you," said Rhoda, trembling very much. "I won't trouble you to come home with me."

She was tying her bonnet and pinning on her shawl in an agitated way. George watched her in silence. When she was ready to go, he held out his hand.

"Good-night," he said.

"Good-night," said Rhoda, hurrying off without looking up, and passing out into the street.

It was unbearable. If George loved her he might do as she wished. But he would sacrifice nothing—not one fancy. Her uncle John was a clergyman. It was a very high calling. Rhoda thought of the pretty little parsonage house, and the church, and the cottages all round about, only waiting to be done good to, while the apples were baking on the trees and cakes in the oven, all of which good things George had refused—George, who did not know one bit what he was doing, nor what it was to scrape and starve, and live with dull, stunted, scraping people. She was quite tired of it all. It was not a real life that she led; it was a

housekeeper's situation, just like Aunt Morgan. She had done her best, and she had earned a rest, and she would not begin all over again. George might be as true as he liked. Rhoda ran up the steps of the old brown house in a silent passion, and gave a sharp pull at the bell. Yes, she hated it all. She was utterly tired of it all—of the noisy home, of Aunt Morgan's precepts and flannels. She could hear the clink of plates in the dining-room, where the inevitable *entrées* of cheese and cold meat were set out on the shabby table-cloth, where her aunt Morgan stood in her black cap and stiff brown curls, carving slice after slice for the hungry curate.

"You are late, Rhoda," said her aunt. "I suppose you staid to late dinner with your friends?"

"No; but I am not hungry," said Rhoda, shrinking away.

"Why, Rhoda, what is the matter?" said John, kindly, and he held out his big hand to her.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNBORN TO-MORROW, AND DEAD YESTERDAY.

WHATEVER Lady Sarah may have thought, Mrs. Palmer used to consider Dolly a most fortunate girl, and she used to say so, not a little to Lady Sarah's annoyance.

"Extremely fortunate," repeats Dolly's mamma, looking thoughtfully at her fat satin shoes. "What a lottery life is! I was as pretty as Dolly, and yet dear Stanham had not any thing like Robert's excellent prospects. Even the Ad— Don't go, Sarah."

Poor Lady Sarah would start up, with an impatient movement, and walk across the room to get away from Philippa's retrospec-

tions. They were almost more than she had patience for just then. She could scarcely have found patience for Philippa herself, if it had not been that she was Dolly's mother. What did she mean by her purrings and self-congratulations? Lady Sarah used to feel most doubtful about Dolly's good fortune just when Philippa was most enthusiastic on the subject, or when Robert himself was pointing out his excellent prospects in his lucid way.

Philippa would listen, nodding languid approbation. Dolly would make believe to laugh at Robert's accounts of his coming honors; but it was easy to see that it was only make-believe incredulity.

Her aunt could read the girl's sweet conviction in her eyes, and she loved her for it. Once, remembering her own youth, this fantastic woman had made a vow never, so long as she lived, to interfere in the course of true love. True love! Is this true love, when one person is in love with a phantom, another with an image reflected in a glass? True love is something more than phantoms, than images and shadows; and yet, stirred by phantoms and living among shadows, its faint dreams come to life.

Lady Sarah was standing by the bookcase, in a sort of zigzag mind of her own old times and of Dolly's to-day. She had taken a book from the shelf—a dusty volume of Burns's poems—upon the fly-leaf of which the name of another Robert Henley was written. She holds the book in her hand, looks at the crooked writing—"S. V., from Robert Henley, May, 1808." She beats the two dusty covers together, and puts it back into its place again. That is all her story. Philippa never heard of it; Robert never heard of it, nor did he know that Lady Sarah loved his name—which had been his father's too—better than she loved him. "Perhaps her happiness had all gone to Dolly," the widow thought, as she stood, with a troubled sort of smile on her face, looking at the two young people through a pane of glass; and then, like a good woman as she is, tries to silence her misgivings into a little prayer for their happiness.

Let us do justice to the reluctant prayers that people offer up. They are not the less true because they are half-hearted, and because those who pray would sometimes gladly be spared an answer to their petitions. Poor Lady Sarah! her prayers seemed too much answered as she watched Dolly day by day more and more radiant and absorbed.

"My dear creature, what are you doing with all those dusty books? Can you see our young people?" says Mrs. Palmer, languidly looking over her arm-chair. "I expect Colonel Witherington this afternoon. He admires Dolly excessively, Sarah; and I really think he might have proposed, if

Robert had not been so determined to carry her off. You dear old thing, forgive me; I don't believe she would ever have married at all if I had not come home. You are in the clouds, you know. I remember saying so to Hawtry at Trincomalee. I should have disowned her if she had turned out an old maid. I know it. I detest old maids. The Admiral has a perfect craze for them, and they all adore him. I should like you to see Miss Macgrudder—there never was any thing so ludicrous, asthmatic, sentimental—frantic. We must introduce Miss Moineaux to him, and the Morgan girls. I often wonder how he ever came to marry a widow, and I tell him so. It was a great mistake. Can you believe it?—Hawtry now writes that second marriages are no marriages at all. Perhaps you agree with him? I'm sure Dolly is quite ready to do so. I never saw a girl so changed—never. We have lost her, my dear; make up your mind to it. She is Robert, not Dolly any more—no thought for any one else, not for me, dear child! And don't you flatter yourself she will ever.....Dear me! Gone? What an extraordinary creature poor Sarah is! touched, certainly; and such a wet blanket!"

Mrs. Palmer, rising from her corner, floats across the room, sweeping over several footstools and small tables on her way. She goes to the window, and not caring to be alone, begins to tap with her diamond finger upon the pane, to summon the young couple, who pay not the slightest attention. Fortunately the door opens, and Colonel Witherington is announced. He is a swarthy man, with shiny boots, a black mustache; his handkerchief is scented with *Esse bouquet*, which immediately permeates the room; he wears tight dog-skin gloves and military shirt collars. Lady Sarah thinks him vulgar and odious beyond words; Mrs. Palmer is charmed to see him, and graciously holds out her white hand. She is used to his adoration, and accepts it with a certain swan-like indifference.

People had different opinions about Mrs. Palmer. In some circles she was considered brilliant and accomplished; in others, silly and affected. Colonel Witherington never spoke of her except with military honors. "Charming woman," he would say; "highly cultivated; you might give her five-and-twenty at the outside. Utterly lost upon that spluttering old psalm-singing Palmer. Psalms are all very well in their proper place—in the prayer-books, or in church; but after dinner, when one has got a good cigar, and feels inclined for a little pleasant conversation, it is not the time to ring the bell for the servants, and have 'em down upon their knees all of a row, and up again in five minutes to listen to an extempore sermon. The Admiral runs on like a clock. I used to stay with them at the Admiralty House. Pity

that poor woman most heartily! Can't think how she keeps up as she does!"

Little brown Lady Henley at Smoke-thwaite would not have sympathized with Colonel Witherington's admiration. She made a point of shrugging her shoulders whenever she heard Philippa's name mentioned. "If you ask me," she would say, "I must frankly own that my sister-in-law is not to be depended on. She is utterly selfish; she only lives for the admiration of gentlemen. My brother Hawtry is a warm-hearted, impulsive man, who would have made any woman happy. If he has looked for consolation in his domestic trials, and found it in religious interests, it is not I who would blame him. Sir Thomas feels as I do, and deeply regrets Philippa's deplorable frivolity. I do not know much of that poor girl of hers. I have no doubt Robert has been dazzled by mother and daughter. They are good-looking, and, as I am told, thoroughly well understand the art of setting themselves off to the best advantage. I am fond of Robert Henley, but I can not pretend to have any feeling for Dorothea one way or another. We have asked them here, of course. They are to come after their marriage. I only hope my sister-in-law appreciates her daughter's good luck, and has the sense to know the value of such a man as Robert Henley."

Mrs. Palmer was perfectly enchanted with her future son-in-law. He could scarcely get rid of her. Robert, with some discomposure, would find himself sitting on his aunt's sofa, hand in hand, listening to long and very unpleasant extracts from her correspondence. "You dear boy!" Mrs. Palmer would say, with her soft, fat fingers firmly clasped round his, "you have done me good. Your dear head is able to advise my poor perplexed heart.—Dolly, he is my prop. I give you up, my child, gladly, to this dear fellow!" These little compliments mollified the young man at first, although he found that by degrees the tax of his aunt's constant dependence became heavier and heavier. Briareus himself could scarcely have supplied arms to support her unsparing weakness, to hand her parcels and footstools about, to carry her shawls and cushions, and to sort the packets of her correspondence. She had the Admiral's letters, tied up with various colored ribbons, and docketed, "Cruel," "Moderately Abusive," "Apologetic," "Canting," "Business." She was always sending for Robert. Her playful tap at the window made him feel quite nervous.

Mrs. Palmer had begun to knit him a pair of muffatees, and used slowly to twist pink silk round ivory needles. Lady Henley laughed very loud when she heard this. "Poor Robert! He will have to pay dearly for those mittens," she said.

For a long time past Mrs. Palmer had rare-