

chose, for Mrs. Palmer floated up stairs with her candle to say good-night to Lady Sarah. She was kissing her hand over the balusters, and dropping all the wax as she went along.

Robert came up to Dolly, who was standing in the hall. "Good-night," he said. "It might have been a pleasant day upon the whole if it had not been for George. You must get him to apologize to Rhoda, Dora. I mean to speak very plainly to him when I see him next."

His calmness exasperated her as he stood there with his handsome face looking down a little reproachfully at her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Speaking won't do a bit of good, Robert," she said, hastily. "Pray don't say much to him—"

"I wonder when you will learn to trust me, Dora," said her cousin, taking her hand. "How shall we ever get on unless you do?"

"I am sure I don't know," Dolly answered, wearily; "we don't seem to want the same things, Robert, or to be going together a bit."

"What do you mean?" said Henley. "You are tired and out of spirits to-night."

With a sudden reaction Dolly caught hold of his arm with both hands. "Robert! Robert! Robert!" she said, holding him fast, and looking as if she could transform him with her eyes to be what she wanted.

"Silly child," he answered, "I don't think you yourself know what you want. Good-night. Don't forget to be ready in time to-morrow."

Then he was gone, having first looked for his umbrella, and the door banged upon Robert and the misty stars, and Dolly remained standing at the foot of the stairs. Frank Raban's words had borne fruit, as sensible words should do. "Trust me," he had said; and Henley had used the same phrase, only with Robert "Trust me" meant believe that I can not be mistaken; with Frank "Trust me" meant trust in truth in yourself and in others. Dolly, with one of those quick impulses which come to impressionable people, suddenly felt that he was right. All along she had been mistaken. It would have been better, far better, from the beginning to have told Lady Sarah every thing. She had been blinded, overpersuaded. Marker came up to shut bolts and put out the lights. Dolly looked up, and she went and laid her tired head on the old nurse's shoulder, and clung to her for an instant.

"Is any thing the matter, my dearie?" said Marker.

"Nothing new," Dolly said. "Marker, George is not come home. I have so much to say to him! Don't bolt the door, and please leave a light."

But George did not come home that night, although the door was left unbolted, and the light kept burning on purpose. When the

morning came his bed was folded smooth, and every thing looked straight and silent in his room, which was orderly as places are when the people are away who inhabit them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CIRCUMSTANCE.

FOR some days before the picnic Mrs. Palmer and Julie had been absorbed in the preparation of two beautiful garments that were to be worn at Mrs. Middleton's dinner, and at a ball at Bucklersbury House, for which Mrs. Palmer was expecting an invitation. Lady Sarah had written at her request to ask for one. Meanwhile the dresses had been growing under Julie's art; throwing out fresh flounces and trimmings and ribbons hour by hour, until they had finally come to perfection, and were now lying side by side on the bed in the spare room, ready to be tried on for the last time.

"Must it be *now*, mamma?" said Dolly. "Breakfast is just ready, and Aunt Sarah will be waiting."

"Julie, go down stairs and beg Lady Sarah not to wait," said Mrs. Palmer, with great decision.

Julie came back saying that Miss Rhoda was with Lady Sarah below, and asking for Miss Dolly.

"Presently," said Mrs. Palmer. "Very pretty indeed, Julie!" Then she suddenly exclaimed, "You can not imagine what it is, Dolly, to be linked to one so utterly uncongenial, you who are so fortunate in our dear Robert's perfect sympathy and knowledge of London life. He quite agrees with me in my wish that you should be introduced. Admiral Palmer hates society, except to preach at it—such a pity, is it not! I assure you, strange as it may seem, I quite dread his return."

Dolly stood bolt upright, scarcely conscious of the dress or the pins, or her mother's monologue. She was still thinking over the great determination she had come to. George had not come back, but Dolly had made up her mind to tell Lady Sarah every thing. She was not afraid; it was a relief to have the matter settled. She would say no word to injure him. It was she who had been to blame throughout. Her reflections were oddly intermingled with snips and pricks other than those of her conscience. Once, as Julie ran a pin into her arm, she thought how strange it was that Mr. Raban should have guessed every thing all along. Dolly longed and feared to have her explanation over.

"Have you nearly done? Let me go down, Julie," said Dolly, becoming impatient at last.

But Julie still wanted to do something to the set of the sleeve.

And while Julie was pinning poor Dolly down the clock struck nine, and the time was over, and Dolly's opportunity was lost forever. It has happened to us all. When she opened the dining-room door at last she knew in one instant that it was too late.

The room seemed full of people. Lady Sarah was there; Mrs. Morgan bristling by the window; Rhoda was there, kneeling at Lady Sarah's knee, in some agitation: her bonnet had fallen off, her hair was all curling and rough. She started up as Dolly came in, and ran to meet her.

"Oh, Dolly!" she said; "come, come," and she seized both her hands. "I have told Lady Sarah every thing; she knows all. Oh, why did we not confide in her long ago?" and Rhoda burst into tears. "Oh, I feel how wrong we have been," she sobbed.

"Rhoda has told me every thing, Dolly," said Lady Sarah in a cold voice—"every thing that those whom I trusted implicitly saw fit to conceal from me."

Was it Aunt Sarah who had spoken in that cold, harsh-sounding tone?

"Rhoda has acted by my advice and with my full approval," said Mrs. Morgan, stepping forward. "She is not one to look back, once her hand is to the plow. When I had seen George's letter—it was lying on the table—I said at once that no time should be lost in acquainting your aunt, Dolly. It is inconceivable to me that you have not done so before. We started immediately after our eight-o'clock breakfast, and all is now clearly understood, I trust, Lady Sarah. Rhoda's frankness will be a lesson to Dolly."

Poor Dolly! she was stiff, silent, overwhelmed. She looked appealingly at her aunt, but Lady Sarah looked away. What could she say? how was it that she was there a culprit while Rhoda stood weeping and forgiven? Rhoda who had enforced the silence, Rhoda now taking merit for her tardy frankness! while George was gone, and Dolly in disgrace.

"Indeed, Aunt Sarah, I would have told you every thing," cried the girl, very much agitated, "only Rhoda herself made me promise—"

"Dolly, you never promised!" cried Rhoda. "But we were all wrong," she burst out, with fresh penitence: "only, Lady Sarah knows all, and we shall be happier now," she said, wiping her eyes.

"Happy in right-doing," interrupted Mrs. Morgan.

"Have we done wrong, Aunt Sarah? Forgive us," said Dolly, with a touching ring in her voice.

Lady Sarah did not answer. She was used to her nephew's misdeeds, but that Dolly—her own Dolly—should have been

the one to plot against her cut the poor lady to the heart. She could not speak. "And Dolly knew it all the time," she had said to Rhoda a minute before Dolly came in. "Yes, she knew it," said Rhoda. "She wished it, and feared—" Here Rhoda blushed very red. "George told me she feared that you might not approve and do for him as you might otherwise have done. Oh, Lady Sarah, what injustice we have done you!"

"Perhaps Dolly would wish to see the letter," said Mrs. Morgan, offering her a paper: there was no mistaking the cramped writing. There was no date nor beginning to the note:

"I have been awake all night thinking over what has happened. It is not your fault that you do not know what love is, nor what a treasure I have wasted upon you. I have given you my best, and to you it is worthless. You can't realize such love as mine. You will not even understand the words that I am writing to you; but it is not your fault, any more than it is mine, that I can not help loving you. Oh, Rhoda, you don't care so much for my whole life's salvation as I do for one moment's peace of mind for me. I see it now—I understand all now. Forgive me if I am hurting you, for the sake of all you have made me suffer. I feel as if I could no longer bear my life here. I must go, and yet I must see you once more. You need not be afraid that I should say any thing to frighten or distress you. Your terror of me has pained me far more than you have any conception of. God bless you! I had rather your hands smote me than that another blessed."

"It is most deplorable that a young man of George's ability should write such nonsense," said Mrs. Morgan.

Poor Dolly flushed up and began to tremble. Her heart ached for her poor George's trouble.

"It is not nonsense," she said, passionately; "people call what they can not feel themselves nonsense. Aunt Sarah, you understand, though they don't. You must see how unhappy he is. How can Rhoda turn against him now? How can she, after all that has passed? What harm has he done? It was not wicked to love her more than she loved him."

"Do you see no cruelty in all this long deception?" said Lady Sarah, with two red spots burning in her cheeks. "You must both have had some motive for your silence. Have I ever shown myself cold or unfeeling to you?" and the flushed face was turned away from her.

"It was not for herself, Lady Sarah," said Mrs. Morgan, wishing to see justice done. "No doubt she did not wish to injure George's prospects."

Dolly was silent. She had some dim feeling of what was in Lady Sarah's mind; but it was a thought she put aside—it seemed unworthy of them both. She was ashamed to put words to it.

If Dolly and her aunt had only been alone, all might have been well, and the girl might have made Lady Sarah understand how true she had been to her and loyal at heart, although silent from circumstances. Dolly looked up with wistful, speaking eyes, and

Lady Sarah almost understood their mute entreaty.

The words of love are all but spoken, when some one else speaks other words; the hands long to grasp each other, and other fingers force them asunder. Alas! Rhoda stood weeping between them, and Mrs. Palmer now appeared in an elegant morning wrapper.

"My dearest child, Madame Frisette is come and is waiting," said Dolly's mamma, sinking into a chair. "She is a delightful person, but utterly reckless for trimmings.—How do you do, Mrs. Morgan; why do you not persuade Lady Sarah to let Madame Frisette take her pattern, and—"

But, as usual, Lady Sarah, freezing under Mrs. Palmer's sunny influence, got up and left the room.

Rhoda, tearful and forgiven, remained for some time giving her version of things to Mrs. Palmer. She had come to speak to Lady Sarah by her aunt's advice. Aunt Morgan had opened George's letter as it lay upon the breakfast-table, and had been as much surprised as Rhoda herself by its contents. They had come to talk things over with Lady Sarah, to tell her of all that had been making Rhoda so unhappy of late.

"I thought she and you, Mrs. Palmer, would have advised me and told me what was right to do," said the girl, with dark eyes brimming over. "How can I help it if he loves me? I know that he might have looked higher."

"The boy is perfectly demented," said Mrs. Palmer, "to dream of marrying. He has not a sixpence, my dear child, barely enough to pay his cab hire. He has been most ridiculous. How we shall ever persuade Lady Sarah to pay his debts I can not imagine! Dolly will not own to it, but we all know that she does not like parting with her money. I do hope and trust she has made her will, for she looks a perfect wreck."

"Oh, mamma!" entreated poor Dolly.

Mrs. Palmer paid no heed, except to say, crossly, "I do wish you had shown a little common-sense. Dolly, you have utterly injured your prospects. Robert will be greatly annoyed; he counts so much upon dear Sarah's affection for you both. As for me, I have been disappointed far too often to count upon any thing. By-the-way, Dolly, I wish you would go up and ask your aunt whether that invitation has come to Bucklersbury House. Go, child; why do you look so vacant?"

Poor Dolly! One by one all those she trusted most seemed to be failing and disappointing her. Hitherto Dolly had idealized them all. She shrunk to learn that love and faith must overcome evil with good, and that this is their reward even in this

life, and that to love those who love you is not the whole of its experience.

Rhoda's letter, miserable as it was, had relieved Dolly from much of her present anxiety about George. That hateful dark river no longer haunted her. He was unhappy, but he was safe on shore. All the same, every thing seemed dull and sad and undefined that afternoon, and Robert, coming in, found her sitting in the oak-room window with her head resting on her hand and her work lying in her lap. She had taken up some work, but as she set the stitches it seemed to her—it was but a fancy—that with each stitch George was going farther and farther away, and she dropped her work at last into her lap, and reasoned herself into some composure; only when her lover came in cheerfully, and talking with the utmost ease and fluency, her courage failed her suddenly.

"What is the matter; why do you look so unhappy?" said Robert.

"Nothing is the matter," said Dolly, "only most things seem going wrong, Robert; and I have been wrong, and there is nothing to be done."

"What is the use of making yourself miserable?" said Robert, good-naturedly scolding her; "you are a great deal too apt, Dolly, to trouble yourself unnecessarily. You must forgive me for saying so. This business between George and Rhoda is simply childish, and there is nothing in it to distress you."

"Do you think that nothing is unhappiness," said Dolly, going on with her own thought, "unless it has a name and a definite shape?"

"I really don't know," said Henley. "It depends upon—What is this invitation, Dora? You don't mean to say the Duchess has not sent one yet?" he said in a much more interested voice.

"There is only the card for Aunt Sarah. I am afraid mamma is vexed, and it is settled that I am not to go."

"Not to go?" Robert cried; "my dear Dolly, of course you must go; it is absolutely necessary you should be seen at one or two good houses, after all the second-rate society you have been frequenting lately. Where is your mother?"

When Mrs. Palmer came in, in her bonnet, languid and evidently out of temper, and attended by Colonel Witherington, Robert immediately asked, in a heightened tone of voice, whether it was true that Dolly was not to be allowed to go to the ball.

Philippa replied in her gentlest accents that no girl should be seen without her mother. If an invitation came for them both, every thing was ready; and, even at the last moment, she should be willing to take Dorothea to Bucklersbury House.

"Too bad," said the Colonel, sitting heav-

ily down in Lady Sarah's chair. "A conspiracy, depend upon it. They don't wish for too much counter-attraction in a certain quarter."

"One never knows what to think," said Mrs. Palmer, thoughtfully. "I have left a card this afternoon, Robert, upon which I wrote a few words in pencil, to explain my connection with Sarah. I wished to show that I at least was not unacquainted with the usages of civilized society. Kindly hand me that 'Peerage.'"

"My dear Aunt Philippa," cried Robert, walking up and down in a state of the greatest perturbation, "what induced you to do such a preposterous thing? What will the Duchess think of us all?"

Mrs. Palmer, greatly offended, replied that she could not allow Robert to speak to her in such disrespectful tones. The Duchess might think what she chose; Dolly should not go without her.

Dolly tried in vain to smooth the angry waters—she only made things worse.

"I don't care about it a bit," she said.

"After all the trouble you have given us in the matter," said her mother, "it is scarcely gracious of you, Dolly, to say that you no longer care for the ball."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHITE ROSES.

SOME one sent Dolly a great bunch of white roses that afternoon; they came in with a late breath of summer—shining white with dark leaves and stems—and, as Dolly bent her head over the soft zones, breathing their sweet breath, it seemed to carry her away into cool depths of fragrance. The roses seemed to come straight from some summer garden, from some tranquil place where all was peace and silence. As she stood holding them in her two hands, the old garden at All-Saints came before her, and the day when Robert first told her that he loved her. How different things seemed already; the roses only were as sweet as she remembered them. Every one seemed changed since then—Robert himself most of all; and if she was herself disappointed, was she not as changed as the rest?

But these kind, dear roses had come to cheer her, and to remind her to be herself, of all that had gone before. How good of Robert to think of them! She wished they had come before he left, that she might have thanked him. She now remembered telling him, as they were driving down to the river, that no roses were left in their garden.

"Very pretty," said her mother. "Take them away, Dolly; they are quite overpowering. You know, Colonel Witherington, how much better people understand these things

at Trincomalee: and what quantities of flowers I used to receive there! Even the Admiral once ordered in six dozen lemon shrubs in tubs for my fête. As for the people in this country, they don't do things by halves, but by quarters, my dear Colonel."

Mrs. Palmer was still agitated, nor did she regain her usual serenity until about six o'clock, when, in answer to a second note from Lady Sarah, the persecuted Duchess sent a blank card for Mrs. Palmer to fill up herself if she chose.

When Dolly came to say good-night to Lady Sarah she held her roses in her hand. Some of the leaves shook down upon her full white skirts. It was late in the summer, and the sweet heads hung languid on their stalks. They were the last roses that Dolly wore for many and many a day.

"So you are going," said Lady Sarah.

"Yes," said Dolly, waiting for one word, one sign, to show that she was forgiven. She stood with sun-gilt hair in the light of the western window.

"Dear Aunt Sarah, you are not well. You must not be left all alone," Dolly said, timidly.

"I am quite well—I shall not be alone," said Lady Sarah. "Mr. Tapeall is coming, and I am going to sign my will, Dolly; and she looked her niece hard in the face. "I shall not change it again, whatever may happen. You will have no need in future to conceal any thing from me, for the money is yours." And Lady Sarah sighed, deeply hurt.

Dolly blushed up.

"Dear Aunt Sarah, I do not want your money," she said. "You could never have thought—"

"I can only judge people by their deeds," said Lady Sarah, coldly still. "You and George shall judge me by mine whether or not I have loved you;" and the poor old voice failed a little, and the lips quivered as she held up her cheek for Dolly to kiss.

"Dear, dearest," said Dolly, "only forgive me too. If you mean that you are going to leave me money, I shall not be grateful. I have enough. What do I want? Only that you should love us always. Do you think I would marry Robert if he did not think so too?"

"Mademoiselle, madame is ready," cried Julie, coming to the door and tapping.

"George, too, would say the same: you know he would," Dolly went on, unheeding Julie's call. "But if you give him what you meant for me, dear Aunt Sarah, indeed that would make me happiest, and then I should know you forgive me."

The door creaked, opened, and Mrs. Palmer stood there impatient in her evening dress.

"My dear Dolly, what have you got to say to Aunt Sarah? We shall be dreadfully late,

and Robert is fuming. *Do pray come. Good-night, Sarah—so sorry to leave you.*"

Rather than keep dinner waiting people break off their talk, their loves, their prayers. The Middletons' dinner was waiting, and Dolly had to come away. Some of the rose leaves were lying on the floor after she had left, and the caressing fragrance still seemed to linger in the room.

Dolly left home unforgiven, so she thought. Aunt Sarah had not smiled nor spoken to her in her old voice once since that wretched morning scene.

But, in truth, Lady Sarah was clearer-sighted than people gave her credit for. She was bitterly hurt by Dolly's want of confidence; but she began to understand the struggle which had been going on in the girl's mind, and, so far, things were not so sad as she had imagined at first. They were dismal enough.

When Marker came to tell Lady Sarah that Mr. Tapeall and his clerks were below, she got up from her chair wearily, and went down to meet the lawyer. What did she care now? She had saved and pinched and laid by (more of late than any one suspected), and Dolly was to benefit, and Dolly did not care; Robert only seemed to count upon the money. It is often the most cautious people who betray themselves most unexpectedly. Something in Henley's manner had annoyed Lady Sarah of late. He had spoken of George with constant disparagement. More than once Robert had let slip a word that showed how confidently he looked for Dolly's inheritance.

One day Mrs. Palmer had noticed Lady Sarah's eyes upon him, and immediately tried to cover his mistake. Not so Dolly, who said, "Robert! what are you thinking of? How should we ever be able to afford a country house if you go into Parliament?"

"Robert thinks he is marrying an heiress, I suppose," said Lady Sarah.

"No, he doesn't," Dolly answered; "that would spoil it all."

This was all the gratitude poor Lady Sarah had saved and pinched herself to win.

Lady Sarah, as I have said, might have been a money-lover, if her warm heart had not saved her. But she was human, and she could not help guessing at Robert's comfortable calculations, and she resented them. Did she not know what it was to be married not for herself, but for what she could bring? Was *that* to be her Dolly's fate? Never, never! Who knows? Let her have her own way; it may be best, after all, thought Lady Sarah, wearily. She was tired of battling. Let George inherit, if it so pleased them. To please them was all she had wished or hoped for, and now even the satisfaction of pleasing them in her own way was denied her. But her girl was true; this she felt. No sordid

thoughts had ever come between them, and for this she thanked God in her heart.

"You may burn it, Mr. Tapeall," said Lady Sarah, as the lawyer produced a beautiful neatly written parchment, where Miss Dorothea Vanborough's name was emblazoned many times. "I want you to make me another. Yes, make it directly, and I will sign it at once, and old Sam can bear witness."

"I shall be happy to receive any further instructions," said the lawyer. "I shall have to take the memorandum home with me to prepare—"

"I will sign the memorandum," said Lady Sarah. "You can have it copied, if you like, Mr. Tapeall; but I wish to have this business settled at once, and to hear no more of it. There is a pen and some ink on that table."

"Where did you get your roses?" said Robert to Dolly; "I thought you told me they were over."

"Did not you send them?" said Dolly, disappointed. "Who can have sent them? Not Colonel Witherington?"

"Mr. Raban is more likely," said Mrs. Palmer. "Julie tells me he came to the door this afternoon."

"How kind of him!" cried Miss Vanborough.

"It was quite unnecessary," said Robert. "Nobody in society carries bouquets now."

"Then I am not in society," said Dolly, laughing; but although she laughed, she felt sad and depressed.

When the door opened and Mrs. Palmer, followed by her beautiful daughter and Henley, came into the room at Mrs. Middleton's, Colonel Witherington declared, upon his honor, they quite brightened up the party. White and gracious with many laces and twinklings, Mrs. Palmer advances, taking to society as a duck takes to the water, and not a little pleased with the sensation she is creating. Dolly follows, looking very handsome, but, it must be confessed, somewhat absent. Her mother had excellent taste, and had devised a most becoming costume, and if Dolly had only been herself, she would certainly have done credit to it; but she had not responded to Mademoiselle Julie's efforts—a sudden fit of dull shyness seemed to overpower her. If Frank Raban had been there, she would have liked to thank him for her flowers, but Mrs. Middleton began explaining to Robert how sorry she was that his friend Mr. Raban had been obliged to go off to Cambridge. Dolly was a little disappointed. The silvery folds of her dress fell each in juxtaposition, but Dolly sat silent and pale and far away, and for some time she scarcely spoke.

"That girl does not look happy," said some one.

Robert overheard the speech, and was

very much annoyed by it. These constant depressions were becoming a serious annoyance to him. He took Dolly down to dinner, but he devoted himself to a sprightly lady on his left hand, who with many shrieks of laughter, and wriggings and twinklings of diamonds, spurred him on to a brilliance foreign to his nature. Young as he was, Robert was old for his age, and a capital diner-out, and he had the art of accommodating himself to his audience. Mrs. Palmer was radiant, sitting between two white neckcloths; one belonged to the Viscount Portcullis, the other to the faithful Witherington; and she managed to talk to them both at once.

Dolly's right-hand neighbor was an upright, rather stern, soldierly-looking man, with a heavy white mustache. He spoke to her, and she answered with an effort, for her thoughts were still far away, and she was preoccupied still. Dolly was haunted by the sense of coming evil; she was pained by Robert's manner. He was still displeased, and he took care to show that it was so. She was troubled about George; she was wondering what he was about. She had written to him at Cambridge that afternoon a loving, tender, sisterly little letter, begging him to write to his faithful sister Dolly. Again she told herself that it was absurd to be anxious and wicked to be cross, and she tried to shake off her depression, and to speak to the courteous though rather alarming neighbor on her right hand.

It was a dinner-party just like any other. They are pretty festivals on the whole, although we affect to decry them. In the midst of the Middleton dinner-table was an erection of ice and ferns and cool green grass, and round about this circled the entertainment—flowers, dried fruit, processions of cut glass and china, with entrées, diversities of chicken and cutlet, and then ladies and gentlemen alternate, with a host at one end and a hostess at the other, and an outermost ring of attendants pouring out gold and crimson juices into the crystal cups.

It is fortunate, perhaps, that other people are not silent always because we are sad. With all its objections—I have read this in some other book—there is a bracing atmosphere in society, a Spartan-like determination to leave cares at home, and to try to forget all the ills and woes and rubs to which we are subject, and to think only of the present and the neighbors fate has assigned for the time. Little by little Dolly felt happier and more reassured. Where every thing was so commonplace and unquestioning, it seemed as if tragedy could not exist. Comedy seems much more real at times than tragedy. Three or four tragedies befall us in the course of our existence, and a hundred daily comedies pass before our eyes.

Dolly, hearing her mother's silver laugh

and Robert's cheerful duet, was reassured, and she entered little by little into the tune of the hour, and once, glancing up shyly, she caught a very kind look in her neighbor's keen dark eyes.

He knew nothing of her, except a sweet girlish voice and a blush; but that was enough almost, for it was Dolly's good fortune to have a voice and a face that told of her as she was. There are some smiles and blushes that mean nothing at all, neither happy emotion nor quick response; and, again, are there not other well-loved faces which are but the homely disguises in which angels have come into our tents? Dolly's looks pleased her neighbor, nor was he disappointed when he came to talk to her; he felt a kindness toward the girl, and a real interest when he discovered her name. He had known her father in India many years before. "Had she ever heard of David Fane?" Colonel Fane seemed pleased when Dolly brightened up and exclaimed. He went on to tell her that he was on his way to the Crimea: his regiment was at Southampton, waiting its orders to sail.

"And you are going to that dreadful war!" said Dolly, in her girlish tones, after a few minutes' talk.

Colonel Fane looked very grave.

"Your father was a brave soldier," he said; "he would have told you that war is a cruel thing; but there are worse things than fighting for a good cause."

"You mean *not* fighting," said Dolly; "but how can we who sit at home in peace and safety be brave for others?"

"I have never yet known a woman desert her post in the time of danger," said Colonel Fane, speaking with gentle, old-fashioned courtesy. "You have your own perils to affront; they find you out even in your homes. I saw a regiment of soldiers today," he said, smiling, "in white caps and aprons, who fight with some very deadly enemies. They are under the command of my sister, my brother's widow. She is a hospital nurse, and has charge of a fever ward at present."

Then he went on to tell Dolly that his brother had died of small-pox not long before, and his wife had mourned him not in sackcloth and ashes, but in pity and love and devotion to others. Dolly listened with an unconscious look of sympathy that touched Colonel Fane more than words.

"And is she quite alone now?" said Dolly.

"I should like you to know her some day," he said. "She is less alone than any body I know. She lives near St. Barnabas's Hospital; and if you will go and see her some time when she is at home and away from her sick, she will make, not acquaintance, but friends with you, I hope."

Then he asked Dolly whether she was an only child, and the girl told him something

—far more than she had any idea of—about George.

"I might have been able to be of some little use to your brother if he had chosen the army for a profession," said Colonel Fane, guessing that something was amiss.

Dolly was surprised to find herself talking to Colonel Fane as if she had known him all her life. A few minutes before he had been but a name. When he offered to help George, Dolly blushed up, and raised two grateful eyes.

There is something in life which is not love, but which plays as great a part almost—sympathy, quick response—I scarcely know what name to give it; at any moment, in the hour of need, perhaps, a door opens, and some one comes into the room. It may be a commonplace man in a shabby coat, a placid lady in a smart bonnet: does nothing tell us that this is one of the friends to be, whose hands are to help us over the stony places, whose kindly voices will sound to us hereafter voices out of the infinite? Life has, indeed, many phases, love has many a metempsychosis. Is it a lost love we are mourning—a lost hope? Only dim, distant stars, we say, where all was light. Lo, friendship comes dawning in generous and peaceful streams!

Before dinner was over Colonel Fane said to Dolly: "I hope to have another talk with you some day. I am not coming up stairs now; but, if you will let me do so, I shall ask my sister, Mrs. William Fane, to write to you when she is free."

Robert was pleased to see Dolly getting on so well with her neighbor. He was a man of some mark, and a most desirable acquaintance for her. Robert was just going to introduce himself, when Mrs. Middleton bowed to Lady Portcullis, and the ladies began to leave the room.

"Good-by," said Dolly's new friend, very kindly; "I shall ask you not to forget your father's old companion. If I come back, one of my first visits shall be to you."

Then Dolly stood up blushing, and then she said, "Thank you very much; I shall never forget you. I, too, am going away—to India—with—" and she looked at Henley, who was at that moment receiving the parting fire of the lively lady. There was no time to say more; she put out her hand with a grateful pressure. Colonel Fane watched Dolly as she walked away in the procession. For her sake he said a few civil words to Henley; but he was disappointed in him. "I don't think poor Stan Vanborough would have approved of such a cut-and-dry son-in-law," the Colonel said to himself as he lighted his cigar and came away into the street.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"ONLY GEORGE."

THOUGHTS seem occasionally to have a life of their own—a life independent; sometimes they are even stronger than the thinkers, and draw them relentlessly along. They seize hold of outward circumstances with their strong grip. How strangely a dominant thought sometimes runs through a whole epoch of life!

With some holy and serene natures this thought is peace in life; with others it is human love, that troubled love of God.

The moonlight is streaming over London; and George is not very far away, driven by his master thought along a bright stream that flows through the gates and by the down-trodden roads that cross Hyde Park. The skies, the streets, are silver and purple; abbey towers and far-away houses rise dim against the stars; lights burn in shadowy windows. The people passing by, and even George, hurrying along in his many perplexities, feel the life and the echo every where of some mystical chord of nature and human nature striking in response. The very iron rails along the paths seemed turned to silver. George leaps over a silver railing, and goes toward a great sea of moonlight lying among the grass and encircled by shadowy trees.

In this same moon-lit stream, flowing into the little drawing-room of the bow-windowed house in Old Street, sits Rhoda, resting her head against the pane of the lantern-like window, and thinking over the events of the last two days.

On the whole, she feels that she has acted wisely and for the best. Lady Sarah seemed to think so—Uncle John said no word of blame. It was unfortunate that Aunt Morgan's curiosity should have made her insist upon reading George's letter; but no harm had come of it. Dolly, of course, was unreasonable. Rhoda, who was accustomed to think of things very definitely, begun to wonder what Frank Raban would think of it all, and whether Uncle John would tell him. She thought that Mr. Raban would not be sorry to hear of what had occurred. What a pity George was not more like Mr. Raban or Robert Henley. How calm they were; while he—he was unbearable; and she was very glad it was all over between them. Lady Sarah was evidently deeply offended with him.

"I hope she will leave him *something*," thought Rhoda. "He will never be able to make his way. I can see that; and he is so rough, and I am such a poor little thing;" and Rhoda sighed. "I shall always feel to him as if he were a brother, and I shall tell Mr. Raban so if—" Here Rhoda looked up, and almost screamed out, for there stood George, rippling with moonlight, watching her through the window from the opposite

side of the street. He looked like a ghost as he leaned against the railings. He did not care who noticed him, nor what other people might think of him. He had come all this way only to see Rhoda once more, and there she was, only separated from him by a pane of glass.

When Rhoda looked up, George came across and stood under the window. The moonlight stream showed him a silver figure plain marked upon the darkness. There she sat with a drooping head and one arm lightly resting against the bar. Poor boy! He had started in some strange faith that he should find her. He had come up all the way only to look at her once more. All his passionate anger had already died away. He had given up hope, but he had not given up love; and so he stood there, wild and haggard, with pulses throbbing. He had scarcely eaten any thing since the evening before. He had gone back to Cambridge he knew not why. He had lain awake all night, and all day he had been lying in his boat hiding under the trees along the bank, looking up at the sky and cursing his fate.

Rhoda looked up. George, with a quick movement, pointed to the door, and sprang up the steps of the house. He must speak to her, now that she had seen him. For what else had he come? She was frightened, and did not move at first in answer to his signs. She was alone. Aunt Morgan and the girls were drinking tea at the schools, but Uncle John was in the study. She did not want him to see George. It would only make a fuss and an explanation—there had been too much already. She got up and left the window, and then went into the hall and stood by the door undecided; and as she stood there she heard a low voice outside say, "Rhoda! let me in."

Rhoda still hesitated. "Let me in," said the voice again, and she opened the door a very little way, and put her foot against it.

"Good-night, George," she said, in a whisper. "Good-night. Go home. Dolly is so anxious about you."

"I have come to see you," said George. "Why won't you let me in, Rhoda?"

"I am afraid," said Rhoda. "You need not be afraid, Rhoda," he said, going back a step. "Dear, will you forgive me for having frightened you?" and he came nearer again.

"I can't—go, go," cried Rhoda, hastily. "Here is some one;" and suddenly, with all her might, she pushed the door in his face. It shut with a bang, with all its iron knobs and locks rattling.

"What is it?" said John Morgan, looking out of his study.

"I had opened the door, Uncle John," said Rhoda. Her heart beat a little. Would George go away? She thought she heard footsteps striking down the street. Then

she felt more easy. She told herself once more that it was far better to have no scenes nor explanations, and she sat down quietly to her evening's task in a corner of her uncle's study. She was making some pinafores for the little Costellos, and she tranquilly stitched and tucked and hemmed. John Morgan liked to see her busy at her womanly work, her little lamp duly trimmed, and her busy fingers working for others more thrifless.

And outside in the moonlight George walked away in a new fury. What indignity had he subjected himself to? He gave a bitter sort of laugh. He had not expected much, but this was worse than any thing he had expected. Reproaches, coldness, indifference—all these he was prepared for. He knew in his heart of hearts that Rhoda did not care for him; and what further wrong could she do him than this injury that people inflict every day upon each other? She had added scorn to her indifference; and again George laughed to himself, thinking of this wooden door Rhoda had clapped upon his passion, and her summary way of thrusting him out.

At one time, instead of banging the door, she used to open it wide. She used to listen to him, with her wonderful dark eyes fixed on his face. Now what had happened? He was the same man, she was the same woman, and nothing was the same. George mechanically walked on toward his own home—if Church House could be so called. He went across the square, and by a narrow back street, and he tried the garden gate, and found it open, and went in, with some vague idea of finding Dolly, and calling her to the bench beside the pond, and of telling her of all his trouble. That slam of the door kept sounding in his ears, a sort of knell to his love.

But George was in no vein of luck that night. The garden was deserted and mysterious, heavy with sweet scents in the darkness. He went down the dark path and came back again, and there was a rustle among the trees; and as he walked across the lawn toward the lighted window of the oak room, he heard two voices clear in the silence, floating up from some kitchen below. He knew Sam's croak; he did not recognize the other's voice.

"Mademoiselle is gone to dance. I like to dance too," it said. "Will you come to a ball and dance with me, Mr. Sam?"

Then followed old Sam's chuckle. "I'll dance with you, mademoiselle," he said.

George thought it sounded as if some evil spirit of the night were mocking his trouble. And so Dolly was dancing while he was roaming about in his misery. Even Dolly had forgotten his pain. Even Rhoda had turned him out. Who cared what happened to him now?