

Robert flushed up. "The eyes of the whole place are upon us," he muttered. Then came something like an oath.

"Hush! silence!" said the people behind.

Robert bit his lip and sat staring at the conductor's rod. Every now and then he gave a little impatient jerk of the head.

Rhoda waited her time. He had not followed Dolly, he had remained with her—it was something. The music went on—not one note did she hear—the time seemed interminable. But Robert, hearing a low sigh, turned at last. He did not speak, but he looked at her.

"You are angry?" whispered Rhoda.

"Why should I be angry with you?" he answered, more gently.



CHAPTER LIII.

THAT THOU ART BLAMED SHALL NOT BE THY DEFECT.

ONCE, as Dolly was hurrying away through the passages to the great front entrance, she looked back, for she thought she heard Robert's step coming after her. It was only Casimir, the servant, who had been loitering by a staircase, and had seen her pass. She came to the great wide doors of the music-hall, where the people were congregated, the servants carrying their mistresses' carriage cloaks over their arms, the touters and vendors of programmes. The music was still in her ears; she felt very calm, very strange. Casimir would have darted off for the carriage if she had not stopped him.

"Is Mademoiselle indisposed? Shall I accompany her?" he asked.

But although Dolly looked very pale, she said she was not ill; she would go home alone; and when she was safely seated in the little open carriage he called for her, the color came back into her cheeks. She leaned back, for she was very tired. As she drove along she

tried to remember what had happened, to think what more would happen, but she could not do so. It was a feeling, not an event, that had moved her so; and the outward events that relate these great unseen histories to others are to the actors themselves of little consequence. As for the future, Dolly could scarcely believe in a future. Was any thing left to her now? Her life seemed over, and she was scarcely twenty: she was sorry for herself. She did not regret what she had done, for he did not love her. It was Rhoda whom he loved—Rhoda who seemed to have absorbed every thing, little by little. There was nothing that she had spared. Dolly wondered what they would say at the Court. She thought of Frank Raban, too. If the squire's news was true, Frank Raban would be thinking no more of her, but absorbed in other interests. Even Frank—was any one faithful in life? Then she thought of George: he had not failed: he had been true to the end, and this comforted her.

Every thing seemed to have failed with her, and yet—how shall I explain it?—Dolly was at peace with herself. In her heart she knew that she had tried, always tried, to do her best. No pangs of conscience assailed her as she drove home through this strange chaos of regrets and forgetfulness. Her hands fell into her lap as she leaned back in the little carriage: it was bringing her away through the dull rattle of the streets to a new home, a new life, swept and garnished, so it seemed to Dolly, where every thing was strange and bare—one in which, perhaps, little honor was to be found, little credit. What did she care! She was too true a lady to trouble herself about resentments and petty slights and difficulties. They had both meant to do right. As for Rhoda, Dolly would not think of Rhoda just then: it hurt her. For George's sake she must try to think kindly of her; was it for her to cast a stone? Dolly came up stairs slowly and steadily, opened the door, which was on the latch, and came in, looking for her mother. Miss Vanborough had never, not even in the days of her happy love, looked more beautiful than she did as she came into the little sitting-room at home. A light was in her face; it was the self-forgetful look of some one who has passed for a moment beyond the common state of life, escaping the assaults of selfish passion, into a state where feeling is not destroyed but multiplied beyond itself. In these moods sacrifice scarcely exists. The vanities of the world glitter in vain, discord can not jar, and in the midst of tumult and sorrow souls are at peace.

Mrs. Palmer was not alone; the squire was there. He had brought news. He had been detained by a peremptory telegram from Norah—"Jonah arrives Paris to-morrow; mamma says, remain; bring Jonah home"—and Jonah, who had come almost at the same

time as the telegram, had accompanied the squire, and was waiting impatiently enough, hoping to see Dolly. He had been somewhat bored by the little elderly flirtation which had been going on for the last half hour between his aunt and his godfather (which sort of *pot-pourri*, retaining a certain faint perfume of by-gone roses, is not uncommon); but he did not move, except to go and stand out upon the balcony and stare up and down the street; he was leaning over the slender railing when Dolly came in, and so it happened that at first she only saw the squire sitting by her mother's easy-chair. She gave him her hand. He stood holding it in his, and looking at her, for he saw that something had happened.

"Alone!" said Mrs. Palmer. "Is Robert with you? I have some news for you; guess, Dolly;" and Philippa looked archly toward the window.

Dolly looked at her mother. "I left them at the concert," she said, not asking what the news was.

"What made you leave them? Why do you stare at me like that?" cried Mrs. Palmer, forgetting her news. "Have you had another quarrel? Dolly, I have only just been saying so to Mr. Anley; under the circumstances you really should not—you really should—"

"It has all been a mistake, mamma," said Dolly, looking up, though she did not see much before her. "Every thing is over. Robert and I have parted, quite parted," she repeated, sadly.

"Parted!" exclaimed the squire. "Has it come to this?"

"Parted!" cried poor exasperated Philippa. "I warned you. It is your own fault, Dolly; you have been possessed all along. Mr. Anley, what is to be done?" cried the poor lady, turning from one to the other. "Is it your doing or Robert's? Dolly, what is it all about?"

Dolly did not answer for an instant, for she could not speak.

The squire began muttering something between his teeth, as he strode up and down the room with his hands in his pockets.

"Take care! you will knock over the jardinière," cried Mrs. Palmer.

Dolly's eyes were all full of tears by this time. As he turned she laid her hand upon the old man's arm. "It is my doing, not his," she said. "You must not be hard upon him; indeed, it is all my doing."

"It is your doing now, and most properly," said the squire, very gravely, and not in the least in his usual half-joking manner. "I can only congratulate you upon having got rid of that abominable prig; but you must not take it all upon yourself, my poor child."

Dolly blushed up. "You think it is not my fault," she said, and the glow spread and

deepened. "He was not bound when he left me, only I had promised to wait." Then, with sudden courage, "You will not blame him when I tell you this," she said: "I have not been true to him, not quite true; I told him so: it was a pity, all a pity," she said, with a sigh. She stood with hanging hands and a sweet, wistful, tender face; her voice was like a song in its unconscious rhythms, for deep feeling gives a note to people's voices that is very affecting sometimes.

"You told him so! What will people say?" shrieked poor Mrs. Palmer. "And here is Jonah, whom we have quite forgotten."

Jonah was standing listening with all his honest ears. It seemed to the young soldier that he also had been listening to music, to some sweet sobbing air played with tender touch. It seemed to fill the room even after Dolly had left it; for when she turned and suddenly saw her cousin it was the climax of that day's agitation. She came up and kissed him with a little sob of surprise and emotion, tried to speak in welcome, and then shook her head and quickly went away, shutting the door behind her. As Dolly left the room the two men looked at one another. They were almost too indignant with Henley to care to say what they thought of his conduct. "Had not we better go?" said Jonah, awkwardly, after a pause.

But Mrs. Palmer could not possibly dispense with an audience on such an occasion as this: she made Jonah promise to return to dinner; she detained the squire altogether to detail to him the inmost feelings of a mother's heart; she sent for cups of tea. "Is Miss Dolly in her room, Julie?" she asked.

"Yes, madame; she has locked the door," said Julie.

"Go and knock, then, immediately, Julie; and come and tell me what she says, poor dear."

Then Mrs. Palmer stirs her own tea, and describes all that she has felt ever since first convinced of Robert's change of feeling. Her experience had long ago taught her to discover those signs of indifference which..... The poor squire listens in some impatience.

While Robert and Rhoda are driving home together from the concert, flattered, dazzled, each pursuing their own selfish schemes, each seeing the fulfillment of small ambitions at hand, Dolly, sitting at the foot of her bed, is saying good-by again and again. The person she had loved and longed to see, and thought of day after day and hour after hour, was not Henley, but some other quite different man, with his face, perhaps, but with another soul and nature..... That Robert who had been so dear to her at one time, so vivid, so close a friend, so wise, so sympathetic, so strong, and so tender, was nothing—no one—he had never existed. The death of this familiar friend, the dispersion of this familiar ghost, seemed, for a few hours,

as if it meant her own annihilation. All her future seemed to have ended here. It was true that she had accused herself openly of want of faithfulness; but the mere fact of having accused herself seemed to make that self-reproach lighter and more easy to bear. After some time she roused herself. Marker was at the door, and saying that it was dinner-time, and Dolly let her in, and dressed for dinner in a dreamy sort of way, taking the things, as Marker handed them to her, in silence, one by one. The squire and Jonah were both in the sitting-room when Dolly came in in the white dress she usually wore, with some black ribbons round her waist and tied into her bronze hair. She did not want to look as if she was a victim, and she tried to smile as usual.

"You must not mind me," she said, presently, in return for the squire's look of sympathy. "It is not to-day that this has happened; it began so long ago that I am used to it now." Then she added, "Mamma, I should like to see Robert again this evening, for I left him very abruptly, and I am afraid he may be unhappy about me."

"Oh, as to that, Dolly, from what the squire tells me, I don't think you need be at all alarmed," cried Dolly's mamma: "Jonah met him on the stairs with Rhoda, and really, from what I hear, I think he must have already proposed. I wonder if he will have the face to come in himself to announce it."

Both Jonah and the squire began to talk together, hoping to stop Mrs. Palmer's abrupt disclosures; but who was there who could silence Mrs. Palmer? She alluded a great deal to a certain little bird, and repeatedly asked Dolly during dinner whether she thought this dreadful news could be true, and Robert really engaged to Rhoda?

"I think it is likely to be true before long, mamma," said Dolly, patiently: "I hope so."

She seemed to droop and turn paler and paler in the twilight. She was not able to pretend to good spirits that she did not feel; but her sweetness and simplicity went straight to the heart of her two champions, who would have gladly thrown Robert out of the first-floor window if Dolly had shown the slightest wish for it.

After dinner, as they all sat in the front-room, with wide evening windows, Julie brought in the lamp. She would have shut out the evening and drawn down the blinds if they had not prevented her. The little party sat silently watching the light dancing and thrilling behind the house-tops; nobody spoke. Dolly leaned back wearily. From time to time Mrs. Palmer whispered any fresh surmise into the squire's ear: "Why did not Robert come? Was she keeping him back?"

Presently Mrs. Palmer started up: a new idea had occurred to her. She would go in herself, unannounced; she would learn the truth; the squire, he too must come. The

squire did as he was bid. As they left the room Jonah got up shyly from his seat, and went and stood out on the balcony. Dolly asked him whether there was a moon.

"There is a moon rising," said the captain, "but you can't see it from where you sit; there, from the sofa, you can see it." And then he came back, and wheeled the sofa round, and began turning down the wheel of the lamp, saying it put the moonlight out.

As the lamp went out suddenly with a splutter, all the dim radiance of the silver evening came in a soft vibration to light the darkened room. One stream of moonlight trickled along the balcony, another came lapping the stone coping of the window: the moon was rising in state and in silence, and Dolly leaned back among her cushions, watching it all with wide-open eyes. Jonah's dark cropped head rose dark against the Milky Way. As the moon rose above the gable of the opposite roof a burst of chill light flooded the balcony, and overflowed, and presently reached the foot of the couch where Dolly was lying, worn out by her long day.

Robert, who had been taking a rapid walk on the pavement outside, had not noticed the moon: he was preoccupied by more important matters. Rhoda's speeches were ringing in his ears. Yet it was Dolly's fault all along; he was ready to justify himself; to meet complaint with complaint; she might have been a happy woman. He had behaved honorably and forbearingly; and now it was really unfair that she should expect any thing more from him, or complain because he had found his ideal in another and more feminine character.

Dolly had heard the roll of the wheels of the carriage that brought Robert and Rhoda home, but she had not heard the short little dialogue which was being spoken as the wheels rolled under the gateway. The two had not said much on the way. Rhoda waited for Robert to speak. Robert sat gazing at his boots.

"One knows what every body will say," he said at last, very crossly.

"The people who know you as I do will say that Dolly might have been a happy woman," Rhoda answered; "that she has wrecked her own happiness." And then they were both again silent.

Rhoda was frightened, and trembled as she looked into Robert's offended face. She thought that the end of it all might be that he would go—leave her and all other complications, and Rhoda had not a few of her own. If he were to break free? Rhoda's heart beat with apprehension; her feeling for Robert was more genuine than most of her feelings, and this was her one excuse for the part she had played. Her nature was so narrow, her life had been so stunted, that the

first touch of sentiment overbalanced and carried her away. Dolly possessed the genius of living and loving and being to a degree that Rhoda could not even conceive; with all her tact and quickness, she could not reach beyond herself. For some days past she had secretly hoped for some such catastrophe as that which had just occurred. She had taken the situation for granted.

"One sometimes knows by instinct what people feel," she said at last. "I have long felt that Dolly did not understand you; but then, indeed, you are not easy to understand." And Robert, raising his eyes from his boots, met the beautiful gloom of her speaking eyes.

One has sometimes watched a cat winding its way between brittle perils of every sort. Rhoda softly and instinctively avoided the vanities of Robert's mind; she was presently telling him of her troubles, money troubles among the rest. She had spent more than her income; she did not dare confess to Mr. Tapeall; she felt utterly incapable of managing that fortune which ought never to have been hers—which she was ready to give up at any hour.

"Cleverer people than I am might do something with all this money," said Rhoda: "something worth doing; but I seem only to get into trouble. You say you will help me, but you will soon be gone."

"I shall be always ready to advise you," said Robert. "If there is any thing at any time—"

"But when you are gone?" said Rhoda, with great emotion.

There was a pause; the horses clattered in under the gateway.

"You must tell me to stay," said Robert, in a low voice, as he helped Rhoda out of the carriage.

As the two slowly mounted the staircase which Dolly had climbed, Jonah, coming away from his aunt's apartment, almost ran up against them. Robert exclaimed, but Jonah passed on. What did Rhoda care that he brushed past as if he had not seen them? She was sure he had seen them, and Rhoda had her own reasons for wishing no time to be lost before her news was made public. She had won her great stake, secured her prize: her triumph was not complete until others were made aware of all that had happened. She urged Robert to tell his aunt at once.

"It is only fair to yourself. Dolly will be telling her story—dear Dolly! she is always so kind; but still, as you have often said, there are two sides to a question. I am afraid your cousin passed us intentionally," said Rhoda. "Not that I care for any thing now."

"Let us have our dinner in peace," said Robert, "and then I will tell them any thing you like." And he sank down comfortably

into one of the big arm-chairs, not sorry to put after dinner out of her mind. While he was with Rhoda he was at ease with himself, and thought of nothing else; but he had vague feelings of a conscience standing outside on the landing, and ready to clutch him as he passed out of the charm of her presence.

He did not go straight off to his aunt when he left Rhoda, and so it happened that he missed Mrs. Palmer when she burst in upon Rhoda and Miss Rougemont. The resolute Robert was pacing the pavement outside, and trying to make up his mind to face those who seemed to him more like life-long enemies than friends. He took courage at last, and determined to get it over, and he turned up the street again, and climbed the staircase once more. Philippa had left the hall door open, and Robert walked in as he had been used to do. He opened the drawing-room door. He was angry with Dolly still, angry with her mother, and ready to resent their reproaches. Robert opened the drawing-room door, and stopped short at the threshold.

The room was not dark, for the bright moonlight was pouring in. Dolly was still lying, asleep. A log burned low in the fireplace, crimsoning the silver light. Robert was startled. He came forward a few steps and stood in the darkened room looking at the sleeping girl: something in her unconsciousness, in the utter silence, in the absence of reproach, smote him as no words of blame or appeal could have done. His excuses, his self-assertions, of what good were they here—who cared for them here? She scarcely moved; she scarcely seemed to breathe; her face looked calm—it was almost like the face of a dead person; and so she was—dead to him. For an instant he was touched, taken by surprise; he longed to awaken her, to ask her to forgive him for leaving her; but as he stood there a dark figure appeared in the open window. It was Jonah, who did not speak, but who pointed to the door.

At any other time Robert might have resented this, but to-night something had moved his cold and selfish heart, some ray from Dolly's generous spirit had unconsciously reached him at last. He turned away and went quietly out of the room, leaving her sleeping still.

He did not see her again; two days later she left for England.

CHAPTER LIV.

HOLY ST. FRANCIS, WHAT A CHANGE IS HERE!

TWELVE o'clock is striking in a bare room full of sunshine. A woman, who is spending her twelfth year in bed, is eating tripe out

of a basin; another, sitting by the fire, is dining off gruel; beds and women alternate all down the ward; two nurses are coming and going, one of them with a black eye. Little garlands of paper, cleverly cut out, decorate the place in honor of some royal birthday. Two little flags are stuck up against the wall and flying triumphantly from the farther end of the room. A print of the royal family, brilliantly colored, is also pinned up. Mrs. Fane is walking down the middle of the work-house infirmary with a basket on her arm, when one of the old women puts out a wrinkled hand to call her back.

"Ain't we grand, mum?" says the old woman, looking up. "It does us all good;" and she nods and goes on with her gruel again.

"How is Betty Hodge to-day?" says Mrs. Fane. The old woman points significantly.

All this time some one has been lying quite still at the further end of the room, covered by a sheet.

"At eight o'clock this morning she went off werry comfortable," says the old woman. "Mrs. Baker she is to scrub the steps now; the matron sent word this morning."

That is all. In this infirmary of the work-house it is a matter of course that people should die. It does not mean a black carriage, nodding feathers, nor blinds drawn, and tombstones with inscriptions. It means ease at last, release from the poor old body that used to scrub the steps so wearily day after day. There it was, quite still in the sunshine, with the garlands on the wall.

"I sha'n't be long," said the old tripe woman, sententiously. She has been expecting to go for months. A friend has sent her a shroud and some silver paper ready cut: she says it is all ready, and she has seen the priest.

"Ah! Mrs. Blaney, you are a sufferer," says the nurse with the black eye. "She can't eat, mum, but she likes her cup of tea;" and the nurse, who also likes her cup of tea, eyes the little packet which she sees coming out of Mrs. Fane's basket, and fetches a canister, into which she elaborately shakes the refreshing shower.

Mrs. Fane hurries on, for she has a guest at home expecting her, and a tea-party organizing for that afternoon, and she has still a visit to pay in the men's ward. Some one brought her a message—Smith wanted to speak to her; and she walked along the white-washed walls, and past check blue counterpanes, looking for her petitioner. By one of the high windows of the ward lay a brown haggard face, with a rough chin, and the little old slipshod messenger pointed to attract Mrs. Fane's attention. She remembered the man at once. He had come to see her not long before. She had sent him some money to Paris—his own money, that he had given to a nurse to keep. Mrs. Fane looked with

her kind round eyes into the worn face that tried to upraise itself to greet her.

"I am sorry to see you here," she said.

"Did you not find your friends?"

"Gone to America," gasped the man.

"You know I have still got some of your money," said Mrs. Fane, sitting down by the bedside.

"It were about that I made so bold as to hask for to see you, mum," said the man. "I have a boy at Dartford," he went on, breathing painfully. "He ain't a good boy, but I've wrote to him to go to you, and if you would please keep the money for him, mum—three pound sixteen the reverend cal'lated it—with what you sent for my journey here. I had better have stopped where I was, and where the young lady found me. Lord! what a turn she give me. I know'd it was all up when I seed her come in."

He was muttering on vacantly, as people do who are very weak. Mrs. Fane's kind heart ached for his lonely woe-begone state. She took his hand in hers—how many sick hands had she clasped in her healing palm!—but poor Smith was beyond her help.

"I see a young fellow that died beside me at the battle of the Alma," said Smith, "and when that young lady came up, as you might be, it brought it all back as it might be now. He was a gentleman, they said; he weren't half a bad chap."

"Who are you speaking of?" said Mrs. Fane, not quite following.

"They called him George—George Vance," said the man; "but that were not his name no more than Smith is mine."

"I have heard of a man of that name who was wounded at the Alma. I did not know that he had died there," said Mrs. Fane. Her hand began to tremble a little, but she spoke very quietly.

Smith hesitated for a minute; then he looked up into the clear, constraining eyes that seemed to him to be expecting his answer. "It ain't no odds to me now," he said, hoarsely, "whether I speak the tru—uth or not; you're a lady, and will keep the money safe for my poor lad. Captain Henley he offered a matter o' twenty pound if we found poor Vance alive. He were a free-handed chap were poor Vance. We know'd he would not grudge the money.....And when the Roosians shot him, poor fellow, it wasn't no odds to him."

Mrs. Fane, looking round, saw the chaplain passing, and she whispered to the old attendant to bring him to her.

"And so you said that you had found him alive, I suppose?" said Mrs. Fane, quickly guessing at the truth, and drawing away her hand.

"Well, mum, you ain't far wrong," said Smith, looking at his thin brown fingers. "There was another poor chap of our corps

died on the way to the ships. It were a long way down to the shore; we changed their names. We didn't think we had done no great harm; for twenty pound is twenty pound; but I have heard as how a fortune was lost through it all—a poor chap like me has no fortune to lose."

"It was the young lady you saw who lost her fortune," said Mrs. Fane, controlling herself, and trying to hide her agitation. "You did her great injury, you see, though you did not mean it. But you can repair this wrong. I think you will like to do so," she said, "and—and—we shall all be very much obliged to you." She would not bribe the poor dying man by promising that she would keep his money all the same. "Mr. Morgan," Mrs. Fane continued, turning to the chaplain, who had come up to the bedside, "here is a poor fellow who wishes to do us a service, and to make a statement, and I want you to take it down." She had writing materials in her basket. She often wrote the sick people's letters for them.

"What is it, my man?" said the chaplain; but as he listened his face changed. He wrote and signed the paper; Mrs. Fane signed it; and then, at her request, poor bewildered Smith feebly scrawled his name. He did it because he was told: he did not seem to care much one way or another for any thing more.

"Joe can tell you all about it," he said.

"Joe Carter—he has took his discharge. I don't know where he is—Liverpool maybe."

John Morgan could hardly contain his excitement, and his umbrella whirled like a mill as he left the work-house. "You have done a good morning's work," said the chaplain, as he came away with Mrs. Fane; "say nothing more at present. We must find out this Joe who was with him."

Afterward it turned out that it would have been better far if John Morgan had spoken openly at the time; but his terror of Rhoda's schemes was so great that he felt that if she only knew all she would lay hands on Joe, carry off Smith himself, make him unsay all he had said. "There is no knowing what that woman may not do," said Morgan. "She wrote to me; I have not answered the letter. Do you know that the marriage is actually fixed? I am very glad that you have got Dolly away from that adder's nest."

"So am I," said Mrs. Fane, beaming for an instant: she had long ago taken Dolly to her heart with a confused feeling of some maternal fibre strung, of something more tender and more enduring than the mere friendship between a girl and an older woman.

I can not help it if most of those who knew my Dolly persisted in spoiling her. She wanted every bit of kindness and sunshine that came in her way. And yet she was free from the strain that had wrenched her

poor little life; she need no longer doubt her own feelings, nor blind herself to that which she would so gladly escape.

The morbid fight was over, and the world was at peace. It was at peace, but unutterably sad, empty, meaningless. When people complain that their lives are dull and have no meaning, it is that they themselves have no meaning. Dolly felt as if she had been in the thick of the fight, and come away wounded. "I may as well be here as any where else," she had said that moonlight evening when poor Jonah had entreated her in vain to come away with him.

Dolly would not go back to Henley; she had her own reasons for keeping away. But next morning, when an opportune letter came from Mrs. Fane, Dolly, who had lain awake all night, went to her mother, who had slept very comfortably, and said, "Mamma, if you can spare me, I think I will go over to England with the squire and Jonah for a little time, until the marriage is over." Mrs. Palmer was delighted.

"To Yorkshire? Yes, dearest, the very best thing you can do."

"Not to Henley, mamma," Dolly said. "I should like, please, to go to Mrs. Fane's, if you do not object."

"What a child you are!" cried Mrs. Palmer; "you prefer poking yourself away in that horrid, dismal hospital, when poor Jonah is on his knees to you to go back to Henley with him."

"Perhaps that is the reason why I must not go, mamma," said Dolly, smiling. "I must not have any explanations with Jonah." Mrs. Palmer was seriously angry, and settled herself down for another nap.

"How can you pretend not to know that you have been going against my wishes all along? Take your own way, however, dearest. Tell Julie not to come until I ring."

So Dolly came to England one summer's afternoon, escorted by her faithful knights. All the streets were warm and welcoming, the windows were open, and the shadows were painting the pretty old towers and steeples of the city: some glint of an Italian sky had come to visit our northern world.

John Morgan met her at the train, Mrs. Fane stood on the door-step to welcome her, the roar of the streets sounded home-like and hopeful once more.

As for Lady Henley, she was furiously jealous when she heard of Dolly in London, and with Mrs. Fane. She abused her to every body for a fortnight. Jonah had come home for two days, and then returned to town again. "That is all we get of him, after all we have gone through," cried poor Lady Henley; "however, perhaps there is a good reason for it; all one wants is to see one's children happy," said the little lady to Mr. Redmayne, who was dining at the Court.

John Morgan lost no time in writing to his confessor, Frank Raban, to tell him of the strange turn that events had taken. "I entreat you to say no word of this to any one," said Morgan. "I am afraid of other influence being brought to bear upon this man that we are in search of, and it is most necessary that we should neglect no precautions. Dolly's interests have been too carelessly served by us all." Raban was rather annoyed by this sentence in Morgan's letter. What good would it have done to raise an opposition that would have only pained a person who was already sorely tried in other ways? Frank somewhat shared Dolly's carelessness about money, as we know. Perhaps in his secret heart it had seemed to him that it was not for him to be striving to gain a fortune for Dolly—a fortune that she did not want. When she looked at him entreatingly and asked him not to interfere, he immediately gave in to her wish, which somehow coincided with his own; now he suddenly began to blame himself, and determined to leave no stone unturned to find the evidence that was wanted. And yet he was more estranged from Dolly at this moment than he had ever been in his life before. He had purposely abstained from any communication with her. He knew she was in London, and he kept away.

Frank Raban was a man of a curious doggedness and tenderness of nature. When he had once set his mind to a thing, he went through with his mind. He could not help himself any more than some people can help being easily moved and dissuaded from their own inclinations. It was this unrelenting determination which had first estranged him from his home, and made him live in some disregard of some received traditions. This one, for instance, that people in the Court Guide are not to marry into the Commercial Directory. Frank had found out his mistake as far as Emma Penfold herself was concerned. Custom would have approved of Raban's second choice, but Frank did not consult other people's opinions any more about Dolly than he had done when he married poor Emma, the gardener's daughter; only he could not help listening in some degree to the accounts that now reached him of the catastrophe at Paris, and feeling that any faint, persistent hope was now crushed forever.

Lady Henley's wishes were apt to color her impression of events as they happened. According to her version, it was for Jonah's sake that Dolly had broken with Robert. It was to Jonah that Dolly had confided her real reason for parting from her cousin. "You know it yourself, squire. It was painful, but far better than the alternative."

"Miss Vanborough's confidences did not extend so far as you imagine, my dear lady,"

said Mr. Anley: "I must honestly confess that I heard nothing of the sort."

Lady Henley was peremptory. She was not at liberty to show her son's last letter, but she had full authority for her information. She was not in the habit of speaking at random. Time would show. Lady Henley looked obstinate. The squire seemed annoyed. Frank Raban said nothing; he walked away gloomily; he came less and less to the Court; he looked very cross at times, although the work he had taken in hand was prospering. Whitewashed cottages were multiplying; a cricket field had been laid out for the use of the village; Medmere was drained and sown with turnip seed. Frank was now supposed to be an experienced agriculturist. He looked in the *Farmer's Friend* regularly. Tanner used to consult him upon a variety of subjects. What was to be done about the sheep? Pitch plaster was no good, should they try Spanish ointment? Those hurdles must be seen to, and what about the flues and the grinders down at the mill?

Notwithstanding these all-absorbing interests, Frank no sooner received Morgan's letter with its surprising news than he started off at once to concert measures with the rector. "Joe" was supposed to be at Liverpool, and Frank started for Liverpool and spent a fruitless week looking up all the discharged and invalided soldiers for ten miles round. He thought he had found some trace of the man he was in search of, but it was tiresome work, even in Dorothea's interest. John Morgan wrote that Jonah was in London, kind and helpful. Foolish Frank, who should have known better by this time, said to himself that they could have settled their business very well without Jonah's help. Frank did him justice, and wished him back in Yorkshire. Lady Henley's hints and wild assertions could not be altogether without foundation, thought this diffident lover. May he be forgiven! Diffidence and jealousy are human failings that bring many a trouble in their train. True love should be far beyond such pitiful preoccupations: and yet, if ever any man loved any woman honestly and faithfully, Frank Raban loved Dorothea, although his fidelity may have shown want of spirit, and his jealousy want of common-sense. Dolly had vaguely hoped that Raban might have written to her, but the jealous thought that she might show Jonah his letter had prevented him from writing. John Marplot wrote that Jonah was often in S— Street. Why did not the good rector add that it was Mrs. Fane who asked him to come there? Dolly was rather provoked when Jonah reappeared time after time and offered himself to join them in a little expedition that Mrs. Fane had planned. Mrs. Fane was pleased to welcome the rector and the captain too.

Six hours' fresh air were to set John Morgan up for his Sunday services. Dolly looked pale; some fresh air would do her good, said her friend.

CHAPTER LV.

SEE YOU NOT SOMETHING BESIDES MASONRY?

ON the Friday before they were to start on their little expedition Mrs. Fane was busy; Dolly had been sitting alone for some time.

She suddenly called to old Marker, asked her to put on her bonnet and come out with her. Dolly made Marker stop a cab, and they drove off; the old nurse wanted to turn back when she found out where Dolly was going, but she could not resist the girl's pleading looks. "It will do me good, Marker," said Dolly; "indeed it will. I want to see the dear old place again."

All that morning she felt a longing to see the old place once more: something seemed to tell her that she must go. One often thinks that to be in such a place would bring ease, that the sight of such a person would solve all difficulties, and one travels off, and one seeks out the friend, and it was but a fancy after all. Poor old Church House! Dolly had often thought of going there, but Mrs. Fane had dissuaded her hitherto. All night long Dolly had been dreaming of her home, unwinding the skeins of the past one by one. It may have been a fancy that brought Dolly, but it was a curious chance.

They had come to the top of the lane, and Dolly got out and paid her cab. Her eyes were dim with the past, that was coming as a veil or a shroud between her and the present. She had no faint suspicion of what was at hand. They walked on unsuspectingly to the ivy gate: suddenly Marker cried out, and then Dolly too gave a little gasp. What cruel blow had fallen? what desecrating hand had dared to touch the dear old haunt? What was this? She had not dreamed this. The garden wall, so sweet with jasmine, was lying low; the prostrate ivy was struggling over a heap of bricks and rubbish; tracks of wheelbarrows ran from the house to the cruel heap, the lawn was tossed up, a mound of bricks stood raised by the drawing-room windows; the windows were gone, black hollows stood in their places, a great gap ran down from Dolly's old bedroom up above to the oak room on the terrace; part of the dining-room was gone: pathetic, black, charred, dismantled, the old house stood stricken and falling from its foundation. Dolly's heart beat furiously as she caught Marker's arm.

"What has happened?" she said. "It is not fire—it is—oh, Marker, this is too much!" Poor Marker could not say one word; the

two women stood clinging to each other in the middle of the garden walk. The sky was golden, the shadows were purple among the fallen bricks.

"This is too much," Dolly repeated, a little wildly; and then she broke away from Marker, crying out, "Don't come! don't come!"

The workmen were gone: for some reason the place was deserted, and there was no one to hear Dolly's sobs as she impatiently fled across the lawn. Was it foolish that these poor old bricks should be so dear to her? foolish that their fall should seem to her something more than a symbol of all that had fallen and passed away? Ah, no, no! While the old house stood she had not felt quite parted, but now the very place of her life would be no more; all the grief of that year seemed brought back to her, when she stopped short suddenly and stood looking round and about in a scared sort of way. She was looking for something that was not any more—listening for silent voices. Dolly! cried the voices, and the girl's whole heart answered as she stood stretching out her arms toward the ulterior shores. At that minute she would have been very glad to lie down on the old stone terrace and never rise again. Time was so long, it weighed and weighed, and seemed to be crushing her. She had tried to be brave, but her cup was full, and she felt as if she could bear no more, not one heavy hour more. This great weight on her heart seemed to have been gathering from a long way off, to have been lasting for years and years: no tears came to ease this pain. Marker had sat down on the stone ledge, and was wiping her grief in her handkerchief. Dolly was at her old haunt by the pond, and bending over and looking into the depth with strange circling eyes.

This heavy weight seemed to be weighing her down and drawing her to the very brink of the old pond. She longed to be at rest, to go one step beyond the present, to be lying straight in the murky gray water, resting and at peace. Who wanted her any more? No one now. Those who had loved her best were dead; Robert had left her: every one had left her. The people outside in the lane may have seen her through the gap in the wall, a dark figure stooping among the purple shadows: she heard their voices calling, but she did not heed them; they were only living voices: then she heard a step upon the gravel close at hand, and she started back, for, looking up, she saw it was Frank Raban who came forward. Dolly was not surprised to see him. Every thing to-day was so strange, so unnatural, that this sudden meeting seemed but a part of all the rest. She threw up her hands and sank down upon the old bench.

His steady eyes were fixed upon her. "What are you doing here?" he said, fright-

ened by the look in her face, and forgetting in his agitation to greet her formally.

"What does it all matter?" said Dolly, answering his reproachful glance, and speaking in a shrill voice: "I don't care about any thing any more; I am tired out, yes, very tired," the girl repeated. She was wrought up and speaking to herself as much as to him, crying out, not to be heard, but because this heavy weight was upon her, and she was struggling to be rid of it and reckless—she must speak to him, to any body, to the shivering bushes, to the summer dust and silence, as she had spoken to the stagnant water of the pond. She was in a state which is not a common one, in which pain plays the part of great joy, and excitement unloosens the tongue, forces men and women into momentary sincerity, and directness carries all before it; her long self-control had broken down, she was at the end of her powers—she was only thinking of her own grief and not of him just then. As she turned her pale stone-cut face away and looked across the low laurel bushes, Frank Raban felt a pang of pity for her of which Dorothea had no conception. He came up to the bench.

"Don't lose courage," he said—"not yet, you have been so good all this time."

It was not so much what he said which touched her, as the way in which he said it. He seemed to know how terribly she had been suffering, to be in tune even with this remorseless fugue of pain repeated. His kindness suddenly overcame her and touched her; she hid her face in her hands and burst out crying, and the tears eased and softened her strained nerves.

"It was coming here that brought it all back," she said; "and finding—" She looked round.

"I am very much shocked, more so than I can tell you," said Frank. "It was to-day quite by chance that I heard what had happened. I came off at once. I have been to your house. It seems Miss Parnell must have wanted money, and that she suddenly closed with a builder's offer. Mr. Tapeall should have warned us. I can hardly tell you the rest, or you will never forgive our fatal delay. They had no right whatever to do what they have done. You are the only person interested; it is you only to whom they should have applied, and we have been most blamable in not telling you this before."

Frank then and there began to tell Dolly of the curious discovery which Mrs. Fane had made, of Smith's confession, and of all that it involved. He told her very carefully, sparing her in every way, thinking of the words which would be simplest and least likely to give pain.

"We ought to have told you before," he repeated. "I shall never forgive myself. We meant to spare you until all the facts

were clearly ascertained. We have made a fatal mistake, and now I am only adding to your pain."

But the tears with which Dolly listened to him were not bitter, his voice was so kind, his words so manly and simple. He did not shirk the truth, as some people sometimes do when they speak of sorrow, but he faced the worst with the simplicity and directness of a man who had seen it all very near. "Please don't blame yourself," she said.

If there are certain states of mind in which facts seem exaggerated and every feeling is overwrought, it is at these very times that people are most ready to accept the blessings of consolation. "Peace, be still," said the Divine Voice, speaking to the tossing waves. And voices come, speaking in human tones to many a poor tempest-tossed soul. It may be only a friend who speaks, only a lover perhaps, or a brother's or sister's voice. Love, friendship, brotherhood, give a meaning to the words. Only that day Dolly had thought that all was over, and already the miracle was working, the storm was passing from her heart, and peace was near at hand.

It all seemed as a dream in the night, when she thought it over afterward. Some few days had passed. She had not seen Frank again, but to have seen him once more made all the difference to her.

Dolly was standing out on the balcony, carefully holding her black silk dress away from the dusty iron bars. It was a bright, gentle-winded Sunday morning, and the countless bells of the district were jangling together, and in different notes calling their votaries to different shrines. The high bell striking quick and clear, the low bell with melancholy cadence, the old-fashioned parish bell swinging on in a sing-song way: a little Catholic chapel had begun its chime an hour before. From the house doors came Sunday folks—children trotting along, with their best hats and conscious little legs, mammas radiant, maid-servants running, cabs going off laden. All this cheerful jingle-jangling filled Dolly's heart with a happy sadness. It was so long since she had heard it, and it was all so dear and so familiar, as she stood listening to it all, that it was a little service in her heart of grateful love and thanks—for love and for praise; for life to utter her love for the peace which had come to her after her many troubles. She was not more happy outwardly in circumstance, but how much more happy in herself none but she herself could tell. How it had come about she could scarcely have explained; but so it was. She had ceased to struggle; the wild storm in her heart had hushed away; she was now content with the fate which had seemed to her so terrible in the days of her girlhood. Unloved, misun-

derstood, was this her fate? she had in some fashion risen above it, and she felt that the same peace and strength were hers. Peace, she knew not why; strength, coming she scarcely knew how or whence. It was no small thing to be one voice in the great chorus of voices, to be one aspiration in the great breath of life, and to know that her own wishes and her own happiness were not the sum of all her wants.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE PLAY IS PLAYED, THE CURTAIN DROPS.

COLONEL FANE was not a rich man, but he had a house which had been his father's before him, and to which he returned now and again in the intervals of service. It stood at a bend of the river, and among hollows and ivy. He looked forward to ending his work there some day, and resting for a year or two. In the mean while the old house was often let in summer, and Mrs. Fane looked after the repairs and necessary renovations. She sometimes spent a few hours among the sedges and shady chestnut-trees. She loved the old place—as who does not love it who has ever been there?—and discovered this sleeping bower, where one may dream of chivalry, of fairy-land, or of peace on earth, or that one is sunshine, or a river washing between heavy banks; or turn one's back to the stream and see a pasture country sliding away toward the hills, through shade and fragrant hours, with songs from the hedges and mellow echoes from the distant farms.

The little party came down, not unprepared to be happy. Mrs. Fane, who never wasted an opportunity, had also brought a little girl from her orphanage, who was to remain for a time with the housekeeper at Queensmede—that was the name of the old house. The child was a bright little creature, with merry soft eyes flashing in wild excitement, and the kind lady was somewhat divided between her interest in some news that John Morgan was giving her and her anxiety lest little Charlotte, her goddaughter, should jump out of window.

"We have to thank the captain here," said John Morgan, "for finding the man we were in search of. I have sent to Tapeall," said John, rubbing his hands. "I find that, after all my precautions, Rhoda got a hint from him last week. Tapeall was evidently prepared for something of the sort when I called there yesterday. However, it is all right—thanks to the captain."

"I don't deserve any thanks," said Jonah. "Poor Carter found me out. He wanted to borrow 10s."

"When did all this happen?" said Mrs. Fane; and she kissed Dolly.

"Only yesterday," answered the rector. "I telegraphed to Raban; poor fellow, he had gone off to Shoeburyness on some false scent; I left word at home in case he should call."

Dolly stooped down and held up little Charlotte to see the pretty golden fields fly past, and the sheep and the lambs frisking.

"Are they gold flowers?" said the little girl. "Is that where ladies gets their money? Is you going to be very rich?"

Dolly did not answer; she had scarcely heard what they all were saying, so many voices were speaking to her, as she watched the flying fields and frisking lambs. Was it all to be hers? The old house was gone—and this was what she most dwelt upon—money was but little in comparison to the desolate home. Could she ever forgive Rhoda this cruel blow? Ah! she might have had it all, if she had but spared the dear home. A letter had come from Robert only that morning, and all this time Dolly was carrying it unopened in her pocket, failing courage to break the seal and open up the past.

Shadows and foreboding clouds were far away from that tranquil valley, from the shady chestnut-tree beneath which Dolly is sitting, resting and shading her eyes from the light.

When the banquet is over they get up from their feast and stroll down to the river-side, through the silent village into the overgrown meadow, where green waving things are throwing their shadows, where an old half-ruined nunnery stands fronting the sun, and the silver river beyond the fields.

There were nuns at Queensmede once: one might fancy a Guinevere ending her sad life there in tranquil penitence; a knight on his knees by the river; a horse browsing in the meadow. The old building still stands among wild flowers and hay, within sight of the river bend; the deserted garden is unfenced, and the roses are growing straggling in the field, and mingle their petals with the clover and poppies that spring luxuriantly. The stable is a gabled building with slender lancet windows, with open doors swinging on the latch. The nuns have passed out one by one from the Lady House, so they call it still. Dolly peeped in at the dismantled walls, and pictured their former occupants to herself—women singing and praying with pale sweet faces radiant in the sweet tranquillity of the old place, and yet their life seemed thin and sad somehow. It was not what she herself had ever dreamed of; a less beautiful existence would better content her, thought Dolly. It was here that she found courage at last to read Robert's letter as she stood in the doorway. She pulled it out and broke the seal.

"MY DEAR DOROTHEA,—Notwithstanding all that has happened, I still feel that it is no common tie of friendship and interest which must always bind us together,