

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,

and that it is due to you that I myself should inform you of a determination which will, as I trust, eventually contribute to every body's happiness. After what you said to me it will, I know, be no surprise to you to have heard that I have proposed to Rhoda, and been accepted by her, but I am anxious to spare your learning from any body but myself the fact that we have determined to put on our marriage, and that this letter will reach you on our wedding-day.

"Your friend Rhoda has entirely thrown herself upon my guidance, and under the circumstances it has seemed advisable to me to urge no longer delay. My affairs require my presence in England; hers also need the most careful management. I am not satisfied with the manner in which certain investments have been disposed of. Notwithstanding some—perhaps not unnatural—reluctance on her part, I propose returning to Church House immediately after our wedding, where, let me tell you, my dear Dora, you will ever find a hearty welcome, and a home if need be, although I am anxious to forget the past, particularly under my present circumstances. I can not but recall once more to you how differently events might have turned out. I have never had an opportunity of explaining that to you, but I hope you do me the justice to believe that it was not your change of fortune which affected my decision to abide by your determination. I have been most anxious to assure you of this. It was your want of trust which first made me feel how dissimilar we were in many ways, how little chance there was in my being able to influence you as a husband. Forgive me for saying that you did not understand my motives, nor do entire justice to the feelings which made me endeavor to persuade you for your own advantage as well as mine. If you had come to India when I wished it, much anxiety to yourself and much sorrow would have been spared you. Now it is too late to think of what might or might not have been: only this fact remains, and do not forget it, dear Dora, that you will never have a more sincere friend, nor one more ready to advise and assist you in any difficulty, than

"Your affectionate cousin,
R. HENLEY.

"Rhoda (did she know I was writing) would unite in most affectionate love. I find her society more and more congenial and delightful to me."

"What are you reading, Dolly?" said Jonah, coming up. "I ought to know that confounded blue paper. Has that fellow the impudence to write to you?" Then he asked, more shyly, "May I see the letter?"

"No, dear Jonah," Dolly said, folding it up. "It is a kind letter, written kindly."

Then she looked hard at him and blushed a little. "This is his wedding-day," she said; "that is why he wrote to me."

Dolly would not show her letter to any one, except to Mrs. Fane. She felt that it would be commented on; she was grateful to Robert for writing it; and yet the letter made her ashamed, now that she began to see him not as he was, but to judge from another standard, and to look at him with other people's eyes. In after-days she scarcely ever spoke of him even to her nearest and dearest. To-day she merely repeated the news. No one made any comment in her hearing. They were anxious at first, but Dolly's face was serene, and they could see that she was not unhappy.

One thing neither Dolly nor Mrs. Fane could understand. Robert evidently knew nothing of the destruction of Church House.

"I am glad Robert had nothing to do with it," said Dolly.

"Will you come wiss me?" said little Charlotte, running up and taking Dolly's hand. Miss Vanborough was not sorry to leave the discussion of Robert's prospects to others, and she walked away, with the little girl still holding by her hand, and went and stood for a minute on the bridge, looking down at the river and the barge floating by; it slid under her feet with its cargo of felled wood, and its wild and silent human cargo, and then it went floating away between the summer banks.

The waters deepened and wavered. Tall waving grasses were also floating and dragging upon the banks, crimson poppies starting here and there, golden irises hanging their heads by the river. Little Charlotte presently ran away, and, half sunk in the grasses, stood struggling with a daisy. A sunshiny man came leading a horse from the sleepy old barn that stood beyond the Lady House. Its old bricks were hung with green veils, and with purple and golden nets of lichen and of moss.

Dolly stopped—was it a burst of music? It was a sweet overpowering rush of honeysuckle scent coming from the deserted garden. In this pastoral landscape there was no sound louder than the lap of the water, or the flowing gurgle of the pigeons straggling from one to another moss-grown ledge. Chance lights stole from the sedge to the grassy banks, from the creek by sweet tumbled grasses to the deserted old grange. Round about stood the rose-trees, flowering in the wilderness, dropping their blossoms; the swallows were flying about the eaves; the daisies sparkled where they caught the sunlight. The indescribable peace and silence of it all tranquilized Dorothea's troubled heart, although even then some thoughts came to her of the life she had wasted, and the love she had thrown away. It was not as in that day when in her despair she had thought there was nothing left; the bitterness of her wound was healed: it was not for the news that had come that she was grieving.

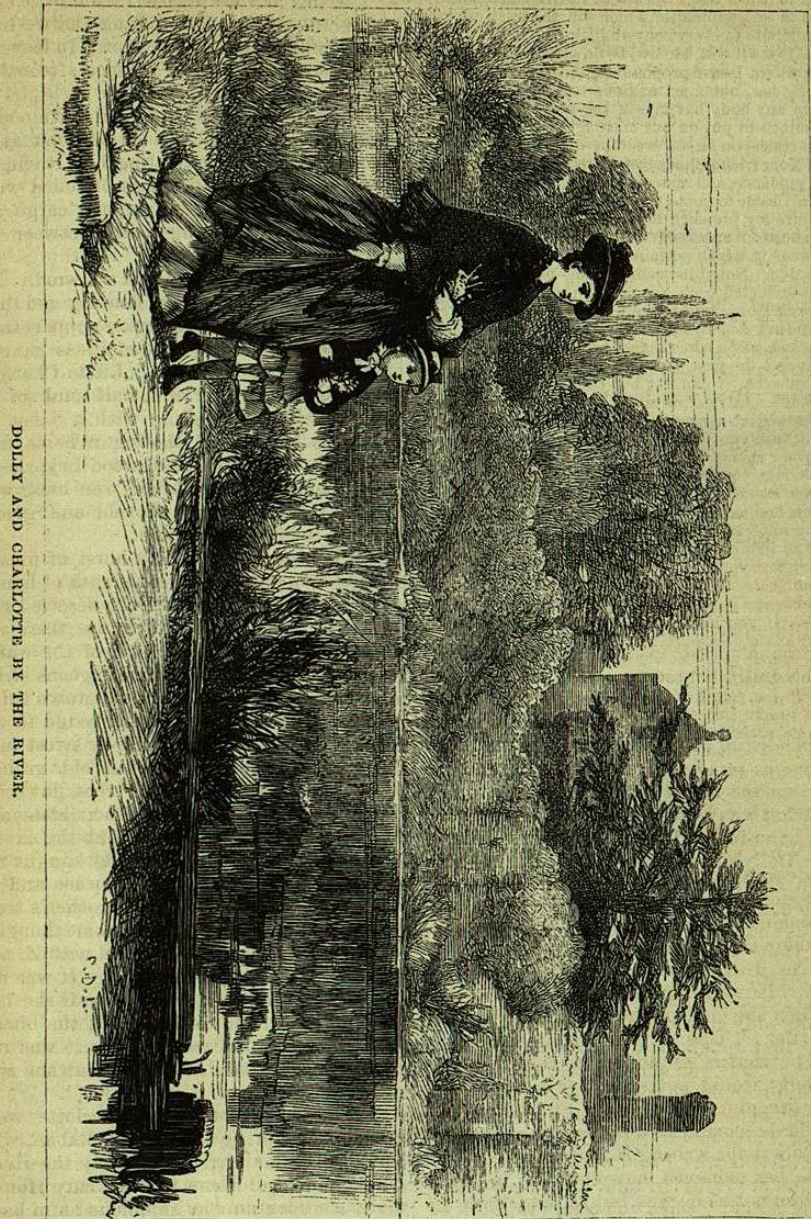
While Dolly and little Charlotte were gathering their flowers, Frank Raban, who came walking along the fields by the river, had joined the others by the Lady House. Morgan's telegram had summoned him back to London, and his message had brought him on to Queensmede. He had heard the news; he said very little about it.

"Where is Miss Vanborough?" he asked, presently.

"Don't you see her on the bridge?" said Jonah, pointing.

Frank walked on a few steps. He saw her standing on the bridge, high above the torrent; then he saw her come slowly along, followed by her little companion.

They were walking slowly away from the field and the deserted garden. As they all



DOLLY AND CHARLOTTE BY THE RIVER.

straggled slowly homeward, with shadows at their feet, the old ivy buttresses of the walls were beginning to shine with vesper light, with deeper and crisper lines in the pure illumination all around. Dolly thought of Haydn's andante again, only here it was light that brought music out of all these instruments—silences, perfumes, and heavy creepers from the bewildering, sweet old place, overflowed with birds, heaped up and falling into hollows.

Frank walked silently beside Dolly. He had come prepared to sympathize: full of concern for her, and she did not seem to want his help, or to care for it any more. That day by the pond, when she had first turned to him in her grief, he had felt nearer to her than now, when in her reserve she said no word of all that he knew she must be feeling. Could this be pride? Did she show this indifferent face to the world? Was she determined that no one should guess at the secret strain? Was she treating him as the first-come acquaintance? It was very

proper, no doubt, and very dignified, but he was disappointed. He could not understand it. She must be unhappy, and yet as he looked at her face he saw no effort there—only peace shining from it. She had stopped before a garland of briony that was drooping with beautiful leaves, making a garland of shadows upon the bricks. She pointed it out to him.

"It is very pretty," said Raban, "but I am in no appreciative mood;" and he looked back at Jonah, who came up just then, and began admiring. Why was Jonah always with her? Why did he seem to join into all their talk? Frank was jealous of Jonah, but he was still more jealous of Dorothea's confidence. There seemed to be no end to Dolly's cousins. Here was Jonah, to whom she had already given more of her confidence than to him—Jonah, who had served her effectually, while he, Frank, had done nothing. He had not quite believed Lady Henley's intimations, but now he began to believe them, and he looked up at Dolly, who was walking along, still looking at the bunches of briony she had gathered. It was not a very heroic mood, and I am truly ashamed of my hero's passing ill humor, coming as it did at this inopportune moment to trouble Miss Vanborough's tardy happiness. And yet somehow it did not trouble her; she saw that Frank was silent and gloomy, but with her instinct for idealizing those she loved, she supposed there was some good reason for it, and she felt that she might perhaps even try to find out what was amiss; it was no longer wrong to take an interest in all that affected him—even Dolly's conscience allowed this—and, when the others walked on, in her sweet voice she asked "if any thing was wrong," and as she spoke her gray eyes opened kindly. Dolly loved to take care of the people she loved. There was a motherly instinct in all her affection.

"My only concern is for you, and for the news that Jonah Henley has told me," said Frank; "but you did not tell me yourself, so I did not like to speak of it to you."

Dolly sighed—then looked up again. "I do not know how to talk of it all," she said, "and that is why I said nothing."

"You are right!" Frank answered, with a sort of sneer; "when one comes to think of it, there are no words in common language that can characterize such conduct."

"Please don't," said Dolly, pained; then she added, "I have been so unhappy that I must not ever pretend to feel what I am not feeling. Perhaps you may think it strange I am happy, not unhappy, to-day. You are all so kind—every thing is so kind. Look at that Virginia creeper over the gate—and that ocean of ivy. I feel as if I could believe in happiness again. I am only beginning now to believe in it. I am sure I hope they will have a great deal in their lives.

Robert has written to me very kindly. Is not Jonah calling us?" Jonah was waiting for them at the gate of the house, and waving a long, shadowy arm, that seemed to reach across the road.

"Happiness," said Frank, lingering, and cross again, and looking round. "This is the sort of thing people mean, I suppose; green pastures and still waters, and if one can be satisfied with grass, as the people were in the Psalms, so much the better for one's self; one may enjoy all the things one didn't particularly want—and watch another man win the prize; another perhaps who doesn't even—" Frank stopped short—what was he saying? he might be giving pain, and he hated himself and his ill humor, jarring and jangling in the peaceful serenity.

But Dolly finished the sentence calmly enough. "Who doesn't care for it; perhaps the prize isn't worth having," she said, very slowly. She did not think of herself until she had spoken; then suddenly her heart began to beat, and she blushed crimson; for her eyes met his, and his looks spoke plainly enough—so plainly that Dolly's gray orbs fell beneath that fixed dreamy gaze. It seemed to look through her heart. Could he read all that she was thinking? Ah! he might read her heart, for she was only thinking as she stood there of all her friend's long fidelity and steady friendship. What had she ever done to deserve it all? And her heart seemed to answer her thought with a strange silent response. Now she might own to herself the blessing of his unflinching friendship; it was no longer a wrong to any human being. Even if she were never any thing more to him, she might openly and gratefully accept his help and his interest; acknowledge the blessing, the new life it had brought her. She had struggled so long to keep the feeling hidden away, it was an unspeakable relief to have nothing more to conceal from herself nor from others—nothing more. She knew at last that she loved him, and she was not ashamed. What a journey she had traveled since they had stood by the spring that autumn day, not a year ago! what terrible countries she had visited! and had it come to this once more? Might she love now in happiness as well as in sorrow? Was she not happy, standing in this golden hollow, with the person whose society she loved best in all the world? No other human being was in sight, nothing but the old shady village, floating into overflowing green, the sleepy hay-cocks, the empty barn, the heaping ivy on the wall, the sunlight slanting upon the silence. She did not mean to speak, but Frank, in this utter silence, heard her secret thought at last. "Don't you know?" said Dorothea. "Oh, Frank, don't you know?" Did she speak the words or look them? He could never

tell: only this he knew, that she was his, that life is kind, that true hearts do come together, that one moment of such happiness and completeness lights up a whole night's wild chaos, and reveals the sweetness of the dawning world.

Jonah, who had gone on with Mrs. Fane, came to the door to call them again, but they did not see him, and he went back into the house, where Mrs. Fane and John Morgan were hard at work upon an inventory.

"Here, let me help you," said Jonah; "I'm not too clumsy to count tea-cups." Little Charlotte made herself very useful by carrying a plate from one chair to another. She finally let it drop, and would have cried when it broke, if the good-natured young captain had not immediately given her the ink to hold. This mark of confidence filled her with pride, and dried her tears. "Sall I 'old it up very high?" she said. "Can you draw a ziant? I can, wiss your pen."

It took them nearly an hour to get through their task, and by this time the tea was ready in the library, the old-fashioned urn hissing and steaming, and Jonah and John Morgan were preparing to set out on their journey home. Frank went with them, and then when he was gone Dolly told her friend her story, and the two sat talking until late into the starlight.

Two days afterward an announcement appeared in the *Times*, and the world learned that Robert Henley and Miss Rhoda Parnell had been married at the British Embassy at Paris by special license by the Bishop of Orinoco. The next news was that of Dolly's marriage to Frank Raban. Pebblethwaite was very much excited. Lady Henley's indignation was boundless at first, but was happily diverted by the news of her favorite daughter Norah's engagement to Mr. Jack Redmayne.

James Brand's blue eyes twinkled a kindly sympathy when the letter came announcing Frank's happiness. He came up to be present at the wedding. It was in the little city church, with its smoke-stained windows. John Morgan's voice failed as he read the opening words and looked down at the bent heads of the two who had met at last hand in hand. "In perfect love and peace," he said; and, as he said it, he felt that the words were no vain prayers.

He had no fear for them, nor had they fear for each other. Some one standing in the drizzle of the street outside saw them drive off with calm and happy faces. It was Robert Henley, who was passing through London with his wife. Philippa, who saw him, kissed her hand and would have stopped him, but he walked on without looking back. He had been to Mr. Tapeall's that morning, after a painful explanation with Rhoda—Rhoda, who was moodily sitting

at the window of her room in the noisy hotel, and going over the wretched details of that morning's talk. It was true that she had sold Church House, tempted by the builder's liberal offer, and wanting money to clear the many extravagances of her Paris life; it was true that she had concealed the lawyer's letter from Robert in which she learned that her title to the property was about to be disputed. She had hurried on their wedding, she had won the prize for which her foolish soul had longed: it was not love so much as the pride of life and of gratified vanity. These things had dazzled her, for these things this foolish little creature had sacrificed her all. Dolly might have been happy in time even married to Robert, but for Rhoda what chance was there? Would her French kid gloves put out their primrose fingers to help her in her lonely hours? would her smart bonnets crown her home with peace and the content of a loving spirit? She lived long enough to find out something of the truth, and to come to Dolly one day to help her in her sorest need. This was long after, when Dolly had long been living at Ravensrick, when her children were playing round about her, and the sunshine of her later life had warmed and brightened the sadness of her youth. What more shall I say of my heroine? That sweet and generous soul, ripening by degrees, slow and credulous, not imbibed by the petty pains of life, faithful and tender and vibrating to many tones, is no uncommon type. Her name is one that I gave her long ago, but her real names are many, and are those of the friends whom we love.

Church House was never rebuilt. At Dolly's wish a row of model lodgings, with iron balconies, patent boilers, ventilators, and clothes hanging out to dry on every floor, have been erected on the site of the place where Lady Sarah lived; and so the kind woman's dreams and helpful schemes have come true.

"We could not put back the old house," said Dolly, "and we thought this would be the next best thing to do." The rooms are let at a somewhat cheaper rate than the crowded lodging-houses round about. People, as a rule, dislike the periodical white-washing, and are fond of stuffing up the ventilators, but otherwise they are very well satisfied.

Dolly did not receive many wedding presents. Some time after her marriage Rhoda sent Dolly a diamond cross; it was that one that Frank Raban had given her many years before. She was abroad at the time, and for many years neither Rhoda nor Dolly met again. Mrs. Palmer used to write home accounts of Rhoda's beauty and fashion from Ems and other watering-places where she used to spend her summers.

The Admiral, who was still abroad, made

it a special point, so Philippa declared, that she should spend her summers on the Continent.

One day Mrs. Raban was turning out some papers in a drawer in her husband's writing-table, when she came upon a packet of letters that she thought must belong to herself. They were written in a familiar writing that she knew at once, for it was Henley's. They were not addressed, and Dolly could not at first imagine how these letters had come there, nor when she had received them. As she looked she was still more bewildered. They were letters not unlike some that she had received, and yet they had entirely passed from her mind. Presently turning over a page, she read not her own name on the address, but that of Emma Penfold, and a sentence: "It is best for your welfare that we should not meet again," wrote Henley. "I am not a marrying man myself—circumstances render it impossible. May you be as happy in your new life. You will have an excellent husband, and one who....."

"What have you got there?" said Frank, who had come in.

"Oh, Frank, don't ask me," said Dolly, hastily going up to the fire that was burning in the grate, and flinging the packet into the flames; then she ran up to him, and clung hold of his arm for a minute. She could not speak.

Frank looked at the burning packet, at

the open drawers, and then he understood it all. "I thought I had burned those letters long ago," he said; and stooping, he took his wife's hand in his and kissed it.

* * * * *

As I write the snow lies thick upon the ground outside, upon the branches of the trees, upon the lawns. Here, within, the fire leaps brightly in its iron cage; the children cluster round the chair by the chimney-corner, where the mother sits reading their beloved fairy tales. The hearth was empty once—the home was desolate; but time after time, day by day, we see the phoenix of home and of love springing from the dead ashes; hopes are fulfilled that seemed too sweet to dream of; love kindles and warms chilled hearts to life. Take courage, say the happy, to those in sorrow and trouble; are there not many mansions even here? seasons in their course, harvests in their season, thanks be to the merciful ordinance that metes out sorrow and peace, and longing and fulfillment, and rest after the storm.

Take courage, say the happy—the message of the sorrowful is harder to understand. The echoes come from afar, and reach beyond our ken. As the cry passes beyond us into the awful unknown, we feel that this is, perhaps, the voice in life that reaches beyond life itself. Their fires are out, their hearths are in ashes, but see, it was the sunlight that put out the flame.

THE END.

