long as I can be *sure* that he is happily employed *elsewhere*. I am a *dull old woman*, I know; but, at least, my wish is not to be a burden. That was the wish of my great-aunt Eliza—your great-great-aunt, Conrad; you never saw her—in her last illness. I borrow her expression—'not to be a burden.'" The Octopus, having seized her prey in this tentacle, was then at liberty to enlarge upon the unselfish character of her great-aunt, reaping the advantages of a vicarious egoism from an hypnotic suggestion that that character was also her own. The great-aunt had, it appeared, lost the use, broadly speaking, of her anatomy, and could only communicate by signs; but when she died she was none the less missed by her own circle, whose grief for her loss took the form of a tablet. The speaker paused a moment for her hearers to contemplate the tablet, and perhaps ask for the inscription, when Sally saw an opening, and took advantage of it.

"Dr. Conrad's going to be very selfish this afternoon, Mrs. Vereker, and come with us to Chalke, where that dear little church is that looks like a barn. I mean to find the sexton and get the key this time."

"My dear, I shall be *per*fectly happy knitting. Do not trouble about me for one moment. I shall think how you are enjoying yourselves. When I was a girl there was nothing I enjoyed more than ransacking old churches. . . ."

And so forth. Rosalind felt almost certain that Sally either said or telegraphed to the doctor, who was wavering, "You'll come, you know. Now, mind; two-thirty punc.," and resolved, if he did *not* come, to go to Iggulden's and extract him from the tentacles of his mamma, and remain entangled herself, if necessary.

In fact, this was how the arrangement for the afternoon worked out. Dr. Conrad did *not* turn up, as expected, and Rosalind carried out her intention. She rescued the doctor, and sent him round to join her husband and Sally, promising to follow shortly and catch them up. The three started to walk, but Fenwick, after a little slow walking to allow Rosalind to overtake them, had misgivings that she had got caught, and went back to rescue her, telling Sally and the doctor it was no use to wait—they would follow on, and take their chance. And the programme so indicated was acted on.

CHAPTER XLI

OF LOVE, CONSIDERED AS A THUNDERSTORM, AND OF AGUR, THE SON OF JAKEH (PROV. XXX.). OF A COUNTRY WALK AND A JUDICIOUSLY RESTORED CHURCH. OF TWO CLASPED HANDS, AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES. NOTHING SO VERY REMARKABLE AFTER ALL!

Love, like a thunderstorm, is very much more intelligible in its beginnings—to its chronicler, at least—than it becomes when it is, so to speak, overhead. We all know the clear-cut magnificence of the great thundercloud against the sky, its tremendous deliberation, its hills and valleys of curdling mist, fraught with God knows what potential of destruction in volts and ohms; the ceaseless muttering of its wrath as it speaks to its own heart, and its sullen secrets reverberate from cavern to cavern in the very core of its innermost blackness. We know the last prismatic benedictions of the sun it means to hide from us—the strange gleams of despairing light on the other clouds—clouds that are not in it, mere outsiders or spectators. We can remember them after we have got home in time to avoid a wetting, and can get our moist water-colours out and do a recollection of them before they go out of our heads—or think we can.

But we know, too, that there comes a time of a sudden wind and agitated panic of the trees, and then big, warm preliminary drops, and then the first clap of thunder, clear in its own mind and full of purpose. Then the first downpour of rain, that isn't quite so clear, and wavers for a breathing-space, till the tart reminder of the first swift, decisive lighting-flash recalls it to its duty, and it becomes a steady, intolerable torrent that empties roads and streets of passers-by, and makes the gutters rivulets. And then the storm itself—flash upon flash—peal upon peal—up to the blinding and deafening climax, glare and thunderbolt in a breath. And then it's overhead, and we are sure something has been struck that time.

It was all plain sailing, two days since, in the love-storm we

want the foregoing sketch of a thunderstorm to illustrate, that was brewing in the firmament of Conrad Vereker's soul. At the point corresponding to the first decisive clap of thunder—wherever it was—Chaos set in in that firmament. And Chaos was developing rapidly at the time when the doctor, rescued by Sally's intrepidity from the maternal clutch, started on what he believed would be his last walk with his idol at St. Sennans. Now he knew that, when he got back to London, though there might be, academically speaking, opportunities of seeing Sally, it wasn't going to be the same thing. That was the phrase his mind used, and we know quite well what it meant.

Of course, when some peevish author or invalid sends out a servant to make you take your organ farther off, a good way down the street, you can begin again exactly where you left off, lower down. But a barrel-organ has no soul, and one has one oneself, usually. Dr. Vereker's soul, on this occasion, was the sport of the love-storm of our analogy, and was tossed and driven by whirlwinds, beaten down by torrents, dazzled by lightning and deafened by thunder, out of reach of all sane record by the most eloquent of chroniclers. It was not in a state to accept calmly the idea of transference to Shepherd's Bush. A tranquil mind would have said, "By all means, go home and start afresh." But no; the music in this case refused to welcome the change. Still, he would forget it—make light of it and ignore it—to enjoy this last little expedition with Sally to the village church across the downs, that had been so sweetly decorated for the harvest festival. A bird in the hand was worth two in the bush. *Carpe diem!*

So Dr. Conrad seemed to have grown younger than ever when he and Sally got away from all the world, after Fenwick had fallen back to rescue the captive, octopus-caught. Whereat Sally's heart rejoiced; for this young man's state of subordination to his skilful and overwhelming parent was a constant thorn in her side. To say she felt for him is to say nothing. To say that she would have jumped out of her skin with joy at hearing that he was engaged to that young lady, unknown; and that that young lady had successfully made terms of capitulation, involving the disbanding of the Goody, and her ultimate dispersal to Bedford Park with a companion—to vouch for this actually happening

might be rash. But Sally told herself—and her mother, for that matter—that she should so jump out of her skin; and you may believe her, perhaps. We happen not to; but it may have been true, for all that.

Agur, the son of Jakeh (Prov. xxx.), evidently thought the souls of women not worth analysis, and the way of a maid with a man not a matter for Ithiel and Ucal to spend time and thought over, as they seem to have said nothing to King Solomon on the subject. But then Agur candidly admitted that he was more brutish than any man, and had not the understanding of a man. So he contented himself with wondering at the way of a man with a maid, and made no remarks about the opposite case. Even with the understanding of a man, would he have been any nearer seeing into the mystery of a girl's heart? As for ourselves, we give it up. We have to be content with watching what Miss Sally will do next, not trying to understand her.

She certainly *believed* she believed—we may go that far—when she started to walk to Chalke Church with a young man she felt a strong interest in, and wanted to see happily settled in life—(all her words, please, not ours)—that she intended, this walk, to get out of Prosy who the young lady was that he had hinted at, and, what was more, she knew exactly how she was going to lead up to it. Only she wouldn't rush the matter; it would do just as well, or better, after they had seen the little church, and were walking back in the twilight. They could be jolly and chatty then. Oh yes, certainly a good deal better. As for any feeling of shyness about it, of relief at postponing it—what *nonsense!* Hadn't they as good as talked it all over already? But, for our own part, we believe that this readiness to let the subject wait was a concession Sally made towards admitting a personal interest in the result of her inquiry—so minute a one that maybe you may wonder why we call it a concession at all. Dr. Conrad was perhaps paltering a little with the truth, too, when he said to himself that he was quite prepared to fulfil his half-promise to Fenwick and reveal his mind to Sally; but not till quite the end of this walk, in case he should spoil it, and upset Sally. Or, perhaps, to-morrow morning, on the way to the train. Our own belief is, he was frightened, and it was an excuse.

"We shall go by the beech-forest," was Sally's last speech to

Fenwick, as he turned back on his mission of rescue. And twenty minutes later she and Dr. Conrad were crossing the smooth sheep-pasture that ended at the boundary of the said forest—a tract of woodland that was always treated with derision on account of its acreage. It was small, for a forest, certainly; but, then, it hadn't laid claim to the name itself. Sally spoke forgivingly of it as they approached it.

"It's a handy little forest," said she; "only you can't lie down in it without sticking out. If you don't expect to, it doesn't matter." This was said without a trace of a smile, Sally-fashion. It took its reasonableness for granted, and allowed the speaker to continue without a pause into conversation sane and unexaggerated.

"What were you and Jeremiah talking about the day before yesterday, when you went that long walk?"

"We talked about a good many things. I've forgotten half."

"Which was the one you don't want me to know about? Because you haven't forgotten that, you know." Vereker thinks of Sally's putative parents, the Arcadian shepherdess and the thunderbolt. Obviously a reality! Besides—so ran the doctor's thought—with her looking like *that,* what can I do? He felt perfectly helpless, but wouldn't confess it. He would make an effort. One thing he was certain of: that evasion, with those eyes looking at him, would mean instant shipwreck.

"We had a long talk, dear Miss Sally, about how much Jeremiah"—a slight accent on the name has the force of inverted commas in text—"can really recollect of his own history." But Sally's reply takes a form of protest, without seeming warranty.

"I say, Dr. Conrad, I wish you wouldn't. . . . However, never mind that now. I want to know about Jeremiah. Has he remembered a lot more, and not told?"

"He goes on recovering imperfect versions of things. He told me a good many such yesterday—so imperfect that I am convinced as his mind clears he will find that some of them, though founded on reality, are little better than dreams. He can't rely on them himself. . . . But what is it you wish I wouldn't?"

"Oh, nothing!—I'll tell you after. Never mind that now. What are the things—I mean, the things he recovers the imperfect versions of? You needn't tell me the versions, you know, but you might tell me what they were versions of, without any breach of confidence." Dr. Conrad has not time for more than a word or two towards the obvious protest against this way of stating the case, before Sally becomes frankly aware of her own unfairness. "No, I won't worm out and inquisit," she says—and we are bound to give her exact language. "It isn't fair on a general practitioner to take him for a walk and get at his professional secrets." The merry eyebrows and the pearly teeth, slightly in abeyance for a serious moment or two, are all in evidence again as the black eyes flash round on the doctor, and, as it were, convey his reprieve to him. He acknowledges it in this sense.

"I'm glad you don't insist upon my telling, Miss Sally. If you had insisted, I should have had to tell." He paused a second, drawing an inference from an expression of Sally's face, then added: "Well, it's true. . . ."

"I wasn't thinking of that." This refers to her intention to say something, which never fructified; but somehow got communicated, magnetically perhaps, to Dr. Conrad. "Never mind what, now. Because if your soles are as slippy as mine are, we shall never get up. Catch hold!"

This last refers to the necessity two travellers are under, who, having to ascend a steep escarpment of slippery grass, can only do so by mutual assistance. Sally and the doctor got to the top, and settled down to normal progress on a practicable gradient, and all the exhilaration of the wide, wind-swept downland. But what had been to the unconscious merpussy nothing but a mutual accommodation imposed by a common lot—common subjection to the forces of gravitation and the extinction of friction by the reaction of short grass on leather—had been to her companion a phase of stimulus to the storm that was devastating the region of his soul; a new and prolonged peal of thunder swift on the heels of a blinding lightning-flash, and a deluge to follow such as a real storm makes us run to shelter from. On Dr. Conrad's side of the analogy, there was no shelter, and he didn't ask for it. Had he asked for anything, it would have been for the power to tell Sally what she had become to him, and a new language he did not now know in which to tell it. And such a vocabulary!

But Dr. Conrad didn't know how simple the language was that

he felt the want of—least of all, that there was only one word in its vocabulary. And when the two of them got to the top of their slippery precipice, breathless, he was no nearer the disclosure he had made up his mind to, and as good as promised Fenwick to make, than when they were treading the beechmast and listening to the wood-doves in the handy little forest they had left below. But oh, the little things in this life that are the big ones all the while, and no one ever suspects them!

A very little thing indeed was to play a big part, unacknowledged till after, in the story of this walk. For it chanced that as they reached the hill-top the diminution of the incline was so gradual that at no exact point could the lease of Sally's hand to that of the doctor he determined by either landlord or tenant. We do not mean that he refused to let go, nor that Sally consciously said to herself that it would be rude to snatch back the gloveless six-and-a-half that she had entrusted to him, the very minute she didn't want his assistance. It was a *nuance* of action or demeanour far, far finer than that on the part of either. But it was real all the same. And the facts of the case were as clear to Sally's subconsciousness, unadmitted and unconfessed, as though Dr. Conrad had found his voice then and there, and said out boldly: "There is *no* young lady I am wavering about except it be you; she's a fiction, and a silly one. There is no one in the world I care for as I do for you. There is nothing in the world that I can name or dream of so precious to me as this hand that I now give up with reluctance, under the delusion that I have not held it long enough to make you guess the whole of the story." All that was said, but what an insignificant little thing it was that said it!

As for Miss Sally, it was only her subself that recognised that any one had said anything at all. Her superself dismissed it as a fancy; and, therefore, being put on its mettle to justify that action, it pointed out to her that, after that, it would be the merest cowardice to shirk finding out about Dr. Conrad's young lady. She would manage it somehow by the end of this walk. But still an element of postponement came in, and had its say. Yet it excited no suspicions in her mind, or she ignored them. She was quite within her rights, technically, in doing so.

It was necessary, though, to tide over the momentary reciprocity

—the slight exchange of consciousnesses that, if indulged, must have ended in a climax—with a show of stiffness; a little pretence that we were a lady and gentleman taking a walk, otherwise undescribed. When the doctor relinquished Sally's hand, he felt bound to ignore the fact that hers went on ringing like a bell in the palm of his, and sending musical messages up his arm; and to talk about dewponds. They occur on the tops of downs, and are very scientific. High service and no rate are the terms of their water-supply. Dr. Conrad knew all about them, and was aware that one they passed was also a relic of prehistoric man, who had dug it, and didn't live long enough, poor fellow! to know it was a dewpond, or prehistoric. Sally was interested. A little bird with very long legs didn't seem to care, and walked away without undue hurry, but amazingly quickly, for all that.

"What a little darling!" Sally said. "Did you hear that delicious little noise he made? Isn't he a water-ouzel?" Sally took the first name that she thought sounded probable. She really was making talk, to contribute her share to the fiction about the lady and gentleman. So was her companion. He reflected for a moment whether he could say anything about Grallæ and Scolopacidæ, or such like, but decided against heaping up instructive matter on the top of the recent dewponds. He gave it up, and harked back quite suddenly to congenial personalities.

"What was it you wished I wouldn't, Miss Sally?"

Our Sally had it on her lips to say, "Why, do *that*—call me *Miss* Sally, of course! I can't *tell* you how I hate it." But, this time, she was seized with a sudden fit of shyness. She could have said it quite easily before that trivial hand-occurrence, and the momentary stiffness that followed it. Now she backed out in the meanest way, and even sought to fortify the lady and gentleman pretext. She looked back over the panorama they were leaving behind, and discerned that that was Jeremiah and her maternal parent coming through the clover-field. But it wasn't, palpably. Nevertheless, Sally held tight to her groundless opinion long enough for the previous question to be droppable, without effrontery. Then her incorrigible candour bubbled up, and she refused to take advantage of her own subterfuge.

"Never mind, Dr. Conrad; I'll tell you presently. I've a bone to pick with you. Wait till we've seen the little churchy-wurchy

—there it is, over there, with a big weathercock—and then we can quarrel and go home separate."

Even Agur, the son of Jakeh, would have seen, at this point, the way that this particular maid, in addressing this particular man, was exaggerating a certain spirit of bravado; and if he had been accompanying them unseen from St. Sennans, would certainly have deserved his own self-censure if he had failed to trace this spirit to its source—the hand-incident. We believe it was only affectation in Agur, and that he knew all about the subject, men, maids, and every other sort; only he didn't think any of the female sorts worth his Oriental consideration. It was a far cry to the dawn of Browning in those days.

Down the hill to the flatlands was a steep pathway, where talk paused naturally. When you travel in single file on a narrow footway with a grass slide to right or left of you, which it does not do to tread on with shoe-soles well polished on two miles of previous grass, you don't talk—especially if you have come to some point in talk where silence is not unwelcome. Sally and the doctor said scarcely a dozen words on the way down to the little village that owned the name and the church of Chalke. When they arrived in its seclusion they found, for purposes of information and reference, no human creatures visible except some absolutely brown, white-haired ones whose existence dated back only a very few years—not enough to learn English in. So, when addressed, they remained a speechless group, too unaccustomed to man to be able to say where keys of churches were to be had, or anything else. But the eldest, a very little girl in a flexible blue bonnet, murmured what Sally, with insight, interpreted into a reference.

"Yes, dear, that's right. You go and tell moarther t' whoam that a lady and gentleman want to see inside the church, and ask for the key." Whereupon the little maid departs down a passage into a smell of wallflowers, and is heard afar rendering her message as a long narrative—so long that Dr. Conrad says the child cannot have understood right, and they had better prosecute inquiry further. Sally thinks otherwise, and says men are impatient fidgets.

The resolute dumbness of one of the small natives must have been a *parti-pris*, for it suddenly disappeared during his sister's absence, and he gave a narrative of a family dissension, not necessarily recent. He appears proud of his own share in it, which Sally nevertheless felt she could not appear to sanction by silence.

"You bad little boy," she said. "You smacked your sister Elizabeth in t' oy, and your foarther smacked you. I hope he hurt." The bad little boy assented with a nod, and supplied some further details. Then he asked for a penny before his sister Elizabeth came back. He wanted it to buy almond-rock, but he wouldn't give any of it to Jacob, nor to his sister Elizabeth, nor to Reuben, nor to many others, whom he seemed to exclude from almond-rock with rapture. Asked to whom he would give some, then, he replied: "Not you—eat it moyself!" and laughed heartlessly. Sally, we regret to say, gave this selfish little boy a penny for not being hypocritical. And then his sister Elizabeth reappeared with the key, which was out of scale with her, like St. Peter's.

The inward splendours of this church had been inferred by Sally from a tiptoe view through the window, which commanded its only archaic object of interest—the monument of a woolstapler who, three hundred and odd years ago, had the effrontery to have two wives and sixteen children. He ought to have had one or two more wives, thought Dr. Conrad. However, the family was an impressive one now, decorated as it was with roses cut out of turnips, and groups of apples and carrots and cereals. And no family could have kneeled down more symmetrically, even in 1580.

But there was plenty to see in that church, too. Indeed, it was for all the world like the advertisement sheets of *Architectonic Ecclesiology* (ask for this paper at your club), and every window was brim full of new stained glass, and every inch of floor-space was new encaustic tiles. And, what was more, there was a new mosaic over the chancel-arch—a modest and wobbly little arch in itself, that seemed afflicted with its position, and to want to get away into a quiet corner and meditate. Sally said so, and added so should she, if she were it.

"I wonder if the woolstapler was married here to one or other of the little square women," said she.

"I wonder why the angels up there look so sulky," said Dr. Conrad. And then Sally, who seemed absent-minded, found

something else to wonder about—a certain musical whistling noise that filled the little church. But it was only a big bunch of moonwort on a stained-glass-window sill, and the wind was blowing through a vacancy that should have been a date, and making Æolian music. The little maid with the key found her voice over this suddenly. Her bruvver had done that, she said with pride. He had oymed a stoo-an when it was putten up, and brokken t' glass. So that stained glass was very new indeed, evidently.

"I wonder why they call that stuff 'honesty,' Miss Sally?" said the doctor. Sally, feeling that the interest of either in the church was really perfunctory, said vaguely—did they? And then, recoiling from further wonderment, and, indeed, feeling some terror of becoming idiotic if this sort of thing went on much longer, she exclaimed, with reality in her voice: "Because it's not pretending to take an interest when it doesn't, like us. But I wish you wouldn't, Dr. Conrad; I do hate it so."

"Hate what? Taking an interest or calling it honesty? *I* didn't call it honesty. *They* did, whoever they are!"

"No, no—I don't mean that. Never mind. I'll tell you when we're out. Come along—that is, if you've seen enough of the tidy mosaic and the tidy stained glass, and the tidy nosegays on the tidy table." The doctor came along—seemed well satisfied to do so. But this was the third time Sally had wished that Dr. Conrad wouldn't, and this time she felt she must explain. She wasn't at all sure that the name of that herb hadn't somehow got into the atmosphere—caught on, as it were, and twitted her. After all, why shouldn't she speak a plain thought to an old friend, as poor Prosy was now? Who could gainsay it? Moreover—now, surely this was an inspiration—why shouldn't she kill two birds with one stone, and work in her inquiry about the other young lady with this plain thought that was on her tongue to speak?

The sun was a sheer blaze of golden light as they stepped out of the little church into its farewell efforts on behalf of the hill-shadowed land of premature sunsets, and the merpussy looked her best in its effulgence. Sally's good looks had never been such as to convince her she was a beauty; and we suppose she wasn't, critically speaking. But youth and health, and an

arrow-straight bearing, and a flawless complexion, in a flood of evening light, make a bold bid for beauty even in the eyes of others than young men already half-imbecile with love. Sally's was, at any rate, enough to dumbfounder the little janitress with the key, who stood at gaze with violet eyes in her sunbrowned face in the shadow, looking as though for certain they would never close again; while, as for Dr. Conrad, he was too far gone to want a finishing touch, and if he had been, the faintest animation of an extra flush due to embarrassment at what she was meaning to say would have done the business for him. What could he do but wonder and idolize, even while he almost flinched before his idol; and wait to know what it was she wished he wouldn't? What was there in earth or heaven he would not, if Sally wished it?

"Dr. Conrad, I'm sure you must know what I mean. I do so hate being called 'Miss Sally.' Do make it 'Sally,' and have done with it."

The breezy freshness of her spontaneous ease was infectious, and the shy man's answering laugh showed how it had caught his soul. "Is that all?" says he. "That's soon done—Sally! You know, I *do* call you Sally when I speak to your mother and . . ."

"Now, *do* say father. You've no idea how I like it when people call Jeremiah my father, instead of step."

"Well—father, then. I mean, *they* said call you Sally; so of course I do. But speaking to you—don't you see? . . ." The doctor hesitates—doesn't actually blush, perhaps. A slight pause in the conversation eases off the context. The little maiden has to lock up the church-door with the big key, and to receive sixpence and a kiss from Sally. The violet eyes follow the lady and gentleman, fixed in wonderment, as they move off towards the hill, and the last glint of the sun vanishes. Then Sally goes on where they left off:

"No, I don't see. Speaking to me, what? Be an explicit little general practitioner, or we shall quarrel, after all, and go home different ways."

"Well, look here! You know Bailey, the young man that drives me round in London?"

"Yes. How does he come in?"

"Why, just this way; I've known the youth for years, and the