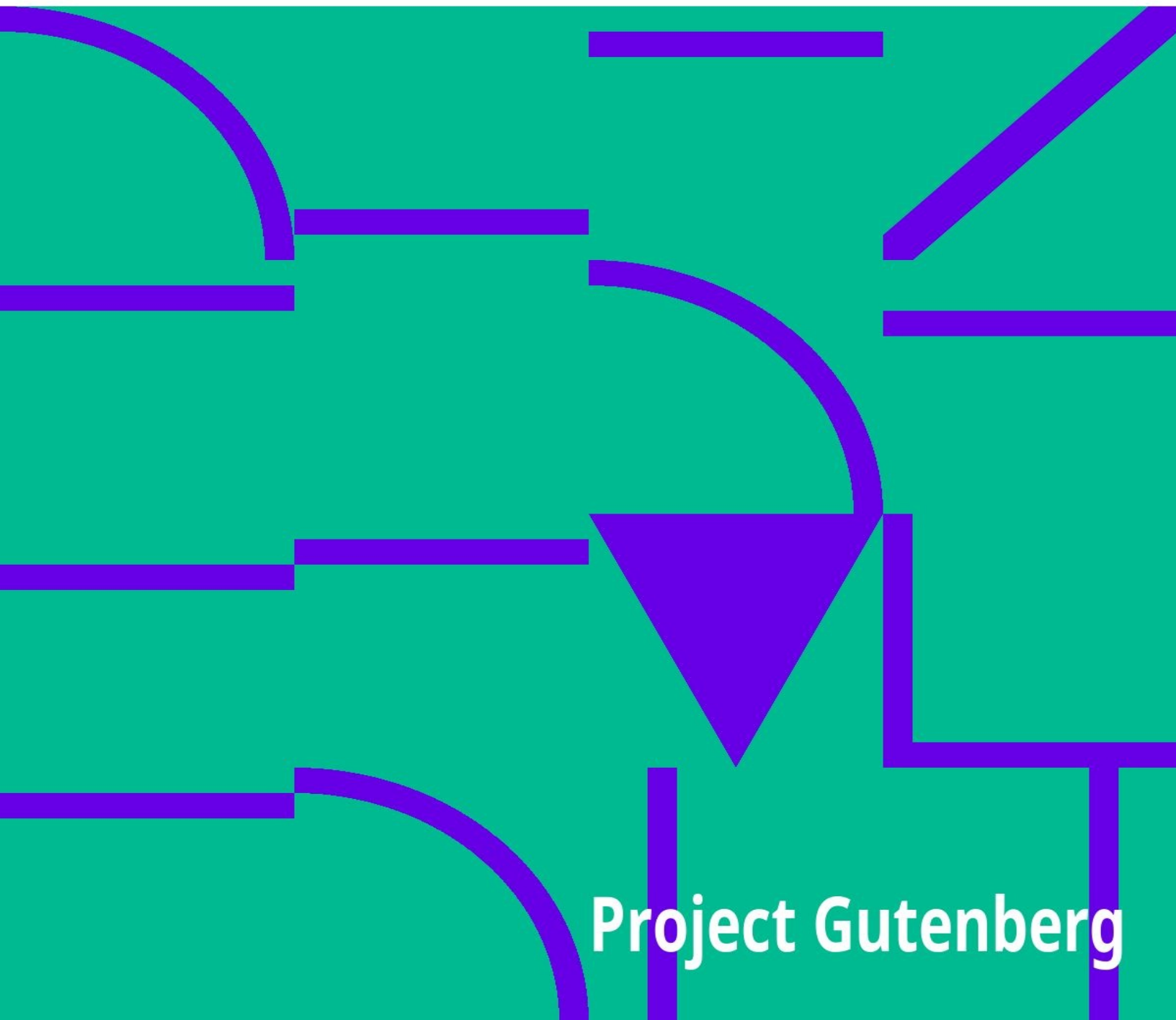


Irene Iddesleigh

Amanda McKittrick Ros

An abstract geometric pattern composed of various purple lines and shapes on a teal background. The pattern includes several horizontal and vertical lines of varying lengths, some curved lines forming arcs, and a prominent downward-pointing triangle in the center-right area. The lines are thick and vibrant purple, creating a modern, architectural feel.

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IRENE IDDESLEIGH.



IRENE IDDESLEIGH.

BY

MRS. AMANDA M'KITTRICK ROS.



Belfast

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1897.

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decoration

CHAPTER I.

SYMPATHISE with me, indeed! Ah, no! Cast your sympathy on the chill waves of troubled waters; fling it on the oases of futurity; dash it against the rock

of gossip; or, better still, allow it to remain within the false and faithless bosom of buried scorn.

Such were a few remarks of Irene as she paced the beach of limited freedom, alone and unprotected. Sympathy can wound the breast of trodden patience,—it hath no rival to insure the feelings we possess, save that of sorrow.

The gloomy mansion stands firmly within the ivy-covered, stoutly-built walls of Dunfern, vast in proportion and magnificent in display. It has been built over three hundred years, and its structure stands respectably distant from modern advancement, and in some degrees it could boast of architectural designs rarely, if ever, attempted since its construction.

The entrance to this beautiful home of Sir Hugh Dunfern, the present owner, is planned on most antique principles; nothing save an enormous iron gate meets the gaze of the visitor, who at first is inclined to think that all public rumours relative to its magnificence are only the utterances of the boastful and idle; nor until within its winding paths of finest pebble, studded here and there with huge stones of unpolished granite, could the mind for a moment conceive or entertain the faintest idea of its quaint grandeur.

Beautiful, however, as Dunfern mansion may seem to the anxious eye of the beholder, yet it is not altogether free from mystery. Whilst many of its rooms, with walls of crystal, are gorgeously and profusely furnished, others are locked incessantly against the foot of the cautious intruder, having in them only a few traditional relics of no material consequence whatever, or even interest, to any outside the ancestral line of its occupants.

It has often been the chief subject of comment amongst the few distinguished visitors welcomed within its spacious apartments, why seemingly the finest rooms the mansion owned were always shut against their eager and scrutinizing gaze; or why, when referred to by any of them, the matter was always treated with silence.

All that can now be done is merely to allow the thought to dwindle into bleak oblivion, until aroused to that standard of disclosure which defies hindrance.

Within the venerable walls surrounding this erection of amazement and wonder may be seen species of trees rarely, if ever, met with; yea, within the beaded borders of this grand old mansion the eye of the privileged beholds the magnificent lake, studded on every side with stone of costliest cut and finish; the

richest vineries, the most elegant ferns, the daintiest conservatories, the flowers and plants of almost every clime in abundance, the most fashionable walks, the most intricate windings that imagination could possibly conceive or genius contrive. In fact, it has well been named “The Eden of Luxury.”

Dunfern mansion was handed down as an heirloom since its purchase by Walter, third Earl of Dunfern, in 1674; and since then has been tenderly cared for internally, and carefully guarded externally, by the skilful hands of noted artisans. The present owner is only son of Sir John Dunfern, by Irene, adopted daughter of Lord and Lady Dilworth, of Dilworth Castle, County Kent.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER II.

THE December sun had hidden its dull rays behind the huge rocks that rose monstrously high west of Dunfern mansion, and ceased to gladden the superb apartment Sir John occupied most part of the day. They had withdrawn their faint reflection from within the mirrored walls of this solitary chamber to brighten other homes with their never-dying sheen.

As the dull, grey evening advanced to such a degree as to render a look of brightness imperative to the surroundings of its sole occupant, Sir John requested that his favourite apartment should be made bright as possible by adding more fuel to the smouldering ashes within the glistening bars which guarded their remains. This being done, three huge lamps were lighted, and placed at respectable distances from each other, when Sir John, with his accustomed grace, began to peruse some of his evening papers.

Though a man of forty summers, he never yet had entertained the thought of yielding up his bachelor ideas to supplant them with others which eventually should coincide with those of a different sex; in fact, he never had bestowed a thought on changing his habits and manner of living, nor until fully realising his position of birthright, that had been treasured by his ancestors for such a lengthened period, and which, sooner or later, must pass into strangers' hands, did the thought ever occur to him of entering into the league of the blessed.

The clock had just chimed nine when a maid entered with a note, neatly laid on a trim little tray, which she placed on the table close beside her master, and then retired. It was rather unusual for him to receive letters so late in the evening, nor until he was in full possession of its contents he could not form the faintest imagination of its worth.

Not far from Dunfern Mansion may be seen situated on a rising hill the beautiful Castle of Lord and Lady Dilworth, a prominent building commanding the finest view in the county. It had been remodelled by the present owner, after inheriting it from his late maternal uncle—Lord Leyburn; and, although equipped with all modern improvements and inventions necessary, yet there dwelt a lack of design and beauty about it possessed by Dunfern Mansion.

The bountiful owner of Dilworth Castle differed much in many respects from Sir John Dunfern. He was a nobleman of rare tact and capacities; a keen sportsman; a Turf frequenter; an ardent politician; and, in fact, a lover of everything which served to promote the interests of his extended and varied social circle in particular, and entire community in general.

Lady Dilworth, it may here be mentioned, was never of a very robust nature, and often had she felt the great strain of society press rather heavily on her weak frame, so much so, as to render the adoption of the subject of this book indispensable. Drawing his chair closer to the table, on which one of the great lamps stood, Sir John proceeded to peruse the contents of the note. It was an invitation from Lord and Lady Dilworth to attend a ball at Dilworth Castle on 22nd prox., given by them in honour of the marriage of Henry, fifth Marquis of Hill-Hall, with Ethel, Countess of Maidstone.

Lord Dilworth and the Marquis were personal friends of Sir John, and to accept this kind and courteous invitation would mean a step towards the summit of the matrimonial ladder, by meeting the majority of the fully-fledged belles in and around Canterbury, and especially Irene Iddesleigh, Lord Dilworth's adopted

daughter, more generally known as “The Southern Beauty.” He slept over the matter that night, with the result that next morning he wrote accepting the kind invitation, more through curiosity than desire.

Although he led a quiet and retired life, generally speaking, still he did not absent himself totally from a few social meetings occasionally, and if imagination painted his future in the manner so artfully designed by Lady Dilworth, no doubt this visit to Dilworth Castle might convert it into reality.

Arriving at the elegant castle, with its tower of modern fame, and spires of Gothic structure, Sir John was met in its great hall by the genial hostess, who conducted him to the brilliant reception-room, superbly laid out for the comfort of its guests; and being the first to arrive, was thus afforded a good opportunity of inspecting the many valuable relics and works of art that adorned its huge and velvety walls.

On the centre wall right opposite where he sat hung a painted portrait, life-size, an admirable production of the well-known artist, “Peto,” and not knowing where such an original of perfection and beauty could be found, he resolved to inquire, when opportunity offered, whose portrait it might be.

At this stage the numerous guests began to assemble, including the majority of the leading gentry in and around Canterbury, as it was looked upon as the chief social event of the season. Mothers were most fidgetty that their daughters should don their costliest gowns and brilliants, as rumour had it that the noble heir to Dunfern estate should honour the assembly with his august presence.

Report gained ground that Sir John, having quietly crept out of boyhood for a lengthened period, would end his days harnessed singly, but idle gossip, flying at all times kite-high, soon gave place in the wavering minds of society belles to that of more serious consideration and welcome expectancy.

On being introduced to all those outside his present circle of acquaintance on this evening, and viewing the dazzling glow of splendour which shone, through spectacles of wonder, in all its glory, Sir John felt his past life but a dismal dream, brightened here and there with a crystal speck of sunshine that had partly hidden its gladdening rays of bright futurity until compelled to glitter with the daring effect they soon should produce. But there awaited his view another beam of life’s bright rays, who, on entering, last of all, commanded the minute attention of every one present—this was the beautiful Irene Iddesleigh.

How the look of jealousy, combined with sarcasm, substituted those of love and bashfulness! How the titter of tainted mockery rang throughout the entire apartment, and could hardly fail to catch the ear of her whose queenly appearance occasioned it! These looks and taunts serving to convince Sir John of Nature's fragile cloak which covers too often the image of indignation and false show, and seals within the breasts of honour and equality resolutions of an iron mould. On being introduced to Irene, Sir John concluded instantly, without instituting further inquiry, that this must be the original of the portrait so warmly admired by him. There she stood, an image of perfection and divine beauty, attired in a robe of richest snowy tint, relieved here and there by a few tiny sprigs of the most dainty maidenhair fern, without any ornaments whatever, save a diamond necklet of famous sparkling lustre and priceless value.

As the evening rolled into the small hours of the morning, the numerous guests began to repair to their respective homes, none of the weaker sex having had the slightest advancement in the direction of their coveted intentions, save Irene, who was fortunate in securing the attention of Sir John Dunfern during the happy hours that fled so quickly.

Immediately before taking his departure he pressed firmly her snowy hand, and left the pretty-gilded area which surrounded his first hopes of matrimony to enter what he was beginning to believe the weary apartments of Dunfern Mansion, that previously had held him bound to them in hermit-like fashion.

decoration

CHAPTER III.

AROUSE the seeming deadly creature to that standard of joy and gladness which should mark his noble path! Endow him with the dewdrops of affection;

cast from him the pangs of the dull past, and stamp them for ever beneath the waves of troubled waters; brighten his life as thou wouldst that of a faded flower; and when the hottest ray of that heavenly orb shall shoot its cheerful charge against the window panes of Dunfern Mansion, the worthy owner can receive it with true and profound thankfulness. Three weeks had scarcely passed ere Sir John was made the recipient of another invitation to Dilworth Castle. This second effusion of cordiality required neither anxious thought nor prolonged decision how to act, knowing as he did that it would again serve to bring his present thoughts into practice by affording him another opportunity of sharing in the loving looks of one for whom he feared there dwelt a strong inclination on his part to advance his affection.

Irene stood looking out on the lake beyond the richly draped window, ruminating on the days of her childhood, which lent a look of dullness to the beautiful face that beamed with delight as Sir John Dunfern entered. The evening was very pleasantly and quietly spent, Irene commanding the greater part of his time and attention, on account of Lady Dilworth being slightly ailing, whose health, generally speaking, at this period was not so robust as formerly, and consequently failed to warrant too many callers. As the clock struck eleven Sir John began to think of returning home, feeling quite happy, fancying his great affection was returned in full by Irene.

Being very domesticated, and having the stiff ideas of a bachelor of long standing so firmly imprinted in his nature, he felt very diffident in asking the object of his visit when next they should meet. But Lady Dilworth entering before taking his departure, saved him putting the shy question by placing herself in his position and demanding the required reply. Sir John promised without further ceremony to visit them more frequently in future, and left their midst with hasty step, lingering in the hall to cast another look at the lovely form which stood not far distant. Leisurely leaning back in his carriage, and burying himself in his great and costly cloak demanded by the night's icy aspect, he rolled along towards his home drowned in sweet thought of the beautiful girl whom he only recently knew, but whose regard for her raged with such rambling anxiety as to convince him of the propriety of making her aware how he meant to play the part of lover.

Until now he was inclined to be prejudiced against the snares and allurements of women, but he strongly resolved to try gradually and abandon every unkind thought harboured in his mind against them, fearing lest all his conjured

imaginations were both unjust and selfish; and determined to drown them for ever in the clashing gulf of fate, felt a prouder and happier mortal than before.

But time would solve the problem and heal the wound which penetrated so deeply his bosom. Yea, a short time he hoped would bring his creeping fever of endearment under the binding stay of appointed authority, and heal its weakening effects with the sacred salve of truth.

Not until the horses dashed up the winding avenue with increased alacrity was he shaken from his meditating attitude, to be ushered once more into his home of boundless wealth. The lonely stare of grave bewilderment took the place of happiness that formerly seemed built in abundance for him within its walls, as he entered the palatial and gorgeously equipped abode he principally inhabited, feeling the tinge of the dull past filling him with entire despair, whilst meditating on the happy future which presented itself to him. How in a trivial period this lonely spot, he thought, should prove the beacon of never-dying bliss, when once furnished with the most precious treasure on earth—a virtuous woman! Ah! the very thought of his embosomed and anticipated alliance made him nervously happy; and believing a bright and noble future lay in store for the lonely owner of Dunfern Estate, he resolved to indulge nature in a few hours of calm repose.

The days moved along more quickly Sir John believed than formerly; and possibly he may have imagined this was so, as he felt no longer fettered with fear of fighting with his inward friend—obstinacy, whose hand of drowsy bachelorism seemed for ever closed to his changing charity; he had at last thrown aside the garb of female dislike, and patronised that of a warm-hearted lover.

Irene did not lead Lady Dilworth to believe that she really cared for Sir John, and, when his name cropped up occasionally, she allowed herself always to keep the coast of conversation clear that would likely convict her views most, and managed cleverly thereby to deceive the friend who came not a day too soon to her rescue. Perhaps had Lady Dilworth proved less concerned about the orphan charge she freed from a life of toil, apparently, and instructed her more on the branches of integrity, then the lovely youthful Irene could have decided more honorably in all cases of questioning, and would have done justice, not alone to herself, but to all concerned; but, like many others similarly surrounded with lovers, battling in the war of extremes, and encompassed on all sides with apparent luxuries, she was confident she would some day come off victorious by

acting the clever Corinthian.

decoration

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN on the eve of glory, whilst brooding over the prospects of a bright and happy future, whilst meditating upon the risky right of justice, there we remain, wanderers on the cloudy surface of mental woe, disappointment and danger, inhabitants of the grim sphere of anticipated imagery, partakers of the poisonous dregs of concocted injustice. Yet such is life.

Sir John's visits began now to be numerous at Dilworth Castle, each visit serving further to strengthen the link of relationship, and bury, in the heaving breast of seeking solace, the dull delight of the weary past. As the weeks wore on, he reckoned them only as days, when comparing their loving length with those of the bleak years he tried to enjoy alone, before taking such steps—yes, serious steps—as those fancied by the would-be bachelor.

At first he was careless and indifferent to the flowery harangues of mothers who paid him periodical visits, with their daughters, of apology, and firmly retained the obstinate qualities of an autocratic ruler, until softened in the presence of one he found he was learning to steadily love. He believed now that the chief stripes, viz.—observation, inclination, advancement and accomplishment, in the well-spun web of matrimony, must harmonise with the groundwork of happiness, without which our lives are not worth an unstamped coin.

Love's path, on which Sir John was known now to tread with the step of intensity, seemed smooth as the ice of Inglewood. There were no obstacles in his way of which he was yet aware, save imagination; this, also, was chased from

his mind by the evident and ample return of Irene's polished affection, the foul gloss of which he failed to notice, and whose pretensions were so cleverly carried out as to defy detection.

Irene was an accomplished and clever girl, and well able to sustain her hidden regard throughout for one who for years previous had been endeavouring to remove the great barrier of position which blocked his path of approach towards her affection. As yet her parentage was totally unknown to Sir John; still, he felt it must not have belonged to the rude and ridiculous, since she possessed all the qualities, outwardly, and features, of a highly refined race. And when only a girl of eleven summers, when the worthy hand of benevolence, friendship, and love clutched the tiny fingers of absolute want, there visibly seemed nothing lacking in appearance, manner, or education to solicit the pity or suspicion of her charitable guardian and protector.

Sir John Dunfern's many visits of late to Dilworth Castle had been creating quite a sensation throughout the quiet corners of costly curiosity, until an announcement appeared in *Mack's Society Journal* to the following effect:—

“A marriage is arranged to take place in August between Sir John Dunfern, of Dunfern Mansion, County Kent, and Irene Iddesleigh, adopted daughter of Lord and Lady Dilworth, of Dilworth Castle, in same county.”

This notice, no doubt, caused the partakers in drawing-room tetè-a-tetès to share in the pangs of jealousy, with silent resentment. Perplexity, a little, would find refuge within the homes of many who led Society by the string of superficial show and pompous importance; and during the interval that elapsed between such an announcement and its important celebration, many and infamous were the charges poured forth against Irene Iddesleigh.

The month preceding Irene's wedding was one of merriment at Dilworth Castle, Lord and Lady Dilworth extending the social hand of fashionable folly on four different occasions. They seemed drunk with delight that Irene, whom they looked upon as their own daughter, should carry off the palm of purity, whilst affluence, position, and title were for years waiting with restless pride to triumph at its grasp.

It was at the second of these social gatherings that the first seed of jealousy was sown within the breast of Sir John Dunfern, and which had a tendency to remain until it gradually grew to such a rapid state of maturity as to be rooted, if possible, for ever from its dusty bed of ambush.

Yes, when the merriment was at its height, and the heat too oppressive to allow much comfort to the corpulent, the espoused of Irene dropped unexpectedly out of the midst of the aristocratic throng, and being passionately an ardent admirer of the fairy-like fruits of the efforts of the horticulturist, directed his footsteps towards the well-filled conservatory at the south wing of the building.

The different-shaded lights which dangled from its roof bestowed a look of Indian exquisiteness on the many quaint and delicate productions of nature that rested daintily in their beds of terra-cotta tint.

But before leaving the room he vaguely scanned the throng to catch a glimpse of Irene, and failed to notice her amongst the many who danced so gaily to the well-timed tunes of the celebrated pianist, Charles Wohden, whose musical touch was always capable of melting the most hardened sinner into moods of mellow softness, or cheering the most downcast and raising their drooping look of sadness to that of high-strung hilarity.

Sir John wandered in and out through the numerous windings of sweetest fragrance, until arriving at the farthest corner, of rather darkened shade, and on a wire couch beheld the object of his pursuit, in closest conversation with her tutor, whose name he had altogether failed to remember, only having had the pleasure of his acquaintance a few hours before.

“Can it be possible?” exclaimed Sir John, in profound astonishment. “Why, I have been searching for you for some time past, and have accidentally found you at last!” Irene, rising to her feet in a second, was utterly dazed, and had the dim lights shewed her proud face to advantage, the ruddy glow of deepest crimson guilt would have manifested itself to a much greater degree. Making multitudinous apologies, etc., she at once joined Sir John, who led her back, in apparent triumph, to share the next waltz.

How the true heart beat with growing passion during the remainder of the merry festivity, and as the final announcement of separation was whispered from ear to ear, the gradual wane of Love’s lofty right would fain have dwindled into pompous nothing as the thought kept tickling his warm enthusiasm with the nimble fingers of jealousy. That she whom he had ardently hoped should share his future with sheer and loving caresses of constant companionship and wife-like wisdom should be trapped in probably vowing to another her great devotion for him!

But better allow the sickening thought to die on the eve of insult rather than live in the breast of him who, at no distant date, would hear the merry peals of wedding bells ring with gladness, and naturally rejoice at the object of their origin.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER V.

OUR hopes when elevated to that standard of ambition which demands unison may fall asunder like an ancient ruin. They are no longer fit for construction unless on an approved principle. They smoulder away like the ashes of burnt embers, and are cast outwardly from their confined abode, never more to be found where once they existed only as smouldering serpents of scorned pride.

The little chat that Irene apparently enjoyed in the conservatory would gladly have become an act of forgetfulness on her part had not Sir John reminded her of its existence a few days afterwards. The spark of jealous passion had not fully died out after the incident referred to, and awaiting silently its decease, Sir John almost had grown a mourner to its imagined demise, following its undying remains so far as the village of Opportunity, when it was again to revive and shine as luminously as before.

It happened about three weeks preceding the day set apart for their holy union, on Sir John arriving at the castle, he was informed of Irene's recent exit, and gently turning away, he resolved to have a stroll in the tastefully laid-out gardens with the sole object of meeting her.

Walking leisurely along, and stooping to pick up some fallen fruit, he suddenly heard a faint sound issue amongst the trees. Remaining breathless for a few seconds, lest he might be deceived by the rippling sounds of the adjacent waves, he again heard the same sweet strain, but of much longer duration than before, and quietly moving towards the spot whence it issued, another sound met his ear in the distance, which seemed to be the hasty tread of some one making good an escape, before he got time to view the object he would eagerly have pursued, but checking his desire somewhat, he allowed the matter to sink into silence. Boldly moving towards the spot whence the sound of music issued, how delightfully surprised was he to find a magnificently-constructed little summer-house, a charming pyramidal Gothic structure, robed internally with mossy mantles of nature, and brightened beyond conception with the instrument of humanity which gave origin to such pathetic and sweetened strains.

Politely offering an apology for intruding on the private little palace of Irene, who failed completely to hide her gross confusion from the keen gaze of her espoused, who never seemed to notice in the least the sudden change that swept so swiftly over her pallid cheeks at his unexpected visit, Sir John sat down.

Irene held in her snowy palms a roll of Italian music, which she earnestly endeavoured to conceal from his penetrating stare, probably on account of the words contained therein, which for ever would be unknown to his varied sphere of knowledge, and which would undoubtedly have betrayed her feelings, never dreaming that they should strike other ears than those for whom they practically were intended.

Perceiving her great excitement at the unexpected appearance of him, who ever afterwards kept his jealous thoughts in silent motion, he absolutely evaded making any inquiry whatever, or slightest allusion to the name and nature of the parchment she so firmly retained. Sir John chatted gaily until he gained good ground for delivering to her the message that instinct had so prompted him to utter.

“Irene, my beloved one,” he began; “it is now only about a score of days until I hoped for ever to call you mine; a hope which unmercifully has haunted me since I fortunately gazed on your lovely face; a hope which I trusted should be fully appreciated by both you and me, and which, I now must own, can never be realised until the clearance of the barrier that since our engagement has been but too apparent.

“The sole object of my visit, my dear Irene”—here Sir John clasped her tender hand in his—“tonight is to elicit from you a matter that lately has cast a shadowy gloom over my anticipated bright and cheerful future. I am not one of those mortals who takes offence at trifles, neither am I a man of hasty temper or words—quite the contrary, I assure you; but it has, fortunately or unfortunately, been probably a failing amongst my ancestors to court sensitiveness in its minutest detail, and, I must acknowledge, I stray not from any of them in this particular point.

“I must acquaint you, though it pains me deeply to do so, that lately you have not treated me with such respect or attention as you certainly lavished upon me before the announcement of our engagement, and for what reason or reasons I now wish to be apprised. You seem when in company with others to ignore my remarks to you entirely, and treat them with proud disdain, as if shame took the place of pride at my wordy approach! I felt and do feel quite hurt, and am resolved that no such repetition shall take place in future. I promised to be at the castle last night, but unfortunately I felt indisposed, and only that I wished to have a thorough understanding relative to your recent conduct, and which has pained me acutely, I should not have ventured out of doors this evening either. I was, in consequence, obliged to write you last night, asking a written reply, which you failed to give! And this evening, instead of being doubly rejoiced at my presence, you, on the contrary, seem doubly annoyed! I therefore pray, my dearest Irene, that you will, and I am persuaded honestly, not hesitate to satisfy me regarding this unpleasantness, that should anything of which you are now aware cause your conduct to be changed towards me, do not allow it a lair within your breast, but confide in me as thou wouldst in a dearly-trusted and faithful lover.”

At this stage Irene began to consider seriously the earnestness that accompanied the words of Sir John, knowing well she had been guilty, grossly guilty, of the charges with which he impeached her, and which were mixed with child-like simplicity, descriptive only of a world-famed bachelor. She pondered whether or not honesty should take the place of deceit—too often practised in women—and concluded to adopt the latter weapon of defence. Raising her hazel eyes to his, and clearing the weft of truth that had been mixing with the warp of falsehood to form an answer of plausible texture, fringed with different shades of love, she thus began:

“My dearest and much beloved, I assure you your remarks have astounded me

not a little! Your words sting like a wasp, though, I am quite convinced, unintentionally. You are well aware that within a short period I will be marked out publicly as mistress of Dunfern mansion—an honour revered in every respect by me; an honour to which I at one time dare never aspire; an honour coveted by many much more worthy than I, whose parentage is as yet bathed in the ocean of oblivious ostentation, until some future day, when I trust it shall stand out boldly upon the brink of disclosure to dry its saturated form and watery wear with the heat of equality. You are about to place me in a position which cannot fail to wring from jealousy and covetousness their flaming torch of abuse. Yes, Sir John, on me you have not ceased to lavish every available treasure and token of your unbounded love. You have been to me not only a loyal admirer, but a thoroughly upright and estimable example of life's purest treasures. You have resolved to place me by your side as your equal, whilst wealth in boundless store is thirsting for your touch. You have elevated my unknown position to such a pitch as to defy taunt or jeer, and at any time if I may have, seemingly, ignored your advances, it was purely want of thought, and not through any underhand motive or scheme whatever.

“I assure you your allusion to my verbal answer last night is very pronounced, and may be overlooked on the ground of pure disappointment. Our time of singleness is now short, and begging your forgiveness for my seeming neglect or indifference, I hope the tide, which until now has flown so gently, may not be stayed on the eve of entering the harbour of harmony, peace, and love.”

At the commencement of Irene's answer of lavishing praises and flimsy apologies, her affianced moved to the opposite corner of the rustic building to scan the features of her he wholly worshipped and reluctantly doubted. Every sentence the able and beautiful girl uttered caused Sir John to shift his apparently uncomfortable person nearer and nearer, watching at the same time minutely the divine picture of innocence, until at last, when her reply was ended, he found himself, altogether unconsciously, clasping her to his bosom, whilst the ruby rims which so recently proclaimed accusations and innocence met with unearthly sweetness, chasing every fault over the hills of doubt, until hidden in the hollow of immediate hate.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER VI.

THE silvery touch of fortune is too often gilt with betrayal: the meddling mouth of extravagance swallows every desire, and eats the heart of honesty with pickled pride: the impostury of position is petty, and ends, as it should commence, with stirring strife. But conversion of feminine opinions tries the touchy temper of opposition, and too seldom terminates victoriously.

“Great mercy! Only another week and I shall almost cease to be a free thinker! Just seven days more and what!—I shall openly have to confess to the world an untruth! Would there be any means of flight from the dangerous dragon that haunts me night and day? Could anything possible be done to save myself from false alliance? Too late!—too late!

“Only seven days and this beautiful boudoir shall own me no more, with its walls of purest white and gilded borders!

“Just seven days and I shall be fettered with chains of dragging dislike and disappointment! Only seven days and thus shall end my cherished hopes, my girlish pride, my most ardent wish, but, alas! not my love! Seven days more shall see my own darling Os”—— Suddenly Irene was aroused by the ringing of the breakfast bell, before she got time to finish the sentence that troubled her weary brain for months before. Dressing herself with frantic expertness, she dashed down the winding staircase with an alacrity better imagined than described, and rushing into the breakfast room where Lord and Lady Dilworth eagerly awaited her, presented the outward mocking appearance of being the happiest of mortals. Her beloved benefactors, who had been the prime movers in the matter of matrimony, saw plainly a saddened look about the lovely face, which Irene tried hard to suppress, and asking why it appeared at this gay time, was answered evasively. Indeed, Lord and Lady Dilworth were wholly ignorant of the present

state of affairs, nor did Irene reveal at any time to Lady Dilworth her great hatred for Sir John, or her maddened desire to become the wife of a poor tutor.

Had she only taken into her confidence her whose wise counsel and motherly example were at all times a prompt step to decision; or had she only hinted to Lady Dilworth her manifest inability to return Sir John's great affection, matters would probably have reached another climax. But owing to the present precarious position in which Lord and Lady Dilworth stood, and as yet unknown to both Irene and other most intimate acquaintances, great was Lady Dilworth's desire to see Irene permanently settled, knowing as she did that ere the sun of another August day would flash its shimmering rays against the crystal stays of Dilworth Castle she would be beyond easy access to Irene either in time of rejoicing or sorrowing.

Preparations were at last almost completed for such an auspicious event. Invitations were issued numerous for the reception to be held at Dilworth Castle after Irene's marriage, but sparingly during the ceremony; all of which were mostly accepted. Costly, multiplying, and varied were the gifts received by Irene; enough to make a princess stare with startling bewilderment.

Amongst the many, none came from Irene's tutor, Oscar Otwell! And although he was the first to whom Lady Dilworth addressed an invitation, still there was no reply, much to the annoyance and astonishment of hostess on the one hand and knowledge of Irene on the other; as, verily, it was not unknown to Irene that absolute indifference to facts, seemingly of domestic importance, was a positive point in Oscar, and never better exemplified than in the present existing state of affairs, which, sickly as it proved to Irene, was deadly so to Oscar.

But future facts had to be solved, which undoubtedly would be treated with more comparative reverence than heretofore, by him who suffered severely—yea, acutely—from the blow struck him on the eve of aspiration and achievement. Love, alas! when smitten with the sword of indifference, dieth soon, but once struck on the tunnelled cheek of secrecy with the hand of pity there leaves a scar of indelible intolerance, until wiped out for ever with the curative balsam of battled freedom.

Sir John and Irene met in Dilworth Castle for the last time on the morning of the third day of August, being the day set apart for the celebration of their marriage. It commenced with the ringing of the village bells; the sun shone forth in all his universal glory; emblems of the approaching festivity did not fail to appear on

the housetops of the humblest village peasant; gladness reigned throughout the household, and all hearts, save two, rejoiced with unabated activity.

It was a morning never to be forgotten by Lord and Lady Dilworth, who, on that day, would be robbed of the treasure held firm and fast by them for the lengthened period of nine years, and which they yielded up with hearts of sorrow, not because of the change in which Irene should have taken deep interest, but on account of the burthen of trouble which loaded them with leaden weights of which they could not possibly free themselves. The intense excitement that for weeks before had found such refuge within their cherished and much-loved home had not long now to live: it would die on the doorstep of apparent bereavement never more to appear within Dilworth Castle under similar circumstances. They knew well that the gnawing jaws of poverty, which for years had failed to expose their grinding power, had reached the last and only bite of sudden termination, and thereby stamped their marks of melancholy so impressively upon the noble brows of the worthy owners of Dilworth Castle, that time could never blot them from observation. As before stated few were those invited to be present at the wedding ceremony, which was to take place about twelve o'clock noon.

Sir John arrived at the Castle shortly before that time, looking charming indeed, whilst Irene, though departing from the rules laid down by Lady Dilworth, demanded from all present remarks bordering on similarity. She looked nervously pale, but queenly, and mastered thoroughly the exposure of the painful agony through which she was passing, knowing as she did and fully believed that "all is not gold that glitters."

It may interest some to know that Irene silently and secretly resolved not to array herself in white; she was reconciled that neither the marriage robe of purity nor the too beaming wedding face was to appear before such devout and reverential Church dignitaries as the Bishop of Barelegs and Canon Foot, with highly impressed and open falsehood, as that practised by her in the absence of labouring under such a solemn vow.

What must have been the breathless surprise of Lady Dilworth chiefly, and those present also, who, only the evening previous, had been pouring such praises over the magnificent duchesse satin gown, which eligible Parisian dressmakers pronounced their chief production of the season, when Irene appeared arrayed in an Irish poplin of the darkest visible shade of green, without either train or

flower of distinction, not even a speck of ribbon or border of lace, and no ornament only the valued necklet which graced her pearly throat when first Sir John was tempted with her enhancing beauty to bestow upon her his choice collection of love's purest fragrance, which should cast the sweetest scent of mutual relationship throughout the dazzling apartments of the mansion she was about to grace.

So thunderstruck and grievously horrified did Lady Dilworth seem at the vague departure of Irene from her orders, that she dare not trust herself to offer her the first motherly embrace! Irene, perceiving the great embarrassment of her beloved Lady Dilworth, glided across the room, and sitting down to the right of her upon whom she had that day flung, in the face of devotion, the last dregs of defiance, "begged to offer an apology for such unruly conduct," and added "that all would be revealed at a future date when least expected."

In the very room where Sir John was first puzzled concerning the beautiful portrait, was he now made the recipient of the original. After the important ceremony was performed, and the register signed, Sir John and Lady Dunfern, when the usual congratulations were ended, left by the one o'clock train *en route* for the Continent. Thus were joined two hearts of widely different beat—one of intense love, which hearsay never could shake; the other of dire dislike, which reason could never alter.

"Born under a lucky star," was the whispered echo throughout the distinguished guests who sat down to breakfast after the junction of opposites. Yea, this was a remark of truth visibly, and might have kept good during the remainder of their lives had not the tuiional click of bygone attachment kept moving with measured pace, until stopped after months, or it may be, small years of constant swinging.

Did Lady Dunfern ever dream that her apology for disobedience to Lady Dilworth's orders, in not arraying herself in the garb of glistening glory, could ever be accepted, even by the kind and loving Lady Dilworth?

Did she imagine for a moment that she, to whom she owed anything but disobedience, even in its simplest form, should be wrested from her arms of companionship ere her return to Dunfern Mansion? Did the thought ever flash through her mind that never again would she be able to pour into the ear of her trusted helper the secrets of the heart of deception, which, for the past seven months, had raged so furiously within her?

Better leave her to the freedom of a will that ere long would sink the ship of opulence in the sea of penury, and wring from her the words:—"Leave me now, deceptive demon of deluded mockery; lurk no more around the vale of vanity, like a vindictive viper; strike the lyre of living deception to the strains of dull deadness, despair and doubt; and bury on the brink of benevolence every false vow, every unkind thought, every trifle of selfishness and scathing dislike, occasioned by treachery in its mildest form!"

decoration

CHAPTER VII.

DISTANT shores have great attractions and large expectations. They harbour around their beaches the exile and patriot, the king and peasant, the lawyer and artisan, the rising swindler and ruined prince. Spotted throughout the unclaimed area of bared soil may be seen the roughly-constructed huts and lofty homes of honest industry. Yes, and concealed therein are hearts yearning for the land of nativity and national freedom; hearts which sorrow after bygone days, and sink low when brooding over the future tide of fortune which already has stopped its gentle flow.

The reception on the evening of Irene's marriage was glorious and brilliant, as were all those given by Lord and Lady Dilworth, and, although attended by society's cream alone, there appeared a visible and unhidden vacancy in the absence of her who so often lent a glow of gaiety to the high-toned throng.

There seemed to be no rival now of buried lineage to mar their desire, or incur the jealousy of would-be opponents; no one to share sympathetically with the afflicted sister of equality and worth; nor was there any one present of such knightly and commanding dignity as he, who, not many hours previous, had

taken upon him the sad duty of delivering up the keys of devotion to her who kept the door of ardent adoration locked against his approach.

It would probably be a long time ere such a scene of silly jealousy and ire would take place as that witnessed, in which the greater majority of those present were then partakers! And, further, it would surely be a much longer period before these guests would again share alike in the generosity so often extended them by Lord and Lady Dilworth.

Next day after Irene's marriage was a busy one at Dilworth Castle; hasty and numerous were the preparations for desolation and departure. Weeks preceding the joyful event, or what should have been, were leisurely devoted to the artistic arrangements in every room within the lordly manor. But, alas! so sudden now was joy's termination, that hours alone were the boundary of command.

It may be stated that Lord Dilworth owned three very extensive estates, namely—Dilworth, Ayrton, and Howden. The first-mentioned extended around the castle of that name, encompassing a spacious tract of soil indeed, and might have done justice to moderation in its most expensive form. The Ayrton Estate, which entirely covers the southern portion of Cheshire, owns a magnificent Hall, the residence of the Earl of Tuckersham, and, although not considered so lucrative as Dilworth, may be estimated a handsome dowry for the son of any rising nobleman in the realm. The Howden Estate, on which are elegantly formed two buildings of note—namely, Blandford Castle and Lauderdale Lodge, both exquisite constructions of architecture and skilled workmanship, and occupied respectively by Sir Sydney Hector and Admiral Charles Depew—lies chiefly around the south-west of Yorkshire, and is not quite so desirable or adapted for agriculture as the two first mentioned, being mostly rented for grazing purposes by the numerous and varied owners of its rugged plots. These estates became so heavily mortgaged that prompt sale was indispensable, and, the matter being quietly arranged six months beforehand, the sixth day of August was the day set apart for the disposal of same.

Bidders were numerous and offers low. Eventually the purchasers were as follow:—The Marquis of Orland bought Dilworth Estate; Lord Henry Headen purchased Ayrton Estate, whilst the lot of Howden fell upon Sir Rowland Joyce, the famous historian and national bard.

Thus were wrested from Lord and Lady Dilworth their luxurious living. They were driven from their nursery of rich and complicated comforts, their castle of

indolence and ease. They were now thrown upon the shivering waters of want, without a word of sympathy in the dreadful hour of their great affliction, without home or friend to extend shelter or sustenance, and cast afloat upon the ocean of oscillating chance to speed across it as best they could.

Was Lord Dilworth therefore to be pitied? Were the torrents of gold which were bound to trickle from these enormous lands and dwellings, manufactories and villages, too trifling for his use? Not a morsel of pity was offered either him or Lady Dilworth as their circumstances became known in the homes of their associates, who so often fed on the fat of their folly and graced their well-lined tables always covered with dainties of deserving censure.

Could human mind contemplate that she who reigned supreme amongst society, she who gave the ball in honor of Irene Iddesleigh's marriage, should ere four days be a penniless pauper? Yet such was fact, not fiction.

The seventh day of August saw Lord and Lady Dilworth titled beggars, steering their course along the blue and slippery waves of the Atlantic, to be participators in the loathing poverty which always exists in homes sought after destruction, degradation, and reckless extravagance.

So soon may the house of gladness and mirth be turned into deepest grief! How the wealthiest, through sheer folly, are made to drink the very essence of poverty and affliction in its purest form! How the golden dust of luxury can be blown about with the wind of events, and is afterwards found buried in the fields of industry and thrift! Their names, which were as a household word, would now be heard no more, and should sink into abject silence and drowned renown, leaving them to battle against the raging war of ruin and hunger, and retire into secluded remorse.

On the return of Sir John and Lady Dunfern from their honeymoon, after four weeks sojourn, what was her ladyship's consternation on perceiving Dilworth Castle in darkness as she and Sir John swept past its avenue on their way to their own brilliantly-lighted mansion? She was rather more taciturn on the night of her return than even during her stay in Florence, and it was only on her approaching her former place of temporary retreat and touchy remembrances that words began to fall from her ruby lips in torrents.

"Tell me, I implore of you, Sir John and husband, why the once blithe and cheerful spot of peace is now apparently a dismal dungeon on the night of our home-coming, when all should have been a mass of dazzling glow and

splendour?

“Can it be that she who proffered such ecstasy for months before, on the eve of our return, is now no more? or can it be possible that we have crossed each other on the wide waters of tossing triumph or wanton woe?

“Speak at once, for pity’s sake! and do not hide from me the answer of truth and honest knowledge? Oh, merciful heavens!”

Here Lady Dunfern drooped her head before Sir John got time to even answer a word, and drawing from his pocket a silver flask, proceeded to open its contents, when the horses suddenly stopped, and a gentle hand politely opened the carriage door to eagerly await the exit of his master and future mistress from its cushioned corners of costly comfort and ease.

“Tom,” cried Sir John, in great and rending agony, “kindly wait for a few minutes, as her ladyship has been frightfully overcome only a short time ago by the blank appearance in and around Dilworth Castle. She fears something dreadful must surely have happened Lady Dilworth in her absence, since she has failed to make the occasion of our home-coming a merry torchlight of rejoicing.” Tom, who had been in Sir John’s service for the past twenty years, was about to testify to the truth of his remarks, when he was joined by other members of the household, who rushed to welcome their beloved master home once more, accompanied by his beautiful bride, of whom they all had heard so much.

Sir John saw that delay was dangerous, and helping to remove his darling Irene from the seat on which she unconsciously reclined, succeeded in placing her on a low couch in the very room he so often silently prayed for her presence. Bathing her highly-heated temples with a sprinkling of cooling liquid concealed in his flask, Sir John lost no time in summoning the village doctor, who, on arrival, pronounced Lady Dunfern to have slightly recovered, and giving the necessary orders left the room.

It was fully two hours ere she partly recovered from her ghastly swoon, to find herself the object of numerous onlookers of the household of which she was now future mistress.

Pale and death-like did she appear in the eyes of her husband, who was utterly overcome with grief at the sudden collapse of his wife under such a stroke of anticipated sorrow; and more grieved was he still when he found on inquiry that the removal of Lord and Lady Dilworth from their heightened haunt of highborn

socialism must sooner or later be revealed to her, who, as yet, had only tasted partly of the bitter cup of divided intercourse and separated companionship.

Many, many were the questions asked by Lady Dunfern relative to Lady Dilworth when Dr. Corbett arrived next morning to pronounce her almost recovered, and, strange, yet true, that no one could possibly have humoured her in such a manner to warrant recovery as the village doctor, until she felt really strong enough to battle against the sorrowful tale of woe with which Sir John should shortly make her cognisant.

On learning from his lips, so soon as her ability occasioned, the real state of affairs concerning the emigrants who were now compelled to wander on the track of trouble, she received the truth with awe and smothered distress. The new sphere in which Lady Dunfern was about to move seemed to her strange; the binding duty which tied her firmly to honour and obedience was kept prominently in vague view; the staff of menials would probably find the rules of her husband more in accordance with their wishes than those which she was beginning to already arrange. She commenced her married life with falsehood, and she was fully determined to prove this feature more and more as the weeks and months rolled along. She was not now afraid of the censure of one whose face she may never more behold, and who was the sole instigation of plunging her into a union she inwardly abhorred. Perhaps, had she never been trained under the loving guidance of Oscar Otwell, her revered tutor, she would only have been too eager to proclaim her ecstasy at her present position more vigorously. But all fetters of power were visibly broken which she wished should remain united, leaving her mother of her future premeditated movements.

As time moved on, Sir John and Lady Dunfern seemed to differ daily in many respects, which occasioned dislike in the breasts of both, and caused the once handsome, cheerful face of the much-respected owner of Dunfern to assume a look of seriousness.

These differences arose chiefly through his great disinclination to attend the numerous social gatherings which awaited them after their marriage. Sir John, finding it almost impossible to stare socialism in the face, seemed inclined rather to stick to the old rule of domestic enjoyment, never forgetting to share fully his cheerful conversation with his wife, when so desired, which, sorrowful to relate, was too seldom.

Now that Lady Dunfern was an acknowledged branch of society, her elegant

presence would have been courted by all those who so often favoured Lady Dilworth with their distinguished patronage, but her social hopes being nipped in the bud by her retiring husband, she dare not resent, and determined, in consequence, to make herself an object of dislike in her home, and cherish her imprisoned thoughts until released, for good or evil.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER VIII.

A WORD of warning tends to great advantage when issued reverently from the lips of the estimable. It serves to allay the danger pending on reticence, and substantiates in a measure the confidence which has hitherto existed between the parties concerned. Again, a judicious advice, extended to the stubborn and self-willed, proves futile, and incurs the further malice and fiery indignation of the regardless, the reckless, and the uncharitable.

Lady Dunfern began now to grow both cross and careless, and seemed not to interest herself so much (since her propositions were so emphatically denounced by her husband) concerning the management of the household staff. She grew daily more retired, and often has her conduct been so preposterously strange as to cause alarm both to Sir John and all over whom he had immediate control.

Indeed, three months of married life scarcely elapsed until she cast a glow of despair within the breast which too often heaved for her with true piety and love. And what was meant by such strange conduct on her part, her husband often wondered. Only the mighty cessation of friendship caused by the flight of her beloved guardians, never attributing such silence and stubbornness to any fault

he justly committed.

Yes, the duped husband, when being fished for with the rod of seeming simplicity and concealed character, and quickly caught on the hook of ingenuity, with deception for a bait, was altogether unable to fathom its shallowest meaning. Was he not, therefore, to be sympathised with, who so charitably extended the hand of honour and adoration to the offspring of unknown parents, and placed her in position equal to any lady of title and boasted parentage within the boundary of County Kent? Should Sir John Dunfern not have been almost worshipped by a wife whose binding duty it was to reverence her husband in all things pertaining to good? No doubt this would have been so had he gained the affections he imagined he possessed, but later on he would inevitably be made aware of matters which as yet only bordered on supposition.

Day after day Lady Dunfern pined like a prisoner in her boudoir, and scarcely ever shared a word with the great and good Sir John, who many times wished in former days that she had occupied his home and all its joys. She formed an inward resolution that if prohibited from enjoying life, to which she was accustomed at Dilworth Castle, she would make her husband, whom she knew too well made her his idol, feel the smart, by keeping herself aloof from his caresses as much as possible.

Often would he be found half asleep in deep thought, not having any friend of immediate intimacy in whom he could confide or trust, or to whom he could unbosom the conduct of his wife, whose actions now he was beginning to detest.

The thoughts of disappointment and shame were building for themselves a home of shelter within him—disappointment on account of cherished hopes which unmistakably were crushed to atoms beneath the feet of her who was the sole instigation of their origin; shame, in all probability, lest the love he sought and bought with the price of self might not be his after all! and may still be reserved against his right and kept for another much less worthy! The little jealous spark again revived and prompted him to renew its lustre, which had been hidden for a length of time behind the cloud of dread so silently awaiting the liberty of covering the hill of happiness.

Quietly ruminating over his wife's manner before marriage, about which he was compelled, through observation, to demand an explanation, and pondering carefully her strange and silent habits since it, he became resolved to probe the wound that had swollen so enormously as to demand immediate relief. Ringing

furiously for a maid, he handed her a note, to be delivered without delay to Lady Dunfern, the nature of which might well be suspected. Be that as it may, its contents were instrumental in demanding immediate attention.

Soon after its delivery a slight tap was heard at the door of Sir John's study, this room being always his favourite haunt, where he sat beside a bright and glowing fire, engaged in sullen thought; and with an imperious "Come in!" he still remained in the same thinking posture; nor was he aware, for fully five minutes or so, that his intruder was no other than she whom he so recently ordered into his presence!

Gazing up in a manner which startled the cold-hearted woman not a little, he requested her "to have a seat right opposite his," to which she instantly complied. At this moment the snow was wafting its flaky handfuls thickly against the barred enclosures of Dunfern Mansion, and chilly as nature appeared outside, it was similarly so indoors for the fond and far-famed husband of Lord Dilworth's charge.

Matters had appeared so unpleasant and altogether bewildering of late that Sir John formed a resolution to bring them to a crisis. Looking fully into the face that seemed so lovely just now, with the dainty spots of blazing ire enlivening the pale cheeks of creeping sin, Sir John began—

"Irene, if I may use such familiarity, I have summoned you hither, it may be to undergo a stricter examination than your present condition probably permits; but knowing, as you should, my life must be miserable under this growing cloud of unfathomed dislike, I became resolved to end, if within my power, such contentious and unladylike conduct as that practised by you towards me of late. It is now quite six months—yea, weary months—since I shielded you from open penury and insult, which were bound to follow you, as well as your much-loved protectors, who sheltered you from the pangs of penniless orphanage; and during these six months, which naturally should have been the pet period of nuptial harmony, it has proved the hideous period of howling dislike!

"I, as you see, am tinged with slightly snowy tufts, the result of stifled sorrow and care concerning you alone; and on the memorable day of our alliance, as you are well aware, the black and glossy locks of glistening glory crowned my brow. There dwelt then, just six months this day, no trace of sorrow or smothered woe—no variety of colour where it is and shall be so long as I exist—no furrows of grief could then be traced upon my visage. But, alas! now I feel so changed! And

why?

“Because I have dastardly and doggedly been made a tool of treason in the hands of the traitoress and unworthy! I was enticed to believe that an angel was always hovering around my footsteps, when moodily engaged in resolving to acquaint you of my great love, and undying desire to place you upon the highest pinnacle possible of praise and purity within my power to bestow!

“I was led to believe that your unbounded joy and happiness were never at such a par as when sharing them with me. Was I falsely informed of your ways and worth? Was I duped to ascend the ladder of liberty, the hill of harmony, the tree of triumph, and the rock of regard, and when wildly manifesting my act of ascension, was I to be informed of treading still in the valley of defeat?

“Am I, who for nearly forty years was idolised by a mother of untainted and great Christian bearing, to be treated now like a slave? Why and for what am I thus dealt with?

“Am I to foster the opinion that you treat me thus on account of not sharing so fully in your confidence as it may be, another?

“Or is it, can it be, imaginative that you have reluctantly shared, only shared, with me that which I have bought and paid for fully?

“Can it be that your attention has ever been, or is still, attracted by another, who, by some artifice or other, had the audacity to steal your desire for me and hide it beneath his pillaged pillow of poverty, there to conceal it until demanded with my ransom?

“Speak! Irene! Wife! Woman! Do not sit in silence and allow the blood that now boils in my veins to ooze through cavities of unrestrained passion and trickle down to drench me with its crimson hue!

“Speak, I implore you, for my sake, and act no more the deceitful Duchess of Nanté, who, when taken to task by the great Napoleon for refusing to dance with him at a State ball, replied, ‘You honoured me too highly’—acting the hypocrite to his very face. Are you doing likewise?” Here Sir John, whose flushed face, swollen temples, and fiery looks were the image of indignation, restlessly awaited her reply.

Lady Dunfern began now to stare her position fully in the face. On this interview, she thought, largely depended her future welfare, if viewed properly.

Should she make her husband cognisant of her inward feelings, matters were sure to end very unsatisfactorily. These she kept barred against his entrance in the past, and she was fully determined should remain so now, until forced from their home of refuge by spirited action.

Let it be thoroughly understood that Lady Dunfern was forced into a union she never honestly countenanced. She was almost compelled, through the glittering polish Lady Dilworth put on matters, to silently resign the hand of one whose adoration was amply returned, and enter into a contract which she could never properly complete. All she could now do was to plunge herself into the lake of evasion and answer him as best she could.

“Sir and husband,” she said, with great nervousness at first, “you have summoned me hither to lash your rebuke unmercifully upon me, provoked, it may be, by underhand intercourse. You accordingly, in the course of your remarks, fail not to tamper with a character which as yet defies your scathing criticism. Only this week have I been made the recipient of news concerning my deceased parents, of whom I never before obtained the slightest clue, and armed with equality, I am in a position fit to treat some of your stingy remarks with the scorn they merit.

“You may not already be aware of the fact that I, whom you insinuate you wrested from beggary, am the only child of the late Colonel Iddesleigh, who fell a victim to a gunshot wound inflicted by the hand of his wife, who had fallen into the pit of intemperance. Yes, Earl Peden’s daughter was his wife and my mother, and only that this vice so actuated her movements, I might still have lent to Society the object it dare not now claim, and thereby would have shunned the iron rule of being bound down to exist for months at a time within such a small space of the world’s great bed.

“If my manner have changed in any way since our union, of it I am not aware, and fail to be persuaded of any existing difference, only what might be attributed to Lady Dilworth’s sudden and unexpected removal from our midst, which occasioned me grief indeed.

“It behoves elderly men like you to rule their wives with jealous supervision, especially if the latter tread on the fields of youth. Such is often fictitious and unfounded altogether, and should be treated with marked silence.

“I may here say I was mistress, in a measure, of my movements whilst under the meek rule of Lady Dilworth; nor was I ever thwarted in any way from acting throughout her entire household as I best thought fit, and since I have taken upon me to hold the reins of similarity within these walls, I find they are much more difficult to manage. I, more than once, have given orders which were completely prohibited from being executed. By whom, might I ask, and why? Taking

everything into consideration, I am quite justified in acquainting you that, instead of being the oppressor, I feel I am the oppressed.

“Relative to my affections, pray have those courted by me in the past aught to do with the present existing state of affairs? I am fully persuaded to answer, ‘Nothing whatever.’

“You speak of your snowy tufts appearing where once there dwelt locks of glossy jet. Well, I am convinced they never originated through me, and must surely have been threatening to appear before taking the step which links me with their origin.

“I now wish to retire, feeling greatly fatigued, and trusting our relations shall remain friendly and mutual, I bid thee good-night.”

Lady Dunfern swept out of the room, and hurrying to her own apartment, burst into an uncontrollable fit of grief.

She had surely been awaked from her reverie by Sir John, and felt sharply the sting of his remarks, which were truly applied, indeed. She now resolved to let matters move along as quietly as possible until after she should pass the most critical period of her existence. She was prepared to manifest her innocence throughout, without detection if possible. But amongst the household there moved a matron under whose hawk-like eye Lady Dunfern was almost inclined to shrink. She felt when in her presence to be facing an enemy of unbounded experience. She abhorred her stealing tread, but not without cause. It was to this dame she so often issued orders that never were carried out; and when intimating to Sir John the necessity of instantly dismissing such a tyrant, he quietly “rebelled,” adding “that she had been almost twenty years in his service, and presently could not think of parting with such a valued and much-trusted friend.”

This woman’s name was Rachel Hyde, and proved the secret channel of intercourse between Sir John and Lady Dunfern, evidently paving the way for her ladyship’s downfall; as Rachel, being mistress for such a period over Dunfern Mansion, could never step the fence leading to abolition of power, which she so unwillingly tried to mount since Sir John’s marriage, and failing totally in her attempt, was lifted and thrown over by her mistress, an act she could never forget, and consequently carried all news, trivial or serious, concerning Lady Dunfern to her master, and delivered it in such an exaggerated form as to incur his wrath, which already had been slightly heated.

A few months elapsed again, during which time matters went on much as usual, until an event happened that should have chased the darkest cloud of doubt and infidelity from the noble brow of the mighty and revered master of Dunfern Mansion.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER IX.

THE thickest stroke of sadness can be effaced in an instant, and substituted with deeper traces of joy. The heart of honest ages, though blackened at times with domestic troubles, rejoices when those troubles are surmounted with blessings which proclaim future happiness.

On the tenth day of June, following Lady Dunfern's interview with her husband, she gave birth to a son and heir. This great event brought with it entire forgiveness on the part of Sir John of his wife's recent conduct. It served for a short time only, a trivial portion too, to stifle the alienation which existed between them, and to heal the sore of evident separation that marred their happiness for months before.

The glad and happy father was only too eager now to snatch a smile from his wife's face, and anxious was he to bury any little obstacle that may have existed in the past, and expel it for ever from its lurking corner of tempting repose. He saw that Lady Dunfern's life was hanging by a flimsy hair, and who could, for an instant, depict the great despair of her husband when told that all hope must be abandoned!

The frantic father wrung his hands in a frenzy of momentary madness, and in spite of authoritative advice he timidly moved in the direction of the bed on which his beloved lay, and knelt beside it to fervently offer up a prayer “for the speedy recovery of her who was the chief object of his existence.” Raising himself up and clasping his darling in his arms, he whispered in her ear a word of encouragement, and gently laying her highly-heated head on the silken pillow he again prayed, in deepest and gravest earnestness, “that she might be spared only a little longer.”

No doubt his prayer was no sooner offered than answered, as she at this stage slightly rallied, and appeared somewhat strengthened. Day by day the still fond and loving husband sat by the bedside of the invalid until strong enough to battle fully against the weakening hand of her malady; and at the very time Sir John sat beside the bed of sickness, inwardly “showering blame upon himself for hindering his wife’s social enjoyment, and for which he believed he acted wrongly;” she, on the contrary, was outwardly pouring rebuke on her own head “for ever entering into a league of life-long punishment by marrying a man she simply abhorred, and leaving her noble and well-learned tutor, Oscar Otwell, whom she yet loved, to wander in a world of blighted bliss!”

Ah! to be sure! It was during these days of unremitting attention that he was afforded an opportunity of storing up a multitude of touchy remarks uttered by his wife when the relapse of raging fever reached its defiant height! She never ceased to talk in a most gentle manner of “Oscar Otwell,” “her darling and much-loved tutor.” She even expressed sorrow, in the course of her broken remarks, “at the false step she had taken to satisfy, not herself by any means, but Lady Dilworth!” She strongly protested her “hatred for him” who sat listening, with grave intensity, to every word that escaped her lips! She even spoke of “a cavity in her jewel-case in which was safely deposited a ring, given her by Oscar during her happy period of instruction under his guidance,” adding, in her painful discourse, that “she loved it as well as himself,” etc., etc.

These rambling statements when ended, in an instant caused Sir John’s resolutions, made by him so recently, to become worthless remarks; and if partly charged with jealousy before, he was doubly so now.

No onlooker could fail in the least to pity the sneered husband, whose livid countenance during the course of her remarks, rambling though they were, was a sight never to be forgotten. How he gazed with astonished indifference at the

invalid so charged with deceit! She who acted the emblem of innocence at all times, and attempted to attach entire blame to her husband! She who partly promised peace in future to him who never again could enjoy it!

How his manner became so abrupt and his speech so scanty within such a short period was verily a proof of the belief he fostered relative to his wife's statements, which were yet to her unknown.

The doctors in attendance endeavoured strongly to imprint upon Sir John the fact that "such remarks as those uttered by his wife should be treated with silence and downright indifference," adding that "patients smitten with fever, of what kind soever, were no more responsible for their sayings than the most outrageous victim to insanity."

Sir John listened attentively to their statements, but failed to be altogether convinced as to their truth. Wondering what sin could be attached to an act he felt was his duty to perform, he moved softly to the bedside of his wife, and being in a sleepy mood, he resolved to sift some of her remarks to the very bottom.

Entering the room she so often occupied, and taking from a chink in her dressing-table a key of admittance to the jewel-case she spoke of, he lost no time in viewing its valuable contents; and, in the very spot in which she vowed dwelt her tutor's gift, there it lay! A golden band with pearl centre, and immediately underneath it there rested a note. At first he felt rather diffident about perusing its contents, but instinct so prompted his curiosity that he yielded to its tempting touch. It ran thus:—

"Hedley,

Berks,

July 3rd.

"Ever beloved Irene,

"I am after reading your gentle yet sorrowful epistle. You cannot possibly retract the step you so publicly have taken without incurring the malice of Lord and Lady Dilworth, who have sheltered you from every sorrow and care with which you otherwise were bound to come in contact.

"They received you into their elegant home, and shielded you, by so doing, from the tyrannical rule of Miss Lamont of 'The Orphanage,' in which you were placed for a period of eight years. They failed not to give you a thorough and practical education, which in itself would enable you to achieve independence, if necessary, or so desired.

"This you received under one whose heart now beats with raging jealousy and vehement

hatred towards the object of Lady Dilworth's choice, being well convinced, through your numerous letters to me lately, it never was yours.

"Dearest Irene, the thought of parting from you for ever is partly sustained with the hope of yet calling you mine! Through time you suggest an elopement, which as yet can only be viewed in the hazy distance; but it seems quite clear to me, dearest, and surely evident, that you abhor the very name of him who a month hence shall place you in a position considerably more elevated and lucrative than that which I now could bestow. But Irene, my beloved, my all! reluctantly I yield my precious treasure to him who, it may be this moment, is rejoicing at his capture.

"I shall ever remain forlorn, dejected, and ruined until such time as we suitably can accomplish the clearance of the cloud of dissatisfaction under which you are about to live. Please write by return.

"Ever your own

"OSCAR.

"Miss Iddesleigh,
Dilworth Castle."

decoration

CHAPTER X.

WHEN dreading the light of day contentment hath fled; imagination oftentimes proves a forerunner to reality; corners of horror shelter themselves within the castles of the queenly, the palaces of the powerful, the monuments of the mighty, and the cottages of the caretaker; but sunshine brings universal joy wherever its beams are wont to dazzle, and often allays the anxiety which precedes its appearance.

"Great heaven!" murmured Sir John, as the tutor's note fell from his nervous grasp, "Am I blind to touch or truth? Am I at last to labour under the fact that my wife loves another! she who only some months since protested her innocence in

such strains as to cause the most doubtful to stay alarm. Here is the ring, and there lies the note—the note of him who claims to be not only her tutor but suitor. Why did she accept the former or cause the latter to be written?”

“Then, the date! Just one month exactly before our marriage; and how I pined for it to elapse whilst another would eagerly have prolonged it. Oh, Irene!—false and low woman! Think you that any longer I can own you as wife or treat you with the respect a wife deserves!” Sir John, ever open to forgiveness, tried hard to master the dreadful spirit of jealousy which arrived at last at its highest point, if he could feel convinced that his wife’s correspondence with her tutor ceased after her marriage, believing if still it continued that other proofs of their dastardly plots would be forthcoming. Thrusting his hand again into the aperture from which he took the two tributes of his wife’s tutor, there appeared nothing to arouse further suspicion, save a Christmas card, written with the same bold hand. The lines were these:—

“Accept my warmest greeting, friendship, love,
Thou art my charming Irene, pet and dove;
Although another claims thee for a time,
I trust to call you some day ever mine.
Oh! pray for parting soon with fettered chains,
To live and move regardless of those reins
That bind your Christmas sprigs of worldly woe
To him, whom you have hated long ago.”

This was a second effusion of Otwell’s, and must have been received by Lady Dunfern since her marriage; and, thought he who held it clutched in his trembling hand, Why did she deposit this card amongst her valuables—had she not held it as a treasure of priceless worth?

Nothing more was wanting now to convince the distracted husband of his wife’s infidelity. Depositing the note, card, and ring in the drawer whence he had taken them, Sir John at once proceeded to Lady Dunfern’s bedroom, and found her awake. Being a nobleman of sterling worth, and one on whose word the greatest dependence was always manifested, he could scarcely fail to inform her of the great and trying scene he had just come through. Struggling, however, manfully from mentioning anything that would serve to retard her recovery, he moved towards the bed on which she lay, and before a word was uttered by him he suddenly staggered and fell.

Who could then perceive the wan and haggard appearance of him who apparently lay lifeless without being totally terror-stricken—could she, whom he

bathed in golden comfort, behold this outstretched form with calm silence?
Surely not!

Instantly ordering a maid to send for Doctor Doherty, the false invalid lay back on her pillow, appearing not much concerned. On the doctor's arrival he applied restoratives, but without the desired effect. Then he ordered his instant removal to his bed-chamber, where every care and watchfulness was extended him by Rachel Hyde.

It was nearly two hours ere he manifested the remotest symptoms of animation, and on inquiry the doctor pronounced the sudden shock he had nervously sustained to be grave indeed. Sir John lay in an unconscious condition until next morning, when his first inquiry was relative to his son.

Gradually regaining strength, and venturing in the doctor's absence out of bed, he walked slowly into his wife's room to make personal his recovery. He looked pale, and much annoyed, and could only with difficulty refrain from acquainting her of what he had in store to communicate. Each day found both invalids, just and unjust, rapidly recovering, and a few weeks found both completely restored to health and strength.

Lady Dunfern could not help noticing the strange and frozen manner of her husband since the eve of his illness. At first she was inclined to fear his approach, but gradually she felt convinced he was slightly affected with a mild form of insanity; and making minute inquiries from the oldest inhabitants in the neighbourhood and adjoining village as to the accuracy of her fears, she was informed that "such never existed amongst his ancestors, so far as they knew or heard."

Was it strange that Sir John felt a changed man towards her who was so fully charged with deceit? Would it have been acting in accordance with his conscience to overlook her wily artifice? Could the once fond and loving husband, the brave and gallant knight, still trust in her whom he felt convinced would bring a world of disgrace, not alone upon himself, but upon one who in after years, he trusted, would proudly sustain the honourable reputation of his race?

Ah! no matter in what light he viewed her conduct now he was brought to loathe her very look, and was fully determined to shut her in from the gaze of an outside world, or the cunning tricks of a trifling tutor. He was resolved, so far as lay in his power, to treat her with the conduct she merited, and never again allow

himself to be persuaded to postpone the visitation of his anger by her villainous pitiful appeals.

After serious thought, Sir John began to act; he was inclined to think delay would be dangerous, and on approaching his breakfast table one morning soon after his recovery, he hinted to his housekeeper that he “wished a private interview with her after his morning repast.” This Rachel punctually obeyed.

Seeing her master’s trembling hand twitch the tips of his beard, she feared something dreadful must surely be disturbing his peace of mind, and commanding her to “lock the door” lest they should be interrupted, he informed her of all that had happened.

Rachel, ever ready to sow doubt in the mind of her master regarding his wife, manifested her want of surprise by relating some incidents which occurred under her notice. Nothing, however monstrous, could astonish Sir John at this time regarding his wife’s movements, and informing Rachel of his intention he ordered the key of one of the rooms that yet had been shut against the entrance of Lady Dunfern.

Hastening to fulfil her master’s order, Rachel returned with the mighty key, and handed it to Sir John, who moved to the door, and thrusting the rusty key into its aperture, succeeded with great difficulty in effecting an entrance. Rachel followed, and both entered, locking the heavy-panelled oak door from within. “This,” said Sir John, “is the room of mycorr, the room of death. It defies escape or secretion. It has been so long as I remember held in abhorrence by my late lamented parents, and, so far as I can understand, by many of my ancestors.

“First of all, the lady who shared its midst was a born imbecile, the eldest daughter of my great great grandfather—Sir Sydney Dunfern. She was nursed and tenderly cared for within these walls for a period of thirty-six years, and through the instantaneous insanity of her ward, was marked a victim for his murderous hand. Yes, it has been related that during midnight, when she was fast asleep, he drew from that drawer” here Sir John pointed to the wardrobe, “a weapon of warlike design, and severed her head almost from her body, causing instant death.

“It was not known until next day about noon that anything extraordinary had happened. It was first detected by Sir Sydney himself, who became alarmed at not having seen Wade—the ward’s name was Hector Wade—as usual at ten o’clock, and tapping at the door, was surprised to hear some noise issue from

within. Being of a hasty temper, he became indignant at the ward's indifference, and calling loudly, finally gained admittance.

"The murderer had her stretched on this floor, and every article capable of being removed piled upon her corpse. Horrified at such a sight, Sir Sydney became wild with grief, and at once handed the pitiful lunatic over to those in authority.

"The next inhabitant doomed to share in its dull delight was Kathleen, wife of my beloved grandfather, a beautiful woman, whose portrait you now see. She, I am sorry to relate, proved more an accomplice than the honoured wife of him who added so much to the welfare of those who now benefit by his great economy. The hand of death visited her here likewise with its separating touch.

"The last person inhabiting its cheerless enclosure was a distant relative of my mother, a gentleman named Rodney Rupert, who fell from the path of virtue and trod the field of vice, until confined within this prison of pathetic account, and who, in a moment of passion, ended his days with that pistol which hangs on yonder hook, and on that bed all these lay, and which shall again be made use of by a traitoress of no mean account either."

Sir John then proceeded to give orders to "have the room made as comfortable as its scanty furniture permitted," which consisted only of one small table, one chair, and an old-fashioned wardrobe, with several small drawers attached, one dressing-table and wash-stand, all of which were magnificently carved oak and richly panelled.

There was only one large window, made up of iron bars and a multitude of small panes of glass not larger than three inches square, all of equal dimensions, and inside this window were strong bars of iron looped on every side and firmly fastened.

The cocoa matting which served as a carpet, parts of which were grim with gore, was almost worn past recognition. These were all the articles this badly-lighted room contained, save several oil-paintings of enormous size. On the whole, it presented the appearance of a private prison.

An icy atmosphere pervaded throughout the room, damped with an odour of something inert, which Sir John believed would be rendered extinct in the presence of a fire.

Rachel, after receiving orders in confidence from her master, set matters to right by lighting a fire, dusting the old and much-worn furniture, airing the bed-

clothes, etc., being strictly charged to admit, on no pretence whatever, now or at any time, any member of the household or visitor to the mansion.

When everything was in perfect readiness for the reception of its guest, Sir John directed Rachel to “bring her Ladyship into his presence.” What could have astonished Lady Dunfern more on being ushered into a room which never before was open for her inspection? Nothing save the information her husband eagerly awaited her to receive. On being informed of her vast deception, which was proved beyond doubt, and to which she felt wholly incompetent to reply, she was absolutely dumb-stricken.

It required no further questioning now concerning her husband’s recent strangeness of manner and rigid coolness with which he was forced to treat her whom he scorned to call wife.

“You, madam,” said he, “have by your conduct, both before and after marriage, forced me to keep you a prisoner within these walls so long as you live or I exist.

“You have not failed to act the infamous by kissing me with the lips of a Judas! You have at last plunged me into deepest disgrace, not alone me, but him whom you should have been liberated to succour and chastise. Mocking wretch! your foul deeds shall have plenty of scope here for improvement, and a prisoner you shall be during the remainder of your life.”

Sir John, without another word, glided from before the presence of her who once was treated as a goddess by him, and turning the great key that locked her for ever from his view, handed it to Rachel, who was to have sole admittance to, and full charge of, his wife.

When left to herself in the ghostly and spacious closet of crippled right, which until now she never dare approach, Lady Dunfern, instead of shewing signs of grief, which Sir John felt assured must burst from its midst, gloried in being aloof from the occasional rebukes to which she was subject whilst occupying the rooms free to her access. She would now have full opportunity of guiding her thoughts to self-advantage or disadvantage. She felt free to try and act as she in any case would have done, regarding very little the shame brought on her husband by her intrigue with the tutor, whom she simply idolized, never once casting a thought on her infant, knowing well it would be passionately cared for.

Oceans of thought took hold on her as she vacantly viewed the damp and darkened walls of her monstrous cell, now and then moving forward to inspect

the many paintings of great and historic worth which hung from their lofty support, mostly all more or less resembling him who probably should ere long add to their number.

Lady Dunfern allowed the weeks and months to pass unheeded until afforded ample opportunity of resorting to some means that might not alone free her from such death-like surroundings, but snap the chain of obligation in two which presently connected her with a husband she cared not for.

She longed for the hour of flight from the dismal shelter under which she was doomed to dwell. She yearned for the days that had fled, and more so for her who had shared in their pleasure. She pined for him whom she so long lived to adore, and hesitated not to do so still.

Could she only acquaint him of her husband's cruelty, how he might assist her in effecting her release. What could be done, she frequently asked herself, to brighten her future only a little?

Could she possibly escape? She feared not.

Every two hours that villainous woman entered during the day since first she was snared in the net of revenge and compelled to remain within its enclosures of shivering fear. Still, she never lost hope of flight, and cheered with the thought of future stratagem, she tried to remain somewhat consoled.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER XI.

THE trickling tide of fortune sometimes ebbs slowly. It meets with occasional

barriers of boisterous worth, and reaches its haven of intent too often with obstruction. Its waters drip on the proud and humble, the mighty and pitiful, the meek and unholy, and refuse to overlook even the weary and careworn confined in the cell. It ceases not to store within its waters of wonder intricate windings of wealth and poverty, triumph and torture, joy and misery, and does not hesitate at any time to safely deposit its various burthens on the numerous beaches along which it must pass.

When almost a year of Lady Dunfern's private imprisonment was about drawing to a close, she was beginning to partly believe the truth of her husband's dogmatic remarks. She had strongly been endeavouring during this time to arrive at some possible means of communication with Marjory Mason, her much-loved maid, whose services Sir John still retained; but every endeavour she yet formed proved absolutely vain. She often thought had she been attended by any of the household staff, only her on whom she never could dream to rely, she might have made good her escape long since; but being watched and visited so regularly by Rachel Hyde, she felt her task much more difficult of performance than at first imagined. Sometimes she would bring her table close to the window and mount on its shaky leaf, then step into the great window-sill, pull out her handkerchief and rub the puny panes to try and catch a glimpse of nature and probably chance to see some of the servants pass.

This heavily-barred window stood considerably high, and if viewed from a distance, or even from the ground adjacent, seemed small in consequence. It was, therefore, very difficult for her to recognise one menial from another, yet she often imagined she could not be mistaken in perceiving a form in the garden, right opposite, that surely strongly resembled her favourite maid.

What course was she, then, to adopt in order to discover the accuracy of her thoughts? How could she manage to be positive regarding Marjory's appearance? She felt it almost miraculous to identify her who trod so far beneath her heightened gaze. Each day she resolved to mount the window at the same hour, believing her constant watching might through time convince her who the object of her anxiety might be.

But the distance between them still remained the same, and ended with the same disappointing result. A thought at last crowned her precious efforts. She fancied if she could succeed in breaking one of the small window panes she could, with the aid of a telescope found in one of the drawers, define exactly who the maid

might chance to be.

The same hour each day found the eager mistress and anxious maid in their respective places, the former mounted on the window-sill, the latter gazing pitifully towards the window of her mistress's hateful cell. But discernment was altogether impossible for Lady Dunfern, who was resolved not to be baffled much longer in ascertaining who the constant visitor was. Snapping from her finger an exquisite diamond ring, and studying which pane of glass would be least noticed, she arrived at the wise conclusion of extracting the lowest corner pane, which she cleverly and effectually succeeded in doing. Wondering, first of all, how she would hide the opening from the cute eye of her who proved her only visitor, she placed her fleecy wrap carelessly against it, and resuming her seat, was persuaded fully to believe she had successfully accomplished the first step to her freedom.

Rachel, arriving now with luncheon, failed to notice, or if noticed, to mention the article in the window. Next day, with great confidence, Lady Dunfern was found in her usual recess, and drawing forth the telescope, viewed keenly the object of her constant search, and to her wild delight she at once beheld Marjory Mason with grave face staring, she fancied, at her. At last, her Ladyship had achieved a mighty work, indeed, which she hoped would yet prove of more practical importance.

It may be mentioned that Marjory Mason visited the same plot of ground at the same hour every available morning since she was robbed of the pleasure of waiting on her mistress, merely to get a glimpse of the window she knew must belong to her Ladyship's haunt of hardship; and could honest Marjory have only seen the handkerchief that every day was pointed to its little transparent enclosures, how she would so gladly have waved hers in return. But other means had to be resorted to, through Lady Dunfern's great perspicacity, to try and establish a line of communication with one she could trust. This being now arrived at cast a world of grief from the mind of her who, under such a roof of suspense as that beneath which she existed, felt if aid were not forthcoming, she would shortly have to yield to the imperative command of the King of Conquering Divines.

Who could now recognise the "Southern Beauty" of Dilworth Castle? Who could visit the once beautiful bride of Dunfern Mansion without naturally betraying signs of heartfelt sorrow? She who so often graced the assemblies of

the proud and famous; she who adorned society with her majestic presence; she who, by her charming manner and elegant bearing, failed not to steal the affection of him who treated her so, was an object of abject commiseration where her conduct wasn't questioned. She was no longer the cheerful associate, the bright converser, the lively, robust Irene Iddesleigh. She, the pride of her guardians, the once adored of her husband, the envied object of socialism, must bear to exist, though by any means within her power, not where she existed presently. The next part to be enacted was to attract Marjory's attention. This could easily be tried, and tying her cambric square firmly round the top of a small poker, she timidly sent it through the cavity, at the same time viewing Marjory by means of her telescope. At first Marjory was seen to shade her eyes with her hand, and move a little forward, then suddenly stop. She would again move slightly nearer to the wafting emblem of despair, and quickly advancing, until she neared the spot where best the snowy sign could be seen, instantly concluded that she must be observed by her ladyship.

When Lady Dunfern perceived that Marjory could by no means be closer to her, she pulled the flag of victory back, leaving her maid in breathless confusion, never for an instant flinching until she might again have an opportunity of rendering her assistance whom she worshipped.

In less than five minutes another signal appeared through the open space in the form of a small piece of paper, the meaning of which Marjory knew well. It appeared to be making its way with wonderful alacrity towards her, who now was in nervous despair lest she should be detected by her master, or some of the other members of his staff. At last the missive reached its destination, and, wildly grasping it, Marjory loosed the cord, that was swiftly drawn back, and plainly written by her mistress's hand were the words, "To Marjory, my trusted maid." Shrieking with delight, she pushed the note into her pocket, and, speedily hastening to the mansion, entered her own room. Securing the door from within, she instantly tore asunder the cover, and read with tearful eyes as follows:—

"Room No. 10.

"Dearest Marjory and Friend,

"You at last have proof of the confidence reposed in you by me. How I have thought of you since I was severed from you no one knows. That you have been aware of my imprisonment I can no longer doubt. However, I shall not presently give you any particulars, but beg to say that if you could by any means you thought safe let me hear if you have ever received any letters for me from Oscar, I should ever feel grateful and reward you accordingly. My reason for such inquiry I shall explain further on. Dear Marjory, keep this dark. Might I suggest that

you slip a note under my door this evening at five o'clock precisely. This you can do I believe at this hour with safety. Trusting you are keeping strong, and hoping soon to thank you personally for such secret kindness,

"Believe me,

"Sincerely yours,

"IRENE.

"To Marjory."

This note was ample explanation of the confidence Lady Dunfern had in her maid. She well knew from previous experience how she could trust her, and felt assured she was not a victim to misplaced confidence. Marjory would sooner have suffered death than betray her whom she had served so long at Dilworth Castle, and so short a time at Dunfern Mansion, and, carefully folding the note she held in her hand, proceeded to reply.

Lady Dunfern, at the hour appointed, stood in agony behind the massive door, underneath which she soon felt sure of receiving news that would either increase or diminish her varied stock of fears. Nor was she disappointed. At the very hour referred to, the note appeared. Who could picture the ecstatic relief of Lady Dunfern as she paced her prison floor, whilst carefully scanning the contents of Marjory's note. In it she stated that her husband received all letters direct, not alone for himself, but for all his servants, and delivered them personally to each, this only happening since she was subject to his cruel treatment.

Lady Dunfern was a little surprised at not receiving through Marjory some news of Oscar. But when informed of her husband being the recipient of all letters, she felt confident his were amongst the many for his inspection, and would not therefore aid his aspect of matters much. Safely depositing the prayed-for epistle of Marjory in her drawer, she seemed to suddenly grow quite cheerful and animated, so much so that Rachel, on entering some short time afterwards, was so struck with the change as to acknowledge that her ladyship must surely appreciate the book she held in her hand to an extraordinary extent, since it had altered her demeanour so.

Could this attendant only have known the true nature of Lady Dunfern's much-changed manner, how, with a conquering air, she would so soon have conveyed the tidings to Sir John. This, however, was not to be. Lady Dunfern believed that such a line of intercourse as that which she had so artfully managed with one on whom she could ever place implicit confidence, must surely yet be the means of freeing her from the fetters of a fierce and prejudiced race.

Every morning, at the same hour, mistress and maid were at their respective posts, the former, with brightened eye, mounted on her favourite pedestal of triumphant account and gazing intently on the object of rescue; the latter, casting that grave and careworn look in the direction of the niched signboard of distress, stood firmly and faithfully until she received the watchword of action and warning.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER XII.

TORTURE trifleth not. It manifests in many instances the deserving censure imposed upon its stinging touch. It acts like the poisonous fangs of the serpent, unless extracted from its burning crypt of chastisement by hands of wily witchcraft. So frightened did Lady Dunfern become lest the eye of the straggler might chance more than once to catch the meaning of Marjory's loitering about the grounds immediately below her window, that she deemed it imperative to alter her arrangements, and, acquainting Marjory in the usual way, appointed an hour that would almost defy matters to be made conspicuous. This change made both of them more free to act, and proved a decided success.

Only some weeks elapsed since Lady Dunfern's first missive reached Marjory until word was forthcoming from Oscar Otwell. Her heart beat wildly with joy on reading the following, slipped to her in the usual way:—

“Hedley,
Berks.

“Dearest Lady Dunfern,

“You may well guess my gross astonishment on receipt of your long looked-for note, and the dire news it contained. My heart bleeds for you, and believe me, no stone shall be left unturned until your release from that heathenish cell of woe shall be proclaimed. Often have I looked for an answer to my letters from you, but, alas! in vain. I began to be convinced that something must have driven your love for me into hate. I am further surprised that my uncle, who purchased Dilworth Estate, and who permanently resides at the castle with his wife and daughters, never alluded in any way in his letters to me to your retirement as it were from public life. His answers to my many questions concerning you he entirely evaded, and never having had an opportunity of a personal interview with him since I entered Chitworth College, I unfortunately have been debarred from rendering long since the aid you now seek.

“Your suggestion shall undoubtedly have my prompt attention, and I’ll now say no more, until I rejoice in your freedom.

“Ever your loving

“OSCAR.”

The mind of him who was in full possession of the facts regarding Lady Dunfern’s present position became perfectly distracted, and on entering College next morning, after receiving her note, was so overcome with grief as to cause grave alarm amongst the many students who benefitted so much by his strenuous efforts to insure success. Doctor O’Sullivan, the eminent President of the College, on seeing Oscar, whom he lately observed was labouring under some weight of sorrow, in such a state of despair, strongly advised a change of air, at the same time kindly offering him a substitute for four weeks, at the end of which time, if he still found himself unable to resume his tuitions, he would prolong his vacation by two weeks. This was the very thing Oscar wanted—absence from duty—and he gladly availed himself of the worthy president’s generous offer.

How Oscar quitted the college on receiving the news which liberated him, not only for four weeks, but for ever!—how he sped along to his room in Upper Joy Street, and there wrote a few words to her who longed for his presence and aid, wondering how the clever trick, so ably concocted by Lady Dunfern, would be accomplished, or if attempted, would succeed!—better leave it to her who had so well managed to even reach the length of liberty which marked her heroism already.

Lady Dunfern was busily engaged, during her hours of uninterrupted, in marking notes, with great caution and clearness, on paper for Marjory’s use; and well guarded and guided must the steps be that should again lead her into the open field of freedom and health.

The heavy rain beat furiously against the darkened window of Lady Dunfern's confined and much-detested abode as Rachel approached her with supper on the night of 24th December.

As the next day brought many touching remembrances with it, Rachel, this iron-willed attendant, spoke in rather soothing strains to her whom more than once she tried to betray. Lady Dunfern, being so fully charged with thoughts edging on her flight, remained in perfect indifference to all her cunning remarks, never betraying the least outward symptom of the excitement that then raged so terribly within her; she was resolved that no word of any description whatever should be conveyed to him who so eagerly awaited Rachel's retracing footsteps outside the cell.

Prompted strongly by Sir John before entering, Rachel carried with her messages of a rather condoling character, to be delivered to her ladyship in such pitiful phrases as to twist from her remarks for the use of him who feared that something dreadful was about to happen owing to a miserable dream he had only a couple of nights before.

But Lady Dunfern was too watchful to allow even one word to escape her lips that might innocently convict her; and steadfastly guarding against the tongue of the treacherous maiden, remained in silence. The evil-intended Rachel lingered around the room fully fifteen minutes, thus affording Lady Dunfern every opportunity of saying something, but all of no avail; and angrily snatching up the large silver tray, bounced out of the room, banging the great door after her, probably in order to frighten her mistress, but not a nerve did the rude and audacious act disturb.

Turning the light very low, the confined woman slipped on tip-toe behind the defiant door, and heard faint sounds proceed from the adjoining corridor, the voices she well knew to be those of both her husband and Rachel. Her heart sank somewhat at the discourse that followed Rachel's recent visit, lest it might be concerning either herself or Marjory; or, worse still, she thought, relative to her intended flight within five hours, which she earnestly implored should not be prevented.

The voices, however, after a lengthy conversation, suddenly ceased, and gently moving to the fire, she sat quietly down to heat her icy limbs, that were almost benumbed with cold.

The thoughts which she allowed to disturb her anxious mind she found were

very numerous, the principal one being that of flight, which she trusted strenuously should be fully accomplished within the time specified. The first hour slipped in, the second moved round too, likewise the third; and, gazing in wild despair in the direction of her dainty-jewelled watch, which she kept suspended from a trivial hook above the mantelpiece of richly carved oak, could scarcely refrain from tears.

The smallest hand of her little timekeeper could not fail to show that the hour of eleven had just been reached; this was precisely the time all the household retired, including Sir John, on whose part it was not a case of command, but option.

On this particular night the staff of servants was not so fully represented as usual. Marjory Mason had not been amongst the number who sought sleep, neither was it known by any one whether or not she was in her own room.

Immediately adjoining Marjory's room was Rachel Hyde's, both of which it was Marjory's duty always to keep in perfect order, thus affording the great friend of Lady Dunfern a daily opportunity of viewing the drawer in which the great key of her ladyship's room was at rest.

It was a habit with Rachel to sleep with her bedroom door ajar, by order of her master, lest a fire might originate during the hours of repose, or burglars enter and carry with them some valuables of no slight worth or interest.

About ten o'clock, an hour before Marjory's usual time to retire, she ably feigned a very severe attack of indigestion, and, trying to look as dejected and sick as she could in consequence, requested that she might be permitted to go to her own room for the night; a request which Rachel readily granted, as Marjory and she always travelled by the express train of friendship. Rachel added that she would act in her stead by clearing her master's supper table herself.

No sooner had Rachel granted Marjory's request than she dashed up the many and winding steps of ascent until she reached the object of her premeditated scheme by boldly entering the housekeeper's room and taking therefrom the choicest treasure it contained—namely, the key which was so soon to prove the nature of the severe illness she so capitally assumed.

Rachel, on entering the room in which Sir John sat, was quickly asked where Marjory was; and after satisfying him as to her illness, she hastily removed the articles used at supper, and repaired to rest. When passing Marjory's door,

Rachel tapped lightly, and failing to gain admission, called on her to admit her with a cup of hot milk. Still no reply came from within. Then, slowly turning the handle, she tried to admit herself without awaking Marjory, feeling sure that she must be sound asleep.

It was only during her third attempt to seek entrance that she found the door locked. Moving into her own room, she muttered something that did not distinctly reach the ear of her who was safely secreted underneath the housekeeper's bed. Divesting herself of her clothing, Rachel soon put herself in a position to guarantee slumber. She wrapped herself well within the fleecy folds of nature, and in less than ten minutes was safely sailing in the boat of dreamland.

Marjory, for it was she who lay stretched under the bed of her who never at any time doubted her word or actions, when fully convinced of Rachel's safe retirement, crept along the carpeted floor on hands and knees, carrying with her the key to victory. Proudly and much agitated did Marjory steal her way along the many winding corridors of carpeted comfort, until at last she came to the bottom of the ghost-like marble steps which led to her mistress; and swiftly running up the icy heights, until reaching the door of danger and blood-thirsty revenge, she, with the caution of a murderess, thrust with great and exceptional care the key into its much-used opening, and heroically succeeded in gaining admittance.

Behind the door lay Lady Dunfern, as if dead. With great presence of mind Marjory locked the door from within, struck a match, and tried to light the lamp, which had been extinguished not long before; this with difficulty she nervously did. Then, turning to her mistress, whose changed countenance was a sight Marjory never forgot until her dying day, she tried every effort to arouse her who so soon was likely to track the path of powerful pursuit. It was fully some minutes until she saw the faintest glimpse of animation, and gently raising the shadowy form in her strong arms, used every means in her power to quickly prepare her for the most trying part of all.

At last Marjory's efforts were completely baffled; and knowing it was approaching the time at which Oscar was to be in readiness at the gate farthest away from the mansion, that was seldom or never used, the poor trembling girl had now enough to bear. She believed the cup of sorrow had been drained to its last dregs; still she hoped on, never giving place to the remotest trace of doubt,

being fully assured of achieving the topmost tier of triumph.

Lady Dunfern had, through pure fear of being caught in her adventure, stood an hour or so behind the door before Marjory's welcome steps were heard, and momentarily on hearing her trusted maid's nimble tread make such rapid strides towards her release was with overjoy so quickly stricken down, at a time when two-fold energy was most required, that she utterly failed to regain the slightest strength; and in this sad state her helper found her!

The moments were passing more quickly now than Marjory wished, and bestowing one final look at her ladyship's watch so firmly clutched in her fingers, was about to break down in despair, when she was suddenly aroused by a dash of sandy pebble thrown against the window, which unmistakably announced the arrival of him who so soon was to shield the shaken form of her once lovely mistress from the snares of jealousy and intrigue.

Oscar, who stood at the gate appointed, was very uneasy, no doubt, as the hour slowly approached that should make him the recipient of the treasure he at first should have honestly secured, and fearing lest the escape might be detected in time for rescue, he was unable to remain any longer where he was. Mounting the iron gate, he soon flung himself over its speary top, and hurriedly making his way towards Lady Dunfern's window, where he perceived the dim light, he announced his arrival in the manner described.

Wringing her hands in wild despair, Marjory touchingly prayed for speedy release from such cruel torture, and opening the door for the last time she carried her mistress into the corridor, and there deposited her until again locking the giant block of oak, then she lightly tripped down the ashen steps, along the corridors, until at last she reached the open door of Rachel's room. Pausing for a moment lest the housekeeper might be awake, she satisfied herself this was not so. She then courageously entered and safely deposited the key in the exact spot whence she took it, retracing in a wonderfully quiet manner her shaking footsteps until arriving to convey her precious charge to a place of safety. Clasping Lady Dunfern once more in her arms, she crept down the chilly steps of fate along the well-padded paths of tapestry, down numerous flights of wiry-carpeted stairs, until finally reaching the lofty hall, where she paused for an instant, being a complete example of exhaustion, and dreading the least delay, approached the door with safety. She then deposited her ladyship on a lounge that lay right behind it until she secured the key which from previous

observation she noted, in case of emergency, hung on a silver hook not eight feet distant.

With the air of a duchess, Marjory dashed open the outer door, at the left wing of the building, and, with her liberated load of love, swept for ever from its touch. Blowing faintly a whistle she bought for the purpose, she soon was released of her charge by him who instantly appeared to shield them both from the breezy blast which bitterly swept that night o'er hill and dale.

Taking Lady Dunfern in his arms, Oscar paced the broad and pebbled walks, speedily arriving at the spot where stood a vehicle in readiness to convey them to their destiny. Not a word was spoken by Oscar, neither did Lady Dunfern betray the slightest symptoms of recovery until safely driven to the pretty home Oscar had previously arranged for her rescue, some twenty miles distant from Dunfern Mansion.

It was situated nearly in the centre of Dilworth Park, and generously handed over to Oscar as a conditional gift from his uncle, the Marquis of Orland, who owned its many acres. Marjory's joy at this stage fully balanced her previous hours of sorrowful and dangerous adventure. She could hardly refrain from tears as she viewed the weary night before through the telescope of trickery. She seemed confident of having performed a great and good work by liberating from the pangs of emotional imprisonment the weak and forlorn, who so soon would have been ordered to separate herself from a closet of chastisement to enter the home of joy everlasting, which ever has its door of gladness open to the ring of the repentant and contrite.

After leaving Lady Dunfern in the careful charge of Marjory, Oscar proceeded to handsomely reward his uncle's coachman, who drove them so quickly from Dunfern Mansion to Audley Hall, requesting him at the same time to treat the matter with profound silence.

The rescued form now opened her eyes, and suddenly a convulsive twitch shook her feeble frame. Casting her heavily-laden orbs of blinded brilliancy around the cosy well-lighted room, had not to be informed by any one what had happened; she gasped, "Thank Heaven, I'm safe!"

Oscar, tenderly bidding Lady Dunfern "Good night," instructed Marjory to carefully administer to her wants until daybreak.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER XIII.

IT is astounding to view the smallest article through a magnifying glass; how large and lustrous an atom of silver appears; how fat and fair the withered finger seems; how monstrously mighty an orange; how immeasurably great the football of youth; but these are as nought when the naked eye beholds the boulder of barred strength—a mountain of mystery.

The usual hour for arousing the inmates of Dunfern Mansion was designated by the ringing of a bell, constructed at the back part of the building, and connected by means of a wire with the room of the footman, whose duty it was to ring fully three minutes every morning at the hour of seven o'clock in winter and six in summer.

On Christmas morning, only a short time after Lady Dunfern's escape was effected, it rang somewhat later, arousing from sleep all the servants, with the exception of Marjory Mason, who failed entirely to put in an appearance, even when called thrice by Rachel. However, believing that she was still fast asleep, Rachel ceased to further call on her until after serving her ladyship's breakfast.

On this festive day the breakfast served in the servants' spacious hall was a sumptuous repast, truly, and required longer time to prepare than was customary. This being so, evidently delayed the housekeeper a considerable time in attending to the wants of her mistress, whose breakfast was always punctually served at nine o'clock. This rule was violated to the extent of about half an hour on the memorable morning of Lady Dunfern's flight.

Sir John breakfasted at fifteen minutes after nine, and looked both careworn and sad, intimating to Rachel his inability to sleep the previous night. Ordering her to

prepare a dainty dish for Lady Dunfern, he proceeded to read the daily paper, that had been so customary for years. Rachel, hastily executing her master's orders, and having all in readiness for her mistress, hurried to her room for the key. Sharply telling the usual maid to follow her with the tray, she wended her way towards the door that twice had been locked since her last visit. Unlocking it, turning the handle and pushing it open, she took from the servant the tray, as was her custom, by strict orders of her master, never allowing the maid further than the door.

Depositing it upon the table, she swiftly turned to the door, and locking it from within, began to gaze around for Lady Dunfern, who sometimes breakfasted in bed. Moving in its direction with tray in hand, no Lady Dunfern appeared! The bed remained unused since she settled it the previous day. Wildly shouting with momentary pain, Rachel let fall the tray, smashing the china, &c., and thickly spotting the matting in some places with its contents. In deep despair she cast one delirious stare around the room, but all to no effect. Heaven help me! has she fled? Oh, what!—what shall I do? Thinking that she might have hidden under the couch of rest, she threw herself on the floor to try and catch only a glance of her hidden form, but was disappointed once more.

Running to the door and frantically opening it, she ran to Marjory's room. Failing to be admitted, she hurried down to acquaint some of the men, who attempted to open Marjory's door, but all their masculine efforts to arouse her were futile. What was there left to be done, save to acquaint Sir John of the matter. Agitated did Rachel enter without signifying her approach to her master, who sat in silence. "Oh, sir," cried she, drowned in tears, and uttered in broken accents the words, "Your wife has escaped—she is not in her room!" "What!" gasped Sir John. "It cannot be!"

Following Rachel to the room of terror he found her information too true. "How on earth has this happened?" asked the horrified husband. "Had you the key?" he fiercely asked of Rachel. Ever ready to substitute the truth with a lie, where the former especially would convict her, she replied, with a stamp of her foot, "that it never was out of her drawer of safe deposit." Thinking probably she may have trifled with the window, Sir John moved forward, and the wrap never being removed, he thought it had not in any way been tampered with until Rachel espied the corner pane. "Ah!" said she, "this is the clue to her cursed craft. This must have had something to do with her escape." Then the thought of Marjory's room being still closed to view she fancied might have something also to do with

the mysterious and marvellous mark of ingenious intrigue.

Both Sir John and Rachel tottered to Marjory's door, and demanding it to be broken open, Sir John entered to be further astonished at her absence, to be sure. On her bed she cannot have lain the previous night, which was proof positive that she was an announced accomplice. But the mystery had yet to be solved as to the action of their flight. Guilt took strong hold on Rachel. She knew the key was always kept in a drawer in her own room, which drawer was constantly kept locked by her and the key hidden inside the little clock that ticked so gently on the mantel-piece in her room; but on second thought, she was so busily engaged during the Christmas season that actually she forgot to lock the drawer the whole week. Never dreaming that this overlook on her part was so cleverly taken notice of by her who not alone committed the ruffianous act, but caused all the blame to be thrown on the party in charge. The housekeeper, who felt sadly and very much annoyed about the affair, grasped the whole thing—first, she thought of Marjory's professed illness the evening previous, then how she tried her door before going to bed, and in this attempt to enter was unsuccessful, and that very morning there was no answer, and, finally, she was missing as well as Lady Dunfern. The well-arranged plot pictured itself in a most vivid manner to her who in one respect, regarding the key's safety, was entirely to blame.

Sir John, summoning all his men, ordered them to go at once and intimate to the officers of the law the sudden flight of the miscreants, and to try and find out their whereabouts; but no trace of them was as yet nigh at hand.

The deceived husband appeared greatly crushed under such a weight of sorrow, and wondering whether or not they could be found, or if Oscar Otwell, he who so often wrote to his wife during her period of imprisonment, had ought to do with her daring adventure, aided by Marjory Mason! It is no longer an unsolved problem that Oscar Otwell was from first to last the chief irritating item of Sir John Dunfern's unhappiness, and whose supposed underhand communications with Lady Dunfern were the principal features depicted in this escape.

These letters of Otwell's Sir John still retained, never reaching her for whom they were intended. Opening his large Davenport that stood close by, he extracted therefrom all the letters of the vaguish tutor, and coming to the one received lastly, found it bore the address, "Chitworth College, Hedley, Berks." This was so much information regarding the rascal who was the sole means of separating Sir John Dunfern and his wife.

The husband, paralysed with sorrow, instantly wrote to Doctor O'Sullivan, the President of the College, who in youthful years was his most intimate acquaintance, and whose name appeared so often in Oscar's letters, making the necessary inquiries relative to one of the teaching staff named "Oscar Otwell." This he sealed in an envelope, and walked to the village to post it himself. After two days' rending agony and suspense, he received the following reply:—

“Chitworth College,
Berks.

“Dear Sir John,

“I am very sorry to inform you that, owing to a grave despondency which of late troubled Oscar Otwell, one of my able and talented assistants, I was compelled, though reluctantly, to allow him either one month’s leave of absence or six weeks’ if he so desired, in order to recruit him somewhat. I strongly advised him to seek a change of air, which I believe he did. I myself, on receipt of your note, visited his lodgings to ascertain from his landlady when he was likely to return. She informs me she has never heard from him since he left, and cannot give the least clue as to his present quarters. She adds that he took all his belongings with him.—Trusting you enjoy good health.

“Believe me,

“Very sincerely yours,

“D. O’SULLIVAN,
Pres.”

“Merciful Father!” exclaimed Sir John, as he finished reading the President’s note, which he laid on the table. “God strengthen me to bear this un-Christian-like calamity. Oh, my son, my son! What disgrace shall this not bring upon you, my child, my all!”

Pacing the floor in profound agony, Sir John rang for his housekeeper to convey the tidings he had just received. Rachel suspected this beforehand, but dare not even hint at such a thing to him, who had already enough to bear. Speaking in terms which shewed manifest symptoms of sorrow, combined with rage and perplexity, he ordered her for ever from his service. “You,” said he, “are solely to blame. Of this I am positively convinced, and through that door march, as I never wish again to set eyes on such a worthless woman.” Here Rachel, who was grievously affected, passed for ever from the presence of him who dared to be questioned.

Next of all, he ordered the footman, Tom Hepworth, into his room. “You,” said he, “are well aware of my present calamity, and might I ask of you how my wife and Marjory Mason effected their escape from below? Had you not the hall doors locked and likewise all the others?” Replying in the affirmative, the footman shook like a poplar, knowing well that instead of having in his room during the hours of repose all the keys of the various doors which led to the outside, he allowed them to remain where they were during the day. “Had you all those keys in your own room at night, according to my orders since Lady

Dunfern was obliged to be dealt with in the manner already described?" demanded Sir John angrily. The honest-hearted footman, being trapped, frankly acknowledged he had not.

"Go, then," said his master "and seek employment elsewhere. You are no longer fit to be here. You have neglected to carry out my orders, therefore you must go." So saying, the sturdy footman bowed and retired.

It no doubt caused Sir John a vast amount of pain to part with two such helps as Rachel Hyde and Tom Hepworth; but once he formed a resolution, nothing save death itself would break it.

Terror seized every dependent in the mansion lest Sir John would visit his anger on each and all in like manner. However, this was not so, as Rachel and Tom, being longer in his service than any of the others, caused him to intrust them with the chief care of matters of importance in preference. And when he found out that they had so carelessly disobeyed his injunctions, they were then compelled to reap the result.

Tom and Rachel, in less than an hour after their master issued his words of censure and dismissal, left the beautiful home, of such lengthy shelter, in which they had shared their help so willingly, to plough the field of adventure on which they now might wander.

decoration

CHAPTER XIV.

THE affections of youth never die. They live sometimes to lift the drooping head, and help to chase sorrow from the heart of the oppressed. If fostered unduly they generally prove to be more closely interwoven than if retained

through honesty alone, and fight the battle of union with cannon strength until gained for good or evil.

Awaking from the deep sleep she so much enjoyed after her troublesome adventures in the past, Christmas Day seemed wreathed with flowers of heavenly fragrance for the once fair bride of Dunfern Mansion. She now felt free to act as she thought best without undergoing an examination which demanded answers of evasive tact—free from the hovering cloud of dislike under which she so solemnly moved since her marriage day—free from the wild gaze of that detestable of mortals, Rachel Hyde, who proved as false as she was foul—free from reposing on the suicidal couch of distrust and distress—free from the surveillance of a so-called philanthropist; and free from the traps of tyrannical power.

She had no longer to fear the opening door of creaking custody or crushed hopes, and well might she now enjoy her Christmas dinner with rural relish and savoury zest. She found in Audley Hall every simple and inexpensive comfort, and rejoiced once more to be under the gentle rule of him whom she would have died to serve. She seemed now to have reached joy's greatest height, and never hoped that she should again be dashed into the dam of denounced riches, where love was an absenter to its silvery depth; since she had aspired to and achieved the greatest aim of her ambition.

Oscar Otwell's happiness knew no bounds. The trusted tutor had at last secured the only hope he ever wished realised, although gained with daring enterprise and false advances. He believed that life at last possessed some charms for him, viewing matters lightly. But behind the silvery rock of fortune there lies a hollow filled with darkened traces of fate.

The love dream of youth had hardly time to be told until the future dream of wonder and dread was about to be prophesied. A couple of months or so after Lady Dunfern took up her residence at Audley Hall found her more a dependent than a patroness. She had recently fled from a dungeon, still it was not one of either starvation or poverty. Whilst occupying its darkened midst she never had any cause for complaint regarding food or attendance, both of which could not possibly have been excelled. It was only when staring her lover's scanty table fully that thoughts of any nature, save cruelty, haunted her and caused a sad expression to appear which before seemed invisible.

Oscar, who had no means whatever of a private nature, soon commenced to feel

the touch of want as well as Lady Dunfern. He had no situation, neither had he the means to afford the homeliest fare, and although made owner of his present habitation, yet it was only conditionally he obtained it from his uncle. Must not the great love they naturally had for each other have been of very superlative strength, since it bade adieu to boundless wealth on the one hand and a comfortable allowance on the other, to face the future with penniless pride!

Advertisements were often seen in the leading journals for a situation, and once the name "Oscar Otwell" appeared below. It was treated with muffled silence, so much so that after a month's daily appealing to a praiseworthy public, the result proved a decided failure.

Did he imagine his conduct in robbing Sir John Dunfern of his youthful wife would be appreciated by a public band of critics? Did he by his various attempts to enter the minds of the needy ever think to solicit their assistance or gain their confidence by tearing asunder the lawful bond of superficial union and right, casting it upon the sieve of shattered shelter to separate the corn of crowded comfort from the chaff of crafty want?

Oscar Otwell, whose literary abilities were proved beyond doubt, and which were the sole source of his existence, was, by his conduct and craving desire, driven into the pit of trifling tenure and allowed to lie dormant until again aroused in a clime to which he soon must wend his wasted way.

It was now that the heated passion of youth's folly became abated as Oscar was beginning to near his purse's wrinkled bottom, and failing in his strenuous efforts to secure a tutorship, was smartly made to feel that he must visit a land of strangers, where height of ability and depth of character were alike unquestioned. It was at this stage, too, that Lady Dunfern was made to taste of the dish of fanciful wish in which she often dipped her slender fingers to sprinkle her body of dishonesty. She got time now to brood over her actions of silly execution and hatch them with heated hunger. The orphan, the pampered, the honoured was at this period the deluded, the mocked, the hungered.

This was only the beginning of what must follow; and where did the blame attachable rest? But on the shoulders of her who had edged the road of unreasonable revenge, and stripped herself of the covering of coveted cost to array herself in linen of loose lore and lengthy wear, and die, it may be, on the wayside of want.

The shaft of poverty still kept striking the inmates of Audley Hall, until forced to

withdraw its clumsy blow. There was evidently now plenty of scope for the talent of the learned Oscar to develop; he must plan how to arrive at an idea that would bring to the occupants of his temporary home the necessities of which they stood immediately in need. Failing in his efforts to gain one step towards relief, Lady Dunfern advised the disposal of Audley Hall privately, which, she strongly hinted to Oscar, was their only path of safety from the door of starvation. To this suggestion she succeeded in gaining his consent.

He accordingly, acting upon her advice, wrote to Doctor O'Sullivan, President of Chitworth College, intimating to him his present circumstances and intention, and begged of him to use his best efforts in sending him a purchaser, the sale to be kept strictly private for reasons which, presently, he felt too delicate to explain.

In a week or so after, a gentleman was seen approach the door of Oscar's home, and making the necessary inquiries regarding the price Oscar meant to accept for it, offered the sum of one thousand pounds, which, needless to say, was gladly accepted.

The purchaser was rather an elderly gentleman, with chiselled features, tall and straight, and seemed to have borne the melting heat of a far-off clime to a large extent. He informed Oscar that being a retired army pensioner, named Major Iddesleigh, he chose to leave the foreign land in which he sojourned for upwards of thirty-five years and reside in his native county, adding that he was a widower, having had two sons, both of whom predeceased him, and preferred a home of his own rather than take up quarters he could not solely claim.

He went on to say he had an only brother, a colonel, who formerly resided at Flixton, a quaint little town on the east coast of Kent. He had not heard from him for many years, and was resolved on arriving in England to lose no time in finding out his whereabouts, and, much to his grave disappointment and vexation, he was informed, whilst staying for a few days with President O'Sullivan, that he and his wife had long since been dead, leaving an only daughter, of whom he was now in earnest pursuit. Oscar's deadly countenance during the latter part of Major Iddesleigh's remarks filled the mind of the purchaser of Audley Hall with thoughts of wonder, and on casting a sharp and penetrating stare at her who passed as Oscar's wife, he was similarly struck with intense awe at the sudden change that swept over her handsome face.

Her brain whirled with dire excitement on being at last informed of him who for

years previous she considered had been a member of the missing majority.

“Great and Merciful Forgiver!” thought Lady Dunfern, “am I at last face to face with Major Iddesleigh, whose name has been so often the subject of conversation with both Lord and Lady Dilworth?” Gathering her thoughts and submitting them to subjection, she tried to subdue her shattered nerves and lock them under proper restraint, until her uncle should safely be out of sight on his way back to the home of the kind-hearted President of Chitworth College.

She had not, however, the slightest thought of making him cognisant of the fact that she was the proud and lovely daughter of his brother, the late Colonel Iddesleigh—the once-adored wife of the widely respected and generous owner of Dunfern Estate, and now the tempted tool of emigration.

She prayed in her bewilderment that she might escape unknown to him, rather than make him aware of the disgrace into which her past conduct had unmistakably plunged her. Bidding Oscar and her “Adieu,” Major Iddesleigh left what was to be his future home, and returned to Doctor O’Sullivan to acquaint him of his purchase.

Before he had even reached the College on his way from Audley Hall, Oscar Otwell, Lady Dunfern, and Marjory had booked for New York, on board the “Delwyn,” and when the worthy President was informed of the purchase, the dashing waves of Atlantic waters were raising themselves to a considerable height before the eyes of the fugitives, who nervously paced the deck of danger in despair and deepest thought of their foul transaction and Major Iddesleigh, lest before they reached their destiny he would be made possessor of his niece’s conduct, and, with the warlike will of a soldier of strength, follow her, and bring her back to Audley Hall to administer to his many wants and comforts, and bequeath to her all he possessed.

Nor did Oscar Otwell, whose nerves were reaching their shaky height, feel free until safely ensconced in a trim little cottage on the outskirts of Dobbs Ferry, some miles distant from the suburbs of New York. Oscar’s first thought, after being quietly settled in his new home, was to bind himself for life to be the husband of her who had risked so much to bring him the joy he long sought after; and within one month after their safe arrival in New York borders, the pretty little church, situated at the east end of Dobbs Ferry, was the scene of a charming group of wealthy sight-seers and warm admirers of the handsome bride of Oscar Otwell, who had lately regained some of her former spirits, which

enlivened her to a pleasing extent, and manifested signs of joy where lines of sorrow so lately lived.

It was for this celebration that Lady Dunfern arrayed herself in the gorgeous gown of purest duchesse satin, which bore such a train of past remembrances. Why its puffs of pearly wealth surrounded her well-formed figure on the celebration of her marriage with him who long ago should have claimed its shining folds, may be considered mysterious. But in this, as well as in many other instances, the busy brain of Marjory Mason was prime mover.

During Lady Dunfern's confinement in the mansion over which she unjustly was appointed mistress, Sir John Dunfern, never suspecting the maid of her on whom he was driven to lavish mycorr, appointed Marjory mistress of her ladyship's wardrobe, and it was during her term of office that she stole from its midst the box containing the beautiful Parisian outfit which failed to put in an appearance on Lady Dunfern's previous wedding-day. This Marjory kept, until safe in the shady cot of comfort which encompassed within its wooden walls the trio of adventure. Lady Dunfern resolved that this gown should be kept a prisoner until either worn with a face of happiness and prided ambition or never worn at all.

On entering the church on the morning of her marriage with Oscar, how every eye was turned towards the beautiful woman whose radiant smile gained the hearts of each and all of its occupants. There she stood before the holy altar with calm resolution and undaunted fear, and her elegant bearing and manner throughout the trying ceremony were thoroughly appreciated by the assembly.

Oscar bore slight traces of nervousness throughout the oratorical ordeal, and was rejoiced indeed as he turned to leave the scene of such outbursts of praise, taking with him her who was to be his coveted partner for life; her, whose footsteps he so often worshipped in days gone by; her, who entered into treaty legally with a man she never could learn to love; her, whom he now claimed as his own, and for whom he stumbled over many an awkward and winding stile, until at last his footsteps had reached the path of level tread, on which he hoped to travel until his journey would be ended to that distant land where strife is a stranger.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER XV.

THE wealthy, the haughty, the noble must alike taste of disappointment. They court ideas whilst surrounded with bountiful store to be fostered and fed with heaven-bordered hopes which nothing save denial could thwart. The meek, the humble, the poor share equally in its visitation, and learn not to frown at its unwelcome intrusion while they bear the load of blighted hopes with unshrinking modesty.

At Dunfern Mansion matters seemed at a standstill, since that Christmas Day which began with such sunshine and ended with such misery. Energy had fled from the able-bodied staff of servants who occupied its rooms of plentiful repast. Each and all of them seemed as if death had entered their midst and snapped from amongst them their sole support.

Was it because of Rachel Hyde's hasty departure? No! They had now no domineering inflicter of petticoat power to check their honest actions or words; no eyes of dreaded terror viewing through spectacles of sin their little faults, and submitting them, in exaggerated form, to the ear of him who now lay so dangerously ill; no false face masked in brassen mould, nor tongue of touchy cut to divide their friendship. Rachel Hyde, whose word, nay, look, was law, was driven from the presence of him who too long was blind to her false approaches, and who always treated her with more leniency and consideration than she really deserved, never again to mount a pinnacle of trust and truth, or share in the confidence of such a just and true specimen of humanity as Sir John Dunfern. She had been made to reap the crops of cunning falsehood, sown so oft in the fields of honour and true worth, and pocket the result of their flimsy income. She, by her long service of artifice, had scattered the seeds of scepticism so thickly around the corners of harmony, goodwill, and peace as to almost defy their speedy removal; but time would swamp their silent growth and supplant in their stead roots of integrity, justice, and benevolence. She had at last been cast

on the mercy of a world of icy indifference to facts of long standing, and made to taste of the stagnant waters of pity, which flung their muddy drops of rancid rascality on the face of dogmatic dread, until crushed beneath their constant clash she yielded her paltry right to Him Whose order must never be disobeyed.

Tom Hepworth, whose absence was partly the cause of sorrow within the breasts of his fellow-workers in Dunfern Mansion, was much to be pitied; he was the very soul of honour, and was highly respected by all who knew him. In his presence every care vanished like snow in sunshine; the pitiful look that shot from the eye of the down-trodden in Rachel Hyde's presence was thrown aside when Tom appeared. He acted as a father and friend on all occasions where trouble reigned supreme, and never failed to hear the light laugh of youth proceed from its hidden bed, where it too often reposed untouched.

Tom Hepworth, whose race was nearly run, when leaving Dunfern Mansion took refuge in the home of Mrs. Durand, his sister, who lived only a short distance from where he had spent more than a third part of his existence. A few months only elapsed whilst under her roof when he was seized with a fit of apoplexy, terminating in a few hours a life of usefulness and blameless bearing. The shock of his sudden demise, when conveyed to his master, whom he revered, brought on a severe attack of hemorrhage, under which Sir John Dunfern now lay prostrate.

Not a week passed after Lady Dunfern took up residence at Audley Hall until Sir John was informed of her whereabouts. Had her escape been effected unknown to Oscar Otwell, it would scarcely have taken such hold on the mind of him who, unfortunately, claimed her as his wife; but to think he had again been duped by a rascally pauper tutor was a pill too difficult to swallow without being moderately reduced. The troubles that visit the just are many, and of these Sir John had ample share. He knew, when too late, that he had jumped the drain of devotion with too much intensity to gain a worthless reward.

He was tempted to invest in the polluted stocks of magnified extension, and when their banks seemed swollen with rotten gear, gathered too often from the winds of wilful wrong, how the misty dust blinded his sense of sight and drove him through the field of fashion and feeble effeminacy, which he once never meant to tread, landing him on the slippery rock of smutty touch, to wander into its hidden cavities of ancient fame, there to remain a blinded son of injustice and unparalleled wrong! All these thoughts seized the blighted protector of the late

Colonel Iddesleigh's orphan daughter; and being gradually augmented by many others of private and public importance, rose, like a tumour of superfluous matter, and burst asunder on receiving the last blow relative to poor old Tom Hepworth.

Sir John in a few weeks gradually grew stronger, until finally he baffled his severe illness with Christian bravery, and was again able to keep the ball of industry moving in the direction indicated during his years of singleness, on which he now looked back, alas! not with sorrow, but pride.

During all this trying time, however, it must be admitted there shone one bright star of filial attraction which seemed to shoot its reflected lines of loving brightness towards him, whose face always beamed with delight in return. Yes, his little son Hugh, who had been placed under the care of Madam Fulham, since Lady Dunfern, by her conduct, could no longer fill the post of mother, had grown to be a bright child, able to totter around his nursery toys of cost and variety. He always seemed a cheerful, intelligent boy, and extremely beautiful, but inclined to be slightly self-willed, a trait which developed itself more and more as years rolled on.

At the age of six, Sir John, abhorring the advice of his many friends to procure for him a tutor, had him sent to Canterbury High School, where he remained for a period of five years as boarder, under the careful charge of Professor Smeath, a man of the highest literary attainments, and whose exemplary training of the many youths placed under his august rule was so pronounced as to leave no room for doubt in the minds of the many parents who intrusted their respective charges to him. Each week during this period found Sir John a visitor at Canterbury; he gave every instruction necessary to Professor Smeath that would serve to interest his son in any way, and strictly prohibited him from allowing any outsider whatever, male or female, an interview with his boy, always treating with dread the wily ways of her who claimed to be once his partner, and who had brought a shower of everlasting shame upon himself and child. This order had only to be issued once to the stern professor carrying out on all possible occasions any instructions received from the parents of the pupils under his control with unflinching and undeniable reliance.

During these five years of Hugh Dunfern's instruction at Canterbury, Sir John was seen to gradually grow careless and despondent. The healthy glow of youth disappeared daily since domestic affliction entered his home, and wrote its living

lines of disgust with steady hand on the brow which was now thickly marked with them. He got too much time to meditate on the immediate past, which was considerably augmented by the absence of his son.

He was known to sit for hours at a time in deep and painful thought, and it was only when aroused by Madam Fulham that he ever cared to stir from his much-frequented couch of rest; she whom he appointed housekeeper in Rachel Hyde's stead, and who acted as well mother to his little son until removed to school—she extended him every attention, of which he stood in great need, after his severe attack of illness and trial, bodily and mentally.

Time rolled along until his son's return from Canterbury, whose very presence should have healed the gaping wounds his absence inflicted, and chased away all gloomy cavities from the mind of Sir John. On the day of Hugh's home-coming, after five years' training under Professor Smeath, which should have been a day of gladness and rejoicing throughout Dunfern Mansion, it was only one of sadness for the heart-broken father.

Bouncing into the room with boyish pride, Hugh ran and proudly embraced him, who, in return, stood face to face with the very image of her whom he could never again own.

There were the rounded forehead, the aquiline nose, the hazel eyes, the nut-brown hair, the ruby lips, the pearly teeth, the dimpled cheeks and tiny chin of his mother, who probably was grappling at the crumbs of pauperism! However, Sir John manfully tried to hide from his boy the source of his grave looks, until some day of revelation would demand their blackened origin to be boldly announced to him who as yet was solely ignorant of his mother being alive.

Six weeks' holiday passed too quickly, Hugh thought, until he would another time be compelled to quit his home of unbounded luxury and enter Chitworth College, Berks, for a further period of instruction, the length of which events alone would define.

Although the very name of Chitworth College brought reminiscences of dislike to him who suffered so much from one of its former staff, yet those days had fled, and with them the footsteps of flaming stratagem.

Being a personal friend of Professor O'Sullivan, Sir John preferred his son to reside with him, and receive under his able control all the necessary acquirements devolving upon a son of such a proud and distinguished race. The

morning at last arrived for Hugh to start on his college career, and, accompanied by his father, was not long in completing the journey.

The interview between Sir John and his attached friend, Doctor O'Sullivan, was affecting in the extreme, so much so that Hugh, being an entire stranger to such outbursts of grief, and not being prepared for such sudden emotional and silent greeting as that now witnessed by him, began to feel it impossible to refrain from joining in their sorrow.

Throwing his youthful arms around his father's neck, he sobbed hysterically, and could only be quieted when his father again appeared cheerful.

Leaving his son in charge of Doctor O'Sullivan, the latter retired from duty that day, and begged Sir John to remain over-night, adding that he would so much like to have a chat with him over matters he had known, and was persuaded to believe caused heartfelt pity to be secreted where once there dwelt heartfelt pride. To this proposal Sir John consented willingly, not caring to leave his gentle and much-loved boy so soon after such a trying meeting as that which he not alone witnessed between friends of old standing, but in which he modestly and sympathetically joined.

All the past gravity which marred Sir John Dunfern's mirth and usefulness, and which he kept attracted to one common centre, crept from its crazy cell on this evening. So soon as dinner was over the President and Sir John retired to a room of seclusion, and the intense relief it gave the trodden and blighted messenger of manhood to at last have a friend in whom he could confide no one could half imagine!

For fully five hours both sat talking confidentially to each other and sympathising when necessary, and it was only during this conversation that Sir John was first made acquaint either of his wife's marriage with Oscar or her present abode, neither of which, in the President's estimation, moved the husband of treachery in its most mischievous form much.

The news of his wife being Mrs. Otwell, instead of the honourable name her conduct ordered her to bury, only served to cast for ever the gentle words of practical remembrance Sir John had in his last will and testament concerning her into an unknown chasm. Until now the forgiving husband, the meek adviser, the patient sufferer, the wounded knight, the once attached partner, the loving father, and the son of justice, gratitude, and chastity was ready to share a little of his ransom with her whom he thought he may have probably wronged by too

rigorous punishment. But President O'Sullivan, whose well-guided words and fatherly advice had on this evening so sealed the mind of forgiveness with the wax of disinterested intent that Sir John, on his arrival home, at once sent for his solicitors, Messrs. Hutchinson & Harper, and ordering his will to be produced, demanded there and then that the pen of persuasion be dipped into the ink of revenge and spread thickly along the paragraph of blood-related charity to blank the intolerable words that referred to the woman he was now convinced, beyond doubt, had braved the bridge of bigamy. Some slight alterations, in consequence, were necessary to be made, and these being righted, the will of Sir John Dunfern remained a prisoner until released on the day of execution, which as yet could not possibly be named.

decoration

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CHAPTER XVI.

HARK! The bell tolled its death-like strains, faint as the far-off fatherland, steady as the starlight, and sweet as the scent of the blooming woodbine. The hour of departure is sure and settled, the loss is sharply felt, the gain completed, and vigorous attempts to retain both are oftentimes multiplying on the exertions of the benefitted.

During all these years of revolution the wheel of action rounded its roads of revelling, riot, and separation. Shandon Cottage, the little house of Oscar Otwell, where he took up residence when first a visitor to the land of laudable ingenuity, was a pretty structure, and would doubtless have proved a little palace of peace to two such lovers had the means been forthcoming to keep the glare of poverty

within its bed of stillness, and prohibit its visitation where least desired.

Oscar, who, during his English career, never was possessor of aught but a slight pittance derived from the sources of his mental labours, and who courted the vain idea, on being made the recipient of £1,000, which he pocketed under false pretences by the underhand sale of Audley Hall, that he was a man of wealth for life, and when safely settled in his trim little cottage, squandered his trifle in a very short time, leaving himself and wife on the mercy of strangers' sympathy, which more or less presents an icy aspect to the eye of the needy.

Marjory Mason, who just spent twelve months under Oscar's roof, was fortunate in securing a husband, whose calling kept her during her short lifetime aloof from the imaginative pinches of the uncertain future.

It was only when Oscar was forced to evade starvation that he deemed it imperative to accept an appointment in a public school, at the yearly income of one thousand dollars, an office he retained until compelled to resign through courting too great love for the all-powerful monster of mangled might—Intemperance. After a number of years the partaker of maddened love was the imparter of maddened might.

With beastly force did Oscar Otwell enter Shandon Cottage on the night of his open dismissal from Waketown Public School, and arousing from sleep his wife, with monster oaths inflicted upon her strokes of abuse which time could never efface.

Ah! it was now the actions of youthful frivolity stood before her mountain high and baffled her sickly retort. It was now she pored over her journal of events, which seemed a burthen unbearable for such a fragile frame, and begged the credit side to be for ever closed to her view, whilst she prayed that the debit be left open until she would enter therein all her past debts to him whom she deceived, deluded, denounced, and despised.

Next morning mended matters little for Oscar Otwell's wife. Still raging with drunken horror, he lavished upon her torrents of insinuations, which she found impossible to overlook, and which forced her to take refuge in the house of the Reverend Bertram Edgar, near by. This man of true piety, at whose church she had occasionally worshipped, extended the refuge she presently implored, and proved instrumental in securing for her the position of governess in a nobleman's family some miles distant.

Disposing of all the household effects, Oscar pocketed their dainty worth, and left Shandon Cottage in earnest pursuit of his wife, intending to again return to their native county in England.

His various inquiries regarding her whereabouts proved vain as the vanishing shadow of Venus, and finally, when completely overcome with sober thoughts of his riotous conduct towards the loving and faithful object of his choice, who had risked so much for him, he cursed his very existence.

A few weeks found him in utter destitution, without either house or chattels to illegally dispose of in case of emergency, and line his pockets of pauperism with coin of dishonest stamp and flashing forgery. Unsuccessful in his worthless attempts to further manifest a standing in the literary world, and being driven almost crazy in his eager efforts to ascertain whither his wife had bent her footsteps, he, in a moment of madness, resolved to resign himself to that ever-anxious defender of Satanic rights who prowls about in ambush until safely securing his prey with the crooked claws of callous craft.

Walking along in the moonlight in the direction of Afton Lake, which sometimes offers its deep waters too freely to victims of sin and suffering, Oscar Otwell resolved to bathe his body of perilous adventure in its darkened waters of deepest death, never more to face the troubles and trials of weak man and share them with weaker woman—never again to approach the wife of his bosom with language of lowest type or lift to her the hand which he so often had sworn should extend her the aid she now must seek.

Arriving at the water's edge, Oscar Otwell divested himself of his scanty attire, and in another moment was struggling in the freezing element which soon should shroud his future with robe of blackest doubt.

Dunraven Hall was situated only a mile from Afton Lake, and was inhabited by the Honourable Eric Eustace, a nobleman of unbounded wealth, whose extension of charity was both wide and varied. It was in this family that Mrs. Otwell was fortunate enough in securing the position before referred to through the instrumentality of her spiritual adviser.

On the night that Oscar Otwell resigned his worldly career, there beat one heart in Dunraven Hall with wild emotion. Mrs. Otwell, retiring to bed as usual, found sleep had altogether fled, and rising from her springy structure of restlessness, dressed herself and paced the bedroom floor enveloped in dread. She was convinced something was about to happen, and struggling in her great efforts to

baffle the fear that haunted her night and day lately, she resolved, so soon as daybreak peeped its cheerful face through her window, to take a walk along the road in order to cast her fears upon the highway of forgetfulness.

Wrapping herself in her warmest cloak, she soon was found walking rapidly along in silence on the road that swept round Afton Lake. She had not gone far when people were seen to mount the fence that conducted them to the nearest point of its watery expanse, which lay about fifty perches from the main road.

Courting her curiosity with nervous fear, she walked along, wondering what had happened to attract such crowds. And finding it rather difficult to refrain from making inquiry from some of the gathering, who by this time had hurriedly been retracing their flighty footsteps from the imaginative scene of death, Mrs. Otwell, modestly approaching a female who swiftly hopped over the fence in tears, asked what had happened.

“Oh, madam,” cried the woman, “the clothing of a gentleman was seen early this morning as David Gillespie, a labourer, was engaged at a drain hard by. It was neatly folded and deposited on the brink. Surely some one must have been demented and drowned himself in Afton Lake. The authorities are now on the spot and refuse to mention who the gentleman is.”

Thanking her for kindly informing her of what she had both seen and heard, Mrs. Otwell hurried back to Dunraven Hall in nervous astonishment, and hastily proceeded to her bedroom to prepare herself for what soon must follow.

The breakfast being shortly afterwards announced, Mrs. Otwell, pale as death, entered the room, and taking her accustomed seat to partake of it, as best she could. She had scarcely got properly seated ere two officers of the law were seen approach Dunraven Hall. Ringing furiously, they demanded an interview with the Hon. Eric Eustace.

Satisfied as to the name of his present governess, they wished to be allowed to see her, which request was willingly granted. Being told that morning by the gardener at Dunraven Hall, who ran to the spot on hearing the news, that a lady named Mrs. Otwell permanently resided at the Hall as governess, the authorities immediately grasped the fact that she might be the unfortunate widow, and on putting the usual questions to her concerning her husband, they were still further convinced as to her identity. Drawing from his pocket a parcel containing Oscar’s card, photo, and a letter addressed to Mrs. Oscar Otwell, the officer in charge asked her to read it aloud, which she did in a rather trembling voice,

without betraying such signs of grief as anticipated. The letter ran thus:—

“Dobbs’ Ferry,

Friday Night,

11 p.m.

“Dearest Irene and Wife,—

“Should ever this reach your length, I trust you will pardon me for the rash act I am about to commit.

“Since the morning you left me at Shandon Cottage my sorrow has been greater than my present frame of mind can well support. I, therefore, have decided on ending my days of starvation by hiding for ever beneath the glassy surface of Alton Lake to shield my wicked body from further inflicting upon you the wrongs I have perpetrated in the past, and for which I am grievously tormented.

“Dearest Irene, I hope you, in your past great warmth of devotion for me (your poor tutor and husband), will forgive my late ungentlemanly conduct in striking you so cowardly on the eve of my downfall, and thereby breaking the confidence you reposed in me for such a lengthened period of our existence.

“From what I know of your noble character, I have every faith in your forgiveness, and rest assured, I never mean to face death without imploring you to rectify, if ever in your power, the wrong you accomplished, partly at my request, in breaking the holy cord of union which bound you during your natural existence to Sir John Dunfern, and again uniting it under foul auspices.

“Had I been so fortunate as to secure you first of all, my conscience, certainly, would at this moment be both clear and unclouded. But feeling persuaded I have robbed that nobleman who now possibly is pining for separation from a world of shame and sorrow underneath the lordly roof of Dunfern Mansion, I am positively convinced, under such dangling dishonour, that never more can this world of sin extend to me the comfort I in vain have tried to seek.

“Awake, then, my beloved, to whom I attach not the slightest blame, to a sense of feeling and justice, and go, I implore of you, and cast yourself at the feet of him and beg his forgiveness, who loved you with a love unspeakable—who severed nearly all his self-indulgence with the instrument of intensity and hesitated not to lavish it upon the head of her to whom I offer my last advice. Then shall you meet the messenger—death—not with shrinking fear (like me), but daring bravery.

“Of your present position or abode I am totally unaware, but, dearest wife, I trust your race of penury is almost run, and that your latter years may be crowned with Christian fortitude and ease, and freed from the thorny dart of the wicked, in whose grave I must soon lie unwept.

“Good bye, for ever!

From your affectionate

“OSCAR.

“Mrs. Oscar Otwell

(Address unknown).”

Folding the letter, and handing it to the officers, together with Oscar's card and photograph—all of which would prove indispensable for their future use—Mrs. Otwell quietly moved again to the breakfast room, and, strange to say, finished her meal in silence.

Then turning to him in whose service she was, intimated her intention to sail for England when the missing body would be recovered, which she meant to bury in Greenwood Cemetery. She lingered on in eager expectation of casting one final look at her husband, but week after week died away without any sign of it being forthcoming, and all hope being fled, Mrs. Otwell resolved to lose no further time in returning to her home of nativity, in order to obey the last instructions from the hand of Oscar Otwell, from whom she was reluctantly obliged to part in the manner described.

Another side the picture of futurity presented for the anxious mother, and that was to try and obtain an interview with her son, who at this period must be a boy of some fifteen summers. Having everything in readiness for her journey to her native land, Mrs. Otwell left Dunraven Hall amidst torrents of sympathy and warm expressions from every member of the family; and it was when driving past Afton Lake for the last time on her way to the deck of the "Delwyn" that the crushed widow of Oscar Otwell and legal wife of Sir John Dunfern was made to taste of the unlimited sorrow of her sad career.

There she was, a stranger in a foreign land—an outcast to the society she shone so brilliantly amongst during years that were now no more, the fostered orphan, the adopted daughter of heiressdom, the wife of devotional distinction, the illegal partner of crutchy poverty, and the penniless widow of undeniable woe.

She was not even granted the ghostly pleasure of viewing her lover's lifeless body, that would have ended her thoughts relative to him, at least for a time, but as matters stood encircled in doubt, there was nothing left save trouble and anxiety for her whose futurity must ever be shaded.

On approaching the harbour of New York, her attention was attracted by a tall gentleman standing not many yards distant, and being so long familiar with his appearance, she found the object of attraction to be no other than Lord Dilworth. Ordering the cabman to a standstill, she popped her head out in utter astonishment, and shouted in such a strain as to instantly attract his attention. Alighting with ardent enthusiasm in the very midst of her troubles, she soon found herself in the arms of Lord Dilworth, who appeared utterly dazed.

“Protector of Powers? can it be Irene? Lady Dunfern, I mean?” gasped he in bewilderment. To which she bowed, blinded in tears, and in as few words as possible, he related a short narrative concerning both himself and Lady Dilworth, who had long since been dead. On hearing of the death of the once noble mistress of Dilworth Castle, Mrs. Otwell seemed as lifeless as a marble statue, and trying vigorously to regain strength after such a sudden shock, she, in a few broken snatches, related her plotted career; but misery having likewise carpeted Lord Dilworth’s floors of fate so much of late, he consequently did not seem so astonished as imagined.

Leaving Mrs. Otwell so far as his time permitted, he pathetically took his final farewell, and shortly after was busy pouring over his books in Franklin Street, office No. 715, where he was employed as a clerk at five hundred dollars a year.

On the other hand, the mighty ocean palace was steering firmly against the clashing breakers with unobstructed speed, acting as protector and friend to all those who entrusted themselves to its unsettled shelter.

decoration

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE mighty orb of gladness spreads its divine halo over many a harrowed home—it encircles the great expanse of foreign adventure and home-hoarded enterprise, and wields its awakening influence against the burthened boroughs of bigotry and lightened land of liberty to a sense of gilded surprise.

The laurels of separation were twining their oily leaves and speedily

constructing a crown for the brow of Sir John Dunfern. After returning from Chitworth College, and ordering the last few finishing touches to be made in his will, he grew more drooped and heartless every year, and seemed almost indifferent to life's ploughing changes.

He felt acutely the information imparted to him by President O'Sullivan regarding the wife he now for ever despised, and who unlawfully belonged to Oscar Otwell. He even felt more severely the effect of such on account of his beloved boy, who was steadily endeavouring to increase his slight store of knowledge under the watchful eye of the most scholarly personage of the day.

He knew ere long—owing to his present state of health, brought to such a low ebb by the mother of his son—that he would be obliged to open to Hugh the book of nature as it stood past and present, and instruct him in its disagreeable pages.

The thought of opening up the past, with its stains of dissipation, perhaps acted on the mind of Sir John more severely than the reality. Yet he must brave himself for the trial when opportunity offered, lest it might be too late.

The time for Hugh Dunfern's fourth summer vacation was close at hand. The boy's genial manner, affability, and frankness, gained for him hosts of friends at Chitworth College, and equally numerous were the sharers in his sorrow on receiving a telegram a very short time before his summer holidays commenced to the effect that his father had taken suddenly ill, and asking him to delay as little as he possibly could during his journey to Dunfern Mansion, which must commence immediately.

The poor, sorrow-stricken boy, who was deeply attached to his father, was quite overcome with grief. Bidding "Good bye" to all his college companions, and taking affectionate leave of his masters and President O'Sullivan, he left the much-loved seat of learning, never more to compete in its classes of clever instruction and high moral bearing—never again to watch with craving eye the distribution of letters, and rejoice on observing his father's crested envelope being gently reached him by the President; and no more to share in the many innocent games of youth, at some of which he was an unequalled expert.

The dull hum of voices in the hall of his home met his anxious ear on the eve of his home-coming, and told a tale without further inquiry. Meeting the three most eminent London physicians—namely, Doctors Killen, Crombie, and Smiley, in the library, where they held a long consultation, Hugh was nerved somewhat

before entering the chamber of death with words of truth regarding his father's hopeless condition; and, on moving quietly to his father's bed, how the lad of tender years was struck with awe at the bleached resemblance of what used to be a rosy, healthy father!

Perceiving his son's bent and weeping form hang over him with meekest resignation, Sir John cast aside the bedclothes, and, extending his hand, caught firm hold of his son's. Hugh spoke not a word, by order of the doctors, lest his father, who was now bereft of speech, would feel the pain of not being able to reply in return.

The suffering patient lingered on in this dumb condition for six weeks, when suddenly he regained speech partly, but only for some hours—a great dispensation of the Almighty, no doubt, in answer to the silent prayers of the invalid. It was first noticed by Madam Fulham, who proved a mighty help to Sir John since his wife's flight.

On entering the chamber of sickness one morning with a new bottle of medicine, sent direct from London, Sir John raised himself slightly on his left elbow and made inquiry about his son.

With hurried and gladdened step was Madam Fulham seen to glide from the presence of her master, and hasten to find Hugh, who was noticed to pace the topmost corridor in agony.

On observing his father had regained speech after his paralytic attack had somewhat abated, how great was his son's delight! Drawing forth a chair to the bedside of the august patient, Hugh, quite unprepared, received the awful intelligence of his mother's conduct and life from the lips of the afflicted, who, in broken accents, related the tale of trouble which for years had kept him a prisoner to its influence.

Taking his son's hand in his, Sir John Dunfern, after audibly, yet a little indistinctly, offering up a prayer of thanks to Him Who never overlooks the words of the just, for His great mercy in again enabling him to regain his sense of speech, of which he so lately had been deprived, began:—

“My much-loved and faithful son, I, your father, am now stricken down in the middle almost of manhood, and am sensitive to the fact that a short space of time—yea, a short space too—must inevitably elapse until I shall be ordered from this temporary abode, which now to me seems only a floating speck of shelter in

the great ocean of time. I am more than thankful that recovery of speech has been granted me for many reasons, which, I fear, my strength cannot permit to be fully explained. However, my great wish to acquaint you of my miserable married career shall, I trust, not be barred from your knowledge by any further visitation of Kingly Power.

“You are aware, my son, that this mansion which soon shall own me no more has been the scene of my frolicking boyhood, my joyful manhood, and, I must now tell you, the undying trouble of a blighted married life.

“Your mother’s name was Irene Iddesleigh, the orphan daughter, I understand, of one Colonel Iddesleigh, of Flixton, in this county. Her father and mother both died about the same time, leaving their daughter absolutely unprovided for. She was taken to an orphanage at the early age of three years, and there remained for a period of eight more, when, through the kindness of one Lord Dilworth, of Dilworth Castle, of whose existence I have already acquainted you, she was brought under his charge, and remained as his adopted daughter until, unfortunately, I brought her here as my wife.

“I cannot help informing you that she was the most beautiful and prepossessing young lady I ever met, and, on making her acquaintance at a ball given by Lord and Lady Dilworth, at Dilworth Castle, not far distant, as you know, I became so intoxicated with her looks of refinement and undoubted beauty that I never regained sobriety until she promised to become my wife!

“The beginning of our married career was bright enough, I dare say, for some weeks only, when she grew very strange in her manner towards me. So remarkably strange, that I was reluctantly compelled to demand an explanation. Being satisfied with her false apologies, used as a way out of her difficulty, I remained content. She still continued nevertheless to maintain the same cold indifference towards me until your birth.

“Knowing that a son was born to me, who, if spared, would still keep up the good old name of Dunfern, I became altogether a foreigner to her past conduct, and it was only when recovering from her illness, after your birth, that I caught hold of the trap of deception she had laid since long before our marriage.

“She was found out to be the idolized of one man named Oscar Otwell, who occupied the position of tutor to her during her years of adoption; and not even did her love in return for him cease when I claimed her as my lawful wife, but continued, so far as I know, until now!

“I was therefore obliged through her mal-practices to shut her in from the gaze of outsiders, and also from my own. I chose Room No. 10 of this building as her confined apartment. You were only a child then of some two months, and, since, I have never beheld her face, which was false as it was lovely.

“My rage was boundless on the day I ordered her into my presence in that room, and, labouring under the passion of a jealous husband, I told her I would confine her within its walls so long as she existed.

“Over a year passed along, every month of which I grew more and more repentant, until the second Christmas of her seclusion, when I fully resolved to free her once more; at the same time, never again to share in my society or companionship.

“But, behold! the mischievous hand of her maid, Marjory Mason, whose services I retained after her imprisonment, was busy working its way for her escape, which she nimbly succeeded in effecting, exactly on the morning of Christmas Day, by stealing from the room of Rachel Hyde, Madam Fulham’s predecessor, the key of her door, and thereby released your mother. Ah! my son, from that hour my life has been a worthless coin, the harp of hideous helplessness struck forth its tunes of turmoil, trouble, and trial, and poured its mixed strains of life and death so vividly in my ear, that since I have, in a measure, been only a wanderer between their striking sounds of extremes.

“I shortly afterwards learned she took refuge in Audley Hall, a residence on the estate of its present owner—the Marquis of Orland, and situated some twenty miles distant, and, horrifying to relate, had been living with Oscar Otwell!

“The dreadful news of her conduct irritated me so that I only, in my last will and testament, bequeathed to her what would grant the ordinary comforts of life, provided I predeceased her. This reference to her remained until I accompanied you to Chitworth College, when President O’Sullivan revealed to me in silent friendship the fact of which I was wholly unaware, viz.—that she had long since sailed for America, at the same time handing me a *New York Herald* sent him by Otwell, and there I beheld the announcement of her marriage with him who ruined my life, and who has been the means of driving me into the pit of tearful tremor, out of which I never more shall climb.

“On returning home from Chitworth College I at once blanked the reference to her in my will, and never more wished to behold the face that swore to me such

vows of villainy; the face that blasted my happiness for life; the mother of you, whom I now earnestly implore never to acknowledge, and who possesses every feature she outwardly bore.

“It may be yours to meet her face to face ere she leave this tabernacle of torment; but, my child, for my sake avoid her cunning ways and works, and never allow her shelter underneath this roof she dishonoured and despised. And I trust God in His great mercy shall forgive her errors, and grant you the blessing of a Father of Love.”

Sir John Dunfern now lay back exhausted on his pillow, and muttered quietly “Thank God.”

Next morning the Angel of Death was seen to spread its snowy wings over his wasted form, and convey the departed spirit into that region of bliss where sorrow, sighing, sin, and suffering are cast for ever from its rooms of glory.

Thus passed away another link of a worthy ancestral chain, who, during his tender years of training, had been guided by the charitable Christian example of a mother of devotion, and who was, during the brighter battle of her son’s creeping years of care and caution, summoned before the Invisible Throne of purity, peace, and praise everlasting, shrouded in hopes of sunshine concerning his future happiness, which, never after his marriage, was known to twinkle in Dunfern Mansion.

decoration

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOCKING Angel! The trials of a tortured throng are naught when weighed in the balance of future anticipations. The living sometimes learn the touchy tricks

of the traitor, the tardy, and the tempted; the dead have evaded the flighty earthly future, and form to swell the retinue of retired rights, the righteous school of the invisible, and the rebellious roar of raging nothing.

The night was dark and tempestuous; the hill rather inclined to be steep; the clouds were bathed in wrinkled furrows of vapoury smoke; the traffic on the quiet and lonely roads surrounding Dunfern Mansion was utterly stopped, and nature seemed a block of obstruction to the eye of the foreigner who drudged so wearily up the slope that led to the home of Mrs. Durand, who had been confined to bed for the past three years, a sufferer from rheumatism.

Perceiving the faint flicker of light that occasionally flung its feeble rays against the dim fanlight of faithful Fanny's home—the aged sister of the late Tom Hepworth—the two-fold widowed wanderer, with trembling step, faltered to the door of uncertain refuge, and, tapping against it with fingers cold and stiff, on such a night of howling wind and beating rain, asked, in weakened accents, the woman who opened to her the door, “If she could be allowed to remain for the night?”—a request that was granted through charity alone. After relieving herself of some outer garments, and partaking of the slight homely fare kindly ordered by Mrs. Durand, the widow of Oscar Otwell and Sir John Dunfern warmed herself and dried her saturated clothing before going to bed. She had just arrived the day previous, and hastened to take up her abode as near her former home of exquisiteness as she could, without detection.

On extinguishing the light before retiring, and casting one glance in the direction of the little window, the innumerable recollections of the abundant past swept across the mind of the snowy-haired widow, and were further augmented by the different starlike lights which shone from the numerous windows in Dunfern Mansion, directly opposite where she lay.

A couple of days found her almost rested after such a trying night as that on which she arrived, and observing the sharpest reticence lest she might be known, she nerved herself to appear next day at Dunfern Mansion, to accomplish the last wish of her late lover and husband, for whom she ventured so much and gained so little, and particularly to try and see her son.

The morning was warm and fine; numerous birds kept chirping outside the little cottage of Mrs. Durand. The widow, with swollen eyes and face of faded fear, prepared herself for the trying moment, which she was certain of achieving. Partaking of a very slight breakfast, she told Mrs. Durand not to expect her for

dinner.

Marching down the hill's face, she soon set foot on the main road that led direct to Dunfern Mansion. Being admitted by Nancy Bennet, a prim old dame, who had been in charge of the lodge for the last eighteen years, the forlorn widow, whose heart sank in despair as she slowly walked up the great and winding avenue she once claimed, reached the huge door through which she had been unconsciously carried by Marjory Mason a good many years ago.

Gently ringing the bell, the door was attended by a strange face. Reverently asking to have an interview with Sir John Dunfern, how the death-like glare fell over the eyes of the disappointed as the footman informed her of his demise! "Madam, if you cast your eyes thence—[here the sturdy footman pointed to the family graveyard, lying quite adjacent, and in which the offcast of effrontery had oftentimes trodden]—you can with ease behold the rising symbol of death which the young nobleman, Sir Hugh Dunfern, has lavishly and unscrupulously erected to his fond memory."

The crushed hopes of an interview with the man she brought with head of bowed and battered bruises, of blasted untruths and astounding actions, to a grave of premature solitude were further crumbled to atoms in an instant. They were driven beyond retention, never again to be fostered with feverish fancy. After the deplorable news of her rightful husband's death had been conveyed to the sly and shameless questioner, who tried hard to balance her faintish frame unobserved, she asked an interview with Sir Hugh Dunfern. This also was denied, on the ground of absence from home.

Heavily laden with the garb of disappointment did the wandering woman of wayward wrong retrace her footsteps from the door for ever, and leisurely walked down the artistic avenue of carpeted care, never more to face the furrowed frowns of friends who, in years gone by, bestowed on her the praises of poetic powers. Forgetful almost of her present movements, the dangerous signal of widowhood was seen to float along the family graveyard of the Dunferns.

Being beforehand acquaint with the numerous and costly tombstones erected individually, regardless of price, the wearied and sickly woman of former healthy tread was not long in observing the latest tablet, of towering height, at the north-east end of the sacred plot.

There seemed a touchy stream of gilded letters carefully cut on its marble face, and on reading them with watery eye and stooping form, was it anything

remarkable that a flood of tears bathed the verdure that peeped above the soil?

The lines were these:—

I.

The hand of death hath once more brought
The lifeless body here to lie,
Until aroused with angels' voice,
Which calls it forth, no more to die.

II.

This man, of health and honest mind,
Had troubles great to bear whilst here,
Which cut him off, in manhood's bloom,
To where there's neither frown nor tear.

III.

His life was lined with works of good
For all who sought his affluent aid;
His life-long acts of charity
Are sure to never pass unpaid.

IV.

Sir John Dunfern, whose noble name
Is heard to echo, far and wide,
In homes of honour, truth, and right,
With which he here lies side by side.

V.

The wings of love and lasting strength
Shall flap above his hollow bed;
Angelic sounds of sweetest strain
Have chased away all tears he shed.

VI.

Then, when the glorious morn shall wake
Each member in this dust of ours,
To give to each the sentence sure
Of everlasting Princely Power—

VII.

He shall not fail to gain a seat
Upon the bench of gloried right,
To don the crown of golden worth
Secured whilst braving Nature's fight.

After carefully reading these lines the figure of melting woe sat for a long time in silence until a footstep came up from behind, which alarmed her not a little. Looking up she beheld the face of a youth whose expression was very mournful, and asking after her mission, was informed she had been casting one last look on the monument of her lamented husband.

“Mighty Heavens!” exclaimed Sir Hugh Dunfern, “are you the vagrant who ruined the very existence of him whom you now profess to have loved? You, the wretch of wicked and wilful treachery, and formerly the wife of him before whose very bones you falsely kneel! Are you the confirmed traitoress of the trust reposed in you by my late lamented, dearest, and most noble of fathers? Are you aware that the hypocrisy you manifested once has been handed down to me as an heirloom of polluted possession, and stored within this breast of mine, an indelible stain for life, or, I might say, during your known and hated existence?

“False woman! Wicked wife! Detested mother! Bereft widow!

“How darest thou set foot on the premises your chastity should have protected and secured! What wind of transparent touch must have blown its blasts of boldest bravery around your poisoned person and guided you within miles of the mansion I proudly own?

“What spirit but that of evil used its influence upon you to dare to bend your footsteps of foreign tread towards the door through which they once stole unknown? Ah, woman of sin and stray companion of tutorism, arise, I demand you, and strike across that grassy centre as quickly as you can, and never more make your hated face appear within these mighty walls. I can never own you; I can never call you mother; I cannot extend the assistance your poor, poverty-stricken attire of false don silently requests; neither can I ever meet you on this side the grave, before which you so pityingly kneel!”

Speechless and dogged did the dishonoured mother steal for ever from the presence of her son, but not before bestowing one final look at the brightened eye and angry countenance of him who loaded on her his lordly abuse. The bowed form of former stateliness left for ever the grounds she might have owned without even daring to offer one word of repentance or explanation to her son.

Walking leisurely along the road that reached Dilworth Castle, how the trying moments told upon her who shared in pangs of insult and poverty!—how the thoughts of pleasant days piled themselves with parched power upon the hilltop of remembrance and died away in the distance! The whirling brain became more

staid as she heard the approach of horses' feet, and stopping to act the part of Lot's wife, gave such a haggard stare at the driver of the vehicle as caused him to make a sudden halt. Asking her to have a seat, the weary woman gladly mounted upon its cushion with thankfulness, and alighted on reaching its journey's end, about three miles from Audley Hall. The drive was a long one, and helped to rest the tired body of temptation.

Returning thanks to the obliging driver, she marched wearily along until she reached the home of her first refuge after flight.

Perceiving the yellow shutters firmly bolted against the light admitters of Audley Hall, she feared disappointment was also awaiting her. Knocking loudly twice before any attempt was made to open the door, there came at last an aged man with halting step and shaking limb.

"Is Major Iddesleigh at home?" asked the saddened widow. "Oh, madam, he has been dead almost twelve years, and since then no one has occupied this Hall save myself, who am caretaker. The Marquis of Orland was deceived by his nephew, who sold it in an underhand manner to the major, and he resolved that never again would he allow it to be occupied since the major's death by any outsider."

"You are rather lonely," said the widow. "Yes, yes," replied he; "but I have always been accustomed living alone, being an old bachelor, and wish to remain so. It is better to live a life of singleness than torture both body and soul by marrying a woman who doesn't love you, like the good Sir John Dunfern—a nobleman who lived only some miles from this, and who died lately broken-hearted—who became so infatuated with an upstart of unknown parentage, who lived in Dilworth Castle, with one Lord Dilworth, the previous owner, that he married her offhand, and, what was the result, my good woman?—why she eventually ran off with a poor tutor! and brought the hairs of hoary whiteness of Sir John Dunfern to the grave much sooner than in all probability they would have, had he remained like me."

Facing fumes of insult again, thought the listener. And asking after Major Iddesleigh's will, eagerly awaited his reply.

Placing one hand upon her shoulder, and pointing with the other, "Behold," said he, "yonder church? that was his last will—Iddesleigh Church. It was only when the jaws of death gaped for their prey that the major was forced to alter his will, having had it previously prepared in favour of his niece, whose whereabouts

could never be traced until after his death.” “Enough—enough, I must go,” said the painful listener, and thanking the old man for his information, which, like her son’s, had screwed its bolts of deadly weight more deeply down on the lid of abstract need, turned her back on Audley Hall for ever.

decoration

decoration

CHAPTER XIX.

HOPE sinks a world of imagination. It in almost every instance never fails to arm the opponents of justice with weapons of friendly defence, and gains their final fight with peaceful submission. Life is too often stripped of its pleasantness by the steps of false assumption, marring the true path of life-long happiness which should be pebbled with principle, piety, purity, and peace.

Next morning, after the trying adventure of the lonely outcast, was the scene of wonder at Dilworth Castle. Henry Hawkes, the head gardener under the Marquis of Orland, on approaching the little summer-house in which Irene Iddesleigh so often sat in days of youth, was horrified to find the dead body of a woman, apparently a widow, lying prostrate inside its mossy walls. “Lord, protect me!” shouted poor Hawkes, half distractedly, and hurried to Dilworth Castle to inform the inmates of what he had just seen.

They all rushed towards the little rustic building to verify the certainty of the gardener’s remarks. There she lay, cold, stiff, and lifeless as Nero, and must have been dead for hours. They advised the authorities, who were soon on the spot.

What stinging looks of shame the Marquis cast upon her corpse on being told

that it was that of the once beautiful Lady Dunfern—mother of the present heir to Dunfern estate!

Lying close at hand was an old and soiled card, with the words almost beyond distinction, “Irene Iddesleigh.” In an instant her whole history flashed before the unforgiving mind of the Marquis, and being a sharer in her devices, through his nephew Oscar Otwell, ordered her body to be conveyed to the morgue, at the same time intimating to Sir Hugh Dunfern her demise.

It transpired at the inquest, held next day, that she was admitted the previous night to the grounds of Dilworth Castle by the porter at the lodge, giving her name as “Irene Iddesleigh.”

She must have taken refuge in the little construction planned under her personal supervision whilst inhabiting Dilworth Castle during her girlhood, and, haunted with the never-dying desire to visit once more its lovely grounds, wandered there to die of starvation.

No notice whatever was taken of her death by her son, who obeyed to the last letter his father’s instructions, and carried them out with tearless pride.

The little narrow bed at the lowest corner on the west side of Seaforde graveyard was the spot chosen for her remains. Thus were laid to rest the orphan of Colonel Iddesleigh, the adopted daughter and imagined heiress of Lord and Lady Dilworth, what might have been the proud wife of Sir John Dunfern, the unlawful wife of Oscar Otwell, the suicidal outcast, and the despised and rejected mother.

She who might have swayed society’s circle with the sceptre of nobleness—she who might still have shared in the greatness of her position and defied the crooked stream of poverty in which she so long sailed—had she only been, first of all, true to self, then the honourable name of Sir John Dunfern would have maintained its standard of pure and noble distinction, without being spotted here and there with heathenish remarks inflicted by a sarcastic public on the administerer of proper punishment; then the dignified knight of proud and upright ancestry would have been spared the pains of incessant insult, the mockery of equals, the haunted diseases of mental trials, the erring eye of harshness, and the throbbing twitch of constant criticism.

It was only the lapse of a few minutes after the widowed waif left Dunfern Mansion until the arrival of her son from London, who, after bidding his mother

quit the grounds owned by him, blotted her name for ever from his book of memory; and being strongly prejudiced by a father of faultless bearing, resolved that the sharers of beauty, youth, and false love should never have the slightest catch on his affections.

The End

ERRATA.

The printed book was typeset and proofread more carefully than most books of similar literary quality. The author's Errata slip was attached to the beginning of the book. It is included here for completeness; all listed changes have been made in the text. Notes in the final column are added by the transcriber.

PAGE

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|---|
| 82 | Read—"was
extended him." | <i>Original form ("were" for "was" with two subjects) is
technically correct.</i> |
| 154 | "senk" should
read "seek." | |
| 156 | "took" is
unnecessary. | <i>Context:
entered the room, and taking her accustomed seat to
partake of it, took as best she could.
Author may have intended "... taking her accustomed
seat, partook of it as best she could".</i> |
| 179 | Read "which calls
it forth." | |
| 184 | "ofthand" should
be "offhand." | <i>Author may have intended "out of hand".</i> |

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