



THE LETTER SLIPPED OUT OF HIS FINGERS, AND LAY AT HIS FEET.—*Page 155.*

JOHN GENTLEMAN,

TRAMP.

BY

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(HERMIONE)

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ETC.

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JOHN GENTLEMAN, TRAMP.



CHAPTER I.

JOHN GENTLEMAN, TRAMP.

WONDER, now, if that woman would scream if she knew a beggar like me was lookin' in at her countin' her shillings ?'

The speaker gathered up his long legs from the right and left sprawl necessary to bring him down to the low level of a cottage window-sill, and, drawing aside, stretched himself up to his full height of gaunt, nineteen-year-old ladhood. His curly, unkempt hair hung like a tangled mane about his neck ; his face was daring—taken in conjunction with the fair head, lion-like. He quietly moved down the little garden walk and took a seat on the low wall, evidently to ruminate.

'Two chimneys : that means she hasn't more than two rooms in her white bandbox o' a

mansion. Reckon she couldn't afford to give a square meal to a hungry beggar in payment for some job. Feel able to put that mountain out o' sight 'most. Criftens! What a rare place the country is!'

He looked round at the sweet pansy rows like two long purple stripes edging the squares of grass before the latticed windows, then at the three tree-shadowed roads at whose junction the white cottage stood. His eyes turned wistfully to the undulating valley beyond which Ben Ledi heaved up a purple shoulder under its mantle of fine gold-grey mist. Round and about the country were chains of hills fainter in outline, yet defined, as cloud peaks in an evening light.

'Blessed if those mountains aren't takin' hands and jinga-ringin' round about like the little shavers at a fair, or else you are turnin' cranky in the head, John Gentleman,' he murmured confusedly.

The shrewd eyes of an elderly woman had been watching the new specimen of vagrant life seated on her garden wall, and their owner, suddenly observing the thin cheek of the intruder whiten, hastened down the little path to inspect him more closely.

'What ails ye?' she inquired, touching him gently on the sleeve.

‘Hunger,’ he replied quietly.

‘I dinna like to see tramps sittin’ on my dyke, but I dinna like to think o’ folk wantin’ when I hae oucht; sae ye maun gather yersel’ thegither, my man, and walk in to rest ye and eat,’ she continued kindly.

‘I’ll come if ye promise me a job to pay for the food,’ came from the figure still immovable on the low wall.

‘Weel, weel, jist as ye like; there’s mony a thing waitin’ for an odd man to do, but he seldom turns up that’s willin’.’

‘Then I’ll eat a meal; but mind it’s no favour—I’m payin’ for’t wi’ my work,’ he said fiercely.

‘Ay, ay,’ she replied soothingly; ‘a man’s no’ the worse o’ a bit spirit. Walk ye in.’

A beautifully clean little place was the kitchen, with its white floor and rows of shining tins; covers it had none, but a host of minor pans, etc., which glittered like water, and served the purpose of more pretentious reflectors. A door at one end of the kitchen stood open, and gave a glimpse of an outhouse and a green, with a burn chattering at its limit.

‘Where do you come frae?’ the woman asked, busying herself over his meal.

‘Glasgow.’

‘Why, that’s forty odd miles! A fine city, I

suppose. I've never managed that length yet. Come, eat, and dinna speak till ye're done.'

The lad tossed back his shaggy locks and began a ravenous attack on the viands set before him, the woman scanning him narrowly meantime.

'A wild, famished bit lad,' she decided; 'bonnie-featured, too. Whaur hae I seen a face like his?'

In the midst of her wondering, he stopped eating, and lifted his keen blue eyes.

'What's the name o' this place and this shire?'

'Greenlea, in Perthshire.'

'Where's the shops, and the theatres, and the whisky dens?'

'Never speak o' sic a thing as a theatre here! A theatre's the gate o' hell,' the woman returned severely.

'Is't? There are other gates to hell, mistress,' the lad returned.

'Surely. We hae neither shops nor theatres here; the place is but a loanin'—no' even a village.'

'I took yon barn among the trees for the theatre. What is't—a show?'

'*That!* It's the kirk o' oor faithers! What kind o' upbringing in a' the earth hae you had,' she exclaimed, in dismay.

'Like that o' most folks left as a kind o'

unexpected legacy to the parish. I got on rare as what the city people call a street Arab; but when I got sort o' disqualified through size, I had to go on the tramp. Since then I've been down in my luck, I have,' he explained.

'What's yer name?'

'John Gentleman, mistress.'

'Ye never were given sic a name! What's yer *Christian* name?'

'Never had another name; couldn't wish a better. The 'House' called me it as a kind o' laugh at fate; perhaps 'cause they knew I must hae been a joy to my lovin' parents!' said he bitterly.

A pitiful smile touched the woman's sensible Scotch face. 'Ye'll hae some trade, hae ye no?'

'No; but I can read, write, cast up accounts, and draw finely. Oh, the towns are uncommon attentive to the head if they do leave the stomach to look after its own affairs.'

'I've been thinking the laird here could find room for an odd man. Harvest is nigh; maybe ye might gang farther an' fare worse than by stayin' here a while. Ye're welcome to the attic abune the loft; and,' seeing a frown contract his brow, 'ye could gie me a hand wi' odd things in return for the board.'

After a meditative silence, John Gentleman spoke :

‘The country’s a fine place, surely, and I will stay a while ; but I couldna *live* long in it. I would be back to the city again.’

‘It is a’ as a body is used, maybe,’ said she sympathisingly.

‘Ay, I could die in the country, but never live long in it.’

Just then a young girl entered the kitchen by the back door, and stood, milk-pail in hand, regarding the stranger with some astonishment.

‘Hae ye got the milkin’ by, Mirren?’

‘Ay, mother.’

‘Ye needna mind bringin’ in the wood ; this lad is goin’ to do odds and ends for us and ithers till he gets fair started some better way,’ was all the information the girl received as to the newcomer introduced to Greenlea that fateful summer evening.

Mirren moved quickly about. An energetic girl of three-and-twenty years, she had other thoughts in her head than for the stranger ; indeed, save for an occasional curious look from her clear grey eyes in the direction of the tall figure carrying in wood and water, she might have seemed forgetful of his very existence. When his task was finished, he disappeared outside, and no more was heard

of him till a visitor called after dusk. He was a tall, aristocratic man, nearly fifty, and was welcomed by Mirren's mother as Mr. Holmes.

'A beautiful evening, Mrs. Laurie. I just dropped in to ask who might the young savage in your garden be? My foot slipped in crossing the stepping-stones at your greenside, and I should have been drenched in the burn had not the fellow seized me in a vice-like grip and deposited me on dry land. I offered him a shilling for the attention, which he politely threw into the stream!'

'Dear me, I'm sorry he was rude, laird; but he is a queer, independent lad. I believe he thinks himself quite the equal o' quality! I've ta'en him on for odd jobs, and I'm that sorry he's fell out wi' you. I was hopin' ye would kindly give him a place at Craigpark, sir,' the good woman said.

'Ah, a tramp!' said the laird contemptuously.

'He doesna look like a tramp, laird; and what's mair, he doesna act like one,' Mrs. Laurie explained, drawing back the snowy window screen for the laird's better inspection of the offender. He looked out good-humouredly.

The savage had washed his face and shaken his tawny locks into an attempt at order, the result being that he made a strong picture standing out clearly defined against tree

shadows. As the laird stepped back a step, the better to focus his vision, his figure unconsciously fell into the self-same attitude as that other outside; and Mirren, who had been standing unobserved at the fireplace, uttered an exclamation. The laird and her mother seemed too absorbed in watching the loungee outside to heed her.

‘Really, Mrs. Laurie, he is a very handsome young heathen indeed,’ Mr. Holmes said, with a short laugh. ‘Now, if he were educated, I should predict the future of—say a democratic leader—for him!’

‘Then ye’ll forget his bit pride and speak to him, laird?’ Mrs. Laurie said.

‘Not to-night. I shall consider the matter, and if Haddow has anything for him, he shall have it. By the way, Mirren, I thought it rather shabby of Haddow never to say till to-day that you two intend trying your fortunes in Glasgow after your marriage next month.’

Mirren hung her pretty brown head, and was silent.

‘Well, I hope the venture will turn out a success. Haddow is over thirty, and, if he can be kept steady, ought to do well. Don’t imagine I am annoyed, my good girl; not any more than is natural at the loss of a good all-round

man-servant and a pretty cottage maid. Good evening, Mrs. Laurie.'

He passed out with a courteous head inclination, and the two women once more were alone.

'Mother, did ye ever see two folk as like as the laird and that lad?' Mirren ejaculated. Mrs. Laurie turned aside from the girl's sharp eyes.

'Nonsense! There is nothing in common between a weel-born laird and a puir wanderer like John Gentleman,' she rejoined.

'Is *that* his name? The one looks as weel-born as the other,' retorted the girl, but her mother silenced her with a rebuke.

As the laird passed the figure at the gate, he halted.

'May I know your name?' he asked courteously.

'John Gentleman,' was the brief reply, with which the lad turned on his heel and left his questioner.

Mr. Holmes looked after the swinging form for an instant; then, with a gesture of impatience, walked off in the opposite direction, curling his lip.

'Talk of the heathen abroad; why, he is nothing to the savage at home. The idea of a fellow like that, doubtless a beggar's brat, being in utter ignorance of his place and class! Still

he is the most splendid type of tramp humanity I ever saw. I am half interested in this rare specimen, whose name modestly aspires to all that a king can be—a gentleman. John Gentleman—John Gentleman—by Jove!’



CHAPTER II.

THE BARN WEDDING.

BEFORE John Gentleman was a month in Greenlea, there had been a death and a marriage. A shepherd's wife up the mountain side was carried down from the bed she had occupied for twenty years to a resting-place here till the grave gives up its dead. The occasion of her burial was John Gentleman's introduction to Greenlea society. He stood apart from the mourners, watching the gossips with a contemptuous smile, until the old weaver, who acted as gravedigger, turned totteringly aside from the half-filled-in grave, and pronounced the ceremony over.

'A long time till ye'll be ready for me,' he croaked, poking one withered finger in the lad's side, his crazy head shaking with excess of age and levity.

'Ay, and how old may you be, Father Time?' John questioned.

‘As auld as the century; but I’ll maybe see it an’ you oot!’

‘Tak’ the laddie for yer successor, Robin. Ye’ll never see him oot, man,’ advised a twinkling-eyed man, who had just come upon the scene.

‘Length o’ leg is no length o’ days,’ mumbled old Robin Ray, hobbling off.

‘A queer auld body that. Ye’ll see mair o’ him shortly. There’s no’ a weddin’ but he comes in to rattle his auld bones, and argy the likelihood o’ tuckin’ the bride awa’ beneath the mools afore the year’s oot!’

‘He’ll no’ trouble folk much longer,’ John Gentleman said, watching the old weaver’s spider-like limbs jerking over the uneven ground until they disappeared in the doorway of his tiny house on the edge of the graveyard.

‘Oh, ye would wonder, man. He’s as lastin’ as an auld mummy!’

‘He’ll no’ hae far to flit from when his time comes,’ said John meditatively.

‘It would be a fine plan to bury him, whaur he’s been buried these last forty years, in his bit place there; it’s no much bigger than a tomb; an’ that lang chimney o’ his, wi’ his spade leanin’ against it, would mak’ a fine monument to him!’ suggested a thin, sinister-looking man, whom John Gentleman knew as Mirren Laurie’s lover.

‘Speak wee, speak wee! Gin auld Robin

hears ye, Davie Haddow, he'll mak' things hot for ye on the weddin'-day that's comin', the twinkling-eyed man enjoined, with uneasy glances backward.

'I'll souse him in the burn if he tries it on wi' me,' Haddow said, with an unpleasant darkening of his moody brow, and the group separated by common, yet unexpressed, consent.

Nevertheless that day at the graveyard was John Gentleman's presentation at the court of a rustic society. The farm women were told by the men who attended the funeral that Mistress Laurie had got a fine big chap, with such a head of hair, to be her odd man, and help harvest wherever he was wanted in the loaning. A quaint old man, with wavering voice and dim eyes, was the minister, and he had spoken to the stranger, thereby giving him a badge of respectability in certain eyes as surely as though it had been tied on his arm. And the newcomer went in and out unawed by the eyes of admiring milkmaids and their sullen swains. His mind was full of contempt for the rustic, clod-like satisfaction with animal existence. Already he was beginning to fret under the standstill experiment, already chafing at the 'dumb, driven cattle' attitude of these men, while he had himself the first fierce longings to be 'a hero in the strife.' These men, bone of

his bone, flesh of his flesh, by the brotherhood of a common humanity, angered him with their servility on the one hand, and their brutality on the other. 'Classes' and 'masses,' he perceived, was the world's vulgar summing up of her inhabitants, and a quick resentment, which all through John Gentleman's Arab days had been smouldering, now showed itself in an occasional blaze of passion at the wrong adjustment of the justice scales. All mind does not go to the class scale, nor all matter to the masses. He had a curious desire to see the festivities at Mirren Laurie's wedding,—not the service itself, but the merry-making,—and was gratified to find the sight did not entail a favour, being open to all the loaning folks irrespective of calling. Thus it was that after the wedding was over, and the harvest moon was high, the hillside farm doors opened and let out into the moonlight knots of lads and lasses who had not been at the simple ceremony, but were guests at the Barn Ball. *The Barn*, dedicated to Hymen, belonged to the glebe lands, but was never despoiled of its associations by the tread of a work-a-day foot, or the sound of anything less than a festive song. When John Gentleman went down to the hollow in which the Barn stood, he found the door open and the place empty, save for the old weaver hobbling over

the well-swept floor. In the wall niches were torches throwing flickering light on the grey flags; handfuls of corn, with blue cornflowers and flaring poppies, were thrust into the wall crevices; the fiddler's seat was in a little alcove where the blind man would be safe from the uproarious dancers. John stood still on the threshold, struck with the eerie, uncanny place.

'Oh ho! Ye've come to the weddin'. Wait till ye see them dancin' like as if the grave winna swallow them a' up. When I see them at their mad antics, it's no' them I see, mark ye; it's the shadows o' the ithers I hae buried lang syne a' starting up an' flickerin' oot on the walls o' my memory. Sae will it be wi' them. I'll bury them a', ' muttered the old gravedigger confidently.

'But you are too old to see them to their graves,' interrupted the other harshly. He was filled with dread of this death's-head at a wedding feast.

'Seventy years hae I seen. Ma folks never dee till ninety. I'll bury them a'—this generation's banes are but gristle!' said he contemptuously.

'I wouldn't throw cold water on the weddin' feast for a' that, Robin.'

Just then the Barn door swung open, and the blind fiddler was led in to his seat. Following the bride and bridegroom came a bevy of rosy-

faced, laughing lasses, wearing bright striped skirts and fresh print uppergowns. Taste in the men's attire was conspicuous by its absence, red and blue neckcloths being the favourite spots of colour on the expanse of homespun bosoms. A wild scream from the fiddle was a signal for choosing partners, this ball being conducted without the services of a master of ceremonies; and, before the onlookers could wink, a Scotch reel was being madly entered upon with all the combined vigour of feet, arms, and throats at play. On and on the mad merriment went, faster and more furious, until the spinning figures seemed turning in John Gentleman's bewildered head. He stood alone near the door; and, had he known it, he was by far the most picturesque figure there. A touch on the shoulder recalled him from his bewilderment, and, looking round, his face took a frown as he saw the laird was at his elbow, with an amused, tolerant smile in his eyes.

'Well, John Gentleman, did you ever see such a thing before?'

'No; I never saw a weddin' nor a berryin' till I came here.'

'Do you like it?'

'Yes—they like it.'

'Savage, rather, this kind of rejoicings at a

solemn time! Where is old Robin Ray?—he is usually at these things to represent the serious element. Have you spoken with him?’

‘Yes.’

‘Think him rather odd? He is the only person out of place here, of course.’

‘No, he isn’t,’ with a red flush mounting to his fair temples.

‘Indeed? Perhaps you will explain?’ said the laird haughtily.

‘Folks as come to sneer at humbler men and women’s treats are a sight more out o’ place, to my mind!’

‘You forget yourself, my lad.’

‘If I do, it’s to give you a chance o’ rememberin’ yourself! You would oblige them savages abune all things by goin’ your own roads.’

‘You are a singular lad, Gentleman. I should like to hear all the venom in your mind at once, but outside—not where every ear is straining to overhear our remarks. Will you come out and tell me what you are driving at?’ Mr. Holmes said, more gently.

‘No; I’m not goin’ to give you my mind, ’cause you think savages have none to speak o’, and I’m not goin’ to check you, ’cause you’re pretty old; but,’ clenching his fists and bringing the blaze of his blue eyes direct on the

laird's, 'if I'd overheard a chap my own age call me a savage to women folk, I'd hae broken every bone in his body!'

'Look here, Gentleman. I beg your pardon for that speech of mine, but you had yourself to blame for it; it was your conduct, not yourself, I thought savage. Now, if you have a right to that name you are so proud of, you must forget this;' the laird laid his hand on the half-turned shoulder as he spoke.

'All right, I'll forget about it, but I hate you all the same, and it's better to say't than deny't,' he muttered.

'Haddow is leaving to-night for Glasgow; will you think about taking his place?'

'Not if ye mean it to make up for yer sneaking.'

The laird bit his lip, but answered quietly, 'No—not at all.'

'Then I'll come for a bit, if ye leave go my arm, and that's all.'

'Good-night, Gentleman.'

'Good-night!' was the reply, gruffly and grudgingly given.

The dancers at last dispersed, as the torches were flaring out of their sockets, and throwing fitful shadows on the floor, where were scattered the corn wreaths with the crushed poppies and flowers that grow between the sheaves. The

lad and the gravedigger were last to leave the deserted banquet-hall together.

‘I’ll never forget Mirren Laurie’s weddin’,
John said.

‘Oh, ye will; ye are young. It’s only the auld man’s memory hings up shadows on the wa’. The ghosts o’ my deid dancers mun be walkin’ this nicht. *I’ve* bury’t them a’!’

John Gentleman was destined never to forget his first wedding. But that belongs to after days.



CHAPTER III.

DISCUSSIONS.

AS it came to pass, John Gentleman was not intended by fate to fill the place of all-round man at Craigpark, for the laird found out his aptitude for figures and clear caligraphy would be of more use to him than the dubious service of willing but impatient hands attuned to labour. So he was elevated to a seat in the owner of Greenlea's office, a bright room on the upper storey of Craigpark, and initiated into the mystery of factoring the estate. For this he received his own terms—not a penny more or less—twelve shillings a week, and boarded with his first friend in Greenlea, Widow Laurie. To Mr. Holmes he was distinctly distant, and as remote from recognising in him a patron as in the hour of their meeting. But he was changed, even in six months, visibly changed in aspect and demeanour—a fact which aroused dull envy in the men and undisguised admira-

tion in the women. His form naturally showed to great advantage in its new rough grey clothing, while the head, which must ever have rendered him noticeable, suited the orthodox felt hat which makes most men commonplace. The only thing which saved him from rustic anger was his decided preference for their society rather than that of his benefactor, in whose company he was forced to be during at least eight hours of the day. Together they were seen everywhere, inspecting such and such a cottage, or tramping the heathery hills starting game in the covers; still not one whit further than the limit of courtesy did the laird, not the young man, feel himself suffered to advance. Mr. Holmes owned the most of Brails, a village eight miles off, but his chief interest seemed to centre in Greenlea, where he was neither born nor brought up; the mansion-house at Brails was let to strangers, for the laird had been an only child, and had now neither kith nor kin to cajole or worry him into occupying his rightful position in domain or society.

‘The laird’s ta’en a fancy to John Gentleman, surely,’ Widow Laurie murmured to herself, as she stood out in the sunshine of the following summer, and, white kerchief on head, watched the two stride away up the road together.

She was interested in the tramp whom fate had led to her door, more so because he compelled the laird's respect, and the laird in Widow Laurie's eyes was an idol set up throughout the generations for the proud worship of his tenantry. Then the young lad filled in a blank, in her life, and occupied her mind with conjectures, her hands with a hundred little offices; she forgot to grieve over Mirren's stray letters telling of the fierce struggle for existence in the great city, and hinting at the burden of life. When a young wife begins to moralise, her husband has commenced to demoralise.

This morning a letter had come to the cottage briefly telling of the birth of a daughter to Mirren, and adding that they meant to call her Lily to mind them of the country, and for the sake of a young woman who had been kind to both mother and child. The letter was addressed 'East Wynd,' and John Gentleman started when it was read aloud to him by the unsuspecting widow, who knew no difference between a wynd and a wayside.

Up the road the laird and John trudged together in silence until they came to a wood at the foot of the hills, where a hush, unbroken by the bird choir, was on everything. Here the laird spoke.

'You never see anything in the grandest city

to compare with the simplest aspect of nature. Men and women in such a country ought to be good, better than the crowded town folk with their dwarfed or blackened things, railed in as sacred, and called trees! You would not go back to the city, Gentleman, would you?’

‘That depends. There are lumps of clay here, if there are devils there.’

‘Which means, you would rather be a city devil than a country clod! Not a wise wish that.’

‘I hae seen devils in clods too. I think a very bad chap might be made a very good one, if he isn’t a clod at heart. It’s no use if they’re clods, city or country.’

‘True. Clods are not restricted to spheres or districts. The greatest clod I ever knew was a pobleman’s son, and lived in a paradise of refinement. You are not far wrong in some of your ideas, my lad; only you must admit that generations of men and women, cultured and delicately reared from their earliest recollection, do not produce the same type of clod as—as—well, the classes which are on a lower rung of the social ladder.’

Mr. Holmes felt he had touched on the one subject sufficient to rouse the tiger in his strange companion’s nature, and shot a quick look at the face slightly above his own. Gentleman’s eyes were shooting out sparks of

anger; his nostril quivered. A slight twitch lifted the corner of his mouth as he replied.

‘I say that the people *you* belong to are worse a deal than those I come from, because it’s *their* fault the poor don’t know how to rise above themselves. They need tellin’ they are made o’ the same flesh—a little whiter—that the wax in their veins is blood in ours!’

‘Yes, quite true; only it must be a wise man who would adjust the two aspect of classes and masses so that neither side of the picture would present too dark a face. A careful training might rub off the extreme touchiness of your youth and enthusiasm, Gentleman; then you would be as fit for the work of reforming and elevating “clods” of whatever sphere as any one I have ever known.’

‘That’s a deal for you to say, that hates my kind.’

‘That is your stubborn mistake. I don’t hate your kind. I cannot get a grip of them although I would fain reach out a helping hand. I have not the gift, the expressed sympathy, whatever you like to call it, that knows where to lay a finger on the secret springs of their beings, although I know behind them must be a wealth of possibilities.’

‘If you’re speaking true, it’s a pity you’re an aristocrat, laird,’ the lad said.

By this time they had passed through the wood, and came in sight of a tiny hut, the shepherd's home.

'I shall build that man a good cottage and make him a present of it. They are wretchedly poor,' said Mr. Holmes compassionately.

'You would do him a better thing to give him more work and wages, so as he could pay honest-like for his house.'

A slouching figure appeared at the cottage gable, carrying a pair of snared rabbits. There was no time to conceal either himself or the game, so the shepherd just stood sullenly regarding the laird and John.

'Well, Allan, at your old tricks again! I supposed the trouble you got into at Brails last year was sufficient for you. I declare to you, the next time you are discovered at your favourite pastime, I shall punish you.'

'Hae you gamekeeper sneaks been spyin' agen?' with a nod towards John Gentleman.

'I am no gamekeeper, Allan. I never knew the creatures had keepers, one man more than another,' John assured him.

The laird was deeply annoyed, and called to Gentleman to return with him, and leave the question of bettering the cottage till the fellow was in a fitter frame of mind and had digested his ill-gotten gains; so the

homeward journey was accomplished almost in silence.

‘I am tired, and will rest in your room a few minutes,’ said Mr. Holmes, as the widow’s cottage was reached.

So it came about that John Gentleman entertained his benefactor for the first time that afternoon.

It was a low-roofed room, with one flower-filled window opposite a box-bed of the familiar Scotch type. The floor was as white as strength could scrub it; the settle was wooden, but with one loose cushion which the sitter could self-adjust who was fortunate enough to secure that square. A row of rude shelves ran across one side of the wall, and held a selection of second-hand books from the ancient Brails curiosity shop, which intensified the laird’s interest in their owner. He determined to add to the store by some way or other, although the possibility of establishing a friendship just then seemed more remote than ever.

When at last there was no further excuse for remaining, he went into the kitchen to inquire for Mirren and her husband. He was touched at the old woman’s despondent face, and grew grave at the implied hints as to Haddow’s stability.

‘I should like to know the truth about their

situation. Mrs. Laurie, to be candid, I don't like the look of things. I shall send John Gentleman there to ascertain all about them, and if it is as I fear, Haddow shall get a chance of coming back here to his old situation, for poor Mirren's sake and the little child's.'

John Gentleman's eyes brightened ; his delight surprised him into speech.

'None knows better than me all about East Wynd. Why, I was born there, and lodged there after I started in business as an Arab!'

The laird looked wistfully across at him, and John read his thoughts.

'I'll not give ye the slip, Mr. Holmes ; I'll come back this time for certain ; it will let me know many things, maybe, to get back for a whiff of misery sight-seeing, after being on the tramp for four years back.'

'What will come o' yer meetin', John?' queried Widow Laurie.

John's face flushed, but he lifted his eyes to the laird's steady gaze.

'Ye didn't know I had started findin' out if the clods had anything a-back of them, Mr. Holmes ; but I've had three men here twice a week to talk to, and one out o' the three's a devil in him ; he's a right sort.'

'Indeed!' with no evident surprise. 'Well,

John, I shall take charge of your meeting while you are attending to my business.'

A gleam of amusement crept into both men's eyes. A challenge proffered and accepted in the exchange of a thought.

So it was that Mr. Holmes unconsciously put the thread of his own history into John's hand, and the tramp had the clue of his own destiny.



CHAPTER IV.

THE LILY OF EAST WYND.

IN one of the teeming, misery hunted quarters of Glasgow was the home to which David Haddow had brought his young wife. For a few months he had managed to sustain a less humble home, but that was only while temporary employment in one of the shipbuilding yards lasted. Even in those early and evanescent days of comparative prosperity, the simple country girl shrank from the men and women with whom she was bound to come in contact, whose lives were one round of labour, with stoppages for drink. Drink! drink! drink! The men drank the silver for no given reason, the women drank the coppers away for very despair, and the old men and women, caricatured by the name of children, starved till they were able to beg or steal. It seemed a hideous dream. The stifing atmosphere, whose gusts of impurity are the same all the world over

where poverty and dirt herd together, sickened Mirren; but she was soon to reach to a still lower phase of city life. Haddow, who had turned to his trade as a joiner for a means of support, found that it would not prove a dependence to a newcomer in a shipbuilding yard. Last comer is first goer when the busy time is over, and a ship is well forward in construction before the joiner is called into requisition; hence the speedy necessity for removal to the East Wynd. Probably the descent had not been so headlong if Haddow had not developed the latent evil of his nature and given the reins of reason over to the hands of self. As it was, Mirren found herself domiciled in an ill-ventilated room in the heart of Glasgow's outcast and abandoned.

By the time her little one was born she had grown familiar to the hourly visits of wretched women on borrowing or gossip intent; her eye was accustomed to squalor; her ear attuned to the scuffle, the scream, the blow of infuriated, unsexed men and women. She longed for a hush, for peace, even if to obtain it she might have to cross the threshold of the grave. At times her heart rose in bitter resentment, which gave a sting to every reluctant slow-dropping tear that oozed beneath her lids as she pressed them against the pillow in the night watches,

when she listened for Haddow's uncertain foot on the stair.

The Wynd had one universally acknowledged terror—a creature who had been an imp of mischief in childhood, and had in riper years earned the fame of infamy. 'The Lily,' as the scoffers named her, forced her way one evening into Mirren's house, and refused to be dislodged. Her coarse yet withal bright beauty attracted Mirren, despite her instinctive shrinking, and she suffered her to remain on condition that she went home quietly before Haddow returned from his search for work, which usually extended to the early morning hours.

The Lily's bold black eyes grew softer in the course of a few months' intimacy with the country girl, who was pining and fading in her prison house. She grew confidential, and Mirren pitiful—a condition of things which insensibly drew the two utterly opposite natures into a sympathy akin to friendship. The Lily's smirched purity seemed washed white again by the young wife's tears, and it looked as though there was a strong stem of womanhood on which another bud of purity might bloom.

'Thirty-three years o' life hae I wasted,' she said sorrowfully one night.

'Oh, woman, woman! It's as lang as Christ, God's ain Son, had o' life in this war!''

Mirren's simple words seemed to choke the waif, and she dropped her first real saving tears with her head in Mirren's lap.

After that, friendship was easy. Haddow made one or two heroic objections when in a maudlin righteousness, as his poor wife told herself; but he had a distinct fear of meddling with the terror of the Wynd, whose latest freak he considered to be the prelude of a march to final destruction. So The Lily remained steadfast to Mirren, as some hungering, strayed animal might be which had been taken in and sheltered.

The woman's wistful desire after holier things was confirmed into strong resolution the hour Mirren whispered over the baby's new-born face, 'She shall be called Lily for you, and to mind me o' the valley at home.'

The two, mother and child, had fared badly but for The Lily's care. Haddow never seemed to like the child, indeed, avoided it carefully, and absented himself almost wholly from home. Then Lily showed her strong affection for the helpless ones, and worked honestly in an East End mill, out of which in former days she had been expelled. On one of her daily excursions to and from the Wynd she encountered a stranger searching for a young countrywoman named Mrs. Haddow. His form was strangely familiar to her—as lifelong inhabitant of the

place; but that did not so much engage her thought as the wild hope of some possible good for Mirren did. Therefore she stepped over to him.

‘Is it Mrs. Haddow ye seek?’

‘Yes; a young woman; she’s from the country,’ the stranger said.

‘Come wi’ me; I ken her. Maybe ye are a friend o’ hers?’

‘Yes; at least I’m sent from her friends.’

The Lily led him through one passage and another with a rapidity which demanded close following. The stranger’s eyes darted swift looks at the stunted children engaged in disgorging the vegetable treasures from a choked-up gutterway, and his head consequently came to occasional grief against the low ceilings of the passages. Still he steered his way as one accustomed to such places, and followed his guide up the final rickety stair.

‘You bide there a minute till I tell her you’re here,’ Lily said.

‘Say John Gentleman is here with a message from the Laird o’ Greenlea.’

The Lily wheeled round, and uttered a suppressed cry of astonishment.

‘John Gentleman! Hae ye forgotten me? Whaur hae ye been these five years? Ye’re mair than Gentleman by name noo,’—touch-

ing his clothes. 'Hae ye fallen in wi' your fortune?'

'No, I didn't forget you ; and I have fallen in with work at the place Mrs. Haddow comes from. I stay with her mother,' John Gentleman explained ; but he held aloof from the woman, and she flushed up to the temples.

'Ye hae lost yer ain tongue, and found one politer like,' she went on.

'Will you tell Mrs. Haddow I am here, please?' John Gentleman replied.

Left for the moment, he looked round and examined the door first of Mirren's house. No, he was not mistaken ; there was the cow's head he had cut out with the old knife he found one day in the gutter where the sickly children were at play. Mirren was living in the very house where he had lived with Mother Meg in the days of his wretched boyhood ; yea, he was standing outside the room where he was born, and where his luckless mother, whoever she was, had died bequeathing him to the parish ! But The Lily beckoned him in now.

A sense of embarrassment filled the young man as his eyes fell on Mirren, with the little child, seated in pathetic poverty before one who a year before had been thrown on her mother's charity.

'I am glad to see any one from home, John Gentleman,' Mirren said.

'Is this your little Lily?' he asked, bending awkwardly over the child.

'She's called for me,' put in The Lily.

'Yes. Lily has been my only friend since we came to live here,' Mirren explained.

'I'll away just now. Maybe I'll see ye in the evenin'—lots o' things has happened since you went off,' The Lily said; then with a nod she vanished. An awkward silence fell on the room after she departed, a silence that seemed to intensify each minute it was prolonged; then Mrs. Haddow's anxiety got the ascendancy, and she inquired for her mother's welfare.

'Mrs. Laurie is well, but uneasy about you. So is Mr. Holmes. He never was satisfied with your coming here; you know that, Mrs. Haddow.'

'It was a mistake to leave the laird, but Davie did it for the best. He is out lookin' for something to do to-day.'

John was studying her face narrowly; not a line of care, not a look of suffering was lost. He knew, without an explanatory word from any one, that the woman before him was as unhappy as a wife as she had been happy as a maiden, the beauty of a country place.

'I hope you will not mind me asking, Mrs.

Haddow, but the laird would like to know if Haddow is quite steady?' he blurted out. A faint flush crept into Mirren's hollow cheeks.

'You must see frae this house that he is no' what we thought him.'

'Then you'll be glad that the laird wants him back in his place again?'

'But you—I thought you had it?'

'No—I never had. I am helping him in his office—factoring, you know. I lodge at your mother's.'

'Dear me! I never kent that. Ye've grown quite a gentleman by nature as by name. I'm glad o' your luck.'

'I believe that. Could I see Haddow to-night? I've a week yet in Glasgow; if any other night would do better, it would suit me as well.'

'Then say to-morrow. You seem to be an auld friend o' Lily's?'

'Not a friend. I used to live in this very house, Mrs. Haddow, with an old hag called Mother Meg. The Lily was a woman when I was a boy. She knew me, that was all.'

'Ye have no need to cry down The Lily. She's a good woman as ever lived now; only for her I'd be starvin',' Mirren said, the quick tears welling up in her eyes, and dropping thick as rain on the child's face. John Gentleman

hastily shook her hand, touched the baby's soft cheek with a hesitating finger, and, promising to call next day, hurriedly departed.

Here and there he cast lingering looks around. An old well stood in one corner of the court on which Mirren's stair alighted; on the top of the ashes and rubbish with which it was filled a quaint figure clad in tatters was standing, holding forth to a ring of admiring children. 'A man's a man for a' that!' shrilled out the small mock preacher as a text, and John Gentleman passed slowly on. 'What a pretty baby that little one is,' he mused. 'Yet she's the child of a devil like Haddow, and she's called for The Lily of East Wynd! Poor baby—born where I was born too; wonder if we'll be like in anything else yet?'



CHAPTER V.

' IF EVER I FIND MY FATHER, I SHALL KILL
HIM !'

THE next day the rain fell in torrents, staining with dull patches the grey dilapidated walls of the houses about East Wynd ; in the city the streets were washed clean, and only needed the cutting east wind to dry them up into brightened aspect ; but in the Wynd the dirty flood of water lay in pools at every step, or rushed down the incline of reeking closes in hopeless endeavour to escape by the choked drains. Regardless of damp, mothers deposited wretched bundles of infant humanity on the flags, and departed to extinguish any remnant of motherly feeling by repeated visits to the drink-shops, with which the poor are peculiarly well provided. Nothing in the vicinity of the Wynd seemed to thrive ; nothing was bright ; prosperous, save these licensed hells, where the degradation of a Christian race goes on merrily

Out of one of these dens David Haddow emerged a few hours before John Gentleman arrived. Every trace of respectability had vanished from the outer man: even had his clothing been but a day old, the slouching gait, gripless down-setting of the feet, and general laxity, would have identified him with the company of debauched do-nothings that lounge after the great army of toilers. He shuffled up-stairs to Mirren, and made surly inquiries as to the necessity of him wasting his time waiting on a tramp, who most likely would never show his face there again; to all of which Mirren patiently replied, or, as instinct prompted, maintained silence. There are times when the highest wisdom of speech is eclipsed by an ellipsis of silence.

Towards evening, being the most suitable time in John Gentleman's imagination, he tapped at the door, and obtained a growled liberty to enter.

Verily the wheel of fortune had in one turn reversed the positions of the two men who stood face to face in that comfortless room—a fact which brought a scowl to Haddow's narrow features.

'Well, ye've a message frae the laird for me—out wi't, man; I'm hurried to get off on mair likely business,' was his greeting.

Mirren pushed forward a chair, but Gentleman only used the back of it for a hand-rest.

‘Mr. Holmes thinks your wife and the little baby might thrive best at Greenlea, and he wants you all back again. If you care to take your old place again, it’s open for you.’

‘Found ye was unsuitable like,’ sneered Haddow.

‘I never had the place; it’s been empty all along—I’m clerking.’

Haddow turned away to the window to conceal the satisfaction on his face. This was news to him; Mirren had not even hinted at the nature of Gentleman’s errand, and he had not dared to imagine such a fall of good luck.

‘I was four years wi’ the laird, and I reckon he finds out the worth o’ me now he hasn’t got me. I’ve a mind not to play collie to the wag o’ the auld boy’s finger; but as times is hard, ye can say I’ll maybe come.’

‘Ye forget, Davie, that it was you played the laird a dirty trick, and no’ him did it to you. I mind he wasna pleased at no’ being told o’ you goin’ to Glasgow. That was over a year ago—the very day you came to Greenlea, John Gentleman,’ Mirren reminded.

‘That’s nought to you as I can see—look to that whimperin’ thing in the bed, and mind what concerns yersel!’

'Will you give me your "Yes" or "No"?' John asked. An ominous glitter had steeled the eyes he turned full on the miserable churl before him.

'Well, yes. But I'm no' comin' for a month yet; there's a job I'm after that I'd rather have first. *She* can go on wi' that brat,' jerking his head towards his wife and sleeping child.

'I was to tell you the laird will remove you, seeing he is causing the outlay.'

'All the better. I'm off then; have a longer crack next time I see ye.' He seized his hat, and, slamming the door behind him, descended the stairs. Neither of them could know how soon and under what terrible circumstances they were to cross each other's paths once, and once only, again.

'Ye won't mind takin 'a cup o' tea wi' The Lily an' me? She's home in a minute or two from now, and this is what she calls feast-night—that means pay-night. Friday's aye a feast wi' that creature,' said Mirren.

No, John did not mind. He felt a curious sensation at being installed once more at what used to be Mother Meg's fireside; and if he was acutely conscious of shrinking from further acquaintance with the tarnished Lily, he pushed the unworthy thought from his mind rather than dismissed it. He had never known Mother

Meg's house to hold such a beautiful thing as a baby. The mite looked solemnly at him with wide soft eyes; its cheeks were like bits of red velvet. He would have liked to lift it very tenderly, but he had an idea it might break; so he contented himself whistling to it, and imagining that contributed to its amusement. Presently the door opened noisily, and The Lily walked in, armed with many packages. She looked as though she expected to find him there, but merely turned over her contributions to the coming feast to Mirren, and picked up the baby without so much as a word of greeting. The baby crowed and broke the ice.

'She is good with you,' John volunteered.

'Ay, she loves The Lily if none else does; don't you, my lammie?'

'I suppose there never was anything half so pretty as *that* in this room before?'

'Twenty years ago you was born here, and as pretty a little chap as I ever carried about or any ither sinfu' woman.'

'Did you carry me about? You must have been young,' he said in astonishment.

'I was thirteen afore you was born, an' I nursed you till Mother Meg sent ye off to the parish for a while. Then ye came back a wee laddie, an' ye never liket me after ye were seven year auld.'

A sudden interest leapt into Gentleman's face, but The Lily, divining what was uppermost in his thoughts, stemmed back his rising questions. 'It's time Mrs. Haddow had her tea; I'll tell ye what ye like after that.' A curious group they presented clustered round the rickety table, whose leanings to one-sidedness did much to develop nervousness in the guest of the evening. Like other men in a like honoured position, he was toasted; but, unlike the majority of toasts, his was crisp, not over-done, nor over-buttered. The lamp threw a kindly, subdued light on the poor surroundings, flickered on Mirren's chastened face and The Lily's bold beauty. John Gentleman's memory took a backward vault, and lighted on the barn at Greenlea, where a year ago the wild torches had flared out on the mad dancers at the bridal festivities of the pale woman opposite him who had been the glowing bride of that weird night.

'I'll put away the things, Lily. You talk wi' John Gentleman, seein' you were his nurse as well as baby's. She's better wi' you than wi' me; you're cheerier, and the bairn seems to know't.'

The Lily settled the baby in her arms and turned her handsome profile to his view. She looked like a tigress tamed by the spell of maternity.

‘Did you know my mother?’

‘Not much; I kent her name—it was Barb’ra Winning. Ay, that’s it. I used to say’t to mysel’. I thoct it was a real bonnie name. She was a bonnie woman, your mother.’

‘Barbara Winning. Am I like her?’

‘Not a crumb. She’d black eyes like this bairn’s; but ye’re like the picture o’ a man she burnt—I mean she burnt the picture, no’ the man. Auld Harry will like the burning o’ your father himsel’! I ken he was your father, because she was dyin’ when she gied it me to burn. She sat up wi’ a’ her wild black hair about her white face, and saw the lowes lickin’ round his face till he was burned up. Then she said, “God will do that with his soul,” and fell back dead! I mind as weel as it was yesterday.’

The Lily’s face was solemn as though the twenty gone years had rolled back, and the awe was still fresh on her memory.

John Gentleman’s lips were quivering with intense feeling; when he spoke, his voice was rough and his words shaken.

‘You never knew his name?’

‘No; Mother Meg didn’t either. It was her brother, an auld man in the country, that sent Barb’ra Winning here. He be to hae kent; he was pretty good to Mother Meg till he dee’d—

that was maist a twelvemonth after you forgat to say good-bye to us!’

‘What like was the man’s face in the picture, Lily?’ Mirren suddenly asked.

‘Jist *him* over agen, for a’ the warl’—he looked sic a swell that we called the wee orphan John Gentleman, because o’ his father.’

‘She was a country girl, wasn’t she?’ Mirren persisted.

‘Ay, she spoke jist like your pairt o’ the country.’

‘Maybe Winning wasna her name; there are lots o’ Glendinnings scattered round about Greenlea,’ Mirren continued. She had her eyes riveted on Gentleman’s head and face, and looked puzzled.

‘If ever I find my father on this side o’ time, I shall kill him!’ John Gentleman uttered these words in a low, concentrated voice, which seemed like the exaggerated sound of a whisper wakening a sleeper from his dreams. Both women started, the baby gave a wail, and he rose to his feet to go.

‘Then you and baby will be at Greenlea in a week, shall we say, Mrs. Haddow?’

‘Yes; I’ll be glad to get home—so glad,’ she whispered.

‘What will I do; I hae none to keep me straight but these two!’ The Lily wailed,

throwing her apron over her face to hide its working.

‘I’ll find a place there for you, Lily; the laird has often sought to do me a favour; I’ll ask this one. And thank you for caring for my mother, and *bless* you for burning the devil whose face I bear!’

He pressed a sovereign into Mirren’s hand with the words, ‘From the laird—to bring you home,’ and went out with as much terrible passion in him as one heart could well carry. On, on, through the night he walked, with his hat crushed over his eyes, and shadowing from the passers-by the blazing wrath that had made tinder of his heart and bonfires of the ‘windows of his soul.’



CHAPTER VI.

SO HIGH, SO PURE, ARE WE, SAID THE STARS,
SO LOW, SO STAINED, ARE YOU !'

THERE were few preparations to make for Mirren's removal to Greenlea. She just abandoned herself to the delicious thought of going home, and allowed the broken-hearted Lily to plan out the scheme of transference. There was little to transfer ; yet even in that little there were some things to be rejected as not worth the cost of transit. In three days' time Mirren would set out for home, and The Lily be left sole occupant of the little desolate house she had held together by honest work. Honest work ! How sweet the commonplace words seemed to the waif of East Wynd ! All was ready ; and she had nothing to do now but strain the baby close to her heart, and listen wistfully to its mother's voice picturing the beauties of the place she too might soon see with eyes that had never yet seen the wind shiver

through cool green grass, and stir the nodding daisy heads. Her grief was uppermost this day; and Mirren, whose spirits were bright again, gently pushed her off to her work as the best cure for sorrow, and she was left alone with the child, each frailer than the other.

She drew a low chair close to the fire to warm the baby feet, which puckered up their tiny pink toes in protest at the cold and appeal to the warmth. How Mirren laughed and cooed down to the one little face in all the world for her!—how they clung close to each other, that simple mother and her first child!

It was nearing sunset, and Mirren had prepared the evening meal, when a hand knocked at the door and opened it before Mirren had time to bid the newcomer enter. She looked round—the baby on her arm—to see who the unceremonious intruder was, and beheld a strange woman of perhaps thirty-five years, who regarded her with an expression of mingled pity and scorn.

‘Did you want anything?’ Mirren asked.

‘I want some one, and that some one has kept out o’ my way these five years. Is David Haddow in the house?’

A chill seemed to have entered the room with the strange woman, whose voice was as much a menace as her face.

'This is all the house ; he isn't in. I am his wife ; perhaps I could get the message.'

'You are his wife ! Never you believe it. *I* am his wife,' the woman said.

Every drop of blood ebbed out of Mirren's face. She clutched the baby tighter, and sat down facing the care-lined countenance of her visitor.

'You've made some mistake. David Haddow married me a year ago in my native place. He was years wi' the laird o' Greenlea ; we kent everything about him. You see you shouldna do such cruel things to a woman who is no' that strong yet.' Reproach shone out of Mirren's grey eyes.

'Puir lass ! that's your bairn, then ? Ay, hug it closer—close as ye like ; its father has nae claim on't. It's a bonnier bit thing than ever mine were, and I have four.' The woman rose and took a bunch of papers from her pocket. 'Read my marriage lines ; ye see frae them I am no impostor. I was married ten years ago, at Edinburgh, to the man that grew tired o' providin' for the five o' us, and thocht he would hide himsel' in a country place. I kent he was bad, but I never heard tell till a week ago that he'd cheated a young lass into thinkin' hersel' his wife.'

Mirren read the fatal lines which word by

word struck off her wedding-ring from her finger; then she returned the paper and looked at her child.

‘Ye think the worst has happened to ye; but I tell you that I’d rather be you, free wi’ that wee bairn, than tied by the law to a villain like Davie Haddow!’

Mirren lifted a shawl from the bed—it bore the impress of the baby’s body—and, like one in a dream, wrapped it tightly round herself and the child.

‘What are ye goin’ to do? I hope ye dinna mean harm to yersel’. Ye have friends, have ye no’?’

‘We were goin’ home to the country in a week; my mother’s there. The laird sent word o’ a place for *him*. He’s off somewhere, and was comin’ after me in a week. I’ll never see him, please God, again.’

Mirren spoke in a muffled voice. She was hardly conscious of the change that had swept over her face and the face of the whole world. The woman looked with some compassion on the forlorn creature before her, whose misery she had disclosed within the last half-hour; then her face hardened; her case was more hopeless, she opined.

‘I have a friend—Lily; she will be here in an hour; will you tell her I’m away? She’ll break

her heart about it when you tell her what I am ; but say I'll get her to come and take care o' baby at Greenlea. I'm sorry for ye, Mrs. Haddow.' The name jerked out, and without another word Mirren shut the door between her and the past. She knew she was penniless, but the sovereign in the drawer belonged to Haddow ; she would not touch that. Her limbs trembled beneath her before she had walked a dozen steps beyond East Wynd ; still she moved on, mechanically choosing the right road, until she was at last on the track of the forty miles which lay between her and home.

By nightfall she had dragged herself over hardly five miles ; she heard the clear bell of a country church ring out eleven, and, with the last sharp stroke, her strength seemed beaten out of her body, and she sat down on the bank behind a heap of road stones. The child slept at her breast as sweetly as though its pillow was above no aching heart ; the cold which numbed the mother's limbs and chilled her body had not yet reached through to it ; it lay with one contented little hand outspread on her breast, and she patted it ever to draw comfort from the clasp of those baby fingers.

All through the night she shivered ; the

autumn moon looked down on her with large-eyed wonder. 'So high, so pure, are we, said the stars; so low, so stained, are you.'

When the morning broke with its sunshine gold upon the crimson autumn leaves and the birds blended twitters with rustling of trees, it all seemed like the sharp pain of a keen knife, and her sorrow bled out in slow tear-drops. How often the infant is wakened by the splash of its mother's tears on its warm cheek! Mirren's Lily cried as the morning air, frost-bitten, nipped her face, and the cry attracted a man who was plodding along with his horses to a town ten miles off. He peered over the stones and hailed the woman rocking herself to and fro.

'Whaur are ye goin'?'

'Greenlea.'

'Dae ye mean to tramp it wi' that little one? Why, it's five-and-thirty miles!'

'I maun tramp it,' wearily.

'Not you. Get in the cairt, and I'll gie ye a lift ten miles o' the way.'

Silently Mirren exchanged her seat on the stones for a perch on the soft sack indicated by her kindly friend, and the horses trudged on.

'It's weel seen ye're a city lass; ye're like the skin-and-bane cratur I see in the Glasgow

streets. Suppose ye never saw the country afore?’

‘I never saw the city till a year ago. I was brought up in the country!’

‘Weel, ye dinna look like it, that’s a’. Maybe ye’ll hae the consumption; it’s gey common in the city.’

The man meant no harm, and sorrow had taken the sting out of all else to Mirren. She only smiled.

‘My auld woman put up a can o’ tea for me to drink when the sun cam’ oot and made me dry—it’s better’n whisky. Tak’ a drink.’

Mirren drank feverishly, but refused to touch something he proffered her to eat. So the time dragged on, and the town was reached where she had to part from her rough friend in need. He looked after the emaciated figure and shook his head.

‘Her days won’t measure another season: a country lass, got into disgrace, like enough, wi’ some city vagabond. Anyhow, death’s heavy enough punishment for most sins.’

Without food, and weighed down by the weight of her precious burden, Mirren accomplished fifteen miles during the next two days, which left ten between her and home. She was half delirious, and wholly racked with

pain, for the heavy rains had set in, and drenched the solitary pair to the skin, over and over again. The child breathed quickly and wailed incessantly—so she struggled on with glazed eyes fixed on the dim peak of Ben Ledi, wreathed round with mist.

‘I shall die afore we get there, baby,’ she whispered again and again.

The last night of her journey was the worst. The roads ran rivers on either side, and a keen wind blew like ice in her face. Almost unconscious, she had no idea that she had wandered off the high road, and was tottering down the path which led to the Barn. She saw at last a door before her, and, staggering against it, fell in against some one whose strong hands caught her in a warm clasp.

‘I wasna his wife—ever. I’ve got home,’ she breathed ; it was her last conscious thought, and it shaped itself even in the moment when the mind was reeling in its socket.

‘John Gentleman, come here for God’s sake. Here are Mirren and her baby home in this fearful night, when we were forced to shelter ourselves,’ cried the laird sharply, and from the extreme end of the Barn John came forward hastily.

‘What does it mean?’ he said, kneeling down beside the inert figure.

‘She says she has come home because she never was Haddow’s wife,’ Mr. Holmes repeated.

‘Run—or, stay; I will run to the manse with the child and bring help for her,’ John Gentleman returned, and, gathering the baby in his arms, he sped out through the darkness.

The laird’s face grew grey, and his hand trembled, as he struck another match and bent over the girl at his feet. She was icy cold and stiff.

‘Can she be dead? No, no; she has fainted. Has she *walked* from Glasgow? What does it mean?’ he muttered, chafing her hands meanwhile.

In a brief space of time John returned with the old minister and a warm blanket. The minister stooped and turned round Mirren’s face.

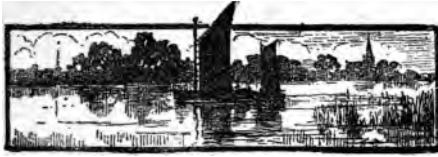
‘I’ll carry her home. She might die in this vault,’ John said.

The old minister rose from his kneeling position and reverently uncovered his white head.

‘My friends,’ he said solemnly, ‘for the first time a shadow has fallen across the bridal Barn. We are in the presence of death. Exhaustion so soon after the little child’s birth, and exposure

to such a tempest of wind and rain, has killed her.'

'Oh ho!' croaked a voice at the door; 'Auld Robin knew he was wanted. What did I say John Gentleman? I'll bury 'em all!'



CHAPTER VII.

SOCIAL OUTCASTS: THE MAN AND THE CHILD.

THE purpose of these pages is not so much to recount the advances of John Gentleman's mind from the hour the laird placed good books in his hands by making his room at Widow Laurie's a circulating library, of which he was librarian, but rather to unfold the story of his life, link by link, just as they fell into his hands. That there was a strong spice of savagery in his nature the reader will have seen from the outset, and the education which books alone give, while rounding off the sharp angles in his character, left him practically the same. A velvet glove has not unfrequently been the cover of an iron hand. His voice, always tuneful, had mellowed with the constant companionship of the laird, even as the key to his old grammar seemed to him some fairy wand by which words arranged themselves into order and became powerful as an army of invisible

soldiers, or persuasive as the mermaids who caused John Gentleman the liveliest moments of imagination. Nothing had come in touch with the quick of his better nature until he realised, standing in the Barn's semi-darkness on the night Mirren Haddow died on its threshold, that the pathos of life alone gives the pathos to death. The slight weight of Mirren's baby never seemed out of his arms; he never quite forgot to see its rain-wet face turned against his heart as it had been that night when he tore over the twisted branches of storm-vanquished trees lying low, and arrived with help from the manse only to find that death, the help of the helpless, had been swifter with its aid than he.

Five years had slipped away since then, and still he remained at Greenlea; but it was not his growing in favour, both in the loaning and at Brails, that chained him to Craigpark—it was the fascination of the child's presence. He would have blushed had the laird insinuated such a thing; still it was true. Unknown to himself, life had no greater delight than to spend an hour devising some means of amusement for the laughing little creature who gathered weeds and called them flowers—a mistake not uncommon to maturer years.

Faithful to his promise, he asked the laird for some corner in his household for The Lily;

and in a short time after Mirren's death, a subdued-looking woman was settled at Craigpark under the housekeeper. There was no need to fear anything from her now; she nursed a wild sorrow in her heart for the loss of the simple country girl who had been a guardian angel to her, and poured out her tenderness on the child's infant years.

'Why not let her be little Lily's nurse?' suggested the laird, after consenting to find shelter for the waif of East Wynd. But this John bluntly refused to do, saying she was a kind soul, and would be a good creature, he doubted not, but she wasn't one to bring up Mirren's baby. Widow Laurie, on whom sorrow had laid an ageing hand, needed no help with the infant for years; but now she was seen to walk less about, and pay little heed to the wiles of her grandchild. This may have been the reason that often nowadays John Gentleman carried her on his shoulder to Craigpark, and gave her over to Lily's care for the day—a circumstance which led to establishing a friendship between the laird and the child. This friendship John regarded with a softened heart; he drew nearer to the laird because of it, and often she made the subject of grave talks.

'Poor baby! she little knows the sting her origin will one day cause her,' mused John,

regarding the little sleeper on the office lounge. She was a child of promising beauty, inheriting her mother's grey eyes and vivid colouring, combined with the jetty hair of her father. All her soft curls were tumbled about her face ; she smiled in her sleep as Gentleman spoke.

'Is there any need that she should ever know? She has no friends but ourselves, and her grandmother, her only relation, is breaking up fast,' said the laird.

'The people will tell her as soon as she shows an inch of the pride that's in her—allow them. I could wager my life she will be told before another ten years go over her pretty head.' John looked compassionately towards the unconscious child.

'But there is no disgrace attached to her mother's memory. She was a martyr, with stronger claim to the name than many who, lifted out of themselves through burning zeal, have died in a transport at the stake. I am positive Mirren's memory is hallowed in the hearts of them that knew her—even strangers could not but be moved at her story.'

'Nevertheless, little Lil is a social outcast. You must not say she isn't, because then you would take away the bond between us,' with a smile.

John Gentleman had been absolutely silent

respecting himself all the years he had been at Greenlea, and Mr. Holmes raised his head quickly at the first keynote to the lad's history being struck in his presence. He bent a little nearer.

'Will you tell me—anything more? just what you feel you can trust another with,' he asked; and John looked straight into the fine face before him with searching eyes, in which shone a trust that had silently been growing in his heart for years.

'I could trust one man, maybe one woman, with all my life's history, all my heart's love; but if he or she scattered it to the winds, the rest of humanity would be the poorer off for my mite of faith, if that would be any loss.'

'You will trust me, then?'

'Yes. There is not much to tell; you know the latter half of it already. When you sent me to Glasgow, Mr. Holmes, neither of us thought the journey would throw some light on my path; it did. The Lily of East Wynd told me what I never knew before, that as a wild lassie of thirteen she had nursed me, that my mother was a country girl with a sweet face and a quaint name, that she died consumed with bitterness towards the man who was my father. She was a passionate woman, evidently—that's where I take my tiger instincts from, laird.' He smiled again that

old smile so sad to see on the faces of the young, the strong.

The laird passed his hand suddenly over his eyes as though to blot out the speaker's face from his sight, then he lifted a pen and held it between his shaking fingers.

'Laird, I vowed to kill the man who was my mother's murderer, and I will if he crosses my path. It's just—a life for a life—that's the law of God, written in His book. You don't know what a comfort that book is to me when I find that *that's* God's law, and it isn't wrong of me to think as I do.'

'But the book does not say a son shall judge his father, far less kill him, Gentleman. The law steps in to deal with crime—and your father did not slay your mother.' The laird spoke in a high, unusual voice, which the other noticed, and attributed to nervous interest.

'If a man drop by drop poisons a woman's mind, thought by thought steals away her sense of wrong, and then abandons the worthless toy of a leisure season, is he not a worse type of murderer than he who robs the body of life? Which is condemned at God's bar—the soul-slayer or the assassin?'

'Yes, yes; you are right. I was thinking of the world's code of justice. It is very terrible to realise that thought.'

The little one on the lounge had wakened and stolen unperceived round to John Gentleman's chair. As the voices took the higher tones of passion and nervous excitement, she hid her face in her hands and gave an audible sob. In an instant John's arm was round her, and he lifted her up on his knee, where she pressed her head close against him, and looked over at the laird with timid, large-eyed wonder.

'Were you frightened, pet?' the young man whispered, bending his fair head over the curly black one. She nodded, but still kept her eyes on the laird.

'He's frightened too,' she said, and, disengaging herself, ran over to the laird and patted his hands by way of comforting him in this distress she could not comprehend. Mr. Holmes stroked the little head tenderly, and returned her to her perch on John's knee.

'We were speaking of this baby's future, John; we can keep her ignorant of even her mother's story by sending her away from Greenlea whenever she gets old enough to entice the malice of evil-spoken folks. Better still, if Widow Laurie should not live long, we could bring her up here, and charge The Lily to see that no whisper reached her ears.'

'That would give her false notions,' John objected.

‘Not at all. You know, John,’ with emphasis, ‘you and I are the little lady’s guardians, and we must agree to what is best for her.’

‘We needn’t plan anything while her grandmother lives, at any rate. Now, Lily, you’re hungry, aren’t you? You will come and have dinner with me, won’t you?’ To all of which the little one was quite content, and suffered herself to be carried down-stairs to the housekeeper’s room, where John always dined now.

The laird left his office and walked in the grounds after the two were gone; he was restless and ill at ease with himself, as though tormented by some gnawing memory. He remained out long after the hour he was accustomed to rejoin John in the office. When he entered the house, he did not go to the wing, but turned off at a long corridor in which his private rooms were situated. He sank into a deep chair with a sigh of relief, as though he felt safe from some pursuing danger; but in a short time he rose and paced the room: he was not safe from the pursuit of thought.

Presently he touched the bell, and desired the servant to send Lily, the housekeeper’s woman, to him.

When The Lily appeared, Mr. Holmes stood at the window watching the rain beating against the panes and swaying the flower heads. He

desired her to close the door, and answer him a few questions.

‘Can you give information without letting the world know it has been asked?’ he somewhat strangely inquired of the startled woman.

‘I’ll be gled to let ye ken onything I can, sir, an’ I’ll say naething o’ it,’ she replied.

‘One question, then. What was the name of John Gentleman’s mother?’ His piercing eyes seemed to devour The Lily’s face, which betrayed lively emotion.

‘Barb’ra Winning, sir,’ she faltered; then uttered a little cry as the laird sank back in his chair pallid as a corpse.

‘Silence! You may go— Stay! Was this Barbara Winning a woman of good character?’

‘As good a lassie as ever was, sir. She died after *his* birth.’

A motion of the laird’s hand dismissed her, but as she left the room she looked suddenly back. The fire-flame lit his face, and made her heart leap back nearly six-and-twenty years, to a little close room, in the heart of whose fire a rough drawing of a man’s face crackled and burned away into ashes. She closed the door and stood in the corridor.

‘It canna be! it canna be!’ she muttered.



CHAPTER VIII.

A DREAD SUSPICION.

THE little circulating library, in conjunction with the weekly meetings held in John's parlour, had produced results even better than the wild enthusiasm of their originator had dreamed of. The meetings were in their sixth year, the library in its third, and the dry bones in the valley were stirred. From Brails members of the Reading Circle trudged cheerfully on the evening of their meeting, which now boasted the laird's name and the aged minister's on the roll.

'With proper guidance, our young friend's notion of elevating our people may be a blessing in this community,' said the old preacher one evening, as he toiled home after attending one of the informal gatherings in Widow Laurie's low-roofed room. He had made up his mind that nothing but Christianity could raise up a young man from the lower classes, whose whole

soul and energies were thrown into the scale of justice, equality, brotherhood. For, argued he, Christianity is the only true and real socialism.

The absolute faith this good old man expressed towards the laird's secretary, for to such position time and sheer ability had raised the loaning 'tramp,' did much to prick John Gentleman's conscience. Christian he was not. What Christian ever could cherish hate as he did against an unknown father? Besides, had he not solemnly vowed vengeance upon that father should God deliver him into his hands? The story of David's forgiveness when Saul was delivered up into his hand this passionate young sinner put away from his soul, but it stuck like a burr to his memory. 'Vengeance is mine,' his soul was fond of repeating, but forgetting ever that clause with which the claim is endorsed, '*saieth the Lord.*' He would not go out of his way to find his enemy; perhaps he was dead; but woe betide him if ever the hour came when they should meet. From this it will be seen that he was not at peace with himself, that unrest looked out from his eyes, and impatience possessed him from crown to sole. Mr. Holmes avoided him under pretence of illness; and, to keep his mind free from the fret of hazardous thoughts which haunted him without the shadow of a reason, he invited the loaning members of

the Reading Circle to spend an evening with him. The Lily offered her services at the cottage in order to relieve Widow Laurie, who sat at her window watching the evening light fading out of the sky and lingering on the dim hills. It was a merry scramble getting ready for ten men to have tea in that little place. Even Baby Lil, as the child was called in contradistinction to The Lily, ran about helping John's party, and looking on the simple preparations as elaborate to an exalted degree. When finished, it all looked very pretty and rural; home flowers, home scones, home-made butter, and Brownie's very best cream, as the little one was at pains to explain to the rustic guests. Somehow they all treated John Gentleman with a deference paid to his own personality—not, as was and is common in such places, giving an ounce of tolerance to the man and a pound of respect to his coat. Things went smoothly on until an unwelcome guest appeared in the shape of the old gravedigger, Robin Ray.

'Weel, Robin, since ye mun poke yer finger into ev'ry pie, ye shall mak' yersel' o' use here,' cried a young farmer who had humour in him.

'Ay, mak' him sing a sang for his pains,' suggested another.

'No, no; don't worry him too much; per-

haps we might get some real entertainment out of him,' John hastened to say.

'Dinna try makin' game o' me,' croaked the irate old man.

'Look here, Robin; here is a cushioned seat, and you shall have it and your supper if you tell us some story.'

'Weel, weel, I'll tell ye o' a lass I kent thirty years gane; but gie me the chair an' a taste o' my supper first,' with a chuckle at his own cunning.

The Lily brought him bread and cheese, with a large glass of milk, all of which he grumbled over, nevertheless subjected to the machinery of his toothless gums.

'Noo, I'll tell ye o' a lass I kent. When the maist o' ye were but born, or no' yet born, she dee't. I didna get berryin' her, tho'.' He shook a disconsolate head at the memory of his keen deprivation, and had to get numerous hints to proceed. 'She wis a black-heided lass—a' the folk o' her name wis black-heided—an' black-heided women aye are deevils. D'ye hear that, ye wee gipsy?' he called to Baby Lil, who peered out at him from behind John's chair.

'Jist you leave the wee cratur' alane, ye auld haveril,' retorted The Lily from the door.

'Ye're anither black jade! Weel, the lass I

wis speakin' o' took up wi' a swell—I'm no' sayin' names—but she thocht he meant makin' her his wife; he, he! She went awa' frae her freens—the last o' them's deid noo—awa' to a big toun whaur a kind man had direckit her to his sister (a fine woman, his sister); an' there she dee't an' her baby dee't; an' that's the tale o' Babie Glendinnin' that disappeared lang syne frae a place five miles ayont Brails, an' a' the mair miles frae here, gin ye want to be par-teecler,' Robin croaked.

The Lily stood staring at John Gentleman with terrified eyes. His face was marble white, the veins stood out like cords on his brow, and, worst of all, his lips twitched as one beyond control of himself. The guests were too absorbed in twitting the old man to notice their chief. Not until he spoke did they apprehend a change in his whole being.

'What was the woman's name?' he asked, gripping old Robin's arm.

'Babie—that's Barb'ra Glendinnin'—used to be lots o' Glendinnin's ower the hill once on a time; there's heaps o' 'em in Brails Kirkyaird—they've dee't oot.'

'Was it not Barbara Winning?'

'Dinna glower at me wi' een like blue lightnin', my man. Whit if she *was* ca'd Babie Winnin'—it wid like eneuch be a pet name her

grand lad gied her! She wis a winnin' cratur', true as yer there!'

John Gentleman seemed suddenly to collect himself, and turned from the old wretch to entertain his guests for the rest of the evening.

'He's an auld lyin' vagabond—nane o' us ever heard tell o' sic a story. I wonder the laird is so forbearin' an' kindly wi' him,' a disgusted lad said to John.

'Is he very kind to him, do you think?'

'Kind is no' the word; he's *leeberal*. That auld beggar wants for naething that the laird can gie him, an' he never did him a ha'penny worth o' good in his cantankerous auld life.'

'Depend upon it, the laird pities him, or he wouldn't be so kind.'

Nevertheless, old Ray had sown the seeds of a dread suspicion in John's mind. After the room was cleared, he called The Lily in and opened up the subject.

'Lily, what does it mean?'

'Dinna you bother about it. The names bein' alike is a' ye've got to hing up suspicions on. An' who are ye suspectin'?' A bold venture that!

'I thought—I suspected—the laird!'

Oh, Lily, Lily, what an actress was lost to the world in you! A sound of such real-seeming laughter rang through the quiet room.

‘My word, John Gentleman, ye *were* lookin’ high! I thocht a young gentleman farmer would hae been lofty enough for a village lassie, but it’s nae less than the laird!’

‘Lily, I have been an idiot. Don’t say no. I deserve to be shot for having such a thought about the laird. I’m glad you took me down that way, and thank you for it.’

‘Of coorse, it winna gang further than oorsels, but I canna help laughin’ at the cheek o’ you, laddie; it’s awfu’!’

The young man lit his pipe and went out to hide the shame on his face. The cool wind was like a draught of reviving water to his dry lips. He would never forgive himself the unworthy thought he had cherished against his best friend. All the laird’s gentleness, patience, goodness, seemed to swell into one lump situated in his ungrateful throat and choking him. He would make reparation to him in every way possible; he would show his gratitude instead of his independence. At the meeting of the roads he ran against the subject of his thoughts.

‘Ah, Gentleman! You startled me, and I’m not very well.’

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Holmes. Will you take my arm the rest of the way?’

The laird stared, then accepted the proffered

arm in silence In this fashion they passed the cottage, and were seen by The Lily.

‘God knows, this is a strange warl,’ she muttered ; ‘if they only kent what’s in each ither’s herts, I wonder how it would be. I’m sorry for ye, laird, I’m sorry for ye ; *her* words are comin’ to pass—your soul maun be burnin’ wi’ shame an’ remorse this nicht.’

At that moment John Gentleman was pouring out his confession of past ingratitude into the laird’s tortured ears.



CHAPTER IX.

A PAGE OF THE LAIRD'S PAST.

THE Lily was troubled about two things; the extent of what old Robin Ray knew concerning the girl he called Barb'ra Glen-dinning; and the chance of John Gentleman falling on proof of his parentage. She grew silent and grave as she weighed the consequences of the revelation to such a nature as the young man's; on the other hand, she could not reconcile the laird's fine nature with a dishonoured youth. She lived for months in an atmosphere of dread, and her heart sickened as she saw the laird's feverish eyes watching for John Gentleman's approach, and the ill-concealed restlessness if he did not come at the very hour expected. She had moments when she wondered if the new tenderness which had sprung up in John's eyes would die out if he knew the man he honoured and delighted to honour was not his friend, but his father—a

conclusion The Lily arrived at early after her introduction to Barbara Glendinning's history. As a little child she had been awed into a reverence for people who kept their word, although in those days she was not without contempt for luckless ones who could not escape Mother Meg's strap by reason of a certain lack in their fabricatory regions. John, as a tiny creature, kept his promises, rather vows, for they seemed to partake more of the nature of vows by reason of the force he threw out of his heart into his words. She knew his whole being was filled with vengeance. Strength he had never weakened by perpetual petty revenges; it was a more to be dreaded thing because it was concentrated and not diffuse. Therefore, instead of wishing for a disclosure of things, she prayed, in a determined way that is common to natures hard at the core, for the disaster to be averted till one or other of the two should be dead. It was strange to hear this woman's logical way of stating the case to God, in whom she implicitly believed, but could not understand that He required no hints as to ways and means of working out the problem of these two crossing lives. How prone men are in all stages of their spiritual lives to offer God *advice* in adjusting the issues at some crisis! The Lily had an idea, a fixed idea, that if she only worried

Heaven a good deal, it would give her what she desired just to get rid of the whole matter. And while she hoped and planned, even cajoled Heaven to keep her excellent scheme in view, the hours were hurrying through weeks, months, till eighteen of them had flown, and the time was at hand for the gossamer to be withdrawn, and the two men to look into each other's faces in their true characters. The laird was rapidly growing grey, and had aged far beyond his years in these last eighteen months. He was consumed with dread that his too keen interest in John Gentleman might rouse suspicion which had turned away from him since the night of The Lily's clever stratagem. His whole being yearned over the strong misdirected nature unfolding itself day by day beside him; it was often by a painful repression he escaped the danger of meeting the half of the young man's history with another exactly fitting one taken from an early chapter in his own life. The need for repression grew stronger every hour of their companionship; many a time, had little Lil not bounded back to their side with the wild-flowers she had gathered in their morning walk, the confession would have been made, so strong was the desire to roll away the burden which for years had been gathering weight to settle down on and crush the laird's heart.

Little Lil, now a beautiful child of nearly seven, had gone off for a ramble with her protector, and the laird was alone. He purposely had arranged that it should be so, for he had an errand to make. Up till the previous night he had never thought of taking the journey on which he started immediately after the two had set out in the wood direction. It was evidently a secret mission, for he looked back several times in his walk, which led him to the little cottage of the old gravedigger.

Old Ray was sitting in the middle of the apartment, his seat being a comfortable arm-chair, carved richly, but in antique design. Clearly it did not belong to the bottomless suite of three which represented the rest of the furniture. He was bent nearly double over some bones which he was contemplating with keen relish. He looked up suspiciously as the laird bent his head to enter the low-roofed abode.

‘What are you about to-day, Robin?’

‘See, see! Here’s three banes I delved oot this mornin’—no’ far frae the grave o’ the auld laird an’ yer leddy mither. They’re ower sma’ banes for the auld laird’s, Mr. Andrew—a big man wis yer faither!’

Mr. Holmes knitted his brows and sat down in a rickety chair in silence.

'I'm sayin' it's ower sma' for yer faither's bane—this biggest bane!' he repeated.

'Robin, you are mad to talk to me so, and your memory must be failing, for you said a minute ago that my mother lay out there in the graveyard: you know she died abroad, and is buried there.'

The old gravedigger lifted his wizen face, on which was an ugly scowl.

'Ma mem'ry failin'! Is't? Man, I could pit the fear o' death in ye by tellin' ye a page o' yer life ye think I hae forgot. But I winna rake up—I would rather hae my banes than yer company,' he retorted, with superlative candour.

'It is just about that page of the past I have called here. I am not sure that I acted with wisdom when I trusted so much in your hands and your sister Meg's. I have a few questions to ask you, and am glad to hear you say your memory is quite clear.'

Robin jerked round and stared blankly at the laird. A dull thud announced the safe arrival of the bones into the chair opposite—he was surprised into showing how much the words had taken him aback.

'When Barbara went to Glasgow, your sister was well paid to care for her, was she not?'

'Yes, an' she did mind her for the three years she was daft—no' speakin' o' the care an' what

not she spent on the bairn afore it died,' old Ray snapped out.

'You scoundrel! Barbara died when the child was born. She never was out of her mind. The child you told me died is alive and well! What did you do with its funeral money and hers? Where is the money supposed to have kept my poor mad Barbara?' Mr. Holmes stood up towering above the wretched old dotard.

'She wis a bad lassie, laird; she didna care for ye,' he whined.

'That is and was your blackest lie. She died cursing me because you let her think I spurned her, and let her live and die on your sister's charity,' he stormed, looking like the tramp of seven years back whom Fate led to Greenlea.

'Hoo did ye find it oot—wha telt ye?'

'John Gentleman, *my son.*'

'John Gentleman—your son! Hoo does he tak' it? Quite the thing, nae doot; ye've made him ye're seecritary an' yer freen', noo a' the time he's yer ain son. Ho, ho!' Robin Ray chuckled.

'Hush, hush!' warned the laird.

'Oh, he disna ken, does he no'! Auld Robin mun be the first to cairry the guid news.'

'Listen, Robin Ray. My son hates me for his mother's wrong. Nothing would make him

believe she would have been my wife whenever the tyrant who was my father died. I should lose him, and—and I dare not think of that.'

'He would dae mair than gang awa'—he would kill ye; he—would—kill—ye!'

'You understand then, Robin Ray, the secret dies with you; on condition that it does so, I shall ask no further account of the stolen money, for it was stolen from me and from *her*.'

'Oh, but ye're no' goin' to get aff sae easy! Gin ye tie up my tongue ye mun pay me; pay me weel for it. Ye ken auld Robin wisna born yesterday!'

The laird looked in haughty surprise at the miserable object before him. The gravedigger's little crafty eyes were gleaming with greed; his whole aspect was repulsive in the extreme. The laird knew his man. 'I want to waste no time with you. If I were younger, I would twist your head from your wretched body; as it is, I cannot afford to lose my son.'

'Gie me twenty gold sovereigns, laird, that's all, an' ye'll get keepin' the young fellow,' he wheedled.

'You shall have them; after that, never let me see your face again on earth.'

'Noo I tak' a guid look at ye, ye're awfu' like him; never ye look in wi' him into the Mirror

Pool, or as sure as ma name's auld Robin, he'll ken wha ye are.'

'You shall have the money to-morrow,' said Mr. Holmes, turning on his heel and walking out with a shiver upon him.

His way did not lie past the Mirror Pool, but he turned aside and went in its direction. It lay in the heart of the wood, which boasted a fine running water; a rocky bit afforded a safe spot for the light bridge the laird had thrown across for convenience. About fifty yards below the bridge the stream had a bend where it branched off into three; by the lesser of its two tributaries Mr. Holmes pursued his way till he came to a deep, clear pool shelved round with rock and with a slab of rock for a bed. Looking down, his face was reflected back with startling fidelity, except perhaps the effect was to make him seem younger by years than he was. The laird groaned as he saw for himself the resemblance to John Gentleman.

'Ah, we've caught you now, John and me, looking at yourself in the glass,' cried a young voice from down the stream, and little Lil, shoes and stockings in hand, waded as far as the water allowed her to come within hail.

'Where is John?' asked the laird, looking fearfully about.

'Here I am, up above you, watching the per-

formance,' John called cheerily, and, parting the branches, disclosed himself. 'What a pity I couldn't see your face, laird! I was too far up. Lily and I, being two sweethearts, came to look at our pictures in the approved fashion of Greenlea lovers,' he explained.

'It was just a fancy I took, John. Shall we go home now?'

'Yes; you are tired, sir. Come, Lil, jump up, and I'll carry my sweetheart home again.'

The three went home talking quietly, and gathering no inkling of coming disaster. Does not a hush precede as well as follow the storm?



CHAPTER X.

‘BARBARA!’

LOOK at him: John Gentleman, secretary to the Laird o’ Craigpark—tramp as used to be. Look at him, I say!’

Robin Ray stood at the Queen’s Hotel door, with a staff to steady his tottering self; he was going home, after spending the day at Brails, and his crazy head wagged even faster than his tongue, which had been moistened too freely at the expense of a young farmer. He was standing ready to depart for Greenlea when the laird’s secretary passed on his way home.

John Gentleman had slipped so quietly into the affairs of that part of the country, that the origin of his position at Craigpark was forgotten by the many, and unknown to the few. The Brails’ folk respected the laird’s clever young factor, who was sharp as a needle to pierce through to the double-sided question of master and man. Therefore old Robin received a

sound rebuke from more than one idler at the Queen's door. In the midst of it all, John retraced his steps and entered a pace into the lobby.

'See, Robin ; you are not fit to walk home. I am going to use the trap to-morrow ; so, instead of putting it up here, as arranged, for this night, I'll just drive home, Mr. Urie, and give old Ray a lift,' he said.

'It's mair than he deserves, cantankerous auld body,' replied the landlord.

'Oh, he's a' right to order, mind ye—he's mair than Andrew Holmes' factor an' secretary, is John Gentleman,' cunningly put in Robin.

'Come now, Robin, you have too much to say to-day. Are you coming with me, or do you prefer hobbling home yourself?' John interrupted.

'Oh, I'll come, I'll come ; when the young master orders, auld Robin mun obey. Comin', master !' and he tottered out to the trap, and was lifted in.

John noticed the curious looks which a few of the people bestowed upon him, and he flushed deeply, as was his wont when suffering annoyance. He was about to seize the reins and drive off, when a sunburnt gentleman walked leisurely out of the hotel, and surveyed him with a glance which gradually deepened into a half smile of recognition.

‘Whose trap is that?’ he inquired of Mr. Urie.

‘It belongs to the laird, Holmes o’ Craigpark, Colonel Matheson.’

The gentleman walked quickly forward, and waved John to stop.

‘My dear fellow, shake hands with your father’s old friend. I should have known you anywhere! I never knew Holmes was married as much. That comes of being nigh thirty years in India.’

‘He, he, he!’ chuckled old Ray.

John Gentleman paled to the lips.

‘You are entirely mistaken, sir. Mr. Holmes has no son—he is unmarried. I am John Gentleman, the laird’s factor.’

‘Are you in earnest?’ asked Colonel Matheson.

‘I assure you, you are quite mistaken,’ coldly.

‘Well, I beg your pardon, but really it is most extraordinary the resemblance. Perhaps you will tell Mr. Holmes his old college friend, Matheson, is home from India, and will give him a call some day soon?’

‘Certainly; good evening.’

‘Good evening,’ replied the disconcerted gentleman, drawing clear from the trap, for, at a touch of the whip, the horse sprang forward,

and sped away down the pleasant road to Greenlea.

He went slowly indoors, and sat down to think. He felt as though he had seen a ghost, and that of an old friend who had been his companion for years. If any one had told Colonel Matheson he would have made so utter a mistake in an identity, he would have laughed in the face of what would have tickled his fancy as a good joke. He was disturbed, and smoked vigorously in consequence. What a laugh Holmes would get at his expense! True, the young man was much more handsome than Holmes had been; he had never had a face which was beautiful, and that fellow had. It was most extraordinary. Down-stairs, the loungers were having the colonel's mistake fully discussed, the result of it all being that the universal eyelid of Brails flew wide open, and to the concentrated sight a strong likeness between the laird and the factor became for the first time apparent.

'Jist chance, that's all; the laird an' Mr. Gentleman never set eyes on one anither till *he* cam' this way as a lad,' Mr. Urie decided, which was simply the truth about the matter, treating it apart from the 'chance' theory.

Old Ray sank into a drunken stupor, from

which, however, he awakened shortly, and fixed his crafty eyes on John's troubled face.

'Why don't you offer me a penny for my thoughts, Robin?' he asked. He felt the cruel gaze fastened on his face, and spoke irritably.

'I could gie ye twenty gold pieces for them, but ye widna pairt wi' them.'

'Twenty! Where would you get them?'

'Frae the laird. But,' suspiciously, 'ye needna want to ken whaur I keep them, for ye'll never ken frae Robin.'

'You have not got them to offer. Don't lie in your old age, man.'

'I'm no leein'—gin ma tongue mun be tied, it mun be compensatit.'

Another stinging thought shot into John's heart. Why need the laird bribe this drivelling old wretch? Then he remembered getting only twenty pounds for his quarter's salary instead of twenty-five; the laird's laughing excuse being he had an account to pay which could not stand a day, while John's dues could, and willingly did. Was he making up Ray's money with his five pounds? It was not possible; the gravedigger was lying to awaken curiosity. So John determined to frustrate his design by keeping silence till the cottage was reached and Robin helped down from his high perch.

'Good-night, Robin.'

‘Guid-nicht—mind ye dinna forget the man’s message to the laird!’

John drove home furiously, his eyes gleaming out of his face like blue stones set in marble. No definite thought shaped itself in his mind; there was nothing but chaos. Trees, shrubs, flowers, lights, all danced together as he drove up the avenue, alighted, and made his way to the laird’s room. It was empty.

Presently The Lily came and said he was to have tea there, and afterwards to join the laird in the library. She saw he was strangely disturbed; but she dared not use the liberty of asking the nature of a mental trouble. But her heart misgave her.

He trifled with the food she left for him, and soon rose from the table. What would the laird think—how would he look if Colonel Matheson’s mistake reached his ears from a foreign source? A curious feeling of determination to tell him himself grounded itself in John’s mind, and he walked right away to the library.

‘There’s the laird’s step; he’s crossin’ to the library,’ said The Lily to a maid who entered the housekeeper’s room at the moment.

‘You’re a bad guesser o’ footsteps then; it was John Gentleman: I saw him,’ returned the woman, and The Lily flushed all over at the

mistake her watchful senses had fallen into. She could have sworn it was the laird's footstep and no other.

The library apparently was empty also when John entered ; the laird was not down yet. On the table lay some loose papers as though torn out of a sketch-block ; and, knowing the laird's pet accomplishment was sketching, John lifted the papers gently and admired the dainty transcripts from nature about Greenlea, which Mr. Holmes had depicted with true artistic touch. A yellow paper fluttered to the floor, and on picking it up he found it was the sketch of a beautiful girl with a passionate face, in itself an index of a sorrowful fate. For that fate is sorrowful which bequeathes to man or woman largest capacities for suffering ; be sure the measure will run over. It bore an indistinct date nine-and-twenty years back. John gazed at the girl's long loose hair streaming in ripples of blackness around her, framing in her figure. Who was she ? Underneath the fold of her gown were the laird's initials almost obliterated, and still fainter these words, 'My Treasure.' The picture fascinated John Gentleman ; he could not lay it down, but walked over to the deep window with it in his hand. As he drew back the velvet curtains, a sigh from behind them startled him. He looked in, and there

was the laird asleep on a couch drawn across the oriel. How worn and haggard he seemed ! His mouth looked wistful and like one acquainted with self-repression ; his eyes were shaded with one thin hand, the other lay across his breast. An overwhelming wave of pity surged through the young man—a stirring, loving compassion for he knew not what. The weary attitude of the whole figure sent a thrill through the watcher's heart ; he forgot the nightmare of suspicion through which his spirit was struggling, everything melted away but the fact which lay bare before his consciousness—he loved this man. Elder brother, companion, friend,—whatever place might be assigned to him,—he had drawn the younger man's spirit through his own, and the cutting apart of fibres knit together means death. Much has been written of the love of man for woman, little of the love of woman for woman, and least of the love of man for man. Well, if they could always have remained so ; if their eyes had kept the seal of blindness, one man sleeping, one heart watching. The laird stirred uneasily and muttered one word which John did not catch. The movements of his body indicated a return from the land of dreams, pleasant or disquieting. The coals crackled with accentuated distinctness, the timepiece rang out the hour

clear as a bell—the laird was awaking. John stooped to catch the first look of his opening eyes ; the lids fluttered as they slowly lifted, his lips breathed softly and distinctly the word John Gentleman did not catch before—‘ Barbara.’



CHAPTER XI.

‘VENGEANCE IS MINE . . . SAITH THE LORD.’

FOR an instant the two men’s eyes were riveted on each other, and then their glances turned to the picture which John had dropped at his side. The weird beauty of the girl’s face seemed to deepen rather than weaken under the doubly concentrated gaze bent upon it. The laird made a convulsive grasp at the sketch, but the other was too quick, and retained possession of it. As yet not one explanatory word had been spoken on either side; both were deadly pale, as though suddenly drawn up on the brink of an unseen precipice. The laird rose at last and held out his hand silently.

‘Is it my hand or this picture you want?’
John asked.

The laird caught his breath before he replied in a strange far-away voice,—

‘Your hand, John; you forget I have not

seen you for a whole day. Where did you pick up that old sketch?’

‘It lay among your papers, Mr. Holmes. Who is it?’

John levelled his eyes with the laird’s—pitiless, frozen eyes, they seemed to cut the laird’s heart in twain with their steely glitter.

‘An early love—an only love, I should say. She is dead.’

‘What was her name?’

‘Is that a question for you to ask me? Do you think a man of my years is at all likely to answer the curious questions of a boy?’

‘I am a man nearer thirty than twenty, and I swear you *shall* answer me that question. Was her name Barbara Winning?’

‘It was not!’

John Gentleman stared blankly at the sketch for some moments, as if utterly baffled; then he walked over to the fireplace where Mr. Holmes had drawn his chair, and put another question, full of masterful command yet strong entreaty.

‘Laird, you *shall* tell me her name. What was it?’

Mr. Holmes looked up despairingly. He could not divine the extent of what John knew; he cared little if the young man in the passion of the moment struck him dead, but the thought

of severance was worse than death to him. He wavered.

‘Let me ask you a question. Why do you wish to know? If to tell you that dead girl’s history would be to reopen an old sorrow which time has never wholly healed, would you insist, John?’

‘Laird, I feel that woman was my mother! I heard you murmur “Barbara” in your sleep. . . . Barbara Winning was my mother’s reputed name—it may have been Barbara something else. . . . What was she to you, this Barbara whose memory pursues your dreams, whose picture makes you white as one who has seen a wraith?’

‘When you connect these sentences, I see to what they point. . . . Do you not think the insinuation an extremely daring one for you to make to me?’

The laird eyed John with a touch of the old *hauteur* which distinguished him in earlier days, and the young man’s cheek coloured.

‘Yes, I am daring; but I can give you reasons for every suspicion which has unwillingly attached itself to you.’

‘Enough! I will not hear them. You forget yourself,’ said Mr. Holmes.

‘You *shall* hear them, both to excuse me and to show how necessary it is you should clear

yourself. You had in your youth a friend called Colonel Matheson?’

‘Yes. What of him?’

‘I was sitting in the trap outside the Brails hotel to-day when a gentleman came forward and said, although he did not know you were married, he knew me to be your son at a glance. His name was Colonel Matheson, and he is just returned from India. I pointed out his mistake, and told him you were never married.’

‘How do you know that I was never married?’

A very flood of light went over John Gentleman’s face, at all the suggestion implied if his wild suspicions were capable of confirmation.

‘Laird,’ he almost whispered, ‘if she, my mother, was your wife, tell me. I could swamp the bitterness of deserting us, in my—love.’

The temptation to lie to the passionate heart bare before him nearly mastered the laird. One sentence would give him the son over whom he yearned; one sentence would sweep the obstruction out of his affection’s path;—nay, never while the cunning, leering face of the old gravedigger was in the land of the living. He rose to his feet as he crushed the temptation out of his heart.

‘I never was married. . . . As to your fancied relationship to me, it is simply a pre-

posterous idea, wholly unwarranted, despite the mistake of my old friend, Colonel Matheson,' he said.

'Perhaps I deserve that taunt. The Lily once made a like remark when old Ray roused my suspicions,' John answered humbly.

'Robin Ray roused your suspicions! When? How?'

'That cannot interest a man who considers himself insulted. When I asked you that girl's name, it was to see if it corresponded with one he spoke of. You will give me your pardon before I go. I couldn't stay after this.'

'What was the name, John?'

'Barbara Glendinning—her story was my mother's story; now you know why your sketch, your mutterings, your friend's mistake, led me to fasten on you my suspicions; and you seemed to like me, laird,' John confessed in a low tone.

'Like you! Yes; I like you. We won't think any more of this, and you must not leave me after I have grown dependent on you. Promise.'

'It seems little good to promise; I feel as though I shall not be another night in Greenlea.'

'Nevertheless, you will not march off and

leave me a note saying you couldn't stay because of this mistake?'

'No; I promise.'

'Go away home, then. I require a solitary walk to blow off the fierce impressions you have made.'

'I'm glad you're not anything to me, for you know a second would have turned respect into contempt, and I'd have forgotten myself out-and-out. Good-night, sir.'

Mr. Holmes made no reply, and John Gentleman went out of the house with a sense of shame deep on his spirit. Still, there were questions he kept putting to himself, and which his mind was forced to reject as unanswerable. There might be more than one Barbara in the district; he had no right to pry into the laird's secrets. He ought to have known that a love affair would be a secret, something too sacred for casual eyes to gaze upon; but, then, John Gentleman's love affair was quite ten years off yet, and it was to tame the savage within him.

There are times when we distinctly feel a crisis is approaching in our lives, that the air is electric; it does not matter what cooling hand reason lays on our imagination, the sense of feverish expectancy is alive to the invisible and the imperceptible sights and sounds of presentiment, in whose thick clouds most spirits

have been folded. There was not a star in the sky; the moon had hidden herself behind a bank of clouds; everything seemed strangely silent as John walked back to the cottage. Whether the sore perplexity in which his heart was involved darkened the road with a deeper gloom or not we cannot say; but doubtless had the whole of life been rounded with the rose-light of happiness, the darkness had certainly seemed a soft mantle drawn round the fair queen, Night; it had mattered little whether the sky was thick with throbbing stars or billowy with broken clouds. A hot resentment in the breast makes a sunset look lurid which, in softer mood, would touch the mind's horizon with paler hues.

John found Widow Laurie seated looking out of the window, and remonstrated with himself for leaving the fading woman so much to herself, so lonely in the ring sorrow had drawn round about her declining years, and out of which time would never bring her with a heart healed, a life mended. There is but one alternative in time's mission to broken lives—to mend or end them; of the mending we may be dubious, of the ending none can advance a cynicism; who can answer the solution of death that has not proved it? And time but slopes down to the river whose waters humanity must ford,

whose name is inevitable. Therefore, it was a sharper twinge of remorse John felt for contributing to Widow Laurie's solitariness because of the thought that she must pass through still greater silence before she was surrounded by the cloud of bright witnesses, taken from all ranks of the sorrowful that tenant that otherwhere which at farthest lies but a step beyond. She welcomed him only half-heartedly. She had been visiting in spirit the otherwhere; she and Mirren had been keeping tryst, and John's step had startled them and broken their communing.

'Ye hae an unquiet spirit, John; it beats oot o' your steps,' she said, in answer to a quick word of apology for disturbing her.

'So I have. Have you a cure for it?'

'Time, lad, time. There's nae healer, nae quieter like time.'

'I thought it was your religion, and not time, that gave you peace of mind, not to speak of peace of heart,' he sighed.

'Time brings us religion, does it no'? Nae-body gets till God gies; mak' certain ye'll get a quiet spirit, but no' till ye've been made ready for't.'

'Do you mean we must wait till we're used? That supposing a man wronged me, and the chance of revenge came along, I

would need to let it go, perhaps never to get it again?’

‘Jist that, jist that! It would gang ill wi’ ye, lad; but it’s the bitter things we mun swallow aye in this life. Ye’re a quick lad wi’ your head; but ye hae had nae trial o’ countin’ the cost o’ victories ower yersel’—that’s the heart’s figurin’!’

‘I wish I had a glimpse into the future,’ he said suddenly.

‘Never wish that. I’d hae gone mad if I’d kent Mirren’s future—which was pairt o’ mine.’

‘I feel like as if something was going to happen to me, Mrs. Laurie.’

‘Maybe. Something’s aye happenin’!’

‘There’s a knock at the door; I was sure I heard some one’s feet on the gravel.’ He went and opened the door wide. A lad from the Hill farm stood white and trembling on the step.

‘Can ye come doon to the station, sir; there’s been a man knockit doon wi’ the express, an’ he’s still leevin’,’ he jerked out.

‘Who is it; any one I know?’

The lad gave an awkward look into the kitchen where Widow Laurie stood twisting her fingers nervously.

‘It’s Mirren’s man!’ he blurted.

‘You idiot!’ muttered John, as he placed the trembling woman in the chair and held her hands in his warm clasp.

‘Haddow killed! O Lord, Thou has ta’en Thine ain time, and the vengeance is mair terrible than oors could hae been,’ she breathed.

‘He’s no’ quite deid, mistress,’ corrected the messenger, ‘but he’s an awfu’ sicht. Wull I get somebody to bide wi’ *her*, an’ let ye come doon to see him?’

‘Yes; and be quick about it.’

Widow Laurie sat speechless till a young woman came down from the farm to keep her company; but as John prepared to depart, she caught his hand and gave him a message to the dying man.

‘Tell him I forgive him, and God’ll forgive if he asks Him.’

John fretted all the way to the station that he was obliged to carry a message of peace to a man whom he believed the special judgment of Heaven had overtaken. He was much of a heathen still in his notions, and he would have counted it simple justice to have emphasised Heaven’s decree by a codicil of earthly censure.

At the waiting-room he found a doctor and

the railway officials grouped round a mangled mass of what had been Mirren's destroyer, for no message of peace could reach through to Haddow's spirit; he lay dead in the body, and alive with spirit life quickened to the verities of eternity. In this was Mirren avenged.

'Tramping along the line from Edinburgh—express overtook him a mile beyond the station; used to be an employee of the laird's, some one tells me,' explained the new doctor from Brails.

John Gentleman stood transfixed long after the waiting-room, with its lifeless tenant, had been locked up and left in care of the porter and a group of awed rustics; he could not realise that without the lifting of a finger Mirren's wrongs had been righted, that a life for a life had been exacted. He walked slowly back, fearing to tell Mrs. Laurie he had been too late, and with a half regretful feeling that he had been unable to discharge the last duty. A strong conviction broke on his mind that the righting of wrongs is best left in God's hands; so powerful had been the appeal to his humanity that night, that the crisis to which his affairs was tending was destined to leave him with unstained hands, although not with a spirit free from the desire for revenge.

'Weel, weel, God kent I forgave him though

he didna,' was all Widow Laurie said when John broke his sad news ; and with the awe of the tragedy fresh on his heart, John Gentleman passed his last night for more than ten years to come in Greenlea.



CHAPTER XII.

THE MIRROR POOL'S REVELATION.

Away! I hate thee even as I loved thee—
Thou art my enemy who wert my friend;
I would and yet I dare not turn and slay thee,
'Tis God who must thy soul and body rend,
Breathe not to me thy words, 'Forget, forgive'—
Take them to God! Away—the wrong must live!
HERMIONE.

WHEN remorse fastens upon a refined nature, the most exquisite of sin's torture is inflicted. When we think that time is not the limit of remorse's revenge, but that it can pass with the spirit out of the body to eternity, then and then alone does the supreme vengeance-power of this eternal Nemesis appal. Once let a shaft of remorse sink in the hardest heart, and it will not be withdrawn till it has driven itself down through the quick to the quivering fibres of life. Half of the world's sin would not be committed could men have an earnest of the after-pain; but that would abolish

the great educational factor in life—experience. It is a true yet sweeping thing to say that experience keeps a school and fools attend it; the whole earth is not peopled by fools, and never wise man lived who had not been a scholar under the austere dame's stern tuition; the longer men are learners the longer shall they be teachers with larger truths to expound and instil. The world looks sideways on error. It is not the sin, but the sin's disclosure, which sends a man or woman to its condemned cell; hence the large number of the human family belonging to the Society of Hypocrites. A virtuous wrath descends upon the wretch who dares to lift the saint's white mask from the sinner's black features; so the world works the strings, and the procession of puppets moves over the gilded stage of life. All this does not interfere with the fixed decree of Heaven. The sin shall find the sinner out, sometimes to the world, always to himself and his God. Among the mutable things which throw a rainbow arch over the most of lives, it is safe to say this is immutable.

Mr. Holmes had not lived from youth till over middle age without being shadowed by the past. Still the revenge of time was withheld until such hour as his heart was bare for the blow which was to come from the hand of his

own flesh and blood. He was not, however, what John Gentleman imagined his unknown father to be, a refined type of a social reptile which will only be extinct with time. He was finely strung, and reined in the emotional inner nature with nervous strength. The hauteur of his manner was habitual rather than natural; it was like a touch of frost in an autumn air. He had sorrowed long and in hermit loneliness over the secret folly of his youth, but it had been buried years before John Gentleman in his providentially directed wandering had found a resting-place at Greenlea. It was another instance of the irony of Fate. When the laird's secret had long been dead and buried, Fate selected her time to resurrect the past and re-open the grave of a heart. If the laird had sinned, he had also been heavily sinned against. To demonstrate this truth it is necessary to turn back to the earlier pages of his history which furnished the material of this record of two lives, and which, strange as it may seem, is true to nature and not divorced from actual fact. Verily truth is stranger than fiction, but the world little knows how much is truth which it reads as fiction.

Andrew Holmes was an only child, and the last of his name. His mother, a gentle Lowland lady of aristocratic but impoverished family,

got the option of being a governess, or marrying the rich tyrant who was her father's friend and contemporary. She exchanged by her marriage a tyrant father for a tyrant husband, and died when her boy was scarce a dozen years old. Married late in life, with habits rooted like weeds, the laird at sixty-two was no fitting guardian for a high-spirited boy of twelve, motherless, and, in the truest sense, fatherless. The young heir chafed under the iron rule which had broken his mother's heart. He had not even her grave to sob his sorrows over, for she died away from her child in a sunny foreign land, to which he made his first travelling pilgrimage when he was free. College life was a revelation to him. The liberty, the pleasures of kindred spirits in close companionship, the width and breadth of ideas after the pent narrowness, all had their immediate effect, and sent him home defiant, ready to return hauteur for hauteur, and determined to take up the thread of a separate life from that mapped out for him. The old laird, then over seventy, could not subdue the young man beyond keeping him chained to his side. The life of a prisoner was pleasant compared with that of the heir, but nevertheless he managed in his solitary rambles to fall across the last of the Glendinnings—Barbara. She was dependent on cousins for a home, and

fretted her proud heart to death because of it. How they became lovers who can say? Does any one know the road that leads from friendship to love? Is it ever the same? Sometimes short and straight, oftenest long and rough, never the same, ever the same. Barbara knew who her lover was, and, in her Scotch simplicity, saw no difference between a laird's son and a farmer's daughter. Neither did her lover. He was passionately in love, and meant to marry Barbara 'Winning,' as he called her for her winsome ways. But the old laird found out the pretty love-story, and dared his heir to marry at all, unless a woman of his choice. The years went on, and a desperate hope strengthened in the young man's heart; the laird was failing rapidly, and could not leave his bed; freedom would soon be his—and Barbara. Pretty, clever Barbara, how she scorned the father as she worshipped the son! The laird rallied; they were not to know it was only for another year. In that last year folly took the place of patience, and a crown of sorrow was plaited for both heads. Surely an evil genius prompted the distracted heir to trust Robin Ray, and place Barbara under his sister's care. From the hour the crushed girl entered the city wynd, she never received one of her lover's letters, nor he one of hers. The rest of the sad

story the reader knows. The years deadened, but did not remove, the laird's pain. No thought of replacing dead Barbara ever had a place in his loyal heart—he had made an idol, and, as of old, God had not suffered him to have it long.

It was a stupendous thought for his brain to grasp, that here was Barbara's son and his, living in his father's house, all unconscious that he was breathing his mother's native air and gazing on scenes dear to her childhood and maiden years. All his life the laird had been hungering for love, and it is not remarkable that when he realised the sonship of the stranger within his gates, he lavished all the pent affection of years on him. All the more passionate and intense love grew, because it had to be stifled; as John Gentleman laid bare the bitterness of his soul against his unknown father, the laird's heart seemed to die within him at the hopelessness of establishing peace between them. All that he would do for John must be done as a friend; he must carry his secret to the grave or place a distance far as heaven and earth between himself and the one life dear to him.

He could not recover from the shock of Colonel Matheson's identification of John as his son. Matters seemed pressing towards a point

of revelation despite his efforts to avert such a disaster. If a man who had neither knowledge of his past thirty years nor yet a clue to his present life could in a moment determine the relationship, it must be clear to the narrower scrutiny of country eyes which had always been turned on him.

The news of Haddow's tragic end shook the laird's whole nature. It seemed as though the cold finger of retribution pointed to the sinner the wages of whose sin were death, and then travelled round to the stricken, sleep-deserted possessor of much wealth and much misery.

The house was unendurable to him, and the old desire of his early days, to walk off his wretchedness on the hills or through the wood, took possession of and mastered him. He left Craigpark when the sun was working a radiant transformation scene among the mother-of-pearl mists of the dawn. He meant to climb the heathery hills, where the free fresh air would cool his brow and brain; but his feet turned aside to the path, shining with dew, which led to the wood.

His mind was full of Barbara. The years rolled back, and he was young again, waiting for the only nymph that haunted his wood, Barbara. It was just as fair now without her as it was

then with her. Wild-flowers bloomed the same as before his wild rose laid its head down in the dust and died ; the water ran along laughing in its race with time, and drew him by an irresistible impulse to follow it in its cool meandering. At the tributaries the charm of the stream was broken ; the Mirror Pool had a fascination greater—he turned away to its green seclusion, perhaps by chance, perhaps it was fate.

If Craigpark could not hold the laird that restless morning, far less could Widow Laurie's cottage contain John Gentleman. A great hush had fallen on his spirit after he had time to realise how completely vengeance had overtaken Mirren's slayer. A sense of man's utter littleness and the wisdom of his leaving all things in the hands from which all things came, subdued him into a softness of heart which became his nature if it was a foreign dress. He was so despairing, so dissatisfied with himself,—his suspicions, his tigerish bloodthirstiness,—that he was exhausted in body and mind. If this softness, this cooling waft of peace, was an earnest of what the old saint in the manse called 'peace which passeth understanding,' and for which the quavering voice prayed for each heart before him, John Gentleman wanted it with all the earnestness of his nature. Having tasted it, he longed for a deep draught to quench the

thirst of his soul. For the first time for many years he forgot to pray his savage prayer for revenge. Perhaps he did not forget, but rather, remembering, put the desire from him.

He started for the hills, as the laird had done, to shake off a nervous boding, but found he had passed too much of his time in bed analysing his wonderful new-found peace; therefore he struck off through the wood, each step bringing him nearer and nearer the crisis of his life. As he walked, he thought, as he often did, of Saul and David. These two characters fascinated him since ever they had fallen into his hands, and as surely as he went out on a ramble, some scene in their history rose up before him as real as in the ancient time. He had always thought David's sparing of Saul's life a mistake, seeing he had been justly delivered into his hands; but now the true nobility of withholding a possible revenge flashed across his mind, and electrified him.

'I could not do it; I know if my enemy were delivered into my hand, my hand would be red,' the young man muttered.

He passed this judgment on himself, as far as he knew himself; but to what extent do we really know ourselves? It was an ignoble estimate of what seemed a strong character,

if one might judge the inner by the outer man. There may be in one who has attained in outward beauty the stature of a perfect man a dwarfed spirit, but rather is the leaning towards a general nobility and some particular twist or knot in character; so it was with John Gentleman. He strode on, a splendid specimen of manhood at twenty-seven. Suddenly, through the trees, his quick eye caught sight of the laird's figure at the Pool. His back was to the young man, and John came to a halt, wondering what charm the Pool had for him, and why he was there at an hour when he usually had not left his room. The old suspicious unrest irritated his heart and quickened his steps. He moved noiselessly across the soft carpet of grass until he was behind the laird's shoulder. A trembling was visible over the laird's figure as he bent a little over the glassy mirror. This John observed, and, with every nerve strung to its uttermost tension, he availed himself of his superior height, and looked over the laird's shoulder into the tell-tale water. For an instant the two faces remained side by side, *facsimiles* of each other; then they both saw a look of horror in each other's reflected eyes, and the spell was broken. The laird slowly turned round, with a look of a hunted one brought to bay. They looked fixedly at each other,

reading, weighing, judging. God never meant the father to take a culprit's place before the son; it was part of the wages of sin that it was so with Andrew Holmes.

'Speak! You *shall* speak now; I swear it,' the younger man said, laying his hand heavily on the other's shoulder.

'What shall I say to you?' the laird muttered, half to himself.

'Tell me how I come to have your very face—tell me who I am?'

'Does your heart not tell you? You are my son! John, put down your arm; God's hand is heavy upon me,' he said brokenly.

In uncontrollable rage the young secretary had raised his arm to strike his enemy delivered into his hand, but it slowly fell to his side, helpless as a little child's.

'I have looked for you for years to avenge my mother's death more than my slurred life; why should I not? In my heart I am a murderer; why should my hand fail?'

'You can do with me what you will; your mother gave my life all the sweetness it ever had; you would do me kindness to free me from bitterness worse than death. Why do you hesitate?'

The words came slowly, wrung out hoarse and terrible,—

‘Because you are—my father. I would I might slay you; but may you be cursed with life—long, terrible years of life!’

‘John, will you hear your mother’s story and mine? She was to be my wife when my tyrant father died. I was deceived; they told me you were dead. . . . My son, my son, have you none of the love your mother had for me?’ the laird cried in sharp bitterness.

The morning light intensified the white faces under the trees; one old and working with strong emotion, the other set and cold as marble, if to marble could be given blue, relentless eyes.

‘Love! I hate you worse because I loved you. What mockery that *I* should have loved *you!* Leave me quickly, or I shall forget your grey hairs, throw God’s claim on you to the winds, and do you an injury.’

‘Will you hear me? the story is so much different from what you think. Will you come with me to the only one who knows my secret, and who caused me the worst of my misery? Old Ray’—

‘Stop! I believe you to be the perjurer you are. Old Ray’s story has been well paid for. Will you go?’

‘Where are you going? What shall you do if you leave me? and how shall I bear the

loneliness? My boy, stay with me, and forgive me!’

A heart of stone might have melted under the gasping words, which were a prayer; but the softness of John Gentleman’s heart had vanished with that one comprehending look in Mirror Pool. His mouth twitched a little, then hardened.

‘If you will not leave me, I had better leave you. You can say John Gentleman found his father, and therefore ended his connection with the Laird of Greenlea. I do not say we shall never see each other again, but if we do, you understand we are strangers—that’s the last favour I shall ever ask of you. There’s little Lily; when her grandmother dies, you can care for her. I dare not take her with me,’ he groaned.

There was a solemn pause, and the laird’s face grew greyer.

‘Good-bye . . . laird,’ he went on unsteadily. ‘I wish you had not been my friend; it makes my hatred deeper. I don’t know why I am standing here with the power taken out of my arm. God knows I hate you; let that be the knife in your heart.’

Without another word, he turned and walked rapidly away through the green sunlit wood, as though he feared himself, and the return of power to his arm; walked as one whose safety

lay in flight, who feared to look back lest he should see the luring face of temptation and obey her voice, which called him back to his vows of vengeance.

Away past the stately home he had grown to love, the hills that had been his delight and his mother's, he fled, with horror deepening in his heart. He avoided the white cottage where the little child who was his guardian angel slept on in her innocence of the tragedies which encompass life, and turned off in the direction of Brails. He always carried some money about with him, and he had more in the laird's keeping. *That* he would never finger; he had plenty for some time to come, and beyond that he gave no thought. Only to be saved from himself, and, with hands unstained, to be once more a wanderer on the face of the earth! A sad ambition for seven-and-twenty.

He could not understand what had come over him, nor why the pain gnawed at his heart as each step hurried him away from the laird whom he hated. Tears like drops of fire burned in, but did not fall from, his eyes, and he was too blind with bitterness to think that they only started when the laird's face, mute with agony, passed and re-passed before his mental vision. The trees flew past, the birds maddened him with their sweet twitters, the blue sky and green



CHAPTER XIII.

INTERIM.

A HALT, a tide, an incident, may change the whole course of a life. The morning John Gentleman fled from Greenlea, he came face to face with Colonel Matheson strolling through the Roman camp which makes Brails a place of certain fame. The colonel's mind was full of the strange resemblance between the laird and his secretary, and he intended driving over to Greenlea that very day. The sight of the young man's desperate face decided him to halt, instead of passing on with a mere greeting, and in this way he found out that the connection between his friend and the secretary was for some sudden reason snapped. The thought that his mistake in the relationship of the two had something to do with the matter flashed through him more like an inspiration than a suspicion, and he resolved to detain the young man over-night, if possible until he had seen the

laird for himself. This was not difficult to do, for John would have suffered any delay rather than that the truth should leak out ; so he consented as naturally as possible to wait over-night, and give Colonel Matheson the insight he desired into best situations for the country house he never intended building. All forenoon the colonel was shut up in his room writing letters—that was his excuse to John for being four hours absent. The room certainly was locked, but its owner spent the forenoon with Andrew Holmes in the latter's bedroom, while John Gentleman lay face downwards on the grassy plain in the centre of the Roman camp.

The laird's face told the truth before his lips struggled through with the story, and his friend sat dumb before him. Then he told Mr. Holmes that the young man was with him, and seemed in terrible distress ; in his opinion the parting was as painful to the son as to the father. Nay, the laird would not be comforted with that ; if he could only know what would become of John, where and how his life was to be spent ; if he could befriend him secretly, or do anything at all for him, it would ease the weight at his heart in some small degree. Colonel Matheson's 'never despair' had rallied the remnant of a forlorn hope and won the day in battle, and something of the same spirit stole

into his bronzed face as, after long silence, he made a proposal. He had influence in Glasgow, and could place John in a first-class house, if the laird would allow him to take one of the partners, his brother-in-law, into confidence to a certain extent. He, Mr. Holmes, could privately supply a salary equal to that which the firm would bestow, and double the poor fellow's income. That would be some comfort, would it not? It was painful to see the avidity with which the laird seized on the idea, and expressed his willingness to sink out of sight in the matter, provided his friend kept him in constant knowledge of his son's career. The alienation must be his punishment. When Colonel Matheson had finished writing his imaginary letters, he sought out John Gentleman, in whom the last few hours had quickened his interest. He supposed his young friend had secured a good appointment before leaving Craigpark? No? He was astonished, and wondered if he could put anything in his way. Supposed he would elevate his nose at a paltry £120 a year, in a wealthy foreign produce house, however; many a fellow would jump at the offer of sixty pounds if just to get into an old firm like Schröder and Mitford's. Colonel Matheson found he must go to Glasgow on the morrow; he would not have time to see his

friend Holmes, but it was not a heartbreak—all of which was spoken so naturally that John believed every word of it, and told the colonel he would accept a much less tempting offer to get launched finally on city life. The end of it all was, a letter was despatched to Mr. Mitford, ordering him to create a vacancy at £120, half of which would be found by a nameless 'somebody' whose singular story was confided. To this surprising request Mr. Mitford complied, after Mr. Schröder had given his consent, with a grim rider bearing on the cool assurance of the gallant Colonel Sam Matheson. Thus began John Gentleman's city life. Years slipped away, and changes took place at Greenlea. Widow Laurie and the old minister passed away; and the laird placed his ward—then a striking little beauty of thirteen—in a school at Dresden, where she remained for four years. At seventeen she wanted home to her Uncle Andrew, as she called the laird, and he was in despair at the thought of dragging himself to Glasgow with a bright girl who could not bear country life. Here, again, Colonel Matheson came to the laird's aid. His sister, an unmarried lady whose lover had been shot down at the colonel's side thirty years before, lived with him in Glasgow; and, as Lily had all along been accustomed to consider Miss Matheson her aunt, there was no

difficulty in transferring her to the colonel's care. The laird, acting on shrewd Miss Christian Matheson's advice, had abandoned the names of Laurie and Haddow. Holmes would have been fatal to a certain scheme Colonel Sam had in his mind ; so, when the little girl asked what her other name was, she was told Matheson. Lily Matheson was not a piece of Dresden china when she came home from the Continent. The usual, or, more truly, the average British maiden is too often sent abroad to acquire a polish she cannot get at home, and returns, after a twelvemonths' rubbing up of her rusty accomplishments, a creature of a thousand airs and few graces. The laird's ward had been carefully, even studiously, nurtured in body and mind, and clung to her protector with fresh tenacity as years wore on, and she was on the threshold of womanhood. Mr. Holmes had not been resident at Greenlea for four years before Lily became an inmate of Colonel Matheson's house ; the spirit of unrest possessed him, and he feared his ward might wish to see the scene of her early childhood, which to him was a haunted spot ; so her holidays were spent with Aunt Christian. 'Have patience, my old friend,' wrote Colonel Matheson to the laird, a year after Lily came to Glasgow. 'Lily will be the means of bringing John back to you. He was

surprised I had never told him of my niece's existence, and for a while absented himself from Langside. You know his leisure time is largely taken up with what seems to be the motive of his life—the bettering of his kind ; so Christian bade me leave her favourite alone, and he would find his way back again. So he did, and what I have so earnestly desired has come about—John has won another heart beside Aunt Christian's—that of our Lily. He has not the slightest idea of her identity, and is only holding back because of his birth. He is a man of the strongest feeling ; the wrench his heart received in parting with you has left a shadow on his face which nothing but reconciliation will lift. He is greatly heartened by the partnership the firm have awarded him, and I am sure you will be glad to know they intended doing so, even had you not sunk so much money in the concern. John is fairly bewildered at *his* share in the profits ; but what he does not know will do him good rather than harm. Again, I say, have patience a little longer, old friend !'

So when we next meet with John Gentleman, it is as a man nursing a secret grief, yet under the spell of a new-found joy which was at once pleasure and pain. If he was ever to possess Lily Matheson, it must be with his past known to her and her guardians. Guardians? There

was another guardian of whom Lily spoke with strong affection—her Uncle Andrew. He gathered from remarks made by Miss Christian and the colonel that he was a self-contained, scholarly old man, who spent his life travelling, and whose one care was the girl who had changed hearts with a nameless man.

The decision of this guardian would carry most weight with Lily—he instinctively knew that; and, with a touch of his old unrest, he determined to lay the story of his life before Miss Christian. She had been his refuge when the loneliness and pain of alienation were gnawing at his heart; she would know what was best for him to do now. Next evening, Miss Christian heard the story which was old to her, but it thrilled her to hear it from him.



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CHAPTER XIV.

'JOHN, YOU ARE THAT SON.'

NO, we do not wish lights, Ann,' Miss Christian said in a quiet voice, and the servant shut the door softly.

The drawing-room was in that semi-darkness which inspires confidences; the marble pillars which stood like twin sentinels before the deep recess where the piano and the east window were, gleamed white against the gloom. Over at the south window a rich crimson couch relieved the dove-coloured tints of carpet, rugs, and furniture, and on it sat John Gentleman.

He was the same and yet different; ten years of intellectual, commercial, and social advancement must yield a triple culture. He was a man nearly eight-and-thirty now, but looked by four years younger; it was not the physical John who was changed, but the spiritual. Colonel Matheson was right when he said a

shadow always was upon his face; it made his eyes look wistful even when the world was patting him on the shoulder, and fortune smiling him up to a seat beside her favoured ones. When he spoke bold words calculated to rouse the poverty-drugged manhood of men toiling within the dark places of the earth, he forgot the pain of his sorrow, but its shadow never passed quite from his face.

He sat with his face turned away from Miss Christian, and from her place by the fire she noticed how worn and fine was his profile. His fingers picked savagely at a gold tassel on his watch-guard, and she knew what his confession had cost him, and that he felt himself anew disgraced. He had kept one thing from the mistress of the house—his father's name — and she was quick to divine his motive.

‘John, why have you not told me, your friend, your father's name?’ she said, not from ignorance of his reason, but to make him confess it.

He moved uneasily, but did not make any reply, whereupon Miss Christian rose, the picture of tender womanliness, and, crossing over to the couch, sat down beside him.

‘Shall I tell you? It is because you are loyal to him, and to be loyal to any one or

anything is a symptom of love. John, you love your father!’

‘No,’ he said between his teeth, but with an effort.

‘If you hate him, as you have insisted you do, why not give his name to an old maid who knows scores of gossips, and could do him deadly injury?’

‘Because’—he looked at her with reproach—‘because, Miss Christian, it would be dishonourable even to one who has stamped me with dishonour.’

A gleam of satisfaction lit the lady’s face; she had proved the truth of her ten-year-old theory, so she changed her tactics with consummate skill.

‘Only yesterday I came across a poem in an old number of a magazine, and I give you these two lines taken from it to show that a poet as well as an old maid can be of the same opinion regarding a case like yours—

Never the ban of inheritance a human life need mar;
Remorse alone is upon the heart an ever-searing
scar.

Do you believe that, my friend?’

‘Then you consider Colonel Matheson will give his consent to Lily’s union with a man of my origin? You know society judges a man somewhat on the same lines as a horse—by his

pedigree in the first instance, and in the second by his ability to win the prizes in the race of life !'

'John, believe me, my brother will consider you the fittest mate on earth for Lily! But she has another guardian whose consent is of chief importance—her Uncle Andrew.'

'Yes; she often speaks of him. Where shall I find him, Miss Christian?' he asked eagerly; and she caught her breath before answering.

'He is a man who had a great sorrow in his life. He had an only son who is responsible for his sorrowful old age. He is at Rothesay.'

'Some men do not know what it is to have a good father,' he said, without the suspicion that he himself was one of these whom he spoke of with such bitterness.

Miss Christian rose and paced the room in evident agitation; her thin hands were tightly locked before her, and her head sank forward in her struggle with fear and boldness. John regarded her with keen amaze, not unmixed with anxiety. A man of his fine perception was not likely to be blind to her distress, and he was about to speak when she silenced him with a gesture. She had decided to confront him with a picture of himself.

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‘You say some men do not know what it is to have a good father. Lily’s guardian had a son of that kind, an implacable man who knew and knows not the meaning of gratitude. True, the father wronged the son once, but he heaped benefits on him even when he knew not from whence they came, and gave him back love for hate.’

‘Do you tell me this to prepare me for his refusal to give me Lily, the only treasure he has left—or what?’

‘No; Lily’s guardian is only so by adoption, but he would not withhold her, even had she been his own niece, from the son whom he has never ceased to love, despite years of ingratitude,’ Miss Christian said, halting before him and laying her hands on his shoulders.

‘John, you are that son!’

The whole world seemed to echo the words vaguely in his ears, as though his brain had suddenly lost its edge, and become dull to meaning. ‘Andrew and Lily’—the names had a far-away sound as though called forth from a tomb. Had he been dreaming all the past year, that he had not known why Lily’s ways were strangely familiar, why the lift of her brows recalled some other face which he could not identify with that of the thoughtful girl who had woven a spell around his life? This shy maiden, who

sorely perplexed him with her reserve on the one hand and her frankness on the other, who charmed him whether revealing or concealing her heart, was none other than the little babe he had strained to his breast when rushing through the storm for aid to her hapless mother, and the child who, in after days, held him to his post at Greenlea. He was too stunned to think on the other aspect of this overwhelming discovery, but Miss Christian above all things wished to turn his thoughts to the laird.

‘John, is the portrait of yourself a true one?’ she asked.

‘You draw the picture of an ungrateful man ; implacable perhaps, not ungrateful am I. When a man’s life up till twenty-seven has been lived under a vow of revenge, do you not think he exercises almost superhuman control in sparing an enemy delivered into his hand? Miss Matheson, I was not strong enough, had not religion enough, to stay on at Greenlea after I found my father in the man I loved,’ he replied ; and her heart ached as each word came slow and hoarse.

She did not blame him so utterly as her words implied ; she knew he was only cognisant of the laird’s sin, and ignorant that he had been as much sinned against as sinning. The happiness of any human being had never cost

her so much thought as that of her friend, and hers was a life lived for others, and drawing its happiness from looking on theirs. She was one of those rarities found on earth, a creature whose spiritual touch is magnetic, drawing heavy hearts upwards by the attraction of an influence electric; and John Gentleman, hungering for some all-satisfying strength on which his soul might lean in all its heaviness, thought he came nearest to it when in her compassionate presence. She was the truest friend man ever had, this delicately nurtured woman, whose crown of white hair was the inheritance of sorrow, not age, for she repaid golden friendship with the interest of prayers. Friendship was to her the image of that holy communion between God and man, established eighteen hundred years ago by the world's Redeemer, who made the name of friend a hallowed word. A friend means one who succours, not one who occupies a bloodless neutrality between the kingdoms of love and hate; friendship dons the same armour as love, but wars a different warfare and in a lower rank. Startling news for those who say 'my friend,' and use him to fill in the pauses between the acts of life's private rehearsals, welcoming and dismissing him with silky tones and satin-smooth complacency! Unless friend-

ship is love's younger brother, he has no place in the family of affections, and is an impostor on whom is lavished the riches of some human heart. Miss Christian was always particular to sift the claims of a new friendship; to subject the birth-mark of ostensible sincerity to the test of her spiritual microscope, as well as to examine the features of this claimant of a wealthy and ancient name, to see if they bore resemblance to those noble characteristics of their ancestors whose lives have been historical. Once satisfied, she threw open the gates of her heart, and welcomed the new-comer on the steps, with her household of delicate sympathies crowding round. Into the holy place of her heart she had taken John's friendship, drawn him within from the other guests sunning themselves in the outer court; but the holy of holies was sacred to a memory; the spirit of prayer and the Spirit of God met there often in the midst of crowded rooms where Pleasure, light-hearted monarch, reigned, and John knew it by the light shining through her brow and out of her eyes. He was awed and subdued into a spirit more meet for yielding to that higher will which was lowering him into a pit of despair, that he might seize the cord of love which alone could draw him upward to the light. Miss Christian's revelation overwhelmed

him. Ingratitude! It was a harsh word for lips so gentle to frame, yet she had called him ungrateful.

‘Does Lily know who I am?’ A natural thought if the Mathesons always had known.

‘No; she is not home from Rothesay yet; but, when you wrote saying you would tell me the story of your life to-night, I asked Colonel Matheson to tell her before she reached Langside. He will take her to some hotel for refreshment when she arrives to-night, and let her know the truth regarding you. She is in ignorance of her own history, but her memory will take her back to Greenlea—and you.’

‘Then you wish her to remain in ignorance? Miss Christian, I should like my wife to know the strange bond of sympathy there is between us,’ he said slowly.

‘Do you think Lily might refuse you if she knew your history and not her own? We will prove her. She shall not know anything until you are satisfied as to her sincerity. You deserve a better fate than to happen on a woman of that kind.’

‘When will they arrive?’

‘They will spend an hour in Glasgow, and the train is due at nine o’clock. Of course you would not see *her* to-night. She will be

stunned, and might lead you into making a mistake about her real feelings. You will go home, John,' laying her fingers on his sleeve.

'Do not ask that. I will remain in the grounds, but I must know to-night what my little valley flower says to the colonel's story. Do you know I am her guardian as well as my—the laird? He dare not refuse to give her to me; she is peculiarly mine,' John said, his passion rising.

'There are wheels! Go to the garden, John; I will come with your fate to you,' she pleaded.

John lifted the edge of Miss Christian's lace shawl and pressed it to his lips in token of his gratitude; then he left the room and hurried through the hall to the garden, just as a carriage wheeled in from the road.

The lights twinkled through the trees like glow-worms, and the figure in the garden stood facing them; for, to his fancy, each seemed a little gold hope flickering through the gloom. A full hour dragged, and John Gentleman's heart passed from hope to despair,—the transition is speedy,—while he cursed the bitter fate which made women who were false fall to the lot of men who were true. His Lily, whom he had thought 'unspotted from the world,'

was like the rest—she could not help being a woman, and women were all false. Ah, no—not all; his dear dead mother and Miss Christian, they were true as the angels of God—but they stood alone!



CHAPTER XV.

THE GOLIATH OF HATE EXPIRES.

MISS CHRISTIAN was surprised to see Colonel Matheson had two companions when he alighted from the carriage. At first a brief hope thrilled her that the third traveller might be the laird; but, as she peered through the gloom, she saw it was a woman's figure, and a familiar one. She hastened into the hall, and found a middle-aged woman, with intelligent black eyes, and more than a remnant of beauty, standing laden with wraps. It was The Lily of East Wynd sobered down into the laird's trusted housekeeper. Miss Christian and she were no strangers, and recognised each other at once, but silently.

'Miss Lily is worn out with late hours, ma'am; the laird had her up most o' last week till a' hours in the mornin'—he was lonesome like, maybe,' she said, to prepare the lady for a change in her adopted niece's appearance.

Miss Christian's eyes met her brother's for a moment, and he turned to the girl on his arm.

'Lily, go to Aunt Christian ; she must have something to tell you about John.'

When last we saw Mirren Laurie's child, she was a beautiful little creature, attractive as bright butterflies are, and with more than usually seductive maiden wiles for her years ; she now stood the fulfilment of that bright promise. The black curls, which had been John's pride, still ringed themselves about her brow, but fashion had massed them up behind in a jetty pile which added height to her by no means 'divinely tall' proportions. She was uncommonly attractive, if for no other point than her eyes—Irish eyes in an Italian face. She left Colonel Matheson's side, and went up-stairs in silence with Miss Christian and The Lily ; but it was not until they reached her room that Miss Christian saw what a change the story of John Gentleman's life had wrought in her face. It was colourless and utterly sad, yet a strange determination shone out of her eyes.

'Don't send Lily away ; she knows too,' she said, as Miss Christian would have motioned the woman to withdraw.

The elder lady's mind reverted to the watcher in the garden with a feeling of fear. The news

had made such a physical change on the girl, that she feared her heart was engaged warring with love and unworthy pride which recoiled from identifying itself with a social waif, even if he was the laird's son. A coldness crept into Miss Christian's voice in consequence.

'Lily, surely John's deeply pathetic story has not raised a barrier between you? You are but a girl; yet you look hard as an embittered woman now. If his manliness is not more to you than his namelessness, then indeed you are not worth his regret or our disappointment.'

'And do you think he would marry me if I were under sentence of social excommunication as he is?' she asked.

'You know he would, or else you have skimmed over the reading of his character. Lily, he is waiting to know what your verdict is—you must make up your mind now. If it is "yea," then God has been good to you in crowning your life with such mercy; if "nay," then I will have something bitter to tell you.'

'You can tell me nothing I do not know, Aunt Christian. The Lily shall take my answer, and this is it: I shall never marry John Gentleman until he lays down his rebellion against his Father in heaven, and forgives his father on

earth, my dear guardian,' she said, lifting up her sweet eyes to the astonished lady's face.

Miss Christian's eyes filled with self-reproachful tears. Lily was truer than she thought; the struggle had been between loyalty to the laird and her-own heart's inclination; but the laird's cause had won.

'My poor child!' Miss Christian murmured, but Lily silenced the pitying words with suspicious haste.

'No commiseration, auntie; don't make me think I am not strong enough to do my duty to that dear old man at Rothesay, who is breaking his heart, and has been doing so for years, although I did not know it.'

'But, my darling, what if John should prove obdurate? It might break *your* heart.'

'Aunt Christian, thirty odd years ago your heart broke, Uncle Sam told me; but time has joined it so well together again that only God knows where the break was. It may be so with me.'

The Lily, from her far end of the room, saw the shiver which passed through Miss Christian's frame, and muttered,—

'Efter thirty years, and there's but the first skin ower the sore!'

Miss Christian's head had been drooping nearer and nearer to the young face pressed

against the easy chair's crimson cushion, and now she pressed a kiss on Lily's brow.

'Surely you have a lighter burden than mine has been before you. I think you will draw father and son together by this alternative of yours; John is love-starved, and cannot throw away bread for a stone. . . . Shall we send your message now, dear?'

'Yes, I have written it. Lily, take this note to Mr. Gentleman, and say he can give it an answer any time to-morrow; he is in the garden.'

Miss Christian wondered where she had found time to write a reply, but busied herself divesting her niece of her coat and her hat. So The Lily set out on her mission with a curious feeling at the thought of once more seeing John Gentleman.

Her sympathies were wholly on the laird's side now. Nearly eleven years without the counter-influences of the son had overturned her prejudice against the father. As she wandered through the deserted rooms at Craigpark, and thought of the laird aimlessly drifting about foreign lands, she came to the conclusion that John was 'thrawn,' and only for his said 'thrawnness' her darling Miss Lily would have been educated like a Christian in a boarding-school at Dollar, where the pupils walked in two long

lines to church, and she would never have been banished to a land where they spoke words the length of her arm. She had always longed for the hour when she could give John a piece of her mind on the subject, but her knees shook with nervousness as she saw his tall figure advancing to meet Aunt Christian's messenger. The note attracted him more than the carrier; he held out his hand for it.

'From Miss Matheson?' he inquired.

'Frae Miss Lily, sir,' she answered.

The Lily had a peculiar voice, with an arresting ring in it, which, once heard, was not likely to be easily forgotten. John bent his head and looked into her face, then he held out his hand—a condescension which The Lily disapproved of in the laird's son; he looked so like the old aristocrat of Greenlea just then that she could not think to take advantage of her nursling's kindly familiarity; nevertheless, she touched his fingers in an apologetic, awkward way, and drew back again.

'I am pleased to see you again, well and happy,' John said.

'It's maist eleven years since ye disappeared frae Greenlea; an' oh, Mr. John, but ye've grown like your father! Are ye no' ready to forgive the laird yet—he's that weary o' his life that I'm sure he'll no' be sorry to lay it doon.'

‘I think you ought to remember I never broke my word in the past, Lily; supposing I felt inclined to forgive, my vow of enmity would not suffer it. Is the laird in ill health, that he comes home from abroad?’ he added with a note of anxiety in his voice which his companion did not fail to mark.

‘Oh, he’s been breakin’ up for years, an’ it’s no’ likely Bute will mend him when a’ thae grand furrin’ pairts hae failed. . . . Ye said ye never broke your word, Mr. John, but ye did! Ye swore ye would *kill* your father when ye found him; did ye do it?’

His face crimsoned; The Lily had caught the only ray of hope which had brightness on the dark side of his character. He knew that the ache which had stayed so long in his heart, when other pains had stung, but passed away, was love, and he was in that anguished state of soul loving what he believed, and what time seemed to reveal more and more to be, an unworthy object. The Lily’s question brushed against an open wound, but showed him for the first time that the tide of hatred had been turned aside by providence the hour he had found it impossible to keep, and easy to break, his word. His silence satisfied The Lily; she had sent her shaft home, and would suffer it to remain there. She handed him

the letter he had been diverted from taking by discovering her identity, and prepared to leave him.

‘Do you know the contents of this letter,’ he asked.

‘Yes, sir; Miss Lily will come to ye when ye promise to be at peace with her guardian. If ye only would hear what that auld drivellin’ Robin Ray had to do wi’ a’ the laird’s misery and your mother’s, ye wouldna find it hard to be at peace wi’ him. Will ye let me mak’ him tell it a’ to me when I am back at Greenlea, and’—

‘No; I shall make him tell it to *me*. Say so to Miss Lily, and that I shall see her to-morrow if her letter does not prohibit me from coming until prepared to make that difficult promise.’

‘And ye will really see auld Ray, Mr. John?’ joyfully.

‘Before the week is over, if we both are living. Lily, my good soul, don’t be so overjoyed; I am sure Ray cannot tell me anything more than I know. I would give ten years of my life if it were possible for me to honour my father as I do my mother’s memory. Now leave me; I would read my letter.’

The Lily’s black eyes glistened with tears as she rapidly made her way back to the house.

She was filled with a wild delight, and scolded herself for greetin' in place o' dancin' at the very prospect of winning over one whom she secretly considered 'dourest o' the dour.' As for John Gentleman, he walked into the city and shut himself into his room before he ventured to read the letter whose text The Lily had given him. Possibly he never felt so desolate as then, when he found himself deserted by all his sympathisers, even by his own stern conviction that he was doing right, that he was obeying the dictates of duty. If the old gravedigger could in any way exonerate his father, then the whole of life had been a mistake, and what he had thought duty was sin. The bare idea was too terrible for him to think of, and he opened his letter. It was not addressed to him, and had no signature, just as though it might have been a transcript from some book, but it had been written in Rothesay! Lily must have been told his story before Colonel Matheson met her.

'The laird has come to suspect that we are more than simple friends,' it began, 'and has told me your story and his. Now I know why your voice, your touch, your ways have always seemed familiar. Uncle Sam has written to say I would one day be your wife, but that will never be until your father's hand and yours

clasp in peace. How deep must be your father's love, when, after all your enmity and unworthy hatred, he seeks now to shield you from any blame, and defends your bitterness for "Barbara's" sake. I dare not believe your path has been deliberately chosen, seeing you have said you fain would be at peace with God, but only a mistaken one, which you must pursue no farther, or else alone. You are not happy, even with me; you are home-sick. Now, will you go to Greenlea and ask a man, on the verge of the grave, to tell you how large a share of your parents' misery he contributed? His name is Robin Ray. I should like to go with you to-morrow to East Wynd, and see where you were born. - If you mean to try my plan, to sift the truth of what I say, come and take me before going to Greenlea. If not, then those who cannot be friends had best be strangers.'

No wonder that The Lily, knowing the contents of her young mistress's letter, rejoiced at the promise John Gentleman had given.

The letter slipped out of his fingers, and lay at his feet. It was the death-warrant of any feeble hope that Lily would commute the sentence conveyed by the messenger in her letter. Miss Christian and the girl he loved

both condemned his past, and charged him with ingratitude. It was cruel. His pain and self-repression, his loneliness, his namelessness, all availed nothing; they arraigned him as a rebel at the bar of God. It was bitter fruit indeed that the tree of duty yielded! And yet how he longed to end the ten years' war between Love and Hate. He was wounded and bleeding, still he would not leave the field; for to abandon it now meant utter defeat, and that would be death to his lifelong idea of retribution. The sword of the spirit was broken, his armour of reserve was dented, the helmet of reason, cold, steel-like reason, had bled the brows it confined, and now a little David had stepped out from the ranks of Love, and buried a pebble in the unshielded heart of the Goliath of Hate. He would be taken prisoner if he did not rally, and so be a recreant to his mother's cause. Goliath was mortally wounded, but did not know he was in his death-struggle; his strength had been drained in the long campaign, and his reign of tyranny was nearly over. Ah! he thought, if this stripling of love only knew that the same cloud which hung over him shadowed herself, would she stand forth the champion of sin? It was so easy for women to forget their sisters' wrongs when they themselves had all their rights; perhaps

even if Lily knew her mother's sorrowful story, she might not sympathise with his fate. Still, he would do her pleasure ; he was so weary of strife. So, with a long-drawn sigh, the Goliath of Hate expired.



CHAPTER XVI.

‘HIS SOUL WAS SHIVERING BEFORE GOD IN
THAT AWFUL OTHERWHERE.’

THE denizens of East Wynd looked in dull amaze after the figures of a lady and gentleman who had passed through an entry leading to a portion of the Wynd, which was about to be pulled down in the interests of health. The stairs were worn away in places, and difficult to ascend; the houses were untenanted, for the occupants had been warned away by the authorities; and so the doors swung back on their hinges, and disclosed to the view what dens had borne the name of home.

John had said very little to Lily beyond that he was willing to take her to the Wynd. She already had his promise that he would go to Greenlea, but he had taken her face between his hands, and read it with curious eyes. He loved her for her loyalty to the laird, but a

jealous thought troubled him that she should give him a lower place in her heart than she gave his father. If she only knew her own story! He would have wished her to know it, so that they might be drawn closer to each other. But that was a man's pure selfishness, he argued; what cruelty it would be to shadow so bright a spirit! When he reviewed the misery through which his own spirit had passed, he resolved to withhold everything from Lily, whether she could or could not be his wife.

He had to assist her up the crazy stairs, and when, with a strange laugh, he motioned her into the miserable room where he and she had first seen the light, he saw her face had paled, and her eyes swam in tears.

'You would rather not stay here? You see, Lily, you *would* come, and it certainly is not a place for a society lily, that toils not, neither spins. Is it too dreadful a thought to remember I was born here, and had a childhood's apprenticeship in misery?'

'No, no! Don't take me away yet,' she whispered.

John Gentleman watched her in silence as she looked round the little room, and thought how he had first seen her there on her mother's knee, when a fire glowed in the now desolate

hearth; and made one spot of brightness. Strange fate that had pursued both their lives, and brought them back again after many years to the place of their birth. If he could hold her again in his arms as he had done then, and comfort her grieving over *her* dark page of history, he would be content; but that was a vain thought. He came over to her side.

‘Lily, do you see now that there is room for bitterness in my heart? Could you forgive if a like fate had been meted out to you?’

He threw his arm round her, and watched her face burning against his coat.

‘And was not a like fate meted out to me?’

The poor dingy room seemed flooded with light in that moment when John Gentleman realised that Lily’s life from the beginning had been made known to her; then resentment at the revealer of the secret consumed him, and he forgot he had ever desired such a revelation should be made.

‘Lily, who dared to tell you that?’ he said angrily.

‘Dared! It was right to tell me, that I should be truer to you. Your father told me the story of two lives, yours and mine, and then gave me the names. John, how good he was to us both—how he loves you!’

‘As proof of which he set about making the one nearest my heart miserable!’

‘I am not miserable, John. I would be the happiest woman on earth if you would be at peace with your father. How good he has been to you during these last ten years Uncle Sam has told me.’

‘How? To my knowledge he knew nothing of me; now, I believe Miss Christian has kept him aware of my progress in life. Has he been kind to me in any other way?’ he asked, with a sudden dread suspicion.

Lily drew away from his arms and looked steadily in his troubled face.

‘Rather kind! He has paid half of your salary since you came to Schröder & Mitford’s, and has sunk so much money in the firm that the new partner will soon be a rich man! Rather kind, was he not?’

A mist came over his eyes and blurred Lily’s sorrowful face. He was thinking of the morning under the trees at the Mirror Pool, and his parting words with the man who was pleading for love,—‘You love me, and I hate you!’ Coals of fire were heaped high on his head, and his heart melted within him.

‘Why could he not let me be? Yes, Miss Christian was not too harsh when she charged me with ingratitude; but I was ignorant of it

all. Lily, let me take you home; I shall go to my father!’

‘Not till you see old Ray. Promise me you will not see the laird until you have heard all. The Lily has returned to Greenlea to-day, for the laird is due to-morrow.’

‘I will promise you anything you ask, for you are my good angel, and have ever been.’

‘Fancy an angel born in this place!’

‘Yes, especially after it had been the birth-place of—a fiend! Come away from this spot, and, darling, be kind to the savage you have tamed. When we used to quarrel, you kissed me good again. Kiss me good again, Lily!’

He was her guardian and her lover; but she said it was the former on whom was bestowed the shy kiss; the lover it was returned it.

They would never see the place again, for it was doomed to make way for light and space; so they stood a moment on the threshold. John cut out the cow’s head which he had carved on the door in his impish days, and gave it to Lily as a keepsake and reminder of their first home; then they descended to the Wynd.

A defiant little urchin threw a stone at John’s hat, while another stroked Lily’s fur jacket with evident satisfaction. As they turned away from

the wretched place, John saw Lily's eyes fill and her lips quiver.

‘What is it, child?’

‘Think on my mother walking from that prison out to Greenlea—and death. Surely you can forgive your father when I can such a monster as mine?’

For answer he pressed the hand on his arm, and hurried her from the place. Miss Christian took John away from Lily that afternoon; she judged it best to leave the girl alone, where she might let her grief for her mother have vent, and not stifle it in the presence of others. Colonel Matheson and his sister had both been startled on hearing that their news about John was a week old to Lily, but respected the laird's motive which led him to divulge his painful secret. As for John, he never left Miss Christian's side; the load of misery seemed to press less heavily now that he meant to atone. Before he left, Lily came down from her room,—a pale but tranquil Lily,—and played the last remnant of an evil spirit out of him—he was utterly vanquished. Then she sang, ‘Strangers Yet.’

After years of life together,
After fair and stormy weather,
Child and parent scarce regret
That they meet as strangers yet!

‘Never sing it again, Lily. Scarce regret? Never cease to regret, is nearer the truth. And now, good-bye, dear ; when I come again, I shall have been to my father.’

Long after he was gone, Miss Christian sat alone, with his last words ringing in her ears—‘I shall have been to my father’—while upstairs Lily remembered his first contrite words—‘I shall go to my father ;’ and in both these loving hearts there rose the prayer that this returning to a human father might be but typical of the prodigal heart’s return to the Father of Spirits. And as they prayed, John Gentleman in his room knelt like a child, and offered up the sacrifice of a broken spirit, of a contrite heart.

In Greenlea a far different scene was being enacted. The Lily’s first leisure duty she felt to be a visit to the old gravedigger. Eighty odd years were beginning to throw their weight on old Ray’s back as well as on his shoulders ; when able to leave his chair he walked double. His nose and chin almost met, while his shifty eyes were dull beneath his bristling brows ; his hands were like the talons of a great bird, for nothing but long curling fingers of bone protruded from his greatcoat sleeves. His ruling passion was strong in death ; for, while the near presence of the inevitable overshadowed

him, he tottered from his chair to the graveyard and looked for bones. He was well provided for by the farmers, and The Lily had instructions to see he did not want ; but the laird never visited him at times when he was at home.

The Lily inspired old Ray with the liveliest fear. Her sharp tongue and references to Mother Meg showed him that she knew all about his faithless friendship to the laird in his dire need. So terrified was he to lose his cottage that he lied to the villagers, and said that the laird had sent John Gentleman abroad to manage a mine, and that that accounted for Mr. Holmes also absenting himself so much. Rumours spread that John's management had made the laird fabulously wealthy, and that he would adopt the young man, only for his, John's, objections. Whenever The Lily heard the latter rumour, she knew old Ray had circulated it, and pounced on him in consequence.

So when she lifted the latch and entered his cottage, he greeted her with a growl.

'Ye're back again, ye black-eyed gipsy. I wis hoppin' ye'd get drooned !'

'I believe a' that, ye auld scoondrel,' she retorted briskly.

'Noo ye're here, whit d'ye want? I'm gaun oot fur a dauner in the yaird.'

'Is't no' high time ye took your last dauner there! But ye mun leeve a day or twa langer, an' then dee as fast as ye like, sae lang as John Gentleman has tackled ye about the game ye played wi' his young mother!'

'Eh! Whit? Lily, ma lass, tak' a bit seat efter that lang walk frae the big hoose! Whit did ye say about that savage?' he inquired anxiously.

'I thocht I'd mak' your auld banes rattle; ye aye delighted to hear ither folks' playin' a bit tune. Ay, he's comin' to mak' freens wi' his fine auld father, and he'll pu' the heid aff ye like a cork oot a bottle if ye tell ony lees! Mind, I ken a' the truth.'

'He's no' to come here! He's no' to come here!' shrieked old Ray.

'Gin ye tell nae lees, he'll maybe jist shake ye, but he'll hae ye hanged at Perth if ye try on the lees,' she continued, grave as an owl.

'Na, na,' he croaked cunningly; 'they divna hang noo-a-days fur tellin' lees.'

'Ye're richt; gin that were the law, a' the trees in the forests wadna keep them in gal-lowses! But he can clap ye in a cauld reeking prison fur being a mean an auld thief as ever leaved, maybe exceptin' your sister, Mother Meg. Lod, hoo she maun be wearyin' fur ye doon in that place whaur there's nae naisty winters!'

The old sinner could not even be faithful to his dead companion in crime; there is not always honour among thieves. He caught at a chance of escape.

‘Ay, she wis a bad, thievin’ hizzy, oor Meg; it was her made the ba’s and made puir silly me fire them. *I* wouldna hae robbed the bit lassie or the laird; it was Meg, Lily—it was Meg!’

‘Man, dinna spend your last hoors leein’. It’s quite true “the nearer the kirk the faurer frae grace.” Here’s you a’ your days not only a stane-cast frae the kirk, but a step frae the kirkyard; an’ ye sit there waggin’ your auld doited head, as hard a sinner as ever the gospel was prodded at.’

The Lily’s black eyes flashed at him, and he cowered away back from them.

‘Tak’ yer black een awa’, woman; they’re no’ canny,’ he whined.

‘I ken what gars ye grue at my een; *Barbara’s* een were black, and ye canna bear mine for that. Hoo are ye gaun to stan’ a glower frae her when ye meet her in the next warl?’

Old Ray rose in a frenzy, and, seizing one of his trophies from the graveyard,—a long bone,—threw it at The Lily; but she merely caught it, and laid it beside him, remarking as she went out,—

‘Ev’ry dog maun hae his bane!’

She chuckled to herself as she walked home, and congratulated herself on having terrified old Ray sufficiently to make him tell the truth to John Gentleman on the morrow. She was disgusted with the mean-spirited specimen of humanity she had left behind her, and wondered why he was allowed to live and younger folks taken. She gave it up as one of the enigmas of life, and busied her brain conjuring up fairer scenes than those to be found in and about the gravedigger’s cottage.

All night her heart beat high with excitement, and it was early morning before she fell asleep.

The cottage in the graveyard had no lamp lit that night; its owner sat in his chair and never heeded the falling of shadows or the rising of the moon. An unbroken silence encircled the place and hung about the eerie churchyard. Then came morning, beautiful and bright.

The Lily haunted the station all day to meet John Gentleman, and at last he came. He was greatly moved when he heard how she had prepared the way for him at the cottage, and anticipated an easy victory over his enemy.

The sun was beating on the old white chimney-stalk rising to so disproportionate a height above the low cottage. The window was screened, and they concluded Robin Ray was taking his

afternoon sleep. He was sleeping the sleep that knows no waking.

John followed The Lily in, and both stood transfixed at the sight which met their eyes.

The old man sat on his chair, with his eyes fixed on the door, as though the sight of something there had killed him; his lean fingers held the bone he had thrown at The Lily in a death-grip; his jaw had dropped. Before him was the bare table, on which little piles of sovereigns were ranged beside two bunches of faded letters and a large cinder; on the table he had traced his confession with the latter:

‘I DID IT A’!’

Perhaps he felt the death-angel’s presence in the lonely place, and strove, by turning out the hoarded money and undelivered love-letters, to propitiate heaven and make amends to those on earth. Very little had been spent on hapless Barbara; three-fourths of the laird’s money had been hoarded by the dead miser. It and the letters had told their own tale without the shaky characters on the table.

The Lily’s gaze was riveted on the figure in the chair; but John Gentleman’s eyes went hungrily to the faded letters. He lifted them in his hands reverently; he kissed them, and blistered the faint, girlish writing with his tears. His mother’s love-letters! He read the tender

words, and wept again as the letters grew terrible and despairing ; then he turned to the laird's—they were as pitiful. Oh, what a pair of wedded hearts that dead sinner stiff and stark in his chair had separated ! The ashes were cold on the hearth, the life was gone from the sinner ; his gaze had been eternally petrified as it met that presence entering at the door ; and his shrinking spirit had fled from out its withered casket, leaving behind it an image stamped with terror. When the grave would cover him over, still he would lie with that stricken face upturned to the darkness. His soul was shivering now before Barbara and Barbara's God in that awful otherwhere.



CHAPTER XVII.

'YOU AND MY MOTHER WERE MORE CRUELLY
WRONGED THAN I.'

Strange that feet returning home,
Should plead a longer way !

TEN years have elapsed since the laird parted with his son, and these years have made him an old man. As he sat in the library the day after the discovery of Robin Ray's death, he looked aged. The Lily had shed sunshine on his heart by telling him that John had come to Greenlea, and that the undelivered letters were in his possession. But the hours brought no John, and that first night at home, after many wanderings, found the master of Craigpark broken-hearted anew. Next day the time dragged still more drearily ; a thousand times the laird heard his foot cross the hall. No maiden ever awaited more eagerly for her lover than this old man for his son. Even The Lily's hopes failed her as evening approached,

and he had not come from the hotel at Brails. Had he returned to Glasgow in a redoubled fit of anger, or was he feeling his position so keenly that he shrank from meeting the laird again?

Mr. Holmes' hair was wholly silver now, as was the moustache shading his sensitive mouth. A droop in the shoulders, a look of unrest, aged him beyond his years, and worried his house-keeper particularly this day.

'You are sure he said he would come?' he asked nervously every other hour; and he was comforted by her answer for the time.

He walked in the shrubberies where John had liked to smoke in the evening, and now and then took out a portrait Colonel Matheson had sent him of his son. It was a stern face, and a sorrowful one withal; the mouth seemed not unacquainted with repression, the eyes wore a mask of coldness. But proud the father was of this alien son—proud of his manly beauty, his devotion to 'Barbara'; even his past antagonism to himself was noble because he avenged his mother's memory. And now he knew what it was to love and be beloved; then the laird sighed over his own ruined life and that other life hid from human recompense.

The thought that John might shrink from

coming back did not occur to him till sunset was nearly past, and even then he put the idea from him as a foolish one. John knew how sure he was of welcome; he would come home if he could bring himself to forgive his father.

The laird took from a cabinet in his own room a favourite pipe which had been John's; every evening he smoked out of that pipe, and was comforted that he had something which linked him to the wanderer. Through the clouds of its smoke he saw the one face in all the world for him; the dreams it conjured up were of peaceful hours in the past when separation was as yet to come, and he was fain to cherish the delusion that these visions might forecast the future as well as recall the past. This thought yielded a subdued happiness—subdued, because when the heart is old its pulses beat a slower measure, and do not squander life as in the fever-riot of youth. Age lives on the assurance of eternity, youth on the expectations of time; the one inheritance a surety, the other a myth. So it is that joys which to the young are golden, to the old seem only gilded; that, however deep a well-earned happiness may seem to youth, age knows it to be a shallow pool only deep enough to mirror the image of eternal joy bending over it. Yet, despite the lesson of time, it was but natural

that the fatherhood in the laird's heart should have its wistful longing for an eventide made light by his son's companionship. The fire of the younger life would rekindle the dying embers of vitality in the older ; the father would re-live his lost youth in the son.

Again, as in the hour of parting, they set out, unconsciously, to meet each other, but not through the wood they went. The laird was disheartened, and as his love seemed to roll back void to its source, a resentful look of wounded pride settled on his face.

He walked away in the direction of the hills, and The Lily, who expected he was going to Brails, turned from the gates in bitter disappointment. He had not been long on the road which wound among the hills when the Scotch mist began to wreathe its grey veil round the shoulders of Ben Ledi and blur the outlines of the surrounding hills. The grass was damp, and each blade glistened like a tiny silver spear thrust up through the breast of earth ; the shepherd's house had a light reflected on the blind, and the flicker tempted the laird to enter and dry his coat, which chilled him with its damp weight. Voices within made him pause at the window and peer in at the side of the blind. He did not wish to put the shepherd's lasses in a flurry by an untimely visit from their

laird. There was a babel of tongues, and a man's voice deep beneath a chatter of trebles. They had some shepherd lad in, and the laird decided not to inflict the restraint of his presence on the rustic group. This was his surmise only, for he could not see any one through the chink of light. He turned to find his way home through the misty mountains, and knew not that a step had been between him and his son. John had spent a day and night poring over and over his mother's letters, and they seemed to him like her voice, faint and far-off. Then the laird's letters, written before John's birth and after the old laird's death, full of gentle insistence that Barbara would be married then, roused him to feel bitterness like death towards the old false man gone to his account. He felt his mother would have wished him to love on after she was taken, and make amends to him who had been so ruthlessly sinned against, if sinning. And he—how had he fulfilled this natural obligation? By an unnatural hatred. He suffered none the less keenly because his whole life had been mistaken, that he had not tried the cause before he condemned. He was cut to the heart by the two-edged sword of his own ingratitude, and shrank from meeting the father whom he had desired to slay, but dared not. If the laird

had not loved him so well, if he had ever been unkind, tyrannical, or anything but the fine-souled gentleman he was, then it would have been less dark a part he had taken in the past years.

He must atone for it; but he shrank from going back to Craigpark. The thought of his absence having wrought a terrible change in the laird sent the blood surging to his brain; he could not bear to harbour it. Then the necessity for immediate atonement mastered him, and he set out slowly and painfully to confess the bitter humiliation of a life mistaken.

The familiar road had many new cottages here and there; they were not so arresting to him as the old landmarks. He shuddered, and hurried past the wood on to the gates of Craigpark. But he could not enter. If the laird had come down the shadowy avenue, John would have hurried to meet him; but he was then in the shrubberies, and once more John turned in agitation away, taking the hill road as the first nearest to him.

He would go in when he returned—the laird would be reading in the library, and he would enter by the French window, as he used to do.

When John Gentleman fled from Greenlea, he was suffering blindly; but that was a more merciful pain than the wide-awake torture which

racked him now on his return. He was at that stage of self-abasement when he felt himself to be the chief of ingrates to God and afterwards to man.

Take heart, ye whom God has brought to this crucifixion of spirit, ye are within touch of redemption; the red tinge of shame becomes the soul better than the pallid hues of spiritual neutrality. He was a mile beyond the shepherd's cottage when the mist began to show itself in a thin haze. Although he hurried back, his clothes were damp through and through, and he went into the cottage.

The women had been young girls when he left Greenlea, but they remembered him and besieged him with questions. Was it true the laird had adopted him? And was he a rich man now? Was he going to Craigpark that night? He answered 'yes' to the last question, and departed as quickly as possible.

The road was so misty that he could only see a little way ahead for a mile or so; then he came to a heap of stones in at the wall which were used as a resting-place. He sat down, not from weariness, but to make the time longer, for each step nearer his own home added to, instead of taking from, the weight at his heart. Suddenly his eye fell on a pipe lying between two loose stones, and it seemed strangely fa-

miliar to him. He drew it out, and then came remembrance. It was his own pipe, and the laird had given it away to some of the farmers very likely. Well, they had kept it in good order, only he wished *he* had cared enough to have retained it on the rack in the study.

He rose and moved down the lonely road again with the pipe in his hand. A star came out, and here a stream turned in from the hills and chattered alongside the way; the air became drier, as though the mountains had drawn up the moisture to quench the heather's thirst.

A figure came hurrying in the opposite direction from John—it was the laird returning for his pipe; its empty case was in his hand. A few yards from each other, right in the middle of the road, they halted, and took a long, long look. What light there was seemed to be on the laird's face, and to John Gentleman it looked white, old, sculptured; he made no advance, but simply waited. John's eye fell on the case in the laird's shaking hand, and in an instant he divined the truth, and his face was transfixed. He took a step forward and said unsteadily,—

‘Father! . . . I have come back. . . . Shall we forgive and forget?’

For ten years the laird had been waiting for

those words, and they thrilled his ears now on that lonely road face to face with that one who had cursed him; he had still sweeter words to hear as his hand was laid in John's close clasp. 'Laird, I loved you even when I thought I hated you; you and—my mother were more cruelly wronged than even I.'

'My son!' whispered the laird. 'Ah, John! if you had listened to me that terrible day at the Pool, you would have known what you know now, and all these desolate years we had been together!'

'All the years to come we shall be together as we used to be—Lily and you and I. . . . Father, why were you so good to me after our parting? I—I have broken my heart thinking on my ingratitude. Yes, that is the word Miss Christian used. . . . Shall we go home, laird?'

The old familiar title slipped over his lips like in the past, and Andrew Holmes took his son's arm and suffered him to lead him home again like one walking in his sleep. 'Shall we go home?' How sweet the words were to the laird's hungry heart.

The Lily's eyes were swollen with weeping at her old master's disappointment. Where was he on this misty night? Perhaps lost among the hills, and all through John Gentleman's 'thrawn-

ness.' But Miss Lily would punish him for it, though it would break her heart—whereupon the dews gathered thick again in the dark eyes straining out into the gloom. The two young maid-servants were newly come to the house, and were consoling each other by proposing to run away if it would always be like this, when they heard a scream of delight come from the back porch, and then a burst of weeping. They concluded the housekeeper was mad. Certainly The Lily was wild with joy, for coming round by the side shrubberies, she saw the laird and John Gentleman arm-in-arm.

'Oh, Mr. John,' she cried, as the two entered the hall; 'ye *were* thrawn, but I maun say ye hae given in handsome!'

Later on she asked the astonished maids if they could dance. They didn't think they would have much chance of it in such a quiet place, they said.

'My lasses, there's gaun to be a barn ball in a while; sic a weddin' as ye never saw. Did ye see the bonnie gentleman that cam' in wi' the laird? That's his son—his adopted son—and he's gaun to mairry the laird's niece—the dearest wee leddy that ever lifted up a bonnie face to heaven.'

'And will they bide here?'

'They'll no' bide onywhere that the laird's no',

and this is his hame. I wis Miss Lily's nurse,
and she was ca'd for me!

'Ma certie! they maun hae thocht muckle
o' ye.'

'It made me a new woman when they ca'd
the wee white lammie efter The Lily o' East
Wynd,' she said humbly.



CHAPTER XVIII

PEACE AND LOVE FOR PASSION AND HATE.

THREE months the laird and John Gentleman companioned together in closer sympathy than those old buried days had ever known. Not even Lily was to come between them in the first months of reconciliation. She was fully content to yield them undivided affection, and well pleased to consider herself for the time an outsider. The laird's revelation had deepened and strengthened her character at the very outset of womanhood. She was not crushed by her sorrow, although most likely she would have been had John Gentleman's sympathy not been able to reach through to it. She was not alone in her trouble, and the sorrows of the laird had roused her out of herself to an activity fatal to despair.

She was happy with Miss Christian and Colonel Matheson — to whom she read the

letters which came regularly from Greenlea, and which disclosed a peace so perfect between father and son, that Miss Christian wiped her eyes, and the colonel looked out of the window. He was proud of himself, was old Colonel Sam, and had he not a right to be justly so? 'Tactics, Christian, tactics, have not been a vain study to me, you see,' he would say, as the two talked over the success of his schemes, which had been projected almost from the first year of John Gentleman's settlement in Glasgow. If that little beauty would hasten and grow up, the gallant colonel thought he saw his way clear to bring the divided house into unity once more. The three hearts must be made as one,—Lily, John, and the laird,—as they used to be, only knit by closer ties than had ever before existed.

'Christian,' he said one morning, walking into the room where his sister sat dreaming, till he and Lily would come down to breakfast; 'Christian, attention!'

Miss Christian smiled and looked up from her reverie.

'I have a letter from John, and no doubt Lily is devouring one also at this moment; do you know what he wants?'

'Lily!'

'Tis just that—nothing more nor less than

Lily! And when do you think he wants to rob us of the only flower which blooms in the end of October?’

‘Perhaps in spring,’ ventured Miss Christian faintly.

‘Spring, madam! He means to have her on Christmas Day! Six weeks you’ll have of her yet; that’s all, Christian.’ He coughed, and twirled his frosty moustache.

Miss Christian had been half-prepared for something of the kind; but the news made the room turn chill, and herself very desolate. She would have commenced to cry, very probably, had not Lily shyly entered at that moment.

‘Well, little woman, I see you are quite delighted at the prospect of becoming Mrs. John Gentleman on Christmas Day! I suppose the laird has been aiding and abetting him in the matter. Liker him to return to his business; a pretty partner he!’

‘Did John write you as well, Uncle Sam?’ Lily asked; her cheeks were burning, and she looked as unlike the flower whose name she bore as possible.

‘Yes; and here is Aunt Christian preparing to dissolve herself in tears. Quite Niobe-like, I’m sure. Bless my heart! are you going to assist her? Well, I’m off; I can stand fire, but

not water!' and the colonel blustered away for a walk in the bleak morning air, which would dry his own watery eyes, he trusted.

The two ladies looked at each other and—didn't cry. They had so many things to talk about that they reserved the luxury of tears till parting came nearer, and when Uncle Sam returned they were half-way through with breakfast.

How the weeks fled! It seemed no time until Christmas week, and then Colonel Matheson and Miss Christian took Lily back to Greenlea, for the laird would have the marriage at Craigpark.

John Gentleman took the two ladies to Widow Laurie's cottage, and showed Mirren's child where he had first seen her mother, a bright girl with milking-cans in her hand. He did not forget to take them down to the little stream where the laird offered 'the savage' a shilling for saving him from an unexpected cold bath, and where he had thrown it into the stream in a passion.

At old Ray's deserted cottage they stopped a while at Miss Christian's request, and Lily shivered when she saw the ghastly trophies lying about just as he had left them. It was so dark within, and the crisp snow without looked so fair, that they left the house thankfully. At

the door his spade lay half buried in the snow, and John remembered how David Haddow had sneered and suggested that old Ray should be buried in his house, with the spade leaning against the tall chimney for a monument.

‘Ours will be the first wedding for many a long year that the old gravedigger has not damped with his presence, Lily,’ he whispered.

‘Was he at my mother’s wedding?’

‘Yes, Lily—don’t think about it, dear.’

How well he remembered Mirren Laurie’s wedding! The whole scene was stamped on his memory—the flowers, the torches, the dancers, and the sweet-faced victim of all the bitter mockery! Old Ray’s leering face at the door, and the laird’s conversation, came back to him like as though it had been yesterday, and not nineteen years ago.

He thanked God a happier fate was in store for Mirren’s child, and pledged himself anew to cherish her till death should part them for that little while between Time and Eternity.

Lily would have one solace that the laird and John would never have. She knew where her mother slept her last sleep, but where Barbara was buried old Ray never divulged, and even had the two who loved her had

any idea of the place, hers was an unknown grave.

Greenlea and Brails contented themselves with the fact that the laird had adopted John Gentleman. Some said they were father and son, and others disputed it, seeing John kept his own name. At any rate, Mirren Laurie's little one was to be co-heir with John Gentleman, and the people were going to make merry over their wedding. The old barn was shut up after Mirren's death. The laird would have deemed it sacrilege to make merry where she had died. So he dedicated another larger barn to Hymen, and promised the farm folk that the newly-married pair should look in on their revels at the barn ball.

The laird and John brought down flowers from the house to decorate the barn, for there were no flaming poppies, no fresh handfuls of corn, to thrust in the niches round the grey walls; but they made evergreens, holly, and mistletoe, along with the delicate hothouse garlands, convert the barn into a festive place, while they trusted to the torches high above the flowers for the weird, wild effect of the past.

When all the earth was clad in virgin white, when the sun tipped the hills with gold, and a hush was upon all nature, they were married.

Two hours later the winter day closed, and from far and near the country folks swarmed to the laird's barn ball. They had arrayed themselves finely, and therefore the scene lost some of its old picturesqueness. The dancers were waxing enthusiastic, the torches flared gorgeously, the rafters rang with laughter, when the door opened and the laird stepped in with Lily on his arm; John was a pace behind.

Then the rafters rang again with shouts of welcome, and Lily was handed over to the oldest farmer's son for a dance, while a rosy lass fell to John Gentleman. The laird's face was a study. He stood with the torchlight falling on his silver hair, and it seemed to those who watched him as though his face was illumined with an inner light. He had soon to return to his guests, but he left John and Lily a little longer, bidding a matron near him keep them in mind of their train.

When at last they left the barn ball, John put walking shoes on his wife's feet and threw her tiny white slippers among the lasses for luck. She who got either of them would be married before twelve months were gone, and in the scramble they slipped away.

Over the snow they went together, but John would not grant his young wife's first request

—to take her to that other barn where her mother had died. He would not have her heart clouded on her wedding day, and reminded her that she had that very day promised him obedience!

‘And you know this is Christmas Day, and there should be peace on earth; so you must be quite happy and not vexed,’ he whispered.

‘I am quite happy, and you know I am not vexed,’ Lily said reproachfully.

They loitered in the grounds, for the frost-king had commenced his fairy work, and crystals glittered like jewels on the arms of the trees. The grass was sparkling as with diamond dust, the snow lay in soft folds round the turrets, and over all shone the stars of peace.

The Lily came to look for them, as the express from the north would reach Greenlea in three-quarters of an hour.

‘Mr. John,’ she said, as they hastened back, ‘would ye be very wroth wi’ me if I kissed your wife? She’s that sweet in her bridal gown!’

‘Well, if you can get near her for that fur cloak and hood, you may take one and get one,’ he laughed.

Lily stood on tiptoe and kissed her nurse

on both cheeks, in return for an almost reverent kiss.

‘I wouldn’t have it on both cheeks—it’s a foreign custom, Lily,’ John said, knowing her prejudice to all foreign things and customs.

‘Weel, it’s rael sweet onyway,’ she returned.

A short time after, the newly-wedded pair were speeding on their way south, and the guests grew merrier in the barn and at the house; for surely never were two more happily mated than Mirren Laurie’s daughter and the laird’s adopted son.

Peace was on earth—at least on that spot of earth—and goodwill was in every heart, surely there was no fairer place than Greenlea, which had once been dark with passionate hate and sin.

Where was passion and hate, came peace and love. The tangle of life showed a golden thread when unravelled. Within the compass of one quiet village the tragedy as well as the comedy of life had been enacted before God the Author of all things and His great cloud of witnesses. The laird’s penance was heavy, but not more so than may overtake a like sin at any stage of the world’s history. It is justice to the living and often to the dead victim. Once more a fight between Love and Hate had resulted in the latter’s overthrow; once more God and

man had striven, and the human lay vanquished before the Divine. It is well for the world that every now and then it sees the upraised arm of flesh struck down in its rebellion against Heaven; the broken bits of our armour may cut the feet of those coming after us, and turn them back from the unequal contest.

The lives of these two men, whose histories have been written, were like burning mountains, one volcanic with love, the other with hate; and, when the internal fires yielded their scathing lava tides, the former had engulfed the latter. Now they had one channel in which to flow, and one tide of affairs.

The country in its peaceful winter aspect suited the laird's mood as he lingered at the window after the guests were up-stairs, and, with one or two exceptions, asleep. It was the year's old age, frosty and with storms past, which he saw spread out before him like his own life.

The last nineteen years passed mournfully before his mental vision. He saw the fair-haired savage lad at the stream-side, the terrible face reflected in the Mirror Pool, and the remorseful man before him on the hill road. These three visions marked epochs in the son's life, when his father was unknown, disowned, and known. His cup was full now; he wanted

not one added drop. The son would make up his life's losses to him, and Lily's happiness would show John what his father had lost when 'Barbara' died.

Then he fell to counting the weeks before they would return, never to leave him lonely again, and sighed in deep content. Life, which had been long bitter, was so sweet now that he looked up to the sky where Barbara waited him, and thanked God who had sent him—John Gentleman, Tramp.

THE END.



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