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ALICE LAUDER

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ALICE LAUDER

A Sketch

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THEMES AND VARIATIONS"

"Glissez, mortels! N'appuyez vous pas!"

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PART I.

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ALICE LAUDER.

CHAPTER I.

THEY all said it would never do ; and, as a matter of fact, it didn't. There was some comfort in that—to the other people. Whether it was at all consoling to Alice Lauder to know that the inevitable result had been foreseen, prophesied, deplored, and commiserated by the whole of her acquaintances on board ship, is another matter ; yet, as often as she went over the whole affair in her thoughts, she declared to herself that she could not have acted differently, even from the very beginning.

The beginning of it all was not a very cheerful day for a beginning. The mail steamer "Suez" had put into this forlorn Australian port for a few hours, to pick up the mails and to take in any incidental passengers who might easily be anxious to get away from St. Paul's Bay. The

white deck of the vessel was always kept in a state of supernatural neatness and shininess. Every coil of rope was tidied up to a hairpin, every brass plate and moulding shone with more than Dutch brilliancy; indeed, the rites of cleanliness and order were carried out to a counsel of perfection on board the "Suez;" yet even this perfection could not make her deck appear a cheerful home on such a day. The passengers, who for the most part had been on board for eight or nine days, and who now felt to the manner born, superciliously gazed at the land, or hung listlessly over the bulwarks, vainly seeking what they could devour in the way of amusement. But there was very little to amuse them either in the weather or the surroundings. Under a sad, misty sky, the horn-shaped landlocked harbour looked all one uniform tint of faded grey, except for an occasional gleam of orange or purple, like stains of iron-mould, as the heavy water moved with the tide. The wind was blowing from the land in a persistent melancholy spirit; it was not strong enough to stir up the waves to strife, but it kept up a dreary sort of strumming in the rigging; and the few grey-green, thin-leaved trees that grew near the beach stooped and hobbled, like old crones driven before the blast, and bent nearly double with

age and fatigue. Sometimes a swift, transitory gust of rain flew over the ship, but soon relapsed into the indefinite saline mist that seemed to pervade both earth and sky. A few scattered white houses with wet iron roofs, a white lighthouse on the north side of the harbour, and the mute sunburnt forest rising tier above tier till it rolled away into the horizon—these were all the visible attractions of St. Paul's, W.A. Sometimes a quick glance of sunshine alighted on the bushy hills far inland, and showed out their ashy-white network of dead trees, or flashed on the flying splinters of rain close at hand; but there was something pallid and cheerless even in that momentary brightness.

"It's very Australian," said Lady May Carr, who was the leading lady of this voyage, to her companion, a tall young Englishman with a grave, handsome face. Lady May was tall, too, and fair and robust. She was a very good imitation of a pretty woman, but her eyes and eyelashes, hair and complexion, were all exactly the same tint—a sort of whitey-brown sugar-paper shade. Nevertheless, she possessed in perfection the well-born, well-trained, well-preserved appearance of the superior travelling Englishwoman. Everything she had on was evidently the right thing; if anything, it was too right.

This was before the advent of tailor-made figures; yet there was a sort of prophetic tailor's finish in her severe yachting dress and professional cloth cap. Her hair was arranged in that neat mathematical formula which no woman, however talented, can produce by her own unaided fingers. Only a lady's maid, and a very clever one at that, could have turned out those whitey-brown braids and puffs in such polished completeness on board ship. She looked rather contemptuously through her eyeglass at the only passenger from St. Paul's, a young lady who was just then coming on board, and mounting the steps as if she were being led to execution; and, indeed, it was evident to the unaided vision that everything about the new-comer was in the wrong, passively if not actively wrong. Her thin, shiny black silk at once declared the fact of having seen better days, but it need not have been decked out with cheap fringe and unfortunate ornaments. The feathers in her hat were weak and drooping, as if they had been curled and recurled with great care and trouble, but could not keep it up a moment longer. On one arm she carried a worn but excellent shawl of real cashmere, which might have covered a multitude of sins, but that some evil genius had sewn on a garnishing of imitation ermine, which

gave the last touch to her failure. Little could be seen of her face, but her eyes were tearful, and she looked as if in the last extremity of shyness and sorrow. The occasion of her sorrow was apparently the parting with her father—a father whose long hair and velvet coat and general air of slipshoddiness proclaimed him aloud as one of those broken-down geniuses who are so often turned off to sink or swim—and who generally sink—in Australian waters. He made his adieu to his daughter in a very ill-timed theatrical manner, with a flourish of tin trumpets as it were, and a waving of hands, just as if he were going off the stage two steps to the bar, to the ghost-tune in the “Corsican Brothers” on a crowded benefit night.

The girl’s face was very white, but she suppressed her sobs, and the expression of her eyes, as she held her father’s hand and gazed on him in silent farewell, made Arthur Campbell turn away with an uncomfortable sensation of sympathy.

“What a guy! I wonder she does not go second-class,” observed Lady May, in her clear, high-toned accents, which were always thought to be so aristocratic. Perhaps they were rather too clear on this occasion, for the girl heard her, and looked at the speaker, or rather over her,

with a swift glance of sad, yet supreme disdain. The other passengers noted this little passage with amusement, and not without a pleased consciousness that for once in her life Lady May had been put down by the silent reproof of a shabby young person in moulting feathers and imitation fur.

Lady May, who was a good-natured person in the main, smiled at Arthur Campbell and resumed her conversation in perhaps slightly lowered tones, while the new passenger waved her hand towards the boat, now leaving the ship's neighbourhood, and went away slowly and sadly to her cabin ; and the " Suez " cheerfully made a start towards the Indian Ocean, leaving behind her the white lighthouse and lonely forests of St. Paul's, more forlorn and solitary than ever as they faded away into the sad grey distance.

CHAPTER II.

IT happened that the "Suez" had great good fortune in her homeward trip on this occasion. Day after day passed by in a robe of pale diaphanous turquoise, a cool, milky haze on the horizon the only shadow of cloud. Peacefully the ship climbed up the same blue hill day after day, and night after night, a smooth breeze meeting her as she moved, and giving some life to the lotus-eater's paradise of the travellers. But there was literally nothing to do, and very little to think of.

"Blue sunny sky above; below,
A blue and sunny sea."

The prestige of Lady May's position rather weighed on the more plebeian sort, and few of these had the energy either to quarrel or to make love under those long, cold grey eyes, and longer, colder nose. Little was seen of the new passenger at first. She seemed to find her own resources sufficient for herself, and spent most

of her time in reading, or making notes in a cramped musical notation in a shabby notebook. By degrees, however, her shyness wore off, and her personality began to make itself felt. The captain, a kindly, courteous gentleman of the old school (of which there are so few pupils left), always conscientiously divided his attentions to a hairbreadth (according to precedence) among his passengers; and he made a point of looking after Miss Lauder. He was rather aghast at finding that she knew no one on board, and had not even been committed to his experienced care. Casting about for a suitable chaperon, he selected a large, broad-featured matron, "by the name of Wigs," who, in a panoply of steel beads and whalebone, which would have defended Minerva herself, sat all day long in a painfully upright position, knitting from her elbows, and gazing benevolently over the ocean. Mrs. Wigs was charmed to take the young lady under her protecting wing; and for the rest of the voyage she sat, clothed in a little brief authority and a great deal of brown moiré, as near as possible to her young charge, listening with evident enjoyment to the conversation about her, but taking no part in it. By degrees, too, one or two others joined in, under Mrs. Wigs' matronly and protecting shadow. The funny

man of the ship (every mail steamer has an amateur jester on board, as necessary as the sail-maker) soon learned to turn his melancholy close-shaven countenance towards her as often as he launched a joke, and never failed to meet an answering sparkle of amusement from under her long black eyelashes. Lady May always looked down her nose—no small distance, by the way—whenever this vulgar person tried to be facetious, and he hated her in return with a vulgar and vivacious hatred. Then one after another of the waifs and strays of travelling life, people who drift about from one place to another out of pure inanity, and who bore each other to death with their stories of hotels and railways, fastened themselves on Miss Lauder's neighbourhood, delighted to find a new victim, and poured out endless moving incidents of *tables d'hôte* and excursion trains, of the price of tickets, the crimes of stewards, the loss of snippets of lace, or disappearances of silver ornaments from their persons, to her sympathetic and intelligent ear.

Lady May meanwhile remained serenely contemptuous of the lower depths of society, even on this little ark of existence that passed so bravely from one continent to the other. Absorbed in her own superiority, and accompanied by her silent, handsome friend, she lounged on

the bamboo chairs, or walked the deck with that superb air of self-satisfaction which only an Englishwoman of a certain rank, supported by a lifetime of cold baths, High Church services, Parisian corset-makers, and invitations to Court, can possibly command; and, in addition, she had the moral support of finding the best-looking man on board completely at her service—so far.

CHAPTER III.

IT happened about five o'clock of a hot Sunday afternoon that all the passengers were nearly dying out of pure boredom. They had eaten one hot dinner at the unnatural hour of three o'clock p.m., and it was morally and physically impossible to eat anything else for twenty-four hours at least. They could not go for a walk; they could not ask anyone in to tea; they had not even the prospect of a game of cards to cheer their spirits. In this vacuum it occurred to the good captain to try and secure "a little music," in the last resort. The piano had been drawn out of the music-saloon on the outer deck, and fastened in a comfortable angle against the mast, for the convenience of the early service; and it was generally felt that at such a time as this even the Old Hundredth played by a child of five years old would have a cheering and ennobling effect. But there was no enterprise in the languid circle. In vain the captain went

from one to another in his courteous way ; no one would break the spell of dulness which seemed to have settled down more heavily than a London fog on the ship's company that lovely tropical evening. At last Lady May took pity on the captain's entreaties, and after as many preliminaries as if she were beginning a lawsuit, she settled herself at the piano, took off an endless number of bracelets and bangles, and carefully transacted the performance of "Strangers Yet." Her voice was a thin, reedy soprano, carefully trained, yet which seemed, somehow, to be of exactly the same whitey-brown complexion as her face ; and when she had finished, though the audience were profuse in their thanks, no one went so far as to ask her to continue. Even Arthur Campbell, who stood leaning over the ship's side, looking down on the smooth, glassy roll of the Indian Ocean, maintained a judicial silence. He was curiously sensitive to music in some forms, and, when once the spell began to work, he enjoyed it with all the infatuation of the opium-eater for his visionary delight ; but the right word was not to be found apparently in Lady May's electro-plated notes, and he seemed to find more music in the majestic rush of the vessel through the onyx-coloured water, as her black precipitous bows slowly swayed to

the horizon, and the two clouds of spray that she dashed aside from her path sank and softly melted away in her wake, like a streak of white daisies in some green summer-suited pasture.

There was a pause in the murmurs of polite thanksgiving, a pause of expectancy ; and, turning his head lazily without moving from his place, he saw the captain escorting another performer to the piano with the pleased but anxious demeanour of an impresario introducing a new star. By his side Alice Lauder moved slowly and almost reluctantly, and it occurred to Campbell, as he looked at her, that he had never really seen the new passenger before ; and, in fact, the same idea struck more than one of the little circle. She had for once discarded the time-honoured black silk, and wore her one festal Sabbath gown of white flannel, which, though badly cut and worse fitted, still fell into solid picturesque folds, and by its cream-coloured mass threw a sort of reflected brightness round her face. She had taken off her hat, and, holding it in her hand, moved with a mechanical step, almost like a blind person, her eyes fixed on the horizon with an absent expression, yet bright with a consciousness of power that lighted up her face into sudden and transitory beauty.

In figure and complexion she belonged to the true Australian type—thin, flexible, and tanned to the transparent brown tint which is only acquired by long intimacy with the strong sunshine and dry air of the most stimulating climate in the world. She was not tall, but her throat and shoulders were beautifully moulded, and gave promise of vocal power. Many Australian girls gain from the very defects of their physique—its narrowness and unsubstantial outlines—a certain airy, floating charm of movement all their own; but Alice Lauder had by no means attained to this state of grace. She walked with an awkward school-boy slouch, and, except when seated at the piano, always appeared to have more hands and feet than were required for her own immediate use. Her yellow-brown hair was badly arranged round a high Spanish comb at the top of her head, and was always coming down, without even the apology of being curly. Her eyes were blue, a deep auroral blue, and shone like silver when she was excited; they were so expressive that one almost excused the rest of her features from showing more than the usual pleasant commonplace of youth and health. In time, when thought and experience should leave their unalterable stamp on those soft and malleable out-

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lines, she might be a striking or interesting-looking woman ; at present she was merely a sunburnt, badly-dressed, awkward and unfinished colonial girl.

She sat down at the piano, still with the same absent, sleep-walking expression, and the passengers visibly brightened up a little. The stout matron leaned her head to one side, closed her eyes, and committed her soul to Providence, as she had observed the manner of musical people to be while undergoing this course of treatment, and calmly awaited the worst.

The funny man rushed forward to turn over the leaves, but, finding there was no music for him to operate on, retired, visibly discomfited. Then she smiled and waited for a moment, with her fingers lightly touching the keys, as gently as if she were pressing the hand of a friend. The piano was a new one fortunately, and it recognized and responded to her touch with instant loyalty and comprehension. She played a few harmonious chords, then suddenly flew into some wild Hungarian dance music. Sunday though it was, and heavy as were their souls with dinner and *ennui*, the passengers felt suddenly exhilarated. The mad delicious foreign melody circled over their heads, danced over the rigging, joined hands with the fleeting waves,

and at last seemed to die away on the horizon in one long sigh of delight and exhaustion. Then the music changed into a beautiful solemn elegy that harmonized with the fading tropical day and the magnificent rush of the ship over the "houseless ocean's heaving field;" and then, by a gradual transition, Alice led the way into one of Schubert's most beautiful, most unearthly inspirations. First she played the deep chords which announce the approach of death to the young and thoughtless girl,—

"Gieb deiner hand, die schön und start Gebild."

Then the pathetic wailing entreaty of the girl,—
"*Ich bin so jung! geh lieber! und ruhre mich nicht an!*" And again sinking lower and lower in pleading,—"*und ruhre mich nicht an!*" Then the deep solemn reassurance of the liberator,—
"*Bin freund! und komme nicht zu strafen!*" and at last the two melodies, interlocked and woven together by the consummate art of the composer, rising and falling, with inextricable joy and regret, fleeting between earth and heaven, till the music fades into a mysterious palpitating whisper, as if some eager wings were beating against a cage and struggling to be free—and then once more Death speaks in solemn consolation,—

“ Give me thy hand, and trust thy soul to me !
The night is here, but dawn will soon be breaking ;
Be of good cheer ! Though dark my image be,
Soft are my arms, and bright shall be thy waking ! ”

When she had finished, Alice sat perfectly still, but with a look of visionary happiness in her eyes. She knew she had played her part well—perhaps more than well. Her father was a thorough pianist, though not quite a musician, trained up in the straitest sect of the German classic school of thirty years ago. He had taught her most patiently from the time that she could play the notes with baby fingers, and day by day he gave her all that he could impart of polish and technique. She was the hope of his life, and as she grew up he recognized with joy that she had something larger than the faculty for mechanical skill, inherited with his own long flexible fingers and musician's temperament. But within the last year or two a larger ambition had dawned upon him ; he believed that his daughter could be made into a great singer, and, recognizing that he could not deal with the training of her voice, he had at last scraped up enough money to send her home. So Alice Lauder was going out into the Old World to seek her fortune—though even the promise of being thrice Lady Mayoress of London would have

fallen far short of her dreams of success. She had a curious shyness about singing to people, and especially to strangers, and no one on board the "Suez" even suspected this talent hidden under her shabby dresses and unfinished manner.

Now she sat perfectly still, her lips slightly parted, and the look of restrained strength and power still lighting up her face. The passengers were really enchanted. They had been carried far away from the narrow deck and the dull Sunday evening on the wings of music, and they fervently blessed and thanked the musician for this hour of pleasure. Only Lady May was heard to observe, "Not the first time she has played in public, or I am much mistaken." Arthur Campbell, to whom this remark was addressed, merely shook his head in silence. Perhaps he intended to agree with the condemnatory observation, perhaps he merely wished to lose nothing of the stream of melody which had been flowing over this Sunday evening Sahara. But Alice played no more that evening, and was presently seen walking up and down the deck, and listening with evident appreciation to the conversation of the funny man, who had surpassed himself that day in the festal glory of his enormously-checked waistcoat and the spottiness of his cobalt-blue necktie.

After this little concert it may be supposed that Miss Lauder was not allowed to hide her talent under a bushel. But she showed herself a true artist as far as caprice went. Sometimes she would refuse to play, however humbly entreated; at others she seemed to be possessed by a spirit of music, and every able-bodied inhabitant of the vessel, as far as duty permitted, would gather round the piano and listen like a three-years' child to her wild Bohemian waltzes and heartbreaking Scandinavian laments. Even the stewards would come to the top of the stairs and listen, and the second-class passengers looked wistfully forward from their appointed limit. And the artist was by no means insensible to her audience. She would often turn aside from all the solemnities of Handel or Beethoven to play some wailing negro melody which she knew the sailors loved, or "The Auld House at Hame," which always made the captain feel weepy; or even "Home, Sweet Home," with variations, for Mrs. Wigs, who listened to the variations with a reverence which Rubinstein himself would not have inspired.

Arthur Campbell was a most regular attendant at these recitations, listening to—one might almost say imbibing—every note, but never speaking to the musician; till one morning he

came up to her, as she sat near the piano, idly turning over a book of music, and asked her if she ever played duets with the violin.

"Yes, sometimes," she said, looking at him with a straight penetrating glance, which seemed to suit oddly with her girlish and haphazard manner and appearance. "Why, do *you* play?"

"Oh, I fumble away at it a bit. I have rather a good fiddle, which was given to me long ago by a man I used to know, and I would sell my soul to play on it properly. Would you like to see it?"

When he brought the case Alice opened it and fondly took up the violin with the touch of an expert.

"No, I don't play myself, but my father is something of a fiddler, and I know lots of music. Shall we try some of these early sonatas of Mozart's? Something simple, I think, would be best."

Her manner plainly said that the simplest pieces would, in all probability, be most adapted to his execution. Nevertheless, Campbell played fairly well, and really had a soul for music. Like most amateurs, he only wanted practice—what an *only*!—and the duet was so far a success that it required to be repeated almost every morning—whenever the young musician happened to be in the mood for a lesson or a rehearsal.

CHAPTER IV.

THOSE two seem to be getting on very well," observed the captain to Lady May. There was the smallest *souçon* of bitterness in his tone. As captain of the "Suez" he knew his social rights, and he did not feel flattered when Lady May temporarily adopted him, now and then, as a substitute for another.

Through the open door of the deck music-saloon they could see the two artists absorbed in working their passage through a difficult sonata of Beethoven; while good Mrs. Wigs sat sentinel at the outer door (for the sake of coolness), but so placed that no syllable should escape her attentive ear. Sometimes Alice would leave off playing and vigorously beat time for a bar or two, with a vindictive air; sometimes she would stop altogether, and, throwing her hands up over her ears, would rock herself to and fro with an agonized expression, when some mistake in her companion's part was more than

usually heartrending. Campbell always cheerfully acquiesced in her reproaches, tuned his instrument, and began again with renewed energy. While playing he leaned up against the wall, his fine head and square-made figure standing out like a portrait by Vandyke against the yellow decorations of the cabin.

“ Oh, he does not mean anything. He never does. That’s the worst of those London men. It’s not the first time he has played a duet with a pretty girl, and won’t be the last if I know anything about him. But I expect his mother will look out for a big match for him. They haven’t much money, but they have the dearest old house down in Greenshire ; just the place those American heiresses would give their eyes for ! But he may do better than that, perhaps, by-and-by ; for he is very sweet, isn’t he, captain ? ”

“ Well, I don’t know about his sweetness, but he’s got a good head. I suppose he means to go into politics.”

“ Oh yes, his Uncle Lanetop will give him a leg-up by-and-by. You know Lord Lanetop ?—he’s always in the papers. He is very fond of Arthur ; quite looks on him as a son, and his own son has turned out such a black sheep, more’s the pity. Why do we all have relations,

and why are they invariably black sheep? as Miss Sewell says in one of her dear old novels. That's what I have often wondered in my own mind. Now if we could all be born without a relation in the world, what a mercy it would be! Don't you think so?"

Lady May had a little habit of suddenly bringing you up with a sharp turn of "Don't you think so?" just as your attention was beginning to wander and you were getting lulled into forgetfulness by her easy conversational ambling.

"Well, I don't know. I am not sure that I quite catch your thought," said the good captain, conscientiously puzzling it out. "Would you call husbands and wives relations, for instance?"

"Oh, by no manner of means! I would not live a day with my husband, if he *was* a relation. He's very fond of Arthur, too, and will be overjoyed when he hears that I have had some one to look after me. It was splendid the way I caught the boy and tied him to my apron-strings for the voyage. I met him one day in Brisbane; so I said at once, 'Now I've got you, and I don't mean to let you go. Here I am wandering about alone and unprotected, with nobody but Smithson to speak a word to. So you will please come along and take my tickets

and count my boxes, and keep your eye on my Rosella parrot and three grey cockatoos.' So he came, quite meekly. You see I know all his people, and he likes to talk about them—particularly about his mother. He thinks all the world of me, but——”

“Oh, that won't do, that won't do at all! We must give up Beethoven, he is too big for us.” These words came in sorrowful tones from the music-saloon.

“Well, let us try back to Mozart then. Those little roulades you play on the piano are delightful, and I really *do* know my Mozart—even you will admit that.”

“Oh yes, you have got the hang of some things very well, very well indeed; but you want work—all you amateurs do. You don't know what work is. You ought to peg away—I mean practise—clean them up! As our old 'cello used to say, 'Battle, battle! it's the only way.'”

“But I haven't time.”

“You seem to have time for other things.” The speaker's eye rested for an instant on Lady May's substantial figure, clothed in the most delicate, dazzling efflorescence of white cambric and embroidery, reposing in a gracefully studied attitude *S. by E.*, and resting her neat bronze toes on the bamboo footstool of her deck-chair.

Only a woman could have guessed what that dress would cost to "do up" alone. Alice Lauder's frock had, alas! been done up several hundred times; the iron had entered into its soul, as it were. But it was clean and cool, and if a couple of buttons *had* come off in the wash, and if a bunch of "gathers" had been hastily tucked in under the waistband, what are unconsidered trifles like these compared with an artistic soul?

Alice began to strike the keys with emphatic realization of Miriam's song:

"Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously!
The horse and his rider hath he cast into the sea."

From the expression of her eyes and fingers you might have imagined that she was condemning some unseen foe to the fate of the horse and his rider. What she really thought was this—"Bronze silk stockings, too, to match her shoes—what extravagances! And yet they look nice, perhaps!"

"Won't you try Mozart again?" said Campbell, as she paused in following out Miriam's song of triumph; for he was always wanting to try something again. And so the sonata went on *d. c.* till lunch time.

It was just about this time that the passengers began to discover, in twos and threes, that

this would never do, and that they couldn't imagine any good could come of it, and they hadn't expected Miss Lauder would turn out *that* sort of girl. Poor Alice was really very far from wishing to be *that* sort of person. She liked playing with Campbell, mainly because he had a musician's fellow-feeling in his soul, and also because it was fun to take him away from the leading lady, who had treated her with very scant politeness. Alice knew very well that she had only to touch the keys and Campbell's black head would appear beside her, just as surely as the "cold crowned snake" yields to the immemorial wisdom of the charmer; and it cannot be denied that she liked using her power when the mood was on her. But there was not the shadow of what we diplomatically call love-making in the hours they passed together, and the critical little world which reviews all our actions and motives gratis in the liberal free-press of gossip would have found very little to condemn could it have overheard the innocent "music-shop" of these two enthusiasts, as the stars slowly changed their places in the azure above, and the ship flew with foam-winged sandals over the azure plain below towards the snow-laden Old World and the winter fields of England just breaking into chilly premonitory impulses of spring.

CHAPTER V.

WELL, I do really think this is Paradise, and I quite believe the story that the Garden of Eden was in Ceylon ! ”

The “ Suez ” had arrived at Point de Galle early that morning, and now Alice Lauder was looking up at the stately architectural foliage of a great breadfruit-tree that scattered the tropical sunset from its green bulk in quivering fragments of gold. She sat on the grass in a happy, but unceremonious position, hugging her knees with both hands, and gazing about with a child’s ecstasy at the novel landscape. The first plunge into tropical scenery gives everyone a delightful shock ; and to Alice’s Australian eyes, accustomed to the yellow-grey glare of her native plains, to the thin bleached grass and transparent foliage of the woodlands, this sudden vision of tropical beauty was almost overpowering. To the right were the old white ramparts built by the Dutch 300 years ago, the spray

dashing mast-high up against the lighthouse. Farther on was the harbour and its little crowd of vessels ; on the other side a fringe of palm-trees bent slowly and reluctantly to the breeze, their huge green fans and dry cordage rustling and creaking like the sails of a ship. Wonderful new blossoms and strangely painted leaves—the hibiscus with its cup of fire, the blood-red pomegranate, the pale foliage and scarlet festoons of the coral-tree overflowed the banks and scrambled up the trunks of the strange tropical trees on every side. Even the hedges and ditches were full of hothouse ferns, bright shields of begonias, and arrow-shaped caladiums. Over all the landscape was a veiled hazy light that softened every outline to a kind of chiaroscuro ; the sea air was full of mingled freshness and languor ; a cinnamon-scented breeze sometimes came in wafts from the inland forests ; over all and through all other sounds floated the deep melancholy undertone of the surf as it swept over the coral reef and whitened the serrated margin of the coast for a thousand miles ; even the natives seemed decked with “ barbaric pomp and pearl ” as they sauntered slowly past, robed in white, with hair twisted in high tortoiseshell combs, and like “ mild-eyed melancholy lotus-eaters ” offered for sale sap-

phires and pearls, carved sandal-wood, ivory boxes, or queer fascinating cat's-eye jewellery.

"It's not my idea of Paradise," said Campbell, who was also reposing enjoyably on the grass near his young guide, philosopher, and friend in music.

They had the breadfruit-tree all to themselves, and it really was very pleasant. Even the watchful eyes of Mrs. Wigs were closed in slumber on the shadiest veranda of the big hotel. Lady May had been spirited away to some remote viceregal regions immediately on her arrival, and Arthur found himself, he scarcely knew how or why, taking care of this very Bohemian young lady under the shade of the murmuring tropical trees. There was no Mrs. Grundy awake within half a mile. Still it must be remembered that Mrs. Grundy hears in her dreams and sees with her eyes shut, and that it is *never* safe to conclude that when the cat's away the mice may play—not even under a breadfruit-tree in a surf-circled island of the Indian Ocean.

"What is your idea, then, if one may ask? Not that I believe you have anything better than this!" and Alice bent down a starry passion-flower from the nearest bough, and drew its crimson petals over her lips.

“Oh, my idea of the nearest thing to Paradise is an old English red-brick manor-house—built about the time that the Dutch sailors were making those limestone ramparts yonder—a house in the shape of a quadrangle, all covered up and buried with ivy and roses—sweet-smelling things, not like that scentless flower in your hand—and in the square between the two old wings of the house is a bit of green, green turf, so soft and smooth that you think it must be picked up and shaken and laid down again every morning like a carpet. And at one end there is an enormous chestnut-tree—something like a tree!” he continued, looking contemptuously at the noble proportions of their sheltering giant.

“Well, I haven’t seen that sort of thing yet; but this nearly drives me crazy—it is so beautiful! Just like the story-books of one’s childhood—the ‘Swiss Family Robinson,’ for instance. There is the sago palm, in which we have so often escaped from desert islands (having previously taken out the pith for food), and the cinnamon-trees and the coffee-berries, and I dare say the Roc’s egg in the ‘Arabian Nights,’ if we knew where to look for it.”

“At all events, we shall have a rattling good dinner at the hotel to-night. You have never

tasted prawn curry, have you? Ah! wait for that before you begin to talk about Paradise!"

"Oh, how prosaic, how tiresome you are!—on an evening like this, too!"

"Wait till you taste it, that's all. Besides, I've seen this sort of thing so often before; there's a terrible family likeness in tropical scenery everywhere. But there's one thing new to me here."

"What is that?"

"I've never met anyone exactly like you before, Miss Lauder."

"I wonder if that is a compliment or not? If it is, I'll add it to my collection. I have a few bottled up in spirits of wine. The best specimens were given me by the chief engineer. You must have noticed him coming out in the twilight every evening and sitting beside me in total silence for half an hour. That was his way of being complimentary, and I thought it very flattering. But it's time to go in now."

"No, don't go yet," said Campbell. "There's a lovely view from the ramparts, and we'll get a breeze there before dinner. It's quite the thing to walk there at this time of the evening—if you can do without the engineer."

They went down the shadow-lined red road, and presently stood on the ramparts and looked

over its low white wall to the sea. A big white convolvulus flowed in rivers of blossom all over the wall, and from below came the melancholy thunders of the surf. Campbell had been thinking as they strolled along, and the result of his meditation was a sudden question—

“Have you any relations in England?”

“Oh, yes; principally an old-maid aunt, who teaches music in Hampstead. She will look after me, and put me in the way of proper training.”

“Training in music, I suppose?”

“Music, or the stage. I’m not quite sure yet whether I shall be a great actress or a singer—which shall it be?”

“I don’t think you know the difficulties before you. And the stage, of all things! I can’t imagine what your father is thinking about to send you off alone into the world like this.”

“Oh, well; we don’t have the same sort of world as you do. There are so many little things which I used to think were quite right,—praiseworthy even,—but now I find they are terribly, hopelessly wrong. But there are also things in *your* world,”—and the girl raised her head and looked out to sea with a glance of pride and disdain,—“things which, on the other hand, *I* think mean and contemptible, and I would not learn them for the world.”

Arthur felt dimly that he was somehow involved in this condemnation, but he bravely rallied to the cause of law and order. "Don't you think you ought to make some study of *our* world, too," he said, "that is, supposing there is any division between artists and society people, if that is what you mean?"

"Oh, yes! And I have made one or two social studies already. This voyage has been a great opportunity." She paused for a moment, took up a bit of stick for an eyeglass, and made a life-like *pose-plastique* of Lady May's favourite attitude and manner. "Mr.—a—Campbell, I think—oh, yes—ah—I recol—lect meeting you—at the Duchess of A.'s—ah—was it not?"

She looked at him through her *pince-nez* as if he were one of the "common objects of the seashore" spoken of by naturalists, and somehow managed to give exactly Lady May's little turn of the nose to her own much shorter and snubbier features.

Arthur laughed, but he felt vexed at the same time, and she observed the shade on his face.

"Oh! I see I ought not to do that sort of thing—bad form, I suppose. But then it is part of my outfit, you know, to study social peculiarities."

"I wish you were not going on the stage, all the same," he continued, doggedly.

"You think I will be a failure? Well, perhaps; you never can tell. But I have a card up my sleeve—I know that's a proper expression, for I've heard you say it—and it *may* turn out a very good one."

"You mean your voice! Well, why don't you let me hear it."

"Perhaps I will now that we are on dry land. I can't sing at sea."

"That's a promise, then. Look at that steamer coming round the point. She brings the mail from Bombay, I expect. There is our old 'Suez' lying close in under the lighthouse. She will be here for another forty-eight hours, the captain tells me, to get her machinery overhauled. So much the better for us, to have two days more of your Paradise." He smiled, and Alice replied in the same language, feeling more friendly with "*ce beau Campbell*" than ever before during their three weeks' sojourn on the waves together. But as they watched the lights of the Indian mail-boat slowly coming through the purple haze, Fate was already cutting the light thread of association which she had so carelessly thrown together over these two dissimilar young people. They did not know that

anything so important was being thought over by the higher powers, and presently went in to dinner at the hotel, where the lofty airy room, the scented artificial breeze of the crimson punkahs, the interesting procession of new curious dishes, the wild extravagance of tropical flowers, and fruits which might have come straight from the orchards of Eden—all combined to give a delightful impression of the foreignness and charm of this tropical island, with its

“Scent of Eastern sandalwood,
Its gleam of gold.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE mail which came in that evening brought a letter to Campbell from a relation of his father's, highly placed in the Indian Civil Service, where the Campbells had always distinguished themselves. The relative had been looking out for a suitable opening, and now wrote that he had secured the very thing—the very thing in this instance being the promise of a private secretaryship to a still greater personage, which might be considered as a very big step up the ladder for any young man with his head screwed on the right way. Arthur was not sure about the screwing of his head, but in any case the offer must be accepted, and at once. He must take the next steamer to India, and say farewell—a long farewell, probably—to all his fellow-passengers on board the “Suez.”

It was with very mingled feelings that he made some hurried preparations for this new departure, or, to speak more truly, with a sensa-

tion of sudden disappointment, even when the long-desired first step towards success in life was so near. He was ambitious in his silent English way, and there was a strength of will behind the fine outlines of his features which really gave them all their charm and distinction. His clear-cut bronze countenance was but the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Nothing small or mean was inscribed there. One felt in looking at him—"He was a man; take him for all in all," and full of a man's ambitions, perhaps even of worldliness of the larger kind. The prospect of congenial work, and not less delightful play, the chance of measuring himself against some of the keenest intellects in a brilliant Indian circle, the new and exciting society, the variety of "big sport," were all alluring to the ambitious side of his nature; yet he felt as homesick as a schoolboy. He longed to see them all again at home—his father, the fine old hunting squire who practised in real life all the virtues of an obituary notice, yet knew more about a horse than any other man in the county; his brilliant diplomatic mother, still young and pretty, and adored by everyone—an adoration she passed on with interest to her big boy; even the old house in the Cotswold Hills, and the dogs and horses, sud-

denly became doubly dear with the irresistible charm of the unattainable. It was hard to turn his steps eastward again, when almost within sight of home ; but he went on writing his letters, and burning his ships, without even a momentary halt for regret. He did not refrain, however, from audible laments and maledictions on the hard fate which came in the disguise of good fortune. Blessings are said to come in disguise ofttimes, and why not the other visitants ? He regretted especially leaving his pleasant voyage unfinished, and parting with two, at least, of his fellow-travellers. What would Lady May say to this turn of events ? and that odd little Australian girl, who interested him somehow against his better judgment. He felt really anxious about her future ; she was so inexperienced, so unfriended, and he had all the musician's kindness for a comrade in arms.

"I wish I could do something for her," he murmured ; "she will never get on by herself in London. I wonder if my mother would look after her ?" But at this point he paused, and deliberated ; for the idea of any society lady "taking up" a girl who habitually wore cotton gloves and made her coiffure with two hairpins and a wisp of black ribbon—even if she *could*

play all Bach's fugues by heart—was almost unthinkable.

He was writing at a window which overlooked the broad, covered terrace in front of the hotel, where all the floating fashionable population of the steamers was wont to assemble before lunch; and at that day Galle was the meeting-place for two or three lines of Indian and Australian mail packets. The usual traffic in jewellery and curiosities was in full swing as Campbell opened the shutter and looked out for a moment's rest and fresh air. Just below him was a group of the "Suez" passengers—of the most undesirable section. Miss Lauder was standing in the centre of the group, quite happy and at home; and her faculty of making friends with all sorts and conditions of men and women, irrespective of social position, or even of the legal penalties of etiquette, was evidently finding full development.

She looked rather pretty from a distance, bright with health and amusement. On her forefinger she balanced a very small brilliant-plumaged paroquet, and every minute or two she raised the tiny jewelled creature to her lips with a delicate caress, while a small Persian kitten, with an immense feathery tail, was coiled up comfortably in a round fuzzy ball on her

s houlder. She seemed to wear these little creatures as if they were some novel form of jewellery, and in point of fact they were very becoming. The bronzy velvet of the kitten's fur contrasted with the yellower tints of her hair, and the little glancing bird was as beautiful as a sapphire amulet. Where the kitten had arrived from did not appear on the surface of things, but it could be easily seen that the paroquet was a "friendship's offering" from the chief engineer, that official appearing for once in the full glare of day, and, careless of his nautical duties, standing beside the young lady with his usual modest air of silent admiration.

Arthur closed the shutter with a snap, shook his head, and returned to his correspondence. His English relations would hardly thank him for an introduction to all this menagerie, and he thought it safest not to attempt such a service. However, when he came down to lunch at the *table d'hôte*, where the news of his departure had already been discussed over the cocoanut curry, Alice looked so sorrowful, and even the undesirable passengers expressed so much regret at losing him, that his heart softened, and he felt quite sad at parting with them, one and all, from the chivalric old captain to the much checkered funny man.

As they left the table he disengaged himself from these farewells, and said in a low voice, "It's too hot for anything now, Miss Lauder, but come down about four o'clock and meet me here. I've found out a capital room at the back with a grand piano, where we can play without bringing a crowd round us. Do come ; it's my last chance for a talk and some music with you. My steamer leaves to-night."

CHAPTER VII.

THE large empty room in the hotel garden, used occasionally for concerts or dances, looked dim and shady, and as cool as any place could be on that burning afternoon. There was a grand piano at one end, a big punkah which was worked rather intermittently by the bribed but intelligent native outside, a number of dusty wooden forms, and only a narrow gleam of green leaves and white sunshine from the half-open Venetian shutter at one end of the room. One of the white-robed silent-footed natives brought in the tea-tray and placed it on the long table, and Alice made the tea and handed it to Campbell with as calm and domestic a mien as if they had been married ten years, slightly flavoured, however, by the consciousness that not a soul knew where they were—outside the room. They had some fruit, too, mangoustines and bananas, and they talked and laughed and ate together as if it were a child's tea-party. But Campbell had something on his mind to say.

"I know you will be vexed with me, Miss Lauder, but I *do* wish you would give up this stage idea. I don't like it at all, though I've no right to say so."

Alice wished very much to say something pleasant at parting, but this was a little too much to ask. She considered for a moment or two what she could say.

"Don't think me obstinate. I know you think differently about these things, but I cannot help it—I must go on. I don't talk much about art, like some people, and I've always approached it from the practical side, which makes a difference; but I do love it all the same. What should I do without it? It's my living, in every sense—I can't give it up."

"But you will marry some day, perhaps."

"Ah, perhaps; but sufficient to the day is the evil thereof."

"Then do you think that your husband will like you to appear in public for money? Five shillings box seats, gallery eighteenpence, and that sort of thing! I hope not."

"As far as that goes," said Alice, with much dignity, raising her head and showing a spark of fire in her eyes, "I have acted in public—and for money—already. My father used to go round as a pianist sometimes to a travelling

company, and I went with him, and now and then I took a small part. I must say he only did it when he was very hard up, and the companies were not very grand, and we played in all kinds of out-of-the-way halls and theatres—at little up-country diggings, and so on. But it was experience for me, and I got on very well." She saw that this was rather a blow to her companion, and to soften it she went on talking—

"Amateurs always think that anyone can do the small parts. That's such a mistake. The big parts are comparatively easy—they are all chalked out for you; but the little side-characters are a blank sheet, and you have to make your own sketch. However, they all said I managed it very well. So now I've made a beginning, you see, and I don't think there is any way out of it."

Campbell got up hastily and walked away to the other end of the room, where the window was open. A storm was brewing out at sea, and the wind began to rise, and rattled the big leaves of the bananas and palms in the garden, and drew out a creepy sort of rustling, like a ghostly flock of mice running over the walls, from the ropy vines and creepers that clothed the roof. He came back to Alice, who was rather sadly looking down, and playing a funereal little tune

on the table with her teaspoon, and took her hand up as if to say good-bye.

"There's one way out of it, Miss Lauder. Give it up, and take me instead. I haven't very much to offer you, but it's better than going to a miserable little theatre—And you have no one to take care of you," he added, in a very gentle tone.

There are some moments in life—moments few and far between, but never to be forgotten in their swift, sudden thrill of mingled joy and pain—when the world does actually seem to stand still, not in a figure of speech, but in a strange reality ; moments of vision when we see other skies, other constellations, and gaze on them bewildered, till, before one can say, "It lightens !" the horizon reels back again, and our old familiar earth wheels away as of old in her star-lighted voyage round the sun. Perhaps it is our own hearts that stand still, and not the solid earth-fields and the immemorial horizon, but the strangeness of the sensation could not be much more perplexing in either case.

Such a momentary experience came to Alice Lauder at these commonplace words, dividing asunder one part of her life from all that had gone before. She was pale and remained standing, silent and immovable, her blue eyes fixed

on his with a serious, penetrating gaze. Childish and inexperienced as she was in many ways, she had all the quick perception of the artist-nature when once her thought was thoroughly aroused ; and probably she read and understood all that was passing in his mind—the sudden generous impulse, the conflict of old associations and influences, even the want of real passion, better than he understood himself. For more than a moment she wavered, balanced, almost yielded. He looked so manly, so kind, with something noble in his eyes, and he would be pleased if she yielded to his wishes and threw over her own future for his. Should she throw it over? To him this appeared no sacrifice, but a great advantage offered to the untried and friendless girl. And she knew too well the wrong side of the medal—the hard experience of cares and work, and endless struggle with poverty, of small successes and depressing failures, and fond speculations in hope deferred. Even if she succeeded, as she so often promised herself, what would that success be compared with a home and a woman's happiness? . . . But Love must build his house upon a rock.

“No, Mr. Campbell,” she said at last, very softly but decidedly, withdrawing her hand from his—“it cannot be.”

"Then you won't give anything up? Even for my sake? I am disappointed——"

He walked away, feeling bitter and hurt, and leaned out into the garden. There was a low roll of thunder out at sea, and some big drops of rain fell like bullets here and there on the leaves. The palms in the woods shook and clattered together with a sharp metallic sound, like the clash of men in armour. The storm would be upon them directly. Alice looked at him, and her eyes slowly filled with tears. It was hard to part like this, yet she did not know how to make friends with him again. He looked very gloomy and unapproachable; it never occurred to him he had not said a word about love, and he thought she was foolishly setting her heart on this scheme of hers above everything a woman ought to prize.

She returned to the teaspoon and the "Funeral March of a Marionette," while in her mind a passage out of a little drawing-room comedy she had once taken part in, kept repeating itself vexatiously, "If you want to make a man respect you, the best way is to refuse him." In despair she took up her music and looked over it. She had brought down some of her songs, and on the top was a MS. copy of Mendelssohn's 47th Psalm, arranged as a solo, as

her father had taught her to sing it. The beautiful music in which a great artist—arrived at the highest point of success in his art, his love, and his genius, while still in the first golden radiance of his honeymoon—poured out the inextinguishable desire of the soul for something higher still, and so wonderfully translated that “divine despair” into melody, rose to her lips almost involuntarily. She played a few chords, and began the recitative in a low and nervous tone; but by degrees her voice seemed to gain new life from the music, and rose in the soprano part with all the lift and spring of a fountain starting into the sunshine:

“Oh, for the wings—for the wings of a dove!
Far away—far away—far away would I rove.”

Her higher notes were pure and spontaneous, and there was a dramatic power and intensity in her singing which she had never shown before. The depths were stirred, and her whole mind and soul seemed to seize on the music as a vital instrument to express that inexpressible “yearning for the lamps of night,” which all the poets have striven to reveal, but never so nobly and simply as in the words of the Hebrew shepherd:

“In the wilderness build me a nest!
And remain there for ever at rest;
In the wilderness build me, build me a nest,
And remain there for ever—for ever at rest.”

Then almost in a whisper, with a deep vibrating intensity, she repeated the beautiful cadences :

“And remain there for ever, for ever, for ever at rest.”

. . . . A blue quiver of lightning hovered over the room tentatively, as if searching for something hidden there; then came the hesitating snap of thunder—the stammering thunder, as the old Greek poets called it—and the storm suddenly fell upon the house with a spinning blow that made it clatter and shake to its foundations. The tropical outburst—almost explosion—of rain followed in a blinding, hissing deluge. Through all this uproar Alice heard Campbell’s step—he was coming to say good-bye. He had to bend over her almost to her ear to make himself heard :

“Good-bye again, and thank you. You have made me understand. That was beautiful, and I know now what you mean. Good-bye, and perhaps some day we may meet again.”

“*Auf wiedersehen!*”

The door slammed, the rain swayed past in almost level showers, all the colouring of the room disappeared in the grey muffled atmosphere. Alice stood by the piano and looked out at the raving storm. It was very dim indoors, and very silent and melancholy. She was alone.

PART II.

TEN YEARS LATER.

“Shadow and shine is life, little Annie,
Cloud and sunshine, flower and thorn.”

TENNYSON.

“Know'st thou an island on the misty ocean,
Green, green with fern, and many an ancient tree,
Whose waving boughs, with soft perpetual motion,
Repeat the same primeval melody?”

CHAPTER I.

(*Alice Lauder, New Arcadia, to Helen Macgregor,
Skye.*)

“DEAR OLD HELEN,—

I ONCE tried to keep a diary long ago, but in the end I found, like most people, that writing to oneself is the most tiresome thing in the world. One needs to be a very perfect Christian to hold the mirror up to nature in that way with complacency; yet now you want me to take to journalism for your own private benefit, and to tell you what I am doing and thinking, and seeing and reading and wearing, and, above all, talking about, here in this little green corner of the world nursed by the South Pacific surges.

“Could we but have foreseen, as they say in novels—it always makes me so angry that they never *will* foresee anything—that you and I would be parted for so long without a word, or even benefit of postman, for more than ten

years, how terrible it would have seemed in those dear old Australian days ! We did not know then that the Fates were spinning a silk thread which was to lead you far away from our great sun-bleached solitary summer plains to the grey crags and heather-lined valleys of your Highland castle ; and, as far as I am concerned, though I don't quite accuse the three weird sisters of keeping

“ ‘The word of promise to the ear
To break it to the heart,’

still I must say that they have strangely equivocated, to say the least of it. Don't you remember that in our day-dreams I was always to be a great singer ? You, I think, wanted to marry a missionary—not that even then you looked quite suited to the part in your fashionable black silk with a long train, and with a gold locket as large as a warming-pan tied round your neck with two long ends of blue ribbon. In those days a really good black silk, with two bodices, was the height of woman's ambition. But we change with the times. Other manners, other tea-gowns. You used to sing ‘What are the wild waves saying?’ and ‘When the swallows homeward fly,’ which always made me cry ; and you were beautiful and high-toned, and I admired you with a girl's first burning enthu-

siasm, which I am afraid you never reciprocated, for I must have been a very wild, untidy little savage in those days, and it was your encouragement which first made me believe in myself and in my future career. Alas ! alas !

“ You must not ask me for my first experiences in England—they would bore you to death if taken *en masse* ; but on the whole the first five or six years were fairly happy ones. My good old aunt had some friends in high musical places, and the experts whom she consulted took an encouraging view of my voice. I had but little to unlearn ; my poor old father had grounded me fairly well, and ‘ my upper register was excellent,’ as Professor Piper used to say. The professor was our teacher, tyrant, guide, philosopher, and friend in the Academy. He seemed to take a fancy to me from the first, and pushed me on at a great rate. I loved the work, hoped for success, and was strong enough to burn the candle at both ends, trusting to make a jump on to the stage before this little illumination gave out. The stage training was a nuisance, but I learned by degrees to ‘ make an appearance,’ and to walk and move and speak as to the manner born, in the quaint life of the theatre. The trouble was that our financial supplies were irregular, to say the least of it.

My father sent me all the money he could scrape up by hook or by crook. Aunt Selina did all she could out of her little savings; still I was obliged to take to teaching, choir-singing, or any other scraps of paying work which turned up—generally turned up by the helping hand either of the professor, or of Mrs. Damon, my other good genius. But the double work was too much, and the London smoke and nocturnal atmosphere depressed me beyond measure; thus the usual hackneyed story of overwork in two volumes, and break down in the third, claimed me for its author. I had arrived at the point of departure: a great potentate in the musical world had agreed to let me sing at a concert of some note. The potentate had heard my voice ‘on approval’ in private, and though not wildly enthusiastic in praise, he was understood to mumble that ‘he had heard a worse C in alt’—a modified word of approval which moved the dear old professor to ecstasy, and caused me to be regarded as a marked personage by the other pupils. But the day before the concert I heard of my poor father’s death—thrown from his horse when just going from one house to another—and the news came upon me with such a shock that I broke down completely. Not only did my voice disappear, like a spring that sinks under-

ground in a day ; but I managed to get a kind of low fever, from which I relapsed into a miserable, nervous state of existence that seemed to last, in my dim recollection, for indefinite ages of twilight. How on earth I ever escaped from those dark days without either dying, or marrying the professor—there never seemed to be any middle course open to me then—is more than I can understand even to this day. He was so good to me, never giving me up, always encouraging and setting me on my feet, and bringing me violets, and books, and sympathy, day after day, and week after week. The kindness he showed to a poor, nervous, broken-down singer (who was also as cross as two sticks most of the time), really deserved the Legion of Honour. You probably live too far out of the musical world to understand the honour it was considered, in our little artistic world, to be noticed, or even scolded by Piper ; but even in the wilds of Skye you must have heard of Mrs. Damon and her musical afternoons in Grosvenor Square. She took me by the hand the first time I was sent for to sing at one of her ‘ At Homes ’ five years ago, and she never let go till she pulled me up on dry land from the sofa and the medicine bottles, and from that terrible time of failure and disappointment.

“But there was a great surprise in store for me. One day I woke up from a long healing draught of sleep, and found my poor old aunt half sobbing, half laughing, over the letter which had just come from Australia. Her other brother, my uncle Richard, whom I had never seen, was dead, and we were half expecting to hear of some little legacy from him. He had gone far away into the ‘Back Blocks’ years before, and had toiled and struggled and fought with dry summers and bad seasons, bush fires and low prices, and all the trials of a pioneer’s business, until just as he was beginning to make the place pay he was carried off by a sudden illness. It turned out that he left me all his property, a third share of Blue Hills station, and the money value of this share came to a sum which made me shut my eyes and open them again wildly two or three times in succession, just to make sure I was not enduring the tyrannical caprice of a dream. Even now I can hardly realize that I may indulge in unlimited gloves, and music, and subscriptions to all Aunt Selina’s pet charities, and I often feel I must apologize to some one for taking a hansom when it is raining, or for buying a novel, or a bonnet, and then throwing them away as soon as I get tired of either. If only my poor old father could have lived to

enjoy this turn of the wheel! but the gods willed otherwise.

“Money is certainly the best patent medicine for a case like mine, and under its prescription I began to get stronger by degrees, and even to see a prospect of getting fat in some remote future; but it was a long weary time before I could call back the natural spring and enjoyment of life. Clare insisted on taking me through a London season, but I can’t say it was a great success. I had neither spirits nor energy for the hard work of society, and I soon got tired of its endless vain repetitions. Music was a sealed book; since my illness I could not bear even to listen to it. I seemed to get tired even of the beautiful dim repose of the English scenery. Its vivid green did not harmonize with my native associations of summer. *Our* summer is not green, but white; as the Bible truly says, ‘white unto the harvest,’ and I longed for her dry, stimulating air and aromatic breath, even ‘with fire and fierce heat on her tresses,’ as of old.

“Mrs. Damon’s husband is in the Navy. Last year he was ordered to the South Pacific station, and it occurred to Clare that she would come out to this place for a year or so, to be near him. She took it for granted that I was coming too,

and when she takes a thing so, it generally is granted ; and here I am.

“ Aunt Selina is comfortably established in a little house of her own in Hampstead, and I don't mind telling you in confidence that I feel myself at least ten years younger since we crossed the Line. This is not quite my own, my native land, but it's under the same stars, anyhow ; and this funny old-young village by the sea, and this pretty rambling wooden house, which Clare has made homelike and comfortable already, is quite dear to me even now. Perhaps, even, I may be able to sing again ! Ah ! *then* you shall come and buy tickets, even all the way from Skye, at tremendous prices.

“ But to return to the present. It is very hot, just the time of year when summer takes the first downward step and the days begin imperceptibly to shorten. In England you say, ‘ As the day lengthens the cold strengthens.’ Well, here, below the Line, as the day shortens the heat increases. There is a thick haze of smoke from the bush fires in the ranges, and a curious burnt smell in the air. I like it ! it is so native, and so truly colonial ! The smoke hangs over the wide clover-carpeted plains that lie between our village and the great dividing ranges, and I can see nothing of their purple pedestals or

snow-covered peaks ; nor can I see the glitter of the sea that lies under our windows, though I hear the waves playing and racing among the rocks below, and sometimes catch sight of a white feather of spray dashing over the low terrace wall next the shore. The west wind feels as soft as silk on one's face, and it carries past an endless stream of thistle seed, floating argosies of eider-down, blown from inland pastures, and now drifting in endless procession out to sea.

“It is so hot that I have discarded my much-travelled grey tweed, and now disport myself in a last year's tea-gown of blue China *crêpe* ; that is, an unthinking world might call it blue ; a brunette would denounce it as green, and a dress-maker would talk of *eau-de-nil*—but it is none of these, and yet it is all of them by turns and nothing long, like the great Rochester. I can't tell you how it is made, for it is so lightly, beautifully built by Julie Bond, that no one but an expert or the man-milliner of a *fin-de-siècle* novel could possibly analyze its character. You just get a general effect of long flowing sleeves and curiously involved draperies, and a slight scintilla of steel embroidery here and there ; and a decided impression of something original and expensive,—yes, expensive at all risks, there

is no doubt about *that*. What a fight I had with Julie before she would put in those steel beads! She plainly told me that I knew nothing about her art, and had better not interfere.

“ ‘But, Julie,’ I observed, ‘I know you allow those American ladies to arrange their own costumes, and why won’t you take my little ideas?’

“ ‘Oh, those young American ladies are *très sérieuses*. They understand, they have the technique. Yes, ma’mselle, I take their advice; but, ah! I charge them for it in the bills—*n’est ce pas!* They have the ideas, but also the dollars, *c’est ça*. English ladies are *différent*.’

“ ‘But I am not English, Julie, and I know all about your work.’

“ ‘Ah! Non, non, ma’mselle. You are not artiste. That is my affair. Leave it to me, and you will have *une robe de fée*—you will not repent. I know you have *des autres affaires*, but you have not the education for the toilette.’

“ Julie is an impressionist!—but perhaps she is right. I know my own attempts at dress-making are failures of the deepest dye—even the housemaid refuses to wear them out; and when I attempt to trim an evening dress the flowers always look as if they were put on with a hammer and nails. The blue *crêpe* is very sweet, but perhaps I ought not to have

appeared in it, without warning, to our first visitors. The good people of Green Street had never seen such a garment before, even in their wildest dreams, and they were somewhat taken aback. The first detachment of callers were much perplexed, evidently, as to its nature and history. They looked me up and looked me down, and over the Watteau plait and under the lace *Steinkirk*, and inside the angel sleeves, till I thought they must take me for a Nihilist in disguise, or perhaps a female Jesuit in search of prey; but I dare say all the time they were mere trying to take the pattern. Poor things! that would puzzle wiser heads than theirs. They took no notice of Clare, although she always looks so much more of a swell than I do, even in her old black serge and blue spectacles. In vain I appealed to Mrs. Damon, and asked her opinion, and tried to efface myself, as in duty bound. They were not to be drawn off from Julie's *chefs-d'œuvre*, and if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery I shall no doubt be sincerely flattered by the appearance of three blue tea-gowns in Green Street before we are many days older. As our visitors took their departure, I heard some of their criticisms, wafted from the veranda steps:

“ ‘Rather queer, isn't it? but it suits her

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figure.' 'It isn't the dress; it's the way they put it on.' While from the fattest, reddest, and most good-natured of the three ladies came a murmur, 'Well, she is rather nice-looking, but I *do* think she looks as if she *had a history*.'

"There is a certain amount of probability about this latter suggestion, isn't there?"

"Clare, as I said, refused to be interested in the Green Street ambassadors. She sat in the stony mood she puts on sometimes, meeting all my imploring glances with a Medusa-like glare from her spectacles, and her only contribution to the conversation—when in my despair I passed the hat round to her, as it were—consisted of a peculiarly cold-drawn trisyllabic, aristocratic 'Really!' I don't think any single word in the English language contains such an amount of cold water as this little exclamation. It holds quite a gallon; but it must be pronounced by an Englishwoman of pure descent; no mere outsider, even after three generations in the same parish, can possibly attain to its linked sweetness long drawn out, and no simple colonial speaker need attempt even a far-off imitation. I never do, for one, but confine myself closely to the far inferior, but sympathetic 'Fancy!' with an occasional lapse—in moments of excitement—into 'Just fancy!' But then I

am obliged to be sympathetic; I haven't the spirit to be anything else. Now Clare is one of nature's aristocrats. In spite of her stumpy figure and more than tendency to *embonpoint*—as the old novels used to put it—for in fact she has passed the tendency point, and arrived there long ago; in spite of her brusque manner and habit of saying just what comes into her head (or it may be, perhaps, in virtue of these qualities); howsoever such things be by sea or land, you can never mistake Mrs. Damon for anyone but a personage. She is never a 'nice person,' never 'a dear little woman,' never 'so amiable,' or even 'well-informed.' All these insulting endearments may be, and I dare say often are, applied to me, but Clare is always spoken of with respect, if not veneration. It was rather amusing to see her meet our new neighbours with this specimen of her Vere-de-Vere manner on, for in ordinary life she is not only fond of calling a spade a spade, but even a rake a rake; and when she gets on the subject of her own or her children's ailments, her tendency towards the realistic school becomes too strongly marked for my comfort.

"Clare, however, is really a delightful companion but for her one foible—her health. Perhaps I ought to say her two foibles, for she is

just as much concerned about the health of Toto and Dulcie as she is as to the vicissitudes of her own. Toto is now a handsome brown little sailor of about seven years old. He is a true son of the soil, and generally has a good deal of it on his nose. He walks about with his hands in his pockets, in close imitation of the big boys of the place, and has a really wonderful command of the fashionable school slang of the day, perfectly up to date. At present the adjective 'jolly' is in the ascendant. 'No jolly fear' is his invariable reply to his anxious mother's questions as to the risk of the various nautical excursions he proposes every morning. Toto's only real fault is a misplaced contempt for domestic ablutions, other than rubbing his mother's best cambric handkerchief over his face with a circular movement, on occasions, and restoring it in a damp ball to his trousers pocket along with a pocket-knife, a few shell-fish—preparing for his museum—and a piece of tarry string used in voyages. Ordinary water baths he looks upon as useful in case of illness, or as a precautionary measure before going to church, but quite unadapted to young persons in robust health and activity. Dulcie is one of those angelic hazel-tinted, brown-haired little beings, with great solemn eyes, and an expression of being-in-this-

world-but-not-of-it, who you may feel perfectly certain will upset your teacup, pull your hair-pins out to see how your hair is made up, and kiss you violently immediately after eating strawberry jam ; not to speak of leaving saucers of milk for her kitten on all the chairs in the drawing-room, or jumping up and down on the springs of the sofa for an hour together. One forgives her these little foibles because her hair and eyes just match the colour of a sealskin jacket, and because her cheeks are so pink and dimpled that one longs to eat them ; but it is impossible to feel the slightest anxiety as to the exuberant health of two such brilliant little creatures ; and even with dear Clare—her amplitude of figure and activity of movement, whenever she feels inclined to go to any entertainment, forbid more than a passing tremor to her friends. Yet her own forebodings are of the gloomiest. For instance, this afternoon it occurred to me that we ought to return some of our calls, and I suggested the Granbys to start with. They are the leading family here, and the village belongs to them body and soul. Whatever treasure you may have (in your own estimation), be it a piano or a peacock, a bonnet or a beanstalk, the Granbys are sure to have a much finer specimen. They live in a big white house—at the opposite

end of the village, fortunately—and everything belonging to them is on the largest scale. The ladies of the family are large, tall, monumental almost in feature, and their manners are full of a calm serenity; you know exactly what they are going to say long before they speak. Their carriages and horses are immensely large, their roses are as big as cabbages, their cabbages are a morning's walk to get round—everything is palatial about them. I *know* they always dress for dinner, though nobody has told me so. They all do their hair tremendously in the fashion, and their conversation almost drives you to disbelieve that two and two make four, they insist upon it so. The neighbours all bow down before them, and they are the glass of fashion and the mould of form in Green Street. So I thought we had better call there first, and this afternoon I said to Clare, 'Let's go and see the Granbys.'

" 'Well, dear, I dare say you had better return their call, but I don't feel well enough to go out just now. My head has just been splitting ever since lunch. I saw you didn't notice it, so I said nothing. I do hate to give in always.'

" 'Won't you go and lie down then, Clare, just for half an hour?'

" 'I only wish I *could* lie down, even for half an hour. I always envy people who can do that.

But with me it's out of the question. I must keep up to the last minute.'

" 'Do you think it's indigestion, perhaps? We had macaroni, you know, for lunch, and I always think Mrs. Mead *does* make it rather rich, though I never can resist it.'

" 'Indigestion? Oh, *dear* no! It's entirely nervous with me. I can feel it coming on exactly the same time as last Tuesday, and I expect it will be worse every attack. But you can't do anything for me. I must just bear it.'

" 'But perhaps it's caused by liver or something. They say the liver is the root of all evil.'

" 'Now, my dear Alice, you are quite wrong there. You are just like Henry. Whenever I feel a little depressed he wants me to go for a walk or play tennis, or something violent. All the doctors tell me that repose, complete repose, and freedom from worry is the only thing to restore the system. So just go out, my child, yourself, and call on the good Granbys. It will do you good. I know your constitution requires exercise.'

" 'And what shall I say about you?'

" 'Oh, take my cards—take oceans of cards, and scatter them over the face of the earth. People in these little country places do like to

be visited. And take notes of their house and furniture, for I like to hear your description when you come back. I fancy they are very rich and very orthodox, and you will have tea there. By the bye,' continued Clare, with sudden interest, 'I wonder if they will give you Christian tea? I have half a mind to go with you on the chance. But no! I don't suppose there are three women in this place who know how to make tea, and one of them is here. They will give you milk and water, slops or wish-wash, but certainly not tea.'

"'Don't you want to see the beauty, "My niece, Mrs. Austin"? We have heard enough of her praises lately. Do come along and help me through with it.'

"'Oh no, not to-day. My head is worse again. I ought not to talk even. But I think I will strum a little on the piano when you are gone and the house is quiet. I have a tune in my head that would go with poor Heine's words—

"'The false one sighed for a wealthier mate,
The faithful one wearied me out and out.'

There you have a whole French novel, *fin de siècle* and all, without the bother of reading it.'

"'The rhyme isn't quite right. How would "wealthier lout" do?'

“No, no, run away and leave me. Neuralgia knows no law, and our chattering makes it worse. Adieu, and make my compliments to our friends in Green Street. I hope to see them some day soon, when I am strong enough. *A bien-tôt!*”

“It was a mild cloudy afternoon when I set out. The wind had fallen, after blowing hard all the morning, and following that loud battle of wind and forest there was something very soothing in the calm repose, almost lassitude, of nature. The stillness was perfect; you could hear a pin drop in the woods. My path led up a slope of hill, and below I could see a stretch of growing corn, all in moving shades of green, shot with silver, for it is just on the turn of ripening. Sometimes a tremor seizes the whole field, and the silvery surface crinkles up in thick solid ripples, as when one draws a skimmer round a pan of scalded cream. Half-way up the hill there is a sort of natural terrace, caused by a landslip long ago, and in the middle of this shelf there is a strong young English oak of perhaps thirty, or even forty years of age, just rising into his sunshiny half century. He is a fine young tree, with thick foliage-clusters round his outstretching limbs, and I can put my arm in a friendly way almost round his waist.

I often stop when I come to this point and have a talk. I tell him of his forefathers' home, where—

“ ‘Sweet fields beyond the swelling floods
Stand dressed in living green,’

and I whisper in his ear those stately lines written on his dynasty—

“ ‘Three centuries he grows; and three he stays
Supreme in state; and in three more decays.’

My young friend has nearly learned the verse by heart now, and he repeats it over and over to himself in prophetic murmurings. By-and-by I shall teach him—

“ ‘O muffle to thy knees in fern.’

And perhaps in years to come he will repeat the delicious words to some weary wayfarer who may take refuge under his shadow. And if my oak, too, should live a thousand years, and see all the chances and changes of this mortal life passing like the cloud and sunlight over this dim-storied island, what will that history be? Will the sun be grown a little paler by that time? And will the lark still pour forth his jubilant notes from the high altar as an almsgiving to the troubled world below? And shall we be anything nearer that ‘far-off divine event to

which the whole creation moves' before his brown acorn-wreath is laid low in the dust? To all these questionings my oak friend listened in silence, or not exactly in silence, but in soft wave-like reverberations, and I went on my way while he wafted me a friendly farewell.

"The Granbys were at home, and the largest daughter poured out tea. My heart sank as I watched her. She seized a jug of milk and distributed it amongst all the cups before her, as you would for a school treat or children's picnic. The milk-jug was very large and the cups were very small; the result may be easily anticipated. She then took up an immense silver teapot, which might have served Britannia for a helmet at a pinch, and poured out a libation of some weak straw-coloured liquid, to call it by no harsher name. Then a second dose of cream, and a lump of sugar, and the deed was done. I secretly thanked my stars that Clare was not present, and meekly drank the milky-grey syrup and prosed away to my hostess as pleasantly as I could under the circumstances.

"In spite of a superabundance of mirrors, yellow satin, and engravings of the royal family, the large drawing-room at the Granbys is rather a pleasant place on a hot afternoon. Its three big windows were wide open and showed us

a piece of lawn, densely green and shaded by a thick cypress hedge, where a crimson rose flared out at intervals. A wandering breath of air wafted in armfuls of mignonette and clove-pink perfume every now and then. From the tennis lawn behind the hedge came also sounds, one might almost say shouts, of merriment; but there was no appearance of 'our beautiful niece,' and I did not feel much disappointed. Anyone can imagine what a colonial country belle, nearly related to the Granby family, would be like. A great deal of hair and complexion, beady black eyes, the figure of a fashion-plate, and the mind of a musical box—there you have the provincial idea of beauty all over the world. While thus musing (and carrying on the conversation suitably), I heard sounds as of two school-boys quarrelling loudly, approaching us from the garden. There was a scuffle, a confusion of tongues, a barking of dogs, and suddenly a young lady in a white dress was precipitated into the room over the low window-sill, accompanied by a young man in tennis flannels, and by two excited black and white colley pups barking at the top of their voices.

“‘Great Scott!’ exclaimed the young lady, ‘I didn’t know that anyone was here.’”

“‘Great Scott, indeed!’ I observed to myself.

‘Is this the way the model family bring up their nieces?’

“I looked at Mrs. Granby. She was calm and benign as usual, and with an indulgent smile merely said in a solemn tone of voice, as if she were reading the Church Service, with a majestic wave of her large white hand—

“‘Miss Lauder, allow me to introduce my niece to you—Mrs. Austin; and also, Miss Lauder—Captain Swan.’

“I half expected to hear some one say, ‘Who giveth this woman?’ but I collected my thoughts and looked attentively at the beauty, for I knew Clare would never rest till I had given her a *catalogue raisonné* of all the family. At the first glance I merely saw a large high-coloured young woman; at the second I clearly made out she was handsome; at the third I realized that it was a Greek goddess—Clytie, perhaps—worshipping Apollo in white cambric and a tennis racquet. I wish I could make a picture of her for you, but it is not easy to do justice to her faulty, over-coloured, yet fascinating individuality. She is of a good size, as I before observed, strongly and broadly made. Her figure is of stately proportions, but she waddles—yes, waddles—when she moves, and her hands and feet are large and stupid-looking. She has

a picturesque fair head set on broad shoulders with that peculiarly graceful spring which one sees in classic marbles, or in a snake preparing to strike, or in a wave that bends backward for an instant before it falls on the shore. Her eyes are bright and full of laughter—nothing more; they have no language. Her colouring is not good—there is too much pink in it, and it reminds one somehow of aniline dyes; but the outline of her low Greek forehead, delicate nose, and above all the drawing of her upper lip and the round firmly-finished Pagan chin is really beautiful to a degree one seldom sees. Very few pretty faces (of the present day at least) could survive being copied in marble, but Mrs. Austin's features would rather gain by the translation; they seem to require the delicate whiteness of alabaster to bring out their statuesque moulding to its full advantage. One feels in looking at her that she must have come out of some museum, 'No. 314, Girl with Vase,' or, 'Figure from a Greek sarcophagus, supposed time of Phidias,' and that she ought to wear a sketchy peplum studded with stars and a slim-necked urn supported on her shoulder by one rounded arm, instead of a tailor-made dress, a sailor hat, and a parasol.

“‘So you have come to live in our village,’

said the goddess in rather loud, cheerful tones, holding her head a little to one side, half in shyness, half affectation, as you see a baby putting on airs sometimes when it is being admired. 'It's a jolly little place in summer—lots of tennis and riding, and——'

" 'Flirtation and gossip,' put in the young man, whose sleek curly head and boyish smile reminded me somehow of a black retriever dog very anxious to please, and dying to run and fetch a stick out of the water.

" 'Who asked for your opinion? Little boys should be seen and not heard,' exclaimed the beauty, playfully tapping him on the head with her tennis-bat.

" 'I looked at our discreet, orthodox hostess; I looked at the calm married daughter. They both smiled benevolently, as if this sort of thing was only to be expected. I smiled too—there was nothing else for it. However, they may have marked some unspoken remonstrance in my eyes, for the elder lady observed with her deepest lay-reader expression of voice, 'Really, Lizzie, you are very unkind to poor Captain Swan.'

" 'Oh no, aunt; I am only getting him into training. He was very uncivilized when first he came here; but now he is greatly improved.

See how tame he is ! He will eat out of my hand,' and snatching some macaroons from the tea-table, she stretched out her vigorous sun-browned palm towards his moustache. He looked rather more foolish than usual for an instant ; then entering into the spirit of the thing, he bent his curly head over her hand and nibbled the biscuit devoutly. (The resemblance was complete ; one could almost see him sit up and beg.)

" Mrs. Austin seemed cheered by this little *jeu d'esprit*. She flung herself down on a foot-stool near me (I heard it creak distinctly—she must be quite eleven stone), and began to look over me with the candid criticism of an *enfant terrible*. There is no need to break the ice with her ; the difficulty is to discover any thick enough to skate over, socially speaking.

" 'What funny long gloves you wear ! Are they very expensive ? That's a very pretty hat ; but I think you want more feathers. I know a girl who always steals her sister's feathers when she goes out. She went to a garden party the other day with nine white feathers in her hat, and all the other girls had to stop at home because they could not find one in the house. Did you buy yours in London ?'

" 'No, Paris. Madame Silvain, Place Ven-

dôme,' I replied mechanically. And then—I don't know what possibly possessed me, but in answer to the very obvious desire expressed in her eyes—'Would you like to try it on?'

"Before the words were well pronounced the hat was wafted off my head, and was poised at an angle of forty-five degrees on Mrs. Austin's fair coils of hair. She gazed at herself in one of the mirrors with serious interest, trying the effect in profile and full face and three-quarters, and finally in as much of a back view as could be managed without screwing her pretty head quite round in a circle. The hat suited her to perfection, and she perceived that fact. Meanwhile I felt rather embarrassed, not to say like an escaped lunatic, with my hairpins gradually stealing down the back of my neck, and a blank despair, which I tried in vain to disguise under a false air of merriment, gradually taking possession of my soul.

"However, the situation was soon relieved. The beauty turned round with a gracious smile and restored my property, deftly pinning it on my hair, and saying affectionately:

" 'Thanks so much! I see you are good-natured, and can put up with a scapegrace like me. Now, captain, *are* you ready? We must finish our set, and don't be so lazy *this* time.

Ah! I shall have a better partner soon! Wait till you see my globe-trotter! *He* won't sit all day drinking tea, not when I am about.'

"'Now, Mrs. Austin, you are too hard on a fellow. Haven't I been working for you in the sweat of my brow all the morning, and now you turn me off for that other fellow. I'm sure he can't play worth a cent.'

"'Yes, he can! Mr. Campbell can do *anything*. He's coming next week, so you had better make hay while the sun shines, I can tell you. Good-bye, Miss Lauder. I must fight this set out to-day; but I'll come and see you very soon, and you must show me all your pretty things. Ta-ta!'

"This was the last of Mrs. Austin, except that a voice was heard in the dim distance as she disappeared down the garden walk, 'Great Scott! I've torn my lace on that horrid nail, and it's all your fault, Swanny!'

"If this is a specimen of society in Green Street, I don't think we shall be at all dull, and it will take more than the whole of the Granbys' associated deadweight to keep us down! The mail is waiting—good-bye!

"Yours ever,
"A. L."

CHAPTER II.

A LICE walked home in a very meditative spirit after her visit to these neighbours. The name she had heard accidentally that afternoon woke many slumbering memories, and broke up the calm everyday film of habit as a stone breaks the newly-formed ice on a shallow pool. Ten years ago! Could it be the same Arthur Campbell? Some inward informer betrayed that it was indeed the same; as far as any person can be said to be identical with himself after ten years of changing existence. She tried to divine the circumstances which might bring him to this out-of-the-way spot, and above all she tried to recollect all she had heard of these friends of his since her arrival in Green Street, and of the beautiful hoiden who so openly chattered of his devotion to herself. There was something frank and outspoken in this colonial girl. Alice felt that she would not boast in vain, and that Arthur Campbell had

probably shown a friendly and open admiration for his fair new friend. "What *does* it matter?" she asked herself a dozen times in that one hour; but to that question there was no reply. Still those past days started into life, in spite of all her remonstrances with herself, and they appeared with a colour and pattern of their own far more vivid than anything of the present. It sometimes happens, when a panelled picture, long fixed against the wall, is moved away, that one is startled to see the long forgotten colour and gilding of a bygone day as fresh as the hour they were laid on. So it was with that swiftly passing voyage in the "Suez," whose every little incident rose again with irrepressible distinctness to her mind. Again the air of the tropics blew on her uncovered hair, and the unceasing recitative of the surf boomed again in her ears, and the huge palm-trees creaked and rustled overhead; and strange scarlet blossoms burned like live coals among the green, while the sea breeze, laden with sparkling particles of salt and spray, flowed over the island. And there was another voice besides that of the surf speaking in her ears; but she refused to listen to it, and in hopes of changing the subject she went again and again over all the picturesque details which the gossip of the little place had

afforded as to its one great subject of interest—the rich, beautiful, erratic cynosure of Green Street eyes—Mrs. Austin. . . . It was generally understood when Lizzie Granby got engaged to Mr. Austin a few years ago, that there was great rejoicing throughout the length and breadth of the clan, which was of no small measure altogether, take it either in cubic feet or superficially. People were a little surprised, it is true, but people always are, and always will be surprised to the end of time over their neighbours' engagements. The Granbys were naturally very glad to get their orphan niece off their hands. It is not every day that one meets with a devoted, sensible, sandy-whiskered husband with £5,000 a year (and making more every day), for a pretty, penniless girl. Besides, it must be confessed that her relations found her rather a handful. They managed it all, however, extremely well—everybody admitted that. They smiled their calm monumental smile in their own serene way, and smoothed over difficulties, and ignored little outbreaks, and paid the bills once a month, and took carriage exercise—as they called it, although the carriage got far the best of the exercise—at the same hour every afternoon, and dressed for dinner, and had family prayers, and would sooner have died than

say or do anything which had not been said or done hundreds of times before; and in the end they married Lizzie with all due ceremonial and the most expensive of wedding breakfasts, and all the neighbours admitted it was a very satisfactory settlement, and that they never expected it would turn out so well; adding, in the same breath, that they had foreseen it all from the very beginning.

In those very young days Lizzie Granby was a pretty girl, but she had by no means arrived at her meridian. It was only when she became Mrs. Austin, and passed through the finishing processes of her tailor, photographer, coiffeur, dentist, and society paragraph maker, that she emerged as a fashionable beauty. Mr. Austin took his wife to a handsome establishment in the neighbouring city, and she lost no time in becoming the rage at the colonial metropolis. She was "taken up" at an early stage by the great lady of the place—a lady by no means straitlaced, and of a very different calibre to the severely proper aunts and cousins in Green Street—and who found Lizzie charming just in proportion as she realized the usual Anglican conception of a spirited colonial girl. In a very short time Mrs. Austin's Greek profile and her slang expressions, her smart tennis and

smarter dresses, became one of the recognized entertainments at G. House. Strangers were always introduced to her, and she was invariably sent for when any patrician traveller appeared on the scene. In common justice it must be observed that Lizzie always did something for her living—as she herself was fond of remarking—on these occasions, and that she formed an agreeable interlude in the travellers' pursuit of useful information, or interesting scenery, on the underneath side of the world.

Some of these travellers were very much struck with the profile, and would almost have carried her off, like some beautiful tropical bird, who might be exhibited to the higher circles in London. Others sought to improve her mind; it seemed almost sad that such a lovely head should be given over entirely to the claims of "fast service," and that the sweet curves of those finely-moulded lips should be employed in making faces at the A. D. C.'s.

But after all, as Lady H—— was wont to observe, if Mr. Austin did not object, surely no one else need do so. The girl was as happy as possible, and really it was keeping her out of mischief to have her round to play with the visitors. There was not the least idea of harm in her, and if she did not enjoy herself at her

age, when on earth would she do so? One part of this argument, at least, was true: Lizzie certainly enjoyed herself, and there is no greater merit in a habitual visitor. Life was a summer-day's pleasure to her as yet, and she danced on the greensward all day long, while her good little husband paid the piper. She was kind, too, in her own way, and even considerate to him, in return. Sometimes she had the air of bearing with him gently, with his misplaced economies and inconvenient generousities; with his habit of brushing his hat while he talked, and his prim old-fashioned way of always finishing his sentences in the precise grammatical fashion of an elder day. He admired his wife immensely, and was even a little jealous of any possible rival to her place and pinnacle of fashion. He did not always appear by her side in the rapid gyrations of her gaieties, for he possessed neither her untiring digestion nor her youthful activity, but he had unlimited confidence in her judgment, and liked to see her sought after by the most brilliant portion of their little colonial world. To his old-fashioned bourgeois ideas there was something sacred about a title, and when Lizzie went out under the shadow of a coronet it almost seemed as if she were under the protection of the Church. So time

went on, and every year he grew a little more dry, and precise, and rich, and increased in goods, and his wife became more blooming, more animated, and more sought after. They had no children, and no angel either of life or death came down to trouble the pool, with healing on his wings.

The Austins had a pretty seaside cottage near their relations in Green Street, and coming down to it one Saturday of torrid summer, they found the little place immensely interested about the two ladies who had taken Carr's corner at the North End. As to Mrs. Damon, she was easily classified. Was not her name written in the sacred books of Debrett? Her husband was a naval officer of distinction; her sister was married to the heir of a dukedom; there was a large fortune coming to them some day, and they always travelled with two servants—a married couple, the man acting as butler, and the wife as lady's maid and superintendent of the nursery. All this information Green Street possessed as if by instinct, and was quite prepared to admire and even idolize Mrs. Damon as far as she would allow it. It was true that Clare did not altogether look like the ideal daughter of a hundred earls as she potted about the beach after her children in a waterproof perfectly green with

age, and her feet protected by a pair of her favourite hygienic shoes. But these were merely the eccentricities of rank, and Green Street had a soul above appearances where the peerage was concerned. The country ladies listened submissively to Clare's vivid dissertations on the respective merits of liver pills or bronchitis kettles. Nothing could have better proved their unselfish devotion, for if there is one principle a woman will cling to above all others in the general wreck of things, it is to her own particular patent medicines. As a rule, Mrs. Granby would have cheerfully gone to the stake sooner than accept her next-door neighbour's cure for influenza ; but when Mrs. Damon called one day with a bottle of uncanny-looking oily mixture, and fixed her bright unwinking gaze on the youngest Granby girl (a doubtful case of ordinary catarrh), even the Spartan mother had to relax her invariable rule, and accept the prescription. It isn't every day that an amateur doctor with the courtesy prefix of "Honourable" could be consulted for nothing, and the Granbys felt that much must be forgiven to the sister-in-law of a future duke. But with regard to the younger visitor opinions were somewhat divided in the village. Most of the girls admired Alice, and were quite ready to adopt her at once. "She

has such lovely eyes, and they have always such a pleading expression, as if she were asking you for something—something you couldn't give her; and her manner is perfectly fascinating, and her voice and everything are quite different from other girls. It's quite a study to see her walk, and sit down, and stand up, and hold her head even. I don't care if she *was* trained for the stage, and I expect she will be a great artist some day. She gave me the address of her tailor, and I mean to get a grey cloth like hers, only with gold braiding on it, the very first thing."

This was the summing-up of the younger portion of society, led by Mrs. Austin, who threw herself into this new friendship with her usual headlong energy. The older ladies were more reserved in their approaches, and were not quite sure that they liked their girls to be so much with a young person who had been an actress—or very nearly one. But this opposition only warmed up Mrs. Austin into more decided partisanship. Only one thing puzzled her in her new friend. When the name of the admired globe-trotter friend turned up (as it did at intervals of five minutes on an average in Lizzie's conversation at this period), Alice Lauder had a way of turning her head away and looking decidedly

embarrassed at first. Once or twice she wondered if this could be the same Mr. Campbell she used to know long ago. Lizzie could not say; there were hundreds of Campbells all over the shop, and especially in India; but this was one in a thousand, a perfect dear, though rather strict in some things and always blowing her up for using slang. He was delightful; you could not possibly forget him if you ever met him, and he could do anything—tennis or shooting, or even writing blue-books and things. “At least, everyone says he is very clever—and he is so good-looking too! He must have had a good time in India, and he has a capital appointment out there. They say his chief simply couldn’t live without him now; and as for the chieftainess!—Oh, *I* know these Indian travellers! and I do like to get a shot at a bird on the wing sometimes,” she concluded, throwing herself in the attitude of a sportsman, shutting one eye and imitating the position of a gun with her tennis racquet. There was nothing she could not do with that implement.

Although this enthusiastic commendation of her new friend might lead one to expect a modern edition of the Admirable Crichton, with something added from the Heir of Redclyffe, and a tinge of Lord Burleigh thrown in, still Alice thought she recognized one or two traits in the

description which belonged to her former fellow-traveller. Often as in the course of the past ten years she had pictured in her thoughts a meeting with him, still she felt strangely reluctant to see him again, now that it seemed inevitable. Like the girl in the visionary poem, she said to herself :

“ In this far land,
Oh, is it thus we meet ! ”

Far different had been her imaginary circumstances. *Then* she was to be a star, a reigning sovereign, hardly to be recognized as the little Australian student of the “ Suez.” Now she would meet him as a failure, out and out, as she repeated to herself. There were one or two circumstances which had softened the fall for her. She was, at all events, a fairly good-looking, well-dressed, popular failure, of independent means ; but she could have borne the thought better if *he* too had also failed, or fallen ever so little out of the race ; but no—

“ Your steps are in the sunshine,
My path lies in the shade,”

she repeated silently ; and then in a half rebound she thought of her good professor, so patient, so faithful, so determined not to take “ No ” for an answer ; and besides her professor

one or two other shades of lover-like mien appeared against the tapestry of memory. Once or twice she had almost been on the point of very nearly feeling a half or quarter or decimal shade of "attachment"—one could not call it anything else—to one or other of these shadows. There was one—a wild-eyed, fair-haired, consumptive Polish student, with a look of genius or insanity (it was hard to say which) stamped on his mobile boy's features, and whose long musical, spider-like fingers drew out such heart-piercing music from the violin—who now seemed to pursue her with phantasmal pleadings. He always wanted Alice to be the saving of him, but she never could see her way to it. Now, it was evident that Arthur Campbell did not need saving. A man who is always going about the world, making sums on the edges of newspapers (as she recollected his doing), and carrying on Platonic flirtations with pretty married women, could not be much in need of her compassion or interest; and so for the fiftieth time she gave up thinking about it and began to think of something else, with the result that her mind wandered again and again round in the same track, like travellers who lose their way in the forest and return despairingly to the same point they set out from. At last she called up all her

strength, and she knew she would not call in vain, determined at least to meet him with the spirit and independence of former days, if Fate would not permit her to escape from this ordeal.

CHAPTER III.

I DON'T think I can manage this garden-party to-day, Clare. You *will* let me off, won't you? I really don't feel up to it, and it is so hot!"

"Why, my dear child, are you not well? I wonder what you had better take?"

Alice was lying on a comfortable chintz-coloured many-cushioned sofa, in a stage attitude of complete prostration, her hands clasped above her head—*vide* photograph of Sarah Bernhardt—and her eyes closed, either from extreme exhaustion or from a deceitful desire to avoid examination.

Clare stood beside her in unwonted magnificence of black lace, and a pink bonnet which had borne the burden and heat of the day during most of the last London season.

As a general rule Clare did not permit anyone in the house except herself to have a headache. There are very few sovereigns who can bear to

have a rival next the throne; and if two of a trade ever *do* agree, it is certainly not when both belong to the over-crowded ranks of the professional invalid. She always blamed other people for their headaches, and thought they proceeded mostly from want of exercise, or eating what did not agree with them; and unless the patient abandoned herself to a succession of Clare's favourite remedies, and also showed signs of speedy benefit from her active though somewhat contradictory treatment, she was apt to be a little stern and incredulous. It was all the more noble of her, therefore, to be so sympathetic to a friend who was throwing her over when just on the point of starting to the Granbys' great annual festivity.

"Well, you do seem a little feverish, and I think I'll give you ten drops of pulsatilla and some anti-pyrine. You wouldn't like me to stay with you?"

"Oh, not for worlds! You are so good to me, Clare, and I feel myself such a trouble sometimes. I often think I must be a millstone round your neck."

"Well, millstones are quite the fashionable thing nowadays. No gentleman's family is complete without one. I think of making a collection of mine and hanging them up in the

hall at Courtlay beside the china and the old brass warming-pans. So you needn't trouble about that. But I hope they won't expect me to stay all day and all night too at their old garden-party."

"Oh, no; you can get off the evening part."

"I will if I can; and yet I feel rather curious to see what Mrs. Austin will do next. She has some people from town staying with her, and they *do* go on in the maddest way, so Mrs. Burton tells me. She says there was a most terrific noise in the Austins' garden last night about ten o'clock, and there were the whole party playing blind-man's-buff by moonlight. The Burtons' nursemaid could hardly get the baby to sleep again. I must say that good little Mrs. Burton is a *little* bit of a gossip. How she does talk when she once begins! Whatever my faults are, I don't like gossip, but some people will listen to any tales. However, it appears that our beauty has got a new young man in tow, a globe-trotter named Campbell—I think I used to know some of his people—and she simply spends hours out in the boat alone with him."

"I don't like gossip either," said Alice, laughing, but not very heartily. "But I do like analysis of character, and I fancy Mrs. Burton is just the woman to provide us with it."

"Yes, and what do you think the fair Lizzie's latest fad is? To make her visitors cook their own dinner! Poor dinner, and poor Mr. Austin! They *do* say her last dress cost £50 without the duty, and she just drags it about every evening. Such bad taste in a little seaside place like this! I like Mrs. Burton, and I'm going to call there on my way to-day; but I mean to give her a hint that she should not repeat so much tittle-tattle. I am a little curious to see if they mean to introduce kiss-in-the-ring this afternoon. It would just suit Mrs. Austin, if all tales are true. Well, good-bye, dear, and if you don't find the anti-pyrine do you good, you might try some red lavender. *Au revoir!*" and Clare rustled majestically away with a delicious *frou-frou* from her black satin "foundation," which augured ill for the reputation of the neighbours when she came to talk over things with the amusing but reprehensible Mrs. Burton.

As soon as her friend was safely out of sight and hearing, Alice jumped up and rushed out to the stable-yard. "Please catch old Corkscrew, and put my saddle on!" she said to the old groom, feeling she must have fresh air and solitude at any price; and in ten minutes she had got into her habit and was cantering along the sea-beach with all the relief of an escaped

prisoner. The horse was an intelligent old hunter which she had picked up for a few pounds in the easy colonial horse-keeping way ; or rather, which had been bought and bargained for by old Mead, the Damons' Irish soldier-retainer, who conducted all business on a dignified basis of what was suitable to the "fust families" in any part of the world. Mead was an Irishman, his wife a Scotchwoman of deepest dye, and together they made a fair working government. Mead was of a liberal nature ; he was willing to give away every vegetable, fowl, or article of live stock in his mistress's possession, if the visitor of the moment happened to please his fancy, or to praise his own principal friend and adviser—a very bald, ancient, and one-eyed fox terrier. Mrs. Mead, on the contrary, was prudent, if not parsimonious ; and to the desires of the children to eat unlimited peach jam, or of her mistress to wear her second-best silk dresses in the evening, Mrs. Mead turned as little attention as Captain Nelson when the admiral's signal waved before his blind eye—unless, indeed, she thought the occasion worthy of such splendour. Fortunately for her thrifty nature, Clare was always willing to wear what was put out for her, and was for the most part oblivious as to her outer woman—equally happy in a dust-coat which had seen



hard service for the last five years, or the most expensive and *fin-de-siècle* of Julie Bond's art-creations.

The Meads had finally adopted Alice, and allowed her an equal share of constitutional rights, so far as being tyrannized over by them, jointly and severally, could be so called. Mead was in his most conversable mood when he assisted her to mount, but she made good her escape with some slight diplomacy, and had soon left the village, the garden-party, Mrs. Austin's peculiarities, and the impending meeting with her former friend, full five miles behind her. The sea air was fresh and life-giving; the wet sand stretched out smooth and brittle as glass, and broke under her horse's hoofs with a pleasant shattering sound. Alice felt the comfort of being alone, and of no longer keeping up appearances. She knew this mood of depression would pass away all the sooner if she could meet it alone. After a time she left the beach and turned inland, taking a path through a little valley filled to the brim with rye grass just ready for cutting, which rolled before the summer wind in glossy corrugated waves, and changed like a pigeon's breast in all shades of ripening brown as it moved in the sun. Under the surface of the hayfield large moon-daisies were floating,

half submerged in green. They showed their white disks through a green transparency of grass, as they seemed to swim with the tide, or turned over, ruffled by a sudden catspaw that changed the whole colour of the valley from brown to violet. There was something very sweet and restful in the little valley; but Alice trotted on towards the rising ground above, for she had thought of a certain quiet place over there—a place where solitude and peace seemed the only inhabitants, and where she might bury the regrets and disappointments of the past without anyone else taking part in the funeral. It was a wide open stretch of moorland, lightly strewn with grey boulders of rock, over head and ears in furze and bracken, and occasionally showing the red-and-white motley of the cattle which wandered over it. On one side a line of cliffs enclosed the purple vintage of the sea in a small estuary; on the other the great dividing range, muffled in azure haze, stretched from north to south without a break. There was a small forlorn wooden church with a tin steeple, perched just at the edge of the plain, where the moorland broke down into the valley. It seemed to accentuate the stillness and solitude of the great purple plain, for one could not imagine any congregation, even on a Sunday, coming

out of either the moorland or the sea, towards this forsaken house of prayer.

Although the day had been hot and oppressive down in the village, there was a crisp coolness and autumnal fragrance in the air that blew from azure mountain-gulfs and precipices, and Alice stopped her horse and drank it in with a sensation of relief and gratitude. The sky was covered with furrows of grey cloud, through which the long sunbeams glistened in diagonal lines, or threaded the cloud-folds like the web of a spider. She got off her horse and turned him loose in the little churchyard to enjoy the church grass, and going a few steps out into the plain, flung herself down on the bracken, and rested her head on a grey, mossy boulder, that seemed to offer the nearest approach to a pillow.

There are moments in all our lives when the world we live in, and from which we take our dye, "subdued to that we work in," seems to slip away into obscurity, and we turn to Nature with an eager desire for her help and consolation. At such times our mother-earth reminds us that we are bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, and our inmost being acknowledges the tie. The nutty fragrance of the furze, the haunting cry of the sea-gull, the sob of the

waves, the warmth of the sunshine, all seem to enter our very souls, and proclaim their blood relationship to every fibre. In such a moment the sentence, "Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return," does not seem altogether spoken in condemnation, and we feel soothed and rested even by the unnoted roll of the earth through space, as she cradles our tiny lives, "rolled on in her diurnal course with rocks and stones and trees."

Alice seemed to absorb something of the beauty of the hills, the peace of the wide heath, the freedom of the wind, as she rested in the warm and fragrant bed of bracken, and when she roused herself at last the skeins of sunlight were all gathered together in a glowing mass of golden cloud. She saw a white arrow of smoke darting over the plain far away, and knew it was the mail train on its long journey across the island from sea to sea, and the sight of the flying smoke brought her back to the life and struggle of this work-a-day world again. A sad little tinkling church bell began to ring with a lonely echo in the waste moorland spaces; but it did not ring all in vain, for presently half-a-dozen children, and a man who was probably the schoolmaster, appeared one after another over the cliff-line, and went into the church. Alice

remembered then that there was a small fishing village at the foot of the cliffs, out of sight, which had probably furnished forth the little congregation ; and presently, from the sound of chanting, and the low roll of the organ, she perceived that some kind of evening service or practice was going on. The voice of psalms and the murmured prayers and amens harmonized dreamily with the solitary place and the sunset. Shadowy forms of music seemed to float over the moor and fade amongst the purple wilderness of the peaks, and Alice drew near the chapel and listened, leaning against the gatepost. This was another voice, clearer and holier than the earth message. There was something strange and impressive in listening to the same psalms, the same aspirations and hopes which had stirred the hearts of generations, ever sounding on from the hot Judæan valley and holy temples of Zion, till now they floated over the untrodden moorland and everlasting hills of this new world in the South.

The English settlers who first landed on this coast half a century ago, had brought the seeds of wheat, and grafts of vine, and all the fond familiar forms of orchard and garden to plant round their dwellings ; and the holy hymns and prayers of their church, which they carried like

the ark of the covenant before them, rolled to-day over this lonely plain with ever new consolation, spoken as by a living, but not a mortal voice, in the wilderness. Alice heard the clear trebles of the children repeating :

“The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever—endureth for ever. Amen.”

Overhead the three aspen trees planted in the churchyard kept up a perpetual chatter and quarrelling amongst their light grey leaves. Sometimes a breath of air would shake the trees all over with a sudden rush of sound, as when a child shakes a toy-rattle in its hand ; sometimes it died away into hurried whispers and twitterings ; but the trees were never entirely silent, even in the stillest and sleepest moment of the day or night. She heard the sound of a horse's steps coming near from over the edge of the valley, and saw the form of a rider outlined darkly against the evening sky, stopping as if in search of something ; but it did not interest her, and she turned again and buried her head in her hands, while the congregation burst forth in familiar unison :

“There is a land of pure delight.”

The sad minor cadences contrasted strongly

with the triumphant spirit of the words, and seemed to lend them a more visionary melody :

“There everlasting spring abides
And never-withering flowers.”

But the rider was close beside her now, and as he jumped off and came up to her side she had hardly time to put on her armour of self-possession, while he took her hand and said, as if they had only parted a few hours before—

“Ah, here you are at last! I thought I was never going to see you again!”

“Indeed!” said Alice, with the smile she had hurriedly caught up, the first to hand, as it were. “Pray have you been looking for me long?”

“Since eleven o’clock this morning,” he replied in the same tone. “When Mrs. Austin told me you were in Green Street, I thought I should meet you at the garden-party this afternoon.”

“And I thought you were there now.”

“So you wouldn’t come? How horrid of you! But I have been there, and when I had waited for you for a whole hour, and had drunk three cups of tea in my despair with the eldest Miss Granby, I thought I would find out where you were. I called at the house, and your ancient

Irishman told me you had gone out for a ride in this direction. I am not *sure*, but I wouldn't like to swear that he didn't wink sympathetically at me. Anyway, I have tracked you out, you see, and I intend to ride home with you."

"Very well; let us go before these good people come out of church."

Campbell mounted her on the old chestnut, and they rode off towards the valley. Both turned round for a moment and took a look at the blue-shadowed hills, and the sunset fading under the low ribbed line of cloud, as if the scene were something memorable.

"This is something like a garden-party!" and turning round, he caught her eye examining him with the questioning interest of a ten years' interval. They both laughed like children, conscious of each other's thoughts, and then rode on through the brimming valley, where the grass was still running and playing with the wind, and shooting into light and shade under the last reflections of sunset.

"Well, what have you been doing with yourself all this time?" he said at last, after a pause full of recollections. "You are a great artist now, I suppose."

"Oh, no, no; just the other way. I have lost my voice, and can't sing a note."

"Have you really? Well, that *is* a shame!" and there was real sympathy in his voice. "I have so often thought of you, and always expected you were getting on like a house on fire."

"Oh no! Fate has been against me. And yet I was working so hard and getting on so well! And there is a kind of I-told-you-so-ness about it all which is very hard to bear. But don't let us talk about it now. Tell me about our old friends on board the 'Suez.' Do you ever hear of them? And what has become of *your* friend, Lady May?"

"Oh, Lady May has married again, and is as fat as a haystack now. Her husband died, you know, and she married a young fellow who was always hanging round her, just out of pity, I believe."

"Well, people say that pity is akin to love; but for my part I think she must be a very poor relation. I must say I never thought Lady May was good-looking, though *some* people did, apparently."

"Oh yes, I'll own up. I used to think her a great star, but I was young and foolish then. And haven't you ever met the chief engineer again? How you could put up with that sort of cad was always a mystery to me. He was so terribly second-rate."

"That's why he suited me at that time." Alice leaned over Corkscrew's neck and caressed his chestnut mane, while her eyes invited a contradiction.

"It's no use,—wild horses would not drag a compliment out of me to-day, after you refused to meet me. I *did* think you had more friendship."

"You haven't told me how you came to be in our village yet," she responded, thinking it more prudent to move the previous question. Like most country-bred Australians, Alice had begun to ride almost as soon as she could walk; indeed, to the dwellers on the great inland plains walking is an art of very secondary value. Her figure harmonized with every movement of the old hunter, as easily as a sea-gull adapts itself to the wave; and the soft evening air dyed her cheek with unwonted carnation and gave to eyes and smile the fitting transitory beauty that the poet celebrates as the greatest charm of all earthly things—

"A moment seen—then gone for ever."

She had changed greatly from the untamed Bohemian girl of former days. The best art of the stage had by slow degrees formed and modulated her movements, and had given her figure

the flexible grace that comes from training and habit; while ten years of study and art had stamped a fairer inscription on her mobile face and expression. Campbell would hardly have recognized her. The shining knot of hair under her neat hat, the calm superiority of her London habit, the pose of her head, the indefinable grace of manner and harmony of voice—all gave him a new and interesting impression. He felt pleased, too, that he had discerned something of her promise in former days, and he said to himself that this renewal of friendship would be an agreeable interlude in his visit. Alice would understand him, and play Mozart, and talk music and art as of old. He should not want any other companion for the time, and, much as he admired Mrs. Austin's beauty, he confessed to himself that one might have too much of a good thing. One never seemed to have too much of Alice Lauder. In fact, that was her great charm, and it was very pleasant to be together again. He had never met any other girl quite like her in all his wanderings, and she interested him—not in the least because she satisfied his ideal, but because of the impression of something bright and distinctive in her quality, some indefinable native touch of character, which had never quite faded from his memory. Above all, she was

companionable, and that, to a man of the world who wanted rest, and the soothing, not the exciting influence of *das ewige weibliche*, was simply a necessary of life.

"Oh, I have been home on sick leave, but they wouldn't let me stay in England for the winter. England was too cold, and India was too hot, and I couldn't stand health-resorts. Some of my people tried to get me to the south of France, but there were too many London people there. I always flee from nice people as from a pestilence; so I fled."

"Wasn't that rather a pity?"

"For the nice people? Perhaps. However, I wanted a place like this to be idle in. I like this new country and the easy open-air colonial life. It suits me all to pieces! I think I shall put in the winter here—your winter—and go back to India in the spring like a giant refreshed."

"Yes, I do think this is a wonderful climate, and it has quite set me up. But I shouldn't have guessed you required much setting up—you don't look like it."

"Oh, you should have seen me before the voyage! I was a scarecrow. And when I got home to England it was not all pleasure. My poor old father was dead. I never seemed to realize it before I got home and found his place

empty, and all the old home was broken up. We had to let the old place, and when I went down there for a day just to see it again, I never felt so miserable in all my life. You often hear people say what a shock it is to go back again in that sort of way, and you read of it in books, but when you realize it yourself——”

“Yes,” said Alice, “I can understand that.”

It seemed perfectly natural that he should tell her of his affairs, as if they were old friends meeting again after ten years’ interval. “And your mother?”

“Oh, my mother is as pretty and young as ever. I’ve never seen anyone like her. She lives in London now, and we had a glorious time there with music—just wallowed in it all the season. You know what music means there, don’t you? I must just have missed you, by the bye, last season.”

“London is too delicious if it wasn’t for that ‘eternal want of pence, that vexes public men.’”

“Oh yes, that’s a fact. And we are all hard up in our family now. I have two younger brothers who must be put into professions, and it takes all we can do to get them started. But I expect to get a good billet by-and-by. My uncle Lanetop is a relation of some great guns

out in India, and I have made a fair record in my work, though I say it myself."

A pause, while the horses' feet crunched the wet glassy sand. Alice felt a certain desire to know more of his acquaintance with the Austin family, but could not bring herself to inquire. However, he went on presently :

"When I was staying with the boss—I mean his Excellency—I met your friend Mrs. Austin, and she asked me to come down here, and I'm very glad of it *now*."

"Ah, you admire her, of course !"

"Oh, she's a terror!—to use her own favourite expression—beautiful, truly beautiful, which is a word I don't often use; and so thoroughly colonial—such a perfect type !"

"I don't know about that."

"Well, I didn't say she was the best type. I have a curiosity to see her husband. I know a good many professional beauties, and I think I can form a good idea of him from my former experience of that class, though I've never met the worthy man."

"I don't believe you can !"

"Isn't he a very kind, quiet, thread-papery little middle-aged man who sits on the edge of his chair, apologizes for everything in his house, and gives hundred-pound notes anony-

mously to charities ? Ah, I thought I was right ! You can't deny my penetration, though you would like to."

"Not more unlike than the crayon sketches you used to make of the passengers on board ship. But here we are at home now. Where are you staying ?"

"At the hotel just now. The Austins asked me to stay with them, but I feared the pace would be rather rapid for an invalid, even one so robust as I am. I mean to get a couple of rooms in some farmhouse near, if I find the place suits me, and Jenkins, my man, approves of it. It would be a good centre for excursions, and I could see something of the country without much bother. I can't stand being a Cook's tourist."

"I think you will like it. It is a nice dreamy little place, where you can eat as much lotus as you like without anyone objecting. There is no Society with a capital S, but there are plenty of nice friendly people about, and the scenery is lovely all round."

"There are no lions in the path, then ? You can solemnly assure me that there are no ruins, nor picture galleries, nor historical museums within twenty miles ?"

"None whatever."

"Thank heaven for that! I shall stay on. A little boating, a little fishing, a good deal of fiddling, and as much loafing in the open air as possible. That will just suit me. Let me help you down, or will you ride up to the door?"

Toto was standing at the gate with his short legs well apart, and his hands in his pockets, in the favourite attitude of the big boy next door.

"Well, Toto, have you been to your Latin lesson?" said Alice, dismounting.

"Yes, I have, and muck it is," replied Toto, with a realistic imitation of the big boy's favourite expression. "It's jolly slow all by myself, and Dulcie won't come and play with me; she only plays with her jolly dolls. Who's that man?"

"That man is going to play marbles with you some day soon, and lick you into a cocked hat," said Campbell, riding away with his old delightful air of *camaraderie*, perfected by long practice amongst the viceregal courts and the pallid beauties of India's coral strand.

CHAPTER IV.

MY *dear* child, where have you been ?" exclaimed Clare in a Cassandra-like voice. She was, to all outward view, reposing in the lap of luxury in her favourite easy-chair before a small wood fire (Clare's health required a fire on most evenings), but her tone seemed to bespeak some impending calamity. "I could not have *believed* you would go out as soon as my back was turned, and I am afraid you will be *very* ill after it."

They were in the dining parlour, a long apartment framed in dark crimson ; the firelight glistened on silver and damask, and on a bunch of flaming, feathery heads of gladioli gathered together in a brown jug and falling over the white cloth with a vivid effect of colour, like the brilliant plumage of a macaw. Mead was laying the table, visibly prepared to stand by Miss Alice with a silent moral support, but conscious at the same time that he only represented a strong

opposition in the house; the real head of the government was engaged at the moment in holding a red-hot salamander over a little dish of scalloped oysters, which sent out a pleasant crispy odour, like a cheerful presentiment, all over the house.

"It was the pulsatilla. It did me so much good; so don't be vexed, dear. And besides, I know Mead wanted to get Corkscrew exercised. Didn't you now, Mead?"

"'Deed and I did, Miss. The ould vagabond is fit to jump over a church now, he's getting so fresh. Will I bring dinner in now, mam?" he concluded, with a marked glance at Alice's habit, which said as plainly as words could say, "Make your escape now while you can, and I will engage the enemy on your behalf."

"Oh yes, do, Clare, have dinner in! I'm perfectly starving. It *must* be the pulsatilla, for I had nothing else. And tell me how you enjoyed the party. And did you play kiss-in-the-ring and hunt the slipper?"

"Well, I've no doubt those good old English sports were in full swing in some part of the grounds, judging by the noise I heard. But I knew I should be ill if I walked about, so I sat in the library most of the time and talked to Mr. Campbell. He tells me he knows you, Alice."

“Oh yes, I met him coming home just now; but never mind him—tell me all about the others. Did Mrs. Granby say, ‘How do you do?—What a very warm day!’ just as if she were making the responses in church? And did la belle Lizzie rush about with her young men, as usual?”

“Well, they *do* say that she is so taken up with this Mr. Campbell that no one else can get a word with her. All I can say is that he seemed quite pleased to sit beside me and talk sensibly. I see nothing to rave about in your Mrs. Austin, though she certainly has a nice nose. She was very much *en évidence* to-day in a white flannel suit—Redfern, I should say—didn’t suit her a bit. Mrs. Burton tells me that she can’t live without admiration for a single minute. And there was a young fellow, Swanny, I think they call him, or it may have been Goosey, for all I know——”

“Yes—yes—Captain Swan. Was he very much in the foreground too?”

“Oh, just hung round all the time, and allowed her to snub him before everybody. Arthur Campbell won’t put up with that sort of thing—she will find that out pretty soon. It turns out I know a lot of his cousins—Cranmers in Surrey—very nice people, and with heaps of money—

just swimming in it; but the daughters are very plain, poor things—six of them, too. However, we had quite a nice talk, and it was a relief to have some real conversation after that everlasting chitter-chatter of this little place. Fancy, he told me that Lord Lancey has broken off his engagement with that barmaid sort of girl he got engaged to, and also that Mrs. Winkes, who was all the rage in London last year, has gone off so terribly that she has had to dye her hair, and it is thought that she enamels her complexion now, for she has never smiled again—for fear of its cracking, we suppose.”

“Ah, well, it is a comfort to have a little intellectual conversation with a London man again. But didn’t he talk about India at all?”

“No, he hadn’t time. But I was hearing from some one else about him. Let me see, was it Mr. Granby, or that other man with the red nose? No, I think it must have been our host. He was very attentive, too, and took me into refreshment ever so often—and they really did things well. I had some capital pistachio cream. I think the Granbys are a nice quiet family, Alice, though you do make fun of them. Yes, and what was I going to tell you about?”

“Oh, about India, perhaps. I was wondering how Mr. Campbell has got on.”

"Oh, very well, indeed. He did get into hot water once with some great person there over a report he wrote about rice-fields or something—but don't ask me what it was all about! And, as Mr. Granby says, it's rather a good thing for a man to have a little hot water sometimes—wakes him up. He thought Mr. Campbell had been rather shunted home—given leave of absence, you know; but said it would be all right when he went back; and they all said he was a rising man. I think it's rather a pity he should be left to Mrs. Austin altogether, and I asked him to come to dinner some day soon."

"Yes?" said Alice, dreamily. "And then we can have some more of that chocolate *soufflé* that Mrs. Mead never *will* make when we are alone. You *do* mean a little dinner, don't you, Clare? Not only the feast of reason and the flow of soul over your London scandals?"

"Dinner is served, mam!" reported Mead, in his sternest military tones, as he drew back a heavy chair from the head of the table with an ominous creak that spoke volumes for the premier's temper if they allowed her Palestine soup to get cold; and the discussion of the latest Green Street gossip was adjourned *pro tem.* in the presence of more important matters of state.

CHAPTER V.

CAMPBELL found so much to attract him in the little colonial village that he determined to spend the rest of his furlough in its leafy and surge-circled bosom. He found a quiet lodging in a farmhouse on the top of the cliff, looking straight over the Pacific Ocean towards the mystic Antarctic regions; and there he unpacked his books, his violin, his MS. sketch of "Life in Northern India" (which might be destined to grow some day into a thick, fat, green-covered volume, and be spoken of in years to come as the standard work of the century on this subject). He also bought a couple of young horses for a mere song—that was what the seller termed the transaction, all unknowing that the composers are few and far between who would realize £50 (cash) on their inspirations, as he did. At all events the mare was cheap at the price, and possibly she might carry off a small hurdle race some day if he took her back to

India with him. He flattered himself that Green Street was just the quiet, sleepy, restful little hollow he had been seeking for all his life, well out of the Society track, and inhabited by a few nice friendly souls, principally Mrs. Austin and Alice Lauder, who would provide him with human sympathy and yet not distract him from the pleasing depths of literary work in which he intended to engulf himself. There were half-a-dozen men, too, in the neighbourhood, or in the village, with whom he easily fraternized, finding in this hardy type of young Englishmen once removed, or even in the undiluted native colonial, something pleasantly strong, manly, and individual. The type seemed, on the whole, more handmade and less ordered by the hundred dozen than that of the parent stock. Campbell rapidly became almost too popular, and could hardly move without a bodyguard of what Clare designated the rag-tag and bob-tail of the district. It was invariably found that he had been to school with the doctor's younger brother; or he had played cricket against the parson's team once up in Yorkshire; or, if the worst came to the worst, he had often heard of the bank manager's brother-in-law from a man in the club at Bombay who used to play whist with him. On these grounds he was at once seized

and confiscated to the hearty, easy-going hospitality of such places; and, though he protested bitterly in his letters home against these interruptions to his severer studies, at heart there was no doubt that he thoroughly enjoyed himself. A hardly-contested election taking place just then gave occasion to a civil war of words which divided the population into two camps, composed on the one side (according to the speaker) of true and liberal-hearted patriots; on the other of sneaks, poltroons, mean whites, office-seekers, and loafers. The government of the day were supposed to be moving heaven and earth—and perhaps another place in which they might have more influence—to get their man in. Arthur threw himself *con amore* into the fight against them, with the result that the ministerial paper alluded to him as a popularity hunter, if not an actual felon and dog-stealer; and in its bi-weekly issue uttered dark sayings as to idiotic globe-trotters, sprigs of nobility, selfish capitalists and owners of inflated moneybags, who were determined to crush the poor man body and soul, and to destroy the hopes of future generations by voting against the government nominee for the rising district of Green Street. Although in some lights these scathing reproofs might fall wide of the mark—for, as

Campbell observed himself, he had no money-bags and had had to work hard for his living ever since he could speak—still they gave a certain prestige to his reputation and helped to consolidate the party of law and order against the infatuated theories of a few Socialistic wind-bags (*vide* opposition paper, published every other evening).

CHAPTER VI.

LOOK here, I'm getting tired of this sitting still business. I vote we shut up shop and have the money returned at the doors—don't you?"

"Oh, *pray* don't move, Princess! Don't yawn, I do beg of you! You will spoil the whole pose, and I was getting you in so splendidly this time."

In a vine-trellised corner of her wide veranda Mrs. Austin was gracefully "composed" with a high-backed Old English chair, a tapestry curtain, and a gauzy mass of pale sea-green drapery twisted mysteriously round her shoulders and falling loosely over her bare arms. Campbell was standing by an easel rapidly sketching her profile in coloured chalks. He had already made a dozen attempts, but none of them were quite satisfactory. There was Mrs. Austin as a New-haven fishwife, half-length; head and shoulders in Greek costume, time of Iphigenia; Gains-

borough hat and feathers ; fancy sketch of Ruth with a wheatsheaf on her head as she " stood in tears amid the alien corn." There was a touch of nature and a gleam of talent in them all, but they could not escape from the merry, careless, defiant glance of her eye, or the laughter-loving curl of her finely-cut lips. It was no use to pretend to tragedy ; whatever character, or rather costume, it pleased her to assume for the moment, even as Niobe herself, she could never avoid looking " cheeky," and Campbell began to perceive with an artist's despair that he could not transmute this quality into the pensive intensity of high art. He thought the fault was in his own hand, and tried in vain other lights, other systems, but he was not artist enough to add the look of soul to the canvas which he vaguely felt was missing in his model.

In point of fact, fortune had dealt unfairly by Lizzie in giving her the empty compliment of prosperous idleness for a wedding gift. Her natural bent was simple and domestic to a fault. She would have been in her element keeping house, bustling, marketing, managing with a small income and a large family, as so many of her sisters were doing, bemoaning their fate all the time. Her head and fingers were clever and capable ; she could do anything with her hands,

but she did not know what to do with herself. She ought to have been one of those comely, buxom matrons who may be seen any Sunday in any country town all over the world, marshalling her little flock to church, arrayed in spotless clothing and shining rosy cheeks; or perhaps helping to keep shop on the boulevards, trim-aproned, tight-laced, with a bright eye for the main chance; or ordering her dairymaids about in some red-tiled, rose-curtained homestead in Devonshire.

Lizzie was wasted on a large establishment. Her servants never permitted her to practise those domestic arts in which she could so easily have surpassed them. She dare not so much as make her own dresses; even the "natural piety" of nursing the sick, or bringing up children, seemed denied by fate. Something was wanting in her life as in her beauty, and in her simple way she was a *femme incomprise* amidst all the surroundings of wealth and amusement. All the more wildly she rushed into the distractions of society and the brotherly companionship of admiring young men. She was not naturally inclined to be "fast"—far from it. Yet she got into the way of rumour and gossip out of very lightheartedness, as persistently as the old woman and the dog run

across the racecourse just as the horses are coming out.

"I can't manage it, Princess," he said at last, in a despairing tone. This royal term of address he had adopted out of a choice of pet names used by Mrs. Austin's *intimes*, and in preference to "Aunt Lizzie," "Lady Racquet," and "Bright-eyes," which were the favourite *noms de guerre* in her inner circle. "You ought to go Home and get your portrait done by one of the great stars. Millais would be delighted to paint your head. It is too good to be wasted on a wretched amateur like me."

"Oh, I couldn't be bothered to sit still all the time. I am as tired as a cat now, and haven't got a kick left, I believe."

"But you must not say *that* when you go to England, you know. Some people do, of course; but it isn't good form, and I don't like to hear you talk nothing but slang."

"Why, what must I say?" inquired Lizzie, leaning forward with clasped hands outstretched before her, and, for a wonder, with a serious, inquiring look in her bright eyes.

"There! that's the very thing—just stay like that for ten minutes, and my fortune's made. Yes, just like that. Don't smile, and don't yawn, Princess, *please*—for my sake! Think of

my reputation. Well, as we were saying," he continued, rushing the outline in on a fresh block, and trying to keep hold of the thread of conversation which gave her that momentary solemnity, "if you use all your favourite expressions when you go to England, people will call you a *Colonial*. Think of that! Though I *have* heard girls who have never been out of England quite as bad; but, however——" he hesitated, absorbed in his work, and feeling the difficulty of being all artist and at the same time playing Mentor and Sir Charles Grandison at one and the same moment, for the benefit of his model.

"Well, give me an instance," said Lizzie, with some dignity. "I really do want to know the lay of the land, for of course we shall go Home some time, and I don't want people to laugh at me for being a perfect savage. I believe you can tell me things without being disagreeable, like Aunt Granby, when she puts on extra starch, and goes for me like a coach-and-four in a hurricane."

"Well, for instance—it's a trifle, but perhaps you needn't say, 'That's a whopper,' or 'That's a good lie,' every time poor Captain Swan pays you a compliment."

"Oh, that *is* a whopper! I don't! I only snub him sometimes because he is so fearfully

meek. I just want to see how far I can go without putting him in a passion."

"Oh, well, I don't object to that. Swanny is a good sort of fellow in the main—his bray is worse than his bite, as it were. So we will pass over that. Did I hear some young ladies saying, 'Go on, you little brute!' at tennis, yesterday?"

"Why, I was talking to the ball, of course. *That's* nothing."

"No, oh no, of course not. I did not think it was—but, I know you will be angry with me, and that will spoil my picture; just turn your head ever so little to the right, please. There!"

. . . . Years after, in a distant land, Campbell turned out a portfolio full of half-finished sketches which he had never looked at since that day. He looked sadly at the graceful head and half-suggested background. Those few touches brought him back again to the surroundings of that summer afternoon. The trellised veranda, with its deeply-carved vine-leaves that made a frame for the cornfield sloping upward, and on the edge of the hill a farmhouse surrounded by its brown loaf-shaped haystacks; and beyond that a blue wavy line of mountain, cleft in two where the unseen river mysteriously forced its way through the narrow gorge. It

was still broad summer, but there was a taste of autumn in the air, in the milky, vaporous sunshine, the over-ripeness of the corn, and the fruity essence of the atmosphere. A warm soft wind blew from the sea and carried along a procession of drowsy clouds, whose shadows floated in tortoiseshell tints over the wheat; the whole cornfield seemed at times to flow upwards and follow the clouds over the hill. The farmhouse was Campbell's home at that time. He could see the men building a rick and tossing the sheaves in a slow, rhythmic measure, and he felt a passing desire to join them at their immemorial rustic labour. A large drove of cattle was reluctantly passing along the road below the hillside. From the distance they looked like vivid parti-coloured waves moving slowly through the valley, with an occasional glimpse of head and horns emerging from the ruddy-tinted mass. He longed, too, momentarily, to paint those rich reds and browns and white splashes of colour which made such a fine contrast to the faded greens and yellows of the landscape. They swayed slowly onwards, lowing as they went, and their loud, mingled lament came on the wind with a deep orchestral effect. All the summer pleasantness came back to Campbell as he looked at the little sketch in the after-time,

and he could almost hear again the locusts' poignant, penetrating cry throbbing through the warm, sleepy afternoon. He looked a little sadly at the half-finished sketch of a face that had passed so soon afterwards into the Silent Land, and said to one who stood near him :

"I don't know how it was that I could never catch her expression. When she looked down I often thought I could idealize her face, and sometimes she would seem so gentle—sad, almost—but then she would laugh again, and that look was gone. I wish I had a better picture of her ; but perhaps this rough outline brings her back more clearly." And he wondered why his wife only sighed and said softly, as if to herself, "Poor, poor Lizzie!"

"Well, go on," said Lizzie's living voice on that summer afternoon. "What am I to be angry with you about? Don't you put yourself in a perspiration over it, anyway."

"Oh, never mind, just now, Princess," he answered absently, giving up his improvement class as a hopeless task. "But there's something wrong about your hair to-day. It doesn't suit the shape of your head in all those twists and fal-lals. Couldn't you put it up in a round sort of knob at the back. You know the way I mean."

"Well, do it yourself, if you don't like it," she laughed back; and, pulling out a few hair-pins, her brilliant fair hair fell all over her shoulders. With the sea-green gauzy drapery and the bright metallic cloud of hair she looked exactly like the picture of a mermaid emerging from the green wave, and there was a mischievous glance in her eyes that seemed to personate the siren's smile to perfection.

Arthur stopped for a moment half-vexed that she had spoilt her pose. Then, taking her at her word, he silently caught up her glistening tresses, and slowly and laboriously coiled them up in a distant resemblance to the coiffure of the Diana at the Louvre. He leaned over her head, to judge of the front effect. Her eyes were half-closed; but there was a meaning dimple in each cheek that seemed to speak volumes. He bent closer still, but in the instant she had jerked herself out of reach, and, with one of her wild, childish laughs, flung away the drapery and the curtain, exclaiming in her cheerfullest tone:

"Well, I vote we do something livelier than sit here all day. What will you bet I won't get a love set from you first thing? Come on! Who's afraid?"

CHAPTER VII.

Alice to Helen.

"September 28.

IT always seems to me that the sweetest time of the year comes when the days and nights are equal—seedtime and harvest. The apple-trees are all out under my windows, and they open their delicate cups like eggshells and show the pink lining inside. The snow is melting from the mountains, and the grass is almost too green on the plains, in contrast to the sombre forests and the dark buttresses of the lower ranges. When I ride up to the little church on the hill now I hear the plaintive vibrating cry of the ewes and lambs thrilling the silent plains with its tremulous symphony. Every flowerbell has a bee, every tree a nest, and the green leaves rustle over it, and the old tree sings and waves and cradles it to rest as patiently as a mother rocks her first baby to sleep. The hyacinths are breaking from their green swaddling bands, and

the scarlet geraniums stand in rows like grenadiers. I have just brought in a basket of lilac, which fills the whole room with the flavour of spring. This is a pleasant, long-shaped, lattice-windowed room, not much more than an attic, but furnished with two lovely views. One low window opens over the ever-blue glades of the bay, flawed and veined here and there with a moving network of light that seems to float upwards from the quivering depths of sea below. The other is shaded by two sighing pine-trees, which murmur their 'perpetual benedictions' over my head. I love the voice of the pines; but for real musical, sympathetic melancholy give me the wind-harp of our Australian casuarinas. Do you remember that indescribable long-drawn sighing cadence that whispered night and day all over the vast, solitary, sun-beaten plains of our youth?

"We have done wonders in our arrangement of the 'studio,' as the servants insist on calling my room. The ceiling follows the natural gable of the roof, and is lined with a sort of cedar-wood native to this country. It has a yellow satiny effect, and harmonizes with the red curtains, with my little store of books, and the etchings in their narrow black frames. Two stout timber beams undisguisedly traverse the roof, and from one we hang a basket of trailing

ferns; from the other, my little green friend the parouquet depends, and swings in state in his brass cage. There is a wide open brick fireplace, with logs of wood ready to hand, and if you want a fire it is the easiest thing in the world (in theory) to be your own Cinderella and build it up. When I come home from my afternoon ride I often come upstairs and practise, for I have a private piano up here. Clare is generally lying down before dinner (her health requires it, especially if she has a new novel), and I find that good Mrs. Mead has lit my fire and put the tea-things in the window and boiled the kettle on my own hearth, and it all looks so comfortable and homely that I don't know whether I am a hopeless sybarite or a comfortable hermit in the desert. A bed of violets is in full blossom under the windows, and as for the neighbours, they are reduced to a condition of silent despair by the appearance of Clare's auricula beds. Some people call these pretty prim blossoms 'dusty millers,' but to my mind they are more like very fine ladies in powder and plush and patches, who have come to make a formal call on their country cousins.

"In our little community it generally happens that any bit of news is introduced as a secret. This has much the same effect as writing '*urgent*'

on a telegram ; or perhaps it adds to the value of the information, as smuggled goods are more attractive than others. One of these state secrets is going round our circle just now with a rapidity that leaves the post-office out of sight. It is to the effect that the Klingenders are going to give a large ball shortly, but you mustn't tell anybody ! They live at a distance of ten miles of bad road, on a large station (station, so called from *estancia*, as in South America), and although we speak of a simple ball, I understand the festivities will last for three days at least. I must tell you all about it when it comes off. At present I don't feel much in the mood for dancing. I am getting older, and the world is out of tune with me sometimes. I am in that hateful transition stage—all the inferiority of youth without the compensations of middle life. Youth wears tight shoes a size too small for it, and trembles at shadows, and believes that the eye of the world is upon it ; middle-age sits with his feet on the fender, and reads the newspapers, and finds excuses for not going out on wet nights. Youth is a stormy ball, middle-age a dinner party. On the whole, I am tired of this stage ; but courage, we shall soon be over it ! I foresee what I shall be in the future : a very nice person, who smiles at the right moment, agrees with everything that

everybody says, and generally wears a black alpaca—the sort of friend you like to have in your house when anyone is ill, or you have a lot of fruit to preserve. I dare say I shall like this rôle when I get used to it. However

“It is generally supposed in Green Street that Arthur Campbell will soon be engaged to the youngest Miss Granby, the one with a pet dog and a giggle. Nothing wears you out like a giggle in the long run, and I should think he would be perfectly miserable under those circumstances, even if the pet dog could be got rid of; but it can't be helped. Others among the more charitably disposed can easily foresee that he will end by running away with Mrs. Austin, or *vice versâ*. I don't think myself that he has any idea of taking flight in either direction. He often comes here and talks with Clare, and the children look upon him as a friend of the family who may be made use of in the direction of chocolate creams or other unconsidered trifles. He looks tired and careworn sometimes, and he often asks me to play ‘something soothing.’ He would sit there for hours if Clare would allow the soothing process to go on indefinitely; but though she has a real love of music, there are limits to her patience, and her hospitality prefers a lunch or dinner to the piano alone. . . .

“The elms have heard the whisper of spring already, and have told the secret to the oaks; these, however, as become trees of royal birth, are slow in coming out, and like to keep the procession waiting. I understand from Tennyson, who has taught our generation so much natural history, that the shy ash-tree is the last to appear—‘delaying as the tender ash delays.’ We don’t happen to have an English ash within calling distance, but I see the horse-chestnut at the gate opening out his crumpled green sleeves in the sunshine; and as for the willows, they are positively swimming in delicate foliage. I opened my window this morning, and could not imagine where the hum of hundreds of bees was coming from. It sounded like a crowd of spinning-wheels all softly spinning together, and looking about I found the sound came from a weeping willow, covered with catkins and full of bees.

“Clare is talking about having a little dinner party still. She has been talking about it for the last three months, but, if the truth must be told, Mrs. Mead’s temper has not been of the sunniest, and to go into action without her consent would be foolhardy, if not atheistical. Mrs. Mead is one of those cooks that men would not willingly let die, and when she is in the right mood you fear no foe whom you invite to dinner;

but there is another rock in the entertaining channel. Ladies abound in Green Street ; but where is there a single eligible being whom one can ask to meet them ? It is a charming village, but this is the fatal drawback. Every paradise has its peculiar trial, and we, alas ! are not exempt. I had almost written that the trouble was that we had no serpent ; it is, at all events, a sad truth that we have no men. Of course we have plenty of men in the abstract, and very pleasant, exemplary men, too. As far as regards the ordinary duties of life, men may be found in the ranks of husbands, fathers, brothers, and uncles, that any place would be proud of ; but there are literally *no* men to marry. (Of course there is always Arthur Campbell, but he is an outsider, and we can't ask him every time.)

“ ‘ Why should we have a party at all ? ’ I inquired at last, with the air of Columbus crushing his eggshell.

“ ‘ Why, indeed ! ’ replied Clare, scathingly. ‘ Why does the earth turn round from west to east, or east to west, whichever it is ? Why does washing-day always fall on a Monday, and throw a gloom over whole families ever since the creation of the world ? Why do the wrong people always accept, and the right people have to go into mourning or get an attack of chicken-

pox? Why are one's monthly bills ever so much larger than one expects, and why is one's bank book *always* on the wrong side? The answer to these questions lies in the constitution of things. They can't be explained, and the best way is just to accept the inevitable. Men or no men, I'm going to have a dinner party next week, and we will write out the invitations this evening.'

“‘Perhaps we might ask some people from Newchurch,’ I suggested at last. Newchurch is the great place of our district. As far as we go here, everyone considers that *our tone* is very high in Green Street. Other places *may* have more population (as a matter of detail, a great many have), more shops, more bustle; but if you want really good society, fresh air, early services, the feast of reason and the flow of soul, you must come to Green Street. Of course, if you want *excitement*, you can go to town. You can get plenty of balls and theatres *there*. In mentioning this it is customary to curl the tip of one's nose up with just the merest shadow of a sneer. It is a little difficult to manage at first, but you soon get into the way of it. Perhaps I ought to add that a good many of us *do* go to Newchurch (whenever we can afford it), but we always delight in coming back to our peaceful,

intellectual, non-gossiping homes, and we make it a point of honour to go round next day and call on our friends and profess loudly that we would not live in that noisy, rattling, dusty, windy place for anything you could give us.

“The children are very happy and sunburnt, and growing by inches every week, it seems to me. Toto wishes us to give up calling him by this pet diminutive, and give him his full title of Reginald. His foible is to appear a big grown-up schoolboy, who understands all the rules of cricket, and never cuts his fingers even with his new knife of two blades. The big boy next door is quite the sporting man, and must be nearly twelve years old. His air of command when he rides up on his pony, whistles for his dog, and throws the bridle to Reggy, is worthy of a ‘Varsity eight’ man. Good little Dulcie always hangs meekly round the boys, and is occasionally promoted to feed the pony with apples. She is sweet and kind to all living creatures, especially kittens, and, when not following her brother about, is always doing some charitable action. Sometimes she nurses a broken-legged doll, or tries to keep the chickens quiet in her lap, or sits in the sun with the old grey cat; or, if no other hospital work offers, she gathers up the weeds that have been thrown out on the

walk and compassionately plants and waters them again. She is very seldom naughty, but if she gets into a temper she disappears under the table and kicks at nothing in particular for a few minutes, and emerges calm and peaceful. I could wish that more of my acquaintances would work off their feelings in the same way when they are entertaining the legendary black dog unawares.

“On the other side of the street I often see another little boy, a delicate only child of studious habits. He comes to see me sometimes, but stands in great awe of the Damon children. He often comes over when I am playing, and stands by the window to listen. This led me to make use of him in a gentle way. We have all got some private weakness. Human nature is frail at the best. ‘I myself am not exempt,’ alas! In fact, if it must be told, I have a great love of composing tunes—hymn tunes mostly, they are the easiest. The difficulty of all artists at first is to find an audience fit though few; and one day it occurred to me that the new boy—Bertie by name—might, for a small consideration, act the part of art-critic. I might try my tunes on him, as it were, as one tries a new bonnet on a friend. This has answered admirably so far. His terms are not high—indeed,

with a generosity not uncommon among children, he often waives the question of payment, declaring that he really doesn't mind it, *i.e.* the musical inspirations, *much*. But with Spartan firmness I always insist on his taking the price of his leisure, whether in the shape of copper coins of the realm or peppermint rock, as the case may be. The labourer is worthy of his hire, and Bertie is always anxious to be complimentary.

"Last Saturday I managed to keep him to tea to meet the other children. They were all very solemn at first, but presently Dulcie invited him to visit her own private cemetery in a corner of the garden, where she has two dolls, a canary, and half a goldfish (the cat ate the rest) interred in suitable mausoleums; and as they trotted away I heard her ask the inevitable introductory question of childhood, 'How old is you?' It's a pity we can't carry on this simple system in maturer life—it would clear up so many difficulties. Afterwards I heard Herbert growing quite conversational, and confiding to Dulcie that he was making up 'a sort of a story,' and he gave an outline in which tigers, Red Indians, elephants and the prophet Jonah seemed to play most sensational parts.

"Altogether we lead a very quiet friendly

existence in this sunshiny corner of the world. So quiet and dreamy it often seems to me that I feel as if I were living through a sort of 'Entr'acte' in which we listen to the music and look at the spectators, but feel no particular anxiety about the play. What will be in the next act? This question often occurs to me, but I put off answering it, like a tiresome letter, from one day to another. I must wait to see what the next few weeks will bring forth in the way of light and leading.

"A curious thing happened to me the other day which gave me new heart and hope for the future. Last Sunday afternoon I took the two children for a long walk over the hills behind the village, leading the pony in case anyone of our company knocked up. The road turns its back to the sea, and, winding up a steep bit of hill, suddenly falls into a quiet green pastoral valley, which looks as if it were fast asleep and had never waked since the beginning of the world. It was a grey, still, windless afternoon, wintry in tone and colouring, but mild; underneath all the stillness you seemed to hear faintly, and at a great distance, the triumphal march and merry music of the coming summer. The green smooth pasture slopes downward with soft restful curves for three or four miles of the valley, and then

risers more abruptly on the other side into the wilder ridges of the dark—almost black—native forest. I sat down in a warm nook, sheltered by the rough gold-work of the furze, and took out a book, while the children scattered about looking for the tiny milk-hued parasols of mushrooms, and the pony browsed contentedly close at hand. I almost think I must have been asleep, like the valley. I thought I was in church; I seemed to hear voices, or rather a voice of someone preaching at a little distance, and after a few moments I turned round and saw Reggie and his sister standing close together and listening open-mouthed to the address of an itinerant preacher, who had collected half-a-dozen listeners from the furze-embossed slopes and small farms about. They were probably Scandinavians (commonly called Scandys), who have a small settlement hereabout, and they all listened with a stolid, but respectful attention, like that of intelligent collie dogs in church, to his discourse. The children were evidently fascinated, whether by the Bohemian style of church service or from an inward conviction that these religious exercises might be forbidden by authority, I cannot say; but they gazed on the preacher—a dark-bearded sailor-looking old man, with a fine, worn face, hair ‘sable-silvered,’ and a wooden leg—as if he were

a missionary indeed to their souls. I drew nearer, but kept behind the furze bushes, according to our national terror of joining in other people's worship. Presently the old man raised his hand with a fine natural gesture, and leaning on his crutch, exclaimed, in the words of the Son of David—

“ ‘Hear in Heaven thy dwelling-place! And when thou hearest, forgive!’ ”

“ It really was rather affecting; but I felt terribly alarmed when the old preacher fixed his eye upon me, and, without moving, observed, ‘My brethren, we will now sing a hymn. Young lady, will you raise the tune?’ in a voice of mild command. I felt turned into stone. He held a book towards me, and I mechanically took it, while the Scandys turned their mild, calm, ruminating eyes on me, with no appearance of surprise. Devoutly hoping that no one I knew could see me, I looked at the hymn he had pointed out, and tried to begin the dear mournful tune of ‘Belmont.’ But the nervous impediment which had laid an embargo on my music for so long asserted itself with all its strength. I could not utter a single note, and I remained dumb and stupidly petrified in this still green pasture before half-a-dozen simple country-folk. I felt terribly disappointed, and the old man,

seeing I did not begin, cast a look of reproof on me, and started off in a high-pitched wavering voice that seemed to have had all its fulness blown away by wear and tear of storms and toil at sea. I felt so sorry for him—for his weather-beaten face, and his worn old voice, and his wooden leg,—above all, he sang so terribly out of tune, that all at once, without my knowing it, a voice that surely never belonged to me—it was so delightfully sweet and full of power—took up the words and sang

“‘There is a fountain filled with blood’

from beginning to end, to the astonishment of the fields and the dark forest slopes which heard the solemn words for the first time in their lives. While we were singing, as if an angel of life moved over the land, a great gold wing of sunlight swept over the hills and then faded away into the still, grey, mild, over-clouded evening, more like autumn than spring.

“But I feel spring stirring in my heart now! I can sing again. George Eliot says somewhere, ‘The soul that was born again to music might wake again to love’—or something to that effect. I can well believe it!

“Yours,

“A. L.”

A week later.

"I found this letter at the bottom of my blotting-case; I am glad it was not posted in the proper time, for I must tell you something more. Something rather uncomfortable has happened—not happened, rather, but hinted. However, you shall hear all, and then you must absolve me from any imprudent interest in the affairs of my neighbours, for that is just where Clare is a little deficient. She fancies I get myself into scrapes by knowing people too easily,—not being English enough, in fact. You shall be the judge on this occasion.

"We had the dinner party last Friday, with a little reception afterwards. Clare belongs to the straitest sect of dinner-givers—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a dinner for a dinner, is her system of retribution; consequently the first part of the entertainment was middle-aged and slightly deaf, for the most part, as she was determined to invite back all those who had asked her, through good report or evil report. I fell to the lot of Mr. Austin, and thanked my stars it was no worse. The Austins go back to town for the winter, but they often come here for a few days' holiday with their friends. Their house is kept in readiness for them at any

moment. We *do* hear strange stories of these holiday escapades—races on the sands barefoot, which Mrs. Austin *always* wins, games of Aunt Sally, and if there *is* anything worse than Aunt Sally you may be sure it is provided. Clare piously thanks Providence that it is too cold for bathing parties, *yet* awhile. However, at dinner there was Lizzie sitting opposite to me, and looking radiant, while A. C. discoursed to her quite happily, and I listened sympathetically to the well-informed prosing of her husband. After dinner we had the whole adult society of Green Street, and every man who could pass the census, young or old, was brought into Clare's conscription from highways and byways, besides several imported direct from town. The little party seemed to go off as well as could be expected on the whole, and we had music and conversation, and strawberries and cream, and some of Mrs. Mead's most ethereal coffee—the sort of coffee they used to have in the 'Arabian Nights;' and altogether it was rather a successful little party.

"At one end of the little hall there is a three-cornered den which is used generally for the children's books, and spades, etc. Mead (who understands these things) had judiciously arranged this corner with a shaded lamp, a screen,

a small table covered with photographs, and two discreet chairs. Here about the middle of the evening I found myself sitting beside the neat grey whiskers of Mr. Austin, of all whiskers in the world! I have not the least idea how I got there. I supposed at the moment that I was entertaining him as a matter of duty, but it has since occurred to me that he may have guided my unconscious steps to a quiet corner where he could say something he had to say, uninterruptedly. I was not paying much attention to his conversation, but dreamily gathered its import mixed with the sound of music and the hum of voices in the different rooms. Clare was playing some of Beethoven's waltzes in the drawing-room, and whenever I hear that particular waltz I have a curious visionary recollection of a scene in my very early childhood, which, however, has no earthly connection with the music. So many years ago I was driving with my father over one of the boundless inland plains of Australia. It was evening of a sultry day. One huge camel-shaped mountain lay like some Titanic shape crouched darkly against the sunset, guarding the empty crater and grass-grown hearth of the ancient volcano. The dry warm wind blew endlessly over the plains, and faintly rustled the carpet of white everlast-

ing-flowers—those curious Australian daisies, with lifeless silvery blossoms and strange sabbatic fragrance. I remember how the wheels whistled over the dry foliage of the *immortelles*, and how the ground seemed to roll away visibly before us, in the billowy volcano-formed barrows which we call 'dead men's graves' over there. I don't know what particular cupboard of the brain holds our earliest associations, but 'as long as life shall hold' that sad floating music will bring back to my mind the white-flowered, balsam-scented plain—once rained over with a fiery deluge, and covered still with fragments of lava as thick as shells on the seashore; the dark abrupt precipices and cliffs of the one great mountain on the horizon; the flaming gorgeous sunset, opening its wings in the west and fleeing away over the desert; and the intense loneliness, the Sabbath-like blank of all sign of man's daily labour, the strange indescribable sense of tragedy and solitude, still soothes my memory with a draught of opiate sweetness. All the while I thus listened to the inward voice of the charmer, seeing visions and dreaming dreams of long past days, I was conscious of the various disconnected fragments of conversation borne in on our ears from various resting-places in the hall or reception rooms. I could hear Mrs.

Granby's deep cathedral voice intoning to her neighbours, 'Yes, I can assure you, it is quite threepence a yard cheaper there than at any other place in town,' and her youngest daughter from the opposite doorway exclaiming, with her intermittent giggle, 'Oh, we had *such* fun! You can't think! It will make you die of laughing! Giggle—giggle—giggle!' while from the other side of the screen came in lower pitched but perfectly distinct accents, 'Yes, I know he was there quite *four* hours this afternoon! Of course, you won't mention it to anyone, but really——' 'How well Mrs. Austin is looking to-night!' I broke in suddenly in needlessly loud tones, for I did not desire my neighbour to overhear any more of our social secrets. 'She always reminds me of a picture of Spring. You ought to get her painted by a really good artist,' I went on hurriedly, determined to leave no blanks in our conversation.

" 'You admire my wife! Yes, and if I may say so, with justice, Miss Lauder. She has a lovely countenance. Perhaps it would not be too indiscreet in me to say that she reciprocates your feeling. She is much admired, I am aware of that, but few people know what goodness, what a guileless simplicity of nature is hers. She is almost too unworldly and——'

“ ‘Great Scott ! What on earth are *you* doing here ! ’ said a cheerful young voice in our neighbourhood. But the question was not addressed to either of us, and after a pause Mr. Austin went on, in the same monotonous undertone :

“ ‘ I never allow myself to forget that Elizabeth is many years younger than I am, and I do not in any way seek to trammel her enjoyments. She chooses her own friends, and perhaps, impulsive as undoubtedly she is, these friends are not always the wisest of mankind. You know one of these friends, Miss Lauder ; he is highly esteemed, I doubt not, by your circle ; as far as I am concerned, I find him a courteous and well-informed gentleman. He is an accomplished traveller, but——’ Here Mr. Austin lifted the large magnifying glass by whose aid he had been examining the photographs on the table before him, and raised it mechanically, so that the glass circle seemed to fix an accusing gaze on me, like a huge Cyclopean eye, while he dropped his voice and said slowly, ‘ but I wish he would not come so much to my house. ’

“ ‘ The murder is out now ! and I am the person who has to pursue it, I thought to myself, and really I was so confused at the moment that I hardly knew what I said next, or even

what Mr. Austin's droning voice was explaining so laboriously to me. Why on earth should he choose *me* for a confidante in such a delicate matter? What have I done that I should be mixed up in their affairs? It is impossible, grotesque! They must all be mad to talk of such a thing. But by degrees I gathered some indications of what he was trying to bring about. I am expected to hint to Mr. Campbell that he is *de trop* in the Austin household. Yes, I—myself—Alice Lauder, spinster, being of sound mind and body—am supposed to take this bomb-shell up in my new six-button tan gloves, and calmly deposit it somewhere out of the way of the children. It is a joke, but rather too practical for my taste! I heard vaguely some disjointed murmurs about 'your old friendship,' 'more influence than anyone else,' 'your practical good sense,' and other unmeaning observations. When anyone talks about my well-known good sense, I always give it up, and fly as from a pestilence to the uttermost parts of the earth.

"I remember nothing more except that the unwinking glare of the magnifying glass was fixed on me for apparently untold ages, while I remained in a state of stupefaction, gazing earnestly at my fan and seeking counsel from the lowest depths of the Turkey carpet, while Mr.

Austin explained and expatiated, apologized and meandered, and explained it all over again. But no—nothing on earth shall move me from my standing-point. I know nothing, absolutely *nothing* of the matter, and I shall *not* know, not for all the Austins and Campbells and Green Street gossips in creation.

“Yours ever, in dismay, dearest Helen,

“A. L.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE delicious spring days that followed Mrs. Damon's reception were very far from being wholly delightful to Alice. There was a wrong note in all the spring harmony, a vague sense of trouble even in the bee-haunted daffodils. She hardly asked herself what was wrong, and she avoided the little social meetings of the neighbours where her bright friendliness had usually been so welcome. There was nothing in the few words that Mr. Austin had addressed to her that evening to spoil her peaceful enjoyment of nature; but she carried about a painful impression of confusion and misunderstanding. Perhaps it was not so much his warning—if warning were really meant—that gave her this presentiment of trouble; but Alice had suddenly felt that her eyes were opened to something wrong, something dangerous—she hardly knew what it was, or where the cloud rose in the blue sky. There was trouble—worse,

there was a sense of wrongdoing—in the air, and in the sunny outburst of nature's happiness that Southern spring morning. After a time she began to piece together, with the unconscious workmanship by which we join words and thoughts and scenes together, till they form a connected whole, all the little sayings and meanings of the Green Street circle which had fallen unheeded on her ears hitherto. It was not to be supposed, in such a green, idyllic spot as this, that gossip would forget to trade her wares; and, indeed, poor Lizzie's name had been frequently canvassed of late amongst her friends. Everybody knew, of course, what a good, open-hearted child of nature she was in reality; still, she was going a little too far this time. She ought to be advised by somebody; or, at least, Mr. Campbell should be spoken to; or, if not Mr. Campbell, then why did not her husband interfere? She would get herself into hot water, and there was danger ahead. There is no smoke without fire; and so on, and so on. This airy conflict raged over Lizzie's head, however, quite unperceived by her, and she continued her joyous and meteor-like career over the ball-rooms and tennis lawns of town and country as gaily and triumphantly as any woman with a perfect profile, a new dress for every day in

the year, and a clear conscience, could possibly desire.

It is true that some women may steal a heart while others dare not look over a hedge; and Lizzie had always appeared to belong to this pleasing and unblamed class of criminals. But now she had reached the invisible cordon which separates the safe from the unsafe—in the eyes of the world, at all events—and it was time for her to draw back. But the worst of it all was—and this struck a pang of cold foreboding into Alice's soul—that Mrs. Austin's sparkling face and geranium complexion were not so joyous and brilliant as they were wont to be. There was an unusual sweetness and gentleness in her voice and manner, a more wistful and far-away expression of thought in her liquid childlike eyes, that made her look far sweeter, but different, in some remote indescribable way. We all know the name of the magician who generally works these changes, and we know, too, that his victim is often the only one in the circle who is unconscious of his fatal spell. Some Frenchwoman has said, "Love is a tile that falls on one's head,"—a saying that really sums up the philosophy of the whole matter in a nutshell. But supposing the tile falls on a young matron's thoughtless curly head? Who is to warn her

of her danger, and to what hospice can she flee for refuge? These questions troubled everybody, more or less, who knew Lizzie, except herself; and they troubled Alice more than any one, perhaps, though she was in no way concerned, as she assured herself with great firmness several hundred times a day on an average. There seemed, however, some strange conspiracy in the air—in the very flowers of her garden, and the wattle blossoms that shook their golden hailstorms over the wall—to draw the net closer around her and bring her into the meshes of fate along with the Austin family, however she might struggle against it. Even Mrs. Granby, the solemn, the dignified pattern of propriety, had in some mysterious way sought her out for counsel and consolation. “My dear Miss Lauder, Lizzie does not know what love is! She has really never loved; Thomas was saying so only this morning to me. We must hope and believe that she never *will*. Of course I know how much she is attached to Mr. Austin, and he deserves all her gratitude and esteem. But it was a *mariage de convenance*, as everyone knows. Now love, Miss Lauder, *that* is a different thing; our hearts have had some experience, though I dare say you young people think you have it all to yourselves.”

The good lady gazed benevolently over her spectacles at her companion. It certainly had struck Alice for a moment that there was something a little ludicrous in the idea of these two portly old people—one with a bald head and mutton-chop whiskers, the other in a lace cap, and picture-frame sides of hair, discussing the romance of life together—but she saw immediately that this was a wrong point of view. It was they who were in the right; they had tasted the sacramental wine of life; they had travelled together for thirty years, and together they had

“Drank deep, laughed free,
Wept, feasted, despaired—been happy.”

She listened gravely therefore, but in all good faith, while Mrs. Granby gradually rolled out her ideas in heavy-syllabled sentences.

. . . . “Thomas is really much concerned about the matter, and it must be something serious when he observes any of our little social interests. But he says it is a matter of common talk all over the place, and even in the clubs—my poor niece, why should she be so attacked?—and Thomas thinks we must take some steps to stop it. He thinks I ought to speak to Lizzie; but it is a difficult matter, and she will not always listen quietly to what I advise. But

Thomas says he believes Mr. Campbell means no harm——”

“I—really—I—Mrs. Granby—I can’t discuss——”

“No, no, my dear ; but I was about to say he is a man of the world, and this trifling sort of intercourse means nothing to him—nothing ! He is no doubt used to something of the sort in ordinary life, just as he is used to go to races or the theatre ; but I am sure he has no intention of—of—flirtation, shall we say ?”

“I really don’t know, Mrs. Granby ; and I *must* add that I don’t care either.”

“I was about to say,” went on the deep rolling accents, flattening down all these trifling interruptions, “that if some friend would speak to him—just delicately indicate that it would be the kindest and best thing to withdraw a little——”

“Very likely that would be best ; but why should I know anything about it at all ?” Alice spoke hurriedly, and her eyes were feverishly bright.

“Because I think—we both think—that you, Miss Lauder, should be that friend. It would come best from you.”

“From me ! Me ! Oh, Mrs. Granby, you are joking surely ! You *cannot* be in earnest.”

"Because we think—we both think," continued the old lady, just as calmly as if Alice had never spoken, "that you would have more influence over Mr. Campbell than anyone else here. We believe—" She paused, and then went on in the deepest of deliberate syllables, "We believe that Mr. Campbell has no object in seeking my niece's society further than to while away the time. If he *has* an object in staying on here—and I fully believe he has—it is not to be near poor Lizzie, it is on *your* account, Miss Lauder."

Alice turned very white at this homethrust, whether from pain or joy did not appear. She replied, after a moment's pause for reflection, very gently and with no affectation :

"I really could not, Mrs. Granby, not even to save my life."

"Not even to save another's?"

The girl shook her head silently, and the old lady sighed.

"Then it's no use saying any more. I think myself your scruples are overstrained in a matter of such importance as this really is. I would not have come to you for a mere trifle. Well, we will say no more," and she rose to go with all the Granby manner of having put one in the wrong by the mere statement of facts. Alice

noticed, as the old lady stood with her face to the light, evidently seeking some further argument to move her antagonist, that her face looked wrinkled and careworn under that prosperous bonnet and air of domination. Middle-aged people show their troubles more plainly than young faces. All the old cares and sorrows come to light again in wrinkles and hollows, and depress the already careworn lines of the countenance. Mrs. Granby looked ten years older in her discouragement. She had all the middle-class Englishwoman's honourable horror of a scandal in her family, and she had the patient expression of bearing the opposition of the younger generation, which mothers of families learn to bear by long experience. Lizzie had been like a daughter to her, but now she refused to listen to a single word of counsel, and Mrs. Granby felt helpless, and wounded by her attitude. She had made a great effort to seek assistance from this stranger ; but she, too, was implacable, and the old woman was going back sadder than when she came. Alice felt a sudden rush of compassion ; her own profession and training had taught her to observe closely all the signs of feeling, and she felt that this was no mere society incident which moved one ordinarily so calm and dignified out of her long-

pursued groove, and brought her to ask such a charity.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Granby," she murmured vaguely, "but I hope it will all come right."

"I hope so," replied the old lady, dispiritedly. "We must hope for the best. I am sure you understand me, Miss Lauder, when I say I have no fear for Lizzie herself. With many people, wrong is not so very wrong, and right is not so very right. It is not so with my niece. When she awakens to reality—when she sees the precipice before her—she will act, and act decisively. But I wish I could spare her that awakening. Well, never mind. Good-bye! Shall we see you at the Klingenders on Tuesday? Nice people, but such a terrible road. I hear it is to be a very large affair. Good-bye! Pray do not come out; I can find my way down the steps by myself, though I am a little shaky to-day."

CHAPTER IX.

THE years that bring the philosophic mind and the ever-widening waistband had also brought to Clare a keener insight into the character and affairs of her neighbours than most people had any idea of. She noticed that Alice was *distract* and out of sorts, but she said nothing, though she listened to a good deal; and, indeed, with Mrs. Burton at her elbow, she could have no excuse for ignorance of the inmost thoughts or failings of anyone within ten miles of circuit. But it was Clare's favourite motto that we should let sleeping dogs lie. The question never occurred to her, "Are the dogs really asleep, or only shutting one eye that they may devour us more conveniently at their leisure?" Besides, Clare was in a very happy frame of mind, expecting "the captain" over to see his family in a few weeks, and it was her firm belief that there were very few things in our philosophy that Henry could not put to rights (under Pro-

vidence, and guided by her own invaluable advice). However, she thought there would be no harm in seeking some relaxation in a little journey, and she accordingly proposed to Alice that they should take a run over the mountains by way of the zigzag railway, staying one night at a little town on the other side, and returning by a longer, but less romantic road over the hills. No sooner said than done. It was a great relief to at least one of the party to get away from home, even for a couple of days, and the stimulating air and change of scene raised her spirits as no other tonic could have done. It is true that we carry our own bosom-cares about with us wherever we go (as the experience of ages has put on record), but at least we can relegate them to the position of mere travelling acquaintances, not heart to heart intimates, as they insist on being at our own fireside. We can compel them to take their own ghostly railway tickets, and pay for their own invisible dinners, and as for the wearisome conversation that they insist on pouring into our inward ears, why, we can go on talking just as well with other people all the time, and no one is a bit the wiser. As they rolled along the steel road that hot, sleepy afternoon, Alice felt soothed and able to argue the matter out quite rationally with herself.

Mrs. Granby had said that Lizzie was standing on a precipice—but what of that? No one in society ever takes any notice of such a trifle; if you were to say to one of your fellow-creatures, “Take care!” you would be considered mad, if not mischief-making. Perhaps religion teaches us otherwise, and one can’t help thinking about the good Samaritan sometimes; but after all we don’t know all the circumstances. Most likely it was the traveller’s own fault that he fell among thieves; he had no business to go by that road. As to taking him to an inn, you might be robbed and murdered yourself, or catch a fever, or something dreadful. There are always the police to call to, and, if not, then one can send a ticket to the Charity Organization Society. These reflections were lulled to a pleasant dimness by the drowsy hum of the afternoon; half awake and half asleep they slipped through the long serpentine valley, lying uncoiled in the summery blaze; past little white wooden-walled towns set down in the grassy, treeless plain; past churches and farms and countryhouses, each islanded in its own dark circle of trees from the surrounding ocean of verdure; past orchards rolling in blossom, which in a few months would be raining apples and peaches on the long grass; past sleek hayfields

and green bays and inlets of corn, till at last they were running up close to the lower spurs of the dividing ranges, and the seven-leagued shadows of the mountains began to stretch across the wide wooded spaces and quiet plains below, and at last the train began to attack the mountain saddle in earnest, supported by one engine in front and one behind. The railroad climbs like a cat over the perpendicular wall of the pass at a great height, and the grandeur of the landscape is almost alarming at the first view. Not so lovely as some of the snow-clad Alpine passes, this summit possesses a strange, forbidding beauty all its own. The same immense mountain sides sheeted with sombre forest, where the white clematis hangs like an avalanche for an instant and then passes out of sight; the same bright rivers, darting like a thing of life far below; the same mysterious glens, and shadow-ridden summits, and purple precipices unroll before the traveller as he winds upwards farther and farther into the inmost hearth and home of the mountains. In the joyous waters of those deep-cut ravines, English trout are thriving, and lose none of their spirit under the shade of the great-crowned tree-ferns and black perpendicular cliffs. There is something lonely, even in the blaze of spring, in these fastnesses;

but when the summit wears the wreath and veil of midwinter, and the snowstorms are blown over from the Antarctic circle to whirl and whistle on the peaks, this must indeed be solitude. As they descended the ranges in long diagonal steps, the scenery gradually became more tame and lowland in its character, and the wind brought the scent and flavour of the sea on its wings, very distinct from the breath of inland fields and valleys. Clare noticed that her companion was gradually brightening under the influence of even this one day's travel; and she saw, too, that other people admired the graceful, pale young lady in the Redfern travelling gown.

"Alice is so much improved," she was writing to her husband that very morning, "you would hardly know her again. She has so much more style and worldly wisdom now. Nature has endowed her with the unusual faculty of looking sad attractively. Many people (I have a suspicion sometimes that I belong to this class myself) only manage to look cross when they are feeling mournful, just as others (I *hope* I am not one of them) always appear haughtily exclusive while all the time they are suffering agonies of shyness and self-distrust. But I must not allow her to practise this attraction too much.

Something is a little awry between her and A. C. You know you are goose enough to love a love-story above everything, and I have promised you one at least from our village. I don't quite know the beginning of this one, and no one can say what the end will be, and I am not very sure about the middle. However, we shall see what we shall see by-and-by. I don't quite know what to make of it all. Alice has been so cold and distant to Arthur C. that he has got offended and never comes near us. The only time I talked to him about giving us up he seemed in a regular temper and growled something about 'wretched gossip and mischief-makers,' which could only apply to the opinion of this little world as to his goings-on with the fair Lizzie. I could not have thought that such a gentle sort of girl as Alice could find it in her heart to ice him off as she does perpetually now. The result is that he seeks consolation with Mrs. Austin more than ever; and *she*, poor girl, is evidently too fond—far too fond—of his society to give him up for all the scandal-mongers in the southern hemisphere. It's a very awkward three-cornered situation, and how we are to get it into a round hole at last I don't quite see; but perhaps you will see your way to do something when you come over."

The train gradually descended towards the lowlands of the coast, and evening found the travellers slowly running along the last terrace of the ranges just as a showery sunset burned over the little new village where they were to stay for the night. Spring here was no longer the wild mountain spirit, flying over the ravines on a burst of sunshine, or dancing on the peaks to the skirl of an Antarctic snow-flurry, but the gentle mother of the fields, keeping house in wood and valley, and binding up the desolation of the newly-cleared forest with daisied turf and ever-deepening grasses. Familiar breaths of sweetness blew from the clover-bedded plains far below, and all the leaves in the valley were honeycombed with sunset, as Clare and Alice stepped out into the little wooden shed which represented the railway station of Linden. Clare was very hungry and in good spirits, and had even forgotten to take her usual dose of aconite at four o'clock, so much had the scenery excited her. She was very forgiving to the newness of the civilization around, and looked forward to the national dish of chops and tea (which might be expected to form their evening meal) with considerable anxiety.

The little wooden inn where they stopped for the night was homely and comfortable, though

it seemed to take its pleasure sadly enough, standing alone in a wilderness of tree-stumps ; and the simple meal was served with true bush hospitality by the round-faced Irish landlady, who pressed upon the two ladies all the dainties at her command—fresh trout from the mountain stream and yellow-brown scones hot from the oven, mushrooms with the delicate ortolan flavour of wild pastures, and lastly, as a special *bonne bouche*, a preserve made of the Cape gooseberry, which often grows wild in the bush, and, skilfully treated, turns into a delicious confection. The landlady hospitably watched every mouthful they ate, and anxiously plied them still with more and more scones and tea ; and when at last convinced against her will that her guests could practically eat and drink no longer, she led the way with great pride to a little stuffy parlour upstairs, and with a smile of triumph opened a new foreign piano, which reposed in a chaste seclusion of crochet covers and photograph albums. Clare smiled, too, and looking very dignified in the eldest of the elderly black silks which Mrs. Mead allowed her to take in her travels, sat down and began to play some of her favourite Chopin, while the landlady, who evidently saw no reason for retiring, offered Alice in succession the photo albums, a heavy

volume of the "Family Herald," and a bound book of music, for her entertainment. At last, however, the claims of the family and lodgers downstairs could no longer be ignored, and, with a parting commendation of the piano to their attention, she disappeared.

"I wish we could do something for her," said Alice. "She is really so very attentive. Paying the bills seems a very small return for her kindness."

"Well, sing something for her. I often hear you practising the scales when you think I am not listening, and this would be a good beginning."

"Ah! I found a song in this old book that I have not seen for ages. It was the song I meant to make my *début* with at that ill-fated concert, and poor dear old Piper always said it was my best. How patiently he used to listen to me trying it over, time after time! I often think, Clare, that the best thing I can do is to go back to London and spend the rest of my life in trying over songs with the professor. Music is a great comfort, and I should be useful to one person at all events."

"Take care you don't spoil your own life and some one else's too, Alice," said Clare, with great seriousness. "Don't throw away your happiness for a childish pique."

Just at that moment a rattling of wheels, a barking of dogs, and a general bustle and commotion all over the village, announced the arrival of the mail-coach, whose weekly visit was the one excitement of life in the little community. Alice leaned out of the window and glanced at the passengers who were alighting at the hotel door, looking very dusty and discouraged after their journey. Most of them were evidently passengers by the incoming mail from England, who had preferred the rough journey over the hills to the tender mercies of a coasting steamer.

Suddenly she uttered an exclamation of surprise, "It can't be! Yes, it is! No, it isn't! Yes, it really *is* the professor!"

Clare, after requesting to be immediately informed whether her friend had suddenly gone mad, and receiving no answer, at last deigned to approach the window, and squeeze herself into the remaining space, whence a view could be obtained of the arrivals.

"For goodness sake, Alice, restrain yourself," she murmured, craning her neck as far as possible round the corner. "Is that him?" she added, regardless of grammar, and gazing at a broad, short, middle-aged back, clothed in dust-coloured tweed, surmounted by a sun-helmet and

a pugaree, which was bending over a mountain of portmanteau.

"Yes, that is the Master!" exclaimed Alice, joyously. "Is he not a dear old fellow? He is as broad as he is long, and as good as he is broad. I am sure he has come out to see me. Oh, I *must* run down and speak to him!"

"Certainly not, I forbid you to do any such thing. Do come away from the window. It's such bad form to stare at people," said Clare severely, while extricating herself with some difficulty from their coign of vantage. "I don't know what this professor means by coming out to see you. It seems to me a very strange proceeding altogether."

"Oh, no; I half expected him. He wrote last mail, and said he might be here any day, but I did not think he could get out so soon,—and *here* of all places in the world!"

"Why of course the coaches connect here with the railway, and most people come overland, so there is nothing so wonderful about it. I will send down my card by-and-by, and you can write a message on it, if you insist upon it; but do let the unfortunate man have his supper in peace first."

Clare hereupon relapsed into the depths of the horsehair sofa, which treacherously offered a

slippery and inclined plane to the unwary guest, who was gradually unseated and deposited on the floor by a sort of glacier action, as a general thing.

"You are a funny girl," she observed at last, recovering her balance with considerable dignity for the third time, and finally gaining a victory over the sofa by bracing her feet earnestly against a chair. "I suppose you will go quite off your head now over your music."

"I do long to have something to do again—something real, you know ; not this make-believe enjoying-myself-so-much sort of life. I can't get on by myself in music, somehow. I do such fussy, fiddling sort of things ; and the more I fuss and fiddle, the worse they are. Now with a good lead, I can always follow. Perhaps it isn't a very great sort of talent, but it's all I have."

"I don't know—I would rather see you happily married, if you want a lead."

"That's easier said than done, Clare. First catch your hare, as we used to say at the Academy, before you boil him down."

"Don't be flippant, Alice. It doesn't become you to be pert. Some noses can stand it, but yours is not the right sort. And it is vexing to see you playing with your own happiness and his too. You know what I mean."

"That person seems to prefer the society of another lady, if I *do* know what you mean."

"Because you drive him to it."

"Oh well, if he is so easily driven as all that—and besides, I have another string to my bow, thank goodness. Yes, I mean my music. What a blessed thing art is, after all! It doesn't quarrel with anyone, or get into a temper, or drop you all of a sudden. You know the words, 'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her.' I must set them to music some day. That's just the sort of feeling I have about my music."

"You are cross to-night, Alice; and you certainly will catch a cold in your head if you sit near that open window. What a queer lonely little corner of the world this is! Look at those dead trees over there, and that white thing starting out of the darkness. Isn't it like a ghost?"

"Yes, it's very like a ghost," said Alice dreamily. "I know, for I have been one myself. It was when I went back to my old home—last year, you remember, Clare, when we stopped at Adelaide on our way out, and you were ill at the hotel. I used to go and wander about the old street by myself. No one knew me, and I hardly seemed to know myself. It is a terrible thing to be a *revenant*. Our old house looked so shabby

and miserable, and the trees were cut down, and the children grown up, and I was a stranger and an outsider. It is the strangest feeling! The little shop at the corner where I used to buy tea-cakes (when we could afford it) was the only place I felt at home in. I never knew what ghosts felt before, but now I know and feel for them. They have my sincerest sympathy. I never shall be frightened of them again, poor things!"

"Well, let us have some music so as to soothe their feelings, if there are any about to-night. I will play the accompaniment, and you can open the door so that the landlady will hear it."

"When sparrows build, and the leaves break forth,
My old sorrow wakes and cries;
For I know there is dawn in the far, far north,
And a scarlet sun doth rise."

There was a new strength and sweetness in Alice's voice that fairly astonished her friend; and when with a genuine thrill of passion she sang—

"How could I tell I should love thee to-day,
Whom that day I held not dear?"

Clare almost wiped away a tear. "I hope to goodness that the professor won't think that she means *him*," she murmured, for at that moment

there was a knock at the door, and a sonorous foreign voice exclaimed—

“I beg ten thousand pardons for this intrusion, but may I ask if—Oh, my dear young lady, it is you! I thought I could not be mistaken. Well, well—this is indeed a joy!”

The professor was a stout middle-aged Germanic personage, chiefly noticeable for an iron-greyish harmony of colouring. His hair, abundant, but not barbaric; his beard trimmed to the proper artist's, Henri Quatre, point of view; his small, bright, penetrating eyes, which betrayed a sort of confidential twinkle under their spectacles—all maintained the same sober and decorous tint, which was also harmonized (in a lower key) in his extremely correct travelling suit and dark grey necktie. His manner was considerate and gentle to an almost alarming degree, and he had a habit of bending forward and listening with a deferential expression to the simple remarks of very ordinary people, as if he were hanging on their words of wisdom. It was only a little trick of manner, but it had the effect on some very young and nervous students of causing them to wish themselves safely dead and buried, rather than conversing with the accomplished virtuoso.

The professor held Alice's hand so long, and

gazed at her so intently, that Clare thought at last it was time for her to interfere; so she graciously slipped off the sofa, with the air of dignity which she knew so well to put on, and introduced herself to the professor with all proper ceremony. He was charmed beyond measure to make the acquaintance of such a dear friend of Miss Lauder, so he declared; nevertheless, at a very early moment the two musicians were fathoms deep in the usual London musical "shop," which is so doubly dear to the exile in the "under world."

"You will come back with me to London, my dear friend," he said at last, as the night was drawing on. "My cantata is coming out at last, praise to heaven! They are going to do it at Birmingham next spring, and I depend on you to sing 'The Maid of Norway.' It is your music, you know. You inspired it. '*Kennst du die eignen Lieder nicht?*'"

"Oh, I should love to sing it! But suppose I were to make a mess of it?"

"I think it is time for us all to go to bed," Clare interposed at last, mildly but firmly. "We have a long journey before us to-morrow, and must be away early. Do you accompany us to Green Street, Professor?"

"With your permission, madam, I will spend

as much time as possible with my much esteemed former pupil."

"Always your pupil, dear master," said Alice, gracefully pressing his hand, and the professor retired bowing to the ground, and walking backwards, as if in the presence of royalty—a proceeding which in an Englishman would have appeared too ridiculous for anything, but which a fat podgy elderly German musician could carry out with impressive dignity.

When she went to her room, Alice opened the window and for a long time gazed out into the bush. So mysterious and dreamlike it all looked, the dark restless waves of woodland sighing and stirring as in sleep, and the far-off laughter of the river rising and falling on the slow breeze, like the voice of some living creature rejoicing alone in the darkness. There was a cold sweetness in the air, and a nameless indistinct under-roll in the forest, that might have been the roar of some great city in the distance. Darkly outlined against a pale arc of sky, the enormous mountain barrier blocked out half the horizon to the east. "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!" she murmured at last, closing the window, as Canopus began to swim upwards from the Northern horizon, like some great battleship sailing among the fleet of smaller stars.

CHAPTER X.

THE professor spent some days very pleasantly at Green Street, in close companionship with his pupil, who seemed to thoroughly enjoy the long walks and talks and endless excursions into music which they took together—"strumming over his old compositions all day long," as Clare put it, with all the jealousy of a mute inglorious amateur. Everything was fresh and delightful to him, and he enjoyed the new scenery, the new air, and the ever-youthful sunshine with all the enthusiasm of a boy on a holiday. But the claims of friendship called him away to the neighbouring capital, where a friend of his youth, Adolf Smalz by name, had established himself in a good mercantile position. Smalz was a man of the world, though he *did* kiss his friend on both cheeks when they met in full view of the railway station public, and he was a leading member of the leading club, of which, according to the hospitable colonial fashion, the professor was immediately made an

honorary member, and presented with the freedom of the billiard table and the smoking-room, as it were. This was a new field of study to the artist, whose club life had been somewhat neglected. He belonged to one or two literary and artistic societies in London, but the easy-going, brotherly, sporting atmosphere of the colonial club was entirely new to him, and he found it extremely fascinating, for the time being. It was very pleasant to sit at breakfast by the open window, framed in a crimson Bougainvillea as high as the house, eating rock oysters just gathered from the rocks below, and drinking coffee composed by the club *chef* (a celebrity honourably known all over the colonies), while the amethyst water of the harbour spread out in a fan-shaped estuary for miles before him, and the purple islands that barred its entrance seemed anchored in the paler azure of the misty horizon; and the brown-faced athletic young fellows around him talked incessantly (in what appeared to him an unintelligible jargon) of their ponies and races and various games. This week happened to be the time of one of those colonial carnivals which so frequently lighten the lot of the exile in these waters—a week given over to races, dances, polo, and every sort of athletic game which could be played either with or with-

out a horse. The club was running over with "representatives" from every part of the colony, each team also being provided with a body-guard of devoted adherents and supporters. The young men were all very kind and friendly to the professor (who felt immensely flattered by their patronage), and they "took him in hand" without delay, and endeavoured to initiate him into the various mysteries of polo, the totalizator, progressive euchre, poker, and Calcutta sweeps. Perhaps they attempted too much at once, for some of the good-looking athletic young fellows might often be observed looking more in sorrow than in anger on their pupil, while he made havoc of their dearest technical terms,—perhaps inquiring ("just as we thought he did begin to understand something") as to "who kicked the goal" at polo, or blandly asking "And who won the race to-day?" when a detachment in hunting boots and straw hats came into breakfast from an early morning run with the harriers over the grassy volcanic hills that shut in the town to the northward.

One of these boys, an innocent-looking, curly-haired youth, known among his intimates as Rat Robinson, took the professor more especially under his protection (always addressing him for some unknown reason as Mynheer), and struggled

earnestly to overcome the deficiencies of the musician's early education.

Mr. Robinson was also something of a musician ; that is to say, he could sing a comic song, and was famous for his version of " Drink, puppy, drink," particularly as to the " whoop " of the chorus, which he rendered with great vivacity and power. On the strength of this bond of union, and yielding to his uncontrollable propensity to introduce everybody to everybody else, Mr. Robinson took complete command of " Mynheer " at the smoking concert which formed a fitting and harmonious close to the gaieties of the week ; and before the end of the evening the professor found himself in possession of a long list of new acquaintances, and of an equally new repertoire of sporting songs. The concert went off extremely well. The professor had played everybody's accompaniments with his usual un-failing courtesy and tact, and had even yielded to the persuasion of the audience so far as to sing some German student-songs in his fine baritone, finishing with " Funicoli, Funicola," amid great applause. The smoke was growing thicker and bluer every moment ; the talk of the men about polo, ponies' legs, and every possible variation on the great *motif* of " The Horse," became more and more intense and animated.

The curly-haired one darted about in the smoke like a trout in running water, incessantly talking and introducing people in terms of continually-rising panegyric. He seemed to think that life would not be worth having unless every single person in the crowded room was made acquainted with every other; and more especially unless they were one and all, jointly and severally, presented to his friend "Mynheer" with all due formality. Meantime the good professor sat dreamily at the piano, occasionally playing a chord or two, and listening in his absent-minded way to the conversation of two men at a table near him, who were discussing with great intensity some points connected with the character of a "little widow" who was continually mentioned; but whether this term was applied to a lady of their acquaintance, a pony, or was merely a technical term of one of their games, he was quite unable to determine. There was a pause in the proceedings, and he was gradually forgetting all his surroundings in a dream of a gavotte in E flat, when the curly-haired one suddenly appeared through the mist of smoke (thick as in a battlefield), dragging a new arrival forward by the button-holes. "Oh, Mynheer!" he exclaimed in a tone of exultation, "allow me to introduce you to a great friend of

mine, an eminent polo player, and a first-rate, all-round man. He can play the fiddle too, like a house on fire. I am sure you will get on splendidly, Campbell. This is our distinguished visitor, Mynheer von Piper. He is the greatest musician at present in the Southern hemisphere, and he is a *great* friend of mine." The professor smiled and shook hands with the newcomer, who observed in a friendly tone, "My name is Campbell, sir, and I know you are Professor Piper. Our friend has forgotten to give our names, but I have often heard of you."

"Ah, Mr. Campbell? Yes, I have heard Miss Lauder speak of you. So?—And you are a musician too?"

"Oh, no, sir, I cannot lay claim to that. But I am awfully fond of it. I heard you playing upstairs last night, and I came to the door to listen. I cannot keep away from music any more than a cat can keep from cream."

"Well, let us have some cream, by all means. What would you like?"

"I should like the ballet music from 'Rosalinde,'" said Campbell.

"Well, if our friends here will bear with us for a little," and the delicate ærial music floated over the smoke, without apparently disturbing any of the talkers.

"This is a beautiful country," the professor said at last, pausing with his long spider fingers resting on the keys, "I wish I could put my impression of its beauty into music. What a change it is from the everlasting grind in foggy London!"

"Yes, and you might find some grand themes in our Maori legends. You ought to do something in that line. They are a grand race of people in some ways, and what a tragedy it is to see them fading away, blighted by the mere touch of our civilization!"

"Yes, I like the appearance of this ancient race. The calm dignity of their manner, and their self-possession is splendid."

"You should see some of the real, genuine Maori chiefs of the older day. Some time ago I went right up the country into the interior, to see an old chief of the *vieille roche*, who has never 'come in,' as they call it, to our civilization. Such a ride it was, up the wildest, roughest bit of country I have ever seen! I was on a real good old stock-horse, and he never funk'd it once, though I did pretty often. Most of the time I seemed to be standing on his head going down the ravines, when I was not sitting on his tail going up."

"That would be a little difficult to describe with a full orchestra," said the professor, "but

perhaps we might do it with the strings alone. Triplets in the treble, I think, and a sort of syncopated movement in the bass." So he improvised a little sketch, lightly touched in, and very *piano*. "Yes, yes. Do go on."

"Well, at last we reached the place where this old chap lived, a sort of raised plateau in the middle of the ranges. He was sitting by himself, like a warrior in his tent—a splendid-looking specimen of a Maori—when we went up to see him. There were some Government swells with our party, and they tried to get round the old man, but he was not to be squared. At last they told him (through the interpreter) that they had come to see him at a great trouble to themselves, and that they expected he would return their visit at their parliament, and see their chiefs. He drew himself up even more haughtily than before, and coldly remarked, 'If the English Rangatiras (chiefs) wish to see me they can come here.' We went back feeling thoroughly snubbed by the old soldier."

"Yes—ah! so—" said the professor, "I am much interested in this native race. My friend, Miss Lauder, has told me—You know her, I think?"

"Yes, very well. You have, of course, been to see her since your arrival?"

"Oh yes, indeed. She is coming home with me—to England, I mean."

"With you?"

"Yes, she is engaged to me. She promised me five years ago, but her health broke down, and I waited. Now I have come to claim her. I hope that we shall get away next mail."

"So soon? Well—I wish her joy! I am rather surprised."

"Yes, but do not be afraid; I shall take great care of her. She is very dear to me."

Campbell turned away rather abruptly, and said good-night. As he left the room one of the eminent polo players observed, "Seems a bit seedy, doesn't he? We shall want all our strength to-morrow for the final tussle." "It is all this confounded concert," answered the next man in a grumbling tone, for he was captain of the local team in which Campbell was playing. "I cannot think what you fellows want this racket for. I do not care for music myself, and if this sort of thing goes on, you will all be used up before we can play a stroke."

CHAPTER XI.

IT was generally understood throughout the length and breadth of the land about this time that the Klingenders would have a brilliant ball, if they died for it ; and as nothing succeeds like success, past, present, or to come, everyone made a point of being present on their Tuesday evening, in spite of all the difficulties and dangers of the bad roads and worse river-crossings that had to be surmounted. The two girls who chiefly represented the Klingender family in the eyes of the world (putting aside a harmless necessary father and mother, and two or three useful but uninteresting brothers) were very pretty, very small, very blonde little creatures, much resembling in colouring and fluffiness of hair, and in a habit of generally wearing some shade of yellow, a pair of pretty and animated prize canaries. They were so much alike in figure, complexion, and general featheriness, that it was a difficult task for a new acquaint-

tance to discern one from the other, or to distinguish the engaged one from the sister who was still at liberty. The engaged Miss Klingender seemed to cling to that blessed estate through good report and evil report, merely as a matter of conviction and inward principle—the object of her engagement, if one may speak scientifically, being a movable quantity, and liable to be changed according to the fluctuations of the seasons, like a winter mantle or a thin pair of shoes. After a short acquaintance, however, observant strangers began to notice that there was a difference, and that the quieter, soberer, and less feathery-fringed and yellow-crested of the two girls was the born coquette; while the superficially brighter and more frivolous was really the business woman of the family, and the strong spirit who managed the entertainments, household affairs, and social functions, with such admirable results. If there was a whisper of flirtation or fastness about the reputation of these charming sisters, it was due to the airy manner, or rather mannerisms, of the useful one; the mild, angelic smiles of the younger girl being invariably bestowed on the object of her affections (for the time being), and on him alone. There was, however, a whisper going round well-informed circles that Miss

Klingender had designs on the peace of a certain personage, no one less than the chief justice of a neighbouring colony, a well-preserved dignified widower then on a visit to Government House; and it was popularly reported (supposing this *affaire de cœur* came to a satisfactory point) that Miss Klingender intended to marry him out of hand—the experience of the family with Adeline's variations having caused them to lose all confidence in a preliminary time of betrothal. However this might turn out in the end, the mere supposition gave an extra spark of *éclat* to the ball; and all the “nobility and gentry” for twenty miles round poured into the garden entrance on this rose-scented night of early summer. The ball was given in honour of a new house, just completed; and very stately and hospitable the wide hall looked as the entering guests filled it up for the house-warming. The Klingenders had sacrificed everything to this apartment. People said it was so like them, in a tone of disparagement; but the general effect was undoubtedly very successful. The lofty vaulted ceiling was ribbed and panelled with native cedar of satiny texture, and yellow as a sunflower in colouring. At one end a well-designed spiral staircase rose in graceful lightness into a recessed gallery; at the other a fine

bay window formed a sort of daïs or stage for the grand piano and a harp. The Klingenders thoroughly understood the art of lighting up, and if ever there is a good excuse for reckless extravagance, it certainly lies in the becoming radiance of innumerable wax candles. They had, on the other hand, carefully abstained from the wild profusion of ornamental pots and garlands of flowers, which in so many similar cases turns our houses into the semblance of a bad horticultural show, with a slight tinge of a cheap bazaar, and some reminiscences of church decorations thrown in. The cedar-lined coved ceiling glowed in a more golden shade of brown, the few choice bowls of flowers, placed well out of reach of the destroyers, perfumed the room with dreamy odours, and the music that floated from the little raised daïs was delicious enough to persuade the new-world fairies to leave their white mushroom rings on the green plain outside, and dance a measure on the satin-polished cedar floor within. Whatever might be the fate of the other domestic apartments, it could not be denied that the ample space, sylvan-colouring, and fine architectural design of this large open hall formed a very attractive introduction to the usual informal, timber-built country-house of the colonies.

The Klingenders had a large sense of hospitality, and had determined not to deal out their invitations by the yard measure of Mrs. Grundy. Consequently all the neighbours, gentle and simple, who by any stretch of fancy could be construed into dancing people, were brought into their fold; and the extra element of "outsiders" gave a piquancy to the general flavour, like the clove of garlic which the French *chef* rubs over the salad bowl, and which, "unsuspected, animates the whole." The up-country detachment were chiefly distinguishable by the intensified accent of their dress and manners. They did everything in italics, as it were. They were all punctual to a fault in arriving, majestic and ceremonious in their greeting, conscientious to the point of solemnity in working out the steps and evolutions of the quadrilles and Lancers. When it came to the more rapid whirl of waltzes and galops, however, the up-country contingent knew what was required of them. They danced very well as a whole, and with the greatest *empressement* and vitality. It was a point of honour with the girls not to give in for a moment's pause till the last note of the waltz had died away; and they spoke not a word, and hardly smiled, until they could feel that this stern duty was accomplished.

But even in a ball-room the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; and before the festivity was half over it was generally admitted that the belle of the evening was a new arrival, a pale quiet young lady in blue and silver brocade who seemed greatly sought after by all sorts and conditions of dancing men, but who, after the manner of such fair potentates, confined her favours to one or two chosen partners. Something must be allowed for the charm of novelty; something to the delicate art of Julie Bond's ideal creation, which, while it seemed on the surface to bring out the weak points of the wearer's appearance—her paleness and want of contour—really accentuated by some subtle touches the colour of her sea-blue eyes and the grace of her slenderly made figure. The great secret, however, of her success was in the charm of her movements. She had carefully studied the art of dancing—as another branch of music, indeed—and the teaching of the best London experts had not been thrown away. Some people can dance by a happy instinct of nature, and when they are in the mood they impart a wild and elemental charm to the practice of this art, which others, guided only by the light of reason, can never hope to attain to. Alice, too, was thoroughly

enjoying herself, conscious that she was playing a part, and playing it with great spirit and refinement. When Cinderella danced so triumphantly at the fairy ball, it must have been a great comfort to her to know that the gaze of her relations was upon her ; and on this occasion Alice was well aware that the eyes of one person at least, who had known her in her former primitive and chrysalis state—in her old frocks, and big boots, and misguided ideas—were fixed upon her, as now, in her brightest mood, admired, surrounded, dressed in silk attire, and sparkling with the diamond stars which Clare insisted on lending her, she floated over the polished cedar floor with

“The grace of a swan gliding over still water.”

This person, however, showed no *empressement* in seeking her out ; he seemed to have relapsed into the lazy *fainéant* manner of the London man, spoilt by attention, and too indolent even to dance with the pretty colonial girls—the conventional globe-trotter’s manner. He sauntered up to Miss Lauder early in the evening, and carelessly, as she thought, asked her for a dance. “I’m afraid I haven’t got one left till quite the end. The twenty-fourth, if you like ; but perhaps I shan’t be here at that time,”

"And I certainly shall not," he replied, rather rudely, turning away. But he had not far to turn before a bright-tressed head bent towards him, and a brighter voice exclaimed :

"Ah, here you are at last ! If I didn't think you had given me the slip altogether, and I was in a rage, too, I can tell you ! You don't seem very chirpy, though ; what's the matter ?"

It was the universal opinion universally expressed on that memorable evening that Mrs. Austin was making a fool of herself. "So stately his form and so lovely her face," it was impossible they should escape observation. She was literally inseparable from her handsome friend ; and if bereft of him for a short time she sat waiting—visibly, for his return—refusing all requests from other men—gaily enough, it is true—but with such devotion to this one companion, that (as some of the up-country girls observed), "It's a regular scandal ! She might just as well be engaged to him !" Whether the scandal consisted in the selfish absorption of an eligible partner, or some more recondite cause, did not appear on the surface ; but the disapproval of her conduct was certainly widespread and broadly expressed.

This turn in the tide of public feeling was not long in reaching the quick ears of Carrie Klin-



gender, as her bright eyes roved incessantly over the ball-room, taking note of every incident and almost every smile or frown, all the time that her flying feet and airy conversation enchanted her partners; and it was Carrie's capable little hand which finally put a match to the mine, and destroyed a fortress that all the heavy arguments of the Granby family, the laboured warnings of Mr. Austin, and the murmured commentaries of all the world around, had not sufficed even to shake for an instant previously.

But the moment of action was not yet arrived, in Carrie's opinion, and she was carried onward by the stream of her social duties in the direction of the supper-room, towards whose closed doors her devoted chief justice had been casting anxious glances for more than an hour previously.

As soon, however, as she could get away from the supper-room Carrie slipped her arm into Mrs. Austin's, and, with the authority of an old school friend, and of a girl who might be married at any moment, suggested that they should go upstairs to the little half-enclosed gallery, which hung over the hall at that corner, in the style of a "Queen's closet" of old Spanish palaces. Carrie well knew what she was about when she fought a pitched battle (and won it)

with the architect over that particular niche, though it had to be built in gross violation of "periods" and of all architectural conscience. She had been long used to the diplomacies of "the interview," and her experience with her sister's numerous admirers—aspirants to future engagements, or "broken-off" lovers on the retired list—led her to desiderate above all things the repose of some quiet spot where an undisturbed conversation could be carried on. Her previous council-chamber had been the old summer-house in the vegetable garden—the only place where she might hope for half an hour's quiet, unbroken by the noisy claims of her large family, or the maraudings of the servants for orders; but this charming little latticed recess had not yet been made use of, and Carrie saw her opportunity to inaugurate it now in a friendly way and for a good cause.

"Isn't this a nice quiet little spot to rest and be thankful in?" she chattered gaily to her companion. "We can see all that is going on underneath us, and no one knows we are looking on and seeing the game. How do you like this Cairo lattice-screen? It's genuine; we got it sent out by a friend in Egypt—one of Adeline's old lovers. Now there is my dear old judge looking everywhere for me. See how faithful

he is! What an example to the younger men!"

"Why, Carrie, do you really mean to——"

"Oh, I don't know; you must not ask me that till *he* does. But he is really a charming companion—so cultivated, so civilized! Of course, there is a disparity of age; but you, Lizzie, can't cast a stone at me on that account."

"No, oh no! But are you sure you love him enough to—to——?"

"Love? Oh, nonsense! I have had enough of sentiment with Adeline's affairs to last me all the rest of my natural life. But if you *do* want to see a case of the real thing—what mother calls the good old-fashioned, jealous devotion of *her* young days—just look at that young man standing against the door, over there—to the right."

"Arthur Campbell! You don't mean him, do you?"

"Yes, I do; and he is just as mad as he can be to-night, because that pale girl in the blue brocade—by the bye, I must take a note of her dressmaker—won't look at him; and she has turned the heads of half my own special partners to-night."

Carrie saw that her shaft had sped, and she

gave her friend time to pluck out the quivering dart, while she rattled on in her pretty, twittering tones, as if all unconscious of Lizzie's whitening cheek and anxious expression.

"Do you mean he cares for her?" she managed to bring out presently; and although Carrie had wandered miles away from her subject meanwhile, they both knew what was meant by the question.

"Rather! My dear child, don't you know it is *your* pretty face that has come in the way of these two young people? I'm ashamed of you! You ought to know better at your age. All Green Street calls you names, and Miss Lauder is as wild as she can be, and Mr. Campbell thinks she wants to snub him, and so he gets the sulks; and you—silly old Greek statue with pink cheeks that you are!—never see an inch before your nose, but just take what comes, and do no end of mischief without knowing it."

"Are you really in earnest, Carrie, or is this one of your jokes? You know I never could tell at school what you meant, and you always say I am so literal-minded. Do explain it to me."

"Oh, this is no joke, I can assure you! And if you don't mind my speaking plainly for once, I would like to say to you—Give him up—it's

time! You have had your fun, and the play is nearly over; ring down the green curtain, and let the audience go home. They have had quite enough amusement for their money!"

"Now you *are* talking riddles. You bewilder me. What do you expect me to do?"

"Just to say, 'Not at home,' the next time your friend comes, and let him fight it out with the other girl. All our dearest friends are talking you over and advising and remonstrating with you (to other people), but no one has the courage to speak to you straight. But believe me, Lizzie, it's the best way—if you really have a friendship for him, it's the best for him."

"And best for you yourself, a thousand times," she added under her breath; but Carrie was too experienced a campaigner to press that side of the question.

"Ah! they are going to have some music now," she said aloud, leaning over the little carved balcony, where the yellow flutter of her ribbons and the feathery gold of her hair showed brightly beside the dead-white satin and the classic outline of her friend. Even at that moment Carrie noticed how much the touch of emotion added to Mrs. Austin's beauty. The fine mask of her face was plainly meant for tragedy;

her pallor and look of trouble seemed to bring out the original design with admirable harmony. Lizzie looked down with all her soul in her eyes—looked at Arthur as if she would read his inmost thoughts; but she could see nothing except that he was looking decidedly sulky, as Carrie had suggested. He stood with his back to the wall and his hands in his pockets, in a tolerably dark and quiet nook, all unaware that anyone could watch his proceedings; while his attention was fixed gloomily on the little impromptu stage. Apparently what he saw there gave him very little pleasure. Some people were getting music arranged; the professor seated himself at the piano, and, with the air of a man who knows what he is about, began to play the accompaniment to their duet.

“Oh, that we two were maying!” floated in clearest melody up the hall, and a fine baritone accompanied Alice’s pure liquid soprano notes.

“Oh, that we two were maying!

Down the stream of the sweet Spring breeze;

Like children with violets playing

’Neath the shade of the whispering trees.”

It was really a beautiful, dreamlike piece of music, and all the audience testified to their enjoyment with the enthusiasm of people who hear a first-class professional performance with-

out paying for it. There was a pause, and a slight confusion of tongues; the two ladies in the balcony looked on with interest.

“What are they going to do next?” exclaimed Carrie, feeling that she ought to be at the helm. “What on earth are they bringing that old spinning-wheel of grandmother’s on the stage for? Oh, I see! She is going to do Marguerite for us. How delightful!”

Alice said afterwards she did not know what had possessed her, but she was wound up to the proper dramatic pitch; and when she came back to the stage, a white cashmere thrown over her rich dress, her hair let down, and one or two hasty toilet touches transforming her from the modern ball-room young lady into the simple love-stricken heroine of the poem, she felt as real—more real and more at home, indeed—in her assumed character than in all her previous gaiety. Her companion began to play the low, melancholy opening accompaniment (she had chosen Schubert’s beautiful conception of the song), and a flute-player from the musicians standing beside the piano added a few liquid notes in *obligato*. Alice sat down to the spinning-wheel in the attitude she had often rehearsed with her stage teacher, and, like a girl in a dream, began to sing very softly in the intensely

sad, appealing music which of itself would translate Goethe's words to any sympathetic listener :

“Meine Ruh' ist hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer,
Ich finde, ich finde sie nimmer ! und nimmermehr !”

Mrs. Austin did not know a word of German, but she understood the music—oh, how clearly ! She knew too well the meaning of those sad, hopeless notes, “*Mein Herz ist schwer.*” Heavy-hearted she was indeed, but she made a brave fight with herself. It seemed to her as if the dry winter branches of her life had all too late burst into blossom ; nevertheless, she must with her own hand destroy the flowers, and spoil all the love and poetry late come into her heart. But she never faltered in her resolution, now that her eyes were opened. All the uprightness and honesty of her nature—the inherited instinct of unstained forefathers—rose in her soul, and bade her take arms and fight her battle, even in this bright music-stirred scene of gaiety and outward happiness. Carrie had said that the only thing she could do for *him* was to give him up. These words rang in her ears, and she clenched her hand on the balcony with a sudden pang as she listened in her inmost heart to this

conviction. Lizzie was not very poetical, but she could have wept with poor, ill-fated Marguerite, as the last words fell on the silence to the sad, hopeless refrain of the spinning-wheel, "*Meine Ruh' ist hin—mein Herz ist schwer.*"

CHAPTER XII.

SHE was still sitting in the gallery, when Campbell at last caught sight of her—just at that period of the entertainment when all rational people think about going to bed, and the younger ones feel an ever-increasing need of chasing the glowing hours with flying feet, till the approach of morning puts even their gay spirits to flight—“Like ghosts from an enchanted fleeing.”

“Won’t you come and have another turn, Mrs. Austin?” he said lightly. “Let us have another circular?—as I heard one of the natives say just now. The floor is just perfect, and there is not such a crowd.”

Lizzie took his arm as if in a dream, and they floated round the room once more, to the melancholy music of “positively the last extra.” However pressing her secret troubles might be, she determined to shut the door in their faces for a brief space. The hour belonged to her, to

her youth, her morning beauty, her keen love of living, and she would enjoy it to the very last moment. Nevertheless, as they threaded the ball-room in airy circles, still the observed of all, and outwardly radiant and triumphant, Lizzie was making up her mind to "clear the course," as she expressed the matter to herself, at the very earliest opportunity.

The wide hall's doors stood open to the still summer night, and by a common impulse they wandered out into the garden, and sat down to rest on a rustic seat, conveniently sheltered and arranged for the solitude *à deux* which the young ladies of the household so thoroughly understood. It was all very still and calm and dewy. Though daylight had not come, the night was already departing, sinking into hollows and valleys, and the bush-birds began to speed the parting guest with mellow calls and cadences. The tiny bush-wren ran up and down his sweet minor scale, and the parson-bird tried half a bar of delicious melody, and then broke off into a loud discordant whistle that would have disgraced a schoolboy's ear for music. The dewy air was cold and exhilarating after the glare of the ball-room, and Lizzie drew her fur cloak round her shoulders, and remained silent for some moments. Odours of orange blossom and heliotrope waited round

the corners, and eastward one brilliant planet sailed majestically up from a sea-green belt of sky. They could see a dim red light moving round the cape below them, on the unseen ocean. It was the mail steamer feeling her way along the rocky treacherous coast-line. The strum of throbbing strings and the muffled beat of the dancers' feet on the floor had a fantastic unreal effect in the distance, and might have been the echo of a witches' sabbath rather than the simple gaiety of a country-house, breaking in on the sacred hour of daybreak.

"There is something I want to speak to you about," she began suddenly, after they had sat silent for some moments. She rested her elbow on one knee and leaned forward, much in the attitude which Michael Angelo has immortalized in the tomb of the Medici, but which is not generally adopted at evening parties. "You will think me mad I dare say, but I do want to have it out with you."

"Let us have it out, by all means."

He smiled, contemplating her from an artist's point of view and finding the "impression" most satisfactory.

"I have had a nasty knock to-night," she went on, speaking slowly and not without some natural dignity, "though the words were strong."

"Carrie Klingender has been talking to me. She says I monopolize you altogether, and that you are dying to be with some one else all the time. Is that true?"

"Good Lord, what a piece of impertinence!"

"Deliberate cheek, you *might* say," said Lizzie calmly, "but is it *true*?"

"True!—What business is it of hers or of any one else to pry into my doings? I wish to heaven Miss Klingender would mind her own business, and leave me alone. I have seen something of scandal and gossip in India, but this beats everything." Campbell was quite white with anger, and one less interested than his companion might have suspected that there was some fire under this sudden puff of smoke.

"Well, she says so. She says they all say so," Lizzie went on firmly, with her straightforward gaze fixed on his face. "Not that I mind their old gossip, but I do want to know the truth. . . . You are angry with me for talking like this, I know, but that is better than laughing at me, as some men would. I am your friend, and I want to do you a good turn if I can. You believe that, don't you?" she went on, with a sweet gentle look that was oddly at variance with her school-boyish method of conversation.

"Yes, you are my friend, but I cannot feel grateful to you."

"I know you are an Englishman, and you would sooner die than talk about your private affairs, or carry a brown paper parcel down the street. But I do not care, I want you to be happy. . . . And I have made mistakes myself. You can't get some things right in a whole lifetime. Do not make a mistake now."

He was still silent, and after waiting a moment for him to respond, she went on with a certain tremor in her voice: "Carrie says that there has been a misunderstanding between you two. If so, perhaps I can put it right. They say that fools rush in, you know, and I dare say that I am a fool."

"No, no; you are a good woman, and I believe in you. It is all the fault of this wretched gossiping little hole," he said at last, with more warmth, moved perhaps more by the little break in her voice than by all her pleadings, "but, as you say, I am not used to talk about this sort of thing."

"Well, no more am I, if it comes to that. Yet if it would do any good I would tell you all about myself. People say that I married for money, and that my relations forced me into it. That's not true. I did it with my eyes open. I

hated poverty—No, not hated, for then I could have fought it,—I feared it, which is much worse. You don't know what genteel poverty is. I do. It was not a matter of theory with me, and I thought that falling in love was all nonsense, and that I could be perfectly happy in my own way. So I was for a long time. I did not care for women's ways, and I liked going about with men, riding and shooting and all that, and when they talked bosh and flattered me, I just laughed at them. People called me fast, but it was just that."

"I know, I know—I understand," he stammered, vaguely, anxious to escape from the situation at any cost, yet unable to render her measure for measure of openhanded truth and candour.

"And now I want to tell you that there *is* something more in life than I dreamed of—Is it love? —I am sure I don't know. Perhaps it is religion; but at any rate don't lose it if you have the chance. There *is* something better in life than money, or fun, or having a good time. You may bet your life on that!"

The slowly-rising light laid a brightness on her fair hair and forehead, and brought a deeper sparkle to her beautiful eyes. Not one woman in a thousand could have borne that penetrating ray without looking fatigued and faded in the

cold daybreak. But Lizzie was a true child of nature, and was seldom out of harmony with the sylvan world. In her shining folds of white satin, a diamond crescent glittering in her hair, she might have been next of kin to the morning, which was already "in his cold crown and crystal silence creeping down" over the jagged purple hills.

Campbell was touched at last, and with a sudden impulse he threw his conventional defences overboard, and spoke frankly :

"Yes, I will tell you all I can. Ten years ago I met her on the voyage home" (Alice Lauder's name was never mentioned between them—it was understood, which is a much more serious thing). "She was a solitary unfriended sort of girl, and we made friends over her music, but nothing more. She was quite mad about going on the stage then, and I tried all I could to dissuade her from it. At last I offered to marry her there and then——"

"Very noble, I am sure," said Lizzie, with one of her sudden childish laughs.

"Well, she refused me, anyhow. Then I met her here. She had changed a good deal, and I don't mind saying that I admired her very much." He stopped as if he had forgotten what they were talking about ; then with a sudden effort he

said: "She is going to be married to that musician fellow—Piper——"

"Impossible! I don't believe it."

"He told me so himself. So that's an end to everything. I have had *my* nasty knock, too, you see. 'Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve."

"I can't understand it at all."

"Neither can I. But yet I do. It is the stage mania with her still. She loves it more than anything else in the world—more than old Piper too, I fancy, but he will smooth the way for her."

"Young people, *do* you know that it is nearly five o'clock, and mother has gone to bed? Everybody has gone away. Are you going to come to breakfast in your ball clothes, Lizzie?" and Miss Klingender appeared for an instant on the pathway before them, like an accusing angel, and then flashed away to attend to some other pressing duty; for the entertainment of twenty guests all staying in the house was mostly depending on her efforts.

Mrs. Austin laughed carelessly, and rising flung her arms over her head with a natural free gesture, as of one who throws off an unaccustomed burden.

"Well, it is time we were off, anyway. I am

going straight home now. I can't stay for the picnic to-morrow—No, to-day it is, of course. I have had enough of talking to last me a lifetime. So good-bye."

"Good-bye, and thanks."

"Look here! I feel I must get away out of this place for a day or two, and pull myself together. There is a steamer going up the Dusky River on Thursday, and I've a great mind to go. It will be a change."

"Good idea! Let me come with you!"

"All right; good-bye till Thursday. The steamer leaves early, mind, so don't oversleep yourself. Adieu."

CHAPTER XIII.

IF you have ever threaded your way, in dreams, along the water-path of a deep, narrow, winding gorge, where the river seems to drive a wedge into the very heart and secret of the mountains—a gorge so deep and narrow that the summer sunshine can hardly slip in through the crevices of sky above, but hangs midway down the ravine, caught in the impenetrable sheet of virgin bush; where the voice of the ever-mourning river, breaking its heart on the rapids, is the only sound in that immense silent wilderness, and has been the only audible voice for century on century; where no flower sparkles in the forest, and hardly a bird floats across the precipice; where the narrow reach of shining water is so closely folded in by the hills, that you seem to be shut up in a land-locked estuary, rather than on a rushing river—if you have seen this one beautiful monotonous effect repeated over and over again, league after league

for a hundred miles, always changing, yet always "the same, the same, and every day the same;" if you have ever voyaged up the Dusky River, in short, either in dreams or on the white deck of the tiny river steamer, you will remember the strange drowsy spell that overpowers the traveller. It is not so much what he sees as what he feels, that moves his spirit. The little iron vessel creeps over the rapids and round the cliff corners like some grotesque water insect seeking its prey. The silence of centuries has settled down on the forest. The immemorial whisper of the woods, the endless complaining of the river, sounds in his ears like the music of a dream; while the impassable barriers of rock, the ever-green clouds of foliage, the stooping fern-trees, slowly unroll before his eyes much as if they were all the unfading scenery of sleep itself.

To one traveller, at all events, on such a blazing afternoon of late summer, the somnolent spell of that green wilderness spoke with irresistible power. The warm smoky air came in lazy breaths with the current, and as he leaned over the rail and repeated slowly to himself—

"My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains."

He looked dreamily at the passing landscape.

Could that be a phantom flitting over the dense shadowed glades, dark as a mausoleum? Was that the face of the Erl-king's daughter looking up from the whirling stream? No, it is only the green, green shadows of the woods in the water. This beautiful river has no history. The cloud and its shadows are the only visitors to the precipices, and so silent it is that one could almost hear the passing footfall of that white feathery summer-cloud, as it drifts for a moment over the abyss and is seen no more. Yet in spite of all this tranquil charm of scenery, Arthur Campbell was not altogether at ease, in the rôle of sole guardian to his pretty and erratic friend, on this expedition. He had naturally supposed, though without thinking much about it, that Mrs. Austin would be accompanied by one or two of her usual following and comrades in arms, if not by the whole party, and had felt rather taken aback that morning when she stepped on board, bright and blooming, and accompanied only by her maid—a pert little person rather younger and less judicious than her mistress, though without her personal attractions. Mrs. Austin, however, was in great form, and as jolly as a sand-boy, as she herself assured him on her arrival. She noticed his rather blank expression, too, and begged him not

to get the black dog so early in the day, for that they were really going to have a good spree, and must make the most of it. She had attired herself with unwonted sobriety, in a solemn frock of black gauzy stuff, with casual flounces and furbelows (as men call them—no woman has ever had the slightest idea of what a furbelow really is) of vapoury black lace. A black plumed shady hat half hid her bright face, pink as sweet-briar blossoms in June, while her lips rivalled the coral of its berries in autumn. She looked so happy and so handsome that all the passengers stared at her as if she were indeed a “phantom of delight.” Fortunately, perhaps, these were few in number. There was a pretty country-girl, in white muslin, with a pocket full of bonbons, which she consumed incessantly like a ruminating animal. The young lady was evidently betrothed to a sad, prosperous, bushy-looking young man who sat next her, and on whose shoulder she reposed in a conventional stereotyped manner, as if she merely took up this attitude for the sake of appearances, and not in the least because there was any pleasure, forbidden or otherwise, in such a fashion of repose. Neither did the sad-faced young man take the slightest notice of her, other than tacitly supporting her weight without remon-

strance. He conversed sparingly and at long intervals with a masculine friend of a similar appearance, in a melancholy high-keyed wind-beaten sort of chant.

Another couple evidently belonged to a higher sphere. The husband was apparently an English tourist, self-important and wealthy; the wife a *passée* woman of fashion. The passengers amused Mrs. Austin immensely. "Look at that poor woman, how got up she is!" she remarked in her loud confidential whisper. "I am sure her hair is put on, and her complexion is very clever, but you can see through it. And her eyes, I do believe they are artificial, and that she takes them out of her travelling bag every morning and puts them on with her veil." Arthur smiled guardedly and acquiesced with a man's insincerity; in his secret thought he had a dreadful idea that the rejuvenated lady bore a certain faint uncomfortable resemblance to Mrs. Austin herself, as she might look in some very distant, disagreeable, middle-aged future.

About half-way the steamer stopped at a small clearing where a Roman Catholic mission had been established some years before. A pleasant-looking Sister, in the uniform of her religious order, with the elderly-youthful expression which

one so often sees under the linen cap, came on board, and sat down near them.

The Sister had a bright cheery face. Her simple dignity of mien and utter unconsciousness of "what is worn now" formed a pleasant contrast to the over-dressed tourist lady. Lizzie felt drawn to her and shyly began a conversation, not knowing whether the rules of this religious order would permit any intercourse with strangers. The Sister responded, and they were soon talking together, more like old friends than passing strangers. No one—not even a tourist—could maintain a proper conventional reserve in the midst of these mountain solitudes. The wooded cliffs slipped past, the afternoon grew more golden and more silent every moment. The good Sister produced a basket of small sun-burnt grapes, and handed them round as gracefully as if she were still doing the honours of her *Paris salon*. There was a charming air of worldly polish still showing in her well-bred French voice and genial manner.

She spoke of her life and the mission work, its hardships and adventures, the joy and happiness she had found in her self-renunciation; and Lizzie listened and looked with all her beautiful childish eyes on the speaker. Presently Sister Agnes glanced at the wedding-ring on the girl's

ungloved fingers, and then at Arthur Campbell, standing a little apart, and remarked in her pretty old-fashioned manner, "*Ce beau monsieur* is your husband, *n'est-ce pas?* Perhaps even this is your honeymoon journey?"—"No, oh no. He is only a friend," Lizzie murmured with crimsoning cheeks. Sister Agnes looked surprised, and there was a moment's silence, in which she doubtless commended the young couple to the protection of her patron saint; then with French tact she spoke of other matters, but something seemed to trouble the sweet harmonious afternoon, and Lizzie began to look weary and *distrain*.

"We shall soon come to anchor for the night," said Campbell, coming up to her later on. "I wonder if there is a road anywhere about here. It looks like the end of the world."

"Not a road, but a bridle-track. How I wish I were a man! what fun it would be!"

"What would you do, *par exemple?*"

"I would get a horse here and ride 'over the hills and far away.' There is a track leading far into the island, and you can get out on the sea-shore, and find your way to a port. You pass by the great snow-mountains and hear the avalanches thundering down all night. There are some deer in the valleys, too, and they have

a legend about a great red stag, with huge antlers, who is always seen and never shot. Why don't you go, Mr. Campbell?"

"I've a great mind to."

"I think you should. It is a great chance to see the interior. Do you see that sandy, bushy sort of a man with the dog? He is going, I know. I heard him talking about it at dinner-time."

Arthur took a sudden resolution. "I will see him, and get him to let me hang on to his party. But what will you do?" he added in a lower key.

"Oh, I shall stay on the steamer, and we will get back to-morrow night. I shall be home by nine. I told them to meet me with the brougham at the wharf, so no one will be anxious. Don't you bother about me."

She looked out at the passing cliffs with her usual unconcerned gaiety, but her lips were firmly pressed together, and the colour that usually lighted up her face with its morning sparkle had quite disappeared.

When he came back the sunset was fading over the woods, and that look of tragedy which is never long absent from the wild southern landscape was settling down with the shadows.

"Well, I must say good-bye soon, worse luck,"

he said presently. "We shall have to walk five miles to the nearest settlement, where they tell me we can get horses and a guide."

"Yes; it is good-bye now, and for a long time. I don't suppose we shall meet again."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I shall not be here when you come back. We are going to Europe immediately. Mr. Austin has arranged it all. This is positively my last spree." She spoke carelessly, but in short, detached sentences, as if she had learned a lesson, and was repeating it by rote.

Arthur stood still, quite confounded for the moment. He wished to say a great many things, but could not remember any one of them. He tried to begin something, but she went on, "Yes, it is horrid saying good-bye. But I shall often think of you. We have had a good time together, and I think our friendship is a real one. It *will* wash, won't it? This has been a pleasant trip, too, and I'm glad we are here in this wild lonely place, and not at home with gossips all over the shop. This is just the place to say good-bye for ever!"

"But I can't go like this," he stammered. "You must not turn me off at a moment's warning. Your kindness, your sympathy has been so much to me. Surely we need not——"

The steamer came to a full stop close to a bank, and was secured by the simple expedient of tying a rope round a tree. The passengers all jumped ashore. The little Sister smiled and waved her adieu. The men on board began to disembark the small cargo, and a crowd of Maoris stood on the bank and superintended the proceedings with their usual air of unemployed dignity.

"I can't leave you like this," he said at last.

"Yes, indeed you must. Look! they are beckoning to you." He had seen Lizzie in many phases, but this was a new mood altogether. She might have been a princess graciously dismissing him from audience, and he felt that there was no appeal from her decision. All at once he seemed to realize how lonely she was, and understood something of the sadness that underlaid her brilliant life. A sudden tenderness brought the tears very near his eyes, but she looked at him with the same calm, unfathomable expression, and silently held out her hand. He kept it for a moment—for an instant held it to his lips—and then, turning away, disappeared into the forest. Lizzie remained standing motionless for some long moments, looking into the shadows and listening, if perhaps a footstep might be returning. Then with an irresistible

sob of loneliness she hid her face in her hands, and leaned over the rushing water, feeling terribly alone and forsaken.

When she looked up, darkness had set over the landscape. The Southern Cross streamed over her head, and a shallow crescent moon sailed above the great mountain-shoulder. Only the river seemed alive in that solitude, as it fled past and far through its green-roofed wilderness. It might have been a river of tears flowing from its secret birthplace in the everlasting hills, and hurrying onwards through the darkness to the unknown ocean, ever murmuring as it ran the same far-heard inconsolable lament over "something that is gone," that it has repeated since the beginning of the world.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was a very dreary, rainy, windy, south-westerly, and chilly afternoon, some days after the ball; and all the members of Mrs. Damon's household hugged the fireside as closely as possible, and thanked their stars that they were not obliged to go out of the house in such weather as this. Clare had given up the unequal contest with the draughts from the back-door, and the dark presentiments of bronchitis which haunted her, and had found no place of safety other than her comfortable bed, where, with all the magazines in the house, a packet of English letters, and a variety of patent medicines close at hand, she bade defiance to colds and sore throats from that comfortable coign of vantage. Alice was vainly trying to fight down the depression and self-depreciation that are apt to follow any unwonted excitement, by the aid of afternoon tea and American novels of extra strength, seated beside a kindly but snappy



wood fire in the drawing-room. The children wandered aimlessly about, trying to assist Mead in cleaning his silver, or begging biscuits from his wife, who maintained a postal deafness to all their requests as to the making of toffee in the schoolroom. Finally they decided to relieve the tedium by playing all the games of cards and chance which Alice could be induced to join them in; the rattle of the dice and the ghastly dissipation of cards by daylight added a last touch to the desolation of the afternoon.

Just as dusk was closing in, however, the sound of wheels on the gravel was heard; a carriage stopped at the door; there was a ring, a rustle of silk, and Mrs. Austin, beautiful, pale, in velvet and furs, and with some new, inscrutable expression in her eyes, entered the room. She had a letter in her hand, and she advanced slowly without a smile and held it towards Alice.

"I want you to do me a favour, Miss Lauder," she said in a grave, firm voice, very different to her usual vivid hilarity of tone. "Will you please give this letter to Mr. Campbell, and say good-bye for me? We are going to England by next mail—we must catch the steamer on Thursday. It's rather sudden—I don't expect to see him again. You will oblige me very much by doing this for me."

Alice remained silent, confused and embarrassed, and not knowing how to refuse. They were both standing, and she noticed how much nobler and more stately Lizzie looked in this new mood; she seemed more like a fine antique statue of the Cumæan Sibyl than a modern professional beauty in a velvet gown. Still with the same unsmiling gaze she went on, with the air of a princess making a request, rather than asking a favour: "I cannot explain to you why I desire this so much. Mr. Austin is very busy with our hurried departure; he does not wish me to see our friends, and say good-bye. I should like you to do this for me. I am going to town to-morrow, and may never perhaps return here. I don't want to see any of these people again. They have been so spiteful—said such horrid things—I hate them all!" She threw her head back, and moved her hand as if to brush off some teasing thoughts.

Little Dulcie stood on the hearthrug with a white kitten under each arm, tightly squeezed as to their necks and very limp as to their furry legs, while their Persian mother mewed imploringly but in vain, agitating her magnificent tail and rubbing herself against the child's arm. Dulcie's eyes were too much taken up with the grand lady to notice the sufferings of her friends;

and, besides, there was a certain exultation in not being sent out of the room that absorbed all her thoughts in the fear of discovery.

"Oh, you must not mind what they say," said Alice, finding voice at last, and anxious to be consolatory. "In a little place like this people must talk, or they would die. It's their only amusement—their opera box—their lending library; you can afford to laugh at their gossip."

"Yes, I know. I never used to care what they said about me, but now—now I feel so strange; it's such a sudden step. However, we shall all be going away soon, I suppose. Mr. Campbell will go to India, and you will be leaving the village soon. It's been a pleasant summer, but now it's all over. What is that verse—'The summer is past, the harvest is ended, and we are not saved.'"

"Why do you say that?" said Alice involuntarily, looking at her clear sad countenance.

"Well, good-bye, Miss Lauder; perhaps we shall never meet again, so you will do this for me?" She held the letter again to Alice, who took it silently, and the two women remained for a long moment looking intently at each other. At last Lizzie removed her steady, melancholy gaze, took Alice's hand for one in-

stant, and then turned away without a word. The carriage wheels grated on the gravel, and had rolled far away before Alice awakened from the trance of mingled feeling that the strange visit produced in her thoughts. . . . She never met Mrs. Austin again; but some years later, when she was on a visit to some Devonshire cousins, they took her to see the show monument of their little church—a beautiful recumbent statue of a young mother lying on a couch, and clasping an infant lightly in her arms—in the best style of modern art. The pure whiteness of the marble, the lovely features of the sculptured portrait, the “rapture of repose” expressed in the whole figure, fascinated the eye with its melancholy sweetness. There was an expression of angelic calm and happiness on the mother’s marble countenance. Underneath was the name “Elizabeth,” and the dates of birth and of death, and the text—(“chosen by herself as she was departing”)—“And the prophet said unto her, ‘Is it well with thee? Is it well with the child?’ And she answered, ‘It is well.’”

CHAPTER XV.

IT is a well-known peculiarity of the nature of things that one never meets with the right person in the right place, especially if such a meeting is desired (for reasons of state) to occur by accident. Those malicious little spirits who watch over human destinies, and who cause us to forget our keys, mislay our railway tickets, lose our tempers, and, above all, to say those things we ought not to have said, and leave unsaid those things we ought to say—are ever on the watch to prevent a happy accident which would relieve us of some perplexity.

It was therefore with no well-grounded hope of meeting Arthur Campbell and handing over to him the letter entrusted to her, that Alice ordered her horse one afternoon, about a week after Mrs. Austin's visit, and rode over the sands and towards the places he most frequented in his evening constitutionals. The rain had passed off, and the full tide of summer flooded the

landscape again. The great plain was braided white with clover, sweetening the air with its peculiar manna fragrance, and harvested by countless reapers in the shape of velvet-coated bees. The solemn purple mountains seemed to have floated away farther into the distance; sometimes a long shaft of sunlight would pierce the veil of haze and bring them visibly nearer, as if within reach of one's hand. Here and there a faint white pillar of smoke rose like the sign of a sacrificial altar from the stairs and peaks of the ranges, but the time of bush-fires was not yet come. Hardly more substantial than the rings of smoke, airy fragments of thistle-down slowly wavered and balanced in the wind, in a constant feathery mist, and floated away to sea. The sight of these elfin plumelets brought back to Alice's mind the early days of her arrival. She had passed the best part of a year now in this quiet green corner of earth, and she felt reluctant to leave it. But as Mrs. Austin had observed, the time of their departure was drawing nigh, and this place would soon know them no more for ever. There was something sad in this idea. The locusts in the pine-trees near the road continued their intensely shrill, throbbing chant as she rode past, and the tiny bush-wren warbled his one little sad tune

over and over again—the sort of tune that one hears in dreams. We are such stuff as dreams are made of; but the dreams are very sweet sometimes, and we hardly wish to awaken.

However, just as she was on the point of giving up her quest, she met the person so anxiously looked for, coming round the corner at a sharp trot. He stopped, and a more friendly smile passed between them than had been usual of late.

“Ah, well met, Miss Lauder! I was just hoping I should see you. I have permission to see the old garden at Dunstan’s Folly, which is considered a great favour. Will you come there with me? It’s a good long way, but a charming ride, and we can be home before dark.”

Alice assented, feeling this would be a capital opportunity of delivering her message, and they rode along side by side almost in silence, for each had grave matter of consideration in mind. The place they were in quest of was often spoken of, but seldom seen by the neighbourhood. A rich Englishman, some twenty years before, had laid out an elaborate pleasure-ground in the style of the old Italian gardens, and had even laid the foundations for a great house to match, on the slope of one of the bush-covered hills, some ten or twelve miles from the village. By

some caprice he abandoned the place before the walls had begun to rise, and returned to England ; but the garden was still kept up, and jealously guarded from all intrusion, by the owner's strict orders. There was consequently a slight, but fascinating halo of mystery around the place, and a piquant difference of opinion with regard to its attractions ; those who had seen it (by some special favour) lauding it as a second enchanted palace of the Sleeping Beauty ; while the majority (who had been refused permission) declared it without hesitation to be nothing more than an overgrown wilderness of flowering shrubs and neglected trees. Campbell had made some acquaintance with the town agent of its eccentric owner, and had gained permission to visit it ; it was a pleasant little pilgrimage for a summer afternoon.

The two riders left the shore, and went along a bridle-track which led them by many turns, and returns, and grassy circuits, deep into the heart and secrets of the thick-wooded coast ranges. The low rolling hills were all covered with primeval forest, moulded by the prevailing winds into a dense evergreen thatch, that sloped away from the coast towards the peaks, and followed the contour of the land as closely as a wet cloth covers a sculptor's clay model. The

little streams that here and there found a way out to the sea were blinded with ferns, and muffled in from all light of sun or moon by the sombre unchanging southern forest.

Every country has its own stamp and nationality of woodland. In England the soft misty English sunlight appears to pervade the very trees themselves, and softens every outline with its tender chiaroscuro. In Australia the pale transparent foliage, the strong sunshine which seems to absorb every spot of shade as well as every drop of moisture, the wild dry wind, and warm atmosphere all give an impression of life and freedom, and have a peculiar native charm of their own. But these South Pacific forests abide in a semi-tropical density and darkness, undisturbed by flying shapes of sun and shadow. There is no variation between the "night of green of the bush" and the "sacred high eternal moon" of the open peaks.

There was a certain pleasure in being together again, and they loved this wild nature so well that the primeval woods seemed to breathe "an ampler ether, a diviner air," to them both. The vague cloud that had hung between them was for the moment dispelled, and they talked together in the happy open companionship of former days. Yet all the world might have

overheard their conversation, as they rode side by side along the narrow pathway. The dim sunlight which for centuries had never fully penetrated the leafy roof above; the mystic whisper of the woods, moving round them like some invisible presence; the cool damp air and mossy fragrance, all combined to tune their thoughts into harmony. Sometimes a small blue kingfisher darted across their path like a falling sapphire, or the reed-warbler repeated his one sad little melody, as if he were saying, "All in vain—all in vain—all in vain," with musical but heart-breaking persistency.

Alice found herself talking of her recollections of childhood—a sign of the last downward step of intimacy between two young people. She spoke of the many roving expeditions she had made with her father over the great island continent; of long summer days spent in riding over the immense inland plains, sun-bleached and swept by the dreaded hot wind of the interior; of winter nights when they camped out beside some great marshes, and heard the pelicans trumpeting to each other, or startled a flock of wild swans from the swamp into the still frosty night. She boasted that she had learned to distinguish between the different water-birds, not only by their notes, but by the

noise of their flight through the air,—the wild ducks making a noise like that of scythes in wet grass, the heavy beat of the bittern's wings like muffled drums ; and many other fond reminiscences of those early years. Then they exchanged some recollections of the secret, half-remembered ideas of childhood. "Have you ever seen a little bush-owl?" said Alice, in affectionate remembrance. "They are the sweetest little fluffy creatures, but they often attack the young birds in their nests, and eat up the fledgelings. Long ago I used to imagine myself a little bird sitting cosily in my nest in the cypress-tree, when this great brown monster with glaring yellow eyes suddenly pounced upon me and ate me up. Don't you think that a brown owl must be much more appalling than any of the ogres or giants of our legends? Perhaps these stories have arisen from a shadowy recollection of such a time in some previous state of existence! And once, when my canary got out of its cage and flew off into the woods, I would not cry, for I thought it must feel exactly as if it had gone straight to heaven, without dying, like the old prophet."

"I don't know much about birds, but I do know something of what horses and dogs think about. I think the nicest thing that Huxley

has written is that about 'our useful officer and servant—I had almost said colleague—the horse.' Is that how it goes? Well, we must ask our colleagues to move on a little faster, if we want to get there and back before dark."

"How far have we to go?"

"Oh, not more than a mile or so. There is a little clearing just over that hill, and I expect we shall find our enchanted garden near it. Just stop for a moment now, and look back. Perhaps we shall never see this again. I for one must leave this country soon, and go back to India's torrid clime, as our hymn-books call it."

"You are going away?—Soon?"

"Yes. I have overstayed my welcome here, I'm afraid," he said, looking straight at Alice. "I have wasted my time, and lost ground in my work. I begin to think I have been a fool—in fact, I am sure of it."

This was not very enlivening, and it did not appear there was anyone to blame, except himself. Alice made no reply, but gazed instead on the dark hollows and purple slopes of the hills, as they flowed and interlaced in their wooded progress inland, only changing colour from the fluctuations of light and shade as the clouds floated over them. Here and there a scarlet-flowered rata-tree triumphed over the

verdure, and with a burst of crimson illuminated the hillside against the blue sky, like a vertical burning bush in the desert.

There is something a little oppressive in the unchanging soberness of our ever-green forests. Seasons return, but not to them returns the time of budding, and leafing, and the vivid autumnal radiance of deciduous trees. It was almost a relief when they passed on and came to a gate, and a little farther found a clear space of grass, a small white veranda-house, such as country settlers generally build, and the usual cheerful bark of dogs and clacking of poultry to announce their arrival.

"Surely *this* isn't the enchanted palace!" exclaimed Alice, surprised at such a commonplace termination to their journey. "I am very glad to see a house and chimney again, and to have a prospect of some Christian tea; but this isn't a bit what I expected."

"Wait a minute or two. This is the place the manager lives in. We must be near the sea again. I hear it rolling in, though we can't see it."

A boy appeared, and took their horses, and let them know that their arrival was expected. "Mother is getting you some tea yonder," he

said, pointing to an enormously high hedge of impenetrable cypress, which ran in a straight line along the hillside.

Campbell opened a little door in the hedge and they passed through, the cypress grating on the hinges as they pushed it open. It formed a living green wall some eight or ten feet thick, like the rampart of an ancient castle. All at once they found themselves in a lovely terraced garden, with a smooth plateau of lawn, a fountain laughing and playing in the wind, and a terraced walk and parapet, half-buried in passion-flowers and ivy. Flowers were everywhere in the wildest confusion—rivers of roses, hedges of heliotrope, islands of orange blossoms. A high brick wall defended one angle of the hillside from the bolts and arrows of the prevailing winds, and was covered with fruit-trees, carefully trained and tended. From this wall every now and then a heavy ripe peach or apricot would drop down with a sudden thud in the stillness—“like the first of a thunder-shower.”

But it was not the charm of this fairy garden, lovely and fantastic as it seemed after the dark native landscape, which made Alice and her companion utter a sudden exclamation of delight.

Far, far below, floating to an immeasurable

azure horizon, the stainless polished floor of the Pacific Ocean stretched out before their eyes. It was a wonderful blue aërial world; only the faintest cloud-shadows wavered over the pale blue depths; only a few rocky islets broke the intense delicious calm. A soft palpable haze, like the bloom of ripe grapes, or the dust on a butterfly's velvet wing, vested the distant islets and the coast-line with a visionary beauty. The colour of the sea was indescribably pure and lovely, melting into the sky-line without a break. One or two ships in full sail seemed to hang on the blue margin of heaven, and the breakers gathered in long curving lines, and rolling inshore, broke unheard on the rocks below, so far above the beach was the garden plateau where they stood.

It was almost too beautiful to talk about, and they gazed on it in silence, as if it were some lovely evidence of the things that are unseen and eternal; while the evening sunshine lowered, and the clouds moved as in sleep, slowly, slowly, slowly, across the deep, and faded away in the pale blue distance.

"Come, we will have something to eat after all this splendour," said Arthur at last. "I see our hostess is arranging a table at the other end of the terrace, and I think we shall rather astonish her when we once begin."

A pleasant-voiced, white-aproned Scotchwoman met them and made them welcome. "It's but seldom we see a young leddy here, in these benighted parts, and lonely it is for me all the year round," she murmured, like another discontented Eve in this beautiful Eden.

Alice talked with her for a time, or rather listened to her repinings, all uttered in the same gentle mournful tones, like the cooings of a wood-pigeon.

"Isn't it strange that a woman always wants to know 'what is worn,' even in a paradise like this?" she observed to Arthur, as the good lady went off at last, in search of more delicacies for her guests.

"I feel much more anxious to know what is eaten," he replied, looking affectionately at the table, where the shining snowfield of the damask cloth threw into relief the bright silver urn, delicate china, and heaped-up dishes of fruit. "Figs, too! and green almonds in the shells! 'The Swiss Family Robinson' was nothing to this, even in our youngest days!"

The two companions at the table might have formed a picture for some Italian painter of the Renaissance, as they sat on the stone terrace, against the rich, leafy, fruited background of the old garden. Something in the situation reminded

them both of the hour they had once spent together in the tropical garden in Ceylon. History repeats itself, even in our own little experiences, very often ; it seemed almost as if they had been sitting there all these years under the spell of some enchanter—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

But suddenly Alice remembered the letter, which had passed entirely from her thoughts during their ride. She took it out and handed it to him, saying rather hurriedly :

"Mrs. Austin came to see me, and asked me to give you this, and to say good-bye for her. She is going away—in fact, she must have sailed by this time. I saw her on Thursday last."

"Yes, I know. I am awfully sorry. It quite knocked me off my perch, as our friend is so fond of saying, when I first heard of it. I shall miss her awfully. She was so good to me. I have been away up the country, you know, and hurried back hoping to see her. But she had already started."

Alice made no reply, but sat with her eyes fixed on the ground, tracing out the pattern of some leaves on the gravel with her riding-whip. A great mulberry-tree shaded this end of the terrace, and its ripe berries lay on the ground

all round them. They both felt a peculiar sense of pleasure and companionship in thus being together—a pleasure not altogether damped by the slight fragrance of forbidden fruit which pervaded the situation. Alice was vaguely aware that there was something not quite *en règle* in thus spending her afternoon, and thought that very probably she was breaking some unpublished law in so doing. Well, if it were so, she would pay the price. The Medes and Persians might be scandalized, but she would bid defiance to their wrath for one day—just for this one long, lovely, but now swiftly-fading afternoon.

Arthur seemed much in the same frame of mind, but at last he broke the spell, and opened the note which she had handed to him. It contained one line only, written in Lizzie's large straggling hand, with the thickest of quill-pens, but with no address or signature. He read the words over two or three times: "I don't believe she is engaged—ask her yourself."

At last he handed the little note over to Alice. "Will you be so kind as to answer this for me?" he said, just as if he had asked her to pass the cream-jug.

She started and looked blankly at the paper; then replied in a rather frigid tone, "I haven't the slightest idea of what you mean."

"Are you engaged to Piper? Tell me the truth, I beg of you."

"Engaged to the professor? Certainly not!"

"But he told me so himself."

"Oh no! you are making some strange mistake."

"He told me that you were going home with him, and that it had been a long engagement."

A light broke in over the situation, and Alice replied, half laughing, but angry too.

"He means that I am engaged to sing the soprano part in his cantata at the festival next spring. It is an old promise, and I am glad that I can fulfil my part of it now. He could not get his music taken up before this, and now I am just ready to sing again."

"Why, what a fool I have been! Of course he meant that, and he is a fine old chap after all. I *did* feel surprised that you should have taken him, but I thought it was all your old love of a musical career. Well, now the coast is clear, and it won't take me long to say two words. Will you have me instead? We have known each other a long time now, and I have never seen anyone like you. I have thought of you all these years, though I really didn't know how much I cared. Tell me now—you will—won't you?"

"Oh, I don't know!" she murmured, pale and troubled. "I can't change all at once. I have given my promise. It's a sort of sacred thing with me now."

"No, no! What does it matter if you have given a dozen promises? Listen to your own heart—and to mine."

"I must not give up my work—indeed I must not; and I know you could not bear me to sing in public——"

"No, that I certainly could not. You must choose now between us, once for all. I could not have a wife who belonged to the public first. It may be a prejudice, but that is my idea."

"Oh, you don't know—you don't understand. It is so hard to explain. I *must* go on—I must work. Don't you remember that Balzac says that the artist must work with the energy of a miner buried under a landslip," she added, trying to smile, and to bring the conversation down to an everyday level again.

"Well, that's just what I don't want to see you doing. You ought to let somebody else do the landslip business for you. You are making a great mistake. There is something better than even an artistic career—you may bet your life on that," he added, quite unconsciously

quoting poor Lizzie's parting injunction. "Suppose, after all, your voice breaks down again! Don't think me a brute for saying so. However, I do believe that you have a great success before you. But what then? Will you be happy? No, I am sure you won't. You care for me in your secret heart, I am sure you do; and yet you throw me over, just for the sake of singing old Piper's music to a crowd at five shillings a head—a crowd who don't care a straw for you yourself, only for what you can give them. I am not an artist—thank Heaven for that!—but I know more about it than you imagine." There was a long pause again between them, and Campbell seemed to be trying to think of further arguments. But at last he exclaimed abruptly, "I can't stand any more of this. It may be play with you, but it's life and death with me. Tell me, once for all, will you trust me, or will you not? I can't ask you again."

Alice remained silent, pale and shaken. She could argue no longer, and a secret traitor in her heart was almost undoing the bolt and letting the enemy in. Arthur bent over towards her, his dark, manly face bright with an expression of tenderness which she had never seen before. If he could have taken her hand there and then, perhaps the battle had been won; but a large

bowl of curds and cream interposed intrusively on the table between them.

Alice recovered herself with a great effort, rose from the table, and walked over towards the parapet.

"I can't," she murmured, almost with a sob. "I have put my hands to the plough, and I must go on."

"Very well, we will say no more about it. It is time for us to be starting. I will go and look after the horses, and bring them round in a few minutes."

He did not look at her again, and Alice remained standing on the terrace alone, gazing absently at the beautiful ocean scene before her. The afternoon was deepening, and the azure of the distant sea was almost unearthly in its purity. Nearer to the land long stripes and shadows of green and purple floated in with the shadows of the cliffs, and in the west a long ladder of sunshine rose step after step through the clouds. But all the joy had faded out of the afternoon. A thin wall of ice seemed slowly building up round her, shutting out the pleasant everyday world of cloud and sunshine, and she could have exclaimed with the poet :

"I have submitted to a new control.
A power is gone which nothing can restore ;
A deep distress has humanized my soul."

But there was no opportunity for her to retrace her steps, even had she wished to do so. She had made her decision, and she knew that she must abide by it.

The ride home was very silent, and not a little depressing. Neither of the riders spoke more than was necessary; they both seemed to have too much to think of. Something new and strange had risen in the girl's heart, some unconscious rebellion against her own choice; and it was hard enough to maintain the composure and dignity suitable to the occasion, and at the same time to subdue with a strong hand the civil war which was stubbornly battling in her inmost thoughts.

Campbell, however, seemed to be resigned to his fate. He rode beside her with an air of cold self-possession, and the manner with which he showed her some little formal attentions plainly declared that he had accepted her decision without appeal. The daylight had almost faded from the valleys, and the dense bush oppressed their spirits with its solitary gloom. It was fortunate that their horses were accustomed to the rough bridle-track, for they could hardly see to guide them. What a contrast this dusky path presented to the shining limitless view from the heights!

Alice could hardly help asking herself whether she had indeed chosen wisely in turning away from the natural sunshine of earth, all for the sake of some fantastic ideal which now seemed to die away into the twilight, instead of supporting her with strong inward faith.

Perhaps they might have remained in the shadows up to this very moment, but that a sudden turn in the path brought them in sight of the sea again. The gloomy arches of the forest framed in a long vista of heavenly azure, and far beyond, half resting on the horizon, half hid in summer clouds, a long range of snow-clad mountain-peaks shone out with startling purity, white and dazzling as if they had been the houses of angels. Just at that moment the horse that Alice was riding stumbled over the root of a tree in the rough pathway, and she fell forward, half losing her balance. Campbell was by her side in the same instant, and lifted her into the saddle again, when something he saw in her tearful, half-averted eyes caused him to stop and remain standing by her side, his arm still round her, while some long, long explanation passed in silence between them. So long did they remain in this enchanted silence that the little reed-warbler in the bush near them thought they had departed, and began once more to try

over the only tune he knew, his one sweet poignant melody—"all in vain, all in vain, all in vain;" the two sheep-dogs yawned and stretched themselves, and looked reproachfully at the horses; and the sunset faded over the blue fields of the Pacific, and left only a faint rosy glow on the far immeasurable snow-peaks that floated between sea and sky at the other side of the bay.

In almost every lifetime there comes a pause now and then when the noises of this world and the roar of its streets die away into silence; moments when we attain the power of seeing the invisible, and hearing the "incommunicable song" of our dreams; moments that the poet and the musician are ever striving to arrest. Sometimes this visitation seizes us while listening to some strain of intensely sad music, whose sadness nevertheless causes us no distress, but rather moves a deeper feeling than delight; or it may be in gazing upon some snow-sheeted, unattainable mountain-peak; or perhaps in the secret pang of self-renunciation unnoticed or misunderstood by all around. All too soon the illumination fades away, but it has taught us much that can never be forgotten. Such a moment came to Alice amid the rustling branches of the primeval forest; and it was

with the feeling of one who lays his gift on the altar and goes silently away into the city that she at last waved farewell to the shadows, as they turned their horses towards the hospitable lights of the little village. Of these two lovers, one would never fully know what the other had sacrificed; but perhaps their cup of love and happiness was not less blessed because it was mingled with the ever-rising, ever-flowing immemorial fountain of human tears.

THE END.



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