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COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2611.

WE TWO BY EDNA LYALL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

COLLECTION

BRITISH AUTHORS

“Men are so made as to resent nothing more impatiently than to be treated as criminal for opinions which they deem true.”

SPINOZA.

“We two are a multitude.”

OVID.

W E T W O

A NOVEL

BY

EDNA LYALL.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1889.



W E T W O

A NOVEL

EDNA LYALL

OVERSEA

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

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OF THE



P R O C O N .

IN MEMORIAM.

1871—1884.

“Knowledge by suffering entereth.”

PRO-COM.

IN MEMORIAM

1871-1901

Published by the Pro-Congress

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W E T W O.

CHAPTER I.

BRIAN FALLS IN LOVE.

Still humanity grows dearer,
Being learned the more.

JEAN INGELOW.

There are three things in this world which deserve no quarter—
Hypocrisy, Pharisaism, and Tyranny.

F. ROBERTSON.

PEOPLE who have been brought up in the country, or in small places where every neighbour is known by sight, are apt to think that life in a large town must lack many of the interests which they have learned to find in their more limited communities. In a somewhat bewildered way, they gaze at the shifting crowd of strange faces, and wonder whether it would be possible to feel completely at home where all the surroundings of life seem ever changing and unfamiliar.

But those who have lived long in one quarter of London, or of any other large town, know that there are in reality almost as many links between the actors of the town life-drama as between those of the country life-drama.

Silent recognitions pass between passengers who meet day after day in the same morning or evening train, on

the way to or from work; the faces of omnibus conductors grow familiar; we learn to know perfectly well on what day of the week and at what hour the well-known organ-grinder will make his appearance, and in what street we shall meet the city clerk or the care-worn little daily governess on their way to office or school.

It so happened that Brian Osmond, a young doctor who had not been very long settled in the Bloomsbury regions, had an engagement which took him every afternoon down Gower Street, and here many faces had grown familiar to him. He invariably met the same sallow-faced postman, the same nasal-voiced milkman, the same pompous-looking man with the bushy whiskers and the shiny black bag, on his way home from the city. But the only passenger in whom he took any interest was a certain bright-faced little girl whom he generally met just before the Montague Place crossing. He always called her his "little girl," though she was by no means little in the ordinary acceptance of the word, being at least sixteen, and rather tall for her years. But there was a sort of freshness and *naïveté* and youthfulness about her which made him use that adjective. She usually carried a pile of books in a strap, so he conjectured that she must be coming from school, and, ever since he had first seen her, she had worn the same rough blue serge dress, and the same quaint little fur hat. In other details, however, he could never tell in the least how he should find her. She seemed to have a mood for every day. Sometimes she would be in a great hurry and would almost run past him; sometimes she would saunter along in the most unconventional way, glancing from time to time at a book or a paper; sometimes her eager face would look absolutely bewitching in its brightness; sometimes scarcely less be-

witching in a consuming anxiety which seemed unnatural in one so young.

One rainy afternoon in November, Brian was as usual making his way down Gower Street, his umbrella held low to shelter him from the driving rain which seemed to come in all directions. The milkman's shrill voice was still far in the distance, the man of letters was still at work upon knockers some way off, it was not yet time for his little girl to make her appearance, and he was not even thinking of her, when suddenly his umbrella was nearly knocked out of his hand by coming violently into collision with another umbrella. Brought thus to a sudden stand, he looked to see who it was who had charged him with such violence, and found himself face to face with his unknown friend. He had never been quite so close to her before. Her quaint face had always fascinated him, but on nearer view he thought it the loveliest face he had ever seen—it took his heart by storm.

It was framed in soft, silky masses of dusky auburn hair which hung over the broad, white forehead, but at the back was scarcely longer than a boy's. The features, though not regular, were delicate and piquant; the usual faint rose-flush on the cheeks deepened now to carnation, perhaps because of the slight *contretemps*, perhaps because of some deeper emotion—Brian fancied the latter, for the clear, golden-brown eyes that were lifted to his seemed bright either with indignation or with unshed tears. To-day it was clear that the mood was not a happy one: his little girl was in trouble.

"I am very sorry," she said, looking up at him, and speaking in a low, musical voice, but with the unembarrassed frankness of a child. "I really wasn't thinking or looking, it was very careless of me."

Brian of course took all the blame to himself, and apologised profusely; but though he would have given much to detain her, if only for a moment, she gave him no opportunity, but with a slight inclination passed rapidly on. He stood quite still, watching her till she was out of sight, aware of a sudden change in his life. He was a busy, hard-working man, not at all given to dreams, and it was no dream that he was in now. He knew perfectly well that he had met his ideal, had spoken to her and she to him; that somehow in a single moment a new world had opened out to him. For the first time in his life he had fallen in love.

The trifling occurrence had made no great impression on the "little girl" herself. She was rather vexed with herself for the carelessness, but a much deeper trouble was filling her heart. She soon forgot the passing interruption and the brown-bearded man with the pleasant gray eyes who had apologised for what was quite her fault. Something had gone wrong that day, as Brian had surmised; the eyes grew brighter, the carnation flush deepened as she hurried along, the delicate lips closed with a curiously hard expression, the hands were clasped with unnecessary tightness round the umbrella and the handle of the book-strap.

She passed up Guilford Square, but did not turn into any of the old decayed houses; her home was far less imposing. At the corner of the square there is a narrow opening which leads into a sort of blind alley paved with grim flag-stones. Here, facing a high blank wall, are four or five very dreary houses. She entered one of these, put down her wet umbrella in the shabby little hall, and opened the door of a barely-furnished room, the walls of which were, however, lined with books. Beside the fire

was the one really comfortable piece of furniture in the room, an Ilkley couch, and upon it lay a very wan-looking invalid, who, as the door opened, glanced up with a smile of welcome.

"Why, Erica, you are home early to day. How is that?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Erica, tossing down her books in a way which showed her mother that she was troubled about something. "I suppose I tore along at a good rate, and there was no temptation to stay at the High School."

"Come and tell me about it," said the mother, gently; "what has gone wrong, little one?"

"Everything!" exclaimed Erica, vehemently. "Everything always does go wrong with us and always will, I suppose. I wish you had never sent me to school, mother; I wish I need never see the place again!"

"But till to-day you enjoyed it so much."

"Yes, the classes and the being with Gertrude. But that will never be the same again. It's just this, mother, I'm never to speak to Gertrude again—to have nothing more to do with her."

"Who said so? And why?"

"Why? Because I'm myself," said Erica, with a bitter little laugh. "How I can help it, nobody seems to think. But Gertrude's father has come back from Africa, and was horrified to learn that we were friends, made her promise never to speak to me again, and made her write this note about it. Look!" and she took a crumpled envelope from her pocket.

The mother read the note in silence, and an expression of pain came over her face. Erica, who was very impetuous, snatched it away from her when she saw that look of sadness.

"Don't read the horrid thing!" she exclaimed, crushing it up in her hand. "There, we will burn it!" and she threw it into the fire with a vehemence which somehow relieved her.

"You shouldn't have done that," said her mother. "Your father will be sure to want to see it."

"No, no, no," cried Erica, passionately. "He must not know; you must not tell him, mother."

"Dear child, have you not learnt that it is impossible to keep anything from him? He will find out directly that something is wrong."

"It will grieve him so, he must not hear it," said Erica. "He cares so much for what hurts us. Oh! why are people so hard and cruel? Why do they treat us like lepers? It isn't all because of losing Gertrude; I could bear that if there were some real reason,—if she went away or died. But there's no reason! It's all prejudice and bigotry and injustice; it's that which makes it sting so."

Erica was not at all given to tears, but there was now a sort of choking in her throat, and a sort of dimness in her eyes, which made her rather hurriedly settle down on the floor in her own particular nook beside her mother's couch, where her face could not be seen. There was a silence. Presently the mother spoke, stroking back the wavy, auburn hair with her thin white hand.

"For a long time I have dreaded this for you, Erica. I was afraid you didn't realise the sort of position the world will give you. Till lately you have seen scarcely any but our own people, but it can hardly be, darling, that you can go on much longer without coming into contact with others; and then, more and more, you must

realise that you are cut off from much that other girls may enjoy."

"Why?" questioned Erica. "Why can't they be friendly? Why must they cut us off from everything?"

"It does seem unjust; but you must remember that we belong to an unpopular minority."

"But if I belonged to the larger party, I would at least be just to the smaller," said Erica. "How can they expect us to think their system beautiful when the very first thing they show us is hatred and meanness. Oh! if I belonged to the other side I would show them how different it might be."

"I believe you would," said the mother, smiling a little at the idea, and at the vehemence of the speaker. "But, as it is, Erica, I am afraid you must school yourself to endure. After all, I fancy you will be glad to share so soon in your father's vexations."

"Yes," said Erica, pushing back the hair from her forehead, and giving herself a kind of mental shaking, "I am glad of that. After all, they can't spoil the best part of our lives! I shall go into the garden to get rid of my bad temper; it doesn't rain now."

She struggled to her feet, picked up the little fur hat which had fallen off, kissed her mother, and went out of the room.

The "garden" was Erica's favourite resort, her own particular property. It was about fifteen feet square, and no one but a Londoner would have bestowed on it so dignified a name. But Erica, who was of an inventive turn, had contrived to make the most of the little patch of ground, had induced ivy to grow on the ugly brick walls, and with infinite care and satisfaction had nursed a few flowers and shrubs into tolerably healthy though

smutty life. In one of the corners Tom Craigie, her favourite cousin, had put up a rough wooden bench for her, and here she read and dreamed as contentedly as if her "garden ground" had been fairyland. Here, too, she invariably came when anything had gone wrong, when the endless troubles about money which had weighed upon her all her life became a little less bearable than usual, or when some act of discourtesy or harshness to her father had roused in her a tingling, burning sense of indignation.

Erica was not one of those people who take life easily; things went very deeply with her. In spite of her brightness and vivacity, in spite of her readiness to see the ludicrous in everything, and her singularly quick perceptions, she was also very keenly alive to other and graver impressions.

Her anger had passed, but still, as she paced round and round her small domain, her heart was very heavy. Life seemed perplexing to her; but her mother had somehow struck the right key-note when she had spoken of the vexations which might be shared. There was something inspiriting in that thought, certainly, for Erica worshipped her father. By degrees the trouble and indignation died away, and a very sweet look stole over the grave little face.

A smutty sparrow came and peered down at her from the ivy-covered wall, and chirped and twittered in quite a friendly way, perhaps recognising the scatterer of its daily bread.

"After all," thought Erica, "with ourselves and the animals, we might let the rest of the world treat us as they please. I am glad they can't turn the animals and birds against us! That would be worse than anything."

Then, suddenly turning from the abstract to the practical, she took out of her pocket a shabby little seal-skin purse.

"Still sixpence of my prize-money over," she remarked to herself. "I'll go and buy some scones for tea. Father likes them."

Erica's father was a Scotchman, and, though so-called scones were to be had at most shops, there was only one place where she could buy scones which she considered worthy the name, and that was at the Scotch baker's in Southampton Row. She hurried along the wet pavements, glad that the rain was over, for as soon as her purchase was completed she made up her mind to indulge for a few minutes in what had lately become a very frequent treat, namely, a pause before a certain tempting store of second-hand books. She had never had money enough to buy anything except the necessary school books, and, being a great lover of poetry, she always seized with avidity on anything that was to be found outside the book-shop. Sometimes she would carry away a verse of Swinburne, which would ring in her ears for days and days; sometimes she would read as much as two or three pages of Shelley. No one had ever interrupted her, and a certain sense of impropriety and daring was rather stimulating than otherwise. It always brought to her mind a saying in the proverbs of Solomon, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."

For three successive days she had found to her great delight Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. The strange metre, the musical Indian names, the delightfully described animals, all served to make the poem wonderfully fascinating to her. She thought a page or two of *Hiawatha* would greatly sweeten her somewhat bitter world this afternoon,



and with her bag of scones in one hand and the book in the other she read on happily, quite unconscious that three pair of eyes were watching her from within the shop.

The wrinkled old man who was the presiding genius of the place had two customers, a tall gray-bearded clergyman with bright, kindly eyes, and his son, the same Brian Osmond whom Erica had charged with her umbrella in Gower Street.

"An outside customer for you," remarked Charles Osmond, the clergyman, glancing at the shopkeeper. Then to his son, "What a picture she makes!"

Brian looked up hastily from some medical books which he had been turning over.

"Why, that's my little Gower Street friend?" he exclaimed, the words being somehow surprised out of him, though he would fain have recalled them the next minute.

"I don't interrupt her," said the shop owner. "Her father has done a great deal of business with me, and the little lady has a fancy for poetry, and don't get much of it in her life, I'll be bound."

"Why, who is she?" asked Charles Osmond, who was on very friendly terms with the old book-collector.

"She's the daughter of Luke Raeburn," was the reply, "and whatever folks may say, I know that Mr. Raeburn leads a hard enough life."

Brian turned away from the speakers, a sickening sense of dismay at his heart. His ideal was the daughter of Luke Raeburn! And Luke Raeburn was an atheist leader!

For a few minutes he lost consciousness of time and place, though always seeing in a sort of dark mist Erica's lovely face bending over her book. The shopkeeper's casual remark had been a fearful blow to him; yet, as he

came to himself again, his heart went out more and more to the beautiful girl who had been brought up in what seemed to him so barren a creed. His dream of love, which had been bright enough only an hour before, was suddenly shadowed by an unthought-of pain, but presently began to shine with a new and altogether different lustre. He began to hear again what was passing between his father and the shopkeeper.

"There's a sight more good in him than folks think. However wrong his views, he believes them right, and is ready to suffer for 'em, too. Bless me, that's odd, to be sure! There is Mr. Raeburn, on the other side of the Row! Fine looking man, isn't he!"

Brian, looking up eagerly, fancied he must be mistaken, for the only passenger in sight was a very tall man of remarkably benign aspect, middle-aged, yet venerable—or perhaps better described by the word "devotional-looking," pervaded too by a certain majesty of calmness which seemed scarcely suited to his character of public agitator. The clean-shaven and somewhat rugged face was unmistakably that of a Scotchman, the thick waves of tawny hair overshadowing the wide brow, and the clear golden-brown eyes showed Brian at once that this could be no other than the father of his ideal.

In the meantime, Raeburn, having caught sight of his daughter, slowly crossed the road, and coming noiselessly up to her, suddenly took hold of the book she was reading, and with laughter in his eyes, said, in a peremptory voice,

"Five shillings to pay, if you please, miss!"

Erica, who had been absorbed in the poem, looked up in dismay; then seeing who had spoken she began to laugh.

"What a horrible fright you gave me, father! But do look at this, it's the loveliest thing in the world. I've just got to the 'very strong man Kwasind.' I think he's a little like you!"

Raeburn, though no very great lover of poetry, took the book and read a few lines.

"Long they lived in peace together,
Spake with naked hearts together,
Pondering much and much contriving
How the tribes of men might prosper."

"Good! That will do very well for you and me, little one. I'm ready to be your Kwasind. What's the price of the thing?—four-and-sixpence! Too much for a luxury. It must wait till our ship comes in."

He put down the book and they moved on together, but had not gone many paces before they were stopped by a most miserable-looking beggar child. Brian standing now outside the shop, saw and heard all that passed.

Raeburn was evidently investigating the case, Erica a little impatient of the interruption was remonstrating.

"I thought you never gave to beggars, and I am sure that harrowing story is made up."

"Very likely," replied her father, "but the hunger is real, and I know well enough what hunger is. What have you here?" he added, indicating the paper bag which Erica held.

"Scones," she said, unwillingly.

"That will do," he said, taking them from her and giving them to the child. "He is too young to be anything but the victim of another's laziness. There! sit down and eat them while you can."

The child sat down on the doorstep with the bag of scones clasped in both hands, but he continued to gaze

after his benefactor till he had passed out of sight, and there was a strange look of surprise and gratification in his eyes. That was a man who knew! Many people had, after hard begging, thrown him pence, many had warned him off harshly, but this man had looked straight into his eyes, and had at once stopped and questioned him, had singled out the one true statement from a mass of lies, and had given him—not a stale loaf with the top cut off, a suspicious sort of charity which always angered the waif—but his own food, bought for his own consumption. Most wonderful of all, too, this man knew what it was to be hungry, and had even the insight and shrewdness to be aware that the waif's best chance of eating the scones at all was to eat them then and there. For the first time a feeling of reverence and admiration was kindled in the child's heart; he would have done a great deal for his unknown friend.

Raeburn and Erica had meanwhile walked on in the direction of Guilford Square.

"I had bought them for you," said Erica, reproachfully.

"And I ruthlessly gave them away," said Raeburn, smiling. "That was hard lines; I thought they were only household stock. But after all it comes to the same thing in the end, or better. You have given them to me by giving them to the child. Never mind, 'Little son Eric!'"

This was his pet name for her, and it meant a great deal to them. She was his only child, and it had at first been a great disappointment to every one that she was not a boy. But Raeburn had long ago ceased to regret this, and the nickname referred more to Erica's capability of being both son and daughter to him, able to help him in his work and at the same time to brighten his home.

Erica was very proud of her name, for she had been called after her father's greatest friend Eric Haerberlein, a celebrated republican, who once during a long exile had taken refuge in London. His views were in some respects more extreme than Raeburn's, but in private life he was the gentlest and most fascinating of men, and had quite won the heart of his little namesake.

As Mrs. Raeburn had surmised, Erica's father had at once seen that something had gone wrong that day. The all-observing eyes, which had noticed the hungry look in the beggar child's face, noticed at once that his own child had been troubled.

"Something has vexed you," he said. "What is the matter, Erica?"

"I had rather not tell you, father, it isn't anything much," said Erica, casting down her eyes as if all at once the paving stones had become absorbingly interesting.

"I fancy I know already," said Raeburn. "It is about your friend at the High School, is it not? I thought so. This afternoon I had a letter from her father."

"What does he say? May I see it?" asked Erica.

"I tore it up," said Raeburn; "I thought you would ask to see it, and the thing was really so abominably insolent that I didn't want you to. How did you hear about it?"

"Gertrude wrote me a note," said Erica.

"At her father's dictation, no doubt," said Raeburn; "I should know his style directly, let me see it."

"I thought it was a pity to vex you, so I burnt it," said Erica.

Then, unable to help being amused at their efforts to save each other, they both laughed, though the subject was rather a sore one.

"It is the old story," said Raeburn. "Life only, as Pope Innocent III. benevolently remarked, 'is to be left to the children of misbelievers, and that only as an act of mercy.' You must make up your mind to bear the social stigma, child. Do you see the moral of this?"

"No," said Erica, with something between a smile and a sigh.

"The moral of it is that you must be content with your own people," said Raeburn. "There is this one good point about persecution—it does draw us all nearer together, really strengthens us in a hundred ways. So, little one, you must forswear school friends, and be content with your 'very strong man Kwasind,' and we will

'Live in peace together,
Speak with naked hearts together.'

By-the-by, it is rather doubtful if Tom will be able to come to the lecture to-night: do you think you can take notes for me instead?"

This was in reality the most delicate piece of tact and consideration, for it was, of course, Erica's delight and pride to help her father.

CHAPTER II.

FROM EFFECT TO CAUSE.

Only the acrid spirit of the times,
Corroded this true steel.—LONGFELLOW.

Not Thine the bigot's partial plea,
Not Thine the zealot's ban;
Thou well canst spare a love of Thee
Which ends in hate of man.—WHITTIER.

LUKE RAEURN was the son of a Scotch clergyman of the Episcopal Church. His history, though familiar to his own followers and to them more powerfully convincing than many arguments against modern Christianity, was not generally known. The orthodox were apt to content themselves with shuddering at the mention of his name; very few troubled themselves to think or inquire how this man had been driven into atheism. Had they done so they might, perhaps, have treated him more considerately, at any rate they must have learnt that the much-disliked prophet of atheism was the most disinterested of men, one who had the courage of his opinions, a man of fearless honesty.

Raeburn had lost his mother very early; his father, a well-to-do man, had held for many years a small living in the west of Scotland. He was rather a clever man, but one-sided and bigoted; cold-hearted, too, and caring very little for his children. Of Luke, however, he was, in his peculiar fashion, very proud, for at an early age the boy showed signs of genius. The father was no great worker; though shrewd and clever, he had no ambition,

and was quite content to live out his life in the retired little parsonage where, with no parish to trouble him, and a small and unexacting congregation on Sundays, he could do pretty much as he pleased. But for his son he was ambitious. Ever since his sixteenth year—when, at a public meeting, the boy had, to the astonishment of every one, suddenly sprung to his feet and contradicted a false statement made by a great landowner as to the condition of the cottages on his estate—the father had foreseen future triumphs for his son. For the speech, though unpremeditated, was marvellously clever, and there was a power in it not to be accounted for by a certain ring of indignation; it was the speech of a future orator.

Then, too, Luke had by this time shown signs of religious zeal, a zeal which his father, though far from attempting to copy, could not but admire. His Sunday services over, he relapsed into the comfortable, easy-going life of a country gentleman, for the rest of the week; but his son was indefatigable, and, though little more than a boy himself, gathered round him the roughest lads of the village, and by his eloquence, and a certain peculiar personal fascination which he retained all his life, absolutely forced them to listen to him. The father augured great things for him, and invariably prophesied that he would "live to see him a bishop yet."

It was a settled thing that he should take Holy Orders, and for some time Raeburn was only too happy to carry out his father's plans. In his very first term at Cambridge, however, he began to feel doubts, and, becoming convinced that he could never again accept the doctrines in which he had been educated, he told his father that he must give up all thought of taking Orders.

Now, unfortunately, Mr. Raeburn was the very last

man to understand or sympathise with any phase of life through which he had not himself passed. He had never been troubled with religious doubts; scepticism seemed to him monstrous and unnatural. He met the confession, which his son had made in pain and diffidence, with a most deplorable want of tact. In answer to the perplexing questions which were put to him, he merely replied testily that Luke had been overworking himself, and that he had no business to trouble his head with matters which were beyond him, and would fain have dismissed the whole affair at once.

"But," urged the son, "how is it possible for me to turn my back upon these matters when I am preparing to teach them?"

"Nonsense," replied the father, angrily. "Have not I taught all my life, preached twice a Sunday these thirty years without perplexing myself with your questionings! Be off to your shooting and your golf, and let me have no more of this morbid fuss."

No more was said; but Luke Raeburn, with his doubts and questions shut thus into himself, drifted rapidly from scepticism to the most positive form of unbelief. When he next came home for the long vacation, his father was at length awakened to the fact that the son, upon whom all his ambition was set, was hopelessly lost to the Church; and with this consciousness a most bitter sense of disappointment rose in his heart. His pride, the only side of fatherhood which he possessed, was deeply wounded, and his dreams of honourable distinction were laid low. His wrath was great. Luke found the home made almost unbearable to him. His college career was of course at an end, for his father would not hear of providing him with the necessary funds now that he had actually con-

fessed his atheism. He was hardly allowed to speak to his sisters, every request for money to start him in some profession met with a sharp refusal, and matters were becoming so desperate that he would probably have left the place of his own accord before long, had not Mr. Raeburn himself put an end to a state of things which had grown insufferable.

With some lurking hope, perhaps, of convincing his son, he resolved upon trying a course of argument. To do him justice he really tried to prepare himself for it, dragged down volumes of dusty divines, and got up with much pains Paley's "watch" argument. There was some honesty, even perhaps a very little love, in his mistaken endeavours; but he did not recognise that, while he himself was unforgiving, unloving, harsh, and self-indulgent, all his arguments for Christianity were of necessity null and void. He argued for the existence of a perfectly-loving, good God, all the while treating his son with injustice and tyranny. Of course there could be only one result from a debate between the two. Luke Raeburn with his honesty, his great abilities, his gift of reasoning, above all his thorough earnestness, had the best of it.

To be beaten in argument was naturally the one thing which such a man as Mr. Raeburn could not forgive. He might in time have learnt to tolerate a difference of opinion, he would beyond a doubt have forgiven almost any of the failings that he could understand, would have paid his son's college debts without a murmur, would have overlooked anything connected with what he considered the necessary process of "sowing his wild oats." But that the fellow should presume to think out the greatest problems in the world, should set up his judgment against Paley's, and worst of all should actually

and palpably beat *him* in argument—this was an unpardonable offence.

A stormy scene ensued. The father in ungovernable fury heaped upon the son every abusive epithet he could think of. Luke Raeburn spoke not a word; he was strong and self-controlled; moreover, he knew that he had had the best of the argument. He was human, however, and his heart was wrung by his father's bitterness. Standing there on that summer day, in the study of the Scotch parsonage, the man's future was sealed. He suffered there the loss of all things, but at the very time there sprang up in him an enthusiasm for the cause of free-thought, a passionate, burning zeal for the opinion for which he suffered, which never left him, but served as the great moving impulse of his whole subsequent life.

"I tell you, you are not fit to be in a gentleman's house," thundered the father. "A rank atheist, a lying infidel. It is against nature that you should call a parsonage your home."

"It is not particularly home-like," said the son, bitterly. "I can leave it when you please."

"Can!" exclaimed his father, in a fury, "you *will* leave it, sir, and this very day too! I disown you from this time. I'll have no atheist for my son! Change your views or leave the house at once."

Perhaps he expected his son to make some compromise; if so he showed what a very slight knowledge he had of his character. Luke Raeburn had certainly not been prepared for such extreme harshness, but with the pain and grief and indignation there rose in his heart a mighty resoluteness. With a face as hard and rugged as the granite rocks without, he wished his father good-bye, and obeyed his orders.

Then had followed such a struggle with the world as few men would have gone through with. Cut off from all friends and relations by his avowal of atheism, and baffled again and again in seeking to earn his living, he had more than once been on the very brink of starvation. By sheer force of will he had won his way, had risen above adverse circumstances, had fought down obstacles, and conquered opposing powers. Before long he had made fresh friends and gained many followers, for there was an extraordinary magnetism about the man which almost compelled those who were brought into contact with him to reverence him.

It was a curious history. First there had been that time of grievous doubt; then he had been thrown upon the world friendless and penniless, with the beliefs and hopes hitherto most sacred to him dead, and in their place an aching blank. He had suffered much. Treated on all sides with harshness and injustice, it was indeed wonderful that he had not developed into a mere hater, a passionate downpuller. But there was in his character a nobility which would not allow him to rest at this low level. The bitter hostility and injustice which he encountered did indeed warp his mind, and every year of controversy made it more impossible for him to take an unprejudiced view of Christ's teaching; but nevertheless he could not remain a mere destroyer.

In that time of blankness, when he had lost all faith in God, when he had been robbed of friendship and family love, he had seized desperately on the one thing left him,—the love of humanity. To him atheism meant not only the assertion—"The word God is a word without meaning, it conveys nothing to my understanding." He added to this barren confession of an intellectual state;

a singularly high code of duty. Such a code as could only have emanated from one about whom there lingered what Carlyle has termed, a great "Aftershine of Christianity." He held that the only happiness worth having was that which came to a man while engaged in promoting the general good. That the whole duty of man was to devote himself to the service of others. And he lived his creed.

Like other people he had his faults, but he was always ready to spend and be spent for what he considered the good of others, while every act of injustice called forth his unsparing rebuke, and every oppressed person or cause was sure to meet with his support at whatever cost to himself. His zeal for what he regarded as the "gospel" of atheism grew and strengthened year by year. He was the untiring advocate of what he considered the truth. Neither illness, nor small results, nor loss, could quench his ardour, while opposition invariably stimulated him to fresh efforts. After long years of toil, he had at length attained an influential position in the country, and though crippled by debts incurred in the struggle for freedom of speech, and living in absolute penury, he was one of the most powerful men of the day.

The old bookseller had very truly observed that there was more good in him than people thought, he was in fact a noble character twisted the wrong way by clumsy and mistaken handling.

Brian Osmond was by no means bigoted; he had, moreover, known those who were intimate with Raeburn, and consequently had heard enough of the truth about him to disbelieve the gross libels which were constantly being circulated by the unscrupulous among his opponents. Still, as on that November afternoon he watched Raeburn

and his daughter down Southampton Row, he was conscious that for the first time he fully regarded the atheist as a fellow-man. The fact was, that Raeburn had for long years been the champion of a hated cause; he had braved the full flood of opposition; and like an isolated rock had been the mark for so much of the rage and fury of the elements that people who knew him only by name had really learned to regard him more as a target than as a man. It was who could hit him hardest, who could most effectually baffle and ruin him; while the quieter spirits contented themselves with rarely mentioning his obnoxious name, and endeavouring as far as possible to ignore his existence. Brian felt that till now he had followed with the multitude to do evil. He had, as far as possible, ignored his existence; had even been rather annoyed when his father had once publicly urged that Raeburn should be treated with as much justice and courtesy and consideration as if he had been a Christian. He had been vexed that his father should suffer on behalf of such a man, had been half-inclined to put down the scorn and contempt and anger of the narrow-minded to the atheist's account. The feeling had perhaps been natural, but all was changed now; he only revered his father all the more for having suffered in an unpopular cause. With some eagerness, he went back into the shop to see if he could gather any more particulars from the old bookseller. Charles Osmond had, however, finished his purchases and his conversation, and was ready to go.

"The second house in Guilford Terrace, you say," he observed, turning at the door. "Thank you, I shall be sure to find it. Good-day." Then, turning to his son, he added, "I had no idea we were such near neighbours!

Did you hear what he told me? Mr. Raeburn lives in Guilford Terrace."

"What, that miserable blind-alley, do you mean, at the other side of the square?"

"Yes, and I'm just going round there now, for our friend, the 'Bookworm,' tells me he has heard it rumoured that some unscrupulous person, who is going to answer Mr. Raeburn this evening, has hired a band of roughs to make a disturbance at the meeting. Fancy how indignant Donovan would be! I only wish he were here to take word to Mr. Raeburn."

"Will he not most likely have heard from some other source?" said Brian.

"Possibly; but I shall go round and see. Such abominations ought to be put down, and if by our own side all the better."

Brian was only too glad that his father should go, and indeed, he would probably have wished to take the message himself had not his mind been set upon getting the best edition of Longfellow to be found in all London for his ideal. So, at the turning into Guilford Square, the father and son parted.

The bookseller's information had roused in Charles Osmond a keen sense of indignation; he walked on rapidly as soon as he had left his son, and in a very few minutes had reached the gloomy entrance to Guilford Terrace. It was currently reported that Raeburn made fabulous sums by his work, and lived in great luxury; but the real fact was that, whatever his income, few men led so self-denying a life, or voluntarily endured such privations. Charles Osmond could not help wishing that he could bring some of the intolerant with him down that gloomy little alley, to the door of that comfortless lodging-house.

He rang, and was admitted into the narrow passage, then shown into the private study of the great man. The floor was uncarpeted, the window uncurtained, the room was almost dark; but a red glow of firelight served to show a large writing-table strewn with papers, and walls literally lined with books; also on the hearthrug a little figure curled up in the most unconventionally comfortable attitude, dividing her attention between making toast and fondling a loud-purring cat.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE FROM ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW.

Toleration an attack on Christianity? What, then, are we to come to this pass, to suppose that nothing can support Christianity, but the principles of persecution? . . . I am persuaded that toleration, so far from being an attack on Christianity, becomes the best and surest support that can possibly be given to it. . . . Toleration is good for all, or it is good for none. . . . God forbid. I may be mistaken, but I take toleration to be a part of religion.

BURKE.

ERICA was, apparently, well used to receiving strangers. She put down the toasting-fork, but kept the cat in her arms, as she rose to greet Charles Osmond, and her frank and rather childlike manner fascinated him almost as much as it had fascinated Brian.

"My father will be home in a few minutes," she said, "I almost wonder you didn't meet him in the square; he has only just gone to send off a telegram. Can you wait? Or will you leave a message?"

"I will wait, if I may," said Charles Osmond. "Oh, don't trouble about a light, I like this dimness very well, and, please, don't let me interrupt you."

Erica relinquished a vain search for candle-lighters, and took up her former position on the hearthrug with her toasting-fork.

"I like the gloaming, too," she said. "It's almost the only nice thing which is economical! Everything else that one likes specially costs too much! I wonder whether people with money do enjoy all the great treats."

"Very soon grow *blasé*, I expect," said Charles Osmond. "The essence of a treat is rarity, you see."

"I suppose it is. But I think I could enjoy ever so many things for years and years without growing *blasé*," said Erica. "Sometimes I like just to fancy what life might be if there were no tiresome Christians, and bigots, and law-suits."

Charles Osmond laughed to himself in the dim light! the remark was made with such perfect sincerity, and it evidently had not dawned on the speaker that she could be addressing any but one of her father's followers. Yet the words saddened him too. He just caught a glimpse through them of life viewed from a directly opposite point.

"Your father has a law-suit going on now, has he not?" he observed after a little pause.

"Oh, yes, there is almost always one either looming in the distance or actually going on. I don't think I can ever remember the time when we were quite free. It must feel very funny to have no worries of that kind. I think, if there wasn't always this great load of debt tied round our necks like a mill-stone, I should feel almost light enough to fly! And then it *is* hard to read in some of those horrid religious papers that father lives an easy-going life. Did you see a dreadful paragraph last week in the *Church Chronicle*?"

"Yes, I did," said Charles Osmond, sadly.

"It always has been the same," said Erica. "Father has a delightful story about an old gentleman who at one of his lectures accused him of being rich and self-indulgent—it was a great many years ago, when I was a baby, and father was nearly killing himself with overwork—and he just got up and gave the people the whole history of his day, and it turned out that he had had nothing to eat. Mustn't the old gentleman have felt delightfully done? I always wonder how he looked when he heard about it, and whether after that he believed that atheists are not necessarily everything that's bad."

"I hope such days as those are over for Mr. Raeburn," said Charles Osmond, touched both by the anecdote and by the loving admiration of the speaker.

"I don't know," said Erica, sadly. "It has been getting steadily worse for the last few years; we have had to give up thing after thing. Before long I shouldn't wonder if these rooms in what father calls 'Persecution Alley' grew too expensive for us. But, after all, it is this sort of thing which makes our own people love him so much, don't you think?"

"I have no doubt it is," said Charles Osmond, thoughtfully.

And then for a minute or two there was silence. Erica, having finished her toasting, stirred the fire into a blaze, and Charles Osmond sat watching the fair, childish face which looked lovelier than ever in the soft glow of the firelight. What would her future be, he wondered. She seemed too delicate and sensitive for the stormy atmosphere in which she lived. Would the hard life embitter her, or would she sink under it? But there was a certain curve of resoluteness about her well-formed chin which was sufficient answer to the second question, while

he could not but think that the best safe-guard against the danger of bitterness lay in her very evident love and loyalty to her father.

Erica in the meantime sat stroking her cat Friskarina, and wondering a little who her visitor could be. She liked him very much, and could not help responding to the bright kindly eyes which seemed to plead for confidence; though he was such an entire stranger, she found herself quite naturally opening out her heart to him.

"I am to take notes at my father's meeting to-night," she said, breaking the silence, "and perhaps write the account of it afterwards too; and there's such a delightfully funny man coming to speak on the other side."

"Mr. Randolph, is it not?"

"Yes, a sort of male Mrs. Malaprop, Oh, such fun!" and at the remembrance of some past encounter, Erica's eyes positively danced with laughter. But the next minute she was very grave.

"I came to speak to Mr. Raeburn about this evening," said Charles Osmond. "Do you know if he has heard of a rumour that this Mr. Randolph has hired a band of roughs to interrupt the meeting?"

Erica made an indignant exclamation.

"Perhaps that was what the telegram was about," she continued, after a moment's thought. "We found it here when we came in. Father said nothing, but went out very quickly to answer it. Oh! now we shall have a dreadful time of it, I suppose, and perhaps he'll get hurt again. I did hope they had given up that sort of thing."

She looked so troubled that Charles Osmond regretted he had said anything, and hastened to assure her that what he had heard was the merest rumour, and very possibly not true.

"I am afraid," she said, "it is too bad not to be true."

It struck Charles Osmond that that was about the saddest little sentence he had ever heard.

Partly wishing to change the subject, partly from real interest, he made some remark about a lovely little picture, the only one in the room; its frame was lighted up by the flickering blaze, and even in the imperfect light he could see that the subject was treated in no ordinary way. It was a little bit of the Thames far away from London, with a bank of many-tinted trees on one side, and out beyond a range of low hills, purple in the evening light. In the sky was a rosy sunset glow, melting above into saffron colour, and this was reflected in the water, gilding and mellowing the foreground of sedge and water-lilies. But what made the picture specially charming was that the artist had really caught the peculiar solemn stillness of evening; merely to look at that quiet, peaceful river brought a feeling of hush and calmness. It seemed a strange picture to find as the sole ornament in the study of a man who had all his life been fighting the world.

Erica brightened up again, and seemed to forget her anxiety when he questioned her as to the artist.

"There is such a nice story about that picture," she said, "I always like to look at it. It was about two years ago, one very cold winter's day, and a woman came with some oil-paintings which she was trying to sell for her husband, who was ill; he was rather a good artist, but had been in bad health for a long time, till at last she had really come to hawking about his pictures in this way, because they were in such dreadful distress. Father was very much worried just then, there was a horrid libel case going on, and that morning he was very busy, and

he sent the woman away rather sharply, and said he had no time to listen to her. Then presently he was vexed with himself because she really had looked in great trouble, and he thought he had been harsh, and, though he was dreadfully pressed for time, he would go out into the square to see if he couldn't find her again. I went with him, and we had walked all round and had almost given her up, when we caught sight of her coming out of a house on the opposite side. And then it was so nice, father spoke so kindly to her, and found out more about her history, and said that he was too poor to buy her pictures; but she looked dreadfully tired and cold, so he asked her to come in and rest, and she came and sat by the fire, and stayed to dinner with us, and we looked at her pictures, because she seemed so proud of them and liked us to. One of them was that little river-scene, which father took a great fancy to, and praised a great deal. She left us her address, and later on, when the libel case was ended, and father had got damages, and so had a little spare money, he sent some to this poor artist, and they were so grateful; though, do you know, I think the dinner pleased them more than the money, and they would insist on sending this picture to father. I'll light the gas, and then you'll see it better."

She twisted a piece of paper into a spill, and put an end to the gloaming. Charles Osmond stood up to get a nearer view of the painting, and Erica, too, drew nearer, and looked at it for a minute in silence.

"Father took me up the Thames once," she said, by-and-by. "It was so lovely. Some day, when all these persecutions are over, we are going to have a beautiful tour and see all sorts of places. But I don't know when they will be over! As soon as one bigot——"

she broke off suddenly, with a stifled exclamation of dismay.

Charles Osmond, in the dim light, with his long gray beard, had not betrayed his clerical dress; but, glancing round at him now, she saw at once that the stranger to whom she had spoken so unreservedly was by no means one of her father's followers.

"Well!" he said smiling, half understanding her confusion.

"You are a clergyman!" she almost gasped.

"Yes; why not?"

"I beg your pardon, I never thought—you seemed so much too——"

"Too what?" urged Charles Osmond. Then, as she still hesitated, "Now you must really let me hear the end of that sentence, or I shall imagine everything dreadful!"

"Too nice," murmured Erica, wishing that she could sink through the floor.

But the confession so tickled Charles Osmond that he laughed aloud, and his laughter was so infectious that Erica, in spite of her confusion, could not help joining in it. She had a very keen sense of the ludicrous, and the position was, undoubtedly, a laughable one; still there were certain appalling recollections of the past conversation which soon made her serious again. She had talked of persecutions to one who was, at any rate, on the side of persecutors; had alluded to bigots, and, worst of all, had spoken in no measured terms of "tiresome Christians."

She turned, rather shyly, and yet with a touch of dignity, to her visitor, and said,

"It was very careless of me not to notice more; but it was dark, and I am not used to seeing any but our

own people here. I am afraid I said things which must have hurt you; I wish you had stopped me."

The beautiful colour had spread and deepened in her cheeks, and there was something indescribably sweet and considerate in her tone of apology. Charles Osmond was touched by it.

"It is I who should apologise," he said. "I am not at all sure that I was justified in sitting there quietly, knowing that you were under a delusion; but it is always very delightful to me in this artificial world to meet any one who talks quite naturally, and the interest of hearing your view of the question kept me silent. You must forgive me, and as you know I am too nice to be a clergyman——"

"Oh, I beg your pardon! How rude I have been," cried Erica, blushing anew; "but you did make me say it."

"Of course; and I take it as a high compliment from you," said Charles Osmond, laughing again at the recollection. "Come, may we not seal our friendship? We have been sufficiently frank with each other to be something more than acquaintances for the future."

Erica held out her hand and found it taken in a strong, firm clasp, which somehow conveyed much more than an ordinary hand-shake.

"And after all, you *are* too nice for a clergyman!" she thought to herself. Then, as a fresh idea crossed her mind, she suddenly exclaimed, "But you came to tell us about Mr. Randolph's roughs, did you not? How came you to care that we should know beforehand?"

"Why, naturally, I hoped that a disturbance might be stopped."

"Is it natural?" questioned Erica. "I should have

thought it more natural for you to think with your own party."

"But peace and justice and freedom of speech must all stand before party questions."

"Yet you think that we are wrong, and that Christianity is right?"

"Yes; but to my mind perfect justice is part of Christianity."

"Oh," said Erica, in a tone which meant unutterable things.

"You think that Christians do not show perfect justice to you?" said Charles Osmond, reading her thoughts.

"I can't say I think they do," she replied. Then, suddenly firing up at the recollection of her afternoon's experiences, she said, "They are not just to us, though they preach justice; they are not loving, though they talk about love! If they want us to think their religion true, I wonder they don't practise it a little more and preach it less. What is the use of talking of 'brotherly kindness and charity,' when they hardly treat us like human beings; when they make up wicked lies about us, and will hardly let us sit in the same room with them!"

"Come, now, we really are sitting in the same room," said Charles Osmond, smiling.

"Oh, dear, what am I to do!" exclaimed Erica. "I can't remember that you are one of them! you are so very unlike most."

"I think," said Charles Osmond, "you have come across some very bad specimens."

Erica in her heart considered her visitor as the exception which proved the rule; but, not wishing to be caught tripping again, she resolved to say no more upon the subject.

"Let us talk of something else," she said.

"Something nicer?" said Charles Osmond, with a little mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"Safer," said Erica, laughing. "But stop, I hear my father."

She went out into the passage to meet him. Charles Osmond heard her explaining his visit and the news he had brought, heard Raeburn's brief responses; then, in a few moments, the two entered the room, a picturesque-looking couple, the clergyman thought: the tall, stately man, with his broad forehead and overshadowing masses of auburn hair; the little, eager-faced, impetuous girl, so winsome in her unconventional frankness.

The conversation became a trifle more ceremonious, though with Erica perched on the arm of her father's chair, ready to squeeze his hand at every word which pleased her, it could hardly become stiff. Raeburn had just heard the report of Mr. Randolph's scheme, and had already taken precautionary measures; but he was surprised and gratified that Charles Osmond should have troubled to bring him word about it. The two men talked on with the most perfect friendliness; and by-and-by, to Erica's great delight, Charles Osmond expressed a wish to be present at the meeting that night, and made inquiries as to the time and place.

"Oh, couldn't you stay to tea and go with us?" she exclaimed, forgetting for the third time that he was a clergyman, and offering the ready hospitality she would have offered to any one else.

"I should be delighted," he said, smiling, "if you can really put up with one of the cloth."

Raeburn, amused at his daughter's spontaneous hospitality, and pleased with the friendly acceptance it had

met with, was quite ready to second the invitation. Erica was delighted; she carried off the cat and the toast into the next room, eager to tell her mother all about the visitor.

"The most delightful man, mother; not a bit like a clergyman! I didn't find out for ever so long what he was, and said all sorts of dreadful things; but he didn't mind, and was not the least offended."

"When will you learn to be cautious, I wonder," said Mrs. Raeburn, smiling. "You are a shocking little chatterbox."

And as Erica flitted busily about, arranging the tea-table, her mother watched her half amusedly, half anxiously. She had always been remarkably frank and outspoken, and there was something so transparently sincere about her, that she seldom gave offence. But the mother could not help wondering how it would be as she grew older, and mixed with a greater variety of people. In fact, in every way she was anxious about the child's future, for Erica's was a somewhat perplexing character, and seemed very ill-fitted for her position.

Eric Haeberlein had once compared her to a violin, and there was a good deal of truth in his idea. She was very sensitive, responding at once to the merest touch, and easily moved to admiration and devoted love, or to strong indignation. Naturally high-spirited, she was subject, too, to fits of depression, and was always either in the heights or the depths. Yet with all these characteristics was blended her father's indomitable courage and tenacity. Though feeling the thorns of life far more keenly than most people, she was one of those who will never yield; though pricked and wounded by outward events, she would never be conquered by circumstance. At present her capabilities for adoration, which were very

great, were lavished in two directions: in the abstract she worshipped intellect, in the concrete she worshipped her father.

From the grief and indignation of the afternoon, she had passed with extraordinary rapidity to a state of merriment, which would have been incomprehensible to one who did not understand her peculiarly complex character. Mrs. Raeburn listened with a good deal of amusement to her racy description of Charles Osmond.

"Strange that this should have happened so soon after our talk this afternoon," she said, musingly. "Perhaps it is as well that you should have a glimpse of the other side, against which you were inveighing, or you might be growing narrow."

"He is much too good to belong to them!" said Erica, enthusiastically.

As she spoke, Raeburn entered, bringing the visitor with him, and they all sat down to their meal, Erica pouring out tea and attending to every one's wants, fondling her cat, and listening to the conversation, with all the time a curious perception that to sit down to table with one of her father's opponents was a very novel experience. She could not help speculating as to the thoughts and impressions of her companions. Her mother was, she thought, pleased and interested, for about her worn face there was the look of contentment which invariably came when for a time the bitterness of the struggle of life was broken by any sign of friendliness. Her father was—as he generally was in his own house—quiet, gentle in manner, ready to be both an attentive and an interested listener. This gift he had almost as markedly as the gift of speech; he at once perceived that his guest was no ordinary man, and by a sort of instinct

he had discovered on what subjects he was best calculated to speak, and wherein they could gain most from him. Charles Osmond's thoughts she could only speculate about; but that he was ready to take them all as friends, and did not regard them as a different order of being, was plain.

The conversation had drifted into regions of abstruse science, when Erica, who had been listening attentively, was altogether diverted by the entrance of the servant, who brought her a brown-paper parcel. Eagerly opening it, she was almost bewildered by the delightful surprise of finding a complete edition of Longfellow's poems, bound in dark-blue morocco. Inside was written, "From another admirer of 'Hiawatha.'"

She started up with a rapturous exclamation, and the two men paused in their talk, each unable to help watching the beautiful little face all aglow with happiness. Erica almost danced round the room with her new treasure.

"What *heavenly* person can have sent me this?" she cried. "Look, father! Did you ever see such a beauty?"

Science went to the winds, and Raeburn gave all his sympathy to Erica and Longfellow.

"The very thing you were wishing for! Who could have sent it?"

"I can't think! It can't be Tom, because I know he's spent all his money, and Auntie would never call herself an admirer of 'Hiawatha,' nor Herr Haeberlein, nor Monsieur Noïrol, nor any one I can think of."

"Dealings with the fairies," said Raeburn, smiling. "Your beggar-child with the scones suddenly transformed into a beneficent rewarder."

"Not from you, father?"

Raeburn laughed.

"A pretty substantial fairy for you! No, no, I had no hand in it. I can't give you presents while I am in debt, my bairn."

"Oh, isn't it jolly to get what one wants!" said Erica, with a fervour which made the three grown-up people laugh.

"Very jolly," said Raeburn, giving her a little mute caress. "But now, Eric, please to go back and eat something, or I shall have my reporter fainting in the middle of a speech."

She obeyed, carrying away the book with her, and enlivening them with extracts from it; once delightedly discovering a most appropriate passage.

"Why, of course!" she exclaimed, "you and Mr. Osmond, father, are smoking the Peace-Pipe!" And with much force and animation she read them bits from the first canto.

Raeburn left the room before long to get ready for his meeting; but Erica still lingered over her new treasure, putting it down at length with great reluctance to prepare her note-book and sharpen her pencil.

"Isn't that a delightful bit where Hiawatha was angry," she said; "it has been running in my head all day—

'For his heart was hot within him,
Like a living coal his heart was.'

That's what I shall feel like to-night when Mr. Randolph attacks father."

She ran upstairs to dress, and, as the door closed upon her, Mrs. Raeburn turned to Charles Osmond with a sort of apology.

"She finds it very hard not to speak out her thoughts; it will often get her into trouble, I am afraid."

"It is too fresh and delightful to be checked though,"

said Charles Osmond; "I assure you she has taught me many a lesson to-night."

The mother talked on almost unreservedly about the subject that was evidently nearest her heart—the difficulties of Erica's education, the harshness they so often met with, the harm it so evidently did the child—till the subject of the conversation came down again, much too excited and happy to care just then for any unkind treatment. Had she not got a Longfellow of her very own, and did not that unexpected pleasure make up for a thousand privations and discomforts?

Yet, with all her childishness and impetuosity, Erica was womanly too, as Charles Osmond saw by the way she waited on her mother, thinking of everything which the invalid could possibly want while they were gone, brightening the whole place with her sunshiny presence. Whatever else was lacking, there was no lack of love in this house. The tender considerateness which softened Erica's impetuosity in her mother's presence, the loving comprehension between parent and child, was very beautiful to see.

CHAPTER IV.

"SUPPOSING IT IS TRUE!"

A man who strives earnestly and perseveringly to convince others, at least convinces us that he is convinced himself.—*Guesses at Truth.*

THE rainy afternoon had given place to a fine and starlight night. Erica, apparently in high spirits, walked between her father and Charles Osmond.

"Mother won't be anxious about us," she said. "She has not heard a word about Mr. Randolph's plans. I was so afraid some one would speak about it at tea-time, and then she would have been in a fright all the evening, and would not have liked my going."

"Mr. Randolph is both energetic and unscrupulous," said Raeburn. "But I doubt if even he would set his roughs upon you, little one, unless he has become as blood-thirsty as a certain old Scotch psalm we used to sing."

"What was that?" questioned Erica.

"I forget the beginning, but the last verse always had a sort of horrible fascination for us—

'How happy should that trooper be
Who, riding on a naggie,
Should take thy little children up,
And dash them 'gin the craggie!'"

Charles Osmond and Erica laughed heartily.

"They will only dash you against metaphorical rocks in the nineteenth century," continued Raeburn. "I remember wondering why the old clerk in my father's church always sang that verse so lustily; but you see we

have exactly the same spirit now, only in a more civilised form, barbarity changed to polite cruelty, as for instance the way you were treated this afternoon."

"Oh, don't talk about that," said Erica, quickly, "I am going to enjoy my Longfellow and forget the rest."

In truth, Charles Osmond was struck with this both in the father and daughter; each had a way of putting back their bitter thoughts, of dwelling whenever it was possible on the brighter side of life. He knew that Raeburn was involved in most harassing litigation, was burdened with debt, was confronted everywhere with bitter and often violent opposition; yet he seemed to live above it all, for there was a wonderful repose about him, an extraordinary serenity in his aspect, which would have seemed better fitted to a hermit than to one who had spent his life in fighting against desperate odds. One thing was quite clear, the man was absolutely convinced that he was suffering for the truth, and was ready to endure anything in what he considered the service of his fellow-men. He did not seem particularly anxious as to the evening's proceedings. On the whole, they were rather a merry party as they walked along Gower Street to the station.

But when they got out again at their destination, and walked through the busy streets to the hall where the lecture was to be given, a sort of seriousness fell upon all three. They were each going to work in their different ways for what they considered the good of humanity, and instinctively a silence grew and deepened.

Erica was the first to break it as they came in sight of the hall.

"What a crowd there is!" she exclaimed. "Are these Mr. Randolph's roughs?"

"We can put up with them outside," said Raeburn; but Charles Osmond noticed that as he spoke he drew the child nearer to him, with a momentary look of trouble in his face, as though he shrank from taking her through the rabble. Erica, on the other hand, looked interested and perfectly fearless. With great difficulty they forced their way on, hooted and yelled at by the mob, who, however, made no attempt at violence. At length, reaching the shelter of the entrance lobby, Raeburn left them for a moment, pausing to give directions to the doorkeepers. Just then, to his great surprise, Charles Osmond caught sight of his son standing only a few paces from them. His exclamation of astonishment made Erica look up. Brian came forward eagerly to meet them.

"You here!" exclaimed his father, with a latent suspicion confirmed into a certainty. "This is my son, Miss Raeburn."

Brian had not dreamed of meeting her, he had waited about curious to see how Raeburn would get on with the mob; it was with a strange pang of rapture and dismay that he had seen his fair little ideal. That she should be in the midst of that hooting mob made his heart throb with indignation, yet there was something so sweet in her grave steadfast face that he was, nevertheless, glad to have witnessed the scene. Her colour was rather heightened, her eyes bright but very quiet, yet as Charles Osmond spoke, and she looked at Brian, her face all at once lighted up, and with an irresistible smile she exclaimed, in the most childlike of voices,

"Why, it's my umbrella man!" The informality of the exclamation seemed to make them at once something more than ordinary acquaintances. They told Charles Osmond of their encounter in the afternoon, and in a

very few minutes Brian, hardly knowing whether he was not in some strange dream, found himself sitting with his father and Erica in a crowded lecture hall, realising with an intensity of joy and an intensity of pain how near he was to the queen of his heart and yet how far from her.

The meeting was quite orderly. Though Raeburn was addressing many who disagreed with him, he had evidently got the whole and undivided attention of his audience; and indeed his gifts both as rhetorician and orator were so great that they must have been either wilfully deaf or obtuse who, when under the spell of his extraordinary earnestness and eloquence, could resist listening. Not a word was lost on Brian; every sentence which emphasised the great difference of belief between himself and his love seemed to engrave itself on his heart; no minutest detail of that evening escaped him.

He saw the tall, commanding figure of the orator, the vast sea of upturned faces below, the eager attention imprinted on all, sometimes a wave of sympathy and approval sweeping over them, resulting in a storm of applause, at times a more divided disapproval, or a shout of "No, no," which invariably roused the speaker to a more vigorous, clear, and emphatic repetition of the questioned statement. And, through all, he was ever conscious of the young girl at his side, who, with her head bent over her note-book, was absorbed in her work. While the most vital questions of life were being discussed, he was yet always aware of that hand travelling rapidly to and fro, of the pages hurriedly turned, of the quick yet weary looking change of posture.

Though not without a strong vein of sarcasm, Raeburn's speech was, on the whole, temperate; it certainly should have been met with consideration. But, unfortun-

ately, Mr. Randolph was incapable of seeing any good in his opponent; his combative instincts were far stronger than his Christianity, and Brian, who had winced many times while listening to the champion of atheism, was even more keenly wounded by the champion of his own cause. Abusive epithets abounded in his retort; at last he left the subject under discussion altogether, and launched into personalities of the most objectionable kind. Raeburn sat with folded arms, listening with a sort of cold dignity. He looked very different now from the genial-mannered, quiet man whom Charles Osmond had seen in his own home but an hour or two ago. There was a peculiar look in his tawny eyes hardly to be described in words, a look which was hard, and cold, and steady. It told of an originally sensitive nature, inured to ill-treatment; of a strong will which had long ago steeled itself to endure; of a character which, though absolutely refusing to yield to opposition, had grown slightly bitter, even slightly vindictive in the process.

Brian could only watch in silent pain the little figure beside him. Once at some violent term of abuse she looked up, and glanced for a moment at the speaker; he just caught a swift, indignant flash from her bright eyes, then her head was bent lower than before over her notebook, and the carnation deepened in her cheek, whilst her pencil sped over the paper fast and furiously. Presently came a sharp retort from Raeburn, ending with the perfectly warrantable accusation that Mr. Randolph was wandering from the subject of the evening merely to indulge his personal spite. The audience was beginning to be roused by the unfairness, and a storm might have ensued had not Mr. Randolph unintentionally turned the whole proceedings from tragedy to farce.

Indignant at Raeburn's accusation, he sprang to his feet and began a vigorous protest.

"Mr. Chairman, I denounce my opponent as a liar. His accusation is utterly false. I deny the allegation, and I scorn the allegator——!"

He was interrupted by a shout of laughter, the whole assembly was convulsed, even Erica's anger changed to mirth.

"Fit for *Punch*," she whispered to Brian, her face all beaming with merriment.

Raeburn, whose grave face had also relaxed into a smile, suddenly stood up, and, with a sort of dry Scotch humour, remarked,

"My enemies have compared me to many obnoxious things, but never till to-night have I been called a crocodile! Possibly Mr. Randolph has been reading of the crocodiles recently dissected at Paris. It has been discovered that they are almost brainless, and, being without reason, are probably animated by a violent instinct of destruction. I believe, however, that the power of their 'jaw' is unsurpassed!"

Then, amidst shouts of laughter and applause, he sat down again, leaving the field to the much discomfited Mr. Randolph.

Much harm had been done that evening to the cause of Christianity. The sympathies of the audience could not be with the weak and unmannerly Mr. Randolph; they were Englishmen, and were, of course, inclined to side with the man who had been unjustly dealt with, who, moreover, had really spoken to them—had touched their very hearts.

The field was practically lost when, to the surprise of all, another speaker came forward. Erica, who knew

that their side had had the best of it, felt a thrill of admiration when she saw Charles Osmond move slowly to the front of the platform. She was very tired, but out of a sort of gratitude for his friendliness, a readiness to do him honour, she strained her energies to take down his speech verbatim. It was not a long one, it was hardly, perhaps, to be called a speech at all, it was rather as if the man had thrown his very self into the breach made by the unhappy wrangle of the evening.

He spoke of the universal brotherhood and of the wrong done to it by bitterness and strife; he stood there as the very incarnation of brotherliness, and the people, whether they agreed with him or not, loved him. In the place where the religion of Christ had been reviled as well by the Christian as by the atheist, he spoke of the revealer of the Father, and a hush fell on the listening men; he spoke of the Founder of the great brotherhood, and by the very reality, by the fervour of his convictions, touched a new chord in many a heart. It was no time for argument, the meeting was almost over; he scarcely attempted an answer to many of the difficulties and objections raised by Raeburn earlier in the evening. But there was in his ten-minutes' speech the whole essence of Christianity, the spirit of loving sacrifice of self, the strength of an absolute certainty which no argument, however logical, can shake, the extraordinary power which breathes in the assertion, "I *know* Him whom I have believed."

To more than one of Raeburn's followers there came just the slightest agitation of doubt, the questioning whether these things might not be. For the first time in her life the question began to stir in Erica's heart. She had heard many advocates of Christianity, and had re-

garded them much as we might regard Buddhist missionaries speaking of a religion that had had its day and was now only fit to be discarded, or perhaps studied as an interesting relic of the past, about which in its later years many corruptions had gathered.

Raeburn, being above all things a just man, had been determined to give her mind no bias in favour of his own views, and as a child he had left her perfectly free. But there was a certain Scotch proverb which he did not call to mind, that "As the auld cock crows, the young cock learns." When the time came at which he considered her old enough really to study the Bible for herself, she had already learnt from bitter experience that Christianity—at any rate, what called itself Christianity—was the religion whose votaries were constantly slandering and ill-treating her father, and that all the privations and troubles of their life were directly or indirectly due to it. She, of course, identified the conduct of the most unfriendly and persecuting with the religion itself; it could hardly be otherwise.

But to-night as she toiled away bravely acting up to her lights, taking down the opponent's speech to the best of her abilities, though predisposed to think it all a meaningless rhapsody, the faintest attempt at a question began to take shape in her mind. It did not form itself exactly into words, but just lurked there like a cloud-shadow,—“supposing Christianity were true?”

All doubt is pain. Even this faint beginning of doubt in her creed made Erica dreadfully uncomfortable. Yet she could not regret that Charles Osmond had spoken, even though she imagined him to be greatly mistaken, and feared that that uncomfortable question might have been suggested to others among the audience. She could

not wish that the speech had not been made, for it had revealed the nobility of the man, his broad-hearted love, and she instinctively revered all the really great and good, however widely different their creeds.

Brian tried in vain to read her thoughts; but as soon as the meeting was over her temporary seriousness vanished, and she was once more almost a child again, ready to be amused by anything. She stood for a few minutes talking to the two Osmonds; then, catching sight of an acquaintance a little way off, she bade them a hasty good-night, much to Brian's chagrin, and hurried forward with a warmth of greeting which he could only hope was appreciated by the thick-set, honest-looking mechanic who was the happy recipient. When they left the hall, she was still deep in conversation with him.

The fates were kind, however, to Brian that day; they were just too late for a train, and before the next one arrived, Raeburn and Erica were seen slowly coming down the steps, and in another minute had joined them on the platform. Charles Osmond and Raeburn fell into an amicable discussion, and Brian, to his great satisfaction, was left to an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* with Erica. There had been no further demonstration by the crowd, and Erica, now that the anxiety was over, was ready to make fun of Mr. Randolph and his band, checking herself every now and then for fear of hurting her companion, but breaking forth again and again into irresistible merriment as she recalled the "alligator" incident and other grotesque utterances. All too soon they reached their destination. There was still, however, a ten minutes' walk before them, a walk which Brian never forgot. The wind was high, and it seemed to excite Erica; he could always remember exactly how she looked, her eyes bright

and shining, her short, auburn hair all blown about by the wind, one stray wave lying across the quaint little seal-skin hat. He remembered too, how, in the middle of his argument, Raeburn had stepped forward and had wrapped a white woollen scarf more closely round the child, securing the fluttering ends. Brian would have liked to do it himself had he dared, and yet it pleased him, too, to see the father's thoughtfulness; perhaps, in that "touch of nature," he, for the first time, fully recognised his kinship with the atheist.

Erica talked to him in the meantime with a delicious, childlike frankness, gave him an enthusiastic account of her friend Hazeldine, the working-man whom he had seen her speaking to, and unconsciously revealed in her free conversation a great deal of the life she led, a busy, earnest, self-denying life Brian could see. When they reached the place of their afternoon's encounter, she al-luded merrily to what she called the "charge of umbrellas."

"Who would have thought, now, that in a few hours' time we should have learnt to know each other!" she exclaimed. "It has been altogether the very oddest day, a sort of sandwich of good and bad, two bits of the dry bread of persecution, but in between, you and Mr. Osmond and my beautiful new Longfellow."

Brian could not help laughing at the simile, and was not a little pleased to hear the reference to his book; but his amusement was soon dispelled by a grim little incident. Just at that minute they happened to pass an undertaker's cart which was standing at the door of one of the houses; a coffin was borne across the pavement in front of them. Erica, with a quick exclamation, put her hand on his arm and shrank back to make room for the bearer to pass. Looking down at her, he saw that she

was quite pale. The coffin was carried into the house and they passed on.

"How I do hate seeing anything like that!" she exclaimed. Then looking back and up to the windows of the house, "Poor people! I wonder whether they are very sad. It seems to make all the world dark when one comes across such things. Father thinks it is good to be reminded of the end, that it makes one more eager to work, but he doesn't even wish for anything after death, nor do any of the best people I know. It is silly of me, but I never can bear to think of quite coming to an end, I suppose because I am not so unselfish as the others."

"Or may it not be a natural instinct, which is implanted in all, which perhaps you have not yet crushed by argument."

Erica shook her head.

"More likely to be a little bit of one of my covenanting ancestors coming out in me. Still I own that the hope of the hereafter is the one point in which you have the better of it. Life must seem very easy if you believe that all will be made up to you and all wrong set right after you are dead. You see we have rather hard measure here, and don't expect anything at all by-and-by. But all the same I am always rather ashamed of this instinct, or selfishness, or Scottish inheritance, which ever it is!"

"Ashamed! why should you be?"

"It is a sort of weakness, I think, which strong characters like my father are without. You see he cares so much for every one, and thinks so much of making the world a little less miserable in this generation, but most of my love is for him and for my mother; and so when

I think of death—of their death——” she broke off abruptly.

“Yet do not call it selfishness,” said Brian, with a slightly choked feeling, for there had been a depth of pain in Erica’s tone. “My father, who has just that love of humanity of which you speak, has still the most absolute belief in—yes, and longing for—immortality. It is no selfishness in him.”

“I am sure it is not,” said Erica, warmly, “I shouldn’t think he could be selfish in any way. I am glad he spoke to-night; it does one good to hear a speech like that, even if one doesn’t agree with it. I wish there were a few more clergymen like him, then perhaps the tolerance and brotherliness he spoke of might become possible. But it must be a long way off, or it would not seem such an unheard-of thing that I should be talking like this to you. Why, it is the first time in my whole life that I have spoken to a Christian except on the most everyday subjects.”

“Then I hope you won’t let it be the last,” said Brian.

“I should like to know Mr. Osmond, better,” said Erica, “for you know it seems very extraordinary to me that a clever scientific man can speak as he spoke to-night. I should like to know how you reconcile all the contradictions, how you *can* believe what seems to me so unlikely, how even if you do believe in a God you can think Him good while the world is what it is. If there is a good God why doesn’t He make us all know Him, and end all the evil and cruelty?”

Brian did not reply for a moment. The familiar gaslit street, the usual number of passengers, the usual careworn or viceworn faces passing by, damp pavements, muddy roads, fresh winter wind, all seemed so natural,

but to talk of the deepest things in heaven and earth was so unnatural! He was a very reserved man, but looking down at the eager, questioning face beside him his reserve all at once melted. He spoke very quietly, but in a voice which showed Erica that he was, at least, as she expressed it "honestly deluded." Evidently he did from his very heart believe what he said.

"But how are we to judge what is best?" he replied. "My belief is that God is slowly and gradually educating the world, not forcing it on unnaturally, but drawing it on step by step, making it work out its own lessons as the best teachers do with their pupils. To me the idea of a steady progression, in which man himself may be a co-worker with God, is far more beautiful than the conception of a Being who does not work by natural laws at all, but arbitrarily causes this and that to be or not to be."

"But then if your God is educating the world, He is educating many of us in ignorance of Himself, in atheism. How can that be good or right? Surely you, for instance, must be rather puzzled when you come across atheists, if you believe in a perfect God, and think atheism the most fearful mistake possible?"

"If I could not believe that God can, and does, educate some of us through atheism I should indeed be miserable," said Brian, with a thrill of pain in his voice which startled Erica. "But I do believe that even atheism, even blank ignorance of Him, may be a stage through which alone some of us can be brought onward. The noblest man I ever knew passed through that stage and I can't think he would have been half the man he is if he had not passed through it."

"I have only known two or three people who from atheists became theists, and they were horrid!" said

Erica, emphatically. “People always are spiteful to the side they have left.”

“You could not say that of my friend,” said Brian, musingly. “I wish you could meet him.”

They had reached the entrance to Guilford Terrace, Raeburn and Charles Osmond overtook them, and the conversation ended abruptly. Perhaps because Erica had made no answer to the last remark, and was conscious of a touch of malice in her former speech, she put a little additional warmth into her farewell. At any rate, there was that which touched Brian’s very heart in the frank innocence of her hand-clasp, in the sweet yet questioning eyes that were raised to his.

He turned away, happier and yet sadder than he had ever been in his life. Not a word passed between him and his father as they crossed the square, but when they reached home they instinctively drew together over the study fire. There was a long silence even then, broken at last by Charles Osmond.

“Well, my son?” he said.

“I cannot see how I can be of the least use to her,” said Brian, abruptly, as if his father had been following the whole of his train of thought, which, indeed, to a certain extent he had.

“Was this afternoon your first meeting?”

“Our first speaking. I have seen her many times, but only to-day realised what she is.”

“Well, your little Undine is very bewitching, and much more than bewitching, true to the core and loyal and loving. If only the hardness of her life does not embitter her, I think she will make a grand woman.”

“Tell me what you did this afternoon,” said Brian, “you must have been some time with them.”

Charles Osmond told him all that had passed; then continued,

"She is, as I said, a fascinating bright little Undine, inclined to be wilful, I should fancy, and with a sort of warmth and quickness about her whole character; in many ways still a child, and yet in others strangely old for her years; on the whole I should say as fair a specimen of the purely natural being as you would often meet with. The spiritual part of her is, I fancy, asleep."

"No, I fancy to-night has made it stir for the first time," said Brian, and he told his father a little of what had passed between himself and Erica.

"And the Longfellow was, I suppose, from you," said Charles Osmond. "I wish you could have seen her delight over it! Words absolutely failed her. I don't think any one else noticed it; but, her own vocabulary coming to an end, she turned to ours, it was 'What *heavenly* person can have sent me this?'"

Brian smiled, but sighed too.

"One talks of the spiritual side remaining untouched," he said, "yet how is it ever to be otherwise than chained and fettered, while such men as that Randolph are recognised as the champions of our cause, while injustice and unkindness meet her at every turn, while it is something rare and extraordinary for a Christian to speak a kind word to her! If to-day she has first realised that Christians need not necessarily behave as brutes, I have realised a little what life is from her point of view."

"Then realising that perhaps you may help her, perhaps another chapter of the old legend may come true, and you may be the means of waking the spirit in your Undine."

"I? Oh no! How can you think of it! You or Dono-

van, perhaps, but even that idea seems to be wildly improbable."

There was something in his humility and sadness which touched his father inexpressibly.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "if you are really prepared for all the suffering this love must bring you, if you mean to take it, and cherish it, and live for it, even though it brings you no gain, but apparent pain and loss, then I think it can only raise both you and your Undine."

Brian knew that not one man in a thousand would have spoken in such a way; his father's unworldliness was borne in upon him as it had never been before. Greatly as he had always revered and loved him, tonight his love and reverence deepened unspeakably—the two were drawn nearer to each other than ever.

It was not the habit in this house to make the most sacred ties of life the butt for ill-timed and ill-judged joking. No knight of old thought or spoke more reverently or with greater reserve of his lady-love than did Brian of Erica. He regarded himself now as one bound to do her service, consecrated from that day forward as her loyal knight.

CHAPTER V.

ERICA'S RESOLVE.

Men are tatoood with their special beliefs like so many South-Sea Islanders; but a real human heart, with Divine love in it, beats with the same glow under all the patterns of all earth's thousand tribes.

O. WENDELL HOLMES.

FOR the next fortnight Brian and Erica continued to pass each other every afternoon in Gower Street, as they had done for so long, the only difference was that now they greeted each other, and occasionally Brian would be rendered happy for the rest of the day by some brief, passing remark from his Undine, or by one of her peculiarly bright smiles. One day, however, she actually stopped; her face was radiant.

"I must just tell you our good news," she said. "My father has won his case, and has got heavy damages."

"I am very glad," said Brian. "It must be a great relief to you all to have it over."

"Immense! Father looks as if a ton's weight had been taken off his mind! Now I hope we shall have a little peace."

With a hasty good-bye, she hurried on, an unusual elasticity in her light footsteps. In Guilford Square she met a political friend of her father's, and was brought once more to a standstill. This time it was a little unwillingly, for Monsieur Noirol teased her unmercifully, and at their last meeting had almost made her angry by talking of a friend of his at Paris who offered untold advantages to any clever and well-educated English girl

who wished to learn the language, and who would in return teach her own. Erica had been made miserable by the mere suggestion that such a situation would suit her; the slightest hint that it might be well for her to go abroad had roused in her a sort of terror lest her father might ever seriously think of the scheme. She had not quite forgiven Monsieur Noirol for having spoken, although the proposal had not been gravely made, and probably only persevered in out of the spirit of teasing. But to-day Monsieur Noirol looked very grave.

"You have heard our good news?" said Erica. "Now don't begin again about Madame Lemercier's school; I don't want to be made cross to-day of all days, when I am so happy!"

"I will tease you no more, dear Mademoiselle," said the Frenchman; but he offered no congratulations, and there was something in his manner which made Erica uneasy.

"Is anything wrong? Has anything happened?" she asked, quickly.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows! It is an evil world, Mademoiselle Erica, as you will realise when you have lived in it as long as I have. But I detain you. Good-bye. *Au revoir!*"

He took off his hat with a flourish, and passed on.

Erica feeling baffled and a little cross, hurried home. Monsieur Noirol had not teased her to-day, but he had been inscrutable and tiresome, and he had made her feel uneasy. She opened the front door, and went at once to her father's study, pausing for a moment at the sound of voices within. She recognised, however, that it was her cousin, Tom Craigie, who was speaking, and without

more delay she entered. Then in a moment she understood why M. Noirol had been so mysterious. Tom was speaking quickly and strongly, and there was a glow of anger on his face. Her father was standing with his back to the mantelpiece, and there was a sort of cold light in his eyes, which filled Erica with dismay. Never in the most anxious days had she seen him look at once so angry, yet so weighed down with care.

"What is the matter?" she questioned, breathlessly, instinctively turning to Tom, whose hot anger was more approachable.

"The scamp of a Christian has gone bankrupt," he said, referring to the defendant in the late action, but too furious to speak very intelligibly.

"Mr. Cheale, you mean?" asked Erica.

"The scoundrel! Yes! So not a farthing of costs and damages shall we see! It is the most fiendish thing ever heard of!"

"Will the costs be very heavy?"

"Heavy! I should think they would indeed!" He named the probable sum; it seemed a fearful addition to the already existing burden of debts.

A look of such pain and perplexity came over Erica's face that Raeburn, for the first time realising what was passing in the room, drew her towards him, his face softening, and the cold angry light in his eyes changing to sadness.

"Never mind, my child," he said, with a sigh. "'Tis a hard blow, but we must bear up. Injustice won't triumph in the end."

There was some hing in his voice and look which made Erica feel dreadfully inclined to cry; but that would have disgraced her for ever in the eyes of stoical Tom,

so she only squeezed his hand hard and tried to think of that far distant future of which she had spoken to Charles Osmond, when there would be no tiresome Christians and bigots and law-suits.

There was, however, one person in the house who was invariably the recipient of all the troubled confidences of others. In a very few minutes Erica had left the study and was curled up beside her mother's couch, talking out unreservedly all her grief, and anger, and perplexity.

Mrs. Raeburn, delicate and invalided as she was, had nevertheless a great deal of influence, though perhaps neither Raeburn, nor Erica, nor warm-hearted Tom Craigie, understood how much she did for them all. She was so unassuming, so little given to unnecessary speech, so reticent, that her life made very little show, while it had become so entirely a matter of course that every one should bring his private troubles to her that it would have seemed extraordinary not to meet with exactly the sympathy and counsel needed. To-day, however, even Mrs. Raeburn was almost too despondent to cheer the others. It comforted Erica to talk to her, but she could not help feeling very miserable as she saw the anxiety and sadness in her mother's face.

"What more can we do, mother?" she questioned. "I can't think of a single thing we can give up."

"I really don't know, dear," said her mother, with a sigh. "We have nothing but the absolute necessities of life now, except indeed your education at the High School, and that is a very trifling expense, and one which cannot be interfered with."

Erica was easily depressed, like most high-spirited persons; but she was not used to seeing either her father or her mother despondent, and the mere strangeness kept

her from going down to the very deepest depths. She had the feeling that at least one of them must try to keep up. Yet, do what she would, that evening was one of the saddest and dreariest she had ever spent. All the excitement of contest was over, and a sort of dead weight of gloom seemed to oppress them. Raeburn was absolutely silent. From the first Erica had never heard him complain, but his anger, and afterwards his intense depression, spoke volumes. Even Tom, her friend and playfellow, seemed changed this evening, grown somehow from a boy to a man; for there was a sternness about him which she had never seen before, and which made the days of their childhood seem far away. And yet it was not so very long ago that she and Tom had been the most light-hearted and careless beings in the world, and had imagined the chief interest of life to consist in tending dormice, and tame rats, and silkworms! She wondered whether they could ever feel free again, whether they could ever enjoy their long Saturday afternoon rambles, or whether this weight of care would always be upon them.

With a very heavy heart she prepared her lessons for the next day, finding it hard to take much interest in Magna Charta and legal enactments in the time of King John, when the legal enactments of to-day were so much more mind-engrossing. Tom was sitting opposite to her writing letters for Raeburn. Once, notwithstanding his grave looks, she hazarded a question.

"Tom," she said, shutting up her *History of the English People*, "Tom, what do you think will happen?"

Tom looked across at her with angry yet sorrowful eyes.

"I think," he said, sternly, "that the chieftain will

try to do the work of ten men at once, and will pay off these debts or die in the attempt."

The "chieftain" was a favourite name among the Raeburnites for their leader, and there was a great deal of the clan feeling among them. The majority of them were earnest, hard-working, thoughtful men, and their society was both powerful and well-organized, while their personal devotion to Raeburn lent a vigour and vitality to the whole body which might otherwise have been lacking. Perhaps comparatively few would have been enthusiastic for the cause of atheism had not that cause been represented by a high-souled, self denying man whom they loved with all their hearts.

The dreary evening ended at length, Erica helped her mother to bed, and then with slow steps climbed up to her little attic room. It was cold and comfortless enough, bare of all luxuries, but even here the walls were lined with books, and Erica's little iron bedstead looked somewhat incongruous, surrounded as it was with dingy-looking volumes, dusty old legal books, works of reference, books atheistical, theological, metaphysical, or scientific. On one shelf, amid this strangely heterogeneous collection, she kept her own particular treasures—Brian's Longfellow, one or two of Dickens' books which Tom had given her, and the beloved old Grimm and Hans Andersen, which had been the friends of her childhood, and which for "old sakes' sake" she had never had the heart to sell. The only other trace of her in the strange little bedroom was in a wonderful array of china animals on the mantelpiece. She was a great animal-lover, and, being a favourite with every one, she received many votive offerings. Her shrine was an amusing one to look at. A green china frog played a tuneless guitar; a pensive monkey gazed with

clasped hands and dreadfully human eyes into futurity; there were sagacious-looking elephants, placid rhinoceroses, rampant hares, two pug dogs clasped in an irrevocable embrace, an enormous lobster, a diminutive polar bear, and in the centre of all a most evil-looking jackdaw about half-an-inch high.

But to-night the childish side of Erica was in abeyance; the cares of womanhood seemed gathering upon her. She put out her candle and sat down in the dark, racking her brain for some plan by which to relieve her father and mother. Their life was growing harder and harder. It seemed to her that poverty in itself was bearable enough, but that the ever-increasing load of debt was not bearable. As long as she could remember, it had always been like a mill-stone tied about their necks, and the ceaseless petty economies and privations seemed of little avail; she felt very much as if she were one of the Danaids, doomed for ever to pour water into a vessel with a hole in it.

Yet in one sense she was better off than many, for these debts were not selfish debts—no one had ever known Raeburn to spend an unnecessary sixpence on himself; all this load had been incurred in the defence of what he considered the truth—by his unceasing struggles for liberty. She was proud of the debts, proud to suffer in what she regarded as the sacred cause; but in spite of that she was almost in despair this evening, the future looked so hopelessly black.

Tom's words rang in her head—"The chieftain will try to do the work of ten men!" What if he overworked himself as he had done once a few years ago? What if he died in the attempt? She wished Tom had not spoken so strongly. In the friendly darkness she did not try to check the tears which would come into her eyes at the

thought. Something must be done! She must in some way help him! And then, all at once, there flashed into her mind Monsieur Noirol's teasing suggestion that she should go to Paris. Here was a way in which, free of all expense, she might finish her education, might practically earn her living! In this way she might indeed help to lighten the load, but it would be at the cost of absolute self-sacrifice. She must leave home, and father and mother, and country!

Erica was not exactly selfish, but she was very young. For a time the thought of the voluntary sacrifice seemed quite unbearable, she could not make up her mind to it.

"Why should I give up all this! Why should prejudice and bigotry spoil my whole life?" she thought, beginning to pace up and down the room with quick, agitated steps. "Why should we suffer because that wretch has gone bankrupt? It is unfair, unjust, it can't be right."

She leant her arms on the window-sill, and looked out into the silent night. The stars were shining peacefully enough, looking down on this world of strife and struggle; Erica grew a little calmer as she looked; Nature, with its majesty of calmness, seemed to quiet her troubled heart and "sweep gradual gospels in."

From some recess of memory there came to her some half-enigmatical words; they had been quoted by Charles Osmond in his speech, but she did not remember where she had heard them, only they began to ring in her ears now:—

"There is no gain except by loss,
There is no life except by death,
Nor glory but by bearing shame,
Nor justice but by taking blame."

She did not altogether understand the verse, but there was a truth in it which could hardly fail to come home to one who knew what persecution meant. What if the very blame and injustice of the present brought in the future reign of justice! She seemed to hear her father's voice saying again,

"We must bear up, child; injustice won't triumph in the end."

"There is no gain except by loss!"

What if her loss of home and friends brought gain to the world! That was a thought which brought a glow of happiness to her even in the midst of her pain. There was, after all, much of the highest Christianity about her, though she would have been very much vexed if any one had told her so, because Christianity meant to her narrow-mindedness instead of brotherly love. However it might be, there was no denying that the child of the great teacher of atheism had grasped the true meaning of life, had grasped it, and was prepared to act on it too. She had always lived with those who were ready to spend all in the promotion of the general good; and all that was true, all that was noble in her creed, all that had filled her with admiration in the lives of those she loved, came to her aid now.

She went softly down the dark staircase to Raeburn's study; it was late, and, anxious not to disturb the rest of the house, she opened the door noiselessly and crept in. Her father was sitting at his desk writing; he looked very stern, but there was a sort of grandeur about his rugged face. He was absorbed in his work and did not hear her, and for a minute she stood quite still watching him, realising with pain and yet with a happy pride how greatly

she loved him. Her heart beat fast at the thought of helping him, lightening his load even a little.

"Father," she said, softly.

Raeburn was the sort of man who could not be startled, but he looked up quickly, apparently returning from some speculative region with a slight effort. He was the most practical of men, and yet for a minute he felt as if he were living in a dream, for Erica stood beside him, pale and beautiful, with a sort of heroic light about her whole face which transformed her from a merry child to a high-souled woman. Instinctively he rose to speak to her.

"I will not disturb you for more than a minute, father," she said, "it is only that I have thought of a way in which I think I could help you if you would let me."

"Well, dear, what is it?" said Raeburn, still watching half dreamily the exceeding beauty of the face before him. Yet an undefined sense of dread chilled his heart. Was anything too hard or high for her to propose? He listened without a word to her account of Monsieur Noirol's Parisian scheme, to her voluntary suggestion that she should go into exile for two years. At the end he merely put a brief question.

"Are you ready to bear two years of loneliness?"

"I am ready to help you," she said, with a little quiver in her voice and a cloud of pain in her eyes.

Raeburn turned away from her and began to pace up and down the little room, his eyes not altogether free from tears, for, pachydermatous as he was accounted by his enemies, this man was very tender over his child, he could hardly endure to see her pain. Yet after all, though she had given him a sharp pang, she had brought him

happiness which any father might envy. He came back to her, his stern face inexpressibly softened.

"And I am ready to be helped, my child; it shall be as you say."

There was something in his voice and in the gentle acceptance of help from one so strong and self-reliant which touched Erica more than any praise or demonstrative thanks could have done. They were going to work together, he had promised that she should fight side by side with him.

"Law-suits may ruin us," said Raeburn, "but, after all, the evil has a way of helping out the good." He put his arm round her and kissed her. "You have taught me, little one, how powerless and weak are these petty persecutions. They can only prick and sting us! Nothing can really hurt us while we love the truth and love each other."

That was the happiest moment Erica had ever known, already her loss had brought a rapturous gain.

"I shall never go to sleep to-night," she said. "Let me help you with your letters."

Raeburn demurred a little, but yielded to her entreaties, and for the next two hours the father and daughter worked in silence. The bitterness which had lurked in the earlier part of the pamphlet that Raeburn had in hand was quite lacking in its close; the writer had somehow been lifted into a higher, purer atmosphere, and if his pen flew less rapidly over the paper, it at any rate wrote words which would long outlive the mere overflow of an angry heart.

Coming back to the world of realities at last somewhere in the small hours, he found his fire out, a goodly pile of letters ready for his signature, and his little

amanuensis fast asleep in her chair. Reproaching himself for having allowed her to sit up, he took her in his strong arms as though she had been a mere baby, and carried her up to her room so gently that she never woke. The next morning she found herself so swathed in plaids and rugs and blankets that she could hardly move, and, in spite of a bad headache, could not help beginning the day with a hearty laugh.

Raeburn was not a man who ever let the grass grow under his feet, his decisions were made with thought, but with very rapid thought, and his action was always prompt. His case excited a good deal of attention; but long before the newspapers had ceased to wage war either for or against him, long before the weekly journals had ceased to team with letters relating to the law-suit, he had formed his plans for the future. His home was to be completely broken up, Erica was to go to Paris, his wife was to live with his sister, Mrs. Craigie, and her son Tom, who had agreed to keep on the lodgings in Guilford Terrace, while for himself he had mapped out such a programme of work as could only have been undertaken by a man of "Titanic energy" and "Herculean strength," epithets which even the hostile press invariably bestowed on him. How great the sacrifice was to him few people knew. As we have said before, the world regarded him as a target, and would hardly have believed that he was in reality a man of the gentlest tastes, as fond of his home as any man in England, a faithful friend and a devoted father, and perhaps all the more dependent on the sympathies of his own circle because of the bitter hostility he encountered from other quarters. But he made his plans resolutely, and said very little about them either one way or the other, sometimes even checking Erica when she

grumbled for him, or gave vent to her indignation with regard to the defendant.

"We work for freedom, little one," he used to say; "and it is an honour to suffer in the cause of liberty."

"But every one says you will kill yourself with over-work," said Erica, "and especially when you are in America."

"They don't know what stuff I'm made of," said Raeburn; "and, even if it should use me up, what then? It's better to wear out than to rust out, as a wise man once remarked."

"Yes," said Erica, rather faintly.

"But I've no intention of wearing out just yet," said Raeburn, cheerfully. "You need not be afraid, little son Eric; and, if at the end of these two years you do come back to find me gray and wrinkled, what will that matter so long as we are free once more. There's a good time coming; we'll have the cosiest little home in London yet."

"With a garden for you to work in," said Erica, brightening up like a child at the castle in the air. "And we'll keep lots of animals, and never bother again about money all our lives."

Raeburn smiled at her ideas of felicity—no cares, and plenty of dogs and cats! He did not anticipate any haven of rest at the end of the two years for himself. He knew that his life must be a series of conflicts to the very end. Still he hoped for relief from the load of debt, and looked forward to the re-establishment of his home.

Brian Osmond heard of the plans before long, but he scarcely saw Erica; the Christmas holidays began, and he no longer met her each afternoon in Gower Street, while the time drew nearer and nearer for her departure

for Paris. At length, on the very last day, it chanced that they were once more thrown together.

Raeburn was a great lover of flowers, and he very often received floral offerings from his followers. It so happened that some beautiful hot-house flowers had been sent to him from a nursery garden one day in January, and, unwilling to keep them all, he had suggested that Erica should take some to the neighbouring hospitals. Now there were two hospitals in Guilford Square; Erica felt much more interested in the children's hospital than in the one for grown-up people; but, wishing to be impartial, she arranged a basketful for each, and well-pleased to have anything to give, hastened on her errand. Much to her delight, her first basket of flowers was not only accepted very gratefully, but the lady superintendent took her over the hospital, and let her distribute the flowers among the children. She was very fond of children, and was as happy as she could be passing up and down among the little beds, while her bright manner attracted the little ones, and made them unusually affectionate and responsive.

Happy at having been able to give them pleasure, and full of tender, womanly thoughts, she crossed the square to another small hospital; she was absorbed in pitiful, loving humanity, had forgotten altogether that the world counted her as a heretic, and, wholly unprepared for what awaited her, she was shown into the visitors' room and asked to give her name. Not only was Raeburn too notorious a name to pass muster, but the head of the hospital knew Erica by sight, and had often met her out of doors with her father. She was a stiff, narrow-minded, uncompromising sort of person, and, in her own words, was "determined to have no fellowship with

the works of darkness." How she could consider bright-faced Erica, with her loving thought for others and her free gift, a "work of darkness," it is hard to understand. She was not at all disposed, however, to be under any sort of obligation to an atheist, and the result of it was that, after a three minutes' interview, Erica found herself once more in the square, with her flowers still in her hand, "declined *without* thanks."

No one ever quite knew what the superintendent had said to her, but apparently the rebuff had been very hard to bear. Not content with declining any fellowship with the poor little "work of darkness," she had gone on in accordance with the letter of the text to reprove her; and Erica left the house with burning cheeks, and with a tumult of angry feeling stirred up in her heart. She was far too angry to know or care what she was doing; she walked down the quiet square in the very opposite direction to "Persecution Alley," and might have walked on for an indefinite time had not some one stopped her.

"I was hoping to see you before you left," said a pleasant quiet voice close by her. She looked up and saw Charles Osmond.

Thus suddenly brought to a standstill, she became aware that she was trembling from head to foot. A little delicate sensitive thing, the unsparing censure and the rude reception she had just met with had quite upset her.

Charles Osmond retained her hand in his strong clasp, and looked questioningly into her bright, indignant eyes.

"What is the matter, my child?" he asked.

"I am only angry," said Erica, rather breathlessly; "hurt and angry, because one of your bigots has been rude to me."

"Come in, and tell me all about it," said Charles

Osmond; and there was something so irresistible in his manner that Erica at once allowed herself to be led into one of the tall, old-fashioned houses, and taken into a comfortable and roomy study, the nicest room she had ever been in. It was not luxurious; indeed, the Turkey carpet was shabby and the furniture well-worn, but it was homelike, and warm and cheerful, evidently a room which was dear to its owner.

Charles Osmond made her sit down in a capacious arm-chair close to the fire.

"Well, now, who was the bigot?" he said, in a voice that would have won the confidence of a flint.

Erica told as much of the story as she could bring herself to repeat, quite enough to show Charles Osmond the terrible harm which may be wrought by tactless modern Christianity. He looked down very sorrowfully at the eager, expressive face of the speaker; it was at once very white and very pink, for the child was sorely wounded as well as indignant. She was evidently, however, a little vexed with herself for feeling the insult so keenly.

"It is very stupid of me," she said, laughing a little; "it is time I was used to it; but I never can help shaking in this silly way when any one is rude to us. Tom laughs at me, and says I am made on wire springs like a twelfth-cake butterfly! But it is rather hard, isn't it, to be shut out from everything, even from giving?"

"I think it is both hard and wrong," said Charles Osmond. "But we do not all shut you out."

"No," said Erica. "You have always been kind, you are not a bit like a Christian. Would you,"—she hesitated a little,—"*would you take the flowers instead?*"

It was said with a shy grace inexpressibly winning. Charles Osmond was touched and gratified.

"They will be a great treat to us," he said. "My mother is very fond of flowers. Will you come upstairs and see her? We shall find afternoon tea going on, I expect."

So the rejected flowers found a resting-place in the clergyman's house; and Brian, coming in from his rounds, was greeted by a sight which made his heart beat at double time. In the drawing-room beside his grandmother sat Erica, her little fur hat pushed back, her gloves off, busily arranging Christmas roses and red camellias. Her anger had died away, she was talking quite merrily. It seemed to Brian more like a beautiful dream than a bit of everyday life, to have her sitting there so naturally in his home; but the note of pain was struck before long.

"I must go home," she said. "This is my last day, you know. I am going to Paris to-morrow."

A sort of sadness seemed to fall on them at the words; only gentle Mrs. Osmond said, cheerfully,—

"You will come to see us again when you come back, will you not?"

And then, with the privilege of the aged, she drew down the young, fresh face to hers and kissed it.

"You will let me see you home," said Brian. "It is getting dark."

Erica laughingly protested that she was well used to taking care of herself, but it ended in Brian's triumphing. So together they crossed the quiet square. Erica chattered away merrily enough, but as they reached the narrow entrance to Guilford Terrace a shadow stole over her face.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "this is the last time I shall come home for two whole years."

"You go for so long," said Brian, stifling a sigh. "You won't forget your English friends?"

"Do you mean that you count yourself our friend?" asked Erica, smiling.

"If you will let me."

"That is a funny word to use," she replied, laughing. "You see, we are treated as outlaws generally. I don't think any one ever said 'will you let' to me before. This is our house; thank you for seeing me home." Then, with a roguish look in her eyes, she added, demurely, but with a slight emphasis on the last word, "Good-bye, my friend."

Brian turned away sadly enough; but he had not gone far when he heard flying footsteps, and looking back saw Erica once more.

"Oh, I just came to know whether by any chance you want a kitten," she said; "I have a real beauty which I want to find a nice home for."

Of course Brian wanted a kitten at once; one would have imagined by the eagerness of his manner that he was devoted to the whole feline tribe.

"Well, then, will you come in and see it?" said Erica. "He really is a very nice kitten, and I shall go away much happier if I can see him settled in life first."

She took him in, introduced him to her mother, and ran off in search of the cat, returning in a few minutes with a very playful-looking tabby.

"There he is," she said, putting the kitten on the table with an air of pride. "I don't believe he has an equal in all London."

"What do you call him?" asked Brian.

"His name is St. Anthony," said Erica. "Oh, I hope, by-the-by, you won't object to that; it was no disrespect

to St. Anthony at all, but only that he always will go and preach to my gold fish. We'll make him do it now to show you. Come along, Tony, and give them a sermon, there's a good little kit!"

She put him on a side-table, and he at once rested his front paws on a large glass bowl and peered down at the gold fish with great curiosity.

"I believe he would have drowned himself sooner or later, like Gray's cat, so I daresay it is a good thing for him to leave. You will be kind to him, won't you?"

Brian promised that he should be well attended to, and, indeed, there was little doubt that St. Anthony would from that day forth be lapped in luxury. He went away with his new master very contentedly, Erica following them to the door with farewell injunctions.

"And you'll be sure to butter his feet well, or else he won't stay with you. Good-bye, dear Tony. Be a good little cat!"

Brian was pleased to have this token from his Undine, but at the same time he could not help seeing that she cared much more about parting with the kitten than about saying good-bye to him. Well, it was something to have that lucky St. Anthony, who had been fondled and kissed. And after all it was Erica's very childishness and simplicity which made her so dear to him.

As soon as they were out of sight, Erica, with the thought of the separation beginning to weigh upon her, went back to her mother. They knew that this was the last quiet time they should have together for many long months. But last days are not good days for talking. They spoke very little. Every now and then Mrs. Raeburn would make some inquiry about the packing or the journey, or would try to cheer the child by speaking of

the home they would have at the end of the two years. But Erica was not to be comforted; a dull pain was gnawing at her heart, and the present was not to be displaced by any visions of a golden future.

"If it were not for leaving you alone, mother, I shouldn't mind so much," she said, in rather a choked voice. "But it seems to me that you have the hardest part of all."

"Aunt Jean will be here, and Tom," said Mrs. Raeburn.

"Aunt Jean is very kind," said Erica, doubtfully. "But she doesn't know how to nurse people. Tom is the one hope, and he has promised always to tell me the whole truth about you; so if you get worse, I shall come home directly."

"You mustn't grudge me my share of the work," said Mrs. Raeburn. "It would make me very miserable if I did hinder you or your father."

Erica sighed.

"You and father are so dreadfully public spirited! And yet, oh, mother! what does the world matter to me if I think you are uncomfortable, and wretched, and alone?"

"You will learn to think differently, dear, by-and-by," said her mother, kissing the eager, troubled face. "And, when you fancy me lonely, you can picture me instead as proud and happy in thinking of my brave little daughter who has gone into exile of her own accord to help the cause of truth and liberty."

They were inspiring words, and they brought a glow to Erica's face; she choked down her own personal pain. No religious martyr went through the time of trial more bravely than Luke Raeburn's daughter lived through the next four and twenty hours. She never forgot even the

most trivial incident of that day, it seemed burnt in upon her brain. The dreary waking on the dark winter morning, the hurried farewells to her aunt and Tom, the last long embrace from her mother, the drive to the station, her father's recognition on the platform, the rude staring and ruder comments to which they were subjected, then the one supreme wrench of parting, the look of pain in her father's face, the trembling of his voice, the last long look as the train moved off, and the utter loneliness of all that followed. Then came dimmer recollections, not less real but more confused: of a merry set of fellow-passengers who were going to enjoy themselves in the South of France; of a certain little packet which her father had placed in her hand, and which proved to be *Mill on Liberty*; of her eager perusal of the first two or three chapters; of the many instances of the "tyranny of the majority" which she had been able to produce, not without a certain satisfaction. And afterwards more vividly she could recall the last look at England, the dreary arrival at Boulogne, the long, weary railway journey, and the friendly reception at Madame Lemercier's school. No one could deny that her new life had been bravely begun.

CHAPTER VI.

PARIS.

But we wake in the young morning when the light is breaking forth;
And look out on its misty gleams, as if the noon were full;
And the Infinite around, seems but a larger kind of earth
Ensphering this, and measured by the self-same handy rule.

Hilda among the Broken Gods.

NOT unfrequently the most important years of a life, the years which tell most on the character, are unmarked by any notable events. A steady, orderly routine, a gradual progression, perseverance in hard work, often do more to educate and form than a varied and eventful life. Erica's two years of exile were as monotonous and quiet as the life of the secularist's daughter could possibly be. There came to her, of course, from the distance the echoes of her father's strife; but she was far removed from it all, and there was little to disturb her mind in the quiet Parisian school. There is no need to dwell on her uneventful life, and a very brief description of her surroundings will be sufficient to show the sort of atmosphere in which she lived.

The school was a large one, and consisted principally of French provincial girls, sent to Paris to finish their education. Some of them Erica liked exceedingly; every one of them was to her a curious and interesting study. She liked to hear them talk about their home life, and, above all things, to hear their simple, naïve remarks about religion. Of course she was on her honour not to enter into discussions with them, and they regarded all English

as heretics, and did not trouble themselves to distinguish between the different grades. But there was nothing to prevent her from observing and listening, and with some wonder she used to hear discussions about the dresses for the "Première Communion," remarks about the various services, or laments over the confession papers. The girls went to confession once a-month, and there was always a day in which they had to prepare and write out their misdemeanours. One day, a little, thin, delicate child from the South of France came up to Erica with her confession in her hand.

"Dear, good Erica," she said, wearily; "have the kindness to read this and to correct my mistakes."

Erica took the little thing on her knee, and began to read the paper. It was curiously spelt. Before very long she came to the sentence, "*J'ai trop mangé.*"

"Why, Ninette," exclaimed Erica, "you hardly eat enough to feed a sparrow; it is nonsense to put that."

"Ah, but it was a fast day," sighed Ninette. "And I felt hungry, and did really eat more than I need have."

Erica felt half angry and contemptuous, half amused, and could only hope that the priest would see the pale, thin face of the little penitent, and realise the ludicrousness of the confession.

Another time all the girls had been to some special service; on their return she asked what it had been about.

"Oh," remarked a bright-faced girl, "it was about the seven joys—or the seven sorrows—of Mary."

"Do you mean to say you don't know whether it was very solemn or very joyful?" asked Erica, astonished and amused.

"I am really not sure," said the girl, with the most placid good-tempered indifference.

On the whole, it was scarcely to be wondered at that Erica was not favourably impressed with Roman Catholicism.

She was a great favourite with all the girls; but, though she was very patient and persevering, she did not succeed in making any of them fluent English speakers, and learnt their language far better than they learnt hers. Her three special friends were not among the pupils, but among the teachers. Dear old Madame Lemer cier, with her good-humoured black eyes, her kind demonstrative ways, and her delightful stories about the time of the war and the siege, was a friend worth having. So was her husband, Monsieur Lemer cier the journalist. He was a little dried-up man, with a fierce black moustache; he was sarcastic and witty, and he would talk politics by the hour together to any one who would listen to him, especially if they would now and then ask a pertinent and intelligent question which gave him scope for an oration.

Erica made a delightful listener, for she was always anxious to learn and to understand, and before long she was quite *au fait*, and understood a great deal about that exceedingly complicated thing, the French political system. Monsieur Lemer cier was a fiery, earnest little man, with very strong convictions; he had been exiled as a Communist but had now returned, and was a very vigorous and impassioned writer in one of the advanced Republican journals. He and his wife became very fond of Erica, Madame Lemer cier loving her for her brightness and readiness to help, and monsieur for her beauty and her quickness of perception. It was surprising and gratifying to meet with a girl who, without being a *femme savante*, was yet capable of understanding the difference between

the Extreme Left and the Left Centre, and who took a real interest in what was passing in the world.

But Erica's greatest friend was a certain Fräulein Sonnenthal, the German governess. She was a kind-eyed Hanoverian, homely and by no means brilliantly clever, but there was something in her unselfishness and in her unassuming humility that won Erica's heart. She never would hear a word against the Fräulein.

"Why do you care so much for Fräulein Sonnenthal?" she was often asked. "She seems uninteresting and dull to us."

"I love her because she is so good," was Erica's invariable reply.

She and the Fräulein shared a bedroom, and many were the arguments they had together. The effect of being separated from her own people was, very naturally, to make Erica a more devoted Secularist. She was exceedingly enthusiastic for what she considered the truth, and not unfrequently grieved and shocked the Lutheran Fräulein by the vehemence of her statements. Very often they would argue far on into the night; they never quarrelled, however hot the dispute, but the Fräulein often had a sore time of it; for, naturally, Luke Raeburn's daughter was well up in all the debateable points, and she had, moreover, a good deal of her father's rapidity of thought and gift of speech. She was always generous, however, and the Fräulein had in some respects the advantage of her, for they spoke in German.

One scene in that little bedroom Erica never forgot. They had gone to bed one Easter Eve, and had somehow fallen into a long and stormy argument about the resurrection and the doctrine of immortality. Erica, perhaps because she was conscious of the "weakness"

she had confessed to Brian Osmond, argued very warmly on the other side; the poor little Fräulein was grieved beyond measure, and defended her faith gallantly though as she feared very ineffectually. Her arguments seemed altogether extinguished by Erica's remorseless logic; she was not nearly so clever, and her very earnestness seemed to trip her up and make all her sentences broken and incomplete. They discussed the subject till Erica was hoarse, and at last from very weariness she fell asleep while the Lutheran was giving her a long quotation from St. Paul.

She slept for two or three hours; when she woke, the room was flooded with silvery moonlight, the wooden cross which hung over the German's bed stood out black and distinct, but the bed was empty. Erica looked round the room uneasily, and saw a sight which she never forgot.

The Fräulein was kneeling beside the window, and even the cold moonlight could not chill or hide the wonderful brightness of her face. She was a plain, ordinary little woman, but her face was absolutely transformed; there was something so beautiful and yet so unusual in her expression that Erica could not speak or move, but lay watching her almost breathlessly. The spiritual world about which they had been speaking must be very real indeed to Thekla Sonnenthal! Was it possible that this was the work of delusion? While she mused, her friend rose, came straight to her bedside, and bent over her with a look of such love and tenderness that Erica, though not generally demonstrative, could not resist throwing her arms round her neck.

"Dear Sunnyvale! you look just like your name!" she

exclaimed, "all brightness and humility! What have you been doing to grow so like Murillo's Madonna?"

"I thought you were asleep," said the Fräulein. "Good-night, *Herzblättchen*, or rather good-morning, for the Easter Day has begun."

Perhaps Erica liked her all the better for saying nothing more definite, but in the ordinary sense of the word she did not have a good night, for long after Thekla Sonnenthal was asleep, and dreaming of her German home, Luke Raeburn's daughter lay awake, thinking of the faith which to some was such an intense reality. Had there been anything excited or unreal about her companion's manner, she would not have thought twice about it; but her tranquillity and sweetness seemed to her very remarkable. Moreover, Fräulein Sonnenthal was strangely devoid of imagination; she was a matter-of-fact little person, not at all a likely subject for visions and delusions. Erica was perplexed. Once more there came to her that uncomfortable question—"Supposing Christianity were true?"

The moonlight paled and the Easter morn broke, and still she tossed to and fro haunted by doubts which would not let her sleep. But by-and-by she returned to the one thing which was absolutely certain, namely, that her German friend was loveable and to be loved, whatever her creed.

And, since Erica's love was of the practical order, it prompted her to get up early, dress noiselessly, and steal out of the room without waking her companion; then, with all the church bells ringing and the devout citizens hurrying to mass, she ran to the nearest flower-stall, spent one of her very few half-francs on the loveliest white

rose to be had, and carried it back as an Easter offering to the Fräulein.

It was fortunate in every way that Erica had the little German lady for her friend, for she would often have fared badly without some one to nurse and befriend her.

She was very delicate, and worked far too hard; for besides all her work in the school, she was preparing for an English examination which she had set her heart on trying as soon as she went home. Had it not been for Fräulein Sonnenthal, she would more than once have thoroughly overworked herself; and indeed as it was, the strain of that two years told severely on her strength.

But the time wore on rapidly, as very fully occupied time always does, and Erica's list of days grew shorter, and shorter, and the letters from her mother were more and more full of plans for the life they would lead when she came home. The two years would actually end in January; Erica was, however, to stay in Paris till the following Easter, partly to oblige Madame Lemercier, partly because by that time her father hoped to be in a great measure free from his embarrassments, able once more to make a home for her.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THE NEW YEAR BROUGHT.

A voice grows with the growing years;
 Earth, hushing down her bitter cry,
 Looks upward from her graves, and hears,
 "The Resurrection and the Life am I."

O Love Divine,—whose constant beam
 Shines on the eyes that will not see,
 And waits to bless us, while we dream
 Thou leavest us because we turn from Thee!

Nor bounds, nor clime, nor creed Thou know'st,
 Wide as our need Thy favours fall;
 The white wings of the Holy Ghost
 Stoop, seen or unseen, o'er the heads of all.

WHITTIER.

It was the eve of the New Year, and great excitement prevailed in the Lemercier's house. Many of the girls whose homes were at a distance had remained at school for the short winter holiday, and on this particular afternoon a number of them were clustered round the stove talking about the festivities of the morrow and the presents they were likely to have.

Erica, who was now a tall and very pretty girl of eighteen, was sitting on the hearthrug with Ninette on her lap; she was in very high spirits, and kept the little group in perpetual laughter, so much so indeed that Fräulein Sonnenthal had more than once been obliged to interfere, and do her best to quiet them.

"How wild thou art, dear Erica!" she exclaimed.
 "What is it?"

"I am happy, that is all," said Erica. "You would be happy if the year of freedom were just dawning for you. Three months more and I shall be home!"

She was like a child in her exultant happiness, far more child-like, indeed, than the grave little Ninette whom she was nursing.

"Thou art not dignified enough for a teacher," said the Fräulein, laughingly.

"She is no teacher," cried the girls. "It is holiday time, and she need not talk that frightful English."

Erica made a laughing defence of her native tongue, and such a babel ensued that the Fräulein had to interfere again.

"Liebe Erica! Thou art beside thyself! What has come to thee?"

"Only joy, dear Thekla, at the thought of the beautiful New Year which is coming," cried Erica. "Father would say I was 'fey,' and should pay for all this fun with a bad headache or some misfortune. Come, give me the French *David Copperfield*, and let me read you how 'Barkis veut bien,' and 'Mrs. Gummidge a pensé à l'ancien.'"

The reading was more exquisitely ludicrous to Erica herself than to her hearers. Still the wit of Charles Dickens, even when translated, called forth peals of laughter from the French girls, too. It was the brightest, happiest little group imaginable; perhaps it was scarcely wonderful that old Madame Lemercier, when she came to break it up, should find her eyes dim with tears.

"My dear Erica——," she said, and broke off abruptly.

Erica looked up with laughing eyes.

"Don't scold, dear madame," she said, coaxingly.

"We have been very noisy; but it is New Year's Eve, and we are so happy."

"Dear child, it is not that," said madame. "I want to speak to you for a minute; come with me, *chérie*."

Still Erica noticed nothing; did not detect the tone of pity, did not wonder at the terms of endearment which were generally reserved for more private use. She followed madame into the hall, still chattering gaily.

"The *David Copperfield* is for monsieur's present tomorrow," she said, laughingly. "I knew he was too lazy to read it in English, so I got him a translation."

"My dear," said madame, taking her hand, "try to be quiet a moment. I—I have something to tell you. My poor little one, monsieur your father is arrived——"

"Father! father here!" exclaimed Erica, in a transport of delight. "Where is he, where? Oh, madame, why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Madame Lemercier tried in vain to detain her, as with cheeks all glowing with happiness and dancing eyes, she ran at full speed to the salon.

"Father!" she cried, throwing open the door and running to meet him. Then suddenly she stood quite still as if petrified.

Beside the crackling wood fire, his arms on the chimney-piece, his face hidden, stood a gray-haired man. He raised himself as she spoke. His news was in his face; it was written all too plainly there.

"Father!" gasped Erica, in a voice which seemed altogether different from the first exclamation, almost as if it belonged to a different person.

Raeburn took her in his arms.

"My child—my poor little Eric!" he said.

She did not speak a word, but clung to him as though

to keep herself from falling. In one instant it seemed as though her whole world had been wrecked, her life shattered. She could not even realise that her father was still left to her, except in so far as the mere bodily support was concerned. He was strong; she clung to him as in a hurricane she would have clung to a rock.

"Say it," she gasped, after a timeless silence, perhaps of minutes, perhaps of hours, it might have been centuries for aught she knew. "Say it in words."

She wanted to know everything, wanted to reduce this huge, overwhelming sorrow to something intelligible. Surely in words it would not be so awful—so limitless.

And he said it, speaking in a low, repressed voice, yet very tenderly, as if she had been a little child. She made a great effort to listen, but the sentences only came to her disjointedly, and as if from a great distance. It had been very sudden—a two hours' illness, no very great suffering. He had been lecturing at Birmingham—had been telegraphed for—had been too late.

Erica made a desperate effort to realise it all; at last she brought down the measureless agony to actual words, repeating them over and over to herself—"Mother is dead."

At length she had grasped the idea! Her heart seemed to die within her, a strange blue shade passed over her face, her limbs stiffened. She felt her father carry her to the window, was perfectly conscious of everything, watched as in a dream whilst he wrenched open the clumsy fastening of the casement, heard the voices in the street below, heard, too, in the distance the sound of church bells, was vaguely conscious of relief as the cold air blew upon her.

She was lying on a couch, and, if left to herself,

might have lain there for hours in that strange state of absolute prostration. But she was not alone, and gradually she realised it. Very slowly the re-beginning of life set in; the consciousness of her father's presence awakened her, as it were, from her dream of unmitigated pain. She sat up, put her arms round his neck, and kissed him; then for a minute let her aching head rest on his shoulder. Presently, in a low but steady voice, she said, "What would you like me to do, father?"

"To come home with me now if you are able," he said; "to-morrow morning, though, if you would rather wait, dear."

But the idea of waiting seemed intolerable to her. The very sound of the word was hateful. Had she not waited two weary years, and this was the end of it all? Any action, any present doing, however painful, but no more waiting! No terrible pause in which more thoughts and, therefore, more pain might grow! Outside in the passage they met Madame Lemercier, and presently Erica found herself surrounded by kind helpers, wondering to find them all so tearful when her own eyes felt so hot and dry. They were very good to her; but, separated from her father, her sorrow again completely overwhelmed her; she could not then feel the slightest gratitude to them or the slightest comfort from their sympathy. She lay motionless on her little white bed, her eyes fixed on the wooden cross on the opposite wall, or from time to time glancing at Fräulein Sonmenthal, who, with little Ninette to help, was busily packing her trunk. And all the while she said again and again the words which summed up her sorrow, "Mother is dead! Mother is dead!"

After a time her eyes fell on her elaborately-drawn

paper of days. Every evening since her first arrival she had gone through the almost religious ceremony of marking-off the day; it had often been a great consolation to her. The paper was much worn; the weeks and days yet to be marked were few in number. She looked at it now, and if there can be a "more" to absolute grief, an additional pang to unmitigated sorrow, it came to her at the sight of that visible record of her long exile. She snatched down the paper and tore it to pieces; then sank back again, pale and breathless. Fräulein Sonnenthal saw and understood. She came to her, and kissed her.

"Herzblättchen," she said, almost in a whisper, and, after a moment's pause, "Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott."

Erica made an impatient gesture, and turned away her head.

"Why does she choose this time of all others to tell me so," she thought to herself. "Now, when I can't argue or even think! A sure tower! Could a delusion make one feel that anything is sure but death at such a time as this! Everything is gone—or going. Mother is dead!—mother is dead! Yet she meant to be kind, poor Thekla, she didn't know it would hurt."

Madame Lemercier came into the room with a cup of coffee and a *brioche*.

"You have a long journey before you, my little one," she said; "you must take this before you start."

Yes, there was the journey! that was a comfort. There was something to be done, something hard and tiring—surely it would blunt her perceptions! She started up with a strange sort of energy, put on her hat and cloak, swallowed the food with an effort, helped to lock her trunk, moved rapidly about the room, looking for any chance possession which might have been left out. There

was such terrible anguish in her tearless eyes that little Ninette shrank away from her in alarm. Madame Lemerrier, who in the time of the siege had seen great suffering, had never seen anything like this; even Thekla Sonnenthal realised that for the time she was beyond the reach of human comfort.

Before long the farewells were over. Erica was once more alone with her father, her cheeks wet with the tears of others, her own eyes still hot and dry. They were to catch the four o'clock train; the afternoon was dark, and already the streets and shops were lighted; Paris, ever bright and gay, seemed to-night brighter and gayer than ever. She watched the placid-looking passengers, the idle loungers at the cafés; did they know what pain was? Did they know that death was sure? Presently she found herself in a second-class carriage, wedged-in between her father and a heavy-featured priest, who diligently read a little dogs'-eared breviary. Opposite was a meek, weasel-faced *bourgeois*, with a managing wife, who ordered him about; then came a bushy-whiskered Englishman and a newly-married couple, while in the further corner, nearly hidden from view by the burly priest, lurked a gentle-looking Sister of Mercy, and a mischievous and fidgety schoolboy. She watched them all as in a dream of pain. Presently the priest left off muttering and began to snore, and sleep fell, too, upon the occupants of the opposite seat. The little weasel-faced man looked most uncomfortable, for the Englishman used him as a prop on one side and the managing wife nearly overwhelmed him on the other; he slept fitfully, and always with the air of a martyr, waking up every few minutes and vainly trying to shake off his burdens, who invariably made stifled exclamations and sank back again.

"That would have been funny once," thought Erica to herself. "How I should have laughed. Shall I always be like this all the rest of my life, seeing what is ludicrous, yet with all the fun taken out of it?"

But her brain reeled at the thought of the "rest of life." The blank of bereavement, terrible to all, was absolute and eternal to her, and this was her first great sorrow. She had known pain, and privation, and trouble, and anxiety, but actual anguish never. Now it had come to her, suddenly, irrevocably, never to be either more or less; perhaps to be fitted on as a garment as time wore on, and to become a natural part of her life; but always to be the same, a blank often felt, always present, till at length her end came and she too passed away into the great Silence.

Despair—the deprivation of all hope—is sometimes wild, but oftener calm with a deathly calmness. Erica was absolutely still,—she scarcely moved or spoke during the long weary journey to Calais. Twice only did she feel the slightest desire for any outward vent. At the Amiens station the schoolboy in the corner, who had been growing more restless and excited every hour, sprang from the carriage to greet a small crowd of relations who were waiting to welcome him. She saw him rush to his mother, heard a confused, affectionate Babel of inquiries, congratulations, laughter. Oh! to think of that happy light-heartedness and the contrast between it and her grief. The laughter seemed positively to cut her; she could have screamed from sheer pain. And, as if cruel contrasts were fated to confront her, no sooner had her father established her in the cabin on board the steamer, than two bright-looking English girls settled themselves close by, and began chatting merrily about the New Year

and the novel beginning it would be on board a Channel steamer. Erica tried to stop her ears that she might not hear the discussion of all the forthcoming gaieties: "Lady Reedham's dance on Thursday, our own, you know, next week," &c. &c. But she could not shut out the sound of the merry voices, or that wounding laughter.

Presently an exclamation made her look and listen.

"Hark!" said one of her fellow-passengers. "We shall start now; I hear the clock striking twelve. A happy New Year to you, Lily, and all possible good fortune."

"Happy New Year!" echoed from different corners of the cabin; the little Sister of Mercy knelt down and told her beads, the rest of the passengers talked, congratulated, laughed. Erica would have given worlds to be able to cry, but she could not. The terrible mockery of her surroundings was too great, however, to be borne; her heart seemed like ice, her head like fire, with a sort of feverish strength she rushed out of the cabin, stumbled up the companion, and ran as if by instinct to that part of the deck where a tall, solitary figure stood up darkly in the dim light.

"It's too cold for you, my child," said Raeburn, turning round at her approach.

"Oh, father, let me stay with you," sobbed Erica, "I can't bear it alone."

Perhaps he was glad to have her near him for his own sake, perhaps he recognised the truth to which she unconsciously testified that human nature does at times cry out for something other than self, stronger and higher.

He raised no more objections, they listened in silence till the sound of the church bells died away in the distance, and then he found a more sheltered seat and wrapped her up closely in his own plaid, and together

they began their new year. The first lull in Erica's pain came in that midnight crossing; the heaving of the boat, the angry dashing of the waves, the foam-laden wind, all seemed to relieve her. Above all, there was comfort in the strong protecting arm round her. Yet she was too crushed and numb to be able to wish for anything but that the end might come for her there, that together they might sink down into the painless silence of death.

Raeburn only spoke once throughout the passage, instinctively he knew what was passing in Erica's mind. He spoke the only word of comfort which he had to speak: a noble one, though just then very insufficient:

"There is work to be done."

Then came the dreary landing in the middle of the dark winter's night, and presently they were again in a railway carriage, but this time alone. Raeburn made her lie down, and himself fell asleep in the opposite corner; he had been travelling uninterruptedly for twenty hours, had received a shock which had tried him very greatly, now from sheer exhaustion he slept. But Erica, to whom the grief was more new, could not sleep. Every minute the pain of realisation grew keener. Here she was in England once more, this was the journey she had so often thought of and planned. This was going home! Oh, the dreariness of the reality when compared with those bright expectations! And yet it was neither this thought nor the actual fact of her mother's death which first brought the tears to her burning eyes.

Wearily shifting her position, she looked across to the other side of the carriage, and saw, as if in a picture, her father. Raeburn was a comparatively young man, very little over forty; but his anxieties and the almost incredible amount of hard work of the past two years

had told upon him, and had turned his hair grey. There was something in his stern set face, in the strong man's reserved grief, in the pose of his grand-looking head, dignified even in exhaustion, that was strangely pathetic. Erica scarcely seemed to realise that he was her father. It was more as if she were gazing at some scene on the stage, or on a wonderfully graphic and heart-stirring picture. The pathos and sadness of it took hold of her; she burst into a passion of tears, turned her face from the light, and cried as if no power on earth could ever stop her, her long-drawn sobs allowed to go unchecked since the noise of the train made them inaudible. She was so little given to tears, as a rule, that now they positively frightened her, nor could she understand how, with a real and terrible grief for which she could not weep, the mere pathetic sight should have brought down her tears like rain. But the outburst brought relief with it, for it left her so exhausted that for a brief half-hour she slept, and awoke just before they reached London, with such a frightful headache that the physical pain numbed the mental.

"How soon shall we be——" home she would have said, but the word choked her. "How soon shall we get there?" she asked, faintly. She was so ill, so weary, that the mere thought of being still again—even in the death-visited home—was a relief, and she was really too much worn out to feel very acutely while they drove through the familiar streets.

At last, early in the cold, new-year's morning, they were set down in Guilford Square, at the grim entrance to "Persecution Alley." She looked round at the grey old houses with a shudder; then her father drew her arm within his, and led her down the dreary little *cul-*

de-sac. There was the house, looking the same as ever, and there was Aunt Jean coming forward to meet them, with a strange new tenderness in her voice and look, and there was Tom in the background, seeming half shy and afraid to meet her in her grief, and there, above all, was the one great eternal void.

To watch beside the dying must be anguish, and yet surely not such keen anguish as to have missed the last moments, the last farewells, the last chance of serving. For those who have to come back to the empty house, the home which never can be home again, may God comfort them—no one else can.

Stillness, and food, and brief snatches of sleep somewhat restored Erica. Late in the afternoon she was strong enough to go into her mother's room, for that last look so inexpressibly painful to all, so entirely void of hope or comfort to those who believe in no hereafter. Not even the peacefulness of death was there to give even a slight, a momentary relief to her pain; she scarcely even recognised her mother. Was that, indeed, all that was left? that pale, rigid, utterly changed face and form? Was that her mother? Could that once have been her mother? Very often had she heard this great change wrought by death referred to in discussions; she knew well the arguments which were brought forward by the believers in immortality, the counter arguments with which her father invariably met them, and which had always seemed to her conclusive. But somehow that which seemed satisfactory in the lecture-hall did not answer in the room of death. Her whole being seemed to flow out into one longing question: Might there not be a Beyond—an Unseen? Was this world indeed only

“A place to stand and love in for an hour,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it?”

She had slept in the afternoon, but at night, when all was still, she could not sleep. The question still lurked in her mind; her sorrow and loneliness grew almost unbearable. She thought if she could only make herself cry again perhaps she might sleep, and she took down a book about Giordano Bruno, and read the account of his martyrdom, an account which always moved her very much. But to-night not even the description of the valiant unshrinking martyr of Freethought ascending the scaffold to meet his doom could in the slightest degree affect her. She tried another book, this time Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*. She had never read the last two chapters without feeling a great desire to cry; but to-night she read with perfect unconcern of Sydney Carton's wanderings through Paris on the night before he gave himself up,—read the last marvellously-written scene without the slightest emotion. It was evidently no use to try anything else; she shut the book, put out her candle, and once more lay down in the dark.

Then she began to think of the words which had so persistently haunted Sidney Carton, “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” She, too, seemed to be wandering about the Parisian streets, hearing these words over and over again. She knew that it was Jesus of Nazareth who had said this. What an assertion it was for a man to make! It was not even “I *bring* the resurrection” or “I *give* the resurrection,” but “I *am* the Resurrection!” And yet, according to her father, his humility had been excessive, carried almost to a fault. Was he the most inconsistent man that ever lived, or what was he? At last she thought she would get up and see whether there was

any qualifying context, and when and where he had uttered this tremendous saying.

Lighting her candle she crept, a little shivering, white-robed figure, round the book-lined room, scanning the titles on every shelf, but Bibles were too much in use in that house to be relegated to the attics, she found only the least interesting and least serviceable of her father's books. There was nothing for it but to go down to the study; so wrapping herself up, for it was a freezing winter's night, she went noiselessly downstairs, and soon found every possible facility for biblical research.

A little baffled and even disappointed to find the words in that which she regarded as the least authentic of the gospels, she still resolved to read the account; she read it, indeed, in two or three translations, and compared each closely with the others, but in all the words stood out in uncompromising greatness of assertion. This man claimed to *be* the resurrection, or as Wyclif had it, the "agen risyng and lyf."

And then poor Erica read on to the end of the story and was quite thrown back upon herself by the account of the miracle which followed. It was a beautiful story, she said to herself, poetically written, graphically described, but as to believing it to be true, she could as soon have accepted the "Midsummer Night's Dream" as having actually taken place.

Shivering with cold she put the books back on their shelf, and stole upstairs once more to bear her comfortless sorrow as best she could.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHY DO YOU BELIEVE IT?"

Then the round of weary duties, cold and formal, came to meet her, With the life within departed that had given them each a soul; And her sick heart even slighted gentle words that came to greet her, For grief spread its shadowy pinions like a blight upon the whole.

A. A. PROCTER.

THE winter sunshine which glanced in a side-long, half-and-half way into "Persecution Alley," and struggled in at the closed blinds of Erica's little attic, streamed unchecked into a far more cheerful room in Guilford Square, and illumined a breakfast-table, at which was seated one occupant only, apparently making a late and rather hasty meal. He was a man of about eight and twenty, and though he was not absolutely good-looking, his face was one which people turned to look at again, not so much because it was in any way striking as far as features went, but because of an unusual luminousness which pervaded it. The eyes, which were dark grey, were peculiarly expressive, and their softness, which might to some have seemed a trifle unmasculine, was counterbalanced by the straight, dark, noticeable eyebrows, as well as by a thoroughly manly bearing and a general impression of unflinching energy which characterised the whole man. His hair, short beard, and moustache were of a deep nut-brown. He was of medium height and very muscular-looking.

On the whole it was as pleasant a face as you would often meet with, and it was not to be wondered at that

his old grandmother looked up pretty frequently from her arm-chair by the fire, and watched him with that beautiful loving pride which in the aged never seems exaggerated and very rarely misplaced.

"You were out very late, were you not, Brian?" she observed, letting her knitting-needles rest for a minute, and scrutinising the rather weary-looking man.

"Till half-past five this morning," he replied, in a somewhat preoccupied voice.

There was a sad look in his eyes, too, which his grandmother partly understood. She knitted another round of her sock and then said,

"Have you seen Tom Craigie yet?"

"Yes, last night I came across him," replied Brian. "He told me she had come home. They travelled by night and got in early yesterday morning."

"Poor little thing!" sighed old Mrs. Osmond. "What a home-coming it must have been?"

"Grannie," said Brian, pushing back his chair and drawing nearer to the fire, "I want you to tell me what I ought to do. I have a message to her from her mother, there was no one else to take it, you know, except the landlady, and I suppose she did not like that. I want to know when I might see her; one has no right to keep it back, and yet how am I to know whether she is fit to bear it? I can't write it down, it won't somehow go on to paper, yet I can hardly ask to see her."

"We cannot tell that the message might not comfort her," said Mrs. Osmond. Then after a few minutes' thought she added, "I think, Brian, if I were you, I would write her a little note, tell her why you want to see her, and let her fix her own time. You will leave it entirely in her own hands in that way."

He mused for a minute, seemed satisfied with the suggestion, and, moving across to the writing-table, began his first letter to his love. Apparently it was hard to write, for he wasted several sheets, and much time that he could ill afford. When it was at length finished, it ran as follows:—

“DEAR MISS RAEBURN,

“I hardly like to ask to see you yet for fear you should think me intrusive, but a message was intrusted to me on Tuesday night which I dare not of myself keep back from you. Will you see me? If you are able to, and will name the time which will suit you best, I shall be very grateful. Forgive me for troubling you, and believe me,

“Yours faithfully,

“BRIAN OSMOND.”

He sent it off a little doubtfully, by no means satisfied that he had done a wise thing. But when he returned from his rounds later in the day the reply set his fears at rest.

It was written lengthways across a sheet of paper: the small delicate writing was full of character, but betrayed great physical exhaustion.

“It is good of you to think of us. Please come this afternoon if you are able.

“ERICA.”

That very afternoon! Now that his wish was granted, now that he was indeed to see her, Brian would have given worlds to have postponed the meeting. He was

well accustomed to visiting sorrow-stricken people, but from meeting such sorrow as that in the Raeburns' house he shrank back feeling his insufficiency. Besides, what words were delicate enough to convey all that had passed in that death-scene? How could he dare to attempt in speech all that the dying mother would fain have had conveyed to her child? And then his own love! Would not that be the greatest difficulty of all? Feeling her grief as he did, could he yet modify his manner to suit that of a mere outsider—almost a stranger? He was very diffident; though longing to see Erica, he would yet have given anything to be able to transfer his work to his father. This, however, was of course impossible.

Strange though it might seem, he—the most unsuitable of all men in his own eyes—was the man singled out to bear this message, to go to the death-visited household. He went about his afternoon work in a sort of steady, mechanical manner, the outward veil of his inward agitation. About four o'clock he was free to go to Guilford Terrace.

He was shown into the little sitting-room; it was the room in which Mrs. Raeburn had died, and the mere sight of the outer surroundings, the well-worn furniture, the book-lined walls, made the whole scene vividly present to him. The room was empty, there was a blazing fire but no other light, for the blinds were down, and even the winter twilight shut out. Brian sat down and waited. Presently the door opened, he looked up and saw Erica approaching him. She was taller than she had been when he last saw her, and now grief had given her a peculiar dignity which made her much more like her father. Every shade of colour had left her face, her eyes were full of a limitless pain, the eyelids were slightly

reddened, but apparently rather from sleeplessness than from tears, the whole face was so altered that a mere casual acquaintance would hardly have recognised it, except by the unchanged waves of short auburn hair which still formed the setting as it were to a picture, lovely even now. Only one other thing was unchanged, and that was the frank unconventional manner. Even in her grief she could not be quite like other people.

"It is very good of you to let me see you," said Brian, "you are sure you are doing right; it will not be too much for you to-day."

"There is no great difference in days, I think," said Erica, sitting down on a low chair beside the fire. "I do not very much believe in degrees in this kind of grief, I do not see why it should be ever more or ever less. Perhaps I am wrong, it is all new to me."

She spoke in a slow, steady, low-toned voice. There was an absolute hopelessness about her whole aspect which was terrible to see. A moment's pause followed, then, looking up at Brian, she fancied that she read in his face something of hesitation, of a consciousness that he could ill express what he wished to say, and her innate courtesy made her even now hasten to relieve him.

"Don't be afraid of speaking," she said, a softer light coming into her eyes. "I don't know why people shrink from meeting trouble. Even Tom is half afraid of me. I am not changed, I am still Erica; can't you understand how much I want every one now?"

"People differ so much," said Brian, a little huskily, "and then when one feels strongly words do not come easily."

"Do you think I would not rather have your sympathy than an oration from any one else! You who were

here to the end! you who did everything for—for her. My father has told me very little, he was not able to, but he told me of you, how helpful you were, how good, not like an outsider at all!”

Evidently she clung to the comforting recollection that at least one trustable, sympathetic person had been with her mother at the last. Brian could only say how little he had done, how much more he would fain have done had it been possible.

“I think you do comfort me by talking,” said Erica. “And now I want you, if you don’t mind, to tell me all from the very first. I can’t torture my father by asking him, and I couldn’t bear it from the landlady. But you were here, you can tell me all. Don’t be afraid of hurting me; can’t you understand, if the past were the only thing left to you, you would want to know every tiniest detail!”

He looked searchingly into her eyes, he thought she was right. There were no degrees to pain like hers! besides, it was quite possible that the lesser details of her mother’s death might bring tears which would relieve her. Very quietly, very reverently, he told her all that had passed,—she already knew that her mother had died from aneurism of the heart,—he told her how in the evening he had been summoned to her, and from the first had known that it was hopeless, had been obliged to tell her that the time for speech even was but short. He had ordered a telegram to be sent to her father at Birmingham, but Mrs. Craigie and Tom were out for the evening, and no one knew where they were to be found. He and the landlady had been alone.

“She spoke constantly of you,” he continued. “The very last words she said were these, ‘Tell Erica that

only love can keep from bitterness, that love is stronger than the world's unkindness.' Then, after a minute's pause, she added, 'Be good to my little girl, promise to be good to her.' After that, speech became impossible, but I do not think she suffered. Once she motioned to me to give her the frame off the mantelpiece with your photograph; she looked at it and kept it near her,—she died with it in her hand."

Erica hid her face; that one trifling little incident was too much for her, the tears rained down between her fingers. That it should have come to that! no one whom she loved there at the last—but she had looked at the photograph, had held it to the very end, the voiceless, useless picture had been there, the real Erica had been laughing and talking at Paris! Brian talked on slowly, soothingly. Presently he paused; then Erica suddenly looked up, and dashing away her tears, said, in a voice which was terrible in its mingled pain and indignation,

"I might have been here! I might have been with her! It is the fault of that wretched man who went bankrupt; the fault of the bigots who will not treat us fairly—who ruin us!"

She sobbed with passionate pain, a vivid streak of crimson dyed her cheek, contrasting strangely with the deathly whiteness of her brow.

"Forgive me if I pain you," said Brian; "but have you forgotten the message I gave you? 'It is only love that can keep from bitterness!'"

"Love!" cried Erica; she could have screamed it, if she had not been so physically exhausted. "Do you mean I am to love our enemies?"

"It is only the love of all humanity that can keep from bitterness," said Brian.

Erica began to think over his reply, and in thinking grew calm once more. By-and-by she lifted up her face; it was pale again now, and still, and perfectly hopeless.

"I suppose you think that only Christians can love all humanity," she said, a little coldly.

"I should call all true lovers of humanity Christians," replied Brian, "whether they are consciously followers of Christ or not."

She thought a little; then with a curiously hard look in her face, she suddenly flashed round upon him with a question, much as her father was in the habit of doing when an adversary had made some broad-hearted statement which had baffled him.

"Some of you give us a little more charity than others, but what do you mean by Christianity? You ask us to believe what is incredible. *Why* do you believe in the resurrection? What reason have you for thinking it true?"

She expected him to go into the evidence question, to quote the number of Christ's appearances, to speak of the five hundred witnesses of whom she was weary of hearing. Her mind was proof against all this; what could be more probable than that a number of devoted followers should be the victims of some optical delusion, especially when their minds were disturbed by grief. Here was a miracle supported on one side by the testimony of five hundred and odd spectators all longing to see their late Master, and contradicted on the other side by common-sense and the experience of the remainder of the human race during thousands of years! She looked full at Brian, a hard yet almost exultant expres-

sion in her eyes, which spoke more plainly than words her perfect conviction:—

“You can’t set your evidences against my counter-evidences! you can’t logically maintain that a few uneducated men are to have more weight than all the united experience of mankind.”

Never would she so gladly have believed in the doctrine of immortality as now, yet with characteristic honesty and resoluteness she set herself into an attitude of rigid defence, lest through strong desire or mere bodily weariness she should drift into the acceptance of what might be, what indeed she considered to be error. But to her surprise, half to her disappointment, Brian did not even mention the evidences. She had braced herself up to withstand arguments drawn from the five hundred brethren, but the preparation was useless.

“I believe in the resurrection,” said Brian, “because I cannot doubt Jesus Christ. He is the most perfectly loveable and trustable Being I know, or can conceive of knowing. He said He should rise again, I believe that He did rise. He was perfectly truthful, therefore He could not mislead; He *knew*, therefore He could not be misled.”

“We do not consider Him to be all that you assert,” said Erica. “Nor do His followers make one inclined to think that either He or His teaching were so perfect as you try to make out. You are not so hard-hearted as some of them——”

She broke off, seeing a look of pain on her companion’s face.

“Oh, what am I saying!” she cried, in a very different tone, “you who have done so much—you who were always good to us,—I did not indeed mean to hurt

you, it is your creed that I can't help hating, not you. You are our friend, you said so long ago.”

“Always,” said Brian, “never doubt that.”

“Then you must forgive me for having wounded you,” said Erica, her whole face softening. “You must remember how hard it all is, and that I am so very, very miserable.”

He would have given his life to bring her comfort, but he was not a very great believer in words, and, besides, he thought she had talked quite as long as she ought.

“I think,” he said, “that, honestly acted out, the message entrusted to me ought to comfort your misery.”

“I can't act it out,” she said.

“You will begin to try,” was Brian's answer; and then, with a very full heart, he said good-bye and left his Undine sitting by the fire, with her head resting on her hands, and the words of her mother's message echoing in her ears. “It is only love that can keep from bitterness, love is stronger than the world's unkindness.”

Presently, not daring to dwell too much on that last scene which Brian had described, she turned to his strange, unexpected reason for his belief in the resurrection, and mused over the characteristics of his ideal. Then she thought she would like to see again what her ideal man had to say about his, and she got up and searched for a small book in a limp red cover, labelled *Life of Jesus of Nazareth.—Luke Raeburn*. It was more than two years since she had seen it; she read it through once more. The style was vigorous, the veiled sarcasms were not unpleasant to her, she detected no unfairness in the mode of treatment, the book satisfied her, the

conclusion arrived at seemed to her inevitable—Brian Osmond's ideal was not perfect.

With a sigh of utter weariness she shut the book and leant back in her chair with a still, white, hopeless face. Presently Friskarina sprang up on her knee with a little sympathetic mew; she had been too miserable as yet to notice even her favourite cat very much, now a scarcely perceptible shade of relief came to her sadness, she stroked the soft grey head. But scarcely had she spoken to her favourite, when the cat suddenly turned away, sprang from her knee and trotted out of the room. It seemed like actual desertion, and Erica could ill bear it just then.

"What, you too, Friskie," she said to herself, "are even you glad to keep away from me?"

She hid her face in her hands; desolate and miserable as she had been before, she now felt more completely alone.

In a few minutes something warm touching her foot made her look up, and with one bound Friskarina sprang into her lap, carrying in her mouth a young kitten. She purred contentedly, looking first at her child and then at her mistress, saying as plainly as if she had spoken,

"Will this comfort you?"

Erica stroked and kissed both cat and kitten, and for the first time since her trouble a feeling of warmth came to her frozen heart.

CHAPTER IX.

ROSE.

A life of unalloyed content,
A life like that of land-locked seas.

J. R. LOWELL.

"ELSPETH, you really must tell me, I'm dying of curiosity, and I can see by your face you know all about it! How is it that grandpapa's name is in the papers when he has been dead all these years? I tell you I saw it, a little paragraph in to-day's paper, headed, 'Mr. Luke Raeburn.' Is this another namesake who has something to do with him!"

The speaker was a tall, bright-looking girl of eighteen, a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired blonde, with a saucy little mouth, about which there now lurked an expression of undisguised curiosity. Rose, for that was her name, was something of a coax, and all her life long she had managed to get her own way; she was an only child, and had been not a little spoilt; but in spite of many faults she was loveable, and beneath her outer shell of vanity and self-satisfaction there lay a sterling little heart.

Her companion, Elspeth, was a wrinkled old woman, whose smooth grey hair was almost hidden by a huge mob-cap, which, in defiance of modern custom, she wore tied under her chin. She had nursed Rose and her mother before her, and had now become more like a family friend than a servant.

"Miss Rose," she replied, looking up from her work, "if you go on chatter-magging away like this, there'll be

no frock ready for you to-night," and with a most uncommunicative air, the old woman turned away, and gave a little impressive shake to the billowy mass of white tarlatan to which she was putting the finishing touches.

"The white lilies just at the side," said Rose, her attention diverted for a moment. "Won't it be lovely! the prettiest dress in the room, I'm sure." Then, her curiosity returning, "But, Elspeth, I shan't enjoy the dance a bit unless you tell me what Mr. Luke Raeburn has to do with us? Listen, and I'll tell you how I found out. Papa brought the paper up to mamma, and said, 'Did you see this?' And then mamma read it, and the colour came all over her face, and she did not say a word, but went out of the room pretty soon. And then I took up the paper, and looked at the page she had been reading, and saw grandpapa's name."

"What was it about?" asked old Elspeth.

"That's just what I couldn't understand; it was all about secularists. What are secularists? But it seems that this Luke Raeburn, whoever he is, has lost his wife. While he was lecturing at Birmingham on the soul, it said, his wife died, and this paragraph said it seemed like a judgment, which was rather cool, I think."

"Poor laddie!" sighed old Elspeth.

"Elspeth," cried Rose, "do you know who the man is?"

"Miss Rose," said the old woman, severely, "in my young days there was a saying that you'd do well to lay to heart, 'Ask no questions, and you'll be told no stories.'"

"It isn't your young days now, it's your old days, Elsie," said the imperturbable Rose. "I will ask you questions as much as I please, and you'll tell me what this mystery means, there's a dear old nursie! Have I not a right to know about my own relations?"

"Oh, bairn! bairn! if it were anything you'd like to hear, but why should you know what is all sad and gloomful? No, no, go to your balls, and think of your fine dresses and gran' partners, though, for the matter of that, it is but vanity of vanities——"

"Oh, if you're going to quote Ecclesiastes, I shall go!" said Rose, pouting. "I wish that book wasn't in the Bible! I'm sure such an old grumbler ought to have been in the Apocrypha."

Elspeth shook her head, and muttered something about judgment and trouble. Rose began to be doubly curious.

Trouble, sadness, a mystery—perhaps a tragedy! Rose had read of such things in books; were there such things actually in the family, and she had never known of them? A few hours ago and she had been unable to think of anything but her first ball, her new dress, her flowers; but she was seized now with the most intense desire to fathom this mystery. That it bid fair to be a sad mystery only made her more eager and curious. She was so young, so ignorant, there was still a halo of romance about those unknown things, trouble and sadness.

"Elspeth, you treat me like a child!" she exclaimed; "it's really too bad of you."

"Maybe you're right, bairn," said the old nurse; "but it's no doing of mine. But look here, Miss Rose, you be persuaded by me, go straight to your mamma and ask her yourself. Maybe there is a doubt whether you oughtn't to know, but there is no doubt that I mustn't tell you."

Rose hesitated, but presently her curiosity overpowered her reluctance.

Mrs. Fane-Smith, or, as she had been called in her maiden days, Isabel Raeburn, was remarkably like her daughter in so far as features and colouring were concerned, but she was exceedingly unlike her in character, for whereas Rose was vain and self-confident, and had a decided will of her own, her mother was diffident and exaggeratedly humble. She was a kind-hearted and a good woman, but she was in danger of losing almost all the real blessedness of life by perpetually harassing herself with the question, "What will people say?"

She looked up apprehensively as her daughter came into the room. Rose felt sure she had been crying, her curiosity was still further stimulated, and with all the persuasiveness at her command, she urged her mother to tell her the meaning of the mysterious paragraph.

"I am sorry you have asked me," said Mrs. Fane-Smith, "but perhaps, since you are no longer a child you had better know. It is a sad story, however, Rose, and I should not have chosen to tell it you to-day of all days."

"But I want to hear, mamma," said Rose, decidedly. "Please begin. Who is this Mr. Raeburn?"

"He is my brother," said Mrs. Fane-Smith, with a little quiver in her voice.

"Your brother! My uncle!" cried Rose, in amazement.

"Luke was the eldest of us," said Mrs. Fane-Smith, "then came Jean, and I was the youngest of all, at least of those who lived."

"Then I have an aunt, too, an Aunt Jean!" exclaimed Rose.

"You shall hear the whole story," replied her mother. She thought for a minute, then in rather a low voice she began. "Luke and Jean were always the clever ones, Luke especially; your grandfather had set his heart on

his being a clergyman, and you can fancy the grief it was to us when he threw up the whole idea, and declared that he could never take orders. He was only nineteen when he renounced religion altogether; he and my father had a great dispute, and the end of it was that Luke was sent away from home, and I have never seen him since. He has become a very notorious infidel lecturer. Jean was very much unsettled by his change of views, and I believe her real reason for marrying old Mr. Craigie was that she had made him promise to let her see Luke again. She married young and settled down in London, and when, in a few years, her husband died, she too renounced Christianity."

To tell the truth, Rose was not deeply interested in the story, it fell a little flat after her expectations of a tragedy. It had, moreover, a sort of missionary flavour, and she had till the last few months lived in India, and had grown heartily tired of the details of mission-work, in which both her father and mother had been interested. Conversions, relapses, heathenism, belief and unbelief were words which had sounded so often in her ears that now they bored her; as they were the merest words to her it could hardly be otherwise. But Rose's best point was her loyalty to her own family, she had the "clan" feeling very strongly, and she could not understand how her mother could have allowed such a complete estrangement to grow up between her and her nearest relations.

"Mamma," she said, quickly, "I should have gone to see Uncle Luke if I had been you."

"It is impossible, dear," replied Mrs. Fane-Smith. "Your father would not allow it for one thing, and then only think what people would say! This is partly my reason for telling you, Rose; I want to put you upon

your guard. We heard little or nothing of your uncle when we were in India, but you will find it very different here. He is one of the most notorious men in England; you must never mention his name, never allude to him, do you understand me?"

"Is he then so wicked?"

"My dear, consider what his teaching is, that is sufficient; I would not for the whole world allow our Grey-shot friends to guess that we are connected with him in any way. It might ruin all your prospects in life."

"Mamma," said Rose, "I don't think Mr. Raeburn will injure my prospects—of course you mean prospects of marrying. If a man didn't care enough for me to take me whether I am the niece of the worst man in England or not, do you think I would accept him?"

There was an angry ring in her voice as she spoke, her little saucy mouth looked almost grand. After a moment's pause she added, more quietly, but with all the force of the true woman's heart which lay hidden beneath her silliness and frivolity, "Besides, mamma, is it quite honest?"

"We are not bound to publish our family history to the world, Rose. If any one asked me, of course I should tell the truth; if there was any way of helping my brother or his child I would gladly serve them, even though the world would look coldly on me for doing so; but while they remain atheists how is it possible?"

"Then he has a child?"

"One only, I believe, a girl of about your own age."

"Oh, mamma, how I should like to know her!"

"My dear Rose, how can you speak of such a thing! You don't realise that she is an atheist, has not even been baptized, poor little thing."

"But she is my cousin, and she is a girl just like me," said Rose. "I should like to know her very much. I wonder whether she has come out yet. I wonder how she enjoyed her first ball."

"My dear! they are not in society."

"How dull! what does she do all day, I wonder?"

"I cannot tell, I wish you would not talk about her, Rose; I should not wish you even to think about her, except, indeed, to mention her in your prayers."

"Oh, I'd much rather have her here to stay," said Rose, with a little mischievous gleam in her eyes.

"Rose!"

"Why, mamma, if she were a black unbeliever you would be delighted to have her, it is only because she is white that you won't have anything to do with her. You would have been as pleased as possible if I had made friends with any of the ladies in the Zenanas."

Mrs. Fane-Smith looked uncomfortable, and murmured that that was a very different question. Rose seeing her advantage, made haste to follow it up.

"At any rate, mamma, you will write to Uncle Luke now that he is in trouble, and you'll let me send a note to his daughter? Only think, mamma, she has lost her mother so suddenly! just think how wretched she must be! Oh, mamma, dear, I can't think how she can bear it!" and Rose threw her arms round her mother's neck. "I should die too if you were to die! I'm sure I should."

Rose was very persuasive, Mrs. Fane-Smith's motherly heart was touched; she sat down there and then, and for the first time since the summer day when Luke Raeburn had been turned out of his father's house, she wrote to her brother. Rose in the meantime had taken a piece

of paper from her mother's writing-desk, and with a fat volume of sermons by way of a desk, was scribbling away as fast as she could. This was her letter:—

“MY DEAR COUSIN,

“I don't know your name, and have only just heard anything about you, and the first thing I heard was that you were in dreadful trouble. I only write to send you my love, and to say how very sorry I am for you. We only came to England in the Autumn. I like it very much. I am going to my first ball to-night, and expect to enjoy it immensely. My dress is to be white tarla—— Oh, dear! how horrid of me to be writing like this to you. Please, forgive me. I don't like to be so happy when you are unhappy; but, you see, I have only just heard of you, so it is a little difficult. With love.

“I remain, your affectionate cousin,

ROSE FANE-SMITH.”

That evening, while Erica, with eyes dim with grief and weariness, was poring over the books in her father's study, Rose was being initiated into all the delights of the ball-room. She was in her glory. Everything was new to her; she enjoyed dancing, she knew that she looked pretty, knew that her dress was charming, knew that she was much admired, and of course she liked it all. But the chaperons shook their heads; it was whispered that Miss Fane-Smith was a terrible flirt, she had danced no less than seven dances with Captain Golightly. If her mother erred by thinking too much of what people said, perhaps Rose erred in exactly the opposite way; at any rate, she managed to call down upon her silly but innocent little head an immense amount of blame from the mothers and elderly ladies.

"A glorious moonlight night," said Captain Golightly. "What do you say, Miss Fane-Smith? Shall we take a turn in the garden? Or are you afraid of the cold?"

"Afraid! oh, dear, no," said Rose, "it's the very thing I should enjoy; I suppose I must get my shawl, though; it is upstairs."

They were in the vestibule.

"Have my ulster," said Captain Golightly. "Here it is, just handy, and it will keep you much warmer."

Rose laughed and blushed, and allowed herself to be put into her partner's coat, rather to the detriment of her billowy tarlatan. After a while they came back again from the dim garden to the brightly-lighted vestibule, and as ill-luck would have it, chanced to encounter a stream of people going into the supper-room. Every one stared at the apparition of Miss Fane-Smith in Captain Golightly's coat. With some difficulty she struggled out of it, and with very hot cheeks sought shelter in the ball-room.

"Hew dreadfully they looked! Do you think it was wrong of me?" she half-whispered to her partner,

"Oh, dear, no! sensible and plucky, and everything delightful! You are much too charming to be bound down to silly conventionalities. Come, let us have this dance. I'm sure you are engaged to some one in the supper-room who can't deserve such a delightful partner. Let us have this *trois temps*, and hurl defiance at the Grey-shot chaperons."

Rose laughed, and allowed herself to be borne off. She had been excited before, now she was doubly excited, and Captain Golightly had the most delicious step imaginable.

CHAPTER X.

HARD AT WORK.

Longing is God's fresh heavenward will
With our poor earthward striving;
We quench it that we may be still
Content with merely living;
But, would we learn that heart's full scope
Which we are hourly wronging,
Our lives must climb from hope to hope
And realise our longing.—J. R. LOWELL.

PERHAPS it was only natural that there should be that winter a good deal of communication between the secularist's house in Guilford Terrace and the clergyman's house in Guilford Square. From the first Raeburn had taken a great fancy to Charles Osmond, and now that Brian had become so closely connected with the memory of their sudden bereavement, and had made himself almost one of them by his silent, unobtrusive sympathy, and by his numberless acts of delicate considerateness, a tie was necessarily formed which promised to deepen into one of those close friendships that sometimes exist between two entire families.

It was a bleak, chilly afternoon in March, when Charles Osmond, returning from a long round of parish work, thought he would look in for a few minutes at the Raeburns'; he had a proposal to make to Erica, some fresh work which he thought might interest her. He rang the bell at the now familiar door and was admitted;

it carried him back to the day when he had first called there and had been shown into the fire-lit room, with the book-lined walls, and the pretty little girl curled up on the rug, with her cat and her toasting-fork. Time had brought many changes since then. This evening he was again shown into the study, but this time the gas was lighted and there was no little girl upon the hearth-rug. Erica was sitting at her desk hard at work. Her face lighted up at the sight of her visitor.

"Every one is out except me," she said, more brightly than he had heard her speak since her return. "Did you really come to see me? How good of you."

"But you are busy," said Charles Osmond, glancing at the papers on the desk? "Press-work?"

"Yes, my first article," said Erica, "it is just finished, but if you'll excuse me for one minute, I ought to correct it, the office boy will call for it directly."

"Don't hurry; I will wait and get warm in the meantime," said Charles Osmond, establishing himself by the fire.

There was a silence broken only by the sound of Erica's pen as she crossed out a word or a line. Charles Osmond watched her and mused. This beautiful girl, whose development he could trace now for more than two years back, what would she grow into? Already she was writing in the *Idol-Breaker*.

He regretted it. Yet it was obviously the most natural employment for her. He looked at her ever-changing face. She was absorbed in her work, her expression varying with the sentences she read; now there was a look of triumphant happiness as she came to something which made her heart beat quickly, again a shade of dissatisfaction at the consciousness of her inability to express

what was in her mind. He could not help thinking that it was one of the noblest faces he had ever seen, and now that the eyes were downcast it was not so terribly sad; there was moreover for the first time since her mother's death a faint tinge of colour in her cheeks. Before five minutes could have passed the bell rang again.

"That is my boy," she exclaimed, and hastily blotting her sheets, she rolled them up, gave them to the servant, closed her desk, and crossing the room, knelt down in front of the fire to warm her hands, which were stiff and chilly.

"How rude I have been to you," she said, smiling a little, "I always have been rude to you, since the very first time we met."

"We were always frank with each other," said Charles Osmond; "I remember you gave me your opinion as to bigots and Christians in the most delightfully open way. So you have been writing your first article?"

"Yes," and she stretched herself as though she were rather tired and cramped. "I have had a delicious afternoon. Yesterday I was in despair about it, but to-day it just came—I wrote it straight off."

"And you are satisfied with it?"

"Satisfied? oh, no! Is anybody ever satisfied? By the time it is in print I shall want to alter every sixth line. Still, I daresay it will say a little of what I want said?"

"Oh, you do want something said?"

"Of course!" she replied, a little indignantly. "If not, how could I write?"

"I quite agree with you," said Charles Osmond, and you mean to take this up as your vocation?"

"If I am thought worthy," said Erica, colouring a little.

"I see you have high ideas of the art," said Charles Osmond; "and what is your reason for taking it up?"

"First of all, though it sounds rather illogical," said Erica, "I write because I *must*, there is something in me which will have its say. Then, too, it is part of our creed that every one should do all in his power to help on the cause, and of course, if only for my father's sake, it would be my greatest pleasure. Then, last of all, I write because I must earn my living."

"Good reasons all," said Charles Osmond. "But I don't feel sure that you won't regret having written when you look back several years hence."

"Oh! I daresay it will all seem crude and ridiculous then, but one must make a beginning," said Erica.

"And are you sure you have thought out these great questions so thoroughly and fairly that you are capable of teaching others about them?"

"Ah! now I see what you mean!" exclaimed Erica, "you think I write in defence of atheism, or as an attacker of Christianity. I do nothing of the kind, father would not allow me to, he would not think me old enough. Oh! no, I am only to write the lighter articles which are needed every now and then. To-day I had a delightful subject—'Heroes—what are they?'"

"Well, and what is your definition of a hero, I wonder; what are the qualities you think absolutely necessary to make one?"

"I think I have only two absolutely necessary ones," said Erica; "but my heroes must have these two, they must have brains and goodness."

"A tolerably sweeping definition," said Charles Osmond, laughing, "almost equal to a friend of mine who wanted a wife, and said there were only two things he would

stipulate for—1500*l.* a-year, and an angel! But it brings us to another definition, you see. We shall agree as to the brains, but how about goodness! What is your definition of that very wide, not to say vague, term?"

Erica looked puzzled.

"I don't think I can define it," she said; "but one knows it when one sees it."

"Do you mean by it, unselfishness, courage, truthfulness, or any other virtue?"

"Oh! it isn't any one virtue, or even a parcel of virtues, it will not go into words."

"It is then the nearest approach to some perfect ideal which is in your mind?"

"I suppose it is," she said, slowly.

"How did that ideal come into your mind?"

"I don't know, I suppose I got it by inheritance."

"From the original moneron?"

"You are laughing at me. I don't know how of course, but I have it, which, as far as I can see, is all that matters."

"I am not sure of that," said Charles Osmond. "The explanation of that ideal of goodness which more or less clearly exists in all our minds, seems to me to rest only in the conviction that all are children of one perfect Father. And I can give you our definition of goodness without hesitation, it is summed up for us in one word—'Christlikeness.'"

"I cannot see it, it seems to me all exaggerated," said Erica, "I believe it is only because people are educated to believe and predisposed to think it all good and perfect that there are so many Christians. You may say it is we who are prejudiced. If we are, I'm sure you Christians have done enough to make us so! How could

I, for instance, be anything but an atheist? Shall I tell you the very first thing I can remember?"

Her eyes were flashing with indignant light.

"I was a little tiny child—only four years old—but there are some scenes one never forgets. I can see it all as plainly as possible, the room in a hotel, the very doll I was playing with. There was a great noise in the street, trampling, hissing, hooting. I ran to the window, an immense crowd was coming nearer and nearer, the street was black with the throng, they were all shouting and yelling—'Down with the infidel!' 'Kill the atheist!' Then I saw my father, he was there strong and fearless, one man against a thousand! I tell you I saw him, I can see him now, fighting his way on single-handed, not one creature brave enough to stand up for him! I saw him pushed, struck, spit upon, stoned. At last a great brick struck him on the head. I think I must have been too sick or too angry to see any more after that. The next thing I remember is lying on the floor sobbing, and hearing father come into the room and say, 'Why little son Eric, did you think they'd killed me?' And he picked me up and let me sit on his knee, but there was blood on his face, and as he kissed me it dropped upon my forehead. I tell you, you Christians baptised me into atheism in my own father's blood. They were Christians who stoned him, champions of religion, and they were egged on by the clergy! Did I not hear it all then in my babyhood? And it is true! it is all fact! ask anybody you like! I have not exaggerated!"

"My dear child, I know you have not," said Charles Osmond, putting his strong hand upon hers. He could feel that she was all trembling with indignation. Was it to be wondered at? "I remember those riots perfectly

well," he continued. "I think I felt and feel as indignant about them as yourself. A fearful mistake was made—Mr. Raeburn was shamefully treated. But Erica,"—it was the first time he had called her by her name,—“you who pride yourself upon fairness, you who make justice your watchword, must be careful not to let the wrongdoing of a few Christians prejudice you against Christianity. You say that we are all predisposed to accept Christ; but candidly you must allow, I think, that you are trebly prejudiced against the very name of Christian. A Christian almost inevitably means to you only one of your father's mistaken prosecutors.”

“Yes, you are so much of an exception that I always forget you are one,” said Erica, smiling a little. “Yet you are not like one of us quite—you somehow stand alone, you are unlike any one I ever met; you and Thekla Sonnenthal and your son make to me a sort of new variety.”

Charles Osmond laughed, and changed the subject.

“You are busy with your examination work, I suppose?” And the question led to a long talk about books and lectures.

In truth, Erica had plunged into work of all kinds, not merely from love of it, but because she felt the absolute need of fresh interests, the great danger of dwelling unduly on her sorrow. Then, too, she had just grasped a new idea, an idea at once noble and inspiring. Hitherto she had thought of a happy future for herself, of a home free from troubles and harassing cares. That was all over now, her golden dream had come to an end, and “Hope dead lives nevermore.” The life she had pictured to herself could never be, but her nature was too strong to be crushed by the sorrow; physically the shock had

weakened her far more than any one knew, but, mentally, it had been a wonderful stimulant. She rose above herself, above her trouble, and life began to mean something broader, and deeper than before.

Hitherto her great desire had been to be free from care, and to be happy; now the one important thing seemed not so much to be happy, as to know. To learn herself, and to help others to learn, became her chief object, and, with all the devotion of an earnest, high-souled nature, she set herself to act out these convictions. She read hard, attended lectures, and twice a week taught in the night school attached to the Institute.

Charles Osmond could not help smiling as she described her days to him. She still retained something of the childishness of an Undine, and as they talked she had taken up her old position on the hearthrug, and Friskarina had crept on to her knee. Here, undoubtedly, was one whom ignorant people would stigmatise as "blue," or as "*femme savante*;" they would of course be quite wrong and inexpressively foolish to use such terms, and yet there was, perhaps, something a little incongruous in the two sides, as it were, of Erica's nature, the keen intellect and the child-like devotion, the great love of learning and the intense love of fun and humour. Charles Osmond had only once in all his long years of experience met with a character which interested him so much.

"After all," he said, when they had talked for some time, "I have never told you that I came on a begging errand, and I half fear that you will be too busy to undertake any more work."

Erica's face brightened at the word; was not work what she lived for?

"Oh! I am not too busy for anything!" she exclaimed.

"I shall quote Marcus Aurelius to you if you say I haven't time! What sort of work?"

"Only, when you can, to come in to us in the afternoon and read a little to my mother. Do you think you could? Her eyes are failing, and Brian and I are hard at work all day; I am afraid she is very dull."

"I should like to come very much," said Erica, really pleased at the suggestion. "What sort of books would Mrs. Osmond like?"

"Oh, anything! history, travels, science, or even novels, if you are not above reading them!"

"I? of course not," said Erica, laughing. "Don't you think we enjoy them as much as other people? when there is time to read them, at least, which isn't often."

Charles Osmond laughed.

"Very well then, you have a wide field. From Carlyle to Miss Bird, and from Ernst Haeckel to Charles Reade. I should make them into a big sandwich if I were you."

He said good-bye, and left Erica still on the hearthrug, her face brighter than it had been for months.

"I like that man," she said to herself. "He's honest and thorough, and good all through. Yet how in the world does he make himself believe in his creed! Goodness, Christlikeness. He looked so grand, too, as he said that. It is wonderful what a personal sort of devotion those three have for their ideal."

She wandered away to recollections of Thekla Sonnenthal, and that carried her back to the time of their last parting, and the recollection of her sorrow. All at once the loneliness of the present was borne in upon her overwhelmingly; she looked round the little room, the Ilkley couch was pushed away into a corner, there was a pile of newspapers upon it. A great sob escaped her. For

a minute she pressed her hands tightly together over her eyes, then she hurriedly opened a book on "Electricity," and began to read as if for her life.

She was roused in about an hour's time by a laughing exclamation. She started, and looking up, saw her cousin Tom.

"Talk about absorption, and brown studies!" he cried, "why, you beat everything I ever saw. I've been looking at you for at least three minutes."

Tom was now about nineteen; he had inherited the auburn colouring of the Raeburns, but otherwise he was said to be much more like the Craigies. He was nice-looking, but somewhat freckled, and though he was tall and strongly built, he somehow betrayed that he had led a sedentary life and looked, in fact, as if he wanted a training in gymnastics. For the rest he was shrewd, business-like, good-natured, and at present very conceited. He had been Erica's friend and playfellow as long as she could remember, they were brother and sister in all but the name, for they had lived within a stone's throw of each other all their lives, and now shared the same house.

"I never heard you come in," she said, smiling a little. "You must have been very quiet."

"I don't believe you'd hear a salute fired in the next room if you were reading, you little bookworm! But look here? I've got a parody on the chieftain that'll make you cry with laughing. You remember the smashed windows at the meeting at Rilchester last week?"

Erica remembered well enough, she had felt sore and angry about it, and the comments in the newspapers had not been consolatory. She had learnt to dread even the

comic papers; but there was nothing spiteful in the one which Tom produced that evening. It was headed:—

SCOTCH SONG.

Tune—“Twas within a mile of Edinboro’ town.”

“Twas within a hall of Rilchester town,
 In the bleak spring-time of the year,
 Luke Raeburn gave a lecture on the soul of man,
 And found that it cost him dear.
 Windows all were smashed that day,
 They said, ‘The atheist can pay,’
 But Scottish Raeburn frowning cried,
 ‘Na, na, it winna do,
 I canna, canna, winna, winna, munna pay for you.’”

The parody ran on through the three verses of the song, the conclusion was really witty, and there was no sting in it. Erica laughed over it as she had not laughed for weeks. Tom, who had been trying unsuccessfully to cheer her ever since her return, was quite relieved.

“I believe the sixpence a-day style suits you,” he said. “But, I say, isn’t anything coming up? I’m as hungry as a hunter.”

Their elders being away for a few days, Tom and Erica were amusing themselves by trying to live on the rather strange diet of the man who published his plan for living at the smallest possible cost. They were already beginning to be rather weary of porridge, pea-soup, and lentils. This evening pea-soup was in the ascendant, and Erica, tired with a long afternoon’s work, felt as if she could almost as soon have eaten Thames mud.

“Dear me,” she said, “it never struck me, this is our Lenten penance! Now, wouldn’t any one looking in fancy we were poor Romanists without an indulgence?”

"Certainly without any self-indulgence," said Tom who never lost an opportunity of making a bad pun.

"It would be a great indulgence to stop eating," said Erica, sighing over the soup yet to be swallowed.

"Do you think it is more inspiring to fast in order to save one's soul, than it is to pay the chieftain's debts? I wish I could honestly say, like the little French girl in her confession, '*J'ai trop mangé.*'"

Tom dearly loved that story, he was exceedingly fond of getting choice little anecdotes from various religious newspapers, especially those which dealt in much abuse of the Church of Rome, and he retailed them *con amore*. Erica listened to several, and laughed a good deal over them.

"I wonder, though, they don't see how they play into our hands by putting in these things," she said, after Tom had given her a description of some ludicrous attack made by a ritualist on an evangelical. "I should have thought they would have tried to agree whenever they could, instead of which they seem almost as spiteful to each other as they are to us."

"They'd know better if they'd more than a grain of sense between them," said Tom, sweepingly, "but they haven't; and as they're always playing battledore and shuttlecock with that, it isn't much good to either. Of course they play into our hands! I believe the spiteful ultra-high paper, and the spiteful ultra-low paper do more to promote atheism than the *Idol-Breaker* itself."

"How dreadful it must be for men like Mr. Osmond, who see all round, and yet can't stop what they must think the mischief. Mr. Osmond has been here this afternoon."

"Ah, now, he's a stunning fellow, if you like,"

said Tom. "He's not one of the pig-headed, narrow-minded set. How he comes to be a parson I can't make out."

"Well, you see, from their point of view it is the best thing to be, I mean he gets plenty of scope for work. I fancy he feels as much obliged to speak and teach as father does."

"Pity he's not on our side," said Tom, "they say he's a first-rate speaker. But I'm afraid he is perfectly crazy on that point, he'll never come over."

"I don't think we've a right to put the whole of his religiousness down to a mania," said Erica. "Besides, he is not the sort of man to be even a little mad, there's nothing the least fanatical about him."

"Call it delusion, if you like it better. What's in a name? The thing remains the same! A man can't believe what is utterly against reason without becoming, as far as that particular belief is concerned, unreasonable, beyond the pale of reason, therefore deluded, therefore mad."

Erica looked perplexed; she did not think Tom's logic altogether good, but she could not correct it. There was, however, a want of generosity about the assertion which instantly appealed to her fine sense of honour.

"I can't argue it out," she said at last, "but it doesn't seem to me fair to put down what we can't understand in other people to madness; it never seemed to me quite fair for Festus to accuse Paul of madness when he really had made a splendid defence, and it doesn't seem fair that you should accuse Mr. Osmond of being mad."

"Only on that one point," said Tom. "Just a little touched, you know. How else can you account for a man like that believing what he professes to believe."

"I don't know," said Erica, relapsing into perplexed silence.

"Besides," continued Tom, "you cry out because I say they must be just a little touched, but they accuse us of something far worse than madness, they accuse us of absolute wickedness."

"Not all of them," said Erica.

"The greater part," said Tom. "How often do you think the chieftain meets with really fair treatment from his antagonists?"

Erica had nothing to say to this. The harshness and intolerance which her father had constantly to encounter was the great grief of her life, the perpetual source of indignation, her strongest argument against Christianity.

"Have you much to do to-night?" she asked, not anxious to stir up afresh the revolt against the world's injustice which the merest touch would set working within her. "I was thinking that, if there was time to spare, we might go to see the Professor; he has promised to show me some experiments."

"Electricity?" Tom pricked up his ears. "Not half a bad idea. If you'll help me, we can polish off the letters in an hour or so, and be free by eight o'clock."

They set to work, and between them disposed of the correspondence.

It was a great relief to Erica after her long day's work to be out in the cool evening air. The night was fine but very windy, indeed the sudden gusts at the street corners made her glad to take Tom's arm. Once, as they rather slackened their speed, half baffled by the storm, a sentence from a passer-by fell on their ears. The speaker looked like a countryman.

"Give me a good gas-burner with pipes and a meter that a honest man can understand! Now this 'ere elective light I say it's not canny; I've no belief in things o' that kind, it won't never——"

The rest of the speech died away in the distance. Tom and Erica laughed, but the incident set Erica thinking. Here was a man who would not believe what he could not understand, who wanted "pipes and a meter," and for want of comprehensible outward signs pooh-poohed the great new discovery.

"Tom," she said, slowly, and with the manner of one who makes a very unpleasant suggestion, reluctantly putting forward an unwelcome thought, "suppose if, after all, we are like that man, and reject a grand discovery because we don't know and are too ignorant to understand! Tom, just suppose if, after all, Christianity should be true and we in the wrong!"

"Just suppose if, after all, the earth should be a flat plain with the sun moving round it!" replied Tom scornfully.

They were walking down the Strand; he did not speak for some minutes, in fact he was looking at the people who passed by them. For the first time in his life a great contrast struck him. Disreputable vulgarity, wickedness, and vice stared him in the face, then involuntarily he turned to Erica and looked down at her scrutinisingly as he had never looked before. She was evidently rapt in thought, but it was not the intellect in her face which he thought of just then, though it was ever noticeable, nor was it the actual beauty of feature which struck him, it was rather an undefined consciousness that here was a purity which was adorable. From that moment he became no longer a boy, but a man with

a high standard of womanhood. Instantly he thought with regret of his scornful little speech,—it was contemptible!

“I beg your pardon,” he said, abruptly, as if she had been following his whole train of thought. “Of course one is bound to study the question fairly; but we have done that, and all that remains for us is to live as usefully as we can and as creditably to the cause as may be.”

They had turned down one of the dingy little streets leading to the river, and now stood outside Professor Gosse's door. Erica did not reply. It was true she had heard arguments for and against Christianity all her life, but had she ever studied it with strict impartiality? Had she not always been strongly biassed in favour of secularism? Had not Mr. Osmond gone unpleasantly near the mark when he warned her against being prejudiced by the wrong-doing of a few modern Christians against Christianity itself! She was coming now for special instruction in science from one who was best calculated to teach; she would not have dreamt of asking instruction from one who was a disbeliever in science. Would the same apply in matters of religious belief? Was she bound actually to ask instruction from Charles Osmond, for instance, even though she believed that he taught error,—harmful error? Yet who was to be the judge of what was error, except by perfectly fair consideration of both sides of the case. Had she been fair? What was perfect fairness?

But people must go on living, and must speak and act even though their minds are in a chaos of doubts and questionings. They had reached Professor Gosse's study, or as he himself called it, his workshop, and Erica turned with relief to the verifiable results of scientific inquiry.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHEELS RUN DOWN.

Great grace, as saith Sir Thomas More,
To him must needs be given,
Who heareth heresy, and leaves
The heretic to Heaven.—WHITTIER.

THE clock in a neighbouring church tower was just striking five on a warm afternoon in June. The pillar-box stood at the corner of Guilford Square nearest the church, and on this particular afternoon there chanced to be several people running at the last moment to post their letters. Among others were Brian and Erica. Brian, with a great bundle of parish notices, had just reached the box when running down the other side of the square at full speed he saw his Undine carrying a bag full of letters. He had not met her for some weeks, for it happened to have been a busy time with him, and, though she had been very good in coming to read to old Mrs. Osmond, he had always just missed her.

"This is a funny meeting-place," she exclaimed, rather breathlessly. "It never struck me before what a truly national institution the Post Office is,—a place where people of all creeds and opinions can meet together, and are actually treated alike!"

Brian smiled.

"You have been very busy," he said, glancing at the innumerable envelopes, which she was dropping as fast as might be into the narrow receptacle. He could see that they were directed in her small, clear, delicate hand-writing.

"And you, too," she said, looking at his diminished bundle. "Mine are secularist circulars, and yours, I suppose, are the other kind of thing, but you see the same pillar eats them up quite contentedly. The Post Office is beautifully national, it sets a good example."

She spoke lightly, but there was a peculiar tone in her voice which betrayed great weariness. It made Brian look at her more attentively than he had yet done—less from a lover's point of view, more from a doctor's. She was very pale. Though the running had brought a faint colour to her cheeks, her lips were white, her forehead almost deathly. He knew that she had never really been well since her mother's death, but the change wrought within the last three weeks dismayed him; she was the mere shadow of her former self.

"This hot weather is trying you," he said.

"Something is," she replied. "Work, or weather, or worry, or the three combined."

"Come in and see my father," said Brian, "and be idle for a little time; you will be writing more circulars if you go home."

"No, they are all done, and my examination is over, and there is nothing special going on just now; I think that is why I feel so like breaking down."

After a little more persuasion, she consented to go in and see Mr. Osmond. The house always had a peculiarly restful feeling, and the mere thought of rest was a relief to her; she would have liked the wheels of life to stop for a little while, and there was rest in the mere change of atmosphere. On the doorstep Brian encountered a patient, much to his vexation; so he could only take Erica into the study, and go in search of his father. He lingered, however, just to tell him of his fears.

"She looks perfectly worn out; you must find out what is wrong, father, and make her promise to see some one."

His tone betrayed such anxiety that his father would not smile, although he was secretly amused at the task deputed to him. However, clergyman as he was, he had a good deal of the doctor about him, and he had seen so much of sickness and disease during his long years of hard work among the poor, that he was after all about as ready an observer and as good a judge as Brian could have selected.

Erica, leaning back in the great easy-chair, which had been moved into summer quarters beside the window, heard the slow, soft step she had learned to know so well, and before she had time to get up, found her hand in Charles Osmond's strong clasp.

"How comfortable your chair is," she said, smiling; "I believe I was nearly asleep."

He looked at her attentively, but without appearing to study her face in any way. She was very pale and there was an indefinable look of pain in her eyes.

"Any news of the examination?" he asked, sitting down opposite her.

"No, it is too soon yet," she replied. "I thought I should have felt so anxious about it; but do you know, now that it is over, I can't make myself care a bit. If I have failed altogether, I don't believe I shall mind very much."

"Too tired to care for anything?"

"Yes, I seem to have come to the end. I wish I were a watch, and could run down and rest for a few days and be wound up again."

He smiled. "What have you been doing with yourself to get so tired?"

“Oh, nothing particular; it has been rather a long day. Let me see! In the morning there were two delegates from Rilchester who had to be kept in a good temper till my father was ready for them; then there was father’s bag to be packed, and a rush to get him off in time for the morning express to Longstaff. Then I went to a lecture at South Kensington, and then by train to Aldersgate Street to see Hazeldine’s wife, who is unconscionable enough to live at the top of one of the model lodging-houses. Then she told me of another of our people whose child is ill, and they lived in another row of Compton Buildings up a hundred more steps, which left my back nearly broken. And the poor little child was fearfully ill, and it is so dreadful to see pain you can do nothing for; it has made me feel wretched ever since. Then,—let me think—oh, I got home and found Aunt Jean with a heap of circulars to get off, and there was a great rush to get them ready by post time.”

She paused; Charles Osmond withdrew his eyes from the careful scrutiny of her face, and noticed the position she had taken up in his chair. She was leaning back but with her arms resting on the arms of the chair; not merely stretched out upon them, but rather as if she used them for support. His eyes wandered back again to her face. After a short silence, he spoke.

“You have been feeling very tired lately; you have had unaccountable pains flying about all over you, but specially your back has felt, as you just said, somewhat ‘broken.’ You have generally noticed this when you have been walking, or bending over your desk writing for the *Idol-Breaker*.”

She laughed.

"Now, please don't turn into a clairvoyant; I shall begin to think you uncanny; and, besides, it would be an argument for Tom when we quarrel about you."

"Then my surmises are true?"

"Substitute first person singular for second plural, and it might have come from my own lips," said Erica, smiling. "But please stop; I'm afraid you will try to turn prophet next, and I'm sure you will prophesy something horrid."

"It would need no very clear-sighted prophet to prophesy that you will have to let your wheels run down for a little while."

"Do you mean that you think I shall die?" asked Erica, languidly. "It wouldn't be at all convenient just now; father couldn't spare me. Do you know," and her face brightened, "he is really beginning to use me a good deal!"

"I didn't mean that I thought your wheels would run down in that way," said Charles Osmond, touched by the pathos of her words. "I may even be wrong, but I think you will want a long rest, and I am quite sure you musn't lose a day before seeing a doctor. I should like my brother to see you; Brian is only junior partner, you know."

"What, another Mr. Osmond! How muddled we shall get between you all!" said Erica, laughing.

"I should think that Brian might be Brian by this time," said Charles Osmond, "that will dispose of one; and perhaps you would like to follow the example of one of my servants, who, I hear, invariably speaks of me as 'the dear rev.'"

Erica laughed.

"No, I shall call you my 'prophet,' though it is true you have begun by being a prophet of evil! By-the-by,

you cannot say again that I am not impartial. What do you think Tom and I did last week?"

"Read the New Testament backwards?"

"No, we went to a Holy Scripture Society meeting at Exeter Hall."

"Hope you were edified," said Charles Osmond, with a little twinkle in his eye; but he sighed, nevertheless.

"Well," said Erica, "it was rather curious to hear everything reversed, and there was a good deal of fun altogether. They talked a great deal about the numbers of bibles, testaments, and portions which had been sent out. There was one man who spoke very broadly, and kept on speaking of the '*portions*,' and there was another whom we called the '*Great Door*,' because eight times in his speech he said that a great door had been opened for them in Italy and other places. Altogether, I thought them rather smug and self-satisfied, especially one man whose face shone on the slightest provocation, and who remarked, in broad Lincolnshire, that they had been '*Aboondantly blessed*.' After his speech a little short, sleek, oily man got up, and talked about Providence. Apparently it had been very kind to him, and he thought the other sort of thing did best for those who got it. But there were one or two really good speakers, and I dare say they were all in earnest. Still, you know, Tom and I felt rather like fish out of water, and especially when they began to sing, '*Oh, Bible, blessed Bible!*' and a lady would make me share her hymn-book. Then, too, there was a collection, and the man made quite a pause in front of us, and of course we couldn't give anything. Altogether, I felt rather horrid and hypocritical for being there at all."

"Is that your only experience of one of our meetings?"

"Oh, no, father took me with him two or three times to Westminster Abbey a good many years ago. We heard the Dean; father admired him very much. I like Westminster Abbey. It seems to belong a little to us, too, because it is so national. And then it is so beautiful, and I liked hearing the music. I wonder, though, that you are not a little afraid of having it so much in your worship; I remember hearing a beautiful anthem there once, which just thrilled one all through. I wonder that you don't fear that people should mistake that for what you call spiritual fervour."

"I think, perhaps, there is a danger in any undue introduction of externals, but any one whose spirit has ever been awakened will never mistake the mere thrill of sensuous rapture for the quickening of his spirit by the Unseen."

"You are talking riddles to me now!" said Erica; "but I feel sure that some of the people who go to church regularly only like it because of that appeal to the senses. I shall never forget going one afternoon into Notre Dame with Madame Lemercier. A flood of crimson and purple light was shining in through the south transept windows. You could see the white-robed priests and choristers—there was one boy with the most perfect voice you can conceive. I don't know what they were singing, something very sweet and mournful, and, as that one voice rang up into the vaulted roof, I saw Madame Lemercier fall down on her knees and pray in a sort of rapture. Even I myself felt the tears come to my eyes, just because of the loveliness, and because the blood in one's veins seemed to bound. And then, still singing, the procession passed into the nave, and the lovely voice grew more and more distant. It was a wonderful effect; no

doubt the congregation thought they felt devout, but, if so, then I too felt devout—quite as religious as they. Your spiritual fervour seems to me to resolve itself into artistic effect produced by an appeal to the senses and emotions.”

“And I must repeat my riddle,” said Charles Osmond, quietly. “No awakened spirit could ever mistake the one for the other. It is impossible! how impossible you will one day realise.”

“One evil prophecy is enough for to-day!” said Erica, laughing. “If I stay any longer, you will be prophesying my acceptance of Christianity. No, no, my father will be grieved enough if your first prediction comes true, but, if I were to turn Christian, I think it would break his heart!”

She rose to go, and Charles Osmond went with her to the door, extracting a promise that she would discuss things with her aunt, and if she approved send for Mr. Osmond at once. He watched her across the square, then turning back into his study paced to and fro in deep thought. Erica’s words rang in his ears. “If I were to turn Christian, I think it would break his heart!” How strangely this child was situated! How almost impossible it seemed that she could ever in this world come to the light! And yet the difficulty might perhaps be no hindrance to one so beautifully sincere, so ready to endure anything and everything for the sake of what she now considered truth. She had all her father’s zeal and self-devotion; surely the offering up of self, even in a mistaken cause, must sooner or later lead to the Originator of all self-sacrifice. Surely some of those who seem only to thwart God, honestly deeming Christianity a mischievous delusion, are really acting more in His spirit,

unconsciously better doing His will than many who openly declare themselves on his side! Yet, as Charles Osmond mused over the past lives of Luke Raeburn and his daughter, and pictured their probable future, a great grief filled his heart. They were both so loveable, so noble! that they should miss in a great measure the best of life seemed such a grievous pity! The chances that either of them would renounce atheism were, he could not but feel, infinitesimally small. Much smaller for the father than for the child.

It was true, indeed, that she had never fairly grasped any real idea of the character of Christ. He had once grasped it to a certain extent, and had lost the perception of its beauty and truth. It was true also that Erica's transparent sincerity, her quick perception of the beautiful might help very greatly to overcome her deeply-ingrained prejudices. But even then what an agony—what a fearful struggle would lie before her! "I think it would break his heart!" Charles Osmond felt his breath come fast and hard at the mere thought of such a difference between the father and daughter. Could human strength possibly be equal to such a terrible trial? For these two were everything to each other. Erica worshipped her father, and Raeburn's fatherhood was the truest, deepest, tenderest part of his character. No, human strength could not do it, but,—

"I am; nyle ye drede!"

His eye fell on a little illuminated scroll above his mantelpiece, Wyclif's rendering of Christ's reassuring words to the fearful disciples. Yes, with the revelation of Himself, He would give the strength, make it possible to dread nothing, not even the infliction of grief to one's nearest and dearest. Much pain, much sacrifice there

would be in His service, but dread—never! The strength of the “I am,” bade it for ever cease. In that strength the weakest could conquer.

But he had wondered on into a dim future, had pictured a struggle which in all probability would not take place. Even were that the case, however, he needed these words of assurance all the more himself. They wove themselves into his reverie as he paced to and fro; they led him further and further away from perplexed surmises as to the future of Raeburn and Erica, but closer to their souls, because they took him straight to the “God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.”

The next morning, as he was preparing a sermon for the following Sunday, there came a knock at his study door. His brother came in. He was a fine-looking man of two or three and fifty.

“I can’t stay,” he said, “I’ve a long round, but I just looked in to tell you about your little heretic.”

Charles Osmond looked up anxiously.

“It is as you thought,” continued his brother. “Slight curvature of the spine. She’s a brave little thing; I don’t wonder you are interested in her.”

“It means a long rest, I suppose?”

“Yes, I told her a year in a recumbent posture; for I fancy she is one of those restless beings who will do nothing at all unless you are pretty plain with them. It is possible that six or eight months may be sufficient.”

“How did she take it?”

“Oh, in the pluckiest way you can conceive! Tried to laugh at the prospect, wanted me to measure her to see how much she grew in the time, said she should expect at least three inches to reward her.”

"A Raeburn could hardly be deficient in courage. Luke Raeburn is without exception the bravest man I ever met."

"And I'd back his daughter against any woman I know," said the doctor.

He left the room, but the news he had brought caused a long pause in his brother's sermon.

CHAPTER XII.

RAEBURN'S HOME-COMING.

He is a man both loving and severe,
A tender heart, a will inflexible.—LONGFELLOW.

LUKE RAEBURN had been lecturing in one of the large manufacturing towns. It was the hottest part of a sultry day in June. He was returning home, and sat in a broiling third-class carriage reading a paper. Apparently what he read was the reverse of gratifying, for there was a look of annoyance on his usually serene face; he was displeased with the report of his lecture given in the local papers, it was calculated to mislead very greatly.

Other matters, too, were harassing him just then, and he was, moreover, paying the penalty of his two years' campaign, in which his almost superhuman exertions and the privations he had voluntarily endured had told severely upon his health. Possessed of a singularly well-regulated mind, and having in an unusual degree the inestimable gift of common-sense, he nevertheless often failed to use it in his personal affairs. He had no idea of sparing himself, no idea of husbanding his strength; this was indeed great, but he treated himself as if it were inexhaustible.

The months of trouble had turned his hair quite white; he was now a more noticeable-looking man than ever.

Not unfrequently he made friends with the men with whom he travelled; he was always studying life from the workingman's point of view, and there was such a charm in his genial manner and ready sympathy that he invariably succeeded in drawing people out. But on this day he was not in the humour for it; instead, he thought over the abusive article and the mangled report in the *Longstaff Mercury*, and debated within himself whether it were worth an action for libel. His love of fighting said yes, his common-sense said no; and in the end common-sense won the day, but left him doubly depressed. He moved to the shady side of the carriage and looked out of the window. He was a great lover of Nature, and Nature was looking her loveliest just then. The trees, in all the freshness of early June, lifted their foliage to the bluest of skies, the meadows were golden with buttercups, the cattle grazed peacefully, the hay-fields waved unmown in the soft summer air, which, though sparing no breath for the hot and dusty travellers, was yet strong enough to sweep over the tall grasses in long, undulating waves that made them shimmer in the sunlight.

Raeburn's face grew serene once more; he had a very quick perception of the beautiful. Presently he retired again behind a newspaper, this time the *Daily Review*, and again his brow grew stern, for there was bad news from the seat of war; he read the account of a great battle, read the numbers of his slain countrymen, and of those who had fallen on the enemy's side. It was an unrighteous war, and his heart burnt within him at the thought of the inhuman havoc thus caused by a false ambition. Again, as if he were fated that day to be con-

fronted with the dark side of life, the papers gave a long account of a discovery made in some charity school, where young children had been hideously ill-treated. Raeburn, who was the most fatherly of men, could hardly restrain the expression of his righteous indignation. All this mismanagement, this reckless waste of life, this shameful cruelty, was going on in what was called "Free England." And here was he, a middle-aged man, and time was passing on with frightful rapidity, and, though he had never lost an opportunity of lifting up his voice against oppression, how little had he actually accomplished!

"So many worlds, so much to do,
So little done, such things to be!"

That was the burden of the unuttered cry which filled his whole being. That was the point where his atheism often brought him to a noble despair. But far from prompting him to repeat the maxim—"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" it spurred him on rather to a sort of fiery energy, never satisfied with what it had accomplished. Neither the dissatisfaction, however, nor even the despair ever made him feel the *need* of any power above man. On the contrary, the unaccountable mystery of pain and evil was his strongest argument against the existence of a God. Upon that rock he had foundered as a mere boy, and no argument had ever been able to reconvince him. Impatience of present ill had in this, as in many other cases, proved the bane of his life.

He would write and speak about these cases of injustice, he would hold them up to the obloquy they so richly deserved.

Scathing sentences already took shape in his brain, but deeper investigation would be necessary before he could write anything. In the meantime to cool himself,

to bring himself into a judicial frame of mind, he took a Hebrew book from his bag, and spent the rest of the journey in hard study.

Harassed, and tired, and out of spirits as he was, he nevertheless felt a certain pleasurable sensation as he left St. Pancras, driving homeward through the hot crowded streets. Erica would be waiting for him at home, and he had a comparatively leisure afternoon. There was the meeting on the Opium Trade at eight, but he might take her for a turn in one of the parks beforehand. She had always been a companion to him since her very babyhood, but now he was able to enjoy her companionship even more than in the olden times. Her keen intellect, her ready sympathy, her eagerness to learn, made her the perfection of a disciple, while not unnaturally he delighted in tracing the many similarities of character between himself and his child. Then, too, in his hard, argumentative, fighting life it was an unspeakable relief to be able to retire every now and then into a home which no outer storms could shake or disturb. Fond as he was of his sister, Mrs. Craigie, and Tom, they constituted rather the innermost circle of his friends and followers; it was Erica who made the *Home*, though the others shared the house. It was to Erica's pure childlike devotion that he invariably turned for comfort.

Dismissing the cab at the corner of Guilford Square, he walked down the dreary little passage, looking up at the window to see if she were watching for him as usual. But to-day there was no expectant face; he recollected, however, that it was Thursday, always a busy day with them.

He opened the door with his latch-key and went in; still there was no sound in the house; he half-paused for

an instant, thinking that he should certainly hear quick footsteps, the opening of a door, some sign of welcome, but all was as silent as death. Half-angry with himself for having grown so expectant of that loving watch as to be seriously apprehensive at its absence, he hastily put down his bag and walked into the sitting-room, his calm exterior belying a nameless fear at his heart.

What the French call expressively a "*serrement de cœur*" seized him when he saw that Erica was indeed at home, but that she was lying on the couch. She did not even spring up to greet him.

"Is anything the matter, dear? Are you ill?" he asked, hurriedly crossing the little room.

"Oh, have you not seen Aunt Jean? she was going to meet you at St. Pancras," said Erica, her heart failing her a little at the prospect of telling her own bad news. But the exceeding anxiety of her father's face helped her to rise to the occasion. She laughed, and the laugh was natural enough to reassure him.

"It is nothing so very dreadful, and all this time you have never even given me a kiss, father." She drew down the grand-looking white head, and pressed her fair face to his. He sat down beside her.

"Tell me, dear, what is wrong with you," he repeated.

"Well, I felt rather out of order, and they said I ought to see some one, and it seems that my tiresome spine is getting crooked, and the long and the short of it is that Mr. Doctor Osmond says I shall get quite well again if I'm careful; but"—she added, lightly, yet with the gentleness of one who thinks merely of the hearer's point of view,—"I shall have to be a passive verb for a year, and you will have to be my 'Very strong man Kwasind.'"

"A year?" he exclaimed, in dismay.

"Brian half gave me hope that it might not be so long," said Erica, "if I'm very good and careful, and of course I shall be both. I am only sorry because it will make me very useless. I did hope I should never have been a burden on you again, father."

"Don't talk of such a thing, my little son Eric," he said, very tenderly. "Who should take care of you if not your own father? Besides, if you never wrote another line for me, you would help me by just being yourself. A burden!"

"Well, I've made you look as grave as half-a-dozen law-suits!" said Erica, pretending to stroke the lines of care from his forehead. "I've had the morning to ruminate over the prospect, and really now that you know, it is not so very dreadful. A year will soon pass."

"I look to you, Eric," said her father. "To show the world that we secularists know how to bear pain. You won't waste the year, if you can do it."

Her face lighted up.

"It was like you to think of that!" she said, "that would indeed be worth doing."

Still, do what she would, Erica could not talk him back to cheerfulness. He was terribly distressed at her news, and more so when he found that she was suffering a good deal. He thought with a pang of the difference of the reality to his expectations. No walk for them in the park that evening, nor probably for many years to come! Yet he was ignorant of these matters, perhaps he exaggerated the danger or the duration; he would go across and see Brian Osmond at once!

Left once more to herself, the colour died out of

Erica's cheeks; she lay there pale and still, but her face was almost rigid with resoluteness.

"I am not going to give way!" she thought to herself. "I won't shed a single tear. Tears are wasteful luxuries, bad for body and mind. And yet—yet—oh, it is hard just when I wanted to help father most! Just when I wanted to keep him from being worried. And a whole year! How shall I bear it, when even six hours has seemed half a life-time! This is what Thekla would call a cross, but I only call it my horrid, stupid, idiotic old spine! Well, I must try to show them that Luke Raeburn's daughter knows how to bear pain; I must be patient, however much I boil over in private. Yet is it honest, I wonder, to keep a patient outside, while inside you are all one big grumble? Rather Pharisaical—outside of the cup and platter; but it is all I shall be able to do, I'm sure. That is where Mr. Osmond's Christianity would come in; I do believe that goes right through his life, privatest thoughts and all. Odd, that a delusion should have such power, and over such a man! There is Sir Michael Cunningham, too, one of the greatest and best men in England, yet a Christian! Great intellects and much study, and still they remain Christians—'tis extraordinary. But a Christian would have the advantage over me in a case like this. First of all, I suppose, they would feel that they could serve their God as well on their backs as upright, while all the help I shall be able to give the cause is dreadfully indirect and problematical. Then certainly they would feel that they might be getting ready for the next world where all wrong is, they believe, to be set right, while I am only terribly hindered in getting ready for this world,—a whole year without the chance of a lecture! And then they have all kinds of

nice theories about pain, discipline, and that sort of thing, which no doubt make it more bearable, while to me it is just the one unmitigated evil. But oh! they don't know what pain means! for there is no death to them—no endless separation. What a delusion it is! they ought to be happy enough. Oh, mother! mother!”

After all, what she really dreaded in her enforced pause was the leisure for thought. She had plunged into work of all kinds, had half-killed herself with work, had tried to hold her despair at arms' length. But now there was no help for it. She must rest, and the thoughts must come.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOSING ONE FRIEND TO GAIN ANOTHER.

For toleration had its griefs,
And charity its trial.—WHITTIER.

“WELL, Osmond, you got into hot water a few years ago for defending Raeburn in public, and by this time you will find it not merely hot, but up to boiling point. The fellow is more notorious than ever.”

The speaker was one of Charles Osmond's college friends, a certain Mr. Roberts, who had been abroad for a good many years, but, having returned on account of his health, had for a few months been acting as curate to his friend.

“A man who works as indefatigably as Mr. Raeburn has done can hardly avoid being noticed,” replied Charles Osmond.

“You speak as if you admired the fellow!”

"There is a great deal to admire in Mr. Raeburn. However greatly mistaken he is, there is no doubt that he is a brave man, and an honest."

"You can speak in such a way of a man who makes his living by speaking and writing against God!"

"I hope I can speak the truth of every man, whether his creed agrees with mine or not."

"A man who grows rich on blasphemy! who sows poison among the people and reaps the harvest!" exclaimed Mr. Roberts.

"That he teaches fearful error, I quite allow," said Charles Osmond, "but it is the grossest injustice to say that he does it for gain. His atheism brought him to the very brink of starvation some years ago. Even now, he is so crippled by the endless litigation he has had that he lives in absolute penury."

"But that letter you sent to the *Church Chronicle* was so uncalled for, you put the comparison so broadly."

"I put it in plain English," said Charles Osmond, "I merely said, as I think, that he puts many of us to shame by his great devotion. The letter was a reply to a very unfair article about the Rilchester riot; it was absolutely necessary that some one should speak. I tell you, Roberts, if you knew the man, you could not speak so bitterly of him. It is not true that he leads a selfish, easy-going life; he has spent thousands and thousands of pounds in the defence of his cause. I don't believe there is a man in England who has led a more self-denying life. It may be very uncomfortable news for us, but we've no right to shut our ears to it. I wish that man could stir up an honest sense of shame in every sleepy Christian in the country. I believe that, indeed, to be his rightful mission. Raeburn is a grand text for a sermon which

the nation sorely needs. 'Here is a man who spends his whole strength in propagating his so-called gospel of atheism. Do you spend your whole strength in spreading the gospel of Christ? Here is a man, willing to leave his home, willing to live without one single luxury, denying himself all that is not necessary to actual health. Have you ever denied yourself anything? Here is a man who spends his whole living—all that he has—on what he believes to be the truth. What meagre tithe do you bestow upon the religion of which you speak so much? Here is a man who dares to stand up alone in defence of what he holds true, a man who never flinches. How far are you brave in the defence of your faith? Do you never keep a prudent silence? Do you never howl with the wolves?'

"Thank heaven you are not in the pulpit!" ejaculated Mr. Roberts.

"I wish those words could be sent through the length and breadth of the land," said Charles Osmond.

"No doubt Mr. Raeburn would thank you," said his friend, with a sharp-edged smile. "It would be a nice little advertisement for him. Why, from a Church of England parson it would make his fortune! My dear Osmond, you are the best fellow in the world, but don't you see that you are playing into the enemy's hands?"

"I am trying to speak the words that God has given me to speak," said Charles Osmond, "The result I can well trust to Him. An uncomfortable truth will never be popular. The words of our Lord Himself were not popular; but they sank into men's hearts and bore fruit, though he was put to death as a blasphemer and a revolutionary."

"Well, at least then, if you must take up the cudgels in his defence, do not dishonour the clerical profession

by personal acquaintance with the man. I hear that he has been seen actually in your house, that you are even intimate with his family."

"Roberts, I didn't think our beliefs were so very different, in fact, I used to think we were nearer to each other on these points than most men. Surely we both own the universal Fatherhood of God?"

"Of course, of course," said Mr. Roberts, quickly.

"And owning that, we cannot help owning the universal brotherhood of men. Why should you then cut yourself off from your brother, Luke Raeburn?"

"He's no brother of mine!" said Mr. Roberts, in a tone of disgust.

Charles Osmond smiled.

"We do not choose our brothers, we have no voice in the growth of the family. There they are."

"But the man says there is no God!"

"Excuse me, he has never said that. What he says is, that the word God conveys no meaning to him. If you think that the best way to show your belief in the All-Father and your love to all His children lies in refusing so much as to touch those who don't know Him, you are of course justified in shunning every atheist or agnostic in the world. But I do not think that the best way. It was not Christ's way. Therefore I hail every possible opportunity of meeting Mr. Raeburn or his colleagues, try to find all the points we have in common, try as far as possible to meet them on their own ground."

"And the result will be that people will call you an atheist yourself!" broke in Mr. Roberts.

"That would not greatly matter," said Charles Osmond. "It would be a mere sting for the moment. It

is not what men call us that we have to consider, but how we are fulfilling the work God has given us to do."

"'Pon my life, it makes me feel sick to hear you talk like this about that miserable Raeburn!" exclaimed Mr. Roberts, hotly. "I tell you, Osmond, that you are ruining your reputation, losing all chance of preferment, just because of this mistaken zeal. It makes me furious to think that such a man as you should suffer for such a creature as Raeburn."

"Have you forgotten that such creatures as you and I and Luke Raeburn had such a Saviour as Jesus Christ? Come Roberts, in your heart you know you agree with me. If one is indeed our Father, then indeed we are all brethren."

"I do not hold with you!" retorted Mr. Roberts, the more angrily because he had really hoped to convince his friend. "I wouldn't sit in the same room with the fellow, if you offered me the richest living in England! I wouldn't shake hands with him to be made an archbishop! I wouldn't touch him with a pair of tongs!"

"Even less charitable than St. Dunstan to the devil," said Charles Osmond, smiling a little but sadly. "Except in that old legend, however, I don't think Christianity ever mentions tongs. If you can't love your enemies, and pray for them, and hold out a brotherly hand to them, perhaps it were indeed better to hold aloof and keep as quiet as you can."

"It is clearly impossible for us to work together any longer, Osmond," said Mr. Roberts, rising. "I am sorry that such a cause should separate us, but if you will persist in visiting an outcast of society, a professed atheist, the most bitter enemy of our church, I cannot allow my

name to be associated with yours,—it is impossible that I should hold office under you.”

So the two friends parted.

Charles Osmond was human, and almost inevitably a sort of reaction began in his mind the instant he was alone. He had lost one of his best friends, he knew as well as possible that they could never be on the same footing as before. He had, moreover, lost in him a valuable co-worker. Then, too, it was true enough that his defence of Raeburn was bringing him into great disfavour with the religious world, and he was a sensitive and naturally a proud man, who found blame, and reproach, and contemptuous disapproval very hard to bear. Years of hard fighting, years of patient imitation of Christ had wonderfully ennobled him; but he had not yet attained to the sublime humility which, being free from all thought of self, cares nothing, scarcely even pauses to think of the world's judgment, too absorbed in the work of the Highest to have leisure for thought of the lowest, too full of love for the race to have love to spare for self. To this ideal he was struggling, but he had not yet reached it, and the thought of his own reputation, his own feelings, would creep in. He was not a selfishly ambitious man, but every one who is conscious of ability, every one who feels within him energies lying fallow for want of opportunity, must be ambitious for a larger sphere of work. Just as he was beginning to dare to allow himself the hope of some change in his work, some wider field, just as he was growing sure enough of himself to dare to accept any greater work which might have been offered to him, he must, by bringing himself into evil repute, lose every chance of preferment. And for what? For attempting to obtain a just judgment for the

enemy of his faith; for holding out a brotherly hand to a man who might very probably not care to take it; for consorting with those who would at best regard him as an amiable fanatic. Was this worth all it would cost? Could the exceedingly problematical gain make up for the absolutely certain loss?

He took up the day's newspaper. His eye was at once attracted to a paragraph headed, "Mr. Raeburn at Longstaff." The report, sent from the same source as the report in the *Longstaff Mercury*, which had so greatly displeased Raeburn that morning, struck Charles Osmond in a most unfavourable light. This bitter opponent of Christianity, this unsparing denouncer of all that he held most sacred, *this* was the man for whom he was sacrificing friendship, reputation, advancement. A feeling of absolute disgust rose within him. For a moment the thought came, "I can't have any more to do with the man."

But he was too honest not to detect almost at once his own Pharisaical, un-Christlike spirit.

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

He had been selfishly consulting his own happiness, his own ease. Worse still, he, of all men in the world, had dared to set himself up as too virtuous forsooth to have anything to do with an atheist. Was that the mind which was in Christ? Was He a strait-laced, self-righteous Pharisee, too good, too religious to have anything to say to those who disagreed with Him? Did He not live and die for those who were yet enemies to God? Was not the work of reconciliation the work He came for? Did he calculate the loss to Himself, the risk of failure? Ah, no, those who would imitate God must first give as a free

gift, without thought of self, perfect love to all, perfect justice through that love, or else they are not like the Father who "maketh His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Charles Osmond paced to and fro, the look of trouble gradually passing from his face. Presently he paused beside the open window; it looked upon the little back garden, a tiny strip of ground indeed, but just now bright with sunshine and fresh with the beauty of early summer. The sunshine seemed to steal into his heart as he prayed.

"All-Father, drive out my selfish cowardice, my self-righteous conceit. Give me Thy spirit of perfect love to all, give me Thy pure hatred of sin. Melt my coldness with Thy burning charity, and if it be possible make me fit to be Luke Raeburn's friend."

While he still stood by the window a visitor was announced. He had been too much absorbed to catch the name, but it seemed the most natural thing that on turning round he should find himself face to face with the prophet of atheism.

There he stood, a splendid specimen of humanity; every line in his rugged Scottish face bespoke a character of extraordinary force, but the eyes which in public Charles Osmond had seen flashing with the fire of the man's enthusiasm, or gleaming with a cold metallic light which indicated exactly his steely endurance of ill-treatment, were now softened and deepened by sadness. His heart went out to him. Already he loved the man, only hitherto the world's opinions had crept into his heart between each meeting, and had paralysed the free God-like love. But it was to do so no longer. That afternoon he had dealt it a final blow, there was no more any room for it

to rear its fair-speaking form, no longer should its veiled selfishness, its so-called virtuous indignation turn him into a Pharisaical judge.

He received him with a hand-shake which conveyed to Raeburn much of the warmth, the reality, the friendliness of the man. He had always liked Charles Osmond, but he had generally met him either in public, or when he was harassed and pre-occupied. Now, when he was at leisure, when, too, he was in great trouble, he instinctively perceived that Osmond had in a rare degree the broad-hearted sympathy which he was just now in need of. From that minute a life-long friendship sprang up between the two men.

"I came really to see your son," said Raeburn, "but they tell me he is out. I wish to know the whole truth about Erica."

It was not his way to speak very much where he felt deeply, but Charles Osmond could detect all the deep anxiety, the half-indulged hope which lay hidden behind the strong reserved exterior. He had heard enough of the case to be able to satisfy him, to assure him that there was no danger, that all must be left to time and patience and careful observance of the doctor's regulation. Raeburn sighed with relief at the repeated assurance that there was no danger, that recovery was only a question of time. Death had so recently visited his home that a grisly fear had taken possession of his heart. Once free of that, he could speak almost cheerfully of the lesser evil.

"It will be a great trial to her, such absolute imprisonment; she is never happy unless she is hard at work. But she is brave and strong-willed. Will you look in and see her when you can?"

"Certainly," said Charles Osmond. "We must do our best to keep up her spirits."

"Yes, luckily she is a great reader, otherwise such a long rest would be intolerable, I should fancy."

"You do not object to my coming to see her?" said Charles Osmond, looking full into his companion's eyes. "You know that we discuss religious questions pretty freely."

"Religious questions always are freely discussed in my house," said Raeburn. "It will be the greatest advantage to her to have to turn things well over in her mind. Besides, we always make a point of studying our adversaries' case even more closely than our own, and, if she has a chance of doing it personally as well as through books, all the better."

"But supposing that such an unlikely thing were to happen as that she should see reason to change her present views? Supposing, if you can suppose anything so unlikely, she should even in future years come to believe in Christianity?"

Raeburn smiled, not quite pleasantly.

"It is as you say such a very remote contingency!" He paused, grew grave, then continued with all his native nobility: "Yet I like you the better for having brought forward such an idea, improbable as I hope it may be considered. I feel very sure of Erica. She has thought a great deal, she has had every possible advantage. We never teach on authority; she has been left perfectly free and has learned to weigh evidences and probabilities, not to be led astray by any emotional fancies, but to be guided by reason. She has always heard both sides of the case; she has lived as it were in an atmosphere of debate, and has been, and of course

always will be, quite free to form her own opinion on every subject. It is not for nothing that we call ourselves Freethinkers. Absolute freedom of thought and speech is part of our creed. So far from objecting to your holding free discussions with my daughter, I shall be positively grateful to you, and particularly just now. I fancy Erica has inherited enough of my nature to enjoy nothing better than a little opposition."

"I know you are a born fighter," said Charles Osmond. "We sympathise with each other in that. And, next to the bliss of a hard-won victory, I place the satisfaction of being well conquered."

Raeburn laughed.

"I am glad we think alike there. People are very fond of describing me as a big bull-dog, but if they would think a little they would see that the love of overcoming obstacles is deeply rooted in the heart of every true man. What is the meaning of our English love of field sports? What the explanation of the mania for Alpine climbing? It is no despicable craving for distinction, it is the innate love of fighting, struggling, and conquering."

"Well, there are many obstacles which we can struggle to remove, side by side," said Charles Osmond. "We should be like one man, I fancy, on the question of the opium trade, for instance."

In a few vigorous words Raeburn denounced this monstrous national sin.

"Are you going to the meeting to-night?" he added, after a pause.

"Yes, I had thought of it. Let us go together. Shall you speak?"

"Not to-night," said Raeburn, a smile flickering about his usually stern lips. "The Right Reverend Father, &c.,

&c., who is to occupy the chair, might object to announcing that 'Mr. Raeburn would now address the meeting.' No, this is not the time or place for me. So prejudiced are people that the mere connexion of my name with the question would probably do more harm than good. I should like, I confess, to get up without introduction, to speak not from the platform but from among the audience incognito. But that is impossible for a man who has the misfortune to be five inches above the average height, and whose white hair has become a proverb, since some one made the unfortunate remark, repeated in a hundred newspapers, that the 'hoary head was only a crown of glory when found in the way of righteousness.'"

Charles Osmond could not help laughing.

"The worst of these newspaper days is that one never can make an end of anything. That remark has been made to me since at several meetings. At the last, I told the speaker that I was so tired of comments on my personal appearance that I should soon have to resort either to the dyer or the wig-maker. But here am I wasting your time and my own, and forgetting the poor little maid at home. Good-bye. I'll call in passing, then, at a quarter to eight. Tom Craigie will probably be with me, he is very rabid on the subject."

"Craigie and I are quite old friends," said Charles Osmond.

And then, as on the preceding night he had stood at the door while Erica crossed the square, so now involuntarily his eyes followed Raeburn. In his very walk the character of the man was indicated:—firm, steady, imperturbable, straightforward.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLES OSMOND SPEAKS HIS MIND.

Fiat justitia, ruat cælum.—*Proverb.*

Justice,—the miracle worker amongst men.

JOHN BRIGHT (July 14, 1868.)

"I THOUGHT you were never coming to see me," said Erica, putting down a newspaper and looking up with eager welcome at Charles Osmond, who had just been announced.

"It has not been for want of will," he replied, sitting down near her couch, "but I have been overwhelmed with work the last few days. How are you getting on? I am glad you don't altogether refuse to see your prophet of evil."

"It would have been worse if you hadn't spoken," she said, in the tone of one trying hard to make the best of things. "I was rather rash though to say that I should like my wheels to run down; I didn't know how terrible it is to be still. One does so grudge all the lost time."

"But you will not let this be lost time—you will read."

"Oh, yes, happily I can do that. And Mrs. McNaughton is going to give me physiology lessons, and dear old Professor Gosse has promised to come and teach me whenever he can. He is so devoted to father, you know, I think he would do anything for me just because I am his child. It is a comfort that father has so many

real good friends. What I do so hate though is the thought of having to be a passive verb for so long. You've no idea how aggravating it is to lie here and listen to all that is going on, to hear of great meetings and not to be able to go, to hear of work to be done and not to be able to do it. And I suppose one notices little things more when one is ill, for just to lie still and watch our clumsy little servant lay the table for dinner, clattering down the knives and forks and tossing down the plates, makes me actually cross! And then they let the room get so untidy; just look at that stack of books for reviewing, and that chaos of papers in the corner! If I could but get up for just five minutes, I shouldn't mind."

"Poor child," said Charles Osmond, "this comes very hard on you."

"I know I'm grumbling dreadfully, but if you knew how horrid it is to be cut off from everything! And, of course, it happens that another controversy is beginning about that Longstaff report. I have been reading half-a-dozen of to-day's newspapers, and each one is worse than the last. Look here! Just read that, and try to imagine that it's your father they are slandering! Oh, if I could but get up for one minute and stamp!"

"And is this untrue?" asked Charles Osmond, when he had finished the account in question.

"There is just enough truth in it to make it worse than a direct lie," said Erica, hotly. "They have quoted his own words, but in a sense in which he never meant them, or they have quite disregarded the context. If you will give me those books on the table, I'll just show you how they have misrepresented him by hacking out single sentences, and twisting and distorting all he says in public."

Charles Osmond looked at the passages referred to, and saw that Erica had not complained without reason.

"Yes, that is very unfair—shamefully unfair," he said. Then, after a pause, he added, abruptly, "Erica, are you good at languages?"

"I am very fond of them," she said, surprised at the sudden turn he had given to the conversation.

"Supposing that Mr. Raeburn's speeches and doings were a good deal spoken of in Europe, as no doubt they are, and that a long time after his death one of his successors made some converts to secularism in Italy, and wrote in Italian all that he could remember of the life and words of his late teacher. Then suppose that the Italian life of Raeburn was translated into Chinese, and that hundreds of years after, a Heathen Chinese sat down to read it. His Oriental mind found it hard to understand Mr. Raeburn's thoroughly Western mind; he didn't see anything noble in Mr. Raeburn's character, couldn't understand his mode of thought, read through the life, perhaps studied it after a fashion, or believed he did; then shut it up, and said there might possibly have been such a man, but the proofs were very weak, and, even if he had lived, he didn't think he was any great shakes, though the people did make such a fuss about him. Would you call that Heathen Chinese fair?"

Erica could not help smiling, though she saw what he was driving at.

But Charles Osmond felt much too keenly to continue in such a light strain. He was no weak-minded, pleasant conversationalist, but a prophet, who knew how to speak hard truths sometimes.

"Erica," he said, almost sternly, "you talk much about those who quote your father's words unfairly; but

have you never misquoted the words of Christ? You deny Him and disbelieve in Him, yet you have never really studied His life. You have read the New Testament through a veil of prejudice. Mind, I am not saying one word in defence of those so-called Christians who treat you unfairly or uncharitably; but I do say that, as far as I can see, you are quite as unfair to Christ as they are to your father. Of course, you may reply that Jesus of Nazareth lived nearly nineteen hundred years ago, and that your father is still living; that you have many difficulties and doubts to combat, while our bigots can verify every fact or quotation with regard to Mr. Raeburn with perfect ease and certainty. That is true enough. But the difficulties, if honestly faced, might be surmounted. You don't honestly face them; you say to yourself, 'I have gone into all these matters carefully, and now I have finally made up my mind; there is an end of the matter!' You are naturally prejudiced against Christ; every day your prejudices will deepen unless you strike out resolutely for yourself as a truth seeker, as one who insists on always considering all sides of the question. At present you are absolutely unfair, you will not take the trouble to study the life of Christ."

Few people like to be told of their faults. Erica could just endure it from her father, but from no one else. She was, besides, too young yet to have learnt even the meaning of the word humility. Had Charles Osmond been a few years younger, she would not even have listened to him. As it was, he was a grey-haired man, whom she loved and revered; he was, moreover, a guest. She was very angry with him, but she restrained her anger.

He had watched her attentively while he spoke. She

had at first only been surprised; then her anger had been kindled, and she gave him one swift flash from eyes which looked like live coals. Then she turned her face away from him, so that he could only see one crimson cheek. There was a pause after he had said his say. Presently, with a great effort, Erica faced him once more, and in a manner which would have been dignified had it not been a trifle too frigid, made some casual remark upon a different subject. He saw that to stay longer was mere waste of time.

When the door had closed behind him, Erica's anger blazed up once more. That he should have dared to accuse her of unfairness! That he should have dared actually to rebuke her! If he had given her a good shaking, she could not have felt more hurt and ruffled. And then to choose this day of all others, just when life was so hard to her, just when she was condemned to a long-imprisonment. It was simply brutal of him! If any one had told her that he would do such a thing she would not have believed them. He had said nothing of the sort to her before, though they had known each other so long, but, now that she was ill and helpless and unable to get away from him, he had seen fit to come and lecture her. Well, he was a parson! she might have known that sooner or later the horrid, tyrannical, priestly side of him would show! And yet she had liked him so much, trusted him so much! It was indescribably bitter to think that he was no longer the hero she had thought him to be. That, after all, he was not a grand, noble, self-denying man, but a fault-finding priest!

She spent the rest of the afternoon in alternate wrath and grief. In the evening Aunt Jean read her a somewhat dry book which required all her attention, and,

consequently, her anger cooled for want of thoughts to stimulate it. Her father did not come in till late; but, as he carried her upstairs to bed, she told him of Charles Osmond's interview.

"I told him you liked a little opposition," was his reply.

"I don't know about opposition, but I didn't like him, he showed his priestly side."

"I am sorry," replied Raeburn. "For my part I genuinely like the man; he seems to me a grand fellow, and I should have said not in the least spoilt by his Christianity, for he is neither exclusive, nor narrow-minded, nor opposed to progress. Infatuated on one point, of course, but a thorough man in spite of it."

Left once more alone in her little attic-room, Erica began to think over things more quietly. So her father had told him that she liked opposition, and he had doled out to her a rebuke which was absolutely unanswerable! But why unanswerable? She had been too angry to reply at the time. It was one of the few maxims her father had given her, "When you are angry be very slow to speak." But she might write an answer, a nice, cold, cutting answer, respectful, of course, but very frigid. She would clearly demonstrate to him that she was perfectly fair, and that he, her accuser, was unfair.

And then, quite quietly, she began to turn over the accusations in her mind. Quoting the words of Christ without regard to the context, twisting their meaning. Neglecting real study of Christ's character and life. Seeing all through a veil of prejudice.

She would begin like her father with a definition of terms. What did he mean by study? What did she mean by study? Well, such searching analysis, for in-

stance, as she had applied to the character of Hamlet, when she had had to get up one of Shakespeare's plays for her examination. She had worked very hard at that, had really taken every one of his speeches and soliloquies, and had tried to gather his true character from them as well as from his actions.

At this point she wandered away from the subject a little, and began to wonder when she should hear the result of the examination, and to hope that she might get a first. By-and-by she came to herself with a sudden and very uncomfortable shock. If the sort of work she had given to Hamlet was study, *had* she ever studied the character of Christ?

She had all her life heard what her father had to say against Him, and what a good many well-meaning, but not very convincing, people had to say for Him. She had heard a few sermons and several lectures on various subjects connected with Christ's religion. She had read many books both for and against Him. She had read the New Testament. But could she quite honestly say that she had *studied* the character of Christ? Had she not been predisposed to think her father in the right? He would not at all approve of that. Had she been a true Freethinker? Had she not taken a good deal to be truth because he said it? If so, she was not a bit more fair than the majority of Christians who never took the trouble to go into things for themselves, and study things from the point of view of an outsider.

In the silence and darkness of her little room, she began to suspect a good many unpleasant and hitherto unknown facts about herself.

"After all, I do believe that Mr. Osmond was right," she confessed at length. "I am glad to get back my

belief in him; but I've come to a horrid bit of lath and plaster in myself where I thought it was all good stone."

She fell asleep and dreamt of the Heathen Chinees reading the translation of the translation of her father's words, and disbelieving altogether in "that invented demagogue, Luke Raeburn."

The next day, Charles Osmond, sitting at work in his study, and feeling more depressed and hopeless than he would have cared to own even to himself, was roused by the arrival of a little three-cornered note. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR MR. OSMOND,

"You made me feel very angry yesterday, and sad, too, for of course it was a case of 'Et tu, Brute.' But last night I came to the unpleasant conclusion that you were quite right, and that I was quite wrong. To prove to you that I am no longer angry, I am going to ask you a great favour. Will you teach me Greek? Your parable of the Heathen Chinees has set me thinking.

"Yours very sincerely,

"ERICA RAEBURN."

Charles Osmond felt the tears come to his eyes. The straightforward simplicity of the letter, the candid avowal of having been "quite wrong," an avowal not easy for one of Erica's character to make, touched him inexpressibly. Taking a Greek grammar from his bookshelves, he set off at once for Guilford Terrace.

He found Erica looking very white and fragile, and with lines of suffering about her mouth; but, though physically weary, her mind seemed as vigorous as ever. She received him with her usual frankness, and with

more animation in her look than he had seen for some weeks.

"I did think you perfectly horrid yesterday!" she exclaimed. "And was miserable, besides, at the prospect of losing one of my heroes. You can be very severe."

"The infliction of pain is only justified when the inflictor is certain, or as nearly certain as he can be, that the pain will be productive of good," said Charles Osmond.

"I suppose that is the way you account for the origin of evil," said Erica, thoughtfully.

"Yes," replied Charles Osmond, pleased that she should have thought of the subject, "that to me seems the only possible explanation, otherwise God would be either not perfectly good or not omnipotent. His all-wisdom enables Him to over-rule that pain which He has willed to be the necessary outcome of infractions of His order. Pain, you see, is made into a means of helping us to find out where that order has been broken, and so teaching us to obey it in the long run."

"But if there is an all-powerful God, wouldn't it have been much better if He had made it impossible for us to go wrong?"

"It would have saved much trouble, undoubtedly; but do you think that which costs us least trouble is generally the most worth having? I know a noble fellow who has fought his way upward through sins and temptations—you would like him, by the way, for he was once an atheist. He is, by virtue of all he has passed through, all he has overcome, one of the finest men I have ever known."

"That is the friend, I suppose, whom your son mentioned to me. But I don't see your argument, for if there was an all-powerful God He could have caused the

man you speak of to be as noble and good without passing through pain and temptation."

"But God does not work arbitrarily, but by laws of progression. Nor does his omnipotence include the working of contradictions. He cannot both cause a thing to be and not to be at the same time. If it is a law that that which has grown by struggle and effort shall be most noble, God will not arbitrarily reverse that law or truth because the creation of sinless beings would involve less trouble."

"It all seems to me so unreal!" exclaimed Erica. "It seems like talking of thin air!"

"I expect it does," said Charles Osmond, trying to realise to himself her position.

There was a silence.

"How did this man of whom you speak come to desert our side?" asked Erica. "I suppose, as you say he was one of the finest men you ever knew, he must, at least, have had a great intellect. How did he begin to think all these unlikely, unreal things true?"

"Donovan began by seeing the grandeur of the character of Christ. He followed his example for many years, calling himself all the time an atheist; at last he realised that in Christ we see the Father."

"I am sorry we lost him if he is such a nice man," was Erica's sole comment. Then turning her beautiful eyes on Charles Osmond, she said, "I hope my note did not convey to you more than I intended. I asked you if you would teach me Greek, and I mean to try to study the character of Christ; but, quite to speak the truth, I don't really want to do it. I only do it because I see I have not been fair."

"You do it for the sake of being a truth-seeker, the best possible reason."

"I thought you would think I was going to do it because I hoped to get something. I thought one of your strong points was that people must come in a state of need and expecting to be satisfied. I don't expect anything. I am only doing it for the sake of honesty and thoroughness. I don't expect any good at all."

"Is it likely that you can expect when you know so little what is there? What can you bring better than an honest mind to the search? Erica, if I hadn't known that you were absolutely sincere, I should not have dared to give you the pain I gave you yesterday. It was my trust in your perfect sincerity which brought you that strong accusation. Even then it was a sore piece of work."

"Did you mind it a little?" exclaimed Erica. But directly she had spoken, she felt that the question was absurd, for she saw a look in Charles Osmond's eyes that made the word "little" a mockery.

"What makes that man so loving?" she thought to herself. "He reminded me almost of father, yet I am no child of his. I am opposed to all that he teaches. I have spoken my mind out to him in a way which must sometimes have pained him. Yet he cares for me so much that it pained him exceedingly to give me pain yesterday!"

His character puzzled her. The loving breath, the stern condemnation of whatever was not absolutely true, the disregard of what the world said, the hatred of shams, and most puzzling of all, the often apparent struggle with himself, the unceasing effort to conquer his chief fault. Yet this noble, honest, intellectual man was labouring under a great delusion, a delusion which somehow gave

him an extraordinary power of loving! Ah no! it could not be his Christianity, though, which made him loving, for were not most Christians hard and bitter and narrow-minded?

"I wish," she said, abruptly, "you would tell me what makes you willing to be friends with us. I know well enough that the *Church Chronicle* has been punishing you for your defence of my father, and that there must be a thousand disagreeables to encounter in your own set just because you visit us. Why do you come?"

"Because I care for you very much."

"But you care, too, perhaps, for other people who will probably cut you for flying in the face of society and visiting social outcasts."

"I don't think I can explain it to you yet," he replied. "You would only tell me, as you told me once before, that I was talking riddles to you. When you have read your Greek Testament and really studied the life of Christ, I think you will understand. In the meantime, St. Paul, I think, answers your question better than I could, but you wouldn't understand even his words, I fancy. There they are in the Greek,"—he opened a Testament and showed her a passage. "I believe you would think the English almost as great gibberish as this looks to you in its unknown characters."

"Do you advise every one to learn Greek?"

"No: many have neither time nor ability, and those who are not apt at languages would spend their time more usefully over good translations I think. But you have time and brains, so I am very glad to teach you."

"I am afraid I would much rather it were for any other purpose!" said Erica. "I am somehow weary of the very name of Christianity. I have heard wrangling

over the Bible till I am tired to death of it, and discussions about the Atonement, and the Incarnation, and the Resurrection, till the very words are hateful to me. I am afraid I shock you, but just put yourself in my place and imagine how you would feel. It is not even as if I had to debate the various questions; I have merely to sit and listen to a never ending dispute."

"You sadden me; but it is quite natural that you should be weary of such debates. I want you to realise, though, that in the stormy atmosphere of your father's lecture-hall, in the din and strife of controversy, it is impossible that you should gain any true idea of Christ's real character. Put aside all thought of the dogmas you have been wearied with, and study the life of the Man."

Then the lesson began. It proved a treat to both teacher and pupil. When Charles Osmond had left, Erica still worked on.

"I should like, at any rate to spell out his riddle," she thought to herself, turning back to the passage he had shown her. And letter by letter, and word by word, she made out "For the love of Christ——"

The verb baffled her, however, and she lay on the sofa chafing at her helplessness till, at length Tom happened to come in, and brought her the English Testament she needed. Ah! there it was! "For the love of Christ constraineth us."

Was *that* what had made him come? Why, that was the alleged reason for half the persecutions they met with! Did the love of Christ constrain Charles Osmond to be their friend, and at the same time constrain the clergy of X—— not many years before to incite the people to stone her father, and offer him every sort of insult? Was it possible that the love of Christ constrained

Mr. Osmond to endure contempt and censure on their behalf, and constrained Mr. Randolph to hire a band of roughs to interrupt her father's speeches?

"He is a grand exception to the general rule," she said to herself. "If there were many Christians like him, I should begin to think there must be something more in Christianity than we thought. Well, if only to please him I must try to study the New Testament over again, and as thoroughly as I can. No, not to please him, though, but for the sake of being quite honest. I would much rather be working at that new book of Tyndall's!"

CHAPTER XV.

AN INTERVAL.

How can man love but what he yearns to help?

R. BROWNING.

DURING the year of Erica's illness, Brian began to realise his true position towards her better than he had hitherto done. He saw quite well that any intrusion of his love, even any slight manifestation of it, might do untold harm. She was not ready for it yet—why, he could not have told.

The truth was, that his Undine, although in many respects a high-souled woman, was still in some respects a child. She would have been merely embarrassed by his love; she did not want it. She liked him very much as an acquaintance; he was to her Tom's friend, or her doctor, or perhaps Mr. Osmond's son. In this way she liked him, was even fond of him, but as a lover he would have been a perplexing embarrassment.

He knew well enough that her frank liking boded ill for his future success; but, in spite of that he could not help being glad to obtain any footing with her. It was something even to be "Tom's friend Brian." He delighted in hearing his name from her lips, although knowing that it was no good augury. He lived on from day to day, thinking very little of the doubtful future as long as he could serve her in the present. A reserved and silent man, devoted to his profession, and to practical science of every kind, few people guessed that he could have any particular story of his own. He was not at all the sort of man who would be expected to fall hopelessly in love at first sight, nor would any one have selected him as a good modern specimen of the chivalrous knight of olden times; he was so completely a nineteenth century man, so progressive, so scientific. But, though his devotion was of the silent order, it was, perhaps for that reason, all the truer. There was about him a sort of divine patience. As long as he could serve Erica, he was content to wait any number of years in the hope of winning her love. He accepted his position readily. He knew that she had not the slightest love for him. He was quite secondary to his father, even, who was one of Erica's heroes. He liked to make her talk of him; her enthusiastic liking was delightful—perhaps all the more so because she was far from agreeing with her prophet. Brian, with the wonderful self-forgetfulness of true love, liked to hear the praises of all those whom she admired; he liked to realise what were her ideals, even when conscious how far he fell short of them.

For it was unfortunately true that his was not the type of character she was most likely to admire. As a friend she might like him much, but he could hardly be

her hero. His wonderful patience was quite lost upon her; she hardly counted patience as a virtue at all. His grand humility merely perplexed her; it was at present far beyond her comprehension. While his willingness to serve every one, even in the most trifling and petty concerns of daily life, she often attributed to mere good nature. Grand acts of self-sacrifice she admired enthusiastically, but the more really difficult round of small denials and trifling services she did not in the least appreciate. Absorbed in the contemplation, as it were, of the Hamlets in life, she had no leisure to spare for the Horatios.

She proved a capital patient; her whole mind was set on getting well, and her steady common sense and obedience to rules made her a great favourite with her elder doctor. Really healthy, and only invalided by the hard work and trouble she had undergone, seven or eight months' rest did wonders for her. In the enforced quiet, too, she found plenty of time for study, Charles Osmond had never had a better pupil. They learnt to know each other very well during those lessons, and many were the perplexing questions which Erica started. But they were not as before a mere repetition of the difficulties she had been primed with at her father's lecture-hall, nor did she bring them forward with the triumphant conviction that they were unanswerable. They were real, honest questions, desiring and seeking everywhere for the true answer which might be somewhere.

The result of her study of the life of Christ was at first to make her a much better secularist. She found to her surprise that there was much in His teaching that entirely harmonised with secularism; that, in fact, He spoke a great deal about the improvement of this world,

and scarcely at all about that place in the clouds of which Christians made so much. By the end of a year she had also reached the conviction that, whatever interpolations there might be in the gospels, no untrue writer, no admiring but dishonest narrator *could* have conceived such a character as that of Christ. For she had dug down to the very root of the matter. She had left for the present the, to her, perplexing and almost irritating catalogue of miracles, and had begun to perceive the strength and indomitable courage, the grand self-devotion, the all-embracing love of the Man. Very superficial had been her former view. He had been to her a shadowy, unreal being, soft and gentle, even a little effeminate, speaking sometimes what seemed to her narrow words about only saving the lost sheep of the house of Israel. A character somehow wanting in that Power and Intellect which she worshipped.

But on a really deep study she saw how greatly she had been mistaken. Extraordinarily mistaken, both as to the character and the teaching. Christ was without doubt a grand ideal! To be as broad-hearted as he was, as universally loving—it would be no bad aim. And, as in daily life Erica realised how hard was the practice of that love, she realised at the same time the loftiness of the ideal, and the weakness of her own powers.

“But, though I do begin to see why you take this man as your ideal,” she said, one day, to Charles Osmond, “I cannot, of course, accept a great deal that He is said to have taught. When he speaks of love to men, that is understandable, one can try to obey; but when he speaks about God, then, of course, I can only think that He was deluded. You may admire Joan of Arc, and see the great beauty of her character, yet at the same

time believe that she was acting under a delusion; you may admire the character of Gotama without considering Buddhism the true religion; and so with Christ, I may reverence and admire His character, while believing Him to have been mistaken."

Charles Osmond smiled. He knew from many trifling signs, unnoticed by others, that Erica would have given a great deal to see her way to an honest acceptance of that teaching of Christ which spoke of an unseen but everywhere present Father of all, of the everlastingness of love, of a reunion with those who are dead. She hardly allowed to herself that she longed to believe it, she dreaded the least concession to that natural craving, she distrusted her own truthfulness, feared above all things that she might be deluded, might imagine that to be true which was in reality false.

And, happily, her prophet was too wise to attempt in any way to quicken the work which was going on within her; he was one of those rare men who can be, even in such a case, content to wait. He would as soon have thought of digging up a seed to see whether he could not quicken its slow development of root and stem, as of interfering in any way with Erica. He came and went, taught her Greek, and always, day after day, week after week, month after month, however much pressed by his parish work, however harassed by private troubles, he came to her with the genial sympathy, the broad-hearted readiness to hear calmly all sides of the question, which had struck her so much the very first time she had met him.

The other members of the family liked him almost as well, although they did not know him so intimately as Erica. Aunt Jean, who had at first been a little pre-

judiced against him, ended by singing his praises more loudly than any one, perhaps conquered in spite of herself by the man's extraordinary power of sympathy, his ready perception of good even in those with whom he disagreed most.

Mrs. Craigie was in many respects very like her brother, and was a very useful worker, though much of her work was little seen. She did not speak in public; all the oratorical powers of the family seemed to have concentrated themselves in Luke Raeburn; but she wrote and worked indefatigably, proving a very useful second to her brother. A hard, wearing life, however, had told a good deal upon her, and trouble had somewhat embittered her nature. She had not the vein of humour which had stood Raeburn in such good stead. Severely matter-of-fact, and almost despising those who had any poetry in their nature, she did not always agree very well with Erica. The two loved each other sincerely, and were far too loyal both to clan and creed to allow their differences really to separate them; but there was, undoubtedly, something in their natures which jarred. Even Tom found it hard at times to bear the strong infusion of bitter criticism which his mother introduced into the home atmosphere. He was something of a philosopher, however, and knowing that she had been through great trouble, and had had much to try her, he made up his mind that it was natural—therefore inevitable—therefore to be borne.

The home life was not without its frets and petty trials, but on one point there was perfect accord. All were devoted to the head of the house—would have sacrificed anything to bring him a few minutes' peace.

As for Raeburn, when not occupied in actual conflict,

he lived in a sort of serene atmosphere of thought and study, far removed from all the small differences and little cares of his household. They invariably smoothed down all such roughnesses in his presence, and probably in any case he would have been unable to see such microscopic grievances; unless, indeed, they left any shade of annoyance on Erica's face, and then his fatherhood detected at once what was wrong.

It would be tedious, however, to follow the course of Erica's life for the next three years, for, though the time was that of her chief mental growth, her days were of the quietest. Not till she was two-and-twenty did she fully recover from the effects of her sudden sorrow and the subsequent overwork. In the meantime, her father's influence steadily deepened and spread throughout the country, and troubles multiplied.

CHAPTER XVI.

HYDE PARK.

Who spouts his message to the wilderness,
Lightens his soul and feels one burden less;
But to the people preach, and you will find
They'll pay you back with thanks ill to your mind.

GOETHE. Translated by J. S. B.

HYDE PARK is a truly national property, and it is amusing and perhaps edifying to note the various uses to which it is often put. In the morning it is the *rendezvous* of nurses and children; in the afternoon of a fashionable throng; on Sunday evenings it is the resort of hard-working men and women, who have to content

themselves with getting a breath of fresh air once a week. But, above all, the park is the meeting-place of the people, the place for mass meetings and monster demonstrations.

On a bright day in June, when the trees were still in their freshest green, the crowd of wealth and fashion had beaten an ignominious retreat before a great political demonstration to be held that afternoon.

Every one knew that the meeting would be a very stormy one, for it related to the most burning question of the day, a question which was hourly growing more and more momentous, and which for the time had divided England into two bitterly opposed factions.

These years which Erica had passed so quietly had been eventful years for the country, years of strife and bloodshed, years of reckless expenditure, years which deluded some and enraged others, provoking most bitter animosity between the opposing parties. The question was not a class question, and a certain number of the working classes and a large number of the London roughs warmly espoused the cause of that party which appealed to their love of power and to a selfish patriotism. The Hyde Park meeting would inevitably be a turbulent one. Those who wished to run no risk remained at home; Rotten Row was deserted; the carriage road almost empty; while from the gateways there poured in a never-ending stream of people—some serious-looking, some eager and excited, some with a dangerously vindictive look, some merely curious. Every now and then the more motley and disorderly crowd was reinforced by a club with its brass band and banners, and gradually the mass of human beings grew from hundreds to a thousand, from one thousand to many thousands, until, indeed, it became almost impossible to form any

idea of the actual numbers, so enormous was the gathering.

"We shall have a bad time of it to-day," remarked Raeburn to Brian, as they forced their way on. "If I'm not very much mistaken, too, we are vastly outnumbered."

He looked round the huge assembly from his vantage ground of six foot four, his cool intrepidity not one whit shaken by the knowledge that, by what he was about to say, he should draw down on his own head all the wrath of the roughest portion of the crowd.

"'Twill be against fearful odds!" said Tom, elbowing vigorously to keep up with his companion.

"We fear naa foe!" said Raeburn, quoting his favourite motto. "And, after all, it were no bad end to die protesting against wicked rapacity, needless bloodshed."

His eye kindled as he thought of the protest he hoped to make; his heart beat high as he looked round upon the throng so largely composed of those hostile to himself. Was there not a demand for his superabundant energy? a demand for the tremendous powers of endurance, of influence, of devotion which were stored up within him? As an athlete joys in trying a difficult feat, as an artist joys in attempting a lofty subject so, Raeburn in his consciousness of power, in his absolute conviction of truth, joyed in the prospect of a most dangerous conflict.

Brian, watching him presently from a little distance, could not wonder at the immense influence he had gained in the country. The mere physique of the man was wonderfully impressive—the strong, rugged Scottish face, the latent power conveyed in his whole bearing. He was no demagogue, he never flattered the people; he

preached indeed a somewhat severe creed, but, even in his sternest mood, the hold he got over the people, the power he had of raising the most degraded to a higher level, was marvellous. It was not likely, however, that his protest of to-day would lead to anything but a free fight. If he could make himself effectually heard, he cared very little for what followed. It was necessary that a protest should be made, and he was the right man to make it; therefore come ill or well, he would go through with it, and, if he escaped with his life—so much the better!

The meeting began. A moderate speaker was heard without interruption, but, the instant Raeburn stood up, a chorus of yells arose. For several minutes he made no attempt to speak; but his dignity seemed to grow in proportion with the indignities offered him. He stood there towering above the crowd like a rock of strength, scanning the thousands of faces with the steady gaze of one who, in thinking of the progress of the race, had lost all consciousness of his own personality. He had come there to protest against injustice, to use his vast strength for others, to spend and be spent for millions, to die if need be! Raeburn was made of the stuff of which martyrs are made; standing there face to face with an angry crowd, which might at any moment break loose and trample him to death or tear him to pieces, his heart was nevertheless all aglow with the righteousness of his cause, with the burning desire to make an availing protest against an evil which was desolating thousands of homes.

The majesty of his calmness began to influence the mob; the hisses and groans died away into silence, such comparative silence, that is, as was compatible with the

greatness of the assembly. Then Raeburn braced himself up; dignified before, he now seemed even more erect and stately. The knowledge that for the moment he had that huge crowd entirely under control was stimulating in the highest degree. In a minute his stentorian voice was ringing out fearlessly into the vast arena; thousands of hearts were vibrating to his impassioned appeal. To each one it seemed as if he individually were addressed.

“You who call yourselves Englishmen, I come to appeal to you to-day! You, who call yourselves free men, I come to tell you that you are acting like slaves.”

Then with rare tact, he alluded to the strongest points of the British character, touching with consummate skill the vulnerable parts of his audience. He took for granted that their aims were pure, their standard lofty, and by the very supposition raised for a time the most abject of his hearers, inspired them with his own enthusiasm.

Presently, when he felt secure enough to venture it, when the crowd was hanging on his words with breathless attention, he appealed no longer directly to the people, but drew, in graphic language, the picture of the desolations brought by war. The simplicity of his phrases, his entire absence of showiness or bombast, made his influence indescribably deep and powerful. A mere ranter, a frothy mob orator, would have been silenced long before.

But this man had somehow got hold of the great assembly, had conquered them by sheer force of will: in a battle of one will against thousands the one had conquered, and would hold its own till it had administered the hard home-thrust which would make the thousands wince and retaliate.

Now, under the power of that “sledge-hammer Saxon,” that marvellously graphic picture of misery and bereave-

ment, hard-headed, and hitherto hard-hearted men were crying like children. Then came the rugged, unvarnished statement shouted forth in the speaker's sternest voice.

"All this is being done in your name, men of England! not only in your name, but at your cost! you are responsible for this bloodshed, this misery! How long is it to go on? How long are you free men going to allow yourselves to be bloody executioners? How long are you to be slavish followers of that grasping ambition which veils its foulness under the fair name of patriotism?"

Loud murmurs began to arise at this, and the orator knew that the ground-swell betokened the coming storm. He proceeded with tenfold energy, his words came down like hailstones, with a fiery indignation he delivered his mighty philippic, in a torrent of forceful words he launched out the most tremendous denunciation he had ever uttered.

The string had been gradually worked up to its highest possible tension; at length when the strain was the greatest it suddenly snapped. Raeburn's will had held all those thousands in check; he had kept his bitterest enemies hanging on his words; he had lashed them into fury, and still kept his grip over them; he had worked them up, gaining more and more power over them, till at length, as he shouted forth the last words of a grand peroration, the bitterness and truth of his accusations proved keener than his restraining influence.

He had foreseen that the spell would break, and he knew the instant it was broken. A moment before, and he had been able to sway that huge crowd as he pleased; now he was at their mercy. No will power, no force of language, no strength of earnestness or truth would avail him now. All that he had to trust to was his immense

physical strength, and what was that when measured against thousands!

He saw the dangerous surging movement in the sea of heads, and knew only too well what it betokened. With a frightful yell of mingled hatred and execration, the seething human mass bore down upon him! His own followers and friends did what they could for him, but that was very little. His case was desperate. Desperation, however, inspires some people with an almost super-human energy. Life was sweet, and that day he fought for his life. The very shouting and hooting of the mob, the roar of the angry multitude, which might well have filled even a brave man with panic, stimulated him, strengthened him to resist to the uttermost.

He fought like a lion, forcing his way through the furious crowd, attacked in the most brutal way on every side, yet ever struggling on if only by inches. Never once did his steadfastness waver, never for a single instant did his spirit sink. His unflinching presence of mind enabled him to get through what would have been impossible to most men, his great height and strength stood him in good stead, while the meanness and the injustice of the attack, the immense odds against which he was fighting nerved him for the struggle.

It was more like a hideous nightmare than a piece of actual life, those fierce tiger faces swarming around, that roar of vindictive anger, that frightful crushing, that hail-storm of savage blows! But, whether life or nightmare, it must be gone through with. In the thick of the fight a line of Goethe came to his mind, one of his favourite mottoes,—“Make good thy standing-place and move the world.”

And even then he half smiled to himself at the for-

lornness of the hope that he should ever need a standing-place again.

With renewed vigour he fought his way on, and with a sort of glow of triumph and new-born hope had almost seen his way to a place of comparative safety, when a fearful blow hopelessly maimed him. With a vain struggle to save himself he fell to the earth,—a vision of fierce faces, green leaves, and blue sky flashed before his eyes, an inward vision of Erica, a moment's agony, and then the surging crowd closed over him, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT DEATH'S DOOR.

Sorrow and wrong are pangs of a new birth:
All we who suffer bleed for one another;
No life may live alone, but all in all;
We lie within the tomb of our dead selves,
Waiting till One command us to arise.

HON. RODEN NOEL.

KNOWING that Erica would have a very anxious afternoon, Charles Osmond gave up his brief mid-day rest, snatched a hasty lunch at a third-rate restaurant, finished his parish visits sooner than usual, and reached the little house in Guilford Terrace in time to share the worst part of her waiting. He found her hard at work as usual, her table strewn with papers and books of reference. Raeburn had purposely left her some work to do for him which he knew would fully occupy her; but the mere fact that she knew he had done it on purpose to engross her mind with other matters entirely prevented her from giving it her full attention. She had never felt more thankful to see Charles Osmond than at that moment.

“When your whole heart and mind are in Hyde Park, how are you to drag them back to what some vindictive old early Father said about the eternity of punishment?” she exclaimed, with a smile, which very thinly disguised her consuming anxiety.

They sat down near the open window, Erica taking possession of that side which commanded the view of the entrance of the *cul-de-sac*. Charles Osmond did not speak for a minute or two, but sat watching her, trying to realise to himself what such anxiety as hers must be. She was evidently determined to keep outwardly calm, not to let her fears gain undue power over her; but she could not conceal the nervous trembling which beset her at every sound of wheels in the quiet square, nor did she know that in her brave eyes there lurked the most visible manifestation possible of haggard, anxious waiting. She sat with her watch in her hand, the little watch that Eric Haeberlein had given her when she was almost a child, and which, even in the days of their greatest poverty, her father had never allowed her to part with. What strange hours it had often measured for her! Age-long hours of grief, weary days of illness and pain, times of eager expectation, times of sickening anxiety, times of mental conflict, of baffling questions and perplexities. How the hands seemed to creep on this afternoon, at times almost to stand still!

“Now, I suppose if you were in my case, you would pray,” said Erica, raising her eyes to Charles Osmond. “It must be a relief, but yet, when you come to analyse it, it is most illogical—a fearful waste of time. If there is a God who works by fixed laws, who sees the whole maze of every one’s life beforehand, then the particular time and manner of my father’s death must be already

appointed, and no prayer of mine that he may come safely through this afternoon's danger can be of the least avail. Besides, if a God could be turned round from His original purpose by human wills and much speaking, I hardly think He would be worth believing in."

"You are taking the lowest view of prayer—mere petition; but even that, I think, is set on its right footing as soon as we grasp the true conception of the ideal father. Do you mean to say that, because your father's rules were unwavering and his day's work marked out beforehand, he did not like you to come to him when you were a little child with all your wishes and longings and requests, even though they were sometimes childish and often impossible to gratify? Would he have been better pleased if you had shut up everything in your own heart, and never of your own accord told him anything about your babyish plans and wants?"

"Still, prayer seems to me waste of time," said Erica.

"What! if it brings you a talk with your Father? If it is a relief to you and a pleasure—because a sign of trust and love—to Him? But in one way I entirely agree with you, unless it is spontaneous it is not only useless but harmful. Imagine a child forced to talk to its father! And this seems to me the truest defence of prayer; to the 'natural man' it always will seem foolishness, to the 'spiritual man'—to one who has recognised the All-Father—it is the absolute necessity of life. And I think by degrees one passes from eager petition for personal and physical good things into the truer and more Christlike spirit of prayer. 'These are my fears, these are my wishes, but not my will but Thine be done.' Shakspeare had got hold of a grand truth, it seems to me, when he said,—

‘So find we profit by losing of our prayers.’”

“And yet your ideal man distinctly said, ‘Ask and ye shall receive,’” said Erica. “There are no limitations. For aught we know, some pig-headed fanatic may be at this moment praying that God in His mercy would rid the earth of that most dangerous man Luke Raeburn; while I might be—of course I am not, but it is conceivable that I might be—praying for his safety. Both of us might claim the same promise, ‘Ask and ye shall receive.’”

“You forget one thing,” said Charles Osmond. “You would both pray to the Father, and his answer—which you, by the way, might consider no answer—would be the answer of a father. Do you not think the fanatic would certainly find profit in having his most unbrotherly request disregarded? And the true loss or gain of prayer would surely be in this: the fanatic would, by his un-Christlike request, put himself further from God; you, by your spontaneous and natural avowal of need and recognition of a Supreme loving will, would draw nearer to God. Nor do we yet at all understand the extraordinary influence exerted on others by any steady, earnest concentration of thought; science is but just awakening to the fact that there is an unknown power which we have hitherto never dreamed of. I have great hope that in this direction, as in all others, science may show us the hidden workings of our Father.”

Erica forgot her anxiety for a moment; she was watching Charles Osmond’s face with mingled curiosity and perplexity. To speak to one whose belief in the Unseen seemed stronger and more influential than most people’s belief in the seen, was always very strange to her, and with her prophet she was almost always conscious

of this double life (*she* considered it double—a real outer and an imaginary inner). His strong conviction; the every-day language which he used in speaking of those truths which most people, from a mistaken notion of reverence, wrap up in a sort of ecclesiastical phraseology; above all, the carrying out in his life of the idea of universal brotherhood, with so many a mere form of words—all served to impress Erica very deeply. She knew him too well and loved him too truly to pause often, as it were, to analyse his character. Every now and then, however, some new phase was borne in upon her, and some chance word, emphasising the difference between them, forced her from sheer honesty to own how much that was noble seemed in him to be the outcome of faith in Christ.

They went a little more deeply into the prayer question. Then, with the wonder growing on her more and more, Erica suddenly exclaimed, "It is so wonderful to me that you can believe without logical proof—believe a thing which affects your whole life so immensely, and yet be unable to demonstrate the very existence of a God!"

"Do you believe your father loves you?" asked Charles Osmond.

"My father? Why, of course."

"You can't logically prove that his love has any true existence."

"Why, yes!" exclaimed Erica. "Not a day passes without some word, look, thought, which would prove it to any one. If there is one thing that I am certain of in the whole world, it is that my father loves me. Why, you who know him so well, you must know that! You must have seen that!"

"All his care of you may be mere self-interest," said Charles Osmond. "Perhaps he puts on a sort of appearance of affection for you just for the sake of what people would say—not a very likely thing for Mr. Raeburn to consider, I own. Still, you can't demonstrate to me that his love is a reality."

"But I *know* it is!" cried Erica, vehemently.

"Of course you know, my child; you know in your heart, and our hearts can teach us what no power of intellect, no skill in logic can ever teach us. You can't logically prove the existence of your father's love, and I can't logically prove the existence of the All-Father; but in our hearts we both of us know. The deepest, most sacred realities are generally those of heart-knowledge, and quite out of the pale of logic."

Erica did not speak, but sat musing. After all, what *could* be proved with absolute certainty? Why, nothing, except such bare facts as that two and two make four. Was even mathematical proof so absolutely certain? Were they not already beginning to talk of a possible fourth dimension of space when even that might no longer be capable of demonstration.

"Well, setting aside actual proof," she resumed, after a silence, "how do you bring it down even to a probability that God is?"

"We must all of us start with a supposition," said Charles Osmond. "There must on the one hand either be everlasting matter or everlasting force (whether these be two real existences, or whether matter be only force conditioned), or, on the other hand, you have the alternative of the everlasting 'He.' You at present base your belief on the first alternative. I base mine on the last, which, I grant you, is at the outset the most difficult of

the two. I find, however, that nine times out of ten the most difficult theory is the truest. Granting the everlasting 'He,' you must allow self-consciousness, without which there could be no true personality. Then, being the Originator, He must be all-powerful, all knowledge-full, and all love-full. We will not quarrel about names; call the Everlasting what you please. 'Father' seems to me at once the highest and simplest name."

"But evil!" broke in Erica, triumphantly. "If He originates all, he must originate evil as well as good."

"Certainly," said Charles Osmond, "He has expressly told us so. 'I form the light and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I, the Lord, do all these things.'"

"I recollect now, we spoke of this two or three years ago," said Erica. "You said that the highest good was attained by passing through struggles and temptations."

"Think of it in this way," said Charles Osmond. "The Father is educating His children; what education was ever brought about without pain? The wise human father does not so much shield his child from small pains, but encourages him to get wisdom from them for the future, tries to teach him endurance and courage. Pain is necessary as an element in education, possibly there is no evolution possible without it. The father may regret it, but, if he is wise, knows that it must be. He suffers twice as much as the child from the infliction of the pain. The All-Father, being at once all-knowing and all-loving, can see the end of the education while we only see it in process, and perhaps exclaim, 'What a frightful state of things,' or like your favourite 'Stephen Blackpool,' 'It's all a muddle!'"

"And the end you consider to be perfection, and

eternal union with God. How can you think immortality probable?"

"It is the necessary outcome of belief in such a God, such a Father as we have spoken of. What! could God have willed that His children whom He really loves should, after a time, fade utterly away? If so, he would be less loving than an average earthly father. If He did indeed love them, and would fain have had them ever with Him, but could not, then He would not be all-powerful."

"I see you are a universalist, a great contrast to my Early Father here, who gloats over the delightful prospect of watching from his comfortable heaven the tortures of all unbelievers. But, tell me, what do you think would be our position in your unseen world? I suppose the mere realisation of having given one's life in a mistaken cause would be about the most terrible pain conceivable?"

"I think," said Charles Osmond, with one of his grave, quiet smiles, "that death will indeed be your 'gate of life,' that seeing the light you will come to your true self, and exclaim, 'Who'd have thought it?'"

The every-day language sounded quaint, it made Erica smile; but Charles Osmond continued, with a brightness in his eyes which she was far from understanding, "And you know there are to be those who shall say, 'Lord, when saw we Thee in distress and helped Thee?' They had not recognised Him here, but He recognised them there? They shared in the 'Come, ye blessed of my Father.'"

"Well," said Erica, thoughtfully, "if any Christianity be true, it must be your loving belief, not the blood-thirsty scheme of the Calvinists. If *that* could by any

possibility be true, I should greatly prefer, like Kingsley's dear old 'Wulf,' to share hell with my own people."

The words had scarcely left her lips when, with a startled cry, she sprang to her feet and hurried to the door. The next moment Charles Osmond saw Tom pass the window; he was unmistakably the bearer of bad news.

His first panting words were reassuring—"Brian says you are not to be frightened;" but they were evidently the mere repetition of a message. Tom himself was almost hopeless; his wrath and grief became more apparent every minute as he gave an incoherent account of the afternoon's work.

"The brutes, the fiends, had half killed the chieftain, had set on him like so many tigers. Brian and Hazeldine were bringing him home—had sent him on to prepare."

Erica had listened so far with a colourless face, and hands tightly clasped, but the word "prepare" seemed to bring new life to her. In an instant she was her strongest self.

"They will never try to take him up that steep, narrow staircase! Quick, Tom! Help me to move this couch into the study."

The little Irish servant was pressed into the service, too, and sent upstairs to fetch and carry, and in a very few minutes the preparations were complete, and Erica had at hand all the appliances most likely to be needed. Just as all was done, and she was beginning to feel that a minute's pause would be the "last straw," Tom heard the sound of wheels in the square, and hurried out. Erica stood in the doorway watching, and presently saw a small crowd of helpers bearing a deathly-looking bur-

den. Whiteness of death—redness of blood! The ground seemed rocking beneath her feet, when a strong hand took hers and drew her into the house.

“Don’t be afraid,” said a voice, which she knew to be Brian’s, though a black mist would not let her see him. “He was conscious a minute ago; this is only from the pain of moving. Which room?”

“The study,” she replied, recovering herself. “Give me something to do, Brian, quickly.”

He saw that in doing lay her safety, and kept her fully employed, so much so, indeed, that from sheer lack of time she was able to stave off the faintness which had threatened to overpower her. After a time her father came to himself, and Erica’s face, which had been the last in his mind in full consciousness, was the first which now presented itself to his awakening gaze. He smiled.

“Well, Erica! So, after all, they haven’t quite done for me! Nine lives like a cat, as I always told you.”

His voice was faint, but with all his wonted energy he raised himself before they could remonstrate. He was far more injured, however, than he knew; with a stifled groan he fell back once more in a swoon, and it was many hours before they were able to restore him.

After that fever set in, and a shadow as of death fell on the house in Guilford Terrace. Doctors came and went; Brian almost lived with his patient; friends—Raeburn had hosts of them—came with help of every description. The gloomy little alley admitted every day crowds of inquirers, who came to the door, read the bulletin, glanced up at the windows, and went away looking graver than when they came.

Erica lost count of time altogether. The past seemed

blotted out; the weight of the present was so great that she would not admit any thought of the future, though conscious always of a blank dread which she dared not pause to analyse, sufficient indeed for her day was the evil thereof! She struggled on somehow with a sort of despairing strength; only once or twice did she even recollect the outside world.

It happened that on the first Wednesday after the Hyde Park meeting some one mentioned the day of the week in her hearing. She was in the sick-room at the time, but at once remembered that her week's work was untouched, that she had not written a line for the *Idol-Breaker*. Every idea seemed to have gone out of her head; for a minute she felt that to save her life she could not write a line. But still she conscientiously struggled to remember what subject had been allotted her, and in the temporary stillness of the first night-watch drew writing materials towards her, and leant her head on her hands until, almost by an effort of will, she at length recalled the theme for her article.

Of course! it was to be that disgraceful disturbance in the church at Z——. She remembered the whole affair now, it all rose up before her graphically—not a bad subject at all! their party might make a good deal by it. Her article must be bright, descriptive, sarcastic. Yet how was she to write such an article when her heart felt like lead? An involuntary "I can't" rose to her lips, and she glanced at her father's motionless form, her eyes filling with tears. Then one of his sayings came to her mind, "No such word as 'Can't' in the dictionary," and she dashed the tears from her eyes, snatched up the pen, and began to write rapidly—almost defiantly. No sooner had she begun than her very exhaustion, the lateness of

the hour, and the stress of circumstance came to her aid—she had never before written so brilliantly.

The humour of the scene struck her; little flashes of mirth at the expense of both priest and people, delicate sarcasms, the more searching from their very refinement, awoke in her brain and were swiftly transcribed. In the middle of one of the most daring sentences Raeburn stirred. Erica's pen was thrown down at once; she was at his side absorbed once more in attending to his wants, forgetful quite of religious controversy, of the *Idol-Breaker*, of anything in fact in the whole world but her father. Not till an hour had passed was she free to finish her writing, but by the time her aunt came to relieve guard at two o'clock the article was finished and Erica stole noiselessly into the next room to put it up.

To her surprise she found that Tom had not gone to bed. He was still toiling away at his desk with a towel round his head; she could almost have smiled at the ludicrous mixture of grief and sleepiness on his face, had not her own heart been so loaded with care and sadness. The post brought in what Tom described as "bushels" of letters every day, and he was working away at them now with sleepy heroism.

"How tired you look," said Erica. "See! I have brought in this for the *Idol*."

"You've been writing it now! that is good of you. I was afraid we should have to make up with some wretched padding of Blank's."

He took the sheets from her and began to read. Laughter is often only one remove from grief, and Tom, though he was sad-hearted enough, could not keep his countenance through Erica's article. First his shoulders began to shake, then he burst into such a paroxysm of

noiseless laughter that Erica, fearing that he could not restrain himself, and would be heard in the sick-room, pulled the towel from his forehead over his mouth; then, conquered herself by the absurdity of his appearance, she was obliged to bury her own face in her hands, laughing more and more whenever the incongruousness of the laughter occurred to her. When they had exhausted themselves, the profound depression which had been the real cause of the violent reaction returned with double force. Tom sighed heavily and finished reading the article with the gravest of faces. He was astonished that Erica could have written at such a time an article positively scintillating with mirth.

"How did you manage anything so witty to-night of all nights?" he asked.

"Don't you remember Hans Andersen's clown Pulchinello?" said Erica. "He never laughed and joked so gaily as the night when his love died and his own heart was broken."

There was a look in her eyes which made Tom reply, quickly,

"Don't write any more just now; the professor has promised us something for next week. Don't write any more till—till the chieftain is well."

After that she wished him good-night rather hastily, crept upstairs to her attic, and threw herself down on her bed. Why had he spoken of the future? Why had his voice hesitated? No, she would not think, she would not!

So the article appeared in that week's *Idol-Breaker*, and thousands and thousands of people laughed over it. It even excited displeased comment from "the other side," and in many ways did a great deal of what in Guilford Terrace was considered "good work." For

Erica herself, it was long before she had time to give it another thought; it was to her only a desperately hard duty which she had succeeded in doing. Nobody ever guessed how much it had cost her.

The weary time dragged on, days and weeks passed by; Raeburn was growing weaker, but clung to life with extraordinary tenacity. And now very bitterly they felt the evils of this voluntarily embraced poverty, for the summer heat was for a few days almost tropical, and the tiny little rooms in the lodging-house were stifling. Brian was very anxious to have the patient moved across to his father's house: but, though Charles Osmond said all he could in favour of the scheme, the other doctors would not consent, thinking the risk of removal too great. And, besides, it would be useless, they maintained,—the atheist was evidently dying. Brian, who was the youngest, could not carry out his wishes in defiance of the others, but he would not deny himself the hope of even yet saving Erica's father. He devised punkahs, became almost nurse and doctor in one, and utterly refused to lose heart. Erica herself was the only other person who shared his hopefulness, or perhaps her feeling could hardly be described by that word; she was not hopeful, but she had so resolutely set herself to live in the present that she had managed altogether to crowd out the future, and with it the worst fear.

One day, however, it broke upon her suddenly. Some one had left a newspaper in the sick-room; it was weeks since she had seen one, and in a brief interval, while her father slept, or seemed to sleep, she took it up half mechanically. How much it would have interested her a little while ago, how meaningless it all seemed to her now! "Latest Telegrams," "News from the Seat of War,"

“Parliamentary Intelligence,”—a speech by Sir Michael Cunningham, one of her heroes, on a question in which she was interested. She could not read it, all the life seemed gone out of it, to-day the paper was nothing to her but a broad sheet with so many columns of printed matter. But as she was putting it down their own name caught her eye. All at once her benumbed faculties regained their power, her heart began to beat wildly, for there, in clearest print, in short, choppy, unequivocal sentences, was the hideous fear which she had contrived so long to banish.

“Mr. Raeburn is dying. The bulletins have daily been growing less and less hopeful. Yesterday Dr. R——, who had been called in, could only confirm the unfavourable opinion of the other doctors. In all probability the days of the great apostle of atheism are numbered. It rests with the Hyde Park rioters, and those who by word and example have incited them, to bear the responsibility of making a martyr of such a man as Mr. Luke Raeburn. Emphatically disclaiming the slightest sympathy with Mr. Raeburn’s religious views, we yet——”

But Erica could read no more. Whatever modicum of charity the writer ventured to put forth was lost upon her. The opening sentence danced before her eyes in letters of fire. That morning she met Brian in the passage and drew him into the sitting-room. He saw at once how it was with her.

“Look!” she said, holding the newspaper towards him. “Is that true? or is it only a sensation trap,—or written for party purposes.”

Her delicate lips were closed with their hardest expression, her eyes only looked grave and questioning. She watched his face as he read, lost her last hope, and

with the look of such anguish as he had never before seen, drew the paper from him, and caught his hand in hers in wild entreaty.

"Oh, Brian, Brian! is there no hope? Surely you can do something for him. There *must* be hope, he is so strong, so full of life!"

He struggled hard for voice and words to answer her, but the imploring pressure of her hands on his had nearly unnerved him. Already the grief that kills lurked in her eyes—he knew that if her father died she would not long survive him.

"Don't say what is untrue!" she continued. "Don't let me drive you into telling a lie,—but only tell me if there is indeed no hope—no chance."

"It may be," said Brian. "You must not expect, for those far wiser than I say it cannot be. But I hope—yes, I still hope."

On that crumb of comfort she lived; but it was a weary day, and for the first time she noticed that her father, who was free from fever, followed her everywhere with his eyes. She knew intuitively that he thought himself dying.

Towards evening she was sitting beside him slowly drawing her fingers through his thick masses of snow-white hair in the way he liked best, when he looked suddenly right into her eyes with his own strangely similar ones, deep, earnest eyes, full now of a sort of dumb yearning.

"Little son Eric," he said faintly, "you will go on with the work I am leaving."

"Yes, father," she replied firmly, though her heart felt as if it would break.

"A harmful delusion," he murmured, half to himself,

"taking up our best men! swallowing up the money of the people! What's that singing, Erica?"

"It is the children in the hospital," she replied. "I'll shut the window if they disturb you, father."

"No," he said. "One can tolerate the delusion for them if it makes their pain more bearable. Poor bairns! poor bairns! Pain is an odd mystery."

He drew down her hand and held it in his, seeming to listen to the singing, which floated in clearly through the open window at right angles with the back windows of the hospital. Neither of them knew what the hymn was, but the refrain which came after every verse as if even the tinies were joining in it was quite audible to Luke Raeburn and his daughter.

"Through life's long day, and death's dark night,
Oh, gentle Jesus, be our light."

Erica's breath came in gasps. To be reminded then that life was long, and that death was dark!

She thought she had never prayed, she had never consciously prayed, but her whole life for the past three years had been an unspoken prayer. Never was there a more true desire entirely unexpressed, than the desire which now seemed to possess her whole being. The darkness would soon hide for ever the being she most loved. Oh, if she could but honestly think that He who called Himself the Light of the world was indeed still living, still ready to help!

But to allow her distress to gain the mastery of her would certainly disturb and grieve her father. With a great effort she stifled the sobs which would rise in her throat, and waited in rigid stillness. When the last notes of the hymn had died away into silence, she turned to look at her father. He had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANSWERED OR UNANSWERED?

“Glory to God—to God!” he saith,
 “Knowledge by suffering entereth,
 And life is perfected by death.”

E. B. BROWNING.

“MR. RÆBURN is curiously like the celebrated dog of nursery lore, who appertained to the ancient and far-famed Mother Hubbard. All the doctors gave him up, all the secularists prepared mourning garments, the printers were meditating black borders for the *Idol-Breaker*, the relative merits of burial and cremation were already in discussion, when the dog—we beg pardon—the leader of atheism, came to life again.

“She went to the joiner’s to buy him a coffin,
 But when she came back the dog was laughing.”

“‘History,’ as a great man was fond of remarking, ‘repeats itself.’”

Ræburn laughed heartily over the accounts of his recovery in the comic papers. No one better appreciated the very clever representation of himself as a huge bulldog starting up into life while Brittania in widow’s weeds brought in a parish coffin. Erica would hardly look at the thing she had suffered too much to be able to endure any jokes on the subject, and she felt hurt and angry that what had given her such anguish should be turned into a foolish jest.

At length, after many weeks of weary anxiety, she was able to breathe freely once more, for her father steadily regained his strength. The devotion of her whole time and strength and thought to another had done wonders for her, her character had strangely

deepened and mellowed. But no sooner was she free to begin her ordinary life than new perplexities beset her on every side.

During her own long illness she had of course been debarred from attending any lectures or meetings whatever. In the years following, before she had quite regained her strength, she had generally gone to hear her father, but had never become again a regular attendant at the lecture-hall. Now that she was quite well, however, there was nothing to prevent her attending as many lectures as she pleased, and naturally, her position as Luke Raeburn's daughter made her presence desirable. So it came to pass one Sunday evening in July that she happened to be present at a lecture given by a Mr. Masterman.

He was a man whom they knew intimately. Erica liked him sufficiently well in private life, and he had been remarkably kind and helpful at the time of her father's illness. It was some years, however, since she had heard him lecture, and this evening, by the virulence of his attack on the character of Christ, he revealed to her how much her ground had shifted since she had last heard him. It was not that he was an opponent of existing Christianity—her father was that, she herself was that, and felt bound to be as long as she considered it a lie—but Mr. Masterman's attack seemed to her grossly unfair, almost wilfully inaccurate, and, in addition, his sarcasm and pleasantries seemed to her odiously vulgar. He was answered by a most miserable representative of Christianity, who made a foolish, weak, blustering speech, and tried to pay the atheist back in his own coin. Erica felt wretched. She longed to get up and speak herself, longing flatly to contradict the

champion of her own cause; then grew frightened at the strength of her feelings. Could this be mere love of fair play and justice? Was her feeling merely that of a barrister who could argue as well on one side as the other? And yet her displeasure in itself proved little or nothing. Would not Charles Osmond be displeased and indignant if he heard her father unjustly spoken of? Yes, but then Luke Raeburn was a living man, and Christ—was she even sure that he had ever lived? Well, yes, sure of that, but of how much more?

When the assembly broke up, her mind was in a miserable chaos of doubt.

It was one of those delicious summer evenings when even in East London the skies are mellow and the air sweet and cool.

"Oh, Tom, let us walk home!" she exclaimed, longing for change of scene and exercise.

"All right," he replied, "I'll take you a short cut, if you don't mind a few back slums to begin with."

Now Erica was familiar enough with the sight of poverty and squalor; she had not lived at the West End, where you may entirely forget the existence of the poor. The knowledge of evil had come to her of necessity much earlier than to most girls, and to-night, as Tom took her through a succession of narrow streets and dirty courts, misery, and vice, and hopeless degradation met her on every side. Swarms of filthy little children wrangled and fought in the gutters, drunken women shouted foul language at one another—everywhere was wickedness—everywhere want.

Her heart felt as if it would break. What was to reach these poor, miserable fellow-creatures of hers? Who was to raise them out of their horrible plight? The

coarse distortion and the narrow contraction of Christ's teaching which she had just heard, offered no remedy for this evil. Nor could she think that secularism would reach these. To understand secularism you need a fair share of intellect,—what intellect would these poor creatures have? Why, you might talk for ever of the "good of humanity," and "the duty of promoting the general good," and they would not so much as grasp the idea of what "good" was—they would sink back to their animal-like state.

Instinctively her thoughts turned to the Radical Reformer who, eighteen hundred years ago, had lived among people just as wicked, just as wretched. How had He worked? What had He done? All through His words and actions had sounded the one key-note; "Your Father." Always He had led them to look up to a perfect Being who loved them, who was present with them.

Was it possible that if Christians had indeed followed their Leader and not obscured His teaching with hideous accretions of doctrine which He had assuredly never taught—was it possible that the Christ-gospel in its original simplicity would indeed be the remedy for all evil?

They were coming into broader thoroughfares now. A wailing child's voice fell on her ear. A small crowd of disreputable idlers were hanging round the closed doors of a public-house, waiting eagerly for the opening which would take place at the close of service-time. The wailing child's voice grew more and more piteous, Erica saw that it came from a poor little half-clad creature of three years old who was clinging to the skirts of a miserable-looking woman with a shawl thrown over her head. Just as she drew near, the woman, with a fearful oath, tried to shake herself free of the child; then, with up-

lifted arm, was about to deal it a heavy blow when Erica caught her hand as it descended, and held it fast in both her hands.

"Don't hurt him," she said, "please, don't hurt him."

She looked into the prematurely wrinkled face, into the half-dim eyes; she held the hand fast with a pressure not of force but of entreaty. Then they passed on, the bystanders shouting out the derisive chorus of "Come to Jesus!" with which London roughs delight in mocking any passenger whom they suspect of religious tendencies. In all her sadness Erica could not help smiling to herself. That she, an atheist, Luke Raeburn's daughter, should be hooted at as a follower of Jesus!

In the meantime the woman she had spoken to stood still staring after her. If an angel had suddenly appeared to her, she could not have been more startled. A human hand had given her coarse, guilty, trembling hand such a living pressure as it had never before received; a pure, loving face had looked at her; a voice, which was trembling with earnestness and full of the pathos of restrained tears, had pleaded with her for her own child. The woman's dormant motherhood sprang into life. Yes, he was her own child after all. She did not really want to hurt him, but a sort of demon was inside her, the demon of drink, and sometimes it made her almost mad. She looked down now with love-cleared eyes at the little crying child who still clung to her ragged skirt. She stooped and picked him up, and wrapped a bit of her shawl round him. Presently, after a fearful struggle, she turned away from the public-house and carried the child home to bed.

The jeering chorus was soon checked, for the shutters were taken down, and the doors thrown wide, and light,

and cheerfulness, and shelter, and the drink they were all craving for were temptingly displayed to draw in the waiting idlers.

But the woman had gone home, and one rather surly-looking man still leant against the wall looking up the street where Tom and Erica had disappeared.

"Blowed if that ain't a bit of pluck!" he said to himself, and therewith fell into a reverie.

Tom talked of temperance work, about which he was very eager, all the way to Guilford Terrace. Erica, on reaching home, went at once to her father's room. She found him propped up with pillows in his arm chair; he was still only well enough to attempt the lightest of light literature, and was looking at some old volumes of *Punch* which the Osmonds had sent across.

"You look tired, Eric!" he exclaimed. "Was there a good attendance?"

"Very," she replied, but so much less brightly than usual that Raeburn at once divined that something had annoyed her.

"Was Mr. Masterman dull?"

"Not dull," she replied, hesitatingly. Then, with more than her usual vehemence, "Father, I can't endure him! I wish we didn't have such men on our side! He is so flippant, so vulgar!"

"Of course he never was a model of refinement," said Raeburn, "but he is effective—very effective. It is impossible that you should like his style; he is, compared with you, what a theatrical poster is to a delicate *tête-de-Greuze*. How did he specially offend you to-night?"

"It was all hateful from the very beginning," said Erica. "And sprinkled all through with doubtful jests which of course pleased the people. One despicable one

about the Entry into Jerusalem, which I believe he must have got from Strauss. I'm sure Strauss quotes it."

"You see what displeases an educated mind, wins a rough, uncultured one. We may not altogether like it, but we must put up with it. We need our Moodys and Sankeys as well as the Christians."

"But, father, he seems to me so unfair."

Raeburn looked grave.

"My dear," he said, after a minute's thought, "you are not in the least bound to go to hear Mr. Masterman again unless you like. But remember this, Eric, we are only a struggling minority, and let me quote to you one of our Scottish proverbs—"Hawks shouldna pick out hawks' een." You are still a hawk, are you not?"

"Of course," she said, earnestly.

"Well, then, be leal to your brother hawks."

A cloud of perplexed thought stole over Erica's face. Raeburn noted it and did his best to divert her attention.

"Come," he said "let us have a chapter of Mark Twain to enliven us."

But even Mark Twain was inadequate to check the thought-struggle which had begun in Erica's brain. Desperate earnestness would not be conquered even by the most delightful of all humorous fiction.

During the next few days this thought-struggle raged. So great was Erica's fear of being biassed either one way or the other that she would not even hint at her perplexity either to her father or to Charles Osmond. And now the actual thoroughness of her character seemed a hindrance.

She had imagination, quick perception of the true and beautiful, and an immense amount of steady common-sense. At the same time she was almost as keen and

quite as slow of conviction as her father. Honestly dreading to allow her poetic faculty due play, she kept her imagination rigidly within the narrowest bounds. She was thus honestly handicapped in the race; the honesty was, however, a little mistaken and one-sided, for not the most vivid imagination could be considered as a set-off to the great, the incalculable counter-influence of her whole education and surroundings. How she got through that black struggle was sometimes a mystery to her. At last one evening, when the load had grown intolerable, she shut herself into her own room, and, forgetful of all her logical arguments, spoke to the unknown God. Her hopelessness, her desperation, drove her as a last resource to cry to the possibly Existent.

She stood by the open window of her little room, with her arms on the window-sill, looking out into the summer night, just as years before she had stood when making up her mind to exile and sacrifice. Then the wintry heavens had been blacker and the stars brighter, now both sky and stars were dimmer because more light. Over the roofs of the Guilford Square houses she could see Charles' Wain and the Pole star, but only faintly.

"God!" she cried, "I have no reason to think that Thou art, except that there is such fearful need of Thee. I can see no single proof in the world that Thou art here. But if what Christ said was true, then Thou must care that I should know Thee, for I must be Thy child. Oh, God, if Thou art—oh, Father, if Thou art,—help us to know Thee! show us what is true!"

She waited and waited, hoping for some sort of answer, some thought, some conviction. But she found, as many have found before her, that "the heavens were as brass."

"Of course it was no use!" she exclaimed, impatiently, yet with a blankness of disappointment which in itself proved the reality of her expectations.

Just then she heard Tom's voice at the foot of the stairs calling her; it seemed like the seal to her impatient "of course." There was no Unseen, no Eternal—of course not! But there was a busy everyday life to be lived.

"All right," she returned, impatiently, to Tom's repeated calls; "don't make such a noise or else you'll disturb father!"

"He is wide awake," said Tom, "and talking to the Professor. Just look here, I couldn't help fetching you down—did you ever see such a speech in your life! A regular brick he must be!"

He held an evening paper in his hand. Erica remembered that the debate was to be on a question affecting all free-thinkers. During the discussion of this, some one had introduced a reference to the Hyde Park meeting and to Mr. Raeburn, and had been careful not to lose the opportunity of making a spiteful and misleading remark about the apostle of atheism. Tom hurried her through this, however, to the speech that followed it.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Who is Mr. Farrant? I never heard of him before."

"Member for Greysbot, elected last spring, don't you remember? One of the bye-elections. Licked the Tories all to fits. This is his maiden speech, and that makes it all the more plucky of him to take up the cudgels in our defence. Here! let me read it to you."

With the force of one who is fired with a new and hearty admiration, he read the report. The speech was undoubtedly a fine one; it was a grand protest against intolerance, a plea for justice. The speaker had not

hesitated for an instant to raise his voice in behalf of a very unpopular cause, and his generous words, even when read through the medium of an indifferent newspaper report, awoke a strange thrill in Erica's heart. The utter disregard of self, the nobility of the whole speech struck her immensely. The man who had dared to stand up for the first time in Parliament and speak thus, must be one in a thousand. Presently came the most daring and disinterested touch of all.

"The honourable member for Rilchester made what I can not but regard as a most misleading and unnecessary remark with reference to the recent occurrence in Hyde Park, and to Mr. Raeburn. I listened to it with pain, for, if there can be degrees in the absolute evil of injustice and lack of charity, it seems to me that the highest degree is reached in that uncharitableness which tries to blacken the character of an opponent. Since the subject has been introduced, the House will, I hope, bear with me if for the sake of justice I for a moment allude to a personal matter. Some years ago I myself was an atheist, and I can only say that, speaking now from the directly opposite standpoint, I can still look back and thank Mr. Raeburn most heartily for the good service he did me. He was the first man who ever showed me, by words and example combined, that life is only noble when lived for the race. The statement made by the honourable member for Rilchester seems to me as incorrect as it was uncalled for. Surely this assembly will best prove its high character not by loud religious protestations, not by supporting a narrow, Pharisical measure, but by impartiality, by perfect justice, by the manifestation in deed and word of that broad-hearted charity,

that universal brotherliness, which alone deserves the name of Christianity."

The manifestation of the speaker's generosity and universal brotherliness came like a light to Erica's darkness. It did not end her struggle, but it did end her despair. A faint, indefinable hope rose in her heart.

Mr. Farrant's maiden speech made a considerable stir; it met with some praise and much blame. Erica learnt from one of the papers that he was Mr. Donovan Farrant, and at once felt convinced that he was the "Donovan" whom both Charles Osmond and Brian had mentioned to her. She seemed to know a good deal about him. Probably they had never told her his surname because they knew that some day he would be a public character. With instinctive delicacy she refrained from making any reference to his speech, or any inquiry as to his identity with the "Donovan" of whose inner life she had heard. Very soon after that, too, she went down to the sea-side with her father, and when they came back to town the Osmonds had gone abroad, so it was not until the autumn that they again met.

Her stay at Codrington wonderfully refreshed her; it was the first time in her life that she had taken a thorough holiday, with change of scene and restful idleness to complete it. The time was outwardly uneventful enough, but her father grew strong in body and she grew strong in mind.

One absurd little incident she often laughed over afterwards. It happened that in the *On-looker* there was a quotation from some unnamed mediæval writer; she and her father had a discussion as to whom it could be, Raeburn maintaining that it was Thomas à Kempis.

Wishing to verify it, Erica went to a bookseller's and asked for the *Imitation of Christ*. A rather prim-looking dame presided behind the counter.

"We haven't that book, miss," she said, "it's quite out of fashion now."

"I agree with you," said Erica, greatly amused. "It must be quite out of fashion, for I scarcely know half-a-dozen people who practise it."

However, a second shop appeared to think differently, for it had Thomas à Kempis in every conceivable size, shape, and binding. Erica bought a little sixpenny copy and went back to the beach, where she made her father laugh over her story.

They verified the quotation, and by-and-by Erica began to read the book. On the very first page she came to words which made her pause and relapse into a deep reverie.

"But he who would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must study to make his whole life conformable to that of Christ."

The thought linked itself in her mind with some words of John Stuart Mill's which she had heard quoted till she was almost weary of them.

"Nor even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation for the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life."

While she was still musing, a sound of piteous crying attracted her notice. Looking up she saw a tiny child wandering along the beach, trailing a wooden spade after her, and sobbing as if her heart would break. In a moment Erica was beside her, coaxing and consoling, but at last, finding it impossible to draw forth an in-

telligible word from the sobs and tears, she took the little thing in her arms and carried her to her father. Raeburn was a great child-lover, and had a habit of carrying goodies in his pocket, much to the satisfaction of all the children with whom he was brought in contact. He produced a bit of butter-scotch, which restored the small maiden's serenity for a minute.

"She must have lost her way," he said, glancing from the lovely little tear-stained face to the thinly shod feet and ungloved hands of the little one. The butter-scotch had won her heart. Presently she volunteered a remark.

"Dolly putted on her own hat. Dolly wanted to dig all alone. Dolly lan away."

"Where is your home?" asked Erica.

"Me don't know! me don't know!" cried Dolly, bursting into tears again, and hiding her face on Raeburn's coat. "Father! father, Dolly wants father."

"We will come and look for him," said Erica, "but you must stop crying, and you know your father will be sure to come and look for you."

At this the little one checked her tears, and looked up as if expecting to see him close by.

"He isn't there," she said, piteously.

"Come and let us look for him," said Erica.

Dolly jumped up, thrust her little hand into Erica's, and toiled up the steep beach. They had reached the road, and Erica paused for a moment, wondering which direction they had better take, when a voice behind her made her start.

"Why, Dorothy—little one—we've been hunting for you everywhere!"

Dolly let go Erica's hand, and with a glad cry rushed

into the arms of a tall, dark, rather foreign-looking man, who caught her up and held her closely.

He turned to Erica and thanked her very warmly for her help. Erica thought his face the noblest she had ever seen.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE MUSEUM.

Methought I heard one calling, "Child,"

And I replied, "My Lord!"

GEORGE HERBERT.

A FAVOURITE pastime with country children is to watch the gradual growth of the acorn into the oak-tree. They will suspend the acorn in a glass of water and watch the slow progress during long months. First one tiny white thread is put forth, then another, until at length the glass is almost filled with a tangle of white fibres, a sturdy little stem raises itself up, and the baby tree, if it is to live, must be at once transplanted into good soil. The process may be botanically interesting, but there is something a little sickly about it, too—there is a feeling that, after all, the acorn would have done better in its natural ground hidden away in darkness.

And, if we have this feeling with regard to vegetable growth, how much more with regard to spiritual growth! To attempt to set up the gradually awakening spirit in an apparatus where it might be the observed of all observers would be at once repulsive and presumptuous. Happily, it is impossible. We may trace influences and suggestions, just as we may note the rain or drought, the heat or cold that affect vegetable growth, but the actual birth is ever hidden.

To attempt even to shadow forth Erica's growth during the next year would be worse than presumptuous. As to her outward life it was not greatly changed, only intensified. October always began their busiest six months. There was the night school at which she was able to work again indefatigably. There were lectures to be attended. Above all, there was an ever increasing amount of work to be done for her father. In all the positive and constructive side of secularism, in all the efforts made by it to better humanity, she took an enthusiastic share. Naturally she did not see so much of Charles Osmond now that she was strong again. In the press of business, in the hard, everyday life there was little time for discussion. They met frequently, but never for one of their long *tête-à-têtes*. Perhaps Erica purposely avoided them. She was strangely different now from the little impetuous girl who had come to his study years ago, trembling with anger at the Lady Superintendent's insult. Insults had since then, alas, become so familiar to her, that she had acquired a sort of patient dignity of endurance, infinitely sad to watch in such a young girl.

One morning in early June, just a year after the memorable Hyde Park meeting, Charles Osmond happened to be returning from the death-bed of one of his parishioners when, at the corner of Guilford Square, he met Erica. It might have been in part the contrast with the sad and painful scene he had just quitted, but he thought she had never before looked so beautiful. Her face seemed to have taken to itself the freshness and the glow of the summer morning.

"You are early abroad," he said, feeling older and grayer and more tired than ever as he paused to speak to her.

"I am off to the museum to read," she said, "I like to get there by nine, then you don't have to wait such an age for your books; I can't bear waiting."

"What are you at work upon now?"

"Oh, to-day for the last time I am going to hunt up particulars about Livingstone. Hazeldine was very anxious that a series of papers on his life should be written for our people. What a grand fellow he was!"

"I heard a characteristic anecdote of him the other day," said Charles Osmond. "He was walking beside one of the African lakes which he had discovered, when suddenly there dawned on him a new meaning to long familiar words, 'The blood of Christ!' he exclaimed. 'That must be Charity! The blood of Christ—that must be Charity!' A beautiful thought, too seldom practically taught."

Erica looked grave.

"Characteristic, certainly, of his broad-heartedness, but I don't think that anecdote will do for the readers of the *Idol-Breaker*." Then, looking up at Charles Osmond, she added, in a rather lower tone, "Do you know, I had no idea when I began what a difficult task I had got. I thought in such an active life as that there would be little difficulty in keeping the religious part away from the secular, but it is wonderful how Livingstone contrives to mix them up."

"You see, if Christianity be true, it must, as you say, 'mix up' with everything. There should be no rigid distinction between secular and religious," said Charles Osmond.

"If it is true," said Erica, suddenly, and with seeming irrelevance, "then sooner or later we must learn it to be so. Truth *must* win in the end. But it is worse to wait

for perfect certainty than for books at the museum!" she added, laughing. "It is five minutes to nine—I shall be late."

Charles Osmond walked home thoughtfully; the meeting had somehow cheered him.

"Absolute conviction that truth must out—that truth must make itself perceptible! I've not often come across a more beautiful faith than that. Yes, little Undine, right you are! 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' Here or there, here or there—

"All things come round to him who will but wait."

There's one for yourself, Charles Osmond! None of your hurrying and meddling now, old man! you've just got to leave it to your betters."

Soliloquising after this fashion he reached home, and was not sorry to find his breakfast awaiting him, for he had been up the greater part of the night.

The great domed library of the British Museum had become very homelike to Erica, it was her ideal of comfort; she went there whenever she wanted quiet, for in the small and crowded lodgings she could never be secure from interruptions, and interruptions resulted in bad work. There was something, too, in the atmosphere of the museum which seemed to help her. She liked the perfect stillness, she liked the presence of all the books. Above all, too, she liked the consciousness of possession. There was no narrow exclusiveness about this place, no one could look askance at her here. The place belonged to the people, and therefore belonged to her; she—heretic and atheist as she was—had as much share in the ownership as the highest in the land. She had her own peculiar nook over by the encyclopedias,

and, being always an early comer, seldom failed to secure her own particular chair and desk.

On this morning she took her place, as she had done hundreds of times before, and was soon hard at work. She was finishing her last paper on Livingstone when a book she had ordered was deposited on her desk by one of the noiseless attendants. She wanted it to verify one or two dates, and she half thought she would try to hunt up Charles Osmond's anecdote. In order to write her series of papers, she had been obliged to study the character of the great explorer pretty thoroughly. She had always been able to see the nobility even of those differing most widely from herself in point of creed, and the great beauty of Livingstone's character had impressed her very much. To-day she happened to open on an entry in his journal which seemed particularly characteristic of the man. He was in great danger from the hostile tribes at the union of the Zambesi and Loangwa, and there was something about his spontaneous utterance which appealed very strongly to Erica.

"Felt much turmoil of spirit in view of having all my plans for the welfare of this great region and teeming population knocked on the head by savages to-morrow. But I read that Jesus came and said, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honour, and there's an end on't. I will not cross furtively by night as I intended. . . . Nay, verily, I shall take observations for latitude and longitude to-night, though they may be the last."

The courage, the daring, the perseverance, the in-

tense faith of the man shone out in these sentences. Was it indeed a delusion, such practical faith as that?

Blackness of darkness seemed to hem her in. She struggled through it once more by the one gleam of certainty which had come to her in the past year. Truth must be self-revealing. Sooner or later, if she were honest, if she did not shut her mind deliberately up with the assurance,—“You have thought out these matters fully and fairly; enough! let us now rest content,”—if she were indeed a true “Freethinker,” she *must* know! And even as that conviction returned to her the words, half-quaint, half-pathetic, came to her mind,—“It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honour, and there’s an end on’t.”

Yes, there would “be an end on’t,” if she could feel sure that he, too, was not deluded!

She turned over the pages of the books, and towards the end found a copy of the inscription on Livingstone’s tomb. Her eye fell on the words, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice.”

Somehow the mention of the lost sheep brought to her mind the little lost child on the beach at Codrington—Dolly, who had “putted on” her own hat, who had wanted to be independent, and to dig by herself. She had run away from home, and could not find the way back. What a steep climb they had had up the beach!—how the little thing’s tiny feet had slipped and stumbled over the stones, and just when they were most perplexed, the father had found them!

Exactly how it all came to her, Erica never knew, nor could she ever put into words the story of the next few moments. When “God’s great sun-rise” finds us

out, we have need of something higher than human speech—there *are* no words for it. At the utmost she could only say that it was like coming out of the twilight, that it seemed as if she were immersed in a great wave of all-pervading light.

All in a moment the Christ who had been to her merely a noble character of ancient history seemed to become to her the most real and living of all living realities. Even her own existence seemed to fade into a vague and misty shadow in comparison with the intensity of this new consciousness—this conviction of His being which surrounded her—which she knew, indeed, to be “way, and truth, and life.” “They shall hear My voice.” In the silence of waiting, in the faithfulness of honest searching, Erica for the first time in her life heard it. Yes, she had been right—truth was self-revealing. A few minutes ago these words had been to her an unfulfilled, a vain promise—the speaker, broad-hearted and loving as he was, had doubtless been deluded. But now the voice spoke to her, called her by name, told her what she wanted.

“Dolly” became to her a parable of life. She had been like that little child; for years she had been toiling up over rough stones and slippery pebbles, but at last she had heard the voice. Was this the coming to the Father?

That which often appears sudden and unaccountable is, if we did but know it, a slow, beautiful evolution. It was now very nearly seven years since the autumn afternoon when the man, “too nice to be a clergyman,” and “not a bit like a Christian,” had come to Erica’s home, had shown her that at least one of them practised the universal brotherliness which almost all preached.⁸ It was

nearly seven years since words of absolute conviction, words of love and power, had first sounded forth from Christian lips in her father's lecture-hall, and had awakened in her mind that miserable uncomfortable question—"supposing Christianity should be true?"

All the most beautiful influences are quiet; only the destructive agencies, the stormy wind, the heavy rain and hail, are noisy. Love of the deepest sort is wordless, the sunshine steals down silently, the dew falls noiselessly, and the communion of spirit with spirit is calmer and quieter than anything else in the world—quiet as the spontaneous turning of the sunflower to the sun when the heavy clouds have passed away, and the light and warmth reveal themselves. The subdued rustle of leaves, the hushed footsteps sounded as usual in the great library, but Erica was beyond the perception of either place or time.

Presently she was recalled by the arrival of another student, who took the chair next to hers—a little deformed man, with a face which looked prematurely old, and sad, restless eyes. A few hours before she would have regarded him with a sort of shuddering compassion; now with the compassion there came to her the thought of compensation which even here and now might make the poor fellow happy. Was he not immortal? Might he not here and now learn what she had just learnt, gain that unspeakable joy? and might not the knowledge go on growing and increasing for ever? She took up her pen once more, verified the dates, rolled up her manuscript, and, with one look at Livingstone's journal, returned it to the clerk and left the library.

It was like coming into a new world; even dingy Bloomsbury seemed beautiful. Her face was so bright,

so like the face of a happy child, that more than one passer-by was startled by it, lifted for a moment from sordid cares into a purer atmosphere. She felt a longing to speak to some one who would understand her new happiness. She had reached Guilford Square, and looking doubtfully across to the Osmonds' house. They would understand! But no—she must tell her father first. And then, with a fearful pang, she realised what her new conviction meant. It meant bringing the sword into her father's house; it meant grieving him with a life-long grief; it meant leaving the persecuted minority, and going over to the triumphant majority; it meant unmitigated pain to all those she loved best.

Erica had had her full share of pain, but never had she known anything so agonising as that moment's sharp revulsion. Mechanically she walked on until she reached home; nobody was in. She looked into the little sitting-room, but only Friskarina sat purring on the rug. The table was strewn with the Saturday papers; the mid-day post had just come. She turned over the letters and found one for herself in her father's hand-writing. It was the one thing needed to complete the realisation of her pain. She snatched it up with a stifled sob, ran upstairs to her room, and threw herself down on the bed in a silent agony.

A new joy had come to her which her father could not share; a joy which he would call a delusion, which he spent great part of his life combating. To tell him that she was convinced of the truth of Christianity—why, it would almost break his heart!

And yet she must inflict this terrible pain. Her nature was far too noble to have dreamed for a single instant of temporising, of keeping her thoughts to herself. A

Raeburn was not likely to fail either in courage or in honesty; but, with her courage and honesty, Erica had the violin-like sensitiveness of nature which Eric Haeberlein had noticed even in her childhood. She saw in the future all the pain she must bring to her father, intensified by her own sensitiveness. She knew so well what her feelings would have been but a short time ago, if any one she greatly loved had "fallen back" into Christianity. How could she tell him? How *could* she!

Yet it was a thing which must be done. Should she write to him? No, the letter might reach him when he was tired and worried—yet, to speak would be more painful.

She got up, and went to the window, and let the summer wind blow on her heated forehead. The world had seemed to her just before one glorious presence-chamber, full of sunshine and rejoicing. But already the shadow of a life-long pain had fallen on her heart. A revealed Christ meant also a revealed cross, and a right heavy one.

It was only by degrees that she grew strong again, and Livingstone's text came back to her once more, "I am with you always."

By-and-by, she opened her father's letter. It ran as follows:—

"I have just remembered that Monday will be your birthday. Let us spend it together, little son Eric! A few days at Codrington would do us both good, and I have a tolerable leisure week. If you can come down on Saturday afternoon, so much the better. I will meet you there, if you will telegraph reply as soon as you get this. I have three lectures at Helmstone on Sunday, but you will probably prefer a quiet day by the sea. Bring me

Westcott's new book, and you might put in the chisel and hammer. We will do a little geologising for the professor, if we have time. Meeting here last night a great success.

"Your loving father,

"LUKE RAEBURN."

"He is only thinking how he can give me pleasure!" sighed Erica. "And I have nothing to give him but pain!"

She went at once, however, for the *Bradshaw*, and looked out the afternoon trains to Codrington.

CHAPTER XX.

STORM.

And seems she mid deep silence to a strain
 To listen, which the soul alone can know,
 Saying, "Fear nought, for Jesus came on earth,
 Jesus of endless joys the wide, deep sea,
 To ease each heavy load of mortal birth.
 His waters ever clearest, sweetest be
 To him who in a lonely bark drifts forth
 On His great deeps of goodness trustfully.

From Vittoria Colonna.

CODRINGTON was one of the very few seaside places within fairly easy reach of London which had not been vulgarised into an ordinary watering-place. It was a primitive little place, with one good, old-established hotel, and a limited number of villas and lodging-houses, which only served as a sort of ornamental fringe to the picturesque little fishing-town.

The fact was, that it was just midway between two large and deservedly popular resorts, and so it had been overlooked, and to the regret of the thrifty inhabitants, and the satisfaction of the visitors who came there for

quiet, its peaceful streets and its stony beach were never invaded by excursionists. No cockneys came down for the Sunday to eat shrimps; the shrimps were sent away by train to the more favoured watering-places, and the Codrington shopkeepers shook their heads and gave up expecting to make a fortune in such a conservative little place. Erica said it reminded her of the dormouse in *Alice in Wonderland*, tyrannised over by the hatter on one side and the March hare on the other, and eventually put head foremost into the teapot. Certainly Helmstone on the east and Westport on the west had managed to eclipse it altogether, and its peaceful sleepiness made the dormouse comparison by no means inapt.

It all looked wonderfully unchanged as she walked from the station that summer afternoon with her father. The square, gray tower of St. Oswald's Church, the little, winding, irregular streets, the very shop-windows seemed quite unaltered, while at every turn familiar faces came into sight. The shrewd old sailor with the telescope, the prim old lady at the bookseller's, who had pronounced the *Imitation of Christ* to be quite out of fashion, the sturdy milkman, with white smock frock, and bright pails fastened to a wooden yoke, and the coast-guardsman, who was always whistling "Tom Bowling."

The sea was as calm as a mill-pond; Raeburn suggested an hour or two on the water, and Erica, who was fond of boating, gladly assented. She had made up her mind not to speak to her father that evening; he had a very hard day's work before him on the Sunday; they must have these few hours in peace. She did not in the least dread any subject coming up which might put her into difficulty, for, on the rare days when her father allowed himself any recreation, he entirely banished all

controversial topics from his mind. He asked no single question relating to the work or to business of any kind, but gave himself up to the enjoyment of a much needed rest and relaxation. He seemed in excellent spirits, and Erica herself would have been rapturously happy if she had not been haunted by the thought of the pain that awaited him. She knew that this was the last evening she and her father should ever spend together in the old perfect confidence; division—the most painful of all divisions—lay before them.

The next day she was left to herself. She would not go to the old gray-towered church; though as an atheist she had gone to one or two churches to look and listen, she felt that she could not honourably go as a worshipper till she had spoken to her father. So she wandered about on the shore, and in the restful quiet learnt more, and grew stronger, and conquered the dread of the morrow. She did not see her father again that day, for he could not get back from Helmstone till a late train, and she had promised not to sit up for him.

The morning of her twenty-third birthday was bright and sunshiny; she had slept well, but awoke with the oppressive consciousness that a terrible hard duty lay before her. When she came down there was a serious look in her eyes which did not escape Raeburn's keen observation. He was down before her, and had been out already, for he had managed somehow to procure a lovely handful of red and white roses and mignonette.

"All good wishes for your birthday, and 'sweets to the sweet,' as some one remarked on a more funereal occasion," he said, stooping to kiss her. "Dear little son Eric, it is very jolly to have you to myself for once. No disrespect to Aunt Jean and old Tom, but two is company!"

"What lovely flowers!" exclaimed Erica. "How good of you! Where did they come from?"

"I made love to old Nicolls, the florist, to let me gather them myself; he was very anxious to make a gorgeous arrangement done up in white paper with a lace edge, and thought me a fearful Goth for preferring this disorderly bunch."

They sat down to breakfast; afterwards, the morning papers came in, and Raeburn disappeared behind the *Daily Review*, while the servant cleared the table. Erica stood by the open French window; she knew that in a few minutes she must speak, and how to get what she had to say into words she did not know. Her heart beat so fast that she felt almost choked. In a sort of dream of pain she watched the passers-by—happy-looking girls going down to bathe, children with spades and pails. Everything seemed so tranquil, so ordinary, while before her lay a duty which must change her whole world!

"Not much news," said Raeburn, coming towards her as the servant left the room. "For dulness commend me to a Monday paper! Well, Eric, how are we to spend your twenty-third birthday? To think that I have actually a child of twenty-three! Why, I ought to feel an old patriarch, and, in spite of white hair and life-long badgering, I don't, you know! Come, what shall we do! Where would you like to go?"

"Father," said Erica, "I want first to have a talk with you. I—I have something to tell you."

There was no longer any mistaking that the seriousness meant some kind of trouble. Raeburn put his arm round her.

"Why, my little girl," he said, tenderly. "You are trembling all over! What is the matter?"

"The matter is that what I have to say will pain you, and it half kills me to do that. But there is no choice—tell you I must. You would not wish me not to be true, not to be honest."

Utter perplexity filled Raeburn's mind. What phantom trouble was threatening him? Had she been commissioned to tell him of some untoward event?—some business calamity? Had she fallen in love with some one he could not permit her to marry? He looked questioningly at her, but her expression only perplexed him still more; she was trembling no longer, and her eyes were clear and bright, there was a strong look about her whole face.

"Father," she said, quietly, "I have learnt to believe in Jesus Christ."

He wrenched away his arm; he started back from her as if she had stabbed him. For a minute he looked perfectly dazed.

At last, after a silence which seemed to each of them age-long, he spoke in the agitated voice of one who has just received a great blow.

"Do you know what you are saying, Erica? Do you know what such a confession as you have made will involve? Do you mean that you accept the whole of Christ's teaching?"

"Yes," she replied, firmly, "I do."

"You intend to turn Christian?"

"Yes, to try to."

"How long have you and Mr. Osmond been concocting this?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Erica, terribly wounded by his tone.

"Did he send you down here to tell me?"

"Mr. Osmond knows nothing about it," said Erica. "How could I tell any one before you, father?"

Raeburn was touched by this. He took several turns up and down the room before speaking again, but the more he grasped the idea the deeper grew his grief and the hotter his anger. He was a man of iron will, however, and he kept both under. When at length he did speak, his voice was quiet and cold and repressed.

"Sit down," he said, motioning her to a chair. "This is not a subject that we can dismiss in five minutes' talk. I must hear your reasons. We will put aside all personal considerations. I will consider you just as an ordinary opponent."

His coldness chilled her to the heart. Was it always to be like this? How could she possibly endure it! How was she to answer his questions,—how was she to vindicate her faith, when the mere tone of his voice seemed to paralyse her heart? He was indeed treating her with the cold formality of an opponent, but never for a single instant could she forget that he was her father—the being she loved best in the whole world.

But Erica was brave and true; she knew that this was a crisis in their lives, and, thrusting down her own personal pain, she forced herself to give her whole heart and mind to the searching and perplexing questions with which her father intended to test the reality of her convictions. Had she been unaccustomed to his mode of attack, he would have hopelessly silenced her, as far as argument goes, in half-an-hour; but not only was Erica's faith perfectly real, but she had, as it were, herself traversed the whole of his objections and difficulties. Though far from imagining that she understood everything, she had yet so firmly grasped the innermost truth that all

details as yet outside her vision were to her no longer hindrances and bugbears, but so many new possibilities—other hopes of fresh manifestations of God.

She held her ground well, and every minute Raeburn realised more keenly that whatever hopes he had entertained of re-convincing her were futile. What made it all the more painful to him was that the thoroughness of the training he had given her now only told against him, and the argument which he carried on in a cold, metallic voice was really piercing his very heart, for it was like arguing against another self, the dearest part of himself gone over to the enemy's side.

At last he saw that argument was useless, and then, in his grief and despair, he did for a time lose his self-control. Erica had often felt sorry for the poor creatures who had to bear the brunt of her father's scathing sarcasm. But platform irony was a trifle to the torrent which bore down upon her to-day. When a strong man does lose his restraint upon himself, the result is terrific. Raeburn had never sufficiently cared for an adversary as to be moved beyond an anger which could be restricted and held within due bounds; he of course cared more for the success of his cause and his own dignity. But now his love drove him to despair; his intolerable grief at the thought of having an opponent in his own child burst all restraining bonds. Wounded to the quick, he who had never in his life spoken a harsh word to his child now poured forth such a storm of anger, and sarcasm, and bitter reproach, as might have made even an uninterested bystander tremble.

Had Erica made any appeal, had she even begun to cry, his chivalry would have been touched; he would have recognised her weakness, and regained his self-control.

But she was not weak, she was strong—she was his other self gone over to the opposite side: that was what almost maddened him. The torrent bore down upon her, and she spoke not a word, but just sat still and endured. Only, as the words grew more bitter and more wounding, her lips grew white, her hands were locked more tightly together. At last it ended.

“You have cheated yourself into this belief,” said Raeburn, “you have given me the most bitter grief and disappointment of my whole life. Have you anything else you wish to say to me?”

“Nothing,” replied Erica, not daring to venture more; for, if she had tried to speak, she knew she must have burst into tears.

But there was as much pain expressed in her voice as she spoke that one word, as there had been in all her father’s outburst. It appealed to him at once. He said no more, but stepped out of the French window, and began to pace to and fro under the verandah.

Erica did not stir; she was like one crushed. Sad and harassed as her life had been, it yet seemed to her that she had never known such indescribably bitter pain. The outside world looked bright and sunshiny: she could see the waves breaking on the shore, while beyond, sailing out into the wide expanse was a brown-sailed fishing-boat. Every now and then her vision was interrupted by a tall, dark figure pacing to and fro; every now and then the sunlight glistened on snow-white hair, and then a fresh stab of pain awoke in her heart.

The brown-sailed fishing-boat dwindled into a tiny dark spot on the horizon, the sea tossed and foamed and sparkled in the sunshine. Erica turned away; she could not bear to look at it, for just now it seemed to her

merely the type of the terrible separation which had arisen between herself and her father. She felt as if she were being borne away in the little fishing-boat, while he was left on the land, and the distance between them slowly widened and widened.

All through that grievous conversation she had held in her hand a little bit of mignonette. She had held it unconsciously; it was withered and drooping, its sweetness seemed to her now sickly and hateful. She identified it with her pain, and years after the smell of mignonette was intolerable to her. She would have thrown it away, but remembered that her father had given it her. And then, with the recollection of her birthday gift, came the realisation of all the long years of unbroken and perfect love, so rudely interrupted to-day. Was it always to be like this? must they drift further and further apart?

Her heart was almost breaking; she had endured to the very uttermost, when at length comfort came. The sword had only come to bring the higher peace. No terrible sea of division could part those whom love could bind together. The peace of God stole once more into her heart.

"How loud soe'er the world may roar,
We know love will be conqueror."

Meanwhile Raeburn paced to and fro in grievous pain. The fact that his pain could scarcely perhaps have been comprehended by the generality of people did not make it less real or less hard to bear. A really honest atheist, who is convinced that Christianity is false and misleading, suffers as much at the sight of what he considers a mischievous belief as a Christian would suffer while watching a service in some heathen temple. Rather his pain would be greater, for his belief in the gradual progress

of his creed is shadowy and dim compared with the Christian's conviction that the "Saviour of all men" exists.

Once, some years before, a very able man, one of his most devoted followers, had "fallen back" into Christianity. That had been a bitter disappointment; but that his own child, whom he loved more than anything in the world, should have forsaken him and gone over to the enemy, was a grief well-nigh intolerable. It was a grief he had never for one moment contemplated.

Could anything be more improbable than that Erica, carefully trained as she had been, should relapse so strangely? Her whole life had been spent among atheists; there was not a single objection to Christianity which had not been placed before her. She had read much, thought much; she had worked indefatigably to aid the cause. Again and again she had braved personal insult and wounding injustice as an atheist. She had voluntarily gone into exile to help her father in his difficulties. Through the shameful injustice of a Christian, she had missed the last years of her mother's life, and had been absent from her death-bed. She had borne on behalf of her father's cause a thousand irritating privations, a thousand harassing cares; she had been hard-working, and loyal, and devoted; and now all at once she had turned completely round and placed herself in the opposing ranks!

Raeburn had all his life been fighting against desperate odds, and in the conflict he had lost well-nigh everything. He had lost his home long ago, he had lost his father's good-will, he had lost the whole of his inheritance; he had lost health, and strength, and reputation, and money; he had lost all the lesser comforts of life; and now he

said to himself that he was to lose his dearest treasure of all, his child.

Bitter, hopeless, life-long division had arisen between them. For twenty-three years he had loved her as truly as ever father loved child, and this was his reward! A miserable sense of isolation arose in his heart. Erica had been so much to him—how could he live without her? The muscles of his face quivered with emotion; he clenched his hands almost fiercely.

Then he tortured himself by letting his thoughts wander back to the past. That very day years ago, when he had first learnt what fatherhood meant; the pride of watching his little girl as the years rolled on; the terrible anxiety of one long and dangerous illness she had passed through—how well he remembered the time! They were very poor, could afford no expensive luxuries; he had shared the nursing with his wife. One night he remembered toiling away with his pen while the sick child was actually on his knee; he always fancied that the pamphlet he had then been at work on was more bitterly sarcastic than anything he had ever written. Then on once more into years of desperately hard work and disappointingly small results, embittered by persecution, crippled by penalties and never-ending litigation; but always there had been the little child waiting for him at home, who by her babylike freedom from care could make him smile when he was overwhelmed with anxiety. How could he ever have endured the bitter obloquy, the slanderous attacks, the countless indignities which had met him on all sides, if there had not been one little child who adored him, who followed him about like a shadow, who loved him and trusted him utterly?

Busy as his life had been, burdened as he had been

for years with twice as much work as he could get through, the child had never been crowded out of his life. Even as a little thing of four years old, Erica had been quite content to sit on the floor in his study by the hour together, quietly amusing herself by cutting old newspapers into fantastic shapes, or by drawing impossible cats and dogs and horses on the margins. She had never disturbed him; she used to talk to herself in whispers.

"Are you happy, little one?" he used to ask from time to time, with a sort of passionate desire that she should enjoy her unconscious childhood, foreseeing care and trouble for her in the future.

"Yes, vely happy," had been the invariable response; and generally Erica would avail herself of the interruption to ask his opinion about some square-headed cat, with eyes askew and an astonishing number of legs, which she had just drawn. Then would come what she called a "bear's hug," after which silence reigned again in the study, while Raeburn would go on writing some argumentative pamphlet, hard and clear as crystal, his heart warmed by the little child's love, the remains of a smile lingering about his lips at the recollection of the square-headed cat.

And the years passed on, and every year deepened and strengthened their love. And by slow degrees he had watched the development of her mind; had gloried in her quick perception; had learnt to come to her for a second opinion every now and then; had felt proud of her common sense, her thoughtful judgments; had delighted in her enthusiastic, loving help. All this was ended now. Strange that, just as he hoped most from her, she should fail him! It was a repetition of his own early history exactly reversed. His thoughts went back to his father's study in the old Scottish parsonage. He remembered a

long, fierce argument; he remembered a storm of abusive anger, and a furious dismissal from the house. The old pain came back to him vividly.

"And she loves me fifty thousand times more than I ever loved my father," he reflected. "And, though I was not abusive, I was hard on her. And, however mistaken, she was very brave, very honest! Oh, I was cruel to her—harsh, and hateful! My little child! my poor little child! It shall not—it cannot divide us. I am hers, and she is mine—nothing can ever alter that."

He turned, and went back into the room. Never had he looked grander than at that minute; this man who could hold thousands in breathless attention—this man who was more passionately loved by his friends, more passionately hated by his enemies than almost any man in England!—he was just the ideal father.

Erica had not stirred, she was leaning back in her chair, looking very still and white. He came close to her.

"Little son Eric!" he said, with a whole world of love in his tone.

She sprang up and wreathed her arms round his neck.

By-and-by, they began to talk in low tones, to map out and piece together as well as they could the future life, which was inevitably severed from the past by a deep gulf. They spoke of the work which they could still share, of the interests they should still have in common. It was very sad work for Erica—ininitely sadder for Raeburn; but they were both of them brave and noble souls, and they loved each other, and so could get above the sadness. One thing they both agreed upon. They would never argue about their opinions. They would, as far as possible, avoid any allusion to the grave differences that lay between them.

Late in the afternoon, a little group of fishermen and idlers stood on the beach. They were looking out seaward with some anxiety, for a sudden wind had arisen, and there was what they called "an ugly sea."

"I tell you it was madness to let 'em go alone on such a day," said the old sailor with the telescope.

"And I tell you that the old gentleman pulls as good an oar as any of us," retorted another man, in a blue Jersey and a sou'wester.

"Old gentleman, indeed!" broke in the coast-guardsmen. "Better say devil at once! Why, man alive! your old gentleman is Luke Raeburn the atheist."

"God forbid!" exclaimed the first speaker, lowering his telescope for a moment. "Why, he be mighty friendly to us fishermen."

"Where be they now, gaffer? D'ye see them?" asked a keen-looking lad of seventeen.

"Ay, there they be! there they be! God have mercy on 'em! They'll be swamped sure as fate!"

The coast-guardsmen, with provoking *sang-froid* and indifference, began to sing,

"For, though his body's under hatches,
His soul is gone alo-o-o-ft."

And then breaking off into a sort of recitative.

"Which is exactly the opposite quarter to what Luke Raeburn's soul will go, I guess."

"Blowed if I wouldn't pull a oar to save a mate, if I were so mighty sure he was going to the devil!" observed a weather-beaten seaman, with gold earrings and a good deal of tattooing on his brawny arms.

"Would you now!" said the coast-guardsmen, with a superior and sardonic smile. "Well, in my 'umble opinion, drowning's too good for him."

With which humane utterance, the coast-guardsman walked off, singing of Tom who

“Never from his word departed,
Whose heart was kind and soft.”

“Well, I, for one, will lend a hand to help them. Now then, mates! which of you is going to help to cheat the devil of his due?” said the man with the earrings.

Three men proffered their services, but the old seaman with the telescope checked them.

“Bide a bit, mates, bide a bit; I’m not sure you’ve a call to go.” He wiped the glasses of his telescope with a red handkerchief, and then looked out seaward once more.

In the meantime while their fate was being discussed on the shore, Raeburn and Erica were face to face with death. They were a long way from land before the wind had sprung up so strongly. Raeburn, who in his young days had been at once the pride and the anxiety of the fishermen round his Scottish home, and noted for his rashness and daring, had now lost the freshness of his experience, and had grown forgetful of weather tokens. The danger was upon them before he had even thought of it. The strong wind blowing upon them, the delicious salt freshness, even the brisk motion, had been such a relief to them after the pain and excitement of the morning. But all at once they began to realise that their peril was great. Their little boat tossed so fearfully that Erica had to cling to the seat for safety; one moment they were down in the hollow of a deep green wave, the next they would be tossed up upon its crest as though their boat had been a mere cockle-shell.

“I’m afraid we’ve made a mistake, Eric,” said Raeburn. “I ought to have seen this storm coming up.”

"What?" cried Erica, for the dashing of the waves made the end of the sentence inaudible.

He looked across the boat at her, and an almost paralysing dread filled his heart. For himself he could be brave, for himself death had no terrors—but for his child?

A horrible vision rose before him. He saw her lying stiff and cold, with glazed eyes and drenched hair. Was there to be a yet more terrible separation between them? Was death to snatch her from him? Ah, no—that should never be! They would at least go down together.

The vision faded; he saw once more the fair, eager face, no longer pallid, but flushed with excitement, the brave eyes clear and bright, but somewhat anxious. The consciousness that everything depended on him helped him to rise above that overmastering horror. He was once more his strongest self.

The rudder had been left on the beach, and it was only possible to steer by the oars. He dismissed even the thought of Erica, and concentrated his whole being on the difficult task before him. So grand did he look in that tremendous endeavour that Erica almost forgot her anxiety; there was something so forceful in his whole aspect that she could not be afraid. Her heart beat quickly indeed, but the consciousness of danger was stimulating.

Yet the waves grew more and more furious, rolling, curling, dashing up in angry white foam—"raging horribly." At length came one which broke right over the little boat, blinding and drenching its occupants.

"Another like that will do for us," said Raeburn, in a quiet voice.

The boat was half full of water. Erica began to bale out with her father's hat, and each knew from the other's face that their plight was hopeless.

Raeburn had faced death many times. He had faced it more than once on a sick bed, he had faced it surrounded by yelling and furious mobs, but he had never faced it side by side with his child. Again he looked at the angry grey-green waves, at the wreaths of curling white foam, again that awful vision rose before him, and, brave man as he was, he shuddered.

Life was sweet even though he was harassed, persecuted, libelled. Life was sweet even though his child had deserted his cause, even though she had "cheated herself into a belief." Life was infinitely worth living, mere existence an exquisite joy, blank nothingness a hideous alternative.

"Bale out!" he cried, despair in his eyes, but a curve of resoluteness about his lips.

A few more strokes warily pulled, another huge wave swooping along, rearing itself up, dashing down upon them. The boat reeled and staggered. To struggle longer was useless. Raeburn threw his oars in board, caught hold of Erica, and held her fast. When they could see once more, they found the boat quite three parts full.

"Child!" he said, "child!" But nothing more would come. For once in his life words failed him; the orator was speechless. Was it a minute or an eternity that he waited there through that awful pause—waited with his arm round Erica, feeling the beating of her heart, the heart which must soon cease beating for ever, feeling her warm breath on his cheek—alas! how few more breaths would she draw! How soon would the cold watery grave close over all that he—

His thoughts were abruptly checked. That eternal minute of waiting was over. It was coming—death was coming—riding along with mocking scorn on the crest of

a giant wave. Higher and higher rose the towering, sea-green wall, mockingly it rushed forward, remorselessly swooped down upon them! This time the boat was completely swamped.

"I will at least die fighting!" thought Raeburn, a despairing, defiant courage inspiring him with almost superhuman strength.

"Trust to me!" he cried. "Don't struggle!" And Erica, who would naturally have fallen into that frantic and vain convulsion which seizes most people when they find themselves in peril of drowning, by a supreme effort of will made no struggle at all, but only clung to her father.

Raeburn was a very strong man, and an expert swimmer, but it was a fearful sea. They were dashed hither and thither, they were buffeted, and choked, and blinded, but never once did he lose his presence of mind. Every now and then he even shouted out a few words to Erica. How strange his voice sounded in that chaos, in that raging symphony of winds and waves.

"Tell me when you can't hold any longer," he cried.

"I can't leave go," returned Erica.

And even then, in that desperate minute, they both felt a momentary thrill of amusement. The fact was, that her effort of will had been so great when she had obeyed him, and clung with all her might to him, that now the muscles of her hands absolutely would not relax their hold.

It seemed endless! Over the cold green and white of the waves Raeburn seemed to see his whole life stretched out before him in a series of vivid pictures. All the long struggles, all the desperate fights wreathed themselves out in visions round this supreme death-

struggle. And always there was the consciousness that he was toiling for Erica's life, struggling, agonising, straining every fibre of his being to save her.

But what was this paralysing cold creeping over his limbs? What this pressure at his heart?—this dimness of his eyes? Oh! was his strength failing him? Was the last hope, indeed, gone? Panting, he struggled on.

"I will do thirty more strokes!" he said to himself.

And he did them.

"I will do ten more!"

And he forced himself to keep on.

"Ten more!"

He was gasping now. Erica's weight seemed to be dragging him down, down, into nothingness.

Six strokes painfully made! Seven!—After all nothingness would mean rest. Eight!—No pain to either, since they were together. Nine!—He should live on in the hearts of his people. Ten!—Agony of failure! he was beaten at last!

What followed they neither of them knew, only there was a shout, an agony of sinking, a vision of a dark form and a something solid which they grasped convulsively.

When Erica came to herself they were by no means out of danger, but there was something between them and the angry sea. She was lying down at the bottom of a boat in close proximity to some silvery-skinned fishes, and her father was holding her hand.

Wildly they tossed for what seemed to her a very long time; but at length fresh voices were heard, the keel grated on the shore, she felt herself lifted up and carried on to the beach. Then, with an effort, she stood up once more, trembling and exhausted, but conscious that mere existence was rapture.

Raeburn paused to reward and thank the men who had rescued them in his most genial manner, and Erica's happiness would have been complete had not the coast-guard'sman stepped up in an insolent and officious way, and observed,

"It is a pity, Mr. Luke Raeburn, that you don't bring yourself to offer thanks to God Almighty!"

"Sir," replied Raeburn, "when I ask your opinion on my personal and private matters, it will be fitting that you should speak—not before!"

The man looked annihilated, and turned away.

Raeburn grasped the rough hands of his helpers and well-wishers, gave his arm to Erica, and led her up the steep beach.

Later on in the evening they sat over the fire, and talked over their adventure. June though it was, they had both been thoroughly chilled.

"What did you think of when we were in the water?" asked Erica.

"I made a deep calculation," said Raeburn, smiling, "and found that the sale of the plant and of all my books would about clear off the last of the debts, and that I should die free. After that I thought of Cicero's case of the two wise men struggling in the sea with one plank to rescue them sufficient only for one. They were to decide which of their lives was most useful to the republic, and the least useful man was to drop down quietly into the deep. It struck me that you and I should hardly come to such a calculation. I think we would have gone down together, little one! What did you think of!"

But Erica's thoughts could not so easily be put into words.

"For one thing," she said, "I thought we should never be divided any more."

She sighed a little; for, after all, the death they had so narrowly escaped would have been so infinitely easier than the life which lay before her.

"Clearly we are inseparable!" said Raeburn. "In that sense, little son Eric, we can still say, 'We fear nae foe!'"

Perhaps the gentle words, and the sadness which he could not entirely banish from his tone, moved Erica almost more than his passionate utterances in the morning.

The day was no bad miniature of her whole life. Very sad, very happy, full of danger, conflict and strife, warmed by outside sympathy, wounded by outside insolence!

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT IT INVOLVED.

Stronger than steel
Is the sword of the spirit;
Swifter than arrows
The life of the truth is;
Greater than anger
Is love, and subdueth.—LONGFELLOW.

THE two or three days at Codrington lengthened out into a week, for both Raeburn and Erica felt a good deal exhausted after the eventful Monday. Raeburn, anxious to spare her as much as possible, himself wrote to Mrs. Craigie, and told her of Erica's change of views.

"It is a great grief," he wrote, "and she will be a serious loss to our cause, but I am determined that we will not enact over again the course of action which drove both you and me from home. Odd! that she

should just reverse our story! Anyhow, you and I, Jean, have been too much persecuted to turn into persecutors. The child is as much in earnest for her delusion as we for our truth. Argument and remonstrance will do no good, and you must understand, and make Tom understand, that I'll not have her bullied. Don't think that I am trying to make her mistaken way all easy for her. She won't find it easy. She will have a miserable time of it with our own set, and how many Christians, do you imagine, will hold out a hand to Luke Raeburn's daughter, even though her views have changed. Maybe, half-a-dozen! not more, I fancy, unless she renounced us with atheism, and that she never will do! She will be between two fires, and I believe between the two she will be worried to death in a year unless we can keep the peace at home. I don't blame Osmond for this, though at first I did suspect it was his doing; but this has been no cram-work. Erica has honestly faced the questions herself, and has honestly arrived at this mistaken conclusion. Osmond's kindness and generosity of course influenced her, but for the rest they have only had the free discussions of which from the first I approved. Years ago he said to me plainly, 'What if she should see reason to change her mind?'

"I scouted the notion then, it seemed—and still seems—almost *incredible*. He has, you see, acted quite honourably. It is Erica's own doing. I remember telling him that our name of Freethinkers was a reality, and so it shall still be! She shall be free to think the untrue is the true; she shall be free to confess herself a Christian before the whole world, though it deal me the hardest of blows."

This letter soon spread the news. Aunt Jean was

too much vexed and not deeply grieved enough to keep silence. Vexation finds some relief in talking, deep grief as a rule prefers not to speak. Tom, in his odd way, felt the defection of his favourite cousin as much as anybody, except Raeburn himself. They had been play-fellows, they had always been like brother and sister together, and he was astounded to think that Erica of all people in the world should have deserted the cause. The letter had come by one of the evening posts. He went out and paced up and down the square in the soft midsummer twilight, trying to realise the facts of the case. Presently he heard rapid steps behind him; no one walked at that pace excepting Brian, and Tom was quite prepared to feel an arm link itself within his.

"Hullo, old fellow!" exclaimed Brian. "Moonlight meditations?"

"Where did you drop from?" said Tom, evasively.

"Broken leg, round the corner—a public-house row. What brutes men are!" exclaimed the young doctor, hotly.

"Disappointing world altogether," said Tom, with a sigh. "What do you think we have just heard about Erica?"

Brian's heart almost stopped beating; he hardly knew what he feared.

"How can I tell?" he answered, hoarsely. "No bad news, I hope?"

"She's gone and turned Christian," said Tom, in a tone of deep disgust.

Brian started.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

"Confound it!" cried Tom. "I forgot you'd be triumphant. Good-night," and he marched off in high dudgeon.

Brian did not even miss him. How could he at such

a time? The weight of years had been lifted off his soul. A consuming happiness took possession of him; his whole being was a thanksgiving. By-and-by he went home, found his father in the study, and was about to speak, when Charles Osmond put an open letter into his hand. While Raeburn had written to his sister, Erica had written to her "prophet"—a sad, happy, quaint letter exactly like herself. Its straightforward simplicity brought the tears to Brian's eyes.

"It will be a fearful life for her now!" he exclaimed. "She will never be able to endure it. Father, now at last I may surely speak to her!"

He spoke very eagerly. Charles Osmond looked grave.

"My dear old fellow, of course you must do as you think best," he replied, after a minute's pause; "but I doubt if it is wise just now."

"Why, it is the very time of all others when she might be glad of me," said Brian.

"But can't you see," returned his father, "that Erica is the last girl in the world to marry a man because she was unhappy, or because she had got a difficult bit of life in front of her? Of course, if you really think she cares for you, it is different; but——"

"She does not care for me," said Brian, quickly; "but in time I think she would. I think I could make her happy."

"Yes, I think you could; but I fancy you will make shipwreck of your hopes if you speak to her now. Have patience."

"I am sick of patience!" cried poor Brian, desperately. "Have I not been patient for nearly seven years? For what would you have me wait? Am I to wait till, between our injustice to secularists and their injustice to

Christians, she is half-badgered out of life? If she could but love me, if she would marry me now, I could save her from what must be a life of misery."

"If I could but get you to see it from what I am convinced is Erica's point of view!" exclaimed Charles Osmond. "Forget for a minute that you are her knight and champion, and try to see things as she sees them. Let us try to reverse things. Just imagine for a minute that you are the child of some leading man, the head and chief of a party or association—we'll say that you are the child of an Archbishop of Canterbury. You are carefully educated, you become a zealous worker, you enter into all your father's interests, you are able to help him in a thousand ways. But, by slow degrees, we will say that you perceive a want in the system in which you have been educated, and, after many years of careful study and thought, you are obliged to reject your former beliefs, and to accept that other system which shall most recommend itself to you. We will suppose for the sake of analogy that you become a secularist. Knowing that your change of views will be a terrible grief to your father the archbishop, it takes your whole strength to make your confession, and you not only feel your father's personal pain, but you feel that his pain will be increased by his public position. To make it worse, too, we must suppose that a number of people calling themselves atheists, and in the name of atheism, have at intervals for the last thirty years being annoying and insulting your father, that in withstanding their attacks he has often received bodily injury, and that the atheists have so often driven him into the law courts that he has been pretty nearly beggared. All his privations you have shared—for instance, you went with him and lived

for years in a poky little lodging, and denied yourself every single luxury. But now you have, in spite of all these persecutions carried on in the name of secularism, learned to see that the highest form of secularism is true. The archbishop feels this terribly. However, being a very loving father, he wisely refuses to indulge in perpetual controversy with his child. You agree still to live together, and each try with all your might to find all the possible points of union still left you. Probably, if you are such a child as I imagine, you love your father ten times more than you did before. Then just as you have made up your mind to try to be more to him, when all you care about in life is to comfort and help him, and when your heart is much occupied with your new opinions, a friend of yours—a secularist—comes to you, and says, 'A miserable life lies before you! The atheists will never thoroughly take up with you while you live with your father the archbishop, and of course it is wretched for you to be surrounded by those of another creed. Come with me! I love you—I will make you happy, and save you from persecution!'

In spite of himself, Brian had smiled many times at this putting of an Archbishop of Canterbury into the position of Luke Raeburn. But the conclusion arrived at seemed to him to admit of only one answer, and left him very grave.

"You may be right," he said, very sadly. "But to stand still and watch her suffer——"

He broke off, unable to finish his sentence.

Charles Osmond took it up.

"To stand still and watch her suffer will be the terribly hard work of a brave man who takes a true, deep view. To rush in with offers of help would be the work

of an impetuous man who took a very superficial view. If Erica were selfish, I would say go and appeal to her selfishness, and marry her at once; for selfishness will never do any good in Guilford Terrace. But she is one of the most devoted women I know! Your appeal would be rejected. I believe she will feel herself in the right place there, and, as long as that is the case, nothing will move her."

"Father," said Brian, rather desperately, "I would take your opinion before any other opinion in the world. You know her well—far better than I do. Tell me honestly—do you think she could ever love me?"

"You have given me a hard task," said Charles Osmond. "But you have asked for my honest opinion, and you must have it. As long as her father lives, I don't believe Erica will ever love a man well enough to marry him. I remember, in my young days, a beautiful girl in our neighbourhood, the belle of the whole county; and years went by, and she had countless offers, but she rejected them all. People used to remonstrate with her, and ask her how it was. 'Oh,' she used to reply, 'that is very easily explained. I never see a man I think equal to my own brothers!' Now, whatever faults Raeburn has, we may be sure Erica sees far less plainly than we see, and nobody can deny that he is a grand fellow. When one bears in mind all that he has had against him, his nobility of character seems to me marvellous. He puts us to shame! And that is why he seems to me the wholesome though powerful medicine for this nineteenth century of ours, with its great professions and its un-Christlike lives."

"What is the use of patience—what is the use of love," exclaimed Brian, "if I am never to serve her?"

"Never! Who said so!" said his father, smiling. "Why you have been serving her every blessed day since you first loved her. Is unspoken love nothing worth? Are prayers useless? Is it of no service to let your light shine? But I see how it is. As a doctor, you look upon pain as the one great enemy to be fought with, to be bound down, to be conquered. You want to shield Erica from pain, which she can't be shielded from, if she is to go on growing.

"Knowledge by suffering entereth!"

No one would so willingly endorse the truth of that as she herself! And it will be so to the end of the chapter. You can't shut her up in a beautiful casket, and keep her from all pain! If you could, she would no longer be the Erica you love. As for the rest, I may be wrong. She may have room for wifely love even now. I have only told you what I think. And whether she ever be your wife or not—and from my heart I hope she may be—your love will in no case be wasted. Pure love can't be wasted; it's an impossibility."

Brian sighed heavily, but made no answer. Presently he took up his hat and went out. He walked on and on without the faintest idea of time or place, occupied only with the terrible struggle which was going on in his heart, which seemed only endurable with the help of rapid and mechanical exercise. When at length he came to himself, he was miles away from home, right down at Shepherd's Bush, and he heard the church clocks striking twelve. Then he turned back, and walked home more quietly, his resolution made.

If he told Erica of his love, and she refused him now, he should not only add to her troubles, but he should inevitably put an end to the comfort of the close friend-

ship which now existed between the two families. He would keep silence.

Erica and her father returned on the Saturday, and then began a most trying time. Tom seemed to shrink from her just as he had done at the time of her mother's death. He was shy and vexed, too, and kept as much out of her way as possible. Mrs. Craigie, on the contrary, could not leave her alone. In spite of her brother's words, she tried every possible argument and remonstrance in the hope of re-convincing her niece. With the best intentions, she was often grossly unfair, and Erica, with a naturally quick temper, and her Raeburn inheritance of fluency and satire, found her patience sorely tried. Raeburn was excessively busy, and they saw very little of him; perhaps he thought it expedient that Erica should fight her own battles, and fully realise the seriousness of the steps she had taken.

"Have you thought," urged Mrs. Craigie, as a last argument—"have you thought what offence you will give to our whole party? What do you think they will say when they learn that you of all people have deserted the cause?"

The tears started to Erica's eyes, for naturally she did feel this a great deal. But she answered bravely, and with a sort of ring in her voice, which made Tom look up from his newspaper.

"They will know that Luke Raeburn's daughter must be true to her convictions, at whatever cost."

"Will you go on writing in the *Idol*?" asked Tom, for the first time making an observation to her which was not altogether necessary.

"No," said Erica—"how can I?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders, and made no further remark.

"Then how do you mean to live? How else can you support yourself?" asked Aunt Jean.

"I don't know," said Erica. "I must get some other work—somewhere."

But her heart failed her, though she spoke firmly. She knew that to find work in London was no easy matter.

"Offer yourself to the *Church Chronicle*," said Mrs. Craigie, sarcastically, "or, better still, to the *Watch Dog*. They always make a good deal of capital out of a convert."

Erica coloured and had to bite her lip hard to keep back the quick retort which occurred to her all too naturally.

By-and-by Mr. Masterman and another well-known secularist walked in. They both knew of Erica's defection. Mr. Masterman attacked her at once in a sort of bantering way.

"So, Miss Raeburn, now I understand why some time ago you walked out in the middle of my lecture one evening."

And then followed a most irritating semi-serious re-monstrance, in questionable taste. Erica writhed under it. A flippant canvassing of her most private and sacred thoughts was hard to bear, but she held her ground, and, being not without a touch of her father's dignity, Mr. Masterman presently beat a retreat, not feeling quite so well satisfied with himself as usual. His companion did not allude directly to her change of views, but treated her with a sort of pitying condescension, as if she had been a mild lunatic.

There was some sort of committee being held in the study that evening. The next person to arrive was Professor Gosse, and almost immediately after came Mr. Harmston, a charming old man, whom Erica had known from her childhood. They came in and had some coffee

before going in to the study. Mrs. Craigie talked to Mr. Harmston. Erica, looking her loveliest, waited on them. Tom watched them all philosophically from the hearthrug.

"I am sorry to hear you have deserted your colours," said the professor, looking more grave than she had ever seen him look before. Then, his voice softening a little as he looked at her, "I expect it all comes of that illness of yours. I believe religion is just an outgrowth of bad health—*mens sana in corpore sano*, you know. Never mind, you must still come to my workshop, and I shall see if science won't re-convert you."

He moved away with his good-humoured, shaggy-looking face, leaving Erica to old Mr. Harmston.

"I am much grieved to hear this of you, Erica," he said, lowering his voice, and bringing his grey head near to hers—"as grieved as if you were my own child. You will be a sore loss to us all."

Erica felt this keenly, for she was very fond of the old man.

"Do you think it does not hurt me to grieve you all?" she said piteously. "But one must be honest."

"Quite right, my dear," said the old man, "but that does not make our loss the less heavy. We had hoped great things of you, Erica. It is grievous to me that you should have fallen back to the miserable superstitions against which your father has fought so bravely."

"Come, Mr. Harmston," said the professor; "we are late, I fancy."

And before Erica could make any reply, Mrs. Craigie and the two visitors had adjourned to the committee-room, leaving her alone with Tom.

Now, for two or three days Erica had been enduring Tom's coldness and Mrs. Craigie's unceasing remon-

stances; all the afternoon she had been having a long and painful discussion with her friend, Mrs. MacNaughton; this evening she had seen plainly enough what her position would be for the future among all her old acquaintances, and an aching sense of isolation filled her heart. She was just going to run upstairs and yield to her longing for darkness and quiet, when Tom called her back. She could not refuse to hear, for the coldness of her old playmate had made her very sad, but she turned back rather reluctantly, for her eyes were brimming with tears.

"Don't go," said Tom, quite in his natural voice. "Have you any coffee for me, or did the old fogies finish it?"

Erica went back to the table and poured him out a cup of coffee; but her hand trembled, and, before she could prevent it, down splashed a great tear into the saucer.

"Come!" said Tom, cheerfully. "Don't go and spoil my coffee with salt water! All very well for David, in a penitential psalm, to drink tears, but in the nineteenth century, you know——"

Erica began to laugh at this, a fatal proceeding, for afterwards came a great sob, and the tears came down in good earnest. Philosophical Tom always professed great contempt for tears, and he knew that Erica must be very much moved indeed to cry in his presence, or, indeed, to cry at all; for, as he expressed it, "It was not in her line." But somehow, when for the first time he saw her cry, he did not feel contemptuous; instead, he began to call himself a "hard-hearted brute," and a "narrow-minded fool," and to feel miserable and out of conceit with himself.

"I say, Erica, don't cry," he pleaded. "Don't, I say, I can't bear to see you. I've been a cold-blooded wretch—I'm awfully sorry!"

"It's very cowardly of me," sobbed Erica. "But—but—" with a rush of tears, "you don't know how I love you all—it's like being killed by inches."

"You're not cowardly," said Tom, warmly. "You've been brave and plucky; I only wish it were in a better cause. Look here, Erica, only stop crying, and promise me that you'll not take this so dreadfully to heart. I'll stand by you—I will, indeed, even though I hate your cause. But it shan't come between us any longer, the hateful delusion has spoilt enough lives already. It shan't spoil ours!"

"Oh, don't!" cried Erica, wounded anew by this.

"Well," said Tom, gulping down his longing to inveigh against Christianity, "it goes hard with me not to say a word against the religion that has brought us all our misery, but for your sake I'll try not when talking with you. Now let us begin again on the old footing."

"Not quite on the old footing either," said Erica, who had conquered her tears. "I love you a thousand times more, you dear old Tom."

And Tom, who was made of sterling stuff, did from that day forward stand by her through everything, and checked himself when harsh words about religious matters rose to his lips, and tried his best to smooth what could not fail to be a rough bit of walking.

The first meeting between Charles Osmond and Erica, after her return from Codrington, did not come about till the morning after her conversation with Tom. They had each called on the other, but had somehow managed to miss. When at length Erica was shown into the study, connected in her mind with so many warm discussions, she found it empty. She sat down in the great arm-chair by the window, wondering if she were indeed the

same Erica who had sat there years before, on the day when her "prophet" had foretold her illness. What changes had come about since then!

But her "prophet" was unchanged, his brisk, "Well, Erica!" was exactly what it had been when she had come to him in the days of her atheism. It had always been full of welcome and sympathy, and now the only difference was that a great happiness shone in his eyes as he came forward with his soft, steady tread and took her hand in both his.

They sat silent for a while, then talked a little but reservedly, for both felt that the subject which filled their thoughts was at once too sacred and too personal to be altogether put into words. Then by-and-by they began to discuss the practical consequences of the change, and especially the great difficulty as to Erica's means of supporting herself.

"Could you not try teaching?" said Charles Osmond.

"The market is already overstocked."

"True, but I should think that your brains and certificates ought to secure you work in spite of that."

"I should like it in many ways," said Erica, "but, you see, except at the night-school it is out of the question, and I could not live upon my grant even if every one of my class passed the examination. For any other sort of teaching,—who do you imagine would have the courage to employ any one bearing the name of Raeburn? Why, I can't give an order in a shop without being looked all over by the person who takes the address. No, governessing would be all very well if one might assume a *nom de guerre*, but that would not do, you see."

"You couldn't find work of that sort among your own set, I suppose?"

"Not now," said Erica. "You see, naturally enough, I am very much out of favour with them all."

"Falling between two stools," said Charles Osmond, half to himself. "But don't lose heart, Erica; 'A stone that is fit for the wall will not be left in the way;' there is work for you somewhere. By the way, I might see old Crutchley—he knows all the literary folk, and might get you an introduction to some one, at any rate."

Just as Erica was leaving, Brian came in from his rounds, and they met at the door. Had he known her trouble and perplexity as to work, no power on earth could have induced him to keep silence any longer; but he knew nothing. She looked a little pale, but that was natural enough, and in her eyes he could see a peace which he had never seen there before. Then deep unselfish happiness filled his heart again, and Erica recognised in his greeting a great deal more than an ordinary bystander would have seen. She went away feeling bettered by that hand-clasp.

"That is a downright good man!" she thought to herself. "Perhaps by the time he's fifty-five he'll be almost equal to his father."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EDITOR.

SOCRATES.—How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite; for they never come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take the other. They are two, and yet they grow together out of one head or stem; and I cannot help thinking that, if Æsop had noticed them, he would have made a fable about God trying to reconcile their strife, and when he could not, he fastened their heads together; and this is the reason why when one comes the other follows.—PLATO.

THAT Erica should live any longer upon the money which her father chiefly made by the dissemination of views with which she disagreed was clearly impossible, at least impossible to one of her sincere and thorough nature. But to find work was very difficult indeed. After an anxious waiting and searching, she was one day surprised by receiving through Charles Osmond's friend, Mr. Crutchley, an introduction to the editor of a well-known and widely-read paper. Every one congratulated her, but she could not feel very hopeful, it seemed too good to prove true—it was, in fact, so exactly the position which she would herself have chosen that it seemed unlikely it should ever really be hers. Still of course she hoped, and arrangements were made for an interview with Mr. Bircham, editor and part-proprietor of the *Daily Review*.

Accordingly, one hot summer morning Erica dressed herself carefully, tried to look old and serious, and set off with Tom to the city.

"I'll see you safe to the door of the lion's den," said Tom, as they made their way along the crowded streets. "I only wish I could be under the table during the inter-

view; I should like to see you doing the dignified journalist."

"I wouldn't have you for the world!" said Erica, laughing. Then, growing grave again, "Oh, Tom! how I wish it were over! it's worse than three hundred visits to a dentist rolled into one!"

"Appalling prospect!" said Tom. "I can exactly picture what it will be! *Bircham!* such a forbidding name for an editor! He'll be a sort of editorial Mr. Squeers; he'll talk in a loud, blustering way, and you'll feel exactly like a journalistic Smike."

"No," said Erica, laughing. "He'll be a neat little dapper man, very smooth and bland, and he'll talk patronisingly and raise my hopes, and then, in a few days' time will send me a polite refusal."

"Tell him at once that you hero-worship Sir Michael Cunningham, the statesman of the age, the most renowned 'Sly Bacon!'"

"Tom, do be quiet!" said Erica. "I wish you had never thought of that horrid name."

"Horrid! I mean to make my fortune out of it. If you like, you can offer the pun on reasonable terms to Mr. Bircham."

"Why, this is Fleet Street! doesn't it lead out of this?" said Erica, with an indescribable feeling in the back of her neck. "We must be quite near."

"Nearer than near," said Tom. "Now then, left wheel! Here we are, you see! It's a mercy that you turn pink with fright, not green like the sea-green Robespierre. Go in looking as pretty as that, and Mr. Squeers will graciously accept your services, unless he's sand-blind."

"What a tease you are! Do be quiet!" implored

Erica. And then, in what seemed to her an alarmingly short time, she was actually left by herself to beard the lion, and a clerk was assuring her that Mr. Bircham was in, and would she walk upstairs.

For reasons best known to himself, the editor of the *Daily Review* had his private room at the very top of the house. A sedate clerk led the way up a dingy staircase, and Erica toiled after him, wondering how much breath she should have left by the time she reached the end. On one of the landings she caught sight of a sandy cat and felt a little reassured at meeting such an everyday creature in this grim abode; she gave it a furtive stroke as she passed, and would have felt it a protection if she could have picked it up and taken it with her. That would have been undignified, however, and by the time she reached the editor's room only a very observant person could have discovered in her frank, self-possessed manner, any trace of nervousness.

So different was Mr. Bircham from their preconceived notions that she could almost have laughed at the contrast. He was very tall and pompous, he wore a lank brown wig which looked as if it might come off at any moment, he had little keen grey eyes which twinkled, and a broad mouth which shut very closely; whether it was grim or humorous she could not quite decide. He was sitting in a swivel chair, and the table strewn with letters, and the desk, with its pigeon-holes crammed with papers, looked so natural and so like her father's that she began to feel a reassuring sense of fellowship with this entire stranger. The inevitable paste-pot and scissors, the piles of newspapers, the books of reference, all looked homelike to her.

Mr. Bircham rose and bowed rather formally, motioned her to a seat, and swung round his own seat so that they

faced one another. Then he scanned her from head to foot with the sort of appraising glance to which she was only too well accustomed—a glance which said as plainly as words, “Oh! so you are that atheist’s daughter, are you?”

But, whatever impression Erica made upon Mr. Bircham, not a muscle of his face altered, and he began to discuss business in a most formal and business-like way. Things did not seem very hopeful, and Erica began to doubt more and more whether she had the smallest chance of acceptance. Something in the dry formal manner of the editor struck a chill to her heart. So much, so very much depended on this interview, and already the prospect seemed far from hopeful.

“I should like to see some of your work,” observed Mr. Bircham. “How long have you been in the habit of writing in Mr. Raeburn’s organ?”

“For the last five years,” said Erica.

Mr. Bircham lifted his shaggy eyebrows at this, for Erica looked even younger than she really was. However, he made no comment, but took up the end of a speaking-tube.

“Send up Jones with the file of *Idol-Breakers* I ordered.”

Erica’s colour rose. Presently the answer from the lower regions appeared in the shape of the sedate clerk carrying a great bundle of last year’s *Idol-Breakers*.

“Perhaps you will show me one or two of your average articles,” said Mr. Bircham, and, while Erica searched through the bundle of papers, he took up one of the copies which she had put aside, and studied the outside page critically. “*The Idol-Breaker: Advocate of Free-thought and Secularism.* Edited by Luke Raeburn.”

"They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three."

Mr. Bircham put it down and began to watch her attentively. She was absorbed in her search, and was quite unconscious of his scrutiny. Even had she noticed him, she would not have understood what was passing in his mind. His little grey eyes grew bright; then he pushed back his wig impatiently; then he cleared his throat; finally he took snuff, sneezed violently, and walked to the window. When he returned, he was even more dry and formal than before.

"These, I think, are fairly representative," said Erica. "I have marked them in the margin."

He took the three or four copies she handed to him, and began to look through one of the articles, muttering a sentence half-aloud every now and then, and making little ejaculations which might have been either of approval or disapproval.

Finally the interview ended. Mr. Bircham put down the papers with a sigh of utter weariness, Erica thought.

"Well, Miss Raeburn," he remarked, "I will look at one or two of your other articles, and will communicate with you in a few days' time."

Then he shook hands with her with frigid politeness, and in another minute she was slowly making her way down the dingy staircase. Partly from the reaction after her excitement, partly from mental worry and physical weariness, she felt by the time she was fairly out of the office as if she could hardly drag herself along. Her heart was like lead, blank loss of hope and weary anxiety as to the next effort to be made were weighing her down. She was naturally high-spirited, but when high-spirited people do get depressed, they go down to the very

deepest depths; and her interview with Mr. Bircham, by its dry cheerlessness, by its lack of human interest, had chilled her all through. If he had even made a remark on the weather, she thought she could have liked him better; if he had expressed an opinion on any subject, even if she had disagreed with him, it would have been a relief; as it was, he seemed to her more like a hard steel pen dressed in broadcloth than a man.

As to his last remark, that could only mean one thing. He did not like to tell her to her face that she would not suit him, but he would communicate with her in a few days, and say it comfortably on paper.

She had never felt quite so desolate and forelorn and helpless as she felt that day when she left the *Daily Review* office, and found herself in the noise and bustle of Fleet Street. The mid-day sun blazed down upon her in all its strength; the pavements seemed to scorch her feet; the weary succession of hurrying, pushing, jostling passengers seemed to add to her sense of isolation. Presently a girl stopped her, and asked the way to Basinghall Street. She knew it well enough, but felt too utterly stupid to direct her.

"You had better ask a policeman," she replied, wearily.

Then, recollecting that she had several commissions to do for her father, besides a great deal to do at the Stores, she braced herself up, and tried to forget Mr. Bircham, and to devote her whole mind to the petty details of shopping.

The next evening she was in the study with her father when Tom brought in a bundle of letters. One of them was for Erica. She at once recognised Mr. Bircham's writing, and a new pang of disappointment shot through her, though she had really lost all hope on the previous

day. This very speedy communication could only mean that his mind had been practically made up before. She began to think of her next chance, of the next quarter she must try, and slowly opened the unwelcome letter. But in a moment she had sprung to her feet in an ecstasy of happiness.

"Oh, father! oh, Tom! he will have me!"

Raeburn looked up from his correspondence, and together they read Mr. Bircham's letter. It was quite as business-like as he himself had been at the interview.

"DEAR MADAM,

"Having fully considered the matter, we are prepared to offer you a place on our staff. The work required was explained to you yesterday. For this we offer a salary of 200*l.* per annum. Should you signify your acceptance of these terms, we will send you our usual form of agreement.

"I am yours faithfully,

"TO MISS RAEburn."

"JACOB BIRCHAM."

"Commend me to people who don't raise one's expectations!" said Erica, rapturously. "Three cheers for my dear, stiff old editor!"

So that anxiety was over, and Erica was most thankful to have such a load taken off her mind. The comfort of it helped her through a very trying summer.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ERICA TO THE RESCUE.

ISABEL.—I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit.

DUKE.—Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful.

Measure for Measure.

It was the first of September. Watering-places were crowded with visitors, destruction had begun among the partridges, and a certain portion of the hard-working community were taking their annual holiday.

Raeburn, whose holidays were few and far between, had been toiling away all through the summer months in town. This evening, as he sat in his stifling little study, he had fallen into a blank fit of depression. He could neither work nor read. Strong as his nature was, it was not always proof against this grim demon, which avenged itself on him for overtaking his brain, shortening his hours of sleep, and in other ways sacrificing himself to his work. To-night, however, there was reason for his depression; for while he sat fighting his demon at home, Erica had gone to Charles Osmond's church—it was the evening of her baptism.

Of course it was the necessary sequence of the confession she had made a few months before, and Raeburn had long known that it was inevitable; but none the less did he this evening suffer more acutely than he had yet suffered, realising more fully his child's defection. The private confession had startled, shocked, grieved him inexpressibly; but the public profession, with its sense of irrevocableness, filled his heart with a grief for which he could find no single ray of comfort.

Erica's brave endurance of all the trials and discomforts involved in her change of faith had impressed him not a little, and even when most hurt and annoyed by her new views, he had always tried to shield her; but it had been a hard summer, and the loss of the home unity had tried him sorely.

Moreover, the comparative quiet of the last year was now ended. A new foe had arisen in the person of a certain retired cheesemonger, who had sworn war to the knife against the apostle of atheism. Unfortunately, Mr. Pogson's war was not undertaken in a Christ-like spirit; his zeal was fast changing into personal animosity, and he had avowed that he would crush Raeburn, though it should cost him the whole of his fortune. This very day he had brought into action the mischievous and unfair blasphemy laws, and to everybody's amazement, had commenced a prosecution against Raeburn for a so-called "blasphemous libel" in one of his recent pamphlets. An attack on the liberty of the press was to Raeburn what the sound of the trumpet is to the war-horse. Yet, now that the first excitement was over, he had somehow sunk into a fit of black depression. How was it? Was his strength failing? was he growing old—unfit for his work?

He was roused at length by a knock at his door. The servant entered with a number of letters. He turned them over mechanically until some handwriting which reminded him of his mother's made him pause. The letter bore the Greyshtot postmark; it must be from his sister Isobel. He opened it with some eagerness; there had been no communication between them since the time of his wife's death, and though he had hoped that the correspondence once begun might have been continued, nothing more had come of it. The letter proved short,

and not altogether palatable. It began with rejoicings over Erica's change of views, the report of which had reached Mrs. Fane-Smith. It went on to regret that he did not share in the change. Raeburn's lip curled as he read. Then came a request that Erica might be allowed to visit her relations, and the letter ended with a kindly-meant but mistaken offer.

"My husband and I both feel that there are many objections to Erica's remaining in her present home. We should be much pleased if she would live with us—at any rate, until she has met with some situation which would provide her with a suitable and permanent residence."

The offer was not intended to be insulting, but undoubtedly, to such a father as Raeburn, it was a gross insult. His eyes flashed fire, and involuntarily he crushed the letter in his hand; then, a little ashamed of the passionate act, he forced himself deliberately to smooth it out again, and, folding it accurately, put it in his pocket. A note for Erica remained in the envelope; he placed it on the mantelpiece, then fell back in his chair again and thought.

After all, might not the visit to Greyshot be a very good thing for her? Of course she would never dream of living with her aunt, would indeed be as angry at the proposal as he had been. But might not a visit of two or three weeks open her eyes to her new position, and prove to her that among Christians such people as the Osmonds were only in the minority! He knew enough of society to be able to estimate the position it would accord to Erica. He knew that her sensitiveness would be wounded again and again, that her honesty would be shocked, her belief in the so-called Christian world shaken.

Might not all this be salutary? And yet he did not like the thought; he could not bear sending her out alone to fight her own battles, could not endure the consciousness that she was bearing his reproach. Oh, why had this miserable, desolating change ever occurred? At this very moment she was making public profession of a faith which could only place her in the most trying of positions; at this very moment she was pledging herself to a life of bondage and trouble; while he, standing aside, could see all the dangers and difficulties of her future, and could do absolutely nothing!

It reminded him of one of the most horrible moments of his life. Walking up Regent Street one afternoon, years ago, Erica, walking with Mrs. Craigie on the opposite side, had caught sight of him, and regardless of the fourfold chain of carriages, had rushed across to him with the fearless daring of a six years' old child, to whom the danger of horses' hoofs was a mere nothing when compared with the desire to get a walk with her father. His heart beat quicker even now as he thought of the paralysing dread of long ago, nor had Miss Erica ever been scolded for her loving rashness; in his relief he had been unable to do anything but clasp the little hand in his as though nothing should ever part them again.

But her loving disregard of all danger and difficulty was no longer inspired by love of him, but by love of what Raeburn considered a myth and a delusion.

In that lay the real sting. Her courage, her suffering, all seemed to him wasted, altogether on the wrong side. Once more black gloom fell upon him. The room grew dusk—then dark, but still he remained motionless.

Again he was interrupted by a knock at his door.

"Signor Civita wished to speak to him."

He braced himself up for an interview with some stranger, and in walked a foreigner wrapped in a long cloak, and looking exceedingly like a stage brigand.

He bowed, the brigand bowed too, and said something, rapid and unintelligible, in Italian. Then glanced at the door to see that it was safely closed, he made a bound to the open window and shut it noiselessly. Raeburn quietly reached down a loaded revolver which hung about the mantelpiece, and cocked it, whereupon the brigand fell into a paroxysm of laughter, and exclaimed, in German.

"Why, my good friend! do you not know me?"

"Haeberlein!" exclaimed Raeburn, in utter amazement, submitting to a German embrace.

"Eric himself and no other! returned the brigand. "Draw your curtains and lock your door and you shall see me in the flesh. I am half stifled in this lordly wig."

"Wait," said Raeburn. "Be cautious."

He left him for a minute, and Haeberlein heard him giving orders that no one else was to be admitted that evening. Then he came back, quietly bolted the door, closed the shutters, and lit the gas. In the meantime his friend threw off his cloak, removed the wig of long, dark hair, and the drooping moustache and shaggy eyebrows, revealing his natural face and form. Raeburn grasped his hand once more.

"Now I feel that I've got you, Eric!" he exclaimed. "What lucky chance has brought you so unexpectedly?"

"No lucky one!" said Haeberlein, with an expressive motion of the shoulders. "But of that anon; let me look at you, old fellow—why you're as white as a miller! call yourself six-and-forty! you might pass for my grandfather!"

Raeburn, who had a large reserve fund of humour,

caught up his friend's black wig from the table and put it on above his own thick, white hair, showing plainly enough that in face and spirits he was as young as ever. It was seven years since they had met, and they fell to talk of reminiscences, and in the happiness of their meeting put off the more serious matters which must be discussed before long. It was a good half-hour before Haeberlein alluded to the occasion of his present visit.

"Being actually in London, I couldn't resist looking in upon you," he said, a cloud of care coming over his face. "I only hope it won't get you into a scrape. I came over to try to avert this deplorable business about poor Kellner—too late, I fear. And the worst of it is, I must have blundered somehow, for my coming leaked out, and they are on the watch for me. If I get safe across to France to-night, I shall be lucky."

"Incautious as ever," sighed Raeburn. "And that Kellner richly deserves his fate. Why should you meddle?"

"I was bound to," said Haeberlein. "He did me many a good turn during my exile, and, though he has made a grave mistake, yet——"

"Yet you must run your chivalrous head into a halter for his sake!" exclaimed Raeburn. "You were ever Quixote. I shall live to see you hanged yet."

Haeberlein laughed.

"No, I don't think you will," he said cheerfully. "I've had some bad falls, but I've always fallen on my feet. With a good cause, a man has little to fear."

"If this *were* a good cause," said Raeburn with significant emphasis.

"It was the least I could do," said Haeberlein, with the chivalrous disregard of self, which was his chief characteristic. "I only fear that my coming here may in-

volve you in it—which heaven forefend! I should never forgive myself if I injured your reputation.”

Raeburn smiled rather bitterly.

“You need not fear that. My reputation has long been at the mercy of all the lying braggarts in the country. Men label me socialist one day, individualist the next. I become communist or egotist, as is most convenient to the speaker and most damaging to myself. But there,” he exclaimed, regaining the tranquil serenity which characterised him, “why should I rail at the world when I might be talking to you? How is my old friend Hans?”

The sound of a key in the latch startled them.

“It is only Erica,” said Raeburn. “I had forgotten she was out.”

“My pretty little namesake! I should like to see her. Is she still a zealous little atheist?”

“No, she has become a Christian,” said Raeburn, speaking with some effort.

“So!” exclaimed Haeberlein, without further comment. He himself was of no particular creed; he was just indifferent, and the zeal of his friend often surprised him.

Raeburn went out into the passage, drew Erica into the front sitting-room, and closed the door.

“There is an old friend of yours in my study,” he said. “He wishes to see you, but you must promise secrecy, for he is in danger.”

“Is it Herr Haeberlein?” asked Erica.

“Yes, on one of his rash, kindly errands, but one of which I don’t approve. However, his work is over, and we must try to get him safely off to France. Come in with me if you will, but I wanted to tell you about it first, so that you should not be mixed up with this against your will, which would be unfair.”

"Would it?" said Erica, smiling, as she slipped her hand into his.

Haeberlein had taken a newspaper out of his pocket, and was searching for something. The gaslight fell on his clean-shaven face, revealing a sweet-tempered mouth, keen blue eyes, a broad German forehead, and closely-cropped iron-grey hair. Erica thought him scarcely altered since their last meeting. He threw down his newspaper as she approached.

"Well, my *Herzblättchen!*" he exclaimed, saluting her with a double kiss, "so you are not ashamed of your old friend? So," holding her at arms' length and regarding her critically, "lion-hearted as ever, I see, and ten thousand times prettier. *Potztausend!* the English girls do beat ours all to nothing. Well, my *Liebchen*, dost thou remember the day when thou carried the Casati despatches in thy geography book under the very nose of a spy? It was a brave deed that, and it saved a brave man's life."

Erica smiled and coloured. "I was not so brave as I seemed," she said, "My heart was beating so loud, I thought people must hear it."

"Hast thou never heard the saying of the first Napoleon, 'The bravest man is he who can conceal his fear!' I do not come under that category, for I never had fear—never felt it. Thou wouldst not dream, *Herzblättchen*, that spies are at this moment dogging my steps while I jest here with thee?"

"Is that indeed true?" exclaimed Erica.

They explained to her a little more of Haeberlein's errand and the risk he ran; he alluded to his hopes that Raeburn might not be involved in any unpleasant consequences. Erica grew pale at the bare suggestion.

"See," exclaimed Haeberlein, "the little one cares

more for your reputation than you do yourself, my friend. See what it is to have a daughter who can be afraid for you, though she cannot be afraid for herself! But, *Liebchen*, thou must not blame me for coming to see him. Think!—my best friend, and unseen for seven years!”

“It is worth a good deal of risk,” said Erica, brightly. But as the terror of having her father’s name mentioned in connexion with Herr Kellner’s once more returned to her, she added, pleadingly, “And you *will* be careful when you leave the house!”

“Yes, indeed,” said Haeberlein. “See what a disguise I have!”

He hastily donned the black wig, moustache, and eyebrows, and the long Italian cloak.

Erica looked at him critically.

“Art thou not satisfied?” he asked.

“Not a bit,” she said, promptly. “In London every one would turn to look twice at such a dress as that, which is what you want to avoid. Besides, those eyebrows are so outrageous, so evidently false.”

She thought for a minute.

“My brown Inverness,” suggested Raeburn.

“Too thick for a summer night,” said Erica, “and,”—glancing from her father to Haeberlein—“too long to look natural. I think Tom’s ulster and travelling-hat would be better.”

“Commend me to a woman when you want sound advice!” cried Haeberlein.

Erica went to search Tom’s room for the ulster, and in the meantime Haeberlein showed his friend a paragraph in one of the evening papers which proved to Raeburn that the risk was indeed very great. They were discussing things much more gravely when Erica returned.

"The stations will be watched," Haeberlein was saying.

"What station do you go to?" asked Erica.

"I thought of trying Cannon Street," replied the German.

"Because," continued Erica, "I think you had better let me see you off. You will look like a young Englishman, and I shall do all the talking, so that you need not betray your accent. They would never dream of Herr Haeberlein laughing and talking with a young girl."

"They would never dream that a young girl would be brave enough to run such a risk!" said Haeberlein. "No, my sweet *Herzblättchen*, I could not bring thee into danger."

"There will be none for me," said Erica, "and it may save you from evil and my father from suspicion. Father, if you will let me, it would be more of a disguise than anything."

"You might meet some one you know," said Raeburn.

"Very unlikely," she replied. "And even if I did, what would it matter? I need not tell them anything, and Herr Haeberlein would get off all the same."

He saw that she was too pure and too unconventional to understand his objection, but his whole heart rebelled against the idea of letting her undertake the task, and it was only after much persuasion that she drew from him a reluctant consent. After all, it would be a great safeguard to Haeberlein, and Haeberlein was his dearest friend. For no one else could he have risked what was so precious to him. There was very little time for discussion. The instant his permission was given, Erica ran upstairs to Tom's private den, lighted his gas-stove, and made a cup of chocolate, at the same time blackening a cork very carefully. In a few minutes she

returned to the study, carrying the chocolate and a plate of rusks, which she remembered were a particular weakness of Herr Haeberlein's. She found that in her absence the two had been discussing matters again, for Haeberlein met her with another remonstrance.

"*Liebe* Erica," he began, "I yielded just now to thy generous proposal; but I think it will not do. For myself I can be rash, but not for thee. Thou art too frail and lovely, my little one, to be mixed up with the grim realities of such a life as mine."

She only laughed. "Why, I have been mixed up with them ever since I was a baby!"

"True; but now it is different. The world might judge thee harshly, people might say things which would wound thee."

"They say! *Let* them say!" quoted Erica, smiling. "*Mens conscia recti* will carry one through worse things than a little slander. No, no, you must really let me have my own way. It is right, and there's an end of it!"

Raeburn let things run their course; he agreed with Erica all the time, though his heart impelled him to keep her at home. And as to Eric Haeberlein, it would have needed a far stronger mind than that of the sweet-tempered, Quixotic German to resist the generous help offered by such a lovely girl.

There was no time to lose; the latest train for the continent left at 9.25, and before Haeberlein had adjusted his new disguise the clock struck nine. Erica very carefully blackened his eyebrows and ruthlessly sheared the long black wig to an ordinary and unnoticeable length, and, when Tom's ulster and hat were added, the disguise was so perfect, and made Haeberlein look so absurdly

young, that Raeburn himself could not possibly have recognised him.

In past years Raeburn had often risked a great deal for his friend. At one time his house had been watched day and night in consequence of his well-known friendship with the Republican Don Quixote. Unfortunately, therefore, it was only too probable that Haeberlein in risking his visit this evening might have run into a trap. If he were being searched for, his friend's house would almost inevitably be watched.

They exchanged farewells, not without some show of emotion on each side, and just at the last Raeburn hastily bent down and kissed Erica's forehead, at his heart a sickening sense of anxiety. She too was anxious, but she was very happy to have found on the evening of her baptism so unusual a service to render to her father, and, besides, the consciousness of danger always raised her spirits.

When, as they had half expected, they found the would-be-natural-looking detective prowling up and down the *cul-de-sac*, it was no effort to her to begin at once a laughing account of a school examination which Charles Osmond had told her about, and so naturally and brightly did she talk that, though actually brushing past the spy under the full light of the street lamp, she entirely disarmed suspicion.

It was a horrible moment, however. Her heart beat wildly as they passed on, and every moment she thought she should hear quick steps behind them. But nothing came of it, and in a few minutes they were walking down Southampton Row. When this was safely passed, she began to feel comparatively at ease. Haeberlein thought they might take a cab.

"Not a Hansom," she said, quickly, as he was on the point of hailing one. "You would be so much more exposed, you know!"

Haeberlein extolled her common-sense, and they secured a four-wheeler and drove to Cannon Street.

Talking now became more possible. Haeberlein leant far back in the corner, and spoke in low tones.

"Thou hast been my salvation, Erica," he said, pressing her hand. "That fellow would never have let me pass in the Italian costume. Thou wert right as usual, it was theatrical,—how do you call,—stagey, is it not?"

"I am a little troubled about your mouth," said Erica, smiling, "the moustache doesn't disguise it, and it looks so good-tempered and like itself. Can't you feel severe just for half-an-hour?"

Haeberlein smiled his irresistibly sweet smile, and tried to comply with her wishes, but not very successfully.

"I think," said Erica, presently, "it will be the best way, if you don't mind, for you just to stroll through the booking-office while I take your ticket. I can meet you by the book-stall and I will still talk for us both in case you betray your accent."

"*Herzblättchen!*" exclaimed Haeberlein, "how shall I ever repay thee! Thou art a real canny little Scot! I only wish I had half thy caution and forethought."

"Don't look like that!" said Erica, laughing, as the benignant expression once more came over his lips. "You really must try to turn down the corners! Your character is a silent, morose misanthrope. I am the chatterbox, pure and simple."

They were both laughing when they drew near to the station, but a sense of the risk sobered Haeberlein,

and Erica carried out her programme to perfection. It was rather a shock to her, indeed, to find a detective keenly inspecting all who went to the ticket-office. He stood so close to the pigeon-hole that Erica doubted whether Herr Haeberlein's eyebrows, improved though they were, could possibly have escaped detection. It required all her self-command to prevent her colour from rising and her fingers from trembling as she received the ticket and the change under that steady scrutiny. Then she passed out on to the platform and found that Herr Haeberlein had been wise enough to buy the paper which least sympathised with his views, and in a few minutes he was safely disposed in the middle of a well-filled carriage.

Erica took out her watch. There were still three minutes before the train started, three long, interminable minutes! she looked down the platform, and her heart died within her; for, steadily advancing towards them, she saw two men making careful search in every carriage.

Herr Haeberlein was sitting with his back to the engine. Between him and the door sat a lady with a copy of the *Graphic* on her knee. If she could only have been persuaded to read it, it might have made an effectual screen. She tried to will her to take it up, but without success. And still the detectives moved steadily forward with their keen scrutiny.

Erica was in despair. Herr Haeberlein imagined himself safe now, and she could not warn him without attracting the notice and rousing the suspicion of the passengers. To complete her misery, she saw that he had pushed his wig a little on one side, and through the black hair she caught a glimpse of silvery grey.

Her heart beat so fast that it almost choked her, but

still she forced herself to talk and laugh, though every moment the danger drew nearer. At the very last moment, an inspiration came to her. The detectives were examining the next carriage.

"They are taking things in the most leisurely way to-night," she exclaimed. "I'm tired of waiting. I shall say good-bye to you, and go home, I think."

As she spoke, she opened the carriage-door, stepped in, and demonstratively kissed her silent companion, much to the amusement of the passengers, who had been a good deal diverted by her racy conversation and the grumpy replies of the traveller. There was a smile on every face when one of the detectives looked in. He glanced to the other side of the carriage, and saw a dark-haired young man in an ulster, and a pretty girl taking leave of her lover. Erica's face entirely hid Herr Haerberlein's from view and the man passed on with a shrug and a smile. She had contrived to re-adjust his wig, and, with many last words, managed to spin out the remaining time, till at last the welcome signal of departure was given.

Haerberlein's mouth relaxed into a benignant smile, as he nodded a farewell; then he discreetly composed himself into a sleeping posture, while Erica stood on the platform and waved her handkerchief.

As she moved away the two detectives passed by her.

"Not there! at any rate," she heard one of them say. "Maybe they got him by the nine o'clock at Waterloo."

"More likely trapped him in Guilford Terrace," replied the other.

Erica, shaking with suppressed laughter, saw the men leave the station; and then, springing into a cab, drove to a street in the neighbourhood of Guilford Square.

Now that her work was over, she began to feel what a terrible strain it had been. At first she lay back in the corner of the cab in a state of dreamy peace, watching the gaslit streets, the hurrying passengers, with a comfortable sense of security and rest. But when she was set down near Guilford Square, her courage, which in real danger had never failed her, suddenly ebbed away, and left her merely a young girl, with aching back and weary limbs, with a shrinking dislike of walking alone so late in the evening. Worst of all, her old childish panic had taken hold of her once more; her knees trembled beneath her, as she remembered that she must pass the spy, who would assuredly still be keeping watch in Guilford Terrace. The dread of being secretly watched had always been a torment to her. Spies, sometimes real, sometimes imaginary, had been the terror of her childhood—had taken the place of the ghost and bogey panics which assail children brought up in other creeds.

The fact was she had been living at very high pressure, and she was too much exhausted to conquer her unreasonable fright, which increased every moment, until she was on the point of going to the Osmonds, willing to frame any excuse for so late a visit if only she could get one of them to walk home with her. Honesty and shame hindered her, however. With a great effort of will she forced herself to pass the door, horrified to find how nearly selfish cowardice had induced her to draw her friends into suspicion. Echoes of the hymns sung at her baptism and at the subsequent confirmation rang in her ears. She walked on more bravely.

By the time she reached Guilford Terrace, she had herself quite in hand. And it was well; for, as she

walked down the dreary little alley, a dark form emerged from the shadow, and suddenly confronted her.

Any one might reasonably be a little startled by having a sudden pause made before them by an unknown person on a dark night. Erica thought she could exactly sympathise with a shying horse; she felt very much inclined to swerve aside. Fortunately she betrayed no fear, only a little surprise, as she lifted her head and looked the man full in the face, then moved on with quiet dignity. She felt him follow her to the very door, and purposely she took out her latch-key with great deliberation, and allowed him, if he pleased, to take a quiet survey of the passage while she rubbed her boots on the mat; then, with a delicious sense of safety, she closed the door on the unfriendly gaze.

In the meantime, Raeburn had spent a miserably anxious evening, regretting his rash permission for Erica to go, regretting his own enforced inaction, regretting his well-known and undisguisable face and form, almost regretting that his friend had visited him. Like Erica, he was only personally brave; he could not be brave for other people. Actual risk he would have enjoyed, but this anxious waiting was to him the keenest torture.

When at length the age-long hour had passed, and he heard the front door close, he started up with an exclamation of relief, and hurried out into the passage. Erica greeted him with her brightest smile.

"All safe," she said, following him into the study. "He is well on his way to Folkestone, and we have eluded three spies."

Then, with a good deal of humour, she related the whole of the adventure, at the same time taking off her hat and gloves.

"And you met no one you knew?" asked Raeburn.

"Only the bishop who baptised and confirmed me this evening, and he of course did not recognise me."

As she spoke, she unbuttoned her ulster, disclosing beneath it her white serge dress.

Raeburn sighed. Words and sight both reawakened a grief which he would fain have put from him.

But Erica came and sat down on the hearthrug, and nestled up to him just as usual.

"I am so tired, *padre mio!*" she exclaimed. "But it has been well worth it."

Raeburn did not answer. She looked up in his face.

"What are you thinking?"

"I was thinking that few people had such an ending to their confirmation day," said Raeburn.

"I thank God for it," said Erica. "Oh! father, there is so much, so very much, we still have in common! And I am so glad this happened to-night of all nights!"

He stroked her hair caressingly, but did not speak.

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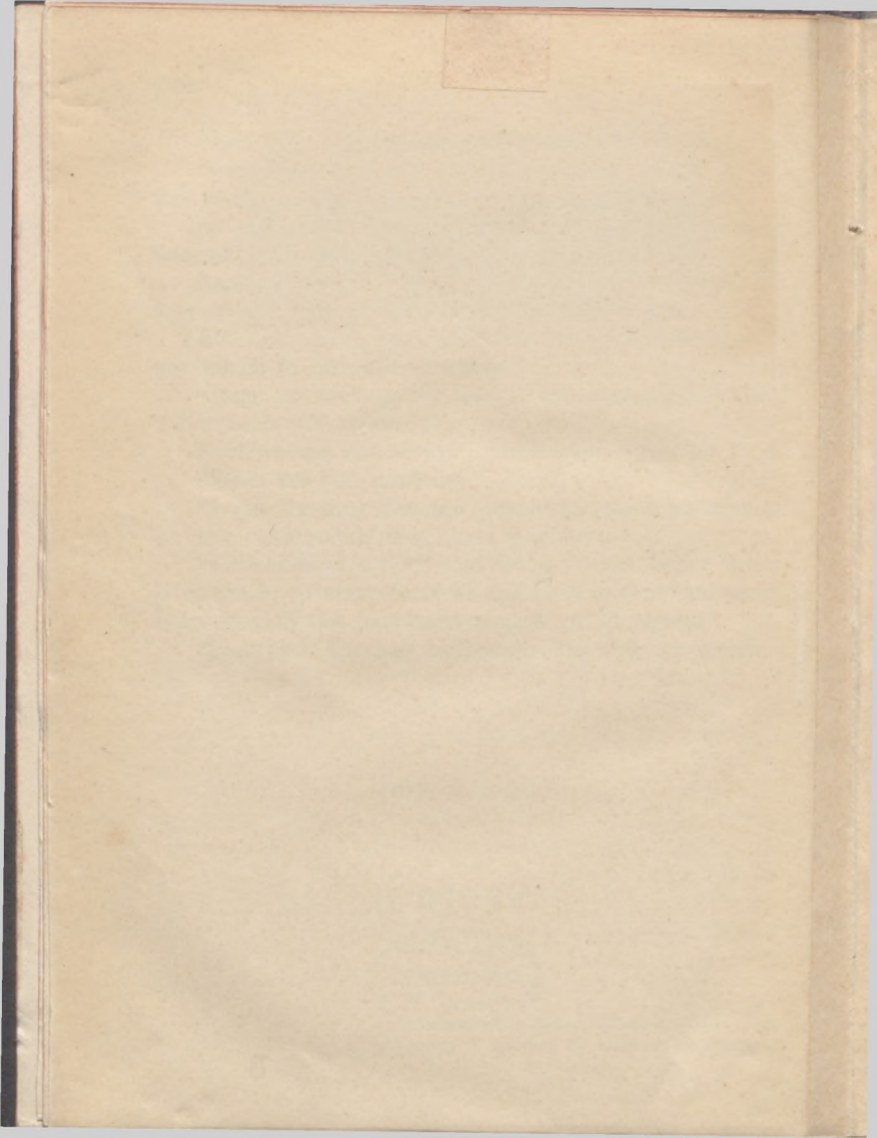


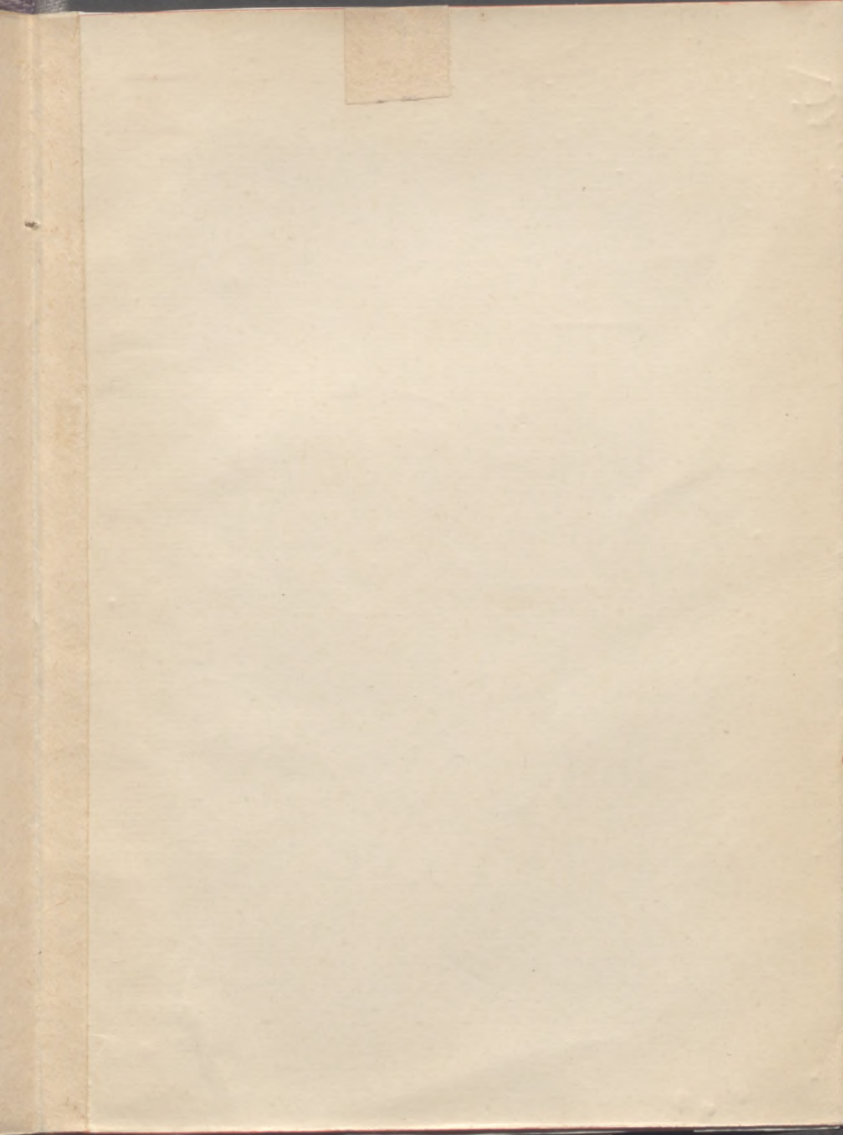
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