Bengala

or, Some Time Ago

Vidal, Mary Theresa (1815-1873)

Edited by Susan McKernan

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John W. Parker and Son, West Strand
General Editor's Foreword

Harry Heseltine

The Colonial Texts Series provides reliable texts of nineteenth century Australian literary works which have been out of print or difficult of access throughout most of the present century. The selection of titles is deliberately slanted towards works of fiction—novels and collections of short stories—because their length has militated even more than in the case of verse against their re-publication. Such texts reveal a range of colonial artistic achievement which has largely dropped from view.

The significance of the titles chosen for publication derives from their power to communicate a fuller and richer understanding of Australia's colonial culture than is otherwise available: the nature of popular taste, the incidence and importance of serial fiction, the influences on Australia's colonial writers, the milieu which sustained, tolerated or rejected them. Accordingly the Introductions outline relevant biographical, historical and critical contexts which the explanatory notes, placed after the main text, further detail; and, to the extent that manuscript and archival resources permit it to be done, a composition and production history of each text is also provided.

Scholarly editions are not mere reprints: they afford each editor the opportunity both to investigate the circumstances of the writing, production, and reading of the chosen work in its original context, and to present to modern readers the most reliable text that research can establish.

A reliable text represents the work accurately and fully. To this end all potentially authorial forms of the text—manuscripts, proofs, serialisations and book editions, whether Australian or foreign—have been located and compared, although some works have extant only one state with authorial involvement. The form of the work which best preserves the author's practice in formal matters, particularly spelling and punctuation, is chosen as the base or copy-text. This is usually the earliest complete or published version of the work, but if necessary the copy-text is emended to represent it (and all such emendations are listed); however, in most cases the copy-text is reproduced in essentially unemended form. Authorial alterations and revisions, if any, are recorded in the apparatus at the foot of the page. Thus a literary work as presented in the Colonial Texts Series is neither mere reprint nor eclectic synthesis; it consists of the corrected text and the apparatus, which reports its alternative authorial forms. Distinctions between authorial and non-authorial variants are made when the editor has compiled a complete bibliographical record of the textual transmission. Alterations by scribes, typesetters, publishers, and others (and variant readings first occurring in posthumous editions) will not normally be printed, but a historical collation will be lodged in the Library of the Australian Defence Force Academy. Except as specified in the Introduction or Note on the Text, the punctuation, spelling and style of the copy-text have not been regularised and so might appear at first to the modern reader as unfamiliar or inconsistent, however, they reflect authorial or at
least period practice. Where a serialisation provides copy-text, care is taken to indicate the manner in which the original instalments were presented.

These endeavours are aimed at presenting a reliable text for a range of colonial works and at revealing the various contexts in which each work took shape and was read, thus helping to fulfil the primary aim of the Series of making a significant contribution to the understanding of the literary culture of Australia's colonial period.
Acknowledgements

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Editor's Introduction

Susan McKernan

Mary Therese Vidal's novel **Bengala: or, Some Time Ago** was published in London in 1860 by John W. Parker and Son. The novel did not have the popular success of her first book, *Tales for the Bush*, a collection of moral tales which was first published in 1844, republished at least four times and translated into Dutch. Nevertheless, it is one of the earliest novels written about Australia and represents the mature work of a writer who began her career with the humble aim of teaching domestic morality to convicts and servants. Although the didacticism of *Tales for the Bush* appealed to Vidal's mid-nineteenth century audience, *Bengala*, with its relaxed depiction of domestic life in pre-goldrush New South Wales (NSW), is more likely to interest modern-day readers.

*Bengala* is a rural domestic comedy, a genre familiar to Vidal's English contemporaries. But the novel's Australian setting provided her with opportunities to describe differences in landscape and social habit. As well, the conditions of convict life and the precarious financial position of many settlers during the 1840's bring more serious considerations into her story of love and marriage. Bengala ranges from light comedy to melodrama when these darker elements impinge on the lives at its centre.

In her dedication to *Bengala*, Vidal refers to ‘more recent and highly-coloured pictures of the same subject.’ She presumably had in mind Henry Kingsley's *Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* which had been published the previous year by Macmillan with great commercial success, remaining continuously in print to the present day. *Geoffry Hamlyn* also deals with the lives of Australian squatters in the years before the goldrushes. But, where Kingsley offers his readers every kind of adventure possible in the Australian countryside—bushfires, attacks by Aborigines and bushrangers, the lost child—and a landscape replete with every geographical feature of the south-eastern area, from snow-capped mountains to the sea, Vidal confines herself to plausible events in the districts immediately south-west of Sydney. Her claim in her dedication that ‘life is the same in one hemisphere as in another’ announces a refusal to seek the exotic in Australian life merely to satisfy the fantasies of her readers. This decision may go some way to account for the relative lack of attention the novel has received, both on publication and since then. Victorian readers who sought Australian novels for their adventure may well have been disappointed by the domesticity of the novel, while its insistence that life in England and Australia was essentially similar has limited its interest for literary historians seeking a distinctively national Australian literary tradition.

Life
Mary Theresa Vidal spent five years in Australia: from 1840 to 1845. She was born in 1815, the first child of Charles William and Theresa Johnson (née Furse) who had made sufficient money in India to retire to the village of Torrington in Devonshire. She had three sisters and two brothers one of whom, Charles Wellington Johnson (later called Furse) became Archdeacon of Westminster while the other, William Johnson (later, Cory), a poet, became one of Eton's most famous teachers (he wrote the Eton Boating Song). In 1835, Mary Theresa married Francis Vidal (1805-84), the local curate. Her granddaughter, the writer Faith Compton MacKenzie (1882-1960), records that Francis Vidal, born in Jamaica to a family of sugar plantation owners, had been brought up with extravagant tastes. He was ‘sent to Eton with the largest pocket-money allowance ever known to a boy’ and, when the Vidal fortunes failed, he chose the Church as the ‘most gentlemanly and least exacting occupation that presented itself.’ After his marriage Francis was appointed chaplain to Exeter Gaol where, MacKenzie claims, he tried unsuccessfully to save the life of a condemned man whom he believed to be innocent, suffering some kind of nervous breakdown as a consequence. However, Arthur Wilcox Manning, who travelled to Australia with the Vidal's, notes in his journal only that Francis Vidal suffered from a throat condition as a result of the damp conditions at Exeter. Whatever his symptoms, the healthy Australian climate may have been one reason to emigrate.

But there were other inducements. The 1830s were a boom period for settlers in south-eastern Australia and there was the prospect of setting up as a farming clergyman. In September 1840 a Francis Vidal of Melbourne was granted the deeds to 93 acres of land along the Yarra River; if this was the same Francis Vidal, he may have hoped to become a wealthy farmer rather than a bush parson. At the time, the Bishop of Australia, William Grant Broughton (1788-1853), was energetically recruiting Anglican clergymen for pastoral work in the colony, and the colonial government was prepared to pay passage money and an annual fee to immigrating clergy. Bishop Broughton had friends at Eton who acted as his agents in recruiting new clergymen and the Vidal's connection with Eton would have made Australia a logical option.

Mary and Francis, with their three sons (aged six months, two and four years old) and Francis's brother George, arrived in Sydney on the *Earl Grey* on 25 February 1840. George (1815-78) was ordained by Bishop Broughton in 1841 and appointed to the large parish of Berrima and Sutton Forest. Throughout 1840 and 1841 Francis Vidal performed parish duties at Penrith and South Creek (now the Sydney suburb of St Mary's) and the Vidal's fourth child and only daughter, Elizabeth (‘Lily’), was born on 22 March 1841 at Minchinbury in the Penrith parish. During 1842 Francis Vidal's church duties were apparently limited to occasional services in his brother's parish of Berrima and Sutton Forest, and by 1843 the family were living in Balmain, a few kilometres from the centre of Sydney, where their fifth child, Robert Wellington, was born on 19 February 1843. Although in January 1845, at the time of its consecration, Francis Vidal was the parish priest at St Mary the Virgin at Denharn Court near Ingleburn, within months the family returned to England. MacKenzie claims that Francis had
promised his wife's family that they would return after five years, but the depressed economic conditions in Australia probably played some part in the decision. Francis Vidal held a substantial share in the Bank of Australia which failed in 1843, and family letters indicate that their Australian experience was a financial disaster.

Mary Vidal's experiences as a clergyman's wife at Penrith, Minchinbury and Denham Court, with possible visits to her brother-in-law's parish further south of Sydney, provided her with some of the material for *Bengala*. In 1836 Governor Bourke had introduced a Church Act which effectively disestablished the Church of England by putting all religious denominations on an equal footing with regard to government funding. Provided a clergyman or parishioner could gather sufficient names of church members and pledges of financial support he could apply for government assistance to build a church. Presumably, Francis Vidal would have gone through this process at Denham Court, just as, in the novel, Mr Budd has done for the church at Bengala and Father Mornay intends to do for the Catholics in the area.

Genteel society in NSW during the 1830s and 1840s was as close-knit as it is depicted in the novel, with landed families forming a chain of social contacts and marriages. During the time the Vidals were at Denham Court, for example, they probably would have mixed with the Blomfield family who lived at the house called Denham Court, which had been built in the early 1830s by Christiana Blomfield's father, Captain Richard Brooks. Through her sisters' marriages and her own marriage, Christiana Blomfield was related to landowners throughout south-eastern NSW. These families were the landed gentry of colonial society, and Mary Vidal's depiction of their social life was undoubtedly based on participation in it.

Family stories about the Vidals' period in Australia, told by MacKenzie, are less credible than events in the novel. One of these stories has Mary Vidal playing Mozart on the piano while the men are out with the cattle. She looks up to find the room filled with Aborigines with apparently sinister intent but mesmerised by the music. She supposedly played on, working through her entire repertoire until the men returned and the Aborigines could be led out onto the lawn. MacKenzie claims, ‘They looked upon her as a supernatural being, and were from that moment perfectly harmless.’ In the novel, however, Aborigines appear directly only once.

Another family story describes Francis Vidal's encounter with the bushranger, Jacky-Jacky, during which Francis is said to have given the bushranger a lecture on the evils of stealing, particularly from parsons. The superstitious Jacky-Jacky returned Vidal's money but did not reform. In fact William Westwood, the bushranger known as Jacky-Jacky, was at large in the district from Queanbeyan to Sydney during 1840 and 1841; he was famed for his gentlemanly manners and refined speech, and a story about Governor Gipps's encounter with him, similar to that about Francis Vidal, appears in bushranging histories. Whether or not the stories about the Vidals' experiences are true, there can be little doubt that Mary Vidal could base her accounts of bushrangers in the novel on events in her own
district: Westwood's former partner, Paddy Curran, was robbing, raping and murdering in the Goulburn and Berrima district until caught in late 1841; a rapist and callous mass murderer called John Lynch was hanged at Berrima in April 1842; and in January 1843 two armed and masked men robbed George Vidal at his residence in Berrima. The convicts and bushrangers in the novel appear to be less dangerous people than those recorded by history; in particular, Jack Lynch, the convict who turns bushranger in Bengala, is much gentler than his namesake.

During the period in which the Vidals found themselves in NSW the colony was in crisis. The heavy droughts of 1839 and 1840, together with the end of transportation in 1840, had changed the previously lucrative pastoral industry into a means of bare survival. The pages of the Sydney Morning Herald during the early 1840s list regular insolvency cases in the courts, and many prominent graziers suffered the shame of bankruptcy. The end of the supply of convict labour meant that Irish Catholic immigrants were becoming the principal source of labour, and those who had hoped to build a society on established English values feared that papist attitudes would undermine their achievements. The dream of a colonial society which echoed the best of English county behaviour was disappearing as the economy declined; with the goldrushes of the 1850s it was lost forever. Bengala accurately depicts the economic crisis and the related concerns of the colonial gentry about the social future of NSW. In particular, the title's reference to Some Time Ago and Vidal's mention of ‘the golden prospect of the Present’ in her dedication suggest her awareness that the novel recreates a society which had vanished by 1860.

In 1845 the Vidals left for England and, in September of that year, Mary went to Eton to help her younger brother, the teacher and poet William Johnson Cory (1823-92), establish a boarding house there. Francis Vidal became a tutor at Eton, taking over William's house in 1851. As well as writing moral tales and novels, Mary Vidal evidently translated for publishers and took a greater share than her husband in the management of the Eton house; one incentive for writing appears to have been the need to support the family after their financial losses in Australia. Though Francis Vidal was remembered by his grandchildren for a casual attitude to his vocation, the Vidals were the epitome of a middle-class Victorian Anglican family with two sons, Furse and Wellington, taking holy orders, two, John and Charles, joining the Royal Navy, George joining the Indian Civil Service and Leonard the Indian Army. ‘Lily’ married Edward Stone, an Eton master, who later founded Stonehouse as a school based on more liberal principles than those of Eton.

After the birth of her second child Mary Vidal suffered from a painful nervous condition, tic douloureux, which became increasingly serious, and in the latter part of her life she took several trips with her husband to Europe for her health. Apparently she was frequently ill, and she died of meningitis in November 1873 at Sutton in Suffolk, where Vidal had become vicar.

After recording Vidal's activities as a writer and illustrator of stories for her children, and her successful efforts to convince her daughter and Edward Stone to marry, MacKenzie comments that ‘There was little that Grandmother Vidal could
not do if she tried." Her achievements as the author of eleven books, mother of seven children and ‘Dame’ of an Eton house confirm this opinion of her.

**Literary Career**

Mary Vidal's career as a writer sprang initially from her duties as an Anglican minister's wife in Australia. Her first work, *Tales for the Bush*, was published in Sydney by D. L. Welch in 1844 as a series of eight, sixpenny monthly parts. Each tale teaches a specific moral lesson, such as the importance of Sunday observance, the need for honesty in small matters as well as large, care in dress and language in order to lessen the indignities of poverty and, most of all, trust in God. Hannah More (1745-1834) was the most widely-read writer of such tales, but the genre was popular in England throughout the nineteenth century.

The tales are less interesting for their earnest moral lessons than for their depiction of the domestic life of convicts and servants in NSW in the early 1840s. Unlike most of the novels set in this period, Vidal's tales concentrate on the everyday aspects of convict life and the relationship between masters and servants. Whether or not the tales were read by their intended audience of convicts and servants, such people play the principal parts in them. In ‘Marion Martin’ a spirited currency lass is taught a scrupulous concern for property by her mistress. In ‘Ruth Walsh’, Vidal praises the modesty and neatness of an immigrant girl whose brother, by contrast, is led astray by the criminal elements in NSW society. ‘Susan's Dream’ prefigures some of the incidents in Henry Lawson's and Barbara Baynton's stories of poor selectors, and ‘The Little Cousins’ and ‘The Cousins Grown Up’ provide a striking contrast between the lives of a successful girl in England and her poor cousin in Australia.

Although the tales offer a morality which now seems trivial and a tone which is sometimes laughably prim, they are well-constructed and do not romanticise the opportunities or evils of Australian life. They are also unsentimental about the relationships between men and women, with their heroines often refusing or being denied marriage—the traditional literary reward for female good behaviour.

In the twentieth century *Tales for the Bush* has been read most often by literary historians and bibliographers who seek it out because it is probably the first book of short stories published in Australia and the second work of fiction by a woman (Anna Maria Bunn's *The Guardian*, 1838, Sydney, is the first). Most of these readers have been repelled by the tales and some have dismissed Vidal as a narrow-minded and rather humourless sermoniser. Nevertheless, H. M. Green noted the careful construction of the Tales and their absence of sentimentality, and Cecil Hadgraft admitted grudgingly that Vidal ‘has an eye for detail, she knows the bush, she can give us the feel of an area or time; but the reader is constantly harassed by the feeling that Vidal may have him in mind as a brand to be plucked from the burning.’

Vidal's second book of moral tales, *Esther Merle and Other Tales* (1847), creates more complex moral situations. Two of the stories, ‘John Salter’ and ‘The Orphan or The Straight Road the Best’, offer unusual insights into the lives of
servants in early Victorian England. John Salter is a handsome country lad who works as a groom for a wealthy city couple. Soon tempted to join other wayward servants in gambling, drunkenness and debauchery while the master is away, he seduces a lonely servant girl who is tried and transported for receiving stolen goods from him, and the story ends with his suicide. In ‘The Orphan’, Anne, the orphan of the title, joins her fellow servants in climbing out the window at night to attend a servants' ball in the local village. They hire ball-dresses from a travelling entrepreneur and, after drinking at the ball, the men set fire to the haystacks of a disliked farmer. As well as providing a moral dilemma for Anne—should she confess what she has seen and risk sending men to prison?—Vidal portrays servants as having a full range of appetites and temptations. Her attitudes may be class-bound but she does not pretend that the middle and upper classes are the only people with interesting moral problems to solve and, therefore, the only subjects worthy of fictional attention. This interest in the servant class and the working class is apparent in all of her fiction.

By the time she wrote her second Australian book, The Cabramatta Store (1850), Vidal was no longer simply a teller of moral tales. MacKenzie argues that the success of Tales for the Bush gave Vidal the confidence to write fiction without the justification of simple didacticism. The Cabramatta Store takes up some of the situations and moral dilemmas in the Tales, but Vidal does not intrude to instruct the reader.

Most of Vidal's other books retain elements of the moral fable. Lucy Helmore, for example, is a heart-rending tale of an English child's sufferings through poverty, which poses the impassioned question: ‘When will masters and parents learn that cruel scourgings and hard words are the cause of half the wickedness in this land, driving children from the shelter of home into haunts of vice?’ In this book, in Ellen Raymond: or Ups and Downs (1859), and in Deb Clinton; the Smuggler's Daughter (1866), Vidal portrays the effects of a father's cruelty and immorality on his daughter.

Of Vidal's eleven books, three novels—Florence Templar: or My Aunt's Story (1856), Ellen Raymond and Bengala—demonstrate a degree of complexity far beyond the aspirations of the moral tale. Florence Templar examines the disparity between appearance and virtue among the gentry in an English country village, while Ellen Raymond follows the fortunes of an impetuous and passionate woman whose reputation has been destroyed forever by her attempt, as a schoolgirl, to elope with her music teacher. The latter novel delineates with sharp clarity the power relations in family life, particularly between husbands and wives, and fathers and daughters; but despite its impressive qualities as a novel, it has received no attention from critics. If Vidal had not written about Australia in three of her books, she might have been lost to literary history entirely.

**Bengala: or, Some Time Ago**

Bengala is not a novel about pioneers on the frontiers of civilisation. The characters in it are occupied in ordinary English tasks and pleasures, which are
given a piquancy and excitement because they take place in a new country. Where other novels about the years before the goldrushes—Alexander Harris's *The Emigrant Family: or The Story of an Australian Settler* (1849) or Henry Kingsley's *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn* (1859)—stress the criminal and money-making opportunities in Australian life, Bengala deals with domestic morality. Vidal is interested in the moral temptations for law-abiding people, and she depicts characters behaving immorally rather than criminally—such as Mr Lang's unthinking cruelty to his convict Lynch, Mr Fitz's sexually exploitative behaviour and Mrs Vesey's social dishonesties. Her heroine, Isabel Lang, provides a model for the education of an Australian girl, and Vidal demonstrates through Isabel the development of a mature Christian woman from a good-hearted and spirited girl. This interest in the moral challenges to well-bred middle class women follows a familiar tradition of women's writing, and Mary Vidal's beginnings as a writer of moral tales is also within this tradition. It is difficult to ignore the similarity between the situation of the heroines in Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816) and *Bengala*. Like Emma Woodhouse, Isabel Lang is an indulged and ignorant girl who misunderstands the marital ambitions of those around her and, like Emma, she has the devotion of an older and wiser man who eventually marries her. As Vidal's dedicatory note suggests (p. 3), she is committed to a literary realism which, at least at the beginning of *Bengala*, is reminiscent of Jane Austen's work.

However, the realities of Australian colonial life ensure that the novel cannot remain within the closed rural society typically examined by Austen and, though Isabel's relationship with Mr Herbert remains the unifying element of the novel, Vidal also pursues broader social, economic and religious problems. Mr Lang's injustice to Jack Lynch demonstrates the possibilities for abuse of the system of private magistracy; the failure of the Bank of Australia and Lang's death force Isabel to take over the management of the family finances; and Father Mornay's presence reminds readers that, in the 1840s, less than half the Australian population was Anglican. The novel places these problems within a domestic perspective—Mr Lang's cruelty to his convict deeply concerns his loving daughter, the financial crash brings a complete reassessment of the Langs' way of life, and the priest brings Isabel her first close encounter with different religious commitments and with frustrated human passion.

Isabel's contact with the tragedies of others is an essential part of her education. Though Vidal appears to be at pains not to sensationalise life in Australia she cannot ignore the existence of the ‘deep and awful phases in life’ (p. 424) beyond the domestic circle of the gentry. While an Austenesque comic realism is appropriate to the earlier parts of the novel, these bleaker phases of life are rendered in a more exaggerated, melodramatic style.

Vidal's resistance to the sensational sometimes undercuts potentially exciting incidents in the novel, such as the visit to Langville by bushrangers in Volume 2, Chapter 3. Where another writer might have drained every drop of suspense and excitement out of the robbery, Vidal allows the whole event to take place offstage while Isabel and Miss Terry are walking in the garden with Mr Herbert and Mr
Farrant. As a distracted Mrs Lang, with the help of her Irish servant, describes the bushrangers' raid Isabel cannot help being amused by their knowledge of women's finery; no real damage has been done and the potentially dangerous moment has been rendered ridiculous by Mrs Lang's response. Vidal also reminds us that bushrangers may, in fact, be murderers by giving Mr Herbert's account of another case.

In this novel, many of the events which are set-pieces of Australian adventure novels by Harris, Kingsley, Boldrewood and others, are rendered both more ordinary and more credible. There is speculation that Mr Lang has been murdered on the road to Sydney but he proves to have met a more mundane end; Jack Lynch hardly commits a crime as a bushranger, though this does not prevent him from meeting a bushranger's death; the familiar 'lost in the bush' motif is portrayed by the fate of Ellen Maclean but we are denied the conventional tale of an anxious search party and a pathetic discovery. Vidal gives her main characters mixed motives for their actions so that the more extreme events in the novel are given a psychological basis. Mr Lang is both warm-hearted and bad-tempered so that the evils he brings on Lynch result from an undisciplined rather than a wicked personality. Lynch has been embittered by experience and he, too, cannot control his passions. Father Mornay's actions stem from the loneliness he suffers as a celibate priest.

In some ways Vidal's preoccupations were typical of her period: for instance, in her emphasis on the role of women in the creation of a moral society. Isabel does her best to curb her father's passions and to direct him in sensible and just decision-making. Through the story of Lynch and Ellen, Vidal argues that marriage may soften even a hardened convict and give stability to a passionate girl. Father Mornay, too, might have had a happier end if he could have married. But Vidal also criticises the limitations on women's activities. Isabel longs to do the man's work of managing a farm rather than spend her time being allowed to 'make puddings and pastry, and stick on flounces, and make up bows, and trim aprons, and change our bonnet trimmings when we are at a standstill' (p. 199); and she proves a good manager when given the chance. But the only employment available to a girl of Isabel's class is as a governess, an occupation for which she has no talent at all.

On one matter of contemporary controversy Vidal expresses a clear opinion—clerical celibacy, an issue which marked the divisions between Catholics and Anglicans, and between Anglicans of High and Low Church allegiance. Catholic emancipation in 1829 had created fears of inroads into the power of the established Church in England. These fears became more real with the emergence of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s and the conversion of one of the Movement's leaders, John Henry Newman, to Catholicism in 1845. By then there was a broad spectrum of religious opinion within the Anglican Church, from the Evangelicals who resisted all the papist trappings of religion, through the Broad Church which advocated both an active program of renewal and some tolerance of Catholicism, to the Tractarians who saw the Church of England as the apostolic inheritor of Catholicism. These various viewpoints were argued in novels written
by religious partisans: Newman's **Loss and Gain** (1848) presented a Tractarian position, which was answered by Charles Kingsley's **Hypatia** (1853) in support of the Broad Church, answered in turn by Newman's **Callista** (1856) presenting his, by now, Catholic commitment. Vidal's minor participation in this debate might be compared with the work of her contemporary, Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) whose writing she enjoyed ‘despite faults.’** Yonge, a friend of the leading Tractarian John Keble, began her career in the same year as Vidal with a didactic work, **Abbeychurch; or Self-Control and Self-Conceit** (1844), and achieved fame with novels such as **The Heir of Redclyffe** (1853), which presented the family (as opposed to the celibate priest) as the centre of Tractarian religious life.

This controversy, which was fuelled in Australia by fears that Irish immigration would soon swamp the country with Catholics, helps explain Father Mornay's appearance in the novel. Though at times mysterious and even sinister, Father Mornay is, for the most part portrayed with some sympathy. Mrs Lang's advice to her daughters early in the novel, that ‘it is hardly right or safe to be in the habit of alluding to a Catholic priest so lightly’ (p. 42) hints that her fears are to be regarded as comical. Vidal does not share Mrs Lang's instinctive anti-papism, but Father Mornay's fate on the other hand demonstrates the dangers of the celibacy enforced by Catholicism. Isabel declares, ‘O, I do think it is so wicked to forbid priests from marrying, if they wish it. Of course many must be wretchedly lonely, for it is not every one who is so very ambitious, or successful either’ (p. 346). Vidal comments: ‘She spoke in her frank, impulsive way, all her innate Protestantism urging her to pity the man, and consider him the victim of system’ (p. 346)—thus offering both a degree of sympathy for the Catholic priest and underlining the author's own Protestantism.

By the 1840s the Catholic Church in Australia had been supervised by the English Benedictine Congregation for twenty years, but the shortage of priests gradually forced the Benedictine bishop, John Bede Polding (1794-1877), to abandon the monastic Benedictine traditions and recruit secular priests from Ireland.** Although the Jesuits did not establish themselves in Australia until the middle of the nineteenth century, an English Jesuit priest, Charles Lovat (1799-1858), arrived in Australia in 1837 to serve in a secular role. For a short time Lovat was the President and principal teacher at the Catholic seminary at St Mary's in Sydney until, after apparent disagreements over his teaching, he was sent to the Yass mission where he served from 1839 to 1848.** Lovat was well-known for the distances he covered on horseback in ministering to Catholics from Goulburn to Kiandra. He was also exceptionally well-educated and something of a scientist; he had studied in Rome where he was ordained. He was an unusual man to be working as a missionary in Australia where most Catholic priests were poorly educated Irishmen. As George Vidal's Berrima parish extended to Yass during the period that Lovat served there, it is likely that Mary Vidal knew about him.

If based on Lovat, Father Mornay also belongs to the tradition of the literary Jesuit which Robert Lee Wolff describes as the apex of Protestant anti-Catholic fears: ‘Jesuits lived under a discipline even more rigorous than the ordinary
priests, were known to be particularly learned, were believed to be in constant
mysterious contact with papal authorities, and stopped at nothing to carry out their
dangerous missions, the very incarnation of the black-clad, sinister, sacerdotal
enemy, who never walk but always glide. Father Mornay's mysterious comings
and goings are consistent with the traditional literary figure. Ultimately, however,
he is presented as pitifully human in his frustrated passion for Isabel.

Mary Vidal was openly Tractarian during the 1850s and her reference in
*Bengala* to the Church of England as the ‘Reformed Church’ (p. 352) indicates
that she saw it as the inheritor of the Catholic apostolic tradition. She probably
sympathised with her brother-in-law, George Vidal, who, in 1868 as the parish
priest of Christ Church St Laurence in Sydney, was embroiled in a controversy
with the Evangelical members of his congregation. Vidal erected a chancel
monument which his parishioners regarded as papist. He subsequently published a
sermon defending such ‘outward signs’ of religious feeling, only to be disciplined
by his Bishop and forced to remove the monument.

It is one of the curiosities of Australian literary history that Charles Kingsley,
one of the principal participants in the literary religious debate, was the brother of
Henry Kingsley, the author of *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*. That novel
depicts the ‘muscular Christian’ parson, Frank Maberly, who reflects Charles
Kingsley's Broad Church attitudes, and elsewhere Henry Kingsley expressed
strong anti-papist sentiments. Mary Vidal's parson, Mr Farrant, does not share
Maberly's enthusiasm for manly pursuits and is quite happy to spend time singing
and talking to the women.

In its brief treatment of Catholicism and the celibacy question, *Bengala*
habitats a context of English literary discussion of the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, just as its
domestic moral realism puts it in the tradition of women's writing modelled on
Jane Austen. In terms of Australian nineteenth century writing, *Bengala* might
also be compared with Catherine Helen Spence's *Clara Morison* (1854) which set
its sights firmly on the moral education of women and on domestic life in
Australia. Spence was an avid admirer of Jane Austen, and *Clara Morison*
does not move beyond the domestic world which Spence knew at first hand. In 1856,
the critic Frederick Sinnett praised *Clara Morison* for its lack of self-conscious
Australianism:

> The novel is no more Australian than results from the fact that the author, having
been resident in Australia, having a gift for novel writing, and writing about what she
knew best, unavoidably wrote an Australian novel ... She has merely illustrated
Australian life insensibly in the process of illustrating human life?

This comment might also be made of *Bengala*; despite its many passing
descriptions of bird and plant life, and its detailed information about the
arrangements of colonial homesteads, it shares with *Clara Morison* the
proposition that Australian life is essentially the same as English life. Joseph
Furphy is the best-known critic of *Geoffry Hamlyn* and the kind of exotic
Australian adventure it represents, but both Catherine Helen Spence and Mary
Theresa Vidal attempted to offer more realistic portrayals of Australian life long
before Furphy wrote *Such is Life* (published 1903).

*Bengala* nevertheless moves beyond the bounds of domestic social comedy into subjects and styles which suggest a less manageable world. In the early parts of the novel Vidal displays a confident control in her depiction of genteel social behaviour; however, her interest in the servant and convict class forces her to write about people and behaviour which do not fit a middle class domestic genre. Despite Vidal's declaration about the similarities between English and Australian life, the peculiar conditions of Australian life in the 1840s push her from one very controlled genre to more exaggerated kinds of writing. *Bengala* does not sit easily within the conventions of Austenesque realism, colonial romance nor melodrama, though it has elements of all three; and it links contemporary English literary, moral and religious debates with social life in Australia during the short period when hopes were entertained for the creation of a colony fit for English ladies and gentlemen.

**Text**

*Bengala* was published in a two-volume format by John W. Parker and Son of London and never re-published. Parker was printer for Cambridge University Press and official publisher for the Christian Knowledge Society, the company's standard works being Bibles, testaments and books of common prayer. But the firm also published *Fraser's Magazine* and included among its authors John Stuart Mill, George Henry Lewes, Charles Kingsley and Charlotte Yonge, so its program embraced atheist, agnostic, Broad Church and Tractarian writings.

In her autobiography, Catherine Helen Spence recalls that Parker agreed to publish her first novel, *Clara Morison*, after it had been rejected by Smith Elder, and that she had been forced to abridge the novel to meet the requirements of the two-volume series; Parker paid Spence £40 for the manuscript and then charged her £10 for the abridgement. Presumably, Vidal would have been paid a similar amount for *Bengala* which was also part of this two-volume series, as were Charlotte Yonge's popular *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), her *The Daisy Chain* (1856), and Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia* (1853). As the two novels Vidal published before *Bengala, Florence Templar* (1856) and *Ellen Raymond* (1859) were both published by the prestigious firm, Smith Elder, the manuscript of *Bengala* may have followed a similar path to Spence's *Clara Morison*. *Bengala* was well-suited to a publishing program which included religious fiction as well as Spence's depiction of domestic life in the colony of South Australia.

In 1860 John Parker junior, who had sponsored *Fraser's Magazine* and the intellectual interests of the firm, died; in 1863, his father sold the firm to Longmans. The lack of critical attention given to *Bengala* may have been partly due to the death of the firm's more active partner in the year of publication. Certainly, Vidal's later books were published by less significant publishers, *Deb Clinton* being published in an illustrated edition recommended for church prizes.

No manuscript or proofs of the novel have been located. The text of this edition is an exact copy of the Parker text except that inverted commas, which appear in
double but predominantly single form, have been standardised as single in this edition. In its original form the novel ran to 317 pages for volume one and 298 pages for volume two; resetting for a one-volume format has entailed different (and also continuous as opposed to Parker's separate) pagination. Some contextual signals available to Vidal's contemporary readership have thus been removed, but facsimiles of the original title pages are provided at the appropriate places, and Parker's typographic design is followed as closely as practicable.

Inconsistencies in spelling have been allowed to stand where precedent has been found, but proper nouns have been made consistent (except when variant spellings were normal, e.g. ‘Woolongong’ and ‘Paramatta’); and obvious compositorial errors have been corrected. All alterations are noted in the List of Editor's Emendations.

Reception

No English reviews of Bengala have been located, but a lengthy, unsigned review appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on 8 August 1860 (p. 2). The reviewer noted Bengala's failings as an Australian romance:

though the external features are accurately given, and though there is little that can be considered improbable in the story, it does not breathe the spirit which pervades colonial life. It is rather a domestic story laid in Australia than a story founded upon incidents which are either peculiar to, or characteristic of, the Australian bush.

The review praised Vidal's characterisation of Isabel Lang but found the story of Father Mornay ‘a strange interlude ... not improbably brought in as an illustration of the practical evils of priestly celibacy.’ However, the Herald concluded that the novel's central concern was a warning against the kind of over-sensitivity displayed in the misunderstandings between Mr Herbert and Isabel, dismissing it as irrelevant to colonial life:

There is indeed much need of this counsel to warmhearted impulsive natures, with whom an imagined slight is sometimes sufficient to efface a long series of kindesses. But in this sunny climate, and in the case of attachments that point to matrimony, there is, perhaps, comparatively little scope for the caution; and if any advice is needed in the matter, it might rather be directed to the suddenness with which engagements are made, and the haste with which they are consummated, than to the trivialness of the misunderstandings by which they are occasionally impeded. It is not generally the tendency of colonial life to develop those acute sensibilities which are said to be more often the source of suffering than of enjoyment to their possessors, but to stimulate impulses that are warm and generous rather than fine and delicate. This beautiful story of ‘hopes and fears and gentle wishes, subdued and cherished long,’ will, perhaps, afford on that account a still more desirable lesson to Australian families; and, if not necessary as a warning, Bengala may be a useful model.

Since 1860, critical comments on Bengala have been confined mainly to literary histories. In his Australian Literature from its Beginnings (1940) E. Morris
Miller commented:

This tale is cold, almost to the degree of austerity ... It is almost devoid of emotion. Even the heart-rending news of the murder of husband and father is received with the prosaic calm of a police department. The repression of the emotions turned some of the characters into intellectual automata.33

Frederick Macartney's 1956 revision of Morris Miller's book, *Australian Literature*, noted that the novel had additional interest to *Tales for the Bush* (which ‘has no significance apart from its connection with Australian literary beginnings’) in its depiction of ‘early settlement and social life in the locality where the author's husband had his extensive parish.’34

On the other hand, in 1950, Colin Roderick found the novel ‘lively and intelligent.’35 H. M. Green was also sympathetic to Mary Vidal's work, admiring the construction of *Tales for the Bush* as well as the greater development of character in *Bengala*. In *Bengala* he found that ‘the moral and religious Victorianism in which the other books are wrapped, as with a damp cloth, is almost laid aside, and the author seems, on looking back, to get a much clearer view of the Australia and its white inhabitants than she then had had.’36 Green could see the stirrings of Australianism, in some of the conversations in the novel but, in general, *Bengala* did little to satisfy his interest in the beginnings of a distinctively national literature.

In *Australian Literature* (1960), Cecil Hadgraft saw *Bengala* as an advance on Vidal's earlier Australian books ‘both in the case of narration and the capturing of characteristic dialogue’, and he concluded: ‘At last, after three almost unreadable chapters full of the worst Victorian rigmarole, she and Herbert marry. Almost the only living character in this volume is an old servant. It is remarkable what an ear the women novelists of the period had for the tone and idiom of those who worked for them’ (p. 17). Elsewhere in dictionaries of biography and commentaries on Australian literature, *Bengala* and Vidal's other Australian books are treated as being only of historical importance.

Many early writers of Australian literary history were intent on identifying a national tradition which emphasised the development of a naturally democratic Australian character formed as a response to conditions of life in the bush. *Bengala* transgresses this tradition by assuming that people in England and Australia are essentially the same, by dealing with the drawing room as much as the bush, by being set in the settled areas around Sydney rather than on the frontiers of British civilisation, and by being alert to the ambiguities of a class structure of convicts, servants and the wealthy without fundamentally questioning such a structure—thus denying the cherished notion of Australian equality. Insofar as the Australian tradition is one which prefers the peculiarly Australian and often masculine experience of the frontiers to a more circumscribed domestic sphere, novels such as *Bengala* have never been likely to fit the required mould. However, readers will find the novel is both a skilful initiation of themes which occupied later Australian novelists and an engaging narrative.
Notes

1 For publishing details of Vidal's books see Appendix.

2 As Much As I Dare; the Autobiography of Faith Compton MacKenzie (London: Collins, 1938), pp. 70-1.

3 See Manning's journal of his voyage on the Earl Grey (MS 289/2/1 National Library of Australia [NLA]) where he describes Vidal's condition as ‘something the matter with his wind-pipe’ (p. 8).

4 Colonial Secretary's Correspondence (23 September 1840, NSW State Archives) records the sale of land at Melbourne to Francis Vidal of Melbourne for £581.5s, though there is no evidence that Mary Vidal's husband visited Melbourne or settled on this land. By the end of their voyage, Arthur Manning had concluded that Francis Vidal was less than committed to his calling (journal, p. 142).


6 Passengers' Index, NSW State Archives.

7 Parish returns for Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, NSW, vols. 26-7, 1840-3.

8 Parish returns, vol. 27, entry 2294.

9 See William Grant Broughton, The Church in Australia: Two Journals of Visitation to the Northern and Southern Portions of his Diocese by the Lord Bishop of Australia (London 1846), 3rd edn, Ill. 5.


11 See Historical Records of Australia, vol. 24, series 1, p. 170; Letters from William Johnson to his father (William Cory papers Eton Library MS 308).


13 As Much As I Dare.75.


15 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 February 1843, p. 2.


17 See letters from William Johnson to his parents (William Cory papers, Eton Library).

18 For family tree see MacKenzie, William Cory, p. xvi.

19 1869 is usually cited erroneously. Her death certificate gives the date as 19 November 1873.
20 As Much As I Dare, p. 77.


22 William Cory, p.71.


27 See Brian Maher, Memories of Yass Mission: St Augustine's Parish Yass NSW (Yass: St Augustine's Sesquicentenary Committee Sydney, 1988), pp. 39ff.

28 Gains and Losses, p. 31.


36 A History of Australian Literature, 1. 99.
Note on the Text

This edition is based on the text published by John W. Parker and Son (London) in 1860. The copy-text has been transcribed from the Parker edition and changed from two-volume to a one-volume format with continuous pagination.

Errors of spelling and punctuation are emended, and are enumerated in the List of Editor's Emendations on pages 443 and 444. [See Editorial Declaration in the Header section of this file CC] and inverted commas have been silently regularised to the majority form of the copy-text (singles)—which it also uses to enclose material itself within inverted commas. The heading for Volume 1 Chapter XV, "Come Back", retains the double inverted commas of the copy-text. Otherwise copy-text is followed precisely and its styling as closely as possible, and historically acceptable inconsistencies of spelling, capitalisation and hyphenation/word separation are allowed to stand. The place name, ‘Westbrooke’, which is sometimes rendered as ‘Westbrook’ in the copy-text, has been silently made consistent.

The unit of currency in New South Wales in the nineteenth century was the pound (indicated by l. in the text), divided into twenty shillings (s) each of twelve pence (d).

The text uses imperial measures. The approximate metric equivalent for the mile is 1.6 kilometres.
‘If I should speak
She would mock me into air: O she would laugh me
Out of myself.’¹

IT may possibly be deemed strange, if not presumptuous, that after the more recent and highly-coloured pictures of the same subject,¹ this homelier and greyer tinted sketch should be brought forward. But though life is the same in one hemisphere as in another, the accidental and surrounding circumstances vary, and there is a more rapid and continual change in a new colony. To seize one of these shifting scenes—a transient period with its own peculiar characteristics, its hopes, fears, evils, and enjoyments—has been my endeavour, hoping that it may not be without interest even to those who, in the golden prospect of the Present, have well nigh forgotten “Some time ago.”—To those friends whose hospitality and kindness in a strange land is now a very pleasant memory, this story is dedicated.
M.T.V.
Volume I.
CHAPTER I.

THE DISTRICT

Vol. I

The sun had reached the horizon, and the fringe of gum-trees on the edge of the hill was thrown out in strong relief by the bright, intense light behind, while the rest of the wooded country lay in shade.

The evening breeze was faintly rising, and stirred the leaves of bignonias and cedar-trees in front of a low, steep-roofed cottage, in the verandah of which a lady sat, alternately patting a huge kangaroo dog and speaking to a man who stood without the gate which separated the verandah from the yard.

‘Really, my good man, it is no use for you to stay! I have told you that my brother—that Mr. Herbert is not at home. He has been up the country.’

‘They say he'll be back to-night,’ the man answered, in a somewhat dogged and surly tone.

‘Probably so, very probably; but of course he cannot be expected to attend to you. Can't you say what you want? You are one of Mr. Lang's men, I think.’

‘I am, my lady,’ and a half-smile of no very pleasant meaning changed his countenance for an instant. ‘Well, as it seems I can't get a hearing to-night, maybe you'll be pleased to tell the gentleman that Lynch wants a word with him badly. He'll attend to me to-morrow, I'll warrant.’

Touching his hat, he turned away. The lady rose, too, and did her best to watch him off the premises, for she had lived long enough among convicts, she said, not to trust them.

At the men's huts, a short way from the house, the man Lynch lingered to light his pipe.

‘Got your ticket, Lynch?’ asked one man.

Lynch smiled bitterly. ‘Ask Lang,’ he said.

‘O, Lynch is going to marry; don't you know that?’ another said, stretching himself on the ground as he spoke.

‘Ay, ay! Is that it? What, to pretty singing Nell, I suppose? And is she to work on the farm and draw double rations, or how?’

‘How?’ said Lynch, ‘how? Why, when I've got my ticket, I'll need no double ration from any man. But there's the pinch. Lang don't fancy tickets!’

‘I've heard he's a hard man,’ remarked the first speaker. ‘For me, I've a wife and four children over sea, and I want no more of that gear. As to a
ticket, if I had one this minute, I'd get it made out for this district. You may go further and fare worse than Herbert for a master, I think. He's a fair man.'

‘He is,’ returned Lynch, ‘and I want to have a word with him now. I suppose 'tis by Bengala Creek he'll be coming?’

‘Ay, ay, no need to go round now, there aint a thimblefull of water there.’

‘Good evening,’ said Lynch; ‘I'll go round that way.’

Lynch crossed the paddock, climbed some slip-rails at the further end, and was soon in the thick bush, followed by a little white terrier with cut and disfigured ears, who snuffed at the hollow trees, and barked many threats at the opossums that were coming forth for their nightly revels. Lynch soon emerged into clearer ground where there were wheel-tracks, and the remains of a wooden bridge, which had once spanned a tolerably full stream of water. But the water was now dried up, and nothing remained but a few broken planks to speak of the once existing bridge. Horse and foot passengers could easily cross at the side in dry weather; but after any rain there was a bog which forced them to take a much longer round to reach the little settlement of Bengala.

At this spot Lynch stopped; he seated himself on an old stump of a tree, and crushing some gum leaves in his fingers, which caused them to emit a strong aromatic scent, he watched the path with a stern, dark expression. There was that in the countenance of the man which would have made most persons turn away; yet his features were good, his figure powerful and well made, though the air with which his small cabbage-tree hat was pushed on one side, and his whole bearing, was almost reckless. The sun was getting low, and already the white fungi were beginning to glow on the fallen trees like gigantic glow-worms, casting a pale white light around them, when a sound of horse's feet echoed round the bush, and Lynch started up. A gentleman on horseback soon appeared, going a fast trot. The horse shied at Lynch, which caused the rider to pull up.

‘Beg pardon, sir,’ said Lynch, uncovering his head, and stepping nearer to him. ‘No harm, sir.’

‘O, Lynch, is it? why, I thought it was one of those troublesome bushrangers. I hear they are out in this direction. Rascals! I wish they may be taken!’

‘Many a good fellow has been driven to that trade,’ replied the man. ‘I took the liberty of calling to beg you, Mr. Herbert, to speak for me, sir.’

‘In trouble again, Lynch?’ said Mr. Herbert, putting his horse into a walk, and leaving room in the path for the man to keep alongside.

‘The old story, sir, and something more. The fact is, Mr. Herbert—I've a fancy—I want to get married—and the girl's willing. It would make
another man of me, sir; but he wont allow it, he'll not answer for me, nor apply for leave; he don't want women and children, he says.’

‘When will your ticket be due, Lynch?’

‘In three months if I go without punishment.’

‘Why, you might have had it a year ago?’

‘Nearly two; but I'd no character—no recommendation—only stripes;' but three months would do it.’

‘Wait then. Get your ticket, and then marry.’

‘That will be never, sir.’

‘It depends on yourself.’

‘It does not,’ said Lynch, with sudden energy. ‘I'm a good workman; Lang don't want to lose me, but I'll work no more! I'll disable myself before I'll be so used again!’

‘Well, I'm sorry for you, my good fellow; but what I am to do in the business I don't know. I spoke in your behalf once.’

‘And I got forty down, of which I bear the marks this blessed minute! Yes! he was savage then; but it isn't to be got off anything now; only to be married. It is hard I consider, after seven years' hard work; four-and-thirty years of age. . . . .’

‘Come, come, my good fellow, you can hardly expect to be able to do all you please here, in the land of punishment. You were sent here for committing a crime.’

‘And I paid the penalty! I left a comfortable home, a farm as good as any in this colony. I left my mother and my sweetheart, who died of a decline for sorrow. I have worked—and after all, sir,’ he added, in a softened tone, ‘I wouldn't be so eager after it, but you see, sir, the girl ran away to my hut, three or four weeks ago, on account of hard usage at home. I took her in and kept her there, and treated her as if she had been a queen, sir; but it's got about, and they talk lightly of her, and even the old father says the best thing she can do is to get married. She is a good girl, sir, as Miss Issy Lang knows, and fond of me, which aint p'r'aps altogether in her favour, as you may think.’

‘Well, I will see Mr. Lang, and do what I can. In the meantime keep out of scrapes, and be civil and patient in your manner, my friend, as I have often advised you. Now, good evening!’

Mr. Herbert trotted on, and was soon out of sight. The convict retraced his steps for a few yards, and then took another turning which led to his master's property, on which he was an assigned servant.8

A loud barking of many dogs, from a deep-toned hound to the stockman's yelping cur, greeted Mr. Herbert, the master of Warratah Brush, on his return to the farm, after a six months' absence at his station in New
England, where the sanguinary attacks of the aborigines\textsuperscript{9} on men and cattle kept every man as much as possible at his post. Telling the man to give his horse a good feed, and patting the dogs which pressed up to him, Mr. Herbert entered the verandah before mentioned, where his sister still sat, enjoying the cool evening. After the first greeting, she said, ‘You are late, John!’

‘Yes; I was detained by one of Lang's men, or I should have been here before.’

‘Ah! he was here, an ill-looking fellow! Pray, John, don't encourage him; our men are well disposed, but a bad example is very catching, and . . . .’

‘Well, Mary, and what is the news?’ interrupted the brother rather abruptly, as he sat down to the meal his sister had prepared for him.

‘Hem! you don't expect news, do you? But by-the-bye, I think there is a little news, for a wonder; a great deal has happened since you left us. There is a very nice person here, John! She is governess at Langville—of course not in the least appreciated there; they are worse than ever;—poor thing, she is quite glad to come here, and have a little talk now and then. She is a ladylike person, and I am sure that she is shocked at Issy, and tired to death of Kate and her mother.’

‘How does Mr. Farrant make way?’ interrupted the brother.

‘Oh, pretty well! Of course he is a great favourite now, just at first; and then he allows no faults in any one. But he will live to find them out. I told you in one of my letters that Issy was evidently setting her cap at him. . . .’

‘And the new people?’ said Mr. Herbert.

‘The Veseys! O, I know little of them. I have not seen them except at church. Rather smart people, I believe. Mr. Budd, who of course knows all the news, says they have brought plenty of money.’

‘They could not have come at a better time for investing it, then,’ said the gentleman, leaning back, and looking very grave. ‘The best sheep in the colony may be had at four shillings a-piece.’

Mr. Herbert presently said that he should go and take a turn about the place. Accordingly, first lighting his cigar, he sauntered out, the dogs rousing themselves from their drowsy attitudes to creep lazily behind him.

Crossing part of a bush-paddock—that is, a piece of the bush or forest ground enclosed, but not cleared—Mr. Herbert looked towards a stock-yard, then, apparently changing his mind, he turned towards a low fence, partly hedged by quince and lemon, and went into the garden.

Not a leaf or a twig was stirring, yet it was anything but ‘still,’ such a medley of sounds filled the air. Grasshoppers and frogs, mosquitos and curlews, mingled their chirping, buzzing, and wailing with the more distant
howl of the dingos, or native dogs, while sharp-nosed opossums leapt from branch to branch. There was a feeling of intense heat and drought; a universal cry for moisture, if not rain, seemed to rise from each crackling leaf and blade.

Leaving the ‘Master’ to note the condition of his garden, about which he and his sister were more careful than was customary at that time in the colony (we are speaking of some twenty years ago), we will, to prevent confusion, give a short sketch of the district and those families with whom principally the story has to do.

A new colony grows apace, and civilization, when once fairly set in, progresses so rapidly, that the very face of the country is altered. But about twenty years ago, more or less, the district of which we speak retained very much of its natural grandeur and beauty, while slowly a few poor bark huts, used respectively for a forge, a wheelwright's hut, and a store, had clustered round a recently built church. These, with the school-house, formed the ‘township’ of Bengala. Warratah Brush, Mr. Herbert's farm, was adjoining, and, with its well-cleared paddocks, and rather tasteful and neat out-buildings, formed a great ornament to the place.

Nine miles away was Langville, the ‘great’ house belonging to the ‘great’ man of the district.

Mr. Lang was a descendant of some Nottingham tradesman, who, failing at home, had carried the remains of his fortune to New South Wales, and, with a shrewd head and ‘good times,’ had gathered riches. The present Mr. Lang possessed flocks and herds, and many a goodly acre. He had built himself a stone mansion, and had been for some years the ruling spirit of the country for many miles round. He had a large family of girls and boys—the two elder girls just grown up.

Before the present church had been built, service was performed at Langville by a clergyman who lived as a settler on his own estate at least eighteen miles off. Mr. Lang felt somewhat aggrieved when the church was erected. It was so much pleasanter to have the service under his own roof, instead of driving nine miles of rough road. Sufficient names having been collected by a very active spirit, a rising man, called Budd, a clergyman was appointed to the district. A parsonage-house was also erected, principally owing to the said Mr. Budd's unwearied energy in raising funds, for which he got heartily abused, but pleased himself by bringing the subject into notice when or wherever it was possible to do so. Mr. Herbert was descended from an old north country family, of late years impoverished, and transplanted to Bath; where his father, the General, had died, leaving one son and one daughter, who having no other tie save a strong love for Bath and Bath society, determined to accompany her
brother when he resolved to emigrate. As an army officer he was entitled to a grant of land, which, together with the remains of the Herbert fortune, enabled him to make a good beginning in the colony. But he was too speculative and too liberal for growing rich fast. He had theories, too, which did not exactly suit colonial politics. He was, perhaps, more respected and admired than liked; and between him and Mr. Lang there was at once a cordial intercourse and constant misunderstanding.

Mr. Lang's wealth did not influence the Herberts as much as he thought it should; while, on the other hand, all the higher points of the Herberts were utterly valueless in the eyes of the Langs. Between the gentlemen there were other sources of discord. Mr. Lang was, of course, a magistrate, and of course he had a great number of convicts as servants.

There were no police magistrates in those days. If a prisoner offended he was summoned before a board of magistrates, composed of the neighbouring settlers. Therefore, if a master desired that forty lashes should be given, who was there to object? ‘Masters must support one another.’

Justice to the convict—the possibility of a master's being in fault or being mistaken—was not much thought of.

When the life was too hard, punishment too frequent, the convict generally contrived to run away, and became a bushranger. This was their only means of escape. But Mr. Herbert considered that his duty as a magistrate, calling upon him to hear a cause and judge upon it, was separate from his position as a master of assigned servants. He was sometimes considered perverse and unneighbourly because he would insist on evidence and conviction before punishment. More than once had he ‘got off’ a prisoner, and was looked upon, in consequence, with suspicion and distrust, by Mr. Lang particularly.

The ladies of the two families, also, had their own separate and peculiar causes of mutual complaint. Miss Herbert thought Mrs. Lang dressed showily and vulgarly, and, with her old country notions, was annoyed at the pride of wealth and the many inconsistencies in the Langville establishment; while Mrs. Lang patronisingly deplored ‘poor dear Miss Herbert's old-fashioned appearance, and wondered what she and her brother found to be proud of, living in such a mean little place, and in such bad style!’

Yet with all this drawback, the intercourse between the two families was brisk, and a superficial observer might have taken them for even intimate friends.

Miss Herbert was many years older than her brother, and although she had begun to find the Bath society a very different thing as years crept on,
and the place she had once occupied as a comely, fashionable young lady, was taken by others, and herself passed by—still at this distance she was wont to look back upon it with a halo of fond regret. By constantly contrasting the past and the present, she really began to believe that she never had an annoyance or met with a stupid or undesirable person till she came to Australia. In the flattering haze of distance, each passing acquaintance was magnified into a friend. Those morning visits and evening parties, the shopping and bazaars, and all the busy bustle with which idle people contrive to surround themselves, once considered a ‘bore,’ were now keenly missed, and the defects and inconveniences of her present life, including her neighbour's faults, were magnified in proportion. She had come out full of theories that a primitive and free life was the best. Yet now she often felt keenly provoked that she had it not in her power to show the Langs what she called ‘the proper thing.’ Her brother was determined and consistent in his opposition to any attempt at fashion or show. He laughed at ‘folly and humbug,’ as he called it, and thoroughly enjoyed the freedom from restraint, and the sociability without show, which was the general custom of the country; though here and there a rich man might pretend to a little more ‘style.’

They both despised the attempts and failures at Langville; and yet whenever an invitation came for them to go there, it was gladly accepted. Miss Herbert enjoyed the easy, softly cushioned chairs, the thick carpets lately arrived from England, the only ones in the district,—and all the luxuries which wealth afforded. She liked, too, to criticise the mistakes, and tried to set Mrs. Lang right in many ways. Mrs. Lang, on her side, while pretending to scorn or pity the Herberts' poverty, had a secret, restless desire for the approval of ‘the Herberts.’ She sought their advice in many indirect ways, and dreaded their criticism above all things. Were the real truth known, Miss Herbert's pride in her own good old family, and the value she set on birth, which was more apparent in her than in her brother, though perhaps not more deep, was the roc's egg to Langville, and caused a certain soreness and jealousy which would have been far worse but for one circumstance. Mr. Herbert professed himself one of those men who, seeing virtues and beauties in every young animal, from pigs and puppies to colts and calves, consider the young of their own race a mistake. Children of all ages were bores and pests, particularly in Australia, where they lived more among the family, and were not condemned, as a general rule, to imprisonment in the nursery. Yet, curiously enough, the very first visit he paid to Langville, he, then quite a young man, took a liking to the second girl of the family, which, while it surprised himself more than any one else, never lessened. He had been ushered into the drawing-room to
await the coming of the lady of the house, and to his intense disgust, a whole set of children were drawn from their play in the verandah to watch him. They were not shy, and from taking observations at the window, they proceeded to approach nearer and stare; the eldest girl even ventured on speech, and asked him how many horses he kept?

This was a signal, and immediately one took up his whip, and another his hat, and three of the party, it must be allowed, behaved in a somewhat rude and noisy fashion. He let them alone, not daring to interfere, but, as he paced to and fro the room, to pass off his disgust, he observed that one who had hitherto kept aloof at the window, came forward and made strenuous efforts to bring her sister and brothers to order. Something in her face struck him, and he listened to what she said in that earnest, loud whisper which children fancy is inaudible.

‘No! but, Kate, it is different! Come away, I tell you. This gentleman doesn't like it a bit. Can't you see? He doesn't like us to be here—so come away!’ By dint of reiterating this to her sister—a girl much taller than herself—and applying a little compulsion to the younger boys, she cleared the room; then in a demure, half-womanly way, and yet with a look of amusement, she proceeded to close the window, saying, ‘If I shut this, they will not come in again to disturb you; you see, in general, people who come here always speak to us, but—’

‘Stop!’ he interrupted, ‘don't close that! What are you doing?—Do come in and let me speak to you,’ he added, highly amused, and also struck by a certain likeness in her clear, frank eyes to some one he had known at home.

She came straight up to him, without any shyness, just looking back to see if the others followed, and was apparently relieved to find they had run down the lawn.

‘So, you think I ought to have spoken to you? You are right! Now then, how do you do, Miss Lang? I suppose you are called Lang?’

‘I am Issy Lang, papa's second daughter; Kate is Miss Lang—.’ Then after a short pause, during which she seemed to be studying his face, ‘Are you the new gentleman come to live at Bengala?’

‘I am just come to the neighbourhood. My name is Herbert—John Herbert.’

‘I am glad of it. I like the name of John; but, I suppose I am not to call you so.’

‘Certainly, if you like, you may,’ he said, laughing.

‘I don't know,’ she said, consideringly; ‘I shall see what papa does.’ Another pause. ‘You don't like children, do you?’

‘I like you. But perhaps you do not call yourself a child; perhaps you are a young lady?’
‘I am twelve years old; I don't wish to be a young lady, because . . . . .’
‘Because . . . ?’
‘I don't like being kept up in so much ceremony, and having to take care
of my dress, and fiddle-faddle! Papa says I needn't be a young lady for a
long time. Kate is already, and she likes it; but I don't. Do you?’
‘Do I what?’
‘I mean do you like young ladies better than children?’
‘Well, I have always thought so; but if you are a child, I shall change my
mind. I should like to be friends with you. What do you say?’
‘I don't know . . . I am afraid—’ and she hesitated and blushed, while she
still looked full and fearlessly at him. He felt much attracted by her
ingenuous and simple manner. It was new to him, and that likeness also
struck a chord which gave pleasure as well as pain.
‘Why are you afraid?’ he said, stroking back her hair, even gently.
‘They say you are so proud,’ she half whispered; ‘are you?’
‘They do, do they? Well, perhaps I may be. Every one is something; but
that need not hinder us from being good friends, need it?’
‘No,’ she said, firmly, putting her hand in his. From that hour a close
friendship sprang up between them. And this notice of his favourite
child—so flattering to Mr. Lang's paternal love and preference—caused
him to overlook much which would otherwise have been less easily
endured.

Mr. Herbert taught Isabel Lang to ride and to draw, and provoked his
sister by his constant preference of her to her far prettier sister, Kate. Years
passed with very little change in the district perceptible to the people
themselves. But meanwhile the children were growing into young women
and men, and Miss Herbert felt very uneasy, and wished her brother would
remember the difference, and not ‘get himself talked of.’

It became necessary at last for Mr. Herbert to go and stay for some time
at his distant station, owing to the rising among the natives mentioned
before.

He found it desirable to be there for many months. During his absence
the new clergyman arrived, and there were also other changes. A long-
deserted house, about equally distant from Langville and Warratah Brush,
called Vine Lodge, had been bought, and repaired by some ‘new comers,’
reported to be of a more fashionable and wealthy class than common
among emigrants. They were now living there, together with the lady's
brother, who, however, only came for a time, it was said. Besides this, the
Langs had been to Sydney, and the two girls had been regularly
‘introduced’ at the Sheriff's ball. They returned in such fashionable trim
as to cause conversation in the district, and they were accompanied by a
Miss Terry, a governess for the younger children. Hitherto the society had been for years confined to the Langs, the Herberts, the Budds, and the Jollys, with the doctor and the officer commanding the company of mounted police stationed in the neighbourhood. These additions to the circle caused therefore no small stir and talk. It may as well be said here, that Mr. Herbert's return home had been somewhat hastened by a summons to attend a meeting, at which it was proposed to take into consideration the site for a new bridge and road, a subject on which the great men in the district differed, and which bid fair to be a bone of discord.
CHAPTER II.
NEIGHBOURS.

Vol.I

‘The church will be pretty full to-day, any how,’ said a curly-headed boy to his companion; ‘we'll soon want another if the district improves at this rate. Come, Dick, you take the bell, for I'm fairly tired;’ and accordingly the two school-boys relieved guard at the bell, which was hung outside a small slab building, and jingled in an unharmonious way.

The graves scattered around proclaimed that this was the church or place of worship for the district. The public road passed in front, and all round was thick bush or forest, save a few flat paddocks belonging to a neighbouring farm. Had it been more cleared, and the unvarying outline of gum-trees a little broken, it might have been pronounced a pretty spot. Here and there was a single graceful shrub, many a delicate blossom, and that peculiar depth of blue sky which inspires the eye with a sense of space. It would have been a pleasant scene, but for the brown and sun-dried grass, and that dull bluish hue, a peculiar feature in Australian foliage, which lessens the beauty to English eyes.

Mr. Herbert stood leaning against the fence, beating the grasshoppers down with his cane, as they swarmed round him, then shifting his straw hat, he turned and looked absently down the road, at the people coming to church. There were working men in white trousers and blue shirts, some distinguished by the addition of a jacket or smart neckerchief, and all with cabbage-tree hats. There were but few women in proportion; either the distance was too great, or the heat too oppressive, or they could not leave their young families. Then came a gig, driven by a remarkably thin, lanky man, and by him was seated a plump, showily-dressed little woman, his wife. Their boys, three in number, galloped before on their ponies.

‘How are ye, Herbert? I was afraid we were late,’ said Mr. Budd, as he guided his horse through the gate; ‘but I see the Langs are not here yet.’ Mr. Herbert gave a distant bow to this address, which was spoken in a nasal, shrill tone of voice, but answered not a word.

‘Oh, here they are, Mr. B.!’ said the lady, disentangling her dress from the gig-step. ‘Here they are, the phaeton, the gig, and all the horses! My! what a number! and there's the new comers, I declare, in a spring cart. Well! I thought they were a cut above that, I must say!’

Mrs. Budd smoothed her dress, and exchanged her gloves for a newer pair.
‘Come on, come on,’ said her husband, ‘before the row begins. What a stiff fellow that Herbert is, to be sure! Considering what I am, I should think he might vouchsafe a word; he, with his small farm, and never doing anything for the good of the district! And here am I taking upon myself all the responsibility and trouble, and am ready to put down my 50l. or 100l. in a minute!’ Mr. Budd's voice was stopped by his wife.

‘My! do look now, Mr. B., look at Mrs. Lang, and the Miss Langs! How smart, I declare! and then there's that Mrs. Vesey, in sleeves just like a man's coat—new fashion, I suppose—and who's that tall fellow?’

‘Oh, that's Fitz, Mrs. Vesey's brother—has some capital dogs, I hear. Perhaps we might come to a bargain. I'll have out our old gig, and do it up. I'll put a low enough price upon it. A little cash, and a couple of those hounds . . . .’

‘Dogs again! Mr. B., don't, pray, be getting any more dogs! There are fifty on the farm already, if there's one!’

Here the husband and wife entered the church, and took their seats, while the parties just arrived were greeting each other at the gate.

‘Here we are,’ said Mr. Lang, with a laugh, ‘safe and sound at last; but 'pon my honour, Herbert, you should get a couple of your men to mend that bridge; we were over as near as could be!’

‘The bridge? Why! it doesn't belong to me,’ returned Mr. Herbert, drily. ‘Though near our paddock, we seldom or never use it; we always cut across the flat, and avoid it. You and Mr. Budd must see to it.’

‘Budd! Oh yes, to be sure, very true, it will give him an excuse to be busy. He certainly ought to do it; very true, his wool-drays always pass that way. Yes, to be sure, I'll give him a hint.’

‘Better send one of your own men, papa; it would be done in a day,’ said Isabel Lang, who now joined them. Mr. Herbert smiled and bowed, but she put out her hand, and said, ‘How d'ye do?’ in so hearty and frank a manner, that the gravity and distance vanished, and they were soon chatting freely, while the rest of the Lang party collected.

‘And how is Miss Herbert?’

‘Quite well; she is as usual busy in the school.’

‘Very good and indefatigable, I am sure, sir,’ remarked Mrs. Lang, after a curtsey to Mr. Herbert. ‘Single ladies have the advantage over us, that they have so much spare time,’ she added, in a patronising tone.

The gentleman again bowed coldly, and drew back a little for the party to pass. On they went,—Mr. Lang and his second daughter Isabel, then Mrs. Lang, all flounces and feathers, her satin dress brushing the ground, and Miss Lang, a pretty, fashionable-looking girl. Near her walked the stranger, about whom Mrs. Budd had asked—a gentleman-like figure, and, if not
regularly handsome, with an attractive face. Then came two little girls and their governess, the latter chiefly remarkable for her quiet, plain dress; Mr. and Mrs. Vesey, and Captain Smith, the officer in charge of the mounted police stationed in the neighbourhood followed; and the last, though certainly not least in stature, walked Mr. Herbert, his lip half curling, though it gradually relaxed as he walked up the little building, and seated himself in a corner of one of the wooden benches. As the service proceeded, another party was added to the congregation. A dozen or more blacks might be seen looking through the open door; some staring curiously round, and others listening to the preacher open-mouthed. The sermon was one to create interest in all, from different reasons. Its object was to call on them to build a church more fitted for Divine worship than the present building. It was curious to see Mr. Budd's deportment, now bending his sharp grey eyes on the clergyman with a self-satisfied expression, and now looking at one, and then another of the congregation, as much as to say, ‘That's for you?’ Mr. Lang raised his eyebrows every now and then, as if in wonder, and then fell to blowing his nose. Mr. Herbert, neither moving head nor foot, leant back in his seat, listening with grave attention. Mr. Farrant had not long been their clergyman, and the style of his sermon, as well as many other things about him, were very new to the district.

When the service was over, and they were once more in the churchyard, waiting for their carriages, Mr. Herbert was stopped by Mr. Budd, who, drawing him aside, began a long story about what he had done with regard to building the new parsonage, and how he was ready now with time and money to commence another church. Mr. Herbert looked impatient, and at last abruptly broke from him, following the others, who were apparently bending their steps across the paddock, instead of getting into their carriages. The Lang's house, Langville, being so far from church, they often stayed and had lunch at Warratah Brush before they returned home.

‘Well, Mr. Herbert, do you see what a party we are, and going to besiege you as usual?’ said Isabel, as he overtook her.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘but it wont last long! When the other church is built, we shall see you no more, I suppose.’

‘No more of those odious Langs, then, for you and Miss Herbert!’ said she, laughing, and half mimicking Miss Herbert's manner. ‘Papa can't forgive Mr. Budd at all. He would not have come here to-day had it not been for Mr. Farrant.’

Mr. Herbert made no answer, but swung his cane round and round; perhaps he wondered if Isabel had really ever overheard his sister's comments on the Langville Sunday visits.
‘What do you think of our new neighbours, Mr. Herbert?’ said Isabel.
‘I have hardly seen them yet. I always look at old friends first, and I find
two young ladies of my acquaintance so—so—what shall I call it?—so
come out, that I've had no eyes for anything else.’
‘It is only because you have been so long in the bush that civilized
society seems strange to you, I dare say. I don't think I can return the
compliment, however. Some people of my acquaintance have drawn in
instead of coming out! A whole week returned, and not the good manners
to call!’
Here Mr. Lang looked back, and called out, ‘Issy, my darling, where did
you put the letters?’
‘Tom has them, papa.’
‘No, he hasn't; he told me you had them.’
‘I only know I told him they were in the driving-box, papa. Run, Willie,
do, and see if they are not there.’
But Willie did not hear; on the contrary, he quickened his pace in the
other direction, and was soon out of sight.
‘I'll run back,’ said Mr. Herbert.
‘Oh no, pray!’ said Isabel. But he was off.
‘Ah, let him go, 'twill take the starch out of him on such a day as this.’
Mr. Lang, shifting his hat, and putting his hand on his daughter Isabel's
shoulder. Then laughing, and saying that she made a capital walking-stick,
he turned round and asked Mrs. Vesey if she did not think it must be a hard
matter to find such a tribe in shoe leather in these pinching times?
Miss Herbert produced biscuits and grapes, bread and butter, colonial
wine,¹ and lemon syrup for her guests. Mrs. Vesey was loud in her praises
of everything, and swept about the little room with an easy confidence,
which contrasted curiously enough with Mrs. Lang's stiff attempts at
dignity. Mrs. Vesey patted the dogs, whistled to the parrots, examined all
the little contrivances, and between times joined Mrs. Lang in quizzing Mr.
and Mrs. Budd.
‘They are deliciously absurd,’ said she; ‘his musical voice would make
his fortune in the puppet-show of Punch and Judy. I shall cultivate their
acquaintance assiduously.’
‘Well, I confess I don't see anything to like in them,’ said Mrs. Lang,
understanding the lively Mrs. Vesey literally. ‘Mrs. Budd is thought to
dress well, I know, but it is not after my taste, I confess.’
‘Voice, madam!’ exclaimed Mr. Lang, ‘if anything could set my teeth on
edge in the world it would be that detestable fellow's voice! Could you but
hear him at a public meeting—heart and senses!— you'd never care to
listen to his Burr-r again!’
‘What is that building with a long chimney?’ asked Mrs. Vesey, looking through her glass.

‘That is a mill,’ said Mr. Herbert.

‘How many bushels did ye grind last week, Herbert?’ asked Mr. Lang, with a half laugh, and winking hard at Mrs. Lang.

‘It was out of repair,’ was the answer.

‘Ay, ay, so I thought. Give me old brown Ben instead of your long chimneys and smoke,’ said Mr. Lang, taking up a book.

‘And does ‘brown Ben’ never get lame?’ drily remarked Mr. Herbert.

‘And what if he does? Put in another—no want of horse-flesh here.’

‘Great waste of it, and great waste of labour, in my opinion,’ said Mr. Herbert. ‘Why, I can show you on my books what the steam-mill does.’ And he rose and went out of the room.

‘Books! books!’ said Mr. Lang, ‘send them to Jericho. I never go by books; I go by old experience, and I know what a horse-mill is, and I know that—’

‘Are they talking of the mill?’ asked Miss Herbert, who was a little deaf, of Mrs. Lang. ‘It is such a convenience!—but John has laid out a great deal on it.’

‘Indeed,’ said Mrs. Lang; ‘I should have thought Mr. Herbert knew better, in these times!’

When Mr. Herbert reappeared with his books, which contained a farm journal, Isabel remarked that it was quite time to go.

‘I must just prove the fact,’ said Mr. Herbert, and he read out a statement of the mill work.

‘I don't care a farthing, sir, for all the statements in the world!—they are not worth this,’ said Mr. Lang, snapping his fingers. ‘They don't convince me, Mr. Herbert.’

‘It would be a hard matter to do that, I own,’ said Mr. Herbert, with a look of contempt.

Mrs. Lang laughed affectedly, and, rising from her chair, said the carriage was come, and so they had better leave the discussions of mills for another day.

The party took their respective places in the phaeton, gig, spring cart, or saddle-horses, and left Warratah Brush and Miss Herbert to ‘peace and quietness,’ as that lady observed when they drove off.

Warratah Brush was a pretty specimen of the generality of colonial cottages, such as they were before people began to build those comfortable stone houses which are now becoming so numerous. It consisted of four rooms on the ground floor, leading into each other without any passage. At the end of the deep verandah there were two small closets boarded in,
which went by the name of ‘verandah rooms;’ one was used as a spare bedroom for travellers, the other for a kind of pantry or store. The beautiful Moreton Bay bignonia, with its clusters of pink blossom, and the passion-flower completely covered the roof and verandah, and was trained into arches, though here and there a long wreath escaped from its confinement, and waved to and fro in the evening breeze, which had now set in. In front was a small garden, consisting of a few beds, with narrow paths between, gay with roses and geraniums. A slight shade was afforded by a group of white cedar trees, already full of their yellow berries. The garden was surrounded by a low fence, which divided it from the farm-yard. Opposite rose a goodly barn, which towered far above the low and steep-roofed cottage, and a little to the left was a stock-yard and a fowl-house, all in good repair and in sight of the house. Behind stood the kitchen and wash-house.

Two large kangaroo dogs lay outside the gate which opened into the verandah, and within stood a row of cages containing different parrots.

‘Well,’ said Miss Herbert, as she sat in the verandah, and fanned herself with a newspaper, ‘it is over till next week, at any rate! I am sure I wish our house was ten miles off from the church, and then we should not have our rooms so filled, and my temper ruffled, every Sunday by those Langs!’

‘So that was the Mrs. Vesey?’ said her brother.

‘Yes; I don't know what to make of them; they are stylish-looking people—evidently gentlefolks. But I don't like their being so very intimate at Langville already. Mrs. Vesey and Isabel seemed to have a great many jokes together, which no one else could hear and you know I hate jokes!’

‘My dear, I assure you everybody could hear but yourself.’

‘You are quite mistaken, John; I saw it all; indeed, I believe they were quizzing me—or the room.’

‘Nonsense; it was Mr. Budd. However, I agree with you about the heat of the room. Really it is too small! I saw such a good site for a house the other day, Mary, behind the Creek. I should like to build there.’

‘Surely you will not be so absurd as to build a Herbertville, just because there is a Langville, John? Pray lay out no more money here! Try and save enough to go home.’ She sighed as she pronounced the last word.

‘Home!’ said her brother. ‘This must be our home. There is not a chance of our ever returning. I don't know even that I wish it. Ten years make a fearful gap, and we should neither of us like the climate of England now, or the habits.’

‘O John, John! as if the very sight of a face fresh from the old country does not set one longing for England! I hate this place; we are buried in the bush, losing money, and having no one to associate with. It is all very well
for you; a man finds occupation—but for a lady . . . .

‘Why, what do you call all those people who were here just now? Ours is quite a gay district! By-the-bye, Mary, I thought the girls, the Langs I mean, a good deal got on; what has smartened them up so?’

‘O, they are ‘come out’ now, and they have been staying in Sydney, as I told you, and I dare say paid the milliner a few visits. Kate is certainly a pretty girl—very pretty—and with the fortune she will have, will be sought after, no doubt. I suspect she was much admired in Sydney. They say she was the belle of the room at the Sheriff’s ball, and Mr. Fitz paid her great attention. Poor Tom Jolly, I feel for him very much!’

‘Isabel looks well, too,’ said Mr. Herbert; ‘she is quite come out since I went away. One forgets how time passes; she is fast growing into womanhood.’

‘Ah, you know,’ said Miss Herbert, drawing in her breath in a way peculiar to herself when not quite pleased, ‘we never agree about her; I can’t admire her at all, she is so freckled!’

‘So fair, you mean,’ put in Mr. Herbert.

‘Handsome eyes, certainly,’ Miss Herbert continued, with an air of consideration and concession.

‘Beaming,’ interrupted her brother.

‘But such a nose! A regular ‘turn up.’ ’

‘Nez retroussé. Elle est piquante et spirituelle.’

‘And her mouth is too wide, or is it that she is always laughing?’

‘ ‘Tis a sweet smile, so full of human love, as some poet says.’

‘In fact,’—Miss Herbert went on, not noticing her brother's interruptions, ‘it is lucky that she is, if anything, rather under-sized, for if she were as tall as her sister, she would be masculine indeed.’

‘As it is, she rejoices in a well-knit, compact figure, active and lithe, and frolicsome as a kitten.’

‘Pooh, John,’ remarked his sister, who had only heard his last words, ‘you will tip your chair over in a moment! What a trick you have of balancing it so, and looking up into the sky, uttering paradoxes.’

‘Prove that! Prove that I have uttered one paradox.’

‘You have uttered an absurdity. In the first place, she is not at all like a kitten, and in the second, if she is, it is no merit, as you seem to assume. Young ladies should not mimic kittens. Your encouragement of Isabel Lang's faults is very wrong in you, John! You ought to know better.’

‘My dear Miss Herbert! I!—I encourage her faults!—when I am for ever criticising and finding fault! Any other girl but herself would hate me.’

‘You do encourage her by making a joke of it. She is too confident, too self-sufficient as it is;—too fond of quizzing and joking, and too forward. I
am sure she and Mrs. Vesey were laughing at my old-fashioned dress.’

‘My dear, indeed. . . .’

‘My dear John, don’t contradict me! I can’t hear, perhaps, as well as others, but I can see. Believe me, my eyes are particularly good, and I did see; so don’t make the matter worse by smoothing it over. Of course I don’t care a farthing—I can’t be expected to dress so well, or to know the fashions exactly as the Miss Langs or Mrs. Vesey, but still . . . .’

Here the servant came to ask if they were ready for dinner.

‘Yes, make some tea, Jane; here, take the key and fill the canister from the chest. Come, John, before the beef grows cold.’

Mr. Herbert, however, remained to read a letter. Its contents seemed not very pleasing. He frowned, and gave a low whistle, at which one of the dogs jumped over the gate.

‘Pshaw, Forrester, I don’t want you; go back, sir!’

The animal drooped his head and wagging his tail in token of submission mingled with disappointment, lay down on the mat within the gate, looking up every now and then at his master, who, after again reading the letter, joined his sister at dinner.

‘Have you anything to give Mr. Farrant, Mary?’ said her brother. ‘I think he will call on his way back; he half promised to do so.’

‘Dear me, then, I must contrive something. He will be so tired and weary, poor man, after such a hot ride.’

Miss Herbert hurried over her dinner in order to prepare some little favourite delicacy for the clergyman. There was much searching in cupboards and consulting with the maid, though Mr. Herbert often said ‘Pshaw,’ and assured her that an egg and some cold meat would be quite enough.

But visitors had been scarce of late at Warratah, and Miss Herbert liked the pleasure of preparation on a small scale; and, moreover, as it was the first meal the clergyman had taken in her house, she determined to have it properly arranged, and some handsome old silver, with the Herbert crest on it, was somewhat proudly taken out. She did not generally use it, being too much afraid of bushrangers, but she thought she should like to show Mr. Farrant that some of his parishioners had this very important certificate of belonging to an old family!

‘Ah, it looks like home!’ sighed she, as she placed the massive spoons and forks on the table. ‘Well! how things are changed, to be sure!’

‘Female vanity!’ muttered Mr. Herbert, with a slight toss of his head, while a little of the said vanity might have been seen lurking about the regions of his own mouth, had it not been more than half hidden by his moustachios.
‘I shall leave you to your hospitable cares, and try and meet Farrant,’ and lighting his cigar he went out, followed by the dogs.

The bush was in an uproar from the noisy birds called familiarly ‘old soldiers,’ as they fluttered about in busy restlessness before going to roost. Then a wild shrieking laugh rang through the forest, and the large-headed bird, the laughing jackass, flew heavily from one white gum to another. Gay parrots chattered their ‘good nights,’ while magpies interchanged plaintive adieus.

A tempting seat on a fallen tree induced Mr. Herbert to rest and give himself up to the listless, dreamy influences of the evening, unrefreshed as it was by any breeze, and only cooler than it had been all day from the absence of the burning sun.

The return of the clergyman, however, soon interrupted his dreams. Mr. Herbert had met Mr. Farrant before he went to his station, but had not seen much of him. He had not felt quite sure whether he should like him or not. Mr. Farrant was essentially fitted to be a popular man, and likely to be so. Everyone praised him, and this caused Mr. Herbert to look with something like distrust on him. At first he had met him with cold hauteur, fully determined not to be in a hurry in forming an intimacy. Mr. Farrant's manner, charming as it was to others, did not quite please Mr. Herbert; but having heard of a very disinterested action done by Mr. Farrant, and the sermon of that morning having proved that he could speak stern truth in a grave manner, as well as win ladies' hearts by talking of poultry and bees, and having a pleasant word for every one, high, low, rich, or poor,—Mr. Herbert was now bent on showing his readiness to come forward to him. Perhaps there was a little complacency in the thought that Mr. Farrant might find him a more congenial companion than any other person in the district—a slight feeling of pride and satisfaction in the idea that though longer, perhaps, in granting his friendship and regard, it would be found as well worth having as others!

In fact, the sister with her cookery, old family plate, and such things, was not more anxious to please than the brother. He ‘unbent’ this evening, and gave himself up to conversation in a way in which few could excel him when he chose. Mr. Farrant was pleased; the weariness he had felt from hard duty in the fervent heat of the day passed away. They adjourned to the verandah, Miss Herbert's ‘withdrawing-room,’ as she called it, and there was much to say and much to hear. Mr. Farrant could talk of the old country, and found interested listeners. Improvements, new books, and music were canvassed, and then Mr. Farrant touched on his desire to have something like good singing in the church. Miss Herbert shook her head at his idea of some of the ladies undertaking it; she thought no one had any
taste for music or anything like a voice in the district. Her brother thought
her hypercritical; he was sure the Langs had good natural ears, though
uncultivated, and Mr. Farrant smiled as he asked if they had heard Mr.
Lang's governess sing?

‘No,’ Miss Herbert said. ‘But she was much prepossessed with her
appearance; such a contrast as it was to the Miss Langs!’

Mr. Herbert remarked, with the slightest possible tone of depreciation,
that she was a very little person, and he had not noticed her face. Then
came a pause, which Mr. Farrant broke by speaking of his enjoyment of the
rides—the beautiful ‘flats,’ which seemed made for a gallop! He seemed
pleased with everything. The climate was delightful, the independence of
the life charming.

‘And the people?’ asked Miss Herbert.

‘Full of kindness and hospitality; thoroughly well meaning,’ said Mr.
Farrant.

This led to a long discussion. Miss Herbert spoke of individuals, and
compared them with old acquaintance in Bath. Mr. Herbert spoke of the
colony in general, and dwelt on the evil the convict system had been to
society. He alluded impatiently to the faults and grievances, and in the tone
of a somewhat disappointed theorist. Prizing the freedom of life, and
dwelling with eloquence on its many picturesque points, yet evidently
deeing a man of education like himself thrown away; wondering how any
person could be foolish enough to break through old associations and home
ties, and exile himself to such a barren land, yet—owning that habit had
reconciled him to the evils; and though for the first five years, finding his
money-tree did not bear the promised fruit, he had over and over again
resolved to return to England—he now felt that this was his home. The
climate alone was an inducement, and late accounts from England did not
tend to make him desire to be there.

Mr. Farrant listened, but did not agree. He, too, had felt the transplanting.
He confessed it was a sad wrench; but instead of being disappointed, he
had found everything better than he expected. He had excuses for all, and
dwelt with evident pleasure on the kindness with which he had been
received.

‘You go very often to Langville, I believe?’ said Miss Herbert.

‘Yes, I do. Really they are so kind. They are delightful girls.’

‘Kate is very pretty, certainly,’ remarked Mr. Herbert, stooping as he
spoke to stroke a cockatoo.

‘Very pretty; but not to be compared to her sister, I think. Miss Isabel
Lang is----’

‘O dear! O dear! Surely you cannot call her pretty!’ said Miss Herbert,
with an almost ludicrous expression of concern.

‘I do. What do you say, Mr. Herbert?’

‘That you have chosen quite a wrong word. But here comes old Forrester to claim his share of attention. Come, Mr. Farrant, if you are anything of a dog-fancier, you must confess this to be a noble fellow;’ and Mr. Herbert expatiated on his merits and points as men are apt to do of a favoured animal.

It was time to break up the party, and Mr. Farrant with reluctance mounted his horse, promising to repeat the visit very soon.

‘A very agreeable young man,’ remarked Miss Herbert, as their guest trotted off.

‘Yes, a pleasant, gentlemanly man—an acquisition—certainly an acquisition,’ returned her brother.

‘Well, I do hope he won’t be falling in love with Issy; I fancied he looked rather conscious when speaking of her.’

‘A true woman’s fancy. Now that the girls have appeared at the balls in Sydney, I suppose every one who speaks to them must be a lover. I thought one might expect a freedom from such folly in the Bush. Depend upon it, Mary, Mr. Farrant has no such thought at present.’

‘Ah, well! we shall see,’ said Miss Herbert, with a very positive nod of the head.

‘I shall ride to Langville for breakfast to-morrow; I have some business to talk over with Lang, and I will make my observations and report them for your benefit,’ remarked Mr. Herbert, carelessly, as he moved away from the verandah into the yard, in a somewhat lounging fashion.
CHAPTER III.

LANGVILLE.

Langville was a new stone house, with a handsome suite of sitting rooms, and every other convenience, including a wide verandah round three sides of the building. The original dwelling was still left standing, half buried in creepers, and was now used for a school-room and spare bedrooms. From the drawing-room windows were seen the farm buildings, forming quite a little village of huts, with a horse-mill, a forge, and a wheelwright's shed, the overseer's cottage, extensive fowl-houses, a good water-hole and stock-yard, all of which Mr. Lang was justly proud of. The road leading up to the house was worse than even the usual average of colonial roads, full of holes and stumps, and Mr. Herbert never failed to remark on this inconsistency every time he went there.

‘Your road is not improved,’ said he to the Miss Langs, as he gave his horse to the servant.

‘Quite good enough,’ said Isabel; ‘a friend is not worth having who fears to encounter a rough road: you must confess there is a beautiful view. I don't believe you have seen anything so pretty in your journey as those hills.’

She pointed to where the morning mist was clearing away from the distant country, and range beyond range looked deeply blue. Then laughing, she said it was all envy that made Mr. Herbert find fault.

‘That view is very fine, certainly,’ said Mr. Herbert; ‘but look there;’ he pointed to the bush at the side of the house, a forest of dead trees, looking like grim ghosts—tall, straight, and white. They had been ‘barked’—that is, killed by cutting away lines of bark, and when dry and dead enough, they were to be set fire to, a short way of clearing ground when labour is scarce.

‘That is enough to spoil any view,’ said Mr. Herbert; ‘but have you been industrious at sketching since I left? Come, where are your views of Darling harbour, and the north shore?’ said he to Isabel.

‘I have none. I have been busy reading lately. I really have not touched a pencil since you left----’

‘What have you been reading? have you subscribed to the library in Sydney?’

‘No; but I have been reading, and reading grave books, too. What do you say to this, and this,’ said she, as they entered the sitting-room, and she pointed to some books on the table.
Mr. Herbert opened them, turned over the leaves, and then looked at the title-page, but said nothing.

‘Ah, Mr. Herbert! very kind of you, I am sure, to come so soon. Wont you step into the other room,’ said Mrs. Lang, who now came in. ‘Looking at the books? you always are fond of books, and so is Issy, I assure you. Mr. Farrant is kind enough to supply her. A very nice young man that is. Issy, my dear, you should cover those books, they are so well bound.’

‘Yes, mamma,’ Isabel answered, while it was evident from the sparkle of fun which rippled all over her face as she glanced at Mr. Herbert, that some joke was coming.

‘Well? What is it? Speak out Issy,’ he said, coming to her side, though there was a little suppressed irritation or annoyance in his manner.

‘Oh, nothing! Only what did that elongation of the lip mean, just now? Are not the books good and desirable?’

‘Good, and desirable, so far as I know. I don't profess to have read all. But of course, of course----’ his words rolled out more rapidly, and the head went up with great effect.

‘Of course, the clergyman of the parish is, or should be, the best judge of that,’ she put in promptly, and looking again very demure and as amiable as possible.

‘Oh!’ said Kate. ‘Mr. Herbert, you have yet to learn what an authority this is come to be. Issy swears by Mr. Farrant in everything.’

To his quick and keen look of question at these words, Isabel answered, without raising her eyes, ‘It is my character. I must obey some one, and I have been so strictly drilled into following advice, that—that, while one adviser was so busy counting fleeces, I was forced to hang myself on to another. At all events, a legitimate one, isn't he, Mr. Herbert?’

‘Legitimate! Of course you are free to do as you like. Reading is, as I have often told you, very desirable. I should say indispensable for a gentlewoman. But, if my memory holds right, you never cared much for it.’

‘I am learning now! I feel a very keen desire for knowledge. You see, an introduction to the great world, meeting all the élite in Sydney, shamed my ignorance. I longed to hide myself. Directly I came home I set myself to learn, and remembered your own words.’

There was something indescribable in the manner and look, as she said this. The comic affectation of a primness, not naturally hers, and yet under all the joke and fun, a touch of heart in her eyes, as she glanced at him, as if to say, ‘don't be angry with me.’

He never could resist her when in this mood, and coming quite close to her now, and looking her straight in the face, he said—
'You remembered my words? Well, Issy, for that—in that you did think of an old friend in his forced absence, and were not wholly taken up with new admirers, I shall strive to forget certain reports I have heard. Give me your hand, child. Is it as it was? I mean, no one has come between and cast me into outer darkness?'

‘Indeed, no! No!’ she said heartily, and giving him her hand, which he clasped between both his own, and finally, not letting it go, he drew it on his arm; when they were summoned to breakfast.

‘But these reports?’ he began, as they went in after the others.
‘About failures, bankruptcies, and so on?’ she asked saucily.
‘No; I speak of reports nearer home, about you, and this district. Did you like your gaiety in Sydney?’

‘Pretty well. It was pleasant to see Kate so admired, though, to be sure, I did get sleepy and tired of sitting out, and being so silent.’

‘Why silent?’
‘Because I had no one to speak to! Kate was sought by every one, but I, poor I, had to look on, and behave ‘pretty’.’

‘Ah! you don't mean that you were overlooked, that you received no attention?’
‘Very little. But it didn't break my heart, as you see.’
‘It is not what I heard. My information was quite different. I expected to find you ‘set up,’ and too proud to speak to me. I was so impatient at being detained up yonder! Really I was uneasy as to what change was coming to the wild little girl I left here.’

‘Afraid lest your office should be taken from you?’
‘What office?’
‘I mean of critic, fault-finder, advice-giver.’
‘To whom?’

‘Oh, as if you didn't know! As if I didn't feel very like a fish out of water, when I had not you to give me weighty and grave advice!’

‘Can I do nothing but advise and find fault? If so, you can't be very rejoiced at my return!’

‘And who said I was?’
‘You are not, then?’

‘Now, don't be disagreeable, Mr. Herbert! Don't begin quarrelling just yet. I am hungry, and here is breakfast ready.’

Mr. Lang, followed by his two boys, joined them presently. ‘Sorry to be late, but I was detained. We've put Venn into the store, and I had to give him a few instructions.’

‘Venn! what is he promoted for?’ said Mr. Herbert.
‘Why, he's a clever chap, sharp as a needle, and if I make it his interest to
serve me, I shall reap the benefit. There's not a cleverer fellow among my men."

‘Nor one with a worse character,’ observed Mr. Herbert, gravely.

‘I can't say much for his morality, certainly,’ said Mr. Lang; ‘but that's nothing to me. He is assigned to me, and I must make the best of him. He has been very sharp about my stray cattle, so I wish to reward him. He knows he can't cheat me in the store.’

‘But will every one else,’ Mr. Herbert said, somewhat sotto voce; then louder, he added—'You don't mean to say you have put such a man over the others? Why, it is offering a premium to vice. Such a person ought to be discouraged in every way, instead of being rewarded.’

‘Oh, I leave that to Mr. Farrant, it is not my business, and I should like to see if any man here would do otherwise. If I choose to patronize a clever man, although he is a convict, I should like to know who is to prevent me.’

Mr. Herbert made no answer, but ate his breakfast in silence. Mr. Lang was ruffled, and found fault with the coffee and the toast.

‘Where are the little ones, and where's Miss Terry?’ he asked.

‘They are in the school-room, Mr. Lang,’ said his wife. ‘It is more convenient for them to breakfast there, and they can begin their studies so much sooner.’

‘Studies indeed! let them learn to boil coffee! I take it that is a far more creditable and more useful thing to know than 'studies!' Isn't it so, Mr. Herbert? A man wants a wife who can give him a comfortable meal, and I assure you, when I first married, and when we lived in that little cottage, Mrs. Lang made better coffee than I ever get now-a-days; the kitchen was close by, and she boiled it herself.’

‘Well, papa, I can assure you mamma made this herself, and it is your fault for staying so long that it is cold,’ said Isabel. ‘But I will get some hot for you.’

‘I beg pardon, Mrs. Lang. No offence, I hope?’ said Mr. Lang, recovering his good humour. ‘I am sure I didn't know you had been so notable of late.’

Before the breakfast party was dispersed, Mr. Farrant was announced. He came to beg Mr. Lang to ride with him, and settle the site for a school-house, and the three gentlemen went off together. In the mean time the ladies were discussing a proposed pic-nic.

‘We must ask the Budds, because they asked us, you know,’ said Mrs. Lang, counting the number of heads on her fingers. ‘And they will bring some of their children, they always do—so say four there.’

‘And the Jollys of course,’ said Isabel.

‘And three from Vine Lodge,’ said Kate.

‘Yes, my dear, and Captain Smith, and Mr. Farrant, and Dr. Marsh, and
that's all, I believe,' said the mother.
‘You've forgotten the Herberts,’ said Isabel.
‘Mr. Herbert is so grave, he is worse than ever; I can't bear him,’ said Kate.
‘Nor I either,’ said Mr. Lang, who came in at the window. ‘And what's more, I won't pay any civility to a man who sets up for a model. He had better be appointed governor here; he is full of new-fangled notions.’
‘He rides a good horse, at any rate,’ remarked Willie, a boy of fifteen.
‘I don't see that it is so very good, for my part, considering he keeps a man always rubbing him. Don't judge horses by a shining coat, my boy!’
Mr. Lang went away, and his wife ran after him to ask a question.
‘This wont do,’ said Isabel to her sister; ‘it will never do to leave out the Herberts; I must go after papa.’
‘O, why trouble yourself about it? That is the way with you, Issy, and you never leave papa alone about Venn. Why not let people take their own way? it is nothing to you.’
‘Nothing to me! it is a great deal to me what my father does, and he is only irritated just for the moment. He will, I know, see that it is right to invite the Herberts, and as to Venn, don't talk of it! To think of that man being our store-keeper, an upper servant, when we know what he is!’
In the course of the day Isabel joined her father in a walk to one of his fields, and contrived to introduce the subject of the pic-nic, and urged the necessity of asking their old friends at Warratah Brush. She found, however, that it was a task of more difficulty than she had anticipated. The subject of the new bridge had been started during the morning, and Mr. Herbert had entirely disagreed with Mr. Lang about it. Mr. Lang was particularly sore at being opposed in anything he had in view, and was very angry with both Mr. Herbert and Mr. Farrant.
But Isabel was a favourite, and as she leant on his arm and talked, his angry mood passed away. He pointed to his crop of green barley with pleasure, and showed her where he meant to clear away the bush and make a vineyard. They mounted the hill, which commanded a view of the greatest part of the cultivated land, and on all sides almost as far as they could see it was Langville property. The new and pretty house just showed its white chimney-tops, the blacksmith's hammer was heard in the distance, and nearer at hand a sheep-bell told them that one of the numerous flocks was not far off.
‘Yes,’ said Mr. Lang, ‘tis a nice spot, and it is a little improved since we came here. ’Twas thick forest then, and we lived in a slab cottage. Ah! there goes a wanga wanga pigeon, your mother would like some of those for dinner. I must send out the boys with the gun.’
The pleasant walk had its full effect on Mr. Lang, and his daughter gained her point.

‘Well, then, we may ask the Herberths, papa?’ said she, as she separated from him at the door.

‘Aye, aye, Issy, you women are all alike,’ and whistling a favourite tune he climbed the fence and proceeded to his farmyard.

Isabel reported her success to her mother and sister.

The former said, ‘Well, I think, my dears, it is best really to ask them. You know Mr. Herbert is quite the gentleman and very clever, and Mrs. Vesey thinks a great deal of this. I think the Herberths would be hurt, and justly so, if we overlooked them. I am sure I have always encouraged Mr. Herbert to come here; it is so good for young men to see society.’

‘Well, then, Kate,’ said her sister, rather impatiently, ‘we'll go to-morrow and ask them.’

‘We? I don't see why you say we, Issy, it is all your own doing.’

‘O, you are Miss Lang, you know; it will come better from you. However, if you don't like the ride, I'll go with Willie.’

‘O, do go, my dear Kate,’ said her mother.

And Kate, who liked being asked more than once, at last consented to accompany her brother and sister.

Mr. Herbert and his sister were at breakfast the next morning when they heard merry voices and horses' feet pass the window.

‘It is the Langs, Kate and Issy and William; what can they be come for, I wonder?’ said Miss Herbert.

Mr. Herbert rose, and on seeing Isabel jump from her horse and knock at the little verandah gate, he walked out. Willie rode round to the stock-yard to see the foals branded, and Kate began with—‘Mr. Herbert, papa and mamma hope you will, you and your sister, I mean, join us in a pic-nic to the Sugar Loaf next week, and . . .’ here her horse fidgeted at the flies, and Isabel took up the speech—‘and come the evening before, if you please; we can give you beds. The Veseys will be there, and perhaps the Jollys; we want you particularly to show us the way by the flats. And don't you think the gig can go? We want Miss Terry to come so much, and she won't ride, you know.’

‘Yes, a gig can go, or you can have our spring-cart; they must get out at the bridge, it would not be safe to go over that, I think.’

‘Well, then, you will come? Thursday week is the day. But you must come on Wednesday.’

‘I see my sister is settling it all with Kate,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘so come and let me show you my favourite little filly, she is worth seeing!’

Isabel followed him to the stock-yard, where all the foals were collected.
‘I suppose that is Pearl,’ said she, pointing to a milk-white creature with slender legs.

‘Yes, there is Pearl, she is quite tame and gentle, she will make a beautiful lady's horse!’

‘How I should like to ride her,’ said Isabel.

‘Will you try? she is broken in. Let me put the side-saddle on.’

‘Yes do, Issy,’ said Willie. ‘I saw Jack riding her the other day, and he said she was quite gentle.’

Willie ran off for the saddle, and in a few minutes Pearl was caught, and Isabel seated on her back. She arched her neck and took a bound or two, but Mr. Herbert had hold of her, and Isabel was too good a horsewoman to feel the slightest fear.

‘Try her paces, Issy, round the paddock,’ said Willie.

He took down the slip-rail as he spoke, and Isabel put the beautiful creature into a canter, and was half round the paddock before Mr. Herbert and Willie had proceeded more than a few steps.

‘Doesn't she ride well, that's all,’ cried he, in boyish delight. ‘And that's a beauty, Mr. Herbert; how much would you take for her?’

Mr. Herbert did not answer—his sister called him, and he had to go back, and give a quick assent to the plan she was proposing for the pic-nic. Before he returned to the rail Isabel had stopped and was patting Pearl's neck and praising her.

‘Now try her walk,’ said Mr. Herbert, and he kept by her side. ‘Just come this way, and I will show you the site I have fixed on for a house,’ and he took down another slip-rail, and calling to Willie to put it up again, he led the way through the bush at the back of the house.

Willie did not care about the site, he went back to the stock-yard and talked to the stockman.

Kate seeing that her sister had gone off, accepted Miss Herbert's offer to look at her bees. The bee-house was at the bottom of a vine-walk in the garden. A low fence divided it from a crop of green barley, and this fence was one mass of passion-flower and the multiflora rose intermixed. Miss Herbert was fond of her garden and bees, and was proud to show them.

‘Look at this native fig-tree,’ said she, ‘isn't it a magnificent shrub? You don't know what pains and trouble I had to save it last summer in the drought! But now it repays me. It is such a rich dark green to rest one's eyes on after the blue gum-trees!’

‘How nice it must be to have so tidy a garden!’ said Kate. ‘We never can make anything grow, and papa will not have a proper garden made because of the expense and trouble.’

Miss Herbert laughed, and said it was absurd for Mr. Lang to talk of
expense.

‘Now he had built such a fine house he ought to have a good garden, and also a good road up to his house.’

‘Very true, Miss Herbert. But times are very bad, and I assure you, papa is very uneasy. He almost thought we could not go to the Government Ball on the Queen’s birthday. But, however, mamma has managed it, so it is settled, luckily for us, for it would be so odd not to go, and Issy is to ‘come out’ regularly then. And we are to have new dresses. Only think of the Whites! They are so curious to know what we shall wear, and they have spread a report that papa has sent to England for pink satins! They only did that out of spite, they know it is not true. Mamma says simple dresses are the best, and Mrs. Vesey, who is going, and knows all about such things, is only going to wear white muslin.’

‘Well, you are preparing in time, at any rate,’ said Miss Herbert, gathering flowers as she slowly walked on, and listened to Kate's chatter. ‘There are three months yet to the ball.’

‘Why, we do think of it, of course, there has been so much talk as to whether we go or not, and we lead such dull lives!’

‘How very intimate you seem to be with Mrs. Vesey already,’ remarked Miss Herbert.

‘Yes, haven't we got on? And what a charming person she is! So clever and stylish and fashionable! By the way, I am so glad your brother is gone. I never dare talk before him!’

‘Indeed! you surprise me! Your sister does not appear to mind it.’

‘No, not at all. But they have always been such allies, you see. Issy rattles on a good deal with every one. Mamma says that it is a high time for her to remember she is a young lady, and grown up, and so on. Mr. Herbert is so accustomed to treat her as a child. That is the worst of going on for ever with the same people. There is poor Tom Jolly! I am sure I don’t mean to be unkind; but really, if he expects that I can go on, being such particular friends now, he is wrong. It can't be! I tell Issy the same about your brother. You can't think,’ she went on, not waiting for any comment or answer, but changing the affected tone to one of more open self-content, ‘how much Issy was admired at Sydney! She was well dressed, and really looked very well. Here, you know, she has never been much thought of; but there she made quite an impression, I can tell you.’

‘In Sydney! I dare say. But if she doesn't learn a quieter manner she will find it will end there, with an impression, as you call it. Gentlemen may like to laugh and joke, but they would not like that manner in a wife.’

‘No; I often tell Issy so, and so does mamma. But papa never sees a fault in her. And Miss Terry makes so much of her. Somehow people don't seem
to mind her way so much. Do you know—please don't tell any one, though—that Mr. Farrant admires Issy very much indeed. He is so very often at our house, and lends her books and all that. By the way, what will Mr. Herbert say to it, I wonder? But where are they gone? We ought to be on our way home.

‘What can it be to my brother whether or no Mr. Farrant admires your sister?’ exclaimed Miss Herbert, with some indignation. ‘He has always looked upon her as a little girl—nothing more. He has been very kind, but I assure you, Kate, that----’

‘No, I know! Of course! I didn't mean anything. Why, he is quite like an uncle to Issy! But, dear Miss Herbert, let us go after them, please.’

Meanwhile, Mr. Herbert had been leading Pearl up the ascent, clearing a way through the scrub, or underwood, till he came to a small cleared piece of ground overlooking the cottage and settlement of huts.

‘This would be the place for a house,’ he said.

‘The Parsonage is the prettiest place here,’ Isabel answered.

‘Not prettier than this might be, I am sure. I hear you have made a sketch of the Parsonage.’ And Mr. Herbert patted Pearl's neck.

‘Yes, for Mr. Farrant to send home. It is very nice having him—and then the Vesey's. Weren't you surprised at all these changes?’

‘Yes. By the way, Isabel, I hope you are on our side about this bridge?’

Mr. Herbert presently said.

‘Indeed, I am on papa's side.’

‘What, if I prove to you that the other is the right line for the public? Come, listen to reason.’

‘I never could. My reasoning goes to make me follow papa.’

‘Absurd! Where would that take you if carried out? Women are all alike, I do believe!’

‘Yes—always right,’ she said, demurely.

‘Are you and I to quarrel, then, over this vexed question?’

‘You know best. I am full of peace, I assure you.’

‘Own that you think our view the right one, and I will excuse your perhaps natural wish to please your father.’

‘I can't own what I don't know.’

‘You ought to know—you ought to influence your father. What is your sense given you for? Isabel, I hoped great things----’

‘Hope told a flattering tale! But, come, I will use my influence and use my sense. Mr. Herbert, do give up this once—just for the sake of peace.’

She put on her most loving manner, and touched his arm lightly with her whip.

‘Foolish girl!’ he laughed. ‘Seriously, though, I dread all this business.
Why, no one with any reason can deny that Bengala Creek is the place for the bridge. The other road makes the way at least four miles longer.

‘O dear! how I do wish there were no such things as bridges and all those dull things. I am so tired of the subject!’

‘Then let us change it. But some day I must try to convert you yet. I must not forget to show you a book of sketches I bought for you.’

‘For me?’

‘Yes—I filled it with studies of trees, and even huts. I thought you might like it. And I have some queer tales to tell about some of the scenes.’

‘It was very civil of you,’ she said, evidently pleased. ‘But don’t expect a speech, for I am a bad hand at thanking.’

‘Never mind! But I shall claim my guerdon some day, remember. Let us take a turn this way. You are in no hurry, I hope, for I have a great deal to say.’

‘What is it?’

‘Ah—well! I hardly remember at this moment. Do you like Mrs. Vesey?’

‘Do I like her? Well—hem—can’t say. She is immensely amusing and sharp. You have no idea how she cuts us all up, one after another—even you—your peculiarities don’t escape her.’

‘Pleasant, certainly! but what are my peculiarities, as you are pleased to call them?’

‘O! I suppose you don’t think yourself the least peculiar! O, no! Mr. Herbert is just like every one else. He never stands for ten minutes together staring into the air over his chin, or never sits silent during the whole of dinner, only vouchsafing a ‘Pshaw’ to express his utter contempt for all the party—he never——’

‘Come, come, Isabel—nonsense! besides, remember I have been many years in the Bush.’

‘Indeed! Are you so very sure you were better behaved before? Poor Bush! you have to bear the faults of a great many. What a wreck is here!—the once accomplished gentleman . . . . . . Oh dear me! who would come to the Bush?’

‘You are the most absurd girl I ever met with.’

‘No wonder! I was born and reared in the Bush!’

Mr. Herbert made no answer to this. Isabel was accustomed to his ‘silent fits,’ as she called them, and she wished to see how long it would last now. So she said nothing. When they reached the paddock, they saw Kate and Willie evidently looking for them.

‘Pleasant dreams to you, Mr. Herbert,’ said Isabel, laughing, and at the same time touching Pearl with her whip smartly, at which the spirited animal bounded forward, and before Mr. Herbert recovered from his
surprise, Isabel had crossed the paddock, and was dismounted and laughing at her own feat, while Willie led Pearl back and called for his sister's pony. Before it was all settled, and while Kate was reminding Miss Herbert of the hour and the day fixed upon for their coming, Mr. Herbert came up, trying to look very grave and dignified, though somewhat out of breath.

‘Wait for the sketch-book. I will not be one moment.—I suppose Willie is to be trusted to carry it?’ said Mr. Herbert, producing a neatly folded parcel.

‘I will not trust him—give it to me, Mr. Herbert,’ said Isabel. ‘Thank you,’ she added; ‘you are an excellent man, notwithstanding all I said just now, and, if you are inclined to be sociable, you may as well ride to Langville this evening. You have not heard Miss Terry sing; and—and—it is very likely—not impossible—that Mr. Farrant will be there, and, if so, there will be duets. I think that even your fastidious taste would be pleased—Good bye!’ and she kissed her hand and cantered after her sister.

‘Issy, how could you ask him for this evening? I'm sure papa wont be over pleased,’ said Kate.

‘Never mind, Kate; papa will say nothing if there is music. I don't suppose he will really come, but I want to see him and Miss Terry together; and he is in such a very good humour—you need not be at all afraid of him to-day.’

There were visitors at Langville. Amelia Jolly and her brother were standing in the verandah when the Langs rode up to the house.

Amelia was rather older than either Kate or Isabel, a thoroughly good-humoured though plain girl, who thought Langville House and its inhabitants quite perfection. Her brother, a fine, well-grown young man, had been a devoted admirer of Kate's ever since he was a boy at the King's School, Paramatta. It had been coquettishly encouraged by Kate, even though her head was turned at a 'finishing' school in Sydney, where she had been taught, among other accomplishments, to look upon herself as a beauty and a fortune, and with far higher pretensions than to be worshipped by Tom. Mrs. Lang had condescendingly allowed the 'poor young man' to come whenever he liked to Langville, because it was such an advantage to him to see a little society, and the Jollies were very worthy, good kind of people, and Amelia always properly sensible of Mrs. and the Miss Langs' kind notice. Mr. Lang liked the young man, and thought it all right that the young ones should enjoy themselves as they liked, though he said he wondered at Tom's taste; 'Issy would make ten times as good a wife!'

But Kate had lately received a great deal of attention from others, and Tom's blunt, honest manners failed to please her this morning. She gave him short answers, and retired to a sofa, where she whispered to the
admiring Amelia an account of her visit to Sydney, and all the gaieties she
had entered into. Isabel happened to be busy in the store-room, and poor
Tom was driven to look over some of Mr. Farrant's books which lay on the
table. At last, Willie came to his relief, and proposed a visit to the stock-
yard. The guests were invited to remain the rest of the day, as a matter of
course, and according to Isabel's prediction, Mr. Farrant made his
appearance about tea-time.

He was a very constant visitor, always having a book to show, or a chant
he wanted the young ladies to try, or some business on which to consult
Mr. Lang.

‘Will you sing ‘Lilla's a Lady,’ Miss Lang?’ asked Tom.
Isabel laughed.

‘Miss Lang! do you hear, Kate? It isn't natural Tom, it wont do.’
Tom coloured up as he said something about ‘old friends, and Sydney,
and taking a liberty,’ which no one heard so as to understand.

‘May I open the piano?’ he asked.

‘O yes, if you like, and Miss Terry will sing,’ said Kate.

‘Ah, but she is not ready—just that one song, Kate—I haven't heard it so
long,’ he said, coming close to the back of her chair.

‘O, don't tease, Tom! I'm not going to sing to-night; and as to that song, I
positively hate it. It is as old as the hills.’
Tom sighed but pressed no more.

‘Girls!’ said Mr. Lang, rousing up from a nap in his easy chair; ‘girls!
what are you doing? What's the good of my buying a grand pianoforte, and
paying such a long bill for teaching you to  sing, Kate, if I am never to hear
it? Come, Kate, bestir yourself!’

‘Papa!’ exclaimed Kate, ‘how you do talk! I am out of practice.’

‘Miss Terry will sing, papa,’ said Isabel, standing behind him and
stroking his hair in a coaxing way.

‘Ah, she is very good-natured and never wants pressing, Issy. You may
both take a leaf out of her book----’ but Isabel playfully put her hand
before his mouth and said hush as the first chords were struck.

Presently Mr. Farrant's voice was heard, full, deep, and mellow, in
‘Comfort ye my people.’

The talking and whispering was hushed, the little girls standing quite
still, watching every turn in the singer's face with open-mouthed attention
and wonder. The boys looked as if they thought it a bad substitute for their
sisters' songs, but they sat very quiet for some time and then crept out of
the room unobserved, to amuse themselves elsewhere. Song followed song.
Miss Terry's voice was clear and sweet. Daylight had faded, and Mrs.
Lang, in the middle of her assiduous beating time with her foot, had
dropped into a sly nap, very comfortable and unseen. Kate was lounging back on the sofa by her friend Amelia, Tom taking quiet observations and looking a little unhappy. Mr. Lang, who really loved music, was listening with all his soul, while Isabel had ensconced herself behind his chair, and sitting on a low stool, had buried her face in her hands.

‘That is a great treat! Thank you, ma'am!’ said Mr. Lang, drawing a long breath, as candles were brought in. ‘Eh, Kate? What mamma—asleep? Aye, as sound as a top.—O no!—of course—I understand, only shutting her eyes as usual! Mrs. Lang never is guilty of a nap, eh, Issy? Issy!—where's the girl gone?’

‘Here, papa,’ she said, coming round.

‘Go and play a tune. You must not leave all the work to Miss Terry.’

‘O no, please! Nothing more after that. I can't, indeed, daddy!’

Mr. Lang left the room presently to give some forgotten orders, and Mr. Farrant pressed Isabel to take some part in a trio, which she declined. He spoke of his love for music, hoping he should not ‘bore’ them, and she answered, but in so low a voice that Kate said—

‘Why, I do believe you have been asleep, Issy! Have you?’

‘No. Yet I believe I have been half dreaming too. It is very odd, but that last song made me think of our walk on the north shore that night, by moonlight. Do you remember, Kate? Well, and it also reminded me of that priest—what was his name?’

‘What, Father Mornay?’ said Kate; ‘what an idea! What connexion can Miss Terry's song possibly have with a moonlight night and a Roman Catholic priest?’ And Kate laughed.

‘My dear Isabel,’ put in her mother, ‘that is just one of your fastidious notions’ (Mrs. Lang always used the word fastidious for anything she was not able to express clearly), ‘which you and Mr. Herbert encourage each other in. It is foolish, my love, very. Besides, it is hardly right or safe to be in the habit of alluding to a Catholic priest so lightly. The less you have to do with them the better.’

‘O, dear mamma, I have nothing to do with them!’ cried Isabel, amused.

‘This Dr. Mornay we met one day at the Kearneys, at North Shore; and certainly it is very odd, I don't know that I have thought of him from that day to this, but Miss Terry's song brought him quite before me, his voice and his look and all.’

‘Is he handsome?’ half whispered Amelia Jolly, who had risen, saying she must prepare for her ride home. ‘Eh, Issy, is he handsome? because once I saw----’

What Miss Jolly saw did not transpire, for her brother interrupted her by urging expedition, and Kate offered to help her to dress, rather in a fit of
perversity, and because poor Tom had come up in the last vain hope of having a few words.

Soon the sound of the horses' feet were heard clattering down the road. The rest of the party stood in the verandah looking at the brilliant, unspeakably calm light from the stars. Bats were whirling heavily in rapid flight around their heads. The clustering passion-flower waved gently to and fro. Mr. Farrant, Miss Terry, and Kate, went out to take a turn; Isabel remained where she was. It was very quiet. But the song echoed still in her ear. It was the first really good music she had ever heard. Something within was stirred—something she could not express weighed upon her, partly pain, partly pleasure. She strove to rally herself, feeling half ashamed at the new emotion; and, when presently her father came into the room, and finding no one there, stepped out to where she was, she put her arm into his, and stooping, kissed his hand.

‘What is it, child? What ails ye?’ he asked, struck with something unusual about his child.

‘Nothing! nothing at all, daddy! I have been thinking; that's all.’

‘Thinking, truly! Don't do it, Issy dear. Take my advice, and never be what you call “thinking.” Action is the thing. Thinking is the ruin of half the men and three parts of the women.’

‘Is it? Well, but how can one help it, after hearing music?’

‘What has music to do with thinking, eh, girl? Bless you, music is the best of all things to set one off, lead one to battle or anything—just the contrary of “thinking.” By the way—there has been a terrible row again about that girl, Nelly. It seems Venn is sweet upon her.’

‘Venn! O papa, don't let him have her!’

‘Why not? A capital good thing for her.’

‘I can't bear him. Besides, she is promised already.’

‘Gammon! Promised! She hasn't two ideas in her head, and yet for the sake of a pair of innocent blue eyes and a sweet voice, all the men in the place are making themselves fools about her! They say she ran away from her step-mother, and was found in Lynch's hut. The Macleans are furious.’

‘That woman does treat her miserably. I wish you would let Lynch marry her. He is very fond of her, papa.’

‘I'll grant no such a favour to him. He deserves a flogging at this moment, for an insolent, sulky brute as he is. Now, Issy, don't be encouraging such a notion, for I am poz—send for the girl, and tell her to be steady and marry Venn. It is the best thing she can do.’

So saying, they overtook the others, and Isabel was startled by one of her brothers jumping out upon her from a bush. Passing an arm round her waist, he, considering that he had been silent enough, began a whole string
of stories of alarms about bushrangers and ghosts. Mr. Farrant entered pleasantly into the strain, and told his wonders too; till he laughingly declared, he must go at once, or he should be afraid to face his ride home. Offers to remain the night were pressed upon him, but he persisted in being obliged to go. Willie, charmed by his stories, was so polite as to fetch his horse, and then go a little way to open the gate for him. He returned rubbing his hands in glee.

‘A jolly fellow, isn't he?’

‘O Willie!’ exclaimed his sisters, in horror at the epithet.

‘I wonder, does he come here courting?’ the boy said, which set Kate off; and brought upon himself a scolding from Isabel, and a gentle reprimand from Miss Terry. The prayer-bell ringing, they all went in by the window.
CHAPTER IV.

VINE LODGE.

Vol. I

‘Really, my dear John,’ said Miss Herbert, a morning or two after the visit from the Langville party, ‘I think you ought to call on Mr. Vesey, eh?’

‘Hem,’ said Mr. Herbert, twisting his moustaches, and then stretching himself after a diligent perusal of the Sydney Herald.¹

‘I never pay morning visits,’ he added, presently.

‘Ah, but you should. You ought to come forward here and take your proper place; besides, these are strangers and gentlefolks, and as we are, it seems, to meet them at the Langs, it would be but civil, I do think, eh?’

‘They are not much in our style, I fancy; but, however, I have nothing very particular to do to-day, so shall we both ride there?’

Miss Herbert readily consented to accompany him, and they were soon on their way to Vine Lodge.

‘Mrs. Vesey was staying at Langville, was she?’ asked Mr. Herbert, as he rode lazily along, just in front of his sister, for the path was narrow; they having preferred a short bush cut to the usual road.

‘Yes, Mrs. Vesey came with them when they returned from Sydney. She and Mr. Fitz were guests at Langville, while Mr. Vesey prepared his new house for them.’

‘It was in a wretched state of ruin, as I recollect,’ said Mr. Herbert. ‘I heard of Vesey up the country—he has money, it is said.’

‘Very likely; so Mr. Budd says—and he is sure to know. I understand from our friend, Miss Warner, in Sydney, that Kate was very much talked of for that Mr. Fitz.’

‘You have told me that so often!’ said Mr. Herbert, impatiently. ‘Hallo,’ added he, as they came to a fence which commanded a view of the house, ‘grand alterations, I declare; ha! that's an improvement.’

A few minutes' riding brought them to the door, at which Mr. Herbert rapped with his whip handle; knockers and bells being very rare, or quite unknown in the district.

Mrs. Vesey's slight, well-dressed figure appeared at the open window, and with her glass at her eye, she reconnoitred her visitors. On seeing who it was, she stepped quickly into the verandah, holding out both hands, and expressing the greatest possible delight at seeing both the lady and gentleman; ‘it was so kind, so very neighbourly—gentlemen generally were such wretched hands at visiting.’ Miss Herbert was carefully
dismounting during this warm welcome, and her brother only frowned, while he led off the horses to the stable, answering to Mrs. Vesey's apologies at there being no man—‘that he was quite accustomed to the work, and never trusted his horses to any colonial servant.’

The parlour was scantily furnished, the floor bare, and the walls only whitewashed; but the lady had contrived to make it look very habitable. A few flowers tastily arranged in tumblers stood on the table—a handsome work-box lay open; spirited sketches and a few finished drawings were ‘littered’ about with studied negligence; and last, but not least, a harp and music-stand gave a certain air to the room, which at once struck Miss Herbert.

Mr. Herbert soon came back accompanied by Mr. Vesey, who was good looking, with a very fresh, clear complexion. He had not much manner, and he made a great deal of sound when he talked, filling up gaps with pompous hems and haws, and he also had rather a trick of leaving his sentences unfinished for his wife to conclude for him, or if she were otherwise engaged, Mr. Vesey drew in his breath with his teeth shut, which had a very significant effect. He had a very high opinion of his wife, though to hear him sometimes, people might run away with an idea that he was a perfectly tyrannical husband, and ‘Laura’ a mere cipher. ‘Certainly,’ as Mrs. Lang remarked to her husband, ‘Mr. Fitz had much more to say, and ten times more manners, but then Mr. Vesey was very good-natured, and had a very handsome fortune.’

‘Do you begin to feel settled?’ asked Miss Herbert, by way of saying something.

‘Why—hem—aw—settled? why, hardly . . .’ ‘O, we're in a horrid rummage!’ said Mrs. Vesey, interrupting her husband. ‘It is indeed nothing short of one of Hercules' labours to make this place habitable.’

‘It is thought a good farm,’ remarked Mr. Herbert.

‘Ah! well, of course, that is the point—aw—hem; ladies . . . .’

‘Make great sacrifices when in an unlucky moment they consent to emigrate, don't you think so, Miss Herbert. It is very much like being buried alive! Just imagine, with so many families in the district—that's the term, I believe?—and not even a book-club! How can one exist? How do you manage, Miss Herbert?’

Miss Herbert thus appealed to, in a grave manner, began to explain how she occupied herself, how very different her life now was to that she had been accustomed to. And Mrs. Vesey nodded and shook her head, and seemed to listen with the greatest sympathy and attention, drawing out the old and well-loved history of Bath, and Bath friends.

‘Laura!’ said Mr. Vesey; ‘what was the name of hem—that—that fellow,
you know; a neighbour, you know—aw—of your father's; kept hounds, you know . . . .

‘Sir Charles Herbert, do you mean?’

‘Yes, exactly . . . gentlemanly man—hem—any relation of yours, hey?’

‘My uncle,’ Mr. Herbert answered, drily; and then rising and going to the window he reminded his sister that he had a long round to take before they went home.

‘O, positively!’ exclaimed Mrs. Vesey, jumping up; ‘you shan't go in such a hurry. Have pity on me, Mr. Herbert, I pray, and remember how long it is since I have met a rational creature. I can't—Mr. Vesey won't allow you to cut your visit short in this way. My harp is strung and tuned, and I want you to hear a new waltz.’

‘By Jove!’ exclaimed Mr. Vesey, striding to the window, and peeping under Mr. Herbert's arm, ‘who on earth—hem!—who are these? why, it is what's-her-name, I declare!’

‘Miss Lang!’ said his wife, running to the other window; while Miss Herbert, not having heard what was said, followed as soon as she could gather up her habit.

‘Kate and Jem Lang,’ she said; ‘and who are they in the gig?’

‘That's little Miss what's-her-name, and—hem—Laura—they will stay, you know, aw—for . . . .’

‘Lunch, certainly. Call Arthur, Mr. Vesey, will you; it is utterly out of the question that I can entertain all single handed—pray, I beseech you, not to go . . . .’ she turned as she spoke to where Mr. Herbert had stood, but he was gone; he and Mr. Vesey had stepped out of the window, and were assisting the ladies to dismount. Mrs. Vesey repeated her request to Miss Herbert, who answered, it must rest with her brother, she had no objection to remain.

The dining-room was small; a narrow, ill-shaped room, but, with a little clever contrivance, it held all the party.

‘Well—hem!’—said Mr. Vesey, as he handed Miss Herbert to a chair. ‘This is what I call, a what's-is-name, pleasant kind of thing. I hate, you know, ceremony, and—aw—what shall I help you to? Laura, what's that?’ and as he surveyed the prettily laid out dishes, he devoutly hoped none of the guests were very hungry, and heartily wished ‘Laura’ would undertake to carve for the party she had pressed into her service.

Mr. Herbert expressed his dislike to anything in the shape of lunch, and as there was but little room, he stood by the window, behind Mrs. Vesey's chair.

‘Well, we shall muster all the district soon!’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert; ‘here is Tom Jolly!’
‘Ho, Jolly Tom, bid him come in; he is my especial delight,’ said Mr. Fitz, with much gravity, and he contrived to put Jolly Tom a little out of countenance as he rose and bowed very low, and said he supposed he was hungry, and smelt the cold beef; but the more the merrier, and so on, looking hard at the somewhat shy young man all the time; while Mr. Vesey muttered to himself about a ‘confounded shabby affair for so many mouths,’ and Mrs. Vesey's terrible eye-glass was up, while she thanked Mr. T. Jolly over and over again for being so very kind as to take the trouble of paying them a visit.

‘Well, ma'am, to say the truth, I met Willie Lang, and he told me I should find the Miss Langs here, and as I had a message for them, you see, I thought I couldn't do better than follow. How do, Kate,’ he said, stretching out his arm behind Mr. Fitz to reach her, and then colouring all over at the polite bow he received, instead of the hearty shake he intended to give.

Isabel came to his relief. ‘I am so glad you came Tom! will you come here? There is plenty of room.’

But Tom was no lunch eater either, and rather awkwardly, though with the most good-humoured face possible, he retreated to where Mr. Herbert had taken his station, and they were soon in full talk. When lunch was over, Mrs. Vesey proposed going to look at the garden; Mr. Fitz led the way with Kate; Tom watched them, but did not appear disposed to follow, till Isabel laughed, and blushing as she spoke, beckoned him to her side, and then taking his arm, she led him away.

‘Did you see that?’ exclaimed Miss Herbert, looking at Miss Terry, at the same time making a movement with her hands to express astonishment and pity.

‘I assure you it is all from high spirits,’ said Miss Terry, smiling. ‘I assure you, Miss Herbert, she is a very simple-minded, true-hearted girl.’

‘Ah, you are so kind in judging others,’ answered Miss Herbert, laying her hand on Miss Terry's arm; ‘and now will you allow me to introduce my brother to you? John!’ and she turned back to him, refusing to listen to Miss Terry's assurance that she had been already introduced, and as she formally led him up to Miss Terry with an air of pride, as much as to say, ‘Look at him, how different from every one else!’ there was the peculiar inquiring expression of eye, so often seen in deaf people, as she watched the movement of his lips. After this, Miss Herbert stepped back to join Mrs. Vesey, who had gone to fetch her parasol.

In the midst of Mrs. Vesey's explanations of plans for improving the garden, Miss Herbert found time and opportunity to observe that her brother was making himself agreeable to the very pretty little governess whom she patronised. He was evidently pleased and pleasing, and this put
his sister into very good humour. Soon, however, a sound of merry ringing laughter made them all look up. It was Isabel: she had made a bet with Mr. Vesey that she would mount a ladder which stood against part of the house where they were repairing the roof. Mr. Vesey was sure no lady had nerve for it, and Isabel, thus dared, mounted it and sat herself on the roof, holding by a chimney. Mr. Vesey clapped his hands, and declared she was a spirited girl, and then in his excitement he proceeded to take away the ladder, leaving her in a somewhat giddy position. Isabel, however, would own no fear. She sat still, and only laughed, while Tom stood by looking as if he thought Mr. Vesey was going rather too far. When Miss Herbert saw it, she turned sharp round and said it gave her vertigo even to look at her. Mrs. Vesey spied at her and laughed. Miss Terry looked alarmed, and earnestly begged Mr. Vesey to put back the ladder.

‘No, that I wont; ha! why, she isn't giddy, you know, at all! She has been badgering me, hem! and faith, you know it's all fair play. If she'll own she's giddy . . . .’

But Isabel shook her head.

‘Give me this, if you please,’ said Mr. Herbert, in an authoritative manner, at the same time taking the ladder from Mr. Vesey, and placing it against the house. He planted it firm, and then said—‘Come down, Isabel, and come backwards.’

She coloured up, but obeyed in silence. When she reached the ground she laughed again, and threatened revenge on Mr. Vesey.

‘How could you be so silly?’ said Mr. Herbert.

‘Silly! I think I was very brave.’

‘You might have broken a limb—your spirits run away with you;’ and Mr. Herbert looked grave.

‘I know what runs away with some one else,’ she answered, still laughing; ‘but however, as I don't mean to acknowledge myself silly, or to say I am sorry, and am not in a humour for lecturing, I wish you good-bye! Come, Tom, let us go into the garden.’

She ran on, followed by Tom and Mr. Herbert. Presently she stopped, and leaning against the fence, said—

‘Why don't you go to Miss Terry, Mr. Herbert?’

‘Because I had rather stay here—I mean to see that you play no more pranks.’

‘But we don't want you, do we, Tom? Come, now, I am sure you like Miss Terry—don't you?’

‘I don't know her much as yet,’ said he, looking half-amused.

‘I want you to cultivate her acquaintance, and I know so well what you will say to her—’Such a dreadful girl is that Isabel! so vulgar! so
boisterous! Do teach her a little of your own gentleness.’

Mr. Herbert and Tom both laughed as she imitated the former.

‘You flatter yourself too much, Isabel. How do you know we have not better subjects to talk of than yourself?’

‘Why, I saw such grim displeasure on your brow just now, it is so natural you should give vent to it, since you know you dare not now take me to task.’

‘I have something else to say to you,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘but I see you are in no mood to hear me.’

‘What is it about?’

‘I’ll tell you if you will leave off joking and listen. Ah,’ seeing Tom walk away, ‘I am glad he is gone. Now listen. I want to have some serious conversation with you. I must ask you something.’

‘How solemn! Are you sure that I shall answer, Mr. Herbert?’

‘Pshaw, Isabel,’ he said, somewhat impatiently, ‘I am tired of joking.’

‘Thank you, sir, you are very complimentary!’ said she, curtseying low.

‘Good morning;’ and she climbed the fence before he knew what she was about, and in another minute was begging Kate to ask for their gig and horses. Mr. Fitz protested against this, but Isabel was firm; Jem was despatched to the stable, and the ladies were soon putting on bonnets and riding skirts. Mr. Fitz politely walked by Kate and her brother to the slip rails, and Miss Terry was begging Isabel not to flourish about her whip, and ‘to please to look at the horse, and not at Tom Jolly!’ but Isabel had many last words for him and messages to his mother, and as she gave him a hearty shake by the hand, tears stood in his eyes. Isabel talked to the horse, who was eager to get on, but once more, to Miss Terry's alarm, she pulled up the reins, and turning round, nodded to Mr. Herbert.

‘Good-bye!’ she said. He took off his hat and bowed.

‘Just as you please,’ she said to herself, though loud enough for Miss Terry to hear. Then touching the horse with her whip, they dashed over the rough new-made road in a way which made Mr. Vesey stare and shrug his shoulders.
CHAPTER V.
THE PETITION.

Vol. I

It was some little time before either of the ladies spoke; but when the horse pulled up at a hill, Miss Terry, with a sigh of relief, said—‘Well, my dear Isabel, I was wondering if the horse was running away!’

Isabel laughed. ‘Were you really afraid! I beg your pardon; but do you know what a relief it is sometimes to drive or ride or run fast, as it happens? It is such a cure for vexations! There! I am all right again now, as cool as possible!’

‘What had happened to put you out, may I ask?’ said Miss Terry, smiling.

‘Ah! thereby hangs a tale! I'll tell you all about it one day. Miss Terry, what do you think of our society? you have seen all now. Mr. Herbert is our last lion.’

‘I shall answer by asking your opinion. I know but little of any of them, and am not quick at becoming acquainted.’

‘How cautious you are! Well, no wonder, poor little timid soul as you are, suddenly brought into these wild parts, among such a rough set! What do I think of them? Well, let me see, first our friends the Herberts; the lady is a mixture, she holds us very cheap, and yet can't do without us, she is an affectionate sister, though rather exigeante,¹ as we were taught in our vocabularies. She is not bad-hearted, and not good-tempered. She does not like being Miss to the end of her days, and yet finds no one worthy of alliance with the Herberts—The Herberts! I will own to you in confidence, it sounds better than the Langs, but names are fiddlesticks . . . .’

‘My dear Isabel again! Now that is one of the expressions I protest against. What can you mean by it?’

‘Oh, it stands for nonsense, humbug, and all sorts of things; I think it is an innocent kind of word after all, it comes out so plump too, 'fiddlesticks.' But to please you, I'll eschew it, indeed I will. You don't say, ‘how vulgar; Issy!’ like Kate, or order me to be more careful, like Mr. Herbert. By the bye, I always enjoy horrifying him of all things in the world.’

‘Well, so I guessed from what I saw to-day; but I suppose he takes it as you mean it?’

‘Oh, not always; besides, there is such a thing as being in earnest in joke. Do you understand? I don't see any use in being afraid of flesh and blood,
even when ornamented with moustachios. I always defy Mr. Herbert, and we give each other rap for rap, I always coming round to sweet temper the soonest. But how do you like him?’

‘He is very much what you led me to expect, only perhaps more agreeable.’

‘I saw he was on his good behaviour to you. Well! I am glad you like him, and I am sure he will like you. But did you remark his way of helping his sister to wine?’

‘Yes, I did certainly, and I thought of what you said the other day.’

‘Yes, that's it. It isn't that one objects to his being attentive to her, it is all very right, but it is done in such a way. My sister, Miss Herbert! as if she was the only person worth thinking of. It offends my good father and mother.’

‘It is a pity that he has that brusque way, but nevertheless, Isabel, I like his face. It is an expressive countenance, and his whole bearing is quite that of a gentleman; nay more, almost aristocratic. But go on with your idea of the people.’

‘Well, then, next to the Herberths comes Dr. Marsh, as a matter of course; a kind of note of admiration to be affixed to their names, for the little Doctor grows eloquent in praise of that ‘superior fellow Herbert, and that extremely agreeable woman, his sister.’ But I will pass him over and Captain Smith, who, in his regimentals, serves to dress up a room, booby as he is.’

‘Pray do not use such a term, Isabel.’

‘Well, you must confess him very silly, and that is tantamount to being a--; but I'll be a good girl, and spare you.’

‘Mr. Tom Jolly, Isabel, what is he?’

‘What! why an honest man, every inch of him! worth a dozen Fitzs, with studs and chains and rings to boot; worth, Miss Terry—more worth loving a vast deal than all the fine gentlemen in the world, and his father and his mother too, I love them all.’----Isabel's eyes glistened as she spoke, then smiling, and returning to her former tone, she added, ‘It was a mistake; depend on it, Tom should have fancied me, and not Kate.’

‘You had better tell him so, then.’

‘To be sure! so I have a dozen times over. And now we will trot on, if you please; I have fulfilled your wishes to perfection, I am sure.’

‘Not quite; there is one missed out—Mr. Farrant.’

‘O no, no! I am not going to meddle with him—he is one of your perfect characters—no, thank you.’

‘But I particularly wish to know your opinion of him—I have a particular reason,’ said Miss Terry, looking out for the stumps as she spoke.
Isabel too seemed to look attentively at the road, as she answered, 'Have you, though? What reason can you have?'

'O pray mind the stumps, Isabel, and don't upset us in this awful-looking place!' exclaimed Miss Terry.

By the time they had surmounted the difficulty they were overtaken by Kate and Jem, who had dawdled behind them, and then all Isabel's attention was devoted to picking out the best track. At last, when they got into the high road, she said, speaking quickly, and as if with restrained emotion, 'Are you very unhappy up here, Miss Terry?'

'Unhappy! what can you mean, Isabel?'

'I mean that you must, in your heart, think us strange folks, and I often fancy you look astonished and disgusted.' . . She sighed, and then went on. 'You and Mr. Farrant—of course I see and feel all the difference—you think me a great Tomboy—with something good at bottom, perhaps—but sadly wrongheaded. Just, in fact, what I think myself, and yet not like, for,—would you believe it, I could find it in my heart to cry when I think of you and then of myself. O! don't be afraid!—I am not really going to shed a tear,' said she, laughing, as Miss Terry laid her hand on hers. 'The downright truth is, I think you the best little thing I ever saw, and the prettiest and the dearest; but I am not going to be swearing eternal friendship and all that stuff, only I wish I was a child again, and under you. . . . You see I did not go to school with Kate, so I never learned to be prettily behaved and so forth, for the truth is, I would not go to school—and I was always my dear daddy's darling, you know—and go I didn't. I ran wild in sun-bonnet and holland pinafore, except when Mr. Herbert tried to teach me drawing, and he tried to get me to read too. He meant to be very kind, and I liked laughing and quarrelling with him, and thought him vastly superior; but oh dear! I am very silly. Do you think me very dreadful, Miss Terry?'

'If I told you all I think, you would consider me a flatterer and insincere, Isabel. I will not say that I don't see your faults, but I am very sure that you will conquer them, and they are very much on the surface.'

'Well! no one knows what I may become with you. Your eyes tell me how I shock you; but, now, don't you think, Miss Terry, people do make too much of little things, and that there is a little insincerity, after all, veiled under a polite, or as Mr. Herbert says, 'refined'—that's his favourite word, by the bye—a 'refined' manner?'

'Are you very sure that your own manner is always a true index to your mind, Isabel?'

'I laugh when I could cry often enough, and I will confess—but no, I wont confess anything now—for here we are at home, and that lazy boy,
Jem, has left down the rails—I think he might have stayed to let us through. Now, you must hold the reins while I get out. If Mr. Herbert were here, his chin would nearly reach the sky in his indignant censures on the utter want of manner in the colonial youth, ‘to leave a lady to put up a slip rail.’ Now guide him through steadily. Famous! why, you'll be a whip in time. By the bye, Mr. Farrant, I suspect, is astonished at Kate and me for driving; but you see I have brought you back safe and sound.’

Isabel was proceeding to put up the rails again herself, when a man drew near. He shifted his hat slightly, as if he intended to be respectful, but didn't know how exactly.

‘I'll put it torights, miss.’
‘Good evening, Lynch,’ said Isabel, as soon as she recognised one of her father's men. At this the hat was taken fairly off; and, looking at her in a peculiar way, he said—

‘I made so bold as to try to see you this evening, Miss Isabel.’

‘Why, have you anything to say?’ and Isabel drew back her foot from the gig step as she spoke.

‘I've a strange request to make,’ said the man, holding the horse, who seemed inclined to fidget at the delay. ‘I have no right, as you may think, to say it, but they say as how you are a kindly-natured young lady, and there's one you were good to long ago, who is ashamed to cross your path now. Maybe you've heard’—here he hesitated and patted the horse absently—‘you've heard, no doubt, of the girl Ellen Maclean, and how she ran away from her hard stepmother?’

Isabel nodded assent.

‘Well, then, she is as innocent as yourself in respect to that affair, but never an hour's peace has the poor girl got since. That vixen, Mrs. Maclean, uses her shocking bad; and the girl's fairly pining. She would go down on her knees to you if you and the Missus would give her some work in the house. 'Tis her heart's desire to serve you, miss, but she dare not ask the favour herself. Maybe you could shelter her, miss? 'Twill be doing her a great kindness.’

‘I don't see how I am to do it,’ said Isabel. ‘There are servants enough already, and my mother, I fear, doesn't think too well of Ellen, and there are strange reports----’

‘For the love of Heaven, miss, don't blast the character of the most ill-used girl that ever trod this earth!’ exclaimed he, with great agitation. ‘She has had a kind word for Jack Lynch, and he has promised to marry her. What crime in that? She is as innocent as an angel, and has not the wit that some have to stand scorn and cruelty. Miss Isabel, I give you my word and honour, she'll die or go crazed if she isn't taken out of all this. If she got
into service it would save her, but she breaks her heart to leave this place.'

‘I will speak to my mother, Lynch, and see what can be done, but don't expect too much.’

‘Expect! I expect nothing! I beg your pardon, miss,’ added he, in softened tones. ‘You'll never repent doing a kind action for her, I'll warrant, and if she's happy I don't care what happens.’

Lynch again took off his hat as Isabel wished him good evening.

‘Is that the man who wants to be married that I heard Mr. Lang speak of?’ asked Miss Terry as they drove on.

‘Yes. He doesn't seem much like a man to break one's heart for, does he? What the girl can see in his grim, convict-like appearance I can't think; but she is in love with him. She is a strange being; there is something wildish about her altogether. I used to be very fond of her, and she of me, till she took up this Lynch. I wish they could marry; but papa wont hear of it.’

Lynch remained standing by the slip rails, and as soon as the gig was out of sight, a slight figure timidly and cautiously crept out of the bushes near, and came up to him.

‘You saw her then?’

‘I did, Nell;' and his whole manner and expression changed into softness as he looked on her.

‘I have watched her often and often as she passes out on foot or on horseback, but it is long since I spoke to her. Is there any hope?’ she added after a pause.

‘She will see what she can do.’ Lynch turned and leant on the fence as he spoke. ‘And now, Ellen,’ he continued, ‘if you do get into the house, or if they get you another place—take my advice and think no more of me. You'll see what I say is true. I can't marry—I can't get my ticket—no! I am sure, do all I can, something will happen. I try to keep out of his way, for his very voice stirs up my blood . . . . You know 'tis reckoned a disgrace to you to have anything to say to me.’

‘I don't care,’ sobbed the girl; ‘ever since my mother died you were my best friend; you, and then Miss Isabel. Folks call you a bad man, and dangerous; but don't I know better? you bear a heavy, lone heart. Wasp and I know it,—the creature! poor dog!’ she added, turning to pat a little rough terrier which had kept close to the man all the time.

‘And don't, Jack,—don't just say a word in answer to the master—but bite your lips and think of the ticket, and keep down your anger. And as to me,’ she added, raising her head and looking up at him affectionately, ‘as to me—I don't care—I'll bear everything. I've been used to hardship since that woman crossed our doorstone; and if you could only set yourself to take sharp words or blows—as I do. Why, this is what I do! I think,—never
mind, they can't touch your heart within you; and that's where happiness lies. I thought it was gone when my mother died. Ah! that was the sorrowful day, and my father was so stern! I feared him always; and do you mind you came Lynch, and made me the beautiful nosegay, and sang the pleasant songs, and called me Golden Nelly, because of my yellow hair?— and I cried so bitterly that time when you got punished."

‘Ay, ay, Nell, I remember; but you are running on, and you forget you shouldn't be here. 'Tisn't much I can do, but by heaven they'll drive me to mischief if they harm you! Now go home, my dear,’ he added, soothingly; ‘go home by the Bush. I must go to my hut this way.’

She put her hand on his arm and said, ‘And you saw Miss Isabel, and she said yes?’

‘Miss Isabel said she would try,’ said Lynch. She waved her hand, and was soon out of sight among the bushes. He whistled to his dog and walked towards the farm in another direction.
CHAPTER VI.

EXCITEMENT AMONG THE CONVICTS.

‘A penny for your thoughts, Isabel,’ said Miss Terry, looking up from her book.
‘They are not worth it, and yet I believe they are to myself. I have done a foolish thing, Miss Terry. Did you observe how cool Mr. Herbert was today? I assure you I thought of it in church!’
‘His manner is generally rather distant at first greeting, but I did not notice anything particular to-day.’
‘It was so, though, and papa was worse. Stupid girl! it was all my own fault. That day at Vine Lodge I was in a wilful mood altogether. I can't resist it sometimes, I feel so contradictory; particularly if people look grave, like Mr. Herbert. He said he wanted to talk to me, and I began joking and left him. Now I find he wanted to talk about Lynch. O, you can't understand how vexed I am! I could have told him so much about it, and of all things I would have entreated him not to interfere with papa. Now, he has talked to papa about it, urged the marriage, and, just like him, entirely defeated his own purpose. Papa is very angry and annoyed at Mr. Herbert's interference, as usual, and ten times more determined than ever to oppose Lynch. Isn't it provoking?’
‘You think you could have prevented it?’
‘To be sure! Mr. Herbert is just the last person in the world to whom papa would listen about his men, and Mr. Herbert's is the very worst manner for advocating their cause; I don't know how it is. However, I will leave no stone unturned to get Ellen into the house. She shall come, and I hope she will give up Lynch in time. She shall do so!’
Miss Terry laughed at Isabel's comic manner and affected tone of voice.
‘Well, Isabel, I know now then that to please you I must always strive for
my own way; so, here I am going out this bright lovely evening in spite of your having begged me to stay at home.’

Miss Terry went into the verandah, and presently Isabel followed.

‘Which way did they go, I wonder?’

‘To the Diamond Creek, I believe; the boys promised me some fringed violets, and Kate said they were sure to be found thereabouts.’

‘This way; come and see the sun set, Miss Terry,’ said Isabel, turning to some rising ground at the side of the house.

‘How plainly we hear the boys’ voices.’

‘Yes, and the hum from the farm—hark! what a noise—what can it be?’

They both turned to listen and to look, while peals of laughter were succeeded by loud hissing, and a sharp clapping of hands which echoed again and again, and caused two or three dogs to run from their mats in the verandah, and listen with ears and tails erect.

‘A curious noise for Sunday evening,’ said Isabel; ‘and look—look at the men, running and throwing, yes, throwing stones at some one! I hope it is no riot, but I live in dread of those men, and I know that Venn sets them up! Hark again!’ She ran down the ascent, while the noise increased, and there was mingled with the clapping and hissing, a low angry sound like groans.

The man servant stood in the verandah, grinning wide.

‘What is it, Patrick?’ inquired Isabel.

‘Only the men hissing Dan, miss;’ and he grinned again as he pointed.

‘Look, he is skulking off like a fox. Ha! that was a hit, however. Now, miss, he's jumped the rails, the villain! And for what does he dare to show his brutal face here among the lads?’

‘Who is he?’ said Isabel, at the same time watching the tall man running as fast as his legs could carry him, while occasional stones or sticks hit him or just missed doing so, and the men continued clapping and setting on the dogs.

‘Who is he, miss? why Dan, just. But look—see, he'll have a throw yet—see the crater!’

Isabel and Miss Terry looked as Patrick pointed. The man had reached a tree; he turned and faced his enemies, and from his gestures seemed to be threatening vengeance; then, as one of the dogs came up to him, he seized a large stone, and hurled it at the animal, who set up a loud and piercing howl. The furious clapping and hissing was renewed, but Dan was now among trees, and making the best of his way out of the farm.

‘You see that's the flogger, miss. He is under a mistake to come here entirely. There's many would kill him dead just could they get their fingers on him. They'd settle him—that's Dan Cats Tail,¹ as they call him, and sure
he's an ugly cratur, enough to frighten the very birds of the air. How did he come here, miss? Why sent on a message, I'm thinking, by the Captain Smith. But here's the master.'

Patrick hurried away, and Miss Terry and Isabel went to meet the party, who were returning from their usual Sunday's walk. Kate was leaning on her father's arm; Mrs. Lang was a little behind with the children. As Isabel came up, he pushed Kate away; ‘There, Katie, you lean as heavy as your mother; you haven't a light tread. Ha! Issy, my darling, where hast been—a deserter, a deserter—and the little woman there; moping, I see. Burn the books, say I, and come out for air and exercise.’ He put his arm on Isabel's shoulder as he spoke, and so, talking and laughing, they all turned into the garden, where they strolled about it in a leisurely way; now plucking a grape or a bud—now stopping to watch the regiment of ants, which in spite of gunpowder and tobacco and all the various war waged against them, persisted in destroying the gravel paths. Bees clustered round the oleanders—rose-breasted sparrows twittered like their browner sisters of the antipodes, while a few stray mosquitoes, roused by the fresh evening breeze, made it very desirable to have a head-covering. Groups of young bush trees which, defying the woodman's tomahawk had again sprung into life, encroached on the palisade fence which bounded the garden, while a hedge of quince and lemon inside the fence, gave the whole place a green and unformal appearance. The ground sloped from the house towards the bed of a creek which once or twice a year had water in it, and at the lowest part grew a magnificent willow, its pensile branches bowing in the slight rising breeze which had not power to stir its neighbour, a massy dark Norfolk Island pine. Above, that deep sky, awful in its grand, unclouded space,—below, all beautiful things, from the stately tree to the graceful vine wreath, casting a lengthened shadow.—The hum and murmur of life mingling with the low sighing in the leaves. The father leaning on his favourite daughter while half turning round to have a quiet joke with his wife, or playfully holding up Kate's rich dress with his walking-stick as she let it trail on the path,—the boys' chatter, the children's clear laugh,—for a time, all care and trouble seemed lost under the influences of that lovely sabbath evening.

Separated from this family group by one or two paddocks, stood the farm buildings, the mill, the forge, and a number of slab huts, and the overseer's cottage, with its glazed windows now flashing in the golden light. The uproar among the men which had Startled Isabel had ceased, though a few voices sounded husky, and some faces were still flushed with excitement or anger, as they laughed and joked about it.

‘That was well hit, Barney,’ said one; ‘your blood was up, my boy!’
‘Aye, Barney's blood is hot,’ said another, as he seated himself by his
dog on a bank. ‘One would think 'twas for O'Connell; he was hallooing.’

Barney, a tall, overgrown Irishman with a slit and disfigured nose,
answered by shaking his fists in the air. ‘That's where ye are again, is it?
By all the saints he's the true friend of the poor, and I shall always maintain
that same, though it was for the love of himself I got sent to this same
country at all, ill luck to ye!’ and panting and hot from his chase after the
hated flogger, Barney threw himself at full length on the ground.

‘Dan had a warmish reception,’ said one of the men, grinning and
crossing his arms, while he looked round at the others. ‘Wouldn't I have
liked to tie him up to that tree!’ muttered another, with clenched teeth.

This was hailed by a loud burst of laughter.

‘What are ye sore yet, Philip? And, I say, look yonder at Lynch, hey?’
said a slight man, who now advanced from behind. He was dressed
carefully, a sprig of geranium stuck in his small flat hat, and he had silver
rings in his ears and on his fingers, which were fine and taper. There was
something stealthy in his tread, and unpleasant in his look, his head seemed
to hide itself as it were, in his shoulders; his eyes were bent on the ground
as he spoke, but he seemed to see everything notwithstanding. ‘Ask Lynch
why he didn't join in Dan's welcome, hey?’ he said to a dark, large man,
who had just lit his pipe, and whose countenance still glowed with anger.

‘I saw you grinning behind the door, Gentleman Bill, and I thought it bad
manners of ye! Ha! your turn may come yet, and then ye'll laugh at the
other side of your mouth. By Jove, I'd just like to see you at the triangle,3
and see if it would cure your horrid grin.’

‘Wait till you catch me, Andrew; but did it come to pass, mayhap I'd
stand game as well as any of ye!’

‘To see the fellow here!’ . . . Andrew took up a stone as he spoke, and
threw it with desperate force into the pond which lay at a few yards
distance, uttering terrible oaths as he did so, while strong excited anger
flashed from his eyes.

There was a flutter and hurry among the geese and the ducks as the stone
plashed in, while Barney started up to see where it came from.

‘That would have done something for Dan, had ye thrown it the right
minute,’ said Gentleman Bill, with a low, chuckling laugh. ‘But I say, do
but look at Lynch—Bob, look at him!’ and he pulled the sleeve of a
handsome young fellow, who was playing with a cockatoo.

‘Bob’ said something in reply, and then spoke to the bird. ‘Forty down!’
repeated the cockatoo; ‘Forty down!’

A loud hoarse laugh burst from all at this speech, and all eyes were
directed towards Lynch, who stood leaning against a dead tree.
‘D’ye hear, Lynch, d’ye hear that?’ said one. ‘Cocky speaks!’
‘I hear!’ without turning his eye.
‘And how did you receive Dan?’ asked another.
‘With true love like a Christian to be sure!’ sneered Bill. ‘Lynch is setting up in life; he's in search of a ticket and a wife, you know!’
‘Cease your venom, you crawling serpent,’ growled Andrew, as he removed his pipe from his mouth, and looking as if he longed to crush the little man with one blow of his huge fist. ‘Can't you let a man alone when his feelings is overpowering him?’
‘Forty down, borne like a stone!’ again screamed the cockatoo, which was followed by another loud peal of laughter.
‘I'll wring thy vile neck if ye say them words again,’ said Andrew, reaching towards the bird.
‘Hands off, if you please,’ said Bob, to whom Cocky belonged, while the bird erected his yellow plume, and stretched out its neck in warlike attitude.
‘Talking of tickets,’ added Bob, who perhaps thought it was time to change the conversation; ‘how did you contrive, Bill, to get a ticket in such quick time?’
A sly, sidelong glance, and a silent prolonged chuckle, was the answer.
‘Picked it out of some one's pocket,’ said a dogged-looking man, the most shabbily dressed and uncared for, in appearance, of the whole set.
Bill shrugged his shoulders, as he said, ‘No, no, it was got through good manners. Dear old lady, she'd believe and swallow everything I said, and would blub away when I touched upon home and friends, and innocence and misfortune. Bless her old soul! she believed it a rare piece of injustice that a civil, respectful fellow like William Smith, ever got shipped off for this place, ha! ha! Think of her fright;’ he laughed so much here as to prevent his speaking for a moment, ‘to think of her horrid alarm if she had known the best pickpocket in London was standing beside her! However, green as she was, she conducted herself like a gentlewoman to me, and so I behaved like a gentleman to her, and she recommended me as one deserving of every encouragement. So I got my ticket you see, and when the old girl departed this life, I left; for young madam wouldn't do for me, and besides I had a fancy for change of air and scene.’
‘By my soul, Bill, and you've nothing at all of a gentleman in ye, to be after speaking agin the lady, and she not above ground!’ said Barney. ‘And wasn't it yourself just that cheated her under her very eyes, barnacles and all, and she looking at ye all the time and never seeing it, the cratur!’
‘Oh, there wasn't much skill required for that,’ answered Bill, with an air of mock humility. ‘But I say, Lynch,’ he added, seeing that man had
moved forwards a little; ‘I say, Lynch, come now, tell us why you kept your arms folded, and didn't give Dan a hit to help him on his way back to Merrima?’

A dark bitter smile passed over Lynch's face. ‘If!----’ and his voice was hollow and tremulous; ‘if I had touched a stone, it would have struck true!’

‘Well said, Lynch! I see you've some proper spirit in you yet, my lad.’

A buzz of approbation passed round. Lynch heard it. Another smile just touched his stern, rigid features—like a gleam from the lightning's flash over a stormy sea; and he walked away with the applause of his companions sounding in his ears—the applause of his world!

Lynch went towards the Bush, followed by his terrier, stopping to look absently at an opossum over head, or breaking down the young saplings that stood in his way. He was not long alone. Ellen joined him.

‘Why, Jack, I thought the gloaming was going to pass away without my seeing you. Are you ill?’ said she, suddenly.

‘Pshaw! who ever heard of a convict being ill? They are not flesh and blood like others, girl.’

She drew a long sigh as she gazed at him with sorrowful surprise. Presently, she said—

‘What was the row about a while ago? Any one might know the overseer was out of the way. Why, the hissing and clapping could be heard at our place, and the woman was for going to see what it was all about, but father wouldn't let her, and while they were quarrelling I slipped away.’

‘The stone lay at my feet—it would have crushed his big head to atoms,’ Lynch muttered, apparently forgetful of Ellen's presence.

‘Whose head, Jack?—what are you talking about? What ails you, Lynch?’ and she laid her hand on his arm.

‘The matter, Nell!’ said he, suddenly checking himself in an angry gesture. ‘The matter! Nothing—only Dan of Merrima has been here.’

‘Aye, Nell.’

‘Poor fellow! And yet what can Dan help of it? It is his trade, you see; 'tis not on him it should be visited, any way.’

‘I'd like to see the man that would not if he could, take his life blood after tearing the flesh off your back for ye. I tell you, Nell, there's not one has been under his cat but would kill him if they knew they were to be hanged for it the next minute. 'Tis nature!—nature is strong in us, Nell!’

The girl did not answer, but looked down at her own arms, which bore evidence of the marks of a stick. They walked on a little way in silence. At last she said—

‘I have been thinking of mother, Jack. I wonder if she knows what
treatment I get—I wonder if she is ever about anywhere! Somehow I don't think she can lie aisey and have her Nell used like a slave. Sometimes I could fancy I hear her when the wind goes moaning like in the trees. Do you ever cast a thought on your mother, Jack?’ she added, abruptly.

‘No; first when I got into trouble it came into my mind, but I wouldn't think of her. Some thoughts wont do, Nell. But once I did dream of her—God help her! ’Twas after forty lashes, and though I took them like a stone, I fainted, and they gave me a something which made me stupid like, and, as I lay a dozing in horrid suffering, I thought in my dream I was looking at some pictures out of her old Bible, and, Nell, I saw one of a man being scourged, and my mother seemed to say, as she pointed to it—See how the Lord bore for you. I can't say,’ added he, and his voice trembled, ‘but it was like enough to have happened years ago—she did try to teach me once—but----’

‘Keep that thought, Jack—keep it in your heart,’ said Ellen, looking earnestly at him, as he turned and leant against an iron bark tree.

He smiled—still bitterly—and then he stooped and gathered one of the delicate harebells, all folded up as it was for night.

‘Take that blossom, Nell, and put it on the fire, and see what comes of it.’

‘Why, it will whither, of course—and shrivel up to nothing, Jack. It couldn't live there.’

‘And there is a fire here, Nell!’ said he, fiercely, smiting his breast as he spoke with clenched hands. ‘Aye, a fire will kill and burn that kind of thought! But go home, girl—go home,’ he added, in a harsh voice. ‘Don't be bringing punishment on yourself again, or idle talk. Mind, I never asked this meeting—go home, Nell.’

Tears rolled down her face. She moved on slowly.

‘Go home, my pretty Nelly,’ he again said, in a softened tone, and throwing his arm round her, ‘Taint fit for you to be here now. I shall be at the clearing to-morrow, maybe you'll look out about there, and now I must be off, for I hear the overseer's voice.’

He was soon gone, striding along over the brushwood, unconscious that she still watched him. When he was no longer visible from the thick scrub falling back on his path, she cut across to the fence, and hidden herself by a friendly native cherry tree, she could see him as he crossed the open ground leading to the huts. She watched him gather up a few sticks and enter his hut. Soon there was a glimmer of light and a stream of smoke, and she knew that he had kindled his fire. Ellen had forgotten much that her own mother had taught her, she had long ceased to pray, except in a very desultory way,—for herself—but those words ‘Our Father,’ &c., she did remember, and, leaning on the fence, with streaming eyes, she repeated
them now for him.
CHAPTER VII.
FROM A LADY'S BOUDOIR TO A CONVICT'S HUT.

Vol. I

There was a very pleasant room at Langville, called the ‘work-room’, or ‘morning-room’. It was well screened by dark venetian shutters. A fine specimen of the Lyre-bird's tail ornamented the cedar chimney-piece, and some of Kate's school flower and fruit paintings, in richly-gilt frames, relieved the white-washed walls. There was but little furniture, save some comfortable American rocking-chairs and a large table covered with work and work-baskets, at which Mrs. Lang and her daughter Kate sat busily employed.

A smaller table stood near the window, where Isabel was stationed, apparently drawing; though from the blackened scraps of paper which lay about, it seemed as if she was more intent on wasting her pencils.

‘It does not signify,’ said she, snapping the point she had so carefully cut, in her energy. ‘I do think it a shame, Kate!’

‘I cannot help it,’ exclaimed Kate, pettishly. ‘I wish they would leave me alone. I am sure I don't ask them to do so. It is all very well for you, Issy; you are not so tormented as I am!’

‘My dear,’ remarked Mrs. Lang, soothingly; ‘my dear, you are Miss Lang, you know, and of course you will receive a great deal of attention; and now you are both getting of an age that really it is very desirable to be careful as to whom you encourage. I always stand up for poor young Jolly; and I shall always say he is a worthy, nice young man. But my love, Issy, your sister certainly has every right to look higher for an establishment.’

‘O mamma!’ laughed Isabel; ‘I am not thinking of any ‘establishement.’ I only contend that good old friends are not to be pouted at for the new brooms. As to matrimony, and that sort of thing, I think it is all fiddlesticks. (How lucky Miss Terry is not here!) Dear me, what a horrid pass we are come to, if we are not to speak, or laugh, or move, without reference to such a grave concern as matrimony, or an establishment!’

‘You are very childish, Isabel,’ said her mother. ‘What a sad disadvantage it was, to be sure, your father's being so over-indulgent, and keeping you at home! You never will learn Kate's manners.’

‘O, well! I am content to leave them all to Kate—so that I am not put into a strait-waistcoat, and obliged to look here and look there, and smile on one and pout on another. However, it is hard to have to do all the agreeable to the miserable neglected ones, while pretty Kate breaks their hearts.’
‘Ah!’ said Mrs. Lang, half laughing; ‘you may keep your own manners, Issy; for if you are not so handsome as your sister, still I think there is something which seems to make you a favourite.’

‘Certainly, no other house is so beset as ours!’ said Kate, affectedly.

‘Of course not, my dear love. Besides the attraction you are, ours is naturally the house to which everybody would desire an introduction; and I am sure I am always particularly happy to see friends. Issy, my dear, I hope you will put away your drawing and run your flounces. I am sure the dress will be nothing without them. Kate's looks lovely. You will look so plain by her side; and you know, my dear, your face and figure wont bear it. . . . .

‘As to that, mamma,’ interrupted Kate, ‘Issy is not so very plain, except her freckles.’

‘Certainly not! Who ever said so? Issy is a very fine young woman, to be sure!’ said Mrs. Lang.

‘A bouncing lassie am I,’ said Isabel, with a very bright smile. ‘But really, mother, you have some malicious intent. You will make Kate and me dreadfully vain if you go on so. As to the flounces—I really cannot undertake such a labour.’ Here she yawned as if very tired. ‘But let me have Ellen's help, and I will come out frilled to my waist. Do, my dear mammy!’

‘I have said, my dear, that I think it very imprudent to have in the girl. She is only half saved or very wicked; but however, do as you will, only don't let her annoy the other servants.’

Mrs. Lang here left the room, and presently Kate began to try on her skirt; and while looking before and behind, and taking a few steps to see the effect, she remarked, ‘I never saw any one like you, Issy, for getting your own way. If you set your heart on anything, you are sure to get it!’

Isabel smiled, but said nothing.

‘What can it be to you about this poor girl? It is sure to end in mischief, and you will have a precious deal of trouble to guide her. Every one says she is crazed!’ Presently she added—'Are you finishing the drawing of the church, or what? O! Issy, by the bye, do you know I think a certain person finds Langville very attractive.’

‘A great many do, according to mamma's account,’ Isabel answered.

‘Ah, yes! but really and truly, I do believe that one among them is very attentive to you. Come now, don't pretend, for I am sure you know what I mean.’

‘Do you mean Dr. Marsh?’

‘Of course I don't.’

‘Perhaps Mr. Herbert, then?’ said Isabel.
'No, not Mr. Herbert. Some one else, much better than Mr. Herbert.'

‘Who can it be?’ said Isabel, with mock gravity.

‘Mr. Farrant. He is always coming here.’

‘Yes, as a clergyman. It is very natural he should visit his parishioners,’ said Isabel, stooping to pick up her pencil.

‘Nonsense; he doesn't go to any other house as he does here.’

‘You forget this is Langville!’ said Isabel, laughing.

‘Ah, laugh away, Issy; but I am positive about it. You can't deny it. See how you are blushing.’

‘I don't know what I am to deny, Kate; and of course you could make any one colour up by making such absurd faces. Pray don't fall into the White's abominable fashion of always talking of beaux and so forth. I do so detest it.’

‘It is hard I mayn't have a joke, however,’ said Kate, tossing her head, and pouting. ‘Every one laughs at me! Besides, I am sure it is true. Mrs. Vesey said so.’ And then saying she must go and remind the laundress to iron a collar for her, Kate left the room.

Isabel soon put up her drawing things, and taking up a parasol, stepped out of window. She crossed the lawn, or rather what stood for a lawn, and skirting along by the garden, took the path which led to a paddock. Crossing this, she passed through some partially cleared bush, and came to a hut inhabited by Maclean, who had rented some land of Mr. Lang, and also worked for him. A stout hard-featured woman was employed in scouring a tub in front of the hut. On seeing Isabel, she stopped, pushed back her hair, and made what was intended for a curtsey.

‘Good day, Mrs. Maclean. Where is Ellen?’

The woman laughed.

‘Ye needn't come to me for that information. She may be where she likes, and I'll never say another word to her,—a good-for-nothing young miss! It is hard, I consider, to get the ill-will and words I have just for trying to keep her up. She is the very plague of my life and her father's too!’

‘It would be well if she could be employed,’ said Isabel.

‘Well, and aint there plenty for her to do if she would! She is a bad girl, miss—a bad girl.’

‘I have a little needlework which I want done. My mother says Ellen may come to the house and do it if—if----’

‘Mrs. Lang had best give it to myself. Ellen can't nor wont work. I said to her father this morning, I would see to get her out in service in some farm where there's hard work. She needs a tight hand.’

‘I should like to try her once more,’ remarked Isabel. ‘She needs kindness, Mrs. Maclean.’
The woman's face darkened, as she muttered, 'She needs a good stick: but, however, miss, if you wish to be trying her, all I can say is she'll not be found here. Our hut is the last place my lady fancies,' and Mrs. Maclean, without further ceremony, turned away and occupied herself with making up the fire.

Isabel went on. A little way at the side a slip rail led to a bush paddock. She climbed the fence, and called 'Ellen' several times, but no answer came. Then Isabel turned further among the trees. A slight crackling noise in the bushes attracted her—she again called 'Ellen,' and a creeping, timid figure peeped round from a thick mass of wild currant plants, and seeing who it was presently curtsied.

'Ellen, idling here!' said Isabel, reproachfully.
'I have nothing to do.'
'Why not go home and work?'
'Home—I've no home!' Large tears stood in her eyes, as she added, quickly, 'Look here, Miss Isabel—look at my arm and my neck—see those black marks—look at this cut,' raising her yellow hair from her temple; 'that's what I get at home!'

'What is it all for, Ellen; is it that you really will not work and behave well? or—'

'No! I wont work for her. I have worked—but no more. It is all because I wont give up—'

'Give up what, Ellen—Lynch?'

'Yes; but that is not all. They pretend to care for that, and dear me, miss, it isn't for my character they care; only you see Venn, he is in power now; and—'

'What has Venn to do with you?'

'Nothing! and never shall! Lynch would kill him first.'
'I don't understand you, Ellen.'

'Why then, miss, Venn is always after me, and they—that is she—wants me to have him; and that's why I got these blows.'

'And what is your objection; there is not much difference between him and Lynch, is there, as to character?' Isabel was suddenly stopped by the girl's vehement exclamation—

'My objection! I hate him;—his character! he is a reptile—a base, low, creeping reptile! Miss Isabel,' added she, coming closer, and looking into her face earnestly, 'did ever you know what it was to love—to love one who loves you, and is scorned by all besides? No, you never did! You are good and kind—yes, a kind young lady—but it isn't the fate of such as you. When you marry you will wear fine clothes, and go to church, and all will smile. You can't understand what I say—that I would die—I would kill
myself—rather than have any one but Jack Lynch. I am the only living thing except Wasp, the creature, he cares for, or that can win a smile out of his heart. He'll never give me up—I'll never give him up; and he says if master—if your father, Miss Isabel, would give the leave, he'd be able to bring me to his hut for his wife, and then no power in law could keep me from him. Think of that! O, you'll get the leave for us, wont you? you'll beg it, wont you? and then I'll work, indeed I will!'

‘Ellen, I can do nothing for you in this matter; but Lynch asked if I would try and get you work in our house.’

‘Did he? O yes, he wished it, I remember. He said 'twould make me hold up my head again; he made me promise to behave well. And you will—you are going to take me, and I shan't be sent away up the country to her aunt, as she threatened? O, Miss Isabel, I will work for you, indeed I will.’

‘Very well, Ellen. Come to me in an hour; you know my room; come there. But you must be tidy, and you must obey orders; no going out, Ellen, remember.’

‘Well, just let me say the good-bye to him; just tell him what I'm going to do, and I'll obey you. Bless you, dear Miss Isabel!’

Isabel returned to the house, pondering over Ellen's strange character, and wondering why her father would not let them marry at once. Ellen gathered up some flowers which she had been arranging according to her fancy, and singing in a clear voice, she sauntered on through the bush, keeping in a line with the fence, though not directly by it; now looking at the birds, now crushing a gum leaf and smelling it, and sometimes stopping to kick at an ugly red ant, and talking to it as a child might, ‘Ah! wouldn't you like to have a bite at me? Ah, but you see I have on a shoe to-day, good luck to you. Ah! you ugly, ill-tempered looking thing!’ At last the sound of a bell roused her to greater speed. She bound her long hair round and round her head, and fixed the velvet band tighter on her forehead; then ran lightly till she came to that part of the bush which was close to the ‘farm’ and the men's huts.

The dinner bell still clanged shrilly through the place, and there was the sound of laughter and voices. The horse who had been turning the mill was set at liberty, while a boy pushed a load of coarse hay towards him for his refreshment. Stately, heavy oxen came from the fields, looking patient and sober, while the whips cracked over their heads, and the men hallooed and swore. The blacksmith stayed his bellows and laid aside his apron, while a few were already cutting up beef and damper.

Ellen replied not to their greetings, though a kind word and a nod was given by many; while others winked or sneered, and then laughed loud as she hurried by. But on she went to the last hut. A white terrier jumped upon
her, and she hugged and stroked him.

‘Lynch, are you there?’

He was there—not eating or preparing his dinner, however; but sitting on a log, with a black shade of suppressed anger on his face.

‘What, Nell! here again! Well, if you wont take no advice, you must take your own way, I suppose. ’Twas a dark day you first saw me, Nell!’

‘And why are you not at dinner, Jack?’ said she, coming close to him.

‘And what ails you? Good God! Jack,’ added she, looking frightened, ‘what is it? You haven’t had words again, have you?’

‘I’m sick of words—I’m sick of life! Whatever such a wretch as I was created for puzzles me. There’s something wrong. One man is not made to be so put upon by another.’

She sat on the floor by him, looking at him—the dog beside her.

‘Look, Nell, at the meat Venn favoured me with for a week’s rations! look at it—tainted, and half bone!—last week the same; but that I don't mind—it is his silly spite. Ah, Nelly! he'll have you yet.’

She shuddered, and drew her arm through his, but said nothing.

‘He had the impudence to speak light of you this very day. He knew I would not stand that, so I come off short commons, you see. He in the store!—he a head servant!—the veriest, lowest knave and pilfering, lying rogue in this country! But never mind . . . . And then, Nell, no more coming down of evenings, my girl. I'm to move—I'm to leave this here hut, and move up with Gentleman Bill.’

‘Why, Jack?—what can that be for?’

‘Why,—Nell, do you ask? Just because they know I like this place, and I have set a peach-tree and a few cabbages here, and knocked up a shelf, and made it somehow my own—that's ‘why.’ But I'm proof—I am not a going to let out. The ticket, Nelly—the ticket!—just let me get the blessed ticket!’

He looked at her as he spoke, and the bitterness seemed to pass away. His eyes were dim as he drew his hand from his head, and passed it over hers, stroking her hair. But it was soon gone, that kindly dew-drop falling on a withered plant. It was shaken off, and the lips were again tightened, and the eyes hardened.

‘Lynch?’ and her voice trembled; ‘Lynch, I have good news—all owing to you, Jack. What do you think?—Miss Isabel is to have me to work for her.’

‘A good thing, too. Why, now, Nell, you will hold up your head again. And mind me,’ added he, ‘Nell, give me up; try to serve Miss Isabel, and you'll get on, mayhap; and don't be after thinking of me, Nell. Bad as I am, I don't wish you to be dragged to misery through me.’
‘Would you give me up, Jack?’

‘No, and that I wouldn't, save for your good. I have known you since you were a child, and I never knew you bad—never unkind—only put upon; and sorely used . . . . You've the softest, the kindliest eye was ever made, I believe. . . . .’

‘And you have for me, Lynch,’ sobbed Ellen. ‘Never say that again. I will never give you up. You've been father and mother and friend to me. I'll work; and Miss Isabel will get the ticket, and then I'll come to you and live here with you, and then you'll never have the dark look.’

Her voice was drowned at last by sobs and tears—her head fell on his knee.

The rough, hard man would have blessed her, would have prayed for her, but he didn't know how. Evil passions were even then at work within him; yet, bad as he was, there was one soft spot, one point in his heart which could be touched. Harshness irritated and goaded him, but kindness and forbearance—even pity—had power.

Insulting words had passed from Venn a few hours before—words of scorn against Ellen—mixed with triumphant mockery—that if he chose he could marry the girl directly, in spite of Lynch. Lynch answered. Venn had power, and he used it. He could pick out the worst meat, the worst tea, and give short measure. He was, in truth, jealous of Lynch with regard to Ellen. Venn was, as Mr. Herbert had said, ‘a great villain;’ but his wickedness lay in cunning and swindling, and for self-interest he could smooth his brow and smile, and speak fair words to any one. He was clever. Though he had cheated his master over and over again, he had kept out of punishment; and partly through a wish to turn the cunning for instead of against himself, and partly because Venn was so very good an accountant, and had a respectful manner, Mr. Lang had promoted him. He did not trust him, but he made it worth his while to save his pocket, though sometimes it might be at the expense of the other men.

Venn knew how to hint at the triangle and forty lashes—a disgrace he had escaped—a disgrace which acted like bitter poison on Lynch, and turned even his better feelings to gall. Venn joked about it as he weighed out rations, and asked when the ticket was to come; and he followed Ellen, found out her favourite haunts, flattered her, and even threatened her. All this made dark work in Lynch's bosom. It seemed as if it was only Ellen's love which kept the bitter thoughts of revenge and despair from finding a vent. But the ticket!—a few months or weeks more, and it must be his—and he could marry, and work where he liked; and Ellen—she would be taken from an unhappy home—she would be cherished—ah! as much as if she were the first lady in the land. He was strong and able—what more
could they need? food and firing, and all that was necessary for clothing
would be theirs. What a tidy, convenient hut he would build for her, with
flowers about it! no matter where—the more lone the better for them both:
she would sing like a bird! People should see that a convict's wife could be
happy and cared for!

These were his dreams by night and his thoughts by day, in his brighter
moments. They beckoned him on, and sustained him. He bid her often
leave him, and give him up, and implored her to go away home, and not
‘bring scandal and talk on herself.’ Yet if she failed to come, he would
wander about the Bush, after work, to see what was become of her, and
watch for hours outside her father's hut, and listen, to know if she were
there.

It was a great relief to him to think of her having work at Langville; and
with this one comfort he turned more easily from his own grievances.
CHAPTER VIII.

‘THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PANTRY.’

Mrs. Lang was in her store-room on the morning when the party was expected, dispensing flour and sugar, butter and eggs, and other necessaries, and giving directions to her servant. She told Isabel to make haste and come to her; and ‘Kate, you go to the drawing-room to receive the Veseys, and tell Miss Terry to have the children dressed and the school-room tidy.’

Isabel was now actively employed in making pastry, and Kate having exchanged her riding-dress for a white gown, took out her worsted work and awaited the arrival of the Veseys.

Presently Mr. Lang came into the store.

‘Well, then, what now? I tell you, my dear, if you have custards, get Miss Terry to make 'em; she's more successful than you are, a great deal.’

‘You had better get Miss Terry to be housekeeper then, Mr. Lang, or your wife, perhaps; for really you seem to prefer her to everybody!’

‘She's a good little soul, anyhow, Mrs. Lang, so don't be jealous, my dear; but she won't ride, and how are we to get her to Sugarloaf tomorrow?’

‘Why, if she won't ride (such nonsense and folly!) she can stay at home; indeed, I think she is wanted to mind the little ones.’

‘She shall do no such thing, if I drive her myself, Mrs. Lang! She shall go. Why, who is to sing, I should like to know, if she don't go?’

‘O, very well, Mr. Lang, certainly,’ said his wife, bridling up. ‘You may drive her instead of me; no doubt you prefer it; I will stay at home.’

‘Nonsense,’ muttered Mr. Lang, looking angry.

‘There is no sort of occasion for any one to stay at home,’ said Isabel; ‘we have asked the Herberts to bring their spring-cart; Miss Terry can go in that, and either Mr. Herbert can drive, or I'll drive her myself, and you and mamma can go in the old gig with quiet Peggy, who will pull you out of all the bogs.’

‘That'll do, Issy; you've a head for managing these things, I see,’ said her father. ‘So, then, the Herberts are coming—well, well—provide plenty of prog,1 d'ye hear? and put up some of the cherry brandy, and we'll make hay while the sun shines, for how long we shall be above water I don't know. Ruin! ruin! Such times!’ and muttering these last words he left the room.

‘What can he mean?’ said his wife. ‘Dear! how he delights to terrify me!
we are not going to ruin, I hope. Has there been any news of the bank today, Issy, my dear?’

Issy did not know; but she had heard the overseer say that only ten out of fifty fat bullocks had been sold, and unless they were sent to be boiled down, they might stay and eat away all the grass for many a long month.

Mrs. Lang shook her head and said—

‘To be sure, the times are dreadful! but the bank—the bank is the worst of all! Nobody knows whether everything belonging to them may not be seized. I have been persuading your father to take the boys from school and get a tutor for them; one can be had for 30l. or 40l. a year, or less than that, and it would save a good deal; and, after all, what's the use of so much Latin and Greek? If they learn to keep accounts and write a good hand, they will be better off than poring over dead languages that no one speaks or understands except disagreeable people, like Mr. Herbert.’

‘And Mr. Farrant,’ Isabel remarked.

‘Yes, my dear, Mr. Farrant; but he'd be all the better, to my thinking, if he was less peculiar; Latin and Greek have given him odd notions; he'll never be a man to do well for himself; he can't live upon poetry or Latin, though really I believe he expects us to live on precious little, he talks so much about giving money for this and that, as if four walls wasn't every way as good for worship as useless pillars and all that carving of ugly faces about them. Aye, aye, depend upon it, Issy, my dear, Latin don't make a good farmer nor a good husband, my dear.’

Isabel did not answer; she was intent on ornamenting the rim of a tart, and her mother soon left her.

The Vesey's had arrived. The gentlemen went to look at the horses, and Mrs. Vesey remained in the drawing-room with Kate.

Mrs. Vesey had come with her husband to New South Wales to make a fortune, laugh at everything, to be admired, as a lady of fashion, and do as she liked.

Clever caricatures were drawn of scenes at Langville, and humorous verses were scribbled cutting up everyone, of course. Selections of these had been shown to Miss Lang, who thought them very charming and clever. Kate had already remodelled her dresses and collars after Mrs. Vesey's fashion, and had begun a chair-cover like the one at Vine Lodge.

Mrs. Vesey paid great attention to Kate, admired her eyes and hair, and whispered in confidence what she thought of the people in the district.

And now, tired with the heat, Mrs. Vesey threw herself on the sofa, saying—

‘There now, Miss Lang, my dear creature, sit in front of me, and I shall see you; it is really a treat in this part of the world to see a pretty face! I
beg pardon, but really this is not a becoming climate. I must try and recover myself before your worthy mother comes. Pray say nothing of my being here; let us enjoy each other for an hour; where is your sister? O! making pastry; well, a very creditable, respectable occupation; and does Mrs. Lang cook the dinner? O! I beg pardon, but I thought it was a colonial fashion, and very primitive; our great grandmothers must have been dear creatures with their keys and receipt-books. I mean to be quite Mrs. Notable myself; I assure you I have serious thoughts of milking the cows! O, it is killingly hot, but this is a palace of a room—only pardon me, a fright of a carpet—Sydney, I suppose—I must tell your father where to send for one in London."

'Does your head ache?' asked Kate, seeing her hold her temples.

'O, my dear, I am subject to dreadful headaches. I am quite a martyr to them! Perhaps you will be so delightfully goodnatured as to fan me a little, for the flies are very annoying.'

Kate was but too happy to be so employed; she took a screen, and whilst fanning her friend, they talked of to-morrow's excursion.

'The Herberths, you say. Well, I am glad of that; the old spinster is such fun, and he, too, with his long chin; and who else is to be here?'

'The Budds and the Jollys. . .'

'Ah! the Jollys, and Mr. Tom, of course. Don't blush; though, by the bye, it is remarkably becoming. I did hear, how I wont say—perhaps my cockatoo told me, for he is very chatty—I did hear it whispered that this young Mr. Jolly blushed, not like you, Kate, but as red as a peony when a certain young lady's name was mentioned; but I hate a man who blushes. He is all very well, I dare say—a capital stock-man, but . . . .'

The gentlemen coming in put a stop to the conversation. Mr. Fitz insisted on relieving Miss Lang—he would fan both ladies. 'By the bye, Miss Lang, who is that uncommonly pretty girl on your farm?' he said.

'I don't know who you mean, unless you call Ellen pretty. I never knew she was a beauty,' said Kate.

'The girl I mean has hair like gold and eyes like—I hardly know what they are like. She is small, and neat, without a cap, we saw her down at those huts by the mill.'

'It must be Ellen. She is the daughter of one of our men. Her father is very angry with her because she wants to marry a convict.'

'O here is Mrs. Lang!' said Mrs. Vesey, jumping up and nearly upsetting a small table which stood near. 'So very glad to see you, my dear Mrs. Lang. Hope you haven't hurried away from your household business, I am sure. I am afraid you have been getting all sorts of nice things for us. Now, I don't care a straw what I eat!'
To all this Mrs. Lang replied by a stiff and constrained curtsey, and trying at the same time to fall into Mrs. Vesey's ‘easy way.’ She was soon followed by Isabel, in her white dress, and her hair smoothly braided, smiling, yet receiving her visitors with a certain air of dignity which silenced Mrs. Vesey for a moment.

Presently, however, she whispered to Kate, ‘My dear Miss Lang, do prevail on your sister to try milk of roses, or something, to get rid of those dreadful freckles. She is so awfully burnt and disfigured.’

Kate blushed as she said, ‘Issy did not mind; she always ran out in the sun without a bonnet.’

Dinner was announced, and Mrs. Vesey praised the mutton, and Mr. Lang talked of his numerous flocks and herds, and what wages shepherds ought to get. Then Mrs. Vesey fell in love with a pumpkin pudding, which she declared she must take a lesson how to make from the cook, if Mrs. Lang would allow her. Mrs. Lang coloured and fidgeted, and said she should be most happy to show Mrs. Vesey anything; but Isabel laughed, and said she doubted if the cook knew much about it.

‘Issy always makes the puddings,’ said Mr. Lang. ‘Issy and Miss Terry are capital hands at that sort of thing. Miss Terry's custards, Mrs. Vesey, are the very best—’

‘Pray, Mr. Lang, don't talk about custards; I dare say Mrs. Vesey is not very much interested in custards,’ said Mrs. Lang.

But Mr Lang had got upon his favourite theme, and one which irritated his better-half, to his great amusement; and Mrs. Vesey protested that custard was the very thing she liked best in the world. Delicious custards! Would Miss Terry be so very obliging as to make some, and let her see the process?

Mr. Fitz, too, said he should certainly come and be initiated in the art of custard-making; it would be capital fun to beat eggs.

‘Don't you think, Miss Lang (turning to Kate), it is a beautiful sight to see the froth rising and rising? Besides, I have always understood there is quite an art in doing it—a stiff elbow, isn't it?’

Kate laughed at his eagerness, and more still when he took up a fork and began to imitate the action. But Mrs. Lang was uneasy, and had a sort of suspicion that they were laughing at her; so she hurried over the dessert, proposing a turn in the verandah.

‘Did you ever see a burning off?’ said Isabel to Mrs. Vesey.

‘O, dear, no!—never—I should like it of all things!’

‘We can easily go, then; for about a quarter of a mile away they are burning off a large paddock.’

The gentlemen heard the proposition, and seconded the resolution,
though Mrs. Lang could not think why Issy had proposed such a thing; ‘as if it was not pleasanter to walk round the cultivation!’

‘What is that?’ said Mrs. Vesey.

‘O, don't you know that we Bush folks are prouder of a bit of cultivation—cultivated, cleared land—than of all the forest and wild country in the world,’ said Isabel.

‘It is not an unnatural feeling,’ said Mr. Farrant. ‘What has cost us trouble generally possesses an interest in our eyes.’

‘And yet I think I never could cut down a fine tree without a pang,’ said Miss Terry.

‘O, yes, you would, in the wholesale way in which the Bush is cleared, Miss Terry; it is not like the magnificent single trees you talk of in England. Come to-night, and see if you wont lend your aid with hearty good-will to burn the fallen wood,’ said Isabel. ‘But do, Kate, let us wait for the Herberts; Mr. Herbert is such a famous hand at making a bonfire, and when it is darker it looks so much better.’

‘No, Issy, don't wait for them. I'm sure we are more at ease without Mr Herbert,’ said Kate.

‘Why, surely you are not afraid of the grand signor Herbert, are you?’ said Mrs. Vesey. ‘He is the greatest fun possible. It excites one's wits when he is present; for you either get such a dark frown or such a smile.’

‘Or such a contemptuous look,’ interrupted Kate.

‘To be sure, that is just it. There is nothing common about him; he is just the man to bring to your feet, my dear.’

‘Not very easily, I should think,’ said Kate.

‘Come; you shall see how I make him talk. You are not half up to fun, Kate; but do come here, and pick me that rose for my brooch, and I've something to whisper to you, fairest of the fair.’ So saying she sprang off the verandah, which was raised by a green bank, and Kate followed her to a part of the house which had a creeping rose trained on it.

Mr. Farrant said he was going to visit a sick person on the farm, but would join them at the fire. The other gentlemen were still in the dining-room. Mrs. Lang and Isabel sat in the verandah, while Miss Terry went to see her pupils—the two youngest girls of the family.
CHAPTER IX.

THE BURNING OFF.

Vol. I

Just as the party left the house for their walk, Mr. and Miss Herbert rode up to the front door, followed by a servant driving the spring-cart Isabel had asked for. Miss Herbert went in to take off her habit, but her brother joined the others to see the ‘burning off.’

Mrs. Vesey placed herself near Mr. Herbert, looking as if she expected him to offer her an arm. This, however, he did not do, and his face gradually gathered into a sarcastic expression, as the lady ran on in a light, clever strain about new operas, books, and improvements in England.

‘Really it is a pleasure to meet with some creature here who is not wholly crammed with bullocks and sheep; some one who can talk and take an interest in literary matters.’

‘I am sorry to say, madam, you have fixed on a very wrong person. I have been many years a settler, my principal study is how to cure the scab in sheep; if you can enlighten me, I shall be grateful.’

‘Dear me, how horrible! I wonder we don't all get wool growing on us here; we shall certainly be turned into legs of mutton; the burden of the song is sheep! sheep! sheep!’

‘Well, take care, Mrs. Vesey,’ said Isabel, ‘that you are not kidnapped for boiling down.’

Mrs. Vesey laughed, ‘Ha, I am hardly fat enough for that purpose; but really, Mr. Herbert, seriously now, don't you, as an unprejudiced man—now don't you think a Bush life dreadful; so lowering, all the little elegances of life gone, and one's manners growing rusty and colonial. I am sure I shall soon find myself covered in wool, and making butter, and scolding convicts, a regular bush-woman—and wont it be dreadful?’

‘My opinion is,’ said Mr. Herbert, drily, ‘that a vulgar person will be equally so, whether in the gay world or in the Bush. It is not making butter or playing waltzes that makes the difference. I am proud to say I have met with as graceful, gracious women in this country as in any other—women who, not being slaves to the many absurd conventional customs of English society, are not ashamed of their household duties, and exercise hospitality and goodness without fashion or show.’

Mrs. Vesey made no answer, but lifted her glass to her eye and glanced round slyly at the party. There was a smile playing round her mouth, as her eyes finally rested on Mrs. Lang, who was toiling along by the side of Mr.
Vesey, in her flounces. Isabel's eyes also rested there, and met Mrs. Vesey's, and then came a deep blush, which only increased when Mrs. Vesey laughed and said, ‘Come, Miss Isabel Lang, why don't you return thanks for the eloquent defence Mr. Herbert has made. I am sure if I were a Bush lady I----’

‘Come along—come along,’ now shouted Willie and Jem, as they rushed by, and the cry was repeated by the gentlemen. They quickened their pace, and soon reached the spot. There lay the tall trees with leaves yet green on them—cut down in their prime or their early youth—the old dry trunk and the tender sapling alike laid low; and there were the heaps which the men had built up and were already setting fire to. The moon was up, and the sun looked red through the thick mass of dark iron-bark trees in the distance. There was the music of the evening breeze as it played on the spiral leaves of the swamp oak, and there was the crackling of the fire louder and louder, and the shouts of men as they called to each other.

It was an animated scene, and everyone entered into it with spirit. Everyone—even Mrs. Lang took up sticks or dry grass to throw on the piles—everyone, but Mr. Herbert, who, leaning against a tree, seemed to enjoy looking on. Isabel, with her father and brothers, was the most active in piling up faggots. She ran to a burning heap and seized a fire stick to apply to the pile they had raised. As she ran through the air the stick blazed up. The boys clapped their hands and cried, ‘Run, Issy! run!’ and swift as the wind she flew and threw it triumphantly on the heap just in time to save her hand from being burnt.

‘More sticks, Willie! run for more,’ cried Isabel, ‘and this pile will beat all the others.’

Mr. Herbert darted forward, and threw sticks and dry leaves; and Mr. Lang dragged a large branch, which they threw on it. Then, indeed, it burst forth in grand style—curling and crackling, and waving its long tongues of flame, throwing a strong glare on the eager and excited faces which stood around.

Several acres were now burning. It was a striking and a peculiar sight—the fires, the pale moon, with the tall, gaunt, white gum-trees and dingy iron barks in the distance, standing out in strong relief against the sky; and the group of young people, jumping to and fro; Isabel—still the busiest of all—here, there, and everywhere.

‘That'll do!’ said Mr. Lang, rubbing his hands.

‘I say, Herbert, this will yield me many a good crop, I hope—but, 'pon my honour, this heat is no joke;’ and he walked away.

Mr. Vesey was talking to one of the men, and learning the best way of clearing land. Mr. Fitz was talking to Kate, who had found a seat on a
stump, and said she was tired of the fires. Presently they were all startled by a loud report, which was echoed round and round the bush, and caused a fluttering among those birds which had taken their places for roosting.

‘Ah!—it's down!—capital!’ said Willie. ‘Lynch has been at that big tree all day; and he made a bet he'd have it down to-night. He's a first-rate hand at felling wood, Lynch is.’

Mr. Herbert, followed by the boys, went up to the spot where the tree had fallen. The man smiled as they praised his work, and touched his hat respectfully to Mr. Herbert.

Mr. Herbert gave the man something by way of encouragement for his manly feat.

‘Thank your honour—good evening, sir.’

Mr. Herbert saw some of the party preparing to go: it was Mr. Fitz, who offered his arm to Kate, and Mr. Vesey and Mrs. Lang. The others still lingered.

‘O, don't go, Issy,’ said her brothers; ‘stay till the moon is bright, and till that large heap is burnt.’

Isabel was quite willing, and Mrs. Vesey said she should like to stay too, it was such a beautiful evening, and such a pity to be shut up in a room.

‘Who is that?’ said Isabel. ‘O, Miss Terry, I am glad you are come.’

‘And here's Mr. Farrant,’ said Mrs. Vesey.

‘Yes,’ said he, coming up to them; ‘I found this lady in the Vine Walk, and persuaded her to come and meet you. Dear me, this is really grand—look!’ said he, turning to Miss Terry, ‘look at that hollow tree, red hot to the very top, every branch, every leaf made of fire. How strikingly beautiful it is, seen against that mass of dark bush.’

‘What is it?’ said Mrs. Vesey.

‘One of the men have fired a hollow tree,’ said Isabel; ‘we have had such dry weather that it burns like tinder—see, it will fall presently; it totters now.’ And in a few moments was heard the crash of the fallen giant echoing round the bush.

The men were now resting from their work and lighting their pipes. Some returned home, others remained to watch lest the fire should catch the fence.

‘There is no illumination that I ever saw like this,’ said Mr. Farrant.

They stood looking at it for some little time longer, and then Isabel said—

‘Really we must go home; tea will be waiting.’

‘Will you take my arm after all your labours?’ said Mr. Farrant.

They proceeded at a brisk pace, the others following.

‘Come, Mr. Herbert,’ said Willie, ‘we are going.’
But Mr. Herbert did not move.

‘Who is that behind those bushes?’ said Mrs. Vesey, when they had walked on about ten minutes. ‘Suppose it should be a bushranger.’

‘Bushrangers don’t go about at night,’ said Miss Terry.

‘O, it is only Pat, going to shoot opossums,’ cried Willie; ‘he always goes out on a moonlight night. He feeds his dogs on them, and he dries the skins to make himself a rug. He kills a dozen or more of a night sometimes; look! there goes one, hush!’

They looked up and saw an opossum with its sharp nose jumping from branch to branch on a tall tree close to the path. The dog that was following set up a loud baying, and in vain tried to climb the tree. Willie and Jem pelted the poor little thing with stones and sticks, though they were entreated not to do so by Mrs. Vesey, and after they had walked on they heard him hallooing, ‘I’ve got him down! now Rover for your supper, my boy!’

It turned out, however, to be a flying squirrel, so Rover was forced to have patience and lick his large jaws, for Willie, thinking Mrs. Vesey had never seen one, carried it by its hind legs for her inspection. The beautiful soft fur, and the peculiar formation of the animal, from which it derives its name of ‘flying,’ was duly admired.

A cloud now overshadowed the moon, and it was rather dark. Mrs. Vesey and Miss Terry hurried on and found Mr. Farrant and Isabel standing on the verandah. He was repeating some lines from the *Ancient Mariner*, Isabel listening. The rest of the party passed in, impatient for tea, Mrs. Vesey saying, as she took the chair Mr. Lang placed for her, ‘There is Mr. Farrant spouting poetry for the young ladies, and we left Mr. Herbert composing a sonnet to the moon, or to himself, I don't know which.’

Miss Herbert stepped out into the verandah, and she had not been there a minute before her brother also came.

‘John, why are you so late? Come, I want to know how we are to go to-morrow; are you going to drive Miss Terry, or how?’

‘I am quite indifferent, I am sure; just as you please,’ was the answer.

‘Well, then, I hope you will ride and keep by me, for there will be a deal of scampering and racing I know, as there always is with the Langs; it doesn't suit me at all. You must keep by me, John.’

‘Yes, I'll be your saddle beau, Mary. Mr. Farrant and Mr. Fitz will be more acceptable companions to the young ladies.’

Miss Herbert looked at him and said, ‘Why, what's the matter? You are very grumpy to-night, John.’ And they both went into the drawing-room.

Kate was sitting on a low stool by Mrs. Vesey, and behind them was Mr. Fitz, talking gaily. Mrs. Lang was growing hot in pouring out tea and
complaining of her servants to Mr. Vesey, who, like many other new comers, in his heart attributed all the fault to want of good management, and explained the system he and Mrs. Vesey intended to act upon; to all of which Mrs. Lang replied—

‘Ah! sir, you don't know what they are!"

Mr. Lang was cutting up cake for his boys, and Miss Herbert was trying to hear what Captain Smith, who had joined the party, was saying about a notorious bushranger he had been hunting without success. Mr. Herbert stood leaning against the chimney-piece, with his hands behind him.

When tea was finished, music was proposed. Kate declined playing, pleading fatigue, so Isabel sat down at the instrument, and playing an old air, nodded to Mr. Herbert, and said: ‘Your favourite!’ Mr. Herbert did not speak, and after playing it two or three times, she asked Mrs. Vesey if she would take her place; but Mrs. Vesey said she must make her brother sing a certain comic song, which, accordingly, after the proper degree of hesitation, he did, and every one laughed, Mr. Lang loudest of all; he rubbed his hands and cried Capital, capital! beautiful, and encore, and the ladies begged hard for another. Isabel half moved a chair towards Mr. Herbert, and said, ‘You are tired.’

‘Not at all, I am obliged to you,’ with a stiff bow; but on glancing at her, and seeing that flushed cheeks and a look of uneasiness, he moved a little, and stood leaning over the back of the proffered chair, instead of the chimney-piece, but he did not speak. Then Mr. Farrant came up and asked Mr. Herbert's opinion of some letters which had appeared in the *Sydney Herald* suggesting a new way of fattening pigs, and by degrees Mr. Herbert was led into an animated conversation. The pigs led to a place in South America, where the people kill these animals merely for their fat, and find it a profitable trade. South America led to a voyage Mr. Herbert once made when a lad, in which his ship had chased some pirates, and before long every voice in the room was hushed, and the two boys had crept up behind Isabel's chair, listening with breathless attention to his vivid and forcible description of the chase.

When the story was ended, there was a general move for bed. Mrs. Vesey expressed her wonder how room could be found for so many. She had not been long enough in the country to know what indian-rubber houses the hospitable settlers have, how they stretch them out, and turn drawing-room sofas, and even dining-tables into beds!

‘Call me, my dear girl,’ said she to Kate; ‘call me early, or I shall never wake to-morrow!’

‘O, don't be afraid of that. No one ever gets any sleep in this house after four. Papa wears creaking shoes, and goes up and down the passage
knocking and hallooing till every one is up.’

‘Another of the Bush fashions! Well, I hope you'll teach my brother Arthur to rise early; he seldom gets up till ten, he is a lazy fellow.’

Kate blushed as she said good night. Mr. Herbert held the door open for the ladies to pass out; Miss Herbert and Isabel were the last. He kissed his sister according to their usual custom, and instead of letting Isabel pass with the bow which had been bestowed on the others, he held out his hand; ‘Isabel . . . . good night!’ he said. But she read the meaning of the pause in his face. She knew he was aware of, and sorry for, his want of temper, and somehow she never liked her friend better than when he stooped to confess himself wrong. She cordially returned his handshake, and forthwith paid great and minute attention to Miss Herbert's comforts in her room.
CHAPTER X.

HOW THEY RIDE IN AUSTRALIA.

Vol.I

Mr. and Mrs. Lang and their daughter Isabel, were up almost as soon as the sun, packing away chicken pies, tongue, cold beef, and other good things for the pic-nic. Kate made the breakfast, assisted by Mr. Fitz, who contrived that morning to be down three hours before his usual time. Before they all assembled at the table, Mr. Herbert walked into the stockyard and stables to see that his horses were taken care of. Mr. Herbert was particular about this; his and his sister's riding horses, contrary to the general custom of the colony, were well groomed and well fed. Willie Lang was admiring them, and wishing that his father would allow him to do the same. The stockman now drove in a mob of horses, and selecting those which were wanted, turned the rest out again.

‘Which horse is your sister going to ride?’ said Mr. Herbert to Willie.

‘Kate rides Bessie; and Isabel—I don't know which Issy will ride—she talked of driving Miss Terry.’

‘Put the side-saddle on my filly, and let me have one of the ponies,’ said Mr. Herbert to the man.

‘That'll be a poor exchange, sir,’ said he, with a grin. ‘Miss Isabel's horse has a queer trick of his own in pulling hard, besides now and then liking a buckjump; but Miss Isabel's used to him, and knows how to manage him better than any one else.’

Willie ran in to tell his sister what a treat was in store for her, to ride Pearl all the way! ‘And she's a beauty to jump! Wont we have leaping in fine style over the middle paddock, where the fallen trees are, that's all!’

The difficulty now was as to who should drive Miss Terry. Mr. Lang said he would, which made his wife very angry, and declare she would not go at all; and Isabel said he really must drive Peggy in the gig, for no one else knew how to take her through the bogs. Mr. Farrant said he always liked driving better than riding, he should be most happy to do it. Mrs. Lang said ‘It was too bad to make such a fuss, why couldn't Miss Terry ride. Some people liked to be important; at all events Willie or Jem could drive her by turns.’

Mr. Farrant however persisted in preferring it, and it was settled accordingly, and some one remarked that no doubt old Mr. Jolly would be glad to change with him when he was tired.

Fortunately, Miss Terry was not present to hear all the difficulties, and
when the children called her she found Mr. Farrant already seated in the cart with his whip in his hand. Isabel handed her in. She was surprised, for she had expected Willie or Jem would take it by turns, but the order to start from Mr. Lang prevented any further explanations. The gig and cart started first, and then followed the equestrians. Isabel on Pearl, who was prancing and curvetting and tossing her head, looking like the queen of the party. Kate and Mrs. Vesey set off at once in a canter, which made Miss Herbert withdraw her foot from the stirrup just as she was in the act of mounting, and say—

‘If this is the way they are going to begin, I wont go. We shall all break our necks.’

Mr. Herbert had to lead her horse to the slip rail, and afterwards kept by her side.

‘I think I shall propose an exchange with Mr. Farrant, by and bye,’ he said.

Miss Herbert looked pleased, but said nothing.

‘I wish to have a little talk with Miss Terry. I admired her quiet way of managing the children and taking her seat in the cart without fuss or nonsense.’

‘Quite the gentlewoman indeed, John. I should like to invite her to spend a day with us, only what should we do with the children?’

‘By all means, invite her and all the young ones. The two Miss Langs and myself can go out and make the long talked-of sketch of my mill.’

‘Pray don't ask so many; I wanted a quiet, cosy talk with poor little Miss Terry. I am sure she needs a little sympathy. I wonder what induced her to take such a situation. I heard some one say that she did not like her brother-in-law; but evidently it is pain and misery to her to be with -- ’

‘Mr. Herbert—Mr. Herbert! we are going to try this fence,’ called out the boys. ‘Issy's pony is sure to clear it—only put her well at it, give a loose rein, and don't touch her with the spur, or she'll buckjump.’

‘Don't be afraid, Miss Herbert,’ said Isabel, riding back to her as Mr. Herbert cantered on.

‘Afraid! Who can help it with such—such extraordinary people as you all are? Really it is the very last expedition of the kind I will ever be tempted to join. Really, my brother should know better than to be such a boy.’

The two lower rails of the colonial gate—usually called a 'slip rail'—being cleared by all the gentlemen, Willie shouted out for his sisters to try. Kate declined, although pressed by Mr. Fitz. Isabel looked at her horse.

‘Don't try,’ called out Mr. Herbert; ‘she is not a pleasant jumper yet.’ ‘Yes, do, Issy,’ shouted the boys.

‘It is not ladylike or feminine,’ remarked Miss Herbert. ‘You should not
ask your sister to do such a colonial thing.’

‘Colonial!’ said Isabel. ‘Oh! if it is colonial I certainly will do it. I am not ashamed to acknowledge myself colonial; so now, Pearl, gently!’

‘Well done! well cleared, Issy—capital,’ shouted Willie and Jem and Mr. Fitz, while Kate seriously thought of following her sister's example, but before she had time to do so, Mr. Herbert had dismounted and was taking out the long heavy rails to allow the sober riders to go through.

‘Pearl is not a bad jumper, Mr. Herbert,’ remarked Isabel, as she patted her steed's neck.

‘If you were my daughter—my sister,’ Mr. Herbert said, sharply, while putting up the rails again, ‘you should not do that a second time.’

‘But I am not—I am not! and never shall be, luckily,’ she answered, laughing, and putting Pearl into a canter.

Mr. Herbert followed in a slow walk, and did not overtake them till all the party assembled before Mr. Jolly's farm. Old Mr. Jolly was, as he said, in his ‘dishabil,’ superintending the salting a bullock which had been cut up that morning. Three or four men with rough gloves were rubbing the pieces of beef, another was packing it tight into a cask, and Mr. Jolly himself occasionally waved a branch of gumtree to keep off the large yellow bottle flies which swarmed around.

‘Hallo!’ he hallooed. ‘Didn't expect ye yet—and there is my wife and myself as busy as bees. Must be done, you know, younkers—business must be minded. Will ye wait in the parlour or go on, and we'll overtake you? Where is Mrs. Jolly, d'ye ask? Bless you, she's in the kitchen, I suppose—never was such a careful woman as she is—not a scrap goes to waste. Such soup from the shins—'twould surprise you!’

Here Mrs. Jolly peeped out of the kitchen window, smiling in the most good-humoured way, and holding up a piece of beefsteak.

‘Have you all breakfasted? O, then, Mr. Jolly, we must make haste and not keep them waiting; or suppose, my dear,’ added she, coming out into the yard, and touching her husband's sleeve with her arm, ‘suppose they go on and we can follow. Tom is so busy to-day,’ said she, turning to Isabel; ‘so disappointed, my dear; but a man has just arrived about the bullocks, so he must stay. He is so sorry and vexed; for he says he has seen nothing of you for such a time; and Amelia has gone to visit her uncle. However, my dear, we have a beau for you—a great acquisition—young Mr. Henley, from England—looking about him, you know; and my husband, having once known his father, invited him up here, just you know to see what a settler's life is. Ah! how d'ye do, Mrs. Vesey, ma'am? I'm glad to see you. Excuse me, for this is a busy day;’ and she laughed again as she pointed to her curl-papers.
Mrs. Vesey looked through her glass and let her horse take a bite of some green barley which a man had just been cutting, and which stood in a wheel-barrow near.

‘How very pretty!’ said she, ‘quite rural; I admire the colonial taste so much, Mrs. Jolly, in always having the entrance to their houses at the back. No show off, but so primitive and simple-minded of them.’

Mrs. Jolly smiled, and said ‘Indeed!’ not understanding or hearing it all; while her husband went close up to Isabel, and holding Pearl's silky mane, said in a confidential, important voice—'Issy, Henley is the son of an old friend of mine—an old schoolfellow—beat me always at dead languages. A fine young man—just arrived with a snug little purse. Wants advice. Told him to have patience and look about with both eyes wide open; but he is of an impatient age you see. Wants to be settled all of a hurry. Can't ride a bit, my dear—all new to him. Don't be too hard upon him, hey? I have had in old Music, you know, the quietest creature ever was, but there are nasty bogs about. Fine-grown young man—see, here he is, bowing to Mrs. Vesey. On my word, he beats our Tom in his bow, whatever he may do at a leap.’ Pearl did not approve of Mr. Jolly's grasp, which tightened in his eagerness to fix Isabel's attention—she pranced and fidgeted; Isabel promised to be very attentive to the young stranger, and Mr. Jolly waddled off to equip for his drive.

Meanwhile Mr. Herbert had persuaded Mr. Farrant to allow him to drive the spring-cart for the rest of the way. At first he was abrupt and grave, and made short answers to little Miss Terry's attempts at conversation; but it seemed at last that the ice was broken. They were in eager, animated talk, and Miss Herbert remarked to her companion, Mr. Farrant, that she was glad to see her brother agreed with herself in finding that nice little creature agreeable.

‘Where is Miss Isabel Lang?’ said Mr. Farrant, looking back.

‘Oh, with that strange gentleman, depend on it. The Langs always court strangers. Ah, you have not lived here long enough to know them!’

Miss Herbert was right. Isabel was waiting for Mr. Henley to mount. ‘Music,’ a long-backed, narrow-faced horse, was led out. Mr. Henley said he knew nothing whatever of riding, but made a spring which startled Music.

‘Stick fast, I suppose,’ said he, gaily.

‘My dear fellow, don't lay into her with that stick,’ exclaimed Mr. Jolly, as he came out tying on a black handkerchief. ‘She has plenty of spirit, and will want a curb more than a stick. Ah, there's Dr. Marsh, I declare! Well, sir, glad to see ye. My wife and I are coming directly; go on, sir, pray.’

‘Upon my word, Mr. Jolly,’ said the Doctor, a stout little roundabout
man, ‘I think I shall do better to keep with your gig. An old navy surgeon like myself cannot ride like those young Bush men and women. Just look at them, already,’ he added, lifting himself in his stirrups, and pointing with his whip. ‘There they are, jumping and scampering; really, upon my word, Miss Isabel, yours is a spirited nag. Ha—well—gently, gently, if you please; gently . . . .’

The Doctor's horse was eager to go, whatever he might be, and he was obliged to follow Isabel; and very soon the three overtook the others in the long flat paddock which almost surrounded the farm. On they went—the very numbers adding excitement and speed—Kate and Mr. Fitz, Isabel and her brothers, Mr. Henley and the Doctor, on they went—till another slip rail checked them.

‘Jump it,’ hallooed out Willie Lang. ‘Come, Kate, show what you can do; loosen your rein. Tippoo will do it, and no fear!—that's right!’

‘I think you and I, my good sir, had better wait till those adventurous people get a-head a little. Gently, gently, Sultan, my good fellow; on my word I don't admire this. Slip rails, Mr. Henley, are one of the pests of the colony; don't attempt it, my good sir! that horse can't do it!’ said the Doctor, nervously, and applying his pocket-handkerchief to his forehead, while he endeavoured to soothe his horse's eagerness. Mrs. Vesey was over—then her husband.

‘Now for it!’ said Mr. Henley, and he recklessly applied the stick, and notwithstanding a considerable swerve in the saddle, got safely over. The prudent doctor, after coaxing and patting Sultan into something like a state of resignation to his hard fate, dismounted, and proceeded carefully to take out the rails.

‘You are very gallant, doctor,’ said Mr. Farrant, as he and Miss Herbert passed through. The Doctor bowed and shifted his spectacles as he saw Miss Herbert—remarking that it was a hot day for riding hard. The spring-cart now came up, and the Doctor having remounted, trotted alongside, telling Miss Terry how the Miss Langs had ridden, and that they were very ‘fine young women; but too adventurous.’ Miss Terry smiled, but Mr. Herbert made no reply but an impatient look and a smart crack of the whip over the horse's head.

‘And how do you like this country, ma'am,’ pursued the Doctor, looking benevolently at Miss Terry.

‘Pretty well. It takes time, you know, to recover after being transplanted.’

‘Good! ah! very good; that is exactly it. But I may venture to whisper in your ear, but don't let your neighbour hear,’ the Doctor looked sly, ‘that no one would stay here unless obliged.’

‘Indeed! is Mr. Herbert such a staunch defender of this country? I was
hardly aware of that,’ said Miss Terry.

‘I admire the country as nature has made it; but not—Ah! what are they doing? what can this be about, I wonder? O, Mr. Herbert, you are called,’ said the Doctor. A party of the foremost equestrians were seemingly at a stand-still. Soon Willie Lang galloped towards the cart.

‘Mr. Herbert, is that bog passable? It looks ugly, but Issy will have it we can go on; she is mad, I believe, she and that young Englishman.’

‘Let him try the bog, if there is any doubt about it,’ said Mr. Herbert, rather sarcastically. ‘He seems to be a bold rider.’

‘Go on!’ roared Willie.

‘Do not go on!’ called out Mr. Herbert; ‘you are all mad, I believe.’ At the same time urging his horse to such a trot that poor Miss Terry was obliged to hold fast, so rough were the jerks from the hard, stiff tufts of coarse grass, which being rejected by the cattle, grew wild and strong in patches among the more eatable kind.

‘Now, then,’ said Mr. Herbert to the expectant group who stood round the margin of the bog. ‘Now, then, Mr. Farrant, may I trouble you for the horse, since I am to judge of this formidable danger.’

Mr. Farrant quickly dismounted, and took his seat by Miss Terry with every appearance of satisfaction at the move. Mr. Herbert gravely and cautiously guided the pony to a part of the bog which had no traces of steps. ‘Follow!’ he called out, in a military tone of command, ‘one by one. Let your horses have their heads; and hold on!’

‘Come, Doctor, we want you to go first,’ said Isabel. ‘We know you to be a safe person.’

‘Excuse me, my dear young lady, but I would far prefer following the others,’ he answered, while reining Sultan back.

‘But it is always better, Dr. Marsh, to be first, before it is much trodden down,’ said Kate.

‘Is it? Then here we go!’ cried Mr. Henley, giving his horse a determined lash. ‘Music’ floundered. Mr. Henley laughed, and urged her on with stick and heels. She gave a sudden spring and slide. Down came the rider flat on his back. He was up again in a moment and waded through the stiff mud. Isabel caught the bridle as ‘Music’ reared her big head and stumbled up the bank. Mr. Henley's coat was thickly plastered with mud, and there was of course a general laugh as soon as the party were safely over, in which the gay young man joined as heartily as any one. The Doctor had resigned himself to his fate, and with a few muttered exclamations against all colonial customs, that of having bogs after rain in particular, he reached the other side. The spring-cart, too, wonderful to say, survived the danger, and Miss Terry nearly bit her lips to prevent a scream. Mr. Herbert watched
her, and immediately rode up to congratulate her on her courage, and offered himself to drive again, but Mr. Farrant would not give up his seat. Miss Terry blushed and smiled as she entered into the badinage which followed, and Miss Herbert remarked to the Doctor that a blush was very becoming. But again everyone’s attention was directed towards Mr. Henley, who was being ‘scraped clean’ by Mr. Fitz.

‘You are dubbed a Bushman for ever, my young friend,’ said Dr. Marsh, patting him on the shoulder patronisingly with his whip.

‘Henley's bog shall be the name of this place henceforth!’ said Isabel. ‘But, come, who will follow me? Let the cart and the timid keep in the track, let the brave and admirers of a fine view follow me!’ She waved her whip, and led the way up a steepish bank of rough iron stones, interspersed with weeping native cherry-trees.

‘Pretty safe, hey?’ said the Doctor, who wavered between his dislike of rough-riding and sustaining his character of a ‘great admirer of nature, particularly in her wildest freaks,’ a favourite phrase of the Doctor's, by the bye. ‘Pretty safe, hey?’ cautiously guiding Sultan between the bushes and stones. ‘Ha, a rolling-stone, very dangerous,—careful, Sultan; bad for ladies' habits, my dear Miss Isabel; a steepish pinch here, Henley—take care of yourself. Ah! indeed, Miss Isabel, you say right—worth the attempt—really a magnificent view!’ and as he pulled up his horse, and shifted his spectacles, he breathed a long sigh of admiration, or relief, whichever it might be.

‘Well! Mr. Herbert,’ said Isabel.

Mr. Herbert bowed.

‘Well, we wait for your remarks. Come, describe the scene—point out its beauties—its points—to Mrs. Vesey and Mr. Henley. Nature requires a showman occasionally,’ said Isabel. ‘You used to be eloquent when we reached this spot, I remember.’

‘That was many years ago,’ Mr. Herbert replied.

‘Perhaps—if—Miss Terry were here, it might—probably it would, inspire the gentleman,’ softly whispered the Doctor to Miss Herbert. ‘Didn't you think he talked a good deal during the drive?’

Miss Herbert did not catch what he said—she answered—

‘Certainly—I quite agree with you—far too forward—quite bold.’

And Miss Herbert and the Doctor, who looked ‘posed,’ went on, following Mr. Herbert in a track which led back to the road to Sugar-loaf.

There was a great deal of laughing and talking amongst the rest of nature's admirers on the hill. Mrs. Vesey mimicking Mr. Herbert's air and manner inimitably well.

‘What is that you are singing, Mr. Henley—an ourang-outang and the
bush? What is it? let us hear,' said Mrs. Vesey, riding on.

‘A song? O, then reserve it for after dinner, pray,’ said Isabel. ‘I shall be so thankful for anything of that kind,’ added she, looking suddenly grave.

‘I could not venture on such a song in such a company. They would call me out,’ said Mr. Henley.

‘O, then! by all means let us have it!’ exclaimed Mrs. Vesey. ‘It would be quite a divertissement to see Mr. Budd, or Mr. Jolly, or even Mr. Herbert—’

The front riders were now in a canter, so the conversation was broken off. They had emerged from the thick scrub of gnarled tea shrubs and native currant bushes, and were now in an open clear space, called in the colony a ‘flat,’ where the trees grew naturally in park-like groups. The conical hill, named Sugar-loaf, from its peculiar shape, appeared in front, rising almost abruptly from the plain. It was a tempting place for a gallop. Isabel was passing them all on Pearl, and Mr. Fitz complimenting her on her horsemanship. Then she reined in Pearl a little and kept by Kate, talking and laughing, the quick pace at which they were cantering through the air raising the spirits of each. Turning round presently she saw Mr. Herbert riding alone, and apparently in one of his unsociable fits. Pearl was a little pulled in, and she dropped behind her sister and Mr. Fitz. Still the hint was not taken. Mr. Herbert kept his distance. At last she turned on her saddle and said—

‘We had better exchange steeds in returning, Mr. Herbert. I fear my pony has given you trouble. He understands me.’

‘The pony goes very well, thank you.’

Nothing could be more matter-of-fact than these words; yet the tone in which they were spoken struck Isabel. Some voices have so much power of expression!

She looked at him for a moment, and then, being one to speak as her heart prompted, she said—

‘Then—what ails you?’

A sudden, and perhaps involuntary, prick from his spur caused Mr. Herbert's steed to give a buck jump, gathering up all four legs, and heaving the back in an indescribable, and nearly impossible-to-sit way. Mr. Herbert, however, was a good rider, and perhaps his success in sitting firm, and his skilful management of the pony, pleased him, for he threw off his silence and talked cheerfully to Isabel as they cantered on; and in a few minutes they reached the spot where they were to dine. Mr. and Mrs. Budd were already there, and by the time the horses were comfortably fastened to trees, and shawls and gig cushions spread in the most shady spots they could find, Mr. and Mrs. Jolly made their appearance.
‘You asked me just now what was the matter,’ said Mr. Herbert, coming up to Isabel, who was for a moment resting against a tree without a smile on her face. ‘Suppose I turn questioner and ask what calls forth so grave a look?’

But while he spoke it was gone, and in its stead the peculiar bright, half saucy, half coaxing expression, which she generally wore, returned.

‘I was trying to follow the example of my betters, that's all,’ said she, pushing back her hair and gathering up her habit, which had before been allowed to fall on the ground. ‘However, I have done considering—now for acting,’ and she moved on a step.

‘Can I assist you?’ asked Mr. Herbert, following.

‘You can do so, if you will,’ said she, looking at him.

‘I am willing, if it be to unpack pies and bottles, but if it be to talk—you know as well as I do how incapable I am, and I have talked enough to-day to last a silent man, like myself, a week.’

‘I pity your poor sister, then, if half an hour's brisk conversation with a lady in a spring cart dooms her to silence for seven days. But, however, your assistance would be very acceptable beyond the laying out dinner. Parties—certain parties you know, Mr. Herbert—must be divided. Who will you take? Let me see; there is Mrs. Vesey?’

‘Any one but her!—I can't stand her—pray do not get intimate with her!’ he added, in that dictatorial tone he sometimes assumed.

‘And pray why not?’ said Isabel, quickly; ‘pray what do you know of her?’

‘Quite enough to see that she is not an improving acquaintance,’ said he, casting a glance towards Mr. Fitz, who was flirting with Kate.

‘I have known you since you were children in sun bonnets and pinafores,’ he added, half apologetically; ‘and I can't help feeling sorry and disappointed if—if I see you led away from good taste.’

‘Thank you,’ said Isabel, curtseying low; ‘but now to our task, if you wont help me, I will find some one else,’ and she tripped on towards Mr. Farrant, who had seated himself by Miss Terry. ‘Mr. Farrant, do be so kind as to assist my mother, will you? Miss Terry, I am sorry to disturb you, but will you sit by my father; he always likes your company, and you can slice the cucumber to please him—will you be so very kind.’

Miss Terry, whose good nature never failed, and who besides saw that Isabel had a reason for her request, immediately complied. Mr. Lang was busy unpacking the basket, and she offered to help him.

Isabel then managed to divide the thoroughly good-tempered Mr. and Mrs. Jolly among those who were more irascible and easily offended. Mrs. Vesey was seated among an undue share of cushions, heaped up by Mr.
Jolly, who implicitly believed all she said as to her delicate health and extreme fatigue, and actually robbed his wife of her only shawl to spread under the lady's feet, saying, in reply to Mrs. Vesey's not very eager exclamations against the monopoly, 'O dear, my wife don't mind such things, she has been used to roughing it. She is the best natured creature I ever met with.'

So Mrs. Vesey resigned herself to the cushions, and shawls, and her companion's good nature, and looked through her glass at the preparations, casting many a sly side look at her brother or husband, which made Isabel's colour mount high. Kate, too, was a 'drone,' as her father said, and Mr. Fitz tied a shawl fantastically over head on the lower branch of a tree, to form a canopy between her and the now powerful sun. Mrs. Jolly laughed as she said, 'What a sweet pretty picture it made. She only wished poor Tom was here to see it,' and then Mrs. Vesey looked through the never-failing glass and nodded at Kate in a meaning way, which made Kate blush. When all was arranged, Mr. Henley contrived a seat for Isabel, declaring she had well earned her dinner and a comfortable seat, and now she must depute him to be her messenger. She cast a quick, and a close observer might have said an anxious, look around, before she suffered herself to be seated. All seemed, however, to go on smoothly. Mr. Budd droned out his long stories to Mrs. Jolly, who had a laugh, or a 'really,' or 'very true,' ready between the pauses. Once, indeed, Mr. Lang began scolding Kate because she did not eat a good dinner, but Miss Terry did her part well, and smoothed things over with great tact. Then came the champagne, and healths were proposed; and then, to Isabel's dismay, Mr. Budd rose, shifted from one long leg to another, and in his nasal tone of voice said—

'And now, ladies and gentlemen, I have—that is, I beg to propose a toast—agreeable I hope to all parties who have any public spirit, and have the good of the district at heart—I say agreeable to all public spirited men—hem—I mean the proposed scheme of a new bridge and church at Bengal. I hope through my own, and the exertions of all this worthy company, especially our excellent minister (bowing to Mr. Farrant), to have the satisfaction of seeing a handsome brick church, which will, I am sure, raise the value of the land around it, and soon attract settlers. Besides—hem—besides the—the poetical, if I may be allowed the expression, the poetical effect of a spire rising from the forest. So—not detaining you any longer,' added Mr. Budd, with energy, 'Here's to the Bridge of Bengal,' and he swung his glass round his head and waved himself to and fro in delight.

No one knew exactly what to do. Mr. Jolly said 'ah' several times,
uncomfortably, and looked towards Mr. Lang, who muttered and frowned as he drew the cork from another bottle.

Isabel begged for Mr. Henley's song, but Mr. Fitz said they must drink the toast first, and he begged to propose the health of Mr. Lang, with three time three. This was done, and then Mr. Lang rose, and in a thundering voice stammered out something about his opposing that scheme with all his might. He considered, without boasting, that he had a right to a voice in the matter—that he always had, he always would oppose such a mad scheme. It should not be. He would eat his own head first. Mr. Budd might try—'

Here Mr. Farrant said he hoped that they would waive the subject for today, so unfitted to the occasion. It was hardly fair to the ladies. Mr. Herbert uttered many a 'pshaw' from under his moustachios, and fed his dog from the scraps. Mrs. Vesey with her glass seemed to be enjoying the whole scene, and in reply to Mrs. Jolly's remark, 'how unpleasant such little jars were among friends,' she answered, 'O, not at all; it gives quite a *piquante* zest to the whole thing, it makes a variety; I enjoy it beyond measure!'

Great was the relief to many of the party when Mr. Henley said—'Well, if you will all promise not to be offended at my song, you shall have it. I am not responsible for its merits or its faults. Mind, all must join in the chorus. Now then—

Off I set with cash in hands,
   And on the map I chose my lands,
But found 'twas nothing but barren sands,
   When I got to the bush of Australia!

**CHORUS**(which after the first was very heartily joined in by the party).

Illawarra, Woolongong,
   Parramatta, Mittagong,
Famous subject for a song,
   Thy charms, O bush of Australia!

Of sheep I bought a precious lot,
   Some died of scab and some of rot,
For the deuce a drop of rain we got,
   In the beautiful bush of Australia!

Illawarra, &c.

My convict rogues were always drunk,
And kept me in a constant funk,
When every night to bed I slunk,
I wished myself out of Australia!

Illawarra, &c.

That these woes are enough I'm sure you'll own,
But there's one thing more the whole to crown,
My little bark hut did tumble down,
And all in Australia!

Illawarra, &c.

Of house and land and all bereft,
My woolly farm I gladly left,
Making o'er by deed of gift,
To the savages of Australia!

Illawarra, &c.

I gladly worked my passage home,
And back to England I am come,
Determined never more to roam,
At least in the bush of Australia!

Illawarra, &c.

Stones upon the road I'd break,
And earn my 'seven bob' a-week,
Which must be owned is a better freak,
Than settling in Australia!

Illawarra, Woolongong,
Parramatta, Mittagong!
I like thee when no more among
Thy charms, O bush of Australia!

This song was applauded by all parties. Another was asked for, and after some pressure, Mr. Fitz gave one. But it fell flat, and Isabel casting a quick glance round, saw ominous symptoms of fatigue and weariness. She did not half like the keen looks through her glass, followed by the hearty, though suppressed laughter, which came from Mrs. Vesey. Isabel did not mind an honest joke, but she grew redder and hotter, under this ‘fun’ of Mrs. Vesey's, which, whatever it might be about, was confined to the ears of her brother Mr. Fitz and Kate. Soon a pencil was evidently brought into play. Isabel resolved to try her best to destroy the picture, and rising quickly proposed their going to explore the top of old Sugar-loaf. ‘Let us have two parties under leaders, and each take a different route; we shall then settle the old dispute as to the easiest and quickest way of ascent.’
‘Here am I ready to lead one set, then,’ said Mr. Budd. And he began a long-winded repetition of his reasons for preferring one track, while Mr. Herbert took the other side, and maintained there was a shorter and better path.

‘Well, let us range ourselves under these two great captains,’ said Isabel.

Mr. Budd immediately turned to beg Mrs. Vesey to favour him, and she taking his arm, Kate, as a matter of course, followed, accompanied by Mr. Fitz.

‘You come with me,’ said Mr. Herbert to Isabel; which she agreed to do, after settling the elders comfortably, who preferred remaining still, to toiling up a steep hill.

Miss Herbert, Miss Terry, Mr. Henley, and the Doctor followed Mr. Herbert. The boys ran after the others. But it happened that Mr. Herbert, with Isabel, very soon outstripped their own party.

‘It was a good move of yours, Isabel. That woman's ill-bred quizzing is intolerable!’ Mr. Herbert spoke with strong annoyance.

‘How hypercritical you are. You never like any one!’ she said, not disposed to own that she in her heart agreed with him.

‘Yes; I like some persons. I like that nice little creature, Miss Terry.’

‘Indeed! Well, that is wonderful! She is highly honoured----’

‘Do you think there is no one else I like?’ he said, seeking her eyes as he spoke.

‘Do you mean by that, that you like me?’

‘Do I mean it?----’

He put out his hand, ‘Isabel! shake hands. I have been behaving abominably! Will you forgive me?’

‘I don’t know what about,’ she said, yielding her hand, but looking shy.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Ah! you know. You asked what ailed me just now. Last evening, too, sulky and miserable as I was, you did not resent it as I deserved. But you see, Isabel, the fact is, I must learn to consider myself as on the shelf, and----’

‘On the shelf? To be read or eaten; what sort of shelf?’

‘Yes!’ he went on, gravely and sadly. ‘It is a difficult lesson, and we all find it so in our turn. To stand aside and let our juniors have their turn, to remember that time is in the natural course of things dividing us—that, in fact, you are growing into bloom, and I am approaching decay.’

Isabel laughed merrily at this, and rallied him for his dismal fancies. But he would not quite throw them off it seemed.

‘I may be—I know I am, or must seem to you, a cross, fussy old fellow. But the fact is, I cannot see you so taken and led by persons of such utterly
bad taste, (oh, Isabel! so very different from those I should wish to see as your friends!) without a certain annoyance. I have no right, I know, to speak, or perhaps to judge, but there is something so thoroughly odious----’

‘Come, come, don't be too severe,’ she interrupted. ‘You have tried to sugar the pill, but I can't allow our ‘particular friends’ to be abused.’

‘Particular friends do you call them?’ he said with emphasis.

‘You should remember how sorely we do want a little variety and amusement,’ she went on demurely. ‘So long as we have been confined to one set—you yourself, Tom Jolly, Dr. Marsh, and Captain Smith! really it is not surprising if we enjoy a little change and fun when it comes?’

‘Hem. . . . . Tom Jolly, Dr. Marsh, and myself! Thank you! I see what estimation I am held in,’ he exclaimed, working himself out of his late penitent, into an offended mood; ‘we three are classed as alike, are we?’

‘Dear Mr. Herbert, no! Not the least alike! I don't mean to compare you. You are not half so good as Tom! Surely you don't imagine that you are?’

‘Oh, he is a very good fellow; an excellent young man, moral and amiable. I don't at all dispute his excellence, or even claim to equal it. But in what way do you compare us?’

‘In nothing, save that you are both such very old and particular friends, that you cease to be amusing. You are not more alike than that great iron bark tree is like a cherry tree. There you are—hard, and tall, and grim. The most unpliant man I ever saw; it takes a storm at least to bend you. And there is Tom,’ pointing to a native cherry tree, ‘a pliant, gentle, honest, clinging, and loving soul.’

‘Yet, even this superior, ‘loving,’ pliable, elastic youth fails to please, it seems, when any new, noisy and vulgar person comes in the way.’

‘Don't let the Veseys disturb your peace of mind.’

‘They do not. But, Isabel—one I had experience of a disposition, in some ways, as far as I can see, like Mrs. Vesey. If you knew all, you would not wonder at my warning you against that sort of ill-nature, though it is called clever quizzing. Some do say,’ he hesitated a little, ‘that you are inclined to it yourself,’ and again his penetrating eye was bent on her. ‘But I beg your pardon, I see—I have no right now—I forget that you are a ‘young lady.’ . . . . While Isabel played with her parasol, uncertain how to answer him, being rather touched by the earnestness of his manner, and also piqued at his sudden drawing in,—voices proclaimed the others at hand. Mr. Herbert and Isabel had reached the desired point, but, busy in their conversation, had taken no further notice than to stand still.

‘Here they are! How long have you been here? Did you look at your watch?’ was vociferated.

Mr. Herbert had proved his point, but had overlooked the exact instant.
Mr. Budd did not like giving in. He asked minute questions as to the route they had taken, and when it was seen that of all Mr. Herbert's followers only one was there, and that the others were anywhere, he maintained that it was not a fair victory. ‘He could show all his staff.’

But where were the laggers? The boys set off to search, and after much shouting and coo-ee-ing, the ladies appeared, out of breath, wet-footed, and with damaged dresses. Such a path never was seen!

They came quite into a deep bog, and if it had not been for Mr. Henley and Mr. Fitz, they would all have stuck there now! Mr. Budd triumphed. It was this very bog he had known of and expected they would come across. Mr. Herbert knew a track which avoided it, but in his pre-occupation with his companion, he had wholly forgotten the necessity of cautioning the rest of the party. There was of course much rallying, and Isabel cleverly turned all joke from herself by fixing it on her companion, and saying ‘that it was just like him to be so absorbed with his argument as to forget everything else.’

Mr. Henley now claimed Isabel's attention, and described with spirit and humour their adventures.

‘We ought to be returning, I think,’ she said, and they led the way.

Mr. Herbert, who had been gradually growing graver and graver as the balls flew past his devoted head, now turned to Miss Terry and offered his escort and help down the rough path, hoping she would forgive his seeming neglect of her during their journey up. Very soon these two were in deep conversation. Isabel looking back, saw them, and nodded her head in a very pleased and triumphant way. The rest fell into couples, as they liked. As they gained the level land, they heard a great coo-ee-ing.

‘That is papa! He is tired and wants to go home,’ said Isabel. ‘Or something is wrong.’

This proved to be the case.

Isabel found her father vexed and irritated. Mr. Budd's horse had slipped his halter, and had caused disturbance among the others. Kate's pony, Tippoo, had made off in consequence, and Mr. Lang and the man who was in attendance had no little trouble to catch him again.

‘It was hot—the flies were unbearable—the locusts would not be satisfied till they gave every one a splitting headache. What was the use of staying in such a place? Pic-nics were the vilest inventions under the sun.’

Mr. Budd laughed loud as he disagreed. He thought they were the most charming parties possible. It was a lovely—a perfect day. Did not Mr. Herbert think so?

Mr. Herbert had not thought about it, he said, as he swung his cane, and walked off to see how Pearl had fared in the skirmish.
The Vine Lodge party and Kate retired to a shady spot, and had just made themselves comfortable when Mr. Lang insisted on starting homewards.

There were many voices raised against this. It was such a pity to start before the cool of the evening—the best part, the homeward ride, would be entirely spoilt if they had to go while it was so hot. But Mr. Lang said he should go—any one who liked to stay longer might do so, only they must beware of the bogs. Isabel said she should go too, and the Jollys thought it quite time to ‘think about it.’

So it ended in the whole party following Mr. Lang. Mr. Herbert drove the spring cart the whole way. He nearly got into a scrape once, he was talking so intently. Isabel did not fail to remark this to Mr. Farrant, who was a little behind her, both trying to keep up with old Peggy's jog-trot. It was, on the whole, a tame and silent ride, a cloud seemed to have settled on the spirits of every one. The boys whistled and laughed a little, and jumped over a few logs; but in spite of all their entreaties and hallooing, no one followed their example, not even Isabel, and their father called out for them not to make fools of themselves, he would have no scampering or leaping.

‘Well, to be sure!’ sighed Mrs. Lang, ‘I must say, Mr. Lang, you and Mr. Budd might have kept quiet for to-day. I can't think why you say anything to him, he's beneath your notice, in my opinion.’

‘A scoundrel! an impertinent, officious scoundrel!’ muttered Mr. Lang as he applied his whip over Peggy's head with so much vehemence as to astonish her, so dutifully was she rolling along in her best trot.

‘Well, never mind, Mr. Lang, don't call names—think no more of it! It has, of course, spoilt the party, and shocked poor Mrs. Vesey.’

‘Spoilt the party! and who spoilt the party, eh? Mrs. Lang, but that . . . .’

‘Pull up, pull up, papa,’ called out Isabel, ‘you don't see that awkward stump. How well Peggy goes to-day, I can hardly keep up with you,’ added she, as she cantered alongside of the gig.

‘Come, Issy, after all, that pony has a prettier action than that trumpery concern Mr. Herbert mounted you on to-day. Some people are uncommonly conceited, and think all their geese swans.’

As the daughter, riding so well, and smiling and talking so goodhumouredly kept beside him, Mr. Lang's mood changed. He laughed in delight as he kept the rest of the party behind. He went at such a pace, that Mrs. Lang declared he must be mad, and they should certainly be upset, and she desired Isabel to keep behind or before, and said that neither she nor her father had any mercy on her nerves.

She grew annoyed as Mr. Lang grew merry, till at last, as they came to the more open road, Isabel galloped on and left them to follow more at
their leisure.
CHAPTER XI.

CURTAIN LECTURES.

Vol.I

There was a long evening before them, and Mrs. Lang was quite tired, and said that her daughters must amuse the party. Kate agreed as far as playing chess with Mr. Fitz went, and Mrs. Vesey contrived to keep several of them round her, including Dr. Marsh and the boys, while she drew comic figures with astonishing rapidity. Miss Terry was almost entirely at the pianoforte, while Mr. Herbert, always fond of music, sat near her, his arms crossed and his pointed chin turned upwards, utterly unconscious how well Mrs. Vesey's pencil had represented him, and how much of the tittering and whispering which came from that table was occasioned by his own attitude. Isabel, meantime, passed from one party to another, encouraging Miss Terry, and bringing out all the few books and curiosities in the house for Miss Herbert; while a pile of old newspapers was fetched for Mr. Vesey, who had expressed a wish to see the market prices of two years since.

The early hours and active habits of the family did not generally allow of any of those fascinating talks at ‘brushing hair’ time to which young ladies are said to be prone. To-night, however, proved an exception, and the two sisters, for once in a way remained to talk over the day.

‘It has been such a delightful day, hasn't it?’ said Kate.

‘I was thinking,’ said her sister, ‘I can't make up my mind quite. It is pleasant to see some new faces, but on the whole, I do believe I have had more trouble than pleasure.’

‘I enjoyed it all, all but that very stupid speechifying. But Mrs. Vesey is enough to make everything pleasant. She turns all into fun.’

‘You and she are inseparable, and that brother of hers—do you really like him, Kate?’

‘Why, don't you?’

‘I know nothing about him. But, somehow, they are complete strangers after all, and I think we should be careful; we do not know them at all.’

‘Nonsense! What is there to know? They are of good family, and have some fortune, and are the most agreeable people we have in the whole district. Take it altogether there were really a respectable set of gentlemen,’ continued Kate, ‘Mr. Henley and Mr. Farrant, but Mr. Fitz is the best, out and out.’

‘Umph. You forget Mr. Herbert, and really, I think not one of them cuts
him out, when he likes to be sociable. Kate! an idea has got into my head, and it won't go out again. Guess what it is.'

‘How can I—is it about me?’

‘No, but it savours of matrimony.’

‘I am sure I can't guess then.’

‘The very thing. Just exactly the right thing! Unique, charming; O, Kate!’

‘I am sure I can't guess, unless it is of yourself; who is there but you and me?’

‘No one else? What not in this very house? O, Kate! how can you so overlook Miss Terry? Come, now you can guess, I am sure.’

‘Miss Terry! a governess!’

‘Yes, a governess, but what a delicate, gentle, sensible little thing it is; what a meek, yet spirited wife she will make for—for—come, Kate, do you give up?’

‘Yes! I thought you hated matchmaking, Issy.’

‘Matchmaking! Why, girl, I make no matches, I only imagine what a wife there is ready made for Mr. Herbert. I am passive, quite, but I see and I wish. I didn't bring them together; I didn't give her that matchless voice, the very thing he most affects; I didn't tell her to sing his favourite songs better than all the others; I didn't give her eyes with that soft downward turn, or eyebrows so delicately arched, or her figure, that quiet, ladylike grace, which is his very exemplification of what should be—the realization of his ideal, in fact. I have heard him describe her exactly when he wishes to give one a model, and here, in this out-of-the-way place, she comes, just as he returns home; quite like a novel! Kate, it is already a fact arranged. Decide on your bridesmaid costume. I, for my part, mean to study the concoction of bridescake.’

‘You are absurd, Issy! You can't be sure. He may not like to marry a governess; though, I am sure I don't care whom he marries! And as to her, I wish her joy, for they say he has a temper of his own.’

‘To be sure! a fine, blazing, warm, kind, domineering temper, too! And she will be oil and sunshine. Hurrah! I say, Kate, we must be very careful not to betray our idea. That would spoil all, only it will be fun to watch the process of a real courtship, and slily help it on, you know.’

‘Our idea? It is quite all your own. Take care of yourself. I am sure you will go and tell Mr. Herbert, or allow him to read it in your face, as he often does. Besides, I suspect, Issy, there will be other things to divert your attention soon. Some people say a certain gentleman rather likes you.’

‘O, yes, a great many do. I should be sorry to think it was only one.’

‘Well, people talk about me,’ returned Kate, rather affectedly. ‘But really I think, Issy, you are the greater flirt or coquette now. I am sure I am quite
content with one.

‘How moderate! I am not; I require a variety. That would be the worst of being engaged, and all that nonsense. It would spoil all the fun to be tied down to one. I couldn't stand it,’ said Isabel, laughing.

‘Well, I shall laugh when you are fairly caught. And caught you will be soon, or, to borrow papa's expression, my name is not Kate. But I am sleepy, so good night.’

‘Good night!’ Isabel returned.

Meanwhile another colloquy was going on in the ‘state-room,’ as it was called.

Mr. Vesey, in his dressing-gown, was looking out of the window.

‘What a confounded noise these wild cattle are—making. And by Jove if it isn't as black as ink out there, and looking like rain. Pretty job to be kept here to-morrow—eh!’

‘I shouldn't care; as we have no cook, it will be convenient. Besides, I want to ascertain for myself in what state these folks' affairs really are. That creature Budd insinuates that Kate's beauty will be her portion. Yet they said in Sydney that both the girls would have something handsome on their wedding-day, to say nothing of what the father may leave.’

‘Well, Arthur, is not losing time, any way. He is rather particular, I should say; don't you?’

‘Nothing but mere flirtation. As to that, if we find Mr. Budd right, Arthur can easily back out of it. I shall send him off at once; though I believe Arthur is not one to forget the one thing, even for the sake of Kate's bright eyes. What a fool the girl makes of herself about him, swallowing all the nonsense he talks.’

‘Every man to his taste—of course, but give me the other girl—upon my soul, she's a deuced nice little thing, aw—plenty of spirit you know—and—to my thinking, very handsome, too.’

‘She is my particular aversion,’ returned his wife, with asperity. ‘That girl presumes to—’

‘I thought she cut you up sharp, aw—my dear!’ laughed the husband.

‘Cut me up! Her cool way is unbearable. The only redeeming point in these people is their having a little money, and possessing the sense to see they are ages and ages behind civilization. The notion of presuming to set me right,—to set up, as she does, for a character; and to order about her elder sister, too! But she will learn who has most influence over Kate yet. I will pay back Miss Isabel Lang, sooner or later.’

‘Ay, ay! I didn't know it had reached—to this point! Well, if there is war between you—it will, be great fun, aw—for you are both great spirits, and clever, aw—and all that, you know. How has ‘Issy,’ as they call
her, managed to—aw, offend you, my love?’

‘In every way. But I will show her I am her match yet. Do you hear, Mr. Vesey; don't go and make a fool of yourself, and flatter up that young lady, because I don't approve of her at all. As to Arthur, it will be a bore, now we have taken this place and all, if our information turns out incorrect. Kate without money is not of course to be thought of. If she had a few thousands, I should be glad to have Arthur settled down as a married man. It may steady him.’

‘Good luck to the poor girl who has that brother of yours, my dear. Upon my soul I pity her. I say, I affirm, Arthur Fitz may have—aw—a long head, and all that, but I say, I don't mind betting anything, he hasn't aw—a heart as big as a kitten's.’

‘Never mind hearts----Dear me, there comes the rain, I do believe!’ and Mrs. Vesey put out the light, and ceased talking.

Beneath her gay and girlish manner, this lady had a very calculating and shrewd mind. Mr. Vesey possessed a very tolerable fortune, but there had been troubles in the family, and there were several poor relations. It was partly to avoid them, and partly in hopes of realizing a large fortune very speedily, that they came to the colony. Her only brother accompanied them, having come to the end of the little he inherited, after a few years' gay living. He too was shrewd and selfish; he liked money, but was too fond of pleasure to work for it if it could be had without. For some time he had lived upon his brother-in-law, and while they were in Sydney Mrs. Vesey determined that he must marry some one with money. They met the Langs at some parties, and were struck with the evidence of wealth displayed, as well as by Kate's beauty, which was great. An acquaintance was directly brought about, and through Mr. Lang they heard of the Vine Lodge estate, which might be had a great bargain, he said. The Langs' fortune was exaggerated in Sydney, and it served to turn the scale, and decide the Vesey's on going to Vine Lodge. Wealthy neighbours whom she might flatter, and turn to use as well as fun, just pleased Mrs. Vesey, and to secure so desirable a prize as Kate for her brother, she would have taken much trouble. Her husband, though very liberal, and entirely led by her, was beginning to be tired of supplying Arthur Fitz with funds, and in fact his marriage was an event much desired by his sister, for more reasons than she cared to say. Hitherto all had prospered. Mrs. Lang, completely charmed by the notice of so ‘fashionable’ a person as Mrs. Vesey, cultivated the acquaintance, and fulfilled all that lady's hopes and calculations with respect to being a ‘good neighbour,’ i.e., supplying Vine Lodge with fruit and vegetables, and lending this and that, while the place was yet rough and disordered.
Langville was entirely at their service while their own place was being furnished, and Langville horses and carriages at their disposal. There was but one hitch, which had a little startled Mrs. Vesey from the very first, and which gave her more uneasiness as she saw more of her. Isabel, though readily entering into the fun and the spirit of their new neighbours, had a keener observation than her mother and sister. She saw sometimes more than Mrs. Vesey intended, and did not scruple to show that she saw. In fact, Mrs. Vesey could neither completely win and fascinate, or awe Isabel. She felt she had found her match, and that her worldly schemes might be frustrated through the influence and good sense of Isabel. There was something also of truth in her husband's remark. Of Kate's beauty, Mrs. Vesey never dreamt of being jealous; it was so very different from her own style. But there was in Isabel enough of similarity to provoke the spirit of rivalry. Now Mrs. Vesey never could endure to divide her reign. She must be acknowledged the sole and undisputed queen of her own peculiar territory. She prided herself on her wit and her power of repartee, on her always speaking home truths; and while she was eminently fashionable, she professed to hold herself free from all restraint,—to wear, and to say, and to do, just what pleased herself.

All this dazzled Kate, and Mrs. Vesey's word was law to her in all matters of taste. But Isabel, looking on, had detected that Mrs. Vesey was in reality playing her sister and mother a trick, and, according to schoolboy phrase, was 'chaffing' them.

Mrs. Vesey also found that she did not entirely carry away the adoration of the district, as she had expected. Some persons preferred Isabel's merry ways and fun. So this, with several other small things, made Mrs. Vesey look on Isabel with increasing dislike and suspicion.
CHAPTER XII.

A RAINY FOREGROUND AND RUIN IN PERSPECTIVE.

Vol. I

‘It is quite impossible for any one to go out to-day,’ said Mr. Lang, in true hospitable fashion, regarding the rain as a Godsend.

They were waiting breakfast for Mrs. Vesey.

‘I don't believe I'll get my letters,’ he continued, with that utter confusion of ‘shall’ and ‘will’ which is a great characteristic of ‘Currency’ talk, ‘unless I ride for them myself. The boy will never stand this rain.’

It might truly be said that it ‘poured.’ Streams of water ran over the road; and the low land was like one large pond or lake. The rain was so hard that even the covered way, leading from the house to the kitchen, did not protect the servants from getting wet as they passed, the wind drifting in at the open sides.

The covers of the various dishes were wet when placed on the table. A regular Australian breakfast it was! Langville was famous for good cheer. Beefsteaks, bacon, kidneys, cold meat, plenty of fresh eggs, peach jam, marmalade of various kinds, honey and fruit, with West Indian yams, potatoes, and a large dish of boiled rice and curry brought up the rear.

Mr. Herbert was teaching the boys to tie some particular knot, and there was a grand consultation as to what was to be the order for the day. Mr. Lang insisted on every one, ‘every soul,’ remaining at Langville. But Mr. Herbert demurred. He had business.

‘Of course ye have. I could have taken my oath ye had business! Steam mill, eh?’ said Mr. Lang, in that way, half-joke half-earnest, he used often to Mr. Herbert.

Then Mr. Farrant ventured to say that two idle days running would not do for him. He must go home.

Mr. Vesey, while observing the dishes, and settling which he would try first, laughed at the notion of minding a wetting. He had heard of being ‘snowed’ up, but never of being ‘rained’ up, since the time of Noah, ha! ha! ha! . . .

‘Haven't ye? Well, keep your eyes open, and I'll lay a wager ye'll know the meaning of being rained up. Soon, too!’ said Mr. Lang.

‘You'll have to be quick, sir,’ put in Willie, ‘or you'll have to swim Petty's Creek.’

Miss Herbert at last consented to remain, as well as Mrs. Vesey, till the roads should be in a better state. Mr. Herbert promised to return for her, as
soon as it was possible.

'Three days' quarantine, at least, Miss Herbert,' said Isabel. 'I watched
the moon set last night, and I knew how it would be. And pray why must
you go?' she added, turning round suddenly on Mr. Herbert. 'Is your
presence at home so positively indispensable?'

'Of course, Issy! Why you forget the mill, the steam mill!' said Mr.
Lang, laughing.

'I should like to stay,' Mr. Herbert said, speaking low, so as only to be
heard by Isabel.

'Then do! You owe me some politeness, you know. Stay, and I'll be so
much obliged. Miss Terry! wont you second me?'

That lady looked up, but evidently had not heard what it was she was
required to do, and Mrs. Vesey rallied her on being absent and 'dreamy.'

'Don't you think Mr. Herbert ought to stay here to-day?' asked Isabel.

'Certainly, certainly,' answered Miss Terry; colouring a very little, but
not showing any further awkwardness.

'If Miss Terry thinks so, I really think I must. No, I forgot! I can't stay
this morning. But I will make a point of returning this evening,' Mr.
Herbert said, looking pleased.

Here Mrs. Lang called Isabel aside. Then she was occupied with putting
up some books belonging to Mr. Farrant.

'Are you ready, Mr. Herbert?' said the clergyman, coming in. 'I must ask
to keep with you, not knowing the ford which Willie makes out so
formidable.'

The two gentlemen bowed, and were soon trotting off, as fast as the
slippery road would allow.

There was some little difficulty in finding 'in-door' amusement for so
large a party at Langville. Neither of the ladies had brought work, but Mrs.
Vesey proposed their going to the store, to learn to make custards. Miss
Herbert begged for writing materials, saying she had a letter to get ready
for the post. While Mrs. Lang was preparing to teach her friends the
mystery of a good custard, Mrs. Vesey's untiring pencil was busy. She was
drawing caricatures. First there was her brother and his dog, an ugly
terrier, with the proverb, 'Love me, love my dog.' He laughingly protested
against his having such a hooked nose, but his sister declared it was exactly
like, and appealed to Kate for her opinion. Kate said it was 'horrid,' at
which the gentleman confessed he felt consoled; but Mrs. Vesey rather
drove poor Kate into a corner by pretending to be hurt at her drawing being
so condemned and criticised. Then came a rough but very clever sketch of
their party at the pic-nic. Mr. Budd was admirable; Isabel said she could
hear his 'twanging' voice, talking of his zeal for public good, and coming
down with fifty pounds, winking all the time. ‘How can you do them so well? so very like?’ she asked Mrs. Vesey.

‘Try. You will find it very easy with practice. Try on fat Mr. Jolly.’

Isabel did try, and as she had a natural turn for the sort of thing, and a free, true touch, it was no bad attempt.

‘Capital!’ said Mr. Fitz. ‘Why you are a genius, Miss Isabel.’

‘Famous!’ exclaimed Mrs. Vesey. ‘Now, try Mr. Herbert! Oh, pray do!’ added she, as Isabel shook her head, and pushed away the paper.

‘It is hardly fair,’ said Isabel. ‘If they were present—perhaps—but to laugh at the absent----’

‘Who on earth would dare to laugh at Mr. Herbert, to his face?’ said Kate, in an alarmed voice.

‘Come, try! Positively I want your idea of Mr. Herbert's physiognomy, Miss Isabel Lang. It is a study.’

Miss Herbert, who was sitting at another table, and was deaf, had not heard all that was said, but the name of Herbert struck her. She looked up, and catching Mrs. Vesey's eye, that lady quickly gave her Isabel's profile of Mr. Jolly. ‘A portrait by Miss Isabel Lang. Good, isn't it, Miss Herbert?’

‘Indeed I am no judge. It doesn't strike me as being like. I cannot approve of caricatures,' she added, rising and going out of the room.

‘Now, then, we have offended the respectable spinster!’ said Mrs. Vesey. ‘She has retreated in anger—true tragedy style! I will have my revenge too, in a full-length portrait—toss of the chin and all! By the way, she is like her brother, the grand signior. Are they supposed to be much attached, and all that sort of thing? I conclude neither party will ever marry. Is there any fraternal bond or promise of perpetual union?’

‘Oh, no! Why Miss Herbert would give a good deal to be married,’ said Kate.

‘My dear creature! What! Do you mean it? Hasn't she turned the awkward corner yet? Bless me! I thought she had passed that formidable turn in life. I considered her quite as one of the extremely respectable, delightful, charming sisterhood of single ladies.’

‘So she has. So she is,’ said Isabel. ‘I am sure there is nothing whatever to justify Kate's idle remark.’

‘Well, Issy, all I can say is,’ Kate answered, peevishly, ‘if she doesn't think of it, some one else does. Miss Herbert is not averse to the attentions of---- But what are you laughing at?’ she suddenly said, blushing.

‘Only at your shrewd sagacity and your charming simplicity, my dear girl! So I find all my little romances about primitive life in the Bush melt away, on near inspection. These two excellent beings are not bound together as brother and sister, as I conceived. They are just like other
mortals, and would marry—if they could. Perhaps that is what makes him so ‘crusty’ at times. I might say ‘low,’ but I prefer plain English, and have a leaning to culinary similes. He is ‘crusty’ sometimes, and puts a ‘damper’ on one's gaiety. But I find no fault. He is an original. I adore originality. He is too proud to be bonâ fide a settler and make money, too high in his notions to do without money, and too conscious of his powers to consent to being a mere nobody in England.’

‘That is it, exactly. How clever you are, dear Mrs. Vesey!’ said Kate, looking admiringly and lovingly at her new friend.

The discussion was stopped by a summons from Mrs. Lang for all the ladies who wished to help in the custards. Mr. Fitz insisted that he should be very useful in beating up eggs, and made them laugh by tying on one of the little girls' pinafores and tucking up his sleeves. All went to the store but Isabel. She put on her bonnet and paced up and down the verandah, on that side of the house where the rain did not beat in.

The coolness of the air was acceptable, and with every big drop that fell, there were pleasing associations of good crops and of green verdure, instead of dry, sere grass, or the soil gaping in ugly cracks for the moisture it so often lacked.

She stood leaning against a pillar at the further end of the verandah for a moment, looking at the strange scene before her. The lowlands were a sheet of water, out of which thin, spare trees with attenuated foliage raised themselves; their fantastic ribbons of hanging bark now wet and dank. Streams coursed down the road which led to the house; streams of water which, if they had been wisely saved in tanks, would have been a provision in time of need in that land where so often ‘no water is.’ Cattle and sheep and horses gathered together beneath such miserable shelter as the narrow and scanty foliage of the bush afforded. Yet was it a cheering prospect for them. Two days' sunshine would raise, as if by magic, many a banquet of juicy grass, particularly wherever a black gin had chanced to kindle a fire. These emerald spots, few and rare, are indeed the jewels of the bush.

But some one was to be seen riding through the wet, braving the falling torrents, and guiding the slipping horse over the now hidden ruts and stumps. He came nearer, into the entrance road. The only gate of which Langville could boast, was heard to bang heavily through the pattering of the rain as it fell on the pavement round the verandah. For one moment the horseman was lost to Isabel's view—as he descended the dip—then again he appeared. ‘It must be Mr. Herbert,’ thought she. ‘I am glad he is come. No—why it is my father; where can he have been—for the letters perhaps. He must have expected an important one, to go on such a day!’ It was Mr. Lang, and in five minutes more he rode up to the house; ‘hallooed’ for the
man to take his horse, and swore at him for not being quick enough. Then
muttering beneath his slouched and dripping hat something about ‘Rascals
and vagabonds and cursed times,’ he came on to the verandah—stopped
short at seeing Isabel, and asked what she did there; whether she wanted to
grow like the green barley?

‘I was tired of the house; but where have you been, sir? how wet you are.
Why did you go out to-day?’

‘Go out! why, because I expected a letter. The rascal has written; I have
it; precious document! Grinding a poor man to dust, ruin, starvation,
beggary. No more pic-nics or government balls, which your mother is mad
about. Issy, I am a ruined man! We are beggars. You must turn to and
work, my girl! I pay 800l. a year in mortgages already, and now I applied
to Barr, and the good-for-nothing, usurious rascal has the impudence to
offer me 300l. for a bill of three months for 700l. I asked him if he really
had the conscience to do so, and he writes word—’Conscience and I have
taken leave of each other for some time. This is my offer. Take it or not, as
you like’.

‘But why go to him, sir—why not sell stock?’

‘Sell! just show me how! show me who will buy. Sixpence a head for my
best merinos, I suppose. Yes, ‘sell!’ Easy to say ‘sell!’ I must either answer
this demand for 300l. or become insolvent. I know not where to raise it!
The colony is ruined. They've taken away our convict labour;* that was the
beginning. However, Westbrooke, thank goodness, is settled on your
mother—it may be a retreat for us yet.’

‘I did not know how seriously bad your affairs were,’ said Isabel.

‘Not worse than my neighbours, that's one comfort. Budd is hard up, they
say; and Herbert even says he shall have to let Warratah and go to his
station. The sooner the better. 'Pon my soul that fellow is abominable! But
for him and his confounded ‘public good’ items, I could get that bridge at
once. It would raise my land directly; but he's as obstinate as a mule. Why,
I even put it to him in a way most men are open to. I convinced him it
would be best for his pocket hereafter. I even went so far as to offer him a
consideration, if he would withdraw his opposition, and, if you believe me-
---’

‘O papa! Did you do that! How could you?’ exclaimed his daughter,
really distressed.

‘What harm? But, as I was going to say, he drew up like an emperor and
declined, and, by Jove, looked so haughty and so confounded sulky, that I
out with it, and gave him a little bit of my mind. I told him a few things,
and if he shows himself here again very soon—why, he is a bolder man
than I thought.’
Isabel was silent for some time. At last she said—
‘O, papa! you have made me downright wretched.’
‘How so?’ he returned quickly, looking at her.
‘I hope you don't mean that—-’
‘I meant such a good scheme! It was all so very comfortable and pat, and
now you have gone and destroyed it all! Yet you profess to like Miss
Terry, too.’
‘Miss Terry? Is the girl gone mad? How have I injured her, for goodness
sake?’
‘Don't you see, daddy, that she, being a very taking little woman, has
managed to please even that difficult to be pleased man, Mr. Herbert?
Fact—I assure you. They are made for each other. And I had set my heart
on it; and now you see you have driven him away, and destroyed the hope.’
‘By Jupiter! how these women do go on! As if I could possibly have
suspected such a plot. Besides, she's too good for him—much too good.
Let it alone, Issy, and don't interfere with his concerns.’
‘But Miss Terry. She is a governess, and it would be such a good thing
for her to have a home of her own, and then we should have her near us.
Confess, now, it is not such a bad idea.’
‘I am sure—if she wishes it. I should be very sorry to injure her. Well,
well—I have given him a flea in the ear, 'tis true; but I leave you women to
make it up. If he likes her, it isn't my words that will keep him away.’
‘And, now, what can be done, papa, about our affairs. How can we
retrench?’
‘Don't know. I did say to your mother we must not indulge in a governess
now, but she was ‘up’ about it in a minute, and I confess I should be loth to
part with the little woman, especially if you are right in your conjectures.’
‘Yes; we must not send her away, whatever we do, papa, yet awhile.
Who, then, can go?’
‘Well, we must cut down the list of people about the place. Such a
number of rations really hampers one now-a-days. That girl—that do-
nothing lass—why should she be on us? She might go for one, and two or
three of the men I shall send off. Your mother is always in rows with that
girl, too, Issy, and if you take my advice you will let her go home.’
‘Such a home as it is, though!’
‘She could do well enough if she would. There is Venn wanting to marry
her. And if she wont have him, let her go home and keep steady, and she
could hear of a place in time. I assure you her being here leads to mischief.
It sets all the men up, for somehow she is a great favourite, and it makes
jealousy with the other servants.’
‘Well, then, she shall go. She will not keep rules, I know, and is always
running out, which mamma is angry about. Poor girl, I fear she will get into some mischief before long.’

When Isabel and her father joined the others, they found that Dr. Marsh had come in Mr. Herbert's gig to fetch Miss Herbert—much to her surprise, as her brother had promised to come. Isabel looked at her father, and he smiled.

‘He's sulky with me—that's it, ma'am. He and I had some argument; and I'll lay a wager, when you return, he'll call me a few pretty names.’

Miss Herbert tried to get up a laugh, and said something about disputes and arguments, and then said she would go at once to prepare for her drive. Isabel followed, and helped her to gather her things together.

‘Didn't your brother send any message to say why he didn't come himself?’ she asked, uneasily.

‘No, none. Perhaps he is engaged; and Dr. Marsh is very kind always.’

‘Yes—very. Do you think your brother,—Mr. Herbert, is really much interested in the bridge question?’

‘Yes—very much,’ Miss Herbert said, drily.

‘How tiresome it is. You don't think that he is angry, I hope? Papa is unguarded, you see, but at bottom he means kindly.’

‘I dare say. But my brother, being a military man, has been accustomed to great respect and regard for the sensitiveness of a gentleman's feelings—a thing little understood here.’

‘I hope politeness is understood,’ Isabel answered, bridling up a little. ‘But, however,’ she added, with heightened colour, ‘please Miss Herbert try and persuade your brother not to be angry, to forgive us, and not to desert us!’

‘Your father and he will judge about that,’ Miss Herbert answered, with cold reserve. She did not like Isabel's evident wish to bring her brother there. ‘Besides, my brother has plenty to do,’ she added, ‘and these are not times to allow of pleasure-taking and idling. He has been too fond of throwing away his time. I can't conscientiously urge him to visit here so often.’ ‘We don't wish to hinder his work, of course,’ said Isabel, trying to be cold and calm too; ‘and, after all, he must take his own way; only I don't like misunderstandings.’

‘You seem very earnest in the matter! Shall I take any message from you to my brother, telling him of the flattering interest you have in his concerns, and the regret you show at any fear of his staying away rather more than he has done?’

This was said in an ironical tone, which Isabel resented.

‘Thank you! I wont trouble you with any message, since as far as regards myself it is a matter of no consequence at all. Luckily we have now such
an agreeable addition to our neighbourhood, what with the Vine Lodge people and the Parsonage, that we can spare----’

‘Old friends!’ put in Miss Herbert, shortly, as she turned to leave the room, all equipped for her drive.

‘Those who are too busy to come,’ Isabel quietly added, and here their talk ended.

The Doctor was ready, and very soon after watching this pair drive down the road, Mrs. Vesey was summoned by her husband to depart. They left under protest, and with a promise to come again very soon.
CHAPTER XIII.

LYNCH'S SKYLARK.

Vol.I

For a few days Langville subsided into great quiet. The only visitor was Mr. Farrant, and, as many of his flock lived on the Langville estate, there seemed to be always a reason for his coming. Mrs. Lang pitied his bachelorhood, too, and always persuaded him to remain for some meal and a little society. This he never seemed disinclined to do. He was certainly sociable, and he managed to please and fit in with every one in the house. He assisted Miss Terry by correcting an exercise now and then, or recommending a book, or setting a sum. He brought new music and new drawings, as well as books for the young ladies, and for Mrs. Lang he had always some request, some tale fitted for her motherly compassion, of his scattered and wild parishioners. The accounts he sometimes gave of a solitary hut or ‘gunjo’ which he came upon unexpectedly in his rides, pitched in some deep secluded gully, where, perhaps, two men lived for a time, cutting bark or sawing planks of the red cedar used for furniture and building, would have made many a stirring tale. Often he was made to understand by innuendoes or broader hints that one of these hut mates had suddenly disappeared, and although a plausible story was told of his destination by the other, it was too plain that grave suspicions of foul play existed. But there was no evidence, no one to witness, no one to be interested in the missing man's fate, sufficiently to hunt up and ascertain the truth of the reports. He might certainly be gone away to a remote place, to ‘Five Islands’ or ‘New Zealand’ as his companion asserted, or he might even then be lying in the gully, under some gum-tree. Mrs. Lang warned Mr. Farrant not to ride too much alone among such people, and she had many anecdotes to relate in return, proving the wildness of life, and the consequences to which evil passions led, without the restraint of society and law.

Isabel enjoyed these quiet visits. Mr. Farrant's refined and gentle cast of mind was new to her. She liked to make him talk of England, of its customs, its buildings, and associations.

True, he never showed the power and force with which Mr. Herbert sometimes spoke; but he was far more equable, and his tastes took a wider field. There was no subject on which Mr. Farrant could not make a pleasant observation in a gentlemanly way, imbuing everything with a little of his own sentiment. Whereas, Mr. Herbert often refused to enter on a subject at
all, saying abruptly that he knew ‘nothing about it.’ When in the mood, he would turn, and in a few words crush all the clergyman's plausible remarks, begging pardon afterwards, and confessing that Mr. Farrant's was a more popular and pleasing theory. He could make himself disagreeable, even Isabel owned; but when it pleased him to throw off this coat of mail, when he contrived to get her apart from others, and with Miss Terry or one other genial listener, then—who could talk as he did? The pity was, that rare indeed were the times!

Now it was convenient and pleasant to have some one not given to ‘moods,’ but provided with plenty of current small change ready to pass round to whoever wished for it. Little did it matter apparently to Mr. Farrant whether his companions really appreciated the poetry he quoted, or understood his favourite arguments; he persevered; and consequently impressed many people with the idea that he was a very ‘intellectual man,’ quite a ‘poet’ in fact! No sharp remark or far-fetched allusion made his hearers feel thoroughly ashamed of their ignorance; but he seemed to utter their own thoughts, so that each one was felt raised in his own esteem when with him, surprised at his own taste, astonished, and almost persuaded, that he was, after all, rather literary, and not so very ignorant! With Mr. Herbert, it need hardly be said, the effect was quite contrary.

Besides this, the true amiability of the clergyman, so ready with friendly sympathy, won all hearts; and Isabel was pleased to find that her father was often amused by him, and seemed to look forward to his visits. Mr. Farrant took interest in the erection of a ‘boiling-down shed,’ which Mr. Lang, following the prevailing fashion, hoped would succeed—One of those resources, suggested by the exigency of the times, as a means of turning their large herds of cattle into some profit; and while occupied with the work, and calculating the probable results, Mr. Lang forgot his panic, and fell back to very much his former life and spirits.

The Bridge question was for the present in abeyance, the Government authorities having taken it up; so that Isabel guessed that her father's ire had subsided, and that if Mr. Herbert would overlook the past, he might soon find his old welcome. But this he did not seem inclined to try. On the first Sunday following their dispute Mr. Lang had angrily refused to allow any of the household to go to church. It was vain to tell him that this desertion of worship would not affect Mr. Herbert. Mr. Lang swore he wouldn't put himself in the way of meeting him; besides, though he declared that he was not angry, and was very glad to see the minister there as often as he liked to come, he wished to show Mr. Farrant that his taking the Herbert side of the question did not please him. The abstaining from ‘supporting’ him by going to church was one means, he thought, of
showing this feeling.

When another Sunday came the girls looked at each other, as Mr. Lang muttered something to the effect that the carriage and horses could not be used.

‘Surely, papa, you are not going to keep us all away again to-day,’ said Isabel. ‘It shows how much Mr. Farrant understood your hint, too, for he expressed sorrow at our being kept at home by the weather! ’

‘O! we must go to-day, Mr. Lang,’ put in his wife.

‘Go, if you will. But my carriage and horses don’t stir, I can tell ye. I am not going to be taxed with driving nine miles and back every week, not I! I will have my own church in my own place, I say, and I’ll let them see I will, too!’

It ended in the young people’s riding. Mrs. Lang, Miss Terry, and the children had the service at home.

While Isabel waited after church for her brother to lengthen her stirrup, Mr. Herbert left Mrs. Vesey, to whom he had been speaking, causing Isabel to doubt if he meant to notice her or Kate at all, and approached her. Now, he had a trick of smothering what would have been a sunny smile, but the very effort to restrain it curled his lips, and it was still a smile ready to break through the clouds and be very brilliant. Isabel, regarding him keenly, knew this expression; she took courage, and offered her hand.

‘Do you know I thought you were not going to speak to any one of us,’ said she.

Then he laughed, but the light had vanished—the laugh expressed annoyance rather than pleasure.

‘So, then, you are angry—you wont shake hands?’ she said, rather uneasy, but striving not to show it.

‘Yes, I will,’ taking her offered hand, first in one and then in both his. ‘I can’t afford to be sulky just now, if I were inclined—I must pocket my pride. Isabel! I must soon go back to the station. I have serious thoughts of shutting up shop here, and taking my sister there. How do you think it would suit her?’

Isabel here pulled away her hand, and without assistance mounted her horse, and as she did so, said—

‘Not at all. You may go—perhaps we shall all be more peaceable without you. Mr. Budd will never resist our party without yourself to support him. Leave your sister, and go to your flocks! Leave the roads and bridges to your betters. I don’t believe really that you understand anything about it, or care. What can it signify to you, personally?’

‘Nothing. It will make no difference to me as an individual. If anything, your father’s plan might accommodate me more. But the other is clearly,
indisputably, the right side for the public. You don't think me wrong in this?’

Isabel's steed pricked up his ears as Willie and Jem led their rough ponies out. She curbed him for a moment, and said quickly, in her winning way, as her friend Mrs. Jolly called it,

‘If I don't think you wrong, I wont say that you are right.’

Then she touched the horse's neck with her whip, and went on a few steps in a fidgety canter, which bid fair soon to be a fast gallop. But Mr. Herbert was soon at her side, and caught hold of the pommel.

‘Don't be in such a hurry—I want to speak to you; I never get a sight of you now. Seriously, I do think of going to the station. I see not how we are to exist at all, if we don't.’

‘What! are you turned croaker? You are the last man to give in to the dismal cry which the very parrots seem of late to have learnt. For my part, I believe it will do us all a great deal of good,—these bad times; we have all been speculating and extravagant. Depend on it, Mr. Herbert, it is only one of your English clouds; when it clears off, it will show us the real brightness of our skies.’

‘Ha! very pretty—all very well. I am glad, however, that you take it so, and keep up your spirits.’

‘O, I always do that. I can't grow miserable just because wool is down, and bullocks wont sell.’

‘If neither wool nor bullocks sell, what is to become of us all—you and Kate included?’

‘Never mind! we shall do very well.’

‘Hem!—Well, it is not fair to infect you with my gloominess.’

‘No; but I will willingly give you some of my cheerfulness. . . . . I wonder,’ she added, quickly changing her tone, and shaking her head, while the colour mounted to her forehead, ‘I wonder how you can stand such ridiculous, rattling nonsense as mine. Times are seriously bad, but----’

The boys now looked back, and called their sister.

‘Isabel!’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘one word on another subject; Lynch has asked me to beg for him. Why does not your father let him marry? I really believe it would secure him a good servant in the fellow, and save that poor girl.’

Isabel shook her head. ‘It is no use; it cannot be. She must go out to service; papa can't afford to keep her on the farm, and the more people interfere, the worse for Lynch. Now, good-bye; will you come to-morrow?’

‘No.’ Mr. Herbert removed his hand from the saddle, and drew up his head. ‘No,’ he repeated.

‘Yes, do.’
He half smiled.
‘Mr. Farrant is coming; join him!’
‘No,’ in his most decided manner. ‘It is impossible!’
‘Good-bye, then. A pleasant journey to the station,’ and she kissed her hand, and cantered on.

Isabel had delayed giving Ellen Maclean notice to go, from a dislike to tell her so, and from some undefined hope, that better conduct and more steady industry on the girl's part, might render her stay possible. A vain hope. She only grew odder and wilder. Mrs. Lang was extremely angry, and insisted on her being sent home. Isabel felt herself that, under present circumstances, it would be desirable for both, if Ellen were sent out of Lynch's way. It kept him in constant hot water, if he thought her ill-used, or if he suspected that Venn had any chance of success with her. It would be very desirable if the girl could go into service somewhere. But the only place Isabel heard of, where a girl was wanted to nurse a baby, was not such as made it desirable for Ellen to be in. However, she must leave Langville; and Isabel on this Sunday evening, gave up joining the family walk, in order to have a quiet and uninterrupted talk with her. The girl cried bitterly when told that she must go, and after letting Isabel talk some time without any answer, she said, ‘Very well, she would go home now. But she wasn't going to stay there.’

‘Why, Ellen? Why not try and please your stepmother, and work for her?’

‘Miss Isabel! wont you please ask the master for the ticket, only the ticket—the blessed ticket, and all would be straight? Don't you see, Jack and me, we're fond one of another, and if life is hard, we could bear up together. What harm would it do to any one, for him to marry me?’

‘It can't be, Ellen. You must wait till Lynch has fairly earned his ticket. His conduct is not such that his master will go out of the way to recommend him, and he does not choose to have any more married couples here.’

‘He allows Venn to marry if he likes,’ the girl said.

‘Yes; if you will marry him, you may.’

‘I'll die sooner! It's all a plot, I know. Every one turns against Jack, I know; most of all, that villain. Let them take care, though. Even the wild dogs will turn and bite in the death-throe. A time would come----’

Then suddenly throwing herself on the floor by Isabel, and catching hold of her dress, the girl looked imploringly into her face.

‘Oh, Miss Isabel, get me a place anywhere, and I'll work, indeed I will; only let us have the ticket afterwards. Well----’ she added, after looking earnestly at Isabel. ‘Well, I'll go home, I'll do anything; I'll go home this
very night.’ And she rose and turned away, but returning, held up her hand.

‘Mind what I said! don't be after driving a man desperate. Keep Jack out of punishment, and I don't care what comes of me. Poor girl! poor Nell, the world is hard, but you'll be happy yet, you will.’ And so saying, she persisted in going at once, and no argument or persuasion from Isabella could restrain her. There was a curious vein of something like insanity, or lack of sense, which ran through the girl's mind; and when the fit came upon her, reasoning was vain. All that Isabel could do, was to set one of the servants to watch at a distance, and it was a kind of bare comfort, to hear that she had been traced to her father's hut. Isabel hoped she might keep her promise and work, but even that might not ensure kind treatment from her violent stepmother, who had an antipathy to the girl. This woman did not bear a good character.

Curious stories were whispered about as to her former life. She had been a prisoner, and lived as servant with the canny Scotchman, Maclean, who in his first wife's lifetime was overseer at Langville, and what was called a respectable and well-to-do man. But when the mistress died, leaving this little child Ellen, about whom she had always been anxious, discerning something not quite right in her mind, everything went wrong. Ellen's grief was excessive, and seemed to increase the disorder. The father sank into despondency, and his affairs went badly, till he was induced by evil counsel to marry his servant. From that hour, misery and dissension took possession of his hut. Maclean was a changed man. He and his master had quarrelled, and he no longer acted as overseer, but took some land on a clearing lease, and removed his goods to the settlement where he erected a hut. It was to this home the girl went on leaving Langville.
CHAPTER XIV.

BREAKING THE ICE.

Vol.I

That same Sunday evening, the master of Warratah Brush had been sitting for a very long time, as if communing with his own thoughts, and from his look they were grave ones. Miss Herbert, having long since finished the sermon which she made a point of reading every Sunday, had watched him anxiously. She had arrived at the conclusion, growing on her for some little time, that her brother, to whom she was sincerely attached, was not quite happy. Some change which she could not describe, or attribute to any one thing in particular, had crept over him. It might certainly be the general panic which now came home to him, yet it was not quite like him to sit down in dejection under a monetary trouble. Rather she would have expected him to rise with twofold energy to meet and grapple with the difficulty.

At last she could bear it no longer, and at the risk of a short answer, she broke the lengthened silence by saying, 'So Mr. Lang is still in anger, and keeps away from church to punish us! I suppose he thinks he makes us very unhappy!'

No answer, only a darkening of the face.

'Do you mean to keep it up? Though, why do I ask? Of course you can't do otherwise. It is for him to come round with apology. Of course it would not be possible for us to think of going there, or making the smallest advance. I observed that you gave the girls a cut to-day. I was amused at your being driven to play the agreeable to Mrs. Vesey, though.'

'Had you waited five minutes more, you might have observed that I did not give any cut.'

'Oh!—and I dare say received none, from that quarter! So you spoke after all, and Issy's eyes did not wander and seek you for nothing. She is anxious enough to be friendly, it seems, and made all kinds of excuses to me for her papa.'

'Did she?'

'Yes; but I received them very coldly. Of course, I am sorry for this misunderstanding; in our small set, it is very unpleasant. Yet, I must own, John, I am not sorry that something should intervene to stop your intercourse with that girl. It will not do now; she is grown up.'

'It did not need this row to bring about that, I assure you, Mary; you need not trouble yourself on that score,' he said, half-bitterly and half-sadly.
‘Why, she's very fond of you—very,’ returned the sister, uneasily; for she never could bear her brother to be hurt in his own esteem.

‘Fond! I don't doubt it. Fond of an old uncle or grandfather. To be sure she is!’

‘Well, and that is but natural, John! I mean, it is just as well, for it would have been awkward if she . . . . I heartily wish,’ she interrupted herself angrily, ‘I do wish that Mr. Farrant would be quick and bring things to a point. Not that I can ever think it tells well for his taste or judgment. A pretty rattling clergyman's wife she will be.’

‘I have heard you hint all this before,’ Mr. Herbert said, rising and walking about, looking down on the ground. ‘But, Mary, do you from your heart mean it? Do you apprehend that Mr. Farrant is paying attention to her?’

‘John, judge for yourself! I only ask you to look with your own clear eye and good sense, and tell me what is taking him there every day in the week? What induces him to be so interested in her improvement? Why, his very sermons seem to me to be meant for that family; and I know, I heard it from Kate—who is, by the way, a perfect sieve—that Issy takes notes of these sermons, and that she is much affected by them, and, as Kate says, gets full of new notions in consequence. I only wish I could think better of it; but I see so many points in her character which I do not like, that . . . .’

‘My dear, I don't think you know Isabel. You know nothing of her, and are prejudiced by her manner, which may be unformed, but . . .’

‘My dear John, I assure you I have taken pains to try and know her, not only by talking of her to Kate and to Miss Terry, but you might have seen, had you observed, that she and I happened to be pretty much together lately.’

‘I saw it with pleasure . . . .’

‘Yet, I must say—it is my duty to tell you, John—of course you can act as you like,—but I must say that I find in her a great deal of that very spirit, that identical disposition which you most dislike and dread; and Mrs. Vesey's coming here only increases and encourages it tenfold.’

His steps became quicker, he threw back his head, biting his lips, and showing symptoms of great annoyance, but he said nothing.

A sound of horses' feet in the yard reached them.

‘Well,’ he said, quickly, ‘you need not be troubled, there is no chance of any greater intimacy between us, and rest assured I am not a man to be taken in. I have had my lesson, one never, never to be forgotten. Here is Farrant. Now, Mary, order some tea at once.’ And he walked out, apparently relieved, to greet their guest, who had fallen into the habit of taking their house in his long round, having every second Sunday a service...
twenty miles off.

Mr. Herbert threw off all gloom, and made himself particularly agreeable. Each time he caught his sister's eye fixed on him he redoubled his efforts to be gay, and to show how much he liked their visitor. When Mr. Farrant rose to go, Mr. Herbert accompanied him to the stable, and even walked on by his side, 'to put up the 'slip-rail' firmly,' as he said.

At parting he patted the clergyman's horse, and, after a little clearing of his voice, he said—

'Farrant, I am about to ask a question. If you don't wish to answer it, say so. Have you—any motive—any reason in particular, I would say, for your frequent visits to a certain house? I have a strong reason for asking, being, as you know, an old friend, a kind of hanger-on or uncle—and—owing to things I have heard, I wish to know—if you have any decided reason for going there, or if it is merely chance.'

Mr. Farrant's face flushed up, but after a moment's pause, he said, 'I did not suppose I had done anything to awaken suspicion. The fact is—I am awkwardly situated—yet, I may say so much in strict confidence to you. Yes, there is a reason—a motive.'

'Enough! I thank you heartily for your confession,' and Mr. Herbert seemed about to turn away; but Mr. Farrant said, 'I had before thought of asking your advice, knowing you to be an intimate friend of the family—but all—everything is so very uncertain yet—that—in fact—you understand when I say that I have a reason, it only implies—my own wishes, nothing more.'

'I understand! But you will succeed. Good evening! Thank you.'

'Mary!' said Mr. Herbert, as he took his candle to retire to his room for the night. 'Am I grown a very old-looking fellow? Am I so very much older than our parson?'

'I suppose you are a few years, perhaps four or five years older than he is. But as to calling yourself old-looking, it is folly. You never looked better in your life, John. Mr. Farrant is very well indeed, but look at him by you. You are far taller and more manly, and handsomer too—though that way he has seems very attractive to people. You don't choose to try to make yourself pleasant; if you did, you could succeed.'

'One is apt to forget how time goes on. But now I awake suddenly to the fact that I have been here between five and six years. However, there is some hard work before me, I can see,' he presently added, with forced animation, 'These are not times to add to one's expenses and cares. We must be very careful, or I don't see how we shall weather the storm. I hear that Lang's affairs are in an ugly state. Budd, too, is very hard up, and that last crash in Sydney has destroyed all confidence. The fact is, we have
been going ahead in the most reckless, thoughtless way as a colony, and now comes the crash. We shall live to see many changes, if we can manage to sit it out ourselves; and, luckily, as I have always kept within bounds, and left that sum safe in England, we are likely to be better off than our neighbours.’

It was about this time that the Bank of Australia failed, and its fearful consequences to the numerous shareholders added considerably to the universal distress and want of confidence.

A phantom seemed to hover over the land. Old-established houses were failing everywhere. There was no sale for anything, no money and no credit. People who had begun to build fine houses had to withhold their hand. Everywhere unfinished buildings proclaimed the dismal truth. Throughout the length and breadth of the land arose a low prophetic cry of coming distress.

A change came, entering the very heart of society. The independent and haughty egotism which the untroubled prosperity of years had engendered gave way. People began now to tremble, and to feel there was a God. In times of distress we all remember this, and while churches were necessarily left unfinished from lack of means, the services and ordinances of religion appeared to be more appreciated and sought. The clergy felt that a path was thus opened to their ministrations. Hearts were softened, new ideas and principles were received. But though, in speaking of this season, it is hardly possible to pass this phase in the life of the colony in silence, it does not belong to this story further to enter into particulars. Suffice it to say, that the prospect of actual ruin stared many a hitherto wealthy family in the face. And this dread was felt in the district of Bengala. It was playing a desperate game; to give up was to hasten the dreaded hour of doom. So each one tried to deceive his neighbour and himself. The ball must be kept up by whatever means. They dared hardly diminish their households, or put down an extra horse, for fear a neighbour's attention should be drawn to them and their weakness suspected.

So Mr. Lang, aided by a naturally sanguine temper, shut his eyes to danger, and busied himself to make the best bargains he could, and to gather enough to pay off the immense mortgages with which he had burdened his property. Mrs. Lang's whole energy was devoted to save on the one hand and to spend on the other—to make a show with small outlay. Above all, she desired to marry her daughters before the hour of ruin struck, and besought her husband at whatever cost to keep up his establishment yet a little longer, and furnish her with cheques for the milliners. If once Kate was Mrs. Fitz, and Isabel Mrs. Farrant, she should
be comparatively relieved and content. She might have wished for something better a short time ago, especially with regard to Isabel. Yet, she reasoned that this was better than nothing, and Isabel had not the beauty of her sister. Mr. Herbert would have been a better match, but he was not liked by herself or her husband, and besides, she began to give him up altogether, for had he thought of it at all, he would have come forward before. Anything was better than to sit down and think; so constant parties and meetings were encouraged between the neighbours. Yet time went on, and still the Herberts came not; and except a hurried meeting in the churchyard,—for there was no more going to Warratah Brush, since Mr. Lang persisted in forbidding the carriage being used on a Sunday,—they had no intercourse whatever.

Mr. Farrant gained golden opinions by proposing a service to be held for the benefit of Mr. Lang's people, in a rough and unfinished building, originally intended for a store. Certainly the distance to Bengala was great, and prevented many of the labourers from going to church, especially the women. Mr. Lang, though deprived of his bridge and road by the final decision of government, resolved to have 'his' church, in which laudable undertaking Mr. Farrant encouraged him, though he tried to put it on other grounds than to 'spite' Mr. Herbert. He said that Mr. Herbert would rejoice in the building, and would, he was sure, be ready to give his share of help. It was quite a different thing from the bridge. But Mr. Lang could not, or would not, see this. 'Herbert and Budd wished to concentrate all the advantages to Bengala, but he would show them that he had his own views, and there should yet be a church and a township, too, at Galoola.' The worst of it was, it was so hard to raise the money just then, and building a church was so expensive.

Mr. Farrant thought that a temporary building might be erected at very small cost, of wood, which might be far more churchlike in form than the usual smooth, shapeless brick buildings. He drew plans, aided by the ladies, and it became a favourite scheme. There was a clever workman and carpenter among Mr. Lang's men. To him was entrusted the execution of this work, under Mr. Farrant's orders.

Mr. Lang forbade any assistance being accepted from Mr. Herbert or Mr. Budd. He asked the Veseys, as they had appeared to approve and would benefit considerably. But the answer was a loud laugh at the absurdity of the idea 'in these bad times.' So they were forced to let it creep on very slowly, and meanwhile Mr. Farrant assembled a congregation, as before said, every other Sunday, on the Langville estate.

It was a great comfort, but Isabel was unhappy at this further estrangement from their old friends. As she said, she always liked to carry
out her ideas; in plain English, she liked to have her own way. And she had settled it would be such a good thing for Mr. Herbert to marry Miss Terry, that this hindrance to her plans was deeply annoying. Some way must be found to restore peace; but musing long and often did not bring any light on the subject.
CHAPTER XV.

"COME BACK."

Vol. I

One morning, on crossing the hall Isabel saw Mr. Fitz at the front door, holding his own and another horse. He said that his sister was gone into the drawing-room; he would lead her mare to the stables himself—he had to pass that way.

‘Would he not dismount?’ Isabel asked. ‘The man would be there in a moment.’

Mr. Fitz said he had a commission for his brother-in-law further on, he would execute that and then call for his sister. He bowed and rode off; and Isabel, hearing by the voices that Kate was in the drawing-room, was meditating whether she might not escape and leave Mrs. Vesey to Kate, when the door opened and both ladies appeared. Retreat was now impossible. Mrs. Vesey put up her glass to look at her brother as he rode slowly down the road.

‘Ah, poor Arthur, he is so sulky—so wretched—at being sent on instead of coming in. Now, do you know, I came on purpose to ask you all to Vine Lodge? Ah! here is Mrs. Lang herself. Only think, Mrs. Lang, of our being so atrocious as never to have asked you to our cot. But now I am resolved to have the whole party—every one, including the piccaninies and Miss Terry, boys and all. Room! never mind that. There is the verandah. The more the merrier always. I shall have every one in Bengala—Jollys and Herberts, and the noble Captain, and Budds—and who else is there?’

Mrs. Lang began to try and excuse herself. She hardly understood the manner of the invitation. She thought that, as Mrs. Lang of Langville's first invitation to Vine Lodge, a proper note on satin paper was due; at all events, if not written, it should have been couched in different terms. But, for Katie's sake little objections must be waived. ‘Mrs. Vesey was very fashionable,’ &c. All this passed slowly through Mrs. Lang's mind. Mrs. Vesey saw her hesitation.

‘I will take no refusal—you are all to come. The fact is, you and the Herberts are not to keep up this quarrel. It cannot be. I must be the mediator; I have set my heart on his coming.’

Mrs. Lang bridled up a little, and began a sentence two or three times while she played with her cap strings, but the vivacious lady allowed no pause. By fluency of speech she overcame, so far as to exact a promise that as many of the party as possible should go. Mr. Lang might be induced, as
Mrs. Vesey made such a point of it. Mrs. Lang did not quite like all this, she was naturally punctilious and sensitive about proper respect, but she consoled herself by the idea that certainly Mrs. Vesey courted them very much—and Mrs. Vesey was somebody. Though she did not dress extravagantly or live in any style whatever, and was always obtruding her ‘poverty,’ yet Mrs. Lang was sure that she was somehow or other a person of consequence, simply because Mrs. Vesey assumed to be so; she sat pondering over this, observing Kate's flush of pleasure, and comparing her height with that of Mrs. Vesey, and thinking that certainly Kate was the prettier of the two, only she could not talk as fast; then, casting a glance at Isabel's grave face, she could not decide whether she was annoyed or not. Mrs. Lang's observations and conclusions were put an end to by her being very suddenly asked in a persuasive, coaxing tone, if she could not oblige Mrs. Vesey by letting her have half a sheep?—some of that incomparable, delicious mutton that only was seen on Langville table. It would be such a kind, neighbourly act—such a charity! and Mr. Vesey would have some wethers in less than a month to repay Mrs. Lang with.

Mrs. Lang's words and ideas flowed more easily when brought to a given practical point. Mrs. Vesey was welcome to some mutton. Mrs. Lang suggested that, as they had no sheep at present, they might very easily send to Langville and get a constant supply of fresh meat. Mr. Lang had before done this for a neighbour. It would be cheaper to a small family like the Veseys to have it in this way—so much better than having to live on salt mutton till another sheep was wanted. Nothing, however, was further from Mrs. Vesey's intentions than running up a butcher's bill with Langville.

‘O dear no!’ she answered, quickly; ‘no odious dealings and bills and that sort of thing between friends. Fancy—Vesey, debtor to J. Lang, Esq.—Horrible! I have a notion that fellow—that Venn of yours—is much too sharp for poor ignorant creatures like us; a friendly interchange and accommodation now and then is delightful . . . but—so you will oblige me, dear Mrs. Lang, with a little of your excellent mutton? and, by the bye, the receipt for that very particular pudding which the grand signor deigns to approve. It should be called Herbert pudding, you know (nodding her head at Isabel). If you want to please a man, give him a good dinner.’

Isabel was going towards the door, but her mother passed and signed to her to remain in the drawing-room. She would fetch her receipt book, she said; in the meantime, would not Mrs. Vesey take off her hat?

Isabel obeyed as to remaining in the room, but she left her sister to carry on the chat. She sat, grave and silent, resting her head on one hand, while with the other she twirled a pencil.

‘What do you say to it, Miss Isabel Lang?’ asked Mrs. Vesey, after a
time. Kate was much amused at Isabel's stare, and owning herself ignorant as to the subject of their conversation.

‘O, I can hardly believe that—your sister acts well. I think the conversation had too much interest for her not to hear. Am I not right, Kate?’

‘I am not sure—I don't know—’ Kate began; but was interrupted by Mrs. Vesey's exclaiming, ‘And who is this? Can it be Arthur already? No. What a gay place this is! One is sure to see all the world here.’

Kate smiled in assent, and looking round at her sister, said—'It is only the clergyman. He comes daily to see his parishioners hereabouts.'

‘Indeed!’ and Mrs. Vesey, following the direction of Kate's eyes, saw Isabel's rising colour, and a rather quick opening and shutting of a book.

‘Indeed!’ repeated Mrs. Vesey.

The gentleman was soon in the room—cheerful, gentle, and courteous, as usual, with that quiet anxiety to please and give no offence which almost invariably insured his being liked. Isabel was nearest to the door, but he passed her to greet the elder sister first; asked for Mrs. Lang while he shook Mrs. Vesey's hand; and lastly, had a long reason to give Isabel, why he came at all;—some difficulty about the girls' school sewing, which he thought his kind friends at Langville could help him in—he remembered Miss Isabel Lang talking about it one day.

‘No, it was Miss Terry,’ Isabel remarked; ‘she was telling us of a specimen book and certain work-bag, which was given at a school she knew—but Miss Terry was engaged just then.’

Mr. Farrant did not seem, however, to be in a particular hurry to leave—he could wait till school hours were over, and he took a seat near the table at which Isabel was sitting.

‘Is that sprig of bushflower invariably good for—for—nervous headache or low spirits, or whatever that numb, creepy, dull sensation may be termed?’ Mrs. Vesey asked presently.

‘That flower in your button-hole, I mean, Mr. Farrant,’ in answer to his look of inquiry, and she put up her glass as if to see it more clearly. ‘It must be invigorating and refreshing, indeed!’ she continued—‘Directly it appeared in the doorway, Miss Isabel Lang's drooping head was raised, and the pale face . . .’

Isabel half rose in evident annoyance and distress, while Mr. Farrant smiled, and began saying he was much flattered and pleased; but glancing at Isabel and seeing plainly that she was not, he took out the little flower and approached Mrs. Vesey.

‘Can you tell me the name of this flower? it is a new acquaintance of mine,’ he said; ‘and, by-the-bye, have you any roses to bestow on my
A long discussion soon arose about shrubs and plants, which continued till they were summoned to luncheon. Mrs. Lang had her receipt book ready, and Mrs. Vesey's attention was devoted to her directions about sauces and puddings. Isabel carved, laughingly refusing Mr. Farrant's help, because 'he certainly did not know a leg from a shoulder;' he confessed his ignorance, and turned to Miss Terry about his girls' sewing specimens, while Kate whispered, grumblingly, at the children for being so impatient and hungry, shrugged her shoulders at Isabel's large slices, and looked ever and anon at the window 'to see if the boys and papa were coming,' she said.

The meal was over, however, and no further addition was made to the party; Mrs. Vesey began to wonder where her brother could be, but amused herself by looking over Miss Terry's specimen book and admiring the beautiful sewing, while all sorts of rules and prizes were canvassed by the ladies and the clergyman, and Isabel only checked her eager talk, after a long hour, with a sudden exclamation—

‘Kate! lend me your guinea-fowl seal,1 will you?’ Then learning where to find it, she went away to the work-room, opened a desk, which, to say the truth, was but seldom used, and after scribbling over and then destroying several pieces of paper, she finished a short note, folded it, and finally was careful to make a very neat and clear impression with the particular seal she had chosen.

The note was as follows—

DEAR MR. HERBERT,—When the mountain would not go to Mahomet, why, Mahomet went to the mountain. Can't you exercise a little greatness of mind? Is there no fountain like the one you told me of once, where forgetfulness of the past might be secured by a draught? Do not forget us quite; though I leave you to solve these contradictory requests, and to read my true meaning in my seal, for the safe keeping of which, I enclose this in a double cover.

From your friend and teaser,
I. L.

This note was given to a boy who was sent to Bengal on an errand to the forge, with special directions to deliver it safely, and Isabel, with a heightened colour, sat down to consider her bold stroke. The voices from the parlour reached her, for doors at Langville were not made to be shut. Isabel was no great thinker in general; at least, she did not much practise self-introspection. But she had naturally a clear, straightforward mind, which was intolerant of mystery and doubt. The habit of the family did not encourage reserve either. Everything was discussed and brought to light in a matter-of-fact way, leaving little or no room for unconsciousness of what
was passing. Mr. Farrant's and Mr. Fitz's visits were openly talked of, and
ascribed to the several attractions of Kate and Isabel. For some time Isabel,
being in no ways predisposed to the subject, only treated these remarks as a
joke; but lately it had struck her that perhaps there was truth in the
assertion. Certainly Mr. Farrant did come very often, certainly he was very
agreeable and very attentive, and several times he had gone out of his way
to seek her, when she was sewing and enjoying a chat with Miss Terry, or
taking a quiet stroll with her. He had urged her to practise her voice, and
had succeeded in making her sing with himself and Miss Terry. That very
morning, when Miss Terry had retired with her pupils, some jokes had
passed on the subject; somehow they did not do so before her, seeing she
disliked it, and Mr. Lang had fired up at the notion of any one's taking his
darling from him. He had asked Isabel if she liked Mr. Farrant. Isabel, after
considering a little, said, ‘I hardly know; I suppose not quite, for I have
never had any quarrel with him.’

At which speech there was a general laugh. ‘Well! I mean it. Whenever I
really and heartily like any one, we always come to some hot words; it is
my way. I don't feel as if I quite knew Mr. Farrant as yet, but of course I
see he is very nice, and very pleasant, and so on.’

The notion of ‘Issy's quarrelsome temper’ tickled her father much. He
said he wished all quarrels were like hers, and then kissing her, told her she
was much too good for them all, and that he did not believe in all this
gallivanting; but still, if mamma was right, it behoved Isabel to look out
and see what she did like, and so on.

And now, sitting apart in the quiet work-room, she tried to get at her own
feelings. Fond of active pursuits, and her perfect health of body saving her
from any shadow of morbid discontent, and the habit of taking refuge in
the erection of airy castles, where happiness is one day to triumph,—Isabel
had enjoyed the present, without thought for the future. She had looked
forward to marriage at some future time as a needful step in life, because
she found that others did so, practically, as well as theoretically; and
besides, her mother always spoke of single life at a certain age as
something oppressively dreary and unfortunate. As to the notion of falling
in love, Isabel had treated it as a great joke; and whenever Kate had
indulged in her small way in this fancy, Isabel had rallied her well out of it,
as something weakly and absurd. Lately, however, the question had in
several shapes come before her. First, she had been much struck with the
girl Ellen Maclean's decided and strong attachment to Jack Lynch. Then,
seeing poor Tom Jolly's sorrowful face when Kate showed him coldness,
made her think there was ‘something in it.’

Now, here was Mr. Fitz, said by all the authorities to be ‘in love’ with
Kate, and Isabel watched and observed the symptoms of the feeling with keen curiosity, and came to a conclusion that, ‘if that was love, it differed very considerably from the feeling which Ellen had or Tom either.’ It might be fashionable, well-bred, polite love. If so, and if Kate liked it, she hoped all would go smooth. But she had begun a little to suspect the perfect disinterested sincerity of Mrs. Vesey’s friendship, and when she remembered the chance of poverty hanging over their heads, she felt uneasy about Mr. Fitz, and once or twice tried to give Kate a hint, but it would not do. Kate responded with so much warmth, and with so much more reserve, too, than was usual to her in such affairs, that Isabel feared her sister's happiness was more involved than she had thought. Then, Mr. Farrant! could it be true that his visits were on her account? There was an uncomfortable twinge at the very notion, immediately followed by a flush of very natural pleasure and gratification, for Mr. Farrant was one she liked and admired, and from whom she had learnt some new things. In two ways he had a new source of power over Isabel. It was the first time she had ever heard any impressive preaching; also his and Miss Terry's was the first music that had touched her. His singing especially attracted her. She was not quite sure that in other ways she found him so agreeable as others seemed to do. ‘There can be no need for hurry,’ she mentally ejaculated. ‘If it is really needful to have to do with marriage and all the odious preliminaries, there is no use in bothering myself beforehand about it.’ And, accordingly, she gladly allowed her mind to escape from the perplexity and wander into regions better suited to her taste. It was far pleasanter to dwell on the scheme she had drawn up for others, to manage for Mr. Herbert and Miss Terry, in bringing them together, and helping each to appreciate those qualities in the other which she only fully knew. There would be difficulty and opposition from her father's wrath against the gentleman, and, as she expected, disapproval from Miss Herbert. For although that lady had come forward very much to Miss Terry, Isabel could not suppose she would entertain the idea for a moment of her brother—a Herbert!—marrying a governess.

Here then was a field for all her energy and determination of character; and what a happy thing it would be for poor Miss Terry! How delightful hereafter to talk it all over, and receive the grateful thanks of both these friends! It would be such a triumph over a certain Mr. Pelham, the gentleman who had married Miss Terry's sister, and whose bad temper and jealousy had been the cause of forcing her to gain her own livelihood. Isabel's warm heart had been deeply stirred against the origin of her friend's many trials. But when the day should come for sending a piece of bridecake and cards with ‘Mrs. Herbert’ on them, all these wrongs would
be avenged! Already her busy fancy had settled that the principal part of Miss Terry's *trousseau* should be made at Langville. Much as Isabel hated sewing in general, she should sit at this for hours with pleasure. Fascinating daydreams! The first step, she had just taken in sending that note. She dreaded the result more than she chose to confess even to herself. But there was no more time now for thinking. She was summoned back to the drawing-room. Mr. Fitz was returned, and very merry and gay they all were, till it was time for the Vine Lodge people to go. Mrs. Vesey reminded Mrs. Lang that they were all ‘due’ on the day after the morrow, at which Mrs. Lang tried to laugh and feel complimented. But a troublesome doubt if these really were fashionable manners, if it were compromising the dignity of ‘Mrs. Lang of Langville,’ gave an awkward stiffness to her manner, and caused her husband to say with one of his merriest laughs—‘Mamma don't fancy being ‘due’ to any one, like a parcel of goods. Don't trouble yourself with so many curtsies, Mrs. Lang, like a Muscovy duck out of water! By Jove, that Mrs. Vesey is a jolly lass; free and hearty, and up to a joke. Eh, Issy? what do you say?’

Then, on Mrs. Lang saying something not very distinct about ‘invitation’ and ‘everything changed!’ he put his arm round her waist, ‘Come, old girl, leave out the starch and you'll do! And if I were you, I wouldn't go to Vine Lodge. You and I will stay at home; and I say, Mrs. Lang, perhaps Miss Terry will make us custards, eh?’
CHAPTER XVI.

A BUSH NYMPH.

It was during the very time that Isabel had retired to write her note, and indulge in a little thought, that a horseman passed through that part of the bush which led by a short cut from Langville to Bengala. Here the trees stretched their branches wider than usual, from their being more cleared. There were fine specimens of those giants of the eucalyptus tribe, gaudy with their flaunting streamers of coloured bark. Here and there a dark, grim iron bark reared its head, while close beside it was a low clump of sober myrtles and tea shrubs. The graceful growth of the exocarpus, or native cherry, gave a touch of relief to the unvarying height and straightness of the forest trees. Then there were the plants, sought by children, bearing a pleasant berry called ‘five corners,’ with blossoms like a fuchsia; while a rich vetch-like creeper, covered whole masses of underwood with its bloom of amethyst. By this was a banksia, or bottle-brush, and other plants too numerous to name. Add the flight of brilliant coloured parrots which were ever crossing the sight, and the intense depth of blue sky, and it will give some notion of the scene. Though all these things were less noticed by the rider than the distant groups of half shy horses, or some of the wild cattle which roamed, it was said, through this extensive forest at will, and only found a boundary in the sea-shore. The gentleman in his loose and light shooting dress, sitting his horse easily, if not carelessly, whistling at times some pretty waltz, was somewhat a pleasing object. If not strictly handsome, there was an ‘air’ about him, and an expression of good humour, which at a first sight would be apt to attract, though a narrower inspection might discover indications of something not quite so agreeable.

It was no other than Mr. Fitz, who rode on upon an errand of Mr. Vesey's; and as he idly whipped the branches, or pushed aside his small Manilla hat, his eyes wandered quickly here and there, showing more habit of observation than reflection. Not a lizard, or an ant-hill escaped him. Suddenly his horse shayed on one side, and he uttered an exclamation which soon changed to words to this effect:

‘By Jove! Here's a Bush nymph, by all the powers. Aye, aye, I've seen that face and head before, or I'm not the man I think.’

Then after stroking and quieting the startled horse, he leant over the saddle, and said in an off-hand, easy, somewhat flippant tone,

‘Good day! It is so rare to meet any one hereabouts, that I was nearly as
much taken aback as—as my horse! Hem. . . . Is there anything the matter, Miss . . . I forget your name, though I know I have had the pleasure of seeing you before. Not ill, I hope?’

This was addressed to a girl who was seated on a stump, rather withdrawn from the track, and sheltered by a tree. She was bent together, and seemed to be crying bitterly. She did not answer him, but raising her head, gazed on him with mournful surprise, mixed with fear. As he suddenly dismounted and approached her, this look of fear increased, and she made a movement as if to run away, but the soft tone of his voice apparently stopped her.

‘Although I do not know your name, I am sure I have seen you. Don't be afraid of me, my poor girl! Ah! no one who has once seen that face, and that hair, could forget it! You are one of Mr. Lang's people, eh?’

‘That I am not!’ she answered quickly, and again burst into tears, to hide which she stooped her head, and her long yellow hair fell like a veil over her.

‘Indeed! Dismissed, I suppose. Too pretty, perhaps! Come now, suppose you confide in me. Look up; am I anything very grim and formidable? Tell me if I can help you.’ And he seated himself by her, giving his horse a long rein, to allow of his cropping the grass.

She stopped crying presently, and stole a look at him. Apparently this begat confidence, for she pushed back her hair, and looked demurely down on the ground.

‘Have you far to go?’ he asked.

‘No further than where I am;’ and again the tears sprang forth.

‘Come, tell me all. Do you know your way home? Have you lost yourself? Perhaps you can't find your way home?’

‘No, that I can't.’

‘Where about is it?’

‘Where? Nowhere on earth, I'm thinking!’ she said wildly. ‘But ride on, sir; ride on your way. It is ill keeping you here on a bootless errand. Ride on!’

Then she caught up her hair, and began quickly to weave it into a rich plait, winding it round and round her head. He watched her, and talked to her in a quiet and soothing way, trying, indirectly, to ask her history. She cast shy and stolen glances at him from time to time, which gradually became more confiding and less frightened. It did not require much art to win poor Nelly's confidence; and as he now diverted his eyes from her, and was apparently looking on the ground, and playing with his whip, she ventured to observe him more at ease. A few kind words, slightly touched with a little flattery, opened her heart, and her tale was soon told. Her dead
mother, the stern father, the cruel step-mother, her best and first friend, Jack Lynch, and Miss Isabel, Lynch's troubles, and desire to get the ticket, even Venn's hated advances,—by degrees he heard, and understood all.

Then he began to speak, and he talked of hope. He had some interest with Mr. Lang. He had very little doubt but that, somehow, they could get the ticket or leave for the marriage. He was intimate with the 'great folks' in Sydney, who had power to grant such leave, and to make the prisoners free. This case should be stated. As for herself, he bade her take heart and hope. Numbers of people would be only too glad to get her as a servant. In fact, now he thought of it, he himself would very soon want some one to wash, and bake, and mend his clothes, sweep his hut, and keep it tidy. He was going to live at a station, somewhere up the Hunter. Would she like to come and do all this? No one should interfere with her, or serve her ill.

She looked up delighted, but then her eyes grew dim. 'She couldn't leave Jack to go so far as all that. She was the only comfort poor Jack had; she would not desert him.'

'But when once you are there, I shall do my best to get 'Jack' there also. I shall propose an exchange with Lang, and as you say he is not favourite, no doubt, for a consideration, I can get him assigned to me. Do you understand? And then—there will be no difficulty. I can grant leave to marry, or get the ticket.'

She grasped his arm as she looked eagerly at him, till tears rolled down her face. She was breathless with excitement.

'Will you consent?' he said, smiling.

'Will I----? O, 'tis my dead mother will watch over you, and bless you. 'Tis herself will bring the blessing, and the good word of the blessed Virgin and all the saints! And you'll see, and they'll see, that I can work; and Jack will be a clever man, as he is, sir. He can fell trees agin anybody, and he can plough, and do a many things about a place. He's a clever chap is Jack Lynch, and he's the man will know how to get things neat and handy about him—that is, when his heart is aisy like. Bless you, sir, for a kind-hearted gentleman!' And rising, she folded her arms across her bosom, and with a touching grace, dropped a low curtsey.

He was pleased, and he would not let her go yet. He talked of their future plans, till her whole face was bright and beautiful with joy. Meanwhile he advised her to go home and do whatever her parents desired, anything, except to marry Venn. That she must resist. He advised her to take the offer of being child's maid to a woman near the settlement, which she said her father had thought of; and he promised to keep his eye on her. If any one dared to ill-treat her, he should come down upon him, and he would send her word when she could journey to his station with the drays. After
some more assurances of protection on his part, and repeated blessings on hers, they parted. She went home, and he proceeded to deliver his message. Her voice, clear and sweet, was raised into snatches of song, and reached him for some time. One thing gave him rather a turn, for just as she dropped her last curtsey and left, and as he rose from the hollow tree on which they had found a seat, a long snake crawled out and glided swiftly across his very path. He vaulted into the saddle with a shudder and rode on fast. On the whole, his ride had added to his already good spirits, and when he returned to Langville, he was even more than usual, the ‘life of the party.’

The little settlement or township of Bengala consisted, as said before, of a few straggling slab huts which had one after the other risen round the temporary church. One or two large and well-grown trees which, favoured by the clearing around them, spread their branches out wider than the usual run of the eucalyptus tribe, gave a picturesque appearance to the place. The broad, ill-made road swept round outside Mr. Herbert's paddock, and his house and other buildings were all in view, the undulating cleared land about the farm being bounded by shelving hills, wooded of course with the everlasting blue and white gums. There was a store kept by the schoolmaster's wife, and a blacksmith's shop; the remaining huts were occupied by persons who had come for the chance of work, one being a shoemaker, another a currier. The Macleans had just taken up their residence in one of the poorest of these habitations. The roughness of the building was now, however, much hidden by the abundant growth of a water-melon, which had thrown its long but short-lived branches quite over the roof.

It was early morning, the dew still lying refreshingly on the melon leaves and on the little patches of grass beneath the trees. Everything was fresh as yet, and feathered musicians came to relieve the chirping night choir. Cockatoos in heavy flight were already on the wing. ‘Lories’ and bright ‘green leeks’ fluttered about the gardens; while the peculiar crack of the stockman's whip gave warning to the scattered bullocks that their rest was at an end. There was an animated meeting between mother cows and their calves, after their night-long separation; while Mr. Herbert's swineherd, or ‘pig boy,’ might be seen driving his squeaking, grubbing herd to the ‘flats,’ where they were to pick up a repast for themselves.

Mrs. Maclean was putting aside the remains of their breakfast while her husband was sharpening a knife, casting stern looks, meanwhile, on Ellen, who was seated on a low stool, her head buried in her hands, and crying bitterly. She had returned, as advised by her new friend, Mr. Fitz.

‘And sure ye're a disgrace to the woman who bore ye—a wild,
headstrong young colt—that needs a stiffer bit and bridle nor ye get. And I'd be ashamed if I was your own father there, that wouldn't give you a rare good beating this minute, and see who would be master!’ said Mrs. Maclean, in a harsh, high-pitched voice, every now and then clenching her fists at the girl, as she came at all near her in the course of her domestic occupations.

‘Will you obey your lawful father's commands, I say?’ demanded Maclean himself, in a severe manner. ‘Will you give a fair answer to the man—or will you not?’

‘Not if I am torn by dogs or beaten to death!’ said the girl, raising her face, and speaking in a low, determined voice.

‘Say that again!’ said he, rising quickly, and seizing a whip which stood in the corner.

‘You may take my life! I don't care! and it ain't the first blood has been spilt by one that owns your name!’ answered she, quickly.

‘What do you mean?’ shouted Mrs. Maclean, giving her a severe cuff, and looking frightfully angry, and then pouring out a torrent of abuse and wicked words.

‘You leave her to me this time, missus,’ said the father, hardly less excited than his wife.

‘I shall give her one chance more, and then if she don't conform, she may . . . . .’

‘Father, let me be! let me stay here—starve me, if you will, work me like a slave, I'll do it,’ the unhappy girl said, ‘but don't ask me to have him.’

Something in the man's face, as she looked up at him pleading for mercy, turned back the tide of her full heart, and the earnest, imploring expression, which had for a moment succeeded the taunting, excited look was instantly changed into one of dogged sullenness. One low, half-suppressed scream, and her hands tightly pressed on her head as if to shield herself while the whip whizzed over her.

‘None of your gammon or promises about work; you'll take the man at his word, or . . . .’

‘I never will! never! never! . . . .’

The words were repeated in agony again and again, while the infuriated man beat her cruelly, goaded on by the shrill croakings of the woman, who, if report said true, would not have been sorry were the whip to give a fatal blow.
CHAPTER XVII.

THE LONDON THIEF SEEKS AMUSEMENT.

Vol. I

The sun rose higher and higher, and in the hottest parts of the roadside the locusts made their sharp saw, heard by all and seen by none. A guana lay on the top rail of the fence, with its crocodile-like mouth wide open, basking in the fervent heat; then at a noise of some one coming, it ran quickly up a tree, its long tail looking like a snake as it curled round and round. A stockman, with his short-handled and long-lashed whip, dismounted, and removing the upper bars of the fence, made his horse jump the rest. After replacing the bars, he vaulted nimbly into the saddle, and with a sharp but furtive look, scanned the bush on either side, then rested his whip-handle on his knee, and appeared to think, while his horse shook his head at the troublesome grasshoppers that hopped and chirped so incessantly, bounding even to the face of horse and rider, and causing both to feel the sharp and stinging blow. The man rode on leisurely till he came to thick scrub, and then he seemed to look warily around, and listen. He pulled up at last, and gave a long whistle, in imitation of a curlew's cry; again and again this was repeated, and then a slight movement was seen in the bushes, and a girl half raised herself from her screen.

‘Jack, I'm too stiff to move towards ye!’

The man quickly dismounted, and leading his horse, stepped towards her; but the horse was restive, and would not advance, which caused delay. In the meantime, Ellen raised herself quite, and on seeing who it was, said in a vexed weak voice, expressing more than mere disappointment—

‘Bill! why I thought you were Jack Lynch himself, and sure I heard his whistle.’

‘His whistle, Nelly! why, it's any man's and every man's whistle, for all I see; but sure I thought you were some lame foal or wild beast among the bushes here. Whatever are you hiding here for? Lucky I didn't ride over ye!’

‘Maybe 'twas no luck at all! But ride on, ride on. I am just sitting here because I choose it,’ said she, leaning back again on the stone she had chosen for a back cushion.

‘That wretch of a woman has been playing off on you again, I see! Why do you submit to it, Nelly? Were I you, I would cut and run!’

‘And where would ye run to?’

‘Where to? why to a hundred places! Bless me, there's plenty of places
for you to go to if you will seek them. I heard say you were going to Allen's—and a better thing you couldn't do now; and then, I say, Nelly, I saw a friend of yours last evening. Says he to me, 'Do you know one called 'Nelly'?' 'Aye, and so I do,' says I, and then he tells me he has engaged you to be his servant, only not being ready just yet, he wants you to bide quiet here for a bit. You can't do better than wait at Allen's.'

'I shan't go there, so hold your tongue, Bill! I know who wants me to go there, and who is thick with Mrs. Allen, so I do.'

'Well! I speak for your good, I am sure! Come, Nell,' he added, seating himself beside her, and leaving his horse to bite a little grass; 'come, now, keep up your spirits. You might make your choice of all the men on the farm.'

'And that same is just what I have done, Bill.'

'Well, I know you have, and I'm willing to help you to it. But you see all depends on that ticket, Nelly. That ticket must be had, and then all is trotting ground.'

'Ay! the ticket, the ticket!' she repeated absently.

'Well—and the way to get it is for Jack to keep out of punishment, and you know, everybody knows he's a chap of hot blood, and not apt to take things quietly, and when he sees you moping about and knows how bad you're served and how they speak of you, it aggravates him. Ho, there! keep quiet, Peter, I say!' The horse, however, was worried with flies, and not inclined to obey till after a good deal of patting and coaxing, when he again betook himself to cropping any tender bud within reach. 'Well, you see, Nelly my dear, as I was saying, there's the ticket must be had, and to gain that—peace and quiet work; and now we are hut mates I have means of knowing something of his mind,—the burden of his song is, That girl! that girl! if she would get a place and keep it.'

'He didn't say the like o' that, Bill; don't think to blarney me.'

'He did, though—a hundred times over he said it. Now just keep your pretty face out of his way for a while—go to Mrs. Allen's; and let him go straight to his work with only his own burden to bear.'

She did not see his side look—so keen, so subtle, so quick in its scrutiny of her whole bearing—not a sigh, not an impatient gesture, not a shudder of pain, slight and suppressed as it was, escaped him. He saw the weals, the swollen face, the acute agony it was to move at all, and he had also seen her in her beauty, with her hair plaited and braided, and her slight but rounded figure set off by a neat dress; he had heard her songs—she was called by the men Lynch's skylark, and he knew the love of that man for her, and he knew how she was desired and sought by another. His whole nature prompted him, not to love her, not to win her for his own pleasure,
but to thwart and circumvent others, to plot, to triumph in secret at the
success of his own cunning, and at the same time to receive the bribes
which Venn and now another had offered for his help. It was quite an
exciting event, and he resolved that the highest bidder should win the prize.
‘Poor girl!’ he said, ‘poor child! you are ill; but just—can't you walk,
d'ye think? Do try—I'll help you. Come to Allen's—you know 'tis not far
off this. I'll warrant she'll give you something to do you good now; and
you'll cheat the old sinners yonder, and do Jack's heart good this night
when I tell him where you are. 'Tis his first wish you were settled to some
work, and could hold up your head against the world. And the ticket'll
come, Nell, see if it don't.’

She drew back as he attempted to put his arm round her.
‘Let me alone!’ she said, bluntly; then, after a pause—‘ 'Tisn't much faith
I put in you or your words, Gentleman Bill; you've boasted too much of
your own sly doings. But I don't know but what your words are true now.
Are you sure Jack would be easier if I was to go there?’

She looked at him as if to read his answer in his eyes, but he did not raise
them.
‘Not a doubt of it,’ he answered; ‘and I must go, so if you want my help,
girl, make haste.’

‘I have seen others at the place!’ she said, musing; ‘ 'tis a plot, 'tis a plot,’
she exclaimed, presently. ‘But oh, dear me, oh, dear! and I am an
unfortunate girl!’ and she began crying like a child.

‘Easy, my dear heart, easy;’ and this time he did put his arm round her,
and held her fast. ‘Come along, my sweetheart! You must, or you'll die
outright here.’

He forced her to rise; she did not resist, but the moving caused her to
groan—‘O, Jack, could I see thee, I'd die the next minute with pleasure!
Leave me here! leave me, I say!’

‘No, no, you shall be put to bed, dear, and see what a kind woman she is,
and to-morrow you'll be as blithe as a bird again. . . .’ And so coaxing, and
soothing, and helping her, with one arm supporting her round the waist,
and the bridle slipped over the other, he led her on; now bending down the
intruding boughs which bounded back again so as to lash poor Peter's face
not a little, now looking from under his eyelids at her, or marking his way
in the thick and tangled forest.

Faint and weary, and sobbing still as if her heart would break, she
reached Allen's hut, too miserable and ill to note the nod of secret
intelligence that passed between her conductor and the woman who was
sitting outside the door at work.

They laid her on a bed and gave her something to drink, and soon the
heavy long-drawn breath of the sleeping girl reached Mrs. Allen and Bill, as they talked in the outer room.

‘All right,’ said he, chuckling. ‘As for him, this to him,’ and he put his fingers to his nose in that fashion which signifies utter contempt for some one.

The woman nodded, and said, ‘Ay! Ay! but don't blab, you know.’

In another moment he was galloping fast through the bush, to make up for lost time. Having ascertained that all the horses were right, he returned home just in time to find his hut-mate Lynch finishing his dinner.

‘Here's baccy for ye,’ said he, turning out two or three figs of tobacco; ‘a smoke will do ye good, man, and I'll treat you. How long since you got a bit up yonder?’

‘Never since that hound got into the store; 'baccy I don't look for, not I; but for fair rations I do, and I declare that the road-gangs can't fare much worse than I do. For what I get is no good to me, it aint fit for a slave!’

‘Why don't you complain to Lang himself, eh?’ asked Bill, with one of his side looks, and low inward laughs. ‘If it were only to keep up your strength for the clearing work, he would wish you to get good meat, I should say. However, here, this is meat and drink;’ and he put some tobacco in his hand. Lynch eagerly took it, and soon the hut was full of its fumes, while Bill eat his beef and damper, and set his hyson1 on the fire.

‘Good, eh? None of your colonial weed, that! true Virginny 'baccy; and if’—he stopped to indulge himself in a long glance—‘and if you only knew where it came from, it would be all the sweeter. I got it from a particular friend of yours.’

Lynch did not vouchsafe an answer.

‘By the way, Jack, that girl is fairly crazy about you. Bless me, if I was in your shoes, would I do as you do, that's all? I had the particular pleasure of seeing her pretty face to-day at Allen's hut. She's settled as child's maid there. Look out for the new ribbons and such like, for Mrs. Allen loves a bit of finery. And a good thing for the girl it is to be in a place; but, as I said before, why don't you take her?’

‘Why, indeed!’ said Lynch, scornfully, and treading his heavy shoe on the hundreds of unfortunate ants who were swarming out of a log Bill had just thrown on the fire. ‘You know why as well as I do!’

‘Well, I'd see if I wouldn't out-do the tyrant. Gad, and if he wont let ye marry, a man of spirit has a way before him. Rather than be crossed in my will in such a matter, I would give the slip to any master, and once in the arms of the forest, why, man, you and Nell can snap your fingers at parsons and banns! There's Rob-heavy, a chum of mine, we came out in the same ship; he's not blest with my easy disposition, and he got discontented, and
had the pleasure of being sent to the road-gang; he got tired of salt beef and hominy and hard work in the broiling sun and his leg ornaments, and what did he and another do but manage to slide off quiet into a thick scrub, where the soldiers couldn't find 'em, and then 'twasn't difficult to get their irons knocked off; for depend on it the feelings of the country is in favour of brave fellows like them. And now where are they? Why, scouring the country, dressed as well as a gentleman, helping themselves to the best horseflesh in the colony, and----'

‘Hunted like wild beasts, to come to the gallows at last!’ said Lynch, gloomily, though he had evidently listened with interest.

‘Well, and if so, a short life and a merry one! Die game, and you are a hero! or live on, and be beat, and starved, and worn down like an old dog! But different men have different tastes. For my part, you see, I had enough in that line at home; I rather took up the steady walk here; I bowed and scraped to an old lady and got my ticket. I shan't be long here, though; I am getting tired of the place; I shall soon see and get my ticket made out for somewhere down the country.’

Lynch smiled, as he said in a sarcastic way, ‘Change of air, I suppose, for your health!’ Then taking up his woodman's axe, and followed by his dog, he went to his work, which was felling trees, in which he excelled.

Bill laughed, and laughed again, and stroked his chin as he watched him.

‘It will take! it will work! Ah! your big bumptious spirits are the ones to deal with. I care not which of 'em gets the girl, but if I hadn't this little bit of business on hand I should get melancholy, I know. Venn thinks he's sure of her now, and Jack is sure to break his head, and then----’
CHAPTER XVIII.

MYSTERIOUS NEIGHBOURS.

Vol. I

When Mr. Lang found from his half-offended wife that the Herberts were to be at Vine Lodge, he swore he wouldn't go. He had plenty to do and to look after at home.

‘How long is this feud to go on, papa?’ Isabel asked.

‘For ever, as far as I care! I bear no ill-will, not a bit of it! But that confounded Herbert's stiffness and pride shall come down. If he chooses to come here, or make an apology, or show any desire to make it up, well and good. I'll give him my hand and say, Come, my boy, that's something like it. But I'll eat my head if I go one step out of my way to meet him.’

Mrs. Lang also found that her presence at home was indispensable, and no persuasion, even from Kate, would move her.

‘Is Miss Terry going?’ asked Isabel.

‘Indeed I think not, my love. Miss Terry ought to superintend the little girls' studies.’

‘Studies be hanged! The little woman shall go, if she likes. Kate, bid her get ready. She shall go in the gig with you. Willy will drive, and Jem and Issy can ride,’ said the father.

But Kate returned with Miss Terry's thanks, but she could not leave home to-day.

‘Eh! what! But she shall! D'ye hear, Kate? Say she must go!’ said Mr. Lang, from behind his newspaper.

‘It is no use, papa, she wont do what she settles not to do, for any one,’ Kate said, rather languidly. ‘Besides, did Mrs. Vesey ask her? Are you quite sure? It is not every one who expects the governess, and all that!’

‘Confound it! Then stay at home every one of ye. If—if a gentlewoman—a lady—whom I choose——’

‘Hush, daddy!’ Isabel here put in; ‘don't excite yourself. Miss Terry really cannot go, she says.’

‘You are sure she doesn't wish it, Issy?’

‘Quite sure,’ Isabel said, rather sorrowfully. ‘It is very provoking of her, as I particularly wanted her to come.’

‘Then, Mrs. Lang, my dear, she shall remain with us. Her wishes shall be obeyed in my house. I shall be delighted with her company. Let's have a good dinner, Mrs. L.’

Mrs. Lang left the room, saying that it was sickening to make such a fuss
about governesses, and that she believed the world was turning head over
heels.

Isabel asked her brother Jem to ride with her round by the Jollys. It
would not make much difference, and she wanted to see Mrs. Jolly and
carry some seeds.

Kate and Willie were to go in the gig.

Mrs. Jolly was looking at her bees. She was delighted to see Isabel.
Amelia and Tom were going to Vine Lodge, and they could all ride on
together. She and her husband were not going. ‘We are too old, my dear;
we like to stay at home best. Very nice people, very gay, and so on; but we
are old-fashioned and simple, and we don't quite understand them.’

When the neat garden was admired, and a pretty bouquet gathered, Mrs.
Jolly insisted on Isabel's coming in to rest while Amelia dressed. She
divided the flowers, binding their stalks up in ribbon. ‘Now, these are for
Kate, my dear, with my love. Poor dear Kate! Ah, Issy! what is good for
one is bad for another, in this life. No doubt you are all rejoicing, and
enjoying this new society; and indeed, I hope it is all as good as it seems,
and that dear Kate will be very, very happy. But you must excuse me, my
dear, if I, as a mother, don't seem quite so cheerful about it as I should,
being an old friend and neighbour. But when I see my poor child's face—
poor Tom! Of course, Issy dear, we know that Kate has a right to look
high, but----’

Tears dimmed the mother's bright eyes, and Isabel's colour flushed up as
she exclaimed, ‘I wish she may find that looking high, as you call it, will
be as good as—as—Tom! How Kate can prefer that dandy, that cold,
quizzing----’

‘Hush, my dear! Of course, I think a great deal of Tom, for I know his
heart and his temper. But I believe that other young man is very clever and
very good-looking; and after all, it is a matter of fancy; and Kate is not to
blame—not at all. Don't let her fancy I or any one, even Tom, ever blames
her. I believe he would do a great deal to make her happy, and now he is of
course very unhappy. His father and I mean to send him away to visit some
relations in Van Dieman's land, for a change. Ah! we can't help these
troubles. To say the truth, we old folks would have preferred yourself, Issy.
You always were a great favourite of husband's and mine—but Tom
always adored your sister, never had a thought for any one else, and I
really believe never will. I don't offend you by saying this, do I, dear?’

‘No; you never could offend me.’

‘Well, my dear, and I hope papa and mamma like Kate's prospects?’

Isabel did not answer directly; she smiled merrily to herself. Presently
she said, ‘Do you know, I wish from my heart I was Queen Elizabeth, or as
‘Bless me, my dear! what makes you wish such a thing! Why, she cut off every one's head, and threw people into prison, didn't she?'

‘I should like to be able to give my orders very much, just now. I should like to say to this one ‘do this,’ and another ‘do that;’ and I am very sure it would be for the good and happiness of all parties if some one could set all straight.’

‘My dear! How can you suppose you know what is best? In these matters, every one is the best judge for him or herself, and one can't be controlled.’

‘No; but there is so much absurd ceremony and reserve, that people don't understand each other or themselves. I should like to say, under penalty of death, You Tom Jolly take Kate Lang for your wedded wife. And then, You Mr. Herbert take Miss Terry.’

‘You don't say so!’ interrupted Mrs. Jolly, almost starting up with surprise. ‘Well! well! I am astonished! that is a thing I never dreamt of.’

‘Pray don't repeat it, dear Mrs. Jolly, not even to Amelia or to Mr. Jolly. It is quite my own idea and secret.’

‘It can never be—never! My dear, just consider,’ Mrs. Jolly said, gravely. ‘But I have considered; I am always considering it; and I am sure it is a most delightful and a most probable thing, and it is quite sure to be, some time or other!’

‘You don't say so! And does your mamma know it? Dear me, how very differently we and almost every one have judged, to be sure! Well, well!’

‘Dear Mrs. Jolly, do tell me, why need there be always so much fuss and mystery and misunderstanding in these affairs? Is it needful? Why couldn't Tom, for instance, say long ago—Kate, do you like me well enough to marry me? And then, at all events, he would have known his fate before he got so deep into it. But so much manouvring and sighing and talking and stuff seems to me so absurd. Kate says, when a man proposes he is sure to go down on his knees! Conceive the horrors of it; I should burst out laughing! Did Mr. Jolly do so to you?’

‘No, indeed, my dear,’ returned Mrs. Jolly, laughing. ‘He was a plain man, much as he is now. It was in church. He was going away to sea the next day. We had known and liked each other a long time. He opened his prayer-book at the words in the marriage service, and laying it on my knee, pointed out—'Wilt thou have this man,' &c.? I looked up in his face, and seeing there what he meant, I just put my finger on the answer, ‘I will.’ And that was all! When he returned from that voyage we married. That was our courting!’

‘That suits me exactly; plain and straightforward. After all, what is the
use of a man going down on his knees to entreat a person just to obey him? for that is the real meaning of all the nonsense—'Will you be my wife?'' There's sense in that. One can look out the meaning of the word 'wife' somewhere,—in the man's eyes and mouth—I should—and there see if it is written 'slave,' or 'plaything,' or 'helpmeet,' and answer 'yes' or 'no' accordingly. A plain answer to a plain question. Ah, you may laugh, but I mean it. And here comes Amelia, and I see Tom and Jem with the horses. So, good-bye. Good-bye!'

'It is really atrocious!' exclaimed Mrs. Vesey, after examining her guests through her glass. 'I had ordered so much meat and pudding, and expected such a host, at least double the number; and here the Langs can't come, the Budds can't come, Captain Smith, Dr. Marsh, Miss Herbert—I am not quite sure even of the Signor himself! Well, come in, come in; I am in a very cross mood; but come in, pray, and we can twirl our thumbs, at all events. Mr. Tom Jolly, the success of this party rests on you. Here are you, verily our only beau, except Arthur, who will be back for dinner. Very sorry, but he was called away on business this morning. So, you see, you are our forlorn-hope, our pièce de résistance—in fact, our all!'

Tom grew redder and redder under this stream of words. He was meditating in his mind whether he might venture to shake hands with Kate, or if he was only to bow.

'Ah! here is the hero. Here is Mr. Herbert!' called out Mrs. Vesey, and in a moment she had run out to receive him in the verandah. She led him in, and then waving her hand towards the couch on which Kate and Isabel were, she said, 'It is not my fault that Mr. and Mrs. Lang are not here. The fact is, I am a peaceable Christian, and it irks me to have quarrelling among friends and neighbours. Our little district ought to be a perfect dove-cot. Now, let me beg of you, Mr. Herbert, to lay down your arms and your arguments; let me have the supreme pleasure of seeing peace established! Your hand, Mr. Herbert; Kate, my love, Miss Isabel Lang, I know you will both support me.'

Kate looked extremely uncertain in what way to take all this; but as it was Mrs. Vesey, it must be right. She half put her hand out, and then with a deep blush drew it back again when she found that Mr. Herbert was making a very low bow. In another moment, he had turned to Tom Jolly, and after a few words with him, they went out of the room together. They met Mr. Vesey just outside, and all went off to the stock-yard, the usual point of interest to the gentlemen. Isabel had turned away and buried her face in a book during Mrs. Vesey's annoying speech. She was very angry indeed. She was sure it had completely undone all the good her note was
intended to work. If Mr. Herbert thought that all this was a plan concocted between them, and arranged before his arrival, nothing would make him more angry. To be so turned into ridicule, and to find them so led away by Mrs. Vesey's jokes after his warnings, would hurt him exceedingly.

She sat long ruminating over this, but apparently reading. At last dinner was announced, and she found herself led out by Mr. Fitz, who was full of regret at the tiresome business which had delayed him; but as he contrived to place himself adroitly next to Kate, who had been taken out first by Mr. Vesey, Isabel was soon at liberty to look about and see what other people were doing. She saw Mr. Herbert, all the gravity and annoyance gone, doing his best to be very agreeable to Amelia Jolly; while poor Tom listened to the lively Mrs. Vesey, and stole wistful glances towards Kate. A vacant place was left for Mr. Farrant, but he did not come till long after they had risen from the table. Amelia drew her arm very affectionately through her friend Isabel's, and led her away to a pleasant and secluded seat in a shady corner of the verandah. Here they chatted as young girls do.

‘And do you like Mr. Fitz very much, dear Isabel?’

‘Don't ask me, if you please, Amelia.’

‘I beg your pardon; I meant nothing, I am sure. By the way, I suppose you are very glad that poor Ellen Maclean has got a place, aint you?’

‘Tisn't very much of a one,’ Isabel said.

‘O, I hoped it was! You see, I heard you say how much you wished she was in some steady family, and I told mamma, and she said she would try her as a kitchen-maid. So I rode with Tom to the settlement to see about it, and found she had left her father's. O, what a dreadful woman that Mrs. Maclean is!’

‘Yes—well?’

‘Well, she said, very gruffly, that the girl was gone to Allen's place, and directed us there. But we could not go till the next day; and then Mrs. Allen said that ‘Nelly’ was engaged to be servant to some gentleman far up the country, and was to start this very day, I think she said, with some drays.’

‘Are you sure? It is very odd I never heard of this.’

‘I am quite sure; and I was sorry too, for I had taken an interest in the poor girl's fate and sad story; and I think mamma would have been kind to her.’

‘To be sure! The very thing of all others! Gone up the country? Where, and to whom? I must inquire, Amelia; for somehow I dread what will come to poor Nelly. She has not the sense to guide herself, and is so pretty that every one notices her. It is very odd,’ Isabel continued, musingly. 'Ah, there is Mr. Farrant! I am glad he is come at last,’ said Amelia. ‘Isn't it very nice to have a clergyman, and such a one—so good, and so kind, and so
agreeable?’

‘Well done, Amelia! String on a few more epithets. Go on—dignified, manly, clever!’

‘No, no; I leave that for Mr. Herbert,’ said Amelia, with a little more spirit than she usually showed. ‘I don't give him up for any one, after all. Then, I believe I always prefer familiar faces and old friends.’

‘Don't you like a variety? Confess that it is pleasanter to have these additions to our circle.’

‘I don't know—perhaps so; yet I was very well content before. I think we were quite as happy without them, only perhaps I ought not to say so. Then I believe I am stupid, for I confess I don't quite understand all the cleverness, wit, or whatever you call it, that Mrs. Vesey and her brother have. It is true,’ she added, after a pause, ‘that our society was small; but, as papa and mamma always said, Mr. and Miss Herbert were hosts in themselves. Papa says, much as he has been about the world, he scarcely ever saw a man he liked more. I don't think these new people half appreciate him, either.’

‘Agreed. But, Amelia, I did not know you were such a staunch admirer of his. It is a pity he doesn't know it.’

‘Not for worlds! Goodness! O, Isabel!’

Both girls gave a start, and looked for a moment rather silly, as they heard a voice they recognised but too surely, very near, say, ‘What are you two gossiping about?’ and then, from behind the sheltering cedar, Mr. Herbert, newspaper in hand, appeared.

‘If you heard yourself well abused, it served you just right, you base deceiver! Do you know, it is very dishonourable to listen?’ said Isabel, rallying herself, though covered with blushes. But poor Amelia could not recover so soon. In frightened amazement, she shrank behind her bolder friend as far as she could, and tried to remember what she had said.

‘O, were you talking of me?’ Mr. Herbert said, coolly, trying to hide a little look of consciousness meanwhile.

‘As if you didn't hear! and you are chuckling over it at this moment, forgetting that Amelia's praise—and of course you observed that I did not second her at all—is worth this,’ flipping her fingers. ‘Why, she praises every one, and, over and above all, Mr. Farrant. She is no judge, so you need not be vain.’

‘She judges people by her own heart,’ Mr. Herbert said, and at the same time trying to bring forward a garden stool.

‘Now don't come here, please. After all that praise, you will be unbearable. I see by your face how it is. We don't want him, do we, Amelia?’
‘I want you, however,’ he said, seating himself by her side. ‘Now, how
d’ye do? We may as well shake hands, since it is—how long? since we
met.’ He took her hand as it lay on her lap.
‘Ah, you didn't choose to do that just now!’
‘No; not to gratify a vulgar joke,’ he said.
‘You were very angry, I saw,’ she went on, all the more boldly, because
in reality she was ill at ease, and wondering if he had received her note.
‘Not with you. I admired your presence of mind and dignity, and thought
it a pity poor Kate couldn't do the like.’
‘There now,’ she said, pulling away her hand from his grasp. ‘You can't
be civil without a little bit of rudeness too!’
‘I was not rude to you, at all events.’
‘As if it wasn't the same thing! You always think because your high and
mighty benevolence chooses to pick me  out, you may say what you like of
my people! Now, I wont have it.’
‘Well—come—I beg your pardon for that little slip. Practise what you
preach, Isabel. I came here on purpos e to see you. Mahomet will go to the
mountain, as you desire.’
‘Will he?’ she said, trying to turn away from his inspection, and feeling
very shy, and inclined to run away.
Mr. Vesey here came up to beg them all to join the others; they were to
walk and see a certain view, he said. He offered his arm to Amelia, leaving
Mr. Herbert and Isabel to follow.
‘Stay a moment, Isabel,’ Mr. Herbert said as she rose. He even pulled her
gently back to her seat. ‘It was like you to write that note.’
‘Yes,’ she returned, quickly; ‘I dare say you abused me well for a
meddling, forward girl, unfeminine and all that.’
‘I shall keep it always,’ he returned, quietly and gravely. ‘It is now some
five or six years since you and I first made acquaintance, and vowed
friendship at first sight. You were a child then; and I was foolishly
dreaming, and forgetting that a time mu st come—’ he stop ped, and cleared
his voice, then went on: ‘I assure you, Isabel, I do not desire to have any
arguments with your father. But I must have my own opinions, my
principles, and act up to them too. You tell me to come to Langville, and I
shall do so, solely because you bid me, and to see you.’
‘Yes, yes; I know all about it! Come and see me; and no one else, I
suppose?’
He was looking at her, not understanding her tone, still less the lurking
fun in her face, when Mr. Farrant came up to them.
It was the first time he had greeted Isabel; she blushed a good deal, and
more still when she saw Mr. Herbert draw back with cold gravity. ‘I am
desired to fetch you both,’ Mr. Farrant said. They all walked on in silence, till Mr. Farrant began some ordinary remarks, which Isabel answered.

The party were standing about the stock-yard and talking of the horses. Tom Jolly was praising his little mare ‘Jenny Jones’ to Mr. Fitz, and for the moment warmed in his subject, had completely thrown off his usual bashful manner. ‘She's out and out the best stock horse in the country, sir! Why, she seems to know the very beast I want to cut out. How she'll fly after them! You see, the bullocks will generally make for falling ground—down they go such precipices! that many a horse can't follow. Bless you, ‘Jenny Jones’ will follow any herd in the colony. And then to see her when a devil of a beast shies round;—she wheels in a minute, though at full gallop, two and three times over; 'tis no such easy matter to sit such a sudden turn—then crack goes the whip, and the beast is cut out as clean as butter. She's the sweetest stock mare, sir, in the district. I wouldn't sell her for any price!’

Every one had now some anecdote to tell of some wonderful chase after wild cattle, or some wonderful horse. Mr. Farrant remarked to Isabel that it was a natural feeling, that strong attachment which grew up between a man and his horse. As they proceeded on their walk, he kept by Isabel's side. They somehow got round from horses to Miss Terry, and it came out in the course of conversation that Mr. Farrant knew her brother-in-law, and could satisfy Isabel's curiosity in many ways about him, and the conduct which led to Miss Terry's going out as a governess. He stopped himself short at last, apologizing for boring her. ‘No,’ she said, eagerly; ‘it was a subject full of interest for her. She did so pity Miss Terry's having to teach,’ and so on. Then she added, with a significant smile, ‘that she hoped, after all, the evil would be turned to good. It might end in something not so very bad, after all!’ On which Mr. Farrant gave a look of keen inquiry at her. They had loitered on the road, and now found themselves left behind and alone. Isabel was the first to observe this, and she felt rather conscious and uneasy. They walked on in silence for a little while, each apparently busy with some thought. ‘I fancy,’ the gentleman began, in a low and hesitating voice, ‘I fancy that you have some suspicion of—of what I intended to keep a secret for some little time.’ She said nothing, not knowing what to say, but feeling very hot and uncomfortable, and angry with herself for not keeping with the others. He presently went on again, but hesitating and nervously. ‘I am peculiarly circumstanced. I can't explain—yet—may I ask?—may I trust? Is it too much to----?’

‘Don't! not now, please!’ she interrupted, earnestly; but hardly knowing what she said: ‘we are so far behind!’

‘We can soon overtake them,’ he said gently. Then as if seeing her
distress, he changed his tone. ‘I beg your pardon! I fear I have bored you! It was a wrong time. I leave myself in your hands; some day—some time—soon—I hope I shall be able to explain and speak plainly.’

‘O, there they are!’ she said, with a long breath of intense relief. Then she checked her hurrying steps, feeling it was not fair or kind towards him! She had stolen a glance, and her quick eye had detected symptoms of agitation or disappointment. She did not wish exactly to hurt him; only if he would but wait till she knew her own mind better—and only would use few words, and not make speeches, how thankful she would be!

‘Yes, here they are,’ he echoed, rather sadly, she thought. ‘Thank you for your kind—but no! your own generous warm heart needs no formal words of thanks: it will best plead for me, I know.’ He offered his hand as he spoke, and she yielded hers to its gentle but warm pressure.

‘Come here, Issy,’ called Willie; ‘here’s the bell bird.’

They stood on the edge of a deep, dark gully, descending some hundred feet with but little slope. At the bottom was a narrow and shallow stream, which in some parts formed a chain of small ponds in hollow basins of rock. Gigantic lilies, with their rich coronals, reared their stately heads amid the feathery foliage which abounded, and the sweet monotonous note of the water-loving bell bird alone broke the deep silence.

‘A frightful place to come upon without warning, when chasing bullocks!’ remarked Mr. Fitz.

‘It is the same gully in which the waterfall empties itself some fifteen miles north,’ said Mr. Herbert. ‘We came upon it four years ago, quite suddenly, when hunting the kangaroo. No one seemed to know the existence of the fall, and it is a very considerable one too.’

‘A lonely place to set up one's tent, isn't it?’ said Mrs. Vesey. ‘But if we go on a few steps we shall come upon a human habitation. Parishioners of yours, Mr. Farrant, which I dare say you know nothing about. Charles and I were walking here last week and found it out. Rather rough neighbours I suspect they are.’

‘Yes. I see no good, aw—Laura, of putting one's self into aw—that sort of—of trap—at all. By Jove! the old lady is aw—something awful—Miss Lang; I assure you she is.’

Some of the party wished to turn back, among whom was Mr. Herbert. For, he said, ‘Many of these gunyos were the resort of bushrangers, or sly grog-shops. Unless on business, or an errand of duty, he never cared going too near them.’

But some thought it an exciting adventure, and said it would be cowardly to return. It was proposed for Mr. Farrant to be spokesman, and to introduce himself as their clergyman. ‘What do you say?’ he asked Isabel;
and she, conscious and shy, hardly knowing what she did, turned round to Mr. Herbert and asked him to come. He looked pleased, and was about to draw her hand on his arm, when Mr. Farrant looked back. ‘Miss Isabel Lang comes with me, I believe?’ They were all forming into pairs, it seemed, that each lady might have a protector. Mr. Herbert immediately withdrew, motioning for her to go to Mr. Farrant, and remarking, with an indifferent, dry voice, ‘I shall stay here. If there is any danger, cooee-ee, and I'll come.’

So saying, he caught hold of a branch and swung himself down for a few feet on the giddy precipice, to a little level platform, from whence he had a beautiful view, range after range, of the deeply blue mountains, and where he could trace the source of the stream, here and there tolerably deep and full, and then again broken by rocks so as to form pools.

The rest of the party, headed by Mrs. Vesey, Willie, and Jem, followed the track, which presently led them away from the edge of the gully into dense scrub, where the native currant bushes and five corner plants abounded. Soon a few blackened stumps were seen, telling of man's work, but already the quick-growing creepers had fastened their tendrils and gay blossoms over them, half hiding their ruins.

Then the place became clearer; several large trees had been cut down, a stack of bark was piled up, and a rude attempt at a shed, in which lay a broken cart, and a tethered bullock standing near, bespoke the neighbourhood of human beings.

In another moment, as they turned a sharp corner, they met with a welcome more lively than pleasant. About half-a-dozen dogs of all kinds, but chiefly a mongrel breed, half dingo and half cur, filled the lone place with their snaps and growls, and the gentlemen had enough to do to keep them from their heels and the ladies' skirts.

A hut, or rather a gunyo, was seen, its high-pitched gable, formed of two very large sheets of bark, placed together like a card house, and a rough attempt at a chimney at the side, of loose stones unmortared. Standing by its side, a magnificent red cedar rose lofty and proud, affording strength, and shade, and shelter. Such as the dwelling was, there were evident signs that it had been inhabited for at least a season. A large pumpkin ran along the ground, and catching a broken post, which seemed to have served as a tethering post, it climbed from thence to the cedar, and from that again threw out its clinging arms to the back roof, on which lay three or four very large pumpkins. There was also a few feet of ground which had been cleared and drilled, and where a dozen or so of Indian corn-stalks raised their green leaves and hung their tasselled blossoms. Some ugly Cochin fowls, tailless, and with abundant legs, pecked about, while a tame
cockatoo reared his crest, and joined his shrill cry to the yelping dogs.

‘I wonder if any one is here!’ Mrs. Vesey said.

As she spoke, a woman with her hands shading her eyes appeared from behind the hut. She had on a man's cabbage-tree hat, on the top of a mass of rough and disordered red hair. She wore a short bedgown and stuff petticoat, and in her mouth was stuck a short black pipe, from which came the fumes of inferior tobacco.

‘Good day!’ said Mrs. Vesey. ‘What a charming place you have here!’

While the boys beckoned to Mr. Farrant to come forward, and whispered sagely that there was a man ‘behind there; they had caught sight of him peeping at them.’

‘Down, ye noisy devils!’ called out the woman, at the same time throwing some pieces of wood at the dogs, which proceeding procured a cessation of noise. But at the same time a much more formidable guardian appeared and took up his place by the woman;—a fierce bull-terrier, with flaming but half-closed eyes, and a wide, open mouth, displaying a row of formidable teeth, over which the lips never closed. A low growl rather alarmed Mrs. Vesey, who quickly retreated, saying—

‘Pray, my good woman, keep in that dreadful, beautiful, awful, charming creature! I adore dogs, but I should be afraid of that pet of yours. How do you do, Mrs.----. You see, in taking a walk, we have come on your house. It is a curious place.’

‘Get in, ye varmin,’ the woman said, kicking the formidable brute till he skulked behind her, though still keeping up the low, ominous growl.

‘Pray, ma'am,’ said Mrs. Vesey, suddenly hitting on what she thought a very happy idea, ‘have you any fowls for sale?’

‘Depends on what I'd get for 'em. Don't care to sell; but, seeing we're short of tea, wouldn't care to swop with 'ee. A quarter chest—and, I don't care, ye may take the lot of'em.’

‘A thousand thanks! But it will be needful for me to put it on paper, and do a sum, before I can agree to such a liberal offer.’

‘Please yerself—'taint none of my seeking;' and the woman turned as if to go.

Just then a shrill, wild scream rose, as it seemed, from the hut. It was a signal for all the dogs to begin again; but the effect of that cry was apparent on every one of the party—most of all, Isabel was startled.

‘Good gracious! what is it? I know that voice!’

There was a sound of scuffling; a dull, heavy noise, and then a gruff voice uttered a whole volley of oaths, and a man, whose hairy face wore a most sinister expression, put his head out of the door.

‘Send they quality folks away, ye Judy, or I'll have Bluebeard at their
throats! Go on your ways, or it will be the worse for ye.’

‘My good woman,’ here Mr. Farrant interposed, ‘I am the clergyman of this district. I have ridden about in many a corner, but I did not know of your hut. Can I be of any use? I am ready to be a friend to all my flock. What may be your name?’

The woman scowled, and then after an intent survey of the speaker, her face relaxed into a sort of grin, which as soon gave way to an unhappy expression, mingled with distrust, fear and defiance.

‘My name is Judy Brown, gin! that’s any good to ‘ee. As for a claryman, us don’t want none of that trade. We are Catholics, my man and me. We don’t ask no one to help us; and I warn ye, if ye come on that kind o’ errand, ye’d best turn home again. ’Tis no place for ye at all, at all!’ She lowered her voice to one of warning at the last, and half pointed backwards with her thumb.

Here Mr. Vesey began to bluster a little, saying that as a magistrate he could not help having an unpleasant suspicion of neighbours who only received a friendly call in such a fashion. He hoped all was right; but he thought it right to say, that now Vine Lodge was inhabited again, it would not be so well for people to imagine that they could do just as they liked — break the laws, &c.

Then the woman began to whimper, rubbing her eyes with her ragged apron. They were only very poor folks, she said. Her husband cut bark, and had been ‘squatting’ there about a year. They hurt no one, and wished no one to interfere with them. They were hard-working people.

‘Have you any children?’ said Mr. Farrant, taking out his pocket-book to note down the facts.

‘Three, please your honour. Two lies there at the foot of yon white gum, and one is up the country keeping of sheep for a gentleman.’

Isabel observed a turn in her lips, very much like a suppressed smile, in spite of the whining voice she had so suddenly assumed.

With a quick impulse, and under pressure of a fleeting suspicion she could not quite realize, she said—

‘Does any one live here besides you and your husband?’

The woman gave a searching glance at her, and then hesitating, first said ‘No one,’ then corrected herself and said, ‘Forbye a girl, just to help me 'bout the work, and so on—a flighty, do-nothing lass, she is, too—and . . .’

But again that cry rose, and now it sounded like ‘Help!’ The woman looked round uneasily, and said ‘it was a neighbour took ill with a sun-stroke.’

A small, mutilated white terrier just then burst out of the hut, and made
its way snuffling, and whining, to where Isabel stood. She, naturally fond of dogs, stooped to notice it, remarking that it seemed to know her, when again there was a suppressed noise, and the dog listening, bounded back and disappeared within the hut.

The man who had been half hiding all this time, now showed himself, and in a very daring and insolent way, asked what they wanted. For as to selling fowls, they didn't profess to sell poultry, and as to the minister calling, once for all he begged to say, no such a man was wanted there; and if folks didn't know better than to go where they was not wanted, they would some day find they'd best have minded their own affairs. He had a carbine on his shoulder and a couple of wanga wangas and an opossum in his hand. No one felt disposed to dispute with him or seek a further acquaintance with the mysterious gunyo.

So wishing him and the woman good day, they all turned back. Some faint and confused noise of speaking, and as it seemed even hot argument, reached them, and once again they were all startled, as the wail of a dog echoed far and wide. It was evident that the poor animal had received punishment for something.

‘I wish we had some of the police here,’ said Isabel. ‘I have a strong impression that something is going wrong there. Kate!’ she said, turning round and waiting for her sister, who with Mr. Fitz was a few steps behind, ‘Kate, did you notice that dreadful scream? Didn't it remind you of Ellen Maclean, as we have heard her cry out, when ill-treated by her wretched mother?’

‘It was only a child, I think,’ remarked Mr. Fitz, quickly; ‘or, didn't she say some one was ill or delirious? What did you suppose, Miss Isabel Lang? How could this Ellen somebody get here, and why?’

‘It is a sly grog-shop, and something worse,’ Mr. Farrant remarked. ‘It will be well to give a hint to Captain Smith of the existence of such a nest. Rather too near to be pleasant I should think, Mrs. Vesey?’

When they told Mr. Herbert all that had happened, he said he could have told them the sort of thing they would find; he had seen many of them. They were generally the very scum and outcasts of the people; their hut is the rendezvous for all the bushrangers or runaways. They made their living ostensibly by cutting bark or sawing wood; but generally there was a deep excavation under their beds, where the grog was kept. The police were afraid of them, if not actually bound by bribery.

As he walked on by Isabel and Mr. Farrant, still talking of these wild characters, Isabel said, ‘I can't get it out of my head that it was poor Nelly's voice!’

‘That was fancy,’ Mr. Farrant answered; ‘for I know the girl is gone with
some drays to a station very far up the Hunter. I couldn't make out who it was she was to live with; but I hope it is a good arrangement.’

‘Under present circumstances it is not bad for her to be out of this neighbourhood,’ Mr. Herbert returned. ‘She is a singular being,’ he went on; ‘there is something very attractive about her.’

As he talked on of the girl, Isabel, always carried away by the impulse of the moment, and under the influence of his old familiar kindness and protection, suddenly put her hand in and took hold of his arm.

He smiled, looked quickly at Mr. Farrant, and then said, as if apologetically, ‘She thinks my arm must be at her service; I am a sort of lay uncle, you see. Take care and not be entrapped by little girls in sun bonnets, Mr. Farrant; you don't know the consequences!’

‘Is there anything extraordinary in my taking your arm unasked?’ she said, trying to withdraw her hand and struck by his manner. But he held it fast, laughing.

Mr. Farrant said something as to its being a very pleasant ‘consequence;’ and he also ventured on a significant smile, while he said, ‘he perfectly understood about it.’

‘Understand what?’ she asked, with flushing cheeks; and she clung to Mr. Herbert the rest of the way in her shy avoidance of Mr. Farrant.

It might have been this feeling, so new to her, which made Isabel quieter and more silent all the rest of the evening. It was a real pleasure to her to meet her old friend after their late estrangement; and as he was in one of his most agreeable moods, and talked in his pleasantest way of foreign lands and travels, keeping the conversation thereby off the small and personal topics of the neighbourhood, Isabel felt proud of him, and off ran her speculations on her favourite scheme, so much so that she was rather absent, and, a thing very unusual for her, gave one or two dreamy answers, betraying her pre-occupation.

When the party broke up, and by the doubtful light of a young moon, they set off to find the tracks through the Bush to their respective homes, Mr. Herbert was not sorry that the clergyman found his duties made it advisable for him to return by a somewhat longer round. He wanted to leave a message at a hut which lay more on the road to Langville; so that he turned off with the Lang party, and left Mr. Herbert to go on alone.

Mr. Herbert left his good horse to find his own way, and gave himself up to a good fit of thinking. He was strictly and peculiarly a man with sensitive appreciation of the honour due from one man to another; besides his military training, his own disposition pointed this way. Not for the world would he now, having, as he thought, been made aware of Mr. Farrant's intentions, intrude or interfere between him and Isabel.
Sometimes he bewailed his own blindness in not anticipating him, and trying to secure the prize so long his own in one sense, that he had forgotten a change must ever come. As it was, he was forestalled; yet, as an old friend, he had still his own place, which he would cede to no one. Sweet as was her confiding trust in him, it was mingled with pain, for he thought it showed so very plainly the light in which she viewed him,—the impossibility of any nearer tie existing between them. Then he turned to the parents, and thought that perhaps it was a fortunate thing all hope was crushed.

It would not be a pleasant connexion. Mr. Lang would probably never consent, or if he did, there would be perpetual disagreement. His marriage at all would be highly imprudent just now, and a great blow to his sister. He had considered himself a determined bachelor; all his habits and his ideas had tended to this. Why should he suddenly desire to change? After all, he might be mistaken. His feelings for the girl were probably what they ever had been. Never, till he had heard her talked of for some one else, had he suspected anything more. He might continue to be her friend, and meet her nearly every day; but if she really did marry Mr. Farrant, how would it be then?

He winced at the thought. He could bear to have her as she was—Isabel Lang; he believed he could bear to think of her as nothing nearer to him; but to see her belong to another—to know that his intercourse with her must depend on that other's will—Pshaw! he whipped up his horse suddenly at the thought. Then, cooling down again, he took a cool survey of the case, and before he reached home he had settled his plan. It was by no means certain that Isabella would marry Mr. Farrant. Indeed, he had seen her avoid him and even prefer himself. But, ah! that very avoidance—would he not be glad to see something of the sort towards himself. The very open and frank affection she showed him was against him. However, he would see as much of her as he could. He would observe and watch, and scrupulously abstain from standing in Mr. Farrant's light; though he half wished he had not committed himself by asking any question. If he found that it was dangerous to himself—there being no question of danger to any other—if the present wild dream did not give way to his foregone habits, he could but leave it all and betake himself to the far-off station. There, it would go hard indeed but he should bring himself to sober sense again.

But the probability was he might indulge himself in the pleasure of seeing and hearing her without harm to himself or any one else; and that there was no one pleasure he cared so much for, he had pretty well convinced himself during all the days he did not meet her, and dreaded Mr. Lang's anger might even make any further intercourse impossible. So Mr.
Herbert returned in a particularly amiable mood—disposed to be very kind to his sister and sociably tell her about the day. He even remarked how pleasant it was to find her there to welcome him, instead of a bare and comfortless bachelor's room. Miss Herbert was surprised and relieved. She had been unhappy at his depression, and now finding him disposed to see all things hopefully, and to talk as he used to do of always remaining a bachelor, she rallied all her cheerfulness, and to hear and see them that hour before they parted for the night, one would have supposed no care or trouble entered into their quiet and uneventful life.
CHAPTER XIX.

A BREEZE BEFORE BREAKFAST.

Isabel did not forget that strange and piercing cry they had heard from the Bark Hut. The she remembered Amelia's news of Ellen Maclean's being engaged as a servant to some one at a distance.

She rose very early and went out towards the men's huts, hoping to learn from Jack Lynch, or some one, what was the truth about this report. Lynch was not to be seen, but 'civil' William Smith, alias Gentleman Bill, who always seemed to be at hand when anything was wanted, and had an answer ready for every one, now came up a little behind, according to his custom, his hat off, and his head bent forward between his shoulders, and eyes apparently on the ground.

'Was the young lady seeking Lynch? Sorry he was gone for the cattle and would not return till night. Could he do anything, or give any message?'

'No, thank you. I don't suppose you can help. I want to find out where the girl, Ellen Maclean, is at this moment.'

She did not see the quick, scrutinizing glance which seemed to scan her through and through, but she heard him say presently, as if trying to recollect, 'She was at Allen's at the township—that is, it is a little out of the road down by the creek. Allen works for Budd, and I saw Nelly Maclean minding Allen's children.'

'When was that?'

'Some days ago, Miss, let me see—it----'

'Are you sure she is there now?'

'Well—not exactly. For I did hear she had met with a situation somewhere a long ways off. They said that she was going along with some drays.'

'Where?'

'I am sure I can't say, Miss. 'Twas no place anear this.'

'Did her father know of it?'

'That I don't know neither, Miss. But I think not. I think he was all for keeping her about here; and I knows that Jack Lynch hadn't heard nothing about it; for, says he to me last evening—he and me live in one hut now, Miss—Bill, he says, I shall just give a look in at Allen's as I pass homewards. It is long since I saw the girl. And I says, 'Well, and so do,' says I; 'but mind yourself, Jack, and don't be after time now, and be a
aggravating the master again.’

‘Thank you;’ and Isabel was just going on, when she heard her father's voice, apparently in great anger, and looking around she saw that many of the men, having come in for breakfast, were hanging about and staring with surprise and curiosity. Anxious and troubled, for these rows were but too frequent, she hurried on to where Mr. Lang was standing, and was much surprised to see a man who for some time had lived at their other place, Westbrooke, one whose somewhat dogged, surly honesty had been admitted by his master, by the very fact of leaving him in sole charge of the place, with the cattle and horses. About horses he was particularly clever, and was generally entrusted with the rearing all the colts. Charley Brand, called ‘Bran Charley,’ or ‘Big Charley,’ was a ‘character,’ and in some way a good deal looked up to by his fellow prisoners. A man of few words and uncommon physical strength, he went on his way with the most unfailing punctuality, interfering with no man, scarcely even volunteering a remark.

In old days, when the family had lived at Westbrooke, that being the home-farm and Langville a mere out-station, Charley Brand had, in his own fashion, noticed the children, and had become a favourite of theirs. It was Isabel he especially picked out; but he was kind to all, and had given them many a ride on his sorrel mare. She was therefore about to greet him cordially as usual, but the words did not pass her lips. The man did not even see her; there he stood, hat in hand, his long, thick hair moved by the hot wind which was rising, his stock-whip dropped, and lying on the ground beside him.

He looked his master full in the face—a look not pleasant, and it grew darker and darker, till Isabel could see how angry the man was getting at every gesture and word of her father's.

Mr. Lang, also a stout man, but of lighter build than Brand, in his suit of white linen and small Manilla hat, paced to and fro before the stable-door, now smacking a whip sharply, now bending it double, now shaking it in threat, as in his stammering, excited way, he poured out his wrath, supplying all hiatus with oaths and abuse. It is a miserable liberty for any one to be able to speak as his temper prompts him unrestrained. With Mr. Lang there was no one to call him to account for words. His servants were prisoners, with no power to give warning, and only too happy if the anger vented itself in that manner, and stopped short of actual punishment, which it sometimes did. But though this was the case with the majority, there were a few exceptions, which unhappily Mr. Lang did not note—a few to whom these hot words were as poison. He never paused to read the countenance of the man he was abusing.
He did not intend to punish Brand; his services were too valuable, and indeed there was something in the man which forbade the idea; but in his keen disappointment in finding a colt, which he had expected to prove valuable, seriously lame, he eased his mind, according to habit, and was now in the middle of his scolding harangue, or what he called a ‘good blowing up.’

Charley's arrival had been unexpected. He was rather a noted character, and it being also breakfast-time, there was quite an audience. Even the household servants and the boys were there. The blood rushed into Isabel's face. She could not bear her father to expose himself so—to give way so completely to passion, and to use such words. She felt lowered, sorry, and, as she looked at Charley, even afraid.

‘You big, greedy, beef-eating rascal! You are as fat as a prize ox. You sit in and gorge, and neglect your duty. Hang you!—you've ruined the colt, and you'll smart, I promise you. You're a knave, an impostor, sirrah—a smoothfaced, lying rascal! What could be expected from a swindling, thieving, confounded jockey boy! I'll do for you, as sure as my name's Lang! You'll see—you'll feel! I'll make an example of you! You don't suppose I'm going to stand it, do you? . . . . . . . And how long—if your confounded tongue can speak truth—how long has the beast gone lame? Speak out, can't ye?’

‘Yes I can speak out, and I mean so to do, Mr. Lang, when for lack of breath you have stayed your oaths and language misbecoming a gentleman. I let ye have the bit—I just gave ye the reins—for to see what you would please for to say. And now, sir, seeing as how I can't write, except just my name, I com'd up here myself, that ye might get the quickest intelligence of this here haccident, which I was all so sorry for as—as—but that's neither here nor there now. The day afore yesterday ‘Prince’ was so well on his fore legs as e'er a colt among 'em all. Yesterday evening I zeed him limp. I drove them all into the stock-yard right away, and examined this 'ere consarn, and I believe it may be some poisonous bite, for 'twas all of a inflammation, and seeing all foments and so on did no good, what did I do? I cast about, and remembered as how David Wheler was reputed as clever about them kind of things, and anyhow your honour would know and judge. So I left William in charge, and off I set, and never stopped for sup nor bite till I rides in here; and this here is the wages I gets, as all can bear me witness—a welcome I'll not be likely to forget too soon, either.’

‘What! you threaten, do you? you insolent old methodist; for you've treated us to quite a sermon this fine morning.’

Here a laugh was raised and passed round, faintly, by the audience, but a look from Charlie Brand stopped it. Isabel's hand was pressed on her


father's arm.

‘Don't, papa; pray don't provoke him! He is tired—perhaps hungry. Wait till you are both cooler, please!’

‘Go in, child, go in,’ Mr. Lang said, impatiently; then, with affected hilarity, ‘Well, sir, don't think to alarm me with your scowls! You just deserve a good twenty-five, but it is ill flogging a fasting man, so turn in and fill your stomach, and then we'll see----’

‘You'll see that no good comes of insulting and blackguarding an honest man! No, sir; you may chance to live to repent this here morning's work—you may, you may! You're the best man here, perhaps; but----’ and he raised his hand, as was afterwards remembered, and shook it, ‘but you and I, Mr. Lang, may chance to meet again in another place, when perhaps you may not be the master!’

The man was white with suppressed anger: his step tottered a little as he turned away, still muttering something to himself. Again he turned round and looked at Mr. Lang, and seemed about to speak; but after a moment's pause he put his hat on his head and went into the hut nearest to him. Mr. Lang suffered himself to be led in by his daughter, who longed, though she dared not, to say something to Charles Brand.

She heard the murmur of men's voices, the laughter and the rude jest, which, directly the master's back was turned, burst forth. Before they reached the breakfast parlour Mr. Lang's anger had vanished.

‘The surly rascal! By Jove, he's a stout fellow, too! Has a quiet berth down there; all his own way, and can't bear a word to be said to him.’

‘He is not a man to provoke so, papa! I wish you would be more careful. Indeed, it is dangerous to make enemies of these men. Bad policy, to say the very least. He looked so deeply angry—so hurt.’

‘Did he, though? As if a man could hear of a valuable beast like Prince being lame, and not blaze up a bit! But stop his mouth—give him some prime 'baccy.’ Here, money is scarce, but as Charlie was an old friend of yours, I don't mind once in a way—here, give him this crown piece. That will smooth all over, I'll engage. Eh, pet, are you satisfied?’ and he pinched her ear.

‘Bless me, Issy, what makes you look so cold and pale?’ exclaimed her mother, as they sat down to breakfast.

‘Pale, is she? Confound the goose-chick! Hang that villain! Is it his black visage which has turned thee sick, child, eh?’ said her father, turning to look well at her.

When the matter was explained a little, both Mrs. Lang and Kate were surprised at Isabel's ‘sensitive nerves,’ and joked her a good deal. But she said low, so that only Miss Terry, her neighbour, heard it,—
‘That man’s look was frightful! If I didn't know he was faithful and attached, I should be indeed uneasy. As it is—well—it is a pity!’

They went out very soon to seek the man, Mrs. Lang intending to make it up to him by a few condescending inquiries and a glass of wine, and Isabel really anxious for a chat with her old favourite; but they found he was gone—gone without any food!

He had brought out his horse, rubbed him down carefully, and let him drink; and then, without a word to any one, rode away—homewards, it was supposed.

‘He didn't wait for orders?’

‘No,’ one man answered. ‘He said any orders could be sent.’

Mr. Lang was of course extremely angry again. He had quite got over his passion, a good breakfast helping not a little towards it. That this fellow should brood over and resent it, proved him more than deserving of everything Mr. Lang had said of him. At first, he threatened to ride after him and bring him back for punishment; his horse must be tired, and could be easily overtaken. This Isabel would have found hard work to prevent, but for the fact that Mr. Lang and his boys were very much wanted to ride in quite an opposite direction, to help in bringing in some cattle—rather a wild set, and therefore exciting.
CHAPTER XX.

MYSTIFICATION.

Vol.I

In the course of the morning, when Isabel was in the school-room, just as the morning's lessons were winding up, and wondering at the gentle patience with which Miss Terry heard a page of French vocabulary mispronounced by Fanny, a high-spirited child, said to be like herself and rather a dunce, the difficult French was quickly broken off by an exclamation, 'There are visitors! O! it is Mr. Farrant and somebody. Now we shall go. I am glad!'

Isabel looked out, and saw Mr. Herbert and Mr. Farrant. The latter had dismounted, and was about to inquire if the family were at home, while Mr. Herbert showed his uncertainty of being welcome by retaining his seat on horseback till there was an order for admittance. She turned to look at Miss Terry, and to say, 'Send away the children, and come with me;' and she could not help seeing the deep blush which covered face and neck as the teacher bent over the book, and strove to recall her pupil's wandering attention. Isabel smiled involuntarily as she said again, 'Do come!' and then she herself hastened out, with pleasure and fear rather strongly contending; for she knew it was her note which had done the deed, and she did not know how her mother and father would receive him; while satisfaction at bringing 'the two' together again, quickened by the sight of the blush, was almost so great as to make her forget to be awkward about Mr. Farrant. Were the truth told, his visit on this particular occasion could have been dispensed with, however.

'How lucky that you are come!' was her greeting as she stepped out by the verandah; 'we were in the most deplorable state of dulness. A man is coming for the horses; you need not go yourself, Mr. Herbert. Well, if you will—if you won't trust any one but yourself. Is it 'Pearl'?'

'Yes; therefore worthy of all care, and she won't bear rough handling, you see; and to say truth, I do always prefer looking after my own horse in this country. No offence, I hope?' he said, patting the silky mane.

'No; it is not worth while.' Then catching up a parasol which usually lay within reach, she turned to accompany him to the stables, while Mr. Farrant, less experienced in the careless ways prevalent, or perhaps caring less, gave up his steed to the boy who appeared, and after greeting Isabel, proceeded to pay his respects in the drawing-room.

'I have obeyed you, Isabel,' Mr. Herbert said as they went on.
‘Yes; so I perceive. You are very good,’ she said, but rather doubtfully, for she was at the moment wondering—should her father return and find him, how would he behave? So much, she well knew, depended on the circumstances of the hour.

‘I hope it is all right,’ Mr. Herbert went on. ‘I hold you responsible. I fancied, after what passed, I should not be justified in coming without express invitation from your father. But I have taken yours as the second best thing.’

‘Papa will forget it all! I know he is sorry for it now; only being the elder, and so on, he couldn't quite make up his mind to be the first to come round. Papa's anger is hot, but soon over; he wonders that people mind it, he so completely forgets it himself.’

‘Well, I am ready to overlook much, knowing his temper, and making excuses for him on many accounts; but there is a point beyond which no man can be expected to go, or justified in bearing.’

‘Ah! if you mean to talk and to look like that, I shall wish I had never interfered,’ Isabel said.

‘Like what? How am I looking to displease you, eh, Isabel?’

‘Never mind! Only, please we wont talk about it;’ and she drew a very long breath.

He looked at her, half amused and half kindly. ‘Are you very doubtful as to the issue of your efforts? Do you wish me now to give it up? I can leave you here at once, if you like.’

‘O no! the fact is, papa and the boys are away after cattle. I don't expect them yet. He will be pleased to hear of your visit, I know. There was a great fuss this morning about the colt, which is terribly lame—some snake-bite, or perhaps a centipede, they say; and Charlie Brand came here about it.’

‘Yes, so I understand,’ Mr. Herbert said, drily; ‘indeed, I saw him—hem. He is a capital servant, Isabel, and has served you all well.’

‘I know. So he went to you. O, he looked so dreadfully angry, and used such threats;’ she shuddered a little.

‘You are certainly nervous, my dear Isabel. There is nothing, I hope, to fear from him; he is too good a man. But—’

‘I know, I know!—don't let us begin about that. Now, is ‘Pearl’ right?’

‘Yes; but how is it I can't hit on a subject pleasing to you this morning?’ Something in her face made him draw her hand on his arm as they returned to the house. At first neither spoke; then he said, ‘I took Mr. Farrant to a new part of his straggling parish to-day. He is going about his work in a very orderly manner, and I really believe he will make his way here, and be appreciated.’
He consulted her face again with a quick glance, as if to see if this subject was more fortunate. But something was the matter with the parasol, and she was intent on rectifying it, so that her face was hidden. By the time it was put right they had reached the verandah. As he stepped back for her to precede him, she turned quickly round—

‘Please not to tell papa or mamma, or Kate, that it was my doing.’

‘You foolish little thing; I know that you must really be frightened, to be so beseeching. Trust me; for your sake I will take care that there shall be nothing unpleasant; I mean, of course, as far as I can manage it.’

‘For ‘my sake’? ’ and she gave a saucy and incredulous smile.

‘Yes; for whose sake but yours? For the sake,’ he added in another tone, ‘of the little maiden who stood at this very window, and first judged me as a crusty fellow for not liking children; then thought me not so bad, after all, and took my part. From that time till now she has been my chief object in this house. Eh, Isabel?’

‘And soon she will have to cede that honour,’ she added, laughing, and turning to go in. He had no opportunity of asking what she meant, for she led him at once into the drawing-room, where all the party were.

Mr. Farrant had probably, Isabel thought, prepared the way, for Mrs. Lang's reception of Mr. Herbert was kind enough. She regretted her husband's absence, and inquired much for his sister. He remained talking to her for an unusual time, till, in fact, Mr. Farrant proposed going over their songs: then Mr. Herbert indulged himself in a newspaper and easy-chair, from which he might drink in the sweet sounds and also make a few quiet observations.

He had not heard them for some time, and he praised the improvement in Isabel's part warmly, and said it was a good work bringing out her voice. Mr. Farrant was animated in his encouragement, proving that practice and teaching would do so much. He was sure, from the tone of Mr. Herbert's own voice in speaking and reading, that he could sing if he tried.

This Mr. Herbert denied, saying he had tried very hard when a lad, emulous of being musical. Miss Terry urged him to make a trial now, and drilled him a little through the ‘Do, re.’ He succeeded better than he expected, and was pleased,—tried again, and again, and finally sang an easy song or two with Miss Terry, who offered to give him lessons, but at the same time urged his acquiring a little knowledge of the notes, &c. She went to the school-room for books, and he accompanied her, and when there, they remained deep in talk for some little time.

Isabel's delight was extreme. She could scarcely keep it to herself, and her gleeful eyes chanced suddenly to meet Mr. Farrant's. He was looking amused too, and even conscious. Leaving his seat near Mrs. Lang, he came
close to her and was bending towards her, when she caught a look from Kate which brought all the blood to her face and gave a very sudden, if not unwelcome, turn to her thoughts. When, however, the sense of his words, spoken in a low tone, did reach her mind, she as speedily recovered her ease, her interest in what he said absorbing other feelings.

‘Ellen Maclean has left the district, and is, I hear, gone far away,’ he was saying.

‘It is true, then! And do you know where she is gone?’

‘Her father does not,’ he answered, after a moment's pause. ‘I am sorry to say the step was taken entirely without his knowledge, far less consent. I fear very much it will end ill.’

‘How so? Where is it? and who managed it? I did not know she had a friend who could procure her a situation.’

‘It was no true friend, I fear; though perhaps she thought so. Her peculiar mind forbids her being judged by common rules, or I should be seriously afraid that she had acted in this most improperly.’

‘What do you mean? Do tell me, Mr. Farrant, please! Ellen is much to me—very much. I can't help feeling her as a sort of charge. Her own mother—such a sweet woman, every one says—was my foster-mother, and Nelly was born here.’

‘Yes; so I heard. I cannot tell you where she is gone till I am more certain of facts than I am now. It is a bad business, and there has been much mystery and concealment. This alone would arouse my suspicion.’

‘But is any one looking after her? Is she actually gone?’

‘Yes; her father is gone after her—at least, he is gone to find out what he can. It is since he left this morning that I discovered what I have as—as—to the party concerned.’

He stopped in grave thought. ‘You have a man called Smith, or Bill, here, haven't you?’ he asked, presently.

‘Yes; ‘Gentleman Bill.’ A sneaking, smooth, but very clever man—a ticket-of-leave man.’

‘Just so. I suspect he has been in the business, but I don't know. Wasn't there an idea of her marrying your storekeeper?’

‘He wished it, and asked papa's leave; but Nelly wouldn't have him.’

‘He is very angry now, and in his rage has let out a few hints of shameful conduct of his own and others. There has been some curious and deep play. I can't quite understand it. But I fear for the poor girl very much.’

So did Isabel, though her fears took no certain shape. Affairs were not by any means in a comfortable state among their numerous government men and women,¹ she knew. Venn was strongly suspected to be at the bottom of much incipient rebellion, but Mr. Lang would not hear a word from any
one against him. He had promoted the man with a full knowledge of his character, and in a fit of worry and fear had resolved to rid himself of the evil by making it the man's interest to serve his master.

Unfortunately, this step had been opposed, and Mr. Lang having once made a personal party matter of it, was determined to 'carry his point over every one's head,' a motive which had become a very ruling one in his life. Isabel had left Mr. Farrant to continue the subject to her mother, and was ruminating on his information, while absently plucking the leaves from the creeper which trailed over the verandah. Voices reached her from the school-room window, which opened also on the verandah, at an angle from the drawing-room.

'I am so very glad,' Mr. Herbert was saying, 'to have this opportunity of speaking; circumstances were against me before.'

What Miss Terry's answer was, did not transpire—something, doubtless, favourable and sweet, Isabel thought. Presently his voice again reached her, a little subdued, but by no means a whisper.

'Yes; mystery is always undesirable, but in this case it is right—for a time. And if you write within three days, it will do, though the sooner the better. Can't you send a note by the post-boy?'

A few words were lost—he was gone further from the window. Now he returns, and Isabel can so well understand the content, the composed, and controlled, but deep satisfaction of the tone; she can even see, in her own fancy, the answering look in his face, so familiar are his habits and expressions to her.

'Be hopeful! The worst, the difficult part, is over. Now that intercourse is renewed, opportunity will not be lacking. I can venture to answer for Mr. Lang; with all his faults, he is truly kind-hearted, and I can see that you are a special favourite. He will be delighted to secure your society near.'---

Again, 'Mr. Farrant is impatient, yet, pray, beg him to be guarded, cautious—to think it well over before . . . .'

Isabel's downright honesty here caused conscience to prick sharply. With a tell-tale face, she put her head round the corner. 'What are you two talking secrets at the open window for? I heard you—at least, I heard some—and I understand all about it!'

They came out—Miss Terry's cheeks quite as red as Isabel's while the gentleman looked very provoking and rather triumphant. 'You understand, do you? Well, we know you can keep a secret, and your forbearance won't be taxed long either. As you have thrust yourself on our secret council, you must e'en take the consequence and act the discreet friend. As you have heard 'all about it,' your own excellent judgment will point out the necessity of silence as yet. What have you done with Farrant? Where is he,
Issy?"

‘Talking to mamma,’ she answered, again stealing a look at Mr. Herbert's lighted-up face, and then noting Miss Terry's very evident embarrassment.

The two gentlemen were just speaking of taking leave when Mr. Lang's voice was heard, and very soon he and his boys came in sight, and also the bullocks.

Isabel looked quickly from the returning party to Mr. Herbert. Was the moment propitious? But the affair was taken out of her hands. She heard her mother begging both the gentlemen to remain and see Mr. Lang.

She felt Mr. Herbert's glance, as it rested for a moment on herself, and she looked up in time to see him exchange a look of meaning with Miss Terry. At the same instant, he expressed his intention of waiting to pay his respects to Mr. Lang; but Mr. Farrant, having spoken a few quiet words to Miss Terry, turned to her and said, he hoped she would kindly say everything proper to Mr. Lang for him, but he must return home at once, he had important business to attend to.

Mr. Herbert watched the clergyman ride down the hill with a grave, yet amused air.

‘What should you say, Isabel—judging solely by the cut, the air, the tout ensemble, as the minister rides yonder—should you guess him a happy, a successful man, or not—eh?’ He looked at her with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

‘Indeed, I don't know—very doubtful, I should say,’ was her answer, with a little annoyance in it. ‘But,’ she went on, determined to return his joke on himself, ‘were I asked as much about some gentleman near me, I should not hesitate so much.’

‘Ah, indeed?’

‘No—in fact, a little less broad display of content would be more interesting,’ she said, with a stress on the word.

He raised his eyebrows with a smile of interrogation and surprise; then lowering both his look and his voice, he said quietly and with some earnestness, ‘I am content, Isabel,’ as you say. Here he paused and looked at her; then smiled at something in her face.

‘Mahomet found the mountain full of promise—but—come into the garden,’ he added, and trying to take her hand.

‘No,’ she said, withdrawing a step from him, and surprised at his manner, so suddenly in the last sentence telling of deeper feeling than he often showed; and while she liked it, shrinking from it too—wondering at herself why, now it came to the point, she did not more eagerly meet his advances towards making her a confidante.

‘No, I don't like you so—so—triumphant—so dreadfully happy; I can
imagine all you have to say; and I don't care to hear any rhapsody second-hand. Besides, here comes papa full of the wild beasts—and that is a subject I do like.’

‘Umph,’ and he bit his lip. ‘Rhapsody’ indeed! You're as slippery as—as. You are the most eccentric of human beings! But, Isabel, you are not in earnest. May I not trust to—the gleam of light, I . . . .

‘What gleam of light?—ah, I understand! Metaphor,’ I suppose, eh? Very proper, I dare say; but I am too plain to catch it all at once. A gleam of light; poetical perhaps? Is that the way you gained your gleam of light—by talking poetry instead of plain English?—ah, you are all alike—can't use common sense or plain prose. Old Mr. Jolly's is the only way—and I wonder how Tom would talk?’

‘Tom! what on earth has Tom to do with it? He seems to interest you very deeply! But I own, I can't exactly see what possible connexion he has with any expression I may have been unfortunate enough to use—rousing your spirit of sarcasm thereby.’

'There now—off you go—phiz!—phiz—iz—pop! Well, well! I suppose it must be excused! I implore your pardon for knocking over your romantic and poetical ideas. Only, don't you see—what can I do? I am so downright and so matter-of-fact, that I can't understand fine words. You should go to Kate, she would lend a willing and a sympathising ear.’

‘I wont trouble her, thank you! But if you are in one of your wild, impossible moods, I can, in fact, I must, wait. I wonder if any one of the wild cattle they chased to-day was more difficult to get hold of and win—manage, I mean, than . . . .’ ‘Good morning, sir,’ said Mr. Lang, who coming up, heated and eager about his successful run, turned the attention of every one to himself at once. There was no allusion made by him or by Mr. Herbert to the past. A very slight increase of rapid utterance—a little stammer on Mr. Lang's part, and the slightest possible touch of hauteur in Mr. Herbert's bow—alone marked the consciousness which both sought to hide. Mr. Lang broke off in the midst of his description of the desperate leap a bullock had been about to take, but was prevented by Willie, of whom his father was greatly proud, to take it for granted Mr. Herbert would remain and dine with them. ‘It was very lucky, for he had picked up another guest—some one Mrs. Lang wouldn't guess in a hurry, or Kate either; indeed, she was quite on a wrong scent, he saw from the becoming colour rising in her cheeks.’ A very fine gentleman, indeed; a scholar, very polite, very handsome, and so on, but yet not a man to bring up a lady's blushes. Wait and see—you'll see!’ Mr. Lang cried out, as he went away, laughing and enjoying the mystification of his wife. ‘Only I say, Mrs. Lang, we must have something good for dinner. Isn't there time now for
some of those very nice custards Miss Terry makes so well?’
‘Nonsense, Mr. Lang; I wish you would forget that stupid joke! But who
is it? Girls! can you guess who is coming in this mysterious fashion?
Where can your papa have met any one out in the Bush?’
‘Papa is so fond of jokes!’ said Kate. ‘It is one of our neighbours, of
course. Mr. Jolly or his son, I dare say.’
‘I fear nothing so refreshing,’ said Isabel; ‘I rather suppose it must be the
Roman Catholic priest; I met him this morning among our men's huts. And
I don't know what it is, but there is something in that man that I can't get
over. They say he is here trying to get names for a church.’
‘Yes, he was in the settlement yesterday,’ Mr. Herbert remarked.
‘To be sure Mr. Lang must be crazy to invite him here to dinner! It can't
be! Really it is very wrong, very dangerous!’ exclaimed Mrs. Lang as she
went out to give orders, much annoyed evidently.
‘It is Dr. Mornay, the person the Kearneys were fond of. We met him at
the North Shore, don't you remember, Kate?’ said Isabel.
‘O, yes! The Kearneys swear by him. For my part, I thought him very
disagreeable.’
‘Did you? I can't say that! returned her sister. ‘But I am afraid of him.’
‘You afraid of any one, Issy? Well, I must make a note of that!’ said Mr.
Herbert, smiling at her. ‘Come into the garden,’ he continued, in a lower
key. ‘There is time enough—I have something to say to you.’
‘Yes, of course! But I don't want to hear it; I know all about it.’
‘You do?’ and he tried to catch her eye.
‘Yes. There is Miss Terry going out with the children. Well?’ she added,
seeing him turn back to herself, indifferently. ‘Now go! I have really some
work which must be done before dinner! Now, don't pretend to be bashful!
Go, and have a talk. It will do you good;’ and she moved on.
‘You are a very provoking gir---’ he could not help saying.
‘Who----Isabel? Has she been teasing you again?’ asked Miss Terry.
‘I wonder what she will be after all!’ he said, musingly.
‘Something very good. There is an excellent foundation, sterling good.’
He sighed, and then tried to turn the subject to Kate, but Miss Terry
continued. ‘Isabel has never yet known sorrow or trial. I believe that is wanting to perfect her. It is a theory of mine,’ she went on, earnestly, ‘that without this, scarcely any character is complete, especially strongly marked ones such as Isabel's.’

‘I wonder where trouble or trial is to come from? I should be sorry to see her gaiety—her look of perfect health—touched. No! I can't fancy her in sorrow!’ Mr. Herbert answered.

‘From what I gather, I fancy trial of a certain kind cannot be very far off. Poor Mr. Lang is often troubled and anxious about money matters, and these young people have never yet known what poverty is.’

‘Ah, true! His affairs are darkish, I believe. Well Isabel has a brave, strong heart.’

‘Indeed she has! You will see how she will come out then. They will all depend on her.’ Miss Terry spoke with animation, and Mr. Herbert was well pleased to continue the subject.

They turned into the vine-walk. Isabel saw them from her window. She observed the bent heads and their gestures, and she smiled. By degrees, however, her face clouded and her work fell neglected.

She thought how long Mr. Herbert had been her own especial friend, her own property as it were, would he, as a married man, be the same to her? Then she reckoned up his good points, and thought Miss Terry a very fortunate woman, and fell to wondering what they talked of, and if Miss Terry ever saw that particular look in his eye, which only came very seldom indeed, but so lighted up and changed his whole face, and which had lately, even that very morning, made her drop her own eye and caused an emotion which she could not account for, and found hard to hide entirely.

She had now and then seen a look a little like it in her father—never in Mr. Farrant. This made her compare the two men, and she found herself wishing that Mr. Farrant was in some points more like her old friend. She ended by deciding that all such affairs as love-making and marriage, were very disagreeable, and she heartily wished people would remain as they were. Why not? They were all very comfortable.
CHAPTER XXI.

MR. LANG'S GUEST.

Vol.I

While Isabel was still deep in thought, the dinner-bell roused her, and her dress was still unready. She half regretted giving up her walk with Mr. Herbert for the sake of finishing it, and decided that if he made another attempt towards opening his heart to her, she would be a good and patient listener. For she should not like to lose him altogether; and if she showed no sympathy now, perhaps it might come to that. So she trained herself into a grand plan of sedate and proper behaviour, and really entered the drawing-room with a face so grave as to make Mr. Herbert look several times at her in surprise, while Mr. Lang grew fidgety and missed something, he did not know exactly what.

Presently he left the room. ‘I do hope that Mr. Farrant will not hear of this,’ remarked Mrs. Lang, who by her increased perpetual restlessness had been betraying her uneasiness.

‘Do you mean about inviting the priest, mamma?’ said Isabel.

‘Yes, my dear, I cannot but think it is very ill-judged. I can't imagine what Mr. Lang is thinking of!’

‘He is turning Liberal after all,’ suggested Mr. Herbert, evidently amused.

‘Now,’ said Isabel, firing up, ‘no inuendo if you please, Mr. Herbert! I don't like that smile at all—I know your ways. That smile is . . . .’

‘No harm, I hope?’ he said.

‘If my papa meets a man tired and hungry, and kindly, out of genuine hospitality and good nature, bids the weary man turn in and eat and drink and refresh himself, is that a reason for all the unutterable things which are stirring in your heart, mamma! Mrs. Lang! Do you grudge a meal to a good and devoted man, who has been doing his duty, under a burning sun and among your own people?’

‘Hear her! She will turn poet yet,’ cried out Jem, laughing.

‘O, what a fuss, Isabel!’ sighed Kate.

‘You seem warm in his cause,’ Miss Terry said.

‘She doesn't mean it!’ put in Mrs. Lang, in high perplexity. ‘But Issy is too fond of fun; indeed, my dear, you are. I always say practical jokes are very reprehensible. Isabel is only joking, Mr. Herbert.’

‘Indeed, no! Mamma, I assure you I am in sober earnest when I repeat that I commend papa for this attention to an excellent man. Besides, it is so
pleasant to see a new face, and not by any means a common one either. Father Mornay is worth seeing.’

She had raised her voice partly in fun, and partly from a little natural love of opposition, when behold! the door, partly open before, was pushed quite back, and Patrick announced, ‘His Reverence, Father Mornay,’ and amid the very evident confusion and embarrassment of Mrs. Lang and her daughters, the person in question stood before them, bowing as coolly and as gravely as if he had not heard Isabel's speech. She was fain to hide herself, thoroughly ashamed, bending under the friendly shelter of a large folio, to allow her cheeks to cool. But in the midst of the rush in her ears, and the tingle in her nerves, she very soon was led out of herself, and charmed into forgetfulness of her flippancy, as the polished gentlemanly tones of the two gentlemen's voices reached her. Mr. Herbert, unlike his conduct on some occasions, had gallantly come to the rescue. He covered the flutter and confusion, too visible among the ladies, by his own ease, and very soon they were in full flow of eager talk, which completely interested Isabel. Presently she ventured even to raise her eyes, and then turned them towards the speakers, in her own mind comparing them as their opposite characteristics struck her. Each was a good specimen of a man. Perhaps Mr. Herbert had never showed himself to better advantage in her eyes. They were speaking of the Holy Land, where both had travelled. Mr. Herbert was animated and eager on his favourite topic, and unconsciously he suddenly turned his eyes to Isabel. There was much in the look, hasty as it was; she felt it to be full of sympathy and interest, even tender. Perhaps it was for her sake, to spare her pain, that he had thus come forward and broken through his habitual reserve; she could not help watching to see if such another glance was haply bestowed elsewhere. If so, she could not detect any. Miss Terry was evidently listening too, and had suffered her favourite knitting to lie idle. She looked the picture of serene content, but Isabel wanted something more. She thought there ought to be more stir, more play in the countenance, for surely she must be feeling very proud and gratified! With a slight sensation of disappointment, and being provoked, she again turned her eyes on the gentlemen. This time it was the priest she looked at. Immediately his eyes moved and met hers. His next sentence was doubly animated; he went on to describe a sunset he had seen when on the banks of the Jordan. There was both humour and taste in the graphic account of their encampment. His choice of words was singularly good, his voice musical and measured. She was wondering how he preached, and what manner of man he really was; for the word ‘Priest’ conveyed no meaning but the popular and generally received notion characteristic of his profession. The individual character hidden beneath
his garb, was what she wanted to know. Again she raised her eyes to his face, pursuing her own train of thought, and for the moment oblivious of sun setting, or Jordan's beauties; but this time her own quickly drooped, and she was vexed with herself for a blush which would rise, on finding him looking at her—looking into her, she felt; and with an expression she could not understand. From that moment an odd fancy beset her, which set reason at defiance, and made her very uncomfortable. There was something strange in Dr. Mornay's look, something she had seen before somewhere, and was associated with some memory or thought she could not realise. She dared not boldly scrutinise his features, for each time she ventured to look at him, she found his eye was always on her. It might be nothing—he might have a trick of absently fixing his eye, or he might be trying to understand her; struck by that speech he had so inopportune overheard. Yet it was disagreeable, and she lost her self-composure and all pleasure in listening.

'I think you must have observed it,' Dr. Mornay was saying presently to Isabel herself. She looked up quickly and inquiringly.

'Did you not see the very peculiar light and appearance in the sky yesterday evening?' he went on. 'I fancied I saw you looking at it. I was at the time near your men's huts; I saw you come in from a gate.'

'Yes, to be sure! Certainly she had observed the sky, but she had quite forgotten it,' she said, with hesitation, and not able to hide her surprise, for she had not seen him at that time.

'You did not see me?' he went on, lowering his voice, and as if answering her expressive countenance. 'No, I did not think you did—therefore—I—will you forgive me if I presume?—but something in you brought back my life long ago—so long ago—so divided from the present that it is like a dream, and I question if I really am the same creature that I then knew as myself. This has not displeased you, I hope—I trust?' he went on with a grave, still earnestness, more forcible than vehemence, perhaps. It seemed so uncalled for that it half frightened her.

She was about to return one of her own merry, half-saucy answers, and lifted her face to his for the purpose, but her words were checked. Again that look—What was it? What did it mean? It was gone, almost as it came. Nothing remained but a look of suffering—a contraction of the brow which almost spoke of some physical pain. Perhaps it was that, and only that. This idea relieved her and gave a turn to her answer.

'Why should it displease me? it did me no harm,' she said.

'Harm!' he repeated, but in so faint a whisper she was not sure he had said it at all, and at that moment Mr. Lang hurried in, full of hospitable
welcome and excuse for some unforeseen delay; hoped his guest had
introduced himself—made himself quite at home. ‘That was Langville
fashion! Every one do as he liked.’ And in the plenitude of his good
humour, soothed by practical assurance that his wine for once in a way had
been well cooled, he appealed to Mr. Herbert if the fullest liberty was not
granted in this house for every one to follow his own taste and
inclinations?

‘My door, sir, is always open, always stands wide open, to signify
welcome to all friends! I hate your knockers and ring-bells, your forms and
your ceremonies! Want a dinner? Want a bed? Come in, and in God's name
be welcome to the best I have. Can't have a spread every day, you see!
’Tisn't every day I can produce certain custards, which, by the way,—my
dear Mrs. Lang, this gentleman will honour us to-morrow, and let me beg
there may be some of that incomparable—O, I beg pardon! To be sure! It is
that lady to whom I must make my request. Dr. Mornay, sir, I know not if
you have been duly presented, but allow me to name to you one—one of
my most particular friends. Miss Terry!—Dr. Mornay! Ah, sir! you must
positively taste Miss Terry's custards! Eh, Issy!'

This rambling speech, which at all events was exquisitely entertaining to
himself, was ended even while Patrick announced that dinner was served.

With a quick gesture and pleasant smile Mr. Lang turned again to Miss
Terry and offered his arm, hurrying her away, while he laughingly declared
she was one of the ‘wee folk’ of whom his old nurse used to speak; good
beings, invisible except to their friends, always at hand when wanted, &c.

‘Hallo! I say, where are they all?’ Mr. Lang exclaimed, as on reaching
the dining-room he found he had in his rapid way outstripped the others.
‘What is all this? Mrs. Lang! Mamma! Missis! Girls—what's wrong?’

‘You were in such a hurry, Mr. Lang!’ his wife murmured reproachfully,
as with a flushed face she sailed in, holding up her ‘o'er long’ satin drapery
with one hand, while the other, duly clothed in (forbid it fashion!) a
mitten—lay ill at ease on Dr. Mornay's arm.

Following close behind was Mr. Herbert, returning Isabel's saucy smile,
as he forcibly detained her hand, and would not allow her to fall back to be
last, while at the same time he gaily deprecated some remarks of Kate's, as
she, somewhat unwillingly too, as it seemed, hung on the other side.

‘These young people wished to cut me in two, sir,’ he said, in answer to
Mr. Lang's questioning glance.

‘Cut you altogether, rather,’ Isabel returned; ‘you men suppose we must
be unhappy at having to walk from one room to another alone. Kate and I
could have done quite well without you.’

‘You will forgive me, I hope,’ Mr. Herbert said to Kate, who still looked
rather annoyed.
  ‘O, I am sure I don't wish to interfere with any of Issy's vested rights and
privileges,’ she answered.
  ‘And do you reckon my support, my arm, as one?’ he replied, with so
pleasant a smile, she could no longer keep up her offence.
  ‘She does, I believe! You know you have taught her to expect it, and . . .
.
  ‘Expect it as a right, Kate, but not as in any way necessary to my
comfort,’ Isabel here put in. ‘I never so keenly regretted the melancholy
fact of being ‘grown up’ before.’
  ‘Indeed! How so?’
  ‘Because I should like to exercise a privilege once mine, of punishing
you. You are just too bad! What can he think of it?’ Isabel said to Mr.
Herbert, lowering her voice.
  ‘The truth, if he likes. As if I was going to give you up to him! to, to——
Isabel, I don't like the man's look.’
  ‘That is your bad taste, for I think him the handsomest man I ever saw.
But, hush!’
  And as the clatter of removing covers, and Mr. Lang's praise of his
mutton, hushed for a moment, it was, indeed, hardly safe to carry on such
remarks.

  ‘And what do you think of him, dear?’ asked Isabel of Miss Terry, as
winding her arm round her waist, she drew her out on the verandah after
dinner.
  ‘Of Dr. Mornay? He is determined, strong-willed, I should think.’
  ‘Yes. Is he one to fear or to love the most?’
  ‘Fancy loving that man!’ exclaimed Kate.
  ‘Not easily, I imagine,’ Miss Terry said.
  ‘I can fancy it, though!’ Isabel remarked, after a short pause. ‘At least, if
he chose it. I wonder, was he ever loved? I suppose he had a mother, and
sisters, too, perhaps. I should like to know his history,’ she continued,
musingly. ‘There is a look which puzzles me. Not a very legible book, I
fancy.’
  ‘Probably not,’ Miss Terry returned; ‘at all events it is not a quality one
is led to expect; such careful, jealous self-control, even of feature is
exacted, that the real nature may easily be hidden. He looks ill, I think.’
  ‘Yes, and sad. Worn and saddened. I wonder if he is happy! I should like
to know all about him!’
  ‘Issy, you will be falling in love directly,’ said Kate.
  ‘My dears! my dears! What are you saying?’ said Mrs. Lang. ‘Take care!
He is a priest, and you shouldn't say such a thing. Pray be careful, for they say they are so sharp, and hear and know everything.

‘But it is quite correct, isn't it, Miss Terry, to fall in love with some dark, mysterious creature,’ said Isabel, in a pompous tone.

‘This one is too old,’ interrupted Kate. ‘I think,’ she went on, ‘that he took a fancy to Issy. I really do! and this is why I think so. I saw him turn and look at her once or twice when she spoke, just as if he was trying to see if her face agreed with her words, and once he smiled at some thought of his own.’

‘No doubt he was pleased, and he kindly wished to encourage Isabel, my love,’ said Mrs. Lang. ‘Of course he was struck with your beauty in the first instance, and then, being a priest, and therefore thinking of such things, he was unwilling to make Issy jealous or uneasy; so he smiled in a fatherly, encouraging way at her!’

‘O, you will destroy me!’ Isabel exclaimed, as soon as she could check her laughter. ‘My dear, dear mammy's far-fetched solicitude, first for my amiability, her fear of jealousy, and dread of vanity! 'Tis too much! And, O! if only he and Mr. Herbert could know, or guess, what utter nonsense we four females have been guilty of—conceive what they would say, and how look! But let us go to the garden and gather a rose. Come, Kate!’ and as Miss Terry said she must go in to settle to-morrow's lessons, the sisters ran off, leaving Mrs. Lang to settle herself comfortably among her cushions. As she reclined her head she faintly murmured, ‘Poor Issy's spirits do run away with her at times.’

‘They will never take her far wrong,’ Miss Terry turned round to answer, before leaving the room.
CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRIEST AND HIS PEOPLE.

It was long after working hours, and the men on Mr. Lang's farm seemed to be in their huts, though one or two might be seen chopping wood into logs fit for their fires. Each man cooked his own meat, and baked his own damper. The long evenings were generally so spent. But now it appeared that something beyond the common routine of cooking, mending, and smoking, was going forward. One or two men sauntered towards a certain hut, looking curiously at it meanwhile. From within was heard a buzz of voices; and looking through the tolerably wide chink left in the bark shutter of the unglazed window, one might see a group of eager faces standing in every kind of attitude, each eye, however, bent in one direction. A fire blazed cheerily, and the tin ‘pannikins’ were set, filled with tea beside it. In the shadow, withdrawn as far into a corner as possible, with the rude table before him, sat a man writing, and alternately making some remark, or asking a question. He had on a wide and long dark cape, which quite hid his figure, and wore a cap drawn far over his brow. The voice was peculiar. It was low and flexible, and although he spoke in a monotonous tone for the most part, there was every now and then, as if despite habitual control, a ring, a thrill in it, which spoke of some inner vibration.

‘What may Barney say?’ he uttered, without looking up, or ceasing to write.

‘Plase yer riverence, Barney here is afther saying that when he got the blow which, saving your presence, knocked him clane dead on these shores to live a convict ever after, he says, the cratur do—there was a whisper, and a promise—’

‘An oath, Mick. By all the saints I swear ’twas an oath, a Bible oath; and ’twas myself heard it too,’ put in Barney.

‘Well, an oath,’ continued the first speaker, ‘that his prospecks should be attended to, your honour. And so——’

‘Proceed! How does that affect his still contributing his mite to his country's deliverer and best friend?’

‘Why this way, your reverence . . .’

‘Good luck to ye!’ said Barney, pushing himself forward to tell his own story, now that the ice was broken by his friend. ‘The gentlemen in my own blessed country, yer riverence, said they would make it up to me, seeing the life was knocked clane out of me, owing to me fighting that day
for O'Connell,¹ (the blessing of the Virgin on him!) and niver a brass farthing has come into my pockets, your honour, at all at all. So if my pence isn't to the fore, I hope you'll not be hard on me for that same, but just make a 'randum of it, and give the gentlemen at home a hint of the promise, that is the oath, I'm maning.’

‘They will be both more willing, and more able to fulfil that promise, or oath, Barney, if they receive the proper rent from hence—you have wages?’

‘Your rieverence, no! I gets nothing, saving my bit and sup, forby the wee duds o' clothes just, and it may be a shilling now and then; but the devil a penny I ever gets of wages.’

‘Well—not even one penny? So Barney's name is to appear with not even one penny after it, when this roll of names—’ and he held up the formidable roll of parchment for all to see. ‘When, I say, all these names shall be read aloud, in the presence of hundreds—ay, thousands of your countrymen—will your name be the only one with a blank, when every boy in the Green Isle would sooner go without his meal, than not contribute to send his champion to fight for his rights, for his liberty, and his church!’

There was a hum and a shuffling of feet at this appeal. Barney's eyes rolled about uneasily, and he fumbled in his pockets.

Other names were called, and a chink of coppers followed. Barney remained irresolute.

‘Well?’ said the priest, looking at him again. ‘Well, Barney, you would let Dan O'Connell be beaten, would you? You who once proved yourself so brave a champion, and so brave a boy. Ah! Barney, you've given up your country, have you? You're not an Irish boy, I see. Perhaps you are a Protestant, eh?—an Orangeman?’²

A burst of laughter greeted this, and many a joke went the round, while poor Barney shifted from one foot to the other, his face gathering a deeper hue, and the words finding increasing difficulty in coming out.

‘The saints! But ye're wrong there, your rieverence. 'Tis a true Irish boy I am; and by my sowl and St. Patrick, here's just the last of the wee savings I was making jist to send a trifle to show the folks at home I was aboveground. But here's for O'Connell the frind of the poor, and Repale³ — Hurrah!’

‘The Repale for ever!’ and ‘O'Connell for ever,’ now resounded, while hats whirled madly overhead.

‘Hush, boys! hush! It does me good to hear you; but we must be prudent—we are in danger of being heard here. Mr. Lang is a Protestant, and it will only upset my work if there is any row. Now, I expect every
man present here to-night to return each to his own hut, as if nothing had occurred. Do you hear me, Barney?"

‘Ay, your honour—your reverence I'm maning! A quieter boy doesn't live than myself. I'm as meek as a lamb, as all know, except when my blood's up jist. The saints above know that except that fight at the fair, and the row at the election, and the bit of row the boys were after when----’

‘Well, well; we have not time to go through the list of your combats, friend Barney. Now here's a glass of the old stuff, and drink each man silently to the health of those he likes, adding also that of ‘Ireland's friend.’ No noise, I beg—I desire.’

‘Now, good-night, good-night,’ he said, as, after each had drained his glass with great gusto, they bowed low, and went out of the hut.

‘Andrew Connor, remain; I have a word to say to you.’ And accordingly a worn, unhappy-looking man, gave a furious tug to his forelock, and came back, closing the door, in obedience to a sign from the priest.

‘Come in and take a seat. Another glass will do you no harm;’ and he poured out some more of the Irish whisky which he had provided to reward the punctual payers of O'Connell's rent, which was for some time collected among Irish emigrants, and even prisoners, and sent home.

‘Andrew—can you tell me anything about a girl called Nelly or Ellen Maclean? The father was a good Catholic, and also the first wife; the present I can make nothing of; and now, on inquiring for this girl, about whom I was much interested at my last visit, I hear very strange rumours. Can you help me to the rights of the case?’

‘I don't consarn myself much with the talk of the place, your reverence. But I did hear she wont resave Venn's—that's our storekeeper's—advances at all. She jist held her head high for him, the cratur. 'Tis said she likes one Lynch.’

‘Where is she now?’

‘And that's more than I can say, your honour. 'Twas said she was living with one Allen; but I heard afterward she'd heard of a good situation somewhere far from this, and that her father and Lynch are mad jist; but I can't say.’

‘Is there a man here called William Smith, or Gentleman Bill?’

‘Yes, your reverence, there is. That is, he was here till yesterday morning, and then he got his wages paid up, seeing he is ‘ticket-of-leave’ man, and they do say the master added a few oaths over and above, for the ready cash is scarce now. He didn't say where he was after going—the boy.’

‘Was it supposed he had anything to do with the girl—ever liked her?’

‘Not that I know, your honour. Gentleman Bill kept his own counsel,
anyway. But I did hear he had been employed by Venn to use his soft tongue—and he keeps the article well oiled—to persuade the girl; and he was chums with Allen's folks.’

‘Well, Andrew, if I can prevent it, that girl shall never marry Venn or Lynch. She is a daughter of the Church, and should not seek to mate with a heretic. If you can either give me certain information as to where she is now, or can bring her to my house, I will give you this’—showing a sovereign.

‘And where may your reverence's house be, your honour, if not down in Sydney?’

‘For the present I have taken that small place in the valley, known by name of Swampoak Gully. There my servant will always be, if I should be absent. He can receive you, the message, or the girl. It is there, in course of time, under God's blessing, we hope to plant a church, and a resident priest will then be sent to this district. We have nearly enough names as it is, to entitle us to Government help. Meanwhile I shall be backwards and forwards to keep the flock together.’

As Andrew went away, a servant brought a horse to the hut door, on which Father Mornay vaulted with practised agility. The horse was remarkable for its beauty and good grooming. Very soon he was riding fast down the rough road, displaying a seat which a Leicestershire huntsman might have envied, and followed by his servant, a man of colour, on another carefully-selected animal.

The next morning Father Mornay was again at Langville to pay his respects, as he politely said, after enjoying Mr. Lang's hospitality; and, as it seemed, from the turn his conversation soon took, he wished to introduce the subject of Ellen Maclean's sudden disappearance, now become the general talk on the farm. Dr. Mornay won Isabel's hearty good-will and gratitude by the warm interest he took in the poor girl, and his earnest assertions that he would leave no stone unturned to find her, at least, to know where and with whom she went.

They were in the garden, when, breaking short in the midst of an interesting conversation, Dr. Mornay said—

‘It is strange how little I consider you as—almost—a stranger! I could—do you think the notion very fanciful?—that of having seen, heard, or known a person some time before, though when and how is impossible to discover?—I could believe as, pardon me, I do wish, you were one of my own flock, and my friend----’

‘It is odd,’ she answered, in her ready and bright way. ‘It is odd, too, that I constantly am forgetting that you are a—a Roman Catholic priest, and as such, I suppose, looking upon us all as just so many heretics—albeit,
perhaps, softened with a sort of contemptuous pity.'

‘Would you like to hear how—in what way—I think of you?’ There was a short pause, and the priest had turned and fixed his keen but mournful eyes on her. ‘Ah! I could indeed wish—wish . . . . ’ He stopped suddenly, and turned even pale, she thought, while something like a spasm seemed to cross his features. He took a few hasty steps onwards, and then spoke again in his usual modulated, quiet tone, ‘Forgive me!'

‘Were you suffering?’ she asked, with wonder and sympathy, though she hardly knew why she felt it, for she had not really liked him till to-day.

‘Yes—suffering! But, no matter, we must all suffer at one time or other—all—even you, Miss Isabel Lang. You who, it is plain, have never been near enough to sorrow, even to scan her features, or to recognise her, but in a very vague way. Will you judge me cruel in saying that your hour will come?’

He spoke earnestly, and Isabel was touched, though she did her best to subdue the feeling.

‘And how do you know I have never seen sorrow?’ she asked.

‘Because I am accustomed to read and to learn faces and features; and I know well that your first phase of youth is not yet ended. Life has passed unconsciously with you as yet. You are free from self-study. You live—exist. You are, as it were—you know not how or why. Happy time—soon, soon to vanish—with some never to be at all! A time will come when all common things around you will take another aspect; you will be troubled, perhaps perplexed, as is natural to one of your frank and straightforward temperament, but----’

‘Trouble, trouble! Every one prophesies trouble and sorrow! I wonder why? I have been happy, certainly; but,—I can fancy being even still happier.’

‘Exactly, with the trouble will come the joy—a new joy.’

‘But when and how?’

‘That is what I cannot answer—dare not try to answer. It is strange, it is passing strange. I am much, much older than you; I have had some experience of life. Yet now, for the first time, I could wish some steps of that life retraced. Were we living in an earlier age,—were I credulous as some few I have known, I might fancy myself under some spell, so completely do I find my appreciation of certain things changed—my cherished habits of thought and aspiration altered. You think I pity you in scorn? No, no; not I! True, I believe, and am bound to believe the holy church the safe fold, the most completely organised and energetic of all church governments: I suppose you think I ought to be seeking converts? Know, young lady—young friend, for so I may surely call you, that I am
not one of these. Far from pitying you, I----’ He had turned; they were now standing at the end of the trellised vine-walk, and he took her hand and gazed a moment at her, as if searching to the very depths of her surprised and wondering eyes.

‘Would that you could pity me! But I must go; I leave the district tomorrow. We may not meet again; yet—will you—will you try not to look on me with dislike, or fear, or distrust? World-tossed, weary traveller as you see me, stiffened in iron armour, which yet is not I, and never will be! even I have once had my fresh springtime of youth. I had a home—mother—sister! The sight of you has moved waters which I deemed dried up. Well!—’

As he paused, his look gradually became more touched with sadness—sadness, blended still with something she did not understand, but which made her feel shy, never having seen so much deep fervour of heart appear in a cold and composed exterior. She said, ‘I don't dislike, or distrust you.’

‘Thank you!—thanks!’ he presently said, taking her hand. ‘Now, farewell!—I shall make it my business to search for Ellen Maclean. Good morning.’

The last words were quite in his ordinary manner, and with a bow which would have done credit to any courtly circle, this new and, to Isabel, perplexing acquaintance left her.

It was some time before she saw him again; and though his manner, look, and words, left a strong impression at the time, other circumstances soon put it out of sight, for Isabel was one to throw herself heartily into the spirit of the hour, whatever that might be, and not toitowoll
CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WOLF AT THE DOOR.

Vol.I

‘Well, Issy, and how goes on the matchmaking, eh?’ asked Mr. Lang, giving his daughter a loving pinch on her ear as he spoke.

‘Which?’ Isabel asked.

‘What, which?—how many are there, then? and pray are you in the fashion too, Issy? Mean'st thou to desert the old nest, young bird?’

She did not answer, but a blush mounted even to her brow.

He went on—'Is it prospering? Ought we to ask the Grand Signor to dinner? because you see, if it is right, and any good to the little woman, Issy, let it be done. Since he has thought fit to pocket his pride and come here, so making me an apology, in point of fact, d'ye see?—I have no objection to doing what I can to help on this little affair; but between ourselves, Issy, it must be quick; for how long we shall call this our own is more than I know.'

‘Mr. Herbert has only been here once, you know daddy; I thought then he made good use of his time, and I don't doubt he will very soon be here again. It is great fun.’

‘Ah, well!—don't get fond of that occupation, girl. Leave folks to manage their own affairs; it is not safe to meddle with matrimony. Does Kate's admirer continue to play the devoted? I fancy I have heard less of his being here.'

‘He is absent; looking out about his own home, they say.’

‘Ah, indeed! Making his house ready?—Is that it, Issy?’

‘I don't know, sir; Kate thinks or hopes so. I have my doubts, rather. I don't like a hard twinkle in Mrs. Vesey's eye.’

‘Your mother would fret, wouldn't she, Issy?’

‘She would feel hurt, I am sure; she likes Mr. Fitz.’

‘Ah, then, mind if he comes in my way I shall assuredly break his head; that is, if he serves my child in a shabby fashion. But here they come. Mamma has been brewing the coffee; and here is bonnie Kate, as fine as a scraped carrot. By Jove, Kate, that's a very pretty dress!’

The letter-bag was brought in with coffee and the more substantial parts of the meal; and Mr. Lang, after passing on a letter or two to his wife and daughters, proceeded to read one of his own.

Long was the silence. The ‘broil’ was growing cold; Isabel took on herself to help it, and putting some on her father's plate, she said—'Now,
papa.’ But this and many other attempts to recall him to the fact that breakfast was waiting for him, failed to rouse Mr. Lang from his intent perusal of this absorbing letter.

Mrs. Lang grew nervous and troubled; glanced at her husband, and at the fast spoiling viands which she had taken pains to cook herself for his pleasure and benefit.

‘News of the wool, Mr. Lang?’ she asked. ‘Have the last drays from the station reached Sydney? What ship is it to go by? No more failures, I hope!’

Still not a word; but as Isabel thought a very ominous neglect of his coffee and egg.

‘Hang the rascals!’ he exclaimed presently in a loud voice, and with a sudden jerk of his legs which considerably splashed the table-cloth, and made them all start.

‘Am I made of money? Can I force people to buy? Can I coin money? A pretty kind of an offer! Pack up, girls! pack up!—we must leave this.’

‘Pray, Mr. Lang!----I beseech you not to be so abrupt, if you have any mercy on my nerves!’ murmured poor Mrs. Lang, plaintively.

‘Nerves!—fiddlesticks! That's a nice fellow!’ drawing his mouth on one side, and then giving a long whistle. ‘ ‘Pon my word and say so, Kate.’

‘Do eat your egg, papa!’ said Isabel.

‘Eat? I can't afford to eat! Hang that vile Jew! Eat indeed!----’

The letter was then read again, examined, turned upside down, grinned at, twisted, then folded carefully and deposited in his waistcoat pocket, the cold coffee hastily swallowed, a piece of dry toast caught up, and Mr. Lang marched off.

Mrs. Lang burst out crying, and Isabel looked grave as she said, ‘I am sure it is bad news!’

‘O dear! I wish it would come at once, if it is to come!’ said Kate. ‘One so often hears the cry of Wolf, that one really ceases to believe in it.’

‘It is something serious, I am sure,’ again said Isabel, as she played with her teaspoon.

Soon Mrs. Lang dried her eyes before proceeding to her store, and Kate shook her flounced apron, and very philosophically resolved not to believe there was such a thing as ruin or poverty. All gentlemen talked so! So she went to the drawing-room and placed the furniture as much as she could in Vine Lodge fashion, and hummed the air of a certain comic song, and then she went to finish her new dress in the work-room, meditating a ride with the boys to the Settlement, as she wished to try if she could get a few hooks-and-eyes at the store there.

Isabel sat on in the dining-room, doing nothing till she heard her father's
step in the hall, as he left his room. He went out at the front door, and she
followed with her parasol. After walking a little way, he turned almost as if
he expected to see her behind him, and waited till she came up.

‘How very dry the ground is again,’ she said.

‘Very; but there's plenty of grass, that's one good thing.’

After a pause, she said, ‘Do you think that the boiling down will really
pay?’

‘Pay? nothing will pay. The country is ruined—ruined!’ Presently he
added, ‘Confound me if I know what to do! I'm at a dead halt, Issy. If I
could only raise this paltry sum I could perhaps manage to swim on till
things came round.’

‘Can't you borrow it?’

‘Of whom?’

‘Of any friend.’

‘Pooh! you talk nonsense, girl. I've had enough of borrowing of ‘friends,’
as you call it. That's why my friend of the mustaches rides the high horse
over me, because I borrowed that unlucky 500l. off him—no, I can't stand
that.’

‘Whom do you mean, sir?’

‘Herbert, to be sure. Didn't you know I was debtor to him for 500l.? ha,
ha! Let him come down on me if he likes; but I will pay him off as soon as
ever I can sell stock to cover principal and interest. But I believe he likes
the honour of lending me cash rather than not; hey, Issy?’

‘I should think he would be very glad of it himself, sir. But you don't
mean that he duns you?’

‘O, no! he never mentioned it; but I see it in his face pretty often. But,
there—go in, girl, go in; the men are waiting for me. Keep up mamma's
spirits, and don't all of ye go into the die-aways, or I shall take to the Bush,
I believe. Keep the ball up, Issy!’

She smiled, as she saw him smile; and yet her heart be at as she marked
the dimness in his eye and felt the fond pressure of his heavy hand on her
shoulder.

‘O that I were a man,’ she thought, as she returned to the house; ‘how
much I could do to help him!’

Isabel went to the school-room when she returned, and waited patiently
till the little girls were dismissed.

‘Now, then, that tiresome work is over, and I hope you are going to sit
idle for a little, and let us have a snug cosy chat, my dear little woman,’
said Isabel, drawing a stool close to Miss Terry.

‘You will not object to my netting my purse, will you? I can always talk
better when my fingers are employed.’
‘O dear! oh dear!’ yawned Isabel, ‘I am weary—I am tired, Miss Terry!’

‘What hard work have you been doing, Isabel?’

‘None! it is from lack of work. I am tired of having nothing to do.’

‘Then pray rouse up, for I can find you plenty of sewing. There are the children's aprons to be braided——’

‘Rummage and—O, I forgot! But no, I wont do that. The aprons are just as good minus the braid; besides, I call sewing doing nothing. Now you may laugh, but I am sure I am made for real work. I have a craving for it. I envy every man who has a farm or station to manage; every person, in fact, who has a certain work which must be done. Why, Miss Terry, just look at Kate and me! What is there to occupy us? Mamma will not give up any management to us; though of course we may make puddings and pastry, and stick on flounces, and make up bows, and trim aprons, and change our bonnet trimmings when we are at a standstill. Yes, and we may ride; that is the only pleasurable part—to ride through the air fast. Ah, how much you miss by not riding! And then we must play a few tunes of an evening and be good girls and go to bed. Dear, dear! is this life? Is this all I am to look forward to, I wonder? And now, too, when I want so much to work! Don't you think I could work—gain money?’

‘Yes; no doubt, if necessary.’

‘What work?’

‘What will be, what is in store for you, of course I know not; but it seems to me, Isabel, there is work at your feet even now.’

‘Point it out, you good little Mentor.’

‘The work of daily obedience and forbearance, the work of quiet, practical influence which a child may be permitted to exercise even over parents, the work of self-control—even better than the making money.’

‘Yes, yes! but, unfortunately, there is no opportunity for me. I am not ordered to do anything very trying, and so cannot show my powers of obedience; unless, indeed, you mean those little hourly frets—those wretched little rubs and pinches which seem quite beneath notice. 'Tisn't that. I want something more; something on a larger scale. O dear! I could, if I might, work for my daddy, and now he is in difficulty, too. Do you know,’ she added suddenly, ‘I almost wish the worst would come. A great misfortune there would be satisfaction in meeting and bearing. It is, after all, better to bear—I am sure it must be—than little daily vexations!’

‘But a great misfortune is generally accompanied by little ones, though we do not see them at a distance—it takes many threads to make a cable, Isabel. When trial comes, I do not doubt you will bear it nobly; but I should like—I wish you would not suppose that the present brings you no work.’

After a pause, Isabel said, ‘Well, set me some work, and I'll try to do it.’
‘There is so much time necessarily your own, and there seems here so little field for you to employ yourself for others as you might at home in England, for instance, that my advice to you is, to force yourself into certain work. Read and study, and that not idly and at the spur of the moment, but regularly, as a duty, if there is nothing else to be done. For it is the habit, and not the thing done that is important.’

‘If you knew how I hate books, or sewing, or any of those feminine occupations! How irksome it is to sit still so long—except, indeed, good tough work, such as mending stockings and so on—But see, here are the Vesey and Mr. Fitz. Ah, then he is come back. Well, I was beginning to wonder—and Kate looked palish. Pshaw!’ she broke off sharply. ‘Do you like scent, and studs, and rings for a man, Miss Terry? I wish they would stay away—hospitable now, ain't I? but I am sick of every one. However, perhaps it will cheer up papa, but it will only drive mamma further into the idea that is fixed in her mind about Kate and Mr. Fitz.’

‘Don't you yourself expect something there, Isabel?’

‘Me? I dont know’ (going to the window). ‘O, I suppose so. I can't make him out. Deary me, but he will be a funny brother. I shall never like him as I do Tom, incomparable Tom!’

Here Kate came in to tell the news that Mr. and Mrs. Vesey and their brother were come, and mamma was asking them to stay till evening, and that Issy must be sure and change her dress before she made her appearance.

‘Nonsense!’ and she looked at the soiled hem of her gown. ‘Dressing once a day is enough, isn't it, Miss Terry?’

‘Not if your mother wishes you to do so twice.’

‘Ah, No. 1 of my work, I see. Well, I asked for it. Obedience, and so forth, in trifles—that is to say, ‘Change your gown, Isabel; smooth your hair, Isabel; avoid rough words, Isabel.’ Very well, Miss Terry, I have learnt my lesson; so, good-bye.’

She appeared in the drawing-room in a quarter of an hour in her best dress, and readily took her share in the duty of entertaining their guests.

‘What did you come for to-day?’ she asked of Mr. Vesey.

‘Well done, Isabel; you are polite!’ said Kate, sotto voce.

‘Aw—ha, ha!—come for?—aw, of course, to the pleasure and all that, you know, of seeing you, aw----’

‘Thank you.’

‘To tell the truth,’ said Mrs. Vesey, laughing, ‘it was washing-day, and it is the old song of ‘Scrub, scrub,’ and so on. We were all glad to bestow ourselves on you and fly from soap-suds, steam, and grumbling women.’

‘I guessed as much,’ said Isabel. ‘Well, and though it is not washing-day
with us, it is a kind of black day; we were all in the dumps, I assure you. Kate looked as melancholy as possible, and I have been very nearly going to do all sorts of things. So you see you were glad to come to us, and we are glad of you; and that's a more sensible way of putting it than pleasure, and happiness, and so forth, Mr. Vesey, isn't it? It is being neighbourly.’

‘Aw, exactly—new idea that—’pon my word you are very sincere and all that, you know.’

Mr. Lang soon popped in his head. ‘Ah, ah! well, glad to see you.’ In another half hour he returned dressed for dinner in a clean white jacket and white trousers. He was excessively ‘put out’ about something, Isabel saw, though as hospitable as usual to his visitors, and evidently amused at Mrs. Vesey's jokes. As soon as the cloth was removed, the cause of his present annoyance burst forth. Mr. Vesey had been speaking of the difficulty he had in managing a certain assigned man of his.

‘The thing is, sir,’ said Mr. Lang, thumping the table, ‘tisn't possible to manage them without power to punish. Sir, the colony is ruined in every way. Why, a man can't get his men punished now. There must be a regular formal trial, and so on. Well, so far, good; but get a few hare-brained reformers on the bench, like a certain friend of ours who shall be nameless, and hang it if the matter isn't turned this way and that way, and after all the fellow dismissed in your very teeth as undeserving of punishment! I should like to know who is the best judge of that. I should like to know if he wouldn't be the better for a flogging. And now here's the rascal sent back to make a fool of me! 'Twont do, 'townt do, Mr. Vesey! However, let—hem—a certain gentleman take his own course. I'm sure I don't care, not I. But he'll smart yet under his new-fangled creeds.’

Mrs. Lang inquired who had been tried, but received no answer; so she turned to Mr. Vesey, and told him how sensitive Mr. Lang was, and naturally enough, at being opposed by so much younger a man than himself, and one not owning half or a quarter his property, &c.

Mr. Vesey wanted to know a great deal about ‘boiling down,’ and a walk to the farm was proposed, which Kate begged might be extended to Diamond Creek. This was agreed to, and they dispersed for parasols, bonnets, and hats.
CHAPTER XXIV.

STORMS WITHOUT AND WITHIN.

The walk to Diamond Creek was one of the prettiest about Langville. The trees grew more gracefully in groups, leaving open glades, as it were, between. Then, again, the path led through more tangled scrub—here a banksia, popularly called bottle-brush shrub, with its crimson blossoms; there a low yellow-flowered bush, almost covered with a rich purple creeper; while the ground was studded with bright blue harebells, assuming a more star-like shape and appearance than their drooping sisters in the northern hemisphere. By the creek itself, which was scarcely ever known to be quite dry—whence, perhaps, its appellation of Diamond—grew numberless pale green shrubs, drooping over its banks, with clumps of swamp oaks intermixed.

There was much laughing and chatting among the young people, though Mr. Lang perpetually recurred to the sore subject, and tried to make Mr. Fitz agree with him that convicts were not like other people, and that nothing but the lash had any effect on them.

Mr. Fitz rather took the other side of the question, which irritated Mr. Lang still more; and then both his wife's and eldest daughter's dresses swept the ground—a thing, he said, he never could abide. 'In the name of common sense, what was the good of wasting so much good cloth? was it to sweep the roads with?' and so on.

Mrs. Vesey ran off to get a nearer view of the conical ant-hills which abounded in this part of the Bush. She was wishing one of the boys had a tomahawk to cut one in two, that she might see it inside. Willie said it was very hard to cut, and persisted that he had heard of a man turning one into an oven. Kate laughed and said it could not be; and then the boys ran to appeal to Isabel if Mr. Herbert had not said so. Isabel confirmed their tale—an ant's nest, one of this peculiar kind, had been converted into an oven by some enterprising squatter.

'There's a very threatening cloud,' said Willie; 'we shall have some thunder before long.'

'Well, truly, it feels ominous; there really seems not a breath of air!' said Mrs. Vesey, seating herself on a fallen tree. 'I shouldn't like being overtaken in a thunderstorm in the Bush. By-the-bye,' said she, suddenly rising, 'if there is a chance of it, we ought to be going at once.'

'No; stay the night, pray do!' was repeated on all sides, while Mr. Lang
looked around, and ‘didn't think it would break yet awhile.’

‘I am a shocking coward in a storm,’ said Mrs. Vesey.

‘O, so am I!’ exclaimed Kate. ‘But Issy doesn't mind it at all; I think she enjoys it, and she stands romancing at the window and saying, ‘How beautiful!’ ‘How sublime!’ quite in Herbert style.’

‘Kate, how can you say so?’

But Kate was in unusually high spirits, and she persisted in turning the joke against her sister, repeating many anecdotes at which Mr. Vesey was especially delighted. He laughed, and clapped his hands, and declared that he had always said Miss Isabel Lang was a ‘what's-its-name, character, and all that; and it was good fun, and on his word and honour, he never met with such a girl—never!’

But a distant roll, and a sudden slight shivering among the boughs, broke off the merry talk. It was coming indeed. Willie was right, and with every clap or flash he looked triumphant, and repeated, ‘I said so!’ while Kate lost her fears in her pleasure at the unavoidable detention of the Vine Lodge party; and Mrs. Vesey screamed more than once as the lightning flashed. Then it appeared to be going off; the claps were fainter, the intervals between the flash and the noise longer, and the wind seemed about to make wild work; already it could be heard rushing up the valley, and then all at once the tall trees swayed about in their topmost branches, leaving the underwood as yet untouched, while the birds uttered a warning shrill cry. Then the wind seemed to stoop and rush with a sweep nearer the ground, taking everything in its way by surprise, and dying off in a low whisper among the wiry swamp oaks.

On reaching the more cleared parts, several head of cattle were seen.

‘Hallo, how is this?’ shouted Mr. Lang. ‘Run, boys; see if the rail is down;’ and when Mr. Lang came up to see them he heard that it was down. Nothing could be more annoying. There were at least twenty or thirty bullocks let in where he particularly wished they should not be. ‘Who left the rails down?’

The boys denied having been there, and they said it was very likely that ‘Magpie,’ a certain knowing bullock, had raised the rail with his horns. It would not be the first time he had done such a thing, and of course all the others would follow.

Mr. Lang was very angry, and declared it couldn't be, for he had ordered pegs to be made for the rail; he knew very well it was one of the two-legged brutes who took a pleasure in doing all the mischief they could.

Isabel, who with Miss Terry had outwalked the others, here waited. ‘I am almost sorry to go home. I never saw such an awful sky, I think,’ said Miss Terry. ‘Look, Isabel, at that dense blackness, and yet before it there seems
to hang a sort of lurid veil of light. The lightning is playing behind it. Isn't it wonderful! Then look there opposite; how far off—far removed from this battle—that deep blue sky looks! and those great rolling masses of clouds! The storm is on both sides, and it will meet. It will be terrific.

Isabel looked, but gave no answer. Miss Terry cast a quick glance at her, at which Isabel coloured up. 'Isn't it vexing?' she said. 'Some fresh disagreement, evidently! Just as I thought I had contrived so wonderfully well to establish peace and bring him back. I fully expected to see him today! Miss Terry, you must really beg him to humour my father a little—he might a little!'

'To whom are you alluding, Isabel?'

'Now, don't pretend, when you see how hurt, how vexed I am! I can't be so philosophic as you are. You don't deceive me though by your elaborate admiration of the storm.'

'Isabel! I don't understand.' But any further conversation was stopped for the present.

The rest of the party coming up, they all passed through this rail, instead of going the longer and prettier way by which they had come. At the end of the next paddock there was another slip-rail, leading to the farm buildings. A man had just climbed it, and was going away; then, seeing the ladies, Isabel being still foremost, he turned, laid aside his tomahawk, and proceeded to take down the rails.

'A pretty fellow you are!' exclaimed Mr. Lang, setting his teeth fast together, and making an inclination with his head in the direction of the other slip rails. 'And so you couldn't put the rails up again, eh? but you must let all those wretched beasts into this reserve paddock. Just like you, for a lazy, good-for-nothing vagabond, not worth your salt.'

'I didn't either take down or put up the rails! I didn't come by that way!' said Lynch, sullenly.

'Tis false!—you did. You always come that way. I'll—I'll stop your tea and sugar, sir! You are an ill-conditioned, insolent fellow! Go and drive the bullocks out,' adding an oath; and he raised a walking cane and flourished it over the man's head in a threatening way.

One dark look, and in another second the man had picked up his tomahawk, grasping it fiercely.

'What d'ye mean by that look, sir? Come, come! that wont do,' said Mr. Lang, hardly able to utter his words from passion, and irritated all the more by Lynch's now unrestrained insolence.

Again he swung his cane within an inch of the man's shoulders. One dreadful oath, and the tomahawk was raised.

'Two can play at that game, and if you will have it, you shall. 'Tis a long
bill I owe ye, man!"

But Mr. Fitz, who had come up to them, sprang forward and caught the man's arm just in time. Mr. Vesey also came to his assistance; while Isabel clung to her father, trying to drag him away. Lynch was white with rage, but he did not resist, and after the first half-uttered vows of revenge, he made no further reply to the gentlemen's advice that he would go quietly back to his hut and make an apology by-and-bye; and they would try and persuade Mr. Lang to overlook the whole affair.

The father pushed his child away, telling her to mind her own affairs, and muttering his determination to ‘get that man on the road-gang.’ Then he suddenly turned and offered Mrs. Vesey his arm, still speaking in an excited manner. She excused herself from accepting his help, and dropped behind with Kate; and the party silently returned to the house.

By this time Mr. Lang had recovered himself, and he joked his wife at looking frightened, saying, she ought to be more accustomed to these little skirmishes, having lived all her life among such people. Then he talked of the weather, and said it would be a stormy night, shouted and coo-ee-ed to Miss Terry and the children, who had lingered behind, and had only now reached the lawn, having escaped the scene at the slip-rails. They ran, and they had hardly gained the verandah when a vivid flash, all forked and jagged, was instantly followed by a loud clap of thunder. The whole sky seemed full of the electric fluid,—the deep rattling roll of the thunder was incessant. The servants dared not cross from the kitchen to the house; the timid hid themselves behind doors, and the stoutest heart felt it to be awful!

* * * * *

There was wild work among the elements that night; many a tree was smitten and scathed; at last the lurid flashes became less vivid, and the thunder rolled more deeply, as if further off. But as the dark heavy clouds broke up, the wind came. How it howled, and boomed down the chimneys; how the dead trees which had been barked for cleaving, crackled and crashed as it swept through them, while above the rushing sound might be heard the sharp fall of some giant more brittle and more exposed than the rest. It was, in truth, a wild night, as Mr. Lang often remarked to his wife, and it was not till just before dawn that he could sleep. Very troubled and anxious were his thoughts; his anger had long passed away, it had had its vent, and was now forgotten; but he lay scheming and planning in hopeless perplexity how to clear himself from pressing difficulties; how to provide for his family, and keep them still in the situation to which his industry and fortunate investments had brought them; to preserve all those numerous comforts and luxuries with which he had surrounded them, the fruit of
years of labour and toil, yet to be honourable and just in meeting his liabilities. Were it only himself it would be nothing; he could begin life again; but his wife and his children, his daughters especially, anything, everything must be done to save them! It was cruel to think of taking them from Langville. He began to consider his wife's oft-repeated assertion that Kate was sure to marry well, and he wished she would make haste about it. If she were settled, it would materially soften the blow to his wife; and as for Issy,—he paused at the thought of her name, and with a long-drawn sigh, bid God bless her.

* * * * *

At the time when the storm raged highest might have been seen, by the lightning's flash, a man at the door of a hut heedless of the danger, almost unconscious of the thunder. He stood motionless for some time—motionless save a quivering which every now and then seemed to seize his limbs. He did not once look up, not once did the lightning stir him, but amid the din of the tempest he heard a low voice which spoke to him from within the hut. At first he appeared not to heed it; then there was a sudden tightening of the lips, or a darker frown, a heaving of the bosom, a stamp of the foot; now his face was turned away, then again inclined towards the speaker, as if listening; and all this—every movement and every gesture—was seen plainly by 'Gentleman Bill,' as he sat in the shade of the wall, himself unseen; while the pale, almost livid features of his companion were distinctly marked and brought out with every flash.

'No, no; 'tisn't in human nature to stand it! I declare I'm sorry for ye, Jack. To think of you being under Dan so soon again, and he'll be all the harder, after the welcome he got here that day . . . . Ah, well! what must be endured . . . . No,—what is it! What can't be cured must be endured! and your back's hard as horn by this time, I suppose. Two roads, however, still lie before ye; the triangle, or the Bush. You see, I came back here to see yourself. 'Pon my soul, I did! and for no one thing besides; believe me or not, as you like! I wanted to tell you; to give you . . . .'

'If you've aught to say of 'her,' just have it out, will ye? If—if—I thought—Bill, you'd played me false, and meddled to take her off me, I'd . . . . I needn't say it, though!' said Lynch, turning round and taking a step nearer to Bill. At the last threat his eyes seemed made of fire, and there was something so fearful in his suppressed concentrated passion, and his stalwart frame stood out so big and strong against the stormy sky, for he was just between the open door and Bill's sight—that the little cunning man felt somewhat troubled, and wished himself safe out of that hut.

'Bless us, what a fuss! Be quiet there!' he said, quietly, and making an
effort to stifle his chuckling laugh, as much excited by nervousness just
then as by his usual enjoyment in working up a frenzy in others. ‘I
certainly did coax the little maid down to Allen's; and what if I did? She'd
have been killed outright at home. I found her black and blue; not able to
walk;—and in the Bush. Didn't I tell you she was at Allen's?’

‘You did so. But when I went there after work, she was gone. Couldn't
get no account of her at all; and Bill, folks do say that----’

‘Folks! let 'em say! What do they say? or what don't they say, for that
matter? But be more civil, or I'll take no more trouble to bring you news.’

‘Speak out, unless you wish me to do you some harm, man!’

‘You are put out, Jack! Well 'tain't pleasant I should think to be con-
templating that pleasant little accident—so, I'll be patient. If you'd take a
smoke, 'twould ease your mind uncommon. Fine thing 'baccy is for the
temper; Quakers smoke on the sly always. Well, well, don't hitch about
your shoulders that way. I'm coming to it—easy, easy; after all, I've not
much to say. Surely, Jack, you don't go for to say you really pin your faith
to any slip of a female, now, do ye? Why man, they're every one of them
alike. You think Nelly prefers you. Ay, ay, so she did. You're right there.
But put her in the way of something better; what then? Nelly likes
smartery—all girls do! A pretty ribbon, or a gown; and Jack Lynch was a
poor sweetheart that way.’

‘Will you hold your cursed nonsense?’ Lynch growled.

‘Bless the fellow! Mustn't I use any figuring speech! I'm just a polishing
off and ornamenting the facts; for seeing how you are in a devil's humour,
perhaps you'll go ramping mad, if I speak too sudden. But keep quiet there,
Jack! and I'm coming. Well, last time I saw Nelly, she had a fine new gown
quite the go, and a blue ribbon, as blue as her eyes. My! she looked dainty
jolly! Ay, ay, thinks I, and where did that smartery come from? So says I,
‘Nelly, my darling, got any message for any of your beaux, down away;
because,’ says I, ‘I'm going back soon.’ ‘Beaux, indeed!’ she said, so
scornful; ‘No, Bill, I've no message, and no beaux;’ and off she walked, as
dine as my lady. ‘But for Jack,’ says I, ‘poor Jack;’ following her, you see.
'I've something very particular indeed, I want to tell Jack,’ she says; ‘but it
mustn't be yet, not yet. Only Bill, you may say, I'm got into a very good
place indeed, and am like to do well, and I hope he'll do well,’ says she,
quite proud like. 'Pon that, somebody spoke to me, and when I turned away
again, she was gone. I searched everywhere, I asked of every one, I
couldn't see no more of her. Only they said as for certain she was in
company with some up country drays, going to live at some place.’

‘And where was this, where you saw her?’

‘Where? Ah! Jack, you're the sharp 'un! Well, 'twas just near that public,
stands back a little from the road, called the Camp House. But where she was going is just what I don't know, you see.’

‘That's false—you do know; you are too sharp not to find out that for your own curiosity.’

‘All I made out from the people of the inn—and you may go and ask for yourself—was, that one of the draymen was a pretty, likely youth, and seemingly uncommon sweet on the girl, and she was all as friendly with him. Now, don't go and shake your big fists at me, or any one else. 'Twont do no good, man! Whistle her down! Not worth a thought—an idle jade! I turned right away, at the risk of my own business, to come back here and give you scent! That's what I call acting honourable, and like a gentleman! Now do as you like—only—now 'tis come to this here point with you, if I were you, I'd let no consideration for her keep me from just following my own way . . . . If—he presently continued, finding Lynch made no remark, ‘you had a mind to go through they infernal lashes, just on account of keeping straight for her—well—I couldn't advise you no ways to it—after what I've seen.’

Lynch left his post at the door, and took his seat on a low stool, burying his head in his hands with his elbows on his knees. There was a long silence. Bill grew tired of it, and the darkness prevented him from watching Lynch. He moved towards the door, and looked out. ‘Stormy night, I guess!’ Then still standing there as Lynch had done, still smoking his pipe, and leaning against the side-post, as if too weak or lazy to stand unsupported,—he spoke of a friend of his, who had taken to the Bush. He had come across him quite by accident, he said, and was almost persuaded into joining him. It might be a short life, but at all events, it was free, and had plenty of stir and fun. Full of adventure! ‘Fancy my chum sending a message to some old crony of a rich settler who had offended them, that he was a marked man! meaning they meant to shoot him; so deuced cool, the sending him fair notice!’ and he chuckled. ‘That's the way, Lynch, depend on it. Clear off all old scores; enjoy liberty, instead of such slavery and crawling life. Pah! and if the end should be unpleasant; but 'tis easy to avoid that by fighting desperate at the last. But, take it at the worst, man, one death's as good as another. Die game! eh, Jack! Why before that comes, you'd ride free and like a conqueror, terrifying every one; and make a name, ‘Lynch, the celebrated bushranger!’ eh, Jack. But I say, there's no end to this firing up yonder; some mischief will come somewhere. I'm tired, and by your leave, I'll just turn in; I'm going to sleep in Andrew's hut. So good-night, old fellow! Cheer up, and be hearty.’

Bill stepped out lightly, but turned to look once again at that bowed, still figure. Then a vivid flash dazzled him, and he quickened his steps to the
other hut, where soon, wrapped in a rug, he was fast asleep. Lynch was alone; bitter thoughts and suspicions crowded on him, while those memories he had before rejected, returned not now, in this his dark hour of need. After the first rush of opposing and confusing feelings, only one idea, one purpose remained. It grew, and strengthened rapidly. When at last he raised his head, all was over, all resolved. He got up, and looked out. It was quiet, as far as human life was concerned. Every one was gone to his rest. He marked that the thunderstorm had passed, but that the wind was in all its fury; and he said to himself that it would be dangerous work among the trees. He picked up his hat, over which he had nearly stumbled, as it lay on the floor, then felt for his clasp knife, and fastened a small tomahawk into his leathern belt. He took out from his bed a red handkerchief, which he knotted round his throat with a bitter scowl; felt on the shelf for a box of matches, and a small piece of tobacco; and then he went to the door, but paused there for a moment—looked back, as if listening, and pressing his hand to his forehead, he passed out. He shut the door carefully, placing a stone before it to keep it close. Once he waited, and even uttered a low whistle, but checked it almost directly, and with a look as if some bitter recollection had crossed him, setting his mouth in a way which gave a very forbidding character to his face, and breasting the wind with strong, firm steps, he very soon passed out of the cleared part of the Langville estate, and plunged into the Bush.
CHAPTER XXV.

SOMETHING IN THE WIND.

Vol. I

A few days after the storm, Kate, Isabel, and Miss Terry were sitting together, each apparently occupied in sewing. But a grave silence had been so long unbroken that one of the little girls coming suddenly to the window, startled them.

‘Two gentlemen riding up the road!’ she said.

On which Kate coloured a little, and shook out her flounces, and twisted her bracelet.

‘Mr. Herbert and Mr. Farrant,’ again said Sophy.

Isabel glanced from Kate to Miss Terry, and caught a deep flush on the face of the latter, though she was bending very quietly over her work as before, and did not indulge in any of those little manouvres Kate had begun.

Kate rose and went to the window.

‘Was ever a house so pestered with callers?’ she said, pettishly; ‘I thought for once what a nice quiet morning we were having; and what is the use of Mr. Herbert's coming now? Papa is sure to speak about Lynch and that other affair. Really, I do wish he would stay away!’

‘Kate!’ remonstrated Isabel, with her finger raised, but so that Miss Terry did not see it.

Kate stepped quickly into the verandah, saying something about going to mamma.

‘Poor Kate! It doesn't look very well, do you think so, now he is here not to call for so many days,’ remarked Isabel.

‘I fancied his manner very disagreeable the last time he came. I wondered how Kate could bear it. But isn't she invited to stay there?’

‘Yes, at some indefinite time. Well—well!’

Here the two visitors entered. Both shook hands first with Isabel; she was nearest to the door.

Mr. Farrant put down a parcel. ‘Some new music,’ he said. He should beg for a trial of it, by-and-bye. He had to visit the sick man living in the Bush behind Langville, but if he might do so, he would call in as he returned.

‘Are you in such a hurry to go now,’ Isabel said, somewhat awkwardly, and stepping towards the window, wanting to bring Mr. Farrant out that the other two might remain together; hearing footsteps she concluded that he
did so. She began picking some flower, saying, as carelessly as she could, ‘What music is it; sacred?’

‘What music do you mean? Don't waste the flowers so, and don't throw them away. Give me that bud.’

It was not Mr. Farrant's voice, and Isabel cast a hurried look through the window, in time to see that gentleman in the act of leaving the room. Mr. Herbert smiled as her eye came back to his.

‘He means to spend the evening here. But I can only spare a short time,’ he said, placing his bud in his button-hole with care.

‘Didn't know you were up to all that,’ she laughed. ‘We are coming on quickly! How long will it last, I wonder? But come, this won't do. We mustn't leave her.”

‘Miss Terry is going to try the song,’ Mr. Herbert said, drawing Isabel's hand on his arm as he spoke. ‘Have you a parasol? for I want you to come in the garden, Isabel.’

‘I'll fetch one;’ and she ran in at the window quickly. ‘Why is this? Why don't you come?’ she said to Miss Terry.

‘I want to look over this; mayn't I?’ and again Miss Terry blushed.

‘Unkind thing! Well—I don't understand your tactics at all. But you will come presently, come to the garden—do!’

‘I will if you so much wish it.’

‘I wish it? Nonsense! You make me cross! Absurd!’

She took a parasol from the hall and went out at the door, coming round to Mr. Herbert, who still waited for her on the verandah.

‘Hush—wait!’ he said; and both stood for a moment to hear Miss Terry's voice.

‘Isn't it magnificent?’ Isabel said.

‘I have only once before heard a voice I liked better,’ he answered.

‘Liked better! You are impartial. You actually allow that there may be better? Well, of course, my experience is none. I never heard any at all like it, nor could I have fancied anything so beautiful.’

‘Not more so than Farrant's?’

‘Perhaps not. No—but different,’ and Isabel stooped her face aside, so that it was hidden from him.

After a little silence she said—’Well, Mr. Herbert?’

‘Well, Isabel. But what does that ‘well’ signify?’

‘Only—what about going to live at the Station, and giving up Warratah Lodge, and so on?’

‘I meant to tell you. Letters from home—from England—have arrived, considerably relieving my mind. I hope to weather these difficulties and to struggle on, and then—it can't last for ever—better days will come. We
shall begin with a new system altogether.’

‘Yes; those who can weather it, as you say. Many will be swamped, though.’

‘Come! you are turned sad-hearted now, Isabel. Is your father very uneasy? I fancied he was worried and careworn?’

‘Very likely. Every one is anxious; he not more so than others.’ There was a shade of annoyance, even resentment, in her tone, which he did not understand.

‘I dare say not! I meant nothing!’ he said, kindly. ‘By the way, Jack Lynch, Isabel! I was so grieved to hear of it! grieved and surprised, for I knew he meant to . . . .’

‘He was most insolent! Why, he would have killed papa! Even you cannot defend his conduct!’ she said quickly.

‘I do not. I know the man is capable of any excess, if—if—provoked. But I grieve; for I also know, or believe, that he might have done well. A very singular character! And the girl—have you heard of her?’

‘Nothing beyond rumours. That is shocking!’ she said; ‘some one has taken advantage of her want of wit, I am very sure. Poor Nelly; I hope almost she is dead! I hope we shall hear; we still inquire; and Dr. Mornay promises to leave no stone unturned.’

‘Better not! Let it alone. There is nothing to hear, nothing to be done,’ said Mr. Herbert.

‘I don't see that at all! and I could not rest till I had tried every means to find out,’ Isabel returned with warmth.

‘Again, I say, I advise you not! Ah, there are the children!’ and he greeted them very kindly.

‘Well, Isabel, and how does the wooing go on? I mean Mr. Fitz!—Ah! is it a sore subject? I beg your pardon. Do you mean . . . .’

‘I mean nothing, and I know nothing. Kate has an invitation to go there soon.’

‘Poor Kate! You wont believe me, but the less you have to do there the better. But I can't afford to quarrel, nor will I have any frowns, for I must soon pay a visit to that station, and I came for a nice talk. Isabel, I have something to—something I wish to say to you----’

‘No, don't! I know! Please don't make a preface a yard long and look so grave! I can't bear any weighty secrets just now. I assure you I am a creature of many moods, and to-day my mood does not incline to bear or to hear.’

‘You always put me off so!’ and Mr. Herbert sighed. ‘Well—O! here's some one already!’ he spoke impatiently, hearing footsteps coming along the gravel-path, and as he stood behind a vine-covered trellis, he could not
see who it was.

‘Why, it is Miss Terry!’ Isabel said, with a saucy look at him. ‘What of the song?’ she added, as Miss Terry came up.

‘Beautiful! you must hear it. It is for two voices;’ and turning, they all paced slowly up and down the vine-walk, the conversation being principally kept up by Mr. Herbert and Miss Terry, so much so, that at last, with a sly smile, Isabel lingered a step behind, and then turning round the corner, she was at the top of the garden by the arbour with the young ones before they missed her.

When, after some time, Isabel, believing she had managed beautifully to secure a quiet tête-à-tête for the two, reappeared in the drawing-room, she was rather surprised to find them all there, and Mr. Herbert actually employed in holding a skein of silk for Kate to wind. This was a wonderful stretch of politeness, Isabel thought; and she smiled, amused to see Kate's evident gratification, and the pretty becoming pink which mantled on her cheeks as he paid her compliments on her skilful fingers.

‘Well! what will not love do!’ Isabel thought. ‘Why, he's becoming that domestic, tame animal, a lady's man!’

She looked at Miss Terry, who was sewing, again the picture of serene content.

Mrs. Lang was talking in a plaintive tone of the bad times, and of Lynch's dark threats, and the great increase of annoyance by bushrangers, when Mr. Farrant entered the room. He was tired, he said, and had nearly lost his way, which made him nervous.

‘What is it, my dear mother?’ Isabel said, after receiving sundry hints by gesture and look, and observing Mrs. Lang glance uneasily from Mr. Farrant to herself.

Mrs. Lang gave her daughter's work a little pull, while she turned with a great effort to be quite at ease, and asked Mr. Farrant if he would like a glass of wine or some lemon sirrup and water.

‘What! does my dearly beloved sock annoy you, Mrs. Lang?’ exclaimed Isabel, rather perversely, regardless of all the hints to hide it up. But Isabel was a little ‘put out.’ She did not know herself why exactly, but felt much disposed to contradict and ‘be cross,’ as children say.

‘Hardly drawing-room work—lady's work,’ suggested Mrs. Lang, in a low and fluttered voice; for though a very slave to the opinions of others on such subjects, and having a great notion of these two gentlemen's super-particularity, she still was rather vain of Isabel's open rebellion. She fancied that it sometimes pleased, and had grown at last to be more easy under it, as ‘Issy's way, and quite original!’

‘Well, I appeal to the judgment of the company! Votes, true and honest!
Is the knitting this sock, destined for William Lang, Esq., when he goes out after cattle or fishing, &c., an offence to the taste and the associations of the present company and to this room—the drawing-room? for I understand mamma that in the morning-room it would not have been so shocking.’

‘How absurd you are, Issy!’ said Kate.

‘Look at this wool!’ Isabel went on; ‘it is pretty and soft, grey and white; and these pins, surely what can be prettier, being of ivory, alias bone, neat and ladylike; and if the leg and foot be not of fairy dimensions; we English—no, Anglo-Australian, that's it—are proud of such a stout leg. Come! no fighting off! Miss Terry, your opinion, please!’

‘I confess to a predilection in favour of knitting and netting,’ said Mr. Farrant, stooping to examine the sock. ‘And how wondrously comfortable! Anti-rheumatic, I am sure. I envy Mr. Lang the----’

‘The socks or the leg?’ put in Isabel, while at the same moment Mrs. Lang said, ‘I am sure, Mr. Farrant, Issy would be most happy, quite gratified to make you such a pair; that is, to fit you, if—if----’

‘Hold, mamma, if you please! I have been about three months already, and this is the first sock. You know I am no worker. I hate all twiddle-dee and twiddle-dum over crochet and canvas, and all that sort of work; I make and I mend needful garments as a strict, stringent duty; and knitting such as this, I keep for odd, idle moments, when I am too dull to enjoy talking, and yet have to sit up, company fashion.’

‘As now?’ said Mr. Herbert, with a curl of his lip.

‘Come, no sneers at me! As for you, it is Hercules, and I don't know who. I shall see you working in the ground of some immense chair-chair-back soon.1 But the question is not decided! Is this admissible; or, shall I take my sock and myself away? no great punishment to either party, perhaps!’

‘No, since Mr. Farrant is so kind as to----’ Mrs. Lang began.

‘On no account,’ said Mr. Farrant. ‘Stay, Miss Isabel Lang, and knit on.’

‘And you?’ Isabel looked at Miss Terry.

‘Certainly,’ was the answer.

‘Yes, stay, or you will be exalting yourself into a martyr, suffering persecution, and ready to sacrifice yourself in behalf of ugly work, because no one else likes it,’ said Mr. Herbert.

‘Thank you!’ said Isabel, rising and making a low curtsey. But the colour flushed up and then faded, and there was a little tremor of the lips too, which told of something not far from pain at Mr. Herbert's home thrust.

Isabel was soon very earnest over her knitting, saying she had made a fault somewhere and must find it out.

Meanwhile Kate's skein being done, Mr. Herbert called for another, and
overcame her scruples by protesting that he quite enjoyed it.

‘Ah, and this soft lamb's-wool is still prettier than silk,’ he said, as she produced some delicately shaded skeins. ‘I always think a heap of these wools—German, are they not?—a singularly happy ornament on a table. I don't care much for such work when done; I think it is thrown away, nine cases out of ten; but all the accompaniments, the etcetera, I like. The frame I see some ladies use, is quite a piece of furniture!’

This led to Kate's alluding to some great wool embroiderers, some ladies, known to Mr. Herbert and the Langs, in Sydney.

Isabel looked up now and then in great surprise, to find him talking in that tone, evidently desiring to please—and to Kate, too! To Kate, with whom he rarely exchanged a dozen words. And she, losing the slight shade of trouble which had been on her face before, was looking quite her best, very pretty!

Mr. Farrant had led off Miss Terry to the pianoforte, and there they were intently discussing something—the new song, she supposed. But Isabel had a feeling very new to her, of being somewhat overlooked. As she sat brooding over the little shadow which had in some strange way crept into her heart, she chafed and felt angry. ‘What are they all about, I wonder? What fun if I could but really read each heart now at this moment! Evidently Mr. Herbert and Miss Terry understand one another. What is he doing with Kate? and have I frightened away my admirer, said to be? No one would guess it from to-day, I am sure! . . . . I doubt if I should sit quite so content as Miss Terry does; actually she seems flattered and pleased. Pooh, there should be some little difference in the eye or something! A good thing not to be jealous! Perhaps it is. But one may go too far! Well, I shouldn't like it; no, I shouldn't!’

As this last idea rose very emphatically, even to her very lips, and caused her to shake her head a little, though very unconsciously, it attracted Mr. Herbert's notice, and Kate's also, as she followed the direction of his glance.

‘Issy, what are you saying to yourself?’ said Kate. ‘I guess, though, what it was; not very difficult with your face, is it? By-the-bye, Mr. Herbert, speaking of the Moretons, did it ever strike you that our Isabel is like Ada?’

‘No, indeed! I take Ada Moreton to be as perfect a specimen of her peculiar kind or type as can be seen.’ Mr. Herbert spoke in his old somewhat dogmatizing tone, which Kate never understood; but he did not heed her blank look.

‘It is a very common hackneyed phrase to call a pretty woman a butterfly, or a humming-bird. But I never see Ada Moreton without the
aptness of the simile striking me; touching, skimming over everything, scarce alighting on anything; pretty, graceful, and bright; tempting youths to follow, and, if they can, make her a prisoner; yet if caught----'

‘Well! if caught; what then?’ Isabel put in, rather sharply.

‘Ah! I didn't think you were listening,’ Mr. Herbert said. ‘I know of old how you swear by Ada Moreton.’

‘My first notion of prettiness. But you . . . . .’

‘Never admired her,’ he concluded, decidedly, and with rather more emphasis than the words or the subject seemed to merit.

‘I confess I don't see in what way Ada and Issy are alike,’ said Mrs. Lang, as if comparing them in her mind, and looking at Isabel.

Mr. Herbert uttered a short, dry, rather contemptuous laugh, and nearly broke Kate's skein, which had diminished to only a few threads. ‘Ada is all prettiness, no rough point, not a corner anywhere. She speaks and sings like a musical-box; never was cross or blunt in her life;—at all events, in company.’

‘Enough!—quite enough to prove your assertion. Thank you!’ said Isabel.

Kate laughed. Mrs. Lang was puzzled.

‘What a very sincere person Anna Moreton is. Don't you think so?’ Kate ventured to remark to Mr. Herbert.

‘Sincerity is a quality which covers a multitude of faults,’ said Mr. Farrant, coming up to them.

‘True,’ said Mr. Herbert, who had finished his task, and was now leaning back in his chair so far, that it threatened to lose its balance every moment. ‘True,’ he said, looking up at the ceiling; ‘yet there is a something which passes for sincerity, which is really nothing more than a total want of self-restraint; a forgetfulness of any consideration but its own headlong impulse. This outpouring of temper and opinion, without reference to subject, person, or time, passes current for sincerity, but it is a mistake----’

‘Thank you again, Mr. Herbert!’ said Isabel, with a heightened colour.

‘I assure you,’ and down came the chair with a sudden thump—'I assure you I meant nothing at all. However . . . . there is a proverb about a cap fitting—and----’

‘Fitting so wonderfully well, that I take it, you see; and I'll wear it, and carry it off at once, in order to ruminate soberly on your able definition of sincerity.’

She was in the verandah in another moment, and passing quickly to the work-room, from whence she intended escaping to her own bed-room. But she was caught. Just as she reached the work-room door opening on the passage, which led from the front hall, Mr. Herbert appeared coming out of
the drawing-room, a much shorter way than hers.

'Isabel, stay. Indeed, you must not run away. I want you, seriously. I don't know when I may be able to come again—and—I must speak to you; tell you something.'

They were at the furthest end of the passage, where, when all the doors were shut as now, it was rather dark. Isabel saw that he was a little nervous, and she had no wish for him to read her countenance, feeling thoroughly unsteady and upset. She tried to laugh, and said she could not stay—she was busy—and so on.

'I have not really hurt or annoyed you, Isabel? surely not?' he said, taking her hand.

'Dear me, no! Annoyed or hurt because you were rude! That would be odd!'

'Rude! I wasn't; I could not be rude. Come, you shall tell me what ails you. What is it, Isabel? And do come back to the work-room, I really must say something to you.'

'I know all about it; and I don't wish to hear you—not now, at least.'

'You know!—you know!'

'Yes, indeed! Whatever my sincerity may be, I can't affect ignorance of this. It may sound odd, I dare say; but the truth is, I do know. And what is more, I am glad; and as you must know, with all your discrimination, I give hearty consent.'

Her manner was flurried and she pressed his hand a little. He was holding hers tightly, and now it became a warm grasp, while he tried to see her face in the doubtful light, and strange varying emotions passed over his features. But she kept it turned away, and presently covered it with her handkerchief, and something very like a suppressed catching sob came.

'O dear, how silly!' she exclaimed, trying to pull away her hand; 'do let me go! please—please! There, it is Mr. Farrant coming, I hear him. Let me go. Please do, Mr. Herbert!' she went on more and more urgently.

'You shall;—well, you shall. But some other time—I won't tease you now. Farrant told me that he meant to see your father to-night. How nervous you are, child. Not afraid of me, surely? I may come to-morrow, Isabel?'

'Of course; only I thought you couldn't. But I see—I understand! Yes, come; come, by all means! But O dear, how funny it all is; and then there is this evening. I must go, or I shall be crazy.'

He let go her hand and she turned away; then came back again, laid her hand on his arm, and tried to speak, but burst into agitated tears, and ran off as fast as she could.

Mr. Herbert was soon seen riding away. Isabel watched him, as in the
quiet of her own room she stilled her tears, feeling heartily ashamed of herself, and very guilty at leaving the drawing-room.

‘But they are singing again. Miss Terry will talk for me. So to-morrow papa is to be told and consulted. I shall triumph! My pet scheme! Poor Kate, it is very sad for her, though! I could fight that puppy! Flattering and wooing her, and now turning the cold shoulder, at the first scent of poverty. The others are of different metal, it seems. But I can't like it! I can't take it in! I don't like him as much as I thought I did. Well! I am not bound. I can say ‘No.’—To-night! Horrid prospect! Will it be ‘No’ or ‘Yes?’ I will not be listening to the singing! None of those old songs! I wont have it! It is not fair. It blinds me. I'll sit here and think! Such a serious step requires serious thought. And how very kind Mr. Herbert was to me! He guesses it all, I am sure!’

So Isabel went on, trying hard but in vain to reduce her thoughts to shape and order, and to decide on the pros and cons, whether it should be ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to the proposal which Mr. Farrant was to make this evening. But her ideas perpetually wandered from this to the other affair, her own darling scheme. She must behave better to Mr. Herbert next time. He meant to be kind and friendly, and she had all but repulsed him and all the confidence he tried to give her. Why was it that she felt so shy in hearing his story? It was odd! Again she passed in review the two gentlemen, and again she liked Mr. Herbert as a ‘friend’ over and over again the best; and again she decided that ‘friends’ were far pleasanter than ‘lovers.’ She only hoped Miss Terry appreciated him properly. Isabel somewhat doubted this. Now she was inclined to resent Miss Terry's measured expressions, and her very unruffled though conscious manner.

‘Well—the dinner bell will soon ring! They don't seem to have missed me, anyhow,’ she said, as, some time having elapsed, she felt rather weary of sitting still and ‘thinking.’ ‘Thinking is dreadfully tiresome, wearying work, I am sure.’

Here she heard the boys stamping along the passage. Her door was touched and opened.

‘Issy!’ said Willie, peeping in. ‘O, here you are! Where in the world are all the rest? Not a soul in the drawing-room! Farrant,—is he here? Going to stay, do you say? Eh, Issy, blush away!—that's it, is it? What fun! Is it settled?’

‘No, no, Willie; pray don't talk so! Besides, what do you mean? What is there to settle?’

‘Fiddle-dum!—as if you didn't know? But I say, Issy, what will the governor say, eh?’
END OF VOL I.
Volume II.
CHAPTER I.

Confession and Confusion.

It was quite late, wonderfully so for Langville, but Isabel, thoroughly wide-awake, kept watch in her room, which commanded a view of one of the drawing-room windows, three of which formed a sort of wide bow, and stood out from the rest of the house.

The windows were open, and the muslin curtains were gently swaying in the evening breeze. She saw that some one was there. Every now and then Mr. Farrant's figure came in sight. He seemed to be walking up and down.

Mrs. Lang and Kate were in bed. Miss Terry had come up stairs with Isabel, and had given her a hurried nervous good-night at parting, and an extra squeeze of the hand as if to mark her sympathy.

‘What is he saying? I wonder,’ thought Isabel; ‘Will it vex papa if I say no? It will mamma, poor mamma! I thought, of course, he would speak to me first! But I suppose this is the correct thing. Not the nicest, though! Yet, perhaps, it is good, and will make it easier for me. I don't want to hurt or mortify him. Have I done wrong not to draw back more, I wonder? Hallo! Who is that?’

‘Isabel! May I come in?’

‘You, Miss Terry! Yes, come in. Have you no light? I can find some matches.’

‘No, don't. I don't wish for light. I could not be easy without seeking you, Isabel, for I feel that you guess, know, in fact! I saw your kind sympathy, to-night! Dear Isabel! let me talk to you a little.’

‘Ah, well—so do! To be sure! I remember now; and to-morrow all this is to be gone through for you, only if Willie is right, he has blundered; excuse me, Miss Terry, but you must cure him of that same blundering propensity!’ Isabel went on rapidly and not very coherently. Miss Terry, with her hand on Isabel's arm, looked at her in surprise.

‘I want you to wish me joy—that is, if you can—if you believe it will be joy for me, Isabel! Do you know I feel lonely to-night—strange, isn't it?’

‘It is all strange to me! I wish I could understand and feel it. I suppose I am one who can't, who never am meant to be in love and all that. Does it really seem so long to you to wait for to-morrow to see him? You must, indeed, be very fond of him!’

‘Well, that I am; though when I spoke of loneliness it was that I missed the congratulations of friends and relations.’
‘I see! But indeed you will have plenty! I am so glad, so very glad, though I can't show it. I have always been wishing and planning this very thing! I assure you I have really planned and worked hard to get you quiet chats and so on.’

‘You have been most kind. I thought it so very generous not to be curious or angry at the evident mystery you perceived. Isabel, it has been painful to us both to keep it secret; but circumstances made it needful. I always felt it so wrong, so guilty, to be deceiving you all.’

‘For how long?—we could see for ourselves, don't flatter yourself!’

‘Yes; no doubt you could and you did see something, though we were careful, too. But you could not know how far it went—that in fact we were engaged before I came here!’

Isabel started.

‘Miss Terry! Come----What do you mean?’

‘Yes, indeed, so it was; and I felt it very wrong. But till my friends came round and consented, we dared not mention it. We agreed to do as well as we could, and patiently await our hour. It was a mere accident our coming to this district. I accepted this situation, while he, unknown to me, made his own arrangements with the bishop. I doubted, and was nearly giving up coming, and then we thought better of it, and agreed to receive it as a good omen, and be thankful. And----’

‘Stop, please! I am giddy! I don't hear quite well!’ and Isabel sat down as she spoke, with her hands raised to her head.

‘Do explain clearly, will you? You were—you are—engaged to----to----’

‘Mr. Farrant,’ interrupted Miss Terry. ‘There he is, telling your father all our story, at this moment. Do you see?’ and she pointed to the drawing-room window.

‘Yes, I see!’ Isabel said, in a low voice.

‘Are you ill, Isabel? Am I keeping you up selfishly?’

‘No; only I feel confused—giddy. Just say it again, will you?’

‘What, that Edward Farrant and I are promised to each other, and that he wants to have his wife soon, and is now consulting your kind father about his plans? But you don't congratulate me.’

‘Haven't I? But I do. Yes, I believe I do very much; only you see you have startled me—surprised me. And now—I can't help thinking of—remembering another, who will be also surprised and, perhaps, hurt.’

‘Who can that be? And I was so sure you had guessed our secret! Edward was sure of it too. He said he began to tell you one day at the Vesey's, and you stopped him in your warm, hasty, but fervent way, and he was convinced you understood it all. And he even fancied you were kind enough to try and cultivate his acquaintance for my sake----’
‘Well, well!’ Isabel murmured, as if only half awake. ‘And Mr. Herbert; I suppose he also understood all?—so you imagine at least. And what are you all dreaming about? I am certain he came to confide the secret to me to-day, and before to-day! Why, I wished him joy, and he said, to-morrow you were to consult or tell my father!’

‘Impossible! You must have misunderstood him, Isabel. Mr. Herbert has known the truth for some little time, and has been very kind; interesting himself in getting at my brother-in-law and helping us much. It is you who have been dreaming, Isabel! Are you awake now, think you?’

‘I don't know! I hardly think so!’ she said in an uncertain way, and gazing about her.

‘Well, I will leave you to sleep and real dreams. To-morrow it will all seem clear to you, and I shall claim a heartier shake-hands; it is not like what I expected from Isabel at all. Good night!’

‘No! you must not go,’ said Isabel, springing after her with some of her own energy. ‘I am waking up—I shall be all right presently. But—no,’ she said, withdrawing her before extended hand, ‘I won't congratulate you yet, till I have picked my bone clean. Pray do you consider it proper, and right, and fair, for him—for any man—to come to a neighbourhood professedly a single and a free man—free to woo and win young ladies, and so on? Suppose Amelia, or Kate, or I had chosen to fall deeply in love. What then? I call it abominable!’

‘But I saw there was no such inclination. I was on my guard of course; and he was very guarded in his manner to others, even though he was imprudently regardless of remarks with respect to myself. If there had been the smallest fear, of course we should have confessed all, at whatever risk to ourselves.’

‘You think yourselves very wise—wonderfully sharp, I see! But I don't at all agree with you. No; I maintain you did ill. If no mischief has come it is not your faults. It proves us a very stony, unimpressible set here. I think’ (she went on just a little bitterly) ‘that with all Mr. Farrant's charms and ‘wishing-to-please-you’ manner, no one's heart was touched. As it is, say what you will, I believe that the men have fared the worse. I am certain Mr. Herbert has gone on a wrong track. I am sure he likes you, and thought he had won you, too!’

‘My dear Isabel, excuse me—that is going too far! Every one understands better than that. Why, I could show you notes of his—of Mr. Herbert's—to me and to Edward, about this very thing. Surely, don't you remember that day in the verandah, when you said you had overheard our secret?—his and mine! And Mr. Herbert said, since you had forced our confidence, you must keep it. Surely—O, Isabel! you do know better; you
must be conscious. Come, if a fear of Mr. Herbert's being unhappy is what stands between me and my expected hoped-for good wishes, I must get them!"

‘Do you really care for them so much?—now, too, that you are so rich in that way! I should have fancied that swallowed up all other feelings, and there was no room for either regret or for more joy.’

‘But it is so long that I have been wishing and longing to tell you—to speak openly! I thought you liked Edward, and I was so glad. I have watched you admire his singing. It drew me closer to you, Isabel. It hurts me for you to be so cold and so harsh now! Can't you forgive us?—we have had much to bear.’

Isabel's answer was to throw her arms round Miss Terry's neck, and to kiss her vehemently. All the native generosity of her heart seemed to flash from her eyes, half dimmed as they were with hushed tears. ‘May you be happy! And you will be happy. Are you very fond of him? Tell me—what is it you feel? I want to know. Do you like all he does, and says, and is? Do you feel to want him when he is away, and yet wish to run away from him when he is here? O, it must be so very very strange! I should not like it. No; I don't really think it is in me to love in that way. If I ever did----’

‘What then, Isabel?’

‘I was going to say I should be unbearable. If I were alone, like you, I might perhaps throw myself wholly on one—only it would be so difficult to find the very right one—one to suit! But now I have papa, and mamma, and Kate, and the chicks, and the troublesome boys, and Mr. Herbert, in a fashion—to say nothing of you or the dear old Jollys, and Tom, and, most of all, daddy! He is my love.’

‘So you think now.’ And Miss Terry smiled. ‘There! the conference is over. See, the light is out, and your poor papa must be half dead with fatigue. He won't forget this evening in a hurry! I'll wait till they are in their rooms. There, both doors are fast. Now good night, dear Isabel! good night!’

‘Good night. Don't be surprised if I am clean gone—vanished to-morrow morning! I feel like it—as if I was whirling off somewhere—as if the whole world was turned over. To-morrow will not, cannot come like any other day, I am sure. We shall see! I feel like something will happen. You may laugh; but I mean it. I never was like this before.’

‘Shall I return to you? Are you afraid to be left? Over-excitement, perhaps. Take a little sal volatile.’

‘No, but a glass of water. On no account come back. Precisely what I want is to be alone. When I don't hear your voice I shall feel myself all right. Good night, Mrs. Farrant—arch-deceiver! actress! cunning woman!’
And again Isabel tried to think. But her efforts were worse than ever now. She had a confused notion that it was a relief—that she was glad, and sorry, and surprised all together—that there would be a great deal of ‘fuss’ to-morrow, and something would happen. She felt as if a part of her life had gone suddenly. There was to be a new act and a new scene. She felt as if she was shifted onwards by some invisible power, and had left old things behind. A few hours seemed to her like months or years ago. Sleep, sound and deep, put an end to these sensations.
CHAPTER II.

Further Explanation.

Vol. II

It was curious, but a weight seemed gone from her. There was a feeling as if it was incumbent on her to look bright and well, and she took unusual trouble to pick out a nice dress, turning over and rejecting several before she was pleased. At last a blue and white muslin was chosen; it was very simple, and not at all costly, but it was fresh and clean, and hung in nice ample folds from the throat to the feet, only confined at the waist by a belt which matched exactly. With her bright wavy hair and sunny smile, in spite of the freckles which so moved Mrs. Vesey's pity, Isabel was as pleasant and fresh an object for the eye to meet on coming down to breakfast as could be imagined; and so her father evidently thought, as he kept his hand under her chin and gazed again and again into her truth-telling eyes.

‘Hast heard, Issy? Ay indeed! and don't care? That's my own heart's darling!—I could have sworn it!—I said so! Sure—quite sure? Another look!—Ah! 'tis my own bright lassie! Now, then, marry away, parson and little woman, as fast they like. But, I say, Issy, wasn't it a sell, eh? Come, I judged her best after all; I never believed she cared for our friend of the mustaches. Ah, here's mamma! Well, Mrs. Lang, here's our poor girl, hardly able to speak or look up, as you may see.'

‘Indeed, I am not surprised;—nothing will ever surprise me again,’ Mrs. Lang remarked while preparing the proper quantity of tea with the air of a martyr. ‘He is gone, I believe, isn't he?’

‘If you mean that culprit Mr. Farrant, my love, yes, he is gone, ashamed to face us, no doubt, eh, Issy?’

‘Issy!’ said Mrs. Lang, with an elevation of her head; ‘I don't think it very good taste of you to be pretending jokes with your father on this subject. It ought to be met with becoming dignity. I call it downright shameful! Talk of deceiving!—talk of breach of promise!’

‘Come, now, my dear Kitty, pray, pray be careful; after all no harm is done. Look here at Isabel,—is this a broken-hearted lassie? No, no; we wont hurt the poor things with black looks and rebukes. Forget and forgive; of course I shall miss the custards, Mrs. Lang; and the singing, Mrs. Lang; but I'll try to get over it. Here's Kate! Come Kate,—do you scent bridecake, or wedding gloves, my dear? Here we are full of it!’

‘Yes, I heard; Miss Terry told me just now,’ Kate said with a careless,
proud toss of the head. ‘Strange affair, I think;—not very fair to some parties, I should say! Luckily for myself it doesn't affect me in the remotest manner, but it is rather queer!’

‘I should think so; the very idea of a governess behaving in such a scandalous way! Taking the precedence of the two young ladies of the house, pushing herself forward! How you can be so strange, so unnatural, Mr. Lang, I can't think!’

‘Come now, mamma,’ said Isabel, coming up and coaxing her; ‘you don't wish Mr. Farrant or any one else to see that you meant him for one of your daughters, do you?’

‘Indeed, no!—my daughters, the Miss Langs of Langville, may look higher, I should hope!’

‘Spoken like a wise woman, Kitty—beg pardon—Mrs. Lang. Bless me, if he had asked me for her I believe I should have said something he wouldn't like.’

‘Who is the ‘her,’ daddy?’

‘Why you—you sauce-box! Mamma wanted to persuade me you fancied him, eh, Issy? as if I didn't know better. Wouldn't have had him, would you, lassie?’

‘Grapes are sour when out of reach,’ said Isabel, as she buttered her father's toast and gave it to him. ‘I have got you to look after, daddy; quite enough I am sure,’ she added, laughing.

‘Ay, and so it is! Issy and I suit, and we don't mean to cut yet. Now, Mrs. Lang, my dear, let me recommend this egg, it will do you good and clear your heart. Now you find us all whole and happy, you wont fret? You will forgive the young people. And I say, about that bridecake,—can't we make it here?’

‘Impossible, Mr. Lang; and I don't feel disposed to make any great effort,—for—for—’

‘A note for Miss Lang, and messenger to wait for an answer,’ said the serving lad, giving Kate a highly-scented pink note.

‘They hope to see me there the day after to-morrow,’ said Kate, flushing with pleasure. ‘No objection is there?’ and, receiving her mother's hearty consent, and not observing her father's doubtful ‘umph!’ she flew off to answer the note.

Isabel clenched her fingers tightly together, and in her mind waged deadly war with any one cruel enough to disappoint Kate. She snatched up the note, when Kate returned and examined it. Apparently it afforded no particular satisfaction.

An hour or two later, when the little post messenger came back, Isabel sought her father. She found him at last near the foal shed still poring over
a letter. Isabel was startled at the face he lifted on hearing her steps.

‘Papa! what is it? No, don't try to laugh! I knew—I knew something was coming wrong; I felt so last night, I did indeed. Tell me, what is it?’

‘What I have long looked for, child,—Ruin! ruin! Good God!—not a house, not a man stands! Lucky he who has funds in England, as it seems our friend and creditor Herbert has. He seems all right again, and so takes upon himself a little lecturing. Read it yourself, he does not want to press the trifle I owe him, as he has found relief from present pressure. Well, beggars can't choose; but it irks me, girl, to be obliged to him.’

‘Yet, he is a very old and a very true friend. I would sooner trust him than—the Vine Lodge people or Mr. Budd.’

‘Well—this fixes me! To Sydney I must go. I must consult with Smith, the lawyer. He'll advise whitewashing, and then there's Westbrooke to go to. But I shall try yet;—your mother! I dread her leaving this, you see.’

‘Don't!—you mustn't dread anything—but disgrace. She will get over it. Westbrooke is a pleasant place. Don't go deeper into it—don't, daddy! Stop at once; it is best for all!’

‘There's truth in that! Well, don't go and croak to mother. Kate is going on a visit; I fear she is deceived, poor girl.’

‘When shall you go, papa?’

‘As soon as I can. First I must ride down to the new wheat plot, and leave directions. I shall send for, or swear in, a couple of constables. I am not easy about those rascally Bushrangers; there is a report that they are in this district. If so, we shall feel them, on account of Lynch, you see. Well, go in—keep up mamma's spirits. I sha'n't be back till late, for I have far to ride. The boys come with me and take orders. Perhaps I may start for Sydney to-morrow. Kiss me, and now go, my sunbeam! Ah, Issy—we've cheated the parson!’

‘Pardon me, sir; it seems rather more like the parson's cheating us.’

‘What, didst think of him, then?’

‘ Couldn't help it, when every one repeated it every day. But as I fretted much at the possibility of their being right, you may suppose I am not at all unhappy at finding they were all wrong. I should have said 'No' at last, I am sure.’

‘Ay, ay! No, Issy, you mustn't desert the nest. The old birds are getting heavy on wing. I couldn't part with you were a king to come and ask me for your hand!’

She left him, looking round on the evidences of comfort and wealth; the place redeemed from the wilderness by her father. And to think they must leave it all! It was hard—hard for them! For herself one place was as good as another. She always liked Westbrooke.
These thoughts were dispersed by seeing Mr. Farrant riding briskly up the entrance road. Not feeling quite in a humour to respond to his demonstrations of happiness and calls on her sympathy, she turned away towards the stables and fed her favourite little foal. The boys were there too, and they had a long inspection of all the horses, till they mounted and rode off, leading their father's mare to meet him at a certain field. Isabel was turning to go in, when Mr. Herbert appeared, leading Pearl, according to his custom.

She was vexed at feeling herself shy and blushing; but somehow, in spite of Miss Terry's assurances, Isabel dreaded making known that lady's engagement to him. She waited gravely engrossed with her own thoughts, while he put Pearl up in comfort.

‘You expected me?—Yes, I have you now at last!—and we will have a turn in the vinewalk,’ he said. Isabel wondered a little at his manner; then put it down to his being unhappy.

‘No, not there. Look!—do you see?’ and Isabel nervously pointed to where Mr. Farrant and Miss Terry were crossing the green, evidently bound for the same place. Searching and keen was the glance she threw at him; she felt shy too, and more awkward than she ever did, on his account.

‘They have done abominably. What right had he—had she to—to----’ but she could not finish.

‘To suit each other, and to find it out and engage to marry?’ And he in his turn tried to read her face.

‘Well! what do you see, or fancy you see? Willow, willow? feeling it yourself, you see it in me! I pity you. It is a sad downfall to my first, as it shall be my last, putting a finger into the thing called matrimony. Ah! I thought you two so suited! But, of course, whatever you felt or feel, you will not confess it—of course not! You are too proud. And I like you quite as well for it—only it is not in me. And I can't pretend that I am not regularly taken in and deceived.’

‘My dear Isabel! You speak so fast, so rapidly; you are so agitated----’

‘That indeed I am not!—never was cooler in my life! But, come, I will not meet them just now! Come this way,’ and she put her hand on his arm, and hurriedly drew him in an opposite direction from the garden towards the men's huts, and the bush which skirted them.

‘I don't understand you,’ he said, presently. ‘What am I too proud to show? What is it you are deceived by? I suppose—I conclude that Farrant spoke out last evening. Such I understood was his intention, and so I warned you, if you remember.’

‘As if I understood one single word you said! Never was so taken by surprise in my life! And surely you knew it! I thought you yourself
admired Miss Terry, and had proposed, and—and----Well!’ she said, in a half-defiant, half-tremulous way, as if ashamed of her shyness, ‘why not speak out? What harm in it? O! if one might but be allowed to speak plain truth, just as we think it! Every one gave me to understand,’ she went on with determination, ‘that he, that consummate actor, that arch deceiver, that he----’ but still it wouldn't do, she could not say it. ‘It is a mortification, isn't it? I ought to be very miserable—heart-broken and deceived—oughtn't I?’ and her voice, in spite of all her efforts, sounded tremulous and thick.

‘O, Isabel! I didn't think this! No, indeed I was mistaken!’ Mr. Herbert said, dropping her hand, and walking on before her in a brusque, disturbed manner. She followed, however, and both were silent, till they came to the fence, and they stood against it. ‘I see, I see! That hurried manner, I understand! Poor child. It was very wrong! Nothing can justify their deceiving us all so! Their secret would have been safe, but we should have known it—you and your family I mean—all along. And did you really not guess it?—not see something going on?’

‘On the contrary; my guesses were all wrong. I did not profess to know or understand such affairs; and when every one came to the same conclusion (why, I even fancied you did) I believed at once! Last night, up to the very last moment, I saw everything wrong. I suppose the correct thing would be to be dreadfully proud and haughty; but somehow I can't reach it. I feel as if I had been ‘made a fool of,’ in plain English, and there's an end of it! It serves me right, I dare say, and will be a lesson. And now let us talk of something else! Papa has had very unpleasant news, and must go to Sydney to-morrow.’ Her deep though smothered sigh was heard by him.

‘Your father wont—I can't get him to trust me, or to believe I have a great regard for him. I could, perhaps, help him now, Isabel. I have had unexpected relief myself. You know, surely, how glad I should be to be of use—don't you? We are friends, you and I, although----’

‘Yes! O yes! But it wont do. I feel something is going to fall on us. I am sure I have had a ‘presentiment’ lately. When do you go to the station?’ she added, abruptly.

‘Immediately. There is nothing now to wait for. When I return, then----. Is there anything I can do?’ he added, as if catching himself up. ‘Isabel, you can't fancy what a disappointment it is to find you so—so----. I came hoping to open my heart to you; but I see it is a wrong time. My dear little Isabel!’ he said, fondly, and again drawing her hand in his arm. ‘You and I have long been friends; my love for you is great, perhaps peculiar. I don't like to see you suffer. You wont long, will you? You will overcome any
feeling that his attentions (confound the man!) had roused. Abominable! Men ought to be careful. But your own pride will come in to aid you.’

‘O yes; if only poor dear mamma will not make me ridiculous through her own annoyance.’

‘Is she then much disappointed? Did she really believe it, and wish it?’

‘I think she did. And then poor Kate's affair; I fear it will not end well.’

‘The only good end to that will be to have nothing to do with him. Isabel, I could tell you things of that fellow that would startle and horrify you. He is an ingrained rascal, worldly and evil. No; Kate deserves some better fate than to be his soon-neglected, ill-used wife. I hear she is going to Vine Lodge.’

‘Yes; on a long-promised visit. I hope it will decide things one way or the other! I know she has been uneasy at his long absence and coldness.’

‘And if she knew what he had been about. Good heavens! how young girls are taken in! Better fret for ever than marry him. But he wont have her now he finds she is not an heiress. You are aware of the reputation you both had in Sydney? Ah! what's that? Is that the dinner-bell?’
CHAPTER III.

Unwelcome Visitors, and Farewell.

Shrill, sharp, and hurried, as if pulled by no steady hand, and for no household purpose, the big bell at the top of Langville House swung to and fro, and sent its call far and wide over the premises.

‘That is the alarm bell,’ said Isabel; ‘it is scarcely ever rung. Papa had it put up in case we needed any of the servants or men at night, or for fire, or Bushrangers. Surely—can it be the children for fun?’

No child's hand pulled the string. Fire! No symptoms appeared of such a thing. All the men were dispersed at their work; it wanted half-an-hour to dinner. ‘Ah! there it goes again,’ and Mr. Herbert ran back to the house as fast as he could. Mr. Farrant joined him at the back-door, while a few miserably frightened female servants peeped out from kitchen and laundry; but no man was to be seen.

‘What is it? What can it be?’ exclaimed at the same time Isabel and Miss Terry, meeting about the middle of the yard.

‘Where is Mr. Lang?’

‘Gone away to the new wheat-paddock, quite out of hearing.’

‘Edward is beckoning for us, Isabel,’ said Miss Terry, pointing to the back-door of the house, where Mr. Farrant appeared for a moment, and then seeing he was observed, retreated again.

When they came in, a scene at once ludicrous and alarming made Isabel at least understand in a moment what it was all about.

Kate was extended on the couch in the work-room, pale and faint, just recovering herself, in fact, from a swoon. Mrs. Lang was disordered and flushed, her cap all on one side, as she divided her grief between her daughter's state and the state of her desk and secretary, which bore evident marks of being turned topsy turvy.

The little girls were also there and their nurse. Sophy was crying bitterly, the other hiding her face in her nurse's apron; and the said nurse, with uplifted hands, was repeating, in a flurried and incoherent way, what she meant to be an explanation of the event.

‘The villain! If he hasn't been after terrifying every soul of us, the wee darlints and all. And Miss Kate there, in a dark swound, enough to turn the heart of any Christian. But, holy Virgin! they be no Christians at all, at all—only a set of rampaging, ill-minded rogues, that deserves hanging this minute, and a good fifty afterwards—the saints save them! The poor
missis! to see all her bits of money forbye the jewels, made free with before her very eyes; and she lawful missis of the place, and a power of servants at her command; and he stuck there, ye may believe me! with a grate ugly gun at her poor head!—One giving her her death-stroke, jist wi' looking at the nasty gun, and the other as glib and quick, and so polite! Save us! if he didn't turn out every drawer and every box, and made off with Miss Kate's lovely golden watch and all. Och hon, Och hon!' and then followed a succession of Irish howls and exclamations in a hybrid tongue, made up between her Irish descent and the currency speech she had learnt in the colony. For 'nurse' was a currency woman, her parents being 'real' Irish emigrants, one of the very first that ever came to Sydney. She was not a bad specimen of her class, and, according to her own notions, she served Mrs. Lang very faithfully, being fond of the children; and having been twice 'crossed in love,' she had fully made up her mind to remain in service, till she could save enough to keep a lodging in Sydney, having forsworn the married state, and occasionally uttering her maxims, gained, as she said, by 'hard experience,' to her two young ladies, Miss Kate and Miss Isabel.

‘Well!’ said Mr. Herbert, coming back to the room, and lowering his voice as he caught sight of Kate's open eyes, and pale, frightened aspect (Isabel was bathing her forehead with eau de Cologne). ‘Well! no traces but those of a spoiled city. The rascals! They are off! When did you ring that bell?’

‘As soon as I was free. But I was ‘baled up’1 with a gun at my head,’ said Mrs. Lang, roused out of all small affectations. ‘Kate and I were working. I had just finished my accounts, intending to ask Mr. Lang for money before he left, as he talks of doing.----Yes; just locked my desk and left the keys in it. I said to Kate, ‘The little girls are spoiling their frocks out there; go, love, and see what they are about.’ Dear Kate complied, as she always does. She is so very amiable! But she turned in a moment in dreadful horror—’Mamma! a man!’ And before I understood her, those dreadful, horrid fellows were at the open window, bowing and grinning! O! I knew! I have had it all before! But Kate, poor dear, delicate, Kate!----’

‘So the bell was not pulled till the deed was done. Is that it?’ and Mr. Herbert's lip curved a little.

‘I don't know what you mean! My nerves are quite unstrung, and I can't bear that abrupt, terrifying manner. How could I ring with a gun levelled at my head? How could Kate ring when she was fainting, and that villain lifted her up and put her down there before my very eyes! As to the others, the men, the servants, friends, boys,—we were entirely deserted! entirely! when they went away, that is, allowing them five minutes, though they said
twenty, and I knew they would kill me and Kate too, if we provoked them—then I pulled the bell indeed! But considering we had two gentlemen on the place, besides our numerous staff of men, some of them constables too, I consider that we were shamefully neglected! Not one of you came in time to do any good. No! Kate and I fought our own battle, and no thanks to any one!’ Mrs. Lang used her handkerchief in more ways than one, and looked aggrieved as well as much upset. ‘Come and lie down, mamma!’ said Isabel, in a soothing but firm voice. ‘Poor mamma! you are quite ill. Such a fright! And Kate so bad! And are they really gone—escaped? Did you recognise the faces, mamma?’

‘No, indeed. Though I dare say it must be that dreadful Lynch. I am nearly certain it was his voice. He might have been disguised, you see!’

‘No, madam,’ said nurse. ‘It was not Jack Lynch, I assure you. Bless you, I saw the faces quite plain—and I'd know them again anywhere. One was dark, and short and square. The other taller and thinner, and had red—yes, either red or quite light hair, and he smiled and showed his teeth; a rare cage too.2 And did your honour just inquire among the men? For they will have made off some road for certain, and one or other of them would likely come right against them returning for dinner.’

‘I asked, of course. They were one and all utterly astonished and ignorant. Every one had been at work, and knew and heard nothing! Nothing more probable than a coalition, eh, Farrant?’ said Mr. Herbert.

‘You know best, of course; meanwhile, shall you not send a constable or two after them, and search the huts—not only here, but every one in the neighbourhood? Though too late to prevent this mischief, we may arrest the evil, and make this district too hot for them. The rascals! The breakers of all home peace and home ties. Lucky, indeed, it is no worse. Fortunate, I do believe, that none but women were here, and consequently there was no dream of resistance, no blood shed. I can't help shrewdly suspecting, at least some connexion between this and Lynch's running off. It is surprising how they cling one to another. The cause of one is the cause of all! Ah, well, poor fellows, their hour is at hand. The mounted police are already bidden to ride after them, and bring them dead or alive! And at the same time, this same police staff is being swept out, and suspected characters dismissed or sent elsewhere.’

‘Do you mean that this very place, this district, is infested particularly?’ inquired Mrs. Lang.

‘Just now it is,’ Mr. Herbert said. ‘Lynch's absconding made some noise, and it so chanced that Bird and Beast,3 the so-called pair of notorious outlaws, were before rumoured as about here. A fellow came across one in the Bush and recognised him directly. His silence was purchased for a
given time by a famous pouch of 'baccy.' But the social qualities of the
weed brought out the news that same evening. And this fact was capped by
another fellow saying, that a strange man answering to the description of
'Beast,' with a perfect forest of hair on his head and face, was seen
skulking behind a barn somewhere. Old Wright was stopped, and his
pockets turned out. They carried off his toothpick case and a picture of his
mother, so he says, which he always carried about him, but no cash. In fact,
various petty rumours prove, like the jackals, that the lion is somewhere at
hand. To-day is further proof. Thank God! you escaped so well. Justice
will soon fall on them; and, meanwhile, this panic will do no good; shall I
disperse these gathering, gaping idlers, Mrs. Lang?’

On her assenting, he went out to the yard, and in a brief, authoritative
manner told the men they were too late, and that, as usual, the women had
done all the work. Little harm was done. All must now return to order and
to work.

‘Constables—Brady! Toole! come here in a quarter of an hour. I shall
have orders and a warrant ready for you. Now friends—now good
people—good women—off with you! The show is over. They came
suddenly, as your own final end and doom will. There is nothing to be said,
nothing to be done.’

Murmuring and exchanging looks, they all turned away, and, as far as
outward signs lay, there was no more undue distraction or excitement.

In the house they looked over the disordered drawers, amused to see the
experience and skill with which they had directly pounced on the valuable
and portable articles.

Unfortunately there was some money—more than usual, for the payment
of wages, and also a private hoard of poor Mrs. Lang's, for the providing
some dainty luxury for her pet child, which had been carried off; and also
some rings and brooches, some rich embroidery work,—which amused
Isabel, she wondering how they could know its value—and a silver snuff-
box and pencil-case. The rest of the plate was safe. They had only ventured
on the one room, it seemed.

Mr. Herbert observed, that as these wretched men were from all possible
trades, among them might be found a judge even of articles of a lady's
toilet; and he brought forward an example of a friend of his, who was
robbed one evening when every one was busy in the harvest fields, and she
and a girl-servant had returned to undress and put to bed the tired-out
children. Three men came; one entering the bedroom where the lady was,
through the window. He told her that two others were close outside, and
that any attempt at giving alarm or escape would cause mischief. They did
not wish to do harm, but must help themselves in order to live, having
eaten nothing since yesterday morning. She said she had no money, only
the few shillings in her purse, which she threw towards him. He called to
his comrade, who entered and set to work to open and examine every box
and drawer, with the quickest and most expert fingers. He chose all that
was valuable and rejected all the common and imitation stuff. They tied up
all these feminine articles in some silk handkerchiefs of her husband's, and
were just about to make off, when to her horror 'clang, clang!' went the
gathering bell. There was a rush and a scuffle—shots fired outside—oaths
and threats were heard—and one old white-haired man, a very old servant,
burst in and fell at her feet. 'Save me, madam! Save----' but as he spoke his
brains were dashed out.

'It was ascertained that this old fellow, the only one left in the house,
resolved to make an effort to secure these audacious robbers, so he rang the
bell which summoned the other men. The robbers had barely time to
escape. One in revenge returned to kill the poor mistaken old fellow; but
even he got off through the window, hiding for a moment behind a water-
cask, and then, when they were searching through the house, he rejoined
his fellows in the Bush. Two of the party are to this day uncaught; one was
hanged.—No! resistance, unless well managed and adequate, is worse than
useless—positively wrong for women alone.'

This event, of course, upset all the usual regulations of Langville. The
cook could not help being one hour late with dinner. Even the dogs and the
cats were roaming about in forbidden corners. The children recovered
from their alarm, were acting bushrangers in the nursery, with great
unction. Kate remained rather faint and plaintive, till reminded by her
mother to make her preparations for an early drive to-morrow to Vine
Lodge. Mrs. Lang subsided into a very sleepy and resigned state, only
wondering what kept Mr. Lang and the boys so late. Then Isabel proposed
their all going to meet them, and Miss Terry agreed to come and bring the
children. The two gentlemen said they would go part of the way, but Mr.
Farrant had business in the settlement, and Mr. Herbert thought his sister
might chance to hear of these unwelcome visitants, and that he must go
back to comfort her.

'I thought you wished to see papa?' Isabel observed.

'Yes; so I did! But it seems as if an age had passed since I came this
morning. No! I must yet defer my talk. It would be no time now. I wish I
could be more easy about you, Isabel! I am sure you will suffer from this,
sooner or later. I don't mean the bushrangers,' he added, in answer to her
look of question.' I allude to the surprise—the—the—I trust I may term it
the annoyance----'

'O, you are thinking of that! Is it only to-day we heard of it? How very
strange. Yes; you have hit it exactly. It is a surprise, and a somewhat
annoying one.’

‘Isabel, if you can, keep Kate from Vine Lodge. She is really a sweet
girl—much more interesting than I ever thought her before, I confess. For
Heaven's sake, keep her easily-led mind from close contact with that
woman! Some day you will agree with me in this, if you don't now. She
showed me her friend’s sketches and rhymes. Anything more utterly in bad
taste I can't fancy. And you, Isabel, do not, I entreat, if only for my sake,
do not cultivate the accomplishment! You mean no harm, you say? I know
it. If I didn't, I should not speak so to you! Isabel, look at me for a moment.
I think you understand me, for you come to me as to a friend you may
trust—I shan't forget that. Since I knew of their secret,’ nodding slightly
towards Miss Terry and her lover in front of them, ‘I have been happy—
yes—happy! But—no, don't hurry away!—When I return—that is, if
forced to go at all to the station, which I devoutly hope to avoid, I shall
come to you. Isabel, we have been good friends, eh? Yes!—well—but we
must be somewhat more than that now.’

‘What; enemies?’

‘No! but—Isabel----’

‘They are calling—come! I feel more like an enemy than anything else
now, with every one. I should like to mount a swift horse and pursue and
take them! A hundred pounds! when we are so very hard up! Poor daddy,
he was troubled enough without this! and our drays are on the road.—
Shouldn't wonder if it really has something to do with Lynch.’

She rattled on, with a burning colour in her face, while his eyes were
fixed on her all the time with a serious scrutiny which made her heart
flutter, though she tried to resent it and to pull away her hands which he
held fast in his.

‘Well, good-bye, good-bye, Isabel!’ he said, still lingering. ‘When I
come again, you must—I must say a few words—I mean, I want to tell you
something—you will listen then, will you? Promise, promise me—for
lately you have always evaded me. Well, take care of yourself—God bless
you!’

Then, in the act of turning back, he said, coming and whispering close to
her ear, ‘Should—should anything happen—I mean, if you leave this—go
to Westbrooke,—or if you think I can help in any way, and supposing I
should be detained in some now unforeseen way, you will write to me? Do
you trust me, Isabel?’

‘Yes, of course I do!—all but in one thing,’ she could not resist adding,
with a saucy smile—'you wont understand a joke,’ she said, with mock
earnest in her voice and look. ‘It is a pity; a little fun is very amusing, and I
don't see why it always makes you so grave and angry; but never mind, there's no joke now. Give my love to your sister, will you? Of course, I don't mean you should really do so. Why, what would she say or think? No, but give my—something—whatever is correct, and so on—and I hope she has not been worried by robbers. Ah, there's Willie, I see—papa is near, then. Will you stay?'

‘No, I can't. Again, good-bye—au revoir!’

‘Good-bye,’ she repeated, and she kissed her hand at him once again, as he turned round by the stable.

She felt sorry he was gone, he had been so kind! That was his best and nicest smile, without a bit of sarcasm or irony. There was no one like him, after all! Yet Miss Terry liked another better. How very strange and incomprehensible taste is! ‘But there they are, all telling and telling, and they wont leave me a scrap of news for poor daddy.’
CHAPTER IV.

Fraternal Confidences.

Vol.II

Leaving the family at Langville to relate their adventure with all the natural alarm, annoyance, and wonder attending such a case, we will follow Mr. Herbert in his return to Warratah Brush.

‘Ah, John, I didn't expect you quite so soon! It is very good of you, and lucky perhaps, too, for here is a letter left by some person travelling to Sydney, I understand.’

‘Indeed! Have you had any visitors, Mary?’

‘Not a soul. I did rather expect Mrs. Vesey, after what she said on Sunday; but fine words cost nothing. How are the Langs?’

‘Rather so so. They had visitors, and of that kind, that I felt somewhat anxious to be here and know how you fared. I believe Forrester & Co. on the verandah are our best friends and keep our place safe from such calls.’

‘What, bushrangers? Well, I assure you, the dogs have been very uneasy to-day—growling at nothing. I shouldn't wonder if they were within scent, and seeing so many men working as there chanced to be in the yard, and these formidable dogs, they thought better of it. To say truly, John, thanking you all the same for your kind thought, I had just as soon be here alone as have you with your fire-arms. You could do nothing, taken by surprise, as you are sure to be; and imperfect resistance is sure to end in bloodshed. I should let them help themselves.’

‘Not very pleasant to watch the rascals turning out one's things before one's face. But where women are concerned, you are right.’

Mr. Herbert here read his letter.

‘That has made you grave again! I was observing how very bright you looked, John, when you first came in—just as if you had heard good news. But what is this?’

‘Nothing new. Confirmation of my doubts of that humbug of an overseer, with his plausible Scotch dialect. I must be off at once. Trust me to take a canny Scotchman again. An Irishman, you may have your honest and open doubts about, and so act on your guard, and if you do chance to win his heart, he will not like to ruin you. But the Scotch preach you a sermon and cheat you at the same time. Can you have my kit ready—let me see—to-morrow or the day after? I must see Blackett first, and that will take a day. I shall go there and start straight from his place, you see. But it is intolerably provoking just now, when I so much wanted to settle—to see---
‘What did you want to settle, John? To go at once is the great object. I should hope you need not stay there at all. You are wanted so much here.’

‘If I could get to Langville and back before breakfast----’ he was murmuring to himself.

‘What, to Langville again! O, John, what does it mean?’

‘It means that a secret has come out which it might have been better for all had we known it before. Like other mysteries, it has led to a few errors. Mary, Farrant has declared himself—he----’

‘Has he, indeed? What, after all, it is to be Isabel, then, though I began to hope----’

‘Thank God! no, no, no!’

‘No? you can't mean it! What, has she refused him?’

‘He has, it seems, been engaged to Miss Terry, even before they either of them came here. Family circumstances forced them to secrecy. It might have done mischief. Happily, I think,—I hope, it has done none.’

‘You astonish me! Well, then, he has good taste, after all! A much more suitable person indeed. Only—only—O John! I did so like her—Mr. Farrant is a man of taste!’

‘Which John Herbert is not? Mary, can't you, wont you try to like Isabel a little better?’ and he sat down by his sister on the couch, and slid his hand round her waist. So seldom was there any attempt at demonstration of their quiet but strong attachment, that Miss Herbert was taken by surprise, and rather moved. His smile pleased her. It was earnest, wistful, happy, and unconstrained.

‘Do, Mary, try! It is, I assure you, only a little prejudice on your part. I should grieve to marry one you could not like. I believed I never should again wish to unite my fate with another's. But I feel this is no slight fancy, no youthful fascination. I love her, love her,’ and his voice rose, ‘in the way a man of my age loves, having once been disappointed, and therefore having kept aloof from all play at loose and bind with the feelings,—as a man capable of weighing facts and sounding the depths of his own heart, can love once—and—but once.’

‘Tell me, John, are you engaged? Is it done?—lest I do mischief,’ she added, in a tremulous, almost apologetic voice.

‘No—that's it. The suspense—you can hardly guess how anxious and nervous I am till—’

‘As if you could doubt—doubt for an instant!’

‘You are mistaken, Mary,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘I doubt much, and altogether; I am wholly uncertain if I shall not injure my cause by speaking now. Yet after such a narrow escape, how can I leave her—leave it
uncertain? I know she likes me,—too well, I sometimes fear! I don't expect
her love could be like my own. It could not be! Mary, one moment I
hope—the next, I despair!'  

'John, is it possible you forget all the pain, the stinging torture you
suffered once?'  

'And why remind me of it now?'  

'Because I must! I remember thinking the effect of that trial anything but
softening. It made you bitter and harsh, John. Where you love, any great
fault would be to poison you, and any fault of the kind showing that
peculiar tone of mind, would, I know, be unbearable. Now, John, you think
me unkind and prejudiced. I don't wish to be so! True, I did not take that
fancy to her you did. But I had no cause to be prejudiced, seeing you like
her so well—I watched her, and I solemnly declare to you, John, that I
have seen, not once, not twice, but over and over again, indications of that
selfsame disposition, a disposition to prefer fun to kindness. She would
wound her dearest friend rather than sacrifice a joke or a bit of so-called
wit and fun! Then, Mrs. Vesey, hasn't she seen this in Isabel? Ay, and
worked it—used it for her own amusement? More than you know have
they given way to the low habit of caricaturing their neighbours. While
waiting for Mrs. Vesey to put her bonnet on a week ago, when I went
there, I turned over a book on the side-table. It was full of pictures,
 likenesses of every individual in the district, and Sydney people, too! Odd
and comical enough. Clever, I suppose, they are called. Not a thing, not a
gesture, escapes their sharp eyes.'  

'Their!—it was Mrs. Vesey's book, her drawings, wasn't it? What has it
to do with Isabel?' He spoke hurriedly and anxiously, all the sweetness
gone from his face. Swinging his foot up and down, with his fingers in his
waistcoat pockets, he watched his sister's countenance.

'I used the plural advisedly, John. Several of the pictures had I. L. in the
corner, and besides that, when Mrs. Vesey came in, she said, ‘Ain't they
clever, Isabel Lang's I mean? she is so ridiculously sensitive, and afraid lest
any one should see his own likeness, as if any one could possibly mind a
little harmless fun!’ I begged to disagree from her, and said I thought it a
very hazardous experiment, which no friendship would stand. She looked
very meaningly at me, and asked if you were not peculiarly sensitive. I
said, not more so than others. ‘O!’ she laughed, ‘I heard a very droll story
about it at Bath. I know! But you need not fear my saying anything. I shall
not tell a soul.’ '  

'What could the woman mean, Mary?'  

'Of course she has in some way heard some gossip, John. She knew
some of our Bath acquaintance, and it is very possible, people are so fond
of ill-natured stories, that . . . we know we have nothing to expect from her forbearance, John. Naturally, her friends would lay all the blame on you, and exaggerate it too.’

‘Good heavens! that it should follow even here, here to the Bush! That a would-be fine lady of fashion should have hit on that miserable story, and now to have been actually probing, and cross-examining me and my countenance to find out how far it fitted. She has even the audacity to play her experiments on me, and to drag her—to drag my own little girl into it too! Something told me that woman could and would work me evil, I took such an antipathy to her!’

He rose and moved up and down, walked to the open door, came back and leant against the chimney-piece. He was very much disturbed. His sister was sorry, but she was too much taken up with her fear and her grief to refrain from giving him temporary pain, if it would but open his eyes!

‘Now, with regard to Isabel—for we have been led far away from her,’ she began----

‘Yes, far indeed,’ he answered with a sudden turn of relief. ‘Isabel may allow her high, girlish spirits to run off with her. I allow, Mary, she is unguarded, frank to a fault, and even giddy; but a more tenderly kind and loving heart never beat. Guided, as she would be, by one she loved and respected, her natural good taste would soon cast off all the little faults she has contracted from the tone of this small, confined society. Frank, ingenuous, generous, true as sunshine, clear as a drop of clear water—why, her faults are but what the French call 'Les défauts de ses qualités.' When once she is mine, when she knows how my very life is bound up in her, she will give up drawing caricatures or Mrs. Vesey's society, which, after all, she only upholds in a little perversity of spirit and for her sister's sake. If I could but be sure—if only that untoward occurrence had not come between me and my words—all would now have been certain! Yet—perhaps—I don't know—it may be well to wait a little, too. They all believed in Mr. Farrant, and perhaps she did—perhaps she suffers—but no, her eye was too bright and clear for that.’

His words became a mere soliloquy at last.

‘O, John! every one, even her own mother, says she is obstinate and self-willed. Miss Terry, who is really attached to her, told me she was anxious about that spirit of opposition that showed at times so strongly. She needed self-control, Miss Terry said. She called her a grand character, but all rough, like a fine piece of marble awaiting the chisel. It is a fearful chance—a serious experiment for a man to be that sculptor as well as husband. Particularly as in this case (blind yourself to it as you may), when in her are the very seeds, which, if encouraged, may shoot up into that
poison you have such cause to dread, and from which all your nature rebels and shrinks. I entreat you to pause and reflect,’ she added, gravely and kindly.

‘What have I been doing all this time?’ he said, quickly. ‘Is it a new, sudden fancy of mine—is she a mere chance acquaintance?’

‘I deny that inference, John. You have hitherto known and loved her as a child, and a child only. You were as blind as any doting father or uncle. Only of late has she risen in a new light to you. Stimulated by example, I believe you first chose to feel jealous and sensitive; and then, Heaven help me! I believed you had given it up and returned to common sense. The fact is, you have quarrelled and argued yourself into love—a most mistaken, ill-founded love. God grant you may see clearly, at least before you are utterly lost! I do entreat a further delay! You are going to the station. Well, go. Leave things as they are. Ponder, and consider, and pray, John, to be guided. See what a month may bring forth. Wait. If all is right, it is but little time lost. It may prove infinite gain.’

‘Four weeks—a month—preposterous!’

‘Four weeks set against a life,’ she repeated, gravely.

‘And how much wiser will four weeks make me up there with lazy shepherds? Or, do you intend to act for me, Mary, and spy, and watch, and note down all her unwary, careless words? Poor child! Mary, it is not kind—it is not like you.’

‘Never mind me, so that you are saved from another shock, John—a shock which would, I fear, make you neither a wiser nor a better man.’

‘You are older than I am,’ he said, after a long pause and several turns to and fro the room. ‘You have been a good sister, Mary; I can't refuse to follow your advice. I wait—I will wait till after my return from the station, to please you. Then I must be at liberty to follow my own judgment.’

‘God send it be a right one, then!’
CHAPTER V.

‘Free Again!’

Vol.II

It was quite late before Jack Lynch left Langville, after Gentleman Bill's side thrusts, on that night of the storm. Often had this alternative presented itself, but as often had it been forcibly repressed. For what would become of Nelly then? Lynch's secretly cherished hope was to make of that poor, helpless, but very lovely girl a respectable wife. For her, he desired all that his own mother had been. For her, he wished to wipe out the stain of his crime; to begin afresh, with a ticket, and a hope of perfect freedom in the end. But when once that hope was undermined and destroyed, he was reckless. For himself, it was far pleasanter to brave Lang, and perhaps revenge his wrongs, than to live on in hopes of quiet respectability, but enduring provocation and severity meanwhile. ‘Bill’ knew what he was about. Each word, each insinuation, every pause, told, as he intended it should tell, on Lynch's sore and goaded spirit. He, Bill, awoke with the early dawn, and stealthily stole out of his resting-place. He passed by Lynch's hut, and noted the closed door,—closed by a stone from without. He laughed—his low inward chuckle, looking quickly but keenly around. His work was accomplished, and giving a shove to the small bundle he carried over his shoulder, he went away briskly. His abrupt disappearance as well as his sudden visit there at all, was lost sight of, as he expected, in the greater stir which Lynch's desertion caused. Meanwhile, hardly heeding the rough night, Jack Lynch pressed onwards with as much speed as he could command. The trees bent to and fro under the heavy gusts, and branches were continually falling. Dark clouds drifted across the sky, making it anything but a desirable night for those who chanced to be out. Lynch with his hat drawn a good deal over his eyes, avoided the roads or even the most beaten tracks, and kept in the scrub. Sometimes he paused for a moment and rested against a tree; then again hurried along; and wonderful to say, scarcely ever appeared to hesitate as to his course, dark and wild as the scene was. After several hours' walk, he came to a fence, which he climbed over, and then keeping by it for a few yards, he reached a creek. ‘All right!’ he exclaimed; ‘I've not forgotten the way, then, though 'tis two or three years since I drove the bullocks off this ground; and now, is it safe to go to Charlie, or what? In troth, the walk has made me tired and hungry. I'll trust him for to-night.’

He swiftly crossed an open paddock which stood high, and overlooked
the surrounding country. A few head of cattle and horses were lying down, and some of them were aroused by the man's steps. It was just light enough for him to see a hut which stood almost in the centre of this paddock; but when he approached within a few yards of the place, the deep growling and angry barking of several dogs made him stand, and call out, ‘Hallo!’ in a loud voice. ‘Charlie Brand! Hallo, there! keep in your dogs.’

A man now appeared at the door of the hut, cracking a stock-whip.

‘What's all this? and who are you, I'd like to know, that wants Charlie Brand, this time of night? Growler will not suffer any liberties, so you'd better not try.’

‘I want a night's lodging, Charlie; don't go to say you don't know me, dark as the night is. You aint the man of sharp sight I took you for, if you can't tell your chum from your foe.’

‘Is that you, Lynch?’ returned the other, advancing a step.

‘Ay, Jack Lynch, as large as life.’

“Well! what's in the wind now? Come, I said to Growler a while ago, says I, 'tisn't a night for man nor beast to get his rest. Don't mind the dogs; come on, will ye. Down, Growler; lie down, sir, will ye.’

The two men now entered the hut together. Lynch took the only seat, and Charlie applied himself to rekindling the dying embers. When the wood caught fire, and the flame lighted up the hut, he turned round, and with a sarcastic, dry smile, surveyed his companion. ‘So you've had a long walk,—ha! ha! ha!—and what's going to be the end? Have you got your ticket? and are you come with any orders?’

‘I have neither ticket nor orders,’ answered Lynch, throwing off his hat and passing his hand through his bushy hair.

‘Well, so I guessed! What you couldn't keep quiet, after all, I suppose. And what's your course now? Why, it aint many months before you get your ticket. Martin said the other day you couldn't be refused again, for you'd been uncommon steady.’

‘And much use it is to be steady, to be sure!’ returned Lynch, bitterly. ‘He abused me before everybody; called me all the names in the world; threatened me with forty lashes again—and all for nothing! and I so near my ticket! But I've escaped him; I'm a free man; and what's more, I'll be revenged!’

‘Take my advice, and eat a bit of supper and go to bed, and you'll think better of it before morning. 'Tis no joke in these times to take to that most gentlemanly profession of the Bush. The police are sharper than they used to be. You have no other than Norfolk Island to look to. But, perhaps, you've heard of the gay doings there under the new governor, the theatre,1 and all that—ha! ha! Perhaps, Lynch, you look for promotion in that little
select corner of the world? Tush, man, you'll give yourself up, and if . . . .'

‘And be flogged! I'll tell you what, Charlie Brand,’ added he, rising and looking fearfully agitated, ‘I've sworn to be revenged; I don't care what comes of me afterwards; but I'll be revenged! He has used me worse than a dog, worse than a born slave! What was I sent out here for? Wasn't it for taking revenge when I was insulted? Ay, ay, 'twas brought in manslaughter. I didn't mean to kill the chap, then; I was sorry—yes—I would most have died myself to bring back his breath. But my nature is high—Lang knew it; he knows I'm a good servant; he knows I'm a prisoner. He has never tried the kind word; and my mind has been growing harder and harder, and now I'm resolved.’

‘And what does little Nelly say to this,’ said Charlie, drily.

‘Don't name her! Any way, that's over! I'll tell ye what, Charlie Brand, I'd have made her a good husband, though I am a government man; and when I had my ticket, I could have offered her a respectable home; but that's over, as I said before; and that cold-hearted tyrant that has done it and trampled on me, shall feel my hand on him. And I say, Charlie, there's no time to waste. Have ye got a drop of brandy here? If you have, give it me quick. I must be off!’

Charlie rose and locked the door of the hut, putting the key in his pocket.

‘Come on! sober now!’ said he, as if speaking to a refractory colt. ‘This is no night for the Bush, and I've no brandy, not I. But I'll give you some as good tea as ever crossed your lips. Why, the old hut can hardly stand this blustering wind! Hark now! there goes a tree! Come, Lynch, don't look so black and sulky, and don't take to stewing your grievances, man! To be sure, Lang is hasty and peppery, and not over-considerate of his assigned men, as I can show. But there, 'tis only to bear it; and we can't help ourselves, you see!’

‘Yes we can, and I will! There's many a good fellow driven to the Bush, and his sin lies at the door of them who gave him such treatment. 'Tis a fine life when you're used to it; plenty of fun and good cheer,’ said Lynch.

‘Your and my taste differ, that's all; I like a roof over my head, and prefers riding quiet to being hunted like a native dog,’ said Charlie, putting in a large allowance of tea into a quart pot, and setting it on the fire.

‘I don't see much differ,’ returns the other, gloomily, again sitting down and drawing nearer the fire, which gave a sense of comfort and insensibly soothed his excited mind. ' 'Tis a choice of evils anyway, as they say; it all depends on what sort of master you get, and I'm sure no slaves can be worse used than Lang's men are.’

‘Why, I suppose, when you were shipped off, and had ‘Convict’ written on your back, or ‘Hyde Park Barracks’ as large as life on your slop, you
didn't go to delude yourself with thinking you were to lead the life of a man of pleasure? 'Tain't no good to stiffen oneself up, Lynch. We're under punishment, as Herbert used to say, and so we must bear it; and, for my part, I've got to make myself tol de rol easy under the yoke.'

‘Ah! you've got your ticket! and so should I, and I should have had Ellen, but for that cursed hard man. Now don't stop me, Charlie! for revenge I must have, so give me a sup of tea and let me out!’

‘A sup of tea and welcome. But I'm not so unhospitable I hope, as to turn you out of doors to-night; and pray what kind of revenge is it you're hatching? I'll tell you what, Lynch,’ and he fixed his eyes steadily and determinedly on him; ‘if you mean anything like blood, you're come to the wrong man. You don't suppose I'd let you go off, after what you've said. No! I'd just take you to the lock-up, my friend, if I had a moment's thought of your passion not passing away. I wont say I love my master, for that I don't; but there's one in that family I'd lay down my life for, pretty like it—the second girl! Ay, my life! She's like my own child; like what 'she' is now, I'll be bound, if I could see her!’ (and he wiped his face as he spoke).

‘I've helped her on her pony scores of times; I've shot birds for her and climbed the trees like a native for young parrots. Many's the time her voice seemed to come into me like, when she'd come running out of the school-room with ‘Now, Charlie, I may play!’ I say, I'd lay down my worthless life for her. So don't think I'll let you go on any evil errand to any belonging to her. You know me, Lynch!’ said he, again looking sternly at him.

‘Know you! Yes, I know you; but I don't fear you. But, Charlie, wouldn't you take revenge if you'd been insulted and unjustly accused—and what harm? Aint I a marked man already? 'Tis better than twenty-four hours I've been out now, and . . . .’

‘Well, then, Lynch, I'll make free to tell you that you have another world as well as this present to look for. God says, ‘Do no murder;’ and if you aint afraid of me, you are of Him, I suppose.’

‘ 'Tisn't much I've heard of Him since I went to the Sunday-school, many a long year back. And did ever you find any to talk to you about that here, Charlie?’

‘I have—thanks be; I have, Jack. Mr. Herbert has. And now, thanks be, there's a church and minister close by, and there I go. But here's some tea, and though I can't say much for the meat, seeing 'tis a little tainted, owing to the flies getting into the cask,—the damper is right good; and now eat and drink, and make yourself comfortable.’

Lynch, who had eaten nothing since the morning, did full justice to Charlie's hospitality, and meanwhile his companion asked questions.
‘And how goes it up yonder? Any signs of the times? Ah! that's bad! No sale, you say? That pinches Lang like a tight shoe, I'll warrant. And the horses? I was looking for a few here soon. The feed keeps up here uncommon fine. And how do the new chums get on—the new minister and the others?’

‘What should I know of them?’ said Lynch, after a long pull at his quart pot. ‘They're seemingly a gay enough set. Makes the place alive! They do say as how the parson is a rare good master, an easy man every way. He'll get plucked among them all if he don't look out.’

‘Ay, ay, Jack. ’Tain't a country where a man can afford to shut his eyes for a moment.’

‘Your favourite, Miss Issy, as they calls her, is to be married to the parson, as they say. You might see and get your ticket made out for that district, and get a place there.’

‘I'm not given to roving. If they leave me tol de rol quiet I haven't no inclination to change. But how's this? I always made it sure as gospel that Miss Issy would have Mr. Herbert! I'll always stand up for him. Many a good word has he given to me, and if all the masters were like him, assigned servants would have justice, leastways. Well, well! I used to think to myself that he was sweet upon her, and if once she was grown up, that would be a match. But I mind ’twasn't always peace among them. The master had his bone of a time to pick with Herbert, and this one could stand up for his rights and respect too.’

When Lynch had finished his meal, he seemed to be quieted down, for, as Charlie shrewdly observed, ‘Fasting don't sweeten the temper.’ The bed (a sheet of bark and an opossum rug) was given up with true hospitality, which might have graced grander places, to the guest, while Charlie wrapped himself in a rough coat, and made himself comfortable by the fire, with some sacks rolled up for a pillow. Very soon both men slept soundly. But Lynch awoke and jumped up at the first gleam of morning light, saying ‘They would track him thus far, and he must be off now and double the scent.’

‘So then you determine to go on? You wont go and give yourself up, and settle down again?’

‘No, be hanged if I do! If now there was a chance—if they'd be easy and pass it over like, and let it be any ways just—I would, just for Nelly's sake, try once more. But they've been at her with their base tricks. I'll lay a wager now, Charlie, she'd be after sorrowing for me, if anything happened. The only creature who would any way. But no! I'm not a going to be fooled by such ways. They think they have me tight with her name. She should have kept steady to me. Now there's but one way for a fellow of pluck.
Good morning. You saw me turn towards Sydney road, eh? Thanks for the lodging! Good-bye!’

Charlie watched him in the dim early light, not without a certain sarcastic grin, while he shook his head too, and said—'There goes another fine fellow, straight on for Norfolk Isle, or the gallows!—there's no saying! He has had dog's fare, and worse. Never nothing but abuse and stripes! Man's spirit can't stand it. Providence keep him from meeting the master, or I wouldn't answer for the end, not I!’
CHAPTER VI.

The Bushranger's Progress.

Vol.II

After a circuitous route, and resting two nights by a fire he kindled in the Bush,—on the third day after his visit to Charlie Brand, Lynch found himself in more familiar ground. It was rather surprising how he had contrived to keep right and not lose himself in the interminable monotony of the Bush, and he had not done so without much careful scrutiny of the sun by day and the stars by night, also often referring to a soiled, crumpled piece of paper, on which was roughly dotted down a map of directions for his guidance. Once again he leant against a tree, with his tomahawk carefully within reach of his hand, and consulted his map. Then looking above he recognised with a smile of triumph that the very next tree to that against which he leant, was a blue gum, which had been fired, and one side of which was dead, while on the other its forklike branches had still both green leaves and blossom.

It was a peculiar tree in its decided shape and its half-and-half condition. Moving a little, so as to bring the said tree quite in front; he noted another a little to the side, bearing marks of the notches made by the natives in climbing those tall and straight trunks in search of wild honey.

‘All right,’ he said, and suddenly turning away from the direction he had previously followed, he plunged down among thick undergrowth and loose iron stones. It was a steep hill. At the bottom was an empty water-hole. On the bushes around it hung, as if torn off in scrambling, a piece of cloth, intended to pass for white. Again Lynch's face showed satisfaction. He sat down and whistled in a low peculiar fashion, which soon broke into a capital imitation of the curlew's cry. After repeating this three times it was answered, and then a boy, only half-clothed in such rags that it was hard to say what garment they ever represented, came in a stealthy but rapid step straight to where Lynch sat.

‘All right,’ he said.

Lynch arose and followed him, saying, ‘Moved, haven't ye?’

‘Yes; 'twasn't safe, on account of the gentry. Made a flitting; and they think we are gone a long way, instead of a few yards further down. More trouble to get at, especially for horses, you see.’

‘And the police?’

‘They've been, and gone like mad, clatter and crash, and thirsty; always wanting drink. Found tracks of they fellows up country! All quiet here
now, and people's eyes looking away, you see.'

‘You are a sharp lad,’ remarked Lynch; and no more was said.

They soon came in sight of a rude hut, formed of two sheets of bark, fastened together by poles. The fowls and other household appendages, were scattered about in a rough and disorderly fashion, and a woman with rough, untidy hair came out and hailed Lynch. It was the same person to whose wild dwelling Mrs. Vesey had once dared to conduct her guests. Taking fright at the visit, and also at the presence, near at hand, of the police, these people had shifted quarters. Their hut was now down in the gully, and out of sight, but not really at all further from Vine Lodge than before. And here Jack Lynch, according to his scheme of doubling the scent, ventured to come back to his old district as an outlaw—at war with authority! It was quite in accordance with their code of honour, that a man should be skilful and brave enough to make his first essay in the new line, close to the very spot of his former bondage; and where people were still talking over his escape with keen interest and open-mouthed wonder.

After greeting the new comer, and swearing at the yelping dogs, Judy returned to the dark hut, and tried to rouse a man who was sleeping there; not in the gentlest way.

‘Come, rouse up, will ye! Up with the stone jar there, 'tis right beneath that big carcase of yourn. We'll drink this night to the ‘free man,’ let to-morrow bring what it will!’

After enforcing her words with some pushes and blows, the man turned over, and peered through his shaggy hair, till he caught sight of Lynch standing without, and feeling at the edge of his tomahawk. One spring brought him close to Jack.

‘Somewhat forbye that will be wanting, Jack; and I've got a right good 'un.—Have it, on condition of fair share, the first good chance ye get.’

‘Where is it?’ said Lynch, looking eager.

The man retreated again to the hut, and returned in a moment with a carbine, and shot, and powder-flask, as well as a belt.

‘I've got a belt,’ Lynch said, pushing that away, and examining the gun narrowly.

‘I'll warrant 'un as true and good,’ said the man. After a little talking the bargain was made, and Lynch felt himself master of the weapon.

The woman had spread some food meanwhile, a couple of empty teachests turned up, forming the table. Cold salt beef, rather hard; freshly baked damper, and a bottle of pickled anchovies, with tea of course, sweetened with plenty of coarse sugar, but no milk, was the fare. And a stone jar was very soon lifted up, and one wineglass, pushed round to each in turn. The boy and two or three children having shown their heads, were
sent off quickly, with a good allowance of damper and beef, and told to keep off till bed-time.

‘You are born to luck, Jack,’ remarked the man; at which Lynch only curled his mouth.

‘Lang journeys to Sydney to-morrow, taking the short cut.’

‘Well, and what of that? He never carries no cash, as you know.’

‘No; but the scrub is so thick, and there's but one track fit for a horse. Keep yourself close, dodging behind a thickish stem, and pop with ‘lively’ there, and your revenge is done, eh!—don't that set the blood a tingling now, Jack? Didn't you just think of such a chance, when Dan was at your back, last time?’

‘Hold your peace, Robert, and don't be after copying the very devil himself! I'm not going back that way, just now, seeing I have but now travelled that road. Sydney way isn't safe nor profitable. I shall cut away and join a fellow I know, who keeps snug, and gets no name, but watches the up-country drays, and so makes a very pretty business. I'm told he cleared several pounds by the last venture on tea and sugar, and a wine cask which reached its owner, a leetle the weaker for the journey, and wouldn't shock a teetotaller even, on account of its strength!’

Judy laughed, and refilled the glass. Lynch refused it, and said he preferred the tea: at which she seemed much astonished, and then professed herself ‘up to him;’ adding that in another month he wouldn't be after fearing a glass of the raal genuine Irish milk would make his hand or his eye less steady for business.

‘The priest was after inquiring for you, Jack, some days agone.’

‘Ay, indeed! And for why? It is to him I owe a long bill for coming between me and the girl. I'm up to him, and know him; he said she shouldn't marry a Protestant; as if poor Nell knew Protestant from Catholic, or Catholic from Christian!’

‘Seems he is very sharp after his ‘sheep’ as he calls 'em. He's got a sort of a house downaway there, and does a smart bit of business there for O'Connell. He screws them up tight for pence, they say, and has a power of boys at his back, ready for a fight and a row any hour. Don't see the good of it, not I! What's Repale to us, out here? Brings down the law folks about us, and disturbs the liberty of this here free country.’

‘Tis wonderful how you Catholics do hold together. But I don't concern myself with it,’ said Lynch.

‘I'd nigh forgot I was a Catholic, by the powers!’ said the man; ‘Judy there, she keeps it up of a time for the credit of us both, but----’

‘Didn't I pay up our pence to the priest, and didn't he praise me for a good Catholic, eh?’ Judy laughed.
‘So my Nelly was here,’ Lynch presently said, having finished eating, and leaning back so that he commanded the countenances of both his companions.

‘What next?’ Judy said with an oath, after a very evident pause of doubt.

‘Well; she was here! I know all about it. You needn’t think to hide it either. Come, you were hired I know on one side. Now you see things are shifted. You know me. If I’m to be any way concerned with you, it will be for your advantage to speak up. What’s past is past, I know that. But what is to be, depends you see.’

Judith exchanged inquiring and somewhat frightened glances with the man, who after a short pause, said gruffly,

‘He's right, Judy; Jack's our man. What of the other? The crawling fellow, he uses us all like a pack of dumb beasts, and then just laughs at us.’

‘Gentleman Bill brought Nelly here. That I know,’ said Lynch. ‘I want to know for whom he acted? I did think 'twas the curse of the place there, that scamp Venn. But I saw he was mad, and beaten like myself. No, no, that Bill slides and slips anywhere, and somebody has made it worth his while to lead us on blindfold, and then leave us in a ditch. Who was it? and where is she gone?’

‘As to the first,—Judy, do'ee know the name?’ said the man. ‘It beats me—outlandish thing. But he's a up-and-up chap, lives handy by, or did. Met my lady in the Bush, when she was a crying over her stepmother's blows, and tells her a lot of gammon, and throws dust in her eyes. Well! he gets Bill in to the fore, and she's carried off.’

‘There ye're wrong, man!’ interposed Judy; ‘she went free like, to one Allen, as child's-maid, or anything else you like—Allen's woman knows what she's about. There this young spark used to go, and talk up to her. He was thought to be making great love up at the big house, all the same. But he's an out-andouter, and no mistake; he's got a fine place up and away somewhere, and it seems his drays with stores was going up there (fine chance for a pretty fellow like you, Jack!); and so Nelly was to join them, and 'twas here they brought her for the start. Bless you, no money's enough for the bother and the fuss we had along of it. She was downright crazy, and so haughty like. Her wouldn't do this, and wouldn't go here! and so on! I had to bring her to reason, and Robert here showed her the length of his stick, I warn you, or ever we kept her from running right away, and losing us all our wages.’

‘Go on,’ said Lynch, with his teeth set close, and looking at the woman in a way which, had she seen it, she would scarcely have liked.

‘One time the gentry took it in their heads to come gallivanting down
there, where we camped then. Bad manners of them, and good luck for them they never came back again. Well, if you believe me, the girl took on one of her frantic fits, and cried out so that they thought a pig was killing—and that brute of a dog, too, nearly spoilt all sport by whimpering over one of 'em, too sharp for her own good, she was. But they went off again, scared by Robert's handsome face there, and his black mane—off they fluttered like a flock of geese, whispering and glancing, and holding in their petticoats, for fear they'd come to some disgrace in 'sich a hole,' as I heard one of 'em say, while she squinted at us all through a brass ring like, or gold, perhaps, it would be. Didn't I laugh when they was off? our young spark and all! 'Twas a audacious trick of his to show his nose here, in company with them all. But he's a prime cock, and will die game, I'll wager.'

‘His name?—surely you must remember it!’ said Lynch.

‘No, I don't. 'Twan't Herbert, was it, Robert?’

‘Tush, no! Why he's owner of the farm at the settlement. A magistrate too. He wasn't here at all. I don't mind the name;—like child's play, no sound in it to catch hold on.’

‘Where's Jem? The boy can tell! Sich a memory he's got! As sharp as a needle!’ Judy said.

‘Well! go on. Did she—did Nelly seem to like his visits? Was it of her own wish and will? Now, Judy, speak true! I'll find out some way, and if you deceive me, 'twill be the worse for you!’

Judy did not like the red light which now glowed in his eyes, or his low determined voice.

‘Nonsense! Why should I go for to gammon you?’ she said, nervously. ‘As to liking it, she did. She was all smiles and manners when he was here. La, bless us!—didn't he flatter and give her finery enough; but when he was off, she'd turn perverse and sit and moan, with all her hair let down about her like . . . .’

‘I know!’ he interrupted, impatiently. ‘Get on, missis! Quick, and out with it.’

‘The grass wont grow under your steps neither, Jack, if this is your way!’ she replied; a little resenting his short way of speaking.

‘But, Judy, why don't 'ee tell the chap why she leant so kindly an ear to his words? Seems now, were I her follower, as I see plain enough Jack is, that's what I'd like to reach.’

‘Right, Robert. Tell me that, Judy.’

‘Well, I believe 'twas on account of his stories about what he was going to do for her right away; such gammon! But Lord love you, she'd sit and look at him and drink it all down, same as if 'twas true gospel. Summut
about a ticket; I never could get no sense of it, not I. And he persuaded her
she was to be a married missis, and wear a gold ring, and keep house, and
what not. And she was to be his maid, to clean up, and wash and mend!
Much notion she had of such work! And she were to have a honest man for
a husband, brought up from somewhere. For you see, there never was no
talk of hisself, just to humour her like, baby as she was!’

Here the man put aside his pipe, and broke out with a gruff, but hearty fit
of laughing.

‘Well, Judy woman, didn't I think ye were sharper? La sakes, now!
Where's your wit been wandering? You, who in general jump at anything,
like a shark to the bait. Don't 'ee see now, 'twas just this very chap the girl
were wild after? Don't you see 'twas about Jack the young fellow
gammoned her, telling about getting his ticket of leave, and getting him up
there for his servant, and marrying them right away?'

‘As if he would have paid all he did just for that purpose, Robert?
Dullard!’ she retorted, contemptuously.

‘But can't ye see, now it lies open afore ye? The girl cared for Jack, and
wouldn't leave him, no how. So they just used his name, and got her in
their toils. Once they'd got her there, she might whistle for her man and her
golden ring! He was mad about it, taken with her silly little baby face; but
that's the way of the fine gentleman. Eh, Jack—am I far wrong now?’

But Jack did not speak. His face was buried in his hands. He raised it at
last to ask, ‘And where is she now?’

‘O that's more than I can tell or guess. They got her off, though she fairly
cut and run once, misdoubting something at the last. There was a deal of
squealing, I can promise you, and Bill had to just bind her hands if he
wished to keep eyes in his head, and then they up with her to a horse, and a
stouter man nor Bill held her fast. I heard her squealing for long after they
were out of sight; and only that the young spark had been very firm about
no violence, they'd have stopped her mouth. As to where she is now—
perhaps come to her right senses to know what's what, and not to throw
away a good chance up there. Or, there was a report, which I didn't heed at
all, at all, that she left them, spite of their watching her, and took to the
Bush. One man swore he saw her up in a tree, sitting with her hair all
round her and singing; and he was so scared he took to his heels, and just
signed the cross and called upon the saints, for he'd heard tell of nasty
things, in the shape of women living in wild places, in trees, or in the sea.
But I didn't take no account of this till this very minute, and now seems
like as if it might be Nelly herself. What do you say?’

‘O, Jem! here, you're wanted!’ called Judy. ‘What was the name of that
young gentle chap who comed here after the girl?’
‘What, he down to the house? Mr. Fitz. I knows 'un well.’
‘Ay, ay, that's the go!’ and Lynch's eyes betrayed his also knowing the owner of that name.
‘He's left this. He's got a place up the country. ‘Goorundoo’ they call it, or Fair Dale; some one, some t'other, up Yass way, and I heard tell he'd lots of drays travelling upwards, and a fine stock of horses he got cheap at a sale.’
‘Clever chap!’ Judy said, pleased at her boy's knowledge.
‘Come here, boy,’ said Lynch. ‘Here's the last coppers I have, three—four of them, and if I had more I'd give it to you, and willing. You've done a good deed. Keep your memory, my lad, and make it serve you as it will me this day.’

Long afterwards, when the children were asleep, and Judith and Robert busy in making things secure for the night, feeding the dogs and so on, Lynch sat still on a stone, a little retired from the glow of the fire, seemingly lost in thought. Some of the hard bitterness passed from his face, and his lips trembled as if with deep feeling struggling for mastery. Once when left quite alone for a moment, the man and woman being out of sight in search of a missing fowl, he lifted his head from his hands and said aloud, ‘O Nell, Nelly girl!—have they murdered ye? And you will be seeking the old place, and the old hut, and no Jack there! Jack's gone, Nelly,—bound for the gallows! But, please God, he'll seek you yet, and hear of you, dead or living. And the vile knave, the worse than thief and outlaw, the base deceiver, the craven coward, I'll find him, too, and demand full payment for all he owes you and me!’
‘What's that you are saying there, Jack?’ said Judy, coming back.
‘Come, turn in, man,’ said Robert. ‘Now's the time for sleep. To-morrow you'll have to put yourself to the fore and begin work. Which way will ye be going? Best settle the signals, you see. The white rag there and further down by the falls, means 'all's safe and right here.’ If you sees nothing, don't venture. Down at Sampson's I'll always get your letters or messages, and he's a tight chap. To-morrow—well—shan't you be for having a look after Lang?’
‘No! I'm bound for the tracks about the road to Goorundoo.’
‘You're late for the drays.’
‘I know. But 'tisn't the drays I'm after. Robert, if she—if Nelly should ever come back here, take her in and take good care of her, if you mean to be chums with me. I tell you she's one of heaven's angels got down here by mistake—changed at birth, perhaps! Anyway that man will be bold who dares lay a rough finger on her!’
‘What be you after her? That's a bit of cursed nonsense, Jack, and
nothing else.’

‘I am after her till I find her alive or—and I am after him, too. I know him. I'll bide my time—Lang! What is Lang to this one!’

‘Well, you do look like something! I wouldn't care to meet you so everywhere! But 'tis folly to waste so much pluck on a slip of a girl without her wits. One female is as good as another! Let her go, man, and just you put that spirit into your dealings with others, and you'll have plenty of everything, and to spare. And I hope you'll remember your old friends.’

‘Ay,’ put in Judy; ‘ask her, poor silly maid. She'll tell you I was kind to her, and gave her a bit of good advice. Don't forget all you owes us, Jack! In case you start early to-morrow, and I feel so tired I'm like to sleep late, I know; don't forget us, and you'll find it handy to have a friend's place for a hide,—a snug, secure little hide as it is, too.’

Judith would have talked on in her sleepy and now rather fretful tone, had not the man roughly ordered her off to bed. He then brought out a sheet of dry bark and a blanket for Lynch; put fresh fuel on the fire, which was made on some stones outside the hut, and then he left him. But Jack Lynch slept very little that night. Wild thoughts coursed up and down his excited mind. Now he was a boy at home, with his mother; then he remembered, as if it was yesterday, Nelly Maclean's mother's death, and the girl's bitter grief, and all his soothing efforts to console her. Then he was again in the lock-up, being primed by a sympathising friend to meet the cruel scourge with some intoxicating dram, and he writhed and loathed with agony and hatred. Above all, Nelly's sweet and artless voice, his ‘sky-lark,’ as they called her, her constant love, her trust, and her beauty, with all her own troubles and ill-treatment, came before him with unnatural distinctness. He could not keep still. He rose and walked about; then took off his hat and brushed back his hair, to feel the night air on his heated brow. His pulses beat quick and full, his limbs trembled. He looked at and handled his carbine, and felt a throab of joy in its possession. He fancied how he would waylay and watch for a sure opportunity when he could face that man, and coolly tell him his sin was found out, and should be punished. He thought he could see the dainty young fellow's face turn white, and hear him plead for mercy. But no mercy should he meet! He grasped the gun so tight as to give a pang of pain to his own hand, which recalled him to himself, and he wondered for a moment at finding himself alone in the still, clear, calm night, the red embers making the wild loneliness of the spot only the more discernible, and those wonderful lights shining overhead. He was free—free in a certain sense—with a deadly weapon at command; but alone,—quite alone, and at war with all. For who was there he could trust? Who was there that would hesitate to betray him
to a cruel death for a reward?—who, save poor Nelly, if she yet lived. Then thoughts of her love came and softened him; all that might have been, and now never, never could be! All he and she had talked of and hoped, and which in course of time might have been, but now never could be. He had destroyed their small and distant hope by his own rash deed. For him to live was henceforth to flee from pursuers—from death! He would be followed, and watched, and dogged. He must never rest, never forget; always fight, and take even his needful food by force. And Nelly! If he ever found her, would she care to share such a fate? Overcome at last, the reaction followed, and he sank down exhausted and trembling, cold dew trickling from his face, after the burning fever. Jack Lynch laid his head on the bark and cried very bitterly. From his very heart he called on ‘Nelly’, as if she were some guardian angel. At last he dropped off into a disturbed sleep, calling still on her and on his mother. And the sun was above the hill-top before he woke and understood all that had passed and all that lay before him.

He wished to go before the hut people came out. But they just caught him, and sent wishes, and warnings, and prophecies of ‘good luck’ after him as he scrambled down the hill and disappeared out of their sight in the dense and pathless forest.
CHAPTER VII.

The Wedding Head-Dress.

Isabel was surprised to find how comparatively little Lynch's escape irritated her father. Perhaps he was glad at heart to be relieved from seeing a man he so much disliked, and knew he had not always treated justly. Or perhaps more pressing troubles occupied him; altogether he was much calmer and quieter, though grave. Little things did not vex him, and his voice took a lower tone. He visited all the outlying huts and the land in process of clearing, leaving orders and noting progress. He made his boys drive in all the horses, and looked them over carefully. He also spent some time in arranging his papers, some of which he was to take to Sydney. Some letters were missing likely to be of consequence, and he allowed Isabel and even Miss Terry to help him in the search. Mrs. Lang was energetically busy in looking out his shirts and darning imaginary thin places in his socks. She also baked a very large stock of ginger-nuts, which used to be a favourite indulgence of his, and no one reminded her that it was too hot weather for such a compound, for every one felt it best that she should be occupied. One day—it was the day before that on which Mr. Herbert started for his station—Mr. Lang noticed that his darling Issy was paler than she ought to be. He spoke of it, and asked if she had been over-working herself. When she denied it, laughingly, he whispered—'No fretting, is it?' And she was provoked with herself for being silly enough to blush so deeply that he could not help observing it.

'What!—after all, Issy? O, fie, fie!'

'No, daddy, indeed, indeed you are wrong! Do you know, I can't understand why I am so very glad as I am? It only shows me what a blessing it is things were so ordained.'

'But you can't tell me you are not fretting, child, about something?'

'Yes; but there are many things rather 'fretty' just now, you see. What is the matter with the Jollys? Not one of them has been here for such a time—I don't like it! They mustn't cut us! Then about—Kate. I am rather fidgety about that; and I don't like my daddy's going to Sydney alone on this errand—and then . . . But I am not ill—a ride will make me all right.'

'Then take a ride; Willy and Jem can go.'

'I will,' she answered, readily; 'I want to go and see how Kate goes on; and I'll be back again for dinner.'

So Isabel and her brothers went to Vine Lodge, and found Kate looking
quite at home and very happy with her friend. Isabel was further relieved by hearing there that Tom Jolly was away at Mr. Henley's new station, and Amelia staying in Sydney.

‘Do you know anything of the Herberts?’ she asked, in a careless tone, presently.

‘No. Don't you? Do you mean he has not been every day to Langville?’ said Mrs. Vesey, with an emphasis Isabel did not like. She wondered if Kate had told her friend the news of Miss Terry—she didn't like to take it for granted.

‘I have a book here which I must return. I have a great mind to ride round by the Settlement with it,’ said Isabel, speaking to Kate.

‘If it is for Mr. Herbert, we are sending a man there this very afternoon. He will be happy to convey your parcel.’

And Mrs. Vesey, raising her glass, gave a meaning glance and smile at Kate. Isabel saw it too, and drew up a little.

‘Thank you, but——’

‘You had rather take it yourself? Well, it is a satisfaction to put a thing into the owner's hands, I grant, and not having seen him for so very long—for two days, I think you said?—I dare say you are anxious to——’

‘No—not that! And I shall be very glad if you will let your man take it. But, Kate, can you give me some paper?’

Isabel spoke haughtily—she meant to be cold—and was offended.

‘Here!’ said Mrs. Vesey, presently, while Isabel looked over Kate's shoulder, searching her blotting-book for a sheet large enough. ‘See, Miss Isabel Lang! I have tied it up—I flatter myself on having parcel-tying fingers! Quite a gift! It ‘comes’—no practice or study will do it. I abhor a clumsy home-tied parcel. It is like a sloven of a woman, down at heels, and out at elbows. But please direct it yourself. That will explain matters. A nice little corner for your love, you see. You look shocked! Is it possible! Now, I should have said it was quite right and natural to put ‘with I. Lang's love,’ or even ‘kind love.’ I declare I should say so myself. No—‘regards’ would be the right term for me. But you must put love, or he will come cantering up your road in a grand taking, to know the meaning of it.’

‘There!’ said Isabel, having hastily scribbled the direction in her worst writing, and not deigning to notice Mrs. Vesey's jokes. ‘Don't forget it, Kate.’

J. HERBERT, Esq.,
Warratah Brush.
From I. L., with thanks.

Mrs. Vesey shrugged her shoulders as she read it aloud, saying—'Cold, freezing! Ah, you are so very proper—quite prudish—though people do
call you . . . Tell Henry to put this into the basket he is to carry to Mr. Herbert,’ she said, giving the parcel to a servant who answered her summons, made by striking a glass with her thimble.

‘What do people say I am, Mrs. Vesey?’ said Isabel, having told Willie to fetch her horse.

‘O, best not repeat these things! It gives a different, and often a wrong impression.’

‘But I want to know. Please to tell me.’

‘Well—it is nothing! Only I have heard people say you were a ‘fast’ girl—and inclined to rebel against all rules of decorum, and so on.’

‘Who are the people, Mrs. Vesey?’

‘I can't pretend to specify; several!’

‘Our society is so small, it is easy to distinguish. Was it your husband, or was it Mr. Farrant?’

‘I was not thinking of either of them. Certainly I have heard Mr. Herbert say something of the kind and regret it too, quite in a kind and friendly, almost fatherly way; Dr. Marsh, too!’

‘Thank you! Now, here are the boys! Any message home, Kate? Good-bye!’ and she was soon off, and riding so fast that her brothers exclaimed, and, for a wonder, begged for a little breathing time.

Isabel was generally chatty and cheerful with the boys, and consequently a great favourite. To-day she was silent all the way. She did not like Mrs. Vesey's looks or tone of voice when speaking of Mr. Herbert. She resented it as impertinent.

Yet, why—what was it? If it had not been for her disagreeable remarks, she would have added something to the bare direction; at all events, it would have been, as always before, with her ‘love.’ She wished she had not sent the book by their man at all.

And what had kept him from coming again, as he had so distinctly said he should do? And what made her so peculiarly anxious about this one visit? Was it his hints and allusions about wanting to speak quietly to her? What was there to say, now Miss Terry's affair had been duly discussed? Above all, what was the meaning of his look when he held her hand and so earnestly bade her good-bye? It could be no bad news, no subject for his sympathy and needing preparation to bear it. Whatever it was, it looked like joy to him.

She had hardly ever,—perhaps never, seen him so moved. Again and again she thought of it, and recalled each expression, every word and tone, and, contrary to her usual habit, weighed and measured and mused over it. She had looked with such great, such almost bounding joy, to seeing him again, mixed with a shy feeling too, which brought the colour to her face
even in thinking of it. Then, as the first day came and went and he did not appear, she found herself pausing at night before going to bed, to think of it again, to see if she had invented, or made something out of nothing. No; she could see it again—that look! She could feel the pressure of his hand. It was something close to his heart, something precious which he would not risk exposing to her perverse moods, but kept back and withheld, in a grave, wistful impatience, till he felt the right moment was come. ‘It was nice of him,’ she thought. It pleased and excited her in an extraordinary way, considering how much there was to think of about her father's affairs. This was a little secret hoard which she kept hidden, but peeped at every now and then, and grew strangely eager to come face to face with. ‘Surely to-day he will be here!’ But the to-day passed into yesterday, and Mr. Herbert came not, and so it was with another day. And then Isabel grew troubled, and her face showed it. The ride had not worked its promised cure either; but, luckily, Mr. Lang took it for granted that all was right and made no remark. They had a quiet and silent dinner. Mr. Lang drinking wine with his wife and his daughter, one after the other, and expressing regret that Kate was away. It took them all by surprise when just before tea Kate herself rushed into the room, rather excited and out of breath. After kissing all round, she explained that Mrs. Vesey was obliged to go to the Budds, and she had proposed dropping Kate at the bottom of the hill by the gates, and picking her up again in the same spot to-morrow morning. ‘I was glad to come back and say good-bye to papa. Isn't it fun?’

‘It does you credit, Katie girl! Come here and kiss me! I was wishing to see your pretty face too. Can't help believing I am on some long journey, though I haven't been accustomed to make much of a ride to Sydney either. But the errand, I suppose, stretches the distance—and somehow—I wish I was home again, girl!’

Mrs. Lang expressed great pleasure in Kate's ‘pretty attention’ to her father, and her kind, affectionate feelings. Kate's coming inspired a little more spirit and her reception gratified her. It was no bad specimen of a family group, bound together by affection, and drawn all the closer under pressure of a threatened calamity.

‘Any commands for Sydney?’ inquired Mr. Lang, smiling. ‘Come, I am sure some things are wanted. Lots of white ribbon, white gloves, and so on—and who is to make the cake? Won't trust me to choose the finery—eh, Miss Terry?’

‘No, indeed, papa!’ said Kate; ‘who would?’

‘Ay, ay!’ he said, his eyes growing dim and soft, as, resting back in his chair, some recollection came over him, causing him to look at his wife, and then at Isabel.
‘Issy, my dear, what do you think was the prettiest and most becoming
dress I ever saw for a bride?—ah! you won’t guess—eh, Kitty?—Mrs.
Lang, will she?’

‘A veil, of course,’ said Kate. ‘But what makes you think of this now?’
‘No! veil, no! nothing like it. Shall I tell, mamma?’ he said.

‘Yes, do! Kate, come and hear what mamma wore when she was
married! We never heard—I never thought of asking, for my part.’

‘Ah! we are growing so learned now in these matters—eh, Miss Terry?’

‘I should like to be informed, sir; my experience is small.’

‘Would you fancy your mother, girls, going out of the beaten track
entirely? By Jove, she was pretty enough to go her own way, too. A
singular costume it was, pretty and simple. Kate, would you wear it? I bet
ten pounds,—though, heaven knows, money is scarce—that neither one of
you here would wear the like! Yet it was very pretty, and would look well
in a picture.’

‘Yes, I would, if it was really simple and pretty,’ said Isabel.
‘And singular! That would settle it for you, Issy,’ Kate said, and got a
pinch for her pains.

‘What was it, papa? I am curious.’

‘A straw bonnet—a broad hat?’ guessed Miss Terry and Kate.

Mrs. Lang smiled a little, and then held her handkerchief to her face.

‘What is the use of raking all that up, Mr. Lang?’

‘Now, mamma,—we must hear!’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Lang, ‘your mother was married in a—a—hang it! I
never can remember that French name! In plain English—a night-cap!’

‘Papa!’

‘Impossible!’

‘Some play on the word,’ suggested Miss Terry.

‘Not a bit of it. A night-cap!’ he repeated.

‘No! Mr. Lang! You always will persist in that mistake. It was not a cap
at all, for I had none. It was a fine cambric pocket-handkerchief tied over
my ears, gipsy fashion,’ said Mrs. Lang.

They all laughed and wondered. Mr. Lang laughed too, but in a subdued
way. And again there was that rare, tender light in his eye, as if he was
looking a long way back, and he sighed as he went on.

‘Night-cap or not, it was a substitute for one, and I say again, it was a
becoming dress, too. Ay, girls, have ye never heard of the marriage bells
we had,—the feast, the excursion or tour? There was the parson, and the
Captain, the second mate, and, I think, three men besides, eh!—well, two
and a boy—you're right, my dear. Said I, ‘Parson, have you a Common
Prayer-Book or not?’ ‘Yes,’ he said; ‘but why, Willy?’ You see he was a
friend of mine. ‘Well, find out the marriage service and join us. I can better take care of her as my wife; and if the worst comes, it will do no harm.’ So I fetched her out—we had got up a sort of rude shelter, with sails and so on, for her—all trembling was she, a poor, delicate, slight darling! So young and so pretty! Ah—well! And there was, as I said, our marriage peal—the dismal break of the waves on that wild shore; and as for rejoicing and feast—even as we sat we could hear the devilish infernal yells of those savages, and we knew the feast they were holding. So I held her up, and the parson married us then and there; and then we wrapped her in a large rough coat of one of the drowned men, and I carried her down to the boat, which all this time the men had got as ready as they could. We shoved off—seven souls, on a wild, stormy sea, with no compass, and only biscuit and rum for a few days, and the shouts of that crew reached us as we pulled on. By heaven! for many a night afterwards I awoke hearing that noise!—So that was your mother's and my wife's bridal dress, girls. A prettier one—one more to my mind—I never shall see. We reached shore, and we got married again, all in form, just to please your mother . . .’

‘It is no good to repeat and keep up that tale. I can't think why you told them,’ said Mrs. Lang. ‘Why should you wish to risk its getting about?’

‘She thinks it a sort of infra dig.—a blot on the escutcheon, you see,’ whispered the husband. ‘Now, I don't. I see nothing to be ashamed of.’

‘Certainly not! But why did you never tell us before, my dear father?’ said Isabel. ‘And how did it happen? You must tell the whole story now.’

‘Nay, now, my dear—Mrs. Lang, now, don't go! I wont say another word!’ expostulated her husband, and catching hold of her, he gave her some hearty kisses and pulled her down by him, for she had risen with apparently the intention of going away. ‘I only wish these lasses here may have, in some respects, as true a sweetheart as I was then, whatever I've been since—eh, Kitty—Mrs. Lang? Come—I see you smile—come, 'tis hardly the second or third time maybe, I have talked of these days; seeing for some reason you didn't fancy it, and indeed I have avoided it like an ugly picture myself. But sometimes memory is strong—old thoughts will come. I venture to say, young and thoughtless as we were to be husband and wife, no truer pair ever came together. We have seen ups and downs, rough and smooth. We began our voyage on rough seas, sure enough. Then we put into port, and after some toil and labour—nothing to young folks—we mounted the ladder, and I thought I had you in a snug corner for life. On my soul, I did! But Providence ordains, and we must submit; and if bad times come again—any way here we are together yet. Cheer up, missis! we'll weather it; and, after all, Westbrooke is good enough for happiness.’

‘But how did it happen?’ persisted Isabel. ‘I am dying to hear all about
it.’

‘Well, then, so it happened. Katharine Keeley and I had plighted our troth, as they say, young as we were. I had not a hundred pounds in coin, and she had nothing. But my uncle gave me a hundred bullocks, and three hundred sheep, and dealing me a round oath, bade me take it, and prosper as I could, or I should never deserve another farthing from him. Well! land was to be had for almost nothing then in New Zealand, and some of your mother's family were settled there and doing well; so it came about that I was sent there on a message, for which I was to receive payment if I succeeded in striking a good bargain with the native chief. Your mother, Katharine Keeley, had been in Sydney for education, when I first saw her, and now she was to go back to her kindred. So we both took our passages in the same ship, the brig Emu, Captain Nuttall commanding. Mr. Rowe, the clergyman, a friend of mine, and several other passengers were there. We set off with fair winds and smooth sea. Bless your soul! I thought it was paradise. I was a good sailor, and there was pretty little Kitty always sitting under the awning. Famous opportunity, Kate, is a voyage for making love! But a change came; a gale of wind and many disasters. To be brief—the Emu split to bits on a rocky shore. That was a smash!—there were two boats. They took the longboat and provisioned her; and then ascertained how many could safely go in her. Lo and behold! nine must be left out. We drew lots; Kitty here was to go; I was left, and so was the parson. Well! she cried, and vowed she wouldn't go without me, and no one cared to give up his chance of life for me. So off they went; and we had the small boat, and our share of provisions too. Three days we were out in that storm, not knowing where we were, and two of the men died. But the Captain, who was with us, you see, guessed that we were near some desperate savage islands, where they eat one another. Sure enough, at last we sighted land, and made for it. Water we must have! It cleared up a little, and we saw where we were. The Captain, and one at least of the men, knew at a glance, and he knew, if we were seen, we should all be killed. But water we must get; and there was a little repair to be done to the boat. So we rigged up a rough shelter from the wind and rain for your mother, and some of us guarded her, while some mended the boat, and some searched for water. This they found, at risk of their lives; and they also found—what assured us of the fate of our poor comrades in the longboat. My God! I can never forget that hour. Soon we heard those dreadful cries, yells I may say, in the distance; and one of our men, who had served in a whaler, and knew about these parts, said it was a song of rejoicing over some prisoners, and the natives were about to hold feast, and . . . . good Lord! it was but too true! We heard afterwards from one, who being but a
bit of a cabin boy, managed to escape, that every soul of them perished; ay,—like so many sheep in the shambles! So, girls, it was then and there, with a grisly death staring us in the face, that I got the parson to marry us two; and in the dress she had on when startled up in the storm your mother became a bride! The good Lord saved us! We made off unseen. The fiends were too busy to keep any look-out. The sky cleared and soon the waves went down. The Captain used all his skill to steer us for New Zealand, and before we got there, we were seen and taken up by a whaler.

‘Now isn't that a romantic and wonderful history, eh? Talk to me of fiction! Girls! I have seen true, actual life stranger than all the fairy tales that ever were invented.’

‘It is so very strange to have buried it so completely! You should rather have celebrated your escape every year,’ said Isabel.

‘Yes. Well, in some fashion we did; for to say truth, we always kept that wedding-day, and not the day, a month later, when we went to church, or rather school-house, where the service was then performed. Only, as I say, mamma here, would never let me notice it any further than a private kiss, for the shivering, pale, little bride of a Kitty, who had turned into such a fashionable, matronly lady, as ‘Mrs. Lang!’—eh, mamma? Why! she would never let me call her ‘Kitty,’ or even ‘Kate,’ after we came to my paternal fortune. As to ‘Katharine,’ it was too much of it, too big a mouthful for common use; so it dropped into ‘Mrs. Lang,‘—dropped into oblivion, like many another thing which I was very loth to part with. You don't know what a notable, thrifty little wife my ‘Kitty’ was. Well! I must say she deserved her honours. She was a good wife to me in my days of toil, and deserved to have all she liked when prosperity came. Now, then, Kate! Issy! if the money for French lace veils and wreaths, and all such costly ‘frizmagigerry’ is not ‘to the fore,’ when it should be;—what say you? shall it be a—a—what 'd'ye call it, a ‘bony newy,’1 or a handkerchief, tied gipsy fashion? which I remember now, it was, and not a genuine night-cap—which, by the way, I never think a very pretty thing. But I never see either of you tie a handkerchief so—over your ears—without a sort of prick taking me back to that seashore, the cloudy sky, the distant shrieks, and the pretty Kitty Keeley.’

‘Well, now, mamma,’ he went on presently, with a genial smile, which Isabel dearly loved, and still a look as if his eyes were seeing far back in life—‘well; no harm is done, is there? These girls think the story worth hearing, you see; and by Issy's face, I should guess, she is thinking that such an adventure is rather an honour than otherwise. Any how, it has done me good! I think we have too much buried our past, and forgotten to set up a tombstone either! And now for a wind-up—a secret in your ear, my dear.
No! Issy, Kate, you are not to hear, on any account.—Whisper! In my secretary drawer—the inner one, wrapped up carefully, is that very identical ‘bony’—what d'ye call it—'handkerchief,' in fact;—you will find in it as much as will buy such another at least—in case, some fine morning, either of our girls should want such head-gear, d'ye hear? Don't tell! for golden shinners are dreadfully scarce, and what's more, those infernal Bushrangers have keen scent. Ah! you jade! you must listen, must you?’ catching Isabel, and bestowing a hearty kiss. ‘Kate didn't hear a syllable! she is too demure, my pretty Kate; so I'll reward her too;’ and he kissed her.

‘Tisn't safe, Mr. Lang, as I have often told you, to have money in the house. It was a miracle they didn't scent it out that day,' remarked his wife even while he was still speaking.

‘Ah! they'd never find that corner! I'd eat my head if they did! Well, what shall be done with it? All I know is 'tisn't safe in the banks! However, whatever it is, and I have almost forgotten, there lies a little saving which I make over to you. It may come in some day yet.’

‘Give me your key and I will make it safe at once,’ Mrs. Lang said, roused and looking cheerful again.

‘I'll be hanged if you shall touch it,’ he said, withdrawing the key from her; ‘or at least till you give me due thanks! There! another for Kitty,’ he said, between his kisses. ‘And now make it safe and tell no one. Trust a woman to invent a scheme, and a man to blunder.’

Kate followed her mother. Isabel remained, leaning over the back of her father's chair, playing with his hair. Miss Terry had slipped out quietly before, feeling that they ought to be alone.

‘Come here, child,’ and he placed her on his knee. ‘Issy, you know now that your mother has had some trials in her life. My dear, that was an awful peril, and she was, I do assure you, as brave as any one among us; and we were none of us cowards! Her weak little body did give way. Many times I held her fainting in my arms from cold, and hunger, and fright, but her spirit was always up. Never a scream or a sigh. The Captain, who always came to see us as long as he lived, used to speak with wonder of her. He was very fond of her. I say, Issy, d'ye think 'twill break her heart to leave this?’

‘She will feel it, of course. But no; she will rally when danger really comes, daddy, just as she was brave then.’

‘Bless your heart. Well, God grant it! I own to you, if I saw your mother grieve and fret too much, I couldn't stand it—I could not. I vex her often. We have words; but she knows I am sorry afterwards, and we understand one another. But I declare my chief thought is to make her happy, and all
this bother would be nothing but for the ruin to her----poor Kitty! poor Mrs. Lang!"

‘But you may arrange matters now,’ Isabel managed to say through her blinding tears, for the seeing one or two roll down her father's cheek was more than she could stand quietly.

‘Not much chance of it! But there will be Westbrooke. It will keep you all alive and going.’

‘Us’ all, daddy, unless you mean to desert us and take your passage.’

Mr. Lang did not answer. He was lost in thought; a painful, anxious look shadowed his face.

‘Well,’ he said presently, as if recovering himself from some maze; ‘I shall be right glad when it is over and settled in one way or other. I shan't stay one moment more than I can help. Issy! look well after everything. I don't mind telling you, I am uneasy about those wretched sinners, the Bush fellows. They may do me an ill turn and come here again. For no consideration resist them. Mind! let them eat and drink, and spoil, if they will, but keep a good look-out about the huts, and after the dogs. Have Towser here every night. The Jollys will come and do anything for you; and the Parson, as far as he can, he will; 'tother one, Herbert, wont be likely to come! Now don't look grave, for it can't be helped. Our blood was up, and we had hard words. I can't put up with his pride, and his cold ways, and his setting up so! I don't wish to have him here again in a hurry; he don't suit me. But for all that, angry as I was, I don't bear him malice. Perhaps,’ he added, uneasy at the look in his child's face, which she vainly strove to conceal, too—'perhaps we shall come round again in time, that is, if he keeps out of my way just now, while I am smarting about these miserable money concerns. Anyway, to please you, I'd swear the peace with any one, even Herbert. But, I say, Issy, come, tell your old father the truth, my pet. Is this—this man anything to you? I mean, in all the late love-making, has it so chanced that you and he . . .’

‘Why, papa! haven't we all been thinking that Mr. Herbert was making up to Miss Terry till just now?’ she said, laughing, but blushing too.

‘Well, so we have, or you tried to make me believe it. But that was a mistake, and—and----Perhaps he knew his own mind all along, you see, and had the taste to like my darling best. Eh, well now, supposing—imagining this to be so, what should you say to it?’

‘I can't imagine or suppose anything about it. I don't think I have much imagination.’

‘Can't you? Then you aint in love, that's clear!’

‘I never wish to be either, if it would make you less happy, and, what is more, I don't fancy it is in my line at all! I assure you, daddy, it is quite
funny how often I stop with a feeling of joy and relief, when it strikes me that Mr. Farrant and Miss Terry are engaged, and that it is no longer expected for me to be entertaining him, and so on! Yes; I could clap my hands and dance for joy, in spite of feeling as if they had made us rather foolish.’

‘God love you, my pet, and I hope it is not greedy or selfish, but I don't want to give you away yet, and that's the truth. But, as I have said before, don't fret! Leave us alone, and Herbert and I shall get all right again. You'll see! Bless your bright loving eyes, I would be civil to any one, just to please you! So cheer up, my heart's pet! Give your old dad a sweet sunny smile now, and go to bed. I have one or two letters to sort out, and shall follow soon. Mamma and Kate are counting the hoard, I'll be bound! I wonder where they'll hide it! Now, Isabel, I leave you to keep up your poor mother, and Kate, and all. 'Tis your spirit and courage I look to now, while I am away—and—always. God in heaven bless you, my heart's darling, and a dear child you have always been to me! Now, again,—and again—good night. Keep alive and cheerful, and tell Kate to get her bony newy . . .

‘Not for that Fitz, though!’ Isabel said, as she went out, looking back with a smile.

‘No!’ her father laughed back. ‘As you say, Issy, not for Fitz. Heaven send her a better one, or, any way, make her happy—all happy!’

Isabel saw her father off just after dawn the next day. His old accustomed cheery way had come back, and the tender melancholy of the preceding evening seemed to have vanished, now that it came to action. She watched him out of sight, and vowed in her heart that come what might of change or trouble, she would do her best to smooth things for him, and Westbrooke should yet prove a very happy home for all. Later Mrs. Vesey called for Kate, claiming the remainder of the visit, although Mrs. Lang was wishing to keep her now that she was at home. When they were gone, Isabel felt herself to be on the ‘look-out,’ in spite of efforts to the contrary. Nothing but a very sudden summons to the station would have kept him away! And not even that—'for he could have found time just to ride here and say good-bye!’ No; she remembered that Mr. Lang had spoken of hard words. Perhaps it was something fresh. And yet Isabel was not aware that they had met lately. Mr. Farrant came, and stayed to carve for them at dinner. He knew nothing of the Herberts, believed they were all right, Mr. Herbert certainly intending to go to his station, but when, he did not know. Isabel, in riding with her brothers, passed quite in front of Warratah Farm. But though any time before, she would naturally have stopped at the gate and inquired for Miss Herbert, now, some shy, conscious feeling rendered this
an impossible thing; and they even rode the faster while within sight of the place. For which afterwards Isabel soundly rated her own folly, and wrathfully attacked Miss Terry in this way. ‘What is come to us all? There is some spirit of stiff gravity brooding over us. I wont bear it! I will be myself, my ownself! Why doesn't Mr. Herbert come here as he said he should? It is your fault. Your hiding up that secret has done more harm than you think. He is afraid to come, or, perhaps, he is unhappy!’

‘No, no, Isabel. He may be busy. These are days for men to be very anxious and eager about their concerns. But Mr. Herbert will come here as soon as he possibly can. He is not unhappy now, nor do I expect he need be so!’

‘Oracular! and that nod and smile, full of meaning—if one could discover what! Well, I wont dispute and run the risk of snapping off your nose, for I feel savagely disposed. It is dull, dreadfully dull. Kate must come home. When will daddy be here, I wonder? O, dear me! to think of my wishing time to fly. A very serious symptom, and it all comes of having nothing to do!’
CHAPTER VIII.

The Hurricane.

Vol.II

Another storm of wind! Not common windy weather which sweeps up clouds of dust or leaves, and rattles at windows and doors, and which some persons really enjoy, but a fearful hurricane, destroying everything weakly which lay in its path, scaring the animals, and leaving its mark wherever it passed. Just before sunset there was every symptom of a thunderstorm. Then, when the sun was gone, those black clouds seemed riven asunder, and dispersed, covering the sky with light and rapidly moving vapour, and a dull but deep sound came up the valleys, setting all the trees swaying and shaking, till the noise increased to a sound which might have been mistaken for the loudest thunder. It was not a night on which one would choose to pass through a Bush road where the slight, brittle trees were sure to snap and fall in all directions. At any pause in the deafening roar might be heard sharp, loud reports from their fall.

Mr. Jolly paused and turned his horse's head back again.

‘No,’ he said to his wife, who greeted him eagerly at the stable door. ‘I will not go there to-day. It would be a clear tempting of Providence. Such a wind is not often felt.’

‘And only so lately we had such another storm,’ she put in.

Before they reached the house, lingering to ascertain the safety and well-being of many a fowl or animal, or to mourn over fallen shingles and the debris from any tenement the least out of repair, they were turned back by hearing the steps of a horse clatter over the paved yard.

‘Tom!’

‘Ay, the lad himself!’

‘Why back so soon, boy?’

‘Why—why—? Haven't you heard? Don't you know? Mr. Budd said all the district was up about it!’

‘About what? Why, the lad looks scared! What ails you, Tom?’

‘Yes—no—that is—Then you haven't heard?’

‘We hear the storm, and think you a rash fellow to come on such a day. Did you take the short road?’

‘I did.’

‘Good heavens! Tom; do you know how great the peril is?’

‘Yes. But I didn't consider—O, father—mother—something so terrible—I don't know how to say it! Yet father and I ought to be busy searching,
too----’
‘Tom! speak out—suspense is worse than any certainty!’ and Mr. Jolly's rubicund face turned pale.
‘Mr. Lang is . . . .’
‘Dead? Good God!’
‘You don't say so!’ cried Mrs. Jolly.
‘Not dead—at least, no one knows. He is missing. Left Sydney day before yesterday----’
‘Pooh! He has visited some one. He's snug somewhere. Lang is an old hand, and would know this wind was not good travelling,’ returned Mr. Jolly, with evident determination not to allow any danger, and with sudden relief shown in every feature.
‘But, sir, he left Sydney the day before yesterday,’ Tom put in very gravely. ‘It was fine weather. He generally does it in a day. And then his horse is come home, saddle turned round and torn to bits, and bridle, of course, in pieces. The creature was found by a man who knew him and his master, who lives at Bango Bridge Inn. The landlord sent him on to Langville. I hear they are distracted!’
‘Upset—taken to some hut or house near—will turn up. Nonsense, Tom; nonsense!’ again asserted Mr. Jolly, but with a fallen countenance.
‘They had heard,’ Tom went on, but speaking now to his mother, ‘that his affairs were very bad; in fact, he had settled to go through the insolvent court. He told them to expect him as the day before yesterday. Men are out in every direction searching. Nothing has been discovered; but great suspicion is entertained on account of that wretched convict who ran away with threats of vengeance. They say he swore to have Lang's life. The mounted police are out.’
‘The mounted monkeys! Cowardly dogs!’ ejaculated Mr. Jolly, glad of something on which to vent his excitement; ‘what do they do? Make a row, and give warning, and let the rogues get off! You and I and half-a-dozen free British hearts will do more than half-a-hundred mounted police! John! saddle my stock mare!’ called out Mr. Jolly. ‘And Prince for Mr. Tom,’ he added.

The wife cast a rueful look at the terrible tempest still raging, but said no word of discouragement. She hurried in to prepare food and start them as comfortably as she could.

‘Would it be any good my going to the house? Could I comfort any of them?’ she said.
‘I called there,’ Tom returned, humbly and in a mournful tone. ‘I saw Issy. She looks like—like a stone image. Mrs. Lang was very ill, and Kate—Miss Lang—had only then come back from—a visit. Miss Terry
was kind enough to speak to me, and even ask our help in the search. From what she said, misfortunes have not come singly, for the officers were there to put an execution in the house, the doing of that insolent fellow, Swartz and Co., who tried to oppose his being whitewashed. She and Issy told them that Mr. Lang had set off with a full purpose of throwing up all he had. But they were insolent, the brutes, and there they remain, till Mr. Lang's lawyer or some one comes to settle matters. Mr. Vesey was there, making a precious row in the yard. But I don't fancy he knows much, or that Isabel depends on him. She said she wished so much for an ‘old’ friend! Father! I know she will like you to go!

‘Pooh, pooh! A very foolish affair! Lang robbed and murdered, indeed! The very last man! That strong active fellow—an old stager, too! Pooh! Old friends? Of course! Where's Herbert? He is sure to be there?’

‘No, sir,’ and again Tom looked distressed; ‘Mr. Herbert had set out for his station; but—so the report goes—he was stopped on the road by an express messenger from his sister, bearing a letter of wonderful news from England. That he is heir to a title, and immense estates, and that he must go there immediately. They say at Bango Bridge Inn that he is already on board the China, which is advertised to sail to-morrow. And—and—there are many reports!’

‘A budget of gossip!—news, I mean—not half of it is true, I'll wager,’ said Mr. Jolly, considerably disturbed, but not willing to allow it.

Towards evening the mighty wind went down. It was gone, no one knew where or how! People were occupied in estimating the ravages, and breathed more freely, finding their dwellings not swept bodily away, though requiring considerable repairs.

In the little morning-room, as in former days, sat Kate, Isabel, and Miss Terry. The Jollys had been there, and had taken back the little girls, while the boys were with Mr. Farrant. Mrs. Lang was stunned and stupified; she shed no tears, but remained still all day, refusing food, and only shaking her head, when anything was said of failure after a fresh search.

‘They were all wrong,’ she said. ‘All stupid! Mr. Lang knew the country so well. He would soon come home, she knew!’

Parties of twos and threes went out in all directions, all, hitherto, in vain! Mr. Jolly showed himself indefatigable and wise, a true friend in need, as Isabel often repeated and with marked emphasis. It was a pity to see her so pale and stricken, all the free, bright look gone. In its stead an expression of startled terror. The very efforts she made to rouse herself were spasmodic, her tone of voice altered. Whenever she could, she sat resting her head on her hands, and gazing with dry eyes, that seemed to burn for
want of a tear. Kate, too, was deeply dejected, and wept all day. She was glad if she could find any one to listen, to talk. Miss Terry was a great support, being calm and self-possessed, and Mr. Farrant was constantly there, acting as much like a son as he could.

‘What was the report to-day?’ Kate inquired, languidly.

‘It is supposed,’ returned Miss Terry, ‘that another servant is involved—Lynch! He is known to have been at Charlie Brand's hut. They are searching for him in another direction. Mr. Fitz, they say, is out with a party of mounted police. The poor wretched man has been seen in that district, and they think he is hiding not far off.’

Kate's face brightened a little.

‘So, you see, he has not so entirely forgotten us!’ she remarked, triumphantly.

Isabel, on the contrary, looked only more sad. She said—'Lynch, too! Poor fellow!'

But the real pressure was in the thought that among all who came forward to show sympathy and offer help, the one she most anxiously looked for, kept away. Why was it? Could it be that the wretched misunderstanding with her father had engendered so deep an anger? The entire absence of the Herberts from any participation in this trouble gave great offence to Mrs. Lang and was sharply commented on by Kate. Even were he still at his station, there was time to have heard (for such news flies fast), and to have written. Miss Herbert, too! where was she, that no message or line even, came to remind them of her being an acquaintance? There was a great struggle in Isabel's mind whether she should volunteer a note to Miss Herbert or not. It would end suspense. But it was too like begging for notice, and her pride refused such a step. When a subject is shut up in one's own mind and dwelt upon unduly, it is apt to become magnified and distorted. It was so, perhaps, here. Isabel was suffering a double portion of grief in imagining the reasons for this painful and unaccountable silence. At last she broke silence, and remarked to Kate, ‘What can have come to Miss Herbert not to call, or send to inquire?’

‘Why, Issy! is it possible? Have you been asleep or deaf? Don't you know that Miss Herbert is gone away—they say, sailed for England. Certainly her brother took his passage in the China; Mr. Jolly says they have succeeded to some property.’

This was news! Isabel, engrossed at first in the terror of her father's disappearance, had failed to hear any other remarks. Since then her own silence and reserve had kept her ignorant. Without another syllable, she now withdrew; whether this was a relief or not, she did not know. It was so strange, so unexpected, that it needed consideration, and her mind was so
tired, so utterly weary of supposing and concluding, that even while she
mused, she dropped into an uncomfortable nap, the result of over-taxed
strength. When she roused herself from this fit of drowsiness and rejoined
the others, she found them eagerly gathered round a letter just received
from Mr. Jolly, who had despatched a messenger with it.
CHAPTER IX.

The Stockman's Rounds.

Vol. II

On the morning after the storm, Charlie Brand, the stockman at Westbrooke farm, saddled his sorrel mare, and, with his grim, sardonic smile, surveyed the premises, keenly noting what had suffered and what escaped. He was uneasy as to the fate of some wild young horses in the bush paddock—that is, a large portion of the bush or forest fenced off—and directed his mare that way. He was far too experienced a bushman to be surprised at finding the usual beaten track blocked up by fallen trees, so that it required some skill and patience to get on at all. At last, after a long circuit, he spied his charges grouped together in a small cleared space, raising their heads and snorting with shy yet friendly greeting as the old sorrel and her rider came in sight. At a peculiar noise he made, they put down their noses and smelt, and then advanced a few paces;—then a little closer, and so on till one had his shaggy yet well formed head resting in familiar confidence on Charlie's arm; while another made advances to the sorrel, who only responded by twitching her odd tail about and imperturbably nibbling the grass which grew within her reach. After a few moments passed in this way, Charlie mounted again, and when he moved on he was followed by his friends. He turned off into a different direction from that he came, meaning to try to fall into another track or bush-path, sometimes used by travellers as a short cut to Sydney. Jogging along and whistling as he went, he was suddenly thrown quite on his mare's neck, and a few words, more pithy than polite, came from his lips in his surprise at the skittish nonsense of the usually staid animal. But to-day she was moved and lost her wonted balance; with ears pricked up and eyes starting, the sorrel backed and turned and jumped, and not all Charlie's efforts could induce her to keep from swaying violently from one side of the road to the other. ‘The devil! what is it, then? Be hanged if I can see anything, you vile old humbug—capering about in this mad fashion now, in your advancing years. Ay, and there's the young ones following your bad example—in course! Snort away! Some dead wild dog or native cat or bullock, maybe—-’ and he dismounted.

It required considerable remonstrating and patting before the sorrel mare could even then be induced to stand still and not suddenly rush off, breaking the bridle. On the farther side of a grim, rough, iron bark tree, among the clustering currant bushes, lay what Charlie soon saw to be a
man. He was lying with his face turned round towards the ground, his hat was off, and not to be seen directly. Cautiously, and with that awe which the roughest and bravest spirit feels face to face with a violent death, Charlie crept nearer, and was about to examine into it more narrowly, when, from a young tree near at hand, with heavy flight, soared away one of those large carrion birds, ever found near death. Two or three large magpies followed, uttering the plaintive note peculiar to them in Australia. Charlie shivered and looked stern for a moment, then again his curiosity overcame his dread, and he turned round the head delicately and tenderly. But he let it go again, staggering back, pale and fixed with horror.

‘My God! That wretched fellow! Then he has gone and done it! The scamp! The black heart! The poor miserable sinner has not been content with dishing himself here, but he must get himself ruined for the next life too! I oughtn't to have let him off so easy, but somehow—I didn't . . . . I've been angry myself, and had bitter thoughts . . . but—it wouldn't have come to this. And so I believe I didn't think it would with him.’ He now fastened the mare to a sapling, and proceeded to find out if indeed it was hopeless death, and how it had chanced.

There was blood on the shirt front and on the ground which he found came from a cut on the temple and from the nose and mouth. Mr. Lang was quite dead—had been dead for many hours.

It was far from any help—no one was the least likely to pass that way. Charlie stood considering what to do and also how this had happened. Mr. Lang had no arms upon him. His purse was still in his pocket. Then Charlie went back, searching about on the ground for any indications of a struggle or as to which way Mr. Lang might have been going. There was a slight appearance of pressure among the currant bushes near, some of which were half broken and bent. Some few yards off he also found one or two marks of a horse's shoes, pointed towards the up country road, but these were speedily lost entirely. Searching with keen and observant eyes, he at last saw, on a prickly banksia, a small scrap, apparently from a woman's dress. Then, further on, a piece of faded, dirty blue ribbon and some dead wild flowers, which had evidently been bound together with grass, and when withered, cast aside. Nothing more did he see, till, returning to where the corpse lay, on a branch growing low down on a gum tree, a man's hat caught his eye—Mr. Lang's, probably. It had been evidently hung there purposely by some hand. Charlie looked and shook his head—'Foul play, I'll swear,' he said, and removing the hat he saw ‘J. Lang, Esq.,’ written within.

Then after a few more moments' deep thought he lifted the body, and managed to place it on his mare; securing it as best he could with his
necktie, pocket-handkerchief, and a piece of green hide. He rolled up his old blanket, which as a habit he always took on his saddle, and made a cushion which supported the head; and then leading the mare, he retraced his steps, walking with bowed head and downcast face. He placed it on his own stretcher, and even gently stroked aside the hair, which soiled with dust and blood lay heavy on the brow.

The last time they had met—master and man—harsh and bitter words had passed. Mr. Lang was a sharp master; but Charlie had served him well, and had found contentment at least in his service. He was a man strongly influenced by old habits, and possessing a certain dry, rough, but very earnest affectionateness, which was showed by his fondling every animal within his reach, and never passing a child without a smile and a joke. He was moved to the heart now! His conscience smote him for all the intemperate words he had uttered to Mr. Lang. Here was the husband—the father smote dead, left to be the prey of wild things—or, to the chance discovery of his own servant!

It was very awful! Mr. Lang was known to have been very hard on Lynch. Lynch had been liked by Charlie; and he was sorry to think of this deed and its consequences. Yet he did not hesitate. He determined at once to go to the nearest settlement, and get a constable, and speak to the Squire Morrison—no time was to be lost. All the consequences of this step rose clearly to his view. He would be questioned about his having seen Lynch, and, perhaps, would be called as a witness against him! He stayed to light his pipe, ‘to put a little comfort and spirit into him,’ as he said, and then covering the body decently, he left his hut, making the door as secure as he could. Accompanied by his dogs, he walked on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. As he climbed over the fence which led into the road, he fancied he caught sight of a man near the small bridge which spanned the road; whoever it was, he seemed to cross the opposite fence and was hidden behind a clump of wattles. Charlie went on, still buried in his thoughts. The grief of Mrs. Lang and her children was now dawning on his mind, slow to take an impression, and only now thinking of the calamity in that light. ‘Miss Isabel, his favourite, her papa's darling—how her bright eyes would sadden!’

‘Hallo! Who's there? O, Thompson; well, I was going to find you!’ he said, finding himself suddenly touched on the shoulder by a man he knew to be a constable.

‘Indeed! was you?’

‘Yes, I was, and to Mr. Morrison too—something has happened----’

But his words were suddenly checked by the sight of another man who came from the fence, and was exchanging looks with Thompson.
The fact is, Brand, I—we—'

'Cut short,' said the other in a gruff voice. 'We were after you. Lucky meeting! By your leave—' and while he produced a pair of handcuffs, which he rapidly proceeded to place on the astonished Charlie, he nodded grimly at a paper which meanwhile the more hesitating Thompson took from his pocket, and held out for Charlie to see.

It was a warrant for his seizure, on suspicion of having murdered J. Lang, Esq.

'How can you say that? when I've just found the body—brought it home to my own place and set off as fast as my legs would carry me, to tell of it! Come, no nonsense, Thompson.'

'Certainly not, Brand! I'm sure I'm uncommonly sorry—'tis awkward and disagreeable; only take care, Brand, what you say, for it might bring you to trouble. Serious affair, you see!'

'Look at this,' growled the other, and pointing to some marks of blood on Charlie's hand and shirtsleeve—jacket he had none on.

'Ah, yes! suspicious, awkward, very!' said Thompson, pompously, in a very evident fright all the time.

'Nonsense! Don't I tell ye I found him, lifted him and brought him home? 'Tis his blood—'tis.'

'Exactly, his blood.'

'His face had blood on it—running from mouth and nostrils on to the ground—lying along in the wild currant plants, he was. Now he is on my stretcher. Come and see him, if you don't believe me.'

'Perfectly. I quite believe you, my dear fellow—only—duty—warrant! You see, to obey orders is my creed. Mr. Morrison and Captain Lambert signed the warrant, sent me on and Bent here—and here we are, ready to do our duty, and sacrifice our feelings to the hard altar of duty. Please don't talk, Brand; it might do you harm; swallow down your words, don't let 'em out. Keep your own counsel, and it is their business to prove it.'

'Well, they can't prove what isn't, any way; though many an innocent man is punished for the guilty, as I know—and if I am ordained to be the man—well, no use making a jaw. But there's my poor beasts must be fed, and there's the body up there, you see.'

'That will be attended to.'

'O well, lead on, then! Where am I to go to? a man don't know in the morning where he'll be lying the night, eh?''

'To the North Creek lock-up. Don't take it to heart, my fine fellow. Comfortable accommodations, and if you've the cash, good brandy to be had dirt cheap; made not so very far off as to make the carriage heavy. In that very place, I and Toms, he's dead now shot through the lungs poor
cove, what we all risk in the cause of duty! Well, as I was about to observe—hem—in the North Creek lock-up, Toms and I had the honour of putting a very great fellow in his day—no other than the celebrated Riley— he as shot an officer commanding the mounted police, and killed two men up country, besides divers other deeds. He lay a night in this lock-up, and bless your soul! he called for the best to eat and drink, and made himself very comfortable, and the next day marched on before us, with the police armed to their chins, riding in file. 'Twas a hot, dusty day! One time I thought all was up, sure enough, when we stopped to rest, and Toms he went to see and get us something to drink from a hut we spied not far off. So we sat down under the starved, miserable little sticks, what passes for trees thereabouts; all at once, says I, where's Riley? Nowhere was he to be found! Such a sputter; such a swearing and cursing; such a hallooing and calling, and the police talking big about going here and there and everywhere! And after all, there was my friend coolly grinning at us behind a bush, just making himself 'snug and comfortable,' as he said. 'No, no; now he was nabbed, he'd take it quietly, and make no more fuss,' he said. And so he did. For not a month after he was hanging, and I saw him myself.'

Beguiling the way with such talk, they marched poor Charlie Brand to the nearest settlement; and here as soon as possible was the body removed, and an inquest held.
CHAPTER X.

The New Schoolyard.

A piece of ground had been fenced and cleared round the new church which Mr. Lang had taken such interest in building. It was not ill-chosen and being rather elevated, it commanded a view of the surrounding country. Mr. Farrant had left a few native apple trees; a picturesque, gnarled tree and some evergreen shrubs prevented the bare, desolate aspect which too many newly cleared spots have. It was a solitary place, though it was not likely long to remain so. Around the new church there would soon spring up some huts tempted by the richness of the adjacent soil and the luxury of a full and good sized creek, which, making a sudden turn in its course, seemed, as Mr. Lang had pointed out, to have come that way on purpose.

Here, two men were digging, and now and then they paused and looked down the road.

‘Well; Lang didn't think who'd be the first to try the feel of this here ground, eh, Bob?’

‘Not he,’ returned the other, also leaning on his spade and shifting his head for a moment. ‘Twere a particular fancy of his, this here place, and they say as how it led to words 'twixt him and Herbert and Budd. To my thinking 'tis a pretty place, and if the land is let in lots like for the clearing and building, I'd not mind just to take one. Look, d'ye see?’ and he touched the earth which stuck to his spade. ‘This is downright good soil; and that creek, too—and then 'tis right upon the high road to Sydney upwards—Lang knew what he was about.’

‘Ay, ay—and so he did, Bob! Well, poor fellow—'pon my soul, I'm sorry for him this minute, I be; though he did get me twenty infernal lashes. Well, well; I wonder where he be gone to. 'Tis a queer thought, aint it, Bob?’

‘They parsons tell a deal about it. Perhaps 'tis true—perhaps 'tisn't. But learning is a great thing to help a man on, Andrew. I have heard say it brings a man to know about the lights up yonder, and showed him where this here great big country was. If so, I don't see why it shouldn't give me a hint or two about the world we are all bound to, I suppose.’

‘The poor will come to the top, mayhap, then. My old father used to talk wonderful—his tongue got him into scrrapes; for he was always speaking and telling of the troubles of the poor and how they get oppressed. Well,
and he said, that next life, the poor would have their own way, and they'd .

‘Lynch couldn't wait for that, poor chap; he's been and done for himself. Must be caught in the end.’

‘What!—don't 'ee think 'twas Charlie, then—eh, Bob?’

‘Not I. Bless 'ee—Charlie's not the chap for it.’

‘Ay, ay? Well, Lynch was aggravated, as I will say; and 'tween ourselves, Bob, Bill Smith didn't do him no good. He got his sharp fingers in, and I'd lay a wager he know a thing or two this minute about this here affair.’

‘Folks talk as how that Herbert had no goodwill for Lang. They met at the inn down away, and had hard and warm words—so they say—and Lang muttered something as he rode off; and Herbert got merry like—as a man does trying to keep off thoughts and deceive people. He talked a great deal and looked strange, they say, and didn't eat nothing, but seemed all put about and astray like. Then he rode away after t'other, you see.’

‘Bless my soul! you don't say so? Ay, ay? Well, that's a choker. And so they are saying as how that----’

‘Well, they talk—talk, that's all! 'Twas strange, you see. There was a quarrel; and the house servants were speaking about it, and that Miss Issy was very much hurt at it. But, mind me, see if they don't look it all over, and just prove black and white against the Government man. Either Charlie or Lynch or both will swing for this here deed whether 'twas another did it or no.’

‘I wonder will it be a large following?’ remarked the other, after a pause.

‘No great things, I dare say,’ returned Bob. ‘He was not much liked; but, I say, what's that? Here they are, then, at last. Come on, we must dig away, or we'll be behindhand.’

Yet both lingered near the fence watching the approach of the hearse as it slowly mounted the hill.

They brought him home, past the church he had built, to his own place, there to rest for a short space only, for on the next morning early he was borne to his grave—the first in the churchyard. Mr. Jolly and his son and Mr. Budd accompanied the body home. And now, in spite of his man Bob's prophecy, a long train followed the funeral. Besides his own family and servants, several people came from a distance, and once again, and for the last time, every possible contrivance was made at Langville to accommodate those who had come far, with beds—the Parsonage also lending help. The additional trouble which this brought to Mrs. Lang was joyfully borne in consideration of the honour and respect shown to her husband.

‘So many friends!’ she remarked.
‘Yes,’ answered Isabel. ‘A great many people. But as to friends—we shall have to begin afresh in that respect as in every other.’

There were many she had never expected or even thought of—she felt the compliment—but it seemed to mark it only as still stranger that any one should be absent. Then she turned to listen to Mr. Jolly, who was speaking in a hushed, solemn tone.

‘There are grave suspicions, I grieve to say. He is committed for trial, and they are vigorously prosecuting a search for Lynch.’

‘Who is committed?’ asked Isabel.

‘Charlie Brand.’

‘Charlie—Charlie Brand?—committed for—for—what is he suspected of, Mr. Jolly?’

‘Of—you know, my dear, he was seen to be in a great passion here—and—’

‘I know—I saw and heard him!’

‘Well; and he was heard to utter some foolish threats, and then—in fact—I need not enter into details which must be painful; but there is grave cause for suspecting him. Poor misguided man!’

‘It is not true—it can't be true! Mr. Jolly, I am so sure Charlie didn't—didn't—couldn't. He kill my father! No—no!—if all the world, and all the courts of justice say yes—I will say no! And can nothing be done—can no one speak for him—see him? Don't you feel it to be an impossibility yourself, mamma?’

‘My love, remember, when people are in a passion they don't know anything, and he was heard to say strange and very wrong things. And that dreadful Lynch! I always did dread him! That girl, too! she set him up and did mischief.’

‘Poor Charlie! If I could but see him and tell him, I believe him innocent! Poor fellow! where is he, Mr. Jolly? I must and will see him!’

‘O, Issy! how strange you are! See or care for a man who has murdered poor papa? I am sure I hope he will be hanged!’

‘Kate, don't say such things. It is not proved yet. Doesn't he deny it himself?’

‘O, yes! His story is that he found him lying dead in the Bush, and brought him back to his hut. Well, time will show. He will have a fair trial and a clever lawyer to plead his cause.’

‘If Mr. Herbert was here, this would be prevented!’ cried Isabel. ‘He knows Charlie so well. He would say at once that . . . .’

‘A fair trial!’ again repeated Mr. Jolly. ‘I say, I wish the poor fellow no harm; but I wish to find out and punish the perpetrator of such a foul and wicked deed. My poor friend, your father, must not be allowed to perish
without our stirring heaven and earth to discover how it was. There are strong suspicions against Brand and against Lynch. Both had been heard to utter violent words, both had been reprimanded, and had therefore a spite against the master. It can be proved, so I am told, that on the morning that Charlie Brand came and went in that strange way, he saw Jack Lynch as he went through the bush. Lynch spoke of the girl Nellie, and Charlie's words are reported to have been—'I wouldn't stand it.' Then Lynch runs away, after being insolent and threatened with punishment. He goes straight to Westbrooke Farm, straight to Charlie's hut. They were seen together the day following the storm. But I need not say all this . . . .

‘No; but if there was twice as much to say, I still declare that Charlie is not the man. You might as well say, Mr. Jolly, that you yourself or any other friend did it in a fit of anger,’ Isabel said, warmly.

Mr. Jolly's countenance at this assumed a strangely troubled aspect. Casting his eyes for an instant on his son, who blushed deep crimson, he bent them on the ground and muttered some incoherent words.

‘Take care, my dear love,’ he added, patting Isabel's shoulder. ‘Many a word uttered in chance and in sheer carelessness, may be caught up and turned to evil, in such a miserable and mysterious affair as this is. Don't play with edge tools.’

‘Edge tools! Careless words!’ she repeated. ‘Mr. Jolly, did you hear me rightly? I only said that it would be easy to patch up a string of evidence if one chose, and say a friend did it.’

‘I know. What makes you say this? Have you any—any—fear? Have you heard? Good God above, Issy!’ the old man went on, apparently gathering fright from her scared face. ‘Say you spoke carelessly, not with meaning. Child! do you know what is said? what people are saying now—yes, now?’

‘O father!’ cried Tom, almost reproachfully.

But the old man's words, and yet more his manner, had by this time riveted the attention of every one, and they urged him to speak out and not hide anything. Mrs. Lang said she ought to know all that was said or thought.

‘Yes,’ joined in Isabel, ‘tell us. There is no more harm in suspecting one more than another. Convicts are not the only wicked people.’

‘Surely not! Yet—this trouble is dark enough, Heaven knows, without idle tongues wagging. Folly! Nonsense! No—no—no! May as well put it to myself, or to Tom there! I say, were circumstances, was evidence ten times more damning,’—the old man grew more and more vehement,—'I say, I would punish such slander. An angry man, a proud man, he could be at times, but to turn his hand and slay his neighbour, his friend, his enemy, if you will,—I affirm, John Herbert is not that man!’ and he struck his stick
loudly on the floor to emphasize his words.

‘John Herbert! Mr. Herbert!’ was breathed out in solemn, startled, and fearful whispers, and each face changed in a moment. Isabel's colour flew to her very temples. She gasped for breath and pressed her hand on her throat.

‘O what a wicked, wicked lie! And he, where is he?’

‘Yes, where is he?’ echoed Mrs. Lang. ‘And what makes them say so, Mr. Jolly?’ and she burst into a fit of weeping, in which Kate joined.

‘People will say anything—anything!’ said Tom, eagerly. ‘They love mystery and horror! I wish there was a punishment for chatterboxes! Slander,—it is slander, libel.’

‘It is an ugly fact, that they had warm words at the inn; that they were known to have disagreed before. And now Herbert's very absence, his quick going away is brought up against him. They say it is all a story about a fortune.’

‘But is Miss Herbert gone, too?’ asked Isabel.

‘No, I think not,’ said Tom.

‘Then ask her! Go or write and ask her if he is gone to England on business, or . . . .’

‘She wouldn't say, if . . . .’ remarked Mrs. Lang.

‘Yes, she would! Go, Mr. Jolly. Go at once, as a piece of righteous justice to an absent man, a fellow-creature, a friend! Go at once to her, and ask her these plain questions.’

Mr. Jolly looked puzzled, and again patted Isabel's arm kindly, murmuring, ‘Poor little soul! Poor child! You ought not to have heard about it, but God will bring out the truth! He will not let the innocent suffer!’

‘Yes, father, Isabel is right. Let us,—I will, if you like, and if you think me fit for it. (You see, Issy, father is tired.) Let me go! I am ready to start at once. I will see the poor lady and ask her to tell me why her brother went, and all about it.’

After a little further conversation, they all agreed that it was a shocking report, and the sooner it was stopped the better; unanimously voting it to be right to learn what they could from Miss Herbert, and for the time forgetting little grievances against her, in anxiety to prevent her hearing the rumour, ‘poor lady!’ It was settled for Tom to rest that night, and to start early in the morning on his mission, meanwhile they were to send to Warratah Brush, and inquire there what the overseer knew of his master's and mistress's movements.

‘Doesn't it seem a horrible addition to the grief, all this wretched suspecting others?’ Isabel remarked to Miss Terry, as they slowly paced up
and down the verandah waiting for Mr. Jolly's return; for he would go himself to Warratah Brush.

‘After all, why are we to be so sure it was a murder? Papa may have been thrown.’

‘Yes; very true. But I suppose this was thought impossible on the inquest. Yet how careful they ought to be in such a hidden case.’

Isabel was very pale now, and she shivered.

‘Are you cold?’ Miss Terry inquired.

‘Yes—no; that is, not in the body; but I feel cold in my heart! Only a few weeks, a few days almost, ago—to think of us all then, and now! I used to think life so quiet and dull! and now----Can I be myself, Isabel? who laughed, and believed care was far away in spite of poverty. O, poor dear daddy!’ She stopped, quite overcome. Then rallying, she spoke fast and eagerly, not waiting for an answer. ‘Why need there be a trial? Why didn't they say, ‘accidental death?’ This is making it three deaths! It was bad enough before. Papa dead, gone for ever! No one to know what he felt; and friends forsaking us—being offended! So forlorn I thought the world was this morning, so dreary and hopeless! and now, this is worse again. Of course it is all wicked nonsense; yet to have such a thought breathed—O! isn't it too much? And if he ever hears it, as he will and must—O dear!’

Miss Terry felt anxious for the poor girl; she looked as if years older; for Isabel was one on whom sorrow and anxiety told deeply and rapidly. As Miss Terry remarked to Mr. Farrant, there was cause for fear about her, unless some little change or relief came soon. She had grown visibly thinner, and never had the relief of quiet weeping which her mother and Kate had. She either slept not at all for the whole night, or she fell into a dead heavy sleep, which seemed thoroughly unrefreshing. She took to being much alone, even avoiding, after just the first, Miss Terry. For hours she would sit at her own window, doing nothing. And these long times of thinking, so new to Isabel, seemed at last to bring calm to her.

‘What do you sit so much alone for, my love?’ her mother would ask. ‘It is so dull, so bad for you. For my part, I don't like to be alone a moment now. It is better to employ oneself, and prevent dwelling on it at all.’

‘Yes, for you, mamma. But I am very busy at those times—busy in sifting and understanding things. I have found out a great deal, I assure you. At least, I have learnt my own foolish ignorance, and perhaps it will guide me for the future.’ Isabel tried to speak cheerfully.

‘How odd you are, Issy!’ cried poor Kate. ‘What can you mean? How will it guide you? How were you ignorant? For my part, I can't bear thinking at all now. There is nothing to think about!’ and tears directly came.
On the fourth day, Miss Terry came outside to Isabel's window, at which as usual she was sitting, and she was startled at the infinite sadness of the girl's unconscious gaze. Forgetting why she came, for the instant, she was moved to stoop, and press a kiss on her head, and say, 'Isabel, he will come back; all will be cleared!'

'What! have you heard? What do you mean?' Isabel exclaimed, her whole expression changing at once, and her pale face flushing up.

'Of that, how could I hear? but I prophesy it. No, don't shake your head so hopelessly, dear Isabel. Let me say just this once, that I understand your feelings, and all, all . . . .'

'My wretched, bungling, ignorant mistakes,' Isabel interrupted, abruptly. 'It is half my own doing, and not the easier to bear for that. Never mind! I am not going to give way. Have patience with me. Say not a syllable to mamma and Kate. You will see I shall come out of it in time.'

After a moment's pause, Miss Terry said, 'But I interrupted you to tell you that Mr. Jolly is here. Yes, he went himself, after all, and saw her! From his own account, good old man, he managed very well, not to shock her; and she had heard nothing at all, luckily. A fortune, a large landed property, has come to Mr. Herbert. The news was sent express after him, and overtook him two stages on his way to the station. He turned back at once, and was just in time to secure a half-cabin in the China. It was of consequence for him to lose no opportunity. Miss Herbert was left to wind up affairs and to follow.'

'What alone, poor lady?'

'No, not alone. Mr. Jolly's was the first smile I have seen on any face for many a day. Fancy, she asked Mr. Jolly for congratulations; next week she is to be married!'

'You don't say so!'

'Yes. Dr. Marsh came in while Mr. Jolly was there. Well, isn't it funny?'

'Very! I suppose he—Mr. Herbert—knew it; or has she done it since?'

'I conclude he knew it, for Dr. Marsh has authority to manage business matters. Warratah Brush is to be sold . . . .'

'Of course!' and Isabel sighed heavily. 'But not unless a fancy price be offered,' continued Miss Terry, 'which is quite improbable. It is to be left to the overseer, and the station is to be kept on, too. That looks like . . . .'

'Good management!' put in Isabel, quickly. 'Waiting for better times and a better sale—that's all.'

'Well, at all events, one's mind is relieved. For Mr. Jolly looks quite bright again. Miss Herbert's quiet and simple answers and information cleared away the ugly mist from his mind; for, as he said, though he didn't believe a syllable, still he wished to feel terra firma under him.'
‘O, I never felt any doubt. It is absurd!’ Isabel answered, sadly, and again sighing. ‘That didn't weigh on me, at least beyond the first dreadful idea. Does he say any more of the others, Charlie and Lynch?’

‘No. But come and see him; you have sat here long enough.’
CHAPTER XI.

Bush-ranging.

Vol.II

After leaving the hut where we last brought him, Lynch made the best of his way, avoiding all roads, yet keeping on his course wonderfully. He was a powerful, stout man, but rough walking and much fasting began to tell on him. He was now beyond his own range. He only guessed his way, and had no longer any friendly hut to seek, where he was sure of shelter and food.

It was a wild country, and he was forced to look about him, and not lose sight of fences or other marks of civilization. Once after a weary spell of many miles, in which his shoes had worn quite off, and his clothes were much torn by the bushes, he came almost suddenly upon a ‘clearing.’ Heaps of trees lay piled and ready for the firing, a lot of ironbark palings were lying on the ground too, ready to begin a fence. Warily he climbed a tree, and saw in the distance some smoke and some sheep. He also heard a sheep-bell.

It was evidently some newly formed sheep station; now the question was, how should he proceed? Food he must have; clothing too, especially shoes, would be very acceptable. He examined his gun and his powder-flask; all was right; so was his knife and his small tomahawk, which he wore suspended in his leather belt—yet he paused, and looked grimly doubtful. Was there no other way of satisfying his hunger? He bitterly cursed the life, and all who had led him into it, but his doubts were suddenly stopped short by the approach of a dog of the terrier breed. Up went the gun in a second, and stepping back behind a large tree, he was again a man prepared to resist or attack a fellow-man—an outlaw!

The dog stopped short, and uttered a bark, then came nearer, sniffing and pricking up his ears. But Lynch's threatening eye told, and after another stare, and a few more barks, he turned, and was out of sight. Lynch receded further into the forest, and waited awhile to listen, but except the distant sheep-bell, he heard nothing. For a long time, till the sun got alarmingly low in fact, he skulked about, not liking to go nearer to the station without ascertaining the number he should have to deal with, and yet knowing that here he must feed. Again he climbed a tree, and looked around him, but not a man was to be seen, though still the smoke went up, and still every now and then the bell tinkled. From the look of the clearing, and all the timber which had been felled, he was sure there must be more than one man. Perhaps two, a shepherd and his mate, who felled the trees. Well, he could
manage two, unless they had a savage watch-dog, as was frequently the custom. Again he gave a look, and this time he saw a man engaged in gathering up sticks for his fire. It was evidently an old man, Lynch believed somewhat of a cripple, too. Looking further and intently (and blessing his wonderfully keen and clear far-sight), he took notice that from the dress, this man was still a government servant; he might therefore turn out a friend. Greatly relieved, Lynch came down from his post of observation, resolved to try what fair words would do, and glad to be yet once more excused from making his first essay as a robber. He walked on fast, and again the terrier appeared in the path, and again accosted him with a bark interrogatory, to which Lynch this time responded amicably, and whistled for him to approach. He took the dog's obeying him as a good omen, and was even patting the creature, forgetting that he was a bushranger, and thinking of years ago, when he was startled by a familiar voice pronouncing his own name.

‘Jack Lynch, as large as life! Surprises will never go out of fashion! And where's your shoemaker, chum?’ was said in a glib, rapid, low-pitched voice. ‘Come, no guns or nonsense here, man! Though, honour alive, but you make a good highwayman; would do to set up a private theatre, such hattitudes and rolling heyes! But good evening, friend! and welcome.’

‘Welcome where, and to what? Be you the old gentleman himself, Gentleman Bill, that I pop on you here this way?’ said Lynch, with gruff contempt he could not hide, and fingers clutching at his gun, as if he longed to raise it.

Bill—for Bill Smith it was—saw this; he threw a keen, sidelong glance, and noted Lynch's angry eye, sunken cheek, and weary gait, as well as his arms and his tattered clothes.

‘Well!’ and he laughed one of his loudest and most chuckling laughs. ‘You are born under a lucky star, my eyes!’

‘Get out with your cursed nonsense!’ Lynch growled. ‘Ye know 'tis a lie.’

‘Civil—polite! I repeat, a lucky star. Law, don't think to growl over me, man. Don't I see with half an eye, that you've been hiding and looking like a hungry fox, waiting your opportunity, and all prepared to present and fire; and don't I see your very heart's a taking a nap like, and going smooth and easy, because there's no question of powder or shot, and only coming across an old chum, who's got a sup, and a bite, and a smoke, over and above, for his friends? Down, big spirit, down. Aisy now,’ and he stroked Lynch's sleeve, as if patting a dog.

‘Get out, will ye? Keep off, or the big spirit may give ye what you don't like, yet! True, I'm a fasting man, and my feet all sores and blisters; but
afore I'm going to break bread with you in peace, Bill, you'll just answer me, what have you been and done with Nellie? eh, Gentleman Bill?'

A long whistle, expressing the utmost surprise, was Bill's answer; but just as Lynch was about to speak again, he put in,

‘There's not another hut nor gunyio within a score of miles. You must be more than man if so be you set off with a fasting stomach, and leave Pat and me to our supper.’

‘Never mind, I'll take care of myself, never you fear. But answer me.’

‘O! ah, I see! So you mean to try your hand like, 'pon Pat and me. Lynch's first appearance in character! True, Pat's old, Pat's crippled and got only half an eye; and our pet darling bulldog, what would strangle a lion, he's gone a little tour for change of air, with Tony, who is gone down along to a store for fresh tomahawks. Couldn't be a more convenient little opportunity, Jack! Well, let us see how you begin. 'Twill be as good as a play; only, you see—I suppose now, Jack, you think you could finger me in a moment? Bale me up in a trice, eh? Bill don't wear ugly knives, do he? nor shoulder naughty carbines, do he? No; but to tell ye a secret, Jack, he do wear something very pretty too, and as convenient as pretty.’

Saying which, with one of his slyest glances, and shaking his shoulders with his suppressed laugh, he pulled out two pistols, and showed them to be loaded.

‘Nothing! nothing at all, chum! Don't be alarmed. It needn't prevent your little practice at all; all the better, you see, for I can pretend to oppose you—all play, you know, Jack! O, yes; pleasant sport, only as I am sure your stomach is uttering dismal groans, suppose we put off our play till we've tried Pat's damper and Pat's cold pork, to say nothing of a half a jar of best mixed pickles, with London shop-mark on it! Ah, glad to see you a Christian. I'd lay a wager now there's Quaker blood somewhere, on one side or the other, in your family—eh, Jack?’

‘As much as there's Quaker's blood in you!’ growled out Lynch, trying to walk on as if unconscious of his companion's meaning.

‘Ah, if you'd said Jew's, that would have been something like it. My great grandmother's great grandmother was a Jewess, and my respected grandfather, of the same generation, was king of the gipsies. A great man he was, and left inheritance to his children, I can tell ye.’

They were now close to a bark hut, and the old man Lynch had before seen, and whom Bill hailed as Pat, was stooping over the fire, while something in the shape of a table was spread with damper, cold pork, and tea—a welcome sight to poor Lynch, who laid aside his gun, and stretched himself out as old Pat bade him, while he muttered to Bill, ‘And who is he, and where did ye get him? Didn't want any more mouths at the barrel of
pork; however, please yourself, please yourself! only fill it again when 'tis empty, that's all.'

‘Hold your cursed nonsense!’ retorted Bill, angrily. ‘He's my chum and dearly beloved friend. Come, old crooked bones, you know but for me you'd have been in his shoes, and that's none at all, at present. He's on the bush, you old dotard, with half an eye which can't see nothing.’

‘On the bush? Ay, ay—and how's that about?’ and Pat turned with eager curiosity to Lynch, but he was too hungry to waste his breath on words. After a few mouthfuls he answered him shortly, and then turned on Bill.

‘Now, tell me, Smith, as you'd wish to be answered the day you have got a like trouble—tell me—what of that girl?’

‘O dear me! what it is to be in love! Fancy a strapping, likely chap like you always a ranting and a raving and a sighing and a dying, quarrelling with man and beast, fasting and looking wretched, all for a slip of a female gender! My gracious! they're not worth it!—not worth this, Jack;' and suitting the action to the word, he filliped a bit of damper away.

‘Don't put me off, Bill, if you mean me well, as perhaps you do. You've fed me when I was fainting I can't deny and won't forget neither, for with all his faults Jack Lynch is no turncoat or masker. What I say I mean—what I mean I says right down.’

‘I know—but 'scuse me, you right down chaps are very unpleasant chaps, too.’

‘Is Nelly living?—tell me that!’

‘I believe so—I hope so. Pity for her pretty face to feed worms, or her sweet voice to be dumb. I hope Nelly is alive and kicking—happy, too, as I believe she is; and don't you go to grudge it to her.’

‘I grudge it! The Lord knows what I would do for the girl's good!’

‘That's right. Well—but don't let them big black eyes of yours blaze up at me so. Faith, it makes my eyes water! Don't be opening your nose and your mouth to receive my information, for I've none to give ye. Sorry for it, Jack—but as true as my name is William Bridges and not Smith at all—I knows not where Miss Maclean is at this present. I wish I did, my hearty! I've lost much for my ignorance.’

‘Bill! she left with you! I have heard—Judy----’

‘Told you a pack of lies, of course—dear old lady! Calm yourself, and drink another pint of tea. Now, here's the length and the breadth of the matter. She was with me, or, more properly, I was with her. We were journeying pleasant as possible—she seated like a queen on her throne, 'pon top of the dray, and all the fellows a crowding round her for to hear her sing just like a little bird. She was in tip-top spirits, and had her joke and her word with every one. One spark got quite foolish upon her, and
dash me, but I believe he began making his court rather too free—that is, ahem—if others had seen—ahem! Why d'ye look up so? I am not meaning anything. Did ye think I did?'

'Never mind—go on.'

'Twasn't going on, unfortunately. 'Twas going off, nobody knows how; but one morning when we all woke up and was about starting, my bird was a missing. Ay—flown right away, I believe you. We coo-ee-eed, we screamed, shouted, waited, cursed, swore, and called upon saints (for two of us was Catholics). But nothing came of it; whether she flew right up, or ran away upon a kangaroo, or what, I don't know. Never more we heard or saw of her, and, what's more, don't believe ever shall. That's my tale, believe it or no, as you like. It lost me a good five-pound note, as I'm a man. Gad, if I did come across her, I'd feel much disposed to try what I could do in the line of bringing refractory females to order.'

'Well, Bill, God in heaven knows whether you speak truth or false. As I said, I've eaten with you and touched your hand, so—you're safe now. But, by heavens, I scent some nasty dirty plot you have hatched that wont bear daylight, I fancy. What you intended I can't say, but 'twas no good for her, I guess, and perhaps 'tis better for her she's lying dead under a bush, as I suppose she is this minute, than . . . .'

But he could not go on. Covering his face with his large brown hand, he crouched down, out of the fierce blaze, and soon his frame shook, while gurgling, suffocating sobs seemed to tear him, and tears rained down over his slice of damper. In a few moments he succeeded in stopping himself.

'It do you credit,' muttered old Pat. 'I cried myself when I buried my gal—thirty years and more agone. I don't give in to hearts as hard as stones. No, not I!'

'Nell was a sweet bird—worth a few tears, if any gal ever is,' said Bill. 'But I don't take to them. They are not in my line.'

Then he told Lynch which road he ought to take if he still persisted in going on Nelly's track. Lynch said one road was as well as another, so he could get victuals as he went on. And then Bill told him where one or two solitary habitations, in reality, sly grog-shops, were situated, as well as where a few well-stocked farms lay, one of which he might visit with great chance of success if he was wary and chose a good moment. Listening to these directions, Lynch soon followed old Pat's example, and fell into a sound sleep, even where he lay.

He awoke early, and before his companions. But not caring to move, he lay on, considering Bill's tale, and looking forwards with a heavy, oppressed heart, for what was life to him? Hardly worth fighting for food to support it! Nelly was dead! Then he thought it all over again, recalling
former suspicions and hints, and Judy's account of Nelly's screams, till he was certain that some foul play had been used, that she had been decoyed or forced to go away. Then suddenly came back the name the boy had mentioned, and he saw how it was. Sitting there in the dim dawn alone, his face kindled and his hands were clenched, as one thought brought another, till once more a purpose filled him. He had something to do—something worth living for! He drew in his breath so loudly that he disturbed both sleepers.

‘Cautious! I must be wary! Ay, ay, deep Gentleman Bill! I must beat you if I can. Revenge—revenge. Ay, Jack Lynch, go-a-head, and be revenged!’

Quietly and noiselessly he managed to rise and leave the small hut. The dog looked up drowsily, but on a gesture from Lynch laid down again. Taking a good-sized piece of the damper, which had been left on the box that reversed acted as table, he got away, and, looking back once to see if all was still quiet, he plunged into the thick scrub, having carefully ascertained his bearings from the first rays of the sun as they lighted the topmost leaves of the tall trees.
CHAPTER XII.

The Chase.

We can only briefly follow Lynch in his several adventures, losing his way at one time, and being driven to eat grubs, as the natives do, from hunger; then chancing to stumble upon a convict shepherd watching his sheep, who bade him roughly but heartily God speed, and shared his last drop of whisky in drinking ‘Death to masters and liberty to government-men!’ Not once did he take his food by force, though two or three times it was a narrow escape. At last he approached Goorundoo, and coming to a sly grog-shop to which he had been directed, he learnt that the mounted police were out in search of him; a strong body, and headed by the new comer, who had brought such a fine lot of cattle, and got such a fine place at Fair Dale. ‘Yes,’ the man said, ‘he was a smart, up-and-up chap; powers of money and some sense. Fond of his pleasure, too, if all was true. He had been in a mad passion a while back at the miscarriage of a plan of his. It seemed he had set his mind on a slip of a girl, who by all reports was out of the way comely and well-favoured.’

‘Ah! her name, did you hear that?’ exclaimed Lynch.

‘Was Nellie; that's all ever I heard. Well, and so they got her 'pon top of a dray, and had orders to treat her like a queen, and they say as how she fairly turned all their heads, and sang more like a bird than anything else. But whether one of the party made too free, or what, or whether she came with her own free will, no one knows. Any way, she gave them the slip, and was missing one morning. They searched up and down, and sent out here and there, but never saw nor heard no more of her. No! there I'm wrong, for the curious part of all is, they did hear! God bless your soul! not a man hereabouts would go out to that spot where last they camped out, alone! Fact, I assure you. I heard Phil Blunt with my own ears declare as how, when they were searching and calling out ‘Nellie! Nellie!’ that they heard her voice answer on the top of the highest tree there, but they saw only a yellow bird, and it spread its wings out, which shone like gold, and sang, just as she did and in her voice, and it flew right away up, out of sight; and when they fetched the other men to that place, there was she herself, in white, sitting upon a branch, crying bitterly, and when they spoke to her she gave a scream, and there was a rustle in the branches over head, and they never see no more of her! Ay! and now of nights they say there's singing often heard, and sometimes crying and wailing. Our young
master, the owner of Fair Dale, took horse they say and went himself, being greatly set on her, like one 'witched' they say, and he came back as pale as ashes, and wouldn't speak a word, good or bad, only swearing under his breath against some one who had deceived him.'

‘What is his name?’

‘A queer one, not just handy to my lips; Fig, or something like it.’

‘Fitz?’

‘Ay, you're on it! Just one of your rough-riders, what don't stick at man nor beast, so he feathers his own nest and hatches his own eggs. He's as good as two at a bargain any day. Well, he's out now with this party of cursed police, and take my advice, and just make off westwards, and hide up for a bit. You could easy borrow a horse from the young master's paddock. I knows one would carry ye safe and fast, a stocking hind off leg. Come at a whistle, tame as a kitten. Saddle? Well, I've an old one would patch up; here, I'll chop it for your knife there, eh? No, bless'ee, a knife's no great use; besides, after a bit, ye can help yourself from Downley's big store, some twenty miles to westward. Find out Tim Stone and his mate, cutting bark near the Jerry river, well known. They'll join you, I guess; watch for a branding-day; all hands in stock-yard with cattle; walk in bold and straight; maidens squeak, bale 'em up; go into the store, fill your pockets and ride off; keep stocking for the purpose.’

Lynch gave up his knife, and took the wretched, rotten old saddle, which by dint of tying with cord, he managed to use. He found and caught the horse with his friend's help, and set off, not as he was advised, to hide exactly, but to reconnoitre, to come up with his pursuers. If he, if Mr. Fitz should be with them—then it would be hard if he didn't get one fair shot at him. For the rest he cared not! The sun struck powerfully on Lynch's head, causing a kind of half-drowsy sensation, and his thoughts seemed to go strangely back, and recall old scenes long since put aside, if not quite forgotten. His mother showing him some pictures from a large family Bible; her very voice seemed to sound in his ears, as she spoke of that other life which his father had already entered into. If it were so, if Nellie was there, should he meet her? and what would his stern old mother say to the poor girl's wild ways? Then he remembered the man's account of her singing, and wondered, if really dead, whether she might not possibly return and sing, and in some way point out who had injured her. The plaintive note of some magpies overhead seemed to chime in with his thoughts, and looking upwards through the spare attenuated foliage of the eucalyptus trees, to the intense blue sky, he wished he could hear her voice, or see her. The country being altogether new and strange to him, he let his horse take his own way a little, and after a couple of hours' quiet riding, he
came up with a shepherd, attended by two dogs, and plaiting the cabbage-tree leaf into lissums for hats. The shepherd was the first to greet, after a keen, prolonged stare at Lynch.

‘Well met; stranger, I guess?’

‘Ay, and seeking information ’bout one Fitz; got a station hereabouts, lately.’

‘Ay, ay! You know him, do you? Queer stories abroad of that ’ere spark. I'm soon after going home to yonder hut. Ye'll be welcome to a can of tea, and a smoke.’

Lynch accepted the invitation, and meanwhile offered his new acquaintance some tobacco, which he eagerly accepted, and placed in his cheek with great gusto. Under its influence he began to talk, and at last hit on something which caused his hearer to pause in his attention to his horse, and hearken with all his might.

‘So you see, folks do say that this very slip of a girl, what scared folks so hereabouts, is the culprit. The report says she murdered Lang of Langville, and has confessed to it too!’

‘What! Nelly, Nelly Maclean, murdered Lang—my master—Mr. Lang! Were you saying that?’ exclaimed Lynch, with emphasis.

‘So they are saying.’

‘Tis just a lie! a black, wicked lie! Why, ’tis an impossibility! That slip of a child! My poor singing bird, who hasn't heart to tread on a worm. Go on; tell me all you know. Hell and murder! I begin to feel astray, like as if everything was clean turned topsy-turvy.’

He ended with a deep sigh, almost a groan, and sank his head between his hands, heedless of the horse's attempts to pull his head away from any hold. But as the shepherd went on speaking of the report which had reached this distant place by some drays passing onwards, Lynch again seized the halter, and seemed to arouse himself, and to take good care of the horse. After waiting an hour, he said he should push on without accepting the shepherd's offer of shelter and food. He must get on as fast as he could, he said, and having asked and received some minute directions as to the road, he mounted his stolen horse, and set off through the bush, avoiding public roads—often astray—but sustained by some exciting impulse, which caused him to forget hunger and danger.
CHAPTER XIII.

The Lark's Last Song.

Vol.II

One evening, when Isabel, according to her custom, had sought her own room to throw herself into the past, to indulge in regret, and gather up what comfort she could for the future, but more than all, perhaps, to be free from the remarks and surmises which fell from others, and often sadly jarred on her,—while sitting at her table, and idly and absentmindedly turning over a few stray volumes of Mr. Herbert's, left behind, a slight rustling at the window made her look round. It was dark, and she saw nothing, but she fancied that a branch of the rosebush which grew there, moved, as if touched by something different from wind. The window was near the ground, and very much covered by roses, according to a fancy of Isabel's.

Her thoughts rested not one moment on it, but, unconsciously, her eyes remained turned towards it. In a few moments, the branch was again moved, slowly—carefully—some one certainly was there, looking in! This was not pleasant, but Isabel was not frightened, believing it to be one of the maids. Presently she was aware of a face being pressed close and flat to the glass—a white, strange face. As there was no light within the room, it was of course almost impossible for any one without to see in. In another moment a hand tried the window. It so happened that it was not fastened, Isabel had shut, but not latched it, on coming in; and now a thin and white arm passed in, with an uncertain, slow movement, and pushing the window back, a head and face appeared. Such a face, discoloured, with wild, distended eyes, and long, disordered hair! Isabel almost imagined it to be a spectre, and being considerably upset and unnerved, she felt positively glued to her seat, frozen, or rather stiffened with horror. Then the figure leaped straight into the room, and uttered a strange laugh, half pleased, half wild and mischievous.

‘Ellen! Ellen! is that you?’ was all Isabel could manage to say.

Directly she spoke, the girl was aware of her presence, and sprang towards her. Her breathing was short and quick, like one upset with running. She pressed one hand on her bosom.

‘Ah! Miss Isabel! Well—you see—and here I am! Goodness knows I'm tired! They have starved me, miss! Not a bird in the bush would give me a crumb! But,’ and she laughed again, a laugh which made Isabel shudder. ‘I said I'd be up to them all. Give me a piece of meat and bread, do—do—miss! Didn't I beg of your papa as he lay yonder, but sorrow a word he'd
answer me! and why? Shall I tell you? Because he couldn't—he was dead—dead! Ain't you glad? I am! I sorry about it? Why, now he's dead, we'll get the ticket, Jack and me. He was bad and wicked, so cross to poor Jack! 'Twas for that I killed him! Ay, with these hands—ay, d'ye see? I believe there's red on them now, for all I tried to get it out. I don't like it—I never could abide blood! For all that I killed him! Shall I tell you how?'

'For God's sake be still, and don't say such dreadful things, Ellen!' said Isabel, recoiling from her in fear and terror. 'Poor girl!' she said, changing her tone with effort, 'you don't know what you say. Come, stay quite still here, and I'll fetch you some food. Will you promise?'

'I can't stay, lady,' shaking her head gravely; 'I must go to Jack. He's waiting—waiting! I must tell him how I gave them all the go-bye. Such fun! And then how I went on, and on, and on, till I came up to where Lang lay, so bad and so weak. And then, you see, I killed him! I say it was myself did it, and not Jack. Who dare say it was him? Just like their spite! Bless you, Jack was away—I'm sure I don't know where—miles and miles away! Why, if he'd been there, would I have had to starve—eh? Give me some food, Miss Isabel, do—do!'

'Keep still here till I get it, then;' and Isabel hurried out and called to Miss Terry, telling her briefly to keep watch on the girl's movements. Isabel went to the kitchen, and brought back some warm milk and bread, which Nelly seized and swallowed voraciously.

'Is Mr. Farrant here, or coming here?' Isabel asked eagerly.

'He can hardly have left the place yet; he was to speak to Venn for your mother. Shall I fetch him?'

'If you please, do; he must advise. This is terrible. She is evidently a raving lunatic; but what makes her say that—that—? In fact she declares she killed him! Good God, how dreadful!'

'Hardly possible, when one considers her size and strength. But she may know something—out of her ravings one may gather some clue. But I'll go at once,' said Miss Terry.

Ellen was sitting back in her chair, having eaten her food, braiding up her disordered hair and crooning a low, dismal ditty to herself. On seeing Isabel by her she looked up with a vague and dim expression; and Isabel saw how worn and haggard she was, and took in the torn and soiled state of her garments.

'Poor Nelly—poor unfortunate girl,' she murmured, softly.

'Yes, wasn't I? But now good luck is come; wasn't I a nice clever lassie, now? 'Twasn't hard at all—so easy! I only just knelt down beside him and looked at him, and he groaned and half opened his eyes, and I touched his hand, and then—and then—La! Miss Isabel, only think, if we'd done the
like before, how much trouble it would have spared. Pah!—I didn't like blood! When they beat and shot poor ‘Wasp,’ Jack's little dog, I screamed and I cried till they threatened to serve me the same. Yes, it was very clever of me, wasn't it now? For, you see, I killed him. He was dead as a stone when I left him. Don't you believe me? You look funny. I don't like that dismal dress. See! now I've tied up my hair, if I can but find some shoes, I must be off on my travels again. Couldn't stop here, thank'ee. No, the ticket, the ticket!—Jack must have it by this time. He's a free man, and he's waiting for me!'

‘A free man, as you say. And for all I know waiting for you, too,’ Isabel repeated, in grave sorrow.

‘Wont you come, too, Miss Isabel?—you may; you and me will go on our weary, weary journey—all through thick trees, and trees, and trees—where they can't find us at all at all! 'Tis better than those dismal jolting drays and the bad rogues of men with their cunning eyes, and long whips going ‘smack, smack!’ I like the trees; only when the wind comes it is terrifying, because they all begin to talk and sing and shriek; but that was on account of the wake—the way our folk do for the dead. Mother was there, and lots—some very ugly—ah! shocking!—dead, dead—yes, quite dead and cold. There he lies! He can't be cross to Jack no more. Wasn't I a clever girl? And the wind! how it moaned and whistled and got stark mad, and that big bough just tumbled down—a pity for the poor tree, too.'

Then she broke out into a song, or rather scraps of several songs; the one she most often repeated, with a strange wild thrill and vigorous emphasis, was some odd doggerel rhymes—

A turning, and turning, and turning,
My mammy she's ever churning,
‘Good day, my lady,’ says she!
And turning, and turning, and turning,
My daddy's always learning,
‘I'm weary of all,’ says he!'!

Before Miss Terry had returned, Ellen's head had sunk back on the chair, and she was asleep.

‘She is a mere shadow! She has been starved; and see—here are bruises and cuts!’ said Mr. Farrant when he came in, after having looked at the poor exhausted girl.

‘Her talk is so very wild—she hints at such terrible things—where can she have been?’ said Isabel.
‘I suspect she ran away from the drays which were to have taken her to the place talked of. She, poor girl, suspected wrong and deceit, and, with her usual cunning, she fairly slipped away from them. This much I have gathered from various rumours. Perhaps she has been lost in the mazes of the bush since, or afraid of showing herself to any one. She is very ill indeed, now. Here is every symptom of high fever. Can you get her into bed?’ Mr. Farrant said. And as he left the room, the two ladies tried quietly to remove her to a couch they had hastily made up as a bed. But she awoke, and had quite an access of delirium, screaming and talking, knowing no one, but always insisting that she was going on some weary journey, among trees, with nothing to eat, and a very high wind; and that Jack was free, and was expecting her. Then she looked at her stained arms and hands and shuddered, exclaiming at her horror of blood.

With the help of a stout maid-servant, they at last succeeded in getting her on the bed, and then, after another struggle and great difficulty, she swallowed a soothing draught, and Isabel, by her own request, was left to watch by her. Mr. Farrant said he should make his bed on the drawing-room sofa, in order to be at hand in case she should say anything worth noting down, or should Isabel need any help.

All night the poor girl was delirious, with brief snatches of disturbed sleep. She talked incessantly, and sometimes sang. Sometimes she was again a child, and spoke of childish pains and joys, and appealed to her mother. Then she was speaking to Jack Lynch, or moaning with sad, broken words at some one's cruelty to his little dog. There was a great confusion in her mind about wicked, bad people, meaning harm to herself, and others to Jack. Once she raised herself quite up and entreated Isabel to send and liberate Jack Lynch from prison, in such a quiet and composed manner, that Isabel believed her to be in her right mind for an instant. ‘Miss! Jack didn't do that thing! I heard the men say that while Lang lived he could never get married or the ticket. Gentleman Bill said so when he took me away; so when I heard the voice up in the tree tell me, ‘Now was the time,’ why, then I went up to him where he lay, and . . . .’

‘O, Nellie! Poor Nellie, don't talk so, or I cannot sit here with you, alone. It horrifies me! you never did it either. You could not. But it shows me that Lynch did, and that he played on your fancies, till you believed you were the one.’

But already Ellen's mind had gone from that to other things;—all night till dawn it was the same, till apparently worn out, her talking subsided into groaning. It was again night, when softly and anxiously Mr. Farrant and Miss Terry appeared at the door, and made signs for Isabel to come away, and let one of them take her place. But she whispered that she could not
stir for a moment, that Ellen slept—a sweet and quiet sleep. Perhaps, if she ever did awake, she might be conscious and clear. She had heard of such cases; and the eager, wistful, questioning of her eye on either countenance, bespoke how deep was her anxiety that this might come to pass.

‘Be ready, be near, to write down—you understand?’ she said, with that deadly calmness which is the very height of passionate excitement. It was impossible not to comply, and she saw that both of them took their seats in the adjoining room, prepared to watch and wait, according to her desire.

But time went on, and there was little sign of any awaking—if at all—to any purpose. The pulse of the poor girl was sinking, and already a grey hue, and a sharpened look, had spread on her weary and emaciated face. Isabel listened for her faint breathing intently, for she began to believe she would die in this sleep. The contrast between the two faces was striking. The one so utterly abandoned to rest—still, and scarcely alive—so pale and wan! The other growing each moment more and more excited and flushed, with her lips set, and her eyes bright with eagerness. A curlew came near, and began his melancholy cry. So eerie, so mournfully it rose amid the intense silence of that dying bed! Again and again it repeated the sad note, till once, when it sounded nearer, Ellen started up, and looking round half wildly, half in pleasure, said:—‘Ah, there's Jack himself! Coming, lad, coming! Bless us, I'm stiff; can't jump up. Miss Isabel, is it yourself sitting anent me? Ah, that's very kind, and 'tis my dead mother will thank you, miss, for this and all other favours. Help me—hark again! Jack's impatient. Jack's free, and I must go to him, and we'll get the ticket.’

‘Stay, Nellie, don't; lie still, my dear! You are very ill, and you must stay here with me till you are well. Jack is not waiting now. That is not his whistle, but a real curlew. Can you understand?’

‘Yes, yes; I'm ill, am I? Well, and so I am. That's odd. It's all of wandering in that great, wide bush. So lonely, Miss Isabel, and the wind was really terrifying. I was scared of it! And Miss Isabel, stoop, close—I'm faint like—faint—very----’

Here Miss Terry gave her some nourishing drink which stood ready; she and Mr. Farrant had come in softly, and stood behind the curtain at the head of the couch. They answered a look from Isabel, and she saw that Mr. Farrant was listening to the girl.

‘That's good, good! So I'm ill, very ill? I know it. Don't put me off the notion. I like to go to my mother; and Jack will come soon, I know. Wont you come soon, dear Miss Isabel, where all is peaceful and resting, as you used to tell me? But stop! I had something I wanted to say to you—to you only. What was it, I wonder?’

‘Was it—anything about—what you saw—in the bush? Did you run
away, Nellie? and did you see my father, Mr. Lang?"

‘Ah, that's it! Miss Isabel—don't fret, dear, but—I must tell you, for I feel like as if I could tell you right and true. I saw him lying all along the ground—so pitiful! all bad, and eyes shut. They say Jack had given him a blow. That's lies! Jack was not near the place. If he had been, I'd have seen him; and I never could see him, nowhere at all, at all! though I went on and on, all day, and most all night, among the trees. My! that was lonely!'

‘But my father—Mr. Lang----’

‘Yes; he was lying all along, and his horse was looking at him, so saucy like, and I was just hiding behind a clump of bushes, afeared if your father should set eyes on me, he'd scold! But I watched; and the horse took a bite just, and another bite, and then off he went—the cratur! his reins all droppling, and the saddle all on a twist; and so Mr. Lang looks round a bit, and sees the cratur desert him, and then he lies back again and gives a moan, up out of his heart, and I saw him put his hand up to his head, and it was red with blood. Then he shuts his eyes, and I thought, may be . . . . ’

Here she seemed too exhausted to go on; but a little pause, and some more arrowroot, revived her. In fainter and more catching accents she went on. ‘I thought he might be sleeping, so I came very softly up to him, and I saw the red blood flowing—flowing—all down—shirt and ground. I puts my two hands together, so! and I says, soft like, but as if I was praying to the Blessed Virgin, ‘Please, sir, please, Mr. Lang, wont ye give me the ticket? and I'll fetch you water and wine, and do all I can for you. Please, sir, for the love of Heaven and the Holy Virgin, wont you?’ He just opened one eye a bit like, as if he fancied it was some spirit up in the air, and he fetches a big sigh, and his hand drops down heavy. Then I took notice of a big branch of a tree, broken clean off by the wind, and which had seemingly struck him, for it had broken in his hat like, and I saw the bits of twigs on the hat, and bits of bark and twigs on his breast; and I noticed that the branch was anigh his head, just where the blow and the blood was. So, don't you see, I think, as how—perhaps—the great wind killed him, eh, Miss Isabel? because he ever denied the ticket to Jack, who'd done him no bad turn, but only good. O dear! I think so, I think that is how it was; and I don't like blood, and he looked so white, and so still!! I got frightened; so I picks up his hat, seeing 'twas not altogether spoilt, and hangs it on a branch near, and then I went on to find Jack, and tell him, and tell you, and I got tired and hungry—and now—I am ill, you see. But no, I'm ready—quite, quite ready, to go to Jack. Where's Jack? Hark! his whistle again! I must go—good-bye, good-bye!’

In another moment, the curlew still making his moan, though further off, the girl again slowly opened her eyes, and held out her hands as if in
ecstasy. ‘O, I'm after coming as quick as I can, Jack. Jack! Jack! the ticket—the blessed ticket.’

‘Let us pray!’ said Mr. Farrant; and kneeling, they followed him in an earnest and solemn petition for this departing soul. Her eyes were fixed on the ceiling, her features were fast becoming rigid, though a smile was on her face. ‘Jack, Jack! My dead mother!’ were the last murmured, faint syllables, and with the last her spirit was breathed away.
CHAPTER XIV.

Last Words.

Vol.II

It was on the evening of the next day, that Isabel, tired and weary tempted her, and sitting there, her fancy wandered beyond the limits of the small clear space before her. The mystery was solved now. To her mind all was clear. She could connect the girl's words and knew how her father met his death. A great horror was spared her and all, for surely in time even her mother and Kate would accept this history in their inner hearts, as they now languidly, and as if with constraint, agreed to it with their lips. But Mrs. Lang could not easily divest herself of the strong impression she had, that her husband had been murdered, either by one of the two convict servants, or horrible, dreadful to think of, in a fit of passionate anger by the man he had insulted. Carried away with these thoughts, striving to realise the relief this new version was to her, Isabel was unusually lost to things present, and neither heard nor saw what went on not far from her. Behind—not many yards, where he could scan her attitude and side face, stood Jack Lynch, the very ghost or shadow of what he had been when last Isabel saw him. Pale as the shadow of death, worn, unshaven, his hair rough and wild, his deep and dark eyes blazing with a concentrated smouldering fire of intense heat; the other features more clearly cut and defined than ever, and alive with some powerful passion; there he was, ragged, and torn, a sight which would scare most persons. Finding her so lost to everything, he advanced a step and rustled the branches of underwood purposely. At last she raised her head, but did not glance round, and he was forced to come to her side.

'Good heavens! who is it?' she cried, starting up. Then suddenly recalling her presence of mind, 'Do you want anything? Are you—are you in want? Who are you?' she repeated, as a dim recognition floated over her mind.

'I am one Lynch—Jack Lynch,' he answered, hoarsely. 'I come—Is she alive and safe? Safe, I say.' He went on, not pausing for an answer, 'You haven't—you daren't have let them take her away for that! How dared any one believe such a lie? She did it?' and he broke into a wild laugh which caused Isabel to shudder. 'She! No—no! Bless you! 'twas another hand, not her innocent fingers. No—no! I'd sworn vengeance, so I had! Many's the time I had it in me to kill him! and now he's dead, got his reward. But don't go for to kill the most innocentest and sweet little soul that ever lived.
Hang the right man. He stands before you, Miss Issy, and he don't mean to shirk; only—for the love of God, for the hope ye have for mercy for yourself, let me only see Nellie once more! Will ye, now?’


‘O, I dared and I could! Why not? Tell me why, Miss Issy? Did he ever spare me? Did I ever get a kind word or aught but curses? Did he pity the poor ill-used orphan, poor Nellie? Would he let her come to me, who would have died or lived so I could best shelter her? No, he—he—Well, that's past now! He's gone! I am ready—yes, ready. But let me see her first, and then bind me and lead me off to your prison. The gallows is welcome!’

‘I don't understand you at all!’ said Isabel, bewildered and frightened at his vehemence.

‘Don't you? Isn't Nellie—Ellen Maclean here? Tell me!’

‘Yes—yes, she . . . .’

‘Then for God's sake let me see her. And, Miss Isabel, you'll never live to repent it, if you use every bit of power you can to get her set free. Don't I say I am the guilty man? Take me and let her go. Now, do you understand?’

‘But, Lynch,’ and she laid her hand on his arm, which trembled with his eagerness. ‘Thank God, we have heard, we know now that my poor father was not murdered at all. At least, so Nellie said. And now you come and confess you did it! O, Lynch! is it, can it be true? Have you done this dreadful, this cruel deed?’

The man gazed at her tearful eyes for a moment; he even rubbed his own hand across his brow, as if to wipe away something.

‘What's hanging to me? What do I care? only—O miss—let me see her first of all! It is the last favour I'll ever beg of man or woman,’ he added, pleadingly.

‘You shall see her, of course. But I must make you understand first, Lynch. Be patient and listen to me. Poor Nellie, you know, has been missing for a long time. No one could find her out, though there were rumours about—well, I see you have heard of this;—then came this horrid thing, and then only two days ago Nellie came to my window. She was cold and half-starved. She must have been lost in the bush, and she was more strange and excited than I ever knew her. She said some dreadful things, that is, she declared she had done it, killed my poor father, and all to get your ticket of leave! How awful it is to say anything to one only half-wit-ted like her! Who knows what words led her even to imagine doing such a thing? By nature such a kind-hearted and gentle girl.’
‘She didn't do it!’ Lynch thundered out. ‘She—a weak slip of a girl! Don't I say I am guilty? Surely I had cause enough to hate him!’

‘Don't say that now! Don't bring up such fearful feelings. Death should teach us better. Ellen now would tell you, could she speak, that a ticket is little, hard words but little, and won't last for ever, but to be wicked and take revenge and to hate, will bring us to hell! She and my father have perhaps met now, up there . . . .’

‘Met! Do you mean—what do you mean, miss?’

‘I mean that Nellie is dead, Lynch—lying dead now in my own room—dead and cold—that is her body. But she is, I hope, safe and happy. Come and see her, if you wish it.’

And rising she went on, while he followed, neither speaking again; nor did they meet any one. She opened the door and signed for him to go in. He stopped and pulled off his torn shoes. Then softly he went in, and close to the bed stood for one moment quite still, then gently lifted the delicate white covering which shrouded her face. So young and childish she looked, and so thin, sharp, and pale! Nellie was dead, indeed. He uttered one long, low, but heart-piercing cry, and fell on his knees beside her, hiding his face; convulsive sobs shook him.

‘O, Nellie! Nellie! It's me—your own Jack, darling, that loves you always and forgives you all, if you've ever forgotten him! Speak, darling,—speak again—just one word! No—never she'll speak again;—never more! But they wronged you. Yes—they've broken your poor heart with fright and craft—the wicked vermin! Nellie! Why did you leave me so? Why didn't you wait just to look at me and say—‘Jack, come! Don't mind the rope—we're bound for the same shore!’ They said you did it! If you did—I would have died for you! But you would not wait. You are gone and I am left alone—alone—all and quite alone for evermore!’ Then nothing was heard but deep sobs. The poor upturned dead face, such a contrast to his! ‘But it wont be long,’ he began again; ‘I'm a coming after you, my heart's pet! They'll put you in the earth, and don't be afeard, for Jack will come and lie beside ye. He's spent and worn, darling, and his days are reckoned up, pretty nigh. They deceived you! Yes—I know about it,’ and he took her hand and kissed it, almost frantically, begging her not to fret—he knew all now, and loved her more than ever. Then rising, and with a sudden self-control stopping his tears and sobs, he turned to Isabel and spoke gravely and sternly.

‘I'll swear I'll find the rascal that strove to ruin her, and do my best to punish him. That done, I'll be glad and thankful to follow her so soon as they choose and any way they please. A hunted animal can't live long, and it's come to that now with me—and worse too. For the wild dogs have got
their homes, but Jack Lynch has not a stone to lay his head on.’

Isabel here left the room, meaning to come back again and offer rest and refreshment on her own responsibility to Lynch. When she returned he was not there. It was easy to go out by the window, and so she concluded he had done so, thinking better, perhaps, of giving himself up as guilty, and resolved to fight a little longer for life.
CHAPTER XV.

Lynch Sleeps—Isabel Acts.

Vol.II

They buried Nellie in the new churchyard.

Two graves now caught the eye of travellers on the high road, and for some time after it was still only two, none other being added.

On the very day that they bore her to this last home, Lynch, having used his strength to the utmost, was obliged to pause from sheer fatigue. He was now many a long mile from Bengala, and approaching the neighbourhood where he had before been—near Mr. Fitz's place, in fact. He had stopped and robbed one traveller; driven to the desperation of a famished man, and set as he was on meeting his enemy face to face, he was anxious to prolong his miserable life for that purpose. Overcome and utterly weary he found a tolerably sheltered spot and laid down for a noontide nap. Strange dreams came to him there, in which his mother and early days, as well as Nellie, were mingled and confused. It might be the oppression of nightmare, or was it the sense of something abhorrent and antagonistic which caused him to turn and mutter, and finally to wake with a start?

Quick as thought his hand had sought and found his gun, for there, in front of him, standing only a few feet from him, was one he little expected to see.

‘Gentleman Bill! What's in the wind now?’

The individual addressed turned with a significant gesture, and in a moment the words, ‘Give yourself up!’ were uttered; while a mounted policeman advanced, and Lynch saw himself surrounded by at least half-a-dozen men. He was against an iron-bark tree. Hardly more grim and dark was it than the man who stood thus at bay. He seemed not to heed the man nearest him. His dark, hollow eyes were searching for some object, which, to judge from the sudden flash of light which suddenly gleamed, he found.

There was a sound of footsteps—a voice—a few sharp clicks—and then the reports of at least three guns—all in a moment. ‘Gentleman Bill’ leapt like a cat on Lynch and caught his arms, but it was too late. Too late did he cry, ‘Don't fire! remember the reward!’

The policeman, naturally timid and nervous, seeing Lynch's determined attitude of resistance, and hearing his gun's report, took aim, and by chance (for his hands shook so that it was a matter of mere chance) the ball struck Lynch. He fell instantly.

Then there was a medley of voices.
‘What the deuce did you fire for, Tim? Save the fool! Wasn't six agin one, enough to take the chap in a whole skin?’

‘He was desperate—I knows what that is! A desperate man will kill or maim a round dozen afore he gives in. I fired when I see him aim at the Squire there,’ answered the accused, as he stooped over his victim to ascertain the extent of the mischief.

‘By Jove, a pretty shot that! Ay, and say so, right through the chest! Poor chap! Well, its best; better nor a halter, to my mind.’

Lynch opened his eyes, and tried to speak, but only a gurgling sound came. ‘Give him a drop of something! Here, Mr. Kinder, have ye your flask handy?’

The man so addressed turned from his occupation of assisting the other wounded man, (which was Mr. Fitz, who had joined the chase con amore,) and handed his flask for Lynch.

The brandy revived him, and he glared wildly to where Mr. Fitz now sat, having recovered from his swoon.

‘Didn't I do for him, after all? Well! and well, 'twas so ordained! 'tis all over now. Ay, Nellie I told ye I'd not be long,’ with a gasp between each word.

‘Wont you confess now?’ urged the constable. ‘Here's one as can put it down and take ‘Affy David’ 'twas your dying speech and confession. 'Twould come handsome and be interesting, and for the public good, for there's a deal of stir 'bout how 'twas brought about, you see. Charlie Brand lies in jail at this present on suspicion, and the gent over the sea, what had hard words, he's not altogether whitewashed. Now, if you done it, now is your time; confess the murder! And do it handsome, like a plucky chap as you be.’

‘What murder?’ Lynch muttered, and opening his dim eyes again for a moment.

‘Lang's! Didn't you give him his finish, or who was it?’ This question was repeated more than once, and at last, making a great effort, Lynch said,

‘I know nought about it! I didn't so much as see the man. No! no! Providence kept him out of my reach. Let me alone! a drop of water,—and let me alone!’ The water refreshed him, and again he spoke—'Bill! ah—but 'tis a mean, dirty trick of yours! You can't be friend or foe. So it's you that have coyed her away, and now betrayed me, and all for—for money—dirty—rascal—Jew.’

Perhaps something in Lynch's look, or his words, or perhaps an old feeling of acquaintanceship, touched the small speck of heart which remained to Bill, for he shuffled and looked uneasy under this speech, nor could he apparently bear to meet the glare of those strange eyes.
‘All in the way of life and business, Jack,’ he said, in his low, smooth voice. ‘A poor devil would be a heathen downright to refuse a matter of twenty pound which was offered to find yourself alive! They'd have caught you first or last, so look at it bravely, chum, and save your breath and strength for your last bit of a journey. Any wishes you may have, I will punctually attend to. Speak your mind, Jack.’

‘I've none! Thank God, I leave none behind me in this bad place! Good-bye, Bill! All's over atween us, and we'll be meeting no more, I suspect. It wouldn't be heaven to me to have such creeping blackguards as you there.’

He was apparently sinking fast; they whispered to each other that it would soon be over. One man wished to alter his position for the better; Lynch groaned, but it relieved him, and after a time he began to murmur to himself, words unintelligible to them, for in this awful hour he was transported through his failing mind to his boyhood's home, and he was speaking with his mother. A soft, and almost sweet expression altered his face, and caused the rough bystanders to say in a whisper, ‘they say 'tis the angels a whispering in the ear, when dying folks look like that.’

‘Call in Nellie, mother! If you're weary, she will sing like a lark to you. Love her for my sake, mother! Down by the water meadow I went for Lenten Rosen;1 you shall have some, and Nellie must have the rest to wear when she goes to the King's courts, in heaven, you told me about. You and I will follow her there, mother!’

‘Again! Is it you calling, mother? Don'tee look so angry! I didn't mean it—I was angered!’

‘Hark! hark!’ and he lifted a finger, and gazed into the space above with eyes which were fast becoming filmy. 'Aint she singing beautiful?' Then with a change of voice—'Stripes and hard words—no ticket! No matter. Coming!' he said louder, 'coming—help! help me, I'm so—so weary—sleepy—sleep—sleep—!’

And so his voice died away to the faintest whisper; then all was still and silent, and the rude men standing round listened eagerly. So, in the wild bush, with the deep intense blue sky above him—the hunted, miserable convict drew his last breath!

Before any one spoke, a bird began a sweet but monotonous song high over head, and Gentleman Bill looked quickly up, with a queer expression. Nor did he join in the conversation which followed on the doubts, and the pros and cons as to Lynch's guilt, for they had not yet heard of Nellie's testimony.

They carried Mr. Fitz home, and summoned a medical man to dress his wound and broken limb, while they bore Lynch's body to the nearest settlement for an inquest. His memory was spared the brand of murder, and
Charles was released from jail, by the authorities receiving the girl's statement of the manner of Mr. Lang's death added to other circumstances.

They buried Jack Lynch in a plot of ground near the 'lock-up,' there being no consecrated place. The convicts and ticket-of-leave men about, joined in setting up a stone slab with his name engraved by one among them, and the date. Long afterwards it was found that some one had planted a scarlet geranium there, and that a rude, but not ill-imagined figure of a bird had been carved on the stone; while there were some who averred that on certain nights a real bird, different from anything known in Australia, is seen perched on the tomb, which, after remaining some time there, spreads its wings and mounts upwards like a lark, singing sweetly, till both sound and sight are lost in distance. But sweet as the song is said to be, no one will willingly visit the place to hear it. They take trouble to this day, to make a long and difficult circuit rather than pass near the spot, and if you ask about it, there is a look of awe and hesitation, and it is difficult to get them to say anything. 'Well, of course, there's no saying!' one, sorely pressed, at last owned—'it may be all nonsense, but they do say as 'tis haunted by a female in shape of a bird, and folks do tell, as how there has been heard piteous sobs and moans—lamenting like, and then comes the bird, and all's quiet; but 'tis queer and strange, and no one knows the rights of it, you see!' Such, with a little variation, is the answer given to all inquiries.
CHAPTER XVI.

Doing Better Than Thinking.

Vol.II

The statement made by Ellen Maclean, and attested by Mr. Farrant, agreeing as it did with many small circumstances, together with the lack of evidence against the two convicts, was received as truth by the authorities and by society in general. It was a great relief, which even served to lighten the actual trouble, to believe they had lost him through an accident, and not from ill-will and revenge. It lifted Isabel into fresh vigour again, and warmly did she resent any return to uncomfortable doubts, which from her nature Mrs. Lang was but apt to do. She was so completely unhinged, that her mind lost almost all power of settling on a conviction. It was trying to Isabel to find her return to the old story, and require it all to be proved over again and again, ending with, ‘Well, it is very mysterious, very! I shall always think it a mystery about Mr. Herbert, and it doesn't look well, his running away. What did he run away and hide for, if he was not ashamed?’

Fervently did Isabel wish at these times to have it in her power to say more than the old oft-repeated and barren story, which reached them through others and not from the Herbersts themselves. One of them might at least have written or sent a message of condolence; but no word ever came. Isabel found her best remedy lay in active work, and it seemed as if, henceforward, she would not have to complain of having nothing to do; all fell upon her as a matter of course. She, with an old servant, preceded the general ‘flitting,’ in order to prepare their future home. Miss Terry promised to bring the others when all was ready. The meeting between Isabel and Charlie Brand was curious. She grasped his rough and big hand, silent from deep feeling. He understood her. ‘Ay, ay,’ he said, drawing his sleeve across his face, and jerking away his favourite little stump of pipe in his pre-occupation of mind. ‘Ay, ay! I knows all so well as if you were bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. No offence, I hope, miss! Says I to myself many's the time, when cooped up down yonder, for the second time in life, as a felon,—says I, Keep up, old boy! This time you're in the right, and you knows it, and Lord, miss, when I gave out the words ‘Not Guilty,’ didn't I thunder it out like truth, as it was. And I says to myself, for comfort like, when things comed hard and pinching, and 'bove all, when the folks looked askance at me as if I was a murderer,—I says, Missy up there don't consider you to be that bloody-minded sinner no ways. (You see they'd told me your opinion, miss.) Miss Issy can't help it; she would, if she could.
Law must take its way; and 'tis contrary that Mr. Herbert's over the sea and can't say not a word for me. Ay, 'twas sort of comfort that ye didn't condemn me, miss.'

'No, indeed, you were right there, Charlie; never for one moment.'

'The Lord give you the like justice, if e'ersoever you may be so misfortunate as to need it. Say no more, if you please. 'Twas just a sharp pinch, and soon over, and here I am, myself again, and ready to serve you and the missis, if so be it is agreeable to yourselves. If not, I can get my ticket made out for some place else, you see. But as I knows the country, and the ins and outs of the estate, I could, though I says it that shouldn't say it, give you some good advice of a time, and would look well after the concern, and do all that's needed, with a slip of a boy.'

'Of course, Charlie, we must have you. You will be prime minister, and I am king. You and I must rule our kingdom, and the first thing is to try and make a little bit of money you see, Charlie, if that is possible----'

'I consider it is, miss; and by your leave I've a scheme to submit to your consideration.'

* * * * *

The drays with the furniture arrived without any serious misadventure, and everything was in its place, and every corner scrubbed and scoured out, by Isabel's own hands, aided by the maid. While without, Charlie proved his zeal by getting in a fine stack of fire-wood for the approaching cold season, and also putting the garden in good order, and mending palings and fences, so that Kate and her mother might not be unnecessarily shocked by dilapidation.

It was now what was called the winter, a little frosty of a morning and evening, but clear and bright all day; thoroughly enjoyable weather. It was quite 'fresh' enough to serve as excuse for a cheerful fire, which Isabel thought would give a look of home and welcome to their one sitting-room. She had prepared everything; arranged the snow-white mosquito hangings, and placed her mother's pillows at the proper inclination; set out her treasured piece of Rattan matting, and placed all the little nick-nacks, which from affection had been picked out to bring. A meat tea had been ordered, and she had culled all the best and freshest flowers, to brighten up the rooms. There seemed nothing more she could do; and rather tired with work and with expectation, Isabel sauntered out across the high paddock where Charlie's hut stood; and reaching the fence which divided it from the bush, she leaned there, looking at the view which spread out wide and clear before her. Westbrooke was on a hill, the highest point being the centre of the horse paddock where Charlie's hut was erected; and towards the west
lay a wide, undulating tract of country—tolerably clear of forest—and
where might be seen as many as two churches, and their small cluster of
attendant huts, forming the settlements of the district. It gave a sociable
and civilized appearance to the place, in strong contrast with Langville,
where nothing of cultivation was seen, but that which belonged to itself.
Here, Mr. Lang had first brought his young wife ‘Kitty.’ Here, Kate and
Isabel had been born. She thought of the early days, scarce remembered,
when they had left this for an almost uncleared place, very far out of the
way, as it was then thought. Her mind went on through her life—hitherto
so very smooth a one as to have but few landmarks. The one most vividly
remembered, and bearing most after-consequences, was her acquaintance
with Mr. Herbert. She tried to recall his first visit—his attitude and his
look. She went over her own rather singular part in the affair, and tried to
trace her appreciation and liking of him, while the keen remembrance of
her saucy speeches and battles, made her wonder that he had not
considered her as a very ‘odious little girl.’ Unconsciously her lips parted
into a smile as she thought how far from this was the truth. How partial and
how constant had his friendship for her ever been. So kind and so
judicious! no silly flattery and nonsense, but always speaking the plain
truth, and desiring her good; only vexed, if he thought her doing wrong, or
led astray. ‘I did not behave well to him,’ she thought; ‘and papa, poor dear
papa!—I wonder why he never could understand, and get on with him.’
This brought a graver train of ideas, and by degrees it seemed as if some
heavy weight had been put on her, even during that quiet walk; for, carried
away by the relief it had been to find all slander put down by facts, and
fully occupied by present active work, she had not till now fully taken in
all the sadness, and even the strangeness of his conduct, as regarded
herself. It fell on her now like some cold, wet shroud. It weighed on her
spirits; she felt she had lost some great and precious thing. Just, too, at the
very moment when she had begun to wake up to a new sense of its worth—
to rejoice even in the failure of her own pet scheme, since it left her her
friend! Looks and words were now recalled, which had not been so
consciously noticed at the time. Yes! she had looked to that promised visit
in a very peculiar way. Then, it had been so blended with shyness and
dread that its sweetness had been somewhat lost; but now, at this distance,
she could look on it quietly and coolly, except that it made her heart beat
rather quickly (‘but that must be owing to her day's hard work’). Why had
he wished so particularly to see her—to get her away alone and in a quiet
listening mood? That it was not to make a confidante of her as to his love
for another, she had learnt. What then could it be? And how provoking she
had been;—so silly and trifling and vexing! Yet how full of kindness and
affection had been his look at her; sometimes, once or twice, it had been even more, when she had suddenly met his eye. Many times before had he and her father had an argument and a brief quarrel, but it had always ended in being friends again. What then could have, not only kept him away during a time of affliction, but have allowed him to leave them—for ever, perhaps—without a word, a line, spoken or written, or even a message? What if he should really never return, finding England too pleasant? His sister's going looked like leaving altogether. What if the ship were lost, or he were to get some illness—the cholera, for instance? She shivered, and moved away from the fence. ‘Surely it was time for the travellers to arrive. Was that the carriage, that black speck on the road?’

Isabel turned and walked homewards in a drooping, heavy way, very different from the quick step she had come out with. Charlie noticed it from his corner in the wood-yard; staying his vigorous strokes of the tomahawk to notice it well as she passed.

‘Tired, I guess! Lonely too—glad they be coming,’ was his remark thereon.

But this fatigue was not of the body, and did not so easily pass away as Charlie hoped; though she made great efforts, and never spared herself. Miss Terry said she had not given herself time to mourn. It was no use pushing it off. Nature must have its way sooner or later. Mrs. Lang moaned over the necessity for her daughter's working so hard; and Kate thought if Issy liked she might easily sit still and get rest and not look so tired and dismal; at which Isabel laughed, and was much offended, she said, making from that time greater efforts to appear happier than she was. She was vexed, too, and took herself vigorously to task till she succeeded, by scolding and drilling, in obtaining a more ‘Christian state of mind,’ as she said. ‘Some fine day I shall, or some one will, get a nice letter from England. It will be full of explanations, making us feel very foolish for our silly thoughts. He is not and cannot be changed from good to bad all at once. He will write in a friendly tone and tell us his plans, and we, one of us, will answer it and tell him ours. I have no business—no right whatever to look for more. He is at liberty to go and live in that land if he likes. So no more fretting, Miss Isabel Lang! Be a wise and brave woman, and do your work, and don't fall into that bad habit of ‘thinking.’ Doing is better than thinking any day.’
CHAPTER XVII.

Life At Westbrooke.

Twelve months had come and gone. The country was still in a depressed and uncertain condition. Public and commercial confidence was still at a low ebb. Throughout the length and breadth of the colony might be seen unfinished buildings—houses and churches—waiting for the money, so difficult to raise, to pay the expense of their completion. Here and there, a once comfortable and prosperous family dwelling was deserted, while its inhabitants had been driven to migrate farther away, to some out station perhaps, devoting all the energy and means of each member of the family to the keeping together what stock there was, and ever devising fresh ways of making any profit. Gentlemen's sons, who were to have been brought up to the learned professions—perhaps to have returned to the old country for a little polish and teaching, were now obliged to put the shoulder to the wheel, literally, and save wages by acting as tillers of the ground or stockmen. Poverty filled the land, and though there was a little lull, old houses and firms were still breaking, and money and lands changing hands.

Among those who profited were the Veseys. They, having some ready money, bought up stock at very low prices, and had taken a fine and improved farm on the Hunter for a mere ‘song.’ Vine Lodge was consequently again deserted. Warratah Brush was occupied by Mr. Herbert's agent—at least, he divided his time between it and the station. He had orders to sell or let, if certain terms could be had. If not, he was to go on quietly and do the best he could with the property. His answer to all inquiries was, that Mr. Herbert was in England engaged in a law-suit, and that he had succeeded to some fortune, but no title. Miss Herbert had surprised people by marrying Dr. Marsh, and then, as his wife, going to England. Langville was occupied by a retired innkeeper from Paramatta, who, it was said, kept a queer house, and lived a questionable life, very much undisturbed by any remarks that his very few and distant neighbours might make. A great change had come to the district—Bengala was a deserted place; and yet in the little township there were signs of life and stir. More huts and even weather-boarded cottages had been added, and small settlers had taken advantage of the times to rent plots of ground cheaply, which they cultivated on their own account, and kept up a small trade by supplying distant stations with necessaries at an enormous price, when it was not convenient to go all the way to Sydney.
The Parsonage was now covered with creepers, and the garden was a model for the neighbourhood. Mr. Farrant was married, and he and his wife lived very comfortably there with their parish, school, glebe farm, and pupils, having plenty to do, and only regretting the separation from their old friends.

A bright and scientifically built up wood-fire burnt on the well-whitened, large fireplace at Westbrooke farm. The two little girls were busy making doll's clothes in a corner, speaking in hushed voices, and now and then casting a glance towards Mrs. Lang, who sat with some needlework on her lap, but for the time not heeding that or anything. She still wore weeds, and had a clouded, discontented expression. Isabel was busy over some accounts. Presently she shut her desk with a sharp snap, and looking up with a bright face, said—'Mamma, it will do. Clear profit; enough to pay for Jem's expenses, and get you a new cloak into the bargain, Mrs. Lang. What do you think of that?'

'I don't want it! What is a new cloak to me? No! if there really is anything to spend, pray let dear, darling Kate have it. In her last letter she says that her dress is getting quite shabby, and she makes that an excuse for not going to the ball. Poor Kate! Ah! well!'

'There is some one out there,' said Fanny, presently.

'Dr. Mornay, probably. I asked him to step down this evening. I wished to give him a message for Kate. He could take anything, Issy, for us. My dear—wont you—hadn't you better just go and meet him? I am sure it is his step in the verandah.'

'No,' returned Isabel, somewhat shortly, and with a slight shade on her changeful face. 'I don't see that I need go out to him. He will be here in a minute.'

'As you like, my dear!' with a sigh. 'But he is so very—so particularly kind and attentive—and has been so real a friend . . . .'

'So funny, that you have completely forgotten to be afraid of him—a Roman Catholic priest!' said Isabel.

'But he is not at all like one,' returned her mother. 'How he comes here and talks—so clever,—so agreeable, and so polite! He is just like a Protestant—all but his long coat.'

Isabel laughed a little; but what she was going to say was checked by a knock at the door. Fanny opened it, and received a caressing stroke on the head for her pains. Dr. Mornay came in like an intimate and constant visitor, drawing the child on to his knee, after greeting Mrs. Lang and while he spoke to Isabel, whose hands were too full, it seemed, for shaking hands. She was collecting the bundles of papers which had strewed the
‘Busy as ever, I see,’ he remarked.
‘Yes; I have finished my accounts, and the result is very consoling; after paying for the new harness and all the expenses, a very respectable profit remains.’

‘All owing to your kind suggestion,’ said Mrs. Lang, addressing Dr. Mornay. ‘I am sure, as I tell Issy, we ought to be very much obliged to you.’

‘Issy doesn’t need reminding of that’, she said, with a blush rising, as she tied up the last packet, and left the table clear for the tea-tray. ‘It will be great triumph showing it to that perverse Charlie. I wont spare him; he shall come down and confess his mistake,’ she added.

‘He has quite come round to the idea,’ Dr. Mornay remarked. ‘I suspect he only keeps up the argument for the sake of a little fun with his young mistress. In sober earnest he allowed to me that it was a good ‘spec,’ and he went on to hope that when you had made some money by it, his own pet scheme might be carried out, which is to make your fortunes, you know.’

‘Building houses is such a risk,’ sighed out Mrs. Lang. ‘And then, times are so bad. When we had spent ever so much on the proposed street, who would there be to live in it—at least to pay the rent? No; it wont do to be led too much by that man, though he means well.’

‘Certainly he does. But the beauty of Dr. Mornay's plan was, that it involved so little outlay,’ said Isabel.

‘I have sometimes been led to regret my officiousness, nevertheless,’ he answered, drawing his chair a little nearer to Isabel's. ‘I fear it has brought a great deal of hard work on you. Even now, though so-so bright, you are thinner than you should be, than you were when—’

‘O, yes, people do get thinner as they grow older. Work is the salt of life; I adore it! No work hurts me, especially such very successful work as this has been. No, you were a good adviser, Dr. Mornay, in that matter.’

‘But not in others!—Is that what you mean to imply?’

‘I implied nothing. I never have double meanings. I am too dull and matter-of-fact.’

‘Talking of being thin, Dr. Mornay, pray observe my dear Kate, and tell me if she is really wasting away in that terrible place,’ Mrs. Lang put in.

‘O mamma! You used to like us to go to Sydney. Consider how very dull Kate would be here. Now she is quite gay in the metropolis, and—’

‘Issy, I think that is hardly right. It is unfeeling and selfish towards your poor dear sister. You are comfortable at home, while she is living with her cousin; such a particular person, too, who worries poor darling Kate every day and all day long, and then you know how bad her spirits are, and how
devotedly fond she is of home and of me!"

Isabel made no answer. But her cheeks were very red, and while she
turned quickly to get the kettle, her handkerchief was furtively raised to her
eyes. Dr. Mornay rose, in his courteous way, to take it from her, and she
resigned it without a word. Mrs. Lang left the room, saying she would be
back in a moment.

‘Do you happen to know of a governess being wanted in any respectable
family?’ asked Isabel, lightly, but not looking at Dr. Mornay.

‘A governess?’

‘Yes. You always seem to know everything. We are so in the habit of
going to you for help now, that I ask even this, you see, though of course it
must be a Protestant family.’

‘God forbid you should come to that drudgery,’ was his answer, playing
with the knife before him.

‘Good gracious me, Dr. Mornay, what is it? I positively must learn to
look on you as—as—dealing in unlawful knowledge at the least. How
could you guess that I meant myself? Can you, indeed, read one's very
thoughts?’

He smiled. It was a very peculiar smile, speaking of self-content and yet
of doubt. It was at once amused and very sad.

‘I can read some thoughts, and you are so very transparent!’ he said,
gently and earnestly. ‘Yet I could wish to read more, and find my power
very limited.’

‘Well! all I can say is, it is not endurable; it is awful! You actually find
out what I declare I have never so much as hinted to any living soul; and
only just lately ventured to glance at in my own private thoughts!’

Mrs. Lang’s re-entrance turned the subject to the duties of the meal. Dr.
Mornay talked in a light and agreeable manner of local interests. There was
no one person and no fact unobserved by him. He threw himself into the
spirit of his companions wonderfully, adapting himself to every taste, not
stupidly and weakly agreeing with every one, but refraining from obtruding
his own peculiar opinions, especially when the subject bore on religion. As
to making converts, he never seemed to have such an idea, and Mrs. Lang
had long since grown to look on him as their pleasantest and most useful
friend. His advice had often been to the point and very judicious, especially
when he had suggested their cutting down the numberless small trees
which in some parts crowded the estate, and sending them as fire-wood, for
sale in Sydney. At first Charlie Brand had sneered at the notion, and much
worried Isabel by what she called his stupid prejudice and opposition.
Charlie was all for building a street in the small township, as the property
extended to one side of the public road. He thought ‘Lang Street’ would
sound well, and turn out a profitable speculation. But Isabel liked the wood scheme best, and so heartily threw herself into the work, standing early and late in the bush, watching the trees being felled, and looking at the carts being filled, that Charlie could not resist trying to please her. When returning from the sale, he saw her looking out so anxiously for his arrival, and noted the eager, bright inquiry of her eyes, as she scanned the empty cart and then his face, that it became a real pleasure to him to be able to say ‘Tolerable-good-enough sale,’ and so on. As said above, this scheme, carried on for more than ten months, had answered entirely, and they were now about to continue it on a larger scale. Then, Dr. Mornay had helped them very much in getting Jem into a situation, on a cattle station, and this evening he was talking very eagerly about what it might lead to. In fact, when Isabel came to consider it quietly, which she did at last, she felt surprised at the way in which this man, almost a stranger a year ago, had become necessary to the house—an advising friend, and implicitly trusted by Mrs. Lang, whose disposition was completely satisfied by his gentle flattery and never-failing attention. Not getting the proposed chapel and school-house in Bengala district, he had subsequently been sent to Westbrooke, where the Romanists had a church, a school, and a thoroughly comfortable residence for the priest. This had greatly facilitated the intimacy, which was added to from his being a great friend, and at one time confessor, to some distant cousins of Mr. Lang, who resided at the north shore, near Sydney.

When the tea-things were removed, and Isabel had brought out her work-basket, Dr. Mornay asked in a lower tone than that he generally used, ‘If the sketch he had begged for, and had been half-promised, was forthcoming?’

‘Half a promise is not a whole. Indeed it was your own imagination, for I did not enter into any promise; I never do draw now. I haven't time, and I—I hate it.’

‘I should not like to ask you to do anything you really hated. I was wrong then to persevere in begging. I did crave a sketch like the one I saw of your old place. I should have sent it home.’ There was a touch of sadness in his tone.

‘Indeed! Home! Have you then . . . .’

‘You think it strange for a priest to talk of home!’ he interrupted. ‘You look on us as separate and lonely individuals, cut off from all household and domestic ties, all human feelings, all affection and love. Yet I had a home, and a mother and father, and sisters too. All are gone, save one, I believe. It was to her I thought of sending it.’

There was so much of pathos, so much tender recollection touched with
sadness in his tone, that she looked into his face: it was in harmony with
his voice, though his eyes were bent on the table. She was moved by the
idea of his life of exile and self-denial; the giving up of all that most men
desire and hold precious. Was it out of real self-devotion? Was this man,
who had so far thrown off his attributes as to be considered by them as any
other ordinary friend,—was he so devoted, so religious a man? In what
light must she, must they all appear to him, and what was his motive for
seeking them, and devoting so much time to their amusement? Had he been
zealous to convert them to his own views, she could understand it. But it
would almost seem as if he came to please and amuse himself. Yet, the
very fact of his being a priest seemed to involve higher and sterner
motives. As we have before said, Isabel was no great thinker. Her feelings
were warm and impulsive, and at this moment there was a re-action in
favour of this singular man. She was angry with herself for some rather
disagreeable doubts concerning him, and some cold and curt speeches she
had made in consequence. She hastened now to assure him that she would
to-morrow seek out her sketching things, and forthwith begin the drawing.
She was out of practice, but she would do her best. Then he looked up at
her, his whole face changed. It was but one brief instant—a mere flush—
but its expression had the effect of throwing back her previous sympathy
and kindly regard. She felt afraid of him, afraid of something which she did
not understand, and which had at different times struck her much in the
same sudden and strange way. She involuntarily shrank back and drew
herself very upright. Before, she had been bending forwards, toying with
her needles and thread, and wrapped in the interest his words and manner
excited.

‘It is very kind of you. But I know I must not thank you too much.
Perhaps when I come back it will be ready,’ he said.

Nothing could be more polite, and at the same time almost indifferent,
than his tone now, and she rallied herself for losing her wits. What was
there to scare her so?

‘You wish to go from home that your sister may return. Isn't that it?’ he
presently asked, with kind interest.

‘O, of course you know all, everything! Well—yes—some such thought,
I confess, has struck me. Mamma pines for Kate, and perhaps it is rather
trying for her to be there, in not the pleasantest of positions. I couldn't
stand it! No, far rather would I dig the ground. Yet I thought she preferred
it to the rough work here. Poor Kate! she is not born for work. But now all
is in pretty good train here, and it will do her good, perhaps, to come
home.’

‘And for you to change from your toil, anxious toil, now that it begins to
grow a little lighter, to something even worse! Have you ever considered what the duties of a governess consist of?'

‘Often! I have imagined myself one. For that I have tried my hand with my sisters; and if all children are as good, it need not be very bad. I am serious. And I mean to inquire at once, and not speak of it here, till something is settled. It would worry mamma. They must be small children, too, Dr. Mornay. I am not accomplished, as you know.’

‘Because you have not cared to be so. You have power, capacity for anything. No, thank Heaven! you are not an accomplished young lady. Happy the parents, thrice happy the children who . . . .’

‘No compliments,’ she put in; ‘I always feel myself insulted. Moreover, it is not truth, for I am not an agreeable, easy-going body. No doubt I shall vex both the parents and the pupils. But I shall do my best. Can you conscientiously recommend me?’

‘The difficulty is, that of course my interest lies with those of my own church. I fear my recommendation would scarcely do you much service; would it not alarm the sheep? A wolf! they would say; Gunpowder-plots and the Inquisition might be thought to lurk in that wavy, golden hair, or shine out in your eyes. No, I will make inquiries and find out who is wanting a governess, but beyond that, for your own sake, I will not go.’

‘Thank you! As usual, you are all wisdom and foresight. But you . . . .’ and she fell into a fit of musing.

‘Of what are you thinking, may I ask? You pique my curiosity by beginning a sentence. After asserting, what you are good enough to call my wisdom, comes a ‘but.’ Now what does that alarming ‘but’ lead to? Do say!’

‘I was thinking that I can't quite understand you. You puzzle me. I always thought that Catholics were so bigoted, calling us all ‘heretics,’ and that at least every priest was by duty bound to try and make converts. But you . . . .’

‘Dr. Mornay is so liberal and so kind!’ said Mrs. Lang, just coming into the room. ‘Ah! your poor dear father was so good a judge of people! He first asked Dr. Mornay to our house—I so well remember the day! And of course I always go by what he thought right and safe.’ Mrs. Lang spoke pathetically, and gave a sigh.

Isabel remembered that day too; and Dr. Mornay, rising, said that he felt grateful for Mrs. Lang's good opinion, and valued it all the more from the amiable motive she gave for it. He, too, had not always found among Protestants such confidence and generous liberality as he always met here. But the world was growing wiser by slow degrees. People were learning to understand each other. There was greater freedom of opinion now. By-and-
bye, all would be brothers. Then, with a low respectful bow, he shook Mrs. Lang's hand, again noticed the children, and invited them to see his tame kangaroo. Lastly, he came to Isabel, and seemed to hesitate what would be her wish, for he had found it did not always lead to hand-taking. To-night she stretched out her hand cordially, and wished him a pleasant walk home.
CHAPTER XVIII.

Moonbeams.

Vol.II

The next day, as Isabel was leaving the garden by a gate which led to a certain favourite walk through the bush to a creek called there a river, she was hailed by some one on the bush side, and looking up, saw Dr. Mornay with his leather pouch slung on his shoulder, evidently on a botanical expedition, to which science he was much addicted. He bowed in his most courteous way, throwing a certain dignity into his greeting, which answered the purpose he intended, by putting her more at her ease.

‘Any new specimens?’ she asked, gaily.

Whereupon he opened his pouch, and from the book drew forth his spoils, at the same time giving a learned yet interesting account of each.

‘I wish I could induce you to enter into this pursuit,’ he said. ‘You would find it invaluable as a resource, giving an interest to every walk.’

‘I have already begun to notice and even gather the flowers,’ she answered. Then adding with a smile, ‘It was impossible to avoid catching the infection.’

He looked gratified.

‘I wish that I might believe my influence strong enough for that or for any other thing.’

‘But it was from you I learnt the taste.’

‘Or rather, being at a loss for an occupation just to fill up time, you have been led to try it, and I am delighted to find that it is so. Natural history has been to me a great gain, taking the place of the recreation others find in channels which are forbidden to me.’

‘And you really confess that you need relaxation and unbending from your calling? Yet I fancied it was all in all to you, leaving no blank.’

‘Well, and it has, I may say, filled me—led me on for years,’ he said, warmly. ‘Yes, it is a glorious, a high destiny! When one has passed the first difficulties, it opens a wide field to a man—power, influence, authority! In what other situation can a man attain so much?’

‘And I heard it said that Dr. Mornay's ambition was to be fully realized, that the highest honours awaited him in his profession. But—is it true,’ she added, breaking off abruptly into another tone, ‘is it true that you are going away?’

‘I am ordered to go to Rome. Yes; I have received flattering letters bidding me appear there as soon as I can.’
There was a tone of regret which surprised her, and looking up, she found his eyes bent on the ground.

‘Then it is true?’ Isabel rejoined.

‘What?’

And he searched her face with his powerful eyes. But even while he looked, his expression changed. Some feeling seemed to rise which softened while it troubled him. He withdrew his gaze with a sigh.

‘And your sister,’ Isabel ventured to say with hesitation. ‘She will, of course, hear and rejoice in your success and honour?’

He scarcely seemed to hear her. He was walking faster, and seemed disturbed.

‘Yes,’ he said, presently; ‘it is true I might attain to distinction and power; what I have toiled for, I have at least attained. Strange! that now it is offered—within my very reach—it seems to have lost its value. Strange state of things!’

And, most unusual for him, he was for a short time lost in thought, and walked on by her side as if unconscious of her presence, far less of her words. But Isabel did not mind it; she thought it was quite in character with his habits of deep and lonely thought, and all the great subjects which doubtless occupied him. She even hoped he had not heard her remark about his sister. She gave her attention to the plants growing near her, and stooped to gather some pretty blossom, hoping to leave him quite at ease.

They were the lovely fringed violets which she gathered—so delicate in form, so brilliant and soft in tint. She examined them closely and with pleasure, and then arranged them with a spray of the correa. On looking up, she found his eyes again bent on her.

‘Does it ever strike you,’ he said, in a quiet, and almost mournful tone, ‘the analogy between plants and life? It may be fanciful, but it is at least a pleasant idea to trace it. This correa, now, with its stiff stem and prickly hard leaves, bearing so exquisite and delicate a blossom; so very fragile, it seems to be, among the hard prickles, yet it . . . .’

‘But I am too matter-of-fact to have a scrap of fancy,’ Isabel returned, laughing. ‘If I thought anything at all beyond the fact that these orange bells look well beside the violets, it would be to pity the poor little weak thing for being among such hard prickles.’

He smiled.

‘Yet the very contrast is touching; and perhaps the prickles and the stiff stem protect the fairy-like flowers better than more pliant, and softer companions would.’

Again he seemed to sigh; and Isabel fancying him in rather low spirits, felt afraid to begin on any subject.
‘I should like you to see, just to see my sister,’ he presently half whispered.
‘Why a stress on ‘just to see’?’
‘Because I don’t know that I should care for you to be much with her. She is almost a saint—a devoted daughter of the Church.’
‘And would of course disdain me as a heretic?’
‘Or lead you, through admiration of her saintly character, to think as she does,’ he said, gently.
‘Well! and I should have fancied that would be just what you would wish and desire. In fact, Dr. Mornay, I never do quite understand it, pleasant and convenient as it is, how you manage to like us Protestants, and don’t even try to convert us. How is it?’
‘For one thing, had I commenced in that way, your doors would have been shut against me. I have lived long enough to know how ill-judged haste is. Yet, pray don’t imagine from this, I am keeping in reserve, and mean suddenly to show my teeth;’ and he smiled rather sadly. ‘It strikes me as strange myself, that in my intercourse with you, the thought once so prominent and powerful, seems to have faded. I have not, after the very first, thought of even wishing it were so, far less of converting you; rather—on the contrary, I mean----’
He stopped short in evident confusion; and she answered, in a joking way,
‘You don’t mean that you think of coming round to us?’
‘No! no! Yet—I will own—yes, Isabel (mind, I am saying what I would not hint at to another soul—scarcely allow to myself—except in confession) my intercourse with you—my great, intense pleasure—has cost me much severe sorrow and penance. You little think what it needs to— to—keep oneself in order. And how it is, I don’t know, but just lately, regrets, old feelings and associations, seem to have received new life. My sister—the old home—my boyhood—all has, as it were, risen from the grave, and haunted me. Doubtless—for my good! In order to strengthen the weaker parts ere the day of reward. I mean, when I may, by God’s mercy, be called to a higher post.’
‘Do you mean,’ she said, in her straightforward way, after looking at him, ‘that because of your friendly visits to us, you have had to do penance?’
‘I do;’ and he smiled. ‘Yes; severe penance.’
‘Then why come? Why do what you think wrong or dangerous? I am sure we should—mamma, would be sorry enough to bring this on you.’
‘Thank you,’ he said, rather coldly. ‘I dare say you could well and easily spare me. As to what I foolishly said just now—pray think no more about
it; above all, say nothing to others. It lies between me and God. Human flesh is weak and faulty to the end. It is a gain and a relief to know that penance will avail to blot out our infirmities. I was led on to open my heart to you—as I often am, I know not why or how. You will not betray me—my weakness—will you?"

‘You know I will not! of course not. But how can you suppose that torturing yourself is of any use? And, really if your visits to us cause it, I cannot wish that——’

‘They will not be for long,’ he interrupted. ‘Very soon I go from this—may be for ever! Don't grudge me the last lingering look on all—all those feelings and ties, from which I may soon be more than ever cut off. Long fasts and deep penitence will wipe out their memory afterwards, no fear! Perhaps this strange impulse, this looking back—this . . . . Perhaps it may be sent to try—to prove me;—a little indulgence is sometimes graciously permitted. I crave your kindness, Isabel Lang, for the short time left me here.’

‘We shall all be glad, I am sure, to do anything for your comfort,’ she answered readily, and moved to pity and feel for him by his sad and mournful manner. Even Isabel's simple and single heart was not proof against the charm—that this much talked-of and highly considered priest, usually so impenetrable in his bland courteousness—should bend to open his inner heart to her, and to her alone.

‘You have been a very kind friend, Dr. Mornay—in a time of need, too—when—when there were but few,’ she said with a husky voice.

‘You are very good to say so. But—when you say this, do you mean yourself? For it is your kindness and your sympathy I crave—yours, as distinct from the others—from all—the world,’ he added; the last two words in so low a whisper that Isabel did not hear it.

They had reached the creek now, and after admiring the graceful growth of the water-loving shrubs, and listening for the bell-bird's note, Dr. Mornay said he must cross the river, being bound for a distant farm. He knew she did not mind the walk back alone. If he could, he should come in the evening, and bring her a book he had ready prepared for specimens of dried flowers. He was anxious to make a botanist of her before he left.

She answered that they should be glad to see him, and with a friendly nod, responded to by a long and grave look, rather than a bow, Isabel turned back, and, walking fast, was soon through the bush, her active nature longing for a little commonplace home talk, after the strange, rather sad, and, to her, incomprehensible conversation of Dr. Mornay.

Finding her mother in the garden, they had a discussion as to which crop would be most profitable; then Isabel adjourned to the stock-yard, where
she refreshed herself by a survey of the calves and a chat with Charlie Brand. From one thing to another she lingered on till summoned to tea, surprised to find it quite half-an-hour later than usual, and her mother doing the honours to Dr. Mornay, having added several small luxuries to their usual fare, in expectation of his visit. Isabel peeped in, and with due dismay, at finding how she had forgotten time, she promised not to be long, and ran away to take off her walking things. While doing so, the remembrance of Dr. Mornay's face, unusually pale, and very hollow, struck her.

'I see now, how much thinner he is. Fancy his fasting, and all that! Well! I suppose he is very earnest and good, poor man. He has great courage and self-denial, for he is one who evidently values all he has to renounce. I suspect there is many a battle between spirit and flesh there. I hope he wont kill himself! But really now I think of it, he is looking sadly.'

Full of this, she returned prepared to be very cordial and kind, and to allow the ‘poor man’ at least a little pleasure, if he thought it such.

Apparently he had thrown off the gravity which had oppressed her. He talked pleasantly and chattily of various things, making Mrs. Lang quite merry, and sorry when he rose, saying he must go. He shook hands all round, even with Isabel, who generally confined herself to a nod.

They thought him on his way home, and Mrs. Lang was speaking of him in terms of praise, when he returned, saying that really the moonshine was so very beautiful, and the air so soft and balmy, it was a pity not to enjoy it. Wouldn't they put on shawls and come as far as the gate? It was a pity to shut out such silvery calm radiance; it would ensure them good dreams and sweet sleep. He spoke to Mrs. Lang, but his eye sought Isabel.

The idea of rheumatism made Mrs. Lang shrink from going beyond the door, but she added, ‘Issy never catches cold, she can go! She is such an admirer of moonlight too. Ah! how poor darling Kate used to joke you, don't you remember? and compare you with Mr. Herbert. Kate never cared very much for it, I think.’

'O yes, mamma, she did. It is lightning you are thinking of. Moonlight is too sentimental and uncertain for me. I prefer broad daylight, much. You see, those mysterious shadows, that undefined outline, except just under the white light which is so very cold—is not after my taste. Give me everything open and clear, warm, true, and decided.’

'Yet keep a little corner for moonlight—such light as this is,’ Dr. Mornay said, turning and gazing upwards, as he stood at the door. 'Not only the moon, but the planets, the constellations, and those wondrous nebul' which to-night look like innumerable silver threads. And I want you to see the effect of the deep shadow and bright light on the hill where your man's hut
stands. The very oxen, as they lie about, chewing the cud, take a new form; and the clumps of scarlet geranium look quite singularly lovely. You are not afraid of cold, I know. Let me beg you to come! You may prefer sunshine after all, if you like it.’

‘Go, Issy. Don't keep Dr. Mornay standing! Don't be so perverse, child,’ said her mother.

Isabel caught up a little shawl which lay on a side table, and hastily throwing it over her head, she passed rather brusquely by Dr. Mornay, and went out to the far end of the deep verandah. But there she stopped short.

‘Yes, it is very bright. ‘The daylight sick;’ and what a noise those frogs are making! Quite melodious you think, I dare say. But to me it is only croaking, though it is all in honour of the moon, I dare say. How many sheets of paper have you wasted in trying to adore her ladyship, and what epithets did you use? I should like to hear some new way of praising it.’

So she rattled on, without waiting for an answer.

‘You don't see it here. A little further on—do come!’

‘No, I don't wish to be mad. Moonbeams affect the brain, you know. But you'll have nice light for walking home. That troublesome dog, old ‘Noble,’ will be be disturbing mamma all night. Don't you hear him! Silly fellow, baying at the moon. How the little opossums will be out to-night; ah! there goes a gun. Poor little things, some one is slaughtering them. How many bad and cruel deeds has the moon seen, even more than the sun—perhaps that is what makes her pale.’

‘Yes, that idea is expressed very well by some author, though at this moment I don't recollect who.’

‘Indeed! Yet I never read it; so I was not stealing, if it turns out a clever idea.’

‘No one knowing you could suppose such a thing. No wonder that you like all clear and bright things, and have so little patience for anything doubtful or hidden. You are almost transparent yourself, and as clear as—as truth! I don't wish you to be less so by even the shadow of a shade. May you never be forced into subtle reserves, never haunted and oppressed by doubts and uncertainty, or by inability to discern light from darkness. Yet—yet—the very angels are said to have compassion—to look down from their pure and lofty heights with pity and compassion on mortals obliged to wear a veil. Thus much I would ask from you . . . .’

‘But I am no angel, and never profess to be one,’ she said, quickly.

‘An angel! No indeed! What is an angel? Intangible,—a dream—perhaps a myth. You are living and real. A woman—a woman . . . Come further here.’

And he even laid his hand on her arm to draw her out. His voice had
fallen gradually in the more excited, more solemn tone which now and then came. She was unwilling to go on, and yet did not like to offend or hurt him by refusing altogether. She stopped again at the fence, however, and declared she would not go beyond.

‘Don't you feel such a scene carry you away far beyond the present—quite back to old times; and then again to some unknown future we have perhaps dreamt of in a confused way?’ he asked. ‘It seems to me so suggestive of peace and rest—work done. And if, as you say, so many dark deeds are done at such an hour, how many passages of love, how many sacred confidences and heroic resolves, have received inspiration, or rather consecration, from these unobtrusive rays—not quite dark, yet not quite light—tempting one on to utter thoughts which the glare of day and the very feeling of work to be done, sends back like a snail to its shell. One reposes now and feels! Every one, probably, has some particular moonlight night to look back upon as an era, when words were said or deeds done, which coloured his life for ever. Some under its influence have sworn a life's love and devotion, interchanging vows, and henceforth feeling not one—not alone—but mated! Others, less happy, choose their career; perhaps turn the long doubting scales, and in a moment of enthusiasm add the required weight, which makes them henceforth aliens from their kind—slaves—martyrs—ay, martyrs . . . laying down all of self—even to the very liberty of speech and look. And this total abnegation, this entire surrender of will, has at first its own stern charm. It points to an unknown future, and self-sacrifice is dear to an ardent, impassioned nature. He goes a willing victim—bound—laid on the altar. He works and toils and suffers. Brain, intellect, affections, temper, passions, taste, all are brought up and submitted to discipline, drilled, and ruthlessly cut down, except in as far as they are of use in the sacrifice . . . And then, this first elevation of mind passed, then there steps in ambition! To be first in the train, to be best and first to do and to suffer, to rule as he has been ruled, even the world; to mould men's fiercest passions as he chooses. Vast—infinite almost—seems this path—glorious and inspiring! Happy, happy for that man, if from such a dream he never awakes, if this phase is the last; except, indeed, that which in course of nature comes on all who live long enough to find that all is vanity; yea, ‘all;' and that all must die—be dust, and perish. But for some . . .’

He paused, his voice thrilling with the deep, constrained passion it betrayed; and glancing timidly in his face, Isabel saw the deep-set eyes glitter strangely, while the lips were quivering, and the broad forehead, whiter even than common in the moonlight, seemed to expand. She could not but listen and be still. His whole strength of will was bent on it, and
such excess of urgency seldom fails for a time.

‘For some,’ he went on, ‘even this wont do! The highest, the most coveted and eagerly sought after prizes, all power, all authority, all praise, turns suddenly into apples of Sodom—dust and ashes—a mere sham and delusion. A man awakes to find himself burning with thirst, craving just that one—one drop of living water which has been put from him—consumed in the fire of the sacrifice—gone! He gave it up. Like Esau, he bartered it. And now—now—my God!—well—what is left for him? Hell! What is hell? Tell me, tell me, Isabel, you young, innocent girl, standing there in open surprise, wondering if I am mad or the Evil One himself! . . . No, I am but a man—mortal, miserable! A man without a hope—without a tie—ay, almost without a faith!’

For a moment he bent his head and crossed his arms on his bosom, perhaps from long habit. Then lifting his head and looking at her, with dim eyes and features drawn as if by sudden and great effort to control agitation, ‘But you are thinking that I am a priest, one sworn to work in the fold of the only true and Catholic Church. A good and great work it is. Yet suppose—I say suppose—that I hate and rebel . . . O, Isabel!’

‘Dr. Mornay!’ she put in quickly. ‘Please don’t say that! Do you know what you are saying, I wonder?’

Her clear, true-sounding voice was in strong contrast with his hurried, husky whisper. The very heat and strength of his passion made her doubly calm, as if it extinguished all feeling in her (a not uncommon occurrence to undemonstrative natures).

‘Forgive me!’ he said, ‘you are right—forgive! Yet—you cannot see—you cannot understand—a Protestant! what is it? to be free—free! free to—to—O, if you felt—if you knew!—but you are so cool, unconscious—Isabel! (with renewed energy) you must feel! He at communicates heat!’ and he seized her hand, but dropped it almost immediately, and then in quite a different voice, subdued, courteous, and restrained, ‘You said that moonbeams affected the head or the brain. There is truth in every fable; certainly they strangely stir the heart. They always have—always had—a peculiar influence on me. Atmospheric influences have never been enough studied, I think,’ he added, drily, after a pause. ‘I fear,’ he said again, as she remained silent, ‘I fear I have been ranting unpardonably! It will not add to your liking for moonshine. Have I disturbed you?’ and now his voice went, as it were, with his words, and expressed a gentle, troubled regret. ‘Will you forget and forgive? Say you forgive me. Be kind—a little so! It will harm no one. I am a priest—yet—sometimes I can't help being only a man, and I go back to old times—to home—to a sister. Is it so very sinful, that I should feel a pang of loneliness, and crave for one word of
true affection—one kind word!’

‘Sinful! Why should you suppose so?’ she said quickly, and resenting the hardness of his lot. ‘It is natural and right! O, I do think it is so wicked to forbid priests from marrying, if they wish it. Of course many must be wretchedly lonely, for it is not every one who is so very ambitious, or successful either.’ She spoke in her frank, impulsive way, all her innate Protestantism urging her to pity the man, and consider him the victim of system.

‘Ah! we wont enter on that discussion,’ he answered, with a little start, and even a look of alarm in his face. ‘Now I ought not to detain you against your will, I know. Good night! You do—you will forgive?’ he added, lingering and retaining her hand in both his.

‘Yes, quite,—if it is needed, entirely! Good-night! You shall have the sketch!’

‘Thanks.’ He murmured something besides which she could not catch, and then turned away. Soon he had passed out of the gate, which swung to, with a sharp click, and Isabel saw him go down the cedar avenue which led from the front of the cottage to the township or settlement; saying to herself, ‘Curious! I wonder if he meant himself all the time! I suppose so. Horrible, cruel system it is, too! And this is the great Dr. Mornay Mr. Farrant was speaking of as being so influential in his own Church, and one likely to arrive at the very highest distinctions; commanded to repair to Rome by the Pope himself, there to be fêted and honoured, and they say to receive a Cardinal's Hat, and to . . . Well, well! suppose, as Mr. Farrant said, he should be Pope himself some day, it would be curious to remember this walk and talk. At all events it assures me that Popes are just like all other men; a little cleverer, perhaps, instead of the indescribable and impossible beings my fancy has painted them.’

With these thoughts, half uttered aloud, according to a trick of hers, Isabel reached the parlour, and blinking and shading her eyes from the lamp-light, she answered her mother's queries, ‘Was Dr. Mornay gone? What had he talked of? What an agreeable man he was! so astonishing for a Roman Catholic priest, too!’ &c. &c. Mrs. Lang was somewhat fretful that night, and inclined to be offended at Isabel's inclination for silence or short answers. She accused her of being very rude and brusque to Dr. Mornay, at which Isabel laughed, and owned she was so sometimes; she didn't know why exactly, but a ‘feeling’ came over her, and she didn't always like his manner or his look. But she assured her mother they had made it up and parted good friends, and that she pitied him very much, too much to be annoyed at him, and then declared her intention of going to bed. Mrs. Lang answered that it was no use for her to do the like, for the
dogs were making such a noise she could not sleep. She would write to ‘poor dear Kate.’
CHAPTER XIX.

‘Absence Makes The Heart Grow Fonder.’

Adversity had not sweetened Mrs. Lang's temper; nor was it to be expected that the habit of fretfulness, indulged in for years, should give way suddenly. Yet she was not really selfish, and mourned far more for her children's sake than her own, at their change of fortune.

Weak minds are often unjust, from sheer inability to take in the whole of any subject. Thus, Mrs. Lang threw all her natural affectionateness into Kate's portion, and made her, as it were, the scapegoat—or representative of the Langville ruin. For Kate's sorrows, small and great, the mother sympathised and felt; for her she would gladly have pinched and denied herself, even necessaries; while the boys, and in fact all besides, would have sunk in comparison to the most trifling want of Kate's. But fortunately Isabel was there, to care for her mother, and to insist on justice being done to the others. Through her undaunted energy and determination, the boys were not neglected, but were likely to be helped and launched, each in the way best suited to his character. The elder, Jem, was already, thanks to Dr. Mornay, promised a very good situation, and the fortunate wood selling speculation enable them to give him an outfit without applying to friends for help—a fact most acceptable to Isabel, though she was grieved to find her mother preferring to retain the money for Kate's expenses in Sydney, and leaving Jem to chance, saying ‘Boys always could shift, and get on!’ Mrs. Lang's pride had vanished, or taken another form. The second boy was destined to enter a highly respectable solicitor's office in Sydney. In the meantime he was being polished off by Mr. Farrant. Kate, since the first few weeks, had found a home with a distant cousin—a widow lady residing in Sydney—well off now—though in early life Mr. Lang had generously maintained her. Her husband being wealthy, she had every comfort, and saw a great deal of society. Though what is called a little ‘particular’ in temper, she did not forget, nor was she ashamed of owning Mr. Lang's former kindness. Her invitation to Kate was couched in friendly terms, and delighted Mrs. Lang, who saw in it a reprieve for her darling, and a life much more suited to her pretty Kate, than working like a servant, buried in the bush. Kate, however, was not long in discovering that it was a different thing to be ‘Mrs. Offley's cousin, poor Miss Lang, you know’ . . . from the well-portioned and well-dressed daughter of the rich Mr. Lang. This, and a continual depression which she could not shake off—even in a
round of parties—gave her letters home a tone of disappointment which grieved her mother, who directly put it down to ‘Mrs. Offley's queer temper,’ and from a little quiet boasting of dear Kate's invitation to Sydney, she fell into speaking of it ‘as a cruel separation from home, and grievous trial to poor darling Kate!’ By degrees Kate became the injured one, the martyr and victim, the self-denying child, who sacrificed herself for others; and her being in Sydney was an act of heroic self-devotion, often contrasted with Isabel's happy home life. For some time Isabel bore these remarks without caring. She knew that Kate could not do her work or take her place, at least for some time, till things were put into train. Mrs. Lang did not even know what Isabel did daily; for, she spared her mother in every possible way, and always, at whatever cost, provided for her wants. Thus from being a busy and active housekeeper, and in her younger days especially, as her husband so often said with joking pride, an energetic and managing woman, Mrs. Lang, knocked down with the sudden grief and change of prospects, sank into imagining herself unequal to any work, and passively gave up the reins to Isabel. At first, her whole occupation was in writing to Mrs. Farrant or to her cousins in Sydney, and afterwards to Kate. One subject alone formed the theme, and round it her thoughts paced also, in a dreary circle, which seemed to grow narrower daily. When the first alarm of poverty had gone off, and through Isabel's sensible arrangements and friends' kindness, she enjoyed, without care or thought, all her small daily comforts, Mrs. Lang began to accept it all as a matter of course, and even forgot previous facts. Without going into the business, she settled in her own mind that it had been a false alarm, and that though no longer at Langville or keeping her carriage, she was still far from being poor. She sometimes urged this as a reason why it was so hard on Kate to be forced to live with Mrs. Offley, and when Isabel tried to explain, she often ended with hinting that some people liked to rule; but after all, Kate was the eldest, and should therefore be considered first, etc. Tears sprang to Isabel's eyes at these speeches; but while it was necessary, she did not allow it to influence her; well knowing that Kate could not carry on her plans about the farm, she worked on as well as she could, being ably and faithfully supported by Charlie Brand. In his rough way, he could not do enough to show his gratitude, though very seldom did the subject pass his lips. Once, when Isabel was urging him to rest, for that he had already done more than a day's work, and might trust the chopping wood to the boy, he answered, looking up at her, with his tomahawk sticking into the block,

‘When I were down there in the cage, thinking all was up, I thought to myself, ‘If I dies with murder branded on me, it wont keep me out of the
kingdom of Heaven, seeing 'tis not a true bill; and when I gets there, it will be my first endeavour to keep a sharp look-out for her who had the kindness to believe I didn't do it. I shall know the road by that time, and if a helping hand can do aught, she'll have one that's all! And as far as I could (being no scholar), I put up a prayer for her. Now I think, Miss Isabel, you know who I mean, and that's all about it. So when you see Charlie Brand a working pretty considerable hard, you'll know the why and the wherefore.'

Yet, it must be confessed, much as it pleased and gratified her, Charlie Brand's devotion would not make up for everything. Isabel sorely missed her father. She was always his particular darling, as Kate was her mother's. And during his life she had no room for missing her mother's caressing affection. Now she felt the difference—felt it acutely, too! And the allusions and hints about Kate's absence began to be more than she could well bear. Circumstances were changed now. Everything had been put into order and good training. Perhaps Kate, with her mother's help, could and would contrive to keep the wheels a-going. Isabel could rely on Charlie Brand to carry on the wood-cutting, which used up all the otherwise useless timber on several acres of bush land, and fetched a good price as firing sold to retail dealers, who fetched it from a place near Sydney, to which Isabel had to convey it.

The time was come for some change to be desirable, Isabel felt. Kate could return home; but at present their resources would not allow of more than one besides the little ones, so that Isabel would have to go elsewhere. Fortunately, she could work and gain money, being able-bodied, as well as having an energetic and active mind. So the thought gradually assumed shape, each speech of her mother's bringing it out in stronger colours. She must be a governess! Yes! after all her toil and labour to make this home, she must leave it, and live and work among strangers. Nor would her absence cause any grief; on the contrary, as it brought Kate home, it would be actually a time of rejoicing. She was not dear or necessary to any one in the world now. No one felt any great interest in her, no one regarded her efforts, except in as far as they ministered to her mother's or Kate's benefit. No one thought of begging her not to go too far or do too much. No! if she worked all day and every day—real hard work—it was deemed by her mother, and by Tom Jolly, their constant visitor, as an honour and privilege to be allowed such an opportunity of doing anything for Kate. Dearly as she did love Kate, it must be owned that there were moments when this feeling brought pain. These thoughts came strongly before her on this evening, after hearing several more pointed speeches than usual from her mother. Even causing her to recal with a sigh the vain though generous devotion of Captain Smith, formerly in charge of the corps of mounted
police in their old district, who, on the death of Mr. Lang and report of his family's ruin, gallantly swore that he had always liked and admired Isabel Lang, and if she was now poor, he should be proud to have her for a wife. Nor did it end in words, for very soon after the family had come to Westbrooke, a clattering was heard one day, and a soldier rode up to the back yard bearing a letter from his chief to Miss I. Lang. A curious letter it was, and oddly enough expressed. But the meaning was clear and honourable. He told her he had long admired and loved her, but held back from feelings of humility. He offered all he had, wishing it was more. Mrs. Lang urged her to consider it, and not act from impulse and hurry. ‘Under present circumstances,’ she began; but Isabel interrupted by saying her answer would be the same under all circumstances, and all her consideration was to write as kind and gentle a ‘No’ as she could. This little episode was not disagreeable. It sometimes helped to warm her heart when it shivered or felt lonely as now. After all, there was much kindness in the world, so often found, too, where unexpected. And then all the words Dr. Mornay had used, more especially on this evening, returned. They were full of a strong and affectionate interest. What had she done to excite it? It seemed like a friend in need rising up. Certainly she wished he was not a Catholic priest exactly. And yet this was beginning to be less a drawback. She was interested and curious about his early history. She pitied and admired him. He was not by any means an ordinary man. So agreeable and entertaining at times! But again there were moments when she drew back afraid of she knew not what. And with all this crept in a complacent consciousness that he was interested in and drawn towards herself particularly, either through some likeness to one of his early friends, or from affinity of taste. When all else is arid and barren, and one has a feeling of being overlooked, there is scarcely a heart insensible to the pleasure of finding itself to be genial in any way to some one. It is natural and human to turn to the light, wherever it may shine.

It comforted Isabel a little to feel herself an object of interest and importance to Dr. Mornay. He alone now ever read her countenance, and saw fatigue or sorrow written there when she did not deign to speak of either. He alone appreciated her efforts and her self-denying love for her family. He alone thought her equal (or superior) to Kate, and not the merely useful working drudge—one of those who, undertaking all the disagreeable tasks which some one must do and no one likes, constantly hears it affirmed by those who sit quietly and benefit by their labours, ‘O, she likes it! She is in her element!’

Mrs. Lang was fond of Isabel, and proud of her, too. She descanted on her useful qualities now, complacently asserting that Issy was in her glory.
It was what she had always wished for. Dr. Mornay judged more truly. He saw where the yoke pressed, and that only a high sense of duty sustained her. Busied as she was with domestic occupations, he deemed her worthy for his friend; her opinion was sought, sometimes her advice asked, and yet the world spoke of him as a star. To her he had sometimes thrown off his trappings and shown a human heart—weaker, yet infinitely more interesting, than the one he was supposed to possess by people in general.

Yet with all the gratification and soothing power of this reflection, Isabel knew that it would not do to rest too much on this singular friendship. In one way her faith had been much weakened, and she cautioned herself often, never to build upon another man's friendly regard, it was like building a house on the sands. Also, an instinctive feeling of reserve and caution came to warn her that although, to her, Dr. Mornay was a kind and helping friend, apparently seeking her good only, he was really separated by his religion and calling as a priest. It was all very well to receive it as passing interest and amusement, but she must be careful. Now this caution and reserve was especially distasteful to her nature, and it set her wishing he was a Protestant. That alone was wanting to make him perfectly delightful. His faults, as far as she could see, were incidental to his calling and position, and would fall away in the clear, broad daylight of the English Church. Then his hurried troubled words seemed again to sound in her ears. Was it possible that he really began to find the defects of his own creed, and to recognise the value of the Reformed Church? It was a pleasant idea, full of charm and excitement, to be the means of bringing this great and clever man, this star of Rome, to her own faith. Was it impossible? Surely such things had happened! The thought had glanced before her once or twice, but had been dismissed as foolish. Now, however, it would not vanish, but grew into shape. Forgetting her own troubles she eagerly threw herself once again into the unprofitable employment of castle-building. Dr. Mornay's conversion would even be a greater triumph than making a match between Miss Terry and Mr. Herbert. This was something worth living for. Nor did her previous failure discourage or warn her, and yet Isabel was not otherwise than humble. She had learnt a lesson, and now, instead of putting herself forward presumptuously, she felt that her share in the work must be passive and silent. Not for one moment did she reckon on any argument on her part weighing with him. Rather he would be insensibly led to it through her. That he had doubts, she felt sure, and that he was uneasy and unhappy. How doubly careful must she be of her duty, lest her faults should hinder the work! There was something very fascinating to one of her temperament in this. It elevated her; she lost herself in pursuing this idea, and really tired
by a busy day, she fell asleep while thinking, leaning back on a couch with all her clothes still on, and the cold, clear moon rays falling full upon her. Isabel slept soundly as if in bed.
CHAPTER XX.

The Hour Of Temptation.

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As Isabel had predicted, ‘Noble’ did bay in a very tormenting way at the moon, and his deep-toned voice was the signal for several sharp and yelping animals, in all directions, and at great distances, to send their several answers, which from the rarity of the atmosphere, resounded clearly, and disagreeably broke on the stillness of the hour. Mrs. Lang turned and tossed, and wished the dogs—anywhere. It worried her. She arose and looked out of her window, lest any one should by chance be lurking about. Not a living thing could be seen, not a moving object of any kind as it seemed, for the slender leaves of the white cedar did not move. There was no air, all was still and bright. ‘But there are some clouds there. Perhaps they will gather in the moon's path and obscure her pitiless rays; then the dogs would rest, and let others sleep.’ As Mrs. Lang fancied, so it happened. The Queen of the Night passed behind a thick mass of clouds, from which there seemed no outlet, for they were gathering fast and forming into battle array, and darkness fell on the land about. ‘Noble’ retired to his bed of straw, and one after another, all the distant barks ceased. Sleep appeared to reign everywhere. Meanwhile the hitherto still leaves began to tremble, and a low sough was heard, as the rising wind caught itself among the intricacies of the forest. A change had come to the night; there was a breeze everywhere, though not a high wind. The one or two ardent lovers of sport, who had sacrificed their sleep for a ‘bang at the 'possums,’ hastened home to get what they could out of the remainder of the night. Yet, one figure might have been seen still. He carried no gun, and apparently it had been the charms of the scene alone which kept him so incessantly pacing about, now up and down the cedar avenue, then in a paddock which lay in front of the cottage, and commanded a view of the place. Now he paused, leaning on the fence, his head buried in his hands. Then again started up, and with rapid steps crossed over and stood facing the house. After which, with careful and silent footfall, he passed quite round it, gazing at each chamber-window as he went, which according to the custom of the place, were mostly unshaded by anything but the plants which half buried the whole building. It had been a close night, and one window had been left partly open. Now in the rising breeze this shook to and fro with a clatter. Dr. Mornay, for he it was, stopped before it and seemed to listen. All was still! Again went the casement, and he stretched
out his hand and bent back a pretty stiff rose-branch to keep it steady. One moment more and he passed on—slowly—and with arms folded, seemingly without looking what direction he took, he reached the old dog's kennel and a horse-block. 'Noble' growled, but two words in a low clear voice, set his tail wagging and restored him to his slumbers. Dr. Mornay sat down on the block. It was nearly dark now, and his face must have been hidden, had any been there to see. But his gestures were remarkable, and after clasping, and almost wringing his hands, and throwing up his face to the now darkened sky, with some impulse of despairing entreaty, as it seemed, he uttered aloud, though his voice was broken, and so changed it could scarcely have been recognised,—'What is it? presentiment! Yet why? The third time in my life—What can it be? Have I scoffed, and now am I to be convinced? Are these spirits?—It is rending, burning, torture!—Once more—yet once more, let me try.' And he fell on his knees and made the sign of the cross. With bowed head, he seemed to pray with passionate urgency. A groan, half-suppressed, at times burst forth and broken words—'All—all—penances—denial—vigils—labours and toil!—Will nothing avail now? Not even my promised reward! Pish! what is it? What is it now I approach it?—Rotten;—dust and ashes! In a few months I should gain all. All!—honour—power. Is it some device of the enemy which has blinded my soul—my intellect! I—I—the stern—the rigid—who laughed at all—I, having battled through more than a score of years, the envy of all. Strong,—great in my self-possession, so that I could afford to approach the forbidden things! For me it had no charms. But now! Scourge—fasting—torture—where are ye? What am I?'—

Then, as if checking himself, and taking up his hat, which had fallen, he rose and walked to and fro—to and fro, with eyes bent on the ground.

Again he stood still. 'Why am I here? What cursed spell chains me to this place? Presentiment?—humbug! I don't, I wont believe in it. It is fever! I am ill. I exposed myself to her. Yet—I don't wish it undone—unsaid, No! it won me . . . . Ah, yes . . . . That was a glimpse of heaven. For what is heaven, but the height and crown of our happiness! Each soul must have its own heaven! I now begin to see what mine must be . . . Fables. What do we know?'—

Presently his foot struck against something, and a very slight ray of light served to show him a glitter on the ground. First his hand mechanically sought his breast, then quickly picked up a locket tied by a black ribbon, which he had dropped without being aware of it. He examined it as well as he could, and pressed it passionately to his lips.

'Ah! is it an omen? To drop—to lose this! Ah, sister! ah, Isabella! my own Isabella—After our work is done, we are 'to meet.'—She said so. So
she prays in her humble home, in her pain—her love—her loneliness! I must not desert her. Her cries, would . . . O my God! what is heaven? What is hell? O, Isabella! if we two had been but Protestants—Heretics . . . . Blasphemy! I see her as she raises her thin hand to stop me. I see her, hear her sigh. She prays—prays for me—the priest—the . . . She is a true child of the Church. Am I mad? No, no; not at all mad. Good Lord—this is a conflict with the devil! 'Tis he who has taken the form that intoxicates me—the very name which is itself a spell of fascination to me! Avaunt ye, Evil One! Pooh, I am doting. It is no spirit—it is myself. Why have I these feelings—these passions? What has a priest—a sacrificed man—to do with them? I deemed I had destroyed them, ruthlessly killed them, smothered them; and yet they live!' Again he changed his tone to tremulous pleading. ‘O, Isabella of my soul—sister—is this your blessed warning? Do you speak to me in this? ‘Fly,’ I hear you say. ‘It is sin, deadly sin. It will cost you the toil, the work of your whole life—all your reward here—all your hope—all my hope hereafter.’ Isabel, I obey, I go! Good Lord! Blessed Virgin! O, all ye holy saints! Powers of heaven! angels of the Almighty! guard me now—thy long-time servant. My stripes, my fasts and vigils, my hard and lonely lot, let it all plead for me now. I go!’

He crossed his arms on his chest as he uttered the last words with a solemn gesture, and his voice rose. With it also rose a rushing sound—not however heeded by him at the moment, absorbed as he was in deathly conflict with his foe. Some time passed, and he was still walking, though with less hurried steps, and his arms still folded on his chest. Was it the wind making that swift, sharp rush? Clouds were hurrying here and there, and still the shrubs, trees, and grass swayed about, but in no very certain direction. It was growing gusty, and seemed undecided in which quarter it was to blow. All was still—buried in sleep. Nothing broke the silence but that singular low, ever increasing sound. The voices of his own heart, and its yet hard throbings, prevented him from noting it. But by another sense, he was made aware of something unusual. He raised his head, and his delicately cut nostril worked. ‘Fire! fire! Some of those bush fires! But----’ again he sniffed and turned in the direction of the barn, which stood close by some uncleared bush; ‘this is coming near,—or is it the wind set in that way?’

There had been two or more of these bush fires going on in the neighbourhood for some days, as he knew. But now with all his usual keen senses awake and clear again, he felt in an instant this was not from the bush.

‘Ha!’ he exclaimed, turning to the cottage; ‘that's it,’ and with a few bounds as it seemed, he stood by the dwelling, within which Mrs. Lang,
and three children, and two maids were sleeping. The whole building was of weather-board, and the roof made of shingles—all inflammable wood. But part of the building was a little detached, for having found it necessary to add two or three rooms, Mr. Lang had put up one of the moveable wooden houses then in vogue. It stood on low wheels or blocks, a little above the ground, and was connected with the main building by a covered way, only a few feet long. Unless passing on that side, it was difficult to see that it was a separate building, both being in the course of years, of one tint, and overgrown with plants. In this moveable house, familiarly called the ‘wooden box,’ Isabel had her sleeping-room, and her store. Here also in a small closet, slept one of the servants; the other remaining with the little children, whose room adjoined Mrs. Lang's. There were besides these, two other small sleeping-closets, called ‘verandah rooms,’ being enclosed off the deep, double verandah, and they served for a passing guest, or for the boys when at home.

When Dr. Mornay reached the spot, he saw that it was Isabel's part that was on fire. As yet it had not touched the cottage. At once he perceived, by pulling down the tarpauling, which, well painted, served as cover to the connecting passage, there might be a possibility, if the wind was at all favourable, of saving the cottage. But it required hands, and to be done at once. Only Charlie Brand and a boy were within call. The man who helped and served as drayman lived in the township. Charlie's hut was some way off, and there was no way of giving him the alarm, for the bell which had been often talked of as very desirable, he knew was not yet even ordered. All this flashed across his mind in an instant. But the flames now seemed to wind and wrap themselves round that doomed wooden box. The smoke was suffocating. Yet no one stirred or gave signs of life. 'Good God! they must be insensible! The smoke—'

Then he remembered his closing Isabel's casement, and he flew round to it, obliged to make a wide circuit, for red-hot pieces of wood and shingles were beginning to fall. And just then, with a sigh, low, but ominous, the wind swept through the cedars, and played in the swamp oaks, and then gave fresh impetus to the devouring flame, which shot up in awful beauty, like some savage beast licking its prey.

'Isabel! Isabel!'

But to his wild appeal there was neither answer nor stir—not a sign of life. And the crackling, hissing flames raged wilder and madder than ever. Then, for a brief moment, arose one of those struggles when the light of the soul seems quenched, when right and wrong are inextricably blended, when reason has fled, and fierce passions rise up in fearful strength to contend with foregone habit. Habit alone and not principle taking the helm.
Fortunate for the poor torn soul at such a time if the habit has hitherto been guided by principle!

‘She is insensible—she will die—perhaps she is dead. O, God! dead! Yet isn't this an answer to my wild prayer—to my sister's prayer? I can go. Who will know I was here? I should be saved from the sin—the disgrace. Am I cruel? Ah no, for life is but agony! Dead—she can no longer beguile me from my hardly earned honours. Dead—she will no longer mix herself up in my dreams with that other Isabel. I shall be free—free—and she, so pure, so good—she will be at rest!'

For an instant he turned away from the burning house—only for an instant. The whole instinct of the man revolted and rose up against such a decree.

‘Is it right, or is it wrong?’ he exclaimed in frantic agony. ‘I had vowed—resolved to give her up. God knows it! God heard it! Isn't it, then, sin to save her? Are not these flames sent in answer to my wild prayer—my former strict devotion—and for hers—my saintly sister's sake?—to take away and remove from my path this delusion of the enemy! She must die! Better for many such to perish, than for discredit to come on the Church—through one of God's chosen ministers too! I will have masses offered for her. To her I had exposed my weakness in a bitter moment. And she must therefore . . . What—die, die horribly? She—Isabel—to die such a cruel death, and I—a man—a brave, strong man, here, able to save her!’

In a moment the old force of habit came back in full sway. In another instant he was plunging through that sea of flame—that stifling smoke.

‘Isabel! Isabel!’

But there was no answer. He saw her and seized her, wrapping her in a large cloak which was hanging near the couch on which she lay, dressed. He carried her out. The flame had not yet reached the interior of her room, though the smoke was so thick as to make it hardly possible to breathe. He bore her on—fast—faster—never pausing or looking round. No sooner had he clasped her in his arms than all else was forgotten—all! He stopped at last at the end of a sloping paddock which ran round the farm, and was fenced off because it had been drilled for maize. A fallen tree lay along. On it he sank, and then, with panting breath, and wildly throbbing pulses, he gazed at her whom he carried. ‘Was she dead, after all?’ He laid her down gently and tenderly, taking off his own coat and covering her with it. He knew where some water was to be found, and quickly came back with his handkerchief dripping, which he applied to her forehead and hands. The quiet, and the clear pure air, soon revived the paralysed senses. There was a quiver in the eyelids—a slight movement of the hand. Then all was apparently locked in death again. Kneeling by her, bending over her, he
uttered wild words. Now addressing her as a departed soul and praying to her as to some saint. Now speaking as to a living woman, entreating her compassion, urging her to arouse herself that they might go—fly together!—for that she had been given him this night as a prey—as his own. He told her there were other lands where they might go and live, out of reach even of the Church. There they would make their own heaven. Then, when the first strength and heat of this had exhausted itself, his voice sank into low, tender murmurs, and his tears dropped unheeded; while bitter sobs choked his whole frame. Incoherent as were his words, they had a wondrous pathos in them; they were so impassioned, yet so sad.

There was too little light to see it, though there were the first faint indications of a cloudy dawn, but on her face there arose a flush, even while she lay so motionless. At last, at some pause he made, she sighed and moved.

‘Where am I? Is it a dream?’ she said, wildly and trembling very much; ‘I was dreaming of Dr. Mornay,’ and she again closed her eyes.

‘Were you? You are cold! O, let me wrap you up and carry you on—on—’ and he strove to raise her. ‘Isabel! Isabel!’

‘Dr. Mornay’—she was now completely conscious. ‘Where am I? Take me back directly.’

‘Back! where? No—we must go on—onwards, not back! never back! I will carry you.’

‘Tell me what it means! Do you hear?’ and she raised herself into a sitting position, and spoke with sternness, though her voice was stifled, and she felt so ill she could hardly pronounce a syllable.

‘The fire! Didn't you know? There was fire. God sent it! Jehovah!—for the sacrifice! But I saved you. The house is burnt down. Nothing remains by this time. You and I are saved, and we only. How could I help it? I couldn't let you die—perish! How could I? Now let us go on—on, far, far onwards. It is cold here.’

Isabel looked keenly round her, noting every bush and tree. She was one of those whose senses are seldom confused, but are ready and clear for any emergency.

‘O, Dr. Mornay! You wont, you can't deceive me! I trust you. You are a man of stern principles—a man----. But how ill I feel! For the sake of God—of your own soul—take me back, or----Is it really burnt? are they hurt? Leave me here—call some one—call Charlie Brand here!’ She spoke with increasing terror and urgency.

‘My soul! my soul! what of it? It is you I ask—of you I demand—what is to come to my soul? Honour, glory, power—all was mine,—but for you! You are mine now—wholly mine, given to me this night—a brand from
the burning!"

‘Do as I say,’ she cried, interrupting him, firmly, for she believed him to be mad. ‘If not, I shall walk home as I can.’

Just then a dog came up with his nose to the ground; he gave a sharp bark or two, and ran off again, then came back, and on the slope of the ground which rose suddenly near them, a figure loomed large and dark against the pale grey sky.

‘Thank God!’ breathed out Isabel, faintly, and sinking back in the reaction of joy at this most opportune relief. For it was stout Charlie himself, who was searching about in a state of mind bordering on frenzy at finding Miss Isabel missing.

‘Carry me home, Charlie—quick! Home!’

‘Ay, ay, and here ye be? My—and this gent too! What, then, it's you has been and pulled her out of that blaze, and a credit to ye it is. But how you comed to hear it down away there, and not a soul had glimpse of the truth nigh the very place, passes me.’

‘I was taking a stroll, as I am fond of doing on such a bright night. I saw—happily I saw the fire, and was enabled to—to—’

‘Ay, ye've saved her; a good deed, too. Couldn't afford to part with her, no ways. Good fruit is scarce!’ Charlie said, and in a moment he had lifted Isabel in his arms, winding the cloak round her skilfully. He pointed with his foot to the coat, half kicking it. ‘That's yourn! Best put it on! A chill will bring the rheumatics after a sweat.’ It was always observed that when most excited in feeling, Charlie subsided into his roughest dialect. As he was going, he half turned to say, ‘Missis will be going down 'pon her knees, I guess, to ye for this turn. Mortal bad just now, not knowing where her was,’ nodding towards Isabel. ‘Began to think 'most she must be gone up straight in a chariot of fire!2 Couldn't see not a morsel of her, not even a heap of ashes like.’ With that he set himself to walk straight on.

A low, stifled moan reached Isabel as she had closed her eyes, feeling faintish, yet indescribably content to be in Charlie's safe keeping.

‘Stay, Charlie! He saved me from a dreadful fate. Is he hurt? Ask—wait! Father Mornay!’

He came to her side directly, but his eyes were bent on the ground.

‘Thank you, thank you,’ she said. ‘God will bless you for saving me.’

She held out her hand. She never afterwards forgot the burning touch of his as he took it and pressed it to his lips. It seemed to her as if it had left a scorching mark behind, and the sound of his voice was unnatural. It was more like a hollow rattle as he tried to utter something and could not,—probably ‘Good-bye.’

‘Poor man! Don't lose sight of him, Charlie!’
‘Ay, ay! Has done a good turn this here night.’ Charlie strode on. ‘Queer thing, that fire. Only just saved. Moveable house gone, every atom of it. Flames caught the cottage just a little and blackened it, but thanks be, the wind went down, and by tearing away the tarpauling, all was saved.’

‘Any one hurt?’ Isabel asked.

‘Yourself and him yonder. No other. All asleep—had to scream and cry like mad.’

‘But Susan—she slept near me; has anyone thought?’

‘She took care of herself, it seems. Susan didn't fancy the baying of old Noble,’ said Charlie, chuckling at the idea; ‘and on the sly went and took up with Bridget; slept like a top all through, till I threw a pail of water over her to sarve her out.’

‘Why?’ asked Isabel, amused in spite of herself.

‘Because of her not being in the fire, where she ought to have been, aside o' you.’

There was silence then, for Isabel was shivering and feeling ill. Besides which, a terrible fear and perplexing doubt lay heavily on her. It was still all confused—all a dream! To fall asleep with such a scheme, and to wake finding herself there, and with him alone, and then those words—those words! Could she ever cease to hear them, to feel them, worse than fire flames? He must have been mad, insane. Perhaps from over-excitement or excess of fasting or work; he was subject to attacks of illness; and once had a brain fever. O that she might never see him again! That he might never, never guess that, though unable to move or give signs of life, she had heard, and having heard, wished to swoon really, or even to die, rather than face him again!

Mrs. Lang, having been long since fully roused, received her daughter with hysterical weeping; praising the bravery of her deliverer; blessing and thanking him, and wishing he had come to be cared for; of course he was hurt, too. But it was evident that Isabel needed real care now, and by Charlie's advice, he was allowed to send a messenger for a doctor who lived only ten miles off, and she was meanwhile laid on her mother's bed and left quiet. What a day it was! The alarm given, people from all parts, within a circuit of some twenty miles, crowded to express sympathy and offer help. There was a constant examining of the wreck of the 'wooden box;' there were reiterated explanations and questionings as to the probable origin of the fire, and as to its being discovered. Charlie Brand, it seemed, usually awoke once towards morning, and sometimes being anxiously inclined, peeped out to take a survey of his premises. He said, the first thing he saw was a red light over the house. In another moment he was dressed, and, followed by his dog, striding across the paddock. He found
the place all but consumed; the last wall fell in with a crash as he came up. He rushed in to see if any one was among the rubbish, and hallooed as, he said, he had never done since he was a boy. His screams had the effect of awaking Mrs. Lang, and then the two maid-servants. But where was Isabel? The suspense, till ‘Noble’ scented her out, had been frightful. Charlie said, ‘I didn't feel so bad and all-over like, when I thought I was to hang.’ Then came the question, But how did Dr. Mornay know of the fire, and knowing it, why had he not raised an alarm? He was not present to explain, so a variety of solutions of the mystery of his conduct were brought forward. Isabel's own version was, that he was so excited and upset, that having rushed in and saved her, he lost all further presence of mind, and as she had been in a swoon, perhaps he dared not leave her. She urged the propriety of some one going to his house to inquire after him. He was certainly very ill, and most likely was hurt, and he ought to be well cared for. Mrs. Lang set off towards evening, herself to inquire and to pour out her thanks. Having sent off the little girls with a kind neighbour, and leaving Isabel asleep under the influence of a soothing draught, the doctor ordering perfect repose and silence for her, Mrs. Lang, after indulging in a fit of weeping and wishing for Kate to talk to, bethought herself of Dr. Mornay, and gladly undertook the mission. But her long walk (long for her) was thrown away, except as to filling up some time. The servant, a stupid half-deaf man, said, ‘His Reverence had not been at home since the previous evening. He had not returned at night, but that was not out of the common for him, nor had he been nigh the place for the day.’

‘But surely you ought to search, inquire. He was helping at our fire, and he was probably hurt. Have you taken any steps?’

‘Hurt—no! His Reverence was ever very independent. Here to-day, to-morrow gone! He didn't like to be asked too much for. No doubt he was about his work somewhere, perhaps in Sydney, perhaps after some sick and sorrowing soul. He'd turn up, not a doubt. No fear!’

Mrs. Lang was indignant, and failing in stirring this man's fears or anxiety, she went to the Parsonage and opened her budget of news and her troubles to Mr. Sands, a stout, round-about, suave little man, yet ‘with a little pepper in his composition, too,’ as he always asserted, rubbing his round, fat hands as he spoke, and winding up with a low, but very hearty laugh.

He turned most things into a joke, till it came to some certain point, and then at a knot or some unseen hitch in the smooth running of the thread, he would suddenly ruffle his feathers like a turkey-cock, his face growing a bright ruby red even to his bald pate, and his hitherto smooth speech turned into sputtering and stammering. He was not married, but said to be
engaged. He was rather popular, and preached ‘clever’ sermons; and had quite a curiously neat garden in which he dug and watered, and, as he said, ‘took all his recreation.’

To him Mrs. Lang imparted her anxiety about Dr. Mornay.

‘Certainly! Very handsome of you, my dear madam. I always make a point of bowing and being on the best of terms with the Catholic priest and the Presbyterian minister. Beyond that I don't pretend to go. Ah!—very heroic—quite romantic. And how came he so opportune on the spot? Ah!—fond of moonlight; superior man! I understand likely to receive very high honours—very high indeed—that is, in the Roman Church. My brains! what a delusion it is. Can you conceive such benighted ignorance, Mrs. Lang? But unhappily such a man, such an intellect as Dr. Mornay's does not—can not, in point of fact—receive it. No! Then what does it end in? Ah, that's it—that's exactly the very point! My dear madam, I can prove . . . .’

‘But if he has fainted in the bush, after saving my child! It is horrid to think of!’ Mrs. Lang said, trying to bring him to the point.

‘Very—O, very horrid indeed! Only you see—really I don't wish to hurt your feelings—but he is a very dangerous man—insidious! Indeed he is; and as one of my parishioners, one of my fold—allow me to suggest, it is at least a bad example. I see you are harping on probable danger of another kind to himself. Now, I don't apprehend any. He is the most ‘whimmy’ man ever known. His servant is right. We shall hear of him in some freaky way soon. But, O! of course, anything to oblige. Yes, if such be your wish, madam, I'll send men at once.’

And under a doubtful sense of overwhelming politeness, Mrs. Lang left, still very much at sea as to Mr. Sands' real meaning.

She found Isabel much worse, in high fever, as it seemed, and delirious. This called out long dormant, but not actually forgotten or lost powers. Mrs. Lang was once more the active, light-handed ‘Kitty’ of whom her husband had been proud to talk. She watched her child, and forgot her own fatigue in the keen sense of anxiety which came over her, lest this prop, this dutiful ‘helping’ child should be taken from her.

Relief came just as it was very sorely needed; Isabel still seriously ill, and Mrs. Lang beginning to give way. Mr. Jolly and his son rode up about the time for the early dinner. Joyfully did Mrs. Lang go out to meet them.

‘What brought you just as I wanted you?’ she asked.

‘Ill news travels fast,’ Mr. Jolly said. ‘Now, what can we do? Mrs. Jolly bade me bring you, every one of you, back. Bless your soul! she is turning out every room at this moment. Such a contriver as she is! Room and to spare for all. No denial. Well, well; as soon as darling Issy can be moved I
mean, of course! I'll have every one of ye! Where are the chicks? Gone! Where's Kate—Miss Lang? The deuce! In Sydney now, and Issy ill and her mamma tired out? That won't do. No, no! Kate ain't the girl I take her for if she isn't wanting to be here. Can't she come?'

‘Let me—can't I go with a message?’ Tom ventured to say, colouring up. ‘O, father, if we had but brought the gig now!’

‘As to that, it can be fetched, boy.’

‘On no account,’ said Mrs. Lang. ‘At least for Kate. Couldn't think of it. No, no. It is necessary now, in our altered position, as I always say, to be doubly particular. And, excuse me, for a lady to travel in a gig with a young man is—is----’

‘But the old one, madam; any harm in me, now?’

‘No, of course,’ Mrs. Lang said, with a bow to Mr. Jolly. ‘You really—if you would be so kind as to bring up our dear girl, I know she will be delighted to come. Her heart is so soft and tender. She pines away, poor darling! All her spirits gone—her pretty colour faded.’

Here Tom shuffled his feet very impatiently. Mrs. Lang looked at him in surprise, and then resumed her speech.

‘I am not sure,—but before this sudden and awful disaster (the fire, I mean) Dr. Mornay had been so good as to promise me to see my Katie. And he is so remarkably clever, I am sure he would find or invent some way of bringing her to me at once. That is, supposing his servant is right, and the Doctor is in Sydney. Very mysterious isn't it, Mr. Jolly?’ she added, with a sudden change of tone.

‘What, ma'am—the Doctor going to Sydney?’

‘Yes. I mean his part in our adventure altogether. His saving Issy, and then disappearing. No one can even guess where he is. He appeared quite suddenly as the fire broke out, and then disappeared. But priests—Catholic priests—are, I believe, always mysterious.’

‘Do you mean that fellow, I beg pardon, that gentleman who was trying to get up a church and what not, our way?’ said Mr. Jolly. ‘Ay, ay; a very clever chap I have heard he is. The Pope's right hand—something very high and powerful in disguise, they say. Sent out here for some political purpose, as well as the strengthening their party. Well, now, you do as you think proper, of course; but for my Amelia, now, I'd sooner trust her to a young fellow like Tom there, though he might, whether he meant it or no, make a little love to her, than have her argued into believing black is white by a man of that stamp.’

‘Now I think of it, Mr. Jolly, if I write to Kate, Mr. Merryman is coming in a day or so to his place near this township. He will be too happy to oblige us, I know, and will give Kate a seat in his carriage—a very
Mrs. Lang had thrown some of her old attempted dignity into her manner. Again she was Mrs. Lang of Langville. Mr. Jolly fell to using his great big purple pocket-handkerchief and clearing his throat.

‘Then let me,’ Tom said, nervously; ‘may I take your letter to Miss Lang? I could go to Mr. Merryman for her, and act as messenger, you see, and anything in fact—and—and I have some business to do in Sydney—eh, father?’

So this matter was arranged thus. Tom was to carry the note, and to give Kate all the help he could, which he took as a high honour, and on his suggestion being received, he took courage, so as to talk, and make some very pertinent remarks as to the fire and its consequences.

Mr. Jolly, finding there was really nothing for him to do, said he should return to his wife, and with many repeated, hearty offers of help, he took leave. First, however, holding a consultation with Charlie Brand about the replacing the lost rooms; the result of which was that, under the said chief's directions, a new building was very soon being erected. When Mrs. Lang hoped he was not running up bills, and so on, he nodded and grinned, and assured her ‘that there bush, coupled with good will, had the wherewithal to build houses enough for a town as big as Sydney itself!’

Before Isabel was recovered, a neat weather-board building was ‘looking up,’ and to watch the progress of it became a source of amusement to her, as she reclined near her mother's window.

After some little delay and difficulty, Kate arrived, but with Tom as her escort after all. Mr. Merryman was not going to leave Sydney for another fortnight, so Tom, finding that Kate's anxiety to go home was great, took on himself to hire a gig, his own horse being quiet in harness; and with more pride and pleasure than he cared to show, he drove Miss Lang home, without an accident or adventure of any kind.

Isabel was fairly surprised, as a blooming, elegantly dressed person came rustling into her room. Was this the pining, injured Kate? Sydney seemed to have done more than Westbrooke; they had no such blooming specimens here. Mrs. Lang's pride and joy were great, and Isabel had not the heart to give the prudent warning which rose to her lips, when she saw the preparations her mother was making to celebrate this event. Kate's return was to be a fête, and Mrs. Lang's notions were more consistent with Langville style than Westbrooke. After a little, she gave up the notion of a large dinner-party, because Issy was not well enough. But Mr. Sands was invited, Tom pressed to remain, and a note despatched to Dr. Mornay. But still the deaf man shook his head, and said ‘his Reverence had not returned, but he was about his work somewhere, no doubt! He was used to go away
quietly like this; no fear, no fear at all!”
CHAPTER XXI.

The Newspaper Paragraph.

‘Tom! are you grown dumb? Come! I am so dull. Do tell me news, all the news of the dear old place,’ said Isabel, after Tom had remained silent for some few minutes.

She was still in her mother's room, on a couch. It had been found that her leg received a burn, from a falling spark, or piece of wood, probably. The wound, though small, had become troublesome, and now kept her a very unwilling prisoner.

‘I beg your pardon, Issy! I was thinking. But how are you? better?’

‘Yes, only this stupid leg! But of what are you thinking, Tom?’

‘Well, as to your all coming on a visit to us. You see, father and mother expect it, and I was considering, that with contrivance, we could make your sister and Mrs. Lang comfortable. O, I hope you will come!’

‘Mamma may, and the little ones, but indeed, Tom, I cannot! Business, you see—I am become an important personage now. As to Kate—well—I don't know, she is better and happier, perhaps it would be a pity to take her where old things must return to her mind.’

‘But if you mean----They are all gone, every one, Issy! We would do all we could to make her merry. The air is good, and----Issy!’ he said, drawing his seat close to her couch, and speaking in almost a whisper, while his face grew crimson—

‘If that would be any relief—I mean of course it would! But will you tell her—that—that—I am always so very busy, you see, that I am never at home. I catch my meals anywhere, don't come in and sit down; you understand? So, she needn't mind me—or—or if she ever for a moment desired anything I could do for her, there, I am within call in a moment. You understand?’

‘Yes, quite. O Tom, that isn't the way! You good, blundering soul, can't you see? No, indeed! I shall not say so, nor will you, I hope, ever be tempted to act so—to give up your rightful, honoured place as your father's son, in your own house! Besides, Tom, Kate wouldn't, couldn't wish it, or like you the better for it.’

‘Wouldn't she? I only meant I wouldn't, for all the world, be in her way or obtrude myself. Though as to not loving and adoring her,—that, Issy, I can never help doing, so long as I live. But I know so well—don't you think I know—and feel—and see—that I am not like those young fellows
she meets? We are quiet simple folks—honest and true, I hope; but, bless you! I see the difference. Yet—sometimes—May I tell you, Isabel?—you are always so very kind! Well, I have had a pleasant thought, that is, if—if—your sister—’

‘Call her Kate!’

‘Kate! Ah! but I don't think she likes me to do so. But, however, to you, just to you, I will. If Kate should happen not to marry, and her heart is so good and so pure, that she can't forget that—that—but no, I will not abuse him) though he clearly has forgotten her—is she should live on as she is, and in time, years hence, she should, in the natural run of things, ever feel a little deserted, when younger people come and push her out rudely, as it is the way of the world;—if then her feelings should have changed a little, and if I only can carry out my resolutions, and have lived as I ought, so as to be not wholly unworthy, it pleases me, Issy, to think, that then I may, perhaps, succeed. She may then allow me to—to—love her—to work for her!’

‘When she is grown old and ugly?’

‘That she never, never can be! Certainly not in my eyes!’ he answered, with warmth.

‘Well, Tom, all I can say is, and always have said, I admire and respect you, and the wonder is, and always will be, how Kate can be so blind. Ah! Tom, you would aim at the highest and best! But why didn't you content yourself with poor me?’

Tom laughed. He thoroughly understood her. ‘I know I wouldn't give up or forfeit your regard—may I say regard?’

‘Regard and affection and respect and interest and admiration and . . . .’

‘Stop, Issy, that sounds like mocking me! No, but your regard, affection, for so it is between us, is my great pleasure. And it is a wish, pretty nearly as deep in my heart as the other, that some day—you see we need patience in this life, Issy—things will work round in time—that one of these days, I may see you joined to the only one worthy of you, and exactly suited. You know who I mean, I see!’

‘Yes, of course I do. But I hope, Tom, your own wish has more foundation, more possibility about it, than this. Consider, even if your first premises are right—consider, now—nonsense! Yet, I own, I do wish we could only hear something satisfactory of him, and . . . has mamma said anything to you, Tom, or to your father?’

Tom looked down, grave and sorry. ‘Yes, Isabel, I can't deny but she has; very distressing, and to me utterly unaccountable. But surely she doesn't really mean it?’

‘I don't know. Sometimes I resolve to think it is just one of poor
mamma's whims, when she gets low and into that mood. She was always rather suspicious, I think, and latterly she was sensitive and jealous. And no one can blame her for resenting any affront to poor papa. Nor can affronts, whether intended or not, be denied. Unhappily, they were always misunderstanding each other. Circumstances added to it, and their tempers were so opposed. Their views of everything so different!

‘Yes, yes, all that I grant; and even that Mr. Herbert could be disdainful and contemptuous, rather imperious too.’

‘Yes; but remember, he was provoked, Tom. There was not one near him, his equal as to education and so on. It was a trial to him, a jar to his peculiar tastes, and he unfortunately did not make allowance; and I always shall think his sister's crude, jealous temper irritated him, and that with an influence less sensitive, less egotistical, in fact, he would have left off all that . . .’

‘Quite so. O, I do like to hear any one do him justice, Issy! It is so horrid to hear them running him down; pitiful creatures, who were afraid to breathe in his presence. But now he is gone, that he is absent, they throw dirt and take their petty revenge by picking out and exaggerating all his faults. But all the poorer kind adore him, and so do we, all of us!’

Isabel had blushed at the beginning of Tom's sentence, but was now calm and cool again, even a little pale, and she bit her lips as she said, ‘After the trial, after all the evidence and the talking, to speak or think of that dreadful—excuse me, but so it was, suspicion, is so very bad. Mamma little knows how she wounds me to pain each time she alludes to it, or I see the thought is passing through her though she does not speak.’

‘Don't distress yourself, Isabel, Mrs. Lang doesn't really believe it more than I do. Only you see, she is troubled and sore, poor soul, and then report says he, Mr. Herbert, is getting quite a rich man in the old country. If he was poor or in distress, I'd bet, Mrs. Lang would be the first to come round and help him, and all those shadows would vanish out of her mind.’

‘Yes; you are right there, Tom,’ said Isabel, brightening with pleasure, both at the truth of his remark, and the good clear sense he showed when not under constraint, and confused with shyness. ‘Yes! that is the root of it, after all,—jealousy. Well, it is harder to rejoice with those who rejoice, than to weep with those who weep. Don't you think so?’

‘To some. But am I tiring you? They said I must not stay long.’

‘O, no! you do me such good. 'Tis such a comfort to be able to say all this.’

Here Kate came up to the window. She was outside, and leaning her elbows on the sill, she stood in a frame, as it were, with the rich scarlet geranium all round her. She had been walking, and held flowers in her
hand, which she handed to her sister.
‘I wish you could come out, Issy. It is so nice here. The garden is so improved. Couldn't you be drawn in a chair somehow?’
‘Where is the chair?’ said Isabel, smiling, but gazing out wistfully too, for fresh air and sunshine were meat and drink to her.
‘How stupid of me!’ exclaimed Tom, rising, and tapping his forehead. Then, without a word, he was rushing out of the room.
‘Tom!’ said Isabel, surprised and rather provoked at his not remaining and talking on pleasantly, now Kate was present.
‘O, I beg pardon—only—good-bye! I forgot—that is—some business. Good-bye. May I come again?’
And without even a glance towards Kate he was gone.
‘What a funny animal it is!’ she said, smiling, and gathering the scarlet blossoms.
‘I don't know what has suddenly struck him now; but I wish you could have heard how well he has been talking. Tom is a sensible, good-hearted fellow as ever lived—improved too.’
‘Yes. I thought he had picked up a little polish, though there is room for more still. Our cousin thought him very handsome,’ said Kate, rather affectedly.
‘Well, and so he is.’
‘That is a matter of taste. He is too dark and ruddy—too stout. But mamma is waiting for me, Issy. I brought you the newspaper, sent here by that polite Mr. Sands. It will pass away the time till I come in again.’
So she gave her the Sydney Morning Herald, and turned away to meet her mother, who was examining the vegetable garden and orchard.

‘More failures! Good gracious me! I hope poor Mr. Vance is not actually ruined. His poor little delicate wife and numbers of small children! Ah—here's something in my way!’ and she read among the advertisements about some good shingles being wanted, and stuck a pin there to show to Charlie Brand—for he had a lot of 'shingles' to dispose of.
‘And here's something else. O dear! O dear! ‘Wanted, a governess, to teach the rudiments, &c.,—will be treated as one of the family. Good testimonials required. Apply to X. W., Shorts, stationer, George-street, Sydney.’ I'll answer it forthwith.’
Then she idly skimmed over the paper, with her mind occupied by the reflections roused by the above advertisement. Conning over her letter, imagining the interview which might follow, wondering who X. W. was in reality, and how she should play her new part, &c.
Suddenly the whole expression of her face was changed. Every feature
seemed in a state of tension—the eyes distended with terror, and her breathing fast and hurried. Eagerly she read on, growing dizzy, for the words seemed to dance up and down, and were all colours, till everything at last was flame—bright, burning flame; and, with a scream, covering her face as if to guard it from something, she fell back in her cushions—to all appearance fainted.

The paper fell on the ground.

Mrs. Lang came in, hurried as usual, fretting a little, and scolding the maid for not having the tea ready and prepared. ‘Miss Isabel ought to have had something quite an hour ago. It is very important, the doctor says, that she have nourishment every two hours or so.’

‘There! didn't I say so. Look at that. She has fainted—Kate! Kate!’

Luckily, Kate was at hand, and there in a moment.

They revived her after a time, and she declared she had not fainted—she had been seized with a panic and a giddiness. She had read—or had she dreamt it? and she looked half bewildered into Kate's face, who did not know what to make of it.

‘Where is the paper?’ Isabel cried with sudden recollection. ‘Dream!—no! it is there! Read it yourselves. What does it mean? Horror! Horrible! O, mamma—O, Kate! Such a terrible, dreadful thing!’

They exchanged glances of wonder and fright—uttered some words meant to be soothing, but so foreign to the purpose that they were irritating. At last Kate lifted the newspaper, and observing the pin at the advertisement, said, ‘I don't understand what it is all about.’

‘Read it, Kate! not that! but—about the fire here—and—and—O, mamma! Doctor Mornay is dead!’

At this she burst into a fit of weeping. And Kate, searching the newspaper, at last came on a paragraph headed—

‘Shocking Catastrophe.’

She pointed to it, and whispered to her mother to take it into the next room and leave her with Isabel to follow as soon as she could.

Mrs. Lang and Tom read an account of some gentleman who had gone out on a botanizing expedition in the bush around the north shore, that sandy soil being famous for the abundance and variety of its wild flowers. While searching about, they had discovered the body of a man lying in a very sequestered spot. This corpse had been afterwards identified as the celebrated and respected Father or Doctor Mornay. A small phial was found tightly clenched in one hand. In his waistcoat pocket there was a parcel, which contained a locket with a curl of a woman's hair, and the word ‘Bella,’ in old English letters worked in enamel.

There was also this written on the back of a letter in pencil—
‘A poor sinner closes a life of toil and penance, alone and in shame, lost in a moment of fiery trial. As you desire to be delivered from purgatory yourself, entreat for the prayers of the faithful in behalf of this erring soul!

‘Ora pro me! once God's faithful servant! Let the locket and sister's hair lie on his poor broken heart and return with it to dust. In that he has sinned, he dies. Mother of Heaven, intercede! Father, have mercy! God, the Judge, Thou knowest all!’

The writing was irregular and illegible, and some words had been carefully blotted over.

‘The result of the inquest was a verdict of ‘Suicide under temporary insanity, brought on by an injury supposed to be received in his late heroic efforts to save the life of a lady from fire.’

‘Many of the Roman Catholic priests attended, and there was quite a crowd on the day of the funeral, which was conducted with great pomp and solemnity; a sermon being preached in his usual eloquent style, by,’ &c. &c.

In another part of the sheet, there was a detailed, but very incorrect account of the fire, breaking out in the dwelling of the widow of our late respected fellow-colonist, the well-known Mr. Lang, of Langville, &c. There was also another paragraph quoted from the Catholic newspaper, giving a history of Dr. Mornay's birth and life to this effect. ‘That he was the only son of emigrant parents, who had taken refuge in the south of Ireland, where the father had earned a poor living by teaching his native language, French, at some schools. The mother had been Italian, and to her native city, Rome, the son had been sent as a youth, to be educated according to the tenets of the members of the Society of Jesus. There had been two sisters, one became a nun in a monastery in Ireland, the other had been struck blind by lightning, and was a well-known character in her own place, a voluntary Sister of Charity, ever ministering to others, after devoting herself to her parents till their deaths. A romantic attachment had subsisted between ‘Sister Isabella’ and her brother, who at first showed no vocation for the priesthood, and gave some trouble by his fiery and determined character. But the superiors had taken the measure of his intellect (not that it was so expressed in this biographical outline) and foresaw that he would be a worthy member of their body. It was however owing to his sister's earnest entreaties and her own exalted piety and devotion, that he finally became a candidate for orders. His future progress was described, and in forcible terms, it was told how he had outstripped all his fellows in devotion and zeal. How he had early displayed a great talent for the management of intricate affairs, a clearness of head and power of
adaptation to circumstances, wonderful for his age. He had been looked upon as one of their great props, trusted by all his superiors. Just at this very time, had been sent from Rome all the necessary papers to advance him to the highest authority and dignity. The Pope had sent for him, and great honours were talked of as awaiting this distinguished servant of the Church, as soon as he arrived in the Holy City. He had much desired to leave a well-organized school and system in the Westbrooke district, it was said, where Catholic families abounded. By his own request, he had been sent to that place as the resident priest, and the result of his labours showed what he had accomplished. A fire breaking out in a neighbour's premises and dwelling-house, Dr. Mornay, in his usual prompt and self-forgetting way, was on the spot before any one else had received the alarm, and only in time to rescue an interesting young woman from a shocking death. He found her senseless from the smoke. At the risk of his own life he bore her out, through the raging flames and stifling smoke. But it was supposed that he received a blow in the head by some falling rafter, as there was a slight discoloration on the brow, and that this and the shock, falling on a much-tried constitution, had affected the brain. There was no other way of accounting for the tragedy which wound up the sad event, and deprived the Holy Church of one of her stanchest and most able sons.’ It went on further to describe the solemn procession, the crowd of mourners who had gathered from even very distant parts, to follow this holy man to his last rest, testifying to the respect and reverence they had for him, &c. &c. At the end it was hinted ‘that what rendered his heroism and brave self-devotion more touching and interesting, was that this young lady he had been so earnest to save, had given every promise of becoming a convert to his teaching. His heart had been intently set on reclaiming this soul from heresy and error, and he had looked forward to placing her safe within the true fold. There was even some reason to suppose that this person had a strong desire, opposed in the most tyrannical way by her friends, to offer herself and her life to God, by taking the vows and the veil in the monastery near Paramatta,’ &c. &c.

This assertion was followed by a sharp contradiction in this style, ‘We have good authority for saying that this is merely a pleasant flight of the fancy, and wholly unfounded in fact, for there never was the smallest idea of the said young lady leaning towards Romanism,’ &c. &c.

We must leave it to the imagination to picture the effect these several announcements had on the several persons with whom our tale is connected. Suffice it to say, there was little else thought of or spoken of for some time. And it was not to be wondered at that this, as much as she heard of it, and luckily much was kept from her, had the effect of throwing
Isabel back in a relapse, during which her life was in great danger. Nor did she lose the after effects of this illness for some months. When she again took her place among the family circle, with her kind and able friend, Mrs. Farrant, at her side, it was observed that a change had come to Isabel. It might be the consequence of physical weakness, or it might be the shadow of some solemn impression, which had sobered her down. And though it could not be said she was not cheerful, or that she was sad, every one felt the difference. Mrs. Farrant said to her husband, that it was what she had always looked for, ‘the finishing touch, as it were, to bring all that was crude into one mellow tone.’ The little sisters said Issy was much ‘more gentle and pretty than she was;’ and Kate remarked that she used to be afraid of saying some things to Issy lest she should be ‘snubbed,’ but now she could tell her any and everything.’

The Westbrooke fire and ‘that terrible suicide,’ as well as the hint as to Isabel's probable conversion to Rome, occupied the public for some time. But very soon all traces of the fire disappeared, and that ceased to be spoken of. And it did not suit Dr. Mornay's friends to encourage too much investigation into his melancholy and mysterious end. His place was soon to all appearance supplied. And who was there to mourn him or shed a tear of pity for his sad fate?

Other events crowded in and had their day. A young colony, like a young child, is more bent on pushing onward, than prone to look back. Even with the Langs, being comparatively a new acquaintance, he soon faded out of their daily life—to all but Isabel. Like a sudden meteor light, he had crossed their path. ‘Kind, courteous and agreeable,’ they said. ‘Rather odd, too;’ but all was accounted for by the word Priest. Unknown and unguessed were all his struggles and his agony. But when the sound of his pleading, despairing voice, echoed in Isabel's ears, and again in memory she felt that burning touch, she would in silent awe, mingled with a sad and tender pity, utter in her own heart a prayer that he might at last rest in peace. Her own severe illness and the relapse mercifully spared her from the pain and annoyance of knowing herself to be the subject of talk and wonder. By the time she returned to daily life and society, the world had forgotten and passed on to other things.
CHAPTER XXII.

Changed Circumstances.

Vol.II

It was the second anniversary of Mr. Lang's funeral; and Isabel had given her pupils a holiday, leaving them rather puzzled to account for the favour. A half holiday had been expected because of Mr. and Mrs. Farrant's coming; but the other half, granted 'because it is a day I like to mark,' was a great puzzle.

'It can't be a birthday or a wedding-day, because she was crying in her own room this morning.'

'Ah! but it may be the birthday of some one dead now,' suggested ten years old to eight years old. Whereupon they ran off to enjoy themselves.

They were the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Moreton Scott, of Currajong Park, a good estate, situated some thirty miles from Westbrooke.

Within, the house was comfortable, roomy, and lofty, though scantily furnished; but without, it was rough and only half-finished, waiting for those 'better times' so many looked for, and, as yet, in vain. Yet Mr. Scott fared better than many others, and although forced to study economy, there was no poverty, and he could afford to wait and lay by, as it were, till prices rose. He was a good-tempered, genial man, fond of showing hospitality, and very proud of his children. He had a theory that the mistresses of colonial households could not make good teachers, however good mothers. There was not leisure to devote sufficient patience and regularity, which he considered the main requisites in the school-room. His boy was at the King's School, and he made strict inquiries for a lady to whom he could entrust his girls. A 'lady' was essential, and to insure this point he would be content to waive a few accomplishments, if necessary. Through a friend of Mr. Farrant's Mr. Scott heard of Isabel. He knew Mr. Lang very slightly, and he was in no haste to consent, but contrived first to meet Isabel at a friend's house, without her being conscious of his object.

Her open and intelligent countenance, unaffected manners, together with the gentle and quiet tone which she had fallen into, charmed him at once. Matters were speedily settled, and in him she found a thoroughly kind friend. Mrs. Scott she did not like quite so well. That lady was considered as a clever woman and excellent manager. Her judgment was thought almost infallible, and her advice was sought by many persons. She was in manner cold and unimpressible, holding it beneath a sensible woman to allow any impulse or ebullition of feeling to escape. 'A uniform self-
possession and complete self-control was,' she said, 'the mainspring of a woman's character; without it, nothing could go rightly.'

Once this would have been irksome to Isabel. But now it seldom troubled her. She was herself a grave and self-controlled woman, rather than the wild impulsive girl she was. She assured her mother, on her only visit home, that she was content and happy, though Mrs. Lang lamented over her gravity, and thought it a pity that Issy should lose that ‘winning and spirited way of her own, which always took people. If her father could see her, he would not know his pet again!’ At which Isabel only smiled quietly, and glancing at her sister, thought that Kate was not so changed. She had recovered her spirits and looks, and was even prettier than ever, succeeding very fairly in her duties as mistress, though she did not keep the little girls in much order, and they spent much of their time with Mrs. Farrant, who was the friend of all the party. Isabel, spending but little on herself, was proud and pleased to save from her own earnings what procured many a little indulgence for her mother or advantage for her brothers. They were doing well, and Isabel supplied Willie with an allowance for clothes and pocket-money while he remained articed to a solicitor in Sydney.

There was much to say between the two friends. Mrs. Farrant spoke of the old district, and said that the overseer at Warratah Brush kept the place and farm in capital order; but did not seem to know what Mr. Herbert's plans were about it. Isabel turned her head away and asked how the Jollys were. The next moment she coloured up, as Mrs. Farrant reminded her that Isabel had herself seen them last; Mr. Jolly and his son having come out of their way to see her a week since.

‘There is no mistaking their content,’ Mrs. Farrant observed. ‘You think it is coming round, do you not?’

‘Yes. To say truly, Kate, in to-day's letter, alluded to it very frankly, and has evidently made up her mind. Dear old Tom! at last!’ Isabel said, with some of her old energy. ‘He deserves to be happy.’

‘Yes. What a parading, flaring account that was in the paper of the wedding of A. Fitz, Esq.!’

‘Well, he will reap as he sows. Do you remember his mimicking Mr. Hogg once?—his papa-in-law now.’

‘They say that the lady herself is very pretty and has been well brought up, and she is enormously rich. Indeed, all the party seem to be flourishing; Mr. Vesey is said to be gathering wealth fast, and I did hear some rumour of their return to England, for which I should not grieve.’

‘Don't be spiteful, Mrs. Farrant! I don't care now about them a bit. I am so obliged to him for the wedding. It was Tom's best friend, I believe.’

‘Would Kate have refused him but for that?’
‘I think so. She had a sort of feeling which I cannot understand at all. Not that she cares at all for him, of course. She has long given that up. Why—she could not do so!’

There followed a pause. Isabel was looking out of window absently, and Mrs. Farrant, watching her, heard a low sigh. Presently she came behind her, and laying her hand on Isabel's shoulder, she whispered—'You must not despair. Take Tom's case as an omen.'

‘Of what? Despair of what?’ she exclaimed, blushing deeply. ‘No, no,’ she added, shaking her head. ‘The case is so very different. As to thinking of it in the way you suppose, I do not—indeed I do not. Whatever there was of that, I battled with it as unworthy of myself—incompatible with self-respect. Yet—I own—yes, there are moments when I remember old days and wonder at the sudden breaking up of a sincere friendship. I can't make it out. Turn it which way I will, there is no accounting for the neglect.’

‘Only one way—and a sad one,’ put in her friend.

‘Ah!—Yet even were it that—if he had again quarrelled with my father and imagined himself as insulted—for he was touchy and proud—yet he owed it to me, at least to write a line to say so. Yes, after—after all that passed—all he said—he owed thus much to me. It is not to be overlooked, I think. No! I cannot quite forgive him! And since—all this time—having heard, as needs he must, all that has happened, still not a word, not a message even, for my mother or any one of us. Even you and Mr. Farrant included. There is but one solution of the riddle.’

‘I don't know. I can't quite give it up yet. My faith is strong in him—so far that there is, or he fancies there is, some great reason for the silence. And moreover, with all his fortune and so on, I also believe that he suffers—yes, Isabel, a man like him cannot be so wholly changed all at once. He suffers, I repeat.’

‘He is angry, if you like!’

‘Well—Time will show! Perhaps the very next ship that comes may bring tidings.’

‘Then it will be soon; Mr. Scott heard that a ship was seen beyond the Heads, waiting for a wind. But I expect nothing. I did for a long time, but it would not do, it interfered with everything. I used strong measures and stifled expectation and—hope.’

‘I hear various rumours of Miss Isabel Lang's cold and hard heart,’ Mrs. Farrant said presently, and smiling.

‘How so? O, don't listen to such nonsense!’ Isabel rejoined, with heightened colour.

‘I don't want to see you a governess much longer—and—if . . . .'
‘Tis a good trade. I am content. But when Katie goes, I shall return home, which I like better. I consider myself a fortunate person. I always did wish for something to do, for work and real interests, and here I have plenty of both. I am sure it is the happiest lot.’

‘O yes! Yet I hope the work and the interests may be changed into others still deeper and pleasanter.’

‘You are meaning marriage. You married folks never think there can be any real happiness out of matrimony. It is unfair to make it so much the only object and end of life. I never had any real vocation in that way, and I mean to keep as I am.’

‘All very well! But surely, Isabel, you must grant there is no other tie in life so strong and binding; it is woman's natural state.’

‘It may be; but as all cannot marry, it is lucky if some persons do not wish it. When mamma has fretted and vexed at my obstinacy, I have soberly and seriously set about considering the question. After all, it is a matter for reflection—a grave business. And I never could endure the very notion! I should be like the kicking mare yesterday, who teased Mr. Scott so. She would go well enough alone, pull and drag famously, but yoked with another, not a step would she stir, and a fine mischief she did. No, I could not take it easily! Some do, and then it is very well. Now! what are you looking at me in that way for? What have I said, or implied?’

‘Nothing! Yet I may draw my own conclusions, and . . . .’ But she stopped short, looked at Mrs. Farrant, and then twisting her watch-chain, she added—'No, I can't quite say that. The truth is, I have a feeling—that is—I can't feel as if all had never been. It does influence me, I dare say, so far, that—I can't explain it; but I do assure you, it is not from any idea of hope. No, I am too proud for that! Besides, I am really very happy, more contented than most of my acquaintance, I think.'

Mrs. Farrant kissed Isabel.

‘Pride had a fall, my dear,’ she said, laughing. ‘But you are quite right, and you ought to be happy if living for others is the way to be so. Nevertheless, I must hope for your sake, and every one's sake, we shall yet learn something. Half our troubles come from want of understanding each other, and we shall find out the mistake here some day, sooner or later.’

This was their only tête-à-tête. The Farrants left on the following day, having greatly cheered Isabel, she assured them; and as she smiled at them, standing by the gate, and her rich hair blowing about in the breeze, they remarked to each other that she looked bright enough! ‘If only he could see her as she is now,—become so entirely what he always wished and expected!’ was Mrs. Farrant's observation.
‘If—If!’—returned her husband. ‘But he does not deserve anything. I cannot excuse him; such intolerable pride must work sorrow and woe. Nothing and no one should have been suffered to come between them. I am grievously disappointed in him. But thank goodness, she survives it, and is looking remarkably well and handsomer than ever. I never saw a person so visibly improve as she does.’
CHAPTER XXIII.

Mr. Scott's Guest.

Vol.II

‘Have you nearly finished your letter? papa says; for the boy is ready to go!’ said one of the children, a few days after the Farrants' visit.

‘So early?’ and Isabel looked at her watch.

‘Yes. There is a gentleman come with papa, and papa wants to send about his luggage, which was to come by the mail cart, and the boy is to take the letters at the same time.’

‘Very well; here is mine.’

Then Isabel sat down to correct an exercise, which being very full of faults, somewhat tried her patience. Before it was quite done the door opened.

‘Miss Lang!’ said Mrs. Moreton Scott, coming in, ‘I want to ask you a favour. Will you be so good as to make and pour out the tea for me? I have a headache, and Moreton has brought back a visitor, rather a stiff difficult person to entertain, too, from what I saw.’

Isabel of course acceded to the request. She rather liked Mr. Scott's way of bringing in a guest uninvited beforehand and unexpected; it gave a little variety to their party. This evening she felt so happy, she was quite up to any enjoyment. She was passing on, but heard one of the little girls say—'What is his name, mamma?'

‘Herbert—Mr. Herbert,’ was the answer.

It stopped her short in her way down-stairs. She felt the rail of the banister shake a little under her tight grasp. Her heart, too, beat very hard, and then, with a flutter, seemed to be dying away.

‘Nonsense! There are other Herberts!’ was her first thought. The next was, ‘Well, wasn't I wishing—praying—for news! And if this should be!—only it can't. It is absurd. How odd it was to hear the name!’

Rousing her courage, and by great effort stilling herself, she went on her way, and came against two gentlemen as they left the drawing-room. Mr. Scott was talking of his house plan, and leading the way to his dressing-room, saying that the spare bed-room would be ready presently, meanwhile this would do.

‘Ah, Miss Lang! Good day! Have I startled you? Didn't see you coming at all! The children well and good, I hope? Let me introduce this gentleman, Mr. Herbert, to you. Miss Lang—that is, properly and correctly, Miss Isabel Lang, I believe—Mr. Herbert.’
It was himself! Isabel's hand was ready to meet his, but he merely bowed, scarcely, as she thought, looking at her. Fortunately she was aware in time of his intention to ignore any previous acquaintance, and had sufficient presence of mind to return his bow. They passed on, and she heard Mr. Scott's voice saying—

‘Governess to our girls—but a lady. I would have that;—quite a lady. You must remember Lang of Bengala? And his sad end—but I forget, wasn't that after you left us?’

Then the door shut, and she heard no more.

‘Well,’ continued Mr. Scott, ‘his family were reduced to almost poverty and retired to a small place which luckily had been settled on the wife. This girl, I am told, did wonders—acted as a son might have done, and supported the family and cleared off some debts of honour which could not be legally claimed, all by her active and sensible management. I believe she supplied pretty nearly all Sydney in firewood. It was a wonderful speculation, and answered too. Then she turned governess. Between ourselves, there was a great fuss—a hue and cry—about that wretched man Mornay—De Mornay—as he ought to be styled. He had got hold of the poor thing and pretty nearly converted her, so they say. But—but—I own I attach no importance to such rumours; and my wife and I were saying the other day, no one can conduct herself better than she has done, or be a better Protestant and Churchwoman. In fact, she is quite a favourite here; and it is our principle, you see, to make the governess, our children's teacher and companion, one of the family. I say this because you may wonder—some people object, you know. But unless you are changed, Herbert, I believe you are no stickler for caste, eh?’

So Mr. Scott rattled on, not noticing the change in his friend's face, or his attitude of suffering, as, instead of washing or brushing, he sank into a chair and buried his head in his hands. Only once he spoke. When Mr. Scott said—

‘You knew Lang?’

‘Yes,’ he answered.

But the tone did not encourage Mr. Scott to prolong the subject. He asked if Mr. Herbert was ill or tired. Then advised him to make haste, unless he liked cold tea. And then he hoped he did not dislike children, because it was one of the customs of the house that they took their meals with their parents. If Mr. Herbert found their habits not disagreeable, Mr. Scott hoped heartily he would make real use of their house. First, to recruit—for the voyage had surely done him no good—and secondly, as a resting-place till he had settled his plans. It was nothing with a good horse to ride to Paramatta any day, and then proceed by steamer, if he had business in
Sydney.

Mr. Herbert ‘was obliged. Liked children, better than older people generally, and hoped they would not alter a single custom for him.’

‘O, we never do that! That is my notion of hospitality—not turning your household upside down and putting on company manners, with the best china, &c. No, we jog on, one day as another, make our friends welcome, give them our best, and let them feel free to come or go, and that they're not hindering anything by remaining just as long as it is agreeable to them. Now—ready? I cut the bread and butter, I beg to observe; and I hear voices.’

He led the way, and pointed to a chair by his wife as Mr. Herbert's seat; Isabel was screened by the urn, and too busy in doing justice to her task to look up or say a word. Conversation was not very brisk. Mrs. Scott was always slow, and this evening she was tired. The children were awed into silence and good behaviour at the look of Mr. Herbert's face. Mr. Scott talked for all, nor was he content long that Isabel should remain in the background. He really liked her to be noticed and appreciated; partly from his genuine kindness and liking of her, and partly also because he was somewhat proud of his choice, proud of having so agreeable and undoubted a lady as instructress for his children. Mr. Scott's wife, children, house, horse, cat and dog, were one and all ‘singularly good and superior.’ He was a happy man, content with and proud of all that bore the mark of M.S. Yet his egotism was never offensive—only kindly.

The tea seemed such a long affair! Isabel dared scarcely glance towards the corner on her right hand side, where, next Mrs. Scott, Mr. Herbert sat. She had a vague impression that he looked ill, and that he was not so hearty and hungry after his ride as Mr. Scott was. He talked but little at first, but after a while he shook off his silence and entered upon English topics, politics, &c., with much of his old and familiar manner, graver, perhaps, and not so sharp and dogmatic. Perhaps, Isabel thought, the mixing with good society, finding his equals among intellectual men, had cured him of his habit of shutting himself up, or being dictatorial, at feeling himself standing alone and above his companions. Once it flashed across her, ‘Is it possible he did not catch the name, and that I am too altered to be recognised?’ But, no, that would not hold. And she was forced to receive the fact that he was entirely estranged; offended beyond power of reconciliation. For she knew by his whole look and manner that he was angry. When tea was over, and Isabel retired to the school-room, making some excuse for not joining them in the drawing-room that evening, she gave way to a feeling of overwhelming misery. ‘Could it be true? Had she seen him? And what a meeting! It had been very bad to wait in suspense.
But now even that was gone. There was nothing more to expect or to hope. It was very bitter. Yet she might learn to get over it in time, and to consider her past life as dead and buried quite;’ so she reasoned.

Mrs. Scott found her in tears, tears such as she had never seen from Isabel, or perhaps fancied it was possible for her to shed. She looked surprised and a little reproachful. But the children were not there, so that the example of weakness and excitability would not injure them. Isabel reading some of her thoughts, stammered out as well as she could, ‘That she was very sorry to be so weak, so foolish; but old times would sometimes come back to her mind.’

To which Mrs. Scott answered, ‘Yes; no doubt it is very sad, very. But it is morbid and injurious to indulge in these regrets. It is a bad plan to keep days, and very bad to hoard up old letters. You must make exertion and compose yourself. Now, let me beg of you to come with me to the drawing-room and force yourself to enter into whatever topic is discussed. It is painful and disagreeable, like bitter medicine, I know, but not the less needful.’

But Isabel pleaded to be excused for this once. She was tired. She would go to bed and sleep. Mrs. Scott should see that she would not so transgress again. But, O, she thought,’that I could fly away—go and hide myself! How can I suffer his being here? Perhaps, however, he will go at once. He did not expect to see me here, I think, though he was so still, so unmoved apparently, on hearing my name. I little thought how difficult it would be.’
CHAPTER XXIV.

The Caricature.

Vol.II

How easy it is to make resolutions! To say overnight, ‘To-day I have been silly, but to-morrow I will be wise and collected. So and so must be my feelings,’ &c. But however diligently we may have conned the lesson, a very small deviation in any of the circumstances we have imagined, upsets all the pre-conceived plan. People look and speak and act otherwise than we expected, and our answer, which we had so cleverly settled, wont fit at all. Then we are awkward and nervous, and so gradually or at once, down falls our wonderful construction for defence.

Isabel determined to be very indifferent and calm. It would not do to be silent and grave, and so to call forth any remark from Mr. and Mrs. Scott. She must go on precisely as she had always before done with their guests. Yet she must guard against the slightest appearance of meeting him even halfway. She thought she had schooled herself to be, as well as to seem to be, uninterested and indifferent with regard to him and his movements. But this was difficult in his presence. Mr. Herbert probably found no such trouble, for it was at his option to go or to stay; yet he remained, expressing his enjoyment of the peace and quiet of the country, after the heat and bustle of Sydney, a few days of which had made him much disposed to taking his passage back again as soon as possible, and throwing up all the settlement of business which he came to conduct.

‘What, then you were not ill from the voyage?’ asked Mr. Scott.

‘No; I am a capital sailor. I don't own to being ‘ill’ at all, as you will have it I was. It was pure bother and worry.’

‘You must find great changes even in the time of your absence!’ remarked Mrs. Scott.

‘Yes, of course! Yes, many, wonderful changes!’ It was also clearly ascertained in conversation that Mr. Herbert had lived in the same district with the Langs, a fact which Mr. Scott had forgotten, or was ignorant of; for the acquaintance begun at Bath, had not been much renewed in the colony. Mr. Herbert merely assented dryly, and turned the subject directly, which was put down by the Scotts as out of delicacy to Miss Lang's feelings. Isabel, on her part, also simply allowed the fact, and that she had not deemed a formal introduction necessary.

‘O!’ said Mrs. Scott, ‘but of course he didn't know you; young people change and grow.’
And on the idea that Isabel had been very young, for Mr. Herbert had once said he knew her as 'a child,' Mrs. Scott did not think it at all odd that their acquaintance was so slight. But though circumstances were thus smooth and easy, and by a little management she was never thrown in his way except when the whole party were assembled, Isabel actually suffered from the continual strain it was to one of her impulsive temperament, to keep up the required unmoved exterior. After a few days, she became restless in his absence, listening and watching for even the sound of his voice or footstep, though in his presence it was almost worse. Every turn of his voice, each movement, excited her to explain to herself its meaning; unconsciously she watched hiscomings and his outgoings, and never lost a word of his conversation even if not addressed to the party in general, but to Mr. or Mrs. Scott personally. Isabel felt sure that he was ill and in some trouble. He could not deceive her by his plausible way of accounting for it all, or by his affectation of indolence. His pale face made her sorry, in spite of his stiff way of disclaiming any claim to the title of invalid. She knew by the inflection of his voice that he was sometimes dejected, though his funny stories kept Mr. and Mrs. Scott alive and excited them to laughter. Isabel couldn't laugh. They rallied her, as having no sense of wit or fun, as failing to appreciate a good joke, and so on. And she knew not how to answer, but listened with burning cheeks, and feeling that his eye had been turned on her, either in wonder or perhaps stern contempt for her affectation, in setting up another character to her employers. She, whose fault had been loving a joke but too well! Then, when released from observation, and relieved from the necessity of any further acting, she would sit for hour after hour without a light, trying to calm herself, to get down her beating pulses, to cool her head and hands in the night breeze. Sometimes, wholly overcome, she would cry with shame at breaking down so in her efforts, and for her miserable want of proper pride. Her aching heart was a shame and reproach to her. For why should she care if he was ill or unhappy? What was it to her, though he had a cough and put his hand on his side so often as if in pain? Why should she fidget herself to watch if he got a comfortable seat, or was out of a draught, a thing which he always had disliked, and which the Scotts never noticed or felt,—or if the children's spirits led them to talk too loud or too fast? What was all this to her?

One day, owing to rain, there was no going out, and Mr. Scott had brought all his children to the drawing-room by way of amusement to himself. His wife was away occupied in some household matter. But after the little girls had shown off their accomplishments by repeating poetry, and playing a tune, and answering questions in arithmetic, and the proud
and fond father was proceeding to draw out their cleverness by proposing that they should read aloud by turns, Isabel, having observed the weary, pre-occupied look on Mr. Herbert's face, as he watched the rain and stroked his moustaches, made a whispering proposal to amuse them by telling them a story. This was received gladly, only Mr. Scott stipulated that the story should go on where they were. So she drew them to a corner, one at her side, the other on a stool at her feet, and in a low, clear voice, she gained their full interest. Once, towards the end, on looking up, she met Mr. Herbert's eyes bent on her with an expression of mournful inquiry. She hurried over the conclusion, and not heeding the pathetic requests of ‘Tell it again’—‘Tell us another,’ she went away. At the door she fancied she heard a voice say—‘It is my turn now—I know a wonderful tale.’ And this voice was not the father's.

Did he do it to divert them from following and teasing her? And what did that look mean? It required a vigorous taking herself to task, followed by a course of quick pacing to and fro her room, to calm her at all. Not till she had bathed her face well in cold water, and forced herself to sing a verse of a song to prove the steadiness and clearness of her voice, would she return.

No one looked up on her entering the room. The little girls were full of animated delight at Mr. Herbert's powers as story-teller; and after tea Mr. Scott persuaded his guest to have a trial of skill at chess, which led them on and on, being well matched, till it was bedtime.

But after five days had so come and gone, Isabel began to show signs of ailment. She was thinner and had constant fever about her; no appetite, and no power of sleeping at night. She felt irritable too, and was easily upset, tears being provokingly near the surface, which distressed her very much. She knew she was ill, and spoke of going home to consult their own doctor, at which Mrs. Scott demurred. It looked as if she could not be cared for and nursed with them. Why, was not the medical man who attended them as good as another? And, meaning kindly, she annoyed Isabel by sending for this Mr. Blackett unknown to her. He said there was a good deal of excitement and fever in the system. ‘Had she been over-working herself? Did she tax her brain too much?’ Quiet, and as much open air as possible, was advised; this, with some cooling medicine, would probably stop the feeling. If not, he should prescribe another remedy on his next visit. And Isabel's lips quivered into a sickly, sad smile, as she wondered to herself ‘if medicine would cure her.’

Following this advice, Isabel went out earlier than usual the next day. They walked to the fenced paddock—a favourite place for the children's games, and while they were engrossed by their play, she leant against the fence, feeling unequal to much walking. It was no longer a strange thing
for her to ‘think.’ Fast and free crowded in many thoughts. They presented themselves generally as questions—questions which were never answered. She dreaded them, and yet seemed to have lost all power of bidding them avaunt! Like spectres which haunt a fever-stricken patient, so did these fancies and doubts haunt her, and give her no rest. She could not be anywhere but they were there too.

After remaining lost in these reflections, with eyes fixed on the ground, seeing nothing, and elbows resting wearily on the topmost rail, she exclaimed aloud, under sudden impulse—

‘I can't understand it! It is a mystery—a wretched mystery!’

‘What is such a mystery, Miss Lang?’ was spoken in Mr. Scott's voice close by her.

She started, and on looking up at him her worn face was immediately covered with a deep, burning flush, for a little behind him was Mr. Herbert.

‘Can't we help you to solve the mystery? I like dispelling darkness and doubt. What were you thinking of, surely not on that mongrel growth before you, the barley, maize, and vetch, on the other side of the fence? Isn't it funny? It will be a nice little bite for the horses, though; eh, Herbert?’

Mr. Scott made many remarks on his crops and on different modes of feeding cattle; sometimes turning to watch his children as they raced about and sent their voices far and clear.

‘Little merry rogues. What, Julia too!—and where's baby? Doesn't it seem odd? Can you fancy that you were ever just as active—just as eager in catching a ball? Though it is not so very long ago in your case,’ he added, smiling at Isabel.

‘No! But it seems—so long! All so far off and dreamy—not real—but like stories I liked and made my own by poring over them.’

‘Ah, it is the happiest time!—No time like childhood, Miss Lang! But are you suffering? Just now you had a colour, and I hoped you were better. Now you are—excuse me—you are very pale. Are you right to be standing here so long?’

‘Perhaps I had better go in,’ she said, wearily, and feeling thoroughly sick at heart—unequal to the fresh air and sunshine—and dreading the solitude of her room as much as the effort it was to be with others.

She was surprised as in passing by Mr. Herbert, who stood in the narrow path made through the paddock, he said, in a low, smothered tone—

‘Don't go in. I mean,’ he added, correcting himself, ‘don't let us disturb you. I heard Mrs. Scott say that it was thought good for you to be out as much as possible.’

‘No, Miss Lang—I beg—pray don't interpret my speech into a hint for
you to go in,’ Mr. Scott here hastened to say. ‘Come, let us go and see my poor sick filly, if you are not tired?’

‘Not at all,’ she said; and she followed him at once.

Just as they reached the shed in which was the filly, a man came up, beseeching a word or two with his master in private. Saying he would return directly, Mr. Scott turned to go, but stopped to beg Mr. Herbert to look at the creature's knee.

How thankful Isabel was to see the children running and bounding towards them, having guessed what brought them here. In a moment they were intent on their remarks and their expressions of pity for the filly; then ran off to fetch handfuls of green barley, telling ‘Snowdrop’ to take it from them, while Mr. Herbert proceeded gravely, and with the eye of a connoisseur, to examine the bad limb, and to stroke and encourage the poor thing, so as to allow him to touch the tender place. For one moment Isabel resolved to escape. They would not miss her. To be here in this way, all but alone with him, was intolerable; just now, too, when she felt so weak and so foolish, and so sure she could not exercise any control over herself if at all hurried.

‘There is papa! See, he is gone to the mill,’ said the eldest girl. ‘How tiresome!’

‘Then he will not return—Jones always has such long stories—he will keep him an hour at least. Hadn't we better go home, my dears?’ Isabel said; and without waiting for their answer she began walking back by the pathway. But presently, hearing no one follow her, she turned to look for them. Mr. Herbert was giving them jumps, letting each by turn stand on the top rail and then giving them a hand, as down they came in a flying leap. They screamed with laughter at the fun of it, and shouted, ‘Again! Only once more! It is my turn!’

‘The first time I have known him notice them,’ Isabel thought. ‘Anything rather than be with me. Children are convenient sometimes. Well! I need not remain. If he is so well amused, I'll leave them to his care;’ and on she went more rapidly, feeling half angry, though at what she did not know, and very sore and hurt, which vexed her, as a proof of utter weakness. ‘I shall break down and expose myself, or really grow mad or silly, if this is to go on much longer. Mrs. Scott must listen—must believe me. I will go home! or I'll—yes, better give up the situation. As long as he is in the colony, he will probably be coming here—I shall be better out of it; though I didn't know I was so despicably weak—well, well!’

A loud voice, loud but deep, now reached her. He was counting, ‘One, two, three!’ Then came a shout, but she would not turn to look at them. He had set them to race, she supposed, as he had often done with her little
sisters, ay and with herself and Kate and the boys—often! often!

As the words hung on her very lips, so intently did they rise, a light but trembling touch fell on her shoulder. ‘Who is that?’ And she turned short round. It was Mr. Herbert, looking thoroughly moved and agitated, with some entreaty at heart which his lips refused to utter. ‘O, is it you?’ she exclaimed. Her voice and look expressing surprise and reproach.

‘Don't hurry away!—Isabel!—I can't bear it any longer! For God's sake, stay—I am not iron—nor stone!’

She could have wept then and there, so much did his appeal, his look, move her. She longed to bow her head and to hide, but instead, she raised herself, drawing up with dignity. ‘What do you mean?’ she said, coldly. ‘I don't know what you are made of. What can you mean by such words?’

‘Mean? Why—all—everything! Mean? Did I mean to come upon you in this way? Good God! to live in the same house day after day? I tell you I can't bear it. You are philosophic and calm I see. Your composure and self-possession is to be envied. It was fate which led me here—here, of all places—of all places the last I need look to stumble on you!’

‘I am very sorry,’ she answered, her voice faltering in spite of her efforts. ‘But it was at your option to stay or go at once, at least so I understood. But, we will see. If Mrs. Scott will allow me,—she wouldn't hear of it two days ago, when I begged it, but she may now—indeed she must!—I will go home. Then you can remain in peace. It was not my wish or intention to disturb you, I am sure. But though you have come back, I suppose the colony is wide enough for us both—we need not meet.’

‘Good heavens! don't talk in that way! Do I wish to send you away? You know I do not. Besides, if it comes to that, I can go, as you observed. It is for me to leave, not you. But still, however that may be—now—now—listen. Stay, for I must speak.’ He paused, as if for breath. ‘Do you remember our last meeting? Do you?’

After an evident struggle, she said, turning from him towards the rail, ‘Much has happened since to put it out of my head. But, however, I don't forget; I am not likely ever to forget it,’ she added, more firmly and eagerly.

‘Much has happened, as you say. To you and to me—much!’ he replied. ‘Yet it seems to me as if my life had stood still, as if everything has been a dream since then, since I left you that day, feeling that with you rested all my future, and the sweet but torturing conviction that my hour was come, that time which a man most dreads; when he must risk all, bring his manhood's strength of love and pride, uncertain if it will be received or rejected—perhaps with scorn, perhaps indifference. I knew,’ here his voice rose and rang again, vibrating, as it were, from the heart's pressure. ‘I knew
then how I loved—how—how deeply! But I could not tell if—in fact, I feared that you held me too much in the light of an intimate friend, a cousin or uncle, to think of me in any other way. I expected you to be frank and kind. I longed for the time, while I dreaded it to torture. You never can know what I then felt, how that night passed with me, with what mingled hope and fear I hailed that dawn, and knew I was to seek you, to tell all—to hear all. And then—then . . . ’ He struck his forehead and, as if overpowered, took a short turn a few steps on and back. He had hit the right chord. Had he assumed her feelings with regard to him to be otherwise than doubtful, she would have shrunk and drawn in with offended pride. As it was, he did not even know what had been the nature of her feelings for him. She was touched, and though she struggled very hard for composure, she could not altogether repress a choking but half-smothered sob, which shook her whole person visibly, and she grasped the rail tightly in her efforts to keep down the rising agitation. He heard that sob. He saw the trembling, when he turned about and faced her again. With one stride he came close to her, and again laid his hand on her shoulder.

‘Isabel! Had I returned—had I come back to you, what would have been my reception? Tell me!’

‘What possible right have you to ask that?’ she said, as soon as she could speak, raising her head, and withdrawing from his touch. ‘It is enough that you never did come back. And it would be more seemly if you were to inquire what I thought—that is, if you care to know—of—of your professing friendship, and then—when trouble and care came—of your desertion and your unkind, cruel, proud neglect of my mother. Even as an acquaintance, a neighbour, in whose house you have been—something was due . . .’

‘You forget, or perhaps you did not fully know, how such considerations had been cancelled,’ he answered, gravely, and she thought cruelly, coldly. ‘Yet, though such was the case, I should not have yielded; my love for you was so strong, it over-powered all, everything. I was prepared to overlook insult and wrong for you. I felt there was truth in what my sister urged, yet—you—you were the favourite child of your poor father, and I flattered myself that in our love for you—his and mine, we should drop all differences and make peace. No, that was not it! I tell you that no amount of rudeness, of prejudice, of misunderstanding, would have withheld me. Nothing—but yourself—you yourself! It was your own hand, and it was a cruel blow. I asked you but now, what would my reception have been? I forgot—surely I had my answer! a most needless question—unless—’ and he fixed his eyes on her, as if reading into her heart. ‘Unless I could still find it a mistake? I want to be assured! If that torture could but be
removed!’ While she watched him in the greatest surprise, curiosity, and fear; for his incoherent words, and the incomprehensibility of all he said alarmed her; he drew out a pocket-book, and with trembling fingers, and face pale with excitement, he proceeded to select from many others, a folded paper. This he opened, and held it towards her. ‘You see?’ and he again searched her countenance with keen scrutiny.

She blushed as she read to herself,

'For Mr. Herbert,

'With I.L.’s thanks and kind regards.’

‘Well!’ he said, though there was scarcely a sound, only his lips framed the word.

She looked up at him in amazement, and echoed, ‘Well! And what of it? A direction it seems, an old direction, from me to you. Where is the treason or the harm? I suppose it was a cover to some of the books you lent me. Why—I see—I know! Yes, I remember quite well when that parcel was sent. It went from Vine Lodge; Mrs. Vesey said a messenger was otherwise going to the township from them, and she would send this safely. Didn't it come? Were the books safe?’

‘It came. The books were there, a man or boy from Vine Lodge did bring it,’ he spoke in a sad tone, almost like despair. Then suddenly he unfolded the paper quite, and turning the other side upwards, displayed to her a cleverly drawn picture of himself, or rather a caricature, ridiculously like, yet utterly disagreeable and even offensive. ‘And you recollect it all too! It was all just as you say! So—it was your hand that drew this, drew it first, and sent it to me. Your doing and planning—after all!’ There was a touching tone of lament in his quiet low voice. Hope was fled. There need be no more agitation, since there was no longer any suspense!

‘But what is it? Let me look at it longer. Where did it come from?’ she exclaimed. ‘It is an odious thing. So vulgar!—clever too.’ She spoke rapidly. Then pausing, she looked up at him, struck by some sudden thought. ‘Do you mean—did you think I drew that?’

‘Did you?’ he said, huskily.

‘Did I?’ She let the paper drop, and turned from him with a haughty gesture of scorn. ‘Mr. Herbert, you know quite well that I did not. I wish, indeed,’ she added, quickly and lightly, even mockingly, ‘that I had half the power displayed there! I beg your pardon for dropping the precious treasure; you seem to value it so much and keep it so carefully. But here come the children, just in time, at the finale of this—this—strange story. We will go in now.’

‘She didn't do it after all—Thank God! thank God!’ he had murmured, half to himself, but half aloud. Meanwhile he took the drawing from her,
and tore it into small shreds, throwing them down and treading them into the soil. She uttered a contemptuous expression and laughed, something in her old way, only it was more mocking and bitter now, than saucy and merry. She went on, leaving him still stamping on the bits of paper. A few steps onwards she was met by the heated and panting racers. Mr. Herbert had, it seemed, sent them to search for gum, promising a great reward for the largest lot and the best lumps. Fanny now claimed the prize. He received their gatherings, in a somewhat hurried manner, filling his pockets with the gum. ‘Now, if you will all run on a-head, and keep there, so that I can explain a particular piece of business to Miss Lang, I don't know what I wont give you. Perhaps a slice of the full moon; certainly something very wonderful indeed. Do you hear?’

‘They are too heated already,’ Isabel said, perversely trying to detain them near her. But the bait was tempting, and they did their best to deserve the promised reward, and soon outstripped their elders.

‘I don't wish to annoy you,’ he said, in a depracatory and gentle way, studying her face. ‘But consider, how anxious

‘You have borne the suspense with great philosophy hitherto! You have not hurried for an explanation or ever sought any, I believe, have you? You assumed the fact, and without proof . . . .’

‘Remember how it was,’ he interrupted. ‘I had, I felt conscious, betrayed—given you cause to guess, at least, something of my feelings for you. But a very few hours after, I receive a parcel of my own books, directed to me in your own writing, and sealed with the identical seal you had once before used to me, a guinea-fowl, with the motto, ‘Come back.’ Within this sealed parcel, nay, on the very sheet of paper itself, is this drawing. Remember, I had seen you trying to make caricatures such as Mrs. Vesey did, and that I had displeased you by expressing my dislike, my strong disapproval, of such things. I had been shown some of your drawing, at least so I was told and believed they were. One was of Mr. Jolly. My sister always warned me against this phase in your character which she had discovered, and which she knew to be peculiarly distasteful, I may say hateful to me. It was a strong case. I tried to disbelieve my own powers of sight. I carried the paper to my sister and asked her whose writing she thought it was? ‘Isabel Lang’s’ she said at once. Then I showed her the picture. She nodded gravely, and said she was more sorry than surprised. What could I think? Could I go to you and inquire? No; I took it as your answer, a check to my advances, which you had seen and desired to stop at once. Add to all this, my previous misunderstanding with your father. I left home that very evening, more mad than wise; I rode hard and rashly, scarcely feeling I was moving, and hardly pulling up for rest or
food, till my horse's strength failed. I went towards my station, but while resting by the way, I was overtaken by a messenger sent by my sister with English letters containing important news, and urging me to sail at once. It suited my mood. I stayed for nothing. I was only too glad to go, to leave this land, urged back by a somewhat similar feeling to that which first goaded me to emigrate. My sister met me in Sydney, bringing my clothes, and also the bad news about you. I forgot to say that I had curiously enough come to the very same inn on the same day as your father—we supped together—and—I wish, believe me I truly wish, we had parted in peace. I don't think I could help it; but that is no matter now. He was angry, and he little knew how sore and smarting I was, or perhaps he would not have poured such irritation on the wound. Well, I embarked without loss of time, immediately in fact. My sister was to follow as soon as she could arrange affairs for us both. I tried hard to drown grief and to forget. I assumed my new position and duties as soon as I arrived. I entered into society and excited myself about the pending lawsuit. Pooh, how vague, hollow, and rotten it all was! I was wretched. My thoughts and ideas revolved on a pivot, one only chord vibrated, and that ever—always. I became ill and restless. Then, at last, I roused myself by the advice of a good man who was frank and honest enough to tell me plain truths, and showed me I could not be happy as I lived. I was appointed steward to a large estate and fortune, and I was bound to do good. Well, I looked about—but do I bore you? are you tired?’—for he heard her sigh.

‘Go on,’ was all she said.

‘I looked around, with a dreary feeling you can hardly understand, and my heart seemed to warm a little to this colony. I settled to leave my affairs, lawsuit and all, in a trusty friend's hands, and to return here. Perhaps I might even remain here, and devote my means to carrying out a few of my theories, and setting an example in developing the resources of the land. Sydney brought me much misery, however; I found that I was haunted by the past. The bustle and the heat—altogether I was nearly knocked up, when I came across Moreton Scott, formerly a tolerably intimate acquaintance. He pressed me to come to his home for rest and quiet. That evening, I heard your voice, only two or three words, speaking to some one on the stairs. It was a shock! But I had warning to enable me to meet you calmly. It was surely God's hand which brought me here, of all places the place I never once thought of as connected with you, much less your dwelling-place. Now, can't you excuse a little my credulity? Isabel, is forgiveness on your part impossible?’

‘I hope not. I have, I believe, no choice, if I desire to rank as a Christian,’ she said, with an attempt at being light and indifferent, but a catch in the
voice betraying the feeling she would fain hide. ‘Yet, first I must observe, that even supposing you were right, in deeming me to be so clever as to be guilty of that picture—what then? What is there so very very heinous—so dreadful in it? Can't you take a joke?’

‘Good Heavens! Don't you see—don't you feel—that no woman could so turn a man to ridicule, if she had the smallest spark of that feeling which would induce her to take him for her husband? I mean any respect or esteem. Certainly, I am sensitive; I grant it. Yet I care not, comparatively at least, for what others do. It was the idea of your doing it—you—you! It seemed so strange that I should be singled out for such a cut, that for the second time my love should be so blasted and mocked, but . . . .’

‘Indeed!’ she exclaimed quickly, and looking keenly at him. ‘The second time you say?’

‘Yes—yes! the second time. What is there in me to provoke it?—others live to old age and never suffer so. I will tell you; of course I meant so to do, that when I first came to this colony, it was flight from a cruel disappointment; it was a cruel insult, I may say, which drove me, then a very young man, to take a sour and bitter view of all things. Isabel, when I was first in all the glory of epaulettes and spurs, a very fine fellow, of course, in a dashing cavalry regiment, I was rather courted by the gay folks at Bath. There were then pre-eminent in fascination and charms, two girls—cousins and rival belles, acknowledged queens of the place. One of them was superb and magnificent, every feature a model, of a calm but cold style of beauty. The other less faultless, possessed, in my eyes, infinitely more attraction. She was the best specimen of high-bred fashion I ever saw. Her sparkling wit and cleverness, and a certain fearless frank way of saying everything she chose, caught my fancy. I mistook it for an ingenuous nature. I was young then. I know now it was the result of high art. Of course I was to fall in love, and so I did. I believed myself bound to her for ever. I also believed that she returned the preference, and there was no obstacle to our union, it was so much desired by our mutual friends. I was mustering courage to come to the point, and to know my fate certainly, though I believed that we had long understood one another. I happened one evening to enter, unheard, a room in which she was, with a select party, entertaining them by a little dramatic scene. She was a wonderful actress, and was in the habit of amusing us with a sort of ‘Mathews at Home’ entertainment. The lights were placed so as to fall only on the stage. I stood in the shadow and heard her voice, thrilling clear as it was, as her words excited peals of laughter. She was, I believe, so I have been told since, giving a comic description of a picnic, and taking off some well-known Bath characters. I had hardly stood there two minutes, when she hit upon
me. It so happened that at this picnic she had a very narrow escape from being killed by her horse taking fright. I, seeing her danger, had left my occupation, uncorking bottles, I believe, for our luncheon, and sprang forward to turn the animal's head. Well, all this scene was now brought up, travestied and turned into the greatest ridicule. Nothing could be more disgusting and absurd than the creature she represented me to be. Yet she so cleverly caught one's likeness, that the audience was convulsed with laughter. Her courage increased with applause; at first she had been a little shy at this point I thought, her voice had faltered a little; but now urged on, by clapping and cries of 'encore! capital!' she was carried away, and said more I dare say than she intended. You may suppose I did not wait long. At best my position would have been awkward. I crept away, unseen and unheeded, at first feeling more sorry than angry. But I presently discovered the real measure and depth of my love, for it did not take long to vanish. When my eyes were opened, and I saw in what light she looked upon me, I began also to read her character better. In fact, it never could have been real love, but only its semblance, a passing, young man's fancy and nothing more, from which I am thankful I was released, though in so painful a manner.'

'Of course! That is always said,' Isabel remarked, with a certain emphasis which made him look earnestly at her for a moment.

When he spoke again, his voice had a tenderer and softer tone.

'The worst part of it was, that this, together with other things, gave me a great distaste for society—for companionship at all. I was in great danger of becoming misanthropic, or, perhaps, of plunging into reckless and dangerous pleasures, to drown my rather miserable thoughts. The upshot was, I displeased my father and uncle by exchanging into a line regiment then abroad. But it was good for me. I saw something of a soldier's life and real work; mixed in the world and got well knocked about. Then my regiment was ordered here; and I fell in love with a bush life, and retired on half pay, taking a grant of land. I intended to lead a solitary life, and forswore all society, and especially all young unmarried ladies. But Providence was kind, and sent a light across my path which saved me from pitfalls, albeit I may be far from what I ought to be. Yes, it is a notable fact, that I, who only noticed children to think them little pests, I, who since my own twin sister's early death, which event was soon followed by my mother's, never knew the influence of home affections and charities—I met a child then—who—who—. Others passed her over to prefer her sister's beauty; but to me—to me—she seemed to be everything—all—something my nature had unconsciously needed and blindly sought. Yes, Isabel; you were for me like a little sister—and more than a sister—more than any
sister could be—distinct from all the world. All that you did and said pleased me. I tried to account for this singular fancy in discovering a likeness to that other one. Well, there was a something, and I do believe my sister noticed it—enough to make me shudder, when I perceived your natural love of mimicry and love of a joke. I think that you ‘took’ to me, as they say, from the first—others said so. I know that your beaming eyes, which gave so frank and cordial a welcome, were my attraction to the house, and often tempted me to be idle. Then I taught you to ride, and helped you to draw—I felt as if you were mine in some way. You were never shy with me. You were too young and too frank to have any conventional scruples. They trusted you to me, and I hope—yes, I have that comfort, I believe that I never, never abused the trust. I was rough and cross enough at times, and you could be sharp, too! Sometimes, as you grew older, I was jealous—intensely so! But, on the whole, our intercourse was smooth and pleasant—sincere and true. I think that we both liked being together, and trusted to each other. And then----’

Another of those choking, half-strangled sobs, burst from her. She longed to run away—to be alone and weep freely. She stopped for a moment against the paling. He looked concerned, and put out his hand towards her, as if proffering help and sympathy.

‘No,’ she said. ‘But you walk so fast—and—I'm not strong, I believe. And then—what is the good of going back—to all—to old times?’

The words were jerked out with effort, and an hysterical laugh struggled to overcome her.

‘Patience me! There is the bell! Let me go—I must go.’

And she tried to hurry on. But he held her back firmly and gravely.

‘There is no hurry. No, Isabel, you shall not hurry off from any sudden impulse. If you go, it must be deliberately—at such a moment. Let us walk on quietly.’ And he tried to draw her hand on to his arm. But she would not allow this.

They were silent for some steps, she trying to overcome her agitation.

Presently he said in a very quiet voice—

‘What did you think—what did you do, finding I did not come again? Did you expect me that next day?’

‘I did. You said you would come, if you remember.’

‘Did I? And what then—what did you do?’

‘I waited.’

There was deep meaning in her voice as she said this. Many an elaborate sentence would fail to convey so much. The weariness of hope deferred. That ‘waiting’ which so many women have as their portion.

‘What a brute you must have thought me! No wonder that you
condemned me, so that now, when we met again, you almost forgot we were not the mere acquaintance or strangers we seemed to be. I read your indifference, and it further confirmed the hint I thought you had intended to give me in that picture. It surprised me. I looked for resentment and pique; but such cool indifference I did not think was in your nature.’

‘Didn't you? Did you expect I was to go on boiling or freezing for ever, and that experience would not teach me the happy medium?’

‘What, are you only now returning!’ here exclaimed Mr. Scott, coming out of the garden gate, a few feet in front of them. ‘There have I been all this time ‘rowing’ with that rascal at the mill, who is spoiling all the machinery with his obstinate ignorance. Hasn't the first bell gone?’

‘Yes, some time ago,’ Isabel said, and she hurried away; while Mr. Herbert vented his annoyance at the interruption—long as the interview had been—by switching all the grass and wild flowers within reach of his cane.
CHAPTER XXV.

Worse And Worse.

Vol.II

There was but little time for reflection, or for the quiet luxury of giving way to the overpowering feelings which had well nigh choked her; yet Isabel rapidly went over the principal points of her late conversation and its wonderful revelations, as, according to the house custom, she changed her dress for tea.

Her wish for an explanation had been granted. She understood now what had before seemed utterly incomprehensible. But the question was, how did they stand with regard to one another? ‘I am to pardon him, and he, I suppose, is to pardon me. Then, are we to be as before? Hardly. My mother will not forgive or forget so easily. Besides, he is a rich man, a grand personage now, as Mr. Scott explained to me—‘Squires’ they call them at home, he says; and as a country gentleman, he takes his place with the highest. And I am a—governess—a drudge of a governess. We are come down as he has climbed up. Impossible, therefore, to fall back into our old places. And I wont stand being condescended to! I hope he will soon take himself off, or I must. I can't be acting a part any longer. Dignified distance doesn't suit me. I can be hot and angry, or I can be amiable and agreeable in an intimate way. If I could but escape the tea this evening—the ever meeting him again!’

Tears trickled over her face, warning her, that if she wished to escape observation, she must eschew the subject at once, and prepare for proper behaviour. With a desperate effort she stopped the inclination to cry, smoothed her hair, and arranged her dress, even adding a ribbon by way of looking ‘cared for.’ But that description of the Bath belle—his first love—rang in her ears, and as she looked into her glass she found herself making comparisons between the figure and face reflected there and his account of another. Then with a wish, hovering between a desire to lie down and sleep, never to wake again, or to be transported back to the days when she had been the child he had described—with a vague sound in her ears of those happy hours gone for ever, giddy with weakness, and feeling very tired, she went down stairs, took up her knitting mechanically, and answered Mrs. Scott's calm questions till the gentlemen entered.

At table she sat just opposite to Mr. Herbert, and she made sundry mistakes in passing the wrong things, and helping Fanny to sugar instead of salt.
‘You are tired, Miss Lang. You were out too long,’ Mr. Scott said.
‘I was getting a little uneasy,’ put in Mrs. Scott. ‘Were all the lessons ended?’
‘Yes, we began so early,’ Isabel said, quickly.

Then the children began to tell their mamma what Mr. Herbert had told them to do, and of his promised reward. Isabel's cheeks burnt, as childlike, they spoke out rather inconveniently, dwelling on details. Then her head began to throb, and glad was she at the first move to rise and leave the room, feeling, come what would, she must give way now. She looked so shivered and sick when, some time after, they sought her, that Mrs. Scott told her to go to bed at once. For hours she tossed about feverish and suffering. Not till near dawn did she fall asleep.

Heavy, plashing rain, long foretold and expected, had set in, greeting Isabel when she woke—puzzled and conscious that something had happened, but not sure what. Gradually it all returned.

‘Here we are, he and I. Neither of us can go in this rain,’ was her first idea. Then followed—‘And why should we go? There is room for both.’

Before she was dressed a great dread came over her. She longed for some good excuse to remain in her room, to escape the meals. She almost wished she was really ill, instead of only this stupid ailing. At last the maid's coming took her by surprise. She brought her breakfast, by Mrs. Scott's order. It was kind of Mrs. Scott; and she was glad of the reprieve. Then she began to form a plan for her conduct; to be at her ease, yet plainly showing that she was aware of the distinction between ‘Mr. Herbert and a governess.’ She studied sundry free and easy, yet distantly polite speeches. But she found no opportunity for making use of them.

When she hurried down to do what lessons there was still time for, Isabel found, that the rain having a little ceased, her pupils were gone to spend the day with their aunt. This she did not know was owing to a hint from Mr. Herbert, quickly received and adopted by Mr. Scott, that she herself needed quiet and rest.

The gentlemen went out in spite of rain and the thick clay soil. Isabel was left to herself the greater part of the day. She was standing by the window looking out when they returned. Greetings were exchanged, and Mr. Scott inquired how she felt. Presently a chair was placed for her, and looking round, she met Mr. Herbert's eye, at which all her studied ease vanished, and a foolish fit of shy distress came on, so that she was hardly aware that Mrs. Scott came into the room, talked, and went out again followed by her husband, leaving Mr. Herbert and Isabel alone together. She still gazed out at the shrubs and the distant country. He was sitting behind her, and his eyes were bent on her as if measuring something.
‘I see, now, that you are changed, Isabel,’ he said.

She blushed and started a little as she found no one else was in the room; but, throwing herself into a would-be careless attitude, she answered, half in joke, half in anger—

‘No doubt. How long has it taken to arrive at so important and interesting a fact? That you are not changed is proved by that remark, which is scarcely complimentary.’

He smiled and brightened up. There was a sweet and familiar charm in this return to her old provoking and saucy retorts.

‘I meant no harm. Did I insinuate anything derogatory to you, by saying that you are changed?’

‘The interpretation being—‘You are changed, having grown older and uglier;’ it is not customary in polite society to say so, whatever we may think. But your discrimination is admirable! I am changed—I am altered—I am aged. Moreover, I am not so well as I used to be, and that adds no charms.’

In spite of the badinage, there was a fall in the voice which came from some inward heart-throb. He had moved from his previous seat and stood a little more in front, studying her aspect with grave, but tender scrutiny.

‘Yes, I can trace it. I see that you have suffered.’

‘I was a blooming, prosperous, thoughtless lassie,’ she said, quickly, yet with earnest emphasis, turning away her face from him. ‘I am now unprosperous, come down in life, in fact, and forced to be careful,—that is all. I know I am changed, very well I feel it. But I am not the only one; other things are changed too. We need not talk about it. You need not trouble yourself to measure or understand the exact line of change. Mr. and Mrs. Scott believe us to be little known to one another. You are not at all obliged to undeceive them, you know.’ She thought she had mastered herself completely, but her voice was thick and her manner irritable.

He sighed. ‘I deserve this! You greatly misunderstand my words, however. I fear,’ he added, presently, ‘I fear you find it hard to forgive?’

She tore the lace of her cuff frills, and her chest heaved under the enforced restraint she put on herself. But she said, as lightly as she could—'No. But I want you to see, to understand, that I have had some trouble, the struggle to live and to provide for others—my family I mean, of course. But though you see me not altogether well and strong, just now, you must not judge anything by that. The worst is over—past long ago, and I get on very well indeed now. So what I want to say is, that though of course I am glad of the explanation, and that such an absurd idea—about that picture, I mean—is put out of your head, as it so distressed you; yet, of course, I know we can't be—that I am not what I was at all. I can't explain myself; I
am stupid and dull this morning, but surely you understand what I mean?’

‘It hardly needed so many words to say that it is your desire I should not presume on former friendship! You desire me to understand that my company is not agreeable to you, in homely phrase,’ he answered, deeply hurt, and showing he was so.

‘I didn't say so. I left it for you to choose how far Miss Isabel Lang, governess to Mrs. Scott's children, is an acquaintance for Mr. Herbert!’ she replied with spirit and displeasure.

He said nothing, but returned to his first seat, where he took up a book. In another moment Mrs. Scott returned and sat down at her work-table; Isabel swelling and panting, and wishing to jump out of window; but pride kept her there and still. She knitted industriously, only speaking when Mrs. Scott spoke to her, during the pauses between her attempts to draw Mr. Herbert into conversation. But he remained silent and gloomy. And so it was for the rest of the day and during the evening. Mr. Scott remarked it to his wife in Isabel's presence.

The next day Isabel took her place as usual in the school-room, and walked out with the children. Again they met the gentlemen, but this time they did not join parties. At dinner Isabel could not avoid seeing Mr. Herbert's face, and she was surprised and somewhat shocked to find him looking so ill. He was silent, and when forced to speak, there was a weariness and flatness in his manner quite sad to see. Once in the evening as he sat, in the old attitude, apart and unhappy, she remembered when she had understood that mood, and was privileged to tease or please him out of it. She was conscious that her own words had hurt him. She recalled looks and tones of that morning's explanations, and felt she had done her best to alienate him. He felt things very deeply. He was looking really ill now. Why should she not try to rouse him, even at the risk of compromising her dignity? Why should she not try to make some amends for the hurt she had caused? Yet it was difficult. There was a gulf between them now, partly of her own making. He had more than once called her ‘Miss Lang.’ How then could she come forward? Yet on self-reflection she felt she owed him some apology for that most blundering, confused, and unfortunate speech of hers. This then she would make. She would see at once, if a way opened for more, or not. It was difficult to find an opportunity, for he avoided her, or at least all tête-à-têtes. Some one was always present. Two days passed after she resolved on an apology, before she found herself for one moment alone with Mr. Herbert. But at last she did so, with only the little girl next to the baby in the room. Not a minute must be lost. So, hurried and flushed, she looked up at him as he sat in the shade, with a book on his lap, his hands in his pockets, and his eyes somewhere upwards. She plunged
desperately into it, not daring to pause, lest her courage should ooze away.

‘I have been wishing,’ she began, feebly, and stopped by something in her throat. Then, on again, this time a little louder. He withdrew his upward gaze, and looked at her as she said—‘Mr. Herbert—I feel—I owe you an apology.’

‘Do you? I was not aware of it!’

‘Yes, you are. I mean—I beg your pardon, but I was rude, don't you remember—and seemed to be ungrateful the other day?’ Here she stopped short, and tossed off a tear, smiling, however, though her eyes were dim.

‘But I did not mean or wish it. You misunderstood me!’

‘Did I?’ he said in a gentle tone, though his voice was sad. Then as she did not go on, he added, ‘How so?’

‘I think you did. Yet perhaps I am wrong and mistaken even now. Very likely nothing I said or did could have that effect, or has anything to do with it,’ she said, with sudden revulsion of feeling. ‘But I felt that I had spoken rudely and ungraciously, when perhaps—perhaps—you meant to be kind, and then seeing you so grave I determined to make an apology. That's all!’ she added, returning to the assumed ease of manner.

He was looking at her, still leaning on his elbow, and pushing aside his hair with his fingers, showing there by a shaded brow, and a countenance betraying inward trouble. ‘You have a kind heart, I know, and do not mean to give pain, I believe,’ he said.

Then he slowly removed his eyes from her to the ground, slightly shaking his head, and moving his hands in a way familiar to her, as a sure sign of his being rather unhappy. Her quick eye had caught this gesture, and noted the weary, listless sadness brooding on his face. An impulse seized her. She suddenly rose, though what to do she didn't know. It ended in her catching up little Julia, the baby girl, and hugging her tightly, kissing the child's face and neck and hair.

Julia cried out ‘Don't!’

‘What, mayn't I love you? Let poor Issy love you, Ju,’ she half whispered, pleading earnestly with eye and voice.

‘No, no—not now—by and bye;’ and the child turned away, going back to her play. Presently she passed near Mr. Herbert, as she had done several times before. Now he stopped her.

‘Little Ju!’ he said, and kissed her, stroking her hair.

His notice was unusual, and struck the child. She stopped in her play and looked up at him, as if expecting more.

‘Don't you like to be loved, Julia?’ he said, again stroking her hair.

‘What?’

‘Will you kiss me—a pretty kiss?’
She held up her rosy little lips directly—drawing a deep sigh of surprise and content—and suffered him to draw her on to his knee, where she was soon quite at her ease, counting his buttons, while he played with her curls.

Isabel's needle flew in and out at a rapid rate the while.

‘I don't think I quite understand, even now,’ Mr. Herbert said, as if there had been no pause or break in the conversation. ‘You say I misunderstood. I thought you inferred a wish that our intercourse should be within the boundary of mere common acquaintance for the future—that you wished to check in me all idea of going back and taking up the threads where they fell.’

He paused almost at each word, as if each carried a separate meaning.

‘Perhaps I was too willing to forget all that wretched interim. The relief was so great, so exquisite, that I was going back again at once, as if it had been only an evil dream. Then—I understood that you wished to check this—to remind me I had sinned past forgiveness in your sight. The hours since then have been spent in realizing that it is no dream, but a terrible reality; that, though we sit at the same table, live under the same roof, there is a partition wall between us! I would have gone—I ought to have gone directly. Yet, I accepted Scott's invitation to prolong my stay, in order to make assurance sure—to take it all in, and look my fate in the face. I flattered myself I had gone on quietly. But from your thinking it necessary to apologize, I fear my manner has betrayed me and shown pain—pain which I had no right or intention to obtrude on you; though—I can't say I wish you had not seen it. That it was worth your while to observe me so far—that small consideration even—I am glad of. But it shall be ended! You shall not be annoyed.’

Could this be Mr. Herbert?—the former kind and partial friend, whose very notice of her had been once a source of pride! Was this the irate and easily-ruffled man she used to like to tease, even while she feared him—speaking so quietly and sadly—so almost humbly! Even little Julia looked up quickly, perceiving pain in his voice. He kissed her upturned face, and went on twisting and untwisting her curls.

Isabel had dropped her work. With her hands passionately clasped over her face, she murmured, low, yet loud enough for him partly to hear—though she did not mean he should do so—'This is dreadful!—too dreadful!'’

He put the child off his knee quickly, and rose from his seat. One step he had taken as if going to her, when—the door opened, and Mrs. Scott came in, followed by the other children. Isabel gathered up her work, and without a glance at any one, she left the room.

She was sitting in the school-room unoccupied, as she had been for more
than an hour, when the servant came in.

‘Is it late, Lucy?’

‘The bell will go in a moment, miss. But I came to bring you this’—laying down a tiny note. ‘Mr. Herbert said he was sorry not to bid you good-bye, miss.’

‘Good-bye?—What!—Is he gone?’

‘Yes, he has been gone about twenty minutes I should think.’

‘Yes,’ put in Fanny, coming into the room. ‘And papa is so vexed about it! He declares Mr. Herbert is very, very capricious; for he promised he would stay longer, and then all at once, he said it was fine, and he must go directly.’

Isabel opened her note and read as follows:—

‘Feeling I have no right to disturb your life by my unwelcome presence, I have told my kind host—what is truth, that I am not well, and want to be at home (meaning my chamber at Petty's Hotel, of course). Let me say this once, that it grieves me to know of your toil and your trouble. But the peace attending the performance of duty, and the natural cheerfulness of your own temper, will, I hope, support you. I know you well enough to feel sure that you will rise above your trial. Forgive all the pain and annoyance I have ever caused you, and which I can't endure to witness. You do not need, nor would you accept, any help I could give. Isabel! no one will ever love you better than I would, and no one will ever more truly desire your happiness—than your old and once near friend, J. HERBERT.’

‘Are you sure he is gone for good?’ Isabel asked.

‘Yes,’ said Fanny, astonished. ‘Why, look! I dare say you may get a peep of him now going up the hill. Yes; see!—there he is!’

And Isabel, keenly scanning the little bit of road visible from the window as it wound round a severe hill, descried a black speck, which, on farther inspection, might be like a man on horseback. When it was out of sight she turned away and walked slowly to her own room, drank some water, and then, sitting down, she closed her eyes in spite of the warning bell for dinner.

She knew now that happiness had been very near her, and that it was gone—gone for ever! Was it not by her own blundering, too? All was over! A grey curtain had once more fallen on her life, giving all things a sombre hue. She tried to think that this was best. She had been tolerably happy and easy before this late return to old thoughts. This had brought both acute pain and great pleasure. Now all was over, and after a little time she should recover herself and return to former habits, and her hardly earned content and equanimity. It would be better, for now there was nothing more to know—no further waiting and looking for tidings—no treacherous
whispers from Hope to beguile her into even a passing moment of gladness! She knew all now. She felt as if she had come to the end of an exciting story—THE END! All was over. And yet she must live on, dull and dreary, as she was now. No, that could not, should not be! She must rouse from this dull stupor, this utter hopelessness. She reminded herself of one source of comfort which would soon give her more pleasure. She might now look back on Mr. Herbert's character as the same, neither better nor worse than she had always known it. He was faulty, but with all his excess of sensitiveness he had attractive qualities she had never found in any one else. His present life had not apparently hurt him or tarnished his old generosity. His sense of responsibility, if anything, was increased, she thought; and he seemed more gentle—more humble.

But the second and last bell now clanged shrilly. The dinner loomed before her as some dreaded monster; but go down she must; and eat, or pretend to eat, she would; lest they should think she was fretting. So rallying all her courage and powers of endurance, and feeling very like a machine, she went into the room where the rest of the people were.
CHAPTER XXVI.

The Dessert.

Mr. Scott was more annoyed than Isabel had ever seen him. He was sorry to lose his guest, and vexed at the sudden whim which had upset his arrangements. This affected his temper, and for a time everything was wrong. Mrs. Scott maintained her usual phlegm; but even more softly and quietly than was her habit, she commented on the misery and inconvenience of a person's not knowing his mind, or being decided in little things.

‘Did you hear anything of this extraordinary move, Miss Lang?’ she asked. ‘You were some time in Mr. Herbert's company, I think, this morning.’

‘I did not hear a word of it.’

‘He is so poorly, too. But I don't care! If he has a brain fever down there at Petty's, it will serve him right. Such a violent hurry, too—wouldn't wait a moment! He seemed like one in a dream. ‘Pon my soul, I shouldn't be surprised at ... I don't believe he knew what he was doing or saying,’ said Mr. Scott, helping himself much more frequently and abundantly to wine than he usually did.

At last the dishes were removed, and the clatter ceased. The dessert was a little better; and Isabel cracked nuts by way of doing something. She was talking to the children, amused with some droll speech of little Julia's, when the servant came to the door and summoned her master.

A whispered dialogue was held in the hall, a few isolated words of which alone reaching the dining-room. Then Mr. Scott popped in his head for a moment.

‘My dear, don't be alarmed! I'll go and judge for myself. I'll wager anything it is all palaver and humbug.’

He was rather pale and hurried, notwithstanding his assuring words, and went away past the window rapidly. Isabel looked at Mrs. Scott with a vague presentiment of evil. That lady languidly remarked—'Some horse hurt, perhaps. But I wish he would be less hurried. Self-control, composure, is so very desirable, under all circumstances.’

The servant came in again, her countenance evidently full of some important news, which she was longing to impart.

‘Master has a umbrella, ma'am,’ at last she ventured to remark. Then, gathering courage, she went on—'They do say as how it is a gentleman has
had a accident about two miles down the road. So the draymen say. Some drays chanced to be passing, and they told our Harry of it; and from the description, Harry thought as how it might be Mr. Herbert, and wished to tell the master. They say he was carried upon a door to the ‘Currency Lass’ inn. They thought as how the life was quite distinct.’

‘Come, that is enough,’ said Mrs. Scott. ‘I believe nothing till I know more. Everything is exaggerated. It is in all uneducated natures to magnify these accidents. Miss Lang, don't allow these little people to be frightening themselves about nothing. They must be taught early to use their reason, and to control all sudden feelings of alarm, and so on. We shall hear all in good time. Miss Lang, will you . . . . . But where is she?—Where is Miss Lang?’

No one knew. She was gone, but no one had seen her leave the room. They sought her everywhere, but vainly.

‘ Very thoughtless, indeed! She has, I dare say, gone to the garden, forgetting the children might need her,’ remarked Mrs. Scott, quietly.

Soon a panting and puffing messenger came with a scrap of paper from Mr. Scott, on which he had scribbled a request for the carriage to be sent as soon as possible to the above-named public-house; for that Mr. Herbert had been thrown from his horse. He was stunned, and they feared he had broken his arm, but nothing very serious, it was hoped.

Mrs. Scott gave the necessary orders, and quietly had everything prepared for receiving her late guest. Neither did she omit to sow a few seeds of good advice, impressing on her children the moral of the event—namely, that hurry and impulse were bad things to lead any one.

In about an hour's time, Mr. Scott returned with Mr. Herbert, the latter looking very pale, and with his arm disabled. He apologized warmly, though in a hurried way, for all the trouble he had caused, and confessed he should have done wiser to follow their advice. ‘But a lesson learnt is a thing gained.’

‘Ah, I grumbled preciously at you, and swore you should never catch me inviting you here again,’ said Mr. Scott. ‘And, you see, you return of your own accord, and not by my asking. Of course, now you are ill and wounded, we must receive you and even nurse you. But I shall give you a bit of my mind hereafter. Never mind! What is a broken arm? ‘Tis an ill wind blows no good to any one.’ So, you see, I gain a companion for some weeks to come.’

Mr. Herbert was obstinate in persisting that he would await the doctor's visit on the couch in the drawing-room instead of going at once to bed. Mrs. Scott warned him of evil and scolded, or rather ‘gave advice;’ but still he persisted. Then she wished to clear the room and send away the
children.

‘Mr. Herbert must be perfectly quiet. Ask Miss Lang to take them.’

‘Can't find her no ways, ma'am.’

‘What, isn't she in yet?’

‘Where is she?’ said Mr. Scott.

‘That we don't know. Have you looked in the garden?’ said his wife to the servant.

‘Yes, ma'am. Couldn't see nothing of her there.’

‘She was here, in this room, when I left,’ said Mr. Scott. ‘For I remember observing how pale she was.’

‘Very likely! Any sudden thing turns her, poor girl. She is rather shattered. Her father's death and that fire, and all those scenes, I suppose, did it.’

‘Have you looked over the house?’ suggested Mr. Herbert.

Upon which the children were despatched to hunt her up. They thought it good fun. But ere very long, the eldest girl, Fanny, rushed back to her mother, and when close beside her burst into tears, with her face hid on her mamma's shoulder.

‘What is it, Fan?’

‘Good God! what is it?’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert, half moving off the couch, but falling back again directly from sharp pain.

‘O, I think she must be dead!’ sobbed Fanny.

‘Nonsense! You are upset—frightened, child. Where is she?’ said Mrs. Scott, trying to be severe, but, for her, very hurried.

The nurse here came in, with a disturbed face.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘In a swoon! No one knows for how long—poor dear soul! She was lying right across the passage. Seemed as if she was going into the spare room. She was always quick and ready in thought. Perhaps she was going to see if the bed was gotten ready for the gentleman.’

Mrs. Scott went out with nurse. And, by dint of coaxing the frightened Fanny, and sending Mary, the second child, to inquire, the gentlemen heard at last that Miss Lang had ‘awoke,’ with a great groan and looking very wild. Then, ‘mamma had explained to her that no one was dead, or even so very much hurt, and told her to lie quietly.’

‘But who was said, or supposed to be dead?’ Mr. Herbert wished to know.

‘You, I suppose,’ the child said, shyly. ‘Harry, the man, said that life was ‘distinct gone;’ and Miss Lang heard it. Perhaps that frightened her and made her ill. I've seen her bad before often, only she told me not to tell, for it was nothing.’

The child would have gone on, pleased by feeling her words were of
importance, but Mr. Herbert gave a low groan, which made all the young ones look with wonder and awe on his own pain, which they were fast forgetting in their excitement about their governess. He was chained to that couch—stay there he must! but by the time that the doctor arrived, a very quick pulse and fever had set in.

Meanwhile, Isabel had sunk into a refreshing sleep. She could give no explanation of her swoon, or her intention in seeking that particular room. She had felt giddy and sick during dinner and even before. Of course the sudden news might have upset her. Mrs. Scott pronounced it to be from over-nervousness—a very bad habit, and she hoped Miss Lang would try to conquer it for the future.

Mr. Herbert said, when they were speaking of her down-stairs later in the evening, ‘that he had known Isabel faint very suddenly before, when far stronger than she seemed now.’ And then it came out that he had known more of her than the Scotts had supposed. As he was excited with pain and fever, he forgot his reserve, and even confided to Mr. Scott his friendship with the Lang family; spoke of his disagreements with Mr. Lang, and so on. So much did he say, that when, towards dawn, Mr. Scott left his friend to snatch a little sleep, he told his wife that he believed ‘there was something in it!’ with which sage and oracular sentence he turned over and went to sleep.

‘Something in what? What is Moreton thinking of, I wonder?—O—I see—I see!’ his wife soliloquized. And at breakfast the next morning, Mrs. Scott bestowed a keener look on her governess. But she said nothing, and gravely acquiesced in Isabel's assurance, that it was all past, and she was quite well and able to be in the school-room as usual. In her fall she had grazed her forehead slightly, and that mark was there. Beyond this there were no symptoms of the swoon.
CHAPTER XXVII.

Reading The News.

Vol.II

Mr. Herbert proved a refractory patient, and the amiable doctor had to consent to many freaks previously unheard of in the treatment after a fall and with a broken bone. He excused his forced compliance on the ground ‘that opposition only did more harm where the will was strong. There was risk of injuring, certainly, but—&c.!’ So Mr. Herbert had his own way, and wrapped in a Turkish pattern dressing-robe, and looking quite ‘interesting and invalidish’ as Mrs. Scott said, he took possession of the couch, on the third evening after the accident. Isabel not hearing of his intention, and not dreaming of his leaving his own room, was taken completely by surprise on entering the drawing-room. She was immediately retreating, supposing that the room was given up to his use.

‘Come in!’ said Mrs. Scott. And trying to shake off her shyness, she came up to where that lady was standing, surrounded by her children, who stared at Mr. Herbert's dress and his slung arm.

‘Good evening!’ Isabel said, trying hard to be cool and indifferent. But he held out his sound hand, without speaking, and she was constrained to give him hers. Touched by the warmth of his grasp, she felt excited; then, not daring to trust herself to be silent, she rattled on, even rallying him, and declaring she heard his screams from the road, and that it was that which made her faint. ‘He only pretends, Fanny,’ she went on, not daring to pause, and catching hold of the astonished child. ‘He likes to be made much of, and fancies that Turkish robe is very imposing and becoming!’ A quiet and amused smile on Mrs. Scott's face at last made her suddenly stop short.

‘You are rather sharp on our invalid, Miss Lang,’ said Mr. Scott, coming in. ‘Yet you showed sympathy and compassion enough by swooning in that tragic way.’

‘Supposing it had nothing whatever to do with the accident, after all?’ she said. ‘It sounds so romantic and like a novel, it is a pity to contradict it, isn't it? But facts are stubborn, and this is the fact—that I managed to turn giddy and fall when I was upstairs, at least some ten minutes after the news was brought, having, moreover, been rather queer and ‘all-overish’ all the day.’

‘You are very anxious to prove you were not frightened, I observe,’ said Mr. Scott.
‘Not anxious at all,’ Isabel said; ‘but so it was.’

‘Well, Miss Lang is not usually one to lose her presence of mind by foolish fright and alarm, I will say,’ put in Mrs. Scott.

‘No, Fanny; no play here. There are too many in the room, my dear,’ said Mr. Scott to his wife.

‘Yes; the children must go,’ she said. Then in a whisper to Isabel, she added, ‘I will take them away, if you will be so very good as to stay here and . . .’

‘No,’ returned Isabel, very decidedly,—‘no, indeed, I can't do that, Mrs. Scott. There is our history class to come off, and—and . . .’

‘The doctor does not wish him to read to himself,’ Mrs. Scott still whispered. ‘He is wishing for the newspaper, and my throat is sore. In fact, Miss Lang, it would be a real favour,’ she pursued. ‘Will you? Is it very disagreeable? Mr. Scott will remain, if you wish it. But you read aloud so nicely—just the news.’

‘Hallo! what is all that whispering about?’ cried Mr. Scott.

And Isabel, afraid lest Mr. Herbert should overhear, or guess at her reluctance, hastily, and not over graciously, said, ‘I must, of course, if you want me to do it.’ And taking up the newspaper, she sat down like a victim, or a school-girl set on a hated task. She did not ask what she should read, but plunged into the leading article at once, hesitating, in her nervousness, and then suddenly conscious of her rapid, hurried style, not very easy to hear, she checked herself, and forced her words to come out in sober and proper sequence. Presently Mr. Scott became fidgety, and said he was sure that Herbert ought to have an air cushion for the broken arm, and he knew where to find one which was put away in his study. Isabel saw him go, but read on steadily, though without the smallest notion of the meaning of the words. This went on, till she found the paper was slipping out of her hands, and looking up, saw, with a start, that Mr. Herbert was stretching out his well arm, and at some risk to the lame one, as she was scarcely within his reach, he was trying to pull away the paper from before her face.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, falling back on his cushions again, and somewhat alarmed at the sudden change of colour in her face.

‘Shall I go on? or is there any particular part you want to hear?’ she said, stooping to pick it up, and willing to hide her countenance from his keen eyes if she could.

‘No, no—though it is very nice. Just what I have often so dreamt of.’

‘What! your lying there with a broken arm?’ she said. ‘Very unpleasant dreams.’

And she laughed a little, nervously, and again seemed to search the paper for a subject.
‘No; but having you to read to me,’ Mr. Herbert said.

‘It is not by any means the first time, I believe,’ she went on, in a careless tone. ‘Wasn't there Sinbad, and a long, dull poem by one Goldsmith, which . . .’

‘Yes; you read it seated on my knee. Fancy that! O, Isabel—’

And then he stopped. After a little pause he went on quietly, almost as if speaking to himself.

‘There is—there must be some fate in it. Here I am again, having made up my mind to leave----And then’—here his voice took a tone of peculiar tenderness—‘you did care—you may deny it, if you like, and I dare say you will; but you were sorry at the idea of my danger, Isabel.’

And he looked at her reproachfully.

‘I don't wish to deny it at all. Why, surely you would expect it! Wouldn't you feel the same for me—or for any one.’

He did not answer this. His eyes were bent on her. She felt their meaning to the quick, though she dared not meet them.

‘Is there no hope, then?’ he said, as if to himself. Then, louder, ‘Isabel, tell me just one thing. Is it that you can't forget or forgive—is it resentment? or is it . . . . Could it never, under any circumstances, have been possible for you to—to—like me—in the way—I like—love you? Was it even then impossible for the friend to be something even dearer and nearer? Had I only come back on that next day, would you have said ‘yes’? Answer me—would you?’

‘Said ‘yes’ to what?’ she answered, fighting it off to the last, though much moved by his earnestness.

‘To my question. If I had asked you to be my wife?’

He could not see her face. It was hidden; and she did not speak. The pause of absolute silence seemed to be long. At last, with a sigh, he broke it.

‘You know me well, all my faults,’ he said. ‘You know that I love you. Can you ever, if not now, in time, return it? Do speak!—I shall never ask again. Perhaps . . . have you known me too long as a friend to look on me as a lover, a husband?—or—or—is it possible that your old regard is gone? Do you even dislike me?—Isabel!’

His words came the faster and more vehemently, that she still remained silent. Again he tried to put out his hand to touch her. But he winced visibly at the pain caused by the exertion of stretching out his arm, and shut his eyes for a moment, looking very white.

‘Pray don't do so,’ she murmured.

He seemed not to hear her. An expression of sadness and suffering seemed to stiffen each feature.
‘Not a word? At least say ‘No,’ and end suspense,’ he said, faintly. Then, controlling the impatience of his tone—‘Isabel, I shall never tease you again; but I entreat you to speak now. Tell me—is it anger—or is it indifference? Ah! anger might yet leave a little hope.’ And he threw up his hand and pressed his head. ‘But, I see! I see! It is indifference—cool, disdainful indifference!—dislike, I believe. There! she is going, and without one word, after all my entreaty—my . . . .’

She had risen from her seat as he spoke. He covered his eyes with his hand.

‘Yes,—well—go!—go, if you like it. If you go now, I shall understand it—I shall know that . . . .’

But he was stopped by feeling something close over him, and the hand which he was now impatiently drawing through his hair (a trick he had when much vexed) came suddenly in contact with something soft, while a kiss, light as dew, fell on his fingers.

Almost springing off his couch, he managed to seize and secure her hand, and drew it over his face.

‘Isabel! God bless you—God love you! You shall never, never repent this. My darling!’ he went on, ‘it is not in your nature to be disdainful or unkind. Yet—what may I think or hope? No—don't go, Isabel; you must come here now.’

And he drew her round to his side. She did not resist, but sank on her knees, burying her face behind his cushions. After a moment, he anxiously tried to raise her head, stroking her hair with his left hand fondly.

‘Don't cry—don't! Is it, then, only for me—because you fear to injure, to hurt me now? Isabel, unhappy?’

‘No—no.’

‘But you are—I see you are! How have I hurt or distressed you? Isabel, what is it?’

Seeing him really distressed, she forced the tears back and looked up.

‘It is nothing. You brought it all on yourself—all. But it is a great mistake.’

‘What is a mistake, Isabel?’

‘All—all this!’

‘These tears, but not . . . .’

‘I tell you it is all wrong,’ she said, with her old petulance. ‘You are acting under an impulse, as Mrs. Scott would say,’ and she laughed hysterically.

‘Mrs. Scott! Nonsense! Isabel, do you love me?’

‘If I do, I ought not to . . . .’

‘Don't—don't say that! Indeed, indeed, I will value and cherish it
always.’

‘I shall tease you into bad health—to death, perhaps,—who knows? There, I thought I was changed; but seeing you has brought back all my old self.’

‘Has it? I am glad. Isabel, you are sure you like me?’

‘No, indeed!’

‘No! you love me, then,—do you?’

‘You ask too many questions. It is tiresome, Mr. Herbert.’

‘Well—only once, just once tell me so! Do you forgive me quite? If you wont speak, give me your hand—do, Isabel!’

She looked at him for a moment earnestly, and then with a quick movement she put her hand in his. He drew her close—very close. ‘Let me go, please,—they are coming!’ He let her go, and she went back to her chair.

‘That is so far away. Closer—come nearer!’

‘Because you are ill, I suppose I must humour you,’ she said, in a troubled voice, and drawing her chair a little nearer to him. ‘And pray do you consider this a discreet step of yours, Mr. Herbert?’ she asked soon, demurely enough, though it was evident she kept a strong check on herself, and was still deeply excited.

‘About what?’ he asked.

‘Why,’ she said, hesitating, ‘what will they say? I mean your sister and grand English friends. Will they like a governess—a girl without beauty or fortune for . . . .’

‘For what? Explain yourself. This girl without ‘beauty or fortune,’ what about her, Isabel? Come, tell me, how is my discretion at fault? But come yet nearer,’ he said; ‘sit on this low seat; I want to see you. No, no; they wont come. Why, they have left us on purpose.’

‘On purpose! What do you mean?’

‘Only that they guess something, and are obliging,’ he said.

‘No! Guess—guess what, Mr. Herbert? Did you tell them, then?’

‘What had I to tell?’ he said, much amused at her alarm. ‘Certainly Scott took it into his head to be joking me this morning, and cross-questioning me too; and I owned, I believe,—that is, I said I had an interest—a regard; but never mind about them. Come here!’ And she did come. ‘That's right. Now I can see your face; a thinner face than it was!’ he added, gently stroking aside a little of her stray hair. ‘Did you blame me very much?’ he said, after a little silence. ‘Were you very angry, Issy, at my not coming to you directly after that last visit? You must have thought it strange, indeed!’

‘I fought your battles while I could;’ her voice was not very clear, and her eyes glistened with unshed tears.
‘Did you?’
‘Yes, and then—I tried to forget you.’
‘And succeeded?’

She glanced at him, and then struggled to say something saucy, but it ended in her hiding her face with her hands, while a few tears trickled down, and a short strong sob burst all restraint. It did not last long. ‘I did not sit down and fret,’ she said, as soon as she could command a steady voice. ‘I had much to do. I was very happy and content. Yes, and leading a better and a busier life than you ever knew me to do.’

He smiled. ‘This is so pleasant, as it ought to be. Don’t you find it quite ‘natural,’ Issy?’

‘Yet, only a few days ago, and you treated me as the veriest stranger,’ she answered. ‘And that was all natural, I suppose?’

‘Don’t talk of it! But although I did so, the very instant I found myself in your presence my heart throbbed to suffocation, and all my pre-conceived ideas seemed to vanish. I felt all the time that you were mine. I could scarcely refrain from drawing you to me, and claiming you as my own, in spite of all and everything.’

‘Whether I liked it or not?—you took that for granted, I suspect, very coolly.’

‘No; sometimes just the reverse. Don’t alarm yourself—you have not been won unwooed. Be content; you have perplexed and troubled me quite enough, and I tortured myself often with the notion that you could never love me. At other moments I certainly seemed to rest on it as a fact pre-ordained. You were mine—mine—without reasoning or accounting for it, that was the feeling.’

Here Isabel jumped up from her low stool and was only just seated in proper dignity, demurely sheltered by the newspaper, when Mr. and Mrs. Scott came in.
CHAPTER XXVIII.

Telling The News.

Vol.II

‘Well, finished the news?’ Mr. Scott asked.

‘Are you ready to return to your room, Mr. Herbert?’ inquired his wife.

‘Not exactly.’

‘But you seem flushed. The news has been too exciting, I fear—eh, Miss Lang?’ said Mr. Scott, looking keenly at her.

‘Well, wool is down, and there is an article prophesying another insolvency in some important house in Sydney,’ she said, looking at the paragraphs as she spoke.

‘Yes, Gribble and Co. are tottering, so it is said. Where will it end?’ And fairly launched on the fruitful topic of bad times, they all talked on eagerly, finding it difficult to stop. Under cover of this discussion Isabel slipped away. Before her return among them, Mr. Herbert had told his hosts of his being engaged to her, so that the first expressions of surprise having been freely uttered, Isabel received a cordial hand-shake from Mr. Scott, and a smile tolerably approving from the lady. With regard to Mr. Herbert, she was herself surprised to find how easily she fell into the old easy and familiar footing, at least, when alone with him. Before others there was a little shyness, and he found it difficult even to catch her eye, far less get an answer when he particularly addressed her. Mrs. Scott was considerate, and contrived that they should be a good deal together and alone. At such times some of the old battles were fought again. He soon shook off his indisposition, and save the sling, there was no further mark of his accident. Isabel lost her careworn look, and the colour came back to her cheeks, under the quiet repose of her heart. Her manner to him was pretty and characteristic. It was what it used to be, with deeper touches. While he was an invalid and on the couch, she was very docile and gentle; so much so, that he laughed and wondered, saying he expected to have to quote the old song to her, ‘One of two must obey.’ But her obedience was so exemplary that . . .

‘Don't be too sure of it!’ she said. ‘When you are yourself again and acting the master, stalking about as a lord of the creation, I shall not be the meek, yielding creature you have found me lately. You are now down and in my power. It would be cowardly and dishonourable to bully you. But . . .’

‘What will she do? What does Miss Lang mean, Mr. Herbert?’ little
Mary had asked, as she sat with her doll, unheeded by them.

‘You perhaps can inform me. What does she do with you in the schoolroom? Is she very terrible?’

‘No—only she will be minded. But you are so big and so tall, she couldn't make you mind, if you didn't like.’

‘Well, that's a comfort for me! Do you know, Mary, if you grow very restive and troublesome, when Miss Lang goes away, your mamma must let you come to me. I have a peculiar method for taming horses and children. Once—very long ago—there was a little girl somewhere about your age, no, nearer your sister Fanny's. She was offended about something and out of temper. It was at a sort of gipsy party some miles from home, and she had ridden on a nice little pony, but rather spirited and apt to jump about and kick. Well, this girl took it into her head to punish us all by declaring she would not mount her pony. She would walk home by herself. They could not frighten her with the prospect of the darkness which must overtake her. The nurse and a lady friend there, and her sister and brothers, all were quite upset, and some of them cried. But the girl was hard and determined, and began to walk off, just like a little rebel as she was. Then they applied to me. ‘She will be lost. Something must happen. O Mr. Herbert!’ All right, said I; and throwing the pony's rein over my arm, I went on whistling. Soon I spied the little rebel walking along in front, and on her hearing the horse's steps, I saw that she quickened her pace; very soon, before she knew that any one was near her, she found herself on the pony's back, and the bridle in her hand. ‘I'll get down—you'll see I will!’ she said. But as she struggled and insisted on walking, the pony's legs were tickled by a switch, and he began to caper and kick so that she had to hold on. Then the rest of the party came trotting along, all the horses fresh and eager to go home. So the young lady was obliged to keep her seat. She kept in front of the cavalcade, and I believe scarcely slackened the pace, which was of the fastest, till they reached their own gates.’

‘Ah, she was conquered. But who was it, Mr. Herbert?’

‘That's a secret,’ Mr. Herbert said, amused.

‘How can you remember such nonsense?’ Isabel remarked. ‘Ask him, Mary, how he got punished for his share in that affair.’

‘It was you,’ said Mary, shyly. ‘Tell me some more about Miss Lang—do, Mr. Herbert.’

‘Yes; and while you do so, I shall go and write my letter,’ said Isabel, and not heeding his request that the letter might be put off, that this was their only quiet time for that day, and so on, she left him, really wishing to have no further delay in writing to Jem. The only cloud of this time of peace to Isabel, was that she dared not yet tell her mother of her having had
any explanation with Mr. Herbert. She had, of course, mentioned his arrival, and since then had only briefly alluded to him, as one with whom she had no concern. Indeed, she was conscious that she must have given them an impression of his extreme coldness, and ‘cutting’ the acquaintance. Her mother's letters always contained some wonder at Isabel's consenting to remain in the same house with one who had acted so ‘scandalously;’ for her part, she hoped she should never meet him. It had been settled by Isabel and Mr. Herbert, that as soon as he could move, he should go himself to Westbrooke and announce their engagement. Yet as the day drew near, and she saw him going about, and fit for the ride, her heart failed her.

‘Why are you so grave?’ he asked. ‘I fear I need not flatter myself that it is because I am going away.’

‘I have a great mind to go with you,’ she answered.

‘Indeed! Well, do so. Yet I thought you settled it was best for me to go first on my own account, and try what I can do.’

‘Yes; but I dread it so.’

‘I hope the dread is needless. Your mother is not so very implacable a person, and you may really trust me to behave properly, when I am so anxious to win her pardon.’

She shook her head. ‘Yes—O yes, it wont be difficult to win. Too easy; that's it.’

‘I don't understand.’

‘Why, don't you see that you are now rich and we are poor, and mamma seems to think so much more than she did of our ‘doing well,’ as she calls it, and so on . . . .’

‘Is that all?’

‘Quite enough too. I don't like it. On the whole, I should prefer her holding back and refusing her consent.’

‘Isabel!’

‘Yes, I should. The other is mortifying; I don't like it.’

‘Nonsense, nonsense. I dare say we could have managed to be happy as poor folks, but surely a comfortable income is a good thing, and your mother is right to desire it for her children, in reason. Don't fancy that I shall think less of her for any care or expectation she has for you. Putting money aside, I know she might very reasonably object to trusting you to me at all. The more she thinks of you and requires for you, the better I shall like her.’

‘You will be satisfied. Mind, I trust to you. Please don't be sharp or satirical. I never liked it towards them. Now, I couldn't bear it! No, I couldn't, I wouldn't . . . .’
‘Nonsense, Issy! As if I should be sharp and satirical to your mother! You ought to know me better. You must trust me, my darling; and I shall for this once do better without you than with you.’

She did not remind him of the many times he had been satirical, but smiled, amused at his present goodwill for them all. She saw him drive away, having sent for a gig from Sydney; and turning back to the school-room, she felt lonely and anxious, yet very happy too.

Mr. Herbert did well; and his account of his visit and reception pleased her, on the whole. From her mother she received an elaborate and rather stiff letter, congratulating her on the ‘fine prospects’ which awaited her. Mr. Herbert had acted handsomely, she said, and made such ample and proper apologies, and was so earnest and so humble in begging her forgiveness and consent, that she had granted both, and hoped she had done well. Isabel was old enough to choose for herself, and so on. Kate's was a less studied affair. She was very glad that her dear Issy was at last caught, and seemed so happy. But for her part, not all his fortune or his cleverness could make her get over the dread she had of him. But of course Issy would never tell him this; and she confessed he had been very kind, and very pleasant, too, for him, and Tom thought a great deal of him. Quite a month passed before Mr. Herbert left Bengala, to which place he had gone from Westbrooke with Tom Jolly.

Isabel had now left the Scotts and was at home. She had offered to remain longer with them, but they were too kind to allow it; and fortunately Mr. Scott had found a substitute, who promised well, ready to come at once.

Mr. Herbert had urged her giving up the task of teaching as soon as possible; and Isabel herself could not help longing to be in her home again, there to examine and realize her new happiness.

Charlie Brand was waiting for her at the end of the Cedar Avenue, and (what no one had ever seen him do before) his hat was actually lifted clear off his head, while the queerest smile touched his lips and shone in his eyes.

‘Glad to have ye back, miss! You'll find us pretty flourishing and looking up, though wanting rain. Fine crop of grapes as ever I saw; but a poor gathering of Ingin Corn. Ay, they slips of yourn are come up finely at last, as you see. The willow will be as fine as the parent tree up at Langville. Patience, you see, miss, and most things come round, and come straight, too! Didn't I say these slips would grow in time? also, that ‘folks’ would find the way back over the wide sea, and all? For, wide as the ocean is, there's a small chap I've heard of, what's painted without breeches, will find
his way over—eh, now, miss? Don Cupid don't stick at a difficulty, do he now miss?’

By which Isabel understood him to express his content and triumph at the fulfillment of his prophecies, that Mr. Herbert would come back some day. But when she alighted from the carriage, and claimed a heartier congratulation by slipping her fingers into his great horny hand, instead of returning her squeeze, he dropped her hand directly, retreating a step, and again touching his hat.

‘Miss—I wish you and the gentleman all joy, I'm sure, and—and—I—’ but his words failed him, and he turned sharp round with bent head and walked away fast.

Isabel found herself made much of by her mother and Kate, to say nothing of her young sisters, who were delighted at her return home. They dragged her here and there and everywhere, anxious to show every spot.

It was pleasant to be at home again, to draw round the tea-table and feel so content—so free from anxiety.

‘When will our other visitor arrive?’ remarked Mrs. Lang.

But hardly had she said it when a gig drove up and Mr. Herbert came in. That evening he and Isabel had a stroll round the paddocks and to her old favourite view from the fence. She told him some of her old thoughts there, but he could not bear her to allude to that time, or to hear of her suffering through him; so they pushed on, and were at last at the bottom of the paddock. Mr. Herbert proposed her resting on a fallen tree; but she glanced around, and, with a look of almost horror, said—

‘Don't let us stay here. That log!—not taken away yet; though I begged Charlie to have it removed or to burn it. O, it is nothing,’ she added, seeing his surprise, ‘only—don't let us stay here. This is where—he—where poor Dr. Mornay brought me that night of the fire!’

And Isabel shuddered and covered up her eyes for a moment. He knew how she shrank from even an allusion to this time, and gently drew her away to higher ground, where the sun still shone. But she could not immediately throw off the feeling of sadness and awe which the memory of her brief intercourse with that unhappy man always promoted. Perhaps the shock it had caused her had been overruled to work well. It had left an indelible impression that there were deep and awful phases in life unknown and unguessed by her; that with all her energy and desire to set things right and straight, she was utterly powerless even to comprehend half the grief and struggles which her fellow-mortals endured. To such a temperament as Isabel's such a sense of powerlessness and humiliation only gave the touch which was needful in order to soften and subdue what might otherwise be too strong and too light.
The two sisters were married on the same day. Both agreeing in preferring a very quiet wedding, the party was limited to Tom's family, the Farrants, and the Scotts; Isabel's pupils acting as bridesmaids.

Mr. Herbert talked of returning to England, yet he lingered; and after some time, finding it vacant, he took Langville. This led to Kate and Tom setting up a separate establishment for themselves at Warratah Brush, so that, as Mr. Farrant observed, the Parsonage had again its old neighbours and friends.

We must now bid them all farewell, though reluctant to leave the old scenes and associations they have called up.

A great change has come to the land since that time. The young colony struggled through much disappointment and depression—struggled manfully; and then came the discovery of gold, bringing renewed life and prosperity.

Handsome and substantial churches must have multiplied through the length and breadth of the land, taking the place of the poor little attempts described in this tale. It is a grand country! And her children will not forget that added wealth and power is also added responsibility. In her hour of need, men were sent out from the mother country and partly maintained, who should preach patience and consolation to all who suffered; and there was suffering. Now, in their time of prosperity, surely they will not be slow to feel, but thankful to show, that they can themselves support and maintain God's church in fitting dignity. 'To whom much is given, much will be required.'

Floreat Australia!

THE END.
Explanatory Notes

Edited by Susan McKernan

Volume 1

Epigraph

1 If I should speak ... myself.’ Much Ado About Nothing, III i. 74-6. Hero is speaking about Beatrice, knowing that Beatrice will overhear her. The anonymous reviewer in the Sydney Morning Herald commented on the likeness between Shakespeare's Benedick and Beatrice, and Vidal's Mr Herbert and Isabel (8 August 1860, p.2).

Author's Note


Chapter 1

1 (p.7) Bignonias and cedar-trees Vidal's descriptions of Australian flora and fauna are usually self-explanatory; she uses the names in common use at the time which exemplify the early habit of using the nearest apparent European equivalent. Cf. ‘opossums’ (8:25), ‘native cherry tree’ (65:21), ‘flying squirrel’ (83:33), ‘native currant bushes’ (93:30), ‘locusts’ (144:4), ‘guana’ (144:5), and so on.

2 (p.7) kangaroo dog Breed evolved in Australia from the Scottish deerhound and the greyhound, originally for hunting kangaroos.

3 (p.7) Up the country A phrase in early use for further into the interior.

4 (p.8) ticket Ticket of leave, a permit entitling a convict to live and work as a private individual within a set area until pardon or the expiration of sentence.

5 (p.8) double rations Convicts and workers were fed from the station stores; hence, married couples drew double rations.

6 (p.8) cabbage-tree hat Wide brimmed woven from leaves of the palm known as the cabbage tree.

7 (p.9) stripes Floggings. Cf. ‘forty down’ at 9:31

8 (p.10) assigned servant A convict in the charge of a private individual, in this case,
Mr Lang.

9 (p.10) **New England ... sanguinary attacks of the aborigines** In the late 1830's and early 1840's hostile attacks by Aborigines on settlers were still common in the New England area. In 1838, Aborigines killed three men working on a station on the Gwydir River, and reprisals followed.

10 (p.12) **Sufficient names ... appointed to the district.** In 1836 the Legislative Council of New South Wales (NSW) passed a General Church Act which provided funds to all religious denominations in proportion to the number of adults in a district subscribing to that denomination. One hundred adults subscribing meant a grant of £100 each year, two hundred £150, to a maximum of £200 for more than five hundred adults. See Introduction, p. xvi.

11 (p.12) **army officer ... entitled to a grant of land** Grants to military officers began in 1792 but were later discontinued because of abuse. By the 1840s many former members of the military had become influential landowners.

12 (p.12) **no police magistrates in those days** In the early 1840s there were a limited number of full-time police magistrates, and most cases were tried by landowners, like Mr Lang and Mr Herbert, serving as part-time magistrates.


14 (p.14) **roc's egg** A roc is a mythical Arabian bird of enormous proportions. A roc's egg, though mythical, is too large to be ignored.

15 (p.16) **the Sheriff's ball** The Sheriff was the chief administrative officer of the courts. Balls were popular entertainments at this time, Louisa Meredith reporting that there were several each year of her time in *NSW: Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During A Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1973), pp. 53-4.

16 (p.16) **the company of mounted police** Until the creation of the NSW Police Department in 1862 there were a number of separate bodies policing the countryside including mounted police, border police, native police and so on. Unlike police sworn in by magistrates the mounted police were organised centrally along military lines and directed, like Captain Smith's men, to patrol particular regions of the colony.

**Chapter 2**

1 (p.21) **colonial wine** In their first years in NSW, the Vidals lived near Minchinbury which was already established as a wine-growing area.

2 (p.23) ‘**Nez retroussé. Elle est piquante et spirituelle.**’ A turned-up nose is saucy and witty (French).
## Chapter 3

1 (p.32) **eat** This form of the verb is considered archaic by the Macquarie Dictionary. Cf. Vidal's use of other uncommon forms such as ‘eatable’ (91:31) and ‘swang’ (241:5).

2 (p.36) **Government Ball on the Queen's Birthday** In the 1840s Queen Victoria's birthday, 24th May, was celebrated by a levee, followed by a ball in the evening. In 1843, the new Government House in Sydney was thrown open for the ball for the first time, though die next day the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial warned that Debt, Mortgages, Insolvency and Penury were among the revellers (25 May 1843, p. 2).

3 (p.38) ‘**Hope told a flattering tale!**’ Anonymous popular song, sung to an air by Giovanni Paisiello (1741-1816):

> Hope told a flattering tale,  
> That Joy would soon return,  
> Ah! naught my sighs avail  
> For Love is doomed to mourn.

4 (p.40) **King's School, Paramatta** Opened in February, 1832, the school was modelled on the King's School at Canterbury, Kent, and aimed to prepare the sons of free settlers to participate in public life and to keep them from associating socially with their convict servants. By 1841 the school had 100 students (80 boarders, 20 day boys), but the financial crash of 1842 led to a temporary closure. The variant spellings of Parramatta (cf. 97:8), and Wollongong (97:7) indicate a common indecision about the spelling of Aboriginal names.

5 (p.41) ‘**Lilla's a Lady,**’ Song by Thomas Haynes Bayly, which was popular from the 1840s to the 1880s.

6 (p.41) ‘**Comfort ye my people,**’ The recitative of Handel's Messiah. Mr Farrant's choice of the song suggests his commitment to a God of forgiveness and love.

## Chapter 4

1 (p.45) **Sydney Herald** The *Sydney Herald* began as a weekly newspaper in 1831, then a daily from 1840, becoming the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1842.

## Chapter 5

1 (p.52) **exigeante** Hard to please.

## Chapter 6

1 (p.60) **Dan Cats Tail** Dan is named after the whip used for flogging - the cat being the handle and the tail being the knotted strips of hide.
2 (p.61) O'Connell  Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847) led the campaign for Catholic Emancipation in Britain which was successful in 1829. By the 1840s and with the support of the Catholic clergy, he had embarked on a campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union of Ireland with Britain and thereby the restoration of an Irish parliament.

3 (p.62) triangle  The triangular frame to which convicts were bound for flogging.

4 (p.63) Merrima? Vidal mixes real place names, such as Yass and the north shore, with fictitious ones, such as Merrima. Merrima is possibly based on Berrima where there was a large gaol with occupation for a flogger, and where Vidal's brother-in-law George lived for a time.

Chapter 8

1 (p.75) prog  Provisions for an excursion, such as a picnic.

2 (p.76)Mrs Notable  Notable in the sense of bustling and busy at housewifery (now a dialect word); hence, Mrs Vesey patronises the industrious Australian housewives. Cf. ‘notable’ (33:8).

3 (p.77) milk of roses  Cold cream.

Chapter 10

1 (p.98) Off I set ... bush of Australia! A version of this song, entitled ‘The Settler's Lament’ appears in Nancy Keesing and Douglas Stewart's, Old Bush Songs (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1957), pp. 71-3. Authorship has been claimed by John Goodwin, a surgeon who arrived in NSW in 1837, and by John Henderson in his Excursions and Adventures in New South Wales (London: W. Shoberl, 1851).

Chapter 12

1 (p.109) ‘Currency’ talk  To be grammatically correct, Mr Lang should have said ‘I shall’, but he has adopted the local speech habit of dropping ‘shall’ in favour of ‘will’. In his The English Language in Australia and New Zealand (London: Longmans, 1966), G. W. Turner argues that ‘most of the world's speakers of English ... do not make [the distinction] naturally and colloquially’ (p. 113) and the habit has not been confined, as Vidal suggests, to Australians. ‘Currency’, as opposed to ‘sterling’ (born in the British Isles), refers to native-born white Australians. See also ‘currency speech’ (242:24).

2 (p.111) caricatures  According to Arthur Wilcox Manning (see Introduction, p. xiv), Francis and George Vidal upset fellow-passengers on the Earl Grey by similar satirical games.

3 (p.113) I pay 800l. a year ... for 700l.!  It seems that Barr will lend Lang £300 on condition that he pays £700 at the end of three months.

4 (p.113) They've taken ... convict labour  Transportation to NSW ended in 1840.
Chapter 13

1 (p.117)‘gunjo’ More commonly, ‘gunya’ or ‘gunyah’, from the Aboriginal word for temporary shelter; later the word is spelt ‘gunyo’ (159:30 and 160:25) and ‘gunyio’ (302:22). The variants may indicate the compositors unfamiliarity with the word.

2 (p.117)‘Five Islands’ The early name for the Illawarra District around Wollongong.

Chapter 14

1 (p.127)The Bank of Australia The Bank of Australia, which was founded in 1826 by the newly powerful free colonial gentry in opposition to the Bank of New South Wales, failed in 1843 in the wake of an economic depression and drought. Francis Vidal held two £50 shares.

Chapter 15

1 (p.133)guinea-fowl seal This seal is apparently embossed with the words ‘Come back’. See 394:13.

Chapter 17

1 (p.147)hyson Coarse green Chinese tea.

2 (p.148)homy Corn porridge.

Chapter 18

1 (p.162)gin If; this is one of the dialect words Vidal uses to indicate the speaker's Irish background. Cf. ‘Och hon!’ for ‘Oh dear!’ at 242:21.

Chapter 20

1 (p.176)government men and women Convicts.

Chapter 22

1 (p.190)fighting ... for O'Connell There was some physical unrest in Ireland associated with O'Connell's campaigns for Catholic emancipation, but only a small proportion of Irish-born convicts were political prisoners.

2 (p.190)Orangeman? An Irish Protestant pledged to defend Protestantism against Catholicism. The Orange Lodges were formed in 1795.

3 (p.191)Repeal Repeal of the Act of Union with Britain: see note 2 for p. 61. A Repeal Association was set up in NSW in 1842 and caused some political concern in the following few years.
4 (p.191) **O'Connell's rent** In the 1820s O'Connell established an Association to campaign for the causes of Catholic emancipation and Repeal of the Union. Membership of the Association was open to anyone who could pay a ‘rent’ of a penny each month or one shilling each year, and so did not exclude the peasantry. See previous note.

5 (p.192) **a man of colour** Probably a part-Aboriginal, though ‘coloured man’ was the more usual expression.

**Chapter 23**

1 (p.201) **a regular formal trial** Landowners, as magistrates, had the power to punish their convicts without going through the forms of the court.

**Chapter 25**

1 (p.217) **Hercules, and I don't know who ... chair-back soon.** Hercules and Omphale, Queen of Lydia. Omphale bought Hercules as a slave and forced him to wear effeminate clothing and do women's work, such as spinning, for a year. The chair-back refers to the habit of winding wool around the backs of chairs.

**Volume II.**

**Chapter 2**

1 (p.236) **whitewashing** Going through the bankruptcy court. Cf. the literal use of whitewash (46:19), and the more usual metaphorical use (322:39).

2 (p.237) **or swear in, a couple of constables** In rural NSW constables were appointed by the local magistrates, such as Mr Lang and Mr Herbert, and accountable to them.

3 (p.238) **Willow, willow?** Chorus of a traditional melancholy ballad, a version of which is sung by Desdemona in *Othello*, IV. iii.

**Chapter 3**

1 (p.242) **'baled up’** More commonly spelt ‘bailed up’; apparently derived from the confining of a cow for milking and applied specifically to bushranging where the victim offers no resistance, or is unable to offer resistance.

2 (p.243) **rare cage too** A fine set of teeth.

3 (p.244) **Bird and Beast** This pair of bushrangers does not appear in the standard bushranging histories and is, presumably, fictitious.

**Chapter 4**
1 (p.251) ‘Les défauts de ses qualités’ The faults of his virtues; ‘Heureux homme quand il n'a pas les défauts de ses qualités’ (Happy the man who has not the vices of his virtues). (French proverbial).

Chapter 5

1 (p.256) Norfolk Island ... the new governor, the theatre, Norfolk Island was a penal settlement for the most dangerous prisoners, particularly for multiple offenders. However, in 1840 Captain Alexander Maconochie (1787-1860), a prison reformer, was appointed superintendent of the Island and instituted a system of rewards for good behaviour which included the provision of musical instruments and occasional opportunities for play-acting.

2 (p.257) ‘Hyde Park Barracks’ The Barracks were the first staging post for newly arrived convicts, and the words marked the bedding and clothes of the convict.

3 (p.258) new chums Newly arrived immigrants.

Chapter 7

1 (p.277) ‘bony newy’ ‘Bonnet de nuit,’ nightcap (French).

Chapter 9

1 (p.291) the celebrated Riley No Riley appears in bushranging histories; he is probably a fiction.

Chapter 12

1 (p.308) lissums for hats The cabbage-tree leaves were plaited into pliable lengths for making into cabbage-tree hats. See note 6 for p. 8.

Chapter 13

1 (p.313) A turning ... says he! Cf. the nursery rhyme lullaby:

Hush thee, my babby
Lie still with thy daddy
Thy mammy has gone to the mill
To grind thee some wheat
To make thee some meat,
Oh, my dear babby, lie still.

As in other parts of the novel, Vidal seems to be alluding to Shakespeare, and Ellen's death has some similarities to the deaths of Desdemona in Othello and Ophelia in Hamlet.
Chapter 15

1 (p.323)Lenten Rosen Daffodils.

Chapter 17

1 (p.337)Gunpowder-plots and the Inquisition The two events the English associated with Catholic perfidy, and the Jesuits in particular. The Jesuits were falsely suspected of collusion in Guy Fawkes' attempt to blow up the English Parliament in 1604, and, although not prominent Inquisitors, were founded in Spain, the setting for the notorious Spanish Inquisition which sought out and punished heretics in the fifteenth century.

Chapter 18

1 (p.343)‘The daylight sick;’ ‘This night methinks is but the daylight sick,’ Merchant of Venice, V. i. 124.

2 (p.345)All is vanity Ecclesiastes iii. 19-20.

3 (p.345)Apples of Sodom Mythical Dead Sea fruits, lovely on the outside but ashes within.

4 (p.345)Living water John iv. 10.

5 (p.345)Esau, Esau, the elder of Isaac's two sons, lost his birthright to his brother, Jacob, exchanging it for food (Genesis xxv. 29).

Chapter 19


Chapter 19

1 (p.360)A brand from the burning! Zechariah iii. 1-3 and Amos iv. 11.

2 (p.361)A chariot of fire! Refers to Elijah being swept up to heaven in a fiery chariot without suffering the pain of death (Kings ii. 11-12).

Chapter 21

1 (p.372)Ora pro me! ... faithful servant! Pray for me (Latin). The reference is probably to the parable of the talents (Matthew xxv. 21).

2 (p.374)The monastery near Paramatta The Sisters of Charity established a convent in temporary quarters near Parramatta in 1839, close to the female factory or women's prison. In 1840, St Mary's convent was built for them and still stands on the site.
Chapter 24

1 (p.393) **gum** The lumps of gum exuded from the wattle tree were commonly collected and sucked by Australian children.

2 (p.396) **Mathews at Home** In the 1860s the actor Charles James Mathews popularised an entertainment called ‘Mr and Mrs Charles Mathews at Home’, apparently based on similar performances by his father in the 1830s and 1840s.

Chapter 25

1 (p.406) **Petty's Hotel** Thomas Petty's family hotel stood at Church Hill, North Barrack gate, Sydney.

Chapter 28

1 (p.425) **must have multiplied** Vidal refers to her lack of first-hand experience of post-goldrush Australia. See Introduction, p. xvii.

2 (p.425) **To whom ... will be required.** Luke xii. 48.

3 (p.425) **Floreat Australia!** Let Australia flourish! (Latin).
Bibliographical Note

Susan McKernan

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Patricia Clarke, **Pen Portraits; Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth Century Australia** (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988), pp. 23-6.


Cecil Hadgraft, **The Australian Short Story Before Lawson** (Melbourne:


Colin Roderick, An Introduction to Australian Fiction (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1950), pp. 12-13 and 33.

Editor's Emendations

This edition is based on the text published by John W. Parker and Son (London) in 1860. The copy-text has been transcribed from the Parker edition and changed from two-volume to a one-volume format with continuous pagination.

Errors of spelling and punctuation are emended, and are enumerated in the List of Editor's Emendations and inverted commas have been silently regularised to the majority form of the copy-text (singles) - which it also uses to enclose material itself within inverted commas. The heading for Volume 1 Chapter XV, "Come Back", retains the double inverted commas of the copy-text. Otherwise copy-text is followed precisely and its styling as closely as possible, and historically acceptable inconsistencies of spelling, capitalisation and hyphenation/word separation are allowed to stand. The place name, ‘Westbrooke’, which is sometimes rendered as ‘Westbrook’ in the copy-text, has been silently made consistent.

List of Editor's Emendations

Emended readings, cited by page and line number, appear to the left of the square bracket. The reading in the copy-text appears to the right, with the swung dash indicating a repeated word.

Volume I

10:34 then.] ~
17:3 how,'] ~,
20:28 No, he] ~,
32:35 school-room,] ~.
34:21 gun,] ~.
36:10 Herbert's] Herhert's
40:28 ‘Issy] ~
46:3 ‘Hallo] ~
46:34 ‘Certainly,’... ‘Mr.] ~, ... ~.
48:7 that?] ~?
48:21 Vesey's] Veseyes
53:7 like Kate] like Kate
58:3 ‘A] ~
74:16 had] bad
85:2 came] come
88:18 capital,’] ~,
92:13 and with] andwith
97:7 Woolongong] Woolongon
99:7 it?----’] ~?”----
100:17 yourself,’]~,
Volume II

101:34 to] so
103:19 ladies] ladie
103:22 Kate.] ~
110:8 ha! .... ] ha! ....' 
118:35 Besides] ~
119:18 effect] effeet
126:17 Mr.] ~
128:26 Yet] yet
131:32 with.] .~.'
131:33 Mrs.] ~.
132:9 If] ~
133:9 Farrant,'] ~,
135:16 Isabel] ~
140:28 ill.] .~.'
148:1 from, it] ~ ~,
148:28 'Hunted] ~
150:19 ready.] ~,
150:23 'Eh!] ~!
151:12 I] ~
151:16 heels.] .~.,
153:12 now.] .~,'
157:8 view.] .~,'
163:21 turning] turing
173:31 wont] ~,
178:21 'No.] ~,~' 
178:25 ' 'Rhapsody] ~
179:26 joke!] ~?
179:39 Kearneys] Keelys
179:41 Kearneys] Keelys
180:6 course!] ~!' 
180:37 'Ah] ~
185:14 came.] ~
193:19 heretics] ~' 
200:30 'Do] 'D
200:31 wish they] wisht hey
205:14 'Look] ~
213:6 He] ~
213:14 she] the
214:21 'By] ~
215:7 now] know
217:21 'I] ~

Volume II

229:17 'Will] ~
229:27 that you] you that
234:22 mamma] mamma
236:35 see.’] ~.
238:34 thick.] ~,
243:23 mamma!’] ~!
246:16 ‘I allude] ~ ~
246:37 enemies?’] ~?
252:33 gain.’] ~.
271:25 Mrs.]~
273:25 she?’] ~?
275:5 ‘Why] ~
275:7 infra dig.] ~ ~
275:13 Mrs.] ~
277:14 ‘Katharine,’] ‘Katherine,’
277:18 was.] ~’
282:22 they] thy
284:1 out.’] ~.
288:16 feels] feel
290:10 constable.] ~.’
292:6 trees;] ~, ~.
297:30 daddy!’] ~!
297:32 ‘accidental] ~
300:10 of civilization] of civilization
301:41 a a a a
302:7 star.] ~
305:7 I!] ~?
310:7 while] While
312:18 same.] ~,
314:2 Isabel] Ellen
314:36 eerie] eyrie
317:16 unusually] unusually
320:9 it,’] ~,
322:31 well,] ~,’
322:34 ‘Here's] Here's
330:4 uncertain] uncertain
332:25 you.’] ~.
332:29 she] she
336:1 priest] prays
339:39 correa] cornea
340:1 correa] cornea
357:25 the] the ‘the
368:18 think] thinks
369:27 influence less] influenceless
371:9 ‘Wanted] ~
374:14 Paramatta,’] ~.
379:39 implied?’] ~?
381:20 a little] alittle
384:26 mind.’] ~.
384:36 ‘that] ~
In this edition all end of line hyphens have been introduced except in the case of the following compound words which are hyphenated in the copy-text:

- four-and-thirty
- stock-yard
- long-deserted
- curly-headed
- sun-dried
- church-yard
- walking-stick
- school-room
- horse-mill
- to-morrow
- pic-nic
- awful-looking
- rose-breasted
- work-room
- drawing-room
- dining-room
- spring-cart
- pre-occupation
- stable-door
- self-composure
- ticket-of-leave
- washing-day
- ill-used
- dinner-bell
- half-an-hour
- so-called
- over-working
- love-making
- coo-ee-eeed
- Tolerable-good
- to-night
- watch-chain
- pocket-book