

# Cowanda, The Veteran's Grant

**An Australian Story**

**Atkinson, Louisa (1834-1872)**

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## Chapter I.

Of chance or change, Oh, let not man complain!  
Else shall he never cease to wail.

— Beattie.

“But thy light footsteps there no more  
Each path, each dingle shall explore;  
In vain may smile each green recess;  
Who now shall pierce its loneliness?”

As the sun drew near the horizon, its golden rays fell across the china-rose hedge, and under the broad verandah, where two elderly gentlemen reclined, smoking.

“Dell,” said one, puffing a blue cloud into the pure air, fragrant with mignonette, “what do you mean to do with your grandson?”

No question could more perfectly have chimed in with Captain Dell's present mood. He was thinking of the boy.

“I hardly know — make him a farmer, probably.”

“Bad — bad, Captain; farming don't pay like sheep.” Another expressive puff of smoke emphasised the assertion.

His companion erected his stately, athletic figure, and mused. Captain Dell had been a military man, who, early in the country's history, sold his commission, and tried farming. A rigid disciplinarian; — you saw it in the firm planting of his foot on the ground, — in the strong, large hand grasping the top of the stick, curiously twisted by being enfolded in the close twining stems of the sarsaparilla, as it grew in its native woods; — you saw it in the shaggy grey brows, drawn firmly together, and half hiding the clear, cool, blue eye, which never flinched before the gaze of any man; and in the straight, resolute lips. Yet he was a handsome man, and rigid in his code of honor as in his law of obedience.

“You are right, Rylston. I have not made riches here.”

“Send Gilbert to the station; he is young, — a few years there will make him a man, and he can take the place of Blackmore. I tell you, Dell, I don't like that fellow: by Jove, he should not superintend for me. My boys manage two of my stations for me. Tom is but twenty, and Will rather older.”

“You have a right to speak in favor of wool-growing; but Gilbert will never make a squatting king.”

Rylston laughed loudly and coarsely: a laugh of self-gratulation — of conscious wealth. His wide stations, his countless flocks, had won him the title of King Rylston: a title half in mockery, but sufficiently pleasing. The pastoral sovereign had risen from poverty and obscurity to his present position. His father had “left his country for his country's good;” but, like many in the early times, collected property, which — in a very peculiar will, at variance with all rules of grammar or syntax, and which had occasioned no small amount of confusion and legal investigation — he had bequeathed to his son. These advantages Seth Rylston turned to the best account, as far as verifying the adage of “money making money.” He had his friends, — for wealth can buy a certain spurious article which passes current under that noble name; and there were those who appreciated some natural good qualities, and on their account overlooked some positively bad ones. Among these was Captain Dell. He was not possessed of business tact, — a most essential quality in a dealing, trading community, like that of Australia; and he often experienced the advantages of King Rylston's keenness in these particulars; but, after all, he could not succeed in introducing his wife and family into refined society. Mrs. Rylston could not rise with her circumstances, nor separate gentility from dress; so she purchased silks and jewellery, and thought herself a lady.

Being on a favorite subject, Mr. Rylston urged his advice, till the question was resolved into Gilbert's destination being the far-off cattle station; — he could back his argument with the weight of wealth.

“Do I take him up with me, Dell?” he asked, passing his forefinger complacently over his huge grey moustache, and erecting his rather obese figure.

“No, thank you; I shall send him with Blackmore. He is in Sydney, and will come here on his way up.”

At that moment a quick half-sigh, half-exclamation of entreaty startled the gentlemen, and, turning, they saw a young girl behind them.

“Aunt Nancy sent me to tell you tea was ready, Grandpa,” she said quietly, but her cheek was flushed, and a shadow rested on her eyes, which made them darker than usual.

“Very well, Rachel; has Berty returned?”

“No, Grandfather.” The color deepened, and the lip quivered now, but she glided in at the open door.

In defiance of all architectural rules, Captain Dell had, as his means or inclination prompted, added to the original size of his dwelling, — here a long dining-room, there a library, — then a cluster of domestic offices, and so on, till every room boasted some three or four doors, beneath which — for bush-carpenters never manage to make things fit — the

winter's winds whistled in chorus, rather to the discomfiture of the inmates. Yet it was a pleasant house, and a very happy household; for in the loving and venerating hearts around him Captain Dell found no opposition nor rebellion to awaken the harsher qualities of his character. His unmarried daughter and orphan grand-children seemed to appeal to his manliness, and such an appeal, however wordless, meets with a quick response in truly manly hearts; and perhaps he loved them all the more for their very weakness and need of his protection.

The irregular form of the building caused many nooks and corners: there were shady borders, which suited currants and gooseberries; and sunny walls, where figs and grapes ripened; there were seats shaded by Cape honeysuckles, and angles where the ivy held the walls with its many fibres. Altogether it was a pleasant spot; if the windows and doors were all of different heights and sizes, and the roof mossy and disposed to admit the rain in certain places where its odd points were intended to join, it bore throughout the signs of the hand of the "rough carpenter," and he had evidently determined not to forfeit his name. A large orchard surrounded three sides of the buildings; — at once an orchard and vegetable garden, but not kept in any order, as it was under the charge of a very elderly man, with occasional assistance from the farm labourers; and they made a point of destroying all the results of their predecessor's work.

Old Skillbeck's gardening was a chronic evil, borne from habit rather than any more active reason. Pruning season found him in his glory; then with saw and knife he made a veritable slaughter in the vegetable world. There was a story current to this effect: —

"What are you doing, Skillbeck?"

"Pruning these yer young trees, Maister," and the gardener snapped off the head of a plum sucker.

"That's a sucker; it is no good."

"It will do no harm," triumphantly returned he; and in this happy conclusion he passed his days among the orchard trees.

The room into which Rachel had preceded the gentlemen was one of the most ancient erections; the ceiling was very low; the stained walls were to all appearances tinted with brickdust, and perfect revolutionists in their independence of line and rule, swelling out into odd and capricious rises and ridges; the wide fireplace supported on its brick hobs a pile of logs, for winter was approaching, and a ruddy blaze richly tinted the ceiling and glowed on the dark cedar furniture. Aunt Nancy was already seated at the tea-board.

Rachel's eyes travelled uneasily from the face of her aunt to that of her grandfather, and, when the visitor addressed her, the tone of her reply and the expression of the eye wore a mixture of timidity and displeasure.

"How will you like your brother to turn a squatter, Miss Rachel?"

inquired King Rylston, when there was a pause in the conversation.

“Not at all; — I would much rather he staid with us here.” The energy of her utterance startled the other females: Aunt Nancy lifted her eyebrows, and her other niece, — a girl nearly the same age as the speaker, — bent her head over her cup to hide the tears that sprang into her eyes, for she immediately comprehended the boy's destiny, and he was dear as an only brother to her.

“Rachel!” said the Captain severely, for her manner had been perhaps too energetic.

“I beg your pardon, Sir.”

“It was not to me you spoke,” he returned coldly.

She looked at King Rylston in silence.

“Never mind,” he said, good-naturedly; “I like a little fire, — milk-and-water don't suit my fancy.”

“You won't send dear Berty to the station, surely, Grandpa, where we shall never see him,” begged she, with beseeching looks.

“And he will have no one to mend his stockings, and get him a nice dinner,” added Aunt Nancy, coming to her relief.

“Yes, Gilbert is to go; — and now, instead of making it a hardship, you had better endeavour to make him enter upon his life with spirit. You know he wants perseverance, — he is too impulsive. As for the little luxuries your aunt mentions, he must learn to do without them. I did without a mother's care from six years old, and Mr. Rylston, or any other gentleman, will tell you of how little real importance these things are to young men.”

Aunt Nancy poured the boiling water simmering in the kettle on the stand over her hand, instead of into the teapot, and saw everything through a haze; and her niece changed color, knowing from past experience that to argue with the Captain when his resolve was taken was worse than futile, as it only precipitated the course of the unwished event; whilst Elice trembled, and the quiet tears chased each other down her cheeks.

At that moment the baying of several dogs, the stamping of a shod horse, and a youthful voice speaking rapidly and gaily, announced the return of Gilbert Calder from his ride.

“All at tea! — am I so late?” he said, entering. “There, Rachel, are some flowers to draw,” and he threw a large and tastefully-arranged bunch of native flowers into his sister's lap, as he passed round the table to the vacant seat.

“Where have you been, Gilbert?”

“Down the gullies to get some bark for old Mother North; she is ill or something, Grandfather. I have been twenty miles since dinner, rummaging after the trees. I had to walk two or three miles. I tied the old horse up to a tree, and followed the creek; it is the wildest hole, I think,

in the world, — a beautiful bush from the creek to the foot of the high rocks, hanging like a wall overhead. I filled my pocket-handkerchief with moss for you, Elice, but I dropped it somewhere.”

“You lost your handkerchief?”

“Yes, Aunt.”

“Your new silk?”

“It was one of those with the red borders.”

Aunt Nancy elevated her hands and eyes in silent horror, wondering what would become of the boy when removed from under her careful eye.

Mr. Rylston began to expatiate upon the superiority of the plains over the mountainous country; he dwelt upon emu and kangaroo hunting across vast plains, where the horizon melted into the tints of the sky, — where the black man still trod his native land, powerful and independent. Gilbert listened eagerly, and it was some little time before he noticed the increasing agitation of the females.

“Why, what — ” he then began in surprise.

“I have determined upon sending you to the station with Mr. Blackmore, and your aunt and the girls naturally feel some regret at parting with you,” explained the Captain, calmly.

The youth dropped his knife and fork, for a moment bewildered and uncertain. His ambition had ever pointed to the unfettered station life, but the sorrow of the loving hearts around him touched a cord which vibrated painfully.

“Don't mind, — I'll write, and come down sometimes and see you,” he said, rising from his chair, and, bending over his aunt, and trying to extend an embracing arm round the girls at either side of her, their fortitude gave way completely, and Aunt Nancy, offering an apology, hurried them away, and with desperate resolve attended to the courtesies of the tea-table, and lavished unheard-of quantities of sugar and jam upon her nephew.

Thoughtless and adventurous, and just entering upon manhood, Gilbert Calder looked forward to his future life with satisfaction, and spent the interval in riding round the neighborhood, bidding farewell to old familiar friends and places.

Busily the fingers of love and industry formed additions to his wardrobe; and as Aunt Nancy packed his valise, she forgot not the old silk handkerchiefs for whip-lashes, the warm flannels, the pretty comforter, knitted by Elice, or the purse sparkling with steel-beads, which Rachel, unknown to anyone, had sat up late of nights to make; and the kindly woman dropped a sovereign into it, though she wiped a tear as she said, “But, dear fellow, it will be no use to him there;” and down under his best coat she stowed a Bible, — not a new one, but an old companion and guide of her own in many a past hour. Here was the

promise marked with trembling hand, when the letters had danced through her tears as she essayed to read them; and near it was a firm line, where Faith had set her seal; nor did she forget to write on the flyleaf, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth;" — and then, after a prayer beside that valise, and when her tears had watered its contents, she felt better, and was quite courageous about the future.

The two girls, who were about the same age, and nearly two years younger than Gilbert, were infected with a similar feeling, and the farewell was uttered with more composure than could have been anticipated.

The route marked out by Captain Dell would have made Gilbert and his companions, Mr. Blackmore and a stockman, the guests of Mr. Rylston; but, for some reason, Blackmore deviated from this course, and when within a few days' journey of their destination, Gilbert's horse having become lame, he left him, and the stockman to act as guide, and by forced stages hastened on before them.

Vast and almost treeless on every side spread the plains, dotted over by herds of cattle, and here and there broken by slight elevations. A vapour, crimsoned by the setting sun, engirdled the prospect, and, like a *mirage*, assumed forms perplexing to the eyes of the travellers. By the deep creek communicating with the river grew pine and myall trees. An emu with rapid strides passing them, or a kangaroo bounding along in the distance, stirred up the Nimrod propensities of the youth, but, like his steed, he was weary.

Almost in silence they had ridden over the last part of the day's journey, and parted; Gilbert alighting at the door of the Overseer's residence, and the man taking his way to the stockmen's huts.

An aged man, sallow, careworn, and unshaven, with a high cap made of opossum skins on his head, came forward officiously to receive Bertie.

"Where is Mr. Blackmore?"

The question was several times repeated, for Silas was, as he explained, "hard of hearing."

"He's not at home just now, Mister, but I'll see you be comfortable. Sit ye down, Mister;" and he steadied a three-legged stool on the sheets of bark spread over the earthen floor, and expedited his preparations for the evening meal.

The gorgeous tints of sunset had faded into grey as Gilbert reached the hut, and, as darkness follows immediately after sunset in Australia, the evening was rapidly growing dark. The hutkeeper stumbled about the room, adding fresh fuel to the fire, and restlessly arranging and disarranging everything moveable, muttering the while to himself; he went often to the door, and, shading his eyes with his hands, appeared to be endeavoring to penetrate the gloom. At first Gilbert supposed him a harmless maniac, and paid no attention to his movements; but by degrees

his observation was arrested.

"I say, Silas," he exclaimed, "what's up?"

"Eh, Mister! sad doings — sad doings!"

"What do you mean?"

"The blacks, ye see, Mister — they've speared a shepherd; he was going down the river the back road — " he came up close and whispered in the youth's ear. Berty drew back.

"I ain't deaf — speak out."

The man looked timidly over his shoulder.

"Are you afraid of the blacks?"

"No, no, Mister; but Mr. Blackmore and the men have gone down to the camp. Sad doings — Lord ha' mercy on us!" He turned to arrange the logs on the fire again.

Gilbert demanded his meaning in vain; a suspicion of the truth flashed across his mind, and with a bound he crossed the room, and caught the hutkeeper by the collar, vowing vengeance if he did not tell the whole truth.

The threat had the desired effect: he found that the desertion of the station was not accidental, but that the Overseer and men had started, armed, to surprise and take deadly retribution upon an encampment of blacks, some miles up the river.

"But Oh, Mister, don't tell! I warn't to let ye know — don't tell!" and the old man sank in an abject manner at the youth's feet.

"Get up, get up — I must be off!" exclaimed Gilbert, wildly shaking the clinging hands from his feet, and bounding away.

In a few moments he was mounted upon the freshest horse he could find, — a tall, large-boned old stock-horse, with a gallop like a camel's, — and speeding as fast as whip and spur could urge him in the direction of the encampment.

The Superintendent, Mr. Blackmore, and some stockmen had started just before sunset upon their murderous errand. Two nights before a shepherd, wandering down the river in search of employment, had deposited his bundle at the hut door, and asked for a night's lodging; the next morning he resumed his journey, and the following day his body was found in the marshes formed by the backwaters of the river, pierced by spears. Blackmore swore he would teach the black-fellows a lesson; and now, in the dark silent night, with the stars gleaming from heaven above upon them, they were securing their horses to the stems of a cluster of oaks, and trembling in their guilt-stricken hearts, as the wind sighed mournfully through the wiry foliage, as if Nature bewailed her to witness the strife. Their guns were loaded with a deadly charge, and in silence they crept along the bank of the creek, in the shadow cast by the trees which margined it.

Already the smoke from the fires at the native encampment rose up

before them, and the clatter of light-hearted gossip broke the stillness.

Some large trees, the roots of which had been left bare by some previous inundation, reared themselves in a rugged wall between the avengers and their prey. On hands and knees Blackmore wound his way up the drift-tangled elevation, drawing his gun after him, and closely followed by his companions. Cautiously they raised their heads to explore the scene. About half-a-dozen tents, formed of dry grass, bark, and green branches, were grouped upon a small point, almost surrounded by a bend in the stream. Little fires shot up their red tongues of fitful blazes, and sent showers of sparks amidst the darkness, as the wind rose in puffs, casting a light upon the wild scene. Men, women, and children sat or lounged about; some roasting fish on the coals, some sleeping, others chatting, and laughing with the clear, sudden laugh of the Australian black, a being so completely the slave of the impulse of the moment.

Blackmore raised his gun and took aim where there were clustered together the Chief and his young Lubra, with her babe nestling in her arms, just as the white babe sleeps in its mother's arms, with its downy cheek pillowed upon her bosom, in utter trustfulness. At that moment there was a noise, a clattering of a horse's feet in the distance, and a loud shout. Blackmore started, and, losing his footing, rolled down the bank, his gun going off as it came in contact with the roots of the trees, and slightly wounding one of the stockmen; the charge rattled among the branches of a pine, scattering its leaves upon them. A wild cry of terror arose in the encampment; several spears whistled above their heads, and the blacks plunged into the water, swam across the stream, and were quickly lost to sight.

Blackmore struggled to his feet to be confronted by Gilbert Calder, pale with agitation and fatigue, whilst his horse swayed and staggered, wreathed in foam, and the blood falling from its spur-lacerated sides. Gilbert was nearly seventeen, a tall, full-grown youth, with an eye capable of expressing so much meaning when aroused that few but felt its power. Now, as he gained breath, he thundered forth words of high displeasure, asserting the mastership, and stigmatizing the trio as murderers. Blackmore had been a soldier, and served under Captain Dell, — quitting military life at the same time, and following the fortunes of his officer. In some encounter, years before, he had received a ghastly wound across the brow and cheek, and, when agitated, his countenance was far from prepossessing. Those who knew him read in the distortion of his features that he would remember that scene for life; but he was too politic to say much, and all returned to the station in a sullen recognition of amnesty.

## Chapter II.

“For the Present wakes the Past.”

SOME time had elapsed, — one of those pauses which occur in in nations, in cities, and more especially in retired localities and families which are barren of incident and change; — a hush such as precedes the storm, and usually as rudely broken. When once the dike has begun to leak, how swift the inundation! After the first separation, how rapid and complete the dispersion! Once more a human family is “scattered abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth.” But such a train of ideas is prospective, for it was that unbroken hush; — we only know that time has passed, because those equestrians are no longer children.

The girls were riding to the little post town, followed by a native black, also mounted; not that the lad had assumed the servile air of a lackey: his reins were negligently flung across the horse's neck, his hands stuffed into his pockets, and the large lips puckered up in a convenient form for whistling “Lucy Long,” or some such air; from time to time the boy discontinued his musical performances to call — “I say, Miss Rachel, you see that magpie's nest;” and a clever imitation of the birds, young and old, followed; from a mouse's hole to a bee's nest far up in the towering branches above them, the great black eyes of the boy went exploring; the Nimrod element of the savage was finely developed in him, although it might only have been in pursuit of “mice and such small deer.”

The bush meanwhile was traversed, and some very pleasing green fields, with a few scattered cottages, were their destination. One of these buildings, a whitewashed slab cottage, had a board erected on two posts before it, on which was written, “Andrew Apjohn. General Store. Post Office. Good Accommodations and Water.” This was the magnet which attracted the party.

There was some zealous activity to hold the horses and assist the ladies to dismount, evinced by the young farmers who were grouped round the counter; for though not one of the largest estate holders, Captain Dell, as a magistrate, and by the force of character, held a certain position in the district. Rachel and Elice bowed and smiled as they entered the store. The room was small and crowded with goods, and the large mailbags lay on the counter and floor; the mail was just in.

“Have you anything for us? — Good-day, Mr. Apjohn.”

“Yes, Miss Calder, I have: there's a letter for the Captain. How does he find himself to-day, Miss? and here's another — no, that's ‘Miss Calder’ — that's yourself, Miss;” and so on the storekeeper's wife proceeded, as, from a pile of letters on the counter, and sundry little drawers and baskets, she produced letters and papers. That important personage himself was playing the part of Sir Oracle, perched upon a cask, with his rubicund face, forming a tolerable *tableau vivant* of Baechus, while he read the latest English news to an attentive audience, with a running commentary of much profundity; the great political questions of the day were being disposed of with much ease and dispatch as the girls left the store, and cantered out of the township to the retired bush-road; then the reins were drawn, and the seals of the many anxiously-expected communications broken. Rachel had a letter from her brother, telling, as all Gilbert's letters did, of mustering days, and hunting, and dangers of various kinds; with a postscript of loving messages to Elice, and Blackmore's respects to the Captain. Her cousin was not less occupied.

“A letter from papa,” she said at length. “I have another little sister since he wrote last, and — how strange it seems, Rachel — these brothers and sisters I have never seen.” Tears gathered in her' eyes.

Captain Dell had had three daughters; the eldest, the homely Anne, grew into the homely maiden, Aunt Nancy; for diamonds unpolished are frequently mistaken for pebbles; but the others married, — the one an officer, the other the Doctor of the regiment then stationed at Sydney; but after a while they were ordered to India. To Mrs. Calder the struggle was severe; she could not part from a husband loved as only such finely-wrought and impassioned natures can love, but she was a mother, and the climate was declared fatal to her children. Aunt Nancy wept over the cots where the little ones slept, and promised to be a mother to them; and her sister tore herself from her children, as it proved, to see them no more. Within a few months fever had stilled the beatings of that loving and sorrowing heart, and the babes were orphans.

Elice's mother, the Captain's youngest daughter, clung to her child; whether the cool, politic man of the world, with his bland, suave manner, had disappointed her hopes, none knew; but her feeble child received her first care, and she said that when it had gained strength they would join him; but the babe each day took firmer hold upon her affections, and the time did not come when she could either part with her, or expose her to the risk of an unhealthy climate. Gradually a naturally fragile constitution sank under many sources of disquiet, and Aunt Nancy once more promised to be a mother to the motherless.

Mr. Gillett, the surgeon, had not long mourned his bereavement; he married a Creole lady with a good fortune, and at stated intervals wrote a letter to his eldest daughter, with an enclosure for her maintenance; the terms conventional and proper might have described these epistles: no

fatherly affection, — no fatherly counsel: the words “My dear Elice,” and “Your Mamma and brothers and sisters desire their love,” were stereotyped and spiritless. He had once written that he considered it best for her to remain in Australia, where she would, no doubt, settle well; — he was no longer in the military, but the civil service, and not likely for some time to leave India. The subject weighed more deeply upon the girl's heart than anyone imagined: it had grown with her, — had become a festering wound carefully guarded; she pictured the family circle from which she was excluded; — the father closing up his desk and letter to the far-off child, with a sigh of relief that that was done, and setting out on a romping game with the little ones — the mother smiling on all. If she was lonely, she thought of them; if she was sorrowful, her imagination flew across the wide sea; the almost morbid sensibility of her spirit was fostered on such reflections, and deepened the bitterness of the case.

Captain Calder also was alive, seeing service in many lands: wounded, duelling, sporting, and leading the life of a man of the world; withal generous and kind; and with a fine honorable spirit, which these pursuits had not been able to quench. Rarely, indeed, did he write, and then it was a long, loving letter; for the dead mother had the richest corner in the Captain's heart, and he loved her children for her sake. Always he added that he would come back to them some day. Ah! those some days, which run away with life and the time of action!

An hour later, and the family party were assembled round the tea-table.

Captain Dell had received a communication which required his sudden departure from home, and the rough brows were rather knitted as he perused his correspondent's letter. Rachel anxiously read the stern face, and gathered from the increased firmness of the lines that the news was unwelcome.

Aunt Nancy officiated at the tea-table with her usual air of simple good-nature: she was such an every-day character, only unusual in the excess of her homely worth, — not the remotest selfishness or unkindness in her composition. A peculiarly square, flat face, of a pale hue, and a pair of small, quiet grey eyes, were indexes to this abundant goodness, but utter absence of imagination: her house was her world, and all her honest, steady principles led her to an unaffected and sincere Christian faith and life.

There was much happiness in that family, but the circle was not complete: it was easy to see that, if sorrow entered, the discordant materials must jar sadly, or at least want the connecting link of sympathy. Good plain Aunt Nancy could be nothing more than a thorough housekeeper, and firm friend in actions. Had she been a wife and mother, she would have done her duty truly, but she could not guide a mind; there she must have stopped short; she had not the faintest idea

of the thoughts and feelings of the young girls who sat on either side of her. The strong mind of the Captain would have fitted him for the task, had not a vigorous firmness — almost severity of will — left him without the tender sympathy so essential to mind-training; he loved “his girls,” as he proudly called them, and was kind, very kind to them; but Rachel had long felt her want, although she had no words to express it. She could not define her necessities, but she wanted culture, apart from education; — a clear, vigorous mind, and frank, warm spirit, enthusiastic in its glow, was vaguely longing rather than achieving; it was for life to do, by a long and painful process, that maturing which the deficiencies of her mental culture had neglected; — a noble nature, which might reach great perfection, and yet lose nothing of its essentially feminine qualities.

Elice's character it would be hard to describe; like her fair, refined countenance, it grew in beauty with familiarity; — a rare quality, and unfolded a peculiar sweetness, which at first was entirely overlooked.

Whilst the Captain still read, and the others refreshed themselves, a visitor entered. Evidently, by the way in which the servant ushered him in, he was no stranger.

“Mr. Fenwick!” exclaimed Aunt Nancy, heartily extending her hand. The gentleman shook it, and passed round the table to Captain Dell.

“We did not expect to see you to-night. I thought you were going with Jenkinson up to his brother's,” remarked he.

“I did think of doing so, but as I must return to Sydney so shortly, I changed my plan.” He paused, looking at the females grouped at the other end of the table, whom, excepting Aunt Nancy, he had only previously noticed by several bows and smiles.

“Indeed! Are you returning immediately?”

“To-morrow.” The visitor again looked at the ladies.

Elice's eyes sought the floor, and Rachel flushed with a quick sympathy.

A chair was placed for Mr. Fenwick at the tea-table, and a freer flow of conversation ensued. After the tray was removed he requested Elice to “give them some music,” which she did. An exquisite touch and some practice made her a pleasing musician. Mr. Fenwick leant over the back of a chair, listening, and occasionally whistling a bar of a tune that struck him, whilst he interspersed his accompaniments with remarks addressed to the Captain, of a purely business or commercial nature. Rachel sat on a sofa in the shade, with her full bright eyes almost anxiously watching them; the occupation of the one and the evident direction of the other's thoughts, notwithstanding his endeavour to appear interested, seemed clearly to answer her mental interrogation — “Can there be real sympathy of soul between them?” — with a most decided negative. Still no one doubted that Elice loved him; it was a sort of whispered mystery in the household; hers was such a tender, loving heart, it appeared made

to love; — *that* excited no wonder. As for the object, Aunt Nancy saw in him a very steady, pains-taking young man; and Captain Dell, a good turn for business; and both were satisfied — though the former fain would have seen less worldliness, and more heavenliness, in his aims. Nothing, however, had been said: it all rested on surmise; and so it did when Mr. Fenwick bade them farewell in a rather low, faltering voice, and started on his journey. On that morning, too, Captain Dell left home.

## Chapter III.

Tremblers beside the grave,  
We call on Thee to save,  
    Father divine!  
Hear, hear our suppliant breath,  
Keep us, in life and death,  
    Thine, only Thine!

— Mrs. Hemans.

THE letter which had called Captain Dell from home announced to him the serious, and it was believed fatal, illness of a relative; and the hurried journey was performed with all the dispatch which the rough roads in the interior admitted of. Some days had, however, passed before he hung his horse's bridle upon the post in front of Mr. Osman's residence, and crossed the threshold with as noiseless a step as his habitual firm tread permitted him to assume.

He had entered a large room, evidently the dining and common sitting room. As usual in country dwellings, the dark boards were uncarpeted, several large dogs being rarely absent from the domestic circle; the furniture was plain and merely necessary, only the superfluity of a case of books. The Captain took a chair, and quietly surveyed the scene presented through the open windows. The barn and stables were in sight, and fields beyond, where a team of bullocks was slowly dragging a grating roller over the clods, — the cattle straying round the broken fences, — the labourers' slab huts falling at an angle which threatened their speedy prostration, but for sundry props. It was completely one of those scenes so often witnessed on an Australian farm, where labour is scarce and wages high, and consequently insufficient for the requirements of the establishment.

There was a chilling air of something wanting, which struck the beholder; whether it was the presence of the master, or servants, or money, he had not time to define before a door opened, and a young man presented himself.

“Captain Dell?” he said, interrogatively. The other acknowledged his identity. “I am truly glad to see you, Sir,” said he, with sincerity. “I feared you would have come too late to see my poor father, and he is

most anxious to see you.”

“He is no better, then?”

A peculiar expression of countenance answered; but he was calm, evidently by a strong effort. “You will take some refreshment, and then see him.”

“No, I will see him at once — I hate delays.” His companion gave a quick look of appreciation, and led the way to the apartment of the dying man.

He had fallen into a light uneasy slumber during his son's brief absence, and the Captain took the chair which, from its position near the head of the bed, had evidently only just been quitted by the young man.

Osman crossed his arms upon his chest, and stood regarding the sleeper in silence; there was a calm upon his countenance, springing so evidently from a higher source, and from a well-ordered mind, that no sorrow however bitter, no circumstance however perplexing, could long disturb it; the eye and mouth both spoke of a highly sensitive disposition, alive to every emotion; the brow was full and round, suggesting the idea of a *weight* of thought, which cast a shadow over the otherwise clear blue eye; he had manifestly gained self-control not without a struggle, — the strong mind and moral development combating with an excessive delicacy and warmth of feeling. In personal appearance he was deficient in the prominent national characteristics of the Australian: his stature was not much beyond the medium, and slender; and his complexion had rather the pallor of deep thought, though well embrowned by the sun, than the glow of the country young man, who, ever on horseback, breathing the fresh air and braving dangers, has a vigorous appearance.

Two years previously he had left Europe, and the University, where already his days and nights of mental toil were reaping him a golden harvest; or where, rather, he stood, sickle in hand, about to gather the fruits of his labour; — recognized as a “clever young man,” and pronounced one who would make a name for himself, when the news of his father's failing health and embarrassed affairs necessitated his abruptly forsaking all to return to him; the trial had been severe, the sacrifice complete. He had to all appearances calmly, even willingly, laid aside book and pen, and thrown himself into the gap, hands and head unceasingly working; but the estate was encumbered past all hopes of speedy recovery. The very unsatisfactory returns of the farmer were barely sufficient to pay interest, and absolutely nothing could be amassed towards liquidating the debts. In this position, before his son's return, Mr. Osman had borrowed largely of Captain Dell, and now he lay on his death-bed, and the debt unpaid.

The Captain's eyes had wandered from the sick man to Leigh; he quietly and keenly scanned his character as developed by externals; he saw the drudgery he had undergone, in the hard brown hand; and the

long pressure of care, in that patient gravity which only grows with time. The result of the scrutiny was highly favorable to the object of it. Captain Dell was not a religious man, — this part of his new friend's spirit he could not sympathise with; but he could in the fine sense of honor and the sturdy determination to do and conquer. His attention was recalled to Mr. Osman by his saying, "Dell, is not that you?"

There was a cordial grasping of hands. "Dell, I have wished most earnestly to see you — there is that money — I can't pay it, not a pound of it."

"You will look to me, Captain Dell. At some future time — it may be long before I can do it — but you shall be paid."

"I am perfectly satisfied. Do not let that trouble you, Osman — your son shall settle with me."

"Thank you, thank you, Captain. — Poor boy!" The latter words were uttered in a low tone, expressive of the deepest sympathy. The father felt the thorny legacy he bequeathed to his son, and perhaps the latter feeling predominated over the relief which a moment before he had experienced, — so quickly do sorrows trip up the heels of pleasures in this rough world of ours. At this moment a head was popped in at the door, with a face usually enlivened by a veritable grin of light-heartedness, but now somewhat lugubrious, and the owner of the head inquired after the state of the master. The trifling interruption broke in upon the silence which had fallen over the party.

Captain Dell was too much of a utilitarian to allow precious moments to run to waste, and he turned the conversation to matters of business from the retrospective character it had begun to assume. He knew that his dying friend was dilatory and easy to an excess, and wished to assure himself that all was done that could be to prevent further entanglement in his disordered affairs, and to permit the property to descend to Leigh as peaceably as might be; and when these matters were adjusted, he suggested to the young man that it would be well for his father to see a clergyman; for all recognise the necessity of religion for the dying, and have a vague impression that they will "make their peace with God at the last."

"Mr. Mills has visited him several times during his illness, but he has not waited till this moment to prepare to meet his God." Leigh spoke gravely, but with a deep satisfaction that it was so; and his companion, with a commendatory remark, rose to leave the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Daylight faded into dusk, and the tall shadows crept out of the corners where the sun had chased them, and stretched their long arms across the room, shaking from their shoulders a black mantle, which opened

noiselessly over each object, like grim undertakers hanging the room in sable.

Leigh's eyes were fixed upon a portrait above the fireplace; the eyes of his father appeared to gleam with a quiet sorrow from the canvas upon him; the drapery and columns which the artist's fancy had placed round the figure faded in the darkness, but still he saw those eyes, with their fixed, grave expression; the light grew dim upon the gilded frame, and the outlines of Captain Dell's figure stood out strong and black against the window, but he did not move; — perhaps he would not for hours, had not a voice without called his attention.

“Can't ye let things be done dacent?” it said.

Leigh crossed the room, and looked from the window; a man stood near, a black gallon bottle clasped in either hand; he was evidently on his way to the huts to institute a wake. Leigh opened the window.

“No drinking — I'll have no noise at the huts.” The tone was peremptory, and the man vanished into the kitchen, from whence the disputing tones of the old female domestic had previously called forth his expostulation.

Leigh turned again to the portrait; the brief interval had deepened the grey to black, and his father's eyes were hidden from him, even as a few hours before the veritable eyes had closed on all earthly. The pall fell over the Present, and hid the Future; and even their hearts' beating sounded with a dull muffled tone as they sat in that dark room, with the silent dead near by.

Captain Dell was not the man to indulge in sentimental musings, but there were subjects for serious reflection, and the hard outlines never altered — the crossed legs, the large hands folded upon the broad chest, and the lips shut closely. Leigh had even more to think of — the son, the Christian, the man of business; in the three characters the subject passed through his mind; his attitude was calm and unconsciously graceful; only the absolute quiet betokened the sorrow which pressed heavily upon his heart.

Slowly from behind the distant mountains the moon uprose, touching with silver the heights, whilst the vales sank into deeper obscurity. Presently the moon had climbed the vaulted roof of heaven, and poured from her vestal lamp a chastened brilliancy that penetrated even into that room where the dead lay. He knew how it would glide in as the soft breeze waved the blind; how, like a messenger of life, it would steal up beside the curtained bed, and light the rigid figure; and he knew how it would even seem to move in the coruscations of that beam, whilst ever the gentle moon looked down upon the whole story of man's life. “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.”

‘Tis day — a thing of common hours,

Of darkness faded into light;  
And time glides on to closing flowers,  
To dews, to silence, and to night.

Expected life has been descried,  
The life that linger'd is no more; —  
One barque is launch'd upon the tide,  
And one is stranded on the shore. — R. HOWITT.

Then the Captain spoke. "Leigh," he said, "you had better come down with me: a few weeks at my house would do you good."

"I can hardly leave home, I believe."

"You must endeavour to do so. Ann is an excellent housekeeper, and has all bright and comfortable, and the girls are always cheerful."

The young man inwardly repeated his words, and the picture they presented was so at variance with his home and future, that he "No, it would not do, it would unnerve me."

"I thank you most sincerely," he said, "but I have a certain task to perform, and till that object is obtained — and it must be a long and arduous struggle — I shall take no pleasure, relax no nerve. But the time may come — I hope it will — when I shall make the acquaintance of these ladies I have heard my father speak so highly of."

"Well, you are right, I believe; but remember the invitation stands open."

The clouds still lay like a dewy bank along the eastern horizon as Captain Dell buttoned up his overcoat, and, taking his stout walking-stick — not to support him, certainly, for the firm planting of the foot betrayed no decaying energies — left the house to take a survey of his host's territory, extending over some distance. The Ranges, as the farm was called, was, as its cognomen indicated, a series of hills and dales, the former wooded by the mimosa and lightwood, and the universal gumtrees, and in places densely scrubby, by an undergrowth of peppermint and willow brush. The visitor ascended and descended with laudable perseverance, determined to thoroughly master his subject, and understand the young man's position; he had, in fact, taken a strong hold upon his fancy, and he was not habitually disposed to accord his good or bad opinion without well studying the character.

From the Run he proceeded to the fields; nature had worn that cheerless air which a scrub fire blackened by recent conflagrations always presents, but the fields told a yet more painful tale: the rough fencing was broken and falling in many places; the fields were cropped by weeds, for want of constant tillage.

Mr. Osman had been ever disposed to sacrifice the future to the present; finding Leigh a talented boy, and possessing literary tastes, he

had involved his estate to give his only child the advantages of a high mental training. The boy little knew, as he hung over his book with such absorbed devotion, that difficulties multiplied upon his kind parent, and that the once light-hearted man had become the keen calculator and economist; not miserly — he was too gentle and generous for that.

Long before the Captain had marched round the melancholy ruins of sheds and barns — how sad in their decay! as greatness and nobility even in ruins are grand, so littleness becomes pitiable — he had weighed the load which lay upon his new friend's shoulders, and which only long years of patience might remove.

At present Leigh was absorbed in the solemnities of his father's obsequies, and the deep grief for his loss, only looking the future steadily in the face, with an earnest "God direct me!" He did not search out the bitterness it might contain; he knew it was there, and he prepared to encounter each difficulty as it arose, and conquer. He locked up his folio, and with it buried the pursuit of literature; — not the love of it; that was a part of himself, and must live with him; and then he went on his way, stifling the aspirations and hopes of the student, and resolving to centre his aims upon that battle-field which the Ranges presented; yet, as a Christian, rising above that strife to a higher and purer hope and desire.

"We shall see you some day?" Captain Dell spoke as he gathered up the reins, and leant one hand on his horse's shoulder, about to vault into the saddle.

"Yes, certainly, if I live: I must become acquainted with your family."

The old man's eyes sparkled as he returned, "You must — you would like Rachel: she could understand you."

Often afterwards, when among those who could not understand him, Leigh recalled the parting words of the fine old Captain, but the former idea of mirth seemed to dispel the half-wish to accept the invitation; not that he was an enemy to cheerfulness, but it had no promise of sympathy with him then. It is so a part of our natures to desire to be understood! Have we a sorrow, we seek to communicate its cause to another, and even in so doing lessen its poignancy; and the pleasure diminishes which has none to reflect it. To be constantly surrounded by our fellow-creatures, yet in our inmost natures *alone*, is a heavy trial, particularly to the sensitive; no wonder, then, that occasionally Leigh Osman found himself dwelling upon the idea which the Captain presented to him.

## Chapter IV.

There is not anything in this world, perhaps, that is more talked of, and less understood, than the business of a happy life.

— Seneca.

AUNT NANCY was busy in the dairy, enveloped in a large holland apron, and, skimmer in hand, passing round from dish to dish with a countenance of quiet satisfaction, such as might arise from a successful baking of pastry, or churning; Elice had adorned the sitting-room with fresh flowers; and Rachel hardly completed those mystic touches which add elegance to homeliness, and order to disorder, when Captain Dell, for whose return in their several ways they were preparing, arrived.

His daughter had known Mr. Osman; indeed he was a distant relative of her mother's, nor were the girls strangers to him; his decease was, therefore, a source of sincere concern to them, and they had many anxious questions to ask respecting his illness and death, and the sorrow of his son. There were tears of kindly sympathy in the eyes of the females as they followed the Captain's narrative, forgetful of cooling cups of tea and the merits of cake and tart.

"I have rarely met with a young man whose character pleases me so much as this Leigh Osman," said he, pushing his cup away, and lying back in his large arm-chair: "firm and steadfast. I have no fear for him, though to an ordinary person, I should say the thing was impossible. Nominally, he possesses much; literally, nothing — A fine boy." The satisfaction in the tone as he uttered the latter words provoked a smile from his audience.

"What's he like, Father?"

"A woman's question, Ann. He is not handsome at first sight, but after a while I thought he had rather a fine countenance."

"And he was sorrowful — you could not judge fairly." Aunt Nancy's kind heart was much affected at the picture she had drawn, and she bustled away after some household concerns. Rachel brought her grandfather's spectacles and a pile of letters, and then the two girls worked in silence as he perused them. One roused him exceedingly, and he paced up and down the room, uttering a sound not unlike canine

growling, and explaining that the cause was more complaints from Blackmore.

“Nothing is the matter with Berty, I hope?”

“No, Rachel, no; — always some complaint from that fellow. I'll drum him out to the Rogue's March one of these days;” and the pacing and canine accompaniment were renewed, for he had paused before the young girls as they sat at their little work-table, engaged in some skilful plaiting and tying ribbon round straw bonnets; — such a fair picture of youthful womanhood they presented, uncorrupted by the vain desire for admiration, but earnestly saying with the Psalmist, “I will go in the strength of the Lord God. I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only.” The picture might have smoothed his ruffled humour, had not Captain Dell been perplexed — a mood very trying to a person of decision. Every month came a letter from the Superintendent laden with bad news; not Job's messengers were more woful in their declamations: troublesome blacks, sour herbage — everything that could decrease the value of the station; and on this source the Captain mainly relied; as he had admitted to his friend King Rylston, he was not rich.

At that moment a most hideous sound startled them. It was the bray of a donkey.

“It is Hiram, old Hiram,” exclaimed all in a breath, and, moved by one impulse, went out to see him.

Hiram was one of the fraternity of vendors of small goods; much of the interest attached to him was due to his asinine companion and pack-bearer, a donkey being an animal sufficiently rare to occasion much curious staring among the youthful population. Moreover, Hiram's little black donkey, with its long meditative countenance and unwonted indulgence in ears, was so suggestive of rides at Margate and Kensington Common, and of village greens and lanes, that the British folks had a friendly feeling towards it.

Hiram's donkey, relieved of its burden, was standing with closed eyes and drooping head, as if it had not brayed or moved for hours, when the parlour guests joined the group of servants eagerly watching the unpacking of sundry valuables. Captain Dell had merely assured himself that it was Hiram, and then returned to the sitting-room; but his grand-daughters were disposed to remain.

Hiram was a little fellow, with a sallow complexion, and a most notorious bargain maker; it was impossible to escape without making a purchase if once the unwary came within reach of his voluble tongue; and strangely enough, and although at the time quite convinced that they were making wonderful bargains, it afterwards appeared their purses were emptied; it was vain to repeat that they were not in want of such things.

“It's a bargain, a perfect bargain — put it by till you do want it; ‘a

store's no sore,' mine dear," or "Mish," as the case might be, if his customers were the servant girls or their young mistresses.

Upon the present occasion Hyram had a new argument to adduce in temptation.

"Just for a keepsake, for I'm going to the Diggings, and you won't see me any more, mine dears. Here's a beautiful car-ring; there, now — see how it sparkles! — real, real crystal."

The young ladies ran away smiling, and Jane Wilson, the housemaid, bought the crystals (?).

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The sun was setting as Blackmore and Gilbert Calder reined in their horses, and turned to take a look across the plains stretching away hundreds of miles before them, and now bathed in a flood of crimson vapour; scarcely a tree broke the sameness, which even the presence of some hundreds of cattle could not enliven; a few, disturbed by the horsemen, were lowing in a calm, clear tone, that added a pleasing accompaniment to the scene.

"It's a fine station," at length exclaimed Berty, proudly, as he gathered up his reins to proceed.

"Yes, rather," admitted Blackmore, smothering a sigh of envy; "but it may be mine soon," he muttered, and slowly followed the young man.

Amidst a Babel of yelping dogs and eager blacks Berty sprung lightly to the ground, and, giving his horse to the hutkeeper, entered the hut.

"Ah, what's this? — Sam back with the letters!" was the pleased exclamation, as a pile of letters and papers occupying one corner of the rude table greeted him. "They will keep," he added, as the man placed a large tin teapot by his side, and Blackmore, delaying to speak with the man from the back station, or rather the outpost in the rear of that, found him engaged in the perusal of the letters. They had not sent to the post for six weeks, and, cut off from all communication with the world, except the few stockmen who occasionally visited them from neighbouring stations, old as the newspapers were, their contents were eagerly desired, while the letters — the only links between them and distant friends — were exceedingly precious.

Gilbert was just commencing the fourth side of Rachel's crossed letter when a passionate oath from his companion startled him.

"What's up, Captain?" he demanded.

"A fool, a perfect fool, — me!" muttered Blackmore, carried away by his strong emotions out of his usual caution.

"That's something new — but what is it?" said he, leaning over to reach the letter the Superintendent had thrown upon the table. "Whew!" he whistled as he read it. It was from his grandfather, and ran thus:

— “Dear Sir, the receipt of your last communication strengthened an idea I had formed of selling the station and stock. I accordingly took the mail to Sydney without delay, and proceeded to the auction rooms of Messrs. — — & Co., intending to place it in their hands, but was so fortunate as to find a purchaser in Mr. — — 's office. I have therefore closed the bargain, and on the 4th of next month you will please assist my grandson in delivering up to Mr. Kensett, the present proprietor, the stock depasturing on the head and swampy plain stations, and assist him, or his agent, in mustering and branding the same; and all such as may be strayed and recoverable of horned or horse stock, &c., &c.” Here followed various business details, ending by desiring Mr. Blackmore's attendance on Captain Dell to close all open accounts between them.

“It's done, and can't be undone,” he remarked, with a short laugh, half bravado, half bitterness. Blackmore had sufficiently recovered composure to desire to conceal from Berty the amount of his disappointment, and he stood shielded by an open *Herald*, his livid lips drawn in on his teeth, his eyes horribly oblique, and his fingers clutched so tightly upon the paper that he severed the piece; the torrent of his wrath had turned from himself to Captain Dell, and fain would he have had those iron fingers riveted round the old man's throat.

“I say, Mate, what's to be done?” said Calder, at length.

“Deliver up the stock and station,” he returned from behind the paper, in a tone of frightful stillness.

“I know, but I'm sorry — are not you?”

“He'll be sorry,” retorted Blackmore, even lower.

“Well, let's have some supper — there is no use in fretting,” said Gilbert, sighing, and folding up his sister's letter. Blackmore glided from the room, and plunged his head into a bucket of cold water before he rejoined him.

“I had a dip after the dust on the plain; it was very thick to-day,” he said, in his old manner, as he drew a wooden bench to the table; only for the distortion of his features and excessive paleness, no one would have suspected the presence of the fire within.

Gilbert felt sad: an uncertain future lay before him; he dreaded to break the seal of the Captain's letter to him, and slowly sipped his tea and cat his boiled beef and damper. Blackmore spoke of the day's ride, the cattle — anything to appear at his ease; eating voraciously, although the victuals seemed as if they would choke him, and his eye became so distorted that, to prevent his seeing it, Gilbert was driven to the dreaded letter. As he anticipated, Captain Dell referred to his intentions with regard to himself, and barely mentioned the sale of the station. “A friend of my solicitors,” thus he wrote, “made me an offer to receive you into his countinghouse; he is a shipping agent. Your future, then, lies before you. Firmly and perseveringly apply yourself to your business, and

success must follow. After delivering the stock to Mr. Kensett you will come at once here, and I will accompany you to town. I have made every arrangement.”

Calder passed his brown hand across his brow, that his companion might not see how utterly the contents of Captain Dell's letter chagrined him; but, taking advantage of the hand intercepting the young man's vision, Blackmore bent forward and fixed his flashing eyes keenly on him, tracing with a greedy interest his every thought and feeling. The drooping attitude and half-smothered sigh sufficiently informed him that Gilbert would submit, though unwillingly; he could not decide how unwillingly; he was unable to come to any definite conclusion; he never had been able to determine how far he could trust Berty; he had, to use his own expression, “turned him round his little finger,” yet something whispered to him that he might go too far, and arouse some latent nobility he could not understand, but dreaded with a sort of superstitious fear. Presently Calder took up a *Melbourne Argus* to read, and Blackmore withdrew his eager eyes, and offered to fill his companion's pipe. “I am just going to have a draw,” he said, indifferently, and was shortly engaged. When he had seen Gilbert smoking and reading, and knew that he would not move till pipe and paper failed him, he opened the door and stepped out, stumbling over the prostrate form of a sleeping native at the door, and, with a savage kick of his heavy boot on the upturned face, the base coward stepped out into the darkness of a moonless night. He paused; the low sobs of the black at the hut door, the shrill screams of myriads of frogs in the river, and the distant howling of a wild dog, — these were all the sounds without; within whispered the voices of sins, whose name was Legion; of disappointed hopes and greeds, — of frustrated plans, — of hatred to self, to all the world; there was none to watch him, and he stamped and cursed; in a frenzy of anger and malice he tore the sod with his nailed boots; he struck his clenched fist against his brow, and, till nature spent itself, was a maniac. Then came reflection — a brute power of self-preservation; and, sinking down by the river's side, he pondered on his future plans. There was much to do, almost single-handed: Calder least of all might assist.

How strikingly did the calm peace of night contrast with him! even in that dark, starless night, the presence of God — of purity — pervaded the silence, unbroken save by his lesser creatures. Well exclaimed the Rev. Blanco White, “Mysterious night!” and its hidden power struck forcibly upon the coward heart of Blackmore. He started up to flee from — himself. In the stockmen's hut therefore we leave him.

Hardly had Blackmore closed the door when Calder laid down the *Argus* and pipe, and, resting his head on his hands, sank into a train of bitter reflections.

For years his life had been a mere animal existence of constant activity

and motion: his days began at sunrise, and ended almost with its setting; had been passed on horseback, through rain and sunshine, in the fiery breath of summer, and the chill blast of winter; the one occupation had been to guide his powerful horse over the plains, to head the galloping herd of cattle, to pursue the obstinate, panting for unchecked liberty, up and down the low hills; — to breast the streams and wade the marshes, bending over his horse's neck, his full eye fixed on the panting beast, marking its frothing sides and tongue lolling from its open jaws, till its strength was spent, and it stood in a cluster of bushes or reeds, and defied, with raised head and horns, his further advance; then, danger adding zest to the wild game, he swung his long hide whip round his head, and cracked it with a report like that of a rifle, urging on his well-trained dogs to attack, — never relaxing the keen observation, that he might swerve aside at each furious charge, till the worn beast was dislodged and again in motion across the plains. Such had been the pursuits of Gilbert Calder, — pursuits where the physical, and not the moral, was strengthened by exercise into iron power; and when wearied, the day's work over, and the tin mug of tea and coarse viands discussed, once more renewing the pipe of tobacco, he flung himself upon the rude couch to read such works as the store of Isaac Smith supplied, — most frequently the light, polluting pages of some fiction, steeped in an impure and improbable dye of romance.

Calder was a thorough bushman; he could find his way anywhere through pathless plains and woods, with the instinct of a savage; he could track the stray beast or lost traveller, and none surpassed him at the branding yard. What would these avail him in the shipping office? The question startled him, and suggested others: — Had Captain Dell a right to dispose of him so unceremoniously? For a moment he determined to seek employment as the superintendent on some station, and pursue a life for which alone he felt fitted.

His experience of town life had not endeared it to him. Naturally he was not fond of such pleasures, but, under Blackmore's guidance, he had drunk with him the poisonous cup, and memory recalled the wasted hours, the feverish hand, and aching brow with which his visits to town had been marked. The confined space, its dusty, smoky atmosphere, so unlike the limitless freedom of the plains, were distasteful and revolting; he had not the comparatively innocent, careless heart of childhood, which had sweetened his school-days, and a dim consciousness of his deficiencies struggled through the darkness round his soul.

How few parents aid their children to reflect, — how few cultivate the spirit. Is it wonderful, then, that the world presents us with a large proportion of moral dwarfs? Calder had nothing within him to oppose the pressure of outward adverse circumstances; the uncompromising morality of Captain Dell had found no response in the warm gushing of

his impulsive heart, and the first whisperings of an unsatisfied soul, which was suddenly deprived of its opiates, oppressed him. The immortal soul! — to which the physical at such moments bears no affinity, and whose voice — whose cravings, as of the starving beggar, importune with such a vivid agony upon that being who seeks nothing beyond himself for its requirements. Those pleadings, seeming to Calder a part of the new life before him, were insupportable; he sprang to the keg of rum, always forming a part of the station's stores, drew out the plug, and, holding a pannikin below, measured himself a deep draught; then, already staggering from its effects, flung himself on his bed and sank into a deep sleep. Again the animal was made to supersede and subdue the spiritual, while that spirit whose influence alone can meet the needs of the soul, was disregarded; for the craven heart shrinks from a knowledge of its own baseness, and its obligations to its God.

Gilbert Calder, as he lay there in the oblivion of drunkenness, was no type of the Australian youth, but the result of a want of spiritual culture, such as every land bears too many specimens of. The freedom and the circumstances of station life present no moral guards for such: no returning Sabbath, with its warning voice of church bell, and organ peal, hymning solemnly songs to heaven, is there. How much need, then, that the young man be prepared before he leaves the home of his childhood or the school desk, to be the companion of stockmen and blacks!

A few weeks' hard riding, and Gilbert's station life terminated, and, with Blackmore, he started on his downward journey.

Evening was drawing in when the travellers reined up before Mr. Rylston's door; the cordial hospitality of the settler met them in the warm greeting, and presently they entered a rather long room, where already several other travellers were assembled, — gentlemen on their way to Sydney from their stations. One was a merchant, making his annual visit of inspection; two others, squatters, — men of very different character and culture from their host; and, despite a little roughness in costume and superabundance of beard, they were evidently gentlemen.

King Rylston's palace, — as, to have all in what artists call “keeping,” we should say, — was a wooden building of a very rough description, and far from well furnished. Mrs. Rylston, with a glossy red face, and an odour suggestive of fried bacon and potatoes floating round her, was bustling about the room, trying to be very genteel; for she could not be contented to appear the homely, good-natured woman she was, but, in conformity with the modern spirit, was desirous of passing for what she was not, and so laid herself open to many jokes and satirical remarks. The new comers, however, met with a very cordial reception, for Gilbert was a favorite, and Blackmore never failed to pay court in a rather extravagant form where there was, even in prospective, a prospect of gain accruing to himself.

The Misses Rylston did not agree with the received opinions of young ladies, as modelled in boarding-schools; excelling rather in the dairy, or equestrian pursuits, than at the piano and embroidery frame. The gentlemanly element infused into the circle was so successfully exercised, that all parties were soon at their ease, and conversation flowed in a careless strain; and the elegant manners of one or two of the squatters were as successful in the slab dwelling as in the more refined city drawing-room.

## Chapter V.

How I'm hurried, borne along, —  
All is business! All alive!  
Heavens! how mighty is the throng, —  
Voices humming like a hive!

— Crabbe.

FOR a brief happy week Gilbert stayed with his relatives, and then, accompanied by the Captain, started for Sydney. Blackmore was not yet come down, and would not be before the latter returned from town.

The legal friends to whom the Captain had referred quickly arranged with their clients, the shipping agents, the necessary preliminaries, and Gilbert's place as their clerk was secured.

There was a good deal of congratulating and shaking of hands, and some witticisms respecting the road to fortune; and Mr. Arney begged him to come and take tea with him shortly.

“And you must run over some evening, and see me, Master Gilbert; Mrs. B — — will be delighted to make your acquaintance,” chimed in Mr. Buchan, the junior partner in the legal firm; and the mercantile gentlemen assured the Captain that they should take the greatest interest in the young man, and that he might consider them his friends. So brightly and pleasantly commenced Berty's career as a clerk.

There was yet lodging to be sought, an occupation promising to be lengthy. Half ludicrous, half annoying, was the search. Captain Dell stepped along with his usual firm, haughty carriage, checking the garrulity of the housewives by his stately bearing. Vain were the attractions of beautiful views, when taken from garret-rooms; sea breezes failed to tempt in obscure quarters of the suburbs; and cheap lodgings proved to be in localities too far for a daily walk from the wharves. The long lists of “Apartments,” “Board and Lodging,” and so on, were daily scanned, and at length Gilbert was installed as a member of a family where “a respectable young man might meet with all the comforts of a genteel home.”

A fortnight had passed since the day when Gilbert first met his employers at Messrs. Arney and Buchan's office; it was yet early as he strode along from Surry Hills, solacing the way with a pipe, and recalling

many wild scenes of station life, and contrasting it very unfavorably with the confinement of his clerkship; the rapid exchange from a nomadic to a life of precision and rule was little likely to please him, and his ideas of the duties of life were so very undefined that he chafed under the restraint.

“Gilbert!” said a familiar voice. He started. “Why, Blackmore, as I'm alive!”

“The very man. How settled you were looking. I have been watching you coming down the street — what is the matter, man?”

They were shaking hands warmly, but there had never been a true friendship between them. Gilbert was warm, generous, and affectionate; Blackmore in every respect opposite; but he was an old friend: the powerful tie of “Do you remember?” bound them, and soon old recollections were evoked; they laughed again at former sources of mirth, and recalled past perils.

“By-the-bye, Gilbert, has that old chap paid your grandfather yet?”

“What — Mr. Kensett?”

“Yes — him that bought the station.”

“No; only the deposit.”

“I wonder the Captain trusts him.”

“Oh, he's safe: he is to pay the end of this month.”

They walked on, Blackmore saying that was all right, and remarking immediately afterwards upon the groups of persons, evidently equipped for the Diggings, who passed them; and the subject appeared forgotten, till he said again, rather suddenly, but in a careless tone, as if actuated by a passing thought —

“Then I suppose the governor will be down shortly.”

“No: Mr. Kensett will bank the money himself, and get a receipt from our solicitors. I wish, Blackmore, I had been in their office: they are regular — ”

“Trumps,” suggested the other.

“Yes.”

“But by-and-by you may get a foreign agency, or be sent out supercargo, eh? and see a little of the world, you know. Would you not like a run with some of the out-bound vessels? I should think the sea would just suit you.”

“I can't go: I am bound till I am twenty-one. After that I shall be my own master, and will, perhaps, turn a blue-jacket.”

“I should surely bolt if I was you — I could not stand it.”

“I won't.”

“Very right. You will make a steady fellow after all, I believe — if you won't. But I am sorry the governor won't be down. I cannot get a situation to my mind. I was thinking of asking him to use his influence.”

“Shall I write to him?”

“No, thank you. If he is not coming down, it would be of no use. But I must say good day here. I shall see you again soon — mind and not forget my address.” So with a grasp of the hand they parted.

The warehouse and office of Ralph and Brett were not situated at the termination of a main street. Gilbert, pursuing his way, entered a lane sloping down to the water; the dusty windows of warehouses looked down upon it, or blank walls cast a shadow across it; over or between these were visible the masts of shipping, and sailors' voices singing in chorus sounded and mingled with the rattling of dray wheels and the whistle of draymen. Then he paused before a door, above which was painted “Ralph and Brett, Shipping Agents,” and, pushing it open, entered a large room, divided by desks, behind which were already assembling the numerous clerks employed there, pen in hand, or turning over the day's paper and chatting, for the principals were not there yet.

“Good morning, Calder,” said a fair young man, with a smiling brown eye, and a countenance which made friends everywhere. Gilbert shook hands, and nodded to the others. A sort of friendship had sprung up between George Welton and the new clerk; the former had assisted him in acquiring the routine of the office, and by a thousand trifling acts either covered or performed his omissions, and by an occasional kind word cheered him, when the wandering eye and gloomy brow informed him that the country lad was ill at ease. Welton was an Englishman, some three-and-twenty years of age, who had left a good situation in a mercantile house at home, to rescue two fading sisters from a climate pronounced fatal to them, for hereditary consumption threatened the fair girls. He had promised to introduce Gilbert to them, or rather to one, for the other was a governess in a family resident some two hundred miles from Sydney; and the younger lived with him, in a very small cottage across the water, and assisted in maintaining herself by giving lessons in music. With these particulars Gilbert was acquainted, George Welton having communicated them to him.

An hour later, and all pens were busy and the office had many visitors — stout, ruddy-faced men, who looked like sea captains and first mates; and others who appeared to be merchants, or clerks, from other commercial houses; and there were consignments, and sailing, and lading, and clearing talked of, and passing the customs, and many other significant terms in that locality. If anyone there interested Gilbert, it was the bluff sea captains, around whom hung an air of freedom and change, and almost a smell of sea-weeds and shells. Blackmore's suggestion passed through his mind and lingered there, gaining strength with encouragement — like the German fabled Red Mantle, who sank into a dwarf before the voice of prayer, and grew into a giant in the presence of covetous thoughts. It was the old story of temptation. Gilbert had no idea of doing wrong, only he suffered his mind to dwell upon it till he became

familiar with it, and the impression it had first made faded: the Red Mantle was growing, and threatening to shut out the light of Heaven.

It was the following afternoon; the business hours were over, and Gilbert rose weary and warm from the desk, and closed the book, and took the spare pen from behind his ear as he placed his hat on his head, and stepped into the lane. There was the same rattling of dray wheels, the same whistling of carmen, the voices of sailors beyond, and, toiling up the lane, sea-faring men, who nodded to him as they passed; if they did business with Ralph and Brett; and there was the supercargo from a large vessel just in from Manila, lighting a cigar from one held between Mr. Brett's forefinger and thumb. Gilbert just paused to view these things, and to glance up at the dusty dead walls and tall warehouses, with creaking chains hanging from posts set in the walls high overhead; he paused to consider whither he should direct his steps; the heat had taken away his appetite, and he had no inclination to return to dinner in that house where the respectable young gentleman was accommodated. — Where then?

“Come along with me, Mate.” — He started as a voice sounded in his ear, and a hand was laid decisively upon his shoulder.

“Where to, Blackmore?”

“To get a breath of air and take a little diversion. Shall we get horses — I know a capital stable — and have a ride out of town? Come.”

Gilbert turned to go.

“With me.” It was a very different voice which spoke this time: nothing of forced candour or good-fellowship in it; it was low and kindly; the young man looked back, and George Welton stepped to his side. His good and bad angels stood on either side of him; he was disposed to yield to Blackmore from long habit, yet the frank, cheerful face of his young friend fascinated him. Blackmore's obliquity of features gained an accession, but he said immediately, “Will not this gentleman join us? We were planning a ride into the country, Sir,” turning to Welton to politely explain.

“I have been unintentionally playing the part of eaves-dropper, for you filled the door, and I paused in consequence; — no, thank you, I must go home; but I fully thought, Calder, you would have accompanied me. I promised to pull Clare up the harbour — come.” He linked his arm in that of his vacillating companion.

We talk of guardian angels, and the idea is at least beautiful. Who can tell how far human beings are employed as agents by spiritual powers?

Blackmore grinned defiantly; he was not going to lose his prey so easily, and a deep, bitter oath was muttered between his teeth as the young men walked away. Half-an-hour afterwards they were springing on to the North Shore landing-place. Gilbert had pictured Clare Welton as a sickly girl, with a hollow cough and a deplorable tone of voice, and,

with all his friendship for her brother, anticipated little pleasure from the evening's excursion.

A brilliant-flowered creeper had been trained across the verandah, throwing a grateful shade; and the pure white blinds, which were drawn, cast a softened light within the very small drawing-room, where already a simple china tea-service was arranged upon a round table, near the French window. Welton had pushed it open, and then stepped back to secure the garden wicket, and Gilbert found himself thus unceremoniously ushered into the presence of Miss Welton. She rose to receive him with an easy composure, which at once calmed his trepidation; she might have been his own age; rather tall and well-formed, with a graceful carriage; her complexion was spotlessly fair, and her mild brown eye had nothing of the restlessness of fever in its glances; she appeared to have forgotten herself, and to think only of those about her; you knew that the white dress was fitted with such precision from a good taste rather than vanity, and the brown hair, smoothly parted across the fair brow, might have been fastidiously simple on anyone else. It was a happy evening: Gilbert was not treated as a stranger, and he did not feel one, as he offered Clare his arm, and took the fish basket from her hand, or when he guided her to her seat in the boat. She was not so handsome as Rachel, nor so clever or deep-feeling, perhaps; but she looked so calm and happy, and made everyone else feel so happy near her. He found, too, by a few remarks which passed between the brother and sister, that they were Christians, and instinctively began to talk to them of his sister, warming as he spoke of her, and recalled her generous loving nature. The rich sunset tinting the waves, the rocky shores of the harbour — how she would have admired them! — the sight would have thrilled the warm pulses of that sensitive heart. His companions listened, and smiled kindly; and from that time he was elevated far beyond his previous standard in their estimation.

The moon rose before the fish basket was filled, and they turned the bow homewards. Lighted up by the soft lunar beams, the scene was inexpressibly lovely: the waves dancing in the light, and rippling round the boat; — the rocky shores, casting a deep shadow at their feet, and the glistening white walls and metal roofs of houses among the wooded summits; — the lamps in the distant city, and the masts of shipping rising up round the wharves, combined to form a pleasing scene, and under the impression of the moment Gilbert exclaimed, "After all, Sydney is not so bad. I do believe I shall get used to it in time."

"And like it," Welton added.

"I don't say that. What do you think, Miss Clare?"

"That it is possible to become attached to any place, if we seek the good, not evil of it, and are at peace with ourselves."

"That latter clause puts contentment beyond the reach of many."

“Why should it? No one is *forced* to do evil. We have a promise from the highest source that a ‘way of escape’ is before us, and surely nothing but a sense of unworthiness can make us at enmity with ourselves.”

“But suppose we cannot see the ‘way of escape’?”

“I can only reply to that by a quotation — ‘Do the Duty which lies nearest thee, which thou knowest to be a Duty; thy second Duty will already become clearer.’ I believe that that is the safe way to find the road, if we seek light on our duties from Christ.”

Gilbert looked gravely into the calm, pale face; he had rested on his oar, and bent forward, for her voice was low, and perhaps then more than usually so. For a moment the serious impression lasted, and then he threw it off, and began an attack upon city life. Welton had always lived in a town, and had little idea of life beyond it; to exist remote from the morning's paper at the breakfast table, and the cries of the vendors of luxuries or necessaries, appeared problematical, and a question he was not disposed to solve; but though their tastes were thus opposed, the evening had strengthened their friendship, and this was the first of a series of visits which were a source of mutual pleasure; but they were viewed with bitter jealousy by Blackmore, and he used every effort to prevent them, and often successfully. He had once accompanied Gilbert on a visit to his friends, but the ex-superintendent was uneasy in the presence of the calm, quiet girl; her very silence reproved him, and with many an inaudible expletive he vowed never to “catch himself there again,” under penalties which are readily evoked by the profane and thoughtless. Gilbert, on the contrary, mixing for the first time in his life with a refined and pretty girl in his own station of life, and with the unrestraint of a relative, insensibly attached much importance to Clare's words and movements, and a smile was dwelt on with considerable pleasure.

## Chapter VI.

Strong sense, deep feeling, passions strong,  
A hate of tyrant and of knave,  
A love of right, a scorn of wrong,  
Of coward, and of slave;  
A kind, true heart, a spirit high,  
That could not fear and would not bow,  
Were written in his manly eye,  
And on his manly brow.

— Hallick.

ABOUT the same time came two unexpected visitors to Cowanda, or rather, Mr. Fenwick having on all sides been considered Elice's admirer, the surprise had rather been that he had suffered some months of silence and absence to pass; but, however, he was once again at the Farm, and established in his wonted seat, between the Captain and his granddaughter. The other visitor was Leigh Osman, from the Ranges; he had brought some small portion of the money owing by his father to Captain Dell; though the sum was trifling, there was a satisfaction to a mind so sensitively just in acquitting any responsibility.

"Did you read the account of the Races, Miss Rachel?" said Fenwick. They were seated round the tea-table.

"No, Sir."

"No! — how was that?"

"I never do."

"But you have a reason beyond custom?" She looked up, and met the eyes of Mr. Osman fixed inquiringly on her.

"Yes; we have often discussed the subject, — that is, Mr. Fenwick and I. I do not approve of racing."

"But a horse of mine ran, Miss Rachel."

"I am sorry for it," she returned quietly.

"By Jove, are you? It was a splendidly contested match. I never saw better running. They — " Mr. Fenwick fell into an elaborate description of the race; this was his hobby; he had landed property, but, like many of the Australian young men, had an instinctive turn for trade, which developed itself in stock dealing: horses and cattle were objects of his

especial attention, and had not Leigh imperceptibly led the conversation into a channel more agreeable to their lady companions, he would have detailed the results of all the speculations in which he had been engaged since they last met.

Leigh was not generally apt to join in common conversation, but in the present instance he was led on, first, by the desire to prove the truth or fallacy of the Captain's assertion that Rachel could understand him; and, afterwards, by the pleasure her sensible remarks and earnest, sparkling eyes gave him. The Captain warmed in such society, and shone in a fine, stately geniality, which he rarely displayed, or rather, rarely found occasion for. Aunt Nancy, like a truly kind-hearted person, was always pleased when others were; and if the subjects of conversation were above her comprehension, she was well content to see her father's glowing face, as he leant back in his large, cumbrous chair, his hands resting on either arm, and the mellow sunshine of satisfaction diffusing itself over his stately person. Shall we admit so much of woman's weakness, as that Aunt Nancy did feel more hospitable because she knew that her cake might have come from the oven of a confectioner without disgracing him, and that her bread and butter could not have been exceeded; — not that the gentlemen would not have been welcome if the former had been heavy, and the latter sour or rancid; but the perfection of her culinary preparations certainly heightened her good feelings towards them, and even awoke a little pride, — though not a pride which ranks in the catalogue with “all uncharitableness,” but quite the reverse.

“No, he is not handsome,” each of the females mentally pronounced, as they looked at Leigh Osman; but how soon that was forgotten, — for there are qualities of heart and mind which far outvalue beauty; we may weary of the gaudy colors of the tulip, — the fragrant violet never tires; meretricious charms first attract, but the power of goodness never changes.

“No common path of life his steps pursued.”

He looked grave, however, — that gravity which springs from continued struggles with monetary difficulties, subjects which a mind constituted like his found particularly irksome.

“How are the cattle looking down your way?” presently inquired Mr. Fenwick, who usually led the conversation back to stock.

“Very well.”

“Are the Ranges well watered?”

“Particularly so, and abundantly grassed.

“Hum. I have been thinking of a spec. in trading horses across the country, and I want to meet with a few good depôts to rest them by the

way. I'll talk to you about it after tea."

Leigh assented.

"May I add a little cream to your tea, Mr. Osman?" said Aunt Nancy; — whether as a mark of the high estimation in which she held him, or whether she had been so absorbed in his previous conversation as to be uncertain of having added that requisite ingredient, is uncertain, for she had a habit of expressing favor in a palpable form.

Even a pleasant tea-drinking will end, and the little party scattered to amuse themselves according to their several tastes. Leigh and the Captain paced one of the verandahs, gravely discussing the involved position of the Ranges, and the girls and their old friend sauntered away to a large shady tree at the bottom of the garden, where a seat had been erected. Mr. Fenwick had brought a bundle of books with him for them, and they were presently seated examining them, and commenting upon their contents.

"This is a beautiful engraving — see, Elly, how clear, yet delicate, the strokes."

"Beautiful!"

Fenwick bent over. "There is a much nicer one here, see." It was a ludicrous sketch, of little artistic merit, which he handed them. Elice laughed, so did Rachel, yet the feeling which she had experienced once before crept into her heart: certainly he wanted refinement and taste; he did not share in all the finer pulses which make up the life-tide of existence; she looked at her cousin, — her soft eyes were resting on his smiling face with such simple confidence that she strove to drive away the idea.

"How few feel as I do. I never met with anyone who really understood me, — unless, indeed, it may be Mr. Osman." Instinctively she looked towards the house; between the trees she could now and then see the gentlemen as they paced the verandah; they were conversing earnestly and gravely, and a low sigh stirred her woman's heart to think how complex were the cares which occupied that mind, and the deep crape round the cabbage-tree hat was evidently not a tribute to custom only.

"Rachel, will you have a ride to-morrow? I have been endeavoring to persuade Miss Elice, and she will give no promise without your decision," were the words which recalled her attention to her companions.

"I shall be most happy," she returned, smiling brightly.

"Then it is settled — did Jack recover from his sprain?"

"Quite. Our horses have had a long rest."

Next day, when Rachel stepped from the house equipped, she found Leigh Osman securing her horse's girths.

"Do you go with us?" she inquired.

"If you permit me." A bright smile accompanied the words.

“We shall be very proud to act as guides to the beauties of our neighbourhood.”

“Do you sketch?”

“A little, very little, — but I love the beautiful.”

“Shall I become your drawing-master while I stay here?”

“Oh! I thank you.” She stood watching him carefully arranging her horse's equipments, and then sprang lightly from his hand to the saddle.

There was something peculiarly fresh and *naive* about Rachel; it had immediately struck Leigh, and a little conversation, and still more observation, had revealed to him warm feelings and noble qualities. It was a new delight to travel through old paths of learning, to communicate and simplify; sometimes smiling gravely at the avidity with which she received it, often surprised with some remark displaying a mind of no common order. These rational conversations, nobler and purer in their aims than any she had hitherto joined in, filled her with delight; yet she was even less gay than usual, but very happy in his society; he never forgot the ruling principle of his actions, and many a lesson that gentle yet firm spirit gave her, which were remembered and treasured up long afterwards in hours of sorrow and darkness.

Every morning the horses were saddled and brought to the door; there was never any hindrance from refractory or strayed horses. Both girls were good riders, and, whether cantering along a level or guiding their steeds through the bush, equally at home. Mr. Fenwick engaged Elice's attention, and Rachel was consequently left to the charge of the Master of the Ranges. On one of these occasions the conversation turned on Gilbert.

“And you have heard from him but once?”

“But once, — soon after he reached Sydney. I am very anxious — ”

“Do you fear he is ill?”

“No, but I think his silence a bad augury. You know he did not wish to enter this office.”

“That aversion may be overcome by a steady determination.”

Rachel looked grave, conscious that this was the very quality her brother wanted.

“And ‘prejudice is the child of ignorance,’ you know. On nearer acquaintance he may not find city life so irksome.” She knew he was trying to cheer her, and she tried to look comforted.

“Up to the time I sailed for England my days were chiefly passed on horseback; there could not have been a more thoughtless, unmethodical lad. I craved for knowledge, and the impulse led me to books; but I had no plan of study, and the generally established character of a genius, which kindly prejudiced friends conceded without reflection, threatened to lead me into a listless gratification of mere impulses, and the regular studies and necessary close application of college life were at first

disagreeable, till I found those impatient longings for information had the means of gratification before them, and that awakened my ardour to seize on them.”

Rachel looked up in the firm countenance, and thought that the discipline must have been a severe one, with such a lively imagination, — such an absorbing love of mental pursuits; she wondered how he had become a farmer with such apparent equanimity; the sense of duty which bound him to an uncongenial pursuit had, indeed, imparted to his manner something decisive, and almost melancholy at times.

“Will you go to Sydney before reaching home?” she inquired presently.

“No. Had I done so I would have called on Gilbert, but we will be acquainted in future, I hope. It will not be long before I come — yes,” he added abruptly, in an altered tone, “it must be some time. I shall return to the Ranges very shortly.” This was one of those sudden changes Rachel had witnessed several times before, which unaccountably swayed the humours of the young man, and she forbore to remark it.

“Have you ‘the gift of silence’?” presently inquired Mr. Osman, lightly.

“I think not.”

“You are uncertain, but uncertainty is not your kindred mood; it oppresses you, and you throw it off by vigorous action. *To do* — there is gratification — there is power in that.”

“Pardon me if I am hardly following you.”

“What — I was thinking aloud! I often do so from having no one to speak to. I make the pictures and books in my home share my emotions, but the highest gratification would be the culture of a mind; — to see it growing and expanding beneath my care, to watch its development, to train and strengthen it, as the gardener cherishes a choice plant, and prizes its promise of perfection.” He paused, and Rachel said with a smile, —

“Still thinking aloud?”

“No, I was speaking to you. Was my tone dreamy? Well, I was dreaming — yes, a dream in truth. Come, let us join them; Fenwick is giving Elice a lesson in steeple-chasing. How essentially the animal predominates over the mental in some natures!”

“I fear so,” she answered, so sadly that her companion started.

“I hope the subject of conversation was pleasing,” called Fenwick, as they joined them, with a roguish laugh.

“Quite.” Mr. Osman's calm manner checked the raillery the other had prepared; in fact, the Master of the Ranges had such a serious way of speaking to Rachel, and always appeared so desirous of improving her mind rather than good opinion, that when he left Cowanda no one could attach any other word than *friendly* to his devotion to her; and when on that day Fenwick was interrupted in laying out plans for the next week,

by the remark that during the ensuing week he hoped to be at home, he merely expressed his regret.

“By Jove! I suppose it is time for me to be starting, too,” he added.

“My movements need not direct yours — the ladies will be dull without you.”

Fenwick glanced at Elice. “Between ourselves, Osman, I should think they would miss you most, because you can talk about their music and drawings, and all the old masters, and that sort of fiddle-faddle, which I can't.”

Leigh smiled gravely, and Rachel laughed at the idea of frivolity being attached to those grave discussions in which he was so frequently engaging her. However, the time of his departure came, and all missed him; for he had a quiet, kindly way which won affection.

## Chapter VII.

Perverse mankind! whose wills, created free,  
Charge all their woes on absolute decree;  
All to the dooming gods their guilt translate,  
And follies are miscall'd the crimes of fate.

— Homer.

GEORGE WELTON had frustrated Blackmore's designs for a time, but it was only for a time. Every evening found the latter ready to lead the youth for a ride into the country, or an omnibus ride to the South Heads, or elsewhere; carefully he strengthened the aversion his victim felt towards office life, and dilated on the adventurous existence at the gold-fields; and at length he suggested that he should forsake his post, and go there. The idea startled him, and he drew back coldly; Blackmore was alarmed, and tried to palliate.

"I was only joking," he said.

Gilbert knew he spoke falsely, and replied coldly, "Indeed!"

"Why, man, how stiff you look! — come, think no more of it — a joke's a joke, you know."

"Certainly, but I shall not go out this evening: I want to write home."

Blackmore used persuasion in vain, and finally desisted. Half-an-hour afterwards Gilbert was penning a letter to his sister — which, however, was never completed — and puffing a cigar, when a knock sounded at his door, and George Welton entered.

"You left the office so quickly to-day I could not get time to speak a word," said he, seating himself.

Gilbert reddened: as his friendship with Blackmore ripened, that with the young man decreased; he shrank, indeed, from renewing his visits to the brother and sister, aware that his pleasures and pursuits were now very different from theirs.

"We have not seen you for some time. Clare is perfect in her part of the duet, and you have decamped. What do you say to accompanying me to-night?"

"Not to-night, George."

"Well, you are writing; — to-morrow, then?"

"Yes, to-morrow — and how is Miss Clare?"

“Quite well. By-the-byo, Calder, my sister Grace will be in town in a few days — she is our beauty, you know.”

“She can't be more — she can't be better than Clare,” returned Gilbert, warmly.

“They are both dear girls. We shall expect you to-morrow, — I shall tell Clare you will return with me. Good evening.” They shook hands. Gilbert returned to his chair, and sat thinking of the pure, calm Clare Welton, and that happy little cottage; he felt himself sliding down — down, away from God, from friends, from goodness. Once free from the desk — then returned Blackmore's insinuation, and the temptation was dallied with and entertained; he felt that Welton would lead him to right if he followed him, and for a while the nobler qualities of his disposition rose up, and asserted their power and affinity with goodness. Oh, had he sought Heaven's help! — but he did not; he resolved, but his impulsive nature laid him open to assault, and a restless indolence revolted from steady employment. It was the dark hour of temptation; — near, all was night; far off was a small portal, watched by a face lighted up by the love of a sister; and behind, like a faint glimmer of reflected moonlight stealing through clouds upon the surface of a lake, was the image of the fair, pale girl, with earnest brown eyes, and a soft loving hand — powerful in its weakness — stretched out towards the wanderer, and pointing to the better world, and inviting him to the holy life of a follower of Christ.

Gilbert was unhappy, and day by day he shrank more from the path of life which, having entered upon, became his duty, however little in conformity with his tastes. “George tells me that a knowledge of business will always be of use to me, and that, when my time here is expired, I may seek something more to my fancy;” — thus he reflected; “but I can't stand another fifteen months — I can't!” and he sprung up under the conviction, and paced his room.

In a fine house, a short distance from town, sat two gentlemen in conversation; the decanters and glasses, and remnants of pine apple and other fruits, with a scarcely perceptible odour of a roast, indicated that they had recently dined.

“Brett,” said one — a tall man, with a long face and reflective brows — “I am at my wits' ends about this youngster, the Captain's grandson; 'pon my honor I am.”

“How so, Sir?” inquired Mr. Brett.

“He has no application, Brett, none whatever. There he sits — write, write, write — with eyes like as if he was dreaming, and the consequence is incessant mistakes. I have a great respect for Arney and Buchan, and the Captain is a fine old man — a true specimen of the British officer, Sir. My uncle on the father's side was a major — Major Ralph — just such another; — fine men. But this youngster is *not* fit for the desk; no,

Brett. I will speak to him very seriously.”

“I am less in the counting-house than you, Sir, but I have marked Calder as a lazy, useless young dog,” returned Mr. Brett, who attended to the shipping interests, and, from the effects of the sea air, or other causes, had a rather glossy, red face, and wore large, nautical-looking whiskers, and a naval cap.

On the following day Mr. Ralph put his expressed intention into effect, and delivered a severe lecture to his careless clerk, in the presence of the others, and several business callers. Gilbert turned very red, and buried his chagrin in *nonchalance*; but he felt it deeply: conscience told him the truth of his employer's strictures, and added a point to the sting; and his pride was outraged to be publicly consured, rather than in the privacy of Mr. Ralph's office; and when that gentleman retired to his *sanctum*, he bent over his writing with dilated nostrils and flashing eyes. The merchant considered his offence a public one, as far as the publicity of the counting-house world was concerned, and to be held up, therefore, as a terror to his other clerks. A just, upright, but coarse-minded man, the mortification and wound to self-respect were lost sight of in the justice of the cause, and Mr. Ralph took up his pen to address some of his correspondents with a keen relish, arising from the remembrance of sundry sharp and strong expressions he had made use of, which certainly would not be easily forgotten by any who heard them; and all present must have done so, for his slow, sonorous voice was raised to a key sufficient to penetrate the whole counting-house. Mr. Ralph was a benevolent man, and very readily that morning headed a charitable list which had been sent him, with a ten-pound note; he was a regular subscriber to public institutions for the amelioration of the condition of the poor or suffering, and ready to assist struggling industry at all times; but the Scriptural injunction to first admonish an erring brother “between him and thee alone,” was not observed, or remembered.

A few hours later Gilbert was pacing the lane with rapid steps; he had shaken off George Welton's friendly hand with an impatient “Not to-night,” and rushed past him; he looked up at the dusty walls, and the chains and pulleys, and down to the stone steps where watermen's boats lay, and the waves were rippling against the green slimy stones, with a determination to see them no more; he passed Mr. Brett without a bow; barely acknowledged a florid captain who had been present during a part of the morning's lecture, but beat a hasty retreat after catching the exordium, and who, with honest benevolence, stepped up to offer a great red hand now; and only paused before a small building, in the window of which were suspended cards, with a notice commencing “*Wanted*” written in large letters on them; he hurriedly read them — a carpenter, a blacksmith, shepherds for Darling Downs, splitters to proceed to the Hawkesbury, and, last, a bullock-driver to take a team to the Lachlan

district. The last place mentioned was within accessible distance of the Turon diggings.

Gilbert had resolved to seek the smiles of fortune at the gold-fields, — where, he had not determined; this decided his resolution. He had not means to travel so far by any more desirable conveyance, and an impulse had inclined him once more to handle the whip, and, after leaving the dray at the station indicated, proceed on foot to the Turon.

Before long a young man, in a new suit of bullock-driver's clothes, entered the agency office, and engaged to drive the team — one of two returning with stores to the sheep station of a city merchant. Again at his lodgings he found Blackmore, who cordially congratulated him, undertook the charge of such clothing and books as he should not take with him, and energetically assisted him in his humble preparations. Then Gilbert penned a brief, hasty note to inform Messrs. Ralph and Brett that he should never enter their office again; and another to his sister; and started on his long and fatiguing journey. The encouraged temptation had been yielded to, and the young, ardent feet pressed eagerly forward in the path which led from duty and happiness. Oh! for a hand to snatch him from destruction — to remind him of a Saviour's love and help in every time of need!

After Blackmore had parted with Gilbert, and seen him, in a round blue woollen frock and cabbage-tree hat, guiding a bullock-team up Parramatta-street, and through the toll-bar, and so on along the road, and knew that he was really out of Sydney, and well content not to return, he retraced his steps — not to the tavern where he boarded, but to one of the streets near the wharves; a boat-builder's yard and some sailors at a public-house door were indications of its proximity to the water. Blackmore walked slowly, scanning the names above the doors, as if in search of some person's appellation which he was uncertain where to seek, and presently stopped before a mean building, in the lower windows of which were exposed sundry small commodities of the eatable sort, such as fruit, biscuits, and sweets, intermingled with gaudy little pictures of ships, eastern scenes — probably representing Joseph before Pharaoh, or the Children of Israel, and birds of fabulous plumage. An inquiry in the shop directed Blackmore to an upper room; the door stood partly open, and he entered a little room, a dusty untidy place, scattered over with envelopes and torn-up papers, with a few old green-painted boxes in one corner of the room, ranged among the dust and spiders' webs, and lettered A. B. C.; the table in the centre of the room was very old, and one leg was attached to the top by a piece of a tea-chest nailed across; behind this sat a thin, small man, with a bloated face, marked by red spots and blotches, which made the other parts of his countenance look the paler; he was dressed in rusty black, and a hat bent excessively crooked stood beside him.

“Mr. Kilby — good day, Sir.”

“Mr. Blackmore, my dear Sir, what can I do for you? — a little service I hope, eh?”

“Yes.”

“Sit down, Sir,” and he handed the second chair, which completed the furniture of his office, and drew from behind the green boxes a spirit bottle and a couple of wine-glasses, one with the foot off; and they leaned close together and consulted in whispers, and examined a parcel of Captain Dell's letters, which Blackmore took from his pocket.

Kilby had been an attorney — a man of no inconsiderable talent; keen, clear, and rapid in his mental deductions and decisions. Some years back his prospects had been good, if not brilliant, and there had loomed upon the distant horizon a future good name and practice; but the man wanted in the fear of God, hence in steady principle; he became a rogue, for he hastened to be rich, and the wealth acquired by industry is usually of slow growth; so his name was struck off the Roll, and the man stood among the ruins of his reputation and prospects; he had a mother, an old woman, with a trembling hand and a grey head, whose widowed heart was set upon this only son; and when he sailed for Australia, she was left to taste the

“Cold charities of man to man,”

and to cling with the cagerness of despair to the hope that “her dear boy” would do well, and send for his poor old mother to see him again before she died. His course in the country of his adoption had been erratic; for a while he had been employed as clerk, but the same want of principle cast him out from the higher to the lower offices, and finally he sank down into his present position; — employed occasionally as a copyist, for he was an expert penman; and the general adviser of a certain class in their emergencies; he it was who directed them in how far they might go without being amenable to the law; who discovered flaws in leases and wills; who proved promissory notes to be “waste paper,” and helped others to run the downward course with himself; — a great man, and leader among such, drowning the whispers of conscience in gin, and glorying in the power his education and legal lore gave him. Poor old mother! in thy loving heart thy dear Dick was still the *acme* of wisdom and goodness, and thou wert mourning him as dead, and watering thy parish allowance with tears; — for surely he would have sent for his mother, his poor old mother, if he were alive. Look upwards, mother, for thy comfort, for there is none for thee on earth! — Seek it in that future, for the earthly future is blotted over by crime and degradation.

The fees which Kilby received for his legal assistance were

peculiar; — sometimes trifling; sometimes a horse was hung up at the post before the door, and the client inquired where he should stable Mr. Kilby's horse.

What had brought Blackmore to consult him was sufficiently explained by the presence of a blank cheque-book, and the careful imitations of the Captain's bold, decided signature, which the latter made repeatedly upon a sheet of paper; and the agreement which Blackmore signed, promising a certain share of “the proceeds thereof.”

“The way of transgressors is hard.” Gilbert's flight had opened the door which admitted the foe to destroy the friends he really loved devotedly. Evil stops not with the individual act, but leads on to a train of others.

## Chapter VIII.

The Post Bag. Yet, seems his spirit wild and proud,  
By grief unsoften'd and unbow'd.  
Oh! there are sorrows which impart  
A sternness foreign to the heart,  
And, rushing with an earthquake's power,  
That makes a desert in an hour,  
Rouse the dread passions in their course,  
As tempests wake the billows' force!

— Mrs. Hemans.

TO CAPTAIN DELL.

DEAR AND RESPECTED SIR, —

You are, I believe, aware that I, after leaving your place, proceeded to Sydney. Notwithstanding the handsome letter you so kindly gave me, I failed in meeting with a situation as Superintendent: that has occasioned my long stay in Sydney. Whilst here, I have met Mr. Gilbert several times; it grieves me to say I have my fears about him. The last time I saw him was in a taproom, where he insisted on my taking a glass; in drawing out his purse to pay, he dropped some papers on the ground, and, in assisting him to collect them, which he did with much trepidation and evident confusion, I saw no less than three fifty-pound notes. How he came into possession of so much money I am quite at a loss to conceive; but a hint he dropped of his intention to proceed immediately to California, induces me to fear the worst. I cannot tell you, dear Sir, how painful it has been to me to communicate these suspicions, but a sense of duty compels me, &c., &c.

PETER BLACKMORE.

TO CAPTAIN DELL.

DEAR SIR, —

In compliance with your directions we presented your cheque at the —  
— Bank this morning, and regret to say that it was dishonored. On inquiries, we were informed that the very amount had been yesterday withdrawn, in payment of a cheque bearing your signature. This circumstance has surprised us, after your written instructions received

yesterday. Waiting your further communications, we remain, &c., &c.,  
ARNEY AND BUCHAN.

TO MISS CALDER.

DEAR RACHEL, —

I'm off at last. I know you will be sorry, and so am I. Indeed I would have staid, if I could, but I cannot: this office life kills me — poked up behind a desk all day, writing away for the very life. I am afraid the Captain will never forgive me. Tell him — but I suppose it is no use. Indeed, darling Rachel, I am sorry enough to bolt, as I am doing. I just write you this before I go — when I shall write again, or where from, I do not know. I wish I was as good as you are, and a Christian. I know I should be happier, and make a useful man; for I do feel as if there was something in me that might make a good and noble man, but the bad always gets the mastery. Pray for me, Sister dear, and believe me that, wherever I go, I dearly love you, and Elly, and all of them. Give kind Aunt a thousand kisses, and Grandfather my love and respects, if he will take them. — Your very, very fond brother,

GILBERT.

Such were the most important of the contents of the letter bag which the black boy threw on the dining-room table, and then went whisting out, little heeding what a freight of cares the bag was charged with.

Gilbert had written to his sister immediately after entering upon his clerkship with Messrs. Ralph and Brett, but not since; and Rachel sprang quickly from the low stool by the window, where she had been scated at work, to empty the leather bag upon the table, and seek for letters from him; and then so joyfully she ran up to her room, conveying the note with her. She did not return, and Elice followed her, impatient to learn the news; she found Rachel on her knees, her face buried in her hands, her frame convulsed by sobs, and the open letter thrown on the carpet beside her.

“Oh! Elly, Elly, Grandfather will never forgive him, and where shall I seek him — my poor dear boy — what will become of him?” she said at length, when Elice's cry of distress made her aware of her presence, and cognizance of the cause of sorrow.

“What will you do?” inquired the latter, with the instinctive feeling that Rachel's strong mind would not long lie subdued by calamity.

“I cannot think just now — but Grandfather must be told.”

“Oh, Rachel, how — ” she paused with a look of apprehension, for the stern side of the Captain's character ever was most apparent to her, and she feared him to a degree which made him less beloved than he was by Rachel.

Gilbert had always looked up to his sister, and made her the confidant

of all his projects, the sharer of all his hopes and fears; and, in the midst of a careless and purportless life, she stood out a being to love and admire; she was his personification of goodness and of truth; she was the monitress who beckoned him to Heaven — who often, though he knew it not, checked the advances to evil, and frustrated the tempter's snares.

There had crept over Rachel a sense of responsibility: she felt as if their dead mother had confided her warm-hearted, heedless boy to her care; she knew that her better-regulated mind and strength of purpose made her, mentally, his senior; and, though she was deficient in mind-culture, and her own purposes in life were but dimly defined — reflected through a fog of uncertainty rather than clear before her — she had tried to lead him step by step with her, as she called that mental chaos into order. Now he had gone out into the world, without friends or means; — whither? Oh, the agony of that unanswered whither! — the heart-sick misery of uncertainty! Where should she seek him? But there was One she could seek — “a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother” — a sure Restingplace; her heart could not faint at this affliction, for He had said, “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee *for a moment*, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.” She would not be a coward, with such a promise — “for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” Very pale was her cheek, though her countenance was settled and firm, and her step did not falter, as she directed her way to Captain Dell's study, where she knew he would be engaged with his share of the correspondence. A change appeared to have come over those familiar rooms since she last trod there: the rose colour had faded, and objects stood in the sombre grey shadow which her mind's mourning cast over them.

“Youth comes, the toils and cares of life  
Torment the restless mind;  
Where shall the tired and harass'd heart  
Its consolation find?  
Then is not youth, as fancy tells,  
Life's summer prime of joy?  
Ah no! for hopes too long delay'd,  
And feelings blasted or betray'd,  
The fabled bliss destroy;  
And youth remembers with a sigh  
The careless days of infancy.” — DR. SOUTHEY.

She knocked gently, and received permission to enter.  
Captain Dell stood by the table, his brows knit, and condensed

lightning gleaming in his eyes and relieving the ashy paleness of his face. Rachel paused, and her courage failed.

“What now — what new Job's comforter has sent that? and he looked at the letter in her hand. She gave it to him. The old man glanced over its contents, and then crumpling it in his hand, dashed it upon the floor, and set his foot firmly upon it.

“Never,” he said, and the firm, cold tones of his voice sounded as if pronouncing the fiat of a doom which was unalterable; — “never let his name be mentioned again — never let him enter this house. Consider him dead — better were he dead.”

Slowly the sister's limbs collapsed, and she sank down before him on the floor, stretched out in a deadly fainting fit; She had not wept, nor remonstrated; but each word in its succinctness had fallen upon her soul like burning lead; she understood it — and that that stubborn will never relaxed.

The old man raised her tenderly and pityingly, and set her in the large chair which stood beside him; and brought a glass of water, and held it to her livid lips, as slowly they parted, and the lids unclosed from the dark full eyes. When she could read them, he placed the letters from his attorneys and exsuperintendent in her hands.

“I do not believe it,” she exclaimed indignantly; for *what* he believed was apparent to her.

“That does not alter the case, Rachel.”

“But you do not — you cannot, Grandfather, believe it either. I know Berty is innocent — I feel he is. Let us search: you will find the culprit — but not in him!”

“What madness do you talk! Search for the culprit — put him in the hands of the law? — No! From my whole soul I loathe dishonour. I for ever cease to trust or love one who is guilty of it. Remember what I have said — I must be obeyed. He is dead, remember, to you — to me — to all honest and upright persons!” and he turned away, putting the letters in his pocket, and left the room.

The Captain was an admirer of good engravings, and, among others he had purchased, was a framed proof of the Magdaleno and Saviour; — the artist had represented those two alone; there was a shadow thrown across the floor, as if her accusers had just departed, conscience-stricken; the face of the woman was beautiful beyond description, youthful, and perfect in mould; but there was on it an expression over which the angels rejoice — the silent prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” but rare, indeed, must have been the talent which painted the Saviour's head: the benign, pitying love — the combining of power and will to forgive, and restore, nay, lift beyond, her former state of innocence and holiness.

Even in that hour of bitterness Rachel's eye wandered up to the plate suspended on the wall above her, and the lesson it conveyed smote

heavily upon her soul: the noble qualities of that old man who had just left her were blotted by a want of mercy, and in his sense of untarnished honour he judged harshly, and in opposition to Him who in His perfect purity yet said, "Neither do I condemn thee."

How the long hours of the afternoon passed was ever a mystery: the house was very silent; Aunt Nancy was darning stockings, with tear-bathed cotton, in her own room, and Elice was floating about the dwelling like the shadow of melancholy; Rachel's head was rested on one hand, and the other hung cold and lifeless by her side; the open book upon her knee had not been read, for the leaves were never turned; and for the first time people observed that the Captain was an old man, and that he was ageing very fast. He went about his usual pursuits: he wrote letters and perused the papers, but his heart was not in these things; and his foot fell heavily, with languor, not force, and he was leaning on his stick.

The mockery of meals was gone through, and evening approached; but the hours of darkness promised little sleep, and the morrow must come and go, and days and weeks of future life, with the same heavy sorrow brooding over them. Time makes us bear all things with calmness; we seem, perhaps, to have forgotten our care; the hopes and aims of life have altered, yet we act the same: it is not necessary that the heart should break, because it is crushed; those we love may be for ever parted from us, and yet day by day finds us at our posts, — but oh, with what different feelings!

It was a mercy that that night illness arrested the steps of the Captain: a new channel received and conducted from Gilbert their sorrows and fears; and, as they nursed the old man, and trod the now cheerless house with noiseless steps, the most vivid impression was the imminent danger in which he lay.

Not, however, for a moment did the stern purpose relax; not in the most distant manner did he refer to the cause of his illness, or their sorrow; he bore it with his accustomed self-reliance and firmness.

A few days later, while Captain Dell still was in a precarious state, the letter bag came again, and in it a paper, with this paragraph among the "Shipping Intelligence": —

"Salt Wave, 800 tons, Smith, Master, for California. Passengers — Gilbert Calder, John Wilkens, &c., &c."

There was mourning in women's hearts, and prayers on high offered for the wanderer; tears were shed in secret, and cheeks, erst rosy and dimpled by smiles, grew pale.

"Rachel," — the Captain spoke some days subsequent to the commencement of his illness; she rose and drew back the curtain; — "get your writing-desk." She obeyed, and presently was reseated by his side, with the requisite materials arranged on a stand. The Captain passed his

large hand across his brow, and strove to collect his thoughts.

“You must write to my solicitors at my dictation. Date it.” She did so, and added, “Gentlemen;” then slowly he proceeded, and Rachel learned with horror that the old happy home was to be disposed of, and the loved associations all scattered. “I have reasons,” dictated Captain Dell, “for not prosecuting inquiries respecting the forgery which has been committed upon me, but it is absolutely impossible for me to support this establishment. I have hitherto depended upon the proceeds of the station. You will do me a great favour by seeing Messrs. — — — — , and placing in their hands the accompanying particulars. Do you know of any small farm to let?” Rachel wrote steadily, and in a clear strong hand, but her eyes drooped and there was a dull aching at her heart; she knew her uncle too well, and the pride he had ever taken in Cowanda, to add to his distress by any expression of her own sorrow; she only bowed her head and wrote quickly. She had always known that they were not rich; she had known it as an abstract thing rather than an actual fact: there never had been a want unsupplied because there was no means to supply it. Her room was furnished with a large glass case, and many elegant and expensive books were ranged there; several exquisite engravings in gilt frames hung round, and an inlaid table supported a papier-maché desk and work-box of great beauty. The piano, the new music, the many luxuries of that home, had never suggested the idea of narrow means; she had heard Mr. Rylston say, when he visited them, that the Captain never would make money; she had heard the same assertion made for years; but in the sunshine of prosperity and happiness, she had passed it by as the idea of a covetous and money-loving being. King Rylston was “a man made of money,” she knew, and cordially condemned the erection of such a golden calf for the soul's worship. Aunt Nancy, too, loved Cowanda: it had been her home for many long years, and useful as she was there, removed from it, her niece pictured her helpless and desolate. Nancy Dell was, in fact, one of those persons of small, homely intellect, that, once put in a path, run along like machinery; — efficient and valuable there, but unadapted to aught else, they are the first to be rendered helpless by a change of position. Rachel had not dared to speak on her own account, nor even when she thought of Elice, for she would in any case soon leave them, and have a home of her own; but when she recalled good, kindly Aunt Nancy, with her flat pale face written over by bewilderment, and her housekeeping skill become in great measure useless, the picture overwhelmed her: her head dropt on her hands, and a deep sob escaped her.

“Rachel,” said Captain Dell, “cheer up, my dear child: I look for much from you. It is because I do so that I selected you to write these letters. Elice will soon leave us; your Aunt is an excellent woman, but not for an emergency. I must rely for the present on you — you have great

I place much confidence in you.”

“You shall not be disappointed,” she said, with the calmness of a mighty effort; and she went on writing, with the colour rising and fading in her cheeks, but that was the only indication of the perturbation of her spirit; she was quite collected, — the sense of responsibility pressed heavily upon her. A few days since she was the general pet: handsome and cheerful, smiles everywhere met her; to-day she stood up face to face with a great trouble; she stood forth alone to meet it, for herself and others. Had she believed Gilbert guilty, shame would have bowed her to the ground; but she did not; her confidence in him was unshaken, and the resolve firmly taken to find him: that was an object never to be relinquished till it was accomplished; but she did not mention it to anyone but Elice. The discordant materials of the family were all upheaved, and, with all their sincere attachment for each other, their characters were too opposite to be readily united, for the sympathy of soul was wanting.

Rachel was committing her ways to God; she was seeking His aid, and there was a dim consciousness that trouble lay before her, and that it was best to be limited to the present in her knowledge: the storm of to-day is sufficient, without calculating the course of to-morrow's thunderbolt.

The letters were written, and the black bag dispatched with them to the post, and then she went into the parlour. The tea-service was spread, and Aunt Nancy sat in a low arm-chair, working at her needle, and nodding her head as if internally humming a slow air; the tea-kettle simmered above the heater in the stand, and there was a pleasant smell of buttered toast; altogether, the scene looked so homely that, had not Rachel paused and fortified her spirit by a mental cry to Heaven for help, she would have been overcome; she went to her aunt, and, drawing a foot-stool to her side, sat down.

“How is he now, love?” inquired she, laying down a piece of work just completed.

“Rather fatigued with dictating letters for me to write.”

“It was a pity to mind them now.”

“They were important.”

“Well, I hope he has not hurt himself,” she returned, for she rarely wrote letters, and considered them rather formidable undertakings.

“I think not,” Rachel replied, thinking how much their contents “hurt,” rather than their wording.

“I wish Elice would come, and your grandfather — did he take the broth?”

“Yes. The dear old place — how I love it!”

“Yes, dear,” assented the worthy woman, with a mild wonderment, as she followed Rachel's loving look of recognition round the apartment.

“But, Aunt, our happiness is in each other — beyond these things,”

added the girl, trying to suggest a footing for her hope which she knew would be wanted, for her grandfather had bade her acquaint her aunt with his arrangements.

“Yes, dear,” again assented she, with a broader light of astonishment illuminating her features.

“We would love any place; we would make it beautiful and comfortable,” — she went on in a hurried tone — “even away from Cowanda.”

“Away, child! why, what ever — ”

“If it were necessary to part with this place — if we could not keep it *now*,” — how that now stabbed her! — “grandfather and you and I would be happy — we would make every place home.”

“My gracious me! I do believe the girl's out of her mind! Away from Cowanda! — No, I hope, never, till they carry away my poor old body, when it pleases the Lord to take me.”

The tears flushed into Rachel's eyes, and Aunt Nancy, convinced that she was not raving, put down her thimble, and demanded a full explanation, which Rachel gave. Aunt Nancy looked particularly pale, and lifted up her hands, uttering several exclamations, and then, subsiding into a bewildered mood, took her tea quietly; in fact, she did not understand Rachel's announcement; it would take a mind like hers a considerable time to apprehend a new idea. Life apart from Cowanda! the thing was an impossibility; the truth would come upon her by some such degrees as this: to-day, when she removed the fresh cream from the dish, the thought would occur, “I shall soon have no dairy to go to;” another time the absence of the well-filled store shelves would threaten, and so on.

Elice was shocked and grieved beyond what Rachel had expected.

“I could have pictured you each moment of the day; I should have known that, unless prevented by illness, you were doing just this or that — I should not have felt away from you. Now we have begun to scatter, Oh, Rachel, how far may we not disperse!” and the gentle girl wept in an agony of desolation. Rachel's shoulder supported her head, but the thought that that would soon be withdrawn added to her woe.

## Chapter IX.

— To act, therefore, in opposition to one another is against nature: and to harbour indignation and hatred is acting in opposition.

— Commentaries of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus.

GILBERT'S haughty note was one of the first which engaged Mr. Ralph's attention the following morning. He had seen that the young man's place was vacant as he passed to his private room, and detected his careless scrawl upon an envelope topping the summit of a pile of epistolary communications. Mr. Ralph's wiry hair rose as he perused the ebullition of the young man's wrath, and red-hot-freedom aspirations.

“ 'Pon my word — 'pon my word!” He could say no more, but, taking down his hat, clapped it with such force upon his head that he drove it down upon his brows, much to the amusement of the clerks, as he rushed past them, and with hurried steps took the way to Messrs. Arney and Buchan's office. The hour was earlier than the former came to office, and the latter was drawing out the rough draught of a will for an old lady, who appeared to be chuckling over the thoughts of cutting off a spendthrift nephew with a shilling.

Mr. Buchan was a good-looking young man, with bright eyes, who had lately stepped from articled clerk to junior partner, and was exceedingly zealous in the prosecution of business; and his face wore now the grave air becoming the disappointment of the reckless nephew, and the right disposal of hard-earned riches; for the old lady displayed a thimble and corny hands, and was clearly giving her young legal friend a lesson on the “way to wealth.” Mr. Buchan, therefore, only bowed to the Agent, and requested him to walk into Mr. Arney's room.

It was rather a small apartment, surrounded by cases of papers, and japanned boxes; it was very neat, like its inmate: the row of books upon the table were placed exactly square, and the green ribbon, which appears to be taking the place of the red tape, was tied in two precise bows; the grate was not filled with squares of torn paper, but clean and bright; and even the windows had been washed within the memory of man. There was a stone court under the window, and a high brick building opposite. Mr. Ralph was in no humour to observe these commonplace objects, and

certainly not to deduce inferences therefrom; and by the time Mr. Arney came his patience had been sorely tried, for the shrill cracked voice of the old lady, in querulous accents addressing Mr. Buchan, sounded in the adjoining room, and the impatient shuffling of feet and coughing announced some person or persons awaiting his leisure.

“Good morning, Sir. — What is this?” The latter remark was elicited by Mr. Ralph's forcing an open letter into the attorney's hand; he sat down on his well-worn leather-cushioned chair, and slowly read and re-read the note, whilst his companion paced the room.

“The impudent young scoundrel! I'll make him smart for this. Free, indeed! — he shall be thrown into the body of the jail.” Thus interrupted, Mr. Arney laid down the note, first folding and replacing it in its envelope, and then, fixing his eyes upon the incensed gentleman, began in a methodical, unmoved tone: —

“Forty years since, Mr. Ralph, you and I were fellow-students — companions in study and in recreation: reading the same books, taking the same walks, loving two sisters” — his voice lowered a little here — “in everything we were knit together, a Damon and a Pythias.”

“Certainly, Arney, certainly,” submitted the other, with a forced patience.

“Forty years ago,” proceeded the attorney, in the same slow tone, which gave to every word its full value and time, “you told me that I should always be your legal adviser, and I have been.” He paused, and Mr. Ralph reddened: he remembered that promise had been given in a fit of gratitude, when his friend Pythias had saved him, like another Damon, from being expelled for some burst of turbulent spirit which had affronted the heads of the college.

“I came to you for your advice, Arney,” he said, presently.

“Good. Listen to me, Ralph. Two years, or more, since, Captain Dell, my highly respected client, came here to this office, and he brought with him his grand-daughter, this Gilbert Calder's sister — a young girl about sixteen, with a joyous heart glistening in her full black eyes. I talked with her, and found her clever in more than the ordinary sense of the word, and extremely warm-hearted and loving; she spoke of this brother, an only brother, and her lip trembled; — and now, Ralph, I do not advise you as your attorney, but I ask you as a man, to forgive this erring lad for his friends' sake.” — From a low, dreamy tone the old man's voice had become earnest, and his peculiarly soft blue eyes rested on the heated face of his companion.

Mr. Arney was a man of great professional knowledge and moral worth, and his influence upon his friend was considerable; but this was asking rather too much. However, as we have said, Mr. Ralph was a charitable man. At that moment, certainly, he would rather have subscribed fifty pounds for a testimonial to the master sweep who had,

no doubt, prevented half Sydney from being burned down, or to aid in purchasing flannel petticoats for the negresses, or any other subscription of hyperbolic merit, rather than exert the charity which “for-giveth all things.”

In boyhood Mr. Arney had received a spinal injury, which checked his growth, and rendered his health delicate; his hands and arms had attained undue proportions, and his frame was attenuated; his long white hair fell back from his round forehead, giving him a venerable aspect, and those gentle eyes of his could grow searching and cool to a painful degree. Presently he began again —

“You could punish this boy, no doubt: you could ruin his future prospects, and break his sister's heart, and cover the grey hairs of his grandfather with shame — but will you do it?”

Mr. Ralph was softening.

“We know you as a benevolent as well as just man; we have seen you befriend the widow and fatherless — ” The Agent gave way.

“Well, there, Arney, the youngster shall go scot-free, for your sake — for your sake,” and, impressing this upon his friend, he departed ceremoniously, ushered to the door by the attorney. Mr. Arney was smiling over his writing when his partner came in shortly afterwards.

## Chapter X.

“Oh! bitter to the youthful heart,  
That scarce a pang, a care has known,  
The hour when first from scenes we part  
Where life's bright spring has flown!  
Forsaking, o'er the world to roam,  
That little shrine of peace — our home.”  
— — — — I love young Ida, and  
I'll wed her.

— Werner.

“Going, gentlemen, going at a sacrifice,” said the auctioneer.

Considerable excitement and surprise had been occasioned by the circulation of the report that Captain Dell was about to part with Cowanda, and employ Mr. Joseph Auxtable, auctioneer and storekeeper, to sell his furniture, &c. It was this announcement which had collected the greater number of the inhabitants of the district; some came to purchase, some to see how things went; some to condole, and express their sincere sorrow for the loss of old neighbours; many were actuated by a feeling which appears common to human nature — rejoicing in the misfortunes which, it was concluded, though none knew, must be the cause of this sale.

But for the painful interest of the scene, it would have been highly amusing: there were the neighbouring gentry, in phaetons or on horseback; farmers' wives, in carts or bullock-drays; old dames and young girls, jogging on plough horses, and others were walking; one old man, formerly a convict servant of the family, was seated on a high large-boned steed, with a gallon-bottle in one hand, and a tin pannikin in the other, inviting everyone to drink the “master and the leddies' healths in a drap o' the cratur,” and adding that there was more coming after, in allusion to a couple of bottles protruding from out of the pockets of his ragged long coat; there was the old nurse of the district, surrounded by a group of matronly women, to whom she was reciting sundry hair-breadth escapes the young ladies, in the early period of their residence at Cowanda, had, from which it was evident nothing but her skill could have prevented a premature termination of their career; there were scenes

in the yard and parlour, for doors were thrown open now, and people walked where they listed.

Mr. Joseph Auxtable found himself in the drawing-room, trying to look very wise and comfortable, and glancing at the ceiling with an air that said plainly, "I understand the reasons, but shall not reveal them!"

Aunt Nancy and her nieces were trying to entertain the ladies of the gathering, who had crowded round them, and were manifesting some curiosity.

"But I did not understand the Captain why he thought of leaving Cowanda," suddenly remarked Mrs. Macmicken, a neighbouring estate holder's lady.

Aunt Nancy was thrown off her guard by this unexpected lunge after the secret, and Rachel came quickly to her relief.

"My grandfather thinks it advisable to lessen the many things which claim his attention."

"To be sure — he's an old man; but who could think it?" submitted another female, in a lower tone, and all glanced at the Captain, who was conversing with Mr. Macmicken at the further end of the room. The events of the last few weeks had added the appearance of years to the stalwart form, and yet he stood so erect and defiant, that to associate the idea of failing powers with him appeared absurd, and the ladies gave a general verdict that "he was a splendid man, and looked far better than many younger men." Rachel had glanced fondly and proudly in the same direction, and acknowledged the remark by a bow.

"Will you sell everything?"

"No, ma'am; we retain some trifling pieces of furniture we have an affection for, and my piano."

"Oh! then you don't sell the piano; I thought I saw one mentioned in the catalogue."

"That was the old one."

The lady looked at the drawn silk and carved wood of the other, with a face that said clearly that she had been imposed upon, and remarked, that she came *on purpose* to see how the piano went; and then demanded where the Captain's old leather-cushioned chair was, as her father wanted it.

"I am sorry, but that is also reserved;" returned Rachel, disposed to laugh, but for the pain depicted in Elice's countenance; so she stole to her side, and put her arm round her waist.

"It's so unfeeling," replied the girl, with tears quivering in her eyes; the encircling arm pressed her firmly, and Rachel returned in the same hushed tone —

"'The Lord taketh pleasure in those that fear Him; in those that trust in his mercy.' We will trust Him, dear Elly, if friends fail us."

The hour for the sale to commence had come; Mr. Auxtable drained his

sixth glass of wine, and prepared for action; and the ladies, who had declined some neighbourly offers of shelter, retired to a room lumbered with trunks and reserved furniture.

The sale would occupy the whole day, and lunch had been provided; and under its exhilarating effects the extolling voice of the auctioneer, and the eager bidding of the crowd, grew loud.

A sense of degradation oppressed Aunt Nancy and Elice; Rachel had felt the same, but reasoned it into abeyance; people walked about the house, and looked into rooms erst sacred, and found fault with things that had been so lately private property; they seemed loosing caste. However, every day comes to an end at last; the property had changed owners, and when Mr. Auxtable could collect the debts, the family were to leave Cowanda for the residence of a mutual friend of the Captain and Mr. Fenwick's; and from this place Elice was to be married and enter upon her new life. Gentle, timid Elice! another week, and as Mrs. Fenwick, she bade farewell to her weeping aunt and the fond companion of her childhood, and went on her way with her exultant husband, in the full tide of feeling, that knows not if it be pain or pleasure. "When the full corn is in the ear it bends, because it is full," and the depths of joy approach very near to sorrow.

While the party still stood gazing into the solitude where the gig had lately disappeared, and where Elice's weeping farewell had been uttered, there appeared, coming up the path, a small tilted cart, driven by a rather small sallow specimen of humanity; as he neared, there was no mistaking Hiram the dealer; he was, as usual, full of news and witticisms, and Aunt Nancy and Rachel retired, with hearts too full to admit of such trifles; but later in the evening, the wary dealer detected Rachel pacing the veranda, and approached with a box of treasures.

"Specimens from the diggings, mish; here's a nugget;" and he elevated a quartz stone.

"But where is the gold?" she inquired, bending over it.

"There — a vein just there, mish; beautiful nugget for young ladies' cu'rosities in the glass case." This was an allusion to a geological collection the cousins had formed, and at that precise time the mention of it affected Rachel so much, that the nugget, quartz and crystals, all floated in haze before her.

"And did Mashter Gilbert go to the diggings?" he suddenly inquired.

"I don't know; he can't be yet;" she said, rather evasively.

"Then you haven't heard since he got up? I was surprised to see him going that way."

"To see him! where, Hiram?" Then remembering how wildly she had spoken, she added — "Where had he got to?"

Hiram described the place, adding, he was driving a dray.

"Driving a dray! travelling with drays! Whose were they?"

The dealer was puzzled by his interrogator's ignorance and agitation, and resolved to gratify his curiosity.

"Didn't you know he went with them teams, mish?" he returned in answer to her query.

"No; whose were they?"

"Well, I don't know, for 'tween ourselves, mish, Mashter Gilbert took me up short and wouldn't speak, and the other fellow was a German, named Johann."

Nothing more could be gleaned, and Rachel succeeded in sending him away at last, after purchasing a pretty quartz pebble, at four times its commercial value, and then she could think. The bitter loneliness which a short time before had oppressed her was gone; Gilbert was not far out on the world of waters, voyaging to a strange land, but under circumstances, however dark, comparatively near and accessible.

The thoughts of residing near Sydney had been extremely distasteful to her, but now such a position promised to aid her in her search. Upon the slender information she had derived from Hiram, she might discover the ultimate destination of the teams, and the whereabouts of her brother; but how came his name to be advertised as passenger by the "Salt Wave?" This was an enigma only to be solved by supposing that he had lost his passage. There was no one she could take counsel from: Aunt Nancy was so truly ignorant of the world and in terror of the Captain, and Elice was now far away; yet to both she immediately communicated the joyful news, that Gilbert was still in Australia.

Under such circumstances, the Christian feels the full force of having a higher strength and wisdom to apply to. Faith lays the burden upon One who has promised to sustain it, and relies upon immutable love. The reflections of the evening had calmed Rachel's spirit, and she joined the circle in the parlour calm and firm.

## Chapter XI.

Under the vine-leaves I shall sit alone,  
And the lone breeze will have a mournful tone  
Amidst their tendrils, while I think on thee.

— Anon.

Messrs. Arney and Buchan had a property in their hands, which, immediately on receipt of Captain Dell's letter, they agreed was the very thing for him; it was an orphan minor's estate, which had been under tenantry for the last ten years, and must be let for seven more before the heir reached his majority: it was then empty, and so gone to decay as to let at a merely nominal rent.

“The very thing for the Captain,” said Mr. Arney.

“The very thing,” echoed Mr. Buchan, and a letter to that effect was written; and after some little correspondence, Captain Dell rented Aloe Hill for seven years.

It was to this place that the family repaired after the sale. Aloe Hill was a small estate, on the Parramatta River. A few fields, the wreck of an orchard, and a large dilapidated cottage, once plastered and whitewashed, constituted the property; there were, or had been, wide verandas and French windows, but the glass was broken in many places, and the walls cracked and damp-stained; in fact, it was a picture of minors' property; the cottage stood at the head of a small inlet, surrounded by native oaks, and more immediately beside the water the mangrove cast its deep shadows; there was a hut there, inhabited by persons who took wood to town, and their large boat lay moored in front of their dwelling, and beyond the gentle slope which rose from the river's edge were a few small farms. The spot was very lonely: the dull patches of bushes shutting it in gave an air of isolation; you felt that you had turned your back on the world, and the distant bark of a dog sounded as a farewell, rather than connecting link with those beyond; no one's business or pleasure led them that way. The wood-cutters were absent all day, and, when at home, convivially inclined; the very air was desolate, and smelt of the weeds left by the receding tide; and the wind found no leaves to rustle, but sighed through the wiry foliage of the native oaks, and burst out in sudden squalls across the fields.

Mr. Arney had sent a person to clean the rooms and welcome the new tenants; for a ride of inspection he had made had left an impression upon his mind, that some cheering influences were requisite. He remembered the lovely girl who, some years before, in company with the Captain, had visited his office, and he fancied he saw her standing in those mouldy smelling rooms, with her bright eyes

“ — — — looking into the darkness  
To see some form arise.”

He fancied he heard those light footsteps treading the weedy paths, and the quick ear gathering up the wind's voices — “Murmurs of pleasures, and pains, and wrongs;” and the old man's heart smote him, that he had recommended so desolate a dwelling for her. Then he said to himself — “but she'll brighten it — yes, she'll brighten it;” and he rode away rapidly, with a radiant face, shedding sun-shine over Aloe Hill, and almost resuscitating the old withered poles of former Aloe flowers, from whence the place took its name. He looked at the unpruned branches of the vines trailing along the paths, and the black stems of the orange trees, and then he pictured it all restored to order; and those dark bright eyes sparkled out between the orange-leaves and through the trellised grapery, and in the midst of all stood the noble-looking old Captain, with his fine form erect, the very personification of indomitable will; and he thought of the orphan heir, and how the value of his property would be augmented by such tenants, till his former satisfaction in the arrangement returned.

The following week, Rachel herself was there; the bustle of moving had, for that day, subsided; the sun was drawing near the horizon; the Captain's arm-chair was pleasantly placed near the window, in the future sitting-room, and he was perusing a volume of Macauley's History, and underlining passages which pleased him, or expressed his own ideas; Aunt Nancy was engaged, and Rachel was free to devote an hour to thought; anxieties and cares which for some days had been rather put aside for the time, than overcome, were assuming a formidable array, which she desired to disperse; she followed a faint path leading to the little inlet, and was soon seated on the trunk of an old mangrove, which dead, white, and pierced by worms, reared itself from the water's edge, which, like loving lips, rose in little waves to kiss the shore; the dark foliage of the mangroves cast a profound shadow across the inlet, and in the shallows there rose the dirk-like succours; cockle and trochur shells lay on sandy banks, where the tide had cast them; and on the shore, beyond water-mark, the St. John's wort rose vigorous, clustering over the stumps of oaks, or sending aspiring branches up the stems of standing trees, as if to stare at the setting sun with its broad gay yellow blossoms;

the pale lichens clung round the oak stem, and waved as the wind swayed the sad grey-hair like foliage, sighing pensively. The water was so clear that she could discern the keel of a boat, the minor's property, which had floated there till it decayed, and was forming a cradle for young fish, some feet below the stream's surface; near there was no sound, save the low murmurs of the wind and the waters; far off the wood-cutters' song came faintly to her, as they pulled their cumbrous boat up the river and sang to the strokes of their oars, and dogs sent back a barking refrain to the echoes their own tongues awoke. The potent powers of such an evening scene, reddened, over by the sun's last ray, calmed that feverish, if suppressed excitement which had oppressed Rachel, and she bent over the cool waters, laving her hands and brow, till when she looked up the brow was smooth and eye clear; and then she began to trace her own part in the life at Aloe Hill, and her probable influence on those around her; for there were dwellings, though the low hills hid them. "I may die here," she thought —

“But mind leaves footprints on the sands of time  
Itself, resolved again to light undying!  
Stamping the past with imagery sublime,  
And with the cloud-world of the future vieing.”

“I have a part in life to fill: Oh, Lord, ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee;’ ” and leaning her head in her hands, she prayed for herself and friends, particularly Gilbert. “I must find him and prove his innocence,” was the absorbing thought as she walked homewards. That he did not write, was no proof of criminality to her; she knew his thoughtless disposition — how he would say, “Dear Rachel! I must write to her some day.” And with this acknowledgment he would pass by the subject; still treasuring his sister's image in his heart's purest corner, if hearts have corners.

## Chapter XII.

“What care I for hardship or toil.  
What reck I for hunger or cold?  
I'm not fearful my fingers to soil,  
So, Hurrah for the Ophir of gold.”

— Jasper.

Every mile that Gilbert traversed led him further from the scene of his late adventures, and made him feel more at ease; for although, like the Australian youths generally, he held danger in scorn, and rather courted than shunned it, he had a sense of uneasiness in having infringed laws which might prove more formidable than infuriated cattle, or wild blacks: he had taken the precaution to conceal, in part, his name; and as he had two Christian names, he was now known as Gilbert St. Just.

The weather was particularly hot and dry, and in consequence the dry dust rose in clouds round the weary feet of the bullocks, which hung their heads, the picture of sad fatigue. Gilbert's new crimson guernsey had assumed the prevailing dust-colour, and his head might have passed muster among a group of New Zealanders; indeed, by the time they had left the region of roads, and were at liberty to choose their own course, it would have been difficult to detect that the young man who drove the leading dray was not at his fitting occupation — cracking his whip and hoarsely shouting at his sluggish team; or checking the creaking of the wheels by an application of tar and grease from the horn hanging behind the dray; but it was towards evening, when the time for unyoking came, that the pleasures of the weary day commenced; then the “leaders” having had a bell suspended round their necks, the wanderer's feet secured by hobbles, all were turned free, to seek a meal from the long dry grass. The drays had been drawn either near a water-hole, or to some convenient spot, for the “stopping-places” were all familiar to Johann, who had been journeys on these roads for some years.

It was at this desired hour that the travellers drew up to the banks of a pond and unyoked their teams, and soon a slender column of smoke ascended, and the black tin can of tea was simmering beside the blaze. The day had been excessively sultry, and the western horizon was a deep fiery red, lined and spotted by thunder-clouds, while distant peals

muttered round the mountains. Gilbert had thrown himself down upon the sward, and was awaiting the boiling of the tea; the damper and beef lay near him, and the quick cropping of the grass by many hungry cattle, the jingling of the bells, and the occasional low, or cough, with Johann's German song, and the shouts of drivers at a distance, hastening to reach the stopping-place before the premature darkness closed in, all formed a scene of wild freedom, becoming the bivouac of a tribe of Bedouin Arabs in the desert. Thoughts of his sister and the home circle, and of Clare Welton, stole over Gilbert, and a half despairing "When shall I see them again? — what good shall I ever do?" almost passed his lips; at that moment several of the coming drays appeared, and preceding them, some travellers with their blankets and provisions slung over their shoulders. The sight of the crackling fire drew them to Gilbert's side, with a frank "Good evening, mate; can I boil my pot at your fire?" Hospitality is a proverbial Australian virtue, and the honours of the encampment were duly done.

The new comers were equipped for the diggings; both were fine men, in the prime of life; one about thirty, the other nearly forty years of age.

"Fancy, Bain, what our friends at home would think if they saw us now," remarked the younger, steadying the quart pot of water amongst the fire-brands, and guarding his eyes with the other hand from the smoke.

"I have no friends to think about me, and where do you call 'at home?'" demanded the other, an almost fierce expression springing up in his deep grey eyes.

"Britain, of course — the old country. You're not going to deny that, surely?"

"No, never." The emphasis was sufficiently strong to satisfy his patriotic companion of Bain's loyalty to the fatherland, and he began to complain of the muddy water, in which about forty thirsty oxen trampling and splashing had not tended to improve.

"You grow fastidious, Bunyip," retorted Bain. This apocryphal appellation had been bestowed upon Phillip Ducie from his having a tendency to the marvellous, and he brushed back his long light moustache, the better to emit a hearty laugh.

The language and manners of the wanderers had acquainted Gilbert with their belonging to a higher class than their dress and position indicated, and he broke out in a Latin aphorism, one of the stray school lessons not yet forgotten. Bain turned quickly, and pursued the quotation.

"Classic ground," cried the Bunyip, in mirthful mockery: "a touchstone we do not often meet with, Bain. Well, friend, you, like us, are a sort of prince *incog.*, as the romance hath it."

"No, not a prince — a native." All joined in the gay laugh.

What a strange trio they were! — travel-worn, rough, unshaven:

stirring their pannikins of tea with bits of twigs picked up from the turf, and dividing their damper with large horn-handled clasp-knives. Johann joined them, and several bullock drivers, and they became again a part of "the people," smoking short black pipes, and discussing beef and diggers' luck with the others; but when one after the other gave unmistakeable tokens of oblivion in heavy nasal discord, Bain turned to Gilbert, inquiring in French if he was disposed for conversation.

"Yes, but not in French; that's a stroke beyond me."

"Then we will withdraw a little further from the *canaille*."

"They are asleep."

" 'Stone walls have ears.' — There, under that tree let us seat ourselves; we do not need the warmth of the fire, and the lightning is a more congenial torch to me."

"As you will." They removed to the spot indicated.

"Are you on your way to the gold-fields?" abruptly demanded the stranger.

"After I get the dray up."

"We are bound for Ophir. Will you throw in your lot with us. Our party is rather small — only Mr. Ducie and myself."

"Both highly respectable gentlemen," put in the Bunyip.

"Bah! who will decide in what the qualifications of a highly respectable gentleman consist? — both working hands — that is more to the purpose."

"I am by myself."

"So I conclude — one who has quarrelled with fortune, or fortune with you — widely different sources flowing into the same stream."

"Yes — a fortune-seeker, with all my wealth in a size that will go in my pocket and that blue cotton handkerchief on the dray."

"None the worse friend. Ducie and I met by chance on the Barwan; volunteered our services to join a party about to push out and take up a new squattage; had some brushes with the blacks — lost our leader by the effect of a spear wound; self had to take his official place, and, after a year's service as assistants to his brother and heir, wearied of loafing, and started on a pedestrian tour, which ultimately brought us here. Antecedents are, of course, irrelevant to the due signing and sealing of the trifold partnership contemplated."

The explanation satisfied Gilbert, and elicited one equally vague.

"We will proceed to the Ophir at once, and you will join us as soon as possible."

"Yes. May not I have a difficulty in finding you?"

"Well thought of." He mused; then unwinding a red scarf from his waist, said, "I will tie this to a poll above our tent roof; that will be your land-mark." He extended his hand, and grasped the young man's firmly; then Mr. Ducie did the same, and they returned to the fire — Gilbert and

the Bunyip to sleep, the other to bury his face in his hands, and think. The early part of his life — he never, however distantly, alluded to it — had left lines and writings on his handsome features; torrid suns had browned his skin, and fatigues, hardships, and, perhaps, mental disquiet, were mingling silver threads through his black locks: the man had evidently a wild, romantic, and even dark history hanging to him, but it was buried in unbroken reserve; for none was the veil lifted, or the key of the blue chamber turned.

Mr. Ducie was simply one who had emigrated to Australia in search of fortune; had wandered through her solitudes, grown skilful in her bush lore, and, after some ten years, finding no tangible results, was about to try her golden resources; talkative, open, and prone to exaggerate, Gilbert was soon in possession of his history, and relationships, from “my uncle the Bishop” to “my great-grandmother the Lady Mary,” together with his own adventures, garnished by sundry hair-breadth escapes and “moving accidents by flood and field,” which suggested the Thousand and One Nights.

Though all appeared fair and promising, Gilbert was far from happy; — “he only is truly happy who is at peace with himself and his God;” and the young man was neither. Thoughtless hilarity might conceal, but could not remove, that sting which unfulfilled duties and disregarded claims of Heaven implant; and he yearned for right, as thousands do, and yet followed evil: shrinking from probing the chronic wound — drowning reflection in tumultuous exertion or pleasure, till the grave opens her cold pale lips to receive him, while Revelation and nature join in the cry so finely breathed by Mackay, when he

“Behold the heavenly light, and climb!  
Look up, O tenant of the cell,  
Where man, the prisoner, must dwell!  
To every dungeon comes a ray  
Of God's interminable day.  
On every heart a sunbeam falls,  
To cheer its lonely prison walls.  
The ray is *Truth*. Oh soul! aspire  
To bask in its celestial fire;  
So shalt thou quit the glooms of clay,  
So shalt thou flourish into day.”

The muttering thunder drew near, and broke out in long, low peals; huge rain-drops fell, and the sleepers started to their feet, and hurriedly sought the shelter afforded beneath the drays; the cattle withdrew to some neighbouring clusters of trees; the oppressive heat of the autumnal day closed in one of those tropical rains which cause such unlooked-for

floods, and suddenly change the face of the country, by connecting muddy pools, and turning them into rivers.

## Chapter XIII.

“There are hearts that still through all the past,  
Unchanging have loved me well;  
There are eyes whose tears were streaming fast,  
When I bade my home farewell.”

The only neighbour which the residents of Aloe Hill had in station above the small market gardeners and fishermen, was a builder and his family.

Mr. Eveleigh was a man who, in common parlance, had “carved out his own fortune:” a wide spread class in Australia.

“I had a sensible father,” he used to say, “and he gave me a trade; my mother thought she saw something remarkable about me, and worked hard, poor woman, to send me to a good school: both did the very best thing for me. We cannot tell what lies before any child.”

Sensible, upright, and hard-working, he pushed out into the world, and emigrated, with a wife and young family. 'Twas not enough to be a carpenter, when every day saw some new building commenced; he was intelligent and practical, and soon added a neat plate to the door of his residence, with “Eveleigh, *Builder*,” upon it. He watched his opportunity; did a bit of land come into the market cheap, he bought it — never mind how remote was the locality; a few years, and it was in the suburbs. Now he was no longer the inmate of a dull damp house, fronted by a timber-yard, but he had built that pretty cottage where Miss Dell and Rachel found them, where they returned Mrs. Eveleigh's call, and he drove a noble chesnut cob and well-kept gig, and was now a large contractor; but prosperity had not changed the man: there was the same kind, upright heart, gleaming out of the small, smiling brown eyes; outwardly, the paper cap and rough attire had vanished, and given place to a suit of comfort and gentility; the comely stout figure, and the firm grasp he gave the hand, carried an assurance of kindness and strength; and Mr. Eveleigh was a man not only respected in the city, but wherever he was known. Wealth had increased; his sons had gone out into the world to fill respectable situations; but he had not forgotten his Maker, and he was walking with his God and *His* blessing was upon him. With a gentle propriety at all times, Mrs. Eveleigh had been able to rise with her husband's circumstances, but her whole time was engrossed with her

house and family.

Mr. Eveleigh had offered the inmates of Aloe Hill a seat in his gig whenever they wished to go to town, and Rachel soon availed herself of his offer. She knew some few persons in Sydney, but though she called on them, it was not on their account that she took the excursion, but to institute a search for Gilbert. By dint of inquiry she found the way to Messrs. Ralph and Brett's warehouse, and was admitted to the clerks' office: it was a particularly busy day; clerks were writing with unwonted rapidity, or passing about from desk to desk, with papers in their hands; there were captains, and shippers, and importers, hurrying into the private office, or waiting to be admitted. Rachel paused at the door bewildered, till an elderly clerk advanced and inquired her business.

"Mr. Ralph is engaged at present, Miss; but as soon as that gentleman comes out, if you will go in, you can see him." Rachel bowed and felt very desolate. It was some time before she glided in at the partly open door, conscious of provoking a stare of surprise from the gentleman just quitting Mr. Ralph's presence; she began to falter an apology, for the agent's countenance looked business-worn and stern; he was expecting the revelation of a collecting card, and deciding the sum he should subscribe, and therefore, after requesting her to sit down, he was startled by the next sentence: —

"My name is Calder, Sir; I am the sister of Gilbert Calder."

Mr. Arney's description of Rachel was still fresh in his mind, and her presence did not dispel the fair image he had painted; it was with assumed sternness that he returned —

"I wait your pleasure, Ma'am."

A kind word would have opened the flood-gate of tears; severity raised her nerve, and she grew calmer, and expressed her regret for his departure.

"Do not mention it; *you* had nothing to do with that, of course. Proceed."

"I am ignorant, Sir, of his place of abode; I heard but once from him after he left Cowanda. Mr. Arney wrote to my grandfather, informing him how generously you had forgiven my brother: we do, indeed, feel grateful for your kindness. Perhaps — I was in hopes you might know something of his probable destination after he left you."

"Unfortunately, I do not. You shall have the note he wrote to me — a very improper note indeed." It was folded and endorsed with all due business precision, but threw no light upon the mystery.

"There was one of my clerks very intimate with your brother; I will call him, and you will excuse me, my time is so fully occupied." And very politely, he handed her over to George Welton, with the mental comment — "A very handsome, dignified young woman." That dignity which was but the cover for a bleeding heart gave way, when the clerk

spoke fondly and warmly of the lost one; but he was as ignorant as herself of the direction of his flight, and, like Mr. Ralph, told her that his name had appeared as passenger to California.

“You may depend upon my making every exertion to serve you, Miss Calder. I will begin a strict search for poor Gilbert. If you wish to see me, and could make it convenient to call on my sister at such hours as I am at home, it might be more pleasant than coming here among all these fellows.”

“Welton, who was that fine girl? Welton, who was the pretty creature? — what eyes!” Such were the inquiries which assailed his return to the desk. “Calder’s sister,” was all that they could learn, and pens began their rapid movements again.

From the place where Hiram had seen the teams, Rachel concluded that their destination was the Lachlan district, and she turned her attention to find who had stations in that locality. Welton had suggested two merchants who had property there, and to their counting-houses she now repaired: the first she called on was absent; the other had no drays down lately, but knew A — — had a run up there, and that his teams had been down lately; but it was such a chance if he should know anything of the bullock-drivers, who had, no doubt, been hired from a Registry Office, or off the ships, and he pouted out his lips and rubbed his chin in a quick musing manner.

“And the young man? A cousin, perhaps.”

“My brother, Sir.”

“Oh! I beg pardon — very distressing. Gone to the diggings in all probabilities — had a clerk go up there last spring, but he soon came back again — out at the elbows. Ha! ha!”

Weary in heart as in step, the sister pursued her way; Mr. A — — was equally polite and suggestive, but the same drivers who had brought down the teams returned with them, and he advised an advertisement. Rachel could not explain her position: her grandfather had commanded her to consider Gilbert as dead, and seek no communication with him; but this was impossible — she loved him intensely, and, with much of the feelings of a mother for a dear wayward child, she felt it a sacred duty to watch over and cherish him — a duty which none might set aside or replace.

The day had been fatiguing and wounding to her spirit to a great degree; every nerve quiverd, and she found it difficult to reply to the cheerful conversation of the builder as they drove home.

Rachel had informed her aunt of her intention to seek for Gilbert, but the good lady was so horror-struck at the idea of rebelling against the Captain’s orders, that for the future she was necessitated to pursue her way alone. Aunt Nancy was surprised that she went so often to town, but concluded that she was dull. “It’s very natural, very natural, poor

darling," she said in her kind-heartedness.

Captain Dell was an altered man: his energy was failing; he was more disposed to sit reading in the verandah than to see after the little property, and Rachel first went to carry orders, and then to superintend their fulfilment; the orchard was under culture, and the fences repair; Rachel rather felt than saw the change; to her aunt it was not apparent, for he looked well, and she was not a keen observer; but he was much thinner, and his hair had become very white. Still he never complained.

There was a neighbourly feud, or a feud among neighbours, always raging around Aloe Hill: straying pigs, cattle, and turkeys committed aggressions, and were received with stones, much to their detriment. This petty warfare had extended among the orchard farms, and, as Aloe Hill had been regarded as general property, a species of "back run" for their mutual convenience, its being occupied was evidently an infringement of the "rights of the people," and to be resented accordingly; a brisk attack therefore was commenced, and now it was that Rachel knew her grandfather was failing, for he rather shrank from than opposed these acts of invasion; she saw that his spirit was weakened, and she trembled at the inroads a grief, borne with such outward unconcern, must be making.

Neither George Welton's nor Rachel's exertions were successful in tracing the fugitive. The former had connected Blackmore with his sudden departure, but he had as mysteriously disappeared; and he communicated to Rachel his suspicions that they were together.

"I trust not," she returned.

"I must confess I took a dislike to that man: there is a dark look about him, like underhand villainy."

"It is so likely that Gilbert should accompany Mr. Blackmore, being accustomed to him; and their destination in that case would certainly be the interior."

"Could we not advertise for Blackmore in a manner that would not appear to emanate from your family. If we knew where he was, and Gilbert is with him, I could try and get a holiday, and run up and persuade him to come down; or you could write to him.

"What should I do without you?" Welton's eyes brightened at the enthusiasm which prompted her reply.

"Then I will prepare bait for our fish, and set it immediately."

"Do. — How kind a friend you are to my poor brother! I trust we may find him, and you be rewarded by seeing him treading the path of duty."

The young man turned away with a glowing cheek, which escaped Rachel's notice. She was not often carried away by feeling, but she had grown to treat the Weltons with confidence and friendship: they shared in all her plans and efforts; they knew of the weary walks she took; the strangers she visited in her fruitless search; and they sympathised in her

disappointments. When she returned home with a drooping eyelid and feverish cheek, Aunt Nancy said she did believe the place disagreed with the child, for she was unlike herself; and then she laughed an assurance that she was quite well, only a little tired. Captain Dell used sometimes to stroke back her rich hair from her brow, and look into her eyes; and those scrutinizing looks were the harder to bear, for — though she could not concur in the sentence he had pronounced on Gilbert, and believed it a sacred duty to prove his innocence, to do which his presence appeared essential — the thought that she was opposing a being she so truly loved and respected, caused her acute distress.

Rachel Calder had been a general pet and treasure at Montobello — lovely, cheerful, and clever; everyone cherished her, and warded aside trouble; with earth smiling on her, she had centred her strong affection upon what appeared all-sufficient for her happiness, and but dimly felt the power of religion. The glories of God in nature — the benevolence and love of the work of redemption — the purity of the Gospel code of morals — had fascinated her imagination and moved her affections, and led her to desire to lead a Christian life; but now the time was come when friends failed, or looked to her to do and to suffer — when she had to judge of the right or wrong of the course she pursued; and now the fulness of religion expanded before her — not the poetry, but reality of the Christian's hope; she recalled many things that Mr. Osman had said to her, and wished that he was there. “We should soon find Gilbert, if he were,” she concluded, with a satisfaction in his strength and abilities.

## Chapter XIV.

“Tis gold, 'tis gold! The craggy steeps,  
The torrent, tumbling down  
The wild ravine — the shatter'd heaps  
Around in fragments thrown —  
The pathless plain, whose verdant sod,  
Alone, the naked savage trod,  
With golden seeds are sown.”

— W. F.

THE sun was rising, casting from heaven to earth a flood of light, like the smile of Hope through the portals of Mercy; the heavy fogs rolled back, and hung awhile above the high tops of the basaltic hills, and then grandly sailed away to curtain for a brief space the Conobalas mountains. The encampment of diggers, lately hushed in sleep, already gave signs of returning animation; little columns of smoke rose before the tents, and men's voices and the barking of dogs grew from occasional to a full chorus.

High hills closed in abruptly upon the bed of the creek; the greater part of the diggers were at some distance, and while the sun illumined them, one lonely tent was still shadowed, as it rested in the bosom of the hills. Canvas had been spread over three poles, united at the top; the addition of a scarlet blanket on the weather side gave warmth to the colouring; here also there were signs of activity: the black kettle stood upon the few branches piled up, and recently ignited; the shovels and picks, the cradle and dishes, lay round; and, while one man held a frying-pan above the flame, another at the water's edge laved his face. Just then a loud, clear whistle sounded upon the heights above, and by a devious and steep descent the signalizer reached them.

“What luck, Bain?” said the cook.

“But little, St. Just;” and the prospector displayed a few specks of gold, as he flung his shovel and dish on the ground. Ducie joined them, glowing with his recent ablution, and with his hair set on end in a manner that imparted a fierce air to his whisker-fringed countenance.

“I grow weary of this,” abruptly remarked Gilbert, as they sat round the frying-pan and kettle, which served in the double capacities of dish and

urn.

“You have small perseverance, friend. This life suits me — free, wild, picturesque; with sufficient excitement to prevent the mind away from the world, the hollow world of shows and pretences, where your dear friends are your dearer enemies, and, from young to old, all is self, self — ‘let *me* prosper, *you* may go to ruin.’ ”

“We know your opinion of the world, Bain. St. Just and I take a milder view of the subject. The fact is, life is what we make it: hatred begets hatred, and he who carries a sword will not want for wounds.”

“Bravo! we shall see the Bunyip in print yet.”

“You may sneer, but your own experience teaches you that I am right.”

“What would you have, St. Just — a change of occupation or place?”

“The latter first; perhaps, afterwards, the other. We make little here — just support ourselves. I care as little for luxuries as you do, but this is simplicity run wild; — without the change, the exercise, or pleasures of the squatter's life — grovelling for gold which we do not get.” Gilbert spoke bitterly, for his heart was ill at ease, and the loving faces, tear-wet for him, haunted him, and the frown of a disregarded God overshadowed him.

“Licensing day approaches. Happily we are so nearly related to the Helix that we can carry our house with us. I am willing to move up or down the creek — to push on to Summer Hill or the Turon — wherever it pleases you; but *not* into the thick of the miners.”

“Nor I. Shall we change, Ducie?”

“Let us consult the paper, and see how the run of luck points.”

“Agreed.”

“Agreed. — And so, Gilbert, you are craving for gold — to be rich — to buy the favour of the million! What then, boy? If you see them round your feet, is *that* homage? — Are they not worshipping the golden calf, and you as its priest? Remove out of the golden reflection, and where are the worshippers? St. Just, you are ignorant of the world, or you would despise it.”

“Despise its pretences; — but it is the work of God, and His image can be found traced upon some souls, which redeem the rest.” The home faces rose up before him, and stirred him to the heart's core.

“Bain is in one of his misanthropical moods this morning. Take no notice of him, St. Just. He may scorn wealth, but he knows its worth — but who comes here?” The discussion was interrupted by the approach of a man, leading a horse loaded by a pack, enveloped in a 'possum-skin cloak. He was an ill-looking fellow, sallow and unwashed, with one eyelid drooping from the effects of a recent blow, which still lowered in green and livid tints above his brow.

The tent was erected upon a flat rock, immediately above the water, which flowed some feet below it; and behind, the masses of trap and

quartz rock were piled in disordered ridges, half-hidden among the long grass and tangled clumps of bushes; the approach, therefore, was difficult, and the wretched old horse, a moving anatomical exhibition, struggled up to the level with apparent effort, urged on by probes from the stick his driver carried.

Suspicion, ever alive in the proximity of a gold-field, prompted the three miners to rise to their feet.

“Good morning, gentle'am.”

“Good morning — you come early; what do you want?”

The stranger eyed Bain, who had been the speaker, and then drew out his pipe and a fig of tobacco, and asked permission to light it at the fire.

“You climbed that mass of rocks, I suppose, to light a pipe,” retorted he, ironically: the bitter humour of the morning had not departed.

“No, not ‘xactly,” drawled the man, and, stepping to his quadruped companion, he removed the opossum-skin rug, revealing a cask. “Have a drop — good — real thing — stuff to put life into a man.”

“Sly grog-selling! Begone with you!” sternly responded Bain.

“Perhaps t'other gentle'am feels dry,” suggested the visitor.

“The other ‘gentle'am’ don't deal at your keg,” returned the Bunyip, while his friend recommended the man's speedy departure, or he would assist him over the rocks, and his wares after him. Thus abjured, the illicit trader applied his stick to the tanned hide of the old horse, and retraced his steps to more jovial quarters.

“A nice specimen of the race *homo*, whose virtues we were just discussing. What do you say to fraternizing with that scoundrel?”

“I have no wish to fraternize with him, Bain; but that man's crimes do not taint the whole world, nor lessen the tie which a common humanity throws about us; but I cannot argue the subject with you; I never was a good speaker.”

“It is time we were at work. St. Just, will you go for the paper?”

Gilbert complied, and started on his walk with a sorrowful heart. If the past could have been undone, he would have taken his place at Ralph and Brett's desk; but it could not. Repentance too often tarries till the drawbridge is uplifted, and the backward way severed; — we do not pause to think what our feelings will be in the future — how that act will look in retrospect.

The stir of busy life was all the more striking after the lonely, shady dell he had just left; he paused sometimes to watch the result of a cradle-full of earth being washed, or to hear the news from other parts of the creek, the valley, or Turon. At length he reached the store where the journal was sold, and before which were posted huge bills announcing that fact.

The news was not such as to induce the miners to remove: the “fields” were dull and unproductive just then, and during Gilbert's absence his

partners had discovered some ounces of gold, which inspired hopes of their being in the neighbourhood of a rich deposit, and the paper was laid aside for perusal in the evening, and shovels and picks played an active part. Evening found them in high spirits: they had made more in that one day than during the previous weeks of toil, and when the sun went down in castellated clouds of burnished gold and purple, they gathered round their fire to chat, and partake of a roughly-cooked supper.

“On the strength of this luck, mates, I think we may take on a cook,” proposed the Bunyip, stretching himself upon the scanty sod.

“Wait awhile: we are not rich enough for that yet, Ducie, unless we can find a cooking apparatus altogether self-providing, and I think such a one has not been patented yet. What a splendid evening, St. Just! Do you see how the clouds that have hung about all day roll back, as if to shed upon earth a last and brightest ray of the setting sun, like the triumph of a departing spirit, bidding adieu to earth for ever, yet casting a look of love upon it! That burnished spot shines out upon us like the very portals of a better world, and the everlasting hills lie in such sombre shade around us.” He sank into silence, with his eyes fixed upon the fading clouds, till that ashy hue so like death took the place of the warm rose tints; and then he brought from the tent his flute, and poured out rich, mellow strains — now soft, low, and tender as the voice of love — now wild and exulting as the song of triumph. His companions listened in breathless silence; it was not a strain to be pronounced pretty or fine — its praise must be wordless; and Bain had laid down his instrument some time before conversation was resumed.

Darkness gathered around, while the younger men built airy castles on that day's success, and which Bain by one cold ironical tone levelled to the ground, when suddenly a call was heard upon the hill-side, and, before they could respond or interrogate, a scuffling sound announced that the person had lost his footing, and was descending the dangerous masses of rock with a run. No time for rendering assistance elapsed before the intruder rolled among them, striking Gilbert's shoulder with a fowling-piece, and narrowly escaping being shot by Ducie's revolver, he being under the impression that it was an attack made by robbers.

“Hold, hold! would you murder me?” shouted the invader, struggling to his feet as the Bunyip's bullets rattled against the rock behind him, scattering splinters of granite among them.

“Who are you?” demanded Bain, who never lost presence of mind, but, on the contrary, appeared in his natural element in danger.

“A naturalist. What became of my case and gun? How came you to set yourselves down in this den, decoying unwary people by your fire-light? It's a wonder I had not broken every bone.” And he passed his hands over his limbs, to ascertain their condition.

“You have reason to rejoice that I did not hit you,” remarked Ducie.

“And accept my thanks for the bruised shoulder you gave me, by way of greeting,” added Gilbert.

The stranger expressed his regret, and as he had no appearance of being a bandit, and was one to three, with a bent fowling-piece, and they well armed, they did not hesitate to offer him a resting-place and some refreshment, which was as cordially accepted.

“Poverty makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows — and gold also, apparently,” he said, cheerfully, as he partook of their hospitality. “Though your encampment nearly proved fatal to me, with your permission, I will relate to you my history, which will, I hope, prove that I am not worthy of this gentleman's bullets.”

“By all means: we have no books here; an oral biography will be quite a treat,” returned Ducie.

“If it were composed of striking incidents, but mine is not. I was apprenticed to a gunsmith, and, by that means, became acquainted with fire-arms; but my natural taste led me to study. My position had been selected by an old aunt, for I was an orphan, and the poor old woman had a great horror of brats of boys; and when, at rare intervals, I did visit her, I played such pranks that her aversion was strengthened; but, however, I was apprenticed, poorly clothed, and allowed sixpence a quarter pocket-money. I became possessed of an old flute, and after driving every person half-distracted in practising, I learnt to play rather well, and used to steal out of an evening to serenade certain windows, from which I had found silver showers descended; by this means I was enabled to purchase books, and devoted my brief leisure to the study of the sciences relating to natural objects. Through various means I became known to gentlemen of similar tastes; was admitted to museums and collections, and learnt to cure and set up skins; and finally, I was employed by several amateur collectors to visit Australia and the Islands, and get specimens, which I remit to them. All that I have at present is in that tin case there, which had so narrow an escape of plunging into the creek, where I should certainly have followed it, for it contains a *new* beetle, one, I am sure, is yet unnamed, and which I intend for Lord — — .”

“And may I inquire if it is a specimen of that biped vulgarly-called man, which you were purposing to transfix on the gold-fields?”

“Why no, Mr. Bain, not exactly; though there are some queer specimens; but as I keep a journal of my proceedings, which I hope to have published, I wished to gather materials for a Chapter upon the Diggings. My name is Frank Maclean.”

A warm invitation to share their tent, &c., during his stay at Ophir, was given, and the Collector was thenceforth added to the party, occasionally working with great zeal in return for his lodgings; at others, making pedestrian tours of observation through that and neighbouring “fields.”

The claim still continued to yield a remunerating, if not rich return for

the labour bestowed upon it, and all thoughts of removing were, for the present, abandoned, when one of those sudden disasters which show us that nothing sublunary is certain, occurred.

A day of violent showers, driven by gusts of wind, closed in early, more so to the few, who, like Gilbert and his friends, had selected the isolation of the mountain gorges, for the heights hid the occasional gleam of sun, which looked out with rueful face between floods of tears, and the vapours were driven by the wind into these recesses among the hills. Every thing was comfortless — the fire would not burn; tea, in consequence, could not be boiled; the tent was small, and lumbered with such things as were liable to injury, and the howling wind, finding its way beneath the canvas, extinguished the lamp. Owing to the soporific influence of a tobacco-pipe, or to the gloom cast by the state of the elements, conversation flagged, and one after another resigned themselves to sleep. Some time after, Gilbert was awoke by the roaring of waters — the truth broke upon him: the creek had risen — he rushed to the opening in the tent — the rain had abated; the clouds hung round the mountains, and faintly a gleam of moon-light fell through them, and glittered on a wall of water rushing down the precipitous bed of the creek.

“Up, up;” he shrieked, “the flood is upon us!”

No second bidding was needed; they were in a moment upon their feet; no time remained for deliberation, or to save aught of their property: by a common instinct they sprang to the height behind them and began the ascent. Onward the water came, wearing a voice of icy warning to the diggers; and by the time the fugitives had reached a level far beyond flood-mark, they were homeless and destitute of all but what they carried about them — a few pounds, and a digger's well worn suit each. The long wet grass had thoroughly saturated them, and they cowered there till morning's light revealed their losses.

“All is gone!” remarked Bain calmly. The Bunyip burst into a reckless laugh. Gilbert felt that while this affliction might happen to any one, to him it was another thorn in the tortuous path of wrong.

“I should not have minded the other things, only the new beetle,” was all the Collector said, with a very white face.

“We are all alike, Mac: near kin to beggars; but it's the last of Ophir I will see; I start from here to-day, ‘follow who lists.’ ”

“Where to?”

“Victoria — Mount Alexander, probably.”

“Lead on, Bain,” was the united response of his partners.

“I will accompany you,” said Maclean; and once more the party commenced a weary journey.

## Chapter XV.

“Urged by a restless longing, the hunger and thirst of the spirit,  
She would commence again her endless search and endeavour.” —

Longfellow.

Advancing months made little change in the Ranges or its owner, excepting that the buildings on the one were emulating the tower of Pisa more closely, and the other wore an added air of silently-borne anxiety; or, rather, the wounds received in grappling with adversity.

He mixed so little with his neighbours that it was a rarity to see him seated at one of their tables; he had come, by invitation, to Mr. Heslop's farm, Tolwong; the gentlemen were now lunching.

“And you will ride over with me, Mr. Osman, to the meeting.”

“Certainly, Sir; though the removal of the Pound to Wangarriling from Tomiarah will be an inconvenience to me, should I require to impound straying stock.”

“By no means, Sir; by taking the back road the distance will be lessened, and as we are trying to get the Court-house removed to Wangarriling, that will be *the* township, which will add seventy per cent. to the value of land in that district.” Mr. Heslop had the convenient art of shifting his position to suit the prejudices or interests of his hearers. Leigh Osman had vested interests which must be consulted, and all the projects of the gentleman's fertile brain were swayed to meet those interests. He had not invited the young man from any friendly feeling, but because he feared him. Osman did not often mingle in such movements; he was not found on Testimonial Committees, or meetings convened to consider this or that question; but when he did appear, he had a quiet way of giving utterance to a stubborn fact or two, and “facts are solid as the pyramids,” which the opponent party found very hard to surmount, or set aside; besides, he was the best educated, deepest read, and most profound thinker in the locality; and so sternly just, that he could not be made to swerve from the direct course of integrity by any means they could devise.

Mr. Heslop was a public-spirited man — shrewd, fearless, and

ambitious. The present case, the altering of a Pound and petitioning Government, were only some of the schemes constantly agitating his busy brain. He had been the main mover in establishing a school some years before; had guaranteed a stipend for a minister, and assisted to collect; been one of the deputies to welcome the Catholic Priest; was a man of property, having, besides estates, a share in a saw and flour mills, and owned a public-house there, leased to a confirmed drunkard, and yet had not hesitated to take the chair at a temperance meeting, a position he was sure to occupy on any public occasion; and was equally sure to make a long illiterate speech, for Mr. Heslop's educational acquirements were scanty. Without committing himself to any definite opinion, he had a problematical way of asserting statements, which left it open to doubt whether he stated a fact, or inquired if such were the ideas of his audience.

By the time lunch was finished, the horses were at the door, and the gentlemen rode together to the place of meeting; they found a rather large assembly in and around the Court-house, to which place they had been convened; and there was a universal touching of hats and bowing, as the new-comers rode up; and the Master of Tolwong alighted and bustled about, shaking hands, while Osman quietly walked through the crowd, followed by a small farmer, who had evidently been sent by a group of anxious confabulators to ascertain Leigh's opinion.

"Hear both sides of the question, Wright, before you second any movements — be quite sure of what you are agreeing to."

"What does he say?" asked the confabulators, as young Wright returned; he explained; a murmur of "It's just like him: he is such an upright, down-spoken gentleman," ran round.

After many long confused speeches, which puzzled every one, and contained so many personal allusions that the temper of the assembly waxed warm, the affair appeared only hopelessly confused. Mr. Heslop had had to confute statements and offer explanations so often, that he was purple in the face; when Leigh Osman rose, and, in an even calm voice, uttered his opinion, which, to the general surprise, was in favour of the proposed alterations, for which he gave uncontrovertible reasons, and he sat down amidst the cheers of the one party, and the disapprobation of the other.

Mr. Heslop was delighted, for he had feared that Leigh would have considered his private, before public interest, and he would have rushed forward to shake hands, had it not been advisable to refrain; and in the midst of a stormy debate upon matters entirely irrelevant to the cause of the meeting, he found the place lately occupied by the Master of the Ranges empty. Could he have followed him, he would have found his mind engaged with subjects foreign to popular praise or censure.

Often since Osman's visit to Captain Dell had that happy fortnight

reverted to his mind; and he dwelt upon the remembrance of the inquiring mind and warm affections he would so gladly have devoted himself to cultivate, direct, and cheer through life. Stern poverty, in a grim garb, stood ever by his side, sealing his lips, and rousing his inflexible honour to oppose every wish to seek a returning love. To the world, he had large properties; to himself, he stood in less real ownership than a hired servant; he had all the labour and care, and none of the pay. To meet the interest as it became due, demanded exertions and toil which warned him not to draw another into the same seething ocean of vexation. He must see the bright dream fade away, and the rich tints fade on the summer's sky of hope. Leigh Osman was a man of warm susceptibilities, and affections deep to passion, and the struggle was severe and often renewed.

The sun had set, and round the narrow track which led him homewards darkness already gathered; the birds were chirping sleepily as they sought their roosts, and the laughing-jackass shouted a wild chorus far in the wooded recesses; the scenery surrounding the Ranges was particularly romantic: a succession of bold lines of hills, so lofty as to almost come under the appellation of mountains, gave to the country an air of primeval quiet and isolation — the farms were so scattered, and the inhabitants, in consequence, so few; streams gushed between rocks, where the wallabi found fastnesses, and the black cockatoo shrieked in the gullies.

There were occasional fine levels under cultivation, and the hills depastured flocks and herds; and, as he rode home, the ringing report of the stockman's whip reached him; large tracts, however, must always be wildernesses, from their inaccessible and barren nature: there were places where the traveller might perish of thirst, within hearing of running water, murmuring far below him between perpendicular rocks. Amidst such regions the botanist would linger, and pronounce it a second Eden.

A few days later the partisans of Mr. Heslop visited Leigh, making collections for a testimonial to that gentleman. "He's such a public-spirited man!" they all chorussed.

"What are we bearing testimony to Mr. Heslop for? — what public service is this little piece of plate you mention to commemorate?"

"Well, Sir, he's done a deal of good in the quarter," suggested one.

"A deal of good," echoed another.

"He's the poor man's friend," added a third, with every symptom of belonging to the befriended class.

"You should put him into the Council," remarked Osman, with a quiet smile they did not fathom.

"Well, Sir, that has been thought of. Next 'lection we hope he will come forward."

"What are his qualifications?"

This was a question requiring more consideration than the deputies had time to bestow, so they repeated their former assertion, and went on their way.

“Why did you give ten pounds to Mr. Heslop's testimonial fund, Banister?” inquired Osman of a neighbour, a few days afterwards.

“Well, they came to me, and he's a neighbour of mine, you know, and would expect it.”

“So, world, are these thy honours?” mentally commented Leigh.

“You did not give much.”

“No.”

Mr. Banister offered no remark, for the negative was uttered in such a calm tone that he felt that his companion had potent reasons; he could not think he was mean, because he knew of so many generous actions which he had performed, and even then he was returning from an empty cottage he had offered as a temporary shelter to a homeless emigrant family out of employ; but he did not know that the Master of the Ranges spent an hour or two every evening beside the sick bed of one of his labourers — a lad who had met with a severe accident, which threatened to cripple him for life; and that the tedium of his protracted suffering was lightened by that hour's reading and conversation, and that the weary lad was thence supplied with thought and amusement for the intervening time. Incidents of this nature did not reach the public ear, for they were not intended for it; they were the promptings of a pious and benevolent spirit, which needed no praise.

While Leigh Osman was thus struggling with adversity, and standing up against what he considered absurd or unjust, winter had advanced, and Aloe Hill presented in many respects a very different aspect. The orchard trees, excepting the oranges, were leafless. Mr. Eveleigh, finding there was no one but Rachel to make any exertions, bargained for her with a neighbouring orchard proprietor to purchase the fruit crop, and she might be seen often in the bleak wind, with a shawl wrapped round her, counting and superintending the packing of baskets of fruit. Joseph Tebbut was rather an oddity — talkative, very deaf, and redolent of tobacco; it was a relief to Rachel when his place was supplied by young Joe, who rarely spoke, and then only in monosyllables; or Mrs. Tebbut, who appeared always engaged in profound calculations, or whose calculating powers were so deficient that the marketing of one day formed an arithmetical problem which she had not worked out before a new one was added.

Those chill, damp months in the minor's ruined house were telling upon the fine old Captain, and Rachel knew it; the dread knowledge lay like an iron weight upon her heart, only the more heavy because vacillating with hope. Ever, as he moved about, her eyes followed him; sometimes, when she would have wandered down to the seat on the dead

mangrove, by the inlet, and gained fresh physical strength while she forgot her anxieties, the recollection that she would soon see him no more bound her to his side, and the bonnet was hung up again, and she took her station near him with her work — busy when he looked up, but when his eyes were fixed upon his book or paper, hers riveted their gaze upon him, as if the long look could supply a life-time. There was no one to whom she could breathe the subject of these thoughts, till one day, as she accompanied Mary Eveleigh to her father's gate, the young visitor remarked —

“Your grandfather does not look well.” They had paused to say good evening; tears trembled in Rachel's eyes.

“You have no reason — ” Mary began in some alarm.

“He is sinking fast,” she returned, with a pause between every word, and speaking with a great effort.

“I hope not.”

“Hope! Ah! Mary, how much that says — how much it confesses of our own weakness! You don't know what it is to stand beside those we love, and have nothing but our *hope* — no power to check their course.” For a few moments her courage failed, and she wept; then returned the recollection of God's infinite love and pity.

“He will — He will do all things best. ‘Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him,’ ” she repeated, as she returned the pressure of her friend's hand, as she walked home, and often, when her spirits sank before some fresh token of his failing strength. Last week he had walked a long distance; this, he rested for an hour after taking a stroll to Mr. Eveleigh's; yesterday he was anxious for the return of the messenger with the post; to-day, rather disposed to sleep in his arm-chair. These were trifles unnoticed by any but Rachel; Aunt Nancy had not an idea of it: she had never known her father to be ill, and her niece would not interrupt her ignorant peace by planting such heavy forebodings as oppressed herself. Meanwhile, her visits to town continued. All George Welton's efforts and her own had failed to discover Gilbert's retreat, and she began to despair, and believe that Hiram's information was incorrect, and her brother really absent from the colony.

“Do not be discouraged, Miss Calder: we will yet find him,” said Clare Welton one day, throwing a caressing arm round the young girl's neck. “I feel that we shall.”

Rachel looked up. There was a light like inspiration in the fine pale features, and it filled her with hope. She had not seen Clare or her brother for some time — her woman's perceptions warned her not; but her own resources had failed, and she again sought them to take counsel with Mr. Welton. She had not revealed to them the crime with which Gilbert stood accused; they knew only of his absence.

Very fatigued, and weary in spirit as well as body, Rachel reached the timber-yard belonging to the builder, and approached his office, a little room just within the gates; the door was locked, and she went down the yard to the foreman's cottage, where she was known.

“But lauk, Miss, he's gone! he said to my master, ‘the young lady will stay in town to-night, I expect, as she has not come;’ — that's what he said.” So spoke the foreman's wife.

Rachel's fortitude nearly gave way. She had on more than one occasion yielded to the persuasions of acquaintances to spend the evening with them, and that day she had not reached the timber-yard till an hour long past her usual time. She glanced round upon the piles of hardwood and kauri pine, the huge square trunks of cedar trees, and the stacks of Hobart Town palings; and for a moment her brave spirit fainted.

“And ye must go out to-night?” interrogated the woman.

“Yes, I must,” she said, in a low tone, that conveyed to her hearer little idea of the aching heart from whence it sprung. The absent brother, the dying grandfather, stood before her! to the other they were unknown; and she went on her way, “for the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith;” and even before she passed beneath the arch above the gates, she caught the woman's gay laugh at some deed of prowess performed by “baby.”

It was the day on which the gardeners brought their produce to market, and Rachel hoped to find some of the Tebbut family not yet returned, and to be allowed a seat in their cart; but where should she seek them? She walked to the market, and to the court where there were carts unloading or receiving their empty boxes and baskets, and women and men carrying the produce from thence to the market stalls; the air was fragrant with the aroma of fruit, and the scene looked worthy the pencil of Gabriel Metzu. Willow coops of poultry added life to the groups, and the cries of hens and geese, the quacking of ducks and clamour of turkeys, increased the Babel of tongues. Rachel ventured in among them, and inquired for Mr. Tebbut or his family.

“Don'ow,” was the brief response.

“She wor here awhile back, hersel',” added another; and then a round red face was lifted from the contemplation of a bushel-basket of fruit, and a male voice shouted —

“Who's asking arter Mother Tebbut?” Several fingers directed his attention to the inquirer. “She is just gone down the street; if you make haste, you'll catch her.”

Rachel stayed to hear no more, uttered a hasty “thank you,” and darted away. Mrs. Tebbut was discernible in the far distance — her head carried erect, her dress scorning the rotund dimensions of modern ladies', and a huge bow of crushed ribbon nodding from the summit of her black bonnet. Rachel lost no time in the chase; neither did Mrs. Tebbut; and the

former gained her side speechless from want of breath.

“You are tired,” remarked she, and Rachel nodded. When she could make her request known, Mrs. Tebbut readily assented, and bade her follow her. They left George-street, and, following one running to the wharfs, stopped before a small dusty shop, containing a miscellaneous assortment of old iron and tin ware; the idea of a customer entering appeared never to suggest itself; every thing seemed to have settled down among the dust into a Rip Van Wynkle sleep, and the old man behind the counter had equally a composed air; he wore a red cap, pushed on one side of the masses of grizzly hair, and a full black beard concealed much of the lower part of his face.

“The cart's in the yard — you set down here,” said Mrs. Tebbut, piloting Rachel into the dusty shop. “Here, Prosper, this is our new neighbour.”

The introduction seemed sufficient: the old iron dealer bowed with the courtesy of a Frenchman, bade her take the chair which he handed, and darted away, returning before long with one of his best trays, which he had dragged from the shelf in his flight, loaded with a tea-service of rather peculiar description — a quaint plated teapot, a china sugar-bowl, without either handle, a homely cup, and a willow-pattern plate, piled with hot buttered toast; all which treasures were spread before Rachel.

“If you would take something — you are so tired — quite pale and faint,” he said, in a foreign tone, though correct pronunciation.

Rachel had too much native feeling not to understand that such kindly hearts are best rewarded in the acceptance of their gifts, and she did justice to the contents of the tea-service, and lighted up Prosper's little black eyes with satisfaction.

Mrs. Tebbut had conceived the idea that her young neighbour's frequent visits to Sydney were occasioned by her giving lessons in some branches of education, and she had communicated this idea to her old friend, the iron dealer, whose sympathy for one he pictured necessarily in distress was unbounded. The refinement and kindness of Rachel's manners had created a favourable impression among her neighbours, which had been extended beyond her immediate circle. Of old, we read that when Joseph was carried into Egyptian bondage, the Lord made him find favour in the eyes of the Egyptians; and the modern wanderer may well rest his cares *there*: He will make “even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

“ ‘Trust in Him at all times: ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us,’ ” repeated Rachel to herself that evening.

“He's rough, but there an't a better man going than Prosper Hugo, though he be a foreigner,” remarked Mrs. Tebbut, as she drove homewards.

“He speaks English very correctly.”

“Bless you, he has been in the country these five-and-twenty years; he changed, you see, over from the Catholics to the Protestants, and left France as servant to some gentleman, and so worked his way out here as sailor. He's a good soul — a real good, trustworthy soul,” and Mrs. Tebbut subsided from her praise of her friend into a calculation of the day's business.

## Chapter XVI.

“Groans, as from parting life's convulsive frame,  
At times were heard upon the gale to swell;  
And, led by these, with fearful steps he came,  
Where, bath'd in blood, the helpless victim fell.”

THE proximity of the Diggings was indicated by the many persons coming and going, loaded drays, carts, and pack-horses, men on foot and on horseback — some pressing forward full of hope; some returning in despair, ruined, or struck by fatal maladies; others rejoicing in newly-acquired wealth. Amidst all this, slowly progressed the weary pedestrians whose good and bad fortunes we have followed at the Ophir. As night approached the travellers became fewer, and, after they had stayed at a low tavern to refresh themselves, their way was solitary. The travellers in either direction had appeared resolved to pass the night at the tavern, and, finding it crowded, they had gladly pursued their way.

Bain was in one of those humours when all connected with earth disgusted and wearied him, and an unsatisfied soul vainly reached after something higher — yet sought it not of Christ, but fed a strong imagination with the poetry of nature; he walked slowly beside Gilbert, now quoting the rhymed thoughts of others, now, in language at once original and rich as eastern imagery, giving utterance to his own. Gilbert was silent: the inward disquiet took with him another shape, that of gnawing remorse; — the grieving sister at home — the fair, pure Clare Welton, around whom he had wreathed so many of life's brightest garlands — beckoned him back to a life of right and usefulness; yet, struggling against their influence, he was placing a yet wider distance between them, and wringing their hearts with agony; he knew what was right: often, at Aunt Nancy's knee, he had read the Bible, and repeated the simple prayer she dictated, concluding — “Make me grow up a good and useful man, and a blessing to my friends and country, for Thy dear Son's sake.”

Bain needed no reply; he was rather uttering his thoughts aloud than communicating them to his companion, and the Bunyip and Collector were some little distance in advance, engaged in a cheerful conversation; their voices or a mirthful laugh just reached them. The even temper and patient contentment under all hardships which Frank Maclean displayed,

had made him a universal favourite.

Darkness approached, but they had resolved to reach the gold-field that night, and pressed on. Dark high trees threw a sombre shadow across the road — a shadow like that of death; presently there was the report of fire-arms, and several men, armed, and their faces covered with black handkerchiefs, rushed out upon the foremost. Bain and Gilbert sprang forward, and fired upon the assailants; there was a returning volley — a cry of agony — a scuffle; Ducie stumbled over the prostrate form of some person — foe or friend, he knew not in the darkness; and blows were dealt indiscriminately. Then there was a pause, broken by deep-drawn breaths and groans; then a sound as of a heavy body dragged into the bush.

“Who’s that? — St. Just, Ducie, Mac!” called Bain’s voice.

“All right, Bain,” responded Gilbert.

“The villains!” growled Ducie, smarting under a bullet-wound; but no word told of the Collector’s safety. “Mac!” called each; a groan replied.

“Good heavens! Mac, my boy, where are you?”

Another groan, and a sound as of some one endeavouring to rise, and then falling heavily, answered Ducie’s question. They stooped down, groping in the darkness for the evidently wounded man, and found him where at the first fire he had fallen.

“What is to be done?” demanded Gilbert. Bain knelt beside the Collector, and felt his pulse.

“Life is ebbing fast,” he said.

“Shall I return to the ‘Pick and Cradle,’ and get aid?”

“You might be murdered by the way, St. Just. Can we not carry him thither?”

“It is so dark. Poor fellow, what a groan!”

“I have no fear — I will go. Do you watch here, Bain — have your revolver loaded.”

Long the watchers looked in the direction in which the young man had started, listening absorbedly to hear if he were attacked.

The dying man’s head was pillowed on a rolled-up blanket, containing their small stock of provisions, and his hand, chill with the dew of death, was held within that of Bain; only the dying utterance of suffering broke the awful silence; a thick scud, which had risen an hour before, was sailing across the sky, and entirely obscured the light of the crescent moon. Bitterly did both miners now regret that they had not stayed at the tavern — the elder man even more than the other, for, by general though tacit consent, he had taken command; and he followed Gilbert step by step, feeling that for worlds he would not have that young life sacrificed.

“Counting the minutes” is ever a tedious occupation; how doubly so to them who dared not strike a light to ascertain the nature of their companion’s wounds, and felt his life was oozing away with the blood

which crimsoned the road-side. After awhile there sounded the galloping of horses, then shouts, and soon the party reined up, and lighted lanterns.

There was no medical man within reach. Bain had, however, in his nomadic life of adventure, acquired much surgical skill, and he, at once, pronounced the case hopeless — the glazed eye-balls wide open and staring, the livid features, told their own tale.

“Shall we move him? he could not reach the ‘Pick’ alive,”

“No; let him die without added torture,” returned Bain, with the calmness of deep emotion. And, surrounded by a circle of grave, and in some cases sincere, sympathisers, the young naturalist ended his journey and life, in a strange land, and among strangers, with earth in mourning, and the sky weeping gentle tears upon his hard couch.

After the inquest, the body was interred by the road-side, and his friends raised a pile of stones above his lonely resting-place, and carved his name upon a standing tree near.

“There is a fond heart somewhere to mourn for him,” said Bain, as he wrapped carefully in paper a faded ribbon, knotted round a lock of fine soft light hair; they had discovered it round his neck, and he preserved it in hopes of returning it some day to one who might cherish it as a memorial of love.

So inauspicious a commencement threw a gloom over their prospects, and, though they had not been plundered by their assailants, their possessions were very limited, hardly sufficient to pay the licence fee, and purchase victuals till they might hope to find gold.

## Chapter XVII.

“Nights enough in tears,  
And days in all the sickness of suspense,  
Our anxious love hath pass'd.”

WHILE the affairs of the encumbered estate which Leigh Osman had inherited became each day more burdensome, a new idea was presented to him. Mr. Heslop made him an offer to rent the Ranges, and, after mature reflection, he decided on accepting his offer: the rent would liquidate the interest, and leave him free to employ his personal exertions to dissolve the claims upon it. In a short time it was let, the stock sold, and Leigh, followed by Ben Owen, a faithful servant, who wished to share his master's fortunes, left the Ranges. The future was all uncertainty; he had no profession, no knowledge of business, beyond that acquired on his farm; no influential friends to procure him a situation, and with a mind and spirit energetic and ready to work, he found both idle. Captain Dell was the only person whose counsels he could seek: he had learnt of their change of abode, but was ignorant of the cause. Perhaps, while he believed that he held his feelings in perfect control, his naturally sensitive disposition swayed him to seek the Captain, from a desire once more to enjoy the society of his grand-daughter.

While Osman was journeying to Aloe Hill, Rachel was, in almost helplessness, prosecuting her search for Gilbert, constantly believing that she had found some clue, and as constantly disappointed; and the impression that he had really left the colony daily assumed strength, and added to the bitterness she felt in seeing her grandfather so surely, though gradually, sinking; and the more intense became her desire to lift the load from the spirit of the one, and gain a pardon for the other. A strong Christian faith supported her, and a naturally firm, brave spirit proved a powerful auxiliary.

She had more than once, since the visit described in a former chapter, journeyed home with Mrs. Tebbut, and partaken of Prosper Hugo's hospitality; she had found in the old iron dealer a rich mine of noble feeling and homely worth — a true diamond in a rough setting. Just at this time came a note from Clare Welton. “George thinks he has heard of Mr. Calder,” she wrote. “Can you come to town?”

Mr. Eveleigh had already left home, when she received the request, and

her next resource was the Tebbuts.

“But I an't coming out to-night, 'cause Joe wants to see the play,” Mrs. Tebbut said, in conclusion of an offer of a seat among her fruit-baskets.”

Captain Dell was looking very drooping that day, and Rachel hesitated to leave home, she had been so repeatedly disappointed; but hope prevailed.

“Rachel appears very fond of town; I should not have expected it;” remarked the Captain when she had departed.

“Poor darling, it's lonely here — and no wonder they wish to have her among them; she is before the Enticks' girls, with all their advantages.” And Aunt Nancy watched the receding figure of her niece with a glowing face.

“She is a good girl, God bless her,” returned the old man fervently.

Rachel, however, was doomed to encounter another disappointment. Intending to return with her neighbours in their humble conveyance in the morning, she bade her friends, the Enticks, farewell on retiring. It was very early; the clock pointed to the half-hour as Rachel consulted its open old-fashioned face, set round with gaudy flowers, a blue rose, and a pink lily.

“Half-past five. At least I shall see Sydney under a new aspect,” she mused, securing her mantle, and stepping with noiseless feet down the passage, and unlocking the door. The sun was just rising; the golden ball of St. James's Church glistened in the first rays, and then the roofs of the higher buildings caught the amber tint, and so it travelled from gable to gable, and shot in at the upper windows to awaken the sleepers; but the streets were still in shade, cool, fresh, and quiet. A group of labourers passed her now and then, with flat baskets, from which protruded saws and squares, or a paintpot or trowel in hand: then, near the tardy rising walls of the Cathedral, an old woman, with a temporary table, raised on benches, circulating large cups of coffee, and thick slices of bread-and-butter among her customers, the workmen, and a few tall boys, masons, labourers, or 'bus boys, perhaps. Not much was said; they eat and drank quietly, and then filed away, and collected in groups, sitting along the curb-stones, and waiting for six o'clock.

Rachel passed on quietly, pained by her novel and solitary position. The passengers in the streets increased; the few females that she had first seen slowly pursuing their way with a homeless air, were replaced by servants opening the shutters, or taking a little fresh air for a moment at the gateways; and then Rachel reached her destination, Prosper Hugo's Iron Store. The gates beside the little shop were open, and the old brown horse hung his melancholy head, and rested on one foot, as young Joe arranged the harness upon him, and Mrs. Tebbut was throwing the empty bushel basket into the cart.

“Why now — — ,” ejaculated she, pausing for a moment, as Rachel

approached, and Prosper emerged from the little kitchen, and a few words explained the reason of her visit.

“Room! yes, to be sure,” replied Mrs. Tebbut: “plenty of room. Joe put those baskets in one another — so.”

Joe went on hooking the chains without speaking, but presently arranged the baskets and boxes, old red-painted gincases, and even turned one on its side, and threw some bagging which had been sewed over the baskets of fruit upon it, and with an expressive point and grunt, indicated that that was her seat; and Rachel stepped up off the chair which the old man placed, and prepared for her return home. Again she had been disappointed, and the sinking form of her grandfather, and the dark uncertain future, rose up before her, and she was gratified that Joe pushed his head into a basket, and, judging from the nasal discord, slept; and Mrs. Tebbut was so occupied in driving and counting the profits of her marketing, that beyond an occasional explanatory sentence, informing the young lady that Joe had been roused before his usual hour, and that Prosper was a good old soul, though he was rough, she did not speak; so they passed out of the town, and along the dusty road, and then through the bush, and passed cottages and orchards, to the river; and Rachel alighted and went on her way with a weary heart, but brave countenance.

“Back so early, dear! What did Mrs. Entick say to your leaving her house before breakfast?” was Aunt Nancy's salutation, as she pressed a kiss upon the glowing cheek.

“They had not risen, Aunt; but I wished them good-bye in the evening.”

“Why did you not stay in town, and come out with Mr. Eveleigh? These Tebbuts are decent people, but I don't like your riding in a fruit-cart, child; it's very unfit for you.”

“I walked up the town, Aunt.”

“Well, but dear, I don't like it; you might have stayed.”

“I wanted to be at home,” was the rather vague reply, made expressive by a fond smile. “How is grandfather?” was added, in a tone of suppressed anxiety.

“He has just gone into the dining-room.”

Rachel hastily removed her bonnet and sought him. Captain Dell was seated in his arm-chair, his head resting upon his hands, and his face expressive of mental and bodily weariness.

“You have returned early, my child,” he said, on encountering her fond anxious look Rachel bent over him, imprinting a kiss on the broad forehead, while she concealed the tears which had risen in her eyes; and then she looked up and delivered sundry kind messages with which she had been charged.

“Tebbut was here — he wanted to see you about fruit or vegetables,”

remarked Aunt Nancy, as she officiated among the coffee-cups.

“I will see him, Aunt.”

“And, my dear, there is an article in the paper I wish you to read: the fine print tries my sight.”

“I will read it at once, dear Grandfather, if you wish.”

“Perhaps you are too fatigued.”

Rachel was indeed weary, but she sprang up in quest of the journal, and complied with his request; and what purer joys are there than those springing from duties fulfilled and happiness bestowed? Let not the daughter or the wife forget her home mission, for it is a holy one.

Old Joseph Tebbut had a great many business matters to arrange, and, as his style was decidedly verbose, their disposal took some time. While thus engaged, Rachel was startled by a step near, and, turning with a smile to meet her grandfather, encountered Mr. Osman. The start and exclamation were quickly repressed, and she held out her hand rather gravely.

“My presence surprises you, does it not?”

“I expected to see my grandfather — ”

“And was disappointed?”

Rachel could not answer this, for the thoughtful countenance near her, lighted by evident pleasure, awakened a crowd of emotions, which she had not time to analyze.

Mr. Osman offered her his arm, having first waited the completion of her business with Tebbut, and they began slowly to pace the orchard walks.

“That path does not lead towards the house, Sir, but in an opposite direction.”

“I wished to learn from you how your friends were. I have been weaving a web of surmises, less from what the Captain has written than from what he has omitted. In the first place, I have feared that he missed your gentle cousin, and Cowanda.”

“Yes, I fear so.” A low sigh replied to his question with greater force than her words.

“And he is not quite well?”

Rachel could hardly bear this, but the old habit, confidence, swept away the reserve springing out of her previous agitation, and she communicated all her fears upon that subject, and found relief even in giving shape to the dread shadows which had haunted her. Many of those vague terrors vanished before the sympathising yet firm judge who scanned them, and by the time they returned to the house she was calm again.

The Captain was delighted, and appeared inspired by new life; to Rachel there was but one drawback — the momentary anticipation that their visitor would inquire for Gilbert; that the evening should pass

without his doing so surprised her, but in the morning, when he found her alone in the verandah, he spoke of Gilbert.

“Captain Dell has not mentioned him for some time, and my inquiries have met with no reply.”

“He has displeased Grandpa,” she faltered.

“Well, shall we not try and remove the offence?”

“I fear we cannot.”

“May I inquire the reason of such a fear? Be assured impertinent curiosity does not prompt the question.”

“I know it; but he believes Gilbert guilty of — of a crime, which I cannot prove he has not committed, though I am sure of it.”

The distress which her eyes and pale cheeks expressed shocked him, and in a gentle voice he invited her to let him at least share her anxiety, hoping, did he know the circumstances, that he might be able to help her. Convinced, as Rachel was, of her brother's innocence, she knew her reasons were such as would not be communicated to another, arising only from feeling, and it was with hesitation that she complied; sensible of lowering herself, also, in the eyes of her companion, whose pure rectitude of principle she well knew; but, when she paused in her recital, the almost respectful tone in which he replied made her aware that her fears on that subject were groundless.

“I see several peculiar circumstances, which, if explained, might clear away the clouds which surround our poor Gilbert.”

The kind mention of her brother affected Rachel deeply; for a few moments she wept. Leigh suffered her to grow calmer before he resumed the conversation; he pointed out to her the circumstances which laid it open to supposition that some one, aware of Gilbert's intended flight, had made use of his name to forge upon the Captain, and escape; and he proposed to himself the task of proving this.

“At present,” he concluded, “I am at a loss in what way to engage either my energies or acquirements. I have no profession, no acquaintance with business, that is, commercial affairs. Captain Dell advises me to look round, and not be in a hurry to enter into some engagement which I might afterwards regret. For a few weeks, therefore, I may have much leisure. Does your aunt know what you have been doing?”

“In part, but she discouraged my efforts, regarding them as disobedient to grandfather. You do not know how acutely I have felt the apparent selfishness of my conduct, when it seemed as if, finding this place dull, I could leave my friends to suffer alone, and seek amusements in Sydney.”

“It must, but we will hope to clear up all these mysteries shortly. — Good morning, Miss Dell.” The latter remark Mr. Osman made turning to receive Aunt Nancy, as she advanced along the verandah.

Rachel, who had not so great a command of feature as her companion,

looked confused, conscious of speaking on a subject which the worthy lady deemed as rebellious; which confusion Aunt Nancy did not fail to observe, and assign to another cause; and she smoothed the creases out of her black silk apron, with a quiet smile at her powers of penetration.

A week later, and Mary Eyeleigh received a visit from her young neighbour.

“I have come to tell you good news,” was Rachel's salutation.

“Indeed! what may I share in?”

The Eveleighs knew something of Rachel's cares: the builder had heard in Sydney that Gilbert had forsaken his situation; he had observed that his name was never mentioned at Aloe Hill, and he had questioned Rachel, and learnt how earnestly she desired to find her brother. Mary, therefore, read in the unusually glowing face that she had met with success.

“I have discovered the father of the German who accompanied Berty on his journey — or rather, Mr. Osman has.”

“And your brother?”

“Not yet.” She described the locality where the German lived, adding that she had seen him.

“But how did you find your way there?”

“Well, Mr. Osman drove me part of the way, and when we left the gig we procured a guide; — he might have sat for a brigand; I am sure any artist would have considered him a treasure, with his black eyes and beard, and all the *et cetera* of that romantic class of gentlemen. He soon began to talk to us of his travels; he had been to California, and all our Diggings; to Victoria, Van Diemen's Land, Chili, and the Islands — everywhere, indeed; but the life at the Diggings appeared to have impressed him most; he spoke of Ballaarat, and the many horrors he had witnessed there, and of those he had seen buried, unknown and uncared for; ‘and they must have friends somewhere,’ he added, ‘that's what beats me.’ ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘friends who were looking for their return, or their letters, and they never coming.’ ‘That's true, Miss, that's true,’ he replied, and for some minutes strode on in silence, only muttering to himself, ‘Oh dear, oh dear!’ as if dark deeds were unfolding themselves before his mind's eye. Presently he continued — ‘At one Digging, when I was let down into the claim in the morning, I felt something cold; I cried to my companions for God's sake to draw me up, and let down a light, for something was wrong; — it was two young men, with their skulls clove in, — quite young, not more than eighteen, and no one knew anything about them; they were laid aside, and buried like dogs. Oh dear!’

“As far as our guide's road and ours lay in the same direction, he continued to talk in this way, sometimes speaking of England with a short laugh. He was just about to return there.”

“Those diggings are horrible places,” remarked Mary, when she

paused.

“Oh, Mary, Mary! to think Berty may be there!” answered Rachel, all her fortitude giving way, and for a few moments she trembled, as if in an ague fit, clasping her hands across her eyes, as if she *would* not let the tears fall.

“Don't, dear, don't,” sobbed Mary, her weaker nature yielding instantly to sympathy; and, warned that this indulgence in grief was not for her, Rachel soon looked up firm but pale. It makes the heart so unselfish to live for others — the abnegation of *I* and the exalting of *thou*, so strong in that holy love! and with a prayer for more strength, Rachel

“When our guide had to leave us, he found a substitute in a little baro-footed boy, who trotted along silently and briskly through the bush. It was far away, where Herman Korff had bought a little patch of land, and cleared it of the scrub; and already a fine vegetable crop, enriched by sea-weeds from the river, refreshed our sight; the hut itself was formed of deal cases, and tin roofed, like so many now-a-day, but it was comfortable and neat. Happily, Mary, industry is rewarded in this colony: I was informed by a German that the wages of the men, such as farm labourers, are only £4 a-year, and the females £1, in some parts of their own country. They appear to desire to be landholders, if only on a small scale, and by frugality their wish can be accomplished here. I cannot help thinking that Australia is peculiarly adapted for such a class of persons: good farmers and gardeners, with steady industrious habits, and soundly educated; they are respectable, if so conducted; yet hardy and unaccustomed to luxury.”

“I know you have a great affection for the nation.”

“Yes, I have: their country, their literature, their history, all peculiarly interest me. But to return to Herman Korff — there was embryo wealth around the old man; his vegetables almost ready for the market, and an old horse, a beauty in his day, grazing close by; and the corner of a cart peeped out from under a shed, constructed of boughs. The man was very civil; he told us who his son was engaged to, and where he now was, but Gilbert had quitted him when he had delivered the dray at the station, and started on foot for the Ophir; he was called Gilbert St. Just.”

“So far all is well; but that is some time since. Can he give you no more recent information?”

“He cannot — yet we may find him: Mr. Osman has written to gentlemen he knows, who are at Ophir.”

“You will be anxious for their reply.”

“Mary, I dare not think of the ensuing weeks; I know nothing of ‘the pleasures of Hope;’ uncertainty is pain — even anticipated pleasure — to me. I suppose my spirit is vehement; I fear so. I try to be calm, and have learnt to look quiet, but uncertainty is a rack which tortures me.”

Mary looked surprised; *she* had none of those vivid emotions — those

burning pulses, which were a part of her friend's nature: a good girl, of ordinary capacity and feeling, life had to her no undercurrent, no Maelstroms; she could be sorrowful and anxious, but not dashed, like the noble ship, upon the rocks, and shattered; she would be safe from want of weight; but Rachel's was a strong character, though under the control of religion; *that* was her safeguard and shield, and the duties of those weeks would be as faithfully performed as though no inward flame burnt.

During that period she did not leave home, and Leigh Osman was much with them; when he entered the room her eyes were raised to meet him, but day by day she read the same answer — silent disappointment, and her eyes fell. He knew what she felt, and he applied the balm which best revived her. When he could not speak of heavenly things, he exerted himself to interest the Captain, and never without success. Again the head was raised, the eye kindled — again that fine air of geniality spread over the old man; once more he felt pleasure in recounting past adventures and actions, or in contesting knotty points in metaphysics or philosophy. If Leigh found him drooping and silent, he suggested some theme where their views were antagonistic, and provoked him to discussion; and then led him to subjects where both were agreed. These arguments did him good; they excited him, and he pronounced Leigh “A fine fellow — a fine fellow.”

Whether Osman enjoyed those days at Aloe Hill it was impossible to decide; he looked too grave to be very happy, and a smile seemed rather to flit across his face to cheer others than to spring from innate cheerfulness; his own views were not clearer, his future still buried in uncertainty, and that poverty sealed his lips and crushed his every hope, and determined his rigidly honorable and proud spirit to preserve the character of a friend only.

## Chapter XVIII.

Then did my heart in lone faint sadness die,  
As from all nature's voices one reply —  
    But one — was given:  
“Earth has no heart, fond dreamer! with a tone  
To send thee back the spirit of thine own —  
    Seek it in Heaven.”

— Mrs. Hemans.

MRS. Fenwick, that is, Elice Fenwick, as she was usually called, to distinguish her from her mother-in-law, was standing at the open window, watching the distant path, along which she hoped, rather than expected, to descry the advancing figure of her husband. Daily disappointments had taught Elice to anticipate rather his absence than his presence; she had found that his business led him so often from her side, that she must reconcile herself to his absence, and seek her pleasures apart from him; but this she could not do. Those few months had greatly altered her: the cheerful smile had vanished, the light step was spiritless, and her manner was quiet, timid, and almost repining. Elice was not understood: Mrs. Fenwick and her daughters were coarse, robust women, who gloried in dairies and kitchens, who scorned books and ‘bookish’ people, and cordially agreed that poor Fred was very unfortunate in having a sickly, useless girl for his wife.

When first she came there, the timid bride, Mrs. Fenwick made a show of giving up authority to her: — “Of course, she must now; she had been mistress there thirty years, but of course she must resign her place now.” This address had the intended effect: Elice was used to Aunt Nancy's gentle household rule, and cordially begged Mrs. Fenwick to retain all her wonted authority. From that day “Mrs. Elice” was a mere cypher, regarded as a valueless encumbrance, and constantly told it was a dreadful thing she was so useless and sickly. Elice looked at her little hands and slender waist, and thought she must be “a mere doll,” and certainly she was useless, if the business of life had no other form than robust labour. All those days of domestic happiness she had pictured came not: those cheerful evenings, when business and care were excluded, and her smile and her presence were to be the sunlight of the

quiet hearth; how neat and comfortable it should be, and she might look up to *her* husband, and accept his opinions with unquestioning faith. What had become of the bright dream? Frederic Fenwick was absent at a cattle sale, or witnessing some trial race of horses he had betted on, or accompanying drovers with stock across the country; and when he came home, how gaily he talked and laughed, and made the dull house ring with a loud hilarious voice; then he took his little wife out riding, or visiting, and called her a rose-bud, and was universally pronounced an excellent husband; but he never thought of her wanting sympathy and counsel; why, there was his mother and the girls, and in a day or two he was gone again. Mrs. Fenwick was an Australian, limited in her education, physically disposed to be severe, from an exuberant power which could feel no pity for weakness, and, like the ignorant, egotistical and prejudiced against everything or person who differed from herself: none are more unpitying to the inexperienced, or readier to crush the accomplished, and defame their ashes; yet she had her good qualities — industry, frugality, and, withal, generosity in gifts. Her daughters were like her in disposition and appearance — all tall stout women, with heavy black brows.

Elice did not communicate the annihilation of all her hopes to her friends, for she fondly loved her husband, and she could neither blame him nor suffer others to do so; and she was so dispirited, that she believed what Mrs. Fenwick and Jane and Kate told her — that it was a pity she had ever married Fred. As to her music and drawing, they were of no use; Fenwick liked a tune when he was at home, but the folio was packed away with the French books, and never looked into. But it was not the loss of these things which grieved her: she wanted her husband's love and confidence; even he treated her like a child; he told her nothing, she was ignorant of his concerns, and if she inquired, he bade her not think about it; she did not understand these things; and if he needed advice, he sought it from Mrs. Fenwick and her daughters. Elice had so much feared to offend them, that she had yielded them the obedience of a child, and received in turn the acknowledgement that she was a poor, childish little thing. She could not take offence, or she ought not, where they spoke so, for they always informed her that, of course, it was for her own good; they had no other motive in speaking, and if she had any feeling, she would be glad to improve.

She was reviewing these things that evening, and forming plans for the future, and watching eagerly for Fenwick's return; she had resolved to explain the matter to him, and beg him to make her a home, however humble; but let it be her own and his, and let her share with him in his cares and joys; she had pictured better days, and hope glowed warmly at her heart. The drooping head was raised, the timid eyes glistened, and the fretful hanging of the lips disappeared. Alas, poor Elice! she did not

know that he could not feel with her, because he had no sympathy with the higher feelings and more refined shades of character.

Evening's shades fell on the landscape; she watched them jealously, for they would conceal the distant view of her husband; the uncertain flickering of twilight did indeed for awhile dazzle her, and then she saw him; but it was no time to spring to his arms and open her heart's confidence to him, for one of his Turf friends rode by his side, and, as they cantered up the road, she heard that they were discussing the merits of White Stockings and Princess, and she knew they were talking of their horses. Bitter tears — tears which the agony of young hopes blighted forced from their source — rose to her eyes, but she smothered them by an effort, and Fenwick and his sporting friend found her languid and pale, while Mrs. Fenwick and her daughters laughed and talked loudly, and bustled about providing a good supper.

“We must be off by peep of day, Fenwick,” said his friend, as he sipped the glass of hot brandy and water Kate had just mixed for him; for she had a toddy-making celebrity.

“Where to?” Elice inquired.

“Why, dear, I've entered Princess against Bates's Rainbow; it's a private race, you know, and we must be there to see it.”

Jane was as fond of horse-racing as her brother, and she prevented further remark by commenting on the merits of the horses.

Alone in her room that evening, the young wife listened to the voices of the gentlemen, and the occasional clatter of a glass, and she asked herself, had she done right in uniting herself with Frederic Fenwick? She buried her face in her hands, and implored forgiveness and a blessing from God. The sin of her husband's worse than wasted existence stood out prominent before her, but he did not see it; he did not love her Saviour; he would not willingly hinder her in a life of faith, but he did not even desire to share it.

An hour later, Elice Fenwick's head was pressed on the shoulder of her husband, and his hand clasped in hers, while, in low accents, she spoke to him as she never had before: she told him that she was unhappy, and she showed him how he could remove her sorrow; she would make his home happy and comfortable; she would endeavour to compensate to him for the loss of these unholy pursuits, if he would relinquish them. Earnest feeling gives eloquence, and Elice's manner awed her husband, it was so tender and firm — so hopeful for the future, so hopeless for the present.

“Well, Elly dear, you shall have what you want. I am very sorry you and mother can't agree. I did think she would be quite a comfort to you, taking care of things; but we will do differently for the future. Don't fret, Rose-bud,” and with real feeling he quenched the strange light of those earnest eyes in hopeful tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

At length. Leigh Osman's friends replied to him; they had delayed to do so till they could communicate some information. That information was the news of the loss Gilbert and his party had sustained, and their departure from Ophir, for Victoria.

Ever, as Rachel believed she had approached him, did he appear to fly before her, and the proposition which Mr. Osman made was an uncertain relief, so counterpoised was it by regret. He had grown impatient, he alleged, of inactivity, and would no longer remain in idleness, but proceed to Melbourne, and from thence to Mount Alexander, where he hoped to find Gilbert, and in that colony to discover what he sought — a remunerative field for his exertions.

“I do not approve of your going to Victoria, Osman,” said Captain Dell, when his intention was communicated to the family.

“Why so, Sir?”

“I don't like the place. As for work, you can find it here. What does Arney say? Consult him. You are a good penman, a bit of a scholar — could correspond in French and German, and half-a-dozen other languages, I suppose. No, I say: stay where you are, and look round you leisurely. We don't want to lose you.”

“Accept my most sincere thanks, my kind friend, but I have already been too long idle; instead of doing more, I am doing less, than formerly. I must go; this life of ease and happiness unnerves me.”

“Bless my heart, Osman, you speak as if you were going on a campaign, and that a feather bed would prevent your afterwards sleeping on a camp mattress. Unnerve you — what for — how?”

Leigh bowed slightly.

“My life may be as trying as a soldier's, without its glory,” was his only remark.

“We shall miss you extremely; the house will be gloomy without you. Won't it, Rachel dear?”

How she would have answered the appeal remained uncertain, for Leigh replied quickly —

“No, it will not be gloomy where Miss Dell and your grand-daughter are.”

“True, Osman, very right; but we *shall* feel your absence.”

Leigh bowed slightly, but his eyes had sought Rachel; he thought she looked pale. Did she — but he recalled his resolve; he had yet his way in life to find — his provision to make. Thus they parted.

“When shall we see you again?” the Captain repeated; but the time when he should return was uncertain.

## Chapter XIX.

— — — by heavenly favour led,  
We meet. — — —

Crabbe.

FAR away from Aloe Hill, in all the weariness of fever, tossed a mortally-stricken man, seeking in change of posture that ease which came not at his call, and which the tender hands of love might not bestow. Night and day the young wife occupied the watcher's chair: she had asserted her authority, and in the dignity of resolve maintained it.

Bitter, indeed, were the feelings of Elice Fenwick as she hung over the couch of her husband; she saw him sinking under a disease brought on by excitement, exposure to the sun, and, perhaps, indulgence in stimulants; but she did not blame him; she pitied his errors, and, as they regarded herself, forgave him freely. She was no longer the pensive child, but the earnest woman; in her loneliness she found energy; feeling that she *could* comfort and be of use to her husband, self-respect again erected its bowed head, and she stepped into her proper position, distilling a balm even from her sorrow, and clinging to the hope that he would recover, and brighter days begin. Earnestly she prayed over him; he would improve, he would be all she desired.

After some days the wandering intellect regained its sway.

“Elly, draw back the blinds, let me see the light again. The sun sets — it is near the horizon — it will soon be gone. Pray, Elly, for pardon for me — for life.”

The sun set; another light went out, and the head of the new-made widow was bowed on the hands of a corpse.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Gold Commissioner, with a small party of horsemen, was riding among the diggers; there, was a new arrival, here one who had evaded payment of the license fee. Now his tones were friendly, now severe and commanding. Those who knew the Commissioner and his subordinate remarked two strangers in his cortège; one, though wrapped in a coarse coat, had an air which bespoke refinement, and the easy grace with

which he guided his horse called forth more than one remark upon his movements; the other rode behind him, or by his side, often laughing and talking, and never without a broad smile. The attention of the party was presently engaged by a group of miners, who resolutely refused to pay the license; the Commissioner grew peremptory, and fearlessly demanded submission to the law, and the others were equally resolute in their opposition.

“Be sociable and agreeable now,” suggested the smiling stranger, pushing forward; “you had better pay, if you will be so good and so kind.”

A request to mind his own business, was made in terms by no means elegant or select, and the man, still advising them to be sociable and agreeable, drew back; at that moment one of the diggers raised a pistol, and its contents would have been lodged in the Commissioner's head, had not one of the by-standers sprung forward, and, grappling with the man, dragged him to the ground; the confusion momentarily increased, a crowd collected, the war of voices swelled like the surging of the ocean in a storm, stones were cast promiscuously, and men swore with brazen throats.

Panting and dust-stained, the combatants rose to their feet, the intending murderer was seized by the Commissioner's companion in the rough coat, and his antagonist, bleeding from a wound inflicted by a bowie knife, was surrounded by his friends; the police rendered assistance, the gentlemen remounted, and the party rode on.

“I must find who that young man was; he rendered me good service, Mr. Osman.”

“He did, and he was wounded.”

“What became of him?”

“He went into the next tent, Sir,” put in the friend of sociability.

“Then, Ben, we will visit him.” They turned their horses' heads to the claim, and the gentlemen alighted, giving their bridles to their attendants.

“Was the wounded man brought in here?” inquired Mr. — — , approaching the tent.

“He is here, Sir.”

“Have you a medical man?”

“No; it is a mere flesh wound; I have dressed it.” The speaker moved aside and pointed to his comrade, whose pale cheek indicated some suffering.

“I have to thank you for your prompt bravery, my fine fellow; I hope you may never want me to return a like service; but what can I now do for you?”

“Nothing, Sir — I require nothing.”

“You know me, of course? If I can be of any use, do not hesitate to send to my tent; in the meantime, I must have an inquiry into this affair,

and you will have to appear as witness. Perhaps some of your mates also saw the affair.”

“We all did.”

“Very good: and what luck are you having? I think you have not been here long; yours is not a countenance to be soon forgotten, and I have only lately met it.”

“We have just come over from the other side; that is, a month or two since.”

“What is your name, young man?” and again the Commissioner turned from the tall dark man he had been interrogating, to his deliverer.

“Gilbert St. Just.”

The other gentleman, Leigh Osman, who had silently listened to the conversation, started, and advancing a step, fixed his expressive eyes upon the speaker.

“Gilbert St. Just,” repeated he and the Commissioner in a breath, and their eyes met.

“Why, this is the gentleman you were seeking,” said the latter. Gilbert looked uneasy, and the dark eyes of Bain flashed as if he would protect his friend if requisite; but Leigh's tone dispelled the idea of hostility.

“My name is Leigh Osman,” he said; “I am, in a remote degree, a family connection.”

“I have heard the name. Did you tell me you were seeking me?”

“Yes; your sister is anxious to hear from you; but you will write. I will not pursue your round with you,” he added, addressing the Commissioner. “Ben, lead my horse away; I shall walk back.”

When the party had moved on, Leigh resumed his position by Gilbert's side, and Bain and Ducie considerably withdrew to their labours.

“I shall be laid up for a week or two, I suppose,” was the young man's first remark, in a tone intended to lead his new friend from any personal allusions, but he failed in his intentions.

“I hope not. Mr. Calder, I have recently left your friends; have you any questions you would wish to put respecting them?”

The many loving interrogations which followed his invitation brought an expression of satisfaction into Osman's eyes.

“But how did you know I was called St. Just? and why did you seek me here?”

“I traced you to Ophir, and from thence to this place.”

“But you have not informed me what was your reason for taking so much trouble — you, who are almost — pardon me — a stranger to our family, and quite so to me;” and the troubled expression returned to Gilbert's brow.

Leigh did not immediately reply, but resting his chin upon his hand, fixed his eyes on his companion.

“Mr. Osman!” The offended tone recalled him, and he sat up and

dismissed the keen look of inquiry.

“You have favoured me with some minutes' staring with eyes like hot coals, burning into my very soul. I am not accustomed to stand such scrutiny, when the right to make it is doubtful.”

“I have displeased you, Mr. Calder, and I am sorry for it:” the frank tone disarmed wrath; “but I cannot disclaim that I was searching, even as you say, into your soul, and my explanation will not fail to provoke you afresh. Shall it be made?”

“By all means.”

“You left Messrs. Ralph and Brett very abruptly.”

“Yes — you had better speak plain — I bolted.”

“May I ask why you did so?”

“Easily explained: I hated business, hated the office, my masters, and the whole city life. Mr. Ralph insulted and degraded me; the Captain had bound me as if I were a child; and I rebelled against it. I would not seek a favour from a man who has injured me as Ralph has, and I took French leave.” Gilbert was pacing up and down the limited area of the tent, with flashing eyes, and one arm swinging, the other hung in a sling.

Leigh half-smiled at his warmth, and the declamatory tone which persons advocating a weak or wrong cause always fly to, but he continued —

“And were those your only reasons, Mr. Calder?”

“Only! — were they not enough to provoke anyone? I am not one of those cold persons whom nothing can rouse.”

“So I perceive,” and the smile grew broader.

“You appear to have attached some other reason to my departure, and as you have so freely questioned me, I must request a similar privilege.”

“I told you that my reason would provoke you.”

“Never mind.”

“It may do more — it must do more.”

“Out with it.”

“Had you any intention of sailing for California? — lost your passage, perhaps?”

“I had no thought of such a thing. Ralph and Brett are, of course, highly incensed, and I thought it prudent to suffer their displeasure to cool. As to the Captain, I fear he will be inexorable.”

“You do not know, then, that a forgery was committed on your grandfather, and that the sale-money of his station was with-drawn?”

“No — speak — you do not think — you cannot connect me with such infamy.”

“I do not; but others do.”

Gilbert staggered, and would have fallen, but for the extended arms which received him.

“Oh God! is not this too heavy a punishment?” he groaned.

“Do not despair; your innocence may be proved; few know of the circumstances. Rachel — Miss Calder — firmly believes you unjustly accused.”

“The dear good girl! Mr. Osman, does George Welton know? does — his sister?”

“No; nor your late employers. Mr. Arney, of course, suspects, but his legal prudence makes him silent.”

“Still, I shall always feel degraded. I can never be anything now, nor happy.”

“You judge wrongly; conscious innocence will preserve your self-respect, and if by *anything* you mean a useful and respected man, that depends upon your future conduct. Seek God's aid to enable you to do right, and leave the result with him; your future may be far happier than the past.”

There was a long pause: Gilbert's averted face prevented his companion from ascertaining his exact feelings. After a while he said —

“Shall I return home, Sir? I will be guided by you.” The subdued tone left no idea of the agony of self-reproach, despair, and fear of ignominy, which was racking him.

“I think it would be well; but yet your simple affirmation may not satisfy the Captain. You know they are not at Cowanda now.”

“Where then?”

“At Aloe Hill.”

“Where the — — ”

“No need for that form of interrogation: it is a small estate on the Parramatta River. Cowanda is sold.”

Again Gilbert's energies collapsed, and another long, mournful silence ensued, during which Bain entered.

“Bain,” exclaimed Gilbert, “I am the most unfortunate fellow alive! this gentleman, Mr. Osman, will explain.”

Leigh did so, and Bain sat down and went quietly and gravely into the minutiae. Ducie, whose open, heedless disposition unfitted him for a confidant, was excluded from that character. It was decided that Gilbert should not at once return, as his presence might only exasperate the Captain, but that every exertion should be made to discover the person who had sailed in his name.

Meanwhile, Leigh removed from his friend the Commissioner's to their claim, bringing with him his faithful follower Ben Owen, and for a time both were engaged in gold-digging.

If Leigh Osman sought to establish an influence over Gilbert, he did not obtrude such a desire, but, on the contrary, treated him with a confidence which won his warmest affections. “He trusts me,” thought the young man, and gratitude rose high. Bain looked on gravely, keenly; too embittered against the world to readily admit a new friend, he sought

rather for the failings than merits of the new miner; while Osman toiled cheerfully, lived steadily, and preserved the bearing of a Christian. Hitherto they had kept aloof from the population on the gold-field, because, with the exception of the Bunyip, neither desired to form acquaintances: Gilbert was not naturally disposed to an evil course of life, and Bain had a contempt for low, coarse, and sensual pleasures; therefore they had stood apart from the pleasures and sins of the gold-field. But now a new life was infused into the encampment; the light of a higher and nobler principle shone upon them — the fear and love of God. If those suggestions stirred remorseful feelings in the breast of Bain, they also presented a purer medium through which to view himself — at least, what he might be — and others; and the clear bold intellect found subjects for reflection, which it eagerly seized upon.

Gilbert appeared rather to have thrown off a burden than added one. Leigh, through Mr. Arney, was making private though zealous efforts to vindicate his character from the odium cast upon it; and the recent news of his friends appeared to lessen the distance between them, particularly as he now wrote to Rachel.

In such a mood the Sabbath morning found him strolling along by Osman's side; they left the broad valley, in which were assembled the incongruous materials of a gold-digging population — canvas tents, bark huts, hovels of every description, crowded together. The young men proceeded till they reached a hill overlooking the strange scene; here, apart from the stir, a few logs had been rudely thrown together, and roofed with sheets of bark, for a place of Divine worship; within, blocks, cut from the trunks of trees, supported heavy slabs; these were the seats; and at the further end, a rude table had been erected for a pulpit. The chapel stood alone, the solid rock around repelling the digger, and its distance from the creek rendering the operation of washing, had any dug, laborious; for the present, therefore, the claim and camp stood back, and the lonely temple, founded on a rock, was, to the reflecting, not inaptly placed: — above that mass of toiling and pollution, pointing upwards, the blue vault overspreading it, the sun traversing its benign course above.

“You will cuter with me, this morning, Gilbert,” said Mr. Osman.

“Where?”

“The chapel.”

“What, the Methodists' Chapel?”

“Yes.”

“I am not a Methodist.”

“Nor am I; but do you not understand that true religion is the worshipping of God in spirit, and not in forms; that, therefore, if those forms be not in opposition or perversion of his Revealed Law, they are nothing, only servants to assist and prevent confusion in our devotions.”

“You hold peculiar notions.” But Gilbert had already felt the power of character, and the matured mind of his companion held his in check; and, although unwilling, he accompanied him.

A few, alas! how few, of the thousands on the field were seated within those wooden walls! Osman turned his eyes upon the speaker, and instantly recognized him. The short massive arm, on which, during the week, when the shirt-sleeve was rolled back, the powerful muscles stood out prominent — the broad shoulders, the clenched hand, even now black and ingrained, and the bronzed cheek — they were the evidences of toil; he was a local preacher — the blacksmith from the creek. To Gilbert, this knowledge lessened his authority — to Osman, increased it. The man who was combatting with toil, and might have pleaded fatigue, was here devoting his day of rest to instruct his fellow-toilers: he was one of them, and he spoke to them as one who knew their peculiar temptations and trials. “I know what you have been doing all last week,” he said, “and I know what you will do all this,” and with truth. He had a loud harsh voice, and he thundered forth mighty truths with uncompromising sternness: he recognized no gilding of stubborn facts, or poetry of language; his actions were vehement, and the drops of dew burst out on his tanned brow and cheek, and damped his short grey hair; yet there was a certain rude eloquence in the address, and many of his sentences were so short and pithy, they must needs be remembered. Thus, to Gilbert these words were ever to find an echo in memory —

“A thousand circumstances surround us to blow out the lamp of life.”

## Chapter XX.

“Triumphant in thy closing eye  
The hope of glory shone;  
Joy breathed in thy expiring sigh,  
To think the fight was won.”

— Rev. S. Dale.

“ARE you going at once to Aloe Hill? I fear the fatigue is too much for you.”

“I shall not find it so, Mr. Arney; I long to be at home.” The old man bent over a packet of papers, and appeared to be busily searching for something, but his fingers turned the letters with an aimless touch, and he hemmed a little. The young widow pushed back the oppressive folds of crape from her fair brow, and rising, pursued — quickly and eagerly, with the manner of a child looking forward to a long delayed

“I long to be at home, to hear the familiar voices again — to see the old faces — to speak to those who understand me; to feel a *woman*, not a *thing*. I want sympathy; I crave for that; I must have it — I must — or die!”

“No, no; you will not die: you will live many years happy and beloved.”

“I must be beloved; that is essential to my being. I will put aside all that is childish and weak, God helping me.”

“You will, you will,” the old man said soothingly. “Shall I send my clerk with you, Mrs. Fenwick?”

“No, Sir, I thank you, I have no fear; I am going *home*.”

“How happy to have a home! Leave your affairs with confidence to me; I will strictly study your interests.”

“I know it, Mr. Arney; I shall have little; I shall be poor — shall I not?”

“No, not poor; but, can you economise?”

“Oh, yes! I can do anything; I feel strong, I have so much hope.” But even as she spoke, the girl-widow wiped away a large hot tear for the dead.

Too slowly for her impatience drove the coachman; too lingeringly turned the wheels; expectation had dried her tears; they would flow when that meeting was over; but, for the present, one thought absorbed her

every faculty, and at length she was folded in the still strong arms of the Captain, was weeping between Aunt Nancy and Rachel, was cared for and cherished. It was all too much, too closely allied with bereavement and disappointment: nature avenged herself for the stress laid upon her, and tears flowed without restraint.

To sleep that night was impossible; the grey light of morning gleamed between the venetian blinds, and the candle flickered in the socket, but still in their own room Rachel and Elice sat on a low couch, with their arms twined round each other, telling and hearing all that had occurred since they parted.

“But, Elly, you must have some sleep, you are so weary with your journey.”

“No, Rachel, no rest now. Do you remember some one exclaiming — ‘Rest, rest, I shall have all eternity for rest.’ There are times when action is most refreshing. Let us admit the dawn.” She pushed open the shutters, a cool breeze entered, laden with the smell of flowers and seaweeds.

“Rachel, I shall love this place, it is so peaceful.”

“It is. How red the horizon is, where the sun will shortly arise. Our God is above and around us — why should we fear anything? is He not stronger than the strongest?”

“A bruised reed He will not break;  
Afflictions all His children feel;  
He wounds them for His mercy sake,  
He wounds to heal!”

Wreathed in each other's arms, they watched the eastern sky grow rich in amber sheen, and the sun's rays light over the silent landscape; and then they stepped from the open window to visit the orchard and the inlet. They did not know that their grandfather traced their progress, and rejoiced to see his children together under the protection of their aunt.

“Elly's marriage was a mistake — strange how often such mistakes are made. I could have wished to leave Rachel under the protection of Leigh Osman — he is a man, a true-hearted man” — thus he reflected — “when I leave them.” This was, indeed, the ever-present thought, for Captain Dell now felt the approach of death. His habits were not altered; no outward alteration notified this conviction, except that he often bent over his large Bible, or, closing it, sat absorbed in thought. Still the sentence pronounced upon Gilbert Calder was unrevoked; no mention of his name passed his lips; the pride of heart was yet unbroken; he was yet saying “I do well to be angry;” but the time came when a clearer light streamed into his soul — a sincere faith in the Lord's Christ; then closing the covers of his Bible, and turning to Rachel, he said —

“My child, I forgive your brother his sin against me. If ever you see him again, tell him so.”

A dread knowledge that the spirit had gained an ascendancy over the body, and was hovering on the wing for flight, seized her; she fell on her knees by his side, and said in a low voice —

“Dear Grandfather, Leigh has found him — toiling steadily and in poverty at the diggings. Oh, believe it, he is innocent.”

“God grant it, my child! Into thy hands, Oh Christ, I resign my soul.”

The victory was won, and the Christian went out from the battle-field, to rest evermore!

## Chapter XXI.

Rather to you I send a joyous greeting,  
With voice and hands uprais'd, and sparkling eyes,  
The happy herald of our coming meeting.

— Evelyn.

BY the light of a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle, Leigh Osman wrote letters. He had remitted his earnings to Captain Dell in liquidation of his debt to him, and he hoped shortly to be able to complete that payment; he was writing now to Rachel an account of her brother: it was a difficult letter to pen; not that the news was bad — quite the contrary, for he hoped he detected the growth of those latent gems of goodness and settled purpose that had hitherto been hardly suspected to exist; but the letter was a violation of the emotions that prompted the warm, loving address, the sympathy with each beat of the heart, which his communication would awaken; but, in his iron will, he bound down love, and substituted friendship and conventionality. He was alone, for his partners were spending the evening at the Commissioner's tent, and Ben Owen had not his master's disrelish for the pleasures of life presented by travelling circuses and rope-dancers. While Leigh hesitated how to conclude his letter so as neither to betray himself, nor wound by unnecessary formality, the canvas roof above him was violently shaken by some one stumbling over the cords, and Ben rushed in.

“Mr. Leigh!” he cried, “I've just had the greatest luck. I overheard some fellows planning to rob the tent; they know where the gold is — they watched us plant it; they will be here in a minute.”

To arouse their neighbours was the first idea, but the surrounding diggers had recently removed, for there had been a “rush” to another part of the creek, and they stood alone. Leigh thrust his letters into his pocket, and, pushing aside the trunk which served as a table, began to dig rapidly, assisted by the excited Ben. A small metal box was soon disclosed, and lifted from its concealment.

“It must go to the Commissioner's tent.”

“Empty it, Master — do empty it!”

“Why so?”

“To give the rascals a disappointment.”

There was no time for debate. Ben brought a strong canvas bag; the gold was removed into it, the box filled with stones and earth, locked, and buried, and the trunk dragged over it. The tread of several feet sounded a few yards distant; the man caught up the bag, and crept into the darkness without. Leigh followed, but hardly rose to his feet before he was thrown down, and a revolver pointed at his heart; passiveness was his only safety: there were several marauders, and he heard them go at once to the spot where the box was buried, disinter it, and come out; two others assisted his guard to bind his arms and feet, and then they retired. The fearful invasion occupied few minutes, and then he was again alone, but unable to assist himself or rise, and his limbs painfully cut by the cords. He had been calm and quiet, evincing no fear; yet the full horrors of his position were present to him, and a grateful acknowledgment to Heaven escaped his lips, with a deep sigh of relief. The young warm heart clings tenaciously to life.

A light shower of rain was falling, and Osman, in the comfortless prone attitude in which he lay, was chilled and suffering; far away he could see the glimmering of lights, and distant reports of a pistol or gun sometimes startled the echoes; he would have shouted right lustily, but feared to recal his assailants, and deemed silence the wisest. An hour, which felt like six, passed, and then the galloping of horses urged furiously up the steep awoke mingled hope and apprehension. Heedless of pits and banks, the horsemen advanced; the voice of Gilbert uttering his name met with a warm response; a few moments more, and his friends were severing the cords, and lifting him to his feet.

“Are you wounded?” was the alarmed interrogatory, for he staggered.

“No, only giddy — where is Ben?”

“All right, Master Leigh! We served the villains a trick they wont forget very soon; we gave 'um the *cure de grass*; it beats everything.”

“In what way did you administer the *coup de grace*?”

“Why, Mr. Bain, I was a-telling you the trick we served them,” and, well satisfied with the aptitude and extent of his learning, he danced in exultation. The gentlemen's gratification was of a more sober cast. Osman's recent danger and escape prompted the desire to relinquish digging, but a mature debate rather decided them on remaining; and, depositing their gold in the safe care of the Commissioner, they were doing very well; — not making fortunes, but realising enough to at some future day put them in a position to enter advantageously upon some more desirable means of living. Thus were they determining, when the news of Captain Dell's death reached them.

But one course was open to Gilbert; that was, to hasten to his relatives, and, as far as possible, supply the place of the protector they had lost. During those days Leigh thought and acted, Gilbert was buried in despair; the conviction that he had at least hastened the old man's

decease, drove him to distraction.

“You will not return to the field, St. Just?”

“No, Bain; never.”

“Nor you, Mr. Osman?”

“I shall not. You know I should have left some time since, but did not wish to leave while Gilbert stayed. Mr. Ralph, with whom I became acquainted in my search for Calder, informed me that he was wishing to open up a connection with some Dutch houses in the north, and wanted to find a suitable person to represent their interests there; and he offered me a place in his counting-house preparatory to conducting this branch establishment. I did not refuse, nor yet accept his offer, and believe he has not filled the post since he wrote to me.”

“But that would take you from the country?”

“It would; but if I live I may hope to return, no longer hampered as I now am.”

“That is, after some dozen years — mercenary, sallow, and with a liver complaint.”

“Not so bad, I would hope: four or five years will be the boundary of my expatriation.”

“You think so now, but when people are in a position to make money, they know not how to leave it.”

“Then I might remain here.”

“Gilbert, my boy, I am going with you,” suddenly added Bain. “What say you to dissolving partnership, Ducie?”

“I suppose I must consent, for I am not disposed to go.”

“I'll go in for a share.”

“Very good, Ben; agreed.

“So let it be: the sooner we leave the better,” returned Bain, and forthwith adjusted their mutual affairs.

A few days more, and the three left the gold-fields; they paused on the high land once more to view the strange animated scene. The ephemeral town was erected on either bank of a stream, and occupied a broad valley, above which rose hills, now robbed of their wooded covering. A last long look was taken in silence, and then, turning their backs upon the diggings, they started forwards with determined steps and hearts. What had been sinful and weak they determined to leave behind, and the future to which that morning gave birth — let it be to God's service.

## Chapter XXII.

“Yes, it was love, — if thoughts of tenderness,  
Tried in temptation, strengthen'd by distress,  
Unmoved by absence, firm in every clime,  
And yet, ah! more than all, untired by time.

\* \* \* \* \*

If there be love in mortals — this was love.”

THICK purple and copper-colored clouds spread over the heavens, and vivid coruscations of light shot and quivered across the summer's sky; and the wind sighed through the oaks by the water, and flapped the creaking shutters of the minor's house at Aloe Hill. It was a dreary, though midsummer night, and Gilbert closed the blinds and drew a chair near his sister. Aunt Nancy was working — true Penelope, her labours never ended; conversation had drooped, and each pursued his or her employment or amusements in silence. At the further end of the room, Gilbert's friend, Bain, paced slowly, with folded arms, sometimes pausing to scrutinise his companions, and gaze more earnestly at that strange anomaly of almost childish form and features and heavy widow's weeds; At length Gilbert interrupted his reveries by expressing a fear that he must find the quiet irksome.

“On the contrary, I am in a state of unusual satisfaction: lavishly painting and gilding in imagination; listening to the fall of waters and birds singing — anything pure and refreshing.”

Aunt Nancy, who was not afflicted with such fertility of imagination, inquired simply —

“Do you hear the birds singing at this hour of the night?”

“Not exactly, ma'am,” returned Bain, gravely, but with rather sparkling eyes. “May I offer to read aloud to you, as conversation is not very animated?”

Rachel rose and brought a small volume.

“Would you read this? it is new to Elice.”

Bain bowed gracefully, and commenced Longfellow's pathetic tale, “Evangeline.” The cynic was laid aside, and he threw a force of feeling

and pathos into his tone, which did justice to the exquisite poem. While he was repeating —

“Merry the meeting was of ancient comrades and neighbours;  
Friend clasped friend in his arms; and they who before were as strangers,

Meeting in exile, became straightway as friends to each other” —  
wheels were heard on the grass-grown drive without, and he laid down the book.

“Who can it be?” asked Rachel, laying her hand on her brother's arm, as he rose to ascertain.

“Can it be Osman?”

“No, Bain: he has business to settle in Sydney; he promised to come out some day soon, but not at this hour.”

A loud knock announced that the stranger was seeking admittance, and Gilbert opened the door; for, attracted by the light, the knocker had come to the sitting-room. A tall elderly man stood disclosed, with a military-cut coat, buttoned up to his chin, and a large iron-grey moustache shading his mouth.

“Is this the residence of Captain Dell?” he inquired. The effect of the simple question startled him; the females turned away in tears, and the young man's cheek blanched as he pointed to his sable suit. The stranger uttered an exclamation of horror.

“Can it be possible that I am too late?”

Finding his friend too agitated to remember either hospitality or ceremony, Bain invited the stranger to enter; he looked earnestly at the tall brown man, and then at Gilbert and the girls; finally resting his gaze on Aunt Nancy.

“Do I see Miss Dell — Miss Anne Dell?” he inquired. She acknowledged her identity.

“I thought so; yet how changed! May I inquire if you know anything of your sister Emma's children — a boy and girl?”

“I do — they are here.”

“That young man and woman! but they must be. Gilbert — Rachel, I am your father.”

The latter sprang to the extended arms, and Gilbert scarcely less excited, clasped his parent's hand in his. Aunt Nancy began to sob, in memory of the days when Emma was a mirthful girl, and Major Calder, the sallow, grizzly old soldier, a fine, elegant young man.

Elice glided from the room, and as she passed along the verandah, encountered Bain, looking very unlike a stoic philosopher; he said something about the parlour being warm, and took a cigar from his pocket, but the little widow fled on in silent emotion.

Later in the evening the party reassembled; Bain's cigar had quite restored his defiant bearing, and the soldier looked particularly happy,

with his daughter on his knee, and his son seated beside him, and Elice at the other side; he had much to tell her, and letters, and colodiotype portraits to present from her family. Miss Dell, who had always held the polite Surgeon Gillett in great awe, had many questions to ask, and all had leisure to survey Major Calder. He was a fine military-looking man, but far too sallow and hollow-checked to be handsome, and probably he never had been; though he had large, full, dark eyes, like his daughter.

A few days were given up to idleness and pleasure, and then the Major began to talk seriously to his son of his future life.

“You are past boyhood, Berty, and must choose your future course. I can procure you a commission, if you desire to enter the army; or I can assist you in any other way you wish, in moderation, for my means are limited.”

“I have a few hundred pounds of my own, father, and I should like to get a station. Mr. Bain is disposed to do the same; we would join partnership, and need not encroach on your kindness.”

The Major coughed, and shook quietly; there was a little independence in the wish to owe all to his own exertions, which pleased him.

“You have my consent, boy — do as you like. I am, indeed, relieved that you do not seek the army; you will be better as a squatter; but do you think you can trust this Alvin Bain?”

“Perfectly.”

“Good. I have had experience in a soldier's life — we don't want to part with you, Gilbert, but I like action. I want to see you at some steady occupation. I have been a wandering, unsettled man, following the impulse of the moment, and left only ‘footsteps in the sands behind me,’ which the waves of time have washed out as I made them.”

“I will lose no time.”

A month passed, and then the family circle was again divided, perhaps to unite no more.

Osman had twice visited them during that time, and he, George Welton, and his sister, were added to the party the evening preceding the squatter's departure for the Gwydir River.

Major Calder and Aunt Nancy sat in the verandah, and Elice with them; the innocence and freshness of the young widow had chained Bain's attention — the man of the world, who had sickened over its duplicities and artifices, who had drunk of its pleasures and sins to satiety, and, sickening of them, found a higher principle of action, the love of God in Christ; the child-like spirit of the fair young being presented a novelty particularly gratifying to his satiated and world-weary heart; and therefore her society and conversation pleased him more than any of the others.

The other young people were grouped at the farther end of the verandah. Rachel was singing in a clear, melodious voice, not unmixed

with melancholy.

“Clare,” said Gilbert, in an under tone, “before we part, I have something to communicate to you, which I have shrunk from mentioning, although I resolved that you should know it.”

“Not if it pains you,” she returned, seeing his troubled expression of countenance.

“I must. You know, Miss Clare, how rashly and wrongly I acted nearly twelve months since, and you know how heavy a punishment followed me, in the loss of my grandfather; but you do not know that another heavy curse lighted upon me — the suspicion of a great crime! — which all my own and my friends' efforts to remove have proved futile; and it must through life, unless some unforeseen interposition of Providence occurs, remain a blot upon my name. God knows, Clare, that I am innocent, and I can only trust to my friends' believing me so to support me under this burden.”

“No, the integrity of your own heart will support you, even if others do not believe you.”

“May I hope that you — ”

“Have perfect confidence in your truth.” The calm, kind tone cheered him.

“Clare, I thank you. In the future, when I am far from you, I shall retain that kind look and tone.”

There was a pause, and then, dissatisfied with so much, Gilbert sought and won another promise.

Three months later, Gilbert Calder, having improved the hut at the station on the Gwydir — though, City Lady, it was *then* rough enough to scare you — returned for his bride; it did not scare her, for she wrote cheerfully of it, and the life she led. She praised her husband and his friend Bain; they were so steady and industrious, and they were forming a little library for winter evenings' amusements, and planting a garden, and teaching her to ride. “And, Rachel,” she wrote, “in my cottage, with its walls lined by old newspapers, and slab floor covered by tea-chest matting, I have all the essentials, and many, very many, of the pleasures of life. Do you know those same newspapers are my best friends: when Gilbert is from home, I draw my chair near the wall, and work and read. I have gathered such a heterogeneous mass of information as would astonish you, varying from the siege of Troy to the fashions in the year one. Speaking of fashions, I dress as pleases me, and my world — *i. e.* Gilbert — and am very independent. I want George and Grace to give up city life, and come here, but fear they are too *townish*.”

At the time that this wedding took place Leigh Osman sailed for Sumatra or Java, or some of the northern islands. In four years, he hoped to realise enough to free his property from encumbrances, and then to return. He spoke little of his future hopes or intentions.

And now, what sort of life was Rachel leading at Aloe Hill? A very busy, useful one. Still was she the main-spring of the establishment: the first excitement over, she feared her long-absent parent would miss the gay companions among whom his life had been spent for so many years; he might grow dissatisfied and melancholy; she must try and prevent this. There were sorrows and anxieties — hopes deferred, and the pangs of uncertainty in her heart; but they must all lie buried there. She must be his comfort and pride, and she must cheer her aunt and Elice, who long remained drooping and sad; and she did it all — not proudly trusting to her own strength, but relying upon her Saviour. All those trials, and she had many, were maturing her character and strengthening her Christian faith. Years hence, if Leigh Osman escaped the fevers and dangers of his foreign exile, he would find her even more worthy of his love than when he went; he would, perhaps, also have benefited, and learn to place full confidence in a true heart; yet, had he known the homage so frequently paid the Major's handsome daughter, some little jealous fears for her fealty might have been pardoned.

That the Major himself viewed her with pride we may be assured, and, indeed, almost with reverence. It was well that she ever treated him with obedience and respect, for it led him towards the principles which actuated her; and much was there in the mind and habits of the old veteran opposed to religion.

## Chapter XXIII.

A Night Long Passed. "All night the booming minute  
gun  
Had peal'd along the deep,  
And mournfully the rising sun  
Look'd o'er the tide-worn ship,

— Felicia Hemans.

THE clouds gathered black upon the horizon, now rolling upwards, now enveloping the rising waves; the wind sobbed — then was hushed — then rose again; the vessel tossed and creaked, and all was bustle and dismay; they furled her sails; they prepared with all promptitude for the coming hurricane. Dark, yet darker, grew the sky, only illumined by streaks of lurid lightning; and the rush of the waters gained strength, and mingled their sounds with the rolling of thunder.

Clinging to the sofas in the saloon were two men — one deadly pale and emaciated, with the fumes of gin yet clinging around him; the other was sun-browned and calmer.

"Mr. Calder!" said the first.

"Well — what now?"

"We'll be wrecked, Sir! we'll surely be wrecked!"

An oath replied to him.

"Don't swear now," said the other, timidly.

"Craven heart, is swearing the blackest crime we have to answer for? We will yet make a fortune in San Francisco."

"I'll go home, if ever I live over this night."

"Won't you join me in the place we arranged?"

"No: I could not keep a gaming-house there."

"You think so now. Hark! how the wind blows! I say, Kil — I mean Wilkins, I wish I were ashore."

The other groaned and cowered over the railing he clung to. The vessel creaked, and heaved, and tossed; the waves broke above her, and rent her masts from their places; and the cries of sailors carried overboard mingled with "the war of elements," and the crashing of timber.

"Great God, have mercy on us! I have been a great sinner! Have mercy on me! Oh, my poor old mother!"

There was the gurgling of water, the vessel staggered, then sank, amidst one cry of agony and horror; and the foam-capped billows rolled over her, and the storm raged as before; and thus they recorded her in the California papers —

“Loss of the ‘Salt Wave.’ — Captain James reports having picked up, after a terrific storm, which he encountered off — — , a fire-bucket, painted green, and, in white letters on it, the words ‘Salt Wave.’ It is feared this well-known trader must have foundered, and all hands perished.”

“Further particulars. — Captain Grey, of the ‘Mary,’ has handed the authorities a small japan case, containing papers picked up in latitude — — , after the storm of — — , chiefly memoranda of money transactions between two persons, named Peter Blackmore and Richard Kilby. Neither of these names agree with the passenger list which had been forwarded by one of the ship owners to a partner here, and which has kindly been handed us for publication; fears are therefore entertained that a second vessel has been lost. Passengers per ‘Salt Wave:’ — Captain Smith, Gilbert Calder, John Wilkins, &c.”

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