

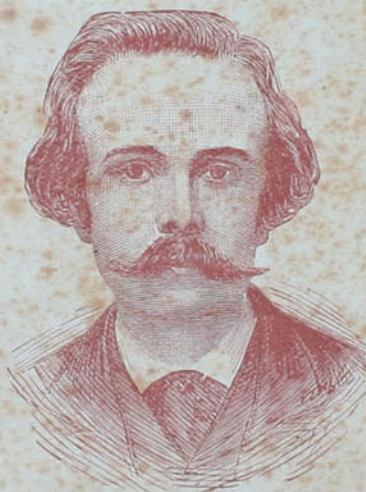
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Aylwin

By

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION



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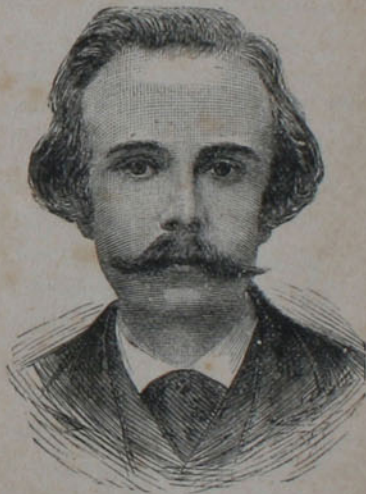
Aylwin

By

Theodore Watts=Dunton

Author of "The Coming of Love: Rhona Boswell's Story"

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION



London

HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED

13 Great Marlborough Street

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INTRODUCTION.

THOUGH written many years ago this story was, for certain personal reasons easy to guess, withheld from publication—withheld, as *The Times* pointed out, because “with the *Dichtung* was mingled a good deal of *Wahrheit*.” But why did I still delay in publishing it after these reasons for withholding it had passed away? This is a question that has often been put to me both in print and in conversation. And yet I should have imagined that the explanation was not far to seek. It was simply diffidence: in other words it was that infirmity which, though generally supposed to belong to youth, comes to a writer, if it comes at all, with years. Undoubtedly there was a time in my life when I should have leapt with considerable rashness into the brilliant ranks of our contemporary novelists. But this was before I had reached what I will call the diffident period in the life of a writer. And then, again, I had often been told by George Borrow, and also by my friend Francis Groome, the great living authority on Romany matters, that there was in England no interest in gypsies. Altogether then, had it not been for the unexpected success of “The Coming of Love,” a story of gypsy life, it is doubtful whether I should not have delayed the publication of “Aylwin” until the great warder of the gates of day we call Death should close his portal behind me and shut me off from these dreams. However, I am very glad now that I did publish it; for it has brought around me a number of new friends—brought them at a time when new friends were what I yearned for—a time when, looking back through this vision of my life, I seem to be looking down an Appian way—a street of tombs—the tombs of those I loved. No wonder, then, that I was deeply touched by the kindness with which the Public and the Press received the story. And if here and there the great success of the book aroused at last the ire of some writer less favoured by fortune, goading him to be unjust to me, I could freely and heartily forgive him and wish him that sweetness of temper

which will come with the better success of his own next literary venture. But, after all, the severest critic of "Aylwin" is he who wrote it.

One critic did me the honour of remarking upon what he called the "absolute newness of the plot and incidents of 'Aylwin.'" He seems to have forgotten, however, that one incident—the most daring incident in the book—that of the rifling of a grave for treasure—is not new: it will at once remind folk-lorists of certain practices charged against our old Norse invaders. And students of Celtic and Gaelic literature are familiar with the same idea. Quite lately, indeed, Mr. Alfred Nutt, in his analysis of the Gaelic "Agallamh na Senorach," or "Colloquy of the Elders," has made some interesting remarks upon the subject.

As far as I remember, the only objection made to "Aylwin" by those critics who were really wishful to do the book justice was that I had imported into a story written for popular acceptance, too many speculations and broodings upon the gravest of all subjects—the subject of love at struggle with death. My answer to this is that although it did win a great popular acceptance, I never expected it to do so. I knew the book to be an expression of idiosyncrasy, and no man knows how much or how little his idiosyncrasy is in harmony with the temper of his time, until his book has been given to the world. It was the story of "Aylwin" that was born of the speculations upon Love and Death; it was not the speculations that were pressed into the story; without these speculations there could have been no story to tell. Indeed the chief fault which I myself should find with "Aylwin," if my business were to criticise it, would be that it gives not too little but too much prominence to the strong incidents of the story—a story written as a comment on love's warfare with death—written for no other purpose than to shew that, confronted as man is every moment by signs of the fragility and the brevity of human life, the great marvel connected with him is not that his thoughts dwell frequently upon the unknown country beyond Orion where the beloved dead are loving us still, but that he can find time and patience to think upon anything else—a story written further to show how terribly despair becomes intensified when a man has lost—or thinks he has lost—a woman whose love was the only light of his world—when his soul is torn from his body, as it were, and whisked off on the wings of the "viewless winds" right away beyond the furthest star, till the universe hangs beneath his feet a trembling point of twinkling light, and at last

even this dies away and his soul cries out for help in that utter darkness and loneliness.

It was to depict this phase of human emotion that both "Aylwin" and its sequel, "The Coming of Love," were written. They were missives from the lonely watch tower of the writer's soul, sent out into the strange and busy battle of the world—sent out to find, if possible, another soul or two to whom the watcher was, without knowing it, akin.

And now as to my two gypsy heroines, the Sinfì Lovell of "Aylwin" and the Rhona Boswell of "The Coming of Love." Although Borrow belonged to a different generation from mine, I enjoyed his intimate friendship in his later years—during the time when he lived in Hereford Square; and since his death I have written a good deal about him—both in prose and in verse—in the *Athenæum*, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and in other places. When, some seven or eight years ago, I brought out an edition of "Lavengro" (in Messrs. Ward, Lock and Co.'s Minerva Library), I prefaced that delightful book by a few desultory remarks upon Borrow's gypsy characters. On that occasion I gave a slight sketch of the most remarkable "Romany Chi" that had ever been met with in the part of East Anglia known to Borrow and myself—Sinfì Lovell. I described her playing on the crwth; I discussed her exploits as a boxer, and I contrasted her in many ways with the glorious Anglo-Saxon road-girl Isopel Berners.

Since the publication of "Aylwin" and "The Coming of Love" I have received very many letters from English and American readers enquiring whether "the gypsy girl described in the introduction to 'Lavengro' is the same as the Sinfì Lovell of 'Aylwin'?" and also whether "the Rhona Boswell that figures in the prose story is the same as the Rhona of 'The Coming of Love'?" The evidence of the reality of Rhona so impressed itself upon the reader that on the appearance of Rhona's first letter in the *Athenæum*, where the poem was printed in fragments, I got among other letters one from the sweet poet and adorable woman Jean Ingelow, who was then very ill, near her death indeed, urging me to tell her whether Rhona's love letter was not a versification of a real letter from a real gypsy to her lover. As it was obviously impossible for me to answer the queries individually, I take this opportunity of saying that the Sinfì of "Aylwin" and the Sinfì described in my introduction to

INTRODUCTION.

"Lavengro" are one and the same character—the character alluded to in the now famous sonnet describing "the walking lord of gypsy lore," Borrow, by his most intimate friend Dr. Gordon Hake.

"And he, the walking lord of gypsy lore !
 How often 'mid the deer that grazed the Park,
 Or in the fields and heath and windy moor,
 Made musical with many a soaring lark,
 Have we not held brisk commune with him there,
 While Lavengro, then towering by your side,
 With rose complexion and bright silvery hair,
 Would stop amid his swift and lounging stride
 To tell the legends of the fading race—
 As at the summons of his piercing glance,
 Its story peopling his brown eyes and face,
 While you called up that pendant of romance
 To Petulengro with his boxing glory
 Your Amazonian Sinfi's noble story !"

Now that so many of the gryengroes (horse-dealers), who form the aristocracy of the Romany race, have left England for America, it is natural enough that to some readers of "Aylwin" and "The Coming of Love" my pictures of Romany life seem a little idealized. *The Times* in a kindly notice of "The Coming of Love" said that the kind of gypsies there depicted are a very interesting people, "unless the author has flattered them unduly." Those who best knew the gypsy women of that period will be the first to aver that I have not flattered them unduly. But I have fully discussed this matter, and given a somewhat elaborate account of Sinfi Lovell and Rhona Boswell, in the introduction to the fifth edition of "The Coming of Love."

I have been asked for a portrait for this edition. Some years ago there appeared in the *Weekly Graphic* the early portrait of me, here reproduced on the title page. It was taken not very long before the time when "Aylwin" was written. Besides being strikingly good as a likeness, the portrait is so associated with the one period of my life round which all the subsequent years seem to have been revolving, that I requested the publisher of the *Graphic* to allow me to purchase the block. That gentleman was so kind as to give it to me; and now, after years of change, I find a happy use for it, for since the publication of "Aylwin" I have frequently been asked where that early portrait could be obtained.

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON.

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"Aylwin' is as unique in prose as 'The Coming of Love' was in poetry."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

"I take the significance of 'Aylwin' to be this—it teaches a profound moral lesson, not by dictation, but by dramatic and pictorial expression—the lesson that the heart through suffering sees where the intellect is blinded."—*The Contemporary Review*,—Dr. Robertson Nicoll.

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"Mr. Watts-Dunton's speciality is as an expounder of the Romantic movement, and in 'Aylwin,' a poetic romance, he has endeavoured to carry into scenes of contemporary life those principles of purely Romantic art which have heretofore found expression solely in pictures of the past. In the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he founded a school of criticism which discarded conventional authority, and sought to test all literary effects by the light of first principles merely."—*Celebrities of the Century.*

Aylwin

“Quoth Ja’afar, bowing low his head:—‘Bold is the donkey-driver, O Ka’dee! and bold the ka’dee who dares say what he will believe, what disbelieve—not knowing in any wise the mind of Allah—not knowing in any wise his own heart, and what it shall some day suffer.’”

I The Cymric Child

I

“THOSE who in childhood have had solitary communings with the sea know the sea’s prophecy. They know that there is a deeper sympathy between the sea and the soul of man than other people dream of. They know that the water seems nearer akin than the land to the spiritual world, inasmuch as it is one and indivisible, and has motion, and answers to the mysterious call of the winds, and is the writing tablet of the moon and stars. When a child who, born beside the sea, and beloved by the sea, feels suddenly, as he gazes upon it, a dim sense of pity and warning; when there comes, or seems to come, a shadow across the waves, with never a cloud in the sky to cast it; when there comes a shuddering as of wings that move in dread or ire, then such a child feels as if the bloodhounds of calamity are let loose upon him or upon those he loves; he feels that the sea has told him all it dares tell or can. And, in other moods of fate, when beneath a cloudy sky the myriad dimples of the sea begin to sparkle as though the sun were shining bright upon them, such a child feels, as he gazes at it, that the sea is telling him of some great joy near at hand, or, at least, not far off.”

One lovely summer afternoon a little boy was sitting on the edge of the cliff that skirts the old churchyard of Raxton-on-Sea. He was sitting on the grass close to the brink of the indentation cut by the water into the horse-shoe curve called by the fishermen Mousetrapp Cove; sitting there as still as an image of a boy in stone, at the forbidden spot where the wooden fence proclaimed the crumbling hollow crust to be

specially dangerous—sitting and looking across the sheer deep gulf below.

Flinty Point on his right was sometimes in purple shadow and sometimes shining in the sun; Needle Point on his left was sometimes in purple shadow and sometimes shining in the sun; and beyond these headlands spread now the wide purple, and now the wide sparkle of the open sea. The very gulls, wheeling as close to him as they dared, seemed to be frightened at the little boy’s peril. Straight ahead he was gazing, however—gazing so intently that his eyes must have been seeing very much or else very little of that limitless world of light and coloured shade. On account of certain questions connected with race that will be raised in this narrative, I must dwell a little while upon the child’s personal appearance, and especially upon his colour. Natural or acquired, it was one that might be almost called unique; as much like a young Gypsy’s colour as was compatible with respectable descent, and yet not a Gypsy’s colour. A deep undertone of “Romany brown” seemed breaking through that peculiar kind of ruddy golden-glow which no sunshine can give till it has itself been deepened and coloured and enriched by the responsive kisses of the sea.

Moreover, there was a certain something in his eyes that was not Gypsy-like—a something which is not uncommonly seen in the eyes of boys born along that coast, whether those eyes be black or blue or grey; a something which cannot be described, but which seems like a reflex of the daring gaze of that great land-conquering and daring sea. Very striking was this expression as he momentarily turned his face landward to watch one of the gulls that had come wheeling up the cliffs towards the flinty grey tower of the church—the old deserted church, whose graveyard the sea had already half washed away. As his eyes followed the bird’s movements, however, this daring sea-look seemed to be growing gradually weaker and weaker.

At last it faded away altogether, and by the time his face was turned again towards the sea, the look I have tried to describe was supplanted by such a gaze as that gull would give were it hiding behind a boulder with a broken wing. A mist of cruel trouble was covering his eyes, and soon the mist had grown into two bright glittering pearly tears, which, globing and trembling, larger and larger, were at length big enough to drown both eyes; big enough to drop, shining, on the grass; big enough to blot out altogether the most brilliant picture that sea and sky could make. For that little boy had begun to learn a lesson which life was going to teach him fully—the lesson that shining sails in the sunny wind, and black trailing bands of smoke passing here and there along the horizon, and silvery gulls dipping playfully into the green and silver waves (nay, all the beauties and all the wonders of the world), make but a blurred picture to eyes that look through the lens of tears. However, with a brown hand brisk and angry, he brushed away these tears, like one who should say, "This kind of thing will never do."

Indeed, so hardy was the boy's face—tanned by the sun, hardened and bronzed by the wind, reddened by the brine—that tears seemed entirely out of place there. The meaning of those tears must be fully accounted for, and if possible fully justified, for this little boy is to be the hero of this story. In other words, he is Henry Aylwin; that is to say, myself; and those who know me now in the full vigour of manhood, a lusty knight of the alpenstock of some repute, will be surprised to know what troubled me. They will be surprised to know that owing to a fall from the cliff I was for about two years a cripple.

This is how it came about. Rough and yielding as were the paths, called "gangways," connecting the cliffs with the endless reaches of sand below, they were not rough enough, or yielding enough, or in any way dangerous enough for me.

So I used to fashion "gangways" of my own; I used to descend the cliff at whatsoever point it pleased me, clinging to the lumps of sandy earth with the prehensile power of a spider-monkey. Many a warning had I had from the good fishermen and sea-folk, that some day I should fall from top to bottom—fall and break my neck. A laugh was my sole answer to these warnings; for, with the possession of perfect health, I had inherited that instinctive belief in good luck which perfect health will often engender.

However, my punishment came at last. The coast, which is yielding gradually to the

sea, is famous for sudden and gigantic landslips. These landslips are sometimes followed, at the return of the tide, by a further fall, called a "settlement." The word "settlement" explains itself, perhaps. No matter how smooth the sea, the return of the tide seems on that coast to have a strange magnetic power upon the land, and the *débris* of a landslip will sometimes, though not always, respond to it by again falling and settling into new and permanent shapes.

Now, on the morning after a great landslip, when the coastguard, returning on his beat, found a cove where, half-an-hour before, he had left his own cabbages growing, I, in spite of all warnings, had climbed the heap of *débris* from the sands, and while I was hallooing triumphantly to two companions below—the two most impudent-looking urchins, barefooted and unkempt, that ever a gentleman's son gathered with—a great mass of loose earth settled, carrying me with it in its fall. I was taken up for dead.

It was, however, only a matter of broken ribs and a damaged leg. And there is no doubt that if the local surgeon had not been allowed to have his own way, I should soon have been cured. As it was I became a cripple. The great central fact—the very pivot upon which all the wheels of my life have since been turning—is that for two years during the impressionable period of childhood I walked with crutches.

It must not be supposed that my tears—the tears which at this moment were blotting out the light and glory of the North Sea in the sun—came from the pain I was suffering. They came from certain terrible news, which even my brother Frank had been careful to keep from me, but which had fallen from the lips of my father—the news that I was not unlikely to be a cripple for life. From that moment I had become a changed being, solitary and sometimes morose. I would come and sit staring at the ocean, meditating on things in general, but chiefly on things connected with cripples, asking myself, as now, whether life would be bearable on crutches.

At my heart were misery and anger and such revolt as is, I hope, rarely found in the heart of a child. I had sat down outside the rails at this most dangerous point along the cliff, wondering whether or not it would crumble beneath me. For this lameness coming to me, who had been so active, who had been, indeed, the little athlete and pugilist of the sands, seemed to have isolated me from my fellow-creatures to a degree that is inconceivable to me now.

A stubborn will and masterful pride made me refuse to accept a disaster such as many a nobler soul than mine has, I am conscious, borne with patience. My nature became soured by asking in vain for sympathy at home; my loneliness drove me—silent, haughty, and aggressive—to haunt the churchyard, and sit at the edge of the cliff, gazing wistfully at the sea and the sands which could not be reached on crutches. Like a wounded sea-gull, I retired and took my trouble alone.

How could I help taking it alone when none would sympathise with me? My brother Frank called me "The Black Savage," and I half began to suspect myself of secret impulses of a savage kind. Once I heard my mother murmur, as she stroked Frank's rosy cheeks and golden curls, "My poor Henry is a strange, proud boy!" Then, looking from my crutches to Frank's beautiful limbs, she said, "How providential that it was not the elder! Providence is kind." She meant kind to the House of Aylwin. I often wonder whether she guessed that I heard her. I often wonder whether she knew how I had loved her.

This is how matters stood with me on that summer afternoon, when I sat on the edge of the cliff in a kind of dull, miserable dream. Suddenly, at the moment when the huge mass of clouds had covered the entire surface of the water between Flinty Point and Needle Point with their rich purple shadow, it seemed to me that the waves began to sparkle and laugh in a joyful radiance which they were making for themselves. And at that same moment an unwonted sound struck my ear from the churchyard behind me—a strange sound indeed in that deserted place—that of a childish voice singing.

Was, then, the mighty ocean writing symbols for an unhappy child to read? My father, from whose book, *The Veiled Queen*, the extract with which this chapter opens is taken, would, unhesitatingly, have answered "Yes."

"Destiny, no doubt, in the Greek drama concerns itself only with the great," says he, in that wonderful book of his. "But who are the great? With the unseen powers, mysterious and imperious, who govern while they seem not to govern all that is seen, who are the great? In a world where man's loftiest ambitions are to higher intelligences childish dreams, where his highest knowledge is ignorance, where his strongest strength is to heaven a derision—who are the great? Are they not the few men and women and children on the earth who greatly love?"

II

So sweet a sound as that childish voice I had never heard before. I held my breath and listened.

Into my very being that child-voice passed, and it was a new music and a new joy. I can give the reader no notion of it, because there is not in nature anything with which I can compare it. The blackcap has a climacteric note, just before his song collapses and dies, so full of pathos and tenderness that often, when I had been sitting on a gate in Wilderness Road, it had affected me more deeply than any human words. But here was a note sweet and soft as that, and yet charged with a richness no blackcap's song had ever borne, because no blackcap has ever felt the joys and sorrows of a young human soul.

The voice was singing in a language which seemed strange to me then, but has become familiar enough since:

"Bore o'r cwmwl aur,
Eryri oedd dy gaer,
Brenhin o wyllt a gwar,
Gwawr ysbrydau."*

Intense curiosity now made me suddenly forget my troubles. I scrambled back through the trees not far from that spot and looked around. There, sitting upon a grassy grave, beneath one of the windows of the church, was a little girl, somewhat younger than myself apparently. With her head bent back she was gazing up at the sky and singing, while one of her little hands was pointing to a tiny cloud that hovered like a golden feather over her head. The sun, which had suddenly become very bright, shining on her glossy hair (for she was bare-headed) gave it a metallic lustre, and it was difficult to say what was the colour, dark bronze or black. So completely absorbed was she in watching the cloud to which her strange song or incantation seemed addressed, that she did not observe me when I rose and went towards her. Over her head, high up in the blue, a lark that was soaring towards the same gauzy cloud was singing, as if in rivalry. As I slowly approached the child, I could see by her forehead (which in the sunshine gleamed like a globe of pearl), and especially by her complexion, that she was uncom-

* Morning of the golden cloud,
Eryri was thy castle,
King of the wild and tame,
Glory of the spirits of air!

Eryri—the Place of Eagles, i.e. Snowden.

monly lovely, and I was afraid lest she should look down before I got close to her, and so see my crutches before her eyes encountered my face. She did not, however, seem to hear me coming along the grass (so intent was she with her singing) until I was close to her, and throwing my shadow over her. Then she suddenly lowered her head and looked at me in surprise. I stood transfixed at her astonishing beauty. No other picture has ever taken such possession of me. In its every detail it lives before me now. Her eyes (which at one moment seemed blue grey, at another violet) were shaded by long black lashes, curving backward in a most peculiar way, and these matched in hue her eyebrows, and the tresses that were tossed about her tender throat and were quivering in the sunlight.

All this picture I did not take in at once; for at first I could see nothing but those quivering, glittering, changeable eyes turned up into my face. Gradually the other features (especially the sensitive full-lipped mouth) grew upon me as I stood silently gazing. Here seemed to me a more perfect beauty than had ever come to me in my loveliest dreams of beauty beneath the sea. Yet it was not her beauty perhaps, so much as the look she gave me, that fascinated me, melted me.

As she gazed in my face there came over hers a look of pleased surprise, and then, as her eyes passed rapidly down my limbs and up again, her face was not overshadowed with the look of disappointment which I had waited for—yes, waited for, like a pinioned criminal for the executioner's uplifted knife; but the smile of pleasure was still playing about the little mouth, while the tender young eyes were moistening rapidly with the dews of a kind of pity that was new to me, a pity that did not blister the pride of the lonely wounded sea-gull, but soothed, healed, and blessed.

Remember that I was a younger son—that I was swarthy—that I was a cripple—and that my mother—had Frank. It was as though my heart must leap from my breast towards that child. Not a word had she spoken, but she had said what the little maimed "fighting Hal" yearned to hear, and without *knowing* that he yearned.

I restrained myself, and did not yield to the feeling that impelled me to throw my arms round her neck in an ecstasy of wonder and delight. After a second or two she again threw back her head to gaze at the golden cloud.

"Look!" said she, suddenly clapping her hands, "it's over both of us now."

"What is it?" I said.

"The Dukkeripen," she said, "the Golden Hand. Sinf and Rhona both say the Golden Hand brings luck: what *is* luck?"

I looked up at the little cloud which to me seemed more like a golden feather than a golden hand. But I soon bent my eyes down again to look at her.

While I stood looking at her, the tall figure of a man came out of the church. This was Tom Wynne. Besides being the organist of Raxton "New Church," Tom was also (for a few extra shillings a week) custodian of the "Old Church," this deserted pile within whose precincts we now were. Tom's features wore an expression of virtuous indignation which puzzled me and evidently frightened the little girl. He locked the door, and walked unsteadily towards us. He seemed surprised to see me there, and his features relaxed into a bland civility.

"This is (hiccup) Master Aylwin, Winifred," he said.

The child looked at me again with the same smile. Her alarm had fled.

"This is my little daughter Winifred," said Tom with a pompous bow.

I was astonished. I never knew that Wynne had a daughter, for intimate as he and I had become, he had actually never mentioned his daughter before.

"My *only* daughter," Tom repeated.

He then told me, with many hiccups, that, since her mother's death (that is to say from her very infancy), Winifred had been brought up by an aunt in Wales. "Quite a lady, her aunt is," said Tom proudly, "and Winifred has come to spend a few weeks with her father."

He said this in a grandly paternal tone—a tone that seemed meant to impress upon her how very much obliged she ought to feel to him for consenting to be her father; and, judging from the look the child gave him, she *did* feel very much obliged.

Suddenly, however, a thought seemed to come back upon Tom, a thought which my unexpected appearance on the scene had driven from his drunken brain. The look of virtuous indignation returned, and staring at the little girl through glazed eyes, he said with the tremulous and tearful voice of a deeply injured parent,

"Winifred, I thought I heard you singing one of them heathen Gypsy songs that you learnt of the Gypsies in Wales."

"No, father," said she, "it was the song they sing in Shire-Carnarvon about the golden cloud over Snowdon and the spirits of the air."

"Yes," said Tom, "but a little time ago you were singing a Gypsy song—a downright heathen Gypsy song." I heard it

about half an hour ago when I was in the church."

The beautiful little head drooped in shame.

"I'm s'prised at you, Winifred. When I come to think whose daughter you are,—mine!—I'm s'prised at you," continued Tom, whose virtuous indignation waxed with every word.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" said the child. "I won't do it any more."

This contrition of the child's only fanned the flame of Tom's virtuous indignation.

"Here am I," said he, "the most (hiccup) respectable man in two parishes,—except Master Aylwin's father, of course,—here am I, the organ-player for the Christianest of all the Christian churches along the coast, and here's my daughter sings heathen songs just like a Gypsy or a tinker. I'm s'prised at you, Winifred."

I had often seen Tom in a dignified state of liquor, but the pathetic expression of injured virtue that again overspread his face so changed it that I had some difficulty myself in realising how entirely the tears filling his eyes and the grief at his heart were of alcoholic origin. And as to the little girl, she began to sob piteously.

"Oh dear, oh dear, what a wicked girl I am!" said she.

This exclamation, however, aroused my ire against Tom; and as I always looked upon him as my special paid henchman, who, in return for such services as supplying me with tiny boxing-gloves, and fishing-tackle, and bait, during my hale days, and tame rabbits now that I was a cripple, mostly contrived to possess himself of my pocket-money, I had no hesitation in exclaiming,

"Why, Tom, you know you're drunk, you silly old fool!"

At this Tom turned his mournful and reproachful gaze upon me, and began to weep anew. Then he turned and addressed the sea, uplifting his hand in oratorical fashion:—

"Here's a young gentleman as I've been more than a father to—yes, more than a father to—for when did his own father ever give him a ferret-eyed rabbit, a real ferret-eyed rabbit thoroughbred?"

"Why, I gave you one of my five-shilling pieces for it," said I; "and the rabbit was in a consumption and died in three weeks."

But Tom still addressed the sea.

"When did his own father give him," said he, "the longest thigh-bone that the sea ever washed out of Raxton church-yard?"

"Why, I gave you *two* of my five-shilling pieces for *that*," said I, "and next day you went and borrowed the bone, and sold it

over again to Dr. Munro for a quart of beer."

"When did his own father give him a beautiful skull for a money-box, and make an oak lid to it, and keep it for him because his mother wouldn't have it in the house?"

"Ah, but where's the money that was in it, Tom? Where's the money?" said I, flourishing one of my crutches, for I was worked up to a state of high excitement when I recalled my own wrongs and Tom's frauds, and I forgot his relationship to the little girl. "Where are the bright new half-crowns that were *in* the money-box when I left it with you—the half-crowns that got changed into pennies, Tom? Where are *they*? What's the use of having a skull for a money-box if it's got no money in it? That's what I want to know, Tom!"

"Here's a young gentleman," said Tom, "as I've done all these things for, and how does he treat me? He says, 'Why, Tom, you know you're drunk, you silly old fool.'"

At this pathetic appeal the little girl sprang up and turned towards me with the ferocity of a young tigress. Her little hands were tightly clenched, and her eyes seemed positively to be emitting blue sparks. Many a bold boy had I encountered on the sands before my accident, and many a fearless girl, but such an impetuous antagonist as this was new. I leaned on my crutches, however, and looked at her unflinchingly.

"You wicked English boy, to make my father cry," said she, as soon as her anger allowed her to speak. "If you were not lame I'd—I'd—I'd hit you."

I did not move a muscle, but stood lost in a dream of wonder at her amazing loveliness. The fiery flush upon her face and neck, the bewitching childish frown of anger corrugating the brow, the dazzling glitter of the teeth, the quiver of the full scarlet lips above and below them, turned me dizzy with admiration.

Her eyes met mine, and slowly the violet flames in them began to soften. Then they died away entirely as she murmured,

"You wicked English boy, if you hadn't—beautiful—beautiful eyes, I'd kill you."

By this time, however, Tom had entirely forgotten his grievance against me, and gazed upon Winifred in a state of drunken wonderment.

"Winifred," he said, in a tone of sorrowful reproach, "how dare you speak like that to Master Aylwin, your father's best friend, the only friend your poor father's got in the world, the friend as I give ferret-eyed rabbits to, and tame hares, and beautiful skulls? Beg his pardon this instant, Winifred. I own

on your knees and beg my friend's pardon this instant, Winifred."

The poor little girl stood dazed, and was actually sinking down on her knees on the grass before me.

I cried out in acute distress,

"No, no, no, no, Tom, pray don't let her—dear little girl!—beautiful little girl!"

"Very well, Master Aylwin," said Tom, grandly, "she sha'n't if you don't like, but she *shall* go and kiss you and make it up."

At this the child's face brightened, and she came and laid her little red lips upon mine. Velvet lips, I feel them now, soft and warm—I feel them while I write these lines.

Tom looked on for a moment, and then left us, blundering away towards Raxton, most likely to a beer-house.

He told the child that she was to go home and mind the house until he returned. He gave her the church key to take home. We two were left alone in the churchyard, looking at each other in silence, each waiting for the other to speak. At last she said, demurely, "Good-bye; father says I must go home."

And she walked away with a business-like air towards the little white gate of the churchyard, opening upon what was called "The Wilderness Road." When she reached the gate she threw a look over her shoulder as she passed through. It was that same look again—wistful, frank, courageous. I immediately began to follow her, although I did not know why. When she saw this she stopped for me. I got up to her, and then we proceeded side by side in perfect silence along the dusty narrow road, perfumed with the scent of wild rose and honeysuckle. Suddenly she stopped and said,

"I have left my hat on the tower," and laughed merrily at her own heedlessness.

She ran back with an agility which I thought I had never seen equalled. It made me sad to see her run so fast, though once how it would have delighted me! I stood still; but when she reached the church porch she again looked over her shoulder, and again I followed her:—I did not in the least know why. That look I think would have made me follow her through fire and water—it *has* made me follow her through fire and water. When I reached her she put the great black key in the lock. She had some difficulty in turning the key, but I did not presume to offer such services as mine to so superior a little woman. After one or two fruitless efforts with both her hands, each attempt accompanied with a little laugh and a little merry glance in my face, she turned the key and pushed open the door. We both passed into the ghastly old church, through the green glass windows of which

the sun was shining, and illuminating the broken remains of the high-backed pews on the opposite side. She ran along towards the belfry, and I soon lost her, for she passed up the stone steps, where I knew I could not follow her.

In deep mortification I stood listening at the bottom of the steps—listening to those little feet crunching up the broken stones—listening to the rustle of her dress against the narrow stone walls, until the sounds grew fainter and fainter, and then ceased.

Presently I heard her voice a long way up, calling out, "Little boy, if you go outside you will see something." I guessed at once that she was going to exhibit herself on the tower, where, before my accident, I and my brother Frank were so fond of going. I went outside the church and stood in the graveyard, looking up at the tower. In a minute I saw her on it. Her face was turned towards me, gilded by the golden sunshine. I could, or thought I could, even at that distance, see the flash of the bright eyes looking at me. Then a little hand was put over the parapet, and I saw a dark hat swinging by its strings, as she was waving it to me. Oh! that I could have climbed those steps and done that! But that exploit of hers touched a strange chord within me. Had she been a boy, I could have borne it in a defiant way; or had she been any other girl than this, my heart would not have sunk as it now did when I thought of the gulf between her and me. Down I sat upon a grave, and looked at her with a feeling quite new to me.

This was a phase of cripplehood I had not contemplated. She soon left the tower, and made her appearance at the church door again. After locking it, which she did by thrusting a piece of stick through the handle of the key, she came and stood over me. But I turned my eyes away and gazed across the sea, and tried to deceive myself into believing that the waves, and the gulls, and the sails dreaming on the sky-line, and the curling clouds of smoke that came now and then from a steamer passing Dullingham Point were interesting me deeply. There was a remoteness about the little girl now, since I had seen her unusual agility, and I was trying to harden my heart against her. Loneliness I felt was best for me. She did not speak, but stood looking at me. I turned my eyes round and saw that she was looking at my crutches, which were lying beside me aslant the green hillock where I sat. Her face had turned grave and pitiful.

"Oh! I forgot," she said. "I wish I had not run away from you now."

"You may run where you like for what I care," I said. But the words were very

shaky, and I had no sooner said them than I wished them back. She made no reply for some time, and I sat plucking the wild flowers near my hands, and gazing again across the sea. At last she said,

"Would you like to come in our garden? It's such a nice garden."

I could resist her no longer. That voice would have drawn me had she spoken in the language of the Toltecs or the lost Zamzummin. To describe it would of course be impossible. The novelty of her accent, the way in which she gave the "h" in "which," "what," and "when," the Welsh rhythm of her intonation, were as bewitching to me as the *timbre* of her voice. And let me say here, once for all, that when I sat down to write this narrative, I determined to give the English reader some idea of the way in which, whenever her emotions were deeply touched, her talk would run into soft Welsh diminutives; but I soon abandoned the attempt in despair. I found that to use colloquial Welsh with effect in an English context is impossible without wearying English readers and disappointing Welsh ones.

Here, indeed, is one of the great disadvantages under which this book will go out to the world. While a story-teller may reproduce, by means of orthographical devices, something of the effect of Scottish accent, Irish accent, or Manx accent, such devices are powerless to represent Welsh accent.

I got up in silence, and walked by her side out of the churchyard towards her father's cottage, which was situated between the new church and the old, and at a considerable distance from the town of Raxton on one side, and the village of Graylingham on the other. Her eager young limbs would every moment take her ahead of me, for she was as vigorous as a fawn. But by the time she was half a yard in advance, she would recollect herself and fall back; and every time she did so that same look of tenderness would overspread her face.

At last she said, "What makes you stare at me so, little boy?"

I blushed and turned my head another way, for I had been feasting my eyes upon her complexion, and trying to satisfy myself as to what it really was like. Indeed, I thought it quite peculiar then, when I had seen so few lovely faces, as I always did afterwards, when I had seen as many as most people. It was, I thought, as though underneath the sunburn the delicate pink tint of the hedge-rose had become mingled with the bloom of a ripening peach, and yet it was like neither peach nor rose. But this tone, whatever it was, did not spread higher than the eye-

brows. The forehead was different. It had a singular kind of pearly look, and her long slender throat was almost of the same tone: no, not the same, for there was a transparency about her throat unlike that of the forehead. This colour I was just now thinking looked something like the inside of a certain mysterious shell upon my father's library shelf.

As she asked me her question she stopped, and looked straight at me, opening her eyes wide and round upon me. This threw a look of innocent trustfulness over her bright features which I soon learnt was the chief characteristic of her expression and was altogether peculiar to herself. I knew it was very rude to stare at people as I had been staring at her, and I took her question as a rebuke, although I still was unable to keep my eyes off her. But it was not merely her beauty and her tenderness that had absorbed my attention. I had been noticing how intensely she seemed to enjoy the delights of that summer afternoon. As we passed along that road, where sea-scents and land-scents were mingled, she would stop whenever the sunshine fell full upon her face; her eyes would sparkle and widen with pleasure, and a half-smile would play about her lips, as if someone had kissed her. Every now and then she would stop to listen to the birds, putting up her finger, and with a look of childish wisdom say, "Do you know what that is? That's a blackbird—that's a thrush—that's a goldfinch. Which eggs do you like best—a goldfinch's or a bullfinch's? I know which I like best."

III

WHILE we were walking along the road a sound fell upon my ears which in my hale days never produced any very unpleasant sensations, but which did now. I mean the cackling of the field people of both sexes returning from their day's work. These people knew me well, and they liked me, and I am sure they had no idea that when they ran past me on the road their looks and nods gave me no pleasure, but pain; and I always tried to avoid them. As they passed us they somewhat modified the noise they were making, but only to cackle, chatter, and bawl and laugh at each other the louder after we were left behind.

"Don't you wish," said the little girl meditatively, "that men and women had voices more like the birds?"

The idea had never occurred to me before, but I understood in a moment what she meant, and sympathised with her. Nature

of course has been unkind to the lords and ladies of creation in this one matter of voice.

"Yes, I do," I said.

"I'm so glad you do," said she. "I've so often thought what a pity it is that God did not let men and women talk and sing as the birds do. I believe He did let 'em talk like that in the Garden of Eden, don't you?"

"I think it very likely," I said.

"Men's voices are so rough mostly and women's voices are so sharp mostly, that it's sometimes a little hard to love 'em as you love the birds"

"It is," I said.

"Don't you think the poor birds must sometimes feel very much distressed at hearing the voices of men and women, especially when they all talk together?"

The idea seemed so original and yet so true that it made me laugh; we both laughed. At that moment there came a still louder, noisier clamour of voices from the villagers.

"The rooks mayn't mind," said the little girl, pointing upwards to the large rookery close by, whence came a noise marvellously like that made by the field workers. "But I'm afraid the blackbirds and thrushes can't like it. I do so wonder what they say about it."

After we had left the rookery behind us and the noise of the villagers had grown fainter, we stood and listened to the blackbirds and thrushes. She looked so joyous that I could not help saying, "Little girl, I think you're very happy, ain't you?"

"Not quite," she said, as though answering a question she had just been putting to herself. "There's not enough wind."

"Then do *you* like wind?" I said in surprise and delight.

"Oh, I love it!" she said rapturously. "I can't be quite happy without wind, can *you*? I like to run up the hills in the wind and sing to it. That's when I am happiest. I couldn't live long without the wind."

Now it had been a deep-rooted conviction of mine that none but the gulls and I really and truly liked the wind. "Fishermen are muffs," I used to say; "they talk about the wind as though it were an enemy, just because it drowns one or two of 'em now and then. Anybody can like sunshine; muffs can like sunshine; it takes a gull or a man to like the wind!"

Such had been my egotism. But here was a girl who liked it! We reached the gate of the garden in front of Tom's cottage, and then we both stopped, looking over the neatly-kept flower-garden and the white thatched cottage behind it, up the walls of which the grape-vine leaves were absorbing

the brilliance of the sunlight and softening it. Wynne was a gardener as well as an organist, and had gardens both in the front and at the back of his cottage, which was surrounded by fruit-trees. Drunkard as he was, his two passions, music and gardening, saved him from absolute degradation and ruin. His garden was beautifully kept, and I have seen him deftly pruning his vines when in such a state of drink that it was wonderful how he managed to hold a pruning knife. Winifred opened the gate, and we passed in. Wynne's little terrier, Snap, came barking to meet us.

There was an air of delicious peacefulness about the garden. This also tended to soften that hardness of temper which only cripples who have once rejoiced in their strength can possibly know, I hope.

"I like to see you look so," said the little girl, as I melted entirely under these sweet influences. "You looked so cross before that I was nearly afraid of you."

And she took hold of my hand, not hesitatingly, but frankly. The little fingers clasped mine. I looked at them. They were much more sun-tanned than her face. The little rosy nails were shaped like filbert nuts.

"Why were you not *quite* afraid of me?" I asked.

"Because," said she, "under the crossness I saw that you had great love-eyes like Snap's all the while. I saw it!" she said, and laughed with delight at her great wisdom. Then she said with a sudden gravity, "You didn't mean to make my father cry, did you, little boy?"

"No," I said.

"And you love him?" said she.

I hesitated, for I had never told a lie in my life. My business relations with Tom had been of an entirely unsatisfactory character, and the idea of any one's loving the beery scamp presented itself in a ludicrous light. I got out of the difficulty by saying,

"I mean to love Tom very much, if I can."

The answer did not appear to be entirely satisfactory to the little girl, but it soon seemed to pass from her mind.

That was the most delightful afternoon I had ever spent in my life. We seemed to become old friends in a few minutes, and in an hour or two she was the closest friend I had on earth. Not all the little shoeless friends in Raxton, not all the beautiful sea-gulls I loved, not all the sunshine and wind upon the sands, not all the wild bees in Graylingham Wilderness, could give the companionship this child could give. My flesh tingled with delight. (And yet all the

while I was not Hal the conqueror of raga-muffins, but Hal the cripple !)

"Shall we go and get some strawberries?" she said, as we passed to the back of the house. "They are quite ripe."

But my countenance fell at this. I was obliged to tell her that I could not stoop.

"Ah! but I can, and I will pluck them and give them to you. I should like to do it. Do let me, there's a good boy."

I consented, and hobbled by her side to the verge of the strawberry-beds. But when I foolishly tried to follow her, I stuck ignominiously, with my crutches sunk deep in the soft mould of rotten leaves. Here was a trial for the conquering hero of the coast. I looked into her face to see if there was not, at last, a laugh upon it. That cruel human laugh was my only dread. To everything but ridicule I had hardened myself; but against that I felt helpless.

I looked into her face to see if she was laughing at my lameness. No: her brows were merely knit with anxiety as to how she might best relieve me. This surpassingly beautiful child, then, had evidently accepted me—lameness and all—crutches and all—as a subject of peculiar interest.

How I loved her as I put my hand upon her firm little shoulders, while I extricated first one crutch and then another, and at last got upon the hard path again!

When she had landed me safely, she returned to the strawberry-bed, and began busily gathering the fruit, which she brought to me in her sunburnt hands, stained to a bright pink by the ripe fruit. Such a charm did she throw over me, that at last I actually consented to her putting the fruit into my mouth.

She then told me with much gravity that she knew how to "cure crutches." There was, she said, a famous "crutches-well" in Wales, kept by St. Winifred (most likely an aunt of hers, being of the same name), whose water could "cure crutches." When she came from Wales again she would "be sure to bring a bottle of crutches-water." She told me also much about Snowdon (near which she lived), and how, on misty days, she used to "make believe that she was the Lady of the Mist, and that she was going to visit the Tywysog o'r Niwl, the Prince of the Mist; it was so nice!"

I do not know how long we kept at this, but the organist returned and caught her in the very act of feeding me. To be caught in this ridiculous position, even by a drunken man, was more than I could bear, however, and I turned and left.

As I recall that walk home along Wilderness Road, I live it as thoroughly as I did

then. I can see the rim of the sinking sun burning fiery red low down between the trees on the left, and then suddenly dropping out of sight. I can see on the right the lustre of the high-tide sea. I can hear the "che-eu-chew, che-eu-chew," of the wood-pigeons in Graylingham Wood. I can smell the very scent of the bean flowers drinking in the evening dews. I did not feel that I was going home as the sharp gables of the Hall gleamed through the chestnut-trees. My home for evermore was the breast of that lovely child, between whom and myself such a strange delicious sympathy had sprung up. I felt there was no other home for me.

"Why, child, where *have* you been?" said my mother, as she saw me trying to slip to bed unobserved, in order that happiness such as mine might not be brought into coarse contact with servants. "Child, where *have* you been, and what has possessed you? Your face is positively shining with joy, and your eyes, they alarm me, they are so unnaturally bright. I hope you are not going to have an illness."

I did not tell her, but went to my room, which now was on the ground floor, and sat watching the rooks sailing home in the sunset till the last one had gone, and the voices of the blackbirds grew less clamorous, and the trees began to look larger and larger in the dusk.

IV

THE next day I was again at Wynne's cottage, and the next, and the next. We two, Winifred and I, used to stroll out together through the narrow green lanes, and over the happy fields, and about the Wilderness and the wood, and along the cliffs, and then down the gangway at Flinty Point (the only gangway that was firm enough to support my crutches, Winifred aiding me with the skill of a woman and the agility of a child), and then along the flints below Flinty Point. She rapidly fell into my habits. She was an adept in finding birds' nests³ and wild honey; and though she would not consent to my taking the eggs, she had not the same compunction about the honey, and she only regretted with me that we could not be exactly like St. John, as Graylingham Wilderness yielded no locusts to eat with the honey.

Winifred, though the most healthy of children, had a passion for the deserted church on the cliffs, and for the desolate churchyard.

It was one of those flint and freestone churches that are sprinkled along the coast. Situated as it was at the back of a curve cut by the water into the end of a peninsula

running far into the sea, the tower looked in the distance like a lighthouse. I observed after the first day of our meeting that Winifred never would mount the tower steps again. And I knew why. So delicate were her feelings, so acute did her kind little heart make her, that she would not mount steps which I could never mount.

Not that Winifred looked upon me as her little lover. There was not much of the sentimental in her. Once when I asked her on the sands if I might be her lover, she took an entirely practical view of the question, and promptly replied "certainly," adding, however, like the wise little woman I always found her, that she "wasn't quite sure she knew what a lover was, but if it was anything *very* nice she should certainly like me to be it."

It was the child's originality of manner that people found so captivating. One of her many little tricks and ways of an original quaintness was her habit of speaking of herself in the third person, like the merest baby. "Winifred likes this," "Winifred doesn't like that," were phrases that had an irresistible fascination for me.

Another fascinating characteristic of hers was connected with her superstitions. Whenever on parting with her I exclaimed, as I often did, "Oh, what a lovely day we have had, Winifred!" she would look expectantly in my eyes, murmuring, "And—and—" This meant that I was to say, "And shall have many more such days," as though there were a prophetic power in words.

She talked with entire seriousness of having seen in a place called Fairy Glen in Wales the Tylwyth Teg. And when I told her of Oberon and Titania, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, whose acquaintance I had made through *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare*, she said that one bright moonlight night she, in the company of two of her Gypsy playmates, Rhona Boswell and a girl called Sinf, had visited this same Fairy Glen, when they saw the Fairy Queen alone on a ledge of rock, dressed in a green kirtle with a wreath of golden leaves about her head.

Another subject upon which I loved to hear her talk was that of the "Knockers" of Snowdon, the guardians of undiscovered copper mines, who sometimes by knocking on the rocks gave notice to individuals they favoured of undiscovered copper, but these favoured ones were mostly children who chanced to wander up Snowdon by themselves. She had, she said, not only heard but seen these Knockers. They were thick-set dwarfs, as broad as they were long. One

Knocker, an elderly female, had often played with her on the hills. Knockers' Llyn, indeed, was very much on Winifred's mind. When a golden cloud, like the one to which she was singing her song at the time I first saw her, shone over a person's head at Knockers' Llyn, it was a sign of good fortune. She was sure that it was so, because the Welsh people believed it, and so did the Gypsies.

Not a field or a hedgerow was unfamiliar to us. We were most learned in the structure of birds' nests, in the various colours of birds' eggs, and in insect architecture. In all the habits of the wild animals of the meadows we were most profound little naturalists.

Winifred could in the morning, after the dews were gone, tell by the look of a buttercup or a daisy what kind of weather was at hand, when the most cunning peasant was deceived by the hieroglyphics of the sky, and the most knowing seaman could "make nothing of the wind."

Her life, in fact, had been spent in the open air.

There were people staying at the Hall, and they and Frank engrossed all my mother's attention. At least, she did not appear to notice my absence from home.

My brother Frank, however, was not so unobservant (he was two years older than myself). Early one morning, before breakfast, curiosity led him to follow me, and he came upon us in Graylingham Wood as we were sitting under a tree close to the cliff, eating the wild honey we had found in the Wilderness.

He stood there swinging a ground-ash cane, and looking at her in a lordly, patronising way, the very personification no doubt of boyish beauty. I became troubled to see him look so handsome. The contrast between him and a cripple was not fair, I thought, as I observed an expression of passing admiration on little Winifred's face. Yet I thought there was not the pleased smile with which she had first greeted me, and a weight of anxiety was partially removed, for it had now become quite evident to me that I was as much in love as any swain of eighteen—it had become quite evident that without Winifred the poor little shattered sea-gull must perish altogether. She was literally my world.

Frank came and sat down with us, and made himself as agreeable as possible. He tried to enter into our play, but we were too slow for him; he soon became restless and impatient. "Oh bother!" he said, and got up and left us.

I drew a sigh of relief when he was gone.

"Do you like my brother, Winifred?" I said.

"Yes," she said.

"Why?"

"Because he is so pretty and so nimble. I believe he could run up——" and then she stopped; but I knew what the complete sentence would have been. She was going to say: "I believe he could run up the gangways without stopping to take breath."

Here was a stab; but she did not notice the effect of her unfinished sentence. Then a question came from me involuntarily.

"Winifred," I said, "do you like him as well as you like me?"

"Oh no," she said, in a tone of wonderment that such a question should be asked.

"But I am not pretty and——"

"Oh, but you *are*!" she said eagerly, interrupting me.

"But," I said, with a choking sensation in my voice, "I am lame," and I looked at the crutches lying among the ferns beside me.

"Ab, but I like you all the better for being lame," she said, nestling up to me.

"But you like nimble boys," I said, "such as Frank."

She looked puzzled. The anomaly of liking nimble boys and crippled-boys at the same time seemed to strike her. Yet she felt it *was* so, though it was difficult to explain it.

"Yes, I *do* like nimble boys," she said at last, plucking with her fingers at a blade of grass she held between her teeth. "But I think I like lame boys better, that is if they are—if they are—you."

I gave an exclamation of delight. But she was two years younger than I, and scarcely, I suppose, understood it.

"He is very pretty," she said meditatively, "but he has not got love-eyes like you and Snap, and I don't think I could love any little boy so very, *very* much now who wasn't lame."

She loved me in spite of my lameness; she loved me because I was lame, so that if I had not fallen from the cliffs, if I had sustained my glorious position among the boys of Raxton and Graylingham as "Fighting Hal," I might never have won little Winifred's love. Here was a revelation of the mingled yarn of life, that I remember struck me even at that childish age.

I began to think I might, in spite of the undoubted crutches, resume my old place as the luckiest boy along the sands. She loved me because I was lame! Those who say that physical infirmity does not feminise the character have not had my experience. No more talk for me that morning. In such a mood as that there can be no talk. I sat in

a silent dream, save when a sweet sob of delight would come up like a bubble from the heaving waters of my soul. I had passed into that rare and high mood when life's afflictions are turned by love to life's deepest, holiest joys. I had begun early to learn and know the gamut of the affections.

"When you leave me here and go home to Wales you will never forget me, Winnie?"

"Never, never!" she said, as she helped me from the ferns which were still as wet with dew as though it had been raining. "I will think of you every night before I go to sleep, and always end my prayers as I did that first night after I saw you so lonely in the churchyard."

"And how is that, Winnie?" I said, as she adjusted my crutches for me.

"After I've said 'Amen,' I always say, 'And, dear Lord Jesus, don't forget to love dear Henry, who can't get up the gangways without me,' and I will say that every night as long as I live."

From that morning I considered her altogether mine. Her speaking of me as the "dear little English boy," however, as she did, marred the delight her words gave me. I had from the first observed that the child's strongest passion was a patriotism of a somewhat fiery kind. The word English in her mouth seemed sometimes a word of reproach: it was the name of the race that in the past had invaded her sacred Snowdonia.

I afterwards learnt that her aunt was answerable for this senseless prejudice.

"Winnie," I said, "don't you wish I was a Welsh boy?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "Don't you?"

I made no answer.

She looked into my face and said, "And yet I don't think I could love a Welsh boy as I love you."

She then repeated to me a verse of a Welsh song, which of course I did not understand a word of until she told me what it meant in English.

It was an address to Snowdon, and ran something like this—

"Mountain-wild Snowdon for me!
Sweet silence there for the harp,
Where loiter the ewes and the lambs
In the moss and the rushes,
Where one's song goes sounding up!
And the rocks re-echo it higher and higher
In the height where the eagles live."

In this manner about six weeks slid away, and Winnie's visit to her father came to an end. I ask, how can people laugh at the sorrows of childhood? The bitterness of

my misery as I sat with that child on the eve of her departure for Wales (which to me seemed at the extreme end of the earth) was almost on a par with anything I have since suffered, and that is indeed saying a great deal. It was in Wynne's cottage, and I sat on the floor with her wet cheeks close to mine, saying, "She leaves me alone." Tom tried to console me by telling me that Winifred would soon come back.

"But when?" I said.

"Next year," said Tom.

He might as well have said next century, for any consolation it gave me. The idea of a year without her was altogether beyond my grasp. It seemed infinite.

Week after week passed, and month after month, and little Winifred was always in my thoughts. Wynne's cottage was a sacred spot to me, and the organist the most interesting man in the world. I never tired of asking him questions about her, though he, as I soon found, knew scarcely anything concerning her and what she was doing, and cared less; for love of drink had got thoroughly hold of him.

Letters were scarce visitants to him, and I believe he never used to hear from Wales at all.

V

At the end of the year she came again, and I had about a year of happiness. I was with her every day, and every day she grew more necessary to my existence.

It was at this time that I made the acquaintance of Winnie's friend Rhona Boswell, a charming little Gypsy girl. Graylingham Wood and Rington Wood, like the entire neighbourhood, were favourite haunts of a superior kind of Gypsies called Griengroes, that is to say, horse-dealers. Their business was to buy ponies in Wales and sell them in the Eastern Counties and the East Midlands. Thus it was that Winnie had known many of the East Midland Gypsies in Wales. Compared with Rhona Boswell, who was more like a fairy than a child, Winnie seemed quite a grave little person. Rhona's limbs were always on the move, and the movement sprang always from her emotions. Her laugh seemed to ring through the woods like silver bells, a sound that it was impossible to mistake for any other. The laughter of most Gypsy girls is full of music and of charm, and yet Rhona's laughter was a sound by itself, and it was no doubt this which afterwards when she grew up attracted my kinsman, Percy Aylwin, towards her. It seemed to emanate not from her throat merely, but from her

entire frame. If one could imagine a strain of merriment and fun blending with the ecstatic notes of a skylark soaring and singing, one might form some idea of the laugh of Rhona Boswell. Ah, what days they were! Rhona would come from Gypsy Dell, a romantic place in Rington Manor some miles off, especially to show us some newly devised coronet of flowers that she had been weaving for herself. This induced Winnie to weave for herself a coronet of sea-weeds, and an entire morning was passed in grave discussion as to which coronet excelled the other.

A year had made a great difference in Winnie, a much greater difference than it had made in me. Her aunt, who was no doubt a well-informed woman, had been attending to her education. In a single year she had taught her French so thoroughly that Winnie was in the midst of Dumas' *Monte Cristo*. And apart from education in the ordinary acceptation of the word, the expansion of her mind had been rapid and great.

Her English vocabulary was now far above mine, far above that of most children of her age. This I discovered was owing to the fact that a literary English lady of delicate health, Miss Dalrymple, whose slender means obliged her to leave the Capel Curig Hotel, had been staying at the cottage as a lodger. She had taken the greatest delight in educating Winnie. Of course Winnie lost as well as gained by this change. She was a little Welsh rustic no longer, but a little lady unusually well equipped, as far as education went, for taking her place in the world.

She understood fully now what I meant when I told her that we were betrothed, and again showed the mingling of child-wisdom and poetry which characterised her by suggesting that we should be married on Snowdon, and that her wedding-dress should be the green kirtle and wreath of the fairies, and that her bridesmaids should be her Gypsy friends, Sinf Lovell and Rhona Boswell. This I acceded to with alacrity.

It was now that I fully realised for the first time her extraordinary gift of observation and her power of describing what she had observed in the graphic language that can never be taught save by the teacher Nature herself. In a dozen picturesque words she would flash upon my very senses the scene that she was describing. So vividly did she bring before my eyes the scenery of North Wales, that when at last I went there it seemed quite familiar to me. And so in describing individuals, her pictures of them were like photographs.

Graylingham Wood was our favourite haunt. This place and the adjoining piece of waste land, called the Wilderness, had for us all the charms of a primeval forest. Here in the early spring we used to come and watch the first violet uplifting its head from the dark green leaves behind the mossy boles, and listen for the first note of the blackcap, the nightingale's herald, and the first *coo* of the wood-pigeons among the bare and newly-budding trees. And here, in the summer, we used to come as soon as breakfast was over with as many story-books as we could carry, and sit on the grass and revel in the wonders of the *Arabian Nights*, the *Tales of the Genii*, and the *Seven Champions of Christendom*, till all the leafy alleys of the wood were glittering with armed knights and Sindbads and Aladdins. The story of Camaralzaman and Badoura was, I think, Winnie's chief favourite. She could repeat it almost word for word. The idea of the two lovers being carried to each other by genii through the air and over the mountain tops had an especial fascination for her. I was Camaralzaman and she Badoura, and the genii would carry me to her as she sat by Knockers' Llyn, or, as she called it, Llyn Coblynau, on the lower slopes of Snowdon.

But above all, there was the sea on the other side of the wood, of the presence of which we were always conscious—the sea, of which we could often catch glimpses between the trees, lending a sense of freedom and wonder and romance such as no landscape can lend. Our great difficulty of course was in connection with my lameness. Few children would have tried to convey a pair of crutches and a lame leg down the cliff to the long level brown sands that lay, farther than the eye could reach, stretched beneath miles on miles of brown crumbling cliffs, whose jagged points and indentations had the kind of spectral look peculiar to that coast. For, alas! the holy water Winifred brought did not "cure the crutches." Yet we used to master the difficulty, always selecting the firmer gangway at Flinty Point, and always waiting, before making the attempt, until there was no one near to see us toiling down. Once down on the hard sands just below the Point, we were happy, paddling and enjoying ourselves till the sunset told us that we must begin our herculean labour of hoisting the leg and crutches up the gangway back to the wood. I have performed many athletic feats since my cure, but nothing comparable to the feat of climbing with crutches up those paths of yielding sand. To myself, now, it seems almost incredible that it was ever achieved,

nor could it have been done without the aid of so active and courageous a friend as Winifred.

We knew Nature in all her moods. In every aspect we found the sea, the wood, and the meadows, happy and beautiful—in winter as in summer, in storm as in sunshine. In the foggy days of November, in the sharp winds of March, in the snows and sleet and rain of February, we used to hear other people complain of the bad weather; we used to hear them fret for change. But we despised them for their ignorance where we were so learned. There was no bad weather for us. In March, what so delicious as breasting together the brave wind, and feeling it tingle our cheeks and beat our ears till we laughed at each other with joy? In rain, what so delicious as to stand under a tree or behind a hedge and listen to the drops pattering overhead among the leaves, and see the fields steaming up to meet them? Then again the soft falling of snow upon the lonely fields, while the very sheep looked brown against the whiteness gathering round them. All beautiful to us two, and beloved!

VI

"BUT where was this little boy's mother all this time?" you naturally ask; "where was his father? In a word, who was he? and what were his surroundings?"

I will answer these queries in as brief a fashion as possible.

My father, Philip Aylwin, belonged to a branch of an ancient family which had been satirically named by another branch of the same family "The Proud Aylwins."

It is a singular thing that it was the proud Aylwins who had a considerable strain of Gypsy blood in their veins. My great-grandfather had married Fenella Stanley, the famous Gypsy beauty, about whom so much was written in the newspapers and magazines of that period. She had previously when a girl of sixteen married a Lovell who died and left a child. Fenella's portrait in the character of the Sibyl of Snowdon was painted by the great portrait painter of that time.

This picture still hangs in the portrait gallery of Raxton Hall.

As a child it had an immense attraction for me, and no wonder, for it was original to actual eccentricity. It depicted a dark young woman of dazzling beauty standing at break of day among mountain scenery, holding a musical instrument of the guitar kind, but shaped like a violin, upon the lower strings

of which she was playing with the thumb of the left hand.

Through the misty air were seen all kinds of shadowy shapes, whose eyes were fixed on the player. I used to stand and look at this picture by the hour together, fascinated by the strange beauty of the singer's face and the mysterious, prophetic expression in the eyes.

And I used to try to imagine what tune it was that could call from the mountain air the "flower-sprites" and "sunshine elves" of morning on the mountain.

Fenella Stanley seems in her later life to have set up as a positive seeress, and I infer from certain family papers and diaries in my possession that she was the very embodiment of the wildest Romany beliefs and superstitions.

I first became conscious of the mysterious links which bound me to my Gypsy ancestress by reading one of her letters to my great-grandfather, who had taught her to write: nothing apparently could have taught her to spell. It was written during a short stay she was making away from him in North Wales. It described in the simplest (and often the most uncouth) words that Nature-ecstasy which the Romanies seem to feel in the woodlands. It came upon me like a revelation, for it was the first time I had ever seen embodied in words the sensations which used to come to me in Graylingham Wood or on the river that ran through it. After long basking among the cowslips, or beneath the whispering branches of an elm, whose shade I was robbing from the staring cows around, or lying on my back in a boat on the river, listening to the birds and the insect hum and all the magic music of summer in the woodlands, I used all at once to feel as though the hand of a great enchantress were being waved before me and around me. The wheels of thought would stop; all the senses would melt into one, and I would float on a tide of unspeakable joy, a tide whose waves were waves neither of colour, nor perfume, nor melody, but new waters born of the mixing of these; and, through a language deeper than words and deeper than thoughts, I would seem carried at last close to an actual consciousness—a consciousness which, to my childish dreams, seemed drawing me close to the bosom of a mother whose face would brighten into that of Fenella.

My father lived upon moderate means in the little seaside town of Raxton. My mother was his second wife, a distant cousin of the same name. She was not one of the "Proud Aylwins," and yet she must have had more pride in her heart than all the

"Proud Aylwins" put together. Her feeling in relation to the strain of Gypsy blood in the family into which she had married was that of positive terror. She associated the word "Gypsy" with everything that is wild, passionate and lawless.

One great cause undoubtedly of her partiality for Frank and her dislike of me was that Frank's blue-eyed Saxon face showed no sign whatever of the Romany strain, while my swarthy face did.

As I write this, she lives before me with more vividness than my father, for the reason that her character during my childhood, before I came to know my father thoroughly—before I came to know what a marvellous man he was—seemed to be a thousand times more vivid than his. With her bright grey eyes, her patrician features, I shall see her while memory lasts. The only differences that ever arose between my father and my mother were connected with the fact that my father had had a former wife. Now and then (not often) my mother would lose her stoical self-command, and there would come from her an explosion of jealous anger, stormy and terrible. This was on occasions when she perceived that my father's memory retained too vividly the impression left on it of his love for the wife who was dead—dead, but a rival still. My father lived in mortal fear of this jealousy. Yet my mother was a devoted and a fond wife. I remember in especial the flash that would come from her eyes, the fiery flush that would overspread her face, whenever she saw my father open a certain antique silver casket which he kept in his escritoire when at home, and carried about with him when travelling. The casket (I soon learned) contained mementoes of his first wife, between whom and himself there seems to have been a deep natural sympathy such as did not exist between my mother and him. This first wife he had lost under peculiarly painful circumstances, which it is necessary that I should briefly narrate. She had been drowned before his very eyes in that cove beneath the church which I have already described.

This semicircular indentation at the end of the peninsula or headland on which the church stood was specially dangerous in two ways. It was a fatal spot where sea and land were equally treacherous. On the sands the tide, and on the cliffs the landslip, imperilled the lives of the unwary. Half, at least, of the churchyard had been condemned as "dangerous," and this very same spot was the only one on the coast where the pedestrian along the sands ran any serious risk of being entrapped by the tide; for the peninsula on which the church stood jutted out for a con-

siderable distance into the sea, and then was scooped out in the form of a boot-jack, and so caught the full force of the waves. One corner, as already mentioned, was called Flinty Point, the other Needle Point, and between these two points there was no gangway within the semicircle up the wall of cliff. Indeed, within the cove the cliff was perpendicular, or rather overhanging, as far as such crumbling earth would admit of its overhanging. To reach a gangway, a person inside the cove would have to leave the cliff wall for the open sands, and pass round either Needle Point or Flinty Point. Hence the cove was sometimes called Mousetrap Cove, because when the tide reached so high as to touch these two points, a person on the sands within the cove was caught as in a mousetrap, and the only means of extrication was by boat from the sea. It was the irresistible action of the sea upon the peninsula (called Church Headland) that had doomed church and churchyard to certain destruction.

Dangerous as was this cove, there was something peculiarly fascinating about it. The black, smooth, undulating boulders that dotted the sand here and there formed the most delightful seats upon which to meditate or read. It was a favourite spot with my father's first wife, who had been a Swiss governess. She was a great reader and student, but it was not till after her death that my father became one. The poor lady was fond of bringing her books to the cove, and pursuing her studies or meditations with the sound of the sea's chime in her ears. My father, at that time I believe a simple, happy country squire, but showing strong signs of his Romany ancestry, had often warned her of the risk she ran, and one day he had the agony of seeing her from the cliff locked in the cove, and drowning before his eyes ere a boat could be got, while he and the coastguard stood powerless to reach her.

The effect of this shock demented my father for a time. How it was that he came to marry again I could never understand. During my childhood he had, as far as I could see, no real sympathy with anything save his own dreams. In after years I came to know the truth. He was kind enough in disposition, but he looked upon us, his children, as his second wife's property, his dreams as his own. Once every year he used to go to Switzerland and stay there for several weeks; and, as the object of these journeys was evidently to revisit the old spots made sacred to him by reminiscences of his romantic love for his first wife, it may be readily imagined that they were not looked upon with any favour by my mother. She

never accompanied him on these occasions, nor would she let Frank do so—another proof of the early partiality she showed for my brother. As I was of less importance, my father (previous to my accident) used to take me, to my intense delight and enjoyment; but during the period of my lameness he went to Switzerland alone.

It was during one of my childish visits to Switzerland that I learnt an important fact in connection with my father and his first wife—the fact that since her death he had become a mystic and had joined a certain sect of mystics founded by Lavater.

This is how I came to know it. My attention had been arrested by a book lying on my father's writing-table—a large book called "*The Veiled Queen*, by Philip Aylwin"—and I began to read it. The statements therein were of an astounding kind, and the idea of a beautiful woman behind a veil completely fascinated my childish mind. And the book was full of the most amazing stories collected from all kinds of outlandish sources. One story, called "*The Flying Donkey of the Ruby Hills*," riveted my attention so much that it possessed me, and even now I feel that I can repeat every word of it. It was a story of a donkey-driver, who, having lost his wife Alawiyah, went and lived alone in the ruby hills of Badakhshan, where the Angel of Memory fashioned for him out of his own sorrow and tears an image of his wife. This image was mistaken by a townsman named Hasan for his own wife, and Ja'afar was summoned before the Ka'dee. Afterwards, when *The Veiled Queen* came into my possession, I noticed that this story was quoted for motto on the title-page:

"Then, quoth the Ka'dee, laughing until his grinders appeared, 'rather, by Allah, would I take all the punishment thou dreadest, thou most false donkey-driver of the Ruby Hills, than believe this story of thine—this mad, mad story, that she with whom thou wast seen was not the living wife of Hasan here (as these four legal witnesses have sworn), but thine own dead spouse, Alawiyah, refashioned for thee by the Angel of Memory out of thine own sorrow and unquenchable fountain of tears.'

"Quoth Ja'afar, bowing low his head: 'Bold is the donkey-driver, O Ka'dee! and bold the Ka'dee who dares say what he will believe, what disbelieve—not knowing in any wise the mind of Allah—not knowing in any wise his own heart and what it shall some day suffer.'

This story so absorbed me that when my father re-entered the house I was perfectly unconscious of his presence. He took the

book from me, saying that it was not a book for children. It possessed my mind for some days. What I had read in it threw light upon certain conversations in French and German which I had heard between my father and his Swiss friends, and the fact gradually dawned upon me that he believed himself to be in direct communication with the spirit of his dead wife. This so acted upon my imagination that I began to feel that she was actually alive, though invisible. I told Frank when I got home that we had another mother in Switzerland, and that our father went to Switzerland to see her.

Having at that time a passionate love for my mother (a love none the less passionate because somewhat coldly returned), I felt great anger against this resuscitated rival; but Frank only laughed and called me a stupid little fool.

Luckily Frank forgot my story in a minute, and it never reached my mother's ears.

Some years after this an odd incident occurred. The idea of a veiled lady had, as I say, fascinated me. One Raxton fair-day I induced Winnie to be photographed on the sands, wearing a crown of sea-flowers in imitation of Rhona Boswell's famous wild-flower coronet, and a necklace of seaweed, with Frank and another boy lifting from her head a long white veil of my mother's. My father accidentally saw this photograph, and was so taken with it that he adorned the title-page of the third edition of *The Veiled Queen* with a small wood-cut of it.

These vagaries of my father's had an influence upon my destiny of the most tragic, yet of the most fantastic kind.

He had the reputation, I believe, of being one of the most learned mystics of his time. He was a fair Hebrew scholar, and also had a knowledge of Sanscrit, Arabic, and Persian. His passion for philology was deep-rooted. He was a no less ardent numismatist. Moreover, he was deeply versed in amulet-lore. He wrote a treatise upon "amulets" and their inscriptions. All this was *after* the death of his first wife. He had a large collection of amulets, Gnostic gems and abraxas stones. That he really believed in the virtue of amulets will be pretty clearly seen as my narrative proceeds. Indeed the subject of amulets and love-tokens became a mania with him. After his death it was said that his collection of amulets, Egyptian, Gnostic, and other, was rarer, and his collection of St. Helena coins larger, than any other collection in England.

Though my mother did not know of the spiritualistic orgies in Switzerland, she knew that my father was a spiritualist. And this

vexed her, not only because she conceived it to be visionary folly, but because it was "low." She knew that it led him to join a newly-formed band of Latter-Day mystics which had been organised at Raxton, but luckily she did not know that through them he believed himself to be holding communication with his first wife. The members of this body were tradespeople of the town, and I quite think that in my mother's eyes all tradespeople were low.

As to her indifference towards me,—that is easily explained. I was an incorrigible little bohemian by nature. She despaired of ever changing me. During several years this indifference distressed me, though it in no way diminished my affection for her. At last, however, I got accustomed to it and accepted it as inevitable. But the remarkable thing was that Frank's affection for his mother was of the most languid kind. He was an open-hearted boy, and never took advantage of my mother's favouritism. Thus I was left entirely to my own resources. My little love-idyl with Winifred was for a long time unknown to my mother, and no amount of ocular demonstration could have made it known (in such a dream was he) to my father.

On one occasion, however, my mother, having been struck by her beauty at church, told Wynne to bring her to the house, little thinking what she was doing. Accordingly, Winifred came one evening and charmed my mother, charmed the entire household, by her grace of manner. My mother, upon whom what she called "style" made a far greater impression than anything else, pronounced her to be a perfect little lady, and I heard her remark that she wondered how the child of such a scapegrace as Wynne could have been so reared.

Unfortunately I was not old enough to disguise the transports of delight that set my heart beating and my crippled limbs trembling as I saw Winifred gliding like a fairy about the house and gardens, and petted even by my proud and awful mother. My mother did not fail to notice this, and before long she had got from Frank the history of our little loves, and even of the "cripple water" from St. Winifred's Well. I partly heard what Frank was telling her, and I was the only one to notice the expression of displeasure that overspread her features. She did not, however, show it to the child, but she never invited her there again, and from that evening was much more vigilant over my movements, lest I should go to Wynne's cottage. I still, however, continued to meet Winifred in Graylingham Wood during her stay with her father; and

at last, when she again left me, I felt desolate indeed.

I wrote her a letter, and took it to him to address. He was very fond of showing his penmanship, which was remarkably good. He had indeed been well educated, though from his beer-house associations he had entirely caught the rustic accent. I saw him address it, and took it myself to the post-office at Rington, where I was not so well known as at Raxton, but I never got any reply.

And who was Tom Wynne? Though the organist of the new church at Raxton, and custodian of the old deserted church on the cliffs, he was the local ne'er do well, drunkard, and scapegrace. He was, however, a well-connected man, reduced to his present position by drink. He had lived in Raxton until he returned to Wales which was his birthplace—having obtained there some appointment the nature of which I never could understand. In Wales he had got married; and there his wife had died shortly after the birth of Winnie. It was no doubt through his intemperate habits that he lost his post in Wales. It was then that he again came to Raxton, leaving the child with his sister-in-law.

Raxton stands on that part of the coast where the land-springs most persistently disintegrate the hills and render them helpless against the ravages of the sea. Perhaps even within the last few centuries the spot called Mousetrap Cove, scooped out of the peninsula on which the old church stands, was dry land. The old Raxton church at the end of this peninsula had, not many years since, to be deserted for a new one, lest it should some day carry its congregation with it when it slides, as it soon will slide, into the sea. But as none had dared to pull down the old church, a custodian had to be found who for a pittance would take charge of it and of the important monuments it contains. Such a custodian was found in Wynne, who lived in the cottage already described on the Wilderness Road. Along this road (which passed both the new church and the old) I was frequently journeying, and Wynne's tall burly form and ruddy face were, even before I knew Winnie, a certain comfort to me.

He was said to be the last remnant of an old family that once owned much land in the neighbourhood, and he was still the recipient of a small pension. My father used to say that Wynne's family was even exceptionally good, that it laid claim to being descended from a still older Welsh family. But my

mother scorned the idea, and always treated the organist as belonging to the lower classes. It was Wynne who had taught me swimming. It was really he, and not my groom, who had taught me how to ride a horse along the low-tide sands so as not to distress him or damage his feet.

It was about this time that my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley, my mother's brother, who had quarrelled with her, became reconciled to her, and came to Raxton. He at once recommended that a friend of his, a famous London surgeon, should be consulted about my lameness. I accordingly went with him to London to be placed under the treatment of the eminent man. Had this been done earlier, what a world of suffering might have been spared me! The man of science pronounced my ailment to be quite curable.

He performed an operation upon the leg, and after a long and careful course of treatment in town, advised that I should go to Margate for a long stay, and avail myself of that change of air. I went, accompanied by my mother and brother, and stayed there several months. My father used to come to see us once a month or so, stay for a week, and then go back.

As the surgeon had prophesied, I made such advance that I was after a while able to walk with tolerable ease without my crutches, by the aid of a walking-stick; and as time went on, the tonic effect of Margate air, aiding the remedies prescribed by the surgeon, worked such a change in me that I was pronounced well, and the doctor said I might return home. I returned to Raxton a cripple no longer.

I returned cured, I say. But how entangled is this web of our life! How almost impossible is it that good should come unmixed with evil, or evil unmixed with good! At Margate, where the bracing air did more, I doubt not, towards my restoration to health than all the medicines,—at Margate my brother drank in his death-poison.

During the very last days of our stay he caught scarlet fever. In a fortnight he was dead. The shock to me was very severe. It laid my mother prostrate for months.

I was now by the death of Frank the representative of our branch of the family, and a little fellow of uncomfortable importance. My uncle Aylwin of Alvanley, being childless, was certain to leave me his large estates, for he had dropped entirely away from the Aylwins of Rington Manor, and also from the branch of the Aylwin family represented by my kinsman Cyril.

II

The Moonlight Cross of
the Gnostics

I

MY mother had some prejudice against a public school, and I was sent to a large and important private one at Cambridge.

And so, with Winifred on my mind, I went one damp winter's morning to Dullingham, our nearest railway station, on my way to Cambridge.

As concerns my school-days I feel that all that will interest the reader is this : as I rode through mile upon mile of the flat, wide-stretching country, I made to myself a vow in connection with Winifred,—a vow that when I left school I would do a certain thing in relation to her, though Fate itself should say, "This thing shall not be done." I did not know then, as I know now, how weak is human will enmeshed in that web of Circumstance that has been a-weaving since the beginning of the world.

I left school without the slightest notion as to what my future course in life was to be. I was to take my rich uncle's property. That was understood now. And although my mother never talked of the matter, I could see in the pensive gaze she bent on me an ever-present consciousness of a future for me more golden still.

But now I formed a new intimacy, and one of a very singular kind—an intimacy with my father, who suddenly woke up to the fact that I was no longer a child. It occurred on my making some pertinent inquiries about a certain Gnostic amulet representing the Gorgon's head, a prize of which he had lately become the happy possessor. On his telling me that the Arabic word for amulet was *hamalet*, and that the word meant "that which is suspended," I said in a perfectly thoughtless way that very likely one of the learned societies to which he belonged might be able to trace some connection between "hamalet" and the "Hamlet" of Shakspeare. These idle and ignorant words of mine fell, as I found, upon a mind ripe to receive them. He looked straight before him at the bust of Shakspeare on the bookshelves as he always looked when his rudderless imagination was well launched, and I heard him mutter, "Hamlet—the Amleth of

Saxo-Grammaticus,—hamalet 'that which is suspended.' The world, to Hamlet's metaphysical mind, *was* 'suspended' in the wide region of Nowhere—in an infinite ocean of Nothing. Why did I not think of this before? Strange that this child should hit upon it." Then looking at me as though he had just seen me for the first time in his life, he said, "How old are you, child?" "Eighteen, father," I said. "Eighteen years?" he asked. "Yes, father," I said with some pique. "Did you suppose I meant eighteen months?" "Only eighteen years," he muttered, "a mere baby, in short; and yet he has hit upon what we Shakspearians have been boggling over for many years—the symbolical meaning involved in Hamlet's name. Henry, I prophesy great things for you."

An intimacy was cemented between us at once. One of the results of this conversation was my father's elaborate paper, read before one of his societies, in which he maintained that Shakspeare's *Hamlet* was a metaphysical poem, the great central idea of which was involved in the name Hamlet, Amleth, or Hamalet—the idea that the universe, suspended in the wide region of Nowhere, lies, an amulet, upon the breast of the Great Latona,—a paper that was the basis of his reputation in "the higher criticism."

Shortly after this my father and I spent the autumn in various parts of Switzerland. One night, when we were sitting outside the chalet in the full light of the moon, I was the witness of a display of passion on the part of one whom I had always considered to be a dreamy book-worm—a passionless, eccentric mystic—that simply amazed me. A flickering tongue from the central fires suddenly breaking up through the soil of an English vegetable garden could hardly have been a more unexpected phenomenon to me than what occurred on that memorable night.

The incident I am going to relate showed me how rash it is to suppose that you have really fathomed the personality of any human creature. The mementoes of his first wife, which accompanied him whithersoever he went, absorbed his attention in Switzerland, and especially in the little place where she was born, far more than they had done at home. He was for ever peeping furtively into his *escritoire* to enjoy the sight of them, and then looking over his shoulder to see if he was being watched by my mother, though she was far away in Raxton Hall. On the night in question he showed me the silver casket containing certain of these mementoos—mementoes which I felt almost too intimate to be shown even to his son.

"And now, Henry," said he, "I am going to show you something that no one else has ever seen since she died—the most sacred possession I have upon this earth." He then opened his shirt and his vest, and showed me lying upon his naked bosom a beautiful jewelled cross of a considerable size. "This," said he, lifting it up, "is an ancient Gnostic amulet. It is called the 'Moonlight Cross' of the Gnostics. I gave it to her on the night of our betrothal. She was a Roman Catholic. It is made of precious stones cut in facets, with rubies and diamonds and beryls so cunningly set that, when the moonlight falls on them, the cross flashes almost as brilliantly as when the sunlight falls on them and is kindled into living fire. These deep-coloured crimson rubies—almost as clear as diamonds—are not of the ordinary kind. They are true 'Oriental rubies,' and the jewellers would tell you that the mine which produced them has been lost during several centuries. But look here when I lift it up; the most wonderful feature of the jewel is the skill with which the diamonds are cut. The only shapes generally known are what are called the 'brilliant' and the 'rose,' but here the facets are arranged in an entirely different way, and evidently with the view of throwing light into the very hearts of the rubies, and producing this peculiar radiance."

He lifted the amulet again (which was suspended from his neck by a beautifully worked cord made of soft brown hair) into the rays from the moon. The light the jewel emitted was certainly of a strange and fascinating kind. The cross had been worn with the jewelled front upon his bosom instead of the smooth back, and the sharp facets of the cross had lacerated the scarred flesh underneath in a most cruel manner. He saw me shudder and understood why.

"Oh, I like that!" he said with an ecstatic smile. "I like to feel it constantly on my bosom. It cannot cut deep enough for me. This is her hair," he said, taking the hair-cord between his fingers and kissing it.

"How do you manage to exist, father," I said, "with that heavy sharp-edged jewel on your breast? you who cannot bear the gout with patience?"

"Exist? I could not exist *without* it. The gout is pain—this is not pain; it is joy, bliss, heaven! When I am dead it must lie for ever on my breast as it lies now, or I shall never rest in my grave."

He had been talking about amulets in the most quiet and matter-of-fact way during that morning; but the moment he produced this cross a strange change came over his face, something like the change that will

come over a dull wood-fire when blown by the wind into a bright life of flame.

"Ha!" he muttered to himself, as his eyes widened and sparkled with a look of intense eagerness and his hand shook, sending the light of the beautiful jewel all about the room, "it is a sad pity he was not *her* son. How I should have loved him then! I like him now very much; but how I should have loved him then, for he is a brave boy. Oh, if I had only been born brave like him!" Then, suddenly recollecting himself, he closed his vest, and said; "Don't tell your mother, Hal; don't tell your mother that I have shown you this." Then he took it out again. "She who is dead cherished it," he continued, half to himself—"she cherished it above all things. She died, boy, and I couldn't help her. She used to wear the cross in the bosom of her dress; and there she was in the cove kissing it when the tide swept over her. I ought to have jumped down and died with her. *You* would have done it, Hal; your eyes say so. Oh, to be an Aylwin without the Aylwin courage!"

After a little time he said: "This has lain on her bosom, Hal, her bosom! It has been kissed by her, Hal, oh, a thousand thousand times! It had her last kiss. When I took it from the cold body which had been recovered, this cross seemed to be warm with her life and love."

And then he wept, and his tears fell thick upon his bosom and upon the amulet. The truth was clear enough now. The appalling death of his first wife, his love for her, and his remorse for not having jumped down the cliff and died with her, had affected his brain. He was a monomaniac, and all his thoughts were in some way clustered round the dominant one. He had studied amulets because the "Moonlight Cross" had been cherished by her; he came to Switzerland every year because it was associated with her; he had joined the spiritualist body in the mad hope that *perhaps* there might be something in it, perhaps there might be a power that could call her back to earth. Even the favourite occupation of his life, visiting cathedrals and churches and taking rubbings from monumental brasses, had begun after her death; it had come from the fact (as I soon learned) that *she* had taken interest in monumental brasses, and had begun the collection of rubbings.

And yet this martyr to a mighty passion bore the character of a dreamy student; and his calm, unfurrowed face, on common occasions, expressed nothing but a rather dull kind of content! Here was a revelation of what, afterwards, was often revealed to me, that human personality is the crowning

wonder of this wonderful universe, and that the forces which turn fire-mist into stars are not more inscrutable than is human character. He lifted up his head and gazed at me through his tears.

"Hal," he said, "do you know why I have shown you this? It *must*, *MUST* be buried with me at my death; and there is no one upon whose energy, truth, courage, and strength of will I can rely as I can upon yours. You must give me your word, Hal, that you will see it and this casket containing her letters buried with me."

I hesitated to become a party to such an undertaking as this. It savoured of superstition, I thought. Now, having at that very time abandoned all the superstitions and all the mystical readings of the universe which as a child I had inherited from ancestors, Romany and English, having at that very time begun to take a delight in the wonderful revelations of modern science, my attitude towards superstition—towards all supernaturalism—oscillated between anger and simple contempt.

"But," I said, "you surely will not have this beautiful old cross buried?" And as I looked at it, and the light fell upon it, there came from it strange flashes of fire, showing with what extraordinary skill the rubies and diamonds had been adjusted so that their facets should catch and concentrate the rays of the moon.

"Yes," he said, taking the cross again in his hand and fondling it passionately, "it must never be possessed by any one after me."

"But it might be stolen, father—stolen from your coffin."

"That would indeed be a disaster," he said with a shudder. Then a look of deadly vengeance overspread his face and brought out all its Romany characteristics as he said: "But with it there will be buried a curse written in Hebrew and English—a curse upon the despoiler, which will frighten off any thief who is in his senses."

And he showed me a large parchment scroll, folded exactly like a title deed, with the following curse and two verses from the 109th Psalm written upon it in Hebrew and English. The English version was carefully printed by himself in large letters:—

"He who shall violate this tomb,—he who shall steal this amulet, hallowed as a love-token between me and my dead wife,—he who shall dare to lay a sacrilegious hand upon this cross, stands cursed by God, cursed by love, and cursed by me, Philip Aylwin, lying here. 'Let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion upon his father-

less children Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread: let them seek it also out of desolate places.'—Psalm cix. So saith the Lord. Amen."

"I have printed the English version in large letters," he said, "so that any would-be despoiler must see it and read it at once by the dimmest lantern light."

"But, father, I said, "is it possible that you, an educated man, really believe in the efficacy of a curse?"

"If the curse comes straight from the heart's core of a man, as this curse comes from mine, Hal, how can it fail to operate by the mere force of will? The curse of a man who loved as I love upon the wretch who should violate a love-token so sacred as this—why, the disembodied spirits of all who have loved and suffered would combine to execute it!"

"Spirits!" I said. "Really, father, in times like these to talk of spirits!"

"Ah, Henry!" he replied, "I was like you once. I could once be content with Materialism—I could find it supportable once; but, should you ever come to love as I have loved (and, for your own happiness, child, I hope you never may), you will find that Materialism is intolerable, is hell itself, to the heart that has known a passion like mine. You will find that it is madness, Hal, madness, to believe in the word 'never'! you will find that you *dare* not leave untried any creed, howsoever wild, that offers the heart a ray of hope. Every object she cherished has become spiritualized, sublimated, has become alive—alive as this amulet is alive. See, the lights are no natural lights." And again he held it up.

"If on my death-bed," he continued, "I thought that this beloved cross and these sacred relics would ever get into other hands—would ever touch other flesh—than mine, I should die a maniac, Hal, and my spirit would never be released from the chains of earth."

It was the superstitious tone of his talk that irritated and hardened me. He saw it, and a piteous expression overspread his features.

"Don't desert your poor father," he said. "What I want is the word of an Aylwin that those beloved relics shall be buried with me. If I had *that*, I should be content to live, and content to die. Oh, Hal!"

He threw such an imploring gaze into my face as he said "Oh, Hal!" that, reluctant as I was to be mixed up with superstition, I promised to execute his wishes: I promised also to keep the secret from all the world during his life, and after his death to share it

with those two only from whom, for family reasons, it could not be kept—my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley and my mother. He then put away the amulet, and his face resumed the look of placid content it usually wore. He was feeling the facets of the mysterious "Moonlight Cross"!

The most marvellous thing is this, however: his old relations towards me were at once resumed. He never alluded to the subject of his first wife again, and I soon found it difficult to believe that the conversation just recorded ever took place at all. Evidently his monomania only rose up to a passionate expression when fanned into sudden flame by talking about the cross. It was as though the shock of his first wife's death had severed his consciousness and his life in twain.

II

NATURALLY this visit to Switzerland cemented our intimacy, and it was on our return home that he suggested my accompanying him on one of his "rubbing expeditions."

"Henry," he said, "your mother has of late frequently discussed with me the question of your future calling in life. She suggests a Parliamentary career. I confess that I find questions about careers exceedingly disturbing."

"There is only one profession I should like, father," I said, "and that is a painter's." In fact, the passion for painting had come on me very strongly of late. My dreams had from the first been of wandering with Winnie in a paradise of colour, and these dreams had of late been more frequent: the paradise of colour had been growing richer and rarer.

He shook his head gravely and said, "No, my dear; your mother would never allow it."

"Why not?" I said; "is painting low too?"

"Cyril Aylwin is low, at least so your mother and aunt say, especially your aunt. I have not perceived it myself, but then your mother's perceptive faculties are extraordinary—quite extraordinary."

"Did the lowness come from his being a painter, father?" I asked.

"Really, child, you are puzzling me. But I have observed you now for some weeks, and I quite believe that you would make one of the best rubbers who ever held a ball. I am going to Salisbury next week, and you shall then make your *début*."

This was in the midst of a very severe winter we had some years ago, when all Europe was under a coating of ice.

"But, father," I said, "shan't we find it rather cold?"

"Well," said my father, with a bland smile, "I will not pretend that Salisbury Cathedral is particularly warm in this weather, but in winter I always rub in knee-caps and mittens. I will tell Hodder to knit you a full set at once."

"But, father," I said, "Tom Wynne tells me that rubbing is the most painful of all occupations. He even goes so far sometimes as to say that it was the exhaustion of rubbing for you which turned him to drink."

"Nothing of the kind," said my father. "All that Tom needed to make him a good rubber was enthusiasm. I am strongly of opinion that without enthusiasm rubbing is of all occupations the most irksome, except perhaps for the quadrumana (who seem more adapted for this exercise), the most painful for the spine, the most cramping for the thighs, the most numbing for the fingers. It is a profession, Henry, demanding, above every other, enthusiasm in the operator. Now Tom's enthusiasm for rubbing as an art was from the first exceedingly feeble."

I was on the eve of revolting, but I remembered what there was lacerating his poor breast, and consented. And when I heard hints of our "working the Welsh churches" my sudden enthusiasm for the rubber's art astonished even my father.

"My dear," he said to my mother at dinner one day, "what do you think? Henry has developed quite a sudden passion for rubbing."

I saw an expression of perplexity and mystification overspread my mother's sagacious face.

"And in the spring," continued my father, "we are going into Wales to rub."

"Into Wales, are you?" said my mother, in a tone of that soft voice whose meaning I knew so well.

My thoughts were continually upon Winnie, now that I was alone in the familiar spots. I had never seen her nor heard from her since we parted as children. She had only known me as a cripple. What would she think of me now? Did she ever think of me? She had not answered my childish letter, and this had caused me much sorrow and perplexity.

We did not go into Wales after all. But the result of this conversation took a shape that amazed me. I was sent to stay with my Aunt Prue in London in order that I might attend one of the Schools of Art. Yes, my mother thought it was better for me even to run the risk of becoming bohemianised like Cyril Aylwin, than to brood over Winnie or

the scenes that were associated with our happy childhood.

In London I was an absolute stranger. We had no town house. On the few occasions when the family had gone to London, it was to stay in Belgrave Square with my Aunt Prue, who was an unmarried sister of my mother's.

"Since the death of the Prince Consort, to go no further back," she used to say, "a dreadful change has come over the tone of society; the love of bohemianism, the desire to take up any kind of people, if they are amusing, and still more if they are rich, is levelling everything. However, I'm nobody now: I say nothing."

What wonder that from my very childhood my aunt took a prejudice against me, and predicted for me a career "as deplorable as Cyril Aylwin's," and sympathised with my mother in her terror of the Gypsy strain in my father's branch of the family?

Her tastes and instincts being intensely aristocratic, she suffered a martyrdom from her ever present consciousness of this disgrace. She had seen very much more of what is called Society than my mother had ever an opportunity of seeing. It was not, however, aristocracy, but Royalty that won the true worship of her soul.

Although she was immeasurably inferior to my mother in everything, her influence over her was great, and it was always for ill. I believe that even my mother's prejudice against Tom Wynne was largely owing to my aunt, who disliked my relations towards Wynne simply because he did not represent one of the great Wynne families. But the remarkable thing was that, although my mother thus yielded to my aunt's influence, she in her heart despised her sister's ignorance and her narrowness of mind. She often took a humorous pleasure in seeing my aunt's aristocratic proclivities baffled by some vexing *contretemps* or by some slight passed upon her by people of superior rank, especially by those in the Royal circle.

There have been so many descriptions of art schools, from the famous "Gandish's" down to the very moment at which I write, that I do not intend to describe mine.

It would be very far from my taste to use a narrative like this, a narrative made sacred by the spiritual love it records, as a means of advertising efforts of such modest pretensions as mine when placed in comparison with the work of the illustrious painters my friendship with whom has been the great honour of my life. And if I allude here to the fact of my being a painter, it is in order that I may not be mistaken for another Aylwin, my cousin Percy, who in some un-

published poems of his which I have seen has told how a sailor was turned into a poet by love—love of Rhona Boswell. In the same way, these pages are written to tell how I was made a painter by love of her whom I first saw in Raxton churchyard, her who filled my being as Beatrice filled the being of Dante when "the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of his body shook therewith."

III

TIME went by, and I returned to Raxton. Just when I had determined that, come what would, I would go into Wales, Wynne one day told me that Winnie was coming to live with him at Raxton, her aunt having lately died. "The English lady," said he, "who lived with them so long and eddicated Winifred, has gone to live at Carnarvon to get the sea air."

This news was at once a joy and a perplexity.

Wynne, though still the handsomest and finest man in Raxton, had sunk much lower in intemperance of late. He now generally wound up a conversation with me by a certain stereotyped allusion to the dryness of the weather, which I perfectly understood to mean that he felt thirsty, and that an offer of half-a-crown for beer would not be unacceptable. He was a proud man in everything except in reference to beer. But he seemed to think there was no degradation in asking for money to get drunk with, though to have asked for it to buy bread would, I suppose, have wounded his pride. I did not then see so clearly as I now do the wrong of giving him those half-crowns. His annuity he had long since sold.

Spite of all his delinquencies, however, my father liked him; so did my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley. But my mother seemed positively to hate him. It was the knowledge of this that caused my anxiety about Winifred's return. I felt that complications must arise.

At this time I used to go to Dullingham every day. The clergyman there was preparing me for college.

On the Sunday following the day when I got such momentous news from Wynne, I was met suddenly, as my mother and I were leaving the church after the service, by the gaze of a pair of blue eyes that arrested my steps as by magic, and caused the church and the churchgoers to vanish from my sight.

The picture of Winifred that had dwelt in

my mind so long was that of a beautiful child. The radiant vision of the girl before me came on me by surprise and dazzled me. Tall and slim she was now, but the complexion had not altered at all; the eyes seemed young and childlike as ever.

When our eyes met she blushed, then turned pale, and took hold of the top of a seat near which she was standing. She came along the aisle close to us, gliding and slipping through the crowd, and passed out of the porch. My mother had seen my agitation, and had moved on in a state of haughty indignation. I had no room, however, at that moment for considerations of any person but one. I hurried out of the church, and, following Winifred, grasped her gloved hand.

"Winifred, you are come," I said; "I have been longing to see you."

She again turned pale and then blushed scarlet. Next she looked down me as if she had expected to see something which she did not see, and when her eyes were upraised again something in them gave me a strange fancy that she was disappointed to miss my crutches.

"Why didn't you write to me from Wales, Winifred? Why didn't you answer my letter years ago?"

She hesitated, then said,

"My aunt wouldn't let me, sir."

"Wouldn't let you answer it! and why?"

Again she hesitated,

"I—I don't know, sir."

"You *do* know, Winifred. I see that you know, and you shall tell me. Why didn't your aunt let you answer my letter?"

Winifred's eyes looked into mine beseechingly. Then that light of playful humour, which I remembered so well, shot like a sunbeam across and through them as she replied—

"My aunt said we must both forget our pretty dream."

Almost before the words were out, however the sunbeam fled from her eyes and was replaced by a look of terror. I now perceived that my mother, in passing to the carriage, had lingered on the gravel-path close to us, and had, of course, overheard the dialogue. She passed on with a look of hate. I thought it wise to bid Winifred good-bye and join my mother.

As I stepped into the carriage I turned round and saw that Winifred was again looking wistfully at some particular part of me—looking with exactly that simple, frank, "objective" expression with which I was familiar.

"I knew it was the crutches she missed," I said to myself as I sat down by my

mother's side; "she'll have to love me now because I am *not* lame."

I also knew something else: I must prepare for a conflict with my mother. My father, at this time in Switzerland, had written to say that he had been suffering acutely from an attack of what he called "spasms." He had "been much subject to them of late, but no one considered them to be really dangerous."

During luncheon I felt that my mother's eyes were upon me. After it was over she went to her room to write in answer to my father's letter, and then later on she returned to me.

"Henry," she said, "my overhearing the dialogue in the churchyard between you and Wynne's daughter was, I need not say, quite accidental, but it is perhaps fortunate that I did overhear it."

"Why fortunate, mother? You simply heard her say that her aunt in Wales had forbidden her to answer a childish letter of mine written many years ago."

"In telling you which, the girl, I must say, proclaimed her aunt to be an exceedingly sensible and well conducted woman," said my mother.

"On that point, mother," I said, "you must allow me to hold a different opinion. I, for my part, should have said that Winifred's story proclaimed her aunt to be a worthy member of a flunkey society like this of ours—a society whose structure, political and moral and religious, is based on an adamant rock of paltry snobbery."

It was impossible to restrain my indignation.

"I am aware, Henry," replied my mother calmly, "that it is one of the fashions of the hour for young men of family to adopt the language of Radical newspapers. In a country like this the affectation does no great harm, I grant, and my only serious objection to it is that it implies in young men of one's own class a lack of originality which is a little humiliating. I am aware that your cousin, Percy Aylwin, of Rington Manor, used to talk in the same strain as this, and ended by joining the Gypsies. But I came to warn you, Henry, I came to urge you not to injure this poor girl's reputation by such scenes as that I witnessed this morning."

I remained silent. The method of my mother's attack had taken me by surprise. Her sagacity was so much greater than mine, her power of fence was so much greater, her stroke was so much deadlier, that in all our encounters I had been conquered.

"It is for the girl's own sake that I speak

to you," continued my mother. "She was deeply embarrassed at your method of address, and well she might be, seeing that it will be, for a long time to come, the subject of discussion in all the beerhouses which her father frequents."

"You speak as though she were answerable for her father's faults," I said, with heat.

"No," said my mother; "but *your* father is the owner of Raxton Hall, which to her and her class is a kind of Palace of the Cæsars. You belong to a family famous all along the coast; you are well known to be the probable heir of one of the largest landowners in England; you *may* be something more important still; while she, poor girl, what is she that you should rush up to her before all the churchgoers of the parish and address her as Winifred? The daughter of a penniless, drunken reprobate. Every attention you pay her is but a slur upon her good name."

"There is not a lady in the county worthy to unlace her shoes," I cried, unguardedly. Then I could have bitten off my tongue for saying so.

"That may be," said my mother, with the quiet irony peculiar to her; "but so monstrous are the customs of England, Henry, so barbaric is this society you despise, that she, whose shoes no lady in the county is worthy to unlace, is in an anomalous position. Should she once again be seen talking familiarly with you, her character will have fled, and fled for ever. It is for you to choose whether you are set upon ruining her reputation."

I felt that what she said was true. I felt also that Winifred herself had recognized the net of conventions that kept us apart in spite of that close and tender intimacy which had been the one great fact of our lives. In a sense I was far more a child of Nature than Winifred herself, inasmuch as, owing to my remarkable childish experience of isolation, I had imbibed a scepticism about the sanctity of conventions such as is foreign to the nature of woman, be she ever so unsophisticated, as Winifred's shyness towards me had testified.

As a child I had been neglected for the firstborn. I had enjoyed through this neglect an absolute freedom with regard to associating with fisher-boys and all the shoeless, hatless "sea-pups" of the sands, and now, when the time had come to civilize me, my mother had found it was too late. I was bohemian to the core. My childish intercourse with Winifred had been one of absolute equality, and I could not now live myself of this relation. These were

my thoughts as I listened to my mother's words.

My great fear now, however, was lest I should say something to compromise myself, and so make matters worse. Before another word upon the subject should pass between my mother and me I must see Winifred—and then I had something to say to her which no power on earth should prevent me from saying. So I merely told my mother that there was much truth in what she had said, and proceeded to ask particulars about my father's recent illness. After giving me these particulars she left the room, perplexed, I thought, as to what had been the result of her mission.

IV

I REMAINED alone for some time. Then I told the servants that I was going to walk along the cliffs to Dullingham Church, where there was an evening service, and left the house. I hastened towards the cliffs, and descended to the sands, in the hope that Winifred might be roaming about there, but I walked all the way to Dullingham without getting a glimpse of her. The church service did not interest me that evening. I heard nothing and saw nothing. When the service was over I returned along the sands, sauntering and lingering in the hope that, late as it was now growing, the balmy evening might have enticed her out.

The evening grew to night, and still I lingered. The moon was nearly at the full, and exceedingly bright. The tide was down. The scene was magical; I could not leave it. I said to myself, "I will go and stand on the very spot where Winifred stood when she lisped 'certumly' to the proposal of her little lover."

It was not, after all, till this evening that I really knew how entirely she was a portion of my life.

I went and stood by the black boulder where I had received the little child's prompt reply. There was not a grain left, I knew, of that same sand which had been hallowed by the little feet of Winifred, but it served my mood just as well as though every grain had felt the beloved pressure. For that the very sands had loved the child, I half believed.

I said to myself, as I sat down upon the boulder, "At this very moment she is here, she is in Raxton. In a certain little cottage there is a certain little room." And then I longed to leave the sands, to go and stand in front of Wynne's cottage and dream there. But that would be too foolish. "I must get

home," I thought. "The night will pass somehow, and in the morning I shall, as sure as fate, see her flitting about the sands she loves, and then what I have sworn to say to her I will say, and what I have sworn to do I will do, come what will."

Then came the puzzling question, how was I to greet her when we met? Was I to run up and kiss her, and hear her say, "Oh, I'm so pleased!" as she would sometimes say when I kissed her of yore? No; her deportment in the morning forbade that. Or was I to raise my hat and walk up to her saying, "How do you do, Miss Wynne? I'm glad to see you back, Miss Wynne," for she was now neither child nor young woman, she was a "girl." Perhaps I had better rush up to her in a bluff hearty way, and say: "How do you do, Miss Winifred? Delighted to see you back to Raxton." Finally, I decided that circumstances must guide me entirely, and I sat upon the boulder meditating.

After a while I saw, or thought I saw, in the far distance, close to the waves, a moving figure among the patches of rocks and stones (some black and some white) that break the continuity of the sand on that shore at low water.

When the figure got nearer I perceived it to be a woman, a girl, who, every now and then, was stooping as if to pick up something from the pools of water left by the ebbing tide imprisoned amid the encircling rocks. At first I watched the figure, wondering in a lazy and dreamy way what girl could be out there so late.

But all at once I began to catch my breath and gasp. The sea-smells had become laden with a kind of paradisaical perfume, ineffably sweet, but difficult to breathe all of a sudden. My heart too—what was amiss with that? And why did the muscles of my body seem to melt like wax? The lonely wanderer by the sea could be none other than Winifred.

"It is she!" I said. "There is no beach-woman or shore-prowling girl who, without raising an arm to balance her body, without a totter or a slip, could step in that way upon stones some of which are as slippery as ice with gelatinous weed and slime, while others are as sharp as razors. To walk like that the eye must be my darling's, that is to say, an eye as sure as a bird's; the ball of the foot must be the ball of a certain little foot I have often had in my hand wet with seawater and gritty with sand. For such work a mountaineer or a cragsman, or Winifred, is needed." Then I recalled her love of marine creatures, her delight in seaweed, of which she would weave the most astonishing

chaplets and necklaces coloured like the rainbow, "seaweed boas" and seaweed turbans, calling herself the princess of the sea (as indeed she was), and calling me her prince. "Yes," said I, "it is certainly she;" and when at last I espied a little dog by her side, Tom Wynne's little dog Snap (a descendant of the original Snap of our never-to-be-forgotten seaside adventures)—when I espied all these things I said, "Then the hour is come."

By this time my heart had settled down to a calmer throb, the paradisaical scent had become more supportable, and I grew master of myself again. I was going towards her, when I stayed my steps, for she was already making her way, entirely unconscious of my presence, towards the boulder where I sat.

"I know what I will do," I said; "I will fling myself flat on the sands behind the boulder and watch her. I will observe her without being myself observed."

I was in the mood when one tries sportfully to deceive one's self as to the depth and intensity of the emotion within. Perhaps I would and perhaps I would not speak to her at all that night; but if I did speak, I would say and do what (on that day when I set out for school) I had sworn to say and do.

So there I lay hidden by the boulder and watched her. She made the circuit of each pool that lay across her path towards the cliffs,—made it apparently for the childish enjoyment of balancing herself on the stones and snapping her fingers at the dog, who looked on with philosophic indifference at such a frivolous waste of force. Yes, though a tall girl of seventeen, she was the same incomparable child who had coloured my life and stirred the entire air of my imagination with the breezes of a new heaven. The voice of the tumbling sea in the distance, the caresses of the tender breeze, the wistful gaze of the great moon overhead, were companionship enough for her—for her whose loveliness would have enchanted a world. She had no idea that there was at this moment stepping round those black stones the loveliest woman then upon the earth. If she had had that idea she would still have been the star of all womanhood, but she would not have been Winifred. A charm superior to all other women's charm she still would have had; but she would not have been Winifred.

When she left the rocks and came upon the clear sand, she stopped and looked at her sweet shadow in the moonlight. Then, with the self-pleasing playfulness of a kitten, she stood and put herself into all kinds of postures to see what varying silhouettes they would make on the hard and polished sand

(that shone with a soft lustre like satin); now throwing up one arm, now another, and at last making a pirouette, twirling her shawl round, trying to keep it in a horizontal position by the rapidity of her movements.

The interest of the philosophic Snap was aroused at last. He began wheeling and barking round her, tearing up the sand as he went like a little whirlwind. This induced Winifred to redouble her gymnastic exertions. She twirled round with the velocity of an engine wheel. At last, finding the enjoyment it gave to Snap, she changed the performance by taking off her hat, flinging it high in the air, catching it, flinging it up again and again, while the moving shadow it made was hunted along the sand by Snap with a volley of deafening barks. By this time she had got close to me, but she was too busy to see me. Then she began to dance—the very same dance with which she used to entertain me in those happy days. I advanced from my stone, dodging and slipping behind her, unobserved even by Snap, so intent were these two friends upon this entertainment, got up, one would think, for whatsoever sylphs or gnomes or water sprites might be looking on.

How could I address in the language of passion which alone would have expressed my true feelings, a dancing fairy such as this?

"Bravo!" I said, as she stopped, panting and breathless. "Why, Winifred, you dance better than ever!"

She leaped away in alarm and confusion; while Snap, on the contrary, welcomed me with much joy.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," she said; not looking at me with the blunt frankness of childhood, as the little woman of the old days used to do, but drooping her eyes. "I didn't see you."

"But I saw *you*, Winifred; I have been watching you for the last quarter of an hour."

"Oh, you never have!" said she, in distress; "what could you have thought? I was only trying to cheer up poor Snap, who is out of sorts. What a mad romp you must have thought me, sir!"

"Why, what's the matter with Snap?"

"I don't know. Poor Snap!" (stooping down to fondle him, and at the same time to hide her face from me, for she was talking against time to conceal her great confusion and agitation at seeing me. *That* was perceptible enough).

Then she remembered she was hatless.

"Oh dear, where's my hat?" said she, looking round.

I had picked up the hat before accosting

her, and it was now dangling behind me. I, too, began talking against time, for the beating of my heart began again at the thought of what I was going to say and do.

"Hat!" I said; "do *you* wear hats, Winifred? I should as soon have thought of hearing the Queen of the Tylwyth Teg ask for her hat as you, after such goings-on as those I have just been witnessing. You see I have not forgotten the Welsh you taught me."

"Oh, but my hat—where is it?" cried she, vexed and sorely ashamed. So different from the unblenching child who loved to stand hatless and feel the rain-drops on her bare head!

"Well, Winifred, I've found a hat on the sand," I said; "here it is."

"Thank you, sir," said she, and stretched out her hand for it.

"No," said I, "I don't for one moment believe in its belonging to you, any more than it belongs to the Queen of the 'Fair People.' But if you'll let me put it on your head I'll give you the hat I've found," and with a rapid movement I advanced and put it on her head. I had meant to seize that moment for saying what I had to say, but was obliged to wait.

An expression of such genuine distress overspread her face, that I regretted having taken the liberty with her. Her bearing altogether was puzzling me. She seemed instinctively to feel as I felt, that raillery was the only possible attitude to take up in a situation so extremely romantic—a meeting on the sands at night between me and her who was neither child nor woman—and yet she seemed distressed at the raillery.

Embarrassment was rapidly coming between us.

There was a brief silence, during which Winifred seemed trying to move away from me.

"Did you—did you see me from the cliffs, sir, and come down?" said Winifred.

"Winifred," said I, "the polite thing to say would be 'Yes'; but you know 'Fighting Hal' never was remarkable for politeness, so I will say frankly that I did not come down from the cliffs on seeing you. But when I did see you, I wasn't very likely to return without speaking to you."

"I am locked out," said Winifred, in explanation of her moonlight ramble. "My father went off to Dullingham with the key in his pocket while I and Snap were in the garden, so we have to wait till his return. Good night, sir," and she gave me her hand. I seemed to feel the fingers around my heart, and knew that I was turning very pale. "The same little sunburnt fingers," I said,

as I retained them in mine—"just the same, Winifred! But it's not 'good night' yet. No, no, it's not good night yet; and, Winifred, if you dare to call me 'sir' again, I declare I'll kiss you where you stand. I will, Winifred. I'll put my arms right round that slender waist and kiss you under that moon, as sure as you stand on these sands."

"Then I will not call you 'sir,'" said Winifred, laughing. "Certainly I will not call you 'sir,' if that is to be the penalty."

"Winifred," said I, "the last time that I remember to have heard you say 'certainly' was on this very spot. You then pronounced it 'certumly,' and that was when I asked you if I might be your lover. You said 'certumly' on that occasion without the least hesitation."

Winifred, as I could see, even by the moonlight, was blushing. "Ah, those childish days!" she said. "How delightful they were, sir!"

"'Sir' again!" said I. "Now, Winifred, I am going to execute my threat—I am indeed."

She put up her hands before her face and said,

"Oh, don't! please don't."

The action no doubt might seem coquettish, but the tone of her voice was so genuine, so serious—so agitated even—that I paused:—I paused in bewilderment and perplexity concerning us both. I observed that her fingers shook as she held them before her face. That she should be agitated at seeing me after so long a separation did not surprise me, I being deeply agitated myself. It was the *nature* of her emotion that puzzled me, until suddenly I remembered my mother's words.

I perceived then that, child of Nature as she still was, some one had given her a careful training which had transmired my little Welsh rustic into a lady. She had not failed to apprehend the anomaly of her present position—on the moonlit sands with me. Though I could not break free from the old equal relations between us, Winifred had been able to do so.

"To her," I thought with shame, "my offering to kiss her at such a place and time must have seemed an insult. The very fact of my attempting to do so must have seemed to indicate an offensive consciousness of the difference of our social positions. It must have seemed to show that I recognised a distinction between the drunken organist's daughter and a lady."

I saw now, indeed, that she felt this keenly; and I knew that it was nothing but the sweetness of her nature, coupled with the fond recollection of the old happy days,

that restrained that high spirit of hers, and prevented her from giving expression to her indignation and disgust.

All this was shown by the appealing look on her sweet, fond face, and I was touched to the heart.

"Winifred—Miss Wynne," I said, "I beg your pardon most sincerely. The shadow-dance has been mainly answerable for my folly. You did look so exactly the little Winifred, my heart's sister, that I felt it impossible to treat you otherwise than as that dear child-friend of years ago."

A look of delight broke over her face.

"I felt sure it was so," she said. "But it is a relief that you have said it." And the tears came to her eyes.

"Thank you, Winifred, for having pardoned me. I feel that you would have forgiven me one else as you have forgiven me. I feel that you would not have forgiven any one else than your old child-companion, whom on a memorable occasion you threatened to hit, and then had not the heart to do so."

"I don't think I *could* hit you," said she, in a meditative tone of perfect unconsciousness as to the bewitching import of her speech.

"Don't you think you could?" I said, drawing nearer, but governing my passion.

"No," said she, looking now for the first time with those wide-open confiding eyes which, as a child, were the chief characteristic of her face, "I don't think I could hit you, whatever you did."

"Couldn't you, Winifred?" I said, coming still nearer, in order to drink to the full the wonder of her beauty, the thrill at my heart bringing, as I felt, a pallor to my cheek. "Don't you think you could hit your old playfellow, Winifred?"

"No," she said, still gazing in the same dreamy, reminiscent way straight into my eyes as of yore. "As a child you were so delightful. And then you were so kind to me!"

At that word "kind" from *her* to *me* I could restrain myself no longer; I shouted with a wild laughter of uncontrollable passion as I gazed at her through tears of love and admiration and deep gratitude—gazed till I was blind. My throat throbbled till it ached: I could get out no more words; I could only gaze. At my shout Winifred stood bewildered and confused. She did not understand a mood like that. Having got myself under control, I said,

"Winifred, it is not my doing; it is Fate's doing that we meet here on this night, and that I am driven to say here what I had as a schoolboy sworn should be said whenever we should meet again."

"I think," said Winifred, pulling herself up with the dignity of a queen, "that if you have anything important to say to me it had better be at a more reasonable time than at this hour of night, and at a more reasonable place than on these sands."

"No, Winifred," said I, "the time is *now*, and the place is here—here on this very spot where, once on a time, you said 'certainly' when a little lover asked your hand. It is now and here, Winifred, that I will say what I have to say."

"And what is that, sir?" said Winifred, much perplexed and disturbed.

"I have to say, Winifred, that the man does not live and never *has* lived," said I, with suppressed vehemence, "who loved a woman as I love you."

"Oh, sir! oh, Henry!" returned Winifred, trembling, then standing still and whiter than the moon.

"And the reason why no man has ever loved a woman as I love you, Winifred, is because your match, or anything like your match has never trod the earth before."

"Oh, Henry, my dear Henry! you *must* not say such things to me, your poor Winifred."

"But that isn't all that I swore I'd say to you, Winifred."

"Don't say any more—not to-night, not to-night."

"What I swore I would ask you, Winifred, is this: will you be Henry's wife?"

She gave one hysterical sob, and swayed till she nearly fell on the sand, and said, while her face shone like a pearl,

"Henry's wife!"

She recovered herself and stood and looked at me; her lips moved, but I waited in vain—waited in a fever of expectation—for her answer. None came. I gazed into her eyes, but they now seemed filled with visions—visions of the great race to which she belonged—visions in which her English lover had no place. Suddenly, and for the first time, I felt that she who had inspired within me this all-conquering passion, though the penniless child of a drunken organist, was a daughter of Snowdon—a representative of the Cymric race that was once so mighty, and is still more romantic in its associations than all others. Already in the little talk I had had with her I began to guess what I realized before the evening was over, that owing to the influence of the English lady, Miss Dalrymple, who had lodged at the cottage with her, she was more than my own equal in culture, and could have held her own with almost any girl of her own age in England. It was only in her subjection to Cymric superstitions that she was benighted.

"Winnie," I murmured, "what have you to say?"

After a while her eyes seemed to clear of the visions, and she said,

"What changes have come upon us both, Henry, since that childish betrothal on the sands!"

"Happy changes for one of the child-lovers," I said—"happy changes for the one who was then a lonely cripple shut out from all sympathy save that which the other child-lover could give."

"And yet you then seemed happy, Henry—happy with Winnie to help you up the gangways. And how happy Winnie was! But now the child-lover is a cripple no longer; he is very, very strong—he is so strong that he could carry Winnie up the gangways in his arms, I think."

The thrill of natural pride which such recognition of my physical powers would otherwise have given me was quelled by a something in the tone in which she spoke.

"And he is powerful in every way," she went on, as if talking to herself. "He is a great rich Englishman to whom (as auntie was never tired of saying) that childish betrothal must needs seem a dream—a quaint and pretty dream."

"And so your aunt said that, Winnie. How far from the truth she was you see to-night."

"Yes, she thought you would forget all about me; and yet she could not have felt quite confident about it, for she made me promise that if you should not forget me—if you should ever ask me what you have just asked—she made me promise—"

"What, Winnie? what? She did not make you promise that you would refuse me?"

"That is what she asked me to promise."

"But you did not."

"I did not."

"No, no! you did not, Winnie. My darling refused to make any such cruel, monstrous promise as that."

"But I promised her that I would in such an event wait a year—at least a year—before betrothing myself to you."

"Shame! shame! What made her do this cruel thing? A year! wait for a year!"

"She brought forward many reasons, Henry, but upon two of them she was constantly dwelling."

"And what were these?"

"Well, the news of the death of your brother Frank of course reached us in Shire-Carnarvon, and how well I remember hearing my aunt say, 'Henry Aylwin will be one of the wealthiest landowners in England.' And I remember how my heart sank at her words, for I was always thinking of the dear little

lame boy with the language of suffering in his eyes and the deep music of sorrow in his voice."

"Your heart sank, Winnie, and why?"

"I felt as if a breath of icy air had blown between us, dividing us for ever. And then my aunt began to talk about you and your future."

After some trouble I persuaded Winnie to tell me what was the homily that this aunt of hers preached *à propos* of Frank's death. And as she talked I could not help observing what, as a child, I had only observed in a dim, semi-conscious way—a strange kind of double personality in Winnie. At one moment she seemed to me nothing but the dancing fairy of the sands, objective and unconscious as a young animal playing to itself, at another she seemed the mouthpiece of the narrow world-wisdom of this Welsh aunt. No sooner had she spoken of herself as a friendless, homeless girl, than her brow began to shine with the pride of the Cymry.

"My aunt," said she, "used to tell me that until disaster came upon my uncle, and they were reduced to living upon a very narrow income, he and she never really knew what love was—they never really knew how rich their hearts were in the capacity of loving."

"Ah, I thought so," I said bitterly. "I thought the text was,

'Love in a hut, with water and a crust.'"

"No," said Winifred firmly, "that was not the text. She believed that the wolf must not be very close to the door behind which love is nestling."

"Then what did she believe? In the name of common sense, Winnie, what did she believe?"

"She believed," said Winnie, her cheek flushing and her eyes brightening as she went on, "that of all the schemes devised by man's evil genius to spoil his nature, to make him self-indulgent, and luxurious, and tyrannical, and incapable of understanding what the word 'love' means, the scheme of showering great wealth upon him is the most perfect."

"Ah, yes, yes; the old nonsense. Easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of love. And in what way did she enlarge upon this most charitable theme?"

"She told me dreadful things about the demoralising power of riches in our time."

"Dreadful things! What were they, Winnie?"

"She told me how insatiable is the greed for pleasure at this time. She told me that the passion of vanity—the greatest of all

the human passions,' as she used to say—has taken the form of money-worship in our time, sapping all the noblest instincts of men and women, and in rich people poisoning even parental affection, making the mother thirst for the pleasures which in old days she would only have tried to win for her child. She told me stories—dreadful stories—about children with expectations of great wealth who watched the poor grey hairs of those who gave them birth, and counted the years and months and days that kept them from the gold which modern society finds to be more precious than honour, family, heroism, genius, and all that was held precious in less materialised times. She told me a thousand other things of this kind, and when I grew older she put into my hand what has been written on the subject."

"Good God! Has the narrow-minded tomfoolery got a literature?"

Winnie went on with her eloquent account of her aunt's doctrines, and to my surprise I found that there actually *was* a literature of the subject.

Winnie's bright eyes had actually pored over old and long Chartist tracts translated into Welsh, and books on the Christian Socialism of Charles Kingsley, and pamphlets on more recent kinds of Socialism.

As she went on I could not help murmuring now and then, "What surroundings for my Winnie!"

"And the result of all this was, Winnie, that your aunt asked you to promise not to marry a man demoralised by privileges and made contemptible by wealth."

"That is what she wanted me to promise; but as I have said, I did not. But I did promise to wait for a year and see what effect wealth would have upon you."

"Did your aunt not tell you also that the man who marries you can never be unmanned by wealth, because he will know that everything he can give is as dross when set against Winnie's love and Winnie's beauty? Did she not also tell you that?"

"Love and beauty!" said Winnie. "Even if a woman's beauty did not depend for its existence upon the eyes that look upon it, I should want to give more to my hero than love and beauty. I should want to give him help in the battle of life, Henry. I should want to buckle on his armour, and sharpen the point of his lance, and whet the edge of his sword. A rich man's armour is bank-notes, and Winnie knows nothing of such paper. His spear, I am told, is a bullion bar, and Winnie's fingers scarcely know the touch of gold."

"Then you agree, Winnie, with these strange views of your aunt?"

"I do partly agree with them now. Ever since I saw you to-day in the churchyard I have partly agreed with them."

"And why?"

"Because already prosperity or bodily vigour or something has changed your eyes and changed the tone of your voice."

"You mean that my eyes are no longer so full of trouble; and as to my voice—how should my voice not change, seeing that it was the voice of a child when you last listened to it?"

"It is impossible for me even now, after I have thought about it so much, to put into words that expression in your eyes which won me as a child. All I knew at the time was that it fascinated me. And as I now recall it, all I know is that your gaze then seemed full of something which I can give a name to now, though I did not understand it then—the pathos and tenderness and yearning, which come, as I have been told, from suffering, and that your voice seemed to have the same message. That expression and that tone are gone—they will, of course, never return to you now. Your life is, and will be, too prosperous for that. But still I hope and believe that in a year's time prosperity will not have worked in you any of the mischief that my aunt feared. For you have a noble nature, Henry, and to spoil you will not be easy. You will never be the dear little Henry I loved, but you will still be nobler and greater than other men, I think."

"Do you really mean that my lameness was a positive attraction to you? Do you really mean that the very change in me which I thought would strengthen the bond between us—my restoration to health—weakens it? That is impossible, Winnie."

She remained silent for a time, as though lost in thought, and then said, "I do not believe that any woman can understand the movements of her own heart where love is concerned. My aunt used to say I was a strange girl, and I am afraid I am strange and perverse. She used to say that in my affections I was like no other creature in the world."

"How should Winifred be like any other creature in the world?" I said. "She would not be Winifred if she were. But what did your aunt mean?"

"When I was quite a little child she noticed that I was neglecting a favourite mavis which I used to delight to listen to as he warbled from his wicker cage. She watched me, and found that my attention was all given to a wounded bird that I had picked up on the Capel Curig road. 'Winnie,' she said, 'nothing can ever win

your love until it has first won your pity. A bird with a broken wing would be always more to you than a sound one!'"

"Your aunt was right," I said, "as no one should know better than I. For was it not the new kind of pity shining in those eyes of yours that revealed to me a new heaven in my loneliness? And when my brother Frank on that day in the wood stood over us in all the pride of his boyish strength, do I not remember the words you spoke?"

"What were they? I have quite forgotten them."

"You said, 'I don't think I could love any one very much who was not lame.'"

"Ah! did I really say that? It was quite true, Henry. I could admire your brother very much for being so handsome and strong and active, but he was too independent of love to win love from me. That child-love was the great educating experience of my life. It taught me the bliss of loving the afflicted—I mean the bliss of loving those to whom love comes as the very breath of heaven."

"Your aunt spoke the truth, indeed, when she said you were a strange girl. But is it really possible that on account of the blessings God has given me, health and wealth and strength—is it really possible that on account of those very blessings which most women find attractive in a man your heart is turned from me? A strange girl, indeed!" I murmured, lost in wonder at this new phase of the mystery of a woman's heart. "Who was the fool," I said to myself, "who said most women have no characters at all?"

For this conversation with Winnie first opened my eyes to the fact that, excepting in the merest superficials, there is a far greater variety in women than in men. In the deepest movements of the heart no two women are alike. Winnie's eccentricity of character was a revelation indeed. Ever since my return to bodily strength and agility I had been saying to myself, "If Winnie could only see me now! If Winnie could love me in those dark days that she turned to sunshine—when I was one of Destiny's own pariahs—if she could love me as a forlorn cripple hobbling upon crutches—what would be her feelings if she could see me now?"

As these thoughts came to me Winnie seemed to read them in my face, for she said, "Ah, yes, mine is indeed a strange eccentric nature. After I was separated from you my thoughts of you were always as the brave little cripple with the deep, yearning eyes, who could not get up the gangways without me. I used to think about you in Wales,

and especially when I was rambling about Snowdon, until I seemed to feel again the pressure—delicious pressure—of your hand on my shoulder for support. I shall never feel that pressure again, Henry. You can get up the gangways of life without me now."

"Who knows, Winifred," I said, "but that calamity may yet put that lost light into my eyes and that lost tone into my voice? But let the engagement stand thus," I said, smiling. "As I am not pledged to your aunt to wait for a year, let ours be a one-sided betrothal. Let Hal be betrothed to Winnie, while Winnie is not betrothed to Hal until a year has proved him to be invulnerable to the poisonous mischief of wealth."

"That would indeed be something new in betrothals," said Winifred with a strange smile.

"Has not everything in connection with us two been new?" I said. "Why should there not be a new kind of betrothal between us? Did not the French wit say that in every love affair there are two parties—one who is loved, and the other *qui se laisse aimer*?"

"No, you mustn't put it so, dear Henry; you mustn't put it in that way. My aunt did not object to the child-betrothal of long ago; she did not object to the little harum-scarum Winnie saying 'certumly!' when the little cripple proposed to her on the boulder."

"Let us renew that betrothal and be children again," I said.

She then told me that her kind friend Miss Dalrymple had always advised her to seek a situation as governess in Wales.

"I have now determined to do so," said Winifred, while a mournful look came into her eyes which I found it easy to understand, knowing as I did what she must already have seen of her father's mode of life.

"And," said I, "to show you that the leprosy of wealth you dread has not destroyed me as a man, I will in a year's time go to Wales, and we will be betrothed on Snowdon (I am afraid we can't be married there), and we will be married in Wales and your bridesmaids shall be your two Gypsy friends."

V.

I WONDER what words could render that love-dream on the dear silvered sands, with the moon overhead, the dark shadowy cliffs and the old church on one side, and the North Sea murmuring a love-chime on the other!

Suffice it to record that Winifred, with a throb in her throat (a throb that prevented her from pronouncing her n's with the clarity that some might have desired), said "certumly" again to Henry's suit,— "Certumly, if in a year's time you seek me out in the mountains, and your eyes and voice show that prosperity has not spoiled you, but that you are indeed my Henry." And this being settled in strict accordance with her aunt's injunctions, she never tried to disguise how happy she was, but told Henry again and again in answer to his importunate questions—told him with her frank courage how she had loved him from the first in the old churchyard as a child—loved him for what she called his love-eyes; told him—ah! what did she not tell him? I must not go on. These things should not be written about at all but for the demands of my story.

And how soon she forgot that the betrothal was all on one side! I could write out every word of that talk. I remember every accent of her voice, every variation of light that came and went in her eyes, every ripple of love-laughter, every movement of her body, lissome as a greyhound's, graceful as a bird's. For fully an hour it lasted. And remember, reader, that it was on the silvered sands, every inch of which was associated with some reminiscence of childhood; it was beneath a moon smiling as fondly and brightly as she ever smiled on the domes of Venice or between the trees of Fiesole; it was by the margin of waves whose murmurs were soft and perfumed as Winifred's own breathings when she slept; and remember that the girl was Winifred herself, and that the boy—the happy boy—had Winifred's love. Ah! but that last element of that hour's bliss is just what the reader cannot realise, because he can only know Winifred through these poor words. That is the distressing side of a task like mine. The beloved woman here called Winifred (no phantom of an idle imagination, but more real to me and dear to me than this soul and body I call my own)—this Winifred can only live for you, reader, through my feeble, faltering words; and yet I ask you to listen to the story of such a love as mine.

"Winnie," I said, "you have often as a child sung songs of Snowdon to me and told me of others you used to sing. I should love to hear one of these now, with the chime of the North Sea for an accompaniment instead of the instrument you tell me your Gypsy friend used to play. Before we go up the gangway, do sing me a verse of one of those songs."

After some little persuasion she yielded

and sang in a soft undertone the following verse :—

"I met in a glade a lone little maid,
At the foot of y Wyddfa the white ;
Oh, lissom her feet as the mountain hind,
And darker her hair than the night ;
Her cheek was like the mountain rose,
But fairer far to see,
As driving along her sheep with a song,
Down from the hills came she."*

"What a beautiful world it is!" said she, in a half-whisper, as we were about to part at the cottage door, for I had refused to leave her on the sands or even at the garden-gate. "I should like to live for ever," she whispered; "shouldn't you, Henry?"

"Well, that all depends upon the person I lived with. For instance, I shouldn't care to live for ever with Widow Shales, the pale-faced tailoress, nor yet with her hump-backed son, whose hump was such a constant source of wistful wonder and solicitude to you as a child."

She gave a merry little laugh of reminiscence. Then she said, "But you could live with me for ever, couldn't you, Henry?" plucking a leaf from the grape-vine on the wall and putting it between her teeth.

"For ever and ever, Winifred."

"It fills me with wonder," said she, after a while, "the thought of being Henry's wife. It is so delightful and yet so fearful."

By this I knew she had not forgotten that look of hate on my mother's face.

She put her hand on the latch and found that the door was now unlocked.

"But where is the fearful part of it, Winifred?" I said. "I am not a cannibal."

"You ought to marry a great English lady, dear, and I'm only a poor girl; you seem to forget all about that, you silly fond boy. You forget I'm only a poor girl—just Winifred," she continued.

"Just Winifred," I said, taking her hand and preventing her from lifting the latch.

"I've lived," said she, "in a little cottage like this with my aunt and Miss Dalrymple and done everything."

"Everything's a big word, Winifred. What may everything include in your case?"

* "Mi gwrdais gynt a morwynig,
Wrth odreu y Wyddfa wen,
Un ysgafn ei throed fel yr ewig
A gwallt fel y nos ar ei phen;
Ei grudd oedd fel y rhosyn,
Un hardd a gwen ei gwawr;
Yn canu cân, a'i defaid mân,
O'r Wyddfa'n d'od i lawr."

"Include!" said Winifred; "oh, everything, housekeeping and—"

"Housekeeping!" said I. "Racing the winds with Rhona Boswell and other Gypsy children up and down Snowdon—that's been your housekeeping."

"Cooking," said Winifred, maintaining her point.

"Oh, what a fib, Winifred! These sun-burnt fingers may have picked wild fruits, but they never made a pie in their lives."

"Never made a pie! I make beautiful pies and things; and when we're married I'll make your pies—may I, instead of a conceited man-cook?"

"No, Winifred. Never make a pie or do a bit of cooking in my house, I charge you."

"Oh, why not?" said Winifred, a shade of disappointment overspreading her face. "I suppose it's unladylike to cook."

"Because," said I, "once let me taste something made by these tanned fingers, and how could I ever afterwards eat anything made by a man-cook, conceited or modest? I should say to that poor cook, 'Where is the Winifred flavour, cook? I don't taste those tanned fingers here.' And then, suppose you were to die first, Winifred, why, I should have to starve, just for want of a little Winifred flavour in the pie-crust. Now I don't want to starve, and you sha'n't cook."

"Oh, Hal, you dear, dear fellow!" shrieked Winifred, in an ecstasy of delight at this nonsense. Then her deep love overpowered her quite, and she said, her eyes suffused with tears, "Henry, you can't think how I love you. I'm sure I couldn't live even in heaven without you."

Then came the shadow of a lich-owl, as it whisked past us towards the apple-trees.

"Why, you'd be obliged to live without me, Winifred, if I were still at Raxton."

"No," said she, "I'm quite sure I couldn't. I should have to come in the winds and play round you on the sands. I should have to peep over the clouds and watch you. I should have to follow you about wherever you went. I should have to beset you till you said, 'Bother Winnie! I wish she'd keep in heaven.'"

I saw, however, that the owl's shadow had disturbed her, and I lifted the latch of the cottage door for her. We were met by a noise so loud that it might have come from a trombone.

"Why, what on earth is that?" I said.

I could see the look of shame break over Winifred's features as she said, "Father." Yes, it was the snoring of Wynne in a drunken sleep: it filled the entire cottage.

The poor girl seemed to feel that that brutal noise had, somehow, coarsened her,

and she actually half shrank from me as I gave her a kiss and left her.

Wondering how I should at such an hour get into the house without disturbing my mother and the servants, I passed along that same road where, as a crippled child, I had hobbled on that bright afternoon when love was first revealed to me. Ah, what a different love was this which was firing my blood, and making dizzy my brain! That child-love had softened my heart in its deep distress, and widened my soul. This new and mighty passion in whose grasp I was, this irresistible power that had seized and possessed my entire being, wrought my soul in quite a different sort, concentrating and narrowing my horizon till the human life outside the circle of our love seemed far, far away, as though I were gazing through the wrong end of a telescope. I had learned that he who truly loves is indeed born again, becomes a new and different man. Was it only a few short hours ago, I asked myself, that I was listening to my mother's attack upon Winifred? Was it this very evening that I was sitting in Dullingham Church?

How far away in the past seemed those events! And as to my mother's anger against Winifred, that anger and cruel scorn of class which had concerned me so much, how insignificant now seemed this and every other obstacle in love's path! I looked up at the moonlit sky; I leaned upon a gate and looked across the silent fields where Winifred and I used to gather violets in spring, hedges-roses in summer, mushrooms in autumn, and I said, "I will marry her; she shall be mine; she *shall* be mine, though all the powers on earth, all the powers in the universe, should say nay."

As I spoke I saw that lights were flashing to and fro in the windows of the Hall. "My poor father is dead," I said. I turned and ran up the road, "Oh, that I could have seen him once again!" At the hall door I was met by a servant, and learnt that, while I had been love-making on the sands, a message had come from the Continent with news of my father's death.

VI

THERE was no meeting Winifred on the next night.

It was decided that my uncle's private secretary should go to Switzerland to bring the body to England. I (remembering my promise about the mementoes) insisted on accompanying him. We started on the morrow, preceded by a message to my father's

Swiss friends ordering an embalment. Before starting I tried to see Winifred; but she had gone to Dullingham.

On our arrival at the little Swiss town, we found that the embalment had been begun. The body was still in the hands of a famous embalmer—an Italian Jew settled at Geneva, the only successful rival there of Professor Laskowski. He was celebrated for having revived the old Hebraic method of embalment in spices, and improving it by the aid of the modern discoveries in antiseptics of Laskowski, Signor Franchina of Naples, and Dr. Dupré of Paris. This physician told me that by his process the body would, without the peculiarly-sealed coffin used by the Swiss embalmers, last "firm and white as Carrara marble for a thousand years."

The people at the chalet had naturally been much astonished to find upon my father's breast a jewelled cross lying. As soon as I entered the house they handed it to me.

For some reason or another this amulet and the curse had haunted my imagination as much as if I believed in amulets and curses, though my reason told me that everything of the kind was sheer nonsense. I could not sleep for thinking about it, and in the night I rose from my bed, and, opening the window, held up the cross in the moonlight. The facets caught the silvery rays and focussed them. The amulet seemed to shudder with some prophecy of woe. It was now that, for the first time, I began to feel the signs of that great struggle between reason and the inherited instinct of superstition which afterwards played so important a part in my life. I then took up the parchment scroll, and opened it and re-read the curse. The great letters in which the English version was printed seemed to me larger by the light of the moon than they had seemed by daylight.

We had to wait for some time in Switzerland. In a locked drawer I found the casket and a copy of *The Veiled Queen*. I read much in the book. Every word I found there was in flat contradiction to my own mode of thought.

Did the shock of this dreadful catastrophe drive Winifred from my mind? No, nothing could have done that. My soul seemed, as I have said, to be new-born, and all emotions, passions, and sentiments that were not connected with her seemed to be shadowy and distant, like ante-natal dreams. It would be hypocrisy not to confess this frankly, regardless of the impression against me it may make on the reader's mind. Yet I had a real affection for my father. In spite of his extraordinary obliviousness of my very exist-

ance till the last year of his life, I was strongly attached to him, and his death made me see nothing but his virtues; yet my soul was so filled with my passion for Winifred as to have but little room for sorrow. As to my mother, her attachment to my father knew no bounds, and her grief at her bereavement knew none.

A day or two before the funeral my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley arrived, and his presence was a great comfort to her. Owing to my father's position in the county a great deal of funeral state was considered necessary, and there was much hurry and bustle.

My uncle having known Wynne when quite a young man, before intemperance had degraded him, took an interest in him still. He had called at the cottage as he passed along Wilderness Road towards Raxton, and the result of this was that the organist came to speak to him at our house upon some matter in connection with the funeral service. My mother was greatly vexed at this. Her conduct on the occasion alarmed me. Ever since Frank's death had made it evident not only that I should succeed to all the property of my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley, but that I might even succeed to something greater, to the earldom which was the glory and pride of the Aylwins, my mother had kept a jealous and watchful eye upon me, being, as I afterwards learned, not unmindful of the early child-loves of Winifred and myself; and the advent to Raxton of Winifred, as a beautiful tall girl, had aroused her fears as well as her wrath.

The day of the funeral came, and the question of the casket and the amulet was on my mind. The important thing, of course, was that the matter should be kept absolutely secret. The valuables must be placed in secrecy with the embalmed corpse at the last moment, before the screwing down of the coffin, when servants and undertakers were out of sight and hearing.

My mother knew what had been my father's instructions to me, and was desirous that they should be fulfilled, though she scorned the superstition. She and I placed the casket and the scroll bearing the written curse upon it beneath my father's head, and hung the chain of the amulet around his neck, so that the cross lay with the jewels uppermost upon his breast. Then the undertakers were called in to screw down the coffin in my presence. My mother afterwards called me to her room, and told me that she was much troubled about the cross. The amulet being of great value, my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley had tried to dissuade her from carrying into execution what he called the "absurd whim of a mystic"; but my

mother urged my promise, and there had been warm words between them, as my mother told me—adding, however, "and the worst of it is, that scamp Wynne, whom your uncle introduced into this house without my knowledge or sanction, was passing the door while your uncle was talking, and if he did not hear every word about the jewelled cross, drink must have stupefied him indeed. *He* is my only fear in connection with the jewels." Her dislike of Wynne had made her forget for the moment the effect her words must have upon me.

"Mother," I said, "your persistent prejudice and injustice towards this man astonish me. Wynne, though poor and degraded now, is a gentleman born, and is no more likely to violate a tomb than the best Aylwin that ever lived."

I will not dwell upon the scene at the funeral. I saw my father's coffin placed in the crypt that spread beneath the deserted church. It was by the earnest wish of my father that he was buried in a church already deserted because the grip of the resistless sea was upon it. At this very time a large slice of the cliff behind the church was pronounced dangerous, and I perceived that new rails were lying on the grass ready to be fixed up, further inland than ever.

VII

MY mother retired to her room immediately on our return to the house. My uncle stayed till just before dinner, and then left. I seemed to be alone in a deserted house, so still were the servants, so quiet seemed everything. But now what was this sense of undefined dread that came upon me and would not let me rest? Why did I move from room to room? and what was goading me? Something was stirring like a blind creature across my brain, and it was too hideous to confront. Why *should* I confront it? Why scare one's soul and lacerate one's heart at every dark fear that peeps through the door of imagination, when experience teaches us that out of every hundred such dark fears ninety-nine are sure to turn out mere magic-lantern bogies?

The evening wore on, and yet I *would* not face this phantom fear, though it refused to quit me.

The servants went to bed quite early that night, and when the butler came to ask me if I should "want anything more," I said, "only a candle," and went up to my bedroom.

"I will turn into bed," I said, "and sleep over it. The idea is a figment of an over-

wrought brain. Destiny would never play any man a trick like that which I have dared to dream of. Among human calamities it would be at once the most shocking and the most whimsical—this imaginary woe that scares me. Destiny is merciless, but who ever heard of Destiny playing mere cruel practical jokes upon man? Up to now the Fates have never set up as humourists. Now, for a man to love, to dote upon, a girl whose father is the violator of his own father's tomb—a wretch who has called down upon himself the most terrible curse of a dead man that has ever been uttered—that would be a fate too fantastically cruel to be permitted by Heaven—by any governing power whose sanctions were not those of a whimsical cruelty."

Yet those words of my mother's about Wynne, and her suspicions of him, were flitting about the air of the room like fiery-bats.

The air of the room—ah! it was stifling me. I opened the window and leant out. But that made matters a thousand times worse, for the moon was now at the very full, and staring across—staring at what?—staring across the sea at the tall tower of the old church on the cliff, where perhaps the sin—the "unpardonable sin," according to Cymric ideas—of sacrilege—sacrilege committed by her father upon the grave of mine—might at this moment be going on. The body of the church was hidden from me by the intervening trees, and nothing but the tall tower shone in the silver light. So intently did the moon stare at it, that it seemed to me that the inside of the church, with its silent aisles, arches and tombs, was reflected on her disc. The moon oppressed me, and when I turned my eyes away I seemed to see hanging in the air the silent aisles of a church, through whose windows the moonlight was pouring, flooding them with a radiance more ghastly than darkness, concentrating all its light on the chancel, beneath which I knew that my father was lying in the dark crypt with a cross on his breast. I turned for relief to look in the room, and there, in the darkness made by the shadow of the bed, I seemed to read, written in pale, trembling flame, the words:

"LET THERE BE NO MAN TO PITY HIM,
NOR TO HAVE COMPASSION UPON HIS
FATHERLESS CHILDREN. . . . LET HIS
CHILDREN BE VAGABONDS, AND BEG THEIR
BREAD: LET THEM SEEK IT ALSO OUT OF
DESOLATE PLACES."

I returned to the window for relief from the bedroom.

"Now, let me calmly consider the case in

all its bearings," I said to myself, drawing a chair to the window and sitting down with my elbows resting on the sill. "Suppose Wynne really did overhear the altercation between my mother and my uncle, which seems scarcely probable, has drit k really so demoralized him, so brutalized him, that for drink he would commit the crime of sacrilege? There are no signs of his having sunk so low as that. But suppose the crime *were* committed, what then? Do I really believe that the curse of my father and of the Psalmist would fall upon Winifred's pure and innocent head? Certainly not. I do not believe in the effect of curses at all. I do not believe in any supernatural interference with the natural laws of the universe."

Ah! but this thought about the futility of the curse, about the folly of my father's superstitions, brought me no comfort. I knew that, brave as Winifred was as a child, when confronting the material world, she was very superstitious. I remembered that as a child, whenever I said, "What a happy day it has been!" she would not rest until she had made me add, "and shall have many more," because of her feeling of the prophetic power of words. I knew that the superstitions of the Welsh hills awed her. I knew that it had been her lot to imbibe, not only Celtic, but Romany superstitions. I knew that the tribe of Gypsies with whom she had been thrown into contact, the Lovells and the Boswells, though superior to the rest of the Romany race, are the most superstitious of all, and that Winifred had become an object of strong affection to the most superstitious even among that tribe, one Sinf Lovell. I knew from something that had once fallen from her as a child on the sands, when prattling about Sinf Lovell and Rhona Boswell, that especially powerful with her was the idea (both Romany and Celtic) about the effect of a dead man's curse. I knew that this idea had a dreadful fascination for her—the fascination of repulsion. I knew also that reason may strive with superstition as with the other instincts, but it will strive in vain. I knew that it would have been worse than idle for me to say to Winifred, "There is no curse in the matter. The dreaming mystic who begot and forgot me, what curse could he call down on a soul like my Winifred's?" Her reason might partly accept my arguments; but straightway they would be spurned by her instincts and her traditional habits of thought. The terrible voice of the Psalmist would hush every other sound. Her sweet soul would pine under the blazing fire of a curse, real or imaginary; her life would be henceforth but a bitter penance. Like the

girl in Coleridge's poem of "The Three Graves," her very flesh would waste before the fires of her imagination.

"No," said I, "such a calamity as this which I dread Heaven would not permit. So cruel a joke as this Hell itself would not have the heart to play."

* * * * *

My meditations were interrupted by a sound, and then by a sensation such as I cannot describe. Whence came that shriek? It was like a shriek coming from a distance—loud *there*, faint *here*, and yet it seemed to come from *me*! It was as though I were witnessing some dreadful sight unutterable and intolerable. And then it seemed the voice of Winifred, and then it seemed her father's voice, and finally it seemed the voice of my own father struggling in his tomb. My horror stopped the pulses of my heart for a moment, and then it passed.

"It comes from the church or from behind the church," I said, as the shriek was followed by an angry murmur as of muffled thunder. All had occurred within the space of half a second. I quickly but cautiously opened my bedroom door, extinguishing my light before doing so, and began to creep downstairs, fearing to wake my mother. My shoes creaked, so I took them off and carried them. Crossing the hall, I softly drew the bolts of the front door; then I passed into the moonlight. The gravel of the carriage-drive cut through my stockings, and a pebble bruised one of my heels so that I nearly fell. When I got safely under the shadow of the large cedar of Lebanon in the middle of the lawn, I stopped and looked up at my mother's window to see if she were a watcher. The blinds were down, there was no movement, no noise. Evidently she was asleep. I put on my shoes and hurried across the lawn towards the high road. I walked at a sharp pace towards the old church. The bark of a distant dog or the baa of a waking sheep was the only sound. When I reached the churchyard, I peered in dread over the lich-gate before I opened it. Neither Wynne nor any living creature was to be seen in the churchyard.

The soothing smell of the sea came from the cliffs, making me wonder at my fears. On the loneliest coast, in the dunnest night, a sense of companionship comes with the smell of seaweed. At my feet spread the great churchyard, with its hundreds of little green hillocks and white gravestones, sprinkled here and there with square, box-like tombs. All quietly asleep in the moonlight! Here and there an aged headstone seemed to nod to its neighbour, as though muttering in its dreams. The old church,

bathed in the radiance, seemed larger than it had ever done in daylight, and incomparably more grand and lonely.

On the left were the tall poplar trees, rustling and whispering among themselves. Still, there might be at the *back* of the church mischief working. I walked round thither. The ghostly shadows on the long grass might have been shadows thrown by the ruins of Tadmor, so quietly did they lie and dream. A weight was uplifted from my soul. A balm of sweet peace fell upon my heart. The noises I had heard had been imaginary, conjured up by love and fear; or they might have been an echo of distant thunder. The windows of the church no doubt looked ghastly, as I peered in to see whether Wynne's lantern was moving about. But all was still. I lingered in the churchyard close by the spot where I had first seen the child Winifred and heard the Welsh song.

I went to look at the sea from the cliff. Here, however, there was something sensational at last. The spot where years ago I had sat when Winifred's song had struck upon my ear and awoke me to a new life—*was gone!* "This then was the noise I heard," I said; "the rumbling was the falling of the earth; the shriek was the tearing down of trees."

Another slice, a slice weighing thousands of tons, had slipped since the afternoon from the churchyard on to the sands below. "Perhaps the tread of the townspeople who came to witness the funeral may have given the last shake to the soil," I said.

I stood and looked over the newly-made gap at the great hungry water. Considering the little wind, the swell on the North Sea was tremendous. Far away there had been a storm somewhere. The moon was laying a band of living light across the vast bosom of the sea, like a girdle. Only a month had elapsed since that never-to-be-forgotten moonlight walk with Winifred. But what a world of emotion since then!

VIII

I WALKED along the cliff to the gangway behind Flinty Point, and descended in order to see what havoc the landslip had made with the graves.

I looked across the same moonlit sands where I had seen Winifred so short a time before, when I had a father. To my delight and surprise, there she was again. There was Winifred, walking thoughtfully towards Church Cove with Snap by her side, who seemed equally thoughtful and sedate. The

relief of finding that my fears about her father were groundless added to my joy at seeing her. With my own dead father lying within a few rods of me I ran towards her in a state of high exhilaration, forgetting everything but her. With sympathetic looks for my bereavement she met me, and we walked hand-in-hand in silence.

After a little while she said: "My father told me he was very busy to-night, and wished me to come on the sands for a walk, but I little hoped to meet you; I am very pleased we have met, for to-morrow I am going to London."

"To London?" I said, in dismay at the thought of losing her so soon. "Why are you going to London, Winnie?"

"Oh," said she, with the same innocent look of business-like importance which, at our first meeting as children, had so impressed me when she pulled out the key to open the church-door, "I'm going on business."

"On business! And how long do you stay?"

"I don't stay at all; I'm coming back immediately."

"Come," I explained, "there's a little comfort in that, at least. Snap and I can wait for one day."

"Good-night," said Winifred.

"Have you not seen the great landslip at the churchyard?" I asked, taking her hand and pointing to the new promontory which the *débris* of the fall had made.

"Another landslip?" said she. "Poor dear old churchyard, it will soon be all gone! Snap and I must have been far away when that fell. But I remember saying to him, 'Hark at the thunder, Snap!' and then I heard a sound like a shriek that appalled me. It recalled a sound I once heard in Shire-Carnarvon."

"What was it, Winnie?"

"You've heard me when I was a little girl talk of my Gypsy sister Sinfi?"

"Often," I said.

"She loves me more than anybody else in the whole world," said Winifred simply. "She says she would lay down her life for me, and I really believe she would. Well, there is not far from where I used to live a famous cascade called the Swallow Falls, where the water drops down a chasm of great depth. If you listen to the noise of the cataract, you may hear mingled with it a peculiar kind of wail as from a man in great agony. It is said to be the wail of a Sir John Wynn, of Gwydir, whose spirit is under a curse, and is imprisoned at the bottom of the falls on account of his cruelty and misdeeds on earth. On those rare

nights when the full moon shines down the chasm, the wail becomes an agonized shriek. Once on a bright moonlight night Sinfi and I went to see these falls. The moonlight on the cascade had exactly the same supernatural appearance that it has now falling upon these billows. Sinfi sings some of our Welsh songs, and accompanies herself on a peculiar obsolete Welsh instrument called a *crwth*, which she always carries with her. While we were listening to the cataract and what she called the Wynn wail, she began to sing the wild old air. Then at once the wail sprang into a loud shriek; Sinfi said the shriek of a cursed spirit; and the shriek was exactly like the sound I heard from the cliffs a little while ago."

"I heard the same noise, Winnie. It was simply the rending and cracking of the poor churchyard trees as they fell."

She turned back with me to the water-mark to see the waves come tumbling in beneath the moon. We sauntered along the sea-margin again, heedless of the passage of time.

And again (as on that betrothal night) Winifred prattled on, while I listened to the prattle, craftily throwing in a word or two, now and then, to direct the course of the sweet music into such channels as best pleased my lordly whim,—when suddenly, against my will and reason, there came into my mind that idea of the sea's prophecy which was so familiar to my childhood, but which my studies had now made me despise.

The sea then threw up to Winifred's feet a piece of seaweed. It was a long band of common weed, that would in the sunlight have shone a bright red. And at that very moment—right across the sparkling bar the moon had laid over the sea—there passed, without any cloud to cast it, a shadow. And my father's description of his love-tragedy haunted me, I knew not why. And right across my life, dividing it in twain like a burn-scar, came and lay for ever that strip of red seaweed. Why did my father's description of his own love-tragedy haunt me?

Before recalling the words that had fallen from my father in Switzerland, I was a boy: in a few minutes afterwards, I was a man with an awful knowledge of destiny in my eyes—a man struggling with calamity, and fainting in the grip of dread. My manhood, I say, dates from the throwing up of that strip of seaweed. Winifred picked up the weed and made a necklace of it, in the old childish way, knowing how much it would please me.

"Isn't it a lovely colour?" she said, as it glistened in the moonlight. "Isn't it just as

beautiful and just as precious as if it were really made of the jewels it seems to rival?"

"It is as red as the reddest ruby," I replied, putting out my hand and grasping the slippery substance.

"Would you believe," said Winnie, "that I never saw a ruby in my life? And now I particularly want to know all about rubies."

"Why do you want particularly to know?"

"Because," said Winnifred, "my father, when he wished me to come out for a walk, had been talking a great deal about rubies."

"Your father had been talking about rubies, Winnifred—how very odd!"

"Yes," said Winnifred, "and he talked about diamonds too."

"THE CURSE!" I murmured, and clasped her to my breast. "Kiss me, Winnifred!"

There had come a bite of sudden fire at my heart, and I shuddered with a dreadful knowledge, like the captain of an unarmed ship, who, while the unconscious landsmen on board are gaily scrutinizing a sail that like a speck has appeared on the horizon, shudders with the knowledge of what the speck is, and hears in imagination the yells, and sees the knives, of the Lascar pirates just starting in pursuit. As I took in the import of those innocent words, falling from Winnifred's bright lips, falling as unconsciously as water-drops over a coral reef in tropical seas alive with the eyes of a thousand sharks, my skin seemed to roughen with dread, and my hair began to stir.

At first she resisted my movement, but looking in my eyes and seeing that something had deeply disturbed me, she let me kiss her.

"What did you say, Henry?"

"That I love you so, Winnie, and cannot let you go just yet."

"What a dear fellow it is!" she said: "and all this ado about a poor girl with scarcely shoes to her feet." Then, after an instant's pause, she said: "But I thought you said something very different. I thought you said something about a curse, and that scared me."

"Scared Winnifred!" I said. "Fancy anything scaring Winnie, who threatens to hit people when they offend her."

"Ah! but I am scared," said she, "at things from the other world, and especially at a curse."

"Why, what do you know about curses, Winnifred?"

"Oh, a good deal. I have never forgotten that shriek of a cursed spirit which I heard at the Swallow Falls. And only a short time ago Sinf Lovell nearly frightened me to death by a story of a whole Gypsy tribe having withered, one after the other—grand-

fathers, fathers, and children—through a dead man's curse. But what is the matter with you, Henry? You surely have turned very pale!"

"Well, Winnie," said I, "I am a little, just a little faint. After the funeral I could take no dinner. But it will be over in a minute. Let us go back a few yards and sit down upon the dry sand, and have a little more chat."

We went and sat down, and my heart slowly resumed its function.

"Let me see, Winnie, what were we talking about? About rubies and diamonds, I think, were we not? You said that when your father bade you come out for a walk to-night, he had just been talking about rubies and diamonds. What was he saying about them, Winnie? But come and lay your head here while you tell me; lay it on my breast, Winnie, as you used to do in Graylingham Wood, and on these same sands."

Evidently the earnestness of my manner and the suppressed passion in my voice drove out of her mind all her wise saws about the perils of wealth and all her wise determinations about the postponed betrothal, for she came and sat by my side and laid her head upon my breast.

"Yes, like that," I said; "and now tell me what your father was saying about precious stones; for I, too, take an interest in jewels, and have a great knowledge of them."

"My father," said Winnifred, "is going to have some diamonds and rubies given to him to-night by a friend of his, a sailor, who has come from India, and I am to go to London to-morrow to sell some of them; for you know, dear, we are very poor. That is why I am determined to go back to Shire-Carnarvon and see if I can get a situation as governess. Miss Dalrymple's recommendation will be of great aid. Poverty afflicts father more than it afflicts most people, and the rubies and diamonds and things will be of no use to us, you know."

I could make her no answer.

"It seems a very strange kind of present from my father's friend," she continued, meditatively; "but it is a very kind one for all that. But, Henry, you surely are still very unwell; your heart is thumping underneath my ear like a fire-engine."

"They are all love-thumps for Winnifred," I said, with pretended jocosity; "they are all love-thumps for my Winnie."

"But of course," said she, "this is quite a secret about the precious stones. My father enjoined me to tell no one, because the temptation to people is so great, and the cottage might be robbed, or I might be way-

laid going to London. But of course I may tell you ; he never thought of *you*."

"No, Winnie, he never thought of me. You are very fond of him ; very fond of your father, are you not ?"

"Oh, yes," said she, "I love him more than all the world—next to you."

"Then he is kind to you, Winnie ?"

"Ye—yes, as kind as he can be—considering—"

"Considering what, Winnie ?"

"Considering that he's often—unwell, you know."

"Winnie," I said, as I gazed in the innocent eyes, "whom are you considered to be the most like, your father or your mother ?"

"I never knew my mother, but I am said to be partly like her. Why do you ask ?"

"Only an idle question. You love me, Winnie ?"

"What a question !"

"And you will do what I ask you to do, if I ask you very earnestly, Winnie ?"

"Certumly," said Winifred, giving, with a forced laugh, the lisp with which that word had been given on a now famous occasion.

"Well, Winifred, I told you that I feel an interest in precious stones, and have some knowledge of them. There are certain stones to which I have the greatest antipathy : diamonds and rubies are the chief of these. Now I want you to promise that diamonds and rubies and beryls shall never touch these fingers, these dear fingers, Winnie, which are mine, you know ; they are mine now," and I drew the smooth nails slowly along my lips. "You are mine now, every bit."

"Every bit," said Winifred, but she looked perplexed.

She saw, however, by my face that, for some reason or other, I was deeply in earnest. She gave the promise. And I knew at least that those fingers would not be polluted, come what would. As to her going to London with the spoil, I knew how to prevent that.

But what course of action was I now to take ? At this very moment perhaps Winifred's father was violating my father's tomb, unless indeed the crime might even yet be prevented. There was one hope, however. The drunken scoundrel whose daughter was my world I knew to be a procrastinator in everything. His crime might, even yet, be only a crime in intent ; and, if so, I could prevent it easily enough. My first business was to hurry to the church, and, if not yet too late, keep guard over the tomb. But to achieve this I must get quit of Winifred without a moment's delay. Now Winifred's most

direct path to the cottage was the path I myself must take to the church, the gangway behind Flinty Point. Yet *she* must not pass the church with me, lest an encounter with her father should take place. There was thus but one course open. I must induce her to take the gangway behind the other point of the cove ; and how was this to be compassed ? That was what I was racking my brain about.

"Winifred," I said at last, as we sat and looked at the sea, "I begin to fear we must be moving."

She started up, vexed that the hint to move had come from me.

"The fact is," I said, "I particularly want to go into the old church."

"Into the old church to-night ?" said Winifred, with a look of astonishment and alarm that I could not understand.

"Yes, something was left undone there this afternoon at the funeral, and I must go at once. But why do you look so alarmed ?"

"Oh, don't go into the old church to-night," said Winifred.

I stood and looked at her, puzzled and strangely disturbed.

"Henry," said she, "I know you will think me very foolish, but I have not yet got over the fright that shriek gave me, the shriek we both heard the moment before the landslip. That shriek was not a noise made by the rending of trees, Henry. No, no ; we both *know* better than that, Henry."

I gave a start ; for, try as I would, I had not really succeeded in persuading myself that what I had heard was anything but a human voice in terror or in pain.

"What do you think the noise was, then ?" said I.

"I don't know ; but I know what I felt as it came shuddering along the sand, and then went wailing over the sea."

"What did you feel, Winnie ?"

"My heart stood still, for it seemed to me to be the call from the grave."

"The call from the grave ! and pray what is that ? I feel how sadly my education has been neglected."

"Don't scoff, Henry. It is said that when the fate of an old family is at stake, there will sometimes come to him who represents it a call from the grave, and when I saw Snap standing stock still, his hair bristling with terror, I knew that it was no earthly shriek. I felt sure it was the call from the grave, and I knelt on the sands and prayed. Henry, Henry, don't go in the church to-night."

That Winifred's words affected me profoundly I need not say. The shriek, whatever it was, had been responded to by her

soul and by mine in the same mysterious way. But the important thing to do was to prevent her from imagining that her superstitious terrors had affected me.

"Really, Winnie," I said, "this double-voiced shriek of yours, which is at once the shriek of the Welshman at the bottom of the swollen falls and the Celtic call from the grave, is the most dramatic shriek I ever heard of. It would make its fortune on the stage. But with all its power of being the shriek of two different people at once, it must not prevent my going into the church to do my duty; so we had better part here at this very spot. You go up the cliffs by Needle Point, and I will take Flinty Point gangway."

"But why not ascend the cliffs together?" said Winifred.

"Why, the prying coastguard might be passing, and might wonder to see us in the churchyard on the night of my father's funeral (he might take us for two ghosts in love, you know). However, we need not part just yet. We can walk on a little further into the cove before our paths diverge."

Winifred made no demur, though she looked puzzled, as we were then much nearer to the gangway I had selected for myself than to the gangway I had allotted to her.

IX

WINIFRED and I were in the little horseshoe curve called "Church Cove," but also called sometimes "Mousetrap Cove," because, as I have already mentioned, a person imprisoned in it by the tide could only escape by means of a boat from the sea.

Needle Point was at one extremity of the cove and Flinty Point at the other. In front of us, therefore, at the very centre of the cliff that surrounded the cove, was the old church, which I was to reach as soon as possible. To reach a gangway up the cliff it was necessary to pass quite out of the cove, round either Flinty Point or Needle Point; for the cliff *within* the cove was perpendicular, and in some parts actually overhanging.

When we reached the softer sands near the back of the cove, where the walking was difficult, I bade Winifred good night, and she turned somewhat demurely to the left on her way to Needle Point, between which and the spot where we now parted she would have to pass below the church on the cliff, and close by the great masses of *débris* from the new landslip that had fallen from the churchyard. This landslip (which had

taken place since she had left home for her moonlight walk) had changed the shape of the cove into a figure something like the Greek ϵ .

I walked rapidly towards Flinty Point, which I should have to double before I could reach the gangway I was to take. So feverishly possessed had I become by the desire to prevent the sacrilege, if possible, that I had walked some distance away from Winifred before I observed how high the returning tide had risen in the cove.

When I now looked at Flinty Point, round which I was to turn, I saw that it was already in deep water, and that I could not reach the gangway outside the cove. It was necessary, therefore, to turn back and ascend by the gangway Winifred was making for, behind Needle Point, which did not project so far into the sea. So I turned back. As I did so, I perceived that she had reached the projecting mass of *débris* in the middle of the semicircle below the churchyard, and was looking at it. Then I saw her stoop, pick up what seemed a paper parcel, open it, and hold it near her face to trace out the letters by the moonlight. Then I saw her give a start as she read it. I walked towards her, and soon reached the landslip. Evidently what she read agitated her much. She seemed to read it and re-read it. When she saw me she put it behind her back, trying to conceal it from me.

"What have you picked up, Winifred?" I said, in much alarm; for my heart told me that it was in some way connected with her father and the shriek.

"Oh, Henry!" said she, "I was in hopes you had not seen it. I am so grieved for you. This parchment contains a curse written in large letters. Some sacrilegious wretch has broken into the church and stolen a cross placed in your father's tomb."

God!—It was the very same parchment scroll from my father's tomb on which was written the curse! I was struck dumb with astonishment and dismay. The whole terrible truth of the situation broke in upon me at one flash. The mysterious shriek was explained now. Wynne had evidently broken open the tomb as soon as his daughter was out of the way. He had then, in order to reach the cottage without running the risk of being seen by a chance passenger on the Wilderness Road, blundered about the edge of the cliff at the very moment when it was giving way, and had fallen with it. It was his yell of despair amid the noise of the landslip that Winifred and I had both heard. My sole thought was for Winifred. She had read the curse; but where was the dead body of her father that would proclaim upon

whose head the curse had fallen? I stared around me in dismay. She saw how deeply I was disturbed, but little dreamed of the true cause.

"Oh, Henry," said she, "to think that you should have such a grief as this; your dear father's tomb violated!" and she sat down and sobbed. "But there is a God in heaven," she added, rising with great solemnity. "Whoever has committed this dreadful crime against God and man will rue the day he was born:—the curse of a dead man who has been really wronged no penance or prayer can cure,—so my aunt in Wales used to say, and so Sinfì says;—it clings to the wrongdoer and to his children. That cry I heard was the voice of vengeance, and it came from your father's tomb."

"It is a most infamous robbery," I said; "but as to the curse, that is of course as powerless to work mischief as the breath of a baby." And again I anxiously looked around to see where was the dead body of Wynne, which I knew must be close by.

"Oh, Henry!" said she, "listen to these words, these awful words of your dead father, and the words of the Bible too."

And she held up to her eyes, as though fascinated by it, the parchment scroll, and read aloud in a voice so awe-struck that it did not seem to be her voice at all:

"He who shall violate this tomb,—he who shall steal this amulet, hallowed as a love-token between me and my dead wife,—he who shall dare to lay a sacrilegious hand upon this cross, stands cursed by God, cursed by love, and cursed by me, Philip Aylwin, lying here. 'Let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion upon his fatherless children. . . . Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread: let them seek it also out of desolate places.'—Psalm cix. So saith the Lord. Amen."

"I am in the toils," I murmured, with grinding teeth.

"What a frightful curse!" she said, shuddering. "It terrifies me to think of it. How hard it seems," she continued, "that the children should be cursed for the father's crimes."

"But, Winifred, they are NOT so cursed," I cried. "It is all a hideous superstition: one of Man's idiotic lies!"

"Henry," she said, shocked at my irreverence, "it *is* so; the Bible says it, and all life shows it. Ah! I wonder what wretch committed the sacrilege, and why he had no pity on his poor innocent children!"

While she was talking, I stooped and picked up the casket from which the letters

had been forced by the fall. She had not seen it. I put it in my pocket.

"Henry, I am so grieved for you," said Winifred again, and she came and wound her fingers in mine.

Grieved for *me!* But where was her father's dead body? That was the thought that appalled me. Should we come upon it in the *débris*? What was to be done? Owing to the tide, there was no turning back now to Flinty Point. The projecting *débris* must be passed. There was no dallying for a moment. If we lingered we should be caught by the tide in Mousetrap Cove, and then nothing could save us. Suppose in passing the *débris* we should come upon her father's corpse. The idea was insupportable. "Thank God, however," I murmured, "she will not even *then* know the very worst; she will see the corpse of her father who has fallen with the cliff, but she need not and will not associate him with the sacrilege and the curse."

As I picked up the letters that had been scattered from the casket, she said,

"I cannot get that dreadful curse out of my head; to think that the children of the despoiler should be cursed by God, and cursed by your father, and yet they are as innocent as I am."

"Best to forget it," said I, standing still, for I dared not move towards the *débris*.

"We must get on, Henry," said she, "for, look, the tide is unusually high to-night. You have turned back, I see, because Flinty Point is already deep in the water."

"Yes," I said, "I must turn Needle Point with you. But as to the sacrilege, let us dismiss it from our minds; what cannot be helped had better be forgotten."

I then cautiously turned the corner of the *débris*, leading her after me in such a way that my body acted as a screen. Then my eyes encountered a spectacle whose horror chilled my blood, and haunts me to this day in my dreams. About twelve feet above the general level of the sand, buried to the breast behind a mass of green sward fallen from the graveyard, stood the dead body of Wynne, amid a confused heap of earth, gravestones, trees, shrubs, bones, and shattered coffins. Bolt upright it stood, staring with horribly distorted features, as in terror, the crown of the head smashed by a fallen gravestone. Upon his breast glittered the rubies and diamonds and beryls of the cross, sparkling in the light of the moon, and seeming to be endowed with conscious life. It was evident that he had, while groping his way out of the crypt, slung the cross around his neck, in order to free his hands. I shudder as I recall the spectacle. The sight would have

struck Winifred dead, or sent her raving mad on the spot; but she had not turned the corner, and I had just time to wheel sharply round, and thrust my body between her and the spectacle. The dog saw it, and, foaming with terror, pointed at it.

"I beg your pardon, Winifred," I said, falling upon her and pushing her back.

Then I stood paralysed as the full sinister meaning of the situation broke in upon my mind. Had the *débris* fallen in any other way I might have saved Winifred from seeing the most cruel feature of the hideous spectacle, the cross, the evidence of her father's sacrilege. I might, perhaps, on some pretence, have left her on this side the *débris*, and turning the corner, have mounted the heap and removed the cross gleaming in hideous mockery on the dead man's breast, and giving back the moonbeams in a cross of angry fire. One glance, however, had shown me that before this could be done there was a wall of slippery sward to climb, for the largest portion of the churchyard soil had broken off in one lump. In falling, it had turned but *half* over, and then had slid down sideways, presenting to the climber a facet of sward nearly perpendicular and a dozen feet high. Wedged in between the jaggy top of this block and the wall of the cliff was the corpse, showing that Wynne had been standing by the fissure of the cliff at the moment when it widened into a landslip.

Nor was that all; between that part of the *débris* where the corpse was perched and the sand below was one of those long pools of sea-water edged by shingles, which are common features of that coast. It seemed that Destiny or Circumstance, more pitiless than Fate and Hell, determined on our ruin, had forgotten nothing.

The contour of the cove; the way in which the *débris* had been thrown across the path we now must follow in order to reach the only place of egress; the way in which the hideous spectacle of Wynne and the proof of his guilt had been placed, so that to pass it without seeing it the passenger must go blindfold; the brilliance of the moon, intensified by being reflected from the sea; the fulness of the high tide, and the swell,—all was complete! As I stood there with clenched teeth, like a rat in a trap, a wind seemed to come blowing through my soul, freezing and burning. I cursed Superstition that was slaying us both. And I should have cursed Heaven but for the touch of Winnie's clasping fingers, silky and soft as when I first felt them as a child in the churchyard.

"What has happened?" asked she, looking into my face.

"Only a slip of my foot," I said, recovering my presence of mind.

"But why do you turn back?"

"I cannot bring myself to part from you under this delicious moon, Winnie, if you will stay a few minutes longer. Let us go and sit on that very boulder where little Hal proposed to you."

"But you want to go into the church," said Winifred, as we moved back towards the boulder.

"No, I will leave that till the morning. I would leave *anything* till the morning, to have a few minutes longer with you on the sands. Try to imagine that we are children again, and that I am not the despised rich man, but little Hal the cripple."

Winifred's eyes, which had begun to look very troubled, sparkled with delight.

"But," said she with a sigh, as we sat down on the boulder, "I'm afraid we sha'n't be able to stay long. See how the tide is rising, and the sea is wild. The tides just now, father says, come right up to the cliff in the cove, and once locked in between Flinty Point and Needle Point there is no escape."

"Yes, darling," I muttered to myself, drawing her to me and burying my face in her bosom, "there is *one* escape, only one."

For death seemed to me the only escape from a tragedy far, far worse than death.

If she made me any answer I heard it not; for, as I sat there with closed eyes, schemes of escape fluttered before me and were dismissed at the rate of a thousand a second. A fiery photograph of the cove was burning within my brain, my mind was absorbed in examining every cranny and every protuberance in the semicircular wall of the cliff there depicted; over and over again I was examining that brain-picture, though I knew every inch of it, and knew there was not in the cliff-wall foothold for a squirrel.

X

THE moon mocked me, and seemed to say:

"The blasting spectacle shining there on the other side of that heap of earth must be passed, or Needle Point can never be reached; and unless it is reached instantly you and she can never leave the cove."

"Then we will never leave it," I whispered to myself, jumping up.

As I did so I found for the first time that her forehead had been resting against my head; for the furious rate at which the wheels of thought were moving left no vital current for the sense of touch, and my flesh was numbed.

"Something has happened," she said.

"And why did you keep whispering 'yes, yes'? Whom were you whispering to?"

The truth was that, in that dreadful trance, my conscience had been saying to me, "Have you a right to exercise your power over this girl by leading her like a lamb to death?" and my love had replied, "Yes, ten thousand times yes."

"Winifred, I said, "I would die for you."

"Yes, Henry," said she, "I know it; but what have we to do with death now?"

"To save you from harm this flesh of mine would rejoice at crucifixion; to save you from death this soul and body of mine would rejoice to endure a thousand years of hell-fire."

She turned pale, amazed at the delirium into which I had passed.

"To save you from harm, dear, I would," said I, with a quiet fierceness that scared her, "immolate the whole human race—mothers, and fathers, and children; I would make a hecatomb of them all to save this body of yours, this sweet body, alive."

But I could not proceed. What I had meant to say was this,—

"And yet, Winnie, I have brought you here to this boulder to die."

But I could not say it—my tongue rebelled and would not say it.

Winifred was so full of health and enjoyment of life that, courageous as she was, I felt that the prospect of certain and imminent death must appal her; and to see the look of terror break over her face confronting death was what I could not bear. And yet the thing must be said. But at this very moment, when my perplexity seemed direst, a blessed thought came to me—a subterfuge holier than truth. I knew the Cymric superstition about "the call from the grave," for had not she herself just told me of it?

"I will turn Superstition, accursed Superstition itself, to account," I muttered. "I will pretend that I am enmeshed in a web of Fate, and doomed to die here myself. Then, if I know my Winifred, she will, of her own free mind, die with me."

"Winnie," I said, "I have to tell you something that I know must distress you sorely on my account—something that must wring your heart, dear, and yet it must be told."

She turned her head sharply round with a look of alarm that almost silenced me, so pathetic was it. On that courageous face I had not seen alarm before, and this was alarm for evil coming to me. It shook my heart—it shook my heart so that I could not speak.

"I felt," said she, "that something awful had happened. And it affects yourself, Henry."

"It affects myself."

"And very deeply?"

"Very deeply, Winnie."

Then, pulling from my pocket the silver casket and the parchment scroll, I said, "It has relation to these."

"That I felt," said she; "how could it be otherwise? Oh, the miscreant! I curse him; I curse him!"

"Winifred," I said, "between me and this casket, and the cross mentioned in this scroll, there is a mysterious link. The cross is an amulet, an heirloom of dreadful potency for good and ill. It has been disturbed; it has been stolen from my father's grave, and there is but one way of setting right that disturbance. To avert unspeakable calamity from falling upon two entire families (the family of Aylwin and that of her to whom this amulet was given) a sacrifice is demanded."

"Henry, you terrify me to death! What is the sacrifice? Oh God! Oh God!"

"My father's son must die, Winnie."

She turned ashen pale, but struggling to be playful, she said, "I fear that the family of Aylwin and the family of somebody else must even take the calamity and bear it; for I don't mean my Henry to die, let me assure both families of that."

"Ah! but, Winnie, I am under a solemn oath and pledge to bear this penalty; and we part to-night. That shriek which so appalled you—"

"Well, well, the shriek?" said she, in a frenzy of impatience.

I made no answer, but she answered herself.

"That shriek was a call to you," she cried, and then burst into a passion of tears. "It cannot be," she said. "It cannot and shall not be; God is too good to suffer it." Then she fixed her eyes upon me and sobbed: "Ah, it is true! I feel it is all true! Yes, they are calling you, and that is why my soul answered the call. Ah, when I saw you just now lift your head from my breast with a face grey and wizened as an old man's—when I saw you look at me, I knew that something dreadful had happened. Oh, I knew, I knew! but I thought it had happened to me. The love and pity in your eyes when you opened them upon me made me think it was my trouble, and not yours, that disturbed you. And now I know it is yours, and you are going to die! They are calling you. Yes, you are going to let the tide drown you! Oh, my love! my love!" and her grief was so acute that I knew not at first whether in this I had done well after all.

"Winifred," I said, "you must bear this.

I have always been ready to take death when it should come. I have at least had one blessed time with Winifred on the sands—Winifred the beloved and beautiful girl—one night, as the crown to the happy days that have been mine with Winifred the beloved and beautiful child. And that night, as we were walking by the sea, it seemed to me such happiness as was ours can come but once—that never again could there be a night equal to that."

Smiles broke through her tears as she listened to me. I had struck the right chord.

"And I thought so too," she said. "It was indeed a night of bliss. Indeed, indeed, God has been good to us, Henry," and she fell into my arms again.

"And now, Winnie," I said, "we must kiss and part—part for ever."

Yes, I had struck the right chord. As she lay in my arms I felt her soft bosom moving with a little hysterical laugh of derision when I said we must part. And then she rose and sat beside me upon the boulder, looking calm and fearless at the tide as it got nearer and nearer to Needle Point.

"Yes, dear," I said, looking in the same direction, "you must be going; see how the waves are surrounding the Point. You must run, Winnie—you must run, and leave me."

"Yes," said she, still gazing across to the Point, "as you say, I must run, but not yet, dear; plenty of time yet," and she smiled to herself as she used to do in the old days, when as a child she had made up her mind to do something.

Then without another word she took her shawl from her shoulders, and pulled it out to see its length. And soon I felt her fingers stealing my penknife from my waistcoat-pocket, and saw her deftly cut up the shawl, strip after strip, and weave it and knot it into a rope, and tie the rope around her waist, and then she stooped to tie it around me.

It was when I felt her warm breath about my neck as she stooped over me to tie that rope, that love was really revealed to me; it was then, and not till then, that all my previous love for Winifred seemed as the flicker of a rushlight to Salámán's cloak of fire; and a feeling of bliss unutterable came upon me, and the night air seemed full of music, and the sky above seemed opening, as she whispered, "Henry, Henry, Henry, in a few minutes you will be mine." But the very confidence with which she spoke these simple words startled me as from a dream. "Suppose," I thought,

"suppose my last drop of bliss with Winnie were being tasted now!" In a moment I felt like a coward. But then there came a loud crash and a thunder from behind the landslip.

"The settlement!" I cried. "The coming in of the tide has made the landslip settle!"

When I sat with closed eyes examining my fiery photograph, I had calculated the "settlement" at the return of the tide as being among the chances of escape. But feeling myself to be engaged in a duel with Circumstance (more cruel than the fiends), I believed that the settlement would come too late for us, or even if it did *not* come too late, it might not hide away the spectacle. The settlement *had* come; what had it done for us? This I must know at once.

"Untie the rope," I said; "quick, untie the rope, there is a settlement of the landslip."

"But what has the settlement to do with us?" said Winnie.

"It *has* to do with us, dear; untie the rope. It has much to do with us, Winnie," I said; for now the determination to save her life came on me stronger than ever.

When the rope was untied, I said, "Wait till I call," and I ran round the corner of the *débris*. The great upright wall of earth and sward, from which had stared the body of Wynne, had fallen, hiding him and his crime together!

To return round the corner of the landslip and call Winifred was the work of an instant, and, quick as she was in answering my call, by the time she had reached me I had thrown off my coat and boots.

"Now for a run and a tussle with the waves, Winnie," I said.

"Then we are not going to die?"

"We are going to live. Run; in six more returns of a wave like that there will be four feet of water at the Point."

"Come along, Snap," said Winifred, and she flew along the sands without another word.

Ah, she could run!—faster than I could, with my bruised heel! She was there first.

"Leap in, Winnie," I cried, "and struggle towards the Point; it will save time. I shall be with you in a second."

Winifred plunged into the tide (Snap following with a bark), and fought her way so bravely that my fear now was lest she should be out of her depth before I could reach her, and then, clad as she was, she would certainly drown. But never for a moment did her good sense leave her. When she was nearly waist-high she stopped and turned round, gazing at me as I tore

through the shallow water—gazing with a wistful, curious look that her face would have worn had we been playing.

To get round the point and pull Winifred round was no slight task, for the water was nearly up to my breast, and a woman's clothing seems designed for drowning her. Any other woman than Winifred *would* have been drowned, and would have drowned me with her. But in straits of this kind the only safety lies in courage.

"What a night's adventures!" said Winifred, after we had turned the Point, and were walking through the shallow water towards the gangway.

We hurried towards the cottage as fast as our wet clothes would permit. On reaching it we found the door unlocked, and entered.

"Father has gone to bed," said Winifred, "and left no candle burning for me."

And without seeing her face, I knew by the tremor of the hand I clasped that she was listening with shame for the drunken snore that she would never hear again.

I lighted a match, which with a candle I found on a chair.

"Your father is no doubt sound asleep," I said; "you will scarcely awake him to-night?"

"Oh dear, no," said Winifred. "Good-night. You look quite ill. Ever since you lifted up your head from my breast, when you were thinking so hard, you have looked quite ill."

Suddenly I remembered that I must be up and on the sands betimes in the morning, to see whether the tide had washed away the fallen earth so as to expose Wynne's body. To prevent Winifred from seeing the stolen cross was now the one important thing in the world.

I bade her good-night and walked towards home.

XI

SHE was right: those few minutes of concentrated agony had in truth made me ill. My wet clothes clinging round my body began to chill me now, and as I crept into the house and upstairs to my room, my teeth were chattering like castanets.

As I threw off my wet clothes and turned into bed, I was partially forewarned by the throbbing at my temples, the rolling fire at the back of my eyeballs, the thirst in my parched throat, that some kind of illness, some kind of fever, was upon me. And no wonder, after such a night!

In that awful trance, when I had sat with my face buried on Winifred's breast, not only had the physiognomy of the cove, but every circumstance of our lives together, been photographed in my brain in one picture of fire. When, after the concentrated agony of those first moments of tension, I looked up into Winifred's face, as though awakening from a dream, my flesh had "appeared," she told me, "grey and wizened, like the flesh of an old man." The mental and physical effects of this were now gathering around me and upon me.

From a painful slumber I awoke in about an hour with red-heat at my brain and with a sickening dread at my heart. "It is fever," thought I; "I am going to be ill; and what is there to do in the morning at the ebb of the tide before Winifred can go upon the sands? I ought not to have come home at all," I said. "Suppose illness were to seize me and prevent my getting there?" The dreadful thought alone paralysed me quite. Under it I lay as under a nightmare. I scarcely dared try to get out of bed, lest I should find my fears well-grounded. At last, cautiously and timorously, I put one leg out of bed and then the other, till at length I felt the little ridges of the carpet; but my knees gave way, my head swam, my stomach heaved with a deadly nausea, and I fell like a log on the floor.

As I lay there I knew that I was indeed in the grasp of fever. I nearly went crazed from terror at the thought that in a few minutes I should perhaps lapse into unconsciousness and be unable to rise—unable to reach the sands in the morning and seek for Wynne's body—unable even to send some one there as a substitute to perform that task. But then whom was I to send? whom could I entrust with such a commission? I was under a pledge to my dead father never to divulge the secret of the amulet save to my mother and uncle. And besides, if I would effectually save Winifred from the harm I dreaded, the hideous sacrilege committed by her father must be kept a secret from servants and townspeople. Whom then could I send on this errand? At the present moment, there were but four people in the world who knew that the cross and casket had been placed in the coffin—my mother, my uncle, myself, and now, alas! Winifred. My mother was the one person who could do what I wanted done. Her sagacity I knew; her courage I knew. But how could I—how dare I, broach such a matter to her? I felt it would be sheer madness to do so, and yet, in my dire strait, in my terror at the illness

I was fighting with, I did it, as I am going to tell.

By this time the noise of my fall had brought up the servants. They lifted me into bed and proposed fetching our medical man. But I forbade them to do so, and said, "I want to see my mother."

"She is herself unwell, sir," said the man to whom I spoke.

"I know," I replied. "Call her maid and tell her that my business with my mother is very important, or I would not have dreamed of disturbing her; but see her I must."

The man looked dubious, but observing my wet clothes on a chair he seemed to think that something had happened, and went to do my bidding.

In a very short time my mother entered the room. I felt that my moments of consciousness were brief, and began my story as soon as we were alone. I told her how the sudden dread that Wynne would steal the amulet had come upon me; I told her how I had run down to the churchyard and discovered the landslip; I told her how, on seeing the landslip, I had descended the gangway and found the body of Wynne, the amulet, the casket, and the written curse. But I did *not* tell her that I had met Winifred on the sands. Excited as I was, I had the presence of mind not to tell her that.

As I proceeded with my narrative, with my mother sitting by my bedside, a look of horror, then a look of loathing, then a look of scorn, swept over her face. I knew that the horror was of the sacrilege. I knew that the loathing and the haughty scorn expressed her feelings towards the despoiler—the father of her whose cause I might have to plead; and I began to wish from the bottom of my heart that I had not taken her into my confidence. When I got to the finding of Tom's body, and the look of terror stamped upon his face, a new expression broke over hers—an expression of triumphant hate that was fearful.

"Thank God at least for that!" she said. Then she murmured, "But that does not atone."

Ah! how I regretted now that I had consulted her on a subject where her proud imperious nature must be so deeply disturbed. But it was too late to retreat.

"Henry," she said, "this is a shocking story you tell me. After losing my husband this is the worst that could have happened to me—the violation of his sacred tomb. Had I only hearkened to my own misgiving about the miscreant! Yet I wonder you did not wait till the morning before telling me."

"Wait till the morning?" I said, forgetting that she did not know what was at my heart.

"Doubtless the matter is important, Henry," said she. "Still, the mischief is done, the hideous crime has been committed, and the news of it could have waited till morning."

"But, mother, unless my father's words are idle breath, it is important, most important, that the amulet should again be buried with him. I meant to go to the sands in the morning and wait for the ebbing tide—I meant to take the cross from the breast of the dead man, and to replace it in my father's coffin. That, mother, was what I meant to do. But I am too ill to move; I feel that in an hour or so, or in a few minutes, I shall be delirious. And then, mother! Oh, *then!*—" My mother looked astonished at my vehemence upon the subject.

"Henry," she said, "I had no idea that you felt such an interest in the matter; I have certainly misjudged your character entirely. And now, what do you want me to do?"

"Nobody," I said, "must know of the cross but ourselves. I want you, mother, to do what I cannot do: I want you to go on the sands and wait for the turn of the tide; I want you to take the cross from Wynne's breast, if the body should be exposed, and secure it in secret till it can be replaced in the coffin."

"I do this, Henry?" said my mother, with a look of bewilderment at my earnestness. "Yet there is reason in what you say, and grievous as the task would be to me, I must consider it."

"But will you engage to do it, mother?"

"Really, Henry, you forget yourself,—you forget your mother too. For me to go down to the sands and watch the ebbing tide, and then defile myself by touching the body of this wretch, is a task I naturally shrink from. Still if, on thinking it over, I find it my duty to do it, it will not be needful for me to enter into a compact with my son that my duty to my dead husband shall be performed. Good-night. I quite think you will be better in the morning. I see no signs myself of the fever you seem to dread, and, alas! I am not, as you know, ignorant of the way in which a fever begins."

She was going out of the room when I exclaimed, in sheer desperation, "Mother, I have something else to say to you. You remember the little girl, the little blue-eyed girl, Wynne's daughter, who came here once, and you were so kind to her, so gracious and so kind"; and I seized her hand and covered

it with kisses, for I was beside myself with alarm lest my one hope should go.

The sudden little laugh of bitter scorn that came from my mother's lips, the sudden spasm that shook her frame, the sudden shadow as of night that swept across her features, should at once have hushed my confession. But I went on: my tongue would not stop now; I felt that my eloquence, the eloquence of Winifred's danger, must conquer, must soften even the hard pride of her race.

"And she has never forgotten your graciousness to her, mother."

"Well?" said my mother, in a tone whose velvet softness withered me.

"Well, mother, she is in all things the very opposite of her father. This very night she told me"—and I was actually about on the verge of repeating poor Winifred's prattle about her resembling her mother, and not her father (for already my brain had succumbed to the force of the oncoming fever, and the catastrophe I was dreading made me a frank and confiding child).

"Well?" said my mother, in a voice softer and more velvety still. "What did she tell you?"

That tone ought to have convinced me of the folly, the worse than folly, of saying another word to her.

"But I can conquer her," I thought; "I can conquer her yet. When she comes to know all the piteousness of Winifred's case, she *must* yield."

"Yes, mother," I cried, "she is in all things the very opposite of Tom. She has such a horror of sacrilege; she has such a dread of a crime and a curse like this; she has such a superstitious belief in the power of a dead man's curse to cling to the delinquent's offspring, that, if she knew of what her father had done, she would go mad—raving mad, mother—she would indeed!" And I fell back on the pillow exhausted.

"Well, Henry, and is this what you summoned me from my bed to tell me—that Wynne's daughter will most likely object to share the consequences of her father's crime? A very natural objection, and I am really sorry for her; but further than that I have certainly no affair with her."

"But, mother, the body of her father lies beneath the *débris* on the shore; the ebbing tide may leave it exposed, and the poor girl, missing her father in the morning, will seek him perhaps on the shore and find him—find him with the proof of his crime on his breast, and know that she inherits the curse—my father's curse! Oh, think of *that*, mother—think of it. And you only can prevent it."

For a few moments there was intense silence in the room. I saw that my mother was reflecting. At last she said:

"You say that Wynne's daughter told you something to-night. Where did you see her?"

"On the sands."

"At what hour?"

"At—at—at—about eleven, or twelve, or one o'clock."

I felt that I was getting into a net, but was too ill to know what I was doing. My mother paused for awhile; I waited as the prisoner tried for life waits when the jury have retired to consult. I clutched the bed-clothes to stay the trembling of my limbs. On a chair by my bedside was my watch, which had been stopped by the sea-water. I saw her take it up mechanically, look at it, and lay it down again. In the agony of my suspense I yet observed her smallest movement.

"And in what capacity am I to undertake this expedition?" said she at length, in the same quiet tone, that soul-quelling tone she always adopted when her passion was at white heat. "Is it in the capacity of your father's wife executing his wishes about the amulet? Or is it as the friend, protectress and guardian of Miss Wynne?"

She sat down again by my bedside, and communed with herself—sometimes fixing an abstracted gaze upon me, sometimes looking across me at the very spot where in the shadow beside my bed I had seemed to see the words of the Psalmist's curse written in letters of fire. At last she said quietly, "Henry, I will undertake this commission of yours."

"Dear mother!" I exclaimed, in my delight.

"I will undertake it," pursued my mother in the same quiet tone, "on one condition."

"Any condition in the world, mother. There is nothing I will not do, nothing I will not sacrifice or suffer, if you will only aid me in saving this poor girl. Name your condition, mother; you can name nothing I will not comply with."

"I am not so sure of that, Henry. Let me be quite frank with you. I do not wish to entrap you into making an engagement you cannot keep. You have corroborated to-night what I half suspected when I saw you talking to the girl in the churchyard; there is a very vigorous flirtation going on between you and this wretched man's daughter."

"Flirtation?" I said, and the incongruity of the word as applied to such a passion as mine did not vex or wound me; it made me smile.

"Well, for her sake, I hope it is nothing more," said my mother. "In view of the impassable gulf between her and you, I do for her sake sincerely hope that it is nothing more than a flirtation."

"Pardon me, mother," I said, "it was the word 'flirtation' that made me smile."

"We will not haggle about words, Henry; give it what name may please you, it is all the same to me. But flirtations of this kind will sometimes grow serious, as the case of Percy Aylwin and the Gypsy girl shows. Now, Henry, I do not accuse you of entertaining the mad idea of really marrying this girl, though such things, as you know, have been in our family. But you are my only son, and I *do* love you, Henry, whatever may be your opinion on that point; and, because I love you, I would rather, far rather, be a lonely, childless woman in the world, I would far rather see you dead on this floor, than see you marry Winifred Wynne."

"Ah! mother, the cruelty of this family pride has always been the curse of the Aylwins."

"It seems cruel to you now, because you are a boy, a generous boy. You think it the romantic, poetic thing to elevate a low girl to your own station—perhaps even to show your superiority to conventions by marrying the daughter of the miscreant who has desecrated your own father's tomb. But, Henry, I know the race to which you and I belong. In five years' time—in three years, or perhaps in two—you will thank me for this; you will say: 'My mother's love was not cruel, but wise.'"

"Oh, mother!" I said, "*any* condition but that."

"I see that you know what my condition is before I utter it. If you will give me your word—and the word of an Aylwin is an oath—if you will give me your word that you will never marry Winifred Wynne, I will do as you desire. I will myself go upon the sands in the morning, and if the body has been exposed by the tide I will secure the evidence of her father's guilt, in order to save the girl from the suffering which the knowledge of that guilt would cause her, as you suppose."

"As I suppose!"

"Again I say, Henry, we will not quarrel about words."

I turned sick with despair.

"And on no other terms, mother?"

"On no other terms," said she.

"Oh, mercy, mother! mercy! you know not what you do. I could not live without her; I should die without her."

"Better die then!" exclaimed my mother, with an expression of ineffable scorn, and

losing for the first time her self-possession; "better die than marry like that."

"She is my very life now, mother."

"Have I not said you had better die then? On no other terms will I go on those sands. But I tell you frankly what I think about this matter. I think that you absurdly exaggerate the effect the knowledge of her father's crime will have upon the girl."

"No, no; I do not. Mercy, dear mother, mercy! I am your only child."

"That is the very reason why you, who may some day be the heir of one of the first houses in England, must never marry Winifred Wynne."

"But I don't want to be heir of the Aylwins; I don't want my uncle's property," I retorted. "Nor do I want the other bauble prizes of the Aylwins."

"Providence has taken Frank, and says you must stand where you stand," replied my mother, solemnly. "You may even some day, should Cyril be childless, succeed to the earldom, and then what an alliance would this be!"

"Earldom! I'd not have it. I'd trample on the coronet. Gingerbread! I'd trample it in the mud, if it were to sever me from Winifred."

"You must succeed to it should Cyril Aylwin, who seems disinclined to marry, die childless," said my mother, quietly; "and by that time you may perhaps have reached man's estate."

"Pity, mother, pity!" I cried in despair, as I looked at the strong woman who bore me.

"Pity upon whom? Have pity upon me, and upon the family you now represent. As to all the fearful effects that the knowledge of this sacrilege will have upon the girl, *that* is a subject upon which you must allow me to have my own opinion. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and provides thick skins for the *canaille*. What will concern her chiefly, perhaps entirely, will be the loss of her father, and she will soon know of that, whether she finds the body on the sands or not. This kind of person is not nearly so sensitive as my romantic Henry supposes. However, my condition will not be departed from. If you consent to give up this girl I will go on the sands; I will defile my fingers; I will secure the stolen amulet at the ebb of the tide, should the corpse become exposed. If you will *not* consent to give her up, there is an end of the matter, and words are being wasted between us."

"Give up Winifred, mother? That is not possible."

"Then there is no more to be said. We will not waste our time in discussing impossibilities. And I am really so de-

pressed and unwell that I must return to my room. I hope to hear you are better in the morning, and I think you will be. The excitement of this night and your anxiety about the girl have unstrung your nerves, and you have lost that courage and endurance which are yours by birthright."

And she left the room.

But she had no sooner gone than there came before my eyes the insupportable picture of a slim figure walking along the sands stooping to look at some object among the *débris*, standing aghast at the sight of her dead father with the evidence of his hideous crime on his own breast; there came the sound of a cry to "Henry" for help! I beat my head against the bedstead till I was nearly stunned. I yelled and bellowed like a maniac: "Mother, come back!"

When she returned to my bedside my eyes were glaring so that my mother stood appalled, and (as she afterwards owned to me) was nearly yielding her point.

"Mother," I said, "I consent to your condition: I will give her up—but oh, save her! Let there be no dallying, let there be no risk, mother. Let nothing prevent your going upon the sands in the morning—early, quite early—and every morning at the ebbing of the tide."

"I will keep my word," she said.

"You will use the fullest and best means to save her?"

"I will keep my word," she said, and left the room.

"I have saved her!" I cried over and over again, as I sank back on my pillow. Then the delirium of fever came upon me, and I lay tossing as upon a sea of fire.

XII

WEAK in body and in mind as an infant, I woke again to consciousness. Through the open window the sunlight, with that tender golden-yellow tone which comes with morning in England, was pouring between the curtains, and illuminating the white counterpane. Then a soft breeze came and slightly moved the curtains, and sent the light and shadows about the bed and the opposite wall—a breeze laden with the scent I always associated with Wynne's cottage, the scent of geraniums. I raised myself on my elbows, and gazed over the geraniums on the window-sill at the blue sky, which was as free of clouds as though it were an Italian one, save that a little feathery cloud of a palish gold was slowly moving towards the west.

"It is shaped like a hand," I said dreamily, and then came the picture of Winifred in the churchyard singing, and pointing to just such a golden cloud, and then came the picture of Tom Wynne reeling towards us from the church-porch, and then came everything in connection with him and with her; everything down to the very last words which I had spoken about her to my mother before unconsciousness had come upon me. But what I did *not* know—what I was now burning to know without delay—was what time had passed since then.

I called out "Mother!" A nurse, who was sitting in the room, but hidden from me by a large carved and corniced oak wardrobe, sprang up and told me that she would go and fetch my mother.

"Mother," I said, when she entered the room, "you've been?"

"Yes," said she, taking a seat by my bedside, and motioning the nurse to leave us.

"And you were in time, mother!"

"More than in time," said she. "There was nothing to do. I have realised, however that your extraordinary and horrible story was true. It was not a fever-dream. The tomb has been desecrated."

"But, mother, you went as you promised to the sands in Church Cove, and you waited for the ebb of the tide?"

"I did."

"And you found——"

"Nothing; no corpse exposed."

"And you went again the next day?"

"I did."

"And you found——"

"Nothing."

"But how many days have passed, mother? How many days have I been lying here?"

"Seven."

"And no sign of—of the body was to be seen?"

"None. The wretch must have been buried for ever beneath the great mass of the fallen cliff. I went no more."

"Oh, mother, you should have gone every day. Think of the frightful risk, mother. On the very day after you ceased your visits the body might have been turned up by the tide, and she might have gone and seen it."

The picture was too terrible. I fell back exhausted. I revived, however, in a somewhat calmer mood. When my mother came into the room again, I returned at once to the subject. I reproached her bitterly for not having gone every day. She listened to my reproaches in entire calmness.

"It was idle to keep repeating these

visits every day," said she, "and I consider that I have fully performed my part of the compact. I expect you to fulfil yours."

I remained silent, preparing for a deadly struggle with the only being on earth I had ever really feared.

"I have fully kept my word, Henry," said she, "and have done for you more than my duty to your father's memory warranted me in doing."

"But, mother, you did not do all that you promised to do; you did not prevent all risk of Winifred's finding it. She may find it even yet."

"That is not likely now. I have performed my part of the compact, and I expect you to perform yours."

"You did not use all means to save my Winifred from worse than death—from madness; you did not use all means to save me from dying of self-murder or of a broken heart; and the compact is broken. Whether or not I could have kept my faith with you by breaking troth with her, it is you who have set me free. Mother," I said, fiercely, "in such a compact it must be the letter of the bond."

"Mean subterfuge, unworthy of your descent," said my mother quietly, but with one of those looks of hers that used to frighten me once.

"No, no, mother; you have not kept the letter of the bond, and I am free. You did *not* take the fullest and best means to save Winifred. Your compact was to save her from the risk I told you of. And, mother, mother, listen to me!" I cried, in a state of crazy excitement now: "in the darkest moment of my life, when I was prostrate and helpless, you were pitiless as Pride. Listen, mother: Winifred Wynne *shall* be mine. Not all the Aylwins that have ever eaten of wheat and fattened the worms shall prevent that. She shall be mine. I say, she shall be mine!"

"The daughter of the man who deserted my husband's tomb!"

"And my father's! That man's daughter shall be my wife," I said, sitting up in bed and looking into those eyes, bright and proud, which had been wont to make all other eyes blink and quail.

"Cursed by your father, and cursed by God—"

"That curse—for what it may be worth—I take upon my own head; the curse shall be mine. Even if I believed the threat about the 'desolate places,' I would be there; if barefooted she had to beg from door to door, rest assured, mother, that an Aylwin would hold the wallet—would leave the whole Aylwin brood, their rank,

their money, and their stupid, vulgar British pride, to walk beside the beggar."

The look on my mother's face would have terrified most people. It would have terrified me once, but in the frenzy into which I had then passed, nothing would have made me quail.

"Your services, mother, are no longer needed," I said. "Wynne's corpse might have been washed up by the tide, and your compact was to be there to see; but now, most likely, it is hidden, not under the loose fragments as I had feared, but under the great mass of earth,—hidden for ever."

"But you forget," said my mother, "that the amulet has to be recovered."

"Mother," I said, in the state of wild suspiciousness concerning her and her motives into which I had now passed, "I know what your words imply,—that Winifred is not yet out of danger; the evidence of the curse and the crime can be dug up."

"I have no wish to harm the girl, Henry. You mistake me."

"Then, mother, we must *not* mistake each other in this matter," I said. "You have alluded to the word of an Aylwin. With me, as with the best of us, the word of an Aylwin is an oath. Wynne's corpse is now hidden; the cross is now hidden; I give you the word of an Aylwin that the man who digs up that corpse I will kill. I will not consider that he is an irresponsible agent of yours; I will kill him, and his blood shall be upon the head of her who sends him, knowing, to his death."

"And be hanged," said my mother.

"Perhaps. But after her father's crime has been exposed, the first thing for me is—to kill."

"Why, boy, there's murder in your eyes!" said my mother, taken off her guard.

"Oh, mother, mother, can you not see that no wolf with a stolen lamb in its mouth was ever more pitilessly shot down by the owner of that lamb than any hireling wolf of yours would be shot down by me?"

"Boy, are you quite demented?"

"Listen, mother. To prevent Winifred from knowing that her father had stolen that amulet, and so brought down upon her the curse, I would have drowned her with myself in the tide. We sat waiting for the tide to drown us, when the settlement came at the last moment and buried it away from her. Is it likely that I should hesitate to kill a clodhopper, or a score, if only to take my vengeance on you and Fate? The homicide now will be yours."

She left, giving me a glance of defiance; but before our eyes ended that conflict, I saw which of us had conquered.

"Hate is strong," I murmured, as I sank down on my pillow, "and destiny is strong; but oh, Winnie, Winnie—stronger than hate, and stronger than destiny and death, is love. She knows, Winnie, that the life of the man who should dig up that corpse would not be worth an hour's purchase; she knows, Winnie, that in the court of conscience she alone is answerable now for what may befall; and you are safe! But poor mother! My poor dear mother, whom once I loved so dearly, was it indeed you I struggled with just now? Mother, mother, was it you?"

This interview retarded my recovery, and I had a serious relapse.

The fever was a severe one. The symptoms were aggravated by these most painful and trying interviews with my mother, and by my increasing anxiety about the fate of Winifred. Yet my vigorous constitution began to show signs of conquering. Of Winifred I could learn nothing, save what could be gleaned from the servants in attendance, who seemed merely to have heard that Tom Wynne was missing, that he had probably fallen drunk over the cliff and been washed out to sea, and that his daughter was seeking him everywhere. As the days passed by, however, and no hint reached me that the corpse had been found on the sands, I concluded that, when the larger mass finally settled on the night of the landslip, the corpse had fallen immediately beneath it, and was buried under the main mass. Yet, from what I had seen of the corpse's position, in the rapid view I had of it, perched on the upright mass of sward, I did not understand how this could be.

And so anxiety after anxiety delayed my progress. Still, on the whole, I felt that the body would not now be dislodged by the tides, and that Winifred would at least be spared a misery compared with which even her uncertainty about her father's fate would be bearable. But how I longed to be up and with her!

Dr. Mivart, who attended me, a young medical man of much ability who had finished his medical education in Paris, and had lately settled at Raxton, came every day with great punctuality.

One day, however, he arrived three hours behind his usual time, and seemed to think that some explanation was necessary.

"I must apologise," said he, "for my unpunctuality to-day, but the fact is that, at the very moment of starting, I was delayed by one of the most interesting—one of the most extraordinary cases that ever came within my experience, even at the Salpêtrière Hospital, where we were familiar with the most marvellous cases of hysteria

—a seizure brought on by terror in which the subject's countenance mimics the appearance of the terrible object that has caused it. A truly wonderful case! I have just written to Marini about it."

He seemed so much interested in his case, that he aroused a certain interest in me, though at that time the word "hysteria" conveyed an impression to me of a very uncertain and misty kind.

"Where did it occur?" I asked.

"Here, in your own town," said Mivart. "A most extraordinary case. My report will delight Marini, our great authority, as you no doubt are aware, on catalepsy and cataleptic ecstasy."

"Strange that I have heard nothing of it!" I said.

"Oh!" replied Mivart, "it occurred only this morning. Some fishermen passing below the old church were attracted, first by a shriek of a peculiarly frightful and unearthly kind, and then by some unusual appearance on the sands, at the spot where the last landslip took place."

My pulses stopped in a moment, and I clung to the back of my chair.

"What—did—the fishermen see?" I gasped.

"The men landed," continued Mivart,—too much interested in the case to observe my emotion,—"and there they found a dead body—the body of the missing organist here, who had apparently fallen with the landslip. The face was horribly distorted by terror, the skull shattered, and around the neck was slung a valuable cross made of precious stones. But the most interesting feature of the case is this, that in front of the body, in a fit of a remarkable kind, squatted his daughter—you may have seen her, an exceedingly pretty girl lately come from Wales or somewhere—and on her face was reflected and mimicked, in the most astonishing way, the horrible expression on the face of the corpse, while the fingers of her right hand were so closely locked around the cross—"

I felt that from my mouth there issued a voice not mine—a long smothered shriek like that which had seemed to issue from my mouth on that awful night when, looking out of the window, I had heard the noise of the landslip. Then I felt myself whispering "The Curse!" Then I knew no more.

XIII

I HAD another dangerous relapse, and was delirious for two days, I think. When I came to myself, the first words I uttered to Mivart, whom I found with me, were in-

quiries about Winifred. He was loth at first to revive the subject, though he supposed that the effect of his narrative upon me had arisen partly from my weakness and partly from what he called his "sensational way" of telling the story. (My mother had been very careful to drop no hint of the true state of the case.) At last, however, Mivart told me all he knew about Winifred, while I hid my face in my pillow and listened.

"In the seizures (which are recurrent) the girl," he said, "mimics the expression of terror on her father's face. Between the paroxysms she lapses into a strange kind of dementia. It is as though her own mind had fled and the body had been entered by the soul of a child. She will then sing snatches of songs, sometimes in Welsh and sometimes in English, but with the strange, weird intonation of a person in a dream. I have known something like this to take place before, but it has been in seizures of an epileptic kind, very unlike this case in their general characteristics. The mental processes seem to have been completely arrested by the shock, as the wheels of a watch or a musical box are stopped if it falls."

He could tell me nothing about her, he said, nor what had become of her since she had left his hands.

"The parish officer is taking his holiday," he added. "I mean to inquire about her. I wish I could take her to Paris to the Salpêtrière, where Marini is treating such cases by transmitting through magnetism the patient's seizure to a healthy subject."

"Will she recover?"

"Without the Salpêtrière treatment?"

"Will she recover?" I asked, maddened beyond endurance by all this cold-blooded professional enthusiasm about a case which was simply a case of life and death to Winnie and me.

"She may, unless the seizures become too frequent for the strength of the constitution. In that event, of course, she would succumb. She is entirely harmless, let me tell you."

He told me that she was at the cottage, where some good soul was seeing after her.

"I'll get up," I said, trying to rise.

"Get up!" said the doctor, astonished; "why do you want to get up? You are not strong enough to sit in a chair yet."

This was, alas! but too true, and my great object now was to conceal my weakness; for I determined to get out as soon as my legs could carry me, though I should drop down dead on the road.

I gathered from the doctor and the servants that the sacrilege had now become publicly known, and had caused much excitement. Wynne had evidently been slightly

intoxicated when he committed it, and had taken no care to conceal the proofs that the grave had been tampered with. At the inquest the amulet had been identified and claimed by my mother.

It was some days before I got out, and then I went at once to the cottage. It was a lovely evening as I walked down Wilderness Road. It was not till I reached the little garden-gate that I began fully to feel how weak my illness had left me. The gate was half open, and I looked over into the garden, which was already forlorn and deserted. Some instinct told me she was not there. The little flower-beds looked shaggy, grass-grown, and uncared for. In the centre, among the geraniums, phlox-beds, and French marigolds, sat a dirty-white hen, clucking and calling a brood of dirty white chickens. The box-bordered gravelled paths, which Wynne, in spite of his drunkenness, used to keep always so neat, were covered with leaves, shaken by the wind from the trees surrounding the garden. One of the dark green shutters was unfastened, and stood out at right-angles from the wall—a token of desertion. On the diamond panes of the upper windows, round which the long tendrils of grape-vines were drooping, the gorgeous sunset was reflected, making the glass gleam as though a hundred little fires were playing behind it. When I reached the door, the paint of which seemed far more cracked with the sun than it had looked a few weeks before, I found on knocking that the cottage was empty. I did not linger, but went at once into the town to inquire about her.

In place of giving me the information I was panting for, the whole town came cackling round me with comments on the organist and the sacrilege. I turned into the "Fishing Smack" inn, a likely place to get what news was to be had, and found the asthmatical old landlord haranguing some fishermen who were drinking their ale on a settle.

"It's my b'lief," said the old man, "that Tom was arter somethink else besides that air jewelled cross. I'm eighty-five year old come next Dullingham fair, and I reogleck as well as if it wur yisterdy when resurrection' o' carpuses wur carried on in the old churchyard jes' like one o'clock, and the carpuses sent up to Lunnon reg'lar, and it's my 'pinion as that wur part o' Tom's game, dang 'im; and if I'd a 'ad *my* way arter the crouner's quest, he'd never a' bin buried in the very churchyard as he went and blast-phemed."

"Where would you 'a buried 'im, then, Muster Lantoff?" asked a fisher-boy in a blue worsted jerkin.

"Buried 'im? why, at the cross-ruds, with

a hedge-stake through his guts, to be sure. If there's a penny agin' 'im on that air slate" (pointing to a slate hung up on the door) "there must be ten shillins, dang 'im."

"You blear-eyed, ignorant old donkey," I cried, coming suddenly upon him, "what do you suppose he could have done with a dead body in these days? Here's your wretched ten shillings,—for which you'd sell all the corpses in Raxton churchyard."

And I gave him half-a-sovereign, feeling, somehow, that I was doing honour to Winifred.

"Thankee for the money, Mister Hal, anyhow," said the old creature. "You was allus a liberal 'un, you was. But as to what Tom could 'a dun with the carpus, I'm allus heer'd that you may dew anythink *with* anythink, if you on'y send it carriage-paid to Lunnon."

I left the house in anger and disgust. No tidings could I get of Winifred in Raxton or Graylingham.

By this time I was thoroughly worn out, and obliged to go home. My anxiety had become nearly insupportable. All night I walked up and down my bedroom, like a caged animal, cursing Superstition, cursing Convention, and all the other follies that had combined to destroy her. It was not till the next day that the true state of the case was made known to me in the following manner: At the end of the town lived the widow of Shales, the tailor. Winifred and I had often, in our childish days, stood and watched old Shales, sitting cross-legged on a board in the window, at his work, when Winifred would whisper to me, "How nice it must be to be a tailor!"

As I passed this shop I now saw that on the same board was sitting a person in whom Winifred had taken a still stronger interest. This was a diminutive imitation of the deceased, in the person of his hump-backed son, a little man of about twenty-four, who might, as far as appearance went, have been any age from twenty to eighty, with a pale anxious face like his mother's. He was stitching at a coat with, apparently, the same pair of scissors by his side that used to delight us two children. Standing by the side of the board, and looking on with a skilled intelligence shining from her pale eyes, was Mrs. Shales, with an infant in her arms—a wasted little grandchild wrapt in a plaid shawl, apparently smoking a chibouque, but in reality sucking vigorously at the mouthpiece of a baby's bottle, which it was clasping deftly with its pink little fingers.

Mrs. Shales beckoned me mysteriously into her shop, and then into the little parlour

behind it, where she used to sit and watch the customers through the green muslin blind of the glass door, like a spider in its web. Young Shales, who left his board, followed us, and they then gave me some news that at once decided my course of action. They told me that one morning, after her frightful shock, Winifred had encountered Shales, who was taking a holiday, and employing it in catching young crabs among the stones. Winifred, who had a great liking for the humpbacked tailor, had come up to him and talked in a dazed way. Shales, pitying her condition, had induced her to go home with him; and then it had occurred to him to go and inquire at the Hall what suggestion could be made concerning her at a house where her father had been so well known. He could not see me; I was ill in bed. He saw my mother, who at once suggested that Winifred should be taken to Wales, to an aunt with whom, according to Wynne, she had been living. (No one but myself knew anything of Wynne's affairs, and my mother, though she had heard of the aunt, had not, as I then believed, heard of her death.) She proposed that Shales himself should contrive to take Winifred to Wales. "She had reasons," she said, "for wishing that Winifred should not be handed over to the local parish officer." She offered to pay Shales liberally for going. I, however, was to know nothing of this. Her object, of course, was to get Winifred out of my way. The aunt's address was furnished by a Mr. Lacon of Dullingham, an old friend of Wynne's, who also, it seems, was ignorant of the aunt's death. This aunt, a sister of Winifred's mother, named Davies, the widow of a sea captain who had once known better days, resided in an old cottage between Bettws y Coed and Capel Curig. Shales had found no difficulty in persuading Winifred to go with him, for she had now sunk into a condition of dazed stupor, and was very docile.

They started on their long journey across England by rail, and everything went well till they got into Wales, when Winifred's stupor seemed to be broken into by the familiar scenery; her wits became alive again. Then an idea seemed to seize her that she was pursued by me, as the messenger bearing my dead father's curse. The appearance of any young man bearing the remotest resemblance to me frightened her. At last, before they reached Bettws y Coed, she had escaped, and was lost among the woods. Shales had made every effort to find her, but without avail, and was compelled at last, by the demands of his business, to give up the quest. He had returned on the pre-

vious evening, and my mother had enjoined him not to tell me what had been done, though she seemed much distressed at hearing that Winnie was lost, and was about to send others into Wales in order to find her, if possible. Shales, however, had determined to tell me, as the matter, he said, lay upon his conscience.

On getting this news I went straight home, ordered a portmanteau to be packed, and placed in it all my ready cash. Before starting I sat down to write a letter to my uncle. On hearing of my movements, my mother came to me in great agitation. In her eyes there was that haggard expression which I thought I understood. Already she had begun to feel that she and she alone was responsible for whatsoever calamities might fall upon the helpless deserted girl she had sent away. Already she had begun to feel the pangs of that remorse which afterwards stung her so cruelly that not all Winnie's woes, nor all mine, were so dire as hers. There are some natures that feel themselves responsible for all the unforeseen, as well as for all the foreseen, consequences of their acts. My mother was one of these. I rose as she entered, offered her a seat, and then sat down again.

She inquired whither I was going.

"To North Wales," I said.

She stood aghast. But she now understood that grief had made me a man.

"You are going," said she, "after the daughter of the scoundrel who desecrated your father's tomb?"

"I am going after the young lady whom I intend to marry."

"Wynne's daughter marry my only son! Never!"

I proceeded with my letter.

"I will write to your uncle Aylwin at once. I will tell him you are going to marry that miscreant's daughter, and he will disinherit you."

"In that case, mother," I said, rising from the table, "I need not trouble myself to finish my letter; for I was writing to him, telling him the same thing. Still, perhaps I had better send mine too," I continued. "I should like at least to remain on friendly terms with him, he is so good to me"; and I resumed my seat at the writing-table.

"Henry," said my mother, after a second or two, "I think you had better *not* write to your uncle; it might only make matters worse. You had better leave it to me."

"Thank you, mother, the letter is finished," I replied as I sealed it up, "and will be sent. Good-bye, dear," I said,

taking her hand and kissing it. "You knew not what you did, and I know you did it for the best."

"When do you return, Henry?" asked she, in a conquered and sad tone, that caused me many a pang to remember afterwards.

"That is altogether uncertain," I answered. "I go to follow Winifred. If I find her alive I shall marry her, if she will marry me, unless permanent insanity prove a barrier. If she is dead"—(I restrained myself from saying aloud what I said to myself)—"I shall still follow her."

"The daughter of the scoundrel!" she murmured, her lips grey with suppressed passion.

"Mother," I said, "let us not part in anger. The sword of Fate is between us. When I was at school I made a certain vow. The vow was that I would woo and win but one woman upon earth—the daughter of the man who has since violated my father's tomb. I have lately made a second vow, that, until she is found, I shall devote my life to the quest of Winifred Wynne. If you think that I am likely to be deterred by fears of being disinherited by your family, open and read my letter to my uncle. I have there told him whom I intend to marry."

"Mad, mad boy!" said my mother, "Society will——"

"You have once or twice before mentioned society, mother. If I find Winifred Wynne, I shall assuredly marry her, unless prevented by the one obstacle I have mentioned. If I marry her I shall, if it so please me and her, take her into society."

"Into society!" she replied, with ineffable scorn.

"And I shall say to society, 'Here is my wife.'"

"And when society asks who *is* your wife?"

"I shall reply, 'She is the daughter of the drunken organist who desecrated my father's tomb, though that concerns you not;—her own speciality, as you see, is that she is the flower of all girlhood.'"

"And when society rejects this earthly paragon?"

"Then I shall reject society."

"Reject society, boy!" said my mother. "Why, Cyril Aylwin himself, the bohemian painter who has done his best to cheapen and vulgarise our name, is not a more reckless, lawless leveller than you. And, good heavens! to him, and perhaps afterwards to you, will come—the coronet."

And she left the room.

III

Winifred's Dukkeripen

I

I NEED not describe my journey to North Wales. On reaching Bettws y Coed I turned into the hotel there—"The Royal Oak"—famished; for, as fast as trains could carry me, I had travelled right across England, leaving rest and meals to chance. I found the hotel full of English painters, whom the fine summer had attracted thither as usual. The landlord got me a bed in the village. A six o'clock *table d'hôte* was going on when I arrived, and I joined it. Save myself, the guests were, I think, landscape painters to a man. They had been sketching in the neighbourhood. I thought I had never met so genial and good-natured a set of men, and I have since often wondered what they thought of me, who met such courteous and friendly advances as they made towards me in a temper that must have seemed to them morose or churlish and stupid. Before the dinner was over another tourist entered—a fresh-complexioned young Englishman in spectacles, who, sitting next to me, did at length by force of sheer good humour, contrive to get into a desultory kind of conversation with me, and, as far as I remember, he talked well. He was not an artist, I found, but an amateur geologist and antiquary. His hobby was not like that fatal antiquarianism of my father's which had worked so much mischief, but the harmless quest of flint implements. His talk about his collection of flints, however, sent my mind off to Flinty Point and the never-to-be-forgotten flint-built walls of Raxton church. After dinner, coffee, liquors and tobacco being introduced into the dining-room, I got up, intending to roam about outside the hotel till bedtime; but the rain, I found, was falling in torrents. I was compelled to return to my friend of the "flints." At that moment one of the artists plunged into a comic song, and by the ecstatic look of the company I knew that a purgatorial time was before me. I resigned myself to my fate. Song followed song, until at last even my friend of the flints struck up the ballad of *Little Billee*, whose lugubrious refrain seemed to "set the table in a roar"; but to me it will always be associated with sickening heart-ache.

As soon as the rain ceased I left the hotel and went to the room in the little town the landlord had engaged for me. There, with the roar in my ears of the mountain streams (swollen by the rains), I went to bed and, strange to say, slept.

Next morning I rose early, breakfasted at "The Royal Oak" as soon as I could get attended to, and proceeded in the direction in which, according to what I had gathered from various sources, Mrs. Davies had lived. This led me through a valley and by the side of a stream, whose cascades I succeeded, after many efforts, in crossing. After a while, however, I found that I had taken a wrong track, and was soon walking in the contrary direction. I will not describe that long dreary walk in a drenching rain, with nothing but the base of the mountain visible, all else being lost in clouds and mist.

After blundering through marshy and boggy hillocks for miles, I found myself at last in the locality indicated to me. Arriving at a roadside public-house, I entered it, and on inquiry was vexed to find that I had again been misdirected. I slept there, and in the morning started again on my quest. I was now a long way off my destination, but had at least the satisfaction of knowing that I was on the right road at last. In the afternoon I reached another wayside inn, very similar to that in which I had slept. I walked up at once to the landlord (a fat little Englishman who looked like a Welshman, with black eyes and a head of hair like a black door-mat), and asked him if he had known Mrs. Davies. He said he had, but seemed anxious to assure me that he was a Chester man and "not a Taffy." She had died, he told me, not long since. But he had known more of her niece, Winifred Wynne (or, as most people called her, Winifred Davies); for, said he, "she was a queer kind of outdoor creature that everybody knew,—as fond of the rain and mist as sensible folk are fond of sunshine."

"Where did she live?" I inquired.

"You must have passed the very door," said the man. And then he indicated a pretty little cottage by the roadside which I had passed, not far from the lake. Mrs. Davies (he told me) had lived there with her niece till the aunt died.

"Then you knew Winifred Wynne?" I said. There was to me a romantic kind of interest about a man who had seen Winifred in Wales.

"Knew her well," said he. "She was a Carnarvon gal—tremenjus fond o' the sea—and a rare pretty gal she was."

"Pretty gal she *is*, you might ha' said, Mr. Blyth," a woman's voice exclaimed from the

settle beneath the window. "She's about in these parts at this very moment, though Jim Burton there says it's her ghose. But do ghoses eat and drink? that's what I want to know. Besides, if anybody's like to know the difference between Winnie Wynne and Winnie Wynne's ghose, I should say it's most likely me."

I turned round. A Gypsy girl, dressed in fine Gypsy costume, very dark but very handsome, was sitting on a settle drinking from a pot of ale, and nursing an instrument of the violin kind, which she was fondling as though it were a baby. She was quite young, not above eighteen years of age, slender, graceful—remarkably so, even for a Gypsy girl. Her hair, which was not so much coal-black as blue-black, was plaited in the old-fashioned Gypsy way, in little plaits that looked almost as close as plaited straw, and as it was of an unusually soft and fine texture for a Gypsy, the plaits gave it a lustre quite unlike that which unguents can give. As she sat there, one leg thrown over the other, displaying a foot which, even in the heavy nailed boots, would have put to shame the finest foot of the finest English lady I have ever seen, I could discern that she was powerful and tall; her bosom, gently rising and falling beneath the layers of scarlet and yellow and blue handkerchiefs, which filled up the space the loose-fitting gown of bright merino left open, was of a breadth fully worthy of her height. A silk handkerchief of deep blood-red colour was bound round her head, not in the modern Gypsy fashion, but more like an Oriental turban. From each ear was suspended a massive ring of red gold. Round her beautiful, towering, tanned neck was a thrice-twisted necklace of half-sovereigns and amber and red coral. She looked me full in the face. Then came a something in the girl's eyes the like of which I had seen in no other Gypsy's eyes, though I had known well the Gypsies who used to camp near Rington Manor, not far from Raxton, for my kinsman, Percy Aylwin, the poet, had lately fallen in love with Winnie's early friend, Rhona Boswell. It was not exactly an "uncanny" expression, yet it suggested a world quite other than this. It was an expression such as one might expect to see in a "budding spae-wife," or in a Roman Sibyl. And whose expression was it that it now reminded me of? But the remarkable thing was that this expression was intermittent; it came and went like the shadows the fleeting clouds cast along the sunlit grass. Then it was followed by a look of steady self-reliance and daring. This last variation of expression was what now suddenly came into

her eyes as she said, scrutinising me from head to foot:

"Reia, you make a good git-up for a Romany-chal. Can you rokkra Romanes? No, I see you can't. I should ha' took you for the right sort. I should ha' begun the Romany rokkerpen with you, only you ain't got the Romany glime in your eyes. It's a pity he ain't got the Romany glime, ain't it, Jim?"

She turned to a young Gypsy fellow who was sitting at the other end of the settle, drinking also from a pot of ale, and smoking a cutty pipe.

"Don't ax me about no mumply Gorgio's eyes," muttered the man, striking the leather legging of his right leg with a silver-headed whip he carried. "You're allus a-takin' intrust in the Gorgios, and yet you're allus a-makin' believe as you hate 'em."

"You say Winifred Wynne is back again?" I cried in an eager voice.

"That's jist what I *did* say, and I ain't deaf, my rei. How she managed to get back here puzzles me, poor thing, for she's jist for all the world like Rhona's daddy's daddy, Opi Bozzell, what buried his wits in his dead wife's coffin. She's even skeared at me."

"Why, you don't mean to say Winnie's back!" cried the landlord. "To think that I shouldn't have heard about Winnie Wynne bein' back. When did you see her, Sinfi?"

"I see her fust ever so many nights ago. I was comin' down this road, when what do I see but a gal a-kicking at the door of Mrs. Davies's empy house, and a-sobbin' she was jist fit to break her heart, and I sez to myself, as I looked at her—'Now, if it was possible for that 'ere gal to be Winifred Wynne, she'd be Winifred Wynne, but as it *ain't* possible for her to be Winifred Wynne, it *ain't* Winifred Wynne, and any mumply Gorgie^o as *ain't* Winifred Wynne may kick and sob for a blue moon for all me."

"But it *was* Winnie Wynne, I s'pose?" said the landlord, in a state now of great curiosity.

"It *was* Winnie Wynne," replied the Gypsy, handing her companion the empty beer-pot, and pointing to the landlord as a sign that the man was to pass it on to him to be refilled. "Up I goes to her, and I says, 'Why, sister, who's bin a-meddlin' with you? I'll tear the windpipe out o' anybody wot's bin a-meddlin' with you.'"

When the girl used the word "sister" a light broke in upon me.

"Are you Sinfi Lovell?" I cried.

"That's jist my name, my rei; but as I

* Gorgio, a man who is not a Gypsy. Gorgie, a woman who is not a Gypsy.

said afore, I ain't deaf. Jist let Jim pass my beer across and don't interrump' me, please."

"Don't rile her, sir," whispered the landlord to me; "she's got the real witch's eye, and can do you a mischief in a twink, if she likes. She's a good sort, though, for all that."

"What are you two a-whisperin' about me?" said the girl in a menacing tone that seemed to alarm the landlord.

"I was only tellin' the gentleman not to rile you, because you was a fightin' woman," said the man.

The Gypsy looked appeased and even gratified at the landlord's explanation.

"But what did Winnie Wynne do then, Sinfi?" asked the landlord.

"She turns round sharp," said the Gypsy; "she looks at me as skeared as the eyes of a hotchiwitchi* as knows as he's a-bein' uncurled for the knife. 'Father!' she cries, and away she bolts like a greyhound; and I know'd at onst as she wur under a cuss. Now, you see, Mr. Blyth, that upset me, *that* did, for Winnie Wynne was the only one on 'em, Gorgio or Gorgie, ever I liked. No offence, Mr. Blyth, it isn't your fault you was born one; but," continued the girl, holding up the foaming tankard and admiring the froth as it dropped from the rim upon her slender brown hand on its way to the floor, "Winnie Wynne was the only one on 'em, Gorgio or Gorgie, ever I liked, and that upset me, *that* did, to see that 'ere beautiful cretur a grinnin' and jabberin' under a cuss. The Romanies is gettin' too fond by half o' the Gorgios, and will soon be jist like mumply Gorgios themselves, speckable and silly; but Gorgio or Gorgie, she was the only one on 'em ever I liked, was Winnie Wynne; and when she turned round on me like *that*, with them kind eyes o' hern (such kind eyes I never seed afore) lookin' like *that* at me (and I know'd she was under a cuss)—I tell you," she said, still addressing the beer, "that it's made me fret ever since—that's what it's done!"

About the truth of this last statement there could be no doubt, for her face was twitching violently in her efforts to keep down her emotion.

"And did you follow her?" said the landlord.

"Not I; what was the good?"

"But what did you do, Sinfi?"

"What did I do? Well, don't you mind me comin' here one night and buyin' a couple of blankets off you, and some bread and meat and things?"

"In course I do, Sinfi, and you said you wanted them for the vans."

The Gypsy smiled and said, "I knowed she was bound to come back, so I pulls up the window and in I gets, and then opens the door and off I comes to you, as bein' the nearest neighbour, for the blankets and things, and I puts 'em in the house, and I leaves the door uncatched, and I hides myself behind the house, and, sure enough, back she comes, poor thing! I hears her kick, kick, kickin' at the door, and then I hears her go in when she finds it give way. So I waits a good while, till I thinks she's eat some o' the vittles and gone to sleep maybe, and then round the house I creeps, and in the door I peeps, and soon I hears her breathin' soft, and then I shuts the door, and goes away to the place."

"But why didn't you tell *us* all this, Sinfi?" asked the landlord. "My wife would ha' went and seen arter her, and we wouldn't ha' touched a farthin' for they blankets and things, not we, Sinfi, not we."

"Ah, you *would*, though," said the girl, "'cause I'd a *made* you take it. Winnie Wynne was the only one on 'em, Gorgio or Gorgie, ever I liked, and nobody's got no right to see arter her only me, and that's why I'm about here *now*, if you *must* know; but nobody's got no right to see arter her only me, and nobody sha'n't nuther. They might go and skear her to run up the hills, and she might dash herself all to factions in no time."

"Don't take on so, Sinfi," said the landlord. "When they are in that way they allus turns agin them as they was fond on."

"Then you noticed as she was fond o' me, Mr. Blyth," said the girl with great earnestness.

"Of course she was fond on you, Sinfi; everybody knows that."

"Yes," said the girl, now much affected, "every body knowed it, *every* body knowed as she was fond o' me. And to see her look at me like *that*—it was a cruel sight, Mr. Blyth, I can tell you. Such a look you never seed in all your life, Mr. Blyth."

"Then I take it she's in the house, now?" said the landlord.

"She goes prowlin' about all day among the hills, as if she was a-lookin' for somebody; and she talks to somebody as she calls the Tywysog o'r Niwl, an' I know that's Welsh for the 'Prince o' the Mist'; but back she comes at night. She talks to herself a good deal; and she sings to herself the Welsh gillies what Mrs. Davies larnt her in a v'ice as seems as if she wur a-singin' in

* Hedgehog.

* Camping place.

her sleep, but it's very sweet to hear it. Yesterday I crep' near her when she was a-sittin' down lookin' at herself in that 'ere llyn where the water's so clear, 'Knockers' Llyn,' as they calls it, where her and me and Rhona Boswell used to go. And I heard her say she was 'cussed by Henry's feyther.' And then I heard her talk to somebody agin, as she called the Prince of the Mist; but it's herself as she's-a-talkin' to all the while."

"Cursed by Henry's father! What curse could any superstitious mystic call down upon the head of Winifred? The heaven that would answer a call of that kind would be a heaven for zanies and tom-fools!" I shouted, in a paroxysm of rage against the entire besotted human race. "That for the curse!" I cried, snapping my fingers. "I am Henry, and I am come to share the curse, if there is one."

"Young man," interposed the landlord, "such blasphemous langige as that must not be spoke here; I ain't a-goin' to have my good beer turned to vinegar by blaspheming them as owns the thunder, I can tell you."

But the effect of my words upon the Gypsy was that of a spark in a powder-mine.

"Henry?" she said, "Henry? are you the fine rei as she used to talk about? Are you the fine cripple as she was so fond on? Yes, Beng te tassa mandi if you ain't Henry his very self."

"Don't," remonstrated the landlord, "don't meddle with the gentleman, Sinf. He ain't a cripple, as you can see."

"Well, cripple or no cripple, he's Henry. I half thought it as soon as he began askin' about her. Now, my fine Gorgio, what do you and your fine feyther mean by cussin' Winnie Wynne? You've jist about broke her heart among ye. If you want to cuss you'd better cuss me;" and she sprang up in an attitude that showed me at once that she was a skilled boxer.

The male Gypsy rose and buttoned his coat over his waistcoat. I thought he was going to attack me. Instead of this, he said to the landlord:

"She's in for a set-to agin. She's sure to quarrel with me if I interferences, so I'll just go on to the place and not spile sport. Don't let her kill the chap, though, Mr. Blyth, if you can anyways help it. Anyhows, I ain't a-goin' to be called in for witness."

With that he left the house.

The Gypsy girl looked at me from head to foot, and exclaimed,

"Lucky for you, my fine fellow, that I'm a duke's chavi, an' mustn't fight, else I'd pretty soon ask you outside and settle this off in no

time. But you'd better keep clear of Mrs. Davies's cottage, I can tell you. Every stick in that house is mine."

And, forgetting in her rage to pay her score, she picked up her strange-looking musical instrument, put it into a bag, and stalked out.

"She's got a queer temper of her own," said the landlord; "but she ain't a bad sort for all that. She's clever, too: she's the only woman in Wales, they say, as can play on the crwth now since Mrs. Davies is dead, what larnt her to do it."

"The crwth?"

"The old ancient Welsh fiddle what can draw the Sperrits o' Snowdon when it's played by a vargin. I dessay you've often heard the sayin' 'The sperrits follow the crwth.' She makes a sight o' money by playin' on that fiddle in the houses o' the gentlefolk, and she's as proud as the very deuce. Ain't a bad sort, though, for all that."

II

THAT I determined to cultivate the acquaintance of Sinf Lovell I need scarcely say. But my first purpose was to see the cottage. The landlord showed me the way to it. He warned me that a storm was coming on, but I did not let that stay me. Masses of dark clouds were gathering, and there was every sign of a heavy rain-storm as I went out along the road in the direction indicated.

There was a damp boisterous wind, that seemed blowing from all points of the compass at once, and in a minute I was caught in a swirl of blinding rain. I took no heed of it, however, but hurried along the lonely road till I reached the cottage, which I knew at once was the one I sought. It was picturesque, but had a deserted look.

It was not till I stood in front of the door that I began to consider what I really intended to do in case I found her there. A heedless, impetuous desire to see her—to get possession of her—had brought me to Wales. But what was to be my course of action if I found her I had never given myself time to think.

If I could only clasp her in my arms and tell her I was Henry, I felt that she must, even in madness, know me and cling to me. I could not realise that any insanity could estrange her from me if I could only get near her.

I put my thumb upon the old-fashioned latch, and found that the door was not locked. It yielded to my touch, and with a

throbbing of every pulse, I pushed it open and looked in.

In front of me rose a staircase, steep and narrow. There was sufficient evening light to enable me to see up the staircase, and to distinguish two black bedroom doors, now closed, on the landing. I stood on the wet threshold till my nerves grew calmer. On my right and on my left the doors of the two rooms on the ground floor were open. I could see that the one on my left was stripped of furniture.

I entered the room on my right—a low room of some considerable length, with heavy beams across the ceiling, which in that light seemed black. Two or three chairs and a table were in it. There was a brisk fire, and over it a tea-kettle of the kind much favoured by Gypsies, as I afterwards learnt. There was no grate, but an open hearth, exactly like the one in Wynne's cottage, where Winifred and I used to stand in summer evenings to see the sky, and the stars twinkling above the great sooty throat of the open chimney. I now perceived the crwth and bow upon the table. Sinfie Lovell had evidently been here since we parted. On the walls hung a few of those highly coloured prints of Scriptural subjects which, at one time, used to be seen in English farm-houses, and are still the only works of art with the Welsh peasants and a few well-to-do Welsh Gypsies who would emulate Gorgio tastes.

On the left-hand side of the room was an arched recess, in which, no doubt, had stood at one time a sideboard, or some such piece of furniture. There was no occupant of the room, however, and I grew calmer as I stood before the fire, which drew from my wet clothes a cloud of steam. The ruddy fingers of the fire-gleam playing upon the walls made the colours of the pictures seem bright as the tints of stained glass. The pathetic message of those flickering rays flowed into my soul. The red mantle of the Prodigal Son, in which he was feeding the swine, shone as though it had been soaked in sorrow and blood-red sin. The house was apparently empty; the tension of my passion became for the first time relaxed, and I passed into a strange mood of pathos, dreamy, but yet acute, in which Winifred's fate, and my mother's harshness, and my father's scarred breast, seemed all a mingled mystery of reminiscent pain.

I had not stood more than a minute, however, when I was startled into a very different mood. I thought I heard a sobbing noise, which seemed to me to come from some one overhead, some one lying upon the boards of the room above me. I was

rooted to the spot where I stood, for the sob seemed scarcely human, and yet it seemed to be hers. A new feeling about Winifred's madness came upon me. I recalled Mivart's horrible description of the mimicry. My God! what was I about to see? I *dared* not turn and go up-stairs; the fire and the singing tea-kettle were, at least, companions. But something impelled me to take the bow and draw it across the crwth-strings. Presently I thought I heard a door over-head softly open, and this was followed by the almost inaudible creak of a light footstep descending the stairs. With paralysed pulses I kept my eyes fixed on the half-open door, in the certainty of seeing her pass along the little passage leading from the staircase to the front door. But as I heard the dear footsteps descend stair after stair my horror left me, and I nearly began to sob myself. My thoughts now were all for her safety. I slipped into the recess, fearing to take her by surprise.

Soon the slim girlish figure passed into the room. And as I saw her glide along I was stunned, as though I had not expected to see her, as though I had not known the footstep coming down the stairs.

With her eyes fixed on the fireplace, she brushed past me without perceiving me, took a chair, and sat down in front of the fire, her elbows resting on her knees, and her face meditatively sunk between her hands. Her sobbing had ceased, and unless my ears deceived me, had given place to an occasional soft happy gurgle of childish laughter.

I stepped out from the shelter of my archway into the middle of the room, dubious as to what course to pursue. I thought that, on the whole, the movement that would startle her least would be to slip quietly out of the room and out of the house while she was in the reverie, then knock at the door. She would arouse herself then, expecting to see some one, and would not be so entirely taken by surprise at the sight of my face as she would have been at finding me, without the slightest warning, standing behind her in the room. I did this: I slipped out at the door and knocked, gently at first, but got no answer; then a little louder—no answer; then louder and louder, till at last I thundered at the door in a state of growing alarm; still no answer.

"She is stone dead," I thought; and now I remembered having noticed, as she brushed past me, a far-off gaze in her eyes, such as some stone-deaf people show.

I re-entered the house. There she was, sitting immovably before the fire, in the same reverie. I coughed and hemmed, softly at first, then more loudly, finally with

such vigour that I ran the risk of damaging my throat, and still there was no movement of that head bent over the fire and resting in the palms of the hands. At last I made a step forward, then another, finally finding myself on the knitted cloth hearthrug beside her. I now had the full view of her profile. That she should be still unconscious of my presence was unaccountable, for I stood at the end of the rug gazing at her. Again I coughed and hemmed, but without producing the smallest effect. Then I determined to address her; but I thought it would be safer to do so as a stranger than to announce myself at once as Henry.

"I beg pardon," I said, "but is there any one at home?"

No answer.

"Is this the way to Capel Curig?"

No answer.

"Will you give me shelter?" I said; and finally I gave a desperate "halloo."

My efforts had not produced the slightest effect. I was now in a state of great agitation. That she was stone deaf seemed evident. But was she not in some kind of fit, though without the contortions of face Mivart had described to me—contortions which haunted me as much as though I had seen them? I stooped down and gazed into her face. There was now no terror there, nor even sorrow. I could see in her eyes sparks of pleasure, as in the eyes of an infant when it seems to see in the air pictures or colours to which our eyes are blind. Round about her cheek and mouth a little dimple was playing, exactly like the dimple that plays around the mouth of a pleased child. This marvellous expression on her face recalled to me what Mivart had said as to the form her dementia assumed between one paroxysm and another.

"Thank God," thought I, "she's not in a fit: she's only deaf."

Driven to desperation, however, I seized her shoulder and shook it. This aroused her. She started up with violence, at the same time overturning the chair upon which she had been sitting. She stared at me wildly. The danger of what I had done struck me now. A fortunate inspiration caused me to say, "Tywysog o'r Niwl." Then there broke over her face a sweet smile of childish pleasure. She made a graceful curtsy, and said, "You've come at last; I was thinking about you all the while."

Shall I ever forget her expression? Her eyes were alive with light and pleasure. It was as though Winifred's soul had fled or the soul of her childhood had re-entered and taken possession of her body. But the

witchery of her expression no words can describe. Never had I seen her so lovely as now. Often when a child I had seen the boatmen on the sands look at us as we passed—seen them stay in the midst of their toil, their dull faces brightening with admiration, as though a bar of unexpected sunlight had fallen across them. In the fields I had seen labourers, sitting at their simple dinner under the hedges, stay their meal to look after the child,—so winning, dazzling, and strange was her beauty. And when I had first met her again, a child no longer, in the churchyard, my memory had accepted her at once as fulfilling, and more than fulfilling, all her childhood's promise. But never had she looked so bewitching as now—a poor mad girl who had lost her wits from terror.

For some time I could only keep murmuring: "More lovely mad than sane!"

"As if I didn't *know* the Prince!" said she. "You who, in fine weather or cloudy, wet or dry, are there on the hills to meet me! As if I don't know the Prince of the Mist when I see him! But how kind of you to come down here and see poor Winnie, poor lonely Winnie, at home!"

She fetched a chair, placed it in front of the fire, pointed to it with the same ravishingly childlike smile, indicating that it was for me, and then, when she saw me mechanically sit down, picked up her chair and came and sat close beside me.

In a second she was lost in a reverie as profound as that from which I had aroused her; and the only sound I heard was the rain on the window and the fitful gusts of wind playing around the cottage.

The wind having blown open the door, I got up to shut it. Winifred rose too, and again taking hold of my hand, she looked up into my face with a smile, and said, "Don't go; I'm so lonely—poor Winnie's so lonely."

As I held her hand in mine, and closed my other hand over it, I murmured to myself, "If God will only give her to me like this—mad like this—I will be content."

"Dearest," I said, longing to put my arm round her waist—to kiss her own passionless lips—but I dared not, lest I might frighten her away, "I will not leave you. I will never leave you. You shall never be lonely any more."

I closed the door, and we resumed our seats.

Can I put into words what passed within my soul as we two sat by the fire, she holding my hand in her own—holding it as innocently as a child holds the hand of its mother? Can I put into words my mingled feelings of

love and pity and wild grief, as I sat looking at her and murmuring, "Yes; if God will only give her to me like *this*, I will be content"?

"Prince," said she, "your eyes look very kind!—Sweet, sweet eyes," she continued, looking at me. "The Prince of the Mist has love-eyes," she repeated, as she placed the seats before the fire again.

Then I heard her murmur, "Love-eyes! love-eyes! Henry's love-eyes!" Then a terrible change came over her. She sprang up and came and peered in my face. An indescribable expression of terror overspread her features, her nostrils expanded, her lips were drawn tightly over her teeth, her eyes seemed starting from their sockets; her throat suddenly became fluted like the throat of an aged woman, then veined with knotted, cruel cords. Then she stood as transfixed, and her face was mimicking that appalling look on her father's face which I had seen in the moonlight. With a yell of "Father!" she leapt from me. Then she rushed from the house, and I could hear her run by the window, crying, "Cursed, cursed, cursed by Henry's father!"

For an instant the movement took away my breath; but I soon recovered and sprang after her to the door.

There, in the distance, I saw her in the rain, running along the road. My first impulse was to follow her and run her down. But luckily I considered the effect this might have in increasing her terror, and stopped. She was soon out of sight. I wandered about the road calling her name, and calling on Heaven to have a little pity—a little mercy.

III

I DECIDED to return to the house, but found that I had lost my way in the obscurity and pelting rain. For hours I wandered about, without the slightest clue as to where I was. I was literally soaked to the skin. Several times I fell into holes in a morass, and was up to my hips in moss and mud and water. Then I began to call out for assistance till I was hoarse. I might as well have called out on an uninhabited island.

The night wore on, and the darkness grew so intense that I could scarcely see my hand when I held it up. Every star in the heavens was hid away as by a thick pall. The darkness was positively benumbing to the faculties, and added, if possible, to the misery I was in on account of Winifred. Suddenly my progress was arrested. I had fallen violently

against something. A human body, a woman! I thrust out my hand and seized a woman's damp arm.

"Winifred," I cried, "it's Henry."

"I thought as much," said the voice of the Gypsy girl I had met at the wayside inn, and she seized me by the throat with a fearful grip. "You've been to the cottage and skinned her away, and now she's seed you there she'll never come back; she'll wander about the hills till she drops down dead, or falls over the brinks."

"Oh God!" I cried, as I struggled away from her. "Winifred! Winifred!"

There was silence between us then.

"You seem mighty fond on her, young man," said the Gypsy at length, in a softened voice, "and you don't strike out at me for grabbin' your throat."

"Winifred! Winifred!" I said, as I thought of her on the hills in a night like this.

"You seem mighty fond on her, young man," repeated the girl's voice in the darkness.

But I could afford no words for her, so cruelly was misery lacerating me.

"Reia," said the Gypsy, "did I hurt your throat just now? I hope I didn't; but you see she was the only one of 'em ever I liked, Gorgio or Gorgie, 'cept Mrs. Davies, lad or wench. I know'd her as a child, and afterwards, when a fine English lady, as poor as a church-mouse, tried to spile her, a-makin' *her* a fine lady too, I thought she'd forget all about me. But not she. I never once called at Mrs. Davies's house with my crwth, as she taught me to play on, but out Winnie would come with her bright eyes an' say, 'Oh, I'm so glad!' She meant she was glad to see *me*, bless the kind heart on her. An' when I used to see her on the hills, she'd come runnin' up to me, and she'd put her little hand in mine, she would, an' chatter away, she would, as we went up an' up. An' one day, when she heard me callin' one o' the Romany chies sister, she says, 'Is that your sister?' an' when I says, 'No; but the Romany chies calls each other sister,' then says she, pretending not to know all about our Romany ways, 'Sinf, I'm very fond on you, may I call you sister?' An' she had sich ways; an' she's the only Gorgio or Gorgie, 'cept Mrs. Davies, as I ever liked, lad or wench."

The Gypsy's simple words came like a new message of comfort and hope, but I could not speak.

"Young man," she continued, "are you there?" and she put out her hand to feel for me.

I took hold of the hand. No words passed; none were needed. Never had I known

friendship before. After a short time I said,

"What shall we do, Sinf?"

"I shall wait a bit, till the stars are out," said she. "I know they're a-comin' out by the feel o' the wind. Then I shall walk up a path as Winnie knows. The sun'll be up ready for me by the time I get to the part I wants to go to. You know, young man, I *must* find her. She'll never come back to the cottage no more, now she's been skeared away from it."

"But I must accompany you," I said.

"No, no, you mustn't do that," said the Gypsy; "she might take fright and fall and be killed. Besides," said she, "Winifred Wynne's under a cuss; it's bad luck to follow up anybody under a cuss."

"But *you* are following her," I said.

"Ah, but that's different. 'Gorgio cuss never touched Romany,' as my mammy, as had the seein' eye, used to say."

"But," I exclaimed, vehemently, "I *want* to be cursed with her. I have followed her to be cursed with her. I mean to go with you."

"Young man," said she, "are there many o' your sort among the Gorgios?"

"I don't know and I don't care," said I.

"'Cause," said she, "that sayin' o' yourn is a fine sight liker a Romany chi's nor a Romany chal's. It's the chies as sticks to the chals, cuss or no cuss. I wish the chals 'ud stick as close to the chies."

After much persuasion, however, I induced the Gypsy to let me accompany her, promising to abide implicitly by her instructions.

Even while we were talking the rain had ceased, and patches of stars were shining brilliantly. These patches got rapidly larger. Sinf Lovell proposed that we should go to the cottage, dry our clothes, and furnish ourselves with a day's provisions, which she said a certain cupboard in the cottage would supply, and also with her crwth, which she appeared to consider essential to the success of the enterprise.

"She's fond o' the crwth," she said. "She allus wanted Mrs. Davies to larn her to play it, but her aunt never would, 'cause when it's played by a maid on the hills to the Welsh dukkerin' gillie,* the spirits o' Snowdon and the livin' mullost† o' them as she's fond on will sometimes come and show themselves, and she said Winnie wasn't at all the sort o' gal to feel comfable with spirits moving round her. She larnt me it, though. It's only when the crwth is played by a maid on the hills that the spirits can follow it."

* *Dukkerin' gillie*, incantation song.

† *Livin' mullos*, wraiths.

We did as Sinf suggested, and afterwards began our search. She proposed that we should go at once to Knockers' Llyn, where she had seen Winifred the day before sitting and talking to herself. We proceeded towards the spot.

IV

THE Gypsy girl was as lithe and active as Winifred herself, and vastly more powerful. I was wasted by illness and fatigue. Along the rough path we went, while the morning gradually broke over the east. Great isles and continents of clouds were rolled and swirled from peak to peak, from crag to crag, across steaming valley and valley; iron-grey at first, then faintly tinged with rose, which grew warmer and richer and deeper every moment.

"It's a-goin' to be one of the finest sunrises ever seed," said the Gypsy girl. "Dordi! the Gorgios come to see our sunrises," she continued, with the pride of an owner of Snowdon. "You know this is the only way to see the hills. You may ride up the Llanberis side in a go-cart."

Racked with anxiety as I was, I found it a relief during the ascent to listen to the Gypsy's talk about Winifred. She gave me a string of reminiscences about her that enchanted, enchanted, and yet harrowed me. A strong friendship had already sprung up between me and my companion; and I was led to tell her about the cross and the curse, the violation of my father's tomb and its disastrous consequences. She was evidently much awed by the story.

"Well," said she, when I had stopped to look round, "it's my belief as the cuss is a-workin' now, and'll have to spend itself. If it could ha' spent itself on the feyther as did the mischief, why all well an' good, but, you see, he's gone, an' left it to spend itself on his chavi; jist the way with 'em Gorgio feythers an' Romany daddies. It'll have to spend itself, though, that cuss will, I'm afeard."

"But," I said, "you don't mean that you think for her father's crime she'll have to beg her bread in desolate places?"

"I do though, wusser luck," said the Gypsy solemnly, stopping suddenly, and standing still as a statue.

"And this," I ejaculated, "is the hideous belief of all races in all times! Monstrous if a lie—more monstrous if true! Anyhow I'll find her. I'll traverse the earth till I find her. I'll share her lot with her, whatever it may be, and wherever it may be in the world. If she's a beggar, I'll beg by her side."

"Right you are, brother," said the Gypsy, breaking in enthusiastically. "I likes to hear a man say that. You're liker a Romany chi nor a Romany chal, the more I see of you. What I says to our people is:—'If the Romany chals would only stick by the Romany chies as the Romany chies sticks by the Romany chals, where 'ud the Gorgios be then? Why, the Romanies would be the strongest people on the arth.' But you see, reia, about this cuss—a cuss has to work itself out, jist for all the world like the bite of a sap."*

Then she continued, with great earnestness, looking across the kindling expanse of hill and valley before us: "You know, the very dead things round us,—these here peaks, an' rocks, an' lakes, an' mountains—ay, an' the woods an' the sun an' the sky above our heads,—cusses us when we do anythink wrong. You may see it by the way they looks at you. Of course I mean when you do anythink wrong accordin' to us Romanies. I don't mean wrong accordin' to the Gorgios: they're two very different kinds o' wrongs."

"I don't see the difference," said I; "but tell me more about Winifred."

"You don't see the difference?" said Sinf. "Well then, I do. It's wrong to tell a lie to a Romany, ain't it? But is it wrong to tell a lie to a Gorgio? Not a bit of it. And why? 'Cause most Gorgios is fools and *wants* lies, an' that gives the poor Romanies a chance. But this here cuss is a very bad kind o' cuss. It's a dead man's cuss, and what's wuss, him as is cussed is dead and out of the way, and so it has to be worked out in the blood of his child. But when she's done that, when she's worked it out of her blood, things'll come right agin if the cross is put back agin on your father's buzzum."

"When she has done what?" I said.

"Begged her bread in desolate places," said the Gypsy girl, solemnly. "Then if the cross is put back agin on your feyther's buzzum, I believe things'll all come right. It's bad the cusser was your feyther though."

"But why?" I asked.

"There's nobody can't hurt you and them you're fond on as your own breed can. As my poor mammy used to say, 'For good or for ill you must dig deep to bury your daddy.' But you know, brother, the wust o' this job is that it's a trúshul as has been stole."

"A trúshul?"

"What you call a cross. There's nothin' in the world so strong for cussin' and blessin' as a trúshul, unless the stars shinin' in the river or the hand in the clouds is as strong. Why, I tell you there's nothin' a trúshul

can't do, whether it's curin' a man as is bit by a sap, or wipin' the very rainbow out o' the sky by jist layin' two sticks crossways, or even curin' the cramp in your legs by jist settin' your shoes crossways; there's nothin' for good or bad a trúshul *can't* do if it likes. Hav'n't you never heer'd o' the dukkeripen o' the trúshul shinin' in the sunset sky when the light o' the sinkin' sun shoots up behind a bar o' clouds an' makes a kind o' fiery cross? But to go and steal a trúshul out of a dead man's tomb—why, it's no wonder as the Wynnes is cussed, feyther and child."

I could not have tolerated this prattle about Gypsy superstitions had I not observed that through it all the Gypsy was on the *qui vive*, looking for the traces of her path that Winifred had unconsciously left behind her. Had the Gypsy been following the trail with the silence of an American Indian, she could not have worked more carefully than she was now working while her tongue went rattling on. I afterwards found this to be a characteristic of her race, as I afterwards found that what is called the long sight of the Gypsies (as displayed in the following of the *patrin*[†]) is not long sight at all, but is the result of a peculiar faculty the Gypsies have of observing more closely than Gorgios do everything that meets their eyes in the woods and on the hills and along the roads. When we reached the spot indicated by the Gypsy as being Winifred's haunt, the ledge where she was in the habit of coming for her imaginary interviews with the "Prince of the Mist," we did not stay there, but for a time still followed the path, which from this point became rougher and rougher, alongside deep precipices and chasms. Every now and then she would stop on a ledge of rock, and, without staying her prattle for a moment, stoop down and examine the earth with eyes that would not have missed the footprint of a rat. When I saw her pause, as she sometimes would in the midst of her scrutiny, to gaze inquiringly down some gulf, which then seemed awful to my inexperienced eyes, but which later on in the day, when I came to see the tremendous chasms of that side of Snowdon, seemed insignificant enough, the circulation of my blood would seem to stop, and then rush again through my body more violently than before. And while the "patrin-chase" went on, and the morning grew brighter and brighter, the Gypsy's lithe, cat-like tread never faltered. The rise and fall of her bosom were as regular and as calm as in the public-house. Such agility and such staying power in a woman astonished me. Finding

* Sap, a snake.

† Trail.

no trace of Winnie, we returned to the little plateau by Knockers' Llyn.

"This is the place," said the Gypsy; "it used to be called in old times the haunted llyn, because when you sings the Welsh dukkerin gillie here or plays it on a crwth, the Knockers answers it. I dare say you've heard o' what the Gorgios call the triple echo o' Llyn Ddu'r Arddu. Well, it's somethin' like that, only bein' done by the knocking sperrits, it's grander and don't come 'cept when they hears the Welsh dukkerin gillie. Now, you must hide yourself somewheres while I go and touch the crwth in her favourite place. I think she'll come to that. I wish though I hadn't brought ye," she continued, looking at me meditatively; "you're a little winded a-ready, and we ain't begun the rough climbing at all. Up to this 'ere pool Winnie and me and Rhona Boswell used to climb when we was children; it needed longer legs nor ourn to get further up, and you're winded a-ready. If she should come on you suddent, she's liker than not to run for a mile or more up that path where we've just been and then to jump down one of them chasms you've just seed. But if she does pop on ye, don't you try to grab her, whatever you do; leave me alone for that. You ain't got strength enough to grab a hare; you ought to be in bed. Besides, she won't be skeared at me. But," she continued, turning round to look at the vast circuit of peaks stretching away as far as the eye could reach, "we shall have to ketch her to-day somehow. She'll never go back to the cottage where you went and skeared her; and if she don't have a fall, she'll run about these here hills till she drops. We shall have to ketch her to-day somehow. I'm in hopes she'll come to the sound of my crwth, she's so uncommon fond on it; and if she don't come in the flesh, p'rhaps her livin' mullo will come, and that'll show she's alive."

She placed me in a crevice overlooking the small lake, or pool, which on the opposite side was enclosed in a gorge, opening only by a cleft to the east. Then she unburdened herself of a wallet containing the breakfast, saying, "When I come back we'll fall to and breakfiss." She then, as though she were following the trail, made a circuit of the pool and disappeared through the gorge. All round the pool there was a narrow ragged ledge leading to this eastern opening. I stood concealed in my crevice and looked at the peaks, or rather at the vast masses of billowy vapours enveloping them, as they sometimes boiled and sometimes blazed, shaking—when the sun struck one and then another—from brilliant amethyst to ver-

million, shot occasionally with purple, or gold, or blue.

A radiance now came pouring through the eastern opening down the gorge or cwm itself, and soon the light vapours floating about the pool were turned to sailing gauzes, all quivering with different dyes, as though a rainbow had become torn from the sky and woven into gossamer hangings and set adrift.

Fatigue was beginning to numb my senses and to conquer my brain. The acuteness of my mental anguish had consumed itself in its own intense fires. The idea of Winifred's danger became more remote. The mist-pageants of the morning seemed somehow to emanate from Winnie.

"No one is worthy to haunt such a scene as this," I murmured, sinking against the rock, "but Winifred—so beautiful of body and pure of soul. Would that I were indeed her 'Prince of the Mist,' and that we could die here together with Sinf's strains in our ears."

Then I felt coming over me strange influences which afterwards became familiar to me—influences which I can only call the spells of Snowdon. They were far more intense than those strange, sweet, wild, mesmeric throbs which I used to feel in Graylingham Wood, and which my ancestress, Fenella Stanley, seems also to have known, but they were akin to them. Then came the sound of Sinf's crwth and song, and in the distance repetitions of it, as though the spirits of Snowdon were, in very truth, joining in a chorus.

At once a marvellous change came over me. I seemed to be listening to my ancestress, Fenella Stanley, and not to Sinf Lovell. I was hearing that strain which in my childhood I had so often tried to imagine, and it was conjuring up the morning sylphs of the mountain air and all the "flower-sprites" and "sunshine elves" of Snowdon.

V

I SHOOK off the spell when the music ceased; then I began to wonder why the Gypsy did not return. I was now faint and almost famished for want of food. I opened the Gypsy's wallet. There was the substantial and tempting breakfast she had brought from the cottage cupboard—cold beef and bread, and ale. I spread the breakfast on the ground.

Scarcely had I done so when a figure appeared at the opening of the gorge and caught the ruddy flood of light. It was

Winifred, bare-headed. I knew it was she, and I waited in breathless suspense, crouching close up into the crevice, dreading lest she should see me and be frightened away. She stood in the eastern cleft of the gorge against the sun for fully half a minute, looking around as a stag might look that was trying to give the hunters the slip.

"She has seen the Gypsy," I thought, "and been scared by her." Then she came down and glided along the side of the pool. At first she did not see me, though she stood opposite and stopped, while the opalescent vapours from the pool steamed around her, and she shone as through a glittering veil, her eyes flashing like sapphires. The palpitation of my heart choked me: I dared not stir, I dared not speak; the slightest movement or the slightest sound might cause her to start away. There was she whom I had travelled and toiled to find—there was she, so close to me, and yet must I let her pass and perhaps lose her after all—for ever?

Where was the Gypsy girl? I was in an agony of desire to see her or hear her cry, and yet her approach might frighten Winifred to her destruction.

But Winifred, who had now seen me, did not bound away with that heart-quelling yell of hers which I had dreaded. No, I perceived to my astonishment that the flash of the eyes was not of alarm, but of greeting to me—pleasure at seeing me! She came close to the water, and then I saw a smile on her face through the misty film—a flash of shining teeth.

"May I come?" she said.

"Yes, Winifred," I gasped, scarcely knowing what I said in my surprise and joy.

She came slipping round the pool, and in a few seconds was by my side. Her clothes were saturated with last night's rain, but though she looked very cold, she did not shiver, a proof that she had not lain down on the hills, but had walked about during the whole night. There was no wildness of the maniac—there was no idiotic stare. But oh the witchery of the gaze!

If one could imagine the look on the face of a wanderer from the cloud-palaces of the sylphs, or the gaze in the eyes of a statue newly animated by the passion of the sculptor who had fashioned it, or the smile on the face of a wondering Eve just created upon the earth—any one of these expressions would, perhaps, give the idea of that on Winifred's face as she stood there.

"May I sit down, Prince?" said she.

"Yes, Winnie," I replied, "I've been waiting for you."

"Been waiting for poor Winnie?" she

said, her eyes sparkling anew with pleasure; and she sat down close by my side, gazing hungrily at the food—her hands resting on her lap.

I laid my hand upon one of hers; it was so damp and cold that it made me shudder.

"Why, Winifred," I said, "how cold you are!"

"The hills are *so* cold!" said she, "*so* cold when the stars go out, and the red streaks begin to come."

"May I warm your hands in mine, Winnie?" I said, longing to clasp the dear fingers, but trembling lest anything I might say or do should bring about a repetition of last night's catastrophe.

"Will you, Prince?" said she. "How very, very kind!" and in a moment the hand was between mine.

Remembering that it was through looking into my eyes that she recognised me in the cottage, I now avoided looking straight into hers. All this time she kept gazing wistfully at the food spread out on the ground.

"Are you hungry, Winifred?" I said.

"Oh, yes; *so* hungry!" said she, shaking her head in a sad meditative way. "Poor Winifred is so hungry and cold and lonely!"

"Will you breakfast with the Prince of the Mist, Winifred?"

"Oh, may I, Prince?" she asked, her face beaming with delight.

"To be sure you may, Winnie. You may always breakfast with the Prince of the Mist if you like."

"Always? Always?" she repeated.

"Yes, Winnie," I said, as I handed her some bread and meat, which she devoured ravenously.

"Yes, dear Winnie," I continued, handing her a foaming horn of Sinf's ale, to which she did as full justice as she was doing to the bread and meat. "Yes, I want you to breakfast with me and dine with me always."

"Do you mean *live* with you, Prince?" she asked, looking me dreamily in the face—"live with you behind the white mist? Is this our wedding breakfast, Prince?"

"Yes, Winnie."

Then her eyes wandered down over her dress, and she said, "Ah! how strange I did not notice my green fairy kirtle before. And I declare I never felt till this moment the wreath of gold leaves round my forehead. Do they shine much in the sun?"

"They quite dazzle me, Winnie," I said, arching my hand above my eyes, as if to protect them from the glare.

"Do you have a nice fire there when it's very cold?" she said.

"Yes, Winifred," I said.

She then sank into silence, while I kept plying her with food.

After she had appeased her hunger she sat looking into the pool, quite unconscious, apparently, of my presence by her side, and lost in a reverie similar to that which I had seen at the cottage.

The form her dementia had taken was unlike anything that I had ever conceived. Madness seemed too coarse a word to denote so wonderful and fascinating a mental derangement. Mivart's comparison to a musical-box recurred to me, and seemed most apt. She was in a waking dream. The peril lay in breaking through that dream and bringing her real life before her. There was a certain cogency of dreamland in all she said and did. And I found that she sank into silent reverie simply because she waited, like a person in sleep, for the current of her thoughts to be directed and dictated by external phenomena. As she sat there gazing in the pool, her hand gradually warming between my two hands, I felt that never when sane, never in her most bewitching moments, had she been so lovable as she was now. This new kind of spell she exercised over me it would be impossible to describe. But it sprang from the expression on her face of that absolute freedom from all self-consciousness which is the great charm in children, combined with the grace and beauty of her own matchless girlhood. A desire to embrace her, to crush her to my breast, seized me like a frenzy.

"Winifred," I said, "you are very cold."

But she was now insensible to sound. I knew from experience now that I must shake her to bring her back to consciousness, for evidently, in her fits of reverie, the sounds falling upon her ear were not conveyed to the brain at all.

I shook her gently, and said, "The Prince of the Mist."

She started back to life. My idea had been a happy one. My words had at once sent her thoughts into the right direction for me.

"Pardon me, Prince," said she, smiling; "I had forgotten that you were here."

"Winifred, I've warmed this hand, now give me the other."

She stretched her other hand across her breast and gave it to me. This brought her entire body close to me, and I said, "Winnie, you are cold all over. Won't you let the Prince of the Mist put his arm round you and warm you?"

"Oh, I should like it so much," she said. "But are you warm, Prince? are you really warm?—your mist is mostly very cold."

"Quite warm, Winifred," I said, as with

my heart swelling in my breast, and with eyelids closing over my eyes from very joy, I drew her softly upon my breast once more.

"Yes—yes," I murmured, as the tears gushed from my eyes and dropped upon the soft hair that I was kissing. "If God will but let me have her *thus!* I ask for nothing better than to possess a maniac."

As we sat locked in each other's arms the head of Sinfi appeared round the eastern cliff of the gorge where I had first seen Winifred. The Gypsy had evidently been watching us from there. I perceived that she was signalling to me that I was not to grasp Winifred. Then I saw Sinfi suddenly and excitedly point to the sky over the rock beneath which we sat. I looked up. The upper sky above us was now clear of morning mist, and right over our heads, Winifred's and mine, there hung a little morning cloud like a feather of flickering rosy gold. I looked again towards the corner of jutting rock, but Sinfi's head had disappeared.

"Dear Prince," said Winifred, "how delightfully warm you are! How kind of you! But are not your arms a little too tight, dear Prince? Poor Winnie cannot breathe. And this thump, thump, thump, like a—like a—fire-engine—*ah!*"

Too late I knew what my folly had done. The turbulent action of my heart had had a sympathetic effect upon hers. It seemed as if her senses, if not her mind, had remembered another occasion, when, as she was lying in my arms, the beating of my heart had disturbed her. In one lightning-flash her real life and all its tragedy broke mercilessly in upon her. The idea of the "Prince of the Mist" fled. She started up and away from me. The awful mimicry of her father's expression spread over her face. With a yell of "Fy Nhad," and then a yell of "Father!" she darted round the pool, and then, bounding up the rugged path like a chamois, disappeared behind a corner of jutting rock.

At the same moment the head of the Gypsy girl reappeared round the eastern cleft of the gorge. Sinfi came quickly up to me and whispered, "Don't follow."

"I will," I said.

"No, you won't," said she, seizing my wrist with a grip of iron. "If you do she's done for. Do you know where she is running to? A couple of furlongs up that path there's another that branches off on the right; it ain't more nor a futt-an'-a-half wide along a precipuss more nor a hundred futt deep. She knows it well. She'll make for that. The cuss is on her worse nor ever, judgin' from the gurn and the flash of her teeth."

I waited for two or three seconds in the wildest impatience.

"Let's follow her now," I said.

"No, no," she whispered, "not yet, 'less you want to see her tumble down the cliff." After a few minutes Sinfi and I went up the main pathway. Winnie seemed to have slackened her pace when she was out of sight, for we saw her just turning away on the right at the point indicated by Sinfi. "Give her time to get along that path," said she, "and then she'll be all right."

In a state of agonized suspense I stood there waiting. At last I said :

"I must go after her. We shall lose her—I know we shall lose her."

Sinfi demurred a moment, then acceded to my wish, and we went up the main pathway and peered round the corner of the jutting rock where Winifred had last been visible. There, along a ragged shelf bordering a yawning chasm—a shelf that seemed to me scarce wide enough for a human foot—Winifred was running and balancing herself as surely as a bird over the abyss.

"Mind she doesn't turn round sharp and see you," said the Gypsy. "If she does she'll lose her head and over she'll fall!"

I crouched and gazed at Winifred as she glided along towards a vast mountain of vapour that was rolling over the chasm close to her. She stood and looked into the floating mass for a moment, and then passed into it and was lost from view.

VI

"Now I can follow her," said Sinfi ; "but you mustn't try to come along here. Wait till I come back. I suppose you've given her all the breakfiss. Give me a drop of brandy out o' your flask."

I gave her some brandy and took a long draught of the burning liquor myself, for I was fainting.

"I shall go with you," I said.

"Dordi," said the Gypsy, "how quickly you'd be a-layin' at the bottom there!" and she pointed down into the gulf at our feet.

"I shall go with you," I said.

"No, you won't," said the Gypsy doggedly ; "cause I sha'n't go. I shall git round and meet her. I know where we shall strike across her slot. She'll be makin' for Llanberis."

"I let her escape," I moaned. "I had her in my arms once ; but you signalled to me not to grip her."

"If you had ha' grabbed her," said the Gypsy, "she'd ha' pulled you along like a

feather—she's so mad strong. You go back to the llyn."

The Gypsy girl passed along the shelf and was soon lost in the veil of vapour.

I returned to the llyn and threw myself down upon the ground, for my legs sank under me, but the dizziness of fatigue softened the effect of my distress. The rocks and peaks were swinging round my head. Soon I found the Gypsy beating over me.

"I can't find her," said she. "We had best make haste and strike across her path as she makes for Llanberis. I have a notion as she's sure to do that."

As fast as we could scramble along those rugged tracks we made our way to the point where the Gypsy expected that Winifred would pass. We remained for hours, beating about in all directions in search of her,—Sinfi every now and then touching her crwth with the bow,—but without any result.

"It's my belief she's gone straight down to Llanberis," said Sinfi ; "and we'd best lose no time, but go there too."

We went right to the top of the mountain and rested for a little time on y Wyddfa, Sinfi taking some bread and cheese and ale in the cabin there. Then we descended the other side. I had not sense then to notice the sunset-glories, the peaks of mountains melting into a sky of rose and light-green, over which a phalanx of fiery clouds was filing ; and yet I see it all now as I write, and I hear what I did not seem to hear then, the musical chant of a Welsh guide ahead of us, who was conducting a party of happy tourists to Llanberis.

When we reached the village, we spent hours in making searches and inquiries, but could find no trace of her. Oh, the appalling thought of Winifred wandering about all night famishing on the hills ! I went to the inn which Sinfi pointed out to me, while she went in quest of some Gypsy friends, who, she said, were stopping in the neighbourhood. She promised to come to me early in the morning, in order that we might renew our search at break of day.

When I turned into bed after supper I said to myself : "There will be no sleep for me this night." But I was mistaken. So great was my fatigue that sleep came upon me with a strength that was sudden and irresistible ; when the servant came to call me at sunrise, I felt as though I had but just gone to bed. It was, no doubt, this sound sleep, and entire respite from the tension of mind I had undergone, which saved me from another serious illness.

I found the Gypsy already waiting for me below, preparing for the labours before her

by making a hearty meal on salt beef and ale.

"Reia," said she, pointing to the beef with her knife, "we sha'n't get bite nor sup, 'cept what we carry, either inside or out, for twelve hours,—perhaps not for twenty-four. Before I give up this slot there ain't a path, nor a hill, nor a rock, nor a valley, nor a precipuss as won't feel my fut. Come! set to."

I took the Gypsy's advice, made as hearty a breakfast as I could, and we left Llanberis in the light of morning. It was not till we had reached and passed a place called Gwastadnant Gate that the path along which we went became really wild and difficult. The Gypsy seemed to know every inch of the country.

We reached a beautiful lake, where Sinfi stopped, and I began to question her as to what was to be our route.

"Winnie know'd," said she, "some Welsh folk as fish in this 'ere lake. She might ha' called 'em to mind, poor thing, and come off here. I'm a-goin' to ask about her."

Sinfi's inquiries here—her inquiries everywhere that day—ended in nothing but blank and cruel disappointment.

Remembering that Winifred's very earliest childhood was passed near Carnarvon, I proposed to the Gypsy that we should go thither at once.

After sleeping again at Llanberis, we went to Carnarvon, but soon returned to the other side of Snowdon, for at Carnarvon we could find no trace of her.

"Oh, Sinfi," I said, as we stood watching the peculiar bright yellow trout in Lake Ogwen, "she is starving—starving on the hills—while millions of people are eating, gorging, wasting food. I shall go mad!"

Sinfi looked at me mournfully, and said:

"It's a bad job, reia, but if poor Winnie Wynne's a-starvin' it ain't the fault o' them as happens to ha' got the full belly. There ain't a Romany in Wales, nor there ain't a Gorgio nuther, as wouldn't give Winnie a crust, if wunst we could find her."

"To think of this great, rich world," I exclaimed (to myself, not to the Gypsy), "choke-full of harvest, bursting with grain, while famishing on the hills for a mouthful is she—the one!"

"Reia," said Sinfi, with much solemnity, "the world's full o' vittles; what's wanted is just a hand as can put the vittles and the mouths where they ought to be—cluss together. That's what the hungry Romany says when he snares a hare or a rabbit."

We walked on. After a while Sinfi said: "A Romany knows more o' these here kinds o' things, reia, than a Gorgio does. It's my

belief as Winnie Wynne ain't a-starving on the hills; she ain't *got* to starve; she's on'y got to beg her bread. She'll have to do that, of course; but beggin' ain't so bad as starvin', after all! There's some as begs for the love on it. Videy does."

I knew by this time that it was useless to battle against Sinfi's conviction that the curse would have to be literally fulfilled, so I kept silence. While she was speaking I was suddenly struck by a thought that ought to have come before.

"Sinfi," I said, "didn't you know an English lady named Dalrymple, who lodged with Mrs. Davies for some years?"

"Yis," said Sinfi, "and I did think o' her. She went to live at Carnarvon. But supposin' that Winnie had gone to the English lady—supposin' that she know'd where to find her—the lady 'ud ha' never let her go away, she was so fond on her. It was Miss Dalrymple as spilt Winnie, a-givin' her lady-notions."

However, I determined to see Miss Dalrymple, and started alone for Carnarvon at once. By making inquiries at the Carnarvon post office I found Miss Dalrymple, a pale-faced, careworn lady of extraordinary culture, who evinced the greatest affection for Winifred. She had seen nothing of her, and was much distressed at the fragments of Winifred's story which I thought it well to give her. When she bade me good-bye, she said, "I know something of your family. I know your mother and aunt. The sweet girl you are seeking is in my judgment one of the most gifted young women living. Her education, as you may be aware, she owes mainly to me. But she took to every kind of intellectual pursuit by instinct. Reared in a poor Welsh cottage as she was, there is, I believe, almost no place in society that she is not fitted to fill."

On leaving Carnarvon I returned to Sinfi Lovell.

But why should I weary the reader with a detailed account of my wanderings and searchings with my strange guide that day, and the next, and the next? Why should I burthen him with the mental agonies I suffered as Sinfi and I, during the following days, explored the country for miles and miles—right away beyond the Cross Foxes, as far as Dolgelley and the region of Cader Idris? At last, one evening, when I and Rhona Boswell and some of her family were walking down Snowdon towards Llanberis, Sinfi announced her conviction that Winifred was no longer in the Snowdon region at all, perhaps not even in Wales at all.

"You mean, I suppose, that she is dead," I said.

"Dead?" said Sinfi, the mysterious sibylline

look returning immediately to her face, that had just seemed so frank and simple. "She ain't got to *die*; she's only got to beg. But I shall ha' to leave you now. I can't do you no more good. And besides, my daddy's goin' into the Eastern Counties with the Welsh ponies, and so is Jasper Bozell and Rhona. Videy and me are goin' too, in course."

With deep regret and dismay I felt that I must part from her. How well I remember that evening. I feel as now I write the delicious summer breeze of Snowdon blowing on my forehead. The sky, which for some time had been growing very rich, grew at every moment rarer in colour, and glassed itself in the llyns which shone with an enjoyment of the beauty like the magic mirrors of Snowdonian spirits. The loveliness indeed was so bewitching that one or two of the Gypsies—a race who are, as I had already noticed, among the few uncultivated people that show a susceptibility to the beauties of nature—gave a long sigh of pleasure, and lingered at the llyn of the triple echo, to see how the soft iridescent opal brightened and shifted into sapphire and orange, and then into green and gold. As a small requital of her valuable services I offered her what money I had about me, and promised to send as much more as she might require as soon as I reached the hotel at Dolgelley, where at the moment my portmanteau was lying in the landlord's charge.

"Me take money for tryin' to find my sister, Winnie Wynne?" said Sinfi, in astonishment more than in anger. "Seein', reia, as I'd jist sell everythink I've got to find her, I should like to know how many gold balansers [sovereigns] 'ud pay me. No, reia, Winnie Wynne ain't in Wales at all, else I'd never give up this patrin-chase. So fare ye well;" and she held out her hand, which I grasped, reluctant to let it go.

"Fare ye well, reia," she repeated, as she walked swiftly away; "I wonder whether we shall ever meet agin."

"Indeed I hope so," I said.

Her sister Videy, who with Rhona Boswell was walking near us, was present at the parting—a bright-eyed, dark-skinned little girl, a head shorter than Sinfi. I saw Videy's eyes glisten greedily at sight of the gold, and, after we had parted, I was not at all surprised, though I knew her father, Panuel Lovell, a frequenter of Raxton fairs, to be a man of means, when she came back and said, with a coquettish smile,

"Give the bright balansers to Lady Sinfi's poor sister, my rei; give the balansers to the poor Gypsy, my rei."

Rhona, however, instead of joining Videy

in the prayer for backsheesh, ran down the path in the footsteps of Sinfi.

What money I had about me I was carrying loose in my waistcoat pocket, and I pulled it out, gold and silver together. I picked out the sovereigns (five) and gave them to her, retaining half-a-sovereign and the silver for my use before returning to the hotel at Dolgelley. Videy took the sovereigns and then pointed, with a dazzling smile, to the half-sovereign, saying, "Give Lady Sinfi's poor sister the posh balanser [half-sovereign], my rei."

I gave her the half-sovereign, when she immediately pointed to a half-crown in my hand, and said, "Give the poor Gypsy the posh-courna, my rei."

So grateful was I to the very name of Lovell, that I was hesitating whether to do this, when I was suddenly aware of the presence of Sinfi, who had returned with Rhona. In a moment Videy's wrist was in a grip I had become familiar with, and the money fell to the ground. Sinfi pointed to the money and said some words in Romany. Videy stooped and picked the coins up in evident alarm. Sinfi then said some more words in Romany, whereupon Videy held out the money to me. I felt it best to receive it, though Sinfi never once looked at me; and I could not tell what expression her own honest face wore, whether of deadly anger or mortal shame. The two sisters walked off in silence together, while Rhona set up a kind of war-dance behind them, and the three went down the path.

In a few minutes Sinfi again returned and, pointing in great excitement to the sunset sky, cried, "Look, look! The Dukkeripen of the trúshul."° And, indeed, the sunset was now making a spectacle such as might have aroused a spasm of admiration in the most prosaic breast. As I looked at it and then turned to look at Sinfi's noble features, illumined and spiritualized by a light that seemed more than earthly, a new feeling came upon me as though y Wyddfa and the clouds were joining in a prophecy of hope.

VII

AFTER losing Sinfi I hired some men to assist me in my search. Day after day did we continue the quest; but no trace of Winifred could be found. The universal opinion was that she had taken sudden alarm at something, lost her foothold and fallen down a precipice, as so many unfortunate tourists had done in North Wales.

* Cross.

One day I and one of my men met, on a spur of the Glyder, the tourist of the flint implements with whom I had conversed at Bettws y Coed. He was alone, geologising or else searching for flint implements on the hills. Evidently my haggard appearance startled him. But when he learnt what was my trouble he became deeply interested. He told me that the day after our meeting at the "Royal Oak," Bettws y Coed, he had met a wild-looking girl as he was using his geologist's hammer on the mountains. She was bare-headed, and had taken fright at him, and had run madly in the direction of the most dangerous chasm on the range; he had pursued her, hoping to save her from destruction, but lost sight of her close to the chasm's brink. The expression on his face told me what his thoughts were as to her fate. He accompanied me to the chasm. It was indeed a dreadful place. We got to the bottom by a winding path, and searched till dusk among the rocks and torrents, finding nothing. But I felt that in wild and ragged pits like those, covered here and there with rough and shaggy brushwood, and full of wild cascades and deep pools, a body might well be concealed till doomsday.

My kind-hearted companion accompanied me for some miles, and did his best to dispel my gloom by his lively and intelligent talk. We parted at Penygwryd. I never saw him again. I never knew his name. Should these lines ever come beneath his eyes he will know that though the great ocean of human life rolls between his life-vessel and mine, I have not forgotten how and where once we touched.

But how could I rest? Though Hope herself was laughing my hopes to scorn, how could I rest? How could I cease to search?

Bitter as it was to wander about the hills teasing my soul by delusions which other people must fain smile at, it would have been more bitter still to accept for certainty the intolerable truth that Winifred had died famished, or that her beloved body was a mangled corpse at the bottom of a cliff. If the reader does not understand this, it is because he finds it impossible to understand a sorrow like mine. I refused to return to Raxton, and took Mrs. Davies's cottage, which was unoccupied, and lived there throughout the autumn. Every day, wet or dry, I used to sally out on the Snowdonian range, just as though she had been lost but yesterday, making inquiries, bribing the good-natured Welsh people (who needed no bribing) to aid me in a search which to them must have seemed monomaniacal.

The peasants and farmers all knew me.

"Sut mae dy galon? (How is thy heart?)" they would say in the beautiful Welsh phrase as I met them. "How is my heart, indeed!" I would sigh as I went on my way.

Before I went to Wales in search of Winifred I had never set foot in the Principality. Before I left it there was scarcely a Welshman who knew more familiarly than I every mile of the Snowdonian country. Never a trace of Winifred could I find.

At the end of the autumn I left the cottage and removed to Penygwryd, as a comparatively easy point from which I could reach the mountain llyn where I had breakfasted with Winifred on that morning. Afterwards I took up my abode at a fishing-inn, and here I stayed the winter through—scarcely hoping to find her now, yet chained to Snowdon. After my labours during the day, scrambling among slippery boulders and rugged rocks, crossing swollen torrent-beds, amid rain and ice and snow and mist such as frightened away the Welsh themselves—after thus wandering, because I could not leave the region, it was a comfort to me to turn into the low, black-beamed room of the fishing-inn, with drying hams, fitches of bacon, and fishing-rods for decorations, and hear the simple-hearted Cymric folk talking, sometimes in Welsh, sometimes in English, but always with that kindness and that courtesy which go to make the poetry of Welsh common life.

Meantime, I had, as I need scarcely say, spared neither trouble nor expense in advertising for information about Winifred in the Welsh and the West of England newspapers. I offered rewards for her discovery, and the result was merely that I was pestered by letters from people (some of them tourists of education) suggesting traces and clues of so wild, and often of so fantastic a kind, that I arrived at the conviction that of all man's faculties his imagination is the most lawless, and at the same time the most powerful. It was perfectly inconceivable to me that the writers of some of these letters were not themselves demented, so wild or so fanciful were the clues they suggested. Yet, when I came to meet them and talk with them (as I sometimes did), I found these correspondents to be of the ordinary prosaic British type. All my efforts were to no purpose.

Among my longer journeys from the fishing-inn, the most frequent were those to Holywell, near Flint, to the well of St. Winifred—the reader need not be told why. He will recollect how little Winnie, while plying me with strawberries, had sagely recommended the holy water of this famous

well as a "cure for crutches." She had actually brought me some of it in a lemonade bottle when she returned to Raxton after her first absence, and had insisted on rubbing my ankle with it. She had, as I afterwards learnt from her father, imprompted and at last induced her aunt (evidently a good-natured and worthy soul) to take her to visit a friend at Holywell, a journey of many miles, for the purpose of bringing home with her a bottle of the holy water. Whenever any ascent of the gangways had proved to be more successful than usual, Winifred had attributed the good luck to the virtues contained in her lemonade bottle. Ah! superstition seemed pretty enough then.

At first in the forlorn hope that memory might have attracted her thither, and afterwards because there was a fascination for me in the well on account of its association with her, my pilgrimages to Holywell were as frequent as those of any of the afflicted devotees of the olden time, whose crutches left behind testified to the genuineness of the Saint's pretensions. Into that well Winnie's innocent young eyes had gazed—gazed in the full belief that the holy water would cure me—gazed in the full belief that the crimson stains made by the *byssus* on the stones were stains left by her martyr-namesake's blood. Where had she stood when she came to look into the well and the rivulet? On what exact spot had rested her feet—those little rosy feet that on the sea-sands used to flash through the receding foam as she chased the ebbing billows to amuse me, while I sat between my crutches in the cove looking on? It was, I found, possible to gaze in that water till it seemed alive with her—seemed to hold the reflection of the little face which years ago peered anxiously into it for the behoof of the crippled child-lover pining for her at Raxton, and unable to "get up or down the gangways without her."

Holywell grew to have a fascination for me, and in the following spring I left the fishing-inn beneath Snowdon, and took rooms in this interesting old town.

VIII

ONE day, near the rivulet that runs from St. Winifred's Well, I suddenly encountered Sinf Lovell.

"Sinf," I said, "she's dead, she's surely dead."

"I tell ye, brother, she ain't got to die!" said Sinf, as she came and stood beside me.

"Winnie Wynne's on'y got to beg her bread. She's alive."

"Where is she?" I cried. "Oh, Sinf, I shall go mad!"

"There you're too fast for me, brother," said she, "when you ask me *where* she is; but she's alive, and I ain't come quite empty-handed of news about her, brother."

"Oh, tell me!" said I.

"Well," said Sinf, "I've just met one of our people, Euri Lovell, as says that, the very mornin' after we seed her on the hills, he met her close to Carnarvon at break of day."

"Then she *did* go to Carnarvon," I said. "What a distance for those dear feet!"

"Euri knowed her by sight," said Sinf, "but didn't know about her bein' under the cuss, so he jist let her pass, sayin' to hisself, 'She jist looks like a crazy wench this mornin', does Winnie Wynne.' Euri was a-goin' through Carnarvon to Bangor, on to Conway and Chester, and never heerd a word about her bein' lost till he got back, six weeks ago."

"I must go to Carnarvon at once," said I.

"No use, brother," said Sinf. "If I han't pretty well worked Carnarvon, it's a pity. I've bin there the last three weeks on the patrin-chase, and not a patrin could I find. It's my belief as she never went into Carnarvon town at all, but turned off and went into Llanbeblig churchyard."

"Why do you think so, Sinf?"

"'Cause her aunt, being a Carnarvon woman, was buried among her own kin in Llanbeblig churchyard. Leastwise, you won't find a ghose of a trace of her at Carnarvon, and it'll be a long kind of a wild-goose chase from here; but if you *will* go, go you must."

She could not dissuade me from starting for Carnarvon at once; and, as I would go, she seemed to take it as a matter of course that she must accompany me. Our journey was partly by coach and partly afoot.

My first impulse on nearing Carnarvon was to go—I could not have said why—to Llanbeblig churchyard.

Among a group of graves of the Davieses we easily found that of Winifred's aunt, beneath a newly-planted arbutus tree. After looking at the modest mound for some time, and wondering where Winifred had stood when the coffin was lowered—as I had wondered where she had stood at St. Winifred's Well—I roamed about the churchyard with Sinf in silence for a time.

At last she said, "I mind comin' here wonst with Winnie, and I mind her sayin': 'There's no place I should so much like to be buried in as in Llanbeblig churchyard.

The graves of them as die unmarried *do* look so beautiful."

"How did she know the graves of those who die unmarried?"

Sinfi looked over the churchyard and waved her hand.

"Wherever you see them beautiful primroses, and them shinin' snowdrops, and them sweet smellin' vi'lets, that's allus the grave of a child or else of a young Gorgie as died a maid; and wherever you see them laurel trees, and box trees, and 'butus trees, that's the grave of a pusson as ain't nuther child nor maid, an' the Welsh folk think nobody else on'y child'n an' maids ain't quite good enough to be turned into the blessed flowers o' spring."

"Next to the sea," I said, "she loved the flowers of spring."

"And I should like to be buried here too, brother," said Sinfi, as we left the churchyard.

"But a fine strong girl like you, Sinfi, is not very likely to die unmarried while there are Romany bachelors about."

"There ain't a-many Romany chals," she said, "as du'st marry Sinfi Lovell, even supposing Sinfi Lovell 'ud marry *them*, an' a Gorgio she'll never marry—an' never can marry. And to lay here aneath the flowers o' spring, wi' the Welsh sun a-shinin' on 'em as it's a-shinin' now, *that* must be a sweet kind of bed, brother, and for anythink as I knows on, a Romany chi 'ud make as sweet a bed o' vi'lets as the beautifullest Gorgi-wench as wur ever bred in Carnarvon, an' as shinin' a bunch o' snowdrops as ever the Welsh spring knows how to grow."

At any other time this extraordinary girl's talk would have interested me greatly; *now*, nothing had any interest for me that did not bear directly upon the fate of Winifred.

Little dreaming how this quiet churchyard had lately been one of the battle grounds of that all-conquering power (Destiny, or Circumstance?) which had governed Winnie's life and mine, I went with Sinfi into Carnarvon, and made inquiry everywhere, but without the slightest result. This occupied several days, during which time Sinfi stayed with some acquaintances encamped near Carnarvon, while I lodged at a little hotel.

"You don't ask me how you happened to meet me at Holywell, brother," said she to me, as we stood looking across the water at Carnarvon Castle, over whose mighty battlements the moon was fighting with an army of black, angry clouds, which a wild wind was leading furiously against her—"you don't ask me how you happened to meet me at Holywell, nor how long I've been back agin in dear old Wales, nor what I've been

a-doin' on since we parted; but that's nuther here nor there. I'll tell you what I think about Winnie an' the chances o' findin' her, brother, and that'll intrust you more."

"What is it, Sinfi?" I cried, waking up from the reminiscences, bitter and sweet, the bright moon had conjured up in my mind.

"Well, brother, Winnie, you see, was very fond o' me."

"She was, and good reason for being fond of you she had."

"Well, brother, bein' very fond o' me, *that* made her very fond o' *all* Romanies; and though she took agin me at fust, arter the cuss, as she took agin you because we was her closest friends (that's what Mr. Blyth said, you know, they allus do), she wouldn't take agin Romanies in general. No, she'd take *to* Romanies in general, and she'd go hangin' about the different camps, and she'd soon be snapped up, being so comely, and they'd make a lot o' money out on her jist havin' her with 'em for the 'dukkerin'."

"I don't understand you," I said.

"Well, you know," said Sinfi, "anybody as is under the cuss is half with the sperrits and half with us, and so can tell the *real* 'dukkerin'." Only it's bad for a Romany to have another Romany in the 'place' as is under the cuss; but it don't matter a bit about having a Gorgio among your breed as is under a cuss; for Gorgio cuss can't never touch Romany."

"Then you feel quite sure she's not dead, Sinfi?"

"She's jist as live as you an' me somewheres, brother. There's two things as keeps *her* alive: there's the cuss, as says she's got to beg her bread, and there's the dukkeripen o' the Golden Hand on Snowdon, as says she's got to marry you."

"But, Sinfi, I mean that, apart from all this superstition of yours, you have reason to think she's alive? and you think she's with the Romanies?"

"I know she's alive, and I think she's with the Romanies. She *must* be, brother, with the Shaws, or the Lees, or the Stanleys, or the Boswells, or some on 'em."

"Then," said I, "I'll turn Gypsy; I'll be the second Aylwin to own allegiance to the blood of Fenella Stanley. I'll scour Great Britain till I find her."

"You can jine *us* if you like, brother. We're goin' all through the West of England with the gries. You're fond o' fishin' an' shootin', brother, an' though you're a Gorgio, you can't help bein' a Gorgio, and you ain't a mumply 'un, as I've said to Jim Burton many's the time; and if you can't give the left-hand body-blow like me, there ain't a many Gorgios nor yit a many Romanies as

knows better nor you what their fistes wur made for, an' altogether, brother, Beng te tassa mandi if I shouldn't be right-on proud to see ye jine our breed. There's a coach-maker down in Chester, and he's got for sale the beautifullest livin'-waggin in all England. It's shiny orange-yellow with red window-blinds, an' if there's a colour in any rainbow as *can't* be seed in the panels o' the front door, it's a kind o' rainbow I ain't never seed nowhere. He made it for Jericho Bozzell, the rich Griengro as so often stays at Raxton and at Gypsy Dell; but Rhona Bozzell hates a waggin and allus will sleep in a tent. They do say as the Prince o' Wales wants to buy that livin'-waggin, only he can't spare the balancers just now—his family bein' so big an' times bein' so bad. How much money ha' you got? Can you stan' a hundud an' fifty gold balancers for the waggin besides the fixins?"

"Sinf, I said, "I'm prepared to spend more than that in seeking Winnie."

"Dordi, brother, you must be as rich as my dad, an' he's the richest Griengro arter Jericho Bozzell. You an' me'll jist go down to Chester," she continued, her eyes sparkling with delight at the prospect of bargaining for the waggon, "an' we'll fix up sich a livin'-waggin as no Romany rei never had afore."

"Agreed!" I said, wringing her hand.

"An' now you an' me's right pals," said Sinf.

We went to Chester, and I became owner of the famous "livin'-waggin" coveted (according to Sinf) by the great personage whom, on account of his name, she always spoke of as a rich, powerful, but mysterious and invisible Welshman. One of the monthly cheese-fairs was going on in the Linen Hall. Among the rows of Welsh carts standing in front of the "Old Yacht Inn," Sinf introduced me to a "Griengro" (one of the Gypsy Locks of Gloucestershire), of whom I bought a bay mare of extraordinary strength and endurance.

IX

It was, then, to find Winifred that I joined the Gypsies. And yet I will not deny that affinity with the kinsfolk of my ancestress Fenella Stanley must have had something to do with this passage in my eccentric life. That strain of Romany blood which, according to my mother's theory, had much to do with drawing Percy Aylwin and Rhona Boswell together, was alive and potent in my own veins.

But I must pause here to say a few words

about Sinf Lovell. Some of my readers must have already recognised her as a famous character in bohemian circles. Sinf's father was a "Griengro," that is to say, a horse-dealer. She was, indeed, none other than that "Fiddling Sinf" who became famous in many parts of England and Wales as a violinist, and also as the only performer on the old Welsh stringed instrument called the "crwth," or cruth. Most Gypsies are musical, but Sinf was a genuine musical genius. Having become, through the good nature of Winifred's aunt Mrs. Davies, the possessor of a crwth, and having been taught by her the unique capabilities of that rarely seen instrument, she soon learnt the art of fascinating her Welsh patrons by the strange, wild strains she could draw from it. This obsolete six-stringed instrument (with two of the strings reaching beyond the key-board, used as drones and struck by the thumb, the bow only being used on the other four, and a bridge placed, not at right angles to the sides of the instrument, but in an oblique direction), though in some important respects inferior to the violin, is in other respects superior to it. Heard among the peaks of Snowdon, as I heard them during our search for Winifred, the notes of the crwth have a wonderful wildness and pathos. It is supposed to have the power of drawing the spirits when a maiden sings to its accompaniment a mysterious old Cymric song or incantation.

Among her own people it was as a seeress, as an adept in the real dukkering—the dukkering for the Romanies, as distinguished from the false dukkering, the dukkering for the Gorgios—that Sinf's fame was great. She had travelled over nearly all England—wherever, in short, there were horse-fairs—and was familiar with London, where in the studios of artists she was in request as a face model of extraordinary value. Nor were these all the characteristics that distinguished her from the common herd of Romany chies: she was one of the few Gypsies of either sex who could speak with equal fluency both the English and Welsh Romanes, and she was in the habit sometimes of mixing the two dialects in a most singular way. Though she had lived much in Wales, and had a passionate love of Snowdon, she belonged to a famous branch of the Lovells whose haunt had for ages been in Wales and also the East Midlands, and she had caught entirely the accent of that district.

Among artists in London, as I afterwards learnt, she often went by the playful name of "Lady Sinf Lovell," for the following reason:

She was extremely proud, and believed

the "Kaulo Camloes" to represent the aristocracy not only of the Gypsies, but of the world. Moreover, she had of late been brought into close contact with a certain travelling band of Hungarian Gypsy-musicians, who visited England some time ago. Intercourse with these had fostered her pride in a curious manner. The musicians are the most intelligent and most widely-travelled not only of the Hungarian Gypsies, but of all the Romany race. They are darker than the *sátoros czijányok*, or tented Gypsies. The Lovells being the darkest of all the Gypsies of Great Britain (and the most handsome, hence called Kaulo Camloes), it was easy to make out an affinity closer than common between the Lovells and the Hungarian musicians. Sinfì heard much talk among the Hungarians of the splendours of the early leaders of the continental Romanies. She was told of Romany kings, dukes, and counts. She accepted, with that entire faith which characterised her, the stories of the exploits of Duke Michael, Duke Andreas, Duke Panuel, and the rest. It only needed a hint from one of her continental friends, that her father, Panuel Lovell, was probably a descendant of Duke Panuel, for Sinfì to consider him a Duke. From that moment she felt as strongly as any Gorgie ever felt the fine sentiment expressed in the phrase, *noblesse oblige*; and to hear her say, "I'm a duke's chavi [daughter], and mustn't do so and so," was a delightful and refreshing experience to me. Poor Panuel groaned under these honours, for Sinfì insisted now on his dressing in a brown velvet coat, scarlet waistcoat with gold coins for buttons, and the high-crowned ribbon-bedizened hat which prosperous Gypsies once used to wear. She seemed to consider that her sister Videy (whose tastes were low for a Welsh Gypsy) did not belong to the high aristocracy, though born of the same father and mother. Moreover, "dook" in Romanes means spirit, ghost, and very likely Sinfì found some power of association in this fact; for Videy was a born sceptic.

One of the special charms of Gypsy life is that a man fully admitted into the Romany brotherhood can be on terms of close intimacy with a Gypsy girl without awakening the smallest suspicion of love-making or flirtation; at least it was so in my time.

Under my father's will, a considerable legacy had come to me, and, after going to London to receive this, I made the circuit of the West of England with Sinfì's people. No sign whatever of Winifred did I find in any of the camps. I was for returning to Wales, where my thoughts always were; but I could not expect Sinfì to leave her family,

so I started thither alone, leaving my waggon in their charge. Before I reached Wales, however, I met in the eastern part of Cheshire, not far from Moreton Hall, some English Lees, with whom I got into talk about the Hungarian musicians, who were here then on another flying visit to England. Something that dropped from one of the Lees as to the traditions and superstitions of the Hungarian Gypsies with regard to people suffering from dementia set me thinking; and at last I came to the conclusion that if I really believed Winifred to have taken shelter among the Romanies, it would be absurd not to follow up a band like these Hungarians. Accordingly I changed my course, and followed them up; but again without finding the slightest clue. Eventually I returned to Wales, partly because that seemed to be even yet the most likely region to afford some trace, partly because I should there again see Sinfì Lovell on her return from England.

My health was now much impaired by sleeplessness (the inevitable result of my anxiety), and by a narcotic, which from the commencement of my troubles I had been in the habit of taking in ever-increasing doses—a terrible narcotic, one of whose multitudinous effects is that of sending all the patient's thoughts circling around one central idea like planets round the sun. Painful and agonizing as had been my suspense,—my oscillation between hope and dread,—during my wanderings with the Lovells, these wanderings had not been without their moments of comfort, for all of which I had been indebted to Sinfì. She would sit with me in an English lane, under a hedge or tree, on a balmy summer evening, or among the primroses, wild hyacinths, buttercups and daisies of the sweet meadows, chattering her reminiscences of Winifred. She would mostly end by saying: "Winnie was very fond on ye, brother, and we shall find her yit. The Golden Hand on Snowdon wasn't sent there for nothink. The dukkeripen says you'll marry her yit; a love like yourn can follow the tryenest patrin as ever wur laid." Then she would play on her crwth and say, "Ah, brother, I shall be able to make this crwth bring ye a sight of Winnie's livin' mullo if she's alive, and there ain't a sperrit of the hills as wouldn't answer to it."

Of Gorgios generally, however, Sinfì had at heart a feeling something akin to dread. I could not understand it.

"Why do you dislike the Gorgios, Sinfì?" I said to her one day on Lake Ogwen, after the return of the Lovells to Wales. We were trout-fishing from a boat anchored to a heavy block of granite which she fastened

to a rope and heaved overboard with a strength that would have surpassed that of most Englishwomen.

"That's nuther here nor there, brother," she replied, mysteriously. So months and months dragged by, and brought no trace of Winifred.

IV

The Leader of the Aylwinians

I

ONE day as Sinf and I were strolling through the lovely glades between Capel Curig and Bettws y Coed, on our way to a fishing-place, we sat down by a stream to eat some bread and cheese we had brought with us.

The sunlight, as it broke here and there between the thick foliage, was playing upon the little cascades in such magical fashion—turning the water into a torrent that seemed as though molten rubies and sapphires and opals were ablaze in one dancing faery stream,—that even the dark tragedy of human life seemed enveloped for a moment in an atmosphere of poetry and beauty. Sinf gazed at it silently, then she said:

"This is the very place where Winnie wonst tried to save a hernshaw as wur wounded. She wur tryin' to ketch hold on it, as the water wur carryin' it along, and he pretty nigh beat her to death wi' his wings for her pains. It wur then as she come an' stayed along o' us for a bit, and she got to be as fond o' my crwth as you be's, an' she used to say that if there wur any music as 'ud draw her sperrit back to the airth arter she wur dead it 'ud be the sound o' my crwth; but there she wur wrong as wrong could be: Romany music couldn't never touch Gorgio sperrit: 'tain't a bit likely. But it can draw her livin' mullo [wraith]." And as she spoke she began to play her crwth *pizzicato* and to sing the opening bars of the old Welsh incantation which I had heard on Snowdon on that never-to-be-forgotten morning.

This, as usual, sent my mind at once back to the picture of Fenella Stanley calling round her by the aid of her music the spirits of Snowdon. And then a strange hallucination came upon me, that made me clutch at Sinf's arm. Close by her, reflected in a little glassy pool divided off from the current by a ring of stones, two blue eyes seemed gazing. Then the face and the entire figure of Winifred appeared, but Winifred dressed as a beggar girl in rags, Winifred standing at a street corner holding out matches for sale.

"Winifred!" I exclaimed; and then the hallucination passed, and Sinf's features were reflected in the water. My exclamation had the strangest effect upon Sinf. Her lips, which usually wore a peculiarly proud and fearless curve, quivered, and were losing the brilliant rosebud redness which mostly characterized them. The little blue tattoo rosettes at the corners of her mouth seemed to be growing more distinct as she gazed in the water through eyes dark and mysterious as Night's, but, like Night's own eyes, ready, I thought, to call up the throbbing fires of a million stars.

"What made you cry out 'Winifred'?" she said, as the music ceased.

"What you told me about the spirits following the crwth was causing the strangest dream," I answered. "I thought I saw Winnie's face reflected in the water, and I thought she was in awful distress. And all the time it was your face."

"That wur her livin' mullo," said Sinf, solemnly.

Convinced though I was that the hallucination was the natural result of Sinf's harping upon the literal fulfilment of the curse, it depressed me greatly.

Close to this beautiful spot we came suddenly upon two tourists sketching. And now occurred one of those surprises of which I have found that real life is far more full than any fiction dares to be. As we passed the artists, I heard one call out to the other, with a "burr" which I will not attempt to render, having never lived in the "Black Country":

"You have a true eye for composition; what do you think of this tree?"

The speaker's remarkable appearance attracted my attention.

"Well," said I to Sinf, "that's the first time I ever saw a painter shaven and dressed in a coat like a Quaker's."

Sinf looked across at the speaker through the curling smoke from my pipe, gave a start of surprise, and then said: "So you've never seed *him*? That's because you're a country Johnny, brother, and don't know

nothink about Londra life. That's a friend o' mine from Londra as has painted me many's the time."

"Painted you?" I said; "the man in black, with the goggle eyes, squatting there under the white umbrella? What's his name?"

"That's the cele'rated Mr. Wilderspin, an' he's painted me many's the time, an' a rare rum 'un he is too. Dordi! it makes me laugh to think on him. Most Gorgios is mad, more or less, but he's the maddest 'un I ever know'd."

We had by this time got close to the painter's companion, who, sitting upright on his camp-stool, was busy with his brush. Without shifting his head to look at us, or removing his eyes from his work, he said, in a voice of striking power and volume: "Nothing but an imperfect experience of life, Lady Sinfi, could have made you pronounce our friend there to be the maddest Gorgio living."

"Dordi!" exclaimed Sinfi, turning sharply round in great astonishment. "Fancy seein' both on 'em here!"

"Mad our friend is, no doubt, Lady Sinfi," said the painter, without looking round, "but not so mad as certain illustrious Gorgios I could name, some of them born legislators and some of them (apparently) born R.A.'s."

"Who should ha' thought of seein' 'em both here?" said Sinfi again.

"That," said the painter, without even yet turning to look at us or staying the movement of his brush, "is a remark I never make in a little dot of a world like this, Lady Sinfi, where I expect to see everybody everywhere. But, my dear Romany chi," he continued, now turning slowly round, "in passing your strictures upon the Gorgio world, you should remember that you belong to a very limited aristocracy, and that your remarks may probably fall upon ears of an entirely inferior and Gorgio convolution."

"No offence, I hope," said Sinfi.

"Offence in calling the Gorgios mad? Not the smallest, save that you have distinctly plagiarized from me in your classification of the Gorgio race."

His companion called out again. "Just one moment! Do come and look at the position of this tree."

"In a second, Wilderspin, in a second," said the other. "An old friend and myself are in the midst of a discussion."

"A discussion!" said the person addressed as Wilderspin. "And with whom, pray?"

"With Lady Sinfi Lovell,—a discussion as to the exact value of your own special kind

of madness in relation to the tom-fooleries of the Gorgio mind in general."

"Kekka! kekka!" said Sinfi, "you shouldn't have said that."

"And I was on the point of proving to her ladyship that in these days, when Art has become genteel, and even New Grub Street 'decorates' her walls—when success means not so much painting fine pictures as building fine houses to paint in—the greatest compliment you can pay to a man of genius is surely to call him either a beggar or a madman."

The peculiarity of this "chaff" was that it was uttered in a simple and serious tone, in which not the faintest tinge of ironical intent was apparent. The other artist looked across and said: "Dear me! Sinfi Lovell! I am pleased to see you, Sinfi. I will ask you for a sitting to-morrow. A study of your head would be very suggestive among the Welsh hills."

The man who had been "chaffing" Sinfi then rose and walked towards his Quaker-like companion, and I had an opportunity of observing him fully. I saw that he was a spare man, wearing a brown velvet coat and a dark felt hat. The collar of the coat seemed to have been made carefully larger than usual, in order to increase the apparent width of his chest. His hair was brown and curly, but close cut. His features were regular, perhaps handsome. His complexion was bright,—fair almost,—rosy in hue, and his eyes were brown.

He shook hands with Sinfi as he passed us, and gave me a glance of that rapid and all-comprehending kind which seems to take in, at once, a picture in its every detail.

"What do you think of him?" said Sinfi to me, as he passed on and we two sat down on the grass by the side of the stream.

"I am puzzled," I replied, "to know whether he is a young man who looks like a middle-aged one, or a middle-aged man who looks like a young one. How's his hair under the hat?"

"Thinnish atop," said Sinfi, laconically.

"And I'm puzzled," I added, still looking at him as he walked over the grass, "as to whether he's a little man who looks middle-sized, or a middle-sized man who looks little."

"He's a little big 'un," said Sinfi; "about the height o' Rhona Bozzell's Tarno Rye."

"Altogether he puzzles me, Sinfi!"

"He puzzled me same way at fust."

What was it that made me take an interest so strange, strong, and sudden in this man? Without a hint of hair upon his face, while juvenile curls clustered thick and short beneath his wide-awake, he had at first

struck me as being not much more than a lad, till, as he gave me that rapid, searching glance in passing, I perceived the little crow's feet round his eyes, and he then struck me immediately as being probably on the verge of thirty-five. His figure was slim and thin, his waist almost girlish in its fall. I should have considered him small had not the unusually deep, loud, manly, and sonorous voice with which he had accosted Sinfi conveyed an impression of size and weight such as even big men do not often produce. This deep voice, coupled with that gaunt kind of cheek which we associate with the most demure people, produced an effect of sedateness such as I should have expected to find (and did *not* find) in the other man—the man of the shaven cheek and Quaker costume; but, in the one glance I had got from those watchful, sagacious, twinkling eyes, there was an expression quite peculiar to them, quite inscrutable, quite indescribable.

II

"CAN you reckon him up, brother?" said Sinfi, taking my meerschaum from my lips to refill it for me, as she was fond of doing.

"No."

"Nor I nuther," said Sinfi. "Nor I can't pen his dukkerin' nuther, though often's the time I've tried it."

During this time the two friends seemed to have finished their colloquy upon "composition"; for they both came up to us. Sinfi rose; I sat still on the grass, smoking my pipe, listening to the chatter of the water as it rushed over the rocks. By this time my curiosity in the younger man had died away. My mind was occupied with the dream-picture of a little blue-eyed girl struggling with a wounded heron. I had noticed, however, that he of the piercing eyes did not look at me again, having entirely exhausted at a glance such interest as I had momentarily afforded him; while his companion seemed quite unconscious of my presence as he stood there, his large, full, deep, brown eyes gazing apparently at something over my head, a long way off. Also I had noticed that "Visionary" was stamped upon this man's every feature—that he seemed an inspired baby of forty, talking there to his companion and to Sinfi, the sun falling upon his long, brown, curly hair, mixed with grey, which fell from beneath his hat, and floated around his collar like a mane.

When my reverie had passed, I found the artists trying to arrange with Sinfi to give an open-air sitting to one of them, the man

addressed as Wilderspin. Sinfi seemed willing enough to come to terms; but I saw her look round at me as if saying to herself, "What am I to do with you?"

"I should like for my brother to sit too," I heard her say.

"Surely!" said Wilderspin. "Your brother would be a great gain to my picture."

Sinfi then came to me, and said that the painter wanted me to sit to him.

"But," said I in an undertone, "the Gorgios will certainly find out that I am no Romany."

"Not they," said Sinfi, "the Gorgios is sich fools. Why, bless you, a Gorgio ain't got eyes and ears like a Romany. You don't suppose as a Gorgio can hear or see or smell like a Romany can?"

"But you forget, Sinfi, that I am a Gorgio, and there are not many Romanies can boast of better senses than your brother Hal."

"Dordi!" said Sinfi, "that's jist like your mock-modesty. Your great grandmother wur a Romany, and it's my belief that if you only went back fur enough, you'd find you had jist as good Romany blood in your veins as I have, and my daddy is a duke, you know, a real, reg'lar, out-an'-out Romany duke."

"I'm afraid you flatter me, sister," I replied. "However, let's try the Gorgios;" and I got up and walked with her close to the two sketchers.

Wilderspin was on the point of engaging me, when the other man, without troubling to look at me again, said:

"He's no more a Romany than I am."

"Ain't a Romany?" said Sinfi. "Who says my brother ain't a Romany? Where did you ever see a Gorgio with a skin like that?" she said, triumphantly pulling up my sleeve and exposing one of my wrists. "That ain't sunburn, that's the real Romany brown, an' we's twinses, only I'm the biggest, an' we's the child'n of a duke, a real, reg'lar, out-an'-out Romany duke."

He gave a glance at the exposed wrist.

"As to the Romany brown," said he, "a little soap would often make a change in the best Romany brown—ducal or other."

"Why, look at his neck," said Sinfi, turning down my neckerchief; "is that sunburn, or is it Romany brown, I should like to know?"

"I assure you," said the speaker, still addressing her in the same grave, measured voice, "that the Romanies have no idea what a little soap can do with the Romany brown."

"Do you mean to say," cried Sinfi, now entirely losing her temper (for on the subject

of Romany cleanliness she, the most cleanly of women, was keenly sensitive)—“do you mean to say as the Romany chals an’ the Romany chies don’t wash theirselves? I know what you fine Gorgios *do* say,—you’re allus a-tellin’ lies about us Romanies. Brother,” she cried, turning now to me in a great fury, “I’m a duke’s chavi, an’ mustn’t fight no mumpy Gorgios; why don’t *you* take an’ make his bed for him?”

And certainly the man’s supercilious impertinence was beginning to irritate me.

“I should advise you to withdraw that about the soap,” I said quietly, looking at him.

“Oh! and if I don’t?”

“Why, then I suppose I must do as my sister bids,” said I. “I must make your bed,” pointing to the grass beneath his feet. “But I think it only fair to tell you that I am somewhat of a fighting man, which you probably are not.”

“You mean? . . .” said he (turning round menacingly, but with no more notion of how to use his fists than a lobster).

“I mean that we should not be fighting on equal terms,” I said.

“In other words,” said he, “you mean? . . .”, and he came nearer.

“In other words, I mean that, judging from the way in which you are advancing towards me now, the result of such an encounter might not tend to the honour and glory of the British artist in Wales.”

“But,” said he, “you are no Gypsy. Who are you?”

“My name is Henry Aylwin,” said I; “and I must ask you to withdraw your words about the virtues of soap, as my sister objects to them.”

“What?” cried he, losing for the first time his matchless *sang-froid*. “Henry Aylwin?” Then he looked at me in silent amazement, while an expression of the deepest humorous enjoyment overspread his features, making them positively shine as though oiled. Finally, he burst into a loud laugh, that was all the more irritating from the manifest effort he made to restrain it.

“Did I hear his Majesty of Gypsydom aright?” he said, as soon as his hilarity allowed him to speak. “Is the humble bed of a mere painter to be made for him by the representative of the proud Aylwins, the genteel Aylwins, the heir-presumptive Aylwins—the most respectable branch of a most respectable family, which, alas! has its ungenteel, its bohemian, its vulgar off-shoots? Did I hear his Majesty of Gypsydom aright?”

He leant against a tree, and gave utterance to peal after peal of laughter.

I advanced with rapidly rising anger, but his hilarity had so overmastered him that he did not heed it.

“Wilderspin,” cried he, “come here! Pray come here. Have I not often told you the reason why I threw up my engagement with my theatrical manager, and missed my high vocation in ungenteel comedy? Have I not often told you that it sprang from no disrespect to my friends, the comic actors, but from the feeling that no comedian can hope to be comic enough to compete with the real thing—the true harlequinade of everyday life, roaring and screaming around me wherever I go?”

Then, without waiting for his companion’s reply, he turned to me, and giving an added volume to his sonorous voice, said:

“And you, Sir King, do you know whose bed your Majesty was going to make at the bidding of—well, of a duke’s chavi?”

I advanced with still growing anger.

“Stay, King Bamfylde, stay,” said he; “shall the beds of the mere ungenteel Aylwins, ‘the outside Aylwins,’ be made by the high Gypsy-gentility of Raxton?”

A light began to break in upon me. “Surely,” I said, “surely you are not Cyril Aylwin, the—?”

“Pray finish your sentence, sir, and say the low bohemian painter, the representative of the great ungenteel—the successor to the Aylwin peerage.”

The other painter, looking in blank amazement at my newly-found kinsman’s extraordinary merriment, exclaimed, “Bless me! Then you really can laugh aloud, Mr. Cyril. What has happened? What can have happened to make my dear friend laugh aloud?”

“Well he may ask,” said Cyril, turning to me. “He knows that ever since I was a boy in jackets I have despised the man who, in a world where all is so comic, could select any particular point of the farce for his empty guffaw. But I am conquered at last. Let me introduce you, Wilderspin, to my kinsman, Henry Aylwin of Raxton Hall, alias Lord Henry Lovell of Little Egypt—one of Duke Panuel’s interesting twinses.”

But Wilderspin’s astonishment, apparently, was not at the *rencontre*: it was at the spectacle of his companion’s hilarity. “Wonderful!” he murmured, with his eyes still fastened upon Cyril. “My dear friend can laugh aloud. Most wonderful! What can have happened?”

This is what had happened. By one of those strange coincidences which make the drama of real life far more wonderful than the drama of any stage, I, in my character of wandering Gypsy, had been thrown across

the path of the *bête noire* of my mother and aunt, Cyril Aylwin, a painter of bohemian proclivities, who (under the name of "Cyril") had obtained some considerable reputation. This kinsman of mine had been held up to me as a warning from my very childhood, though wherein lay his delinquencies I never did clearly understand, save that he had once been an actor—before acting had become genteel. Often as I had heard of this eccentric painter as the representative of the branch of the family which preceded mine in the succession to the coveted earldom, I had never seen him before.

He stood and looked at me in a state of intense amusement, but did not speak.

"So you are Cyril Aylwin?" I said. "Still you must withdraw what you said to my sister about the soap."

"Delicious!" said he, grasping my hand. "I had no idea that high gentility numbered chivalry among its virtues. Lady Sinf, he continued, turning to her, "they say this brother of yours is a character, and, by Jove! he is. And as to you, dear lady, I am proud of the family connection. The man who has two Romany Rye kinsmen may be excused for showing a little pride. I withdraw every word about the virtues of soap, and am convinced that it can do nothing with the true Romany-Aylwin brown."

On that we shook hands all round. "But, Sinf," said I, "why did you not tell me that this was my kinsman?"

"'Cause I didn't know," said she. "I han't never seed him since I've know'd you. I always heerd his friends call him Cyril, and so I used to call him Mr. Cyril."

"But, Lady Sinf, my Helen of Little Egypt," said Cyril, "suppose that in my encounter with my patrician cousin—an encounter which would have been entirely got up in honour of you—suppose it had happened that I had made your brother's bed for him?"

"You make *his* bed!" exclaimed Sinf, laughing. "Dordi! how you would ha' went down afore the Swimmin' Rei!"

"But suppose that, on the contrary, he had gone down before me," said Cyril; "suppose I had been the death of your Swimming Rei, I should have been tried for the wilful murder of a prince of Little Egypt, the son of a Romany duke. Why, Helen of Troy was not half so mischievous a beauty as you."

* By the Welsh Gypsies, but few of whom can swim, I was called "the Swimmin' Rei," a name which would have been far more appropriately given to Percy Aylwin (Rhona Boswell's lover), one of the strongest swimmers in England; but he was simply called the Tarno Pyc (the young gentleman).

"You was safe enough, no fear," said Sinf. "It 'ud take six o' you to settle the Swimmin' Rei."

I found that Cyril and his strange companion were staying at the "Royal Oak," at Bettws y Coed. They asked me to join them, but when I told them I "could not leave my people, who were encamped about two miles off," Cyril again looked at me with an expression of deepest enjoyment, and exclaimed "delightful creature."

Turning to Sinf, he said: "Then we'll go with you and call upon the noble father of the twins, my old friend King Panuel."

"He ain't a king," said Sinf modestly, "he's only a duke."

"You'll give us some tea, Lady Sinf?" said Cyril. "No tea equal to Gypsy tea."

"Romany tea, Mr. Cyril," replied Sinf, with perfect dignity and grace. "My daddy, the duke, will be pleased to welcome you."

We all strolled towards the tents. I offered to carry an umbrella and a campstool. Cyril walked briskly away with Sinf, leaving me to get on with Wilderspin as best I could. Before the other two were out of earshot, however, I heard Cyril say,

"You shouldn't have taken so seriously my chaff about the soap, Sinf. You ought to know me better by this time than to think that I would really insult you."

"How you would ha' went down afore the Swimmin' Rei!" replied Sinf regretfully.

III

BETWEEN my new companion, Wilderspin, and myself there was an awkward silence for some time. He was evidently in a brown study. I had ample opportunity for examining his face. Deeply impressed upon his forehead there was, as I now perceived, an ancient scar of a peculiar shape. At last, a lovely bit of scenery broke the spell, and conversation began to flow freely.

We had nearly got within sight of the encampment when he said,

"I am in some perplexity, sir, about the various branches of your family. Aylwin, I need not tell you, was the name of the greatest man of this age, and I am anxious to know what is exactly your connection with him."

"You surprise me," I said. "Out of our own family, in its various branches, there is, I have been told, no very large number of Aylwins, and I had no idea that one of them had become famous."

"I did not say famous, sir, but great; two very different words. Yet, in a certain deep sense, it may be said of Philip Aylwin's

name that since his lamented death it has even become famous. The Aylwinians (of which body I am, as you are no doubt aware, founder and president) are, I may say, becoming——”

“Philip Aylwin!” I said. “Why, that was my father. He famous!”

The recollection of the essay upon “Hamalet and Hamlet,” the thought of the brass-rubbings, the knee-caps and mittens, came before me in an irresistibly humorous light, and I could not repress a smile. Then arose upon me the remembrance of the misery that had fallen upon Winnie and myself from his monomania and what seemed to me his superstitious folly, and I could not withhold an angry scowl. Then came the picture of the poor scarred breast, the love-token, and the martyrdom that came to him who had too deeply loved, and smile and frown both passed from my face as I murmured,—“Poor father! he famous!”

“Philip Aylwin’s son!” said Wilderspin, staring at me. Then, raising his hat as reverentially to me as if I had been the son of Shakespeare himself, he said, “Mr. Aylwin, since Mary Wilderspin went home to heaven, the one great event of my life has been the reading of *The Veiled Queen*, your father’s book of inspired wisdom upon the modern Renaissance of Wonder in the mind of Man. To apply his principles to Art, sir—to give artistic rendering to the profound idea hinted at in the marvellous vignette on the title-page of his third edition—has been, for some time past, the proud task of my life. And you are the great man’s son! Astonishing! Although his great learning overwhelms my mind and appals my soul (whom, indeed should it not overwhelm and appal?) there is not a pamphlet of his that I do not know intimately, almost by heart.”

“Including the paper on ‘Hamlet and Hamalet, and the wide region of No-where?’”

“Including that and everything.”

“Did you know him, Mr. Wilderspin?”

“Not in the flesh: in the spirit, who knows him so well? Your mother I have had the pleasure of meeting at the house of Lord Sleaford, and indeed I have had the distinguished honour of painting her portrait; but the great author of *The Veiled Queen*—the inspired designer of the vignette symbolical of the Renaissance of Wonder in Art—I never had the rapture of seeing. This very day, the anniversary of his birth,” he continued, “is a great day in the Aylwinian calendar.”

“My father’s birthday? Why, so it is!”

“Mr. Aylwin, is it possible that the anniversary of a day so momentous for the world is forgotten—forgotten by the very issue of the great man’s loins?”

“The fact is,” said I, in some confusion, “I have been living with the Gypsies, and, you see, Mr. Wilderspin, the passage of time——”

“The son of Philip Aylwin a Gypsy!” murmured Wilderspin meditatively, and unconscious evidently that he was speaking aloud—“a Gypsy! Still it would surely be a mistake to suppose,” he continued, perfectly oblivious now of my presence, “that the vagaries of the son can really bring shame upon the head of the father.”

“But, by God!” I cried, “it is no mistake that the vagaries of the father can bring shame and sorrow and misery upon the child. I could name a couple of fathers—sleeping very close to each other now—whose vagaries——”

My sudden anger was carrying me away; but I stopped, recollecting myself.

“Doubtless,” said Wilderspin, “there are fathers and fathers. The son of Philip Aylwin has assuredly a right to be critical in regard to all other fathers than his own.”

I looked in his face; the expression of solemn earnestness was quite unmistakable.

“It is not you,” I said, “it is Heaven, or else it is the blind jester Circumstance, that is playing this joke upon me!”

“To your honoured father,” he continued, taking not the smallest notice of my interjection, “I owe everything. From his grave he supports my soul; from his grave he gives me ideas; from his grave he makes my fame. How should I fail to honour his son, even though he——”

Of course he was going to add—“even though he be a vagabond associating with vagabonds,”—but he left the sentence unfinished.

“I confess, Mr. Wilderspin,” said I, “that you speak in such enigmas that it would be folly for me to attempt to answer you.”

“I wish,” said Wilderspin, “that all enigmas were as soluble as this. Let me ask you a question, sir. When you stood before my picture, ‘Faith and Love,’ in Bond Street, did you not perceive that both it and the predella were inspired entirely by your father’s great work, *The Veiled Queen*, or rather that they are mere pictorial renderings and illustrations of that grand effort of man’s soul in its loftiest development?”

I had never heard of the picture in question. As for the book, my father, perceiving

my great dislike of mysticism, had always shrunk from showing me any effusion of his that was not of a simply antiquarian kind. In Switzerland, however, after his death, while waiting for the embalmer to finish his work, I had become, during a few days' reading, acquainted with *The Veiled Queen*. It was a new edition containing an "added chapter," full of subtle spiritualistic symbols. Amid what had seemed to me mere mystical jargon about the veil of Isis being uplifted, not by Man's reason, not by such researches as those of Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and the continental evolutionists, but by Faith and Love, I had come across passages of burning eloquence.

"I am sorry to say," I replied, "that my Gypsy wanderings are again answerable for my shortcomings. I have not yet seen your picture. When I do see it I——"

"Not seen 'Faith and Love' and the equally wonderful predella at the foot of it?" he exclaimed incredulously. "Ah, but you have been living among the Gypsies. It is the greatest picture of the modern world; for, Mr. Aylwin, it renders in Art the inevitable attitude of its own time and country towards the unseen world, and renders it as completely as did the masterpiece of Polygnotus in the Lesche of the Cnidians at Delphi—as completely as did the wonderful frescoes of Andrea Orcagna on the walls of the Campo Santo at Pisa."

"And you attribute your success to the inspiration you derived from my father's book?"

"To that and to the spirit of Mary Wilderspin in heaven."

"Then you are a Spiritualist?"

"I am an Aylwinian, the opposite (need I say?) of a Darwinian."

"Of the school of Blake, perhaps?" I asked.

"Of the school of Blake? No. He was on the right road; but he was a writer of verses! Art is a jealous mistress, Mr. Aylwin: the painter who rhymes is lost. Even the master himself is so much the weaker by every verse he has written. I never could make a rhyme in my life, and have faithfully shunned printer's ink, the black blight of the painter. I am my own school; the school of the spirit world."

"I am very curious," I said, "to know in what way my father and the spirits can have inspired a great painter. Of the vignette I may claim to know something. Of the spirits as artists I have of course no knowledge, but as regards my father, he, I am certain, could hardly have told a Raphael from a chromo-lithograph copy. He was, in spite of that same vignette, most ignorant of art.

Raxton Hall possesses nothing but family portraits."

IV

By this time we had reached the encampment, which was close by a waterfall among ferns and wild-flowers. Little Jerry Lovell, a child of about four years of age, came running to meet me with a dead water-wagtail in his hand which he had knocked down.

"Me kill de Romany Chiriklo," said he, and then proceeded to tell me very gravely that, having killed the "Gypsy magpie," he was bound to have a great lady for his sweetheart.

"Jerry," said I bitterly, "you begin with love and superstition early; you are an incipient 'Aylwinian': take care."

When I explained to Wilderspin that this was one of the Romany beliefs, he said he did not at present see the connection between a dead water-wagtail and a live lady, but that such a connection might doubtless exist. Paniel Lovell now came forward to greet and welcome Wilderspin. Sinfì and Cyril had evidently walked at a brisk rate, for already tea was spread out on a cloth. The fire was blazing beneath a kettle slung from the "kettle-prop." The party were waiting for us. Sinfì, however, never idle, was filling up the time by giving lessons in riding to Euri and Sylvester Lovell, two dusky urchins in their early teens, while her favourite bantam-cock Pharaoh, standing on a donkey's back, his wattles gleaming like coral in the sun, was crowing lustily. Cyril, who lay stretched among the ferns, his chin resting in his hands and a cigarette in his mouth, was looking on with the deepest interest. As I passed behind him to introduce Wilderspin to Videy Lovell (who was making tea), I heard Cyril say,

"Lady Sinfì, you must and shall teach me how to make an adversary's bed—the only really essential part of a liberal education."

"Brother," said Sinfì, turning to me, "your thoughts are a-flyin' off agin; keep your spirits up afore all these."

The leafy dingle was recalling Graylingham Wilderness and "Fairy Dell," where little Winifred used to play Titania to my childish Oberon, and dance the Gypsy "shawl-dance" Sinfì had taught her!

So much was I occupied with these reminiscences that I had not observed that during our absence, our camp had been honoured by visitors. These were Jericho Boswell, christened, I believe, Jasper, his daughter Rhona, and James Herne, called

on account of his accomplishments as a penman the Scollard. Although Jasper Boswell and Panuel Lovell were rival Griengoes, there was no jealousy between them—indeed, they were excellent friends.

There were many points of similarity between their characters. Each had risen from comparative poverty to what might be called wealth, and risen in the same way, that is to say, by straightforward dealing with the Gorgios, although as regarded Jericho, Rhona was generally credited with having acted as a great auxiliary in amassing his wealth. All over the country the farmers and horse-dealers knew that neither Jasper nor Panuel ever bishoped a gry, or indulged in any other horse-dealing tricks. Their very simplicity of character had done what all the crafty tricks of certain compeers of theirs had failed to do. They were also very much alike in their good-natured and humorous way of taking all the ups and downs of life.

A very different kind of Romany was the Scollard; so different, indeed, that it was hard to think that he was of the same race: Romany guile incarnate was the Scollard. He suggested even in his personal appearance the typical Gypsy of the novel and the stage, rather than the true Gypsy as he lives and moves. The Scollard was well known to be half-crazed with a passion for Rhona Boswell, who was the *fiancée* of that cousin of mine, Percy Aylwin, before mentioned. Percy was considered to be a hopelessly erratic character. Much against the wish of his parents, he had been brought up as a sailor; but on seeing Rhona Boswell he promptly fell in love with her, and quitted the sea in order to be near her. And no man who ever heard Rhona's laugh professed to wonder at Percy's infatuation. As a Griengro her father, Jericho Boswell, who had no son, was said to have owed his prosperity to Rhona's instinctive knowledge of horseflesh.

While our guests, Romany and Gorgio, were doing justice to the trout, Welsh brown bread and butter and jam which Videy had spread before them, Sinfi went to the back of the camp to look at the ponies, and I got into conversation with Rhona Boswell, whom I remembered so well as a child. At first she was shy and embarrassed, doubtful, as I perceived, whether or not she ought to talk about Winnie. She waited to see whether I introduced the subject, and finding that I did not, she began to talk about Sinfi, and plied me with questions as to what we two had been doing, and where we had been during our wanderings through Wales.

When tea was over and Cyril was in lively

talk with Sinfi, Wilderspin grew restless, and I perceived that he wanted to resume his conversation with me about his picture. I said to him: "This idea of my father's which has inspired you, and resulted in such great work, what is its nature?"

"I am a painter, Mr. Aylwin, and nothing more," he replied. "I could only express Philip Aylwin's ideas by describing my picture and the predella beneath it. Will you permit me to do so?"

"May I ask you," I said, "as a favour to do so?"

Immediately his face became very bright, and into his eyes returned the far-off look already described.

"I will first take the predella, which represents Isis behind the Veil," said he. "Imagine yourself thousands of years away from this time. Imagine yourself thousands of miles away, among real Egyptians."

"Real 'Gyptians!" cried Sinfi. "Who says the Romanies ain't real 'Gyptians? Anybody as says my daddy ain't a real 'Gyptian duke'll ha' to set to with Sinfi Lovell."

"Nonsense," said Cyril, smiling, and playing idly with a coral amulet dangling from Sinfi's neck; he's talking about the ancient Egyptians: Egyptian mummies, you silly Lady Sinfi. You're not a mummy, are you?"

"Well, no, I ain't a mummy as fur as I knows on," said Sinfi, only half-appeased; "but my daddy's a 'Gyptian duke for all that, —ain't you, dad?"

"So it seems, Sin," said Panuel, "but I ommust begin to wish I worn't! it makes you feel so blazin' shy bein' a duke all of a sudden."

"Dabla!" said the guest Jericho Boswell. "What, Pan, has she made a dook on ye?"

The Scollard began to grin.

"Pull that ugly mug o' yourn straight, Jim Herne," said Sinfi, "else I'll come and pull it straight for you."

Wilderspin took no notice of the interruption, but addressed me as though no one else were within earshot.

"Imagine yourself standing in an Egyptian city, where innumerable lamps of every hue are shining. It is one of the great lamp-fêtes of Sais, which all Egypt has come to see. There, in honour of the feast, sits a tall woman, covered by a veil. But the painting is so wonderful, Mr. Aylwin, that, though you see a woman's face expressed behind the veil—though you see the warm flesh-tints and the light of the eyes through the aerial film—you cannot judge of the character of the face—you cannot see

whether it is that of woman in her noblest, or woman in her basest, type. The eyes sparkle, but you cannot say whether they sparkle with malignity or benevolence—whether they are fired with what Philip Aylwin calls 'the love-light of the seventh heaven,' or are threatening with 'the hungry flames of the seventh hell!' There she sits in front of a portico, while, asleep, with folded wings, is crouched on one side of her the figure of Love, with rosy feathers, and on the other the figure of Faith, with plumage of a deep azure. Over her head, on the portico, are written the words:—'I am all that hath been, is, and shall be, and no mortal hath uplifted my veil. The tinted lights falling on the group are shed, you see, from the rainbow-coloured lamps of Sais, which are countless. But in spite of all these lamps, Mr. Aylwin, no mortal can see the face behind that veil. And why? Those who alone could uplift it, the figures with folded wings—Faith and Love—are fast asleep at the great Queen's feet. When Faith and Love are sleeping there, what are the many-coloured lamps of science?—of what use are they to the famished soul of man?"

"A striking idea!" I exclaimed.

"Your father's," replied Wilderspin, in a tone of such reverence that one might have imagined my father's spectre stood before him. "It symbolises that base Darwinian cosmogony which Carlyle spits at, and the great and good John Ruskin scorns. But this design is only the predella beneath the picture 'Faith and Love.' Now look at the picture itself, Mr. Aylwin," he continued, as though it were upon an easel before me. "You are at Sais no longer: you are now, as the architecture around you shows, in a Greek city by the sea. In the light of innumerable lamps, torches, and wax tapers, a procession is moving through the streets. You see Isis, as Pelagia, advancing between two ranks, one of joyous maidens in snow-white garments, adorned with wreaths, and scattering from their bosoms all kinds of dewy flowers; the other of youths, playing upon pipes and flutes, mixed with men with shaven shining crowns, playing upon sistra of brass, silver, and gold. Isis wears a Dorian tunic, fastened on her breast by a tasselled knot,—an azure-coloured tunic bordered with silver stars,—and an upper garment of the colour of the moon at moon-rise. Her head is crowned with a chaplet of sea-flowers, and round her throat is a necklace of seaweeds, wet still with seawater, and shimmering with all the shifting hues of the sea. On either side of her stand the awakened angels, uplifting from her face a veil whose folds flow soft as water over her

shoulders and over the wings of Faith and Love. A symbol of the true cosmogony which Philip Aylwin gave to the world!"

"Why, that's esackly like the wreath o' seaweeds as poor Winnie Wynne used to make," said Rhona Boswell.

"The photograph of Raxton Fair!" I cried. "Frank and Winnie, and little Bob Milford, and the seaweeds!" The terrible past came upon my soul like an avalanche, and I leapt up and walked frantically towards my own waggon. The picture, which was nothing but an idealisation of the vignette upon the title-page of my father's book—the vignette taken from the photograph of Winnie, my brother Frank and one of my fisher-boy playmates—brought back upon me—all!

Sinfi came to me.

"What is it, brother?" said she.

"Sinfi," I cried, "what was that saying of your mother's about fathers and children?"

"My poor mammy's daddy, when she wur a little chavi, beat her so cruel that she was a ailin' woman all her life, and she used to say, 'For good or for ill, you must dig deep to bury your daddy.'"

I went back and resumed my seat by Wilderspin's side, while Sinfi returned to Cyril.

Wilderspin evidently thought that I had been overcome by the marvellous power of his description, and went on as though there had been no interruption.

"Isis," said he, "stands before you; Isis, not matronly and stern as the mother of Horus, nor as the Isis of the licentious orgies; but (as Philip Aylwin says) 'Isis, the maiden, gazing around her, with pure but mystic eyes.'"

"And you got from my father's book, *The Veiled Queen*, all this"—I was going to add—"jumble of classic story and mediæval mysticism,"—but I stopped short in time.

"All this and more—a thousand times more than could be rendered by the art of any painter. For the age that Carlyle spits at and the great and good John Ruskin scorns is gross, Mr. Aylwin; the age is grovelling and gross. No wonder, then, that Art in our time has nothing but technical excellence; that it despises conscience, despises aspiration, despises soul, despises even ideas—that it is worthless, all worthless."

"Except as practised in a certain temple of art in a certain part of London that shall be nameless, whence Calliope, Euterpe, and all the rhythmic sisters are banished," interposed Cyril.

"But how did you attain to this superlative excellence, Mr. Wilderspin?" I asked.

"That would indeed be a long story to tell," said he. "Yet Philip Aylwin's son has a right to know all that I can tell. My dear friend here knows that, though famous now, I climbed the ladder of Art from the bottom rung; nay, before I could even reach the bottom rung, what a toilsome journey was mine to get within sight of the ladder at all! The future biographer of the painter of 'Faith and Love' will have to record that he was born in a hovel; that he was nursed in a smithy; that his cradle was a piece of board suspended from the smithy ceiling by a chain, which his mother—his widowed mother—kept swinging by an occasional touch in the intervals of her labours at the forge."

I did not even smile at this speech, so entirely was the effect of his egotism killed by the wonderful way of pronouncing the word "mother."

"You have heard," he continued in a voice whose intense earnestness had an irresistible fascination for the ear, like that of a Hindoo charmer—"you have heard of the mother-bird who feeds her young from the blood of her own breast; that bird but feebly typifies her whom God, in His abundant love of me, gave me for a mother. There were ten of us—ten little children. My mother was a female blacksmith of Old Hill, who for four shillings and sixpence a week worked sixteen hours a day for the fogger, hammering hot iron into nails. The scar upon my forehead—look! it is shaped like the red-hot nail that one day leapt upon me from her anvil, as I lay asleep in my swing above her head. I would not lose it for all the diadems of all the monarchs of this world. She was much too poor to educate us. When the wolf is at the door, Mr. Aylwin, and the very flesh and blood of the babes in danger of perishing, what mother can find time to think of education, to think even of the salvation of the soul,—to think of anything but food—food? Have you ever wanted food, Mr. Aylwin?" he suddenly said in a voice so magnetic from its very earnestness, that I seemed for the moment to feel the faintness of hunger.

"No, no," I said, a tide of grief rushing upon me; "but there is one who perhaps—there is one I love more dearly than your mother loved her babes—"

Sini rose, and came and placed her hand upon my shoulder and whispered,

"She ain't a-starvin', brother; she never starved on the hills. She's only jest a-beggin' her bread for a little while, that's all."

And then, after laying her hand upon my forehead, soft and soothing, she returned to Cyril's side.

"No one who has never wanted food knows what life is," said Wilderspin, taking but little heed of even so violent an interruption as this. "No one has been entirely educated, Mr. Aylwin—no one knows the real primal meaning of that pathetic word Man—no one knows the true meaning of Man's position here among the other living creatures of this world, if he has never wanted food. Hunger gives a new seeing to the eyes."

"That's as true as the blessed stars," muttered old Mrs. Boswell, Rhona's beloved granny, who was squatting on a rug next to her son Jericho, with a pipe in her mouth, weaving fancy baskets, and listening intently. "The very airth under your feet seems to be a-sinkin' away, and the sweet sunshine itself seems as if it all belonged to the Gorgios, when you're a-follerin' the patrin with the empy belly."

"I thank God," continued Wilderspin, "that I once wanted food."

"More nor I do," muttered old Mrs. Boswell, as she went on weaving; "no mammy as ever felt a little chavo^o a-suckin' at her burk † never thanked God for wantin' food: it dries the milk, or else it spiles it."

"In no way," said Wilderspin, "has the spirit-world neglected the education of the apostle of spiritual beauty. I became a 'blower' in the smithy. As a child, from early sunrise till nearly midnight, I blew the bellows for eighteenpence a week. But long before I could read or write my mother knew that I was set apart for great things. She knew, from the profiles I used to trace with the point of a nail on the smithy walls, that, unless the heavy world pressed too heavily upon me, I should become a great painter. Except anxiety about my mother and my little brothers and sisters, I, for my part, had no thought besides this of being some day a painter. Except love for her and for them, I had no other passion. By assiduous attendance at night-schools I learnt to read and write. This enabled me to take a better berth in Black Waggon Street, where I earned enough to take lessons in drawing from the reduced widow of a once prosperous fogger. But ah! so eager was I to learn, that I did not notice how my mother was fading, wasting, dying slowly. It was not till too late that I learnt the appalling truth, that while the babes had been nourished, the mother had starved—starved! On a few ounces of bread a day no woman can work the oliver and prod the fire. Her last whispers to me were 'I shall see you, dear, a great painter yet: Jesus will let me look

* Child.

† Bosom.

down and watch my boy.' Ah, Sinfì Lovell! that makes you weep. It is long, long since I ceased to weep at that. 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.'

Rhona Boswell, down whose face also the tears were streaming, nodded in a patronizing way to Wilderspin, and said, "Reia, my mammy lives in the clouds, and I'll tell her to show you the Golden Hand, I will."

"From the moment when I left my mother in the grave," said Wilderspin, "I had but one hope, that she who was watching my endeavours might not watch in vain. Art became now my religion; success in it my soul's goal. I went to London; I soon began to develop a great power of design, in illustrating penny periodicals. For years I worked at this, improving in execution with every design, but still unable to find an opening for a better class of work. What I yearned for was the opportunity to exercise the gift of colour. That I did possess this in a rare degree I knew. At last I got a commission. Oh! the joy of painting that first picture! My progress was now rapid. But I had few purchasers till Providence sent me a good man and great gentleman, my dear friend—"

"This is a long-winded speech of yours, *mon cher*," yawned Cyril. "Lady Sinfì is going to strike up with the Welsh fiddle unless you get along faster."

"Don't stop him," I heard Sinfì mutter, as she shook Cyril angrily; "he's mighty fond o' that mother o' his'n, an', if he's ever sich a born nataral, I likes him."

"I never exhibited in the Academy," continued Wilderspin, without heeding the interruption, "I never tried to exhibit; but, thanks to the dear friend I have mentioned, I got to know the Master himself. People came to my poor studio, and my pictures were bought from my easel as fast as I could paint them. I could please my buyers, I could please my dear friend, I could please the Master himself; I could please every person in the world but one—myself. For years I had been struggling with what cripples so many artists—with ignorance—ignorance, Mr. Aylwin, of the million points of detail which must be understood and mastered before ever the sweetness, the apparent lawlessness and abandonment of Nature can be expressed by Art. But it was now, when I had conquered these,—it was now that I was dissatisfied, and no man living was so miserable as I. I dare say you are an artist yourself, Mr. Aylwin, and will understand me when I say that artists—figure-painters, I mean,—are divided into two classes—those whose na-

tural impulse is to paint men, and those who are sent into the world expressly to paint women. My mother's death taught me that my mission was to paint women, women whom I—being the son of Mary Wilderspin—love and understand better than other men, because my soul (once folded in her womb) is purer than other men's souls."

"Is not modesty a Gorgio virtue, Lady Sinfì?" murmured Cyril.

"Nothin' like a painter for thinkin' strong beer of hisself," she replied; "but I likes him—oh, I likes him."

"No man whose soul is stained by fleshly desire shall render in art all that there is in a truly beautiful woman's face," said Wilderspin. "I worked hard at imaginative painting; I worked for years and years, Mr. Aylwin, but with scant success. It shames me to say that I was at last discouraged. But, after a time, I began to feel that the spirit-world was giving me a strength of vision second only to the Master's own, and a cunning of hand greater than any vouchsafed to man since the death of Raphael. This was once stigmatised as egotism; but 'Faith and Love,' and the predella 'Isis behind the Veil,' have told another story. I did not despair, I say; for I knew the cause of my failure. Two sources of inspiration were wanting to me—that of a superlative subject and that of a superlative model. For the first I am indebted to Philip Aylwin; for the second I am indebted to—"

"A greater still, Miss Gudgeon, of Primrose Court," interjected Cyril.

"For the second I'm indebted to my mother. And yet something else was wanting," continued Wilderspin, "to enable me for many months to concentrate my life upon one work—the self-sacrificing generosity of such a friend as I think no man ever had before."

"Wilderspin," said Cyril, rising, "the Duke of Little Egypt sleeps, as you see. His Grace of the Pyramids snores, as you hear. The autobiography of a man of genius is interesting; but I fear that yours will have to be continued in our next."

"But Mr. Aylwin wants to hear—"

"He and our other idyllic friends are early to bed and early to rise; they have, in the morning, trout to catch for breakfast, and we have a good way to walk to-night."

"That's just like my friend," said Wilderspin. "That's my friend all over."

With this they left us, and we betook ourselves to our usual evening occupations.

Next morning the two painters called upon us. Wilderspin sketched alone, while Sinfì, Rhona, Cyril and I went trout-fishing in one of the numerous brooks.

"What do you think of my friend by this time?" said Cyril to me.

"He is my fifth mystic," I replied; "I wonder what the sixth will be like. Is he really as great a painter as he takes himself to be, or does his art begin and end with flowery words?"

"I believe," said Cyril, pointing across to where Wilderspin sat at work, "that the strange creature under that white umbrella is the greatest artistic genius now living. The death of his mother by starvation has turned his head, poor fellow, but turned it to good purpose: 'Faith and Love' is the greatest modern picture in Europe. To be sure, he has the advantage of painting from the finest model ever seen, the lovely, if rather stupid, Miss Gudgeon, of Primrose Court, whom he monopolises."

Cyril had already, during the morning, told me that my mother, who was much out of health, was now staying in London, where he had for the first time in his life met her at Lord Sleaford's house. Notwithstanding their differences of opinion, my mother and he seemed to have formed a mutual liking. He also told me that my uncle Cecil Aylwin of Alvanley (who in this narrative must not, of course, be confounded with another important relative, Henry Aylwin, Earl of Aylwin) having just died and left me the bulk of his property, I had been in much request. I consequently determined to start for London on the following day, leaving my waggon in charge of Sinfi, who was to sit to Wilderspin in the open air.

During this conversation Sinfi was absorbed in her fishing, and wandered away up the brook, and I could see that Cyril's eyes were following her with great admiration.

Turning to me and looking at me, he said, "Lucky dog!" and then, looking again across at Sinfi, he said, "The finest girl in England."

V

Haroun-al-Raschid the Painter

I

ON reaching London and finding that it was necessary I should remain there for some little time, I wrote to Cyril to say so, sending some messages to Sinfi and her father about my own living-waggon.

My mother was now staying at my aunt's house, whither I went to call upon her shortly after my arrival in town.

Our meeting was a constrained and painful one. It was my mother's cruelty to Winifred that had, in my view, completely ruined two lives. I did not know then what an awful struggle was going on in her own breast between her pride and her remorse for having driven Winnie away, to be lost in Wales. Afterwards her sad case taught me that among all the agents of soul-torture that have ever stung mankind to madness the scorpion Remorse is by far the most appalling. But other events had to take place before she reached the state when the scorpion stings to death all other passions, even Pride and even Vanity, and reigns in the bosom supreme. We could hardly meet without softening towards each other. She was most anxious to know what had occurred to me since I left Raxton to search for Winnie. I gave her the entire story from my first seeing Winnie in the cottage, to my *rencontre* with her at Knockers' Llyn. At this time she had accidentally been brought into contact with Miss Dalrymple, who had lately received a legacy and was now in better circumstances. Miss Dalrymple had spoken in high terms of Winnie's intelligence and culture, little thinking how she was making my mother feel more acutely than ever her own wrongdoing. Knowing that I was very fond of music, my mother persuaded me to take her on several occasions to the opera and the theatre. She with more difficulty persuaded me to consult a medical man upon the subject of my insomnia; and at last I agreed, though very reluctantly, to consult Dr. Mivart, late of Raxton, who was now living in London. Mivart attributed my ailment (as I, of course, knew he would) to hypochondria, and I saw that he was fully aware of the cause. I therefore opened my mind to him upon the subject. I told him everything in connection with Winifred in Wales.

He pondered the subject carefully and then said:

"What you need is to escape from these terrible oscillations between hope and despair. Therefore I think it best to tell you frankly that Miss Wynne is certainly dead. Even suppose that she did not fall down a precipice in Wales, she is, I repeat, certainly dead. So severe a form of hysteria as hers must have worn her out by this time. It is difficult for me to think that any nervous system could withstand a strain so severe and so prolonged."

I felt the terrible truth of his words, but I made no answer.

"But let this be your consolation," said he. "Her death is a blessing to herself, and the knowledge that she is dead will be a blessing to you."

"A blessing to me?" I said.

"I mean that it will save you from the mischief of these alternations between hope and despair. You will remember that it was I who saw her in her first seizure and told you of it. Such a seizure having lasted so long, nothing could have given her relief but death or magnetic transmission of the seizure. It is a grievous case, but what concerns me now is the condition into which you yourself have passed. Nothing but a successful effort on your part to relieve your mind from the dominant idea that has disturbed it can save you from—from—"

"From what?"

"That drug of yours is the most dangerous narcotic of all. Increase your doses by a few more grains and you will lose all command over your nervous system—all presence of mind. Give it up, give it up and enter Parliament."

I left Mivart in anger, and took a stroll through the streets, trying to amuse myself by looking at the shop windows and recalling the few salient incidents that were connected with my brief experiences as an art student.

Hours passed in this way, until one by one the shops were closed and only the theatres, public bars, and supper-rooms seemed to be open.

I turned into a restaurant in the Haymarket, for I had taken no dinner. I went upstairs into a supper-room, and after I had finished my meal, taking a seat near the window, I gazed abstractedly over the bustling, flashing streets, which to me seemed far more lonely, far more remote, than the most secluded paths of Snowdon. In a trouble such as mine it is not Man but Nature that can give companionship.

I was so absorbed in my thoughts that I did not observe whether I was or was not now alone in the room, till the name of Wilderspin fell on my ear and recalled me to myself. I started and looked round. At a table near me sat two men whom I had not noticed before. The face of the man who sat on the opposite side of the table confronted me.

If I had one tittle of that objective power and that instinct for description which used to amaze me in Winifred as a child, I could give here a picture of a face which the reader could never forget.

If it was not beautiful in detail it was illuminated by an expression that gave a unity of beauty to the whole. And what was the expression? I can only describe it

by saying that it was the expression of genius; and it had that imperious magnetism which I had never before seen in any face save that of Sinfu Lovell. But striking as was the face of this man, I soon found that his voice was more striking still. In whatever assembly that voice was heard, its indescribable resonance would have marked it off from all other voices, and have made the ear of the listener eager to catch the sound. This voice, however, was not the one that had uttered the name of Wilderspin. It was from his companion, who sat opposite to him, with his great broad back, covered with a smart velvet coat, towards me, that the talk was now coming. This man was smoking cigarettes in that kind of furious sucking way which is characteristic of great smokers. Much smoking, however, had not dried up his skin to the consistence of blotting paper and to the colour of tobacco ash as it does in some cases, but tobacco juice, which seemed to ooze from his face like perspiration, or rather like oil, had made his complexion of a yellow green colour, something like a vegetable marrow. Although his face was as hairless as a woman's, there was not a feature in it that was not masculine. Although his cheek bones were high and his jaw was of the mould which we so often associate with the prizefighter, he looked as if he might somehow be a gentleman. And when I got for a moment a full view of his face as he turned round, I thought it showed power and intelligence, although his forehead receded a good deal, a recession which was owing mainly to the bone above the eyes. Power and intelligence too were seen in every glance of his dark bright eyes. In a few minutes Wilderspin's name was again uttered by this man, and I found he was telling anecdotes of the eccentric painter—telling them with great gusto and humour, in a loud voice, quite careless of being overheard by me. Then followed other anecdotes of other people—artists for the most part—in which the names of Millais, Ruskin, Watts, Leighton, and others came up in quick succession.

That he was a professional anecdote-monger of extraordinary brilliancy, a *raconteur* of the very first order, was evident enough. I found also that as a story-teller he was reckless and without conscience. He was, I thought, inventing anecdotes to amuse his companion, whose manifest enjoyment of them rather weakened the impression that his own personality had been making upon me.

After a while the name of Cyril Aylwin came up, and I soon found the man telling a story of Cyril and a recent escapade of his which I knew must be false. He then went

rattling on about other people, mentioning names which, as I soon gathered, were those of female models known in the art world. The anecdotes he told of these were mostly to their disadvantage. I was about to move to another table, in order to get out of ear-shot of this gossip, when the name "Lady Sinfì" fell upon my ears.

And then I heard the other man—the man of the musical voice—talk about Lady Sinfì with the greatest admiration and regard. He wound up by saying, "By the bye, where is she now? I should like to use her in painting my new picture."

"She's in Wales; so Kiomi told me."

"Ah, yes! I remember she has an extraordinary passion for Snowdon."

"Her passion is now for something else, though."

"What's that?"

"A man."

"I never saw a girl so indifferent to men as Lady Sinfì."

"She is living at this moment as the mistress of a cousin of Cyril Aylwin."

My blood boiled with rage. I lost all control of myself. I longed to feel his face against my knuckles.

"That's not true," I said in a rather loud voice.

He started up, and turned round, saying in a hectoring voice, "What was that you said to me? Will you repeat your words?"

"To repeat one's words," I said quietly, "shows a limited vocabulary, so I will put it thus,—what you said just now about Sinfì Lovell being the mistress of Cyril Aylwin's cousin is a lie."

"You dare to give me the lie, sir? And what the devil do you mean by listening to our conversation?"

The threatening look that he managed to put into his face was so entirely histrionic that it made me laugh outright. This seemed to damp his courage more than if I had sprung up and shown fight.

The man had a somewhat formidable appearance, however, as regards build, which showed that he possessed more than average strength. It was the manifest genuineness of my laugh that gave him pause. And when I sat with my elbows on the table and my face between my palms, taking stock of him quietly, he looked extremely puzzled. The man of the musical voice sat and looked at me as though under a spell.

"I am a young man from the country," I said to him. "To what theatre is your histrionic friend attached? I should like to see him in a better farce than this."

"Do you hear that, De Castro?" said the other. "What is your theatre?"

"If he is really excited," I said, "tell him that people at a public supper room should speak in a moderate tone or their conversation is likely to be overheard."

"Do you hear this young man from the country, De Castro?" said he. "You seem to be the Oraculum of the hay-fields, sir," he continued, turning to me with a delightfully humorous expression on his face. "Have you any other Delphic utterance?"

"Only this," I said, "that people who do not like being given the lie should tell the truth."

"May I be permitted to guess your Christian name, sir? Is it Martin, perchance?"

"Yes," I replied, "and my surname is Tupper." He then got up and laid his hand on the *raconteur's* shoulder, and said, "Don't be a fool, De Castro. When a man looks at another as the author of *Proverbial Philosophy* is looking at you, he knows that he can use his fists as well as his pen."

"He gave me the lie. Didn't you hear?"

"I did, and I thought the gift as entirely gratuitous, *mon cher*, as giving a scuttleful of coals to Newcastle."

The anecdote-monger stood silent, quelled by this man's voice.

Then turning to me, the man of the musical voice said, "I suppose you know something about my friend Lady Sinfì?"

"I do," I said, "and I am Cyril Aylwin's kinsman, whom you call his cousin, so perhaps, as every word your friend has said about Sinfì Lovell and me is false, you will allow me to call him a liar."

A look of the greatest glee at the discomfiture of his companion overspread his face.

"Certainly," he said with a loud laugh.

"You may call him that, you may even qualify the noun you have used with an adjective if the author of the *Proverbial Philosophy* can think of one that is properly descriptive and yet not too unparliamentary. So you are Cyril Aylwin's kinsman. I have heard him," he said with a smile that he tried in vain to suppress, "I have heard Cyril expatiate on the various branches of the Aylwin family."

"I belong to the proud Aylwins," I said.

The twinkle in his eye made me adore him as he said—"The proud Aylwins. A man, who in a world like this, is proud and knows it, and is proud of confessing his pride, always interests me, but I will not ask you what makes the proud Aylwins proud, sir."

"I will tell you what makes me proud," I said: "my great-grandmother was a full-blooded Gypsy, and I am proud of the descent."

He came forward and held out his hand and said, "It is long since I met a man who interested me"—he gave a sigh—"very long; and I hope that you and I may become friends."

I grasped his hand and shook it warmly.

The anecdote-monger began talking at once about Sinfi, Wilderspin and Cyril Aylwin, speaking of them in the most genial and affectionate terms. In a few minutes, without withdrawing a word he had said about either of them, he had entirely changed the spirit of every word. At first I tried to resist his sophistry, but it was not to be resisted. I ended by apologising to him for my stupidity in misunderstanding him.

"My dear fellow," said he, "not a word, not a word. I admired the way in which you stood up for absent friends. Didn't you, D'Arcy?"

At this the other broke out into another mellow laugh. "I did. How's your kinsman, and how's Wilderspin?" he said, turning to me. "Did you leave them well?"

We soon began, all three of us, to talk freely together. Of course I was filled with curiosity about my new friends, especially about the liar. His extraordinary command of facial expression, coupled with the fact that he wore no hair on his face, made me at first think he was a great actor; but being at that time comparatively ignorant of the stage, I did not attempt to guess what actor it was. After a while his prodigious acuteness struck me more than even his histrionic powers, and I began to ask myself what Old Bailey barrister it was.

Turning at last to the one called D'Arcy, I said, "You are an artist; you are a painter?"

"I have been trying for many years to paint," he said.

"And you?" I said, turning to his companion.

"He is an artist too," D'Arcy said, "but his line is not painting—he is an artist in words."

"A poet?" I said in amazement.

"A romancer, the greatest one of his time unless it be old Dumas."

"A novelist?"

"Yes, but he does not write his novels, he speaks them."

De Castro, evidently with a desire to turn the conversation from himself and his profession, said, pointing to D'Arcy, "You see before you the famous painter Haroun-al-Raschid, who has never been known to perambulate the streets of London except by night, and in me you see his faithful vizier."

It soon became evident that D'Arcy for some reason or other had thoroughly taken to me—more thoroughly, I thought, than De

Castro seemed to like, for whenever D'Arcy seemed to be on the verge of asking me to call at his studio, De Castro would suddenly lead the conversation off into another channel by means of some amusing anecdote. However, the painter was not to be defeated in his intention; indeed I noticed during the conversation that although D'Arcy yielded to the sophistries of his companion, he did so wilfully. While he forced his mind, as it were, to accept these sophistries there seemed to be all the while in his consciousness a perception that sophistries they were. He ended by giving me his address and inviting me to call upon him.

"I am only making a brief stay in London," he said; "I am working hard at a picture in the country, but business just now calls me to London for a short time."

With this we parted at the door of the restaurant.

II

IT was through the merest accident that I saw these two men again.

One evening I had been dining with my mother and aunt. I think I may say that I had now become entirely reconciled to my mother. I used to call upon her often, and at every call I could not but observe how dire was the struggle going on within her breast between pride and remorse. She felt, and rightly felt, that the loss of Winifred among the Welsh hills had been due to her harshness in sending the stricken girl away from Raxton, to say nothing of her breaking her word with me after having promised to take my place and watch for the exposure of the cross by the wash of the tides until the danger was certainly past.

But against my aunt I cherished a stronger resentment every day. She it was with her inferior intellect and insect soul who had in my childhood prejudiced my mother against me and in favour of Frank, because I showed signs of my descent from Fenella Stanley while Frank did not. She it was who first planted in my mother's mind the seeds of prejudice against Winnie as being the daughter of Tom Wynne.

The influence of such a paltry nature upon a woman of my mother's strength and endowments had always astonished as much as it had irritated me.

I had not learnt then what I fully learnt afterwards, that in this life it is mostly the dull and stupid people who dominate the clever ones—that it is, in short, the fools who govern the world.

I should, of course, never have gone to

Belgrave Square at all had it not been to see my mother. Such a commonplace slave of convention was my aunt, that, on the evening I am now mentioning, she had scarcely spoken to me during dinner, because, having been detained at the solicitors', I had found it quite impossible to go to my hotel to dress for her ridiculous seven o'clock dinner.

When I found that my mother had actually taken this inferior woman into her confidence in regard to my affairs and told her all about Winnie and the cross, my dislike of her became intensified, and on this evening my mother very much vexed me in the drawing-room by taking the cross from a cabinet and saying to me:

"What is now to be done with this? All along the coast there are such notions of its value that to replace it in the tomb would be simple madness." I made no reply. "Indeed," she continued, looking at the amulet as she might have looked at a cobra uprearing its head to spring at her, "it must really be priceless. And to think that all this was to be buried in the coffin of—! It is your charge, however, and not mine."

"Yes, mother," I said, "it is my charge"; and taking up the cross I wrapped it in my handkerchief.

"Take the amulet and guard it well," she said, as I placed it carefully in the breast pocket of my coat.

"And remember," said my aunt, breaking into the conversation, "that the true curses of the Aylwins are and always have been superstition and love-madness."

"I should have added a third curse,—pride, aunt," I could not help replying.

"Henry," said she, pursing her thin lips, "you have the obstinacy and the courage of your race, that is to say, you have the obstinacy and the courage of ten ordinary men, and yet a man you are not—a man you will never be, if strength of character, and self-mastery and power to withstand the inevitable trials of life, go to the making of a man."

"Pardon me, aunt; but such trials as mine are beyond your comprehension."

"Are they, boy?" said she. "This fancy of yours for an insignificant girl—this boyish infatuation which with any other young man of your rank would have long ago exhausted itself and been forgotten—is a passion that absorbs your life. And I tremble for you: I tremble for the house you represent."

But I saw by the expression on my mother's face that my aunt had now gone too far. "Prue," she said, "your tremblings concerning my son and my family are, I assure you, gratuitous. Such trembling as

the case demands you had better leave to me. My heart tells me I have been very cruel to that poor child, and I would give much to know that she was found and that she was well."

I set out to walk to my hotel, wondering how I was to while away the long night until sleep should come to relieve me. Suddenly I remembered D'Arcy, and my promise to call upon him. I changed my course, and hailing a hansom drove to the address he had given me.

When I reached the door I found, upon looking at my watch, that it was late—so late that I was dubious whether I should ring the bell. I remembered, however, that he told me how very late his hours were, and I rang.

On sending in my card I was shown at once into the studio, and after threading my way between some pieces of massive furniture and pictures upon easels, I found D'Arcy lolling lazily upon a huge sofa. Seeing that he was not alone, I was about to withdraw, for I was in no mood to meet strangers. However, he sprang up and introduced me to his guest, whom he called Symonds, an elegant-looking man in a peculiar kind of evening dress, who, as I afterwards learnt, was one of Mr. D'Arcy's chief buyers. This gentleman bowed stiffly to me.

He did not stay long; indeed, it was evident that the appearance of a stranger somewhat disconcerted him.

After he was gone D'Arcy said, "A good fellow! One of my most important buyers. I should like you to know him, for you and I are going to be friends, I hope."

"He seems very fond of pictures," I said.

"A man of great taste, with a real love of art and music."

In a little while after this gentleman's departure in came De Castro, who had driven up in a hansom. I certainly saw a flash of anger in his eyes as he recognised me, but it vanished like lightning, and his manner became cordiality itself. Late as it was (it was nearly twelve), he pulled out his cigarette case, and evidently intended to begin the evening. As soon as he was told that Mr. Symonds had been, he began to talk about him in a disparaging manner. Evidently his *métier* was, as I had surmised, that of a professional talker. Talk was his stock-in-trade.

The night wore on and De Castro in the intervals of his talk kept pulling out his watch. It was evident that he wanted to be going, but was reluctant to leave me there. For my part I frequently rose to

go, but on getting a sign from D'Arcy that he wished me to stay I sat down again. At last D'Arcy said,

"You had better go now, De Castro, you have kept that hansom outside for more than an hour and a half; and besides, if you stay till daylight our friend here will stay longer, for I want to talk with him alone."

De Castro got up with a laugh that seemed genuine enough, and left us.

D'Arcy, who was still on the sofa, then lapsed into a silence that became after a while rather awkward. He lay there, gazing abstractedly at the fireplace.

"Some of my friends call me, as you heard De Castro say the other night, Haroun-al-Raschid, and I suppose I am like him in some things. I am a bad sleeper, and to be amused by De Castro when I can't sleep is the chief of blessings. De Castro, however, is not so bad as he seems. A man may be a scandal-monger without being really malignant. I have known him go out of his way to do a struggling man a service."

"You are a bad sleeper?" I said in a tone that proclaimed at once that I was a bad sleeper also.

"Yes," said he, "and so are you, as I noticed the other night. I can always tell. There is something in the eyes when a man is a bad sleeper that proclaims it to me."

Then springing up from the divan and laying his hand upon my shoulder, he said, "And you have a great trouble at the heart. You have had some great loss the effect of which is sapping the very fountains of your life. We should be friends. We must be friends. I asked you to call upon me because we must be friends."

His voice was so tender that I was almost unmanned.

I will not dwell upon this part of my narrative; I will only say that I told him something of my story, and he told me his.

I told him that a terrible trouble had unhinged the mind of a young lady whom I deeply loved and that she had been lost on the Welsh hills. I felt that it was only right that I should know more of him before giving him the more intimate details connected with Winnie, myself, and the secrets of my family. He listened to every word with the deepest attention and sympathy. After a while he said,

"You must not go to your hotel to-night. A friend of mine who occupies two rooms is not sleeping here to-night, and I particularly wish for you to take his bed, so that I can see you in the morning. We shall not breakfast together. My breakfast is a

peculiarly irregular meal. But when you wake ring your bedroom bell and order your own breakfast; afterwards we shall meet in the studio."

I did not in the least object to this arrangement, for I found his society a great relief.

Next morning, after I had finished my solitary breakfast, I asked the servant if Mr. D'Arcy had yet risen. On being told that he had not, I went downstairs into the studio where I had spent the previous evening. After examining the pictures on the walls and the easels, I walked to the window and looked out at the garden. It was large, and so neglected and untrimmed as to be a veritable wilderness. While I was marveling why it should have been left in this state, I saw the eyes of some animal staring at me from the distance, and was soon astonished to see that they belonged to a little Indian bull. My curiosity induced me to go into the garden and look at the creature. He seemed rather threatening at first, but after awhile allowed me to go up to him and stroke him. Then I left the Indian bull and explored this extraordinary domain. It was full of unkempt trees, including two fine mulberries, and surrounded by a very high wall. Soon I came across an object which, at first, seemed a little mass of black and white oats moving along, but I presently discovered it to be a hedgehog. It was so tame that it did not curl up as I approached it, but allowed me, though with some show of nervousness, to stroke its pretty little black snout. As I walked about the garden, I found it was populated with several kinds of animals such as are never seen except in menageries or in the Zoological Gardens. Wombats, kangaroos, and the like, formed a kind of happy family.

My love of animals led me to linger in the garden. When I returned to the house I found that D'Arcy had already breakfasted, and was at work in the studio.

After greeting me with the greatest cordiality, he said,

"No doubt you are surprised at my menagerie. Every man has one side of his character where the child remains. I have a love of animals which, I suppose, I may call a passion. The kind of amusement they can afford me is like none other. It is the self-consciousness of men and women that makes them, in a general way, intensely unamusing. I turn from them to the unconscious brutes, and often get a world of enjoyment. To watch a kitten or a puppy play, or the funny antics of a parrot or a cockatoo, or the wise movements of a

wombat, will keep me for hours from being bored."

"And children," I said—"do you like children?"

"Yes, so long as they remain like the young animals—until they become self-conscious, I mean, and that is very soon. Then their charm goes. Has it ever occurred to you how fascinating a beautiful young girl would be if she were as unconscious as a young animal? What makes you sigh?"

My thoughts had flown to Winifred breakfasting with her "Prince of the Mist" on Snowdon. And I said to myself, "How he would have been fascinated by a sight like that!"

My experience of men at that time was so slight that the opinion I then formed of D'Arcy as a talker was not of much account. But since then I have seen very much of men, and I find that I was right in the view I then took of his conversational powers. When his spirits were at their highest he was without an equal as a wit, without an equal as a humourist. He had more than even Cyril Aylwin's quickness of repartee, and it was of an incomparably rarer quality. To define it would be, of course, impossible, but I might perhaps call it poetic fancy suddenly stimulated at moments by animal spirits into rapid movements—so rapid, indeed, that what in slower movement would be merely fancy, in him became wit. Beneath the coruscations of this wit a rare and deep intellect was always perceptible.

His humour was also so fanciful that it seemed poetry at play, but here was the remarkable thing: although he was not unconscious of his other gifts, he did not seem to be in the least aware that he was a humourist of the first order; every *jeu d'esprit* seemed to leap from him involuntarily, like the spray from a fountain. A dull man like myself must not attempt to reproduce these qualities here.

While he was talking he kept on painting, and I said to him, "I can't understand how you can keep up a conversation while you are at work."

I took care not tell him that I was an amateur painter.

"It is only when the work that I am on is in some degree mechanical that I can talk while at work. These flowers, which were brought to me this morning for my use in painting this picture, will very soon wither, and I can put them into the picture without being disturbed by talk; but if I were at work upon this face, if I were putting dramatic expression into these eyes, I should have to be silent."

He then went on talking upon art and poetry, letting fall at every moment gems of criticism that would have made the fortune of a critic.

After a while, however, he threw down the brush and said,

"Sometimes I can paint with another man in the studio; sometimes I can't."

I rose to go.

"No, no," he said; "I don't want you to go, yet I don't like keeping you in this musty studio on such a morning. Suppose we take a stroll together."

"But you never walk out in the daytime."

"Not often; indeed, I may say never, unless it is to go to the Zoo, or to Jamrach's, which I do about once in three months."

"Jamrach's!" I said. "Why, he's the importer of animals, isn't he? Of all places in London that is the one I should most like to see. If I can call myself anything at all, it is a naturalist."

"We will go," said D'Arcy; and we left the house.

In Maud Street a hansom passed us; D'Arcy hailed it.

"We will take this to the Bank," said he, "and then walk through the East End to Jamrach's. Jump in."

As we drove off, the sun was shining brilliantly, and London seemed very animated—seemed to be enjoying itself. Until we reached the Bank our drive was through all the most cheerful-looking and prosperous streets of London. It acted like a tonic on me, and for the first time since my trouble I felt really exhilarated. As to D'Arcy, after we had left behind us what he called the "stucco world" of the West End, his spirits seemed to rise every minute, and by the time we reached the Strand he was as boisterous as a boy on a holiday.

On reaching the Bank we dismissed the hansom and proceeded to walk to Ratcliffe Highway. Before reaching it I was appalled at the forbidding aspect of the neighbourhood. It was not merely that the unsavoury character of the streets offended and disgusted me, but the locality wore a sinister aspect which acted upon my imagination in the strangest, wildest way. Why was it that this aspect fairly cowed me, scared me? I felt that I was not frightened on my own account, and yet when I asked myself why I was frightened I could not find a rational answer.

As I saw the sailors come noisily from their boarding-houses; as I saw the loafers standing at the street corners, smoking their dirty pipes and gazing at us; as I saw the tawdry girls, bare-headed or in flaunting hats covered with garish flowers, my

thoughts, for no conceivable reason, ran upon Winnie more persistently than they had run upon her since I had abandoned all hope of seeing her in Wales.

The thought came to me that, grievous as was her fate and mine, the tragedy of our lives might have been still worse.

"Suppose," I said, "that instead of being lost in the Welsh hills she had been lost here!" I shuddered at the thought.

Again that picture in the Welsh pool came to me, the picture of Winnie standing at a street corner, offering matches for sale. D'Arcy then got talking about Sinfi Lovell and her strange superiority in every respect to the few Gypsy women he had seen.

"She has," said he, "mesmeric power; it is only semi-conscious, but it is mesmeric. She exercises it partly through her gaze and partly through her voice."

He was still talking about Sinfi when a river-boy, who was whistling with extraordinary brilliancy and gusto, met and passed us. Not a word more of D'Arcy's talk did I hear, for the boy was whistling the very air to which Winnie used to sing the Snowdon Song

I met in a glade a lone little maid
At the foot of y Wyddfa the white.

I ran after the boy and asked him what tune he was whistling.

"What tune?" he said, "blowed if I know."

"Where did you hear it?" I asked

"Well, there used to be gal, a kind of a beggar gal, as lived not far from 'ere for a little while, but she's gone away now, and she used to sing that tune. I allus remember tunes, but I never could make out anything of the words."

D'Arcy laughed at my eccentricity in running after the boy to learn where he had got a tune. But I did not tell him why.

After we had passed some way down Ratcliffe Highway, D'Arcy said, "Here we are then," and pointed to a shop, or rather two shops, on the opposite side of the street. One window was filled with caged birds; the other with specimens of beautiful Oriental pottery and grotesque curiosities in the shape of Chinese and Japanese statues and carvings.

My brain still rang with the air I had heard the river boy whistling, but I felt that I must talk about something.

"It is here that you buy your wonderful curiosities and porcelain!" I said.

"Partly; but there is not a curiosity shop in London that I have not ransacked in my time."

The shop we now entered reminded me of that Raxton Fair which was so much associated with Winnie. Its chief attraction was the advent of Wombwell's menagerie. From the first moment that the couriers of that august establishment came to paste their enormous placards on the walls, down to the sad morning when the caravans left the market-place, Winnie and I and Rhona Boswell had talked "Wombwell." It was not merely that the large pictures of the wild animals in action, the more than brass sound of the cracked brass band, delighted our eyes and ears. Our olfactories also were charmed. The mousy scent of the animals mixed with the scent of sawdust, which to adults was so objectionable, was characterised by us as delicious. All these Wombwell delights came back to me as we entered Jamrach's, and for a time the picture of Winifred prevented my seeing the famous shop. When this passed I saw that the walls of the large room were covered from top to bottom with cages, some of them full of wonderful or beautiful birds, and others full of evil-faced, screeching monkeys.

While D'Arcy was amusing himself with a blue-faced rib-nosed baboon, I asked Mr. Jamrach, an extremely intelligent man, about the singing girl and the Welsh air. But he could tell me nothing, and evidently thought I had been hoaxed.

In a small case by itself was a beautiful jewelled cross, which attracted D'Arcy's attention very much.

"This is not much in your line," he said to Jamrach. "This is European."

"It came to me from Morocco," said Jamrach, "and it was no doubt taken by a Morocco pirate from some Venetian captive."

"It is a diamond and ruby cross," said D'Arcy, "but mixed with the rubies there are beryls. I am at this moment describing a beryl in some verses. The setting of the stones is surely quite peculiar."

"Yes," said Jamrach. "It is the curiosity of the setting more than the value of the gems which caused it to be sent to me. I have offered it to the London jewellers, but they will only give me the market-price of the stones and the gold."

While he was talking I pulled out of my breast pocket the cross, which had remained there since I received it from my mother the evening before.

"They are very much alike," said Jamrach; "but the setting of these stones is more extraordinary than in mine. And of course they are more than fifty times as valuable."

D'Arcy turned round to see what we

were talking about, when he saw the cross in my hand, and an expression of something like awe came over his face.

"The Moonlight Cross of the Gnostics!" he exclaimed. "You carry this about in your breast pocket? Put it away, put it away! The thing seems to be alive."

In a second, however, and before I could answer him, the expression passed from his face, and he took the cross from my hands and examined it.

"This is the most beautiful piece of jewel work I ever saw in my life. I have heard of such things. The Gnostic art of arranging jewels so that they will catch the moon-rays and answer them as though the light were that of the sun, is quite lost."

We then went and examined Jamrach's menagerie. I found that one source of the interest D'Arcy took in animals was that he was a believer in Baptista Porta's whimsical theory that every human creature resembles one of the lower animals, and he found a perennial amusement in seeing in the faces of animals caricatures of his friends.

With a fund of humour that was exhaustless, he went from cage to cage, giving to each animal the name of some member of the Royal Academy, or of one of his own intimate friends.

On leaving Jamrach's he said to me, "Suppose we make a day of it and go to the Zoo?"

I agreed, and we took a hansom as soon as we could get one and drove across London towards Regent's Park.

Here the pleasure that he took in watching the movements of the animals was so great that it seemed impossible but that he was visiting the Zoo for the first time. I remembered, however, that he told me in the morning how frequently he went to these gardens.

But his interest in the animals was unlike my own, and I should suppose unlike the interest of any other man. He had no knowledge whatever of zoology, and appeared to wish for none. His pleasure consisted in watching the curious expressions and movements of the animals and in dramatising them.

On leaving the Zoo, I said, "The cross you were just now looking at is as remarkable for its history as for its beauty. It was stolen from the tomb of a near relative of mine. I was under a solemn promise to the person upon whose breast it lay to see that it

should never be disturbed. But, now that it has been disturbed, to replace it in the tomb would, I fear, be to insure another sacrilege. I wonder what you would do in such a case?"

He looked at me, and said, "As it is evident that we are going to be intimate friends, I may as well confess to you at once that I am a mystic."

"When did you become so?"

"When? Ask any man who has passionately loved a woman and lost her; ask him at what moment mysticism was forced upon him—at what moment he felt that he must either accept a spiritualistic theory of the universe or go mad; ask him this, and he will tell you that it was at that moment when he first looked upon her as she lay dead, with Corruption's foul fingers waiting to soil and stain. What are you going to do with the cross?"

"Lock it up as safely as I can," I said; "what else is there to do with it?"

He looked into my face, and said, "You are a rationalist."

"I am."

"You do not believe in a supernatural world?"

"My disbelief of it," I said, "is something more than an exercise of the reason. It is a passion, an angry passion. But what should you do with the cross if you were in my place?"

"Put it back in the tomb."

I had great difficulty in suppressing my ridicule, but I merely said, "That would be, as I have told you, to insure its being stolen again."

"There is the promise to the dead man or woman on whose breast it lay."

"This I intend to keep in the spirit like a reasonable man—not in the letter like——"

"Promises to the dead must be kept to the letter, or no peace can come to the bereaved heart. You are talking to a man who knows!"

"I will commit no such outrage upon reason as to place a priceless jewel in a place where I know it will be stolen."

"You will replace the cross in that tomb."

As he spoke he shook my hands warmly, and said, "*Au revoir*. Remember, I shall always be delighted to see you."

It was not till I saw him disappear amongst the crowd that I could give way to the laughter which I had so much difficulty in suppressing. What a relief it was to be able to do this!

VI

The Song of y Wyddfa

I

AFTER this I had one or two interviews with our solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields, upon important family matters connected with my late uncle's property.

I had been one night to the theatre with my mother and my aunt. The house had been unusually crowded. When the performance was over, we found that the streets were deluged with rain. Our carriage had been called some time before it drew up, and we were standing under the portico amid a crowd of impatient ladies when a sound fell or seemed to fall on my ears which stopped for the moment the very movements of life. Amid the rattle of wheels and horses' feet and cries of messengers about carriages and cabs, I seemed to distinguish a female voice singing :

"I met in a glade a lone little maid
At the foot of y Wyddfa the white ;
Oh, lissome her feet as the mountain hind,
And darker her hair than the night !"

It was the voice of Winifred singing as in a dream.

I heard my aunt say,

"Do look at that poor girl singing and holding out her little baskets ! She must be crazed to be offering baskets for sale in this rain and at this time of night."

I turned my eyes in the direction in which my aunt was looking, but the crowd before me prevented my seeing the singer.

"She is gone, vanished," said my aunt sharply, for my eagerness to see made me rude.

"What was she like ?" I asked.

"She was a young slender girl, holding out a bunch of small fancy baskets of woven colours, through which the rain was dripping. She was dressed in rags, and through the rags shone, here and there, patches of her shoulders ; and she wore a dingy red handkerchief round her head. She stood in the wet and mud, beneath the lamp, quite un-

conscious apparently of the bustle and confusion around her."

Almost at the same moment our carriage drew up. I lingered on the step as long as possible. My mother made a sign of impatience at the delay, and I got into the carriage. Spite of the rain, I put down the window and leaned out. I forgot the presence of my mother and aunt. I forgot everything. The carriage moved on.

"Winifred !" I gasped, as the certainty that the voice was hers came upon me.

And the dingy London night became illuminated with scrolls of fire, whose blinding, blasting scripture seared my eyes till I was fain to close them : "Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread : let them seek it also out of desolate places."

So rapidly had the carriage rolled through the rain, and so entirely had my long pain robbed me of all presence of mind, that, by the time I had recovered from the paralyzing shock, we had reached Piccadilly Circus. I pulled the check-string.

"Why, Henry !" said my mother, who had raised the window. "what are you doing ? And what has made you turn so pale ?"

My aunt sat in indignant silence.

"Ten thousand pardons," I said, as I stepped out of the carriage, and shook hands with them. "A sudden recollection—important papers unsecured at my hotel—business in—in Lincoln's Inn Fields. I will call on you in the morning."

And I reeled down the pavement towards the Haymarket. When I was some little distance from the carriage, I took to my heels and hurried as fast as possible towards the theatre, utterly regardless of the people. I reached the spot breathless. I stood for a moment staring wildly to right and left of me. Not a trace of her was to be seen. I heard a thin voice from my lips, that did not seem my own, ask a policeman, who was now patrolling the neighbourhood, if he had seen a basket-girl singing.

"No," said the man, "but I fancy you mean the Essex Street Beauty, don't you ? I haven't seen her for a long while now, but her dodge used to be to come here on rainy nights, and stand bare-headed and sing and sell just when the theatres was a-bustin'. She gets a good lot, I fancy, by that dodge."

"The Essex Street Beauty ?"

"Oh, I thought you know'd p'raps. She's a stornary pretty beggar-wench, with blue eyes and black hair, as used to stand at the corner of Essex Street, Strand, and the money as that gal got a-holdin' out her matches and a-sayin' texes out of the Bible must ha' been stornary. So the Essex Street Beauty's bin about here agin on the rainy-

night dodge, 'es she? Well, it must have been the fust time for many a long day, for I've never seen her now for a long time. She couldn't ha' stood about here for many minutes; if she had I must ha' seen her."

I staggered away from him, and passed and repassed the spot many times. Then I extended my beat about the neighbouring streets, loitering at every corner where a basket-girl or a flower-girl might be likely to stand. But no trace of her was to be seen. Meantime the rain had ceased.

All the frightful stories that I had heard or read of the kidnapping of girls came pouring into my mind, till my blood boiled and my knees trembled. Imagination was stinging me to life's very core. Every few minutes I would pass the theatre, and look towards the portico.

The night wore on and I was unconscious how the time passed. It was not till day-break that I returned to my hotel, pale, weary, bent.

I threw myself upon my bed: it scorched me.

I could not think. At present I could only see—see what? At one moment a squalid attic, the starlight shining through patched window-panes upon a lonely mattress, on which a starving girl was lying; at another moment a cellar damp and dark, in one corner of which a youthful figure was crouching; and then (most intolerable of all!) a glaring gin-palace, where, among a noisy crowd, a face was looking wistfully on, while coarse and vulgar men were clustering with cruel, wolfish eyes around a beggar-girl. This I saw and more—a thousand things more.

It was insupportable. I rose and again paced the street.

When I called upon my mother she asked me anxious questions as to what had ailed me the previous night. Seeing, however, that I avoided replying to them, she left me after a while in peace.

"Fancy," said my aunt, who was writing a letter at a little desk between two windows,—"fancy an Aylwin pulling the check-string, and then, with ladies in the carriage and the rain pouring—"

During that day how many times I passed in front of the theatre I cannot say; but at last I thought the very men in the shops must be observing me. Again, though I half poisoned myself with my drug, I passed a sleepless night. The next night was passed in almost the same manner as the previous one.

II

FROM this time I felt working within me a great change. A horrible new thought got entire possession of me. Wherever I went I could think of nothing but—the curse. I scorned the monstrous idea of a curse, and yet I was always thinking about it. I was always seeking Winifred — always speculating on her possible fate. I saw no one in society.

My time was now largely occupied with wandering about the streets of London. I began by exploring the vicinity of the theatre, and day after day used to thread the alleys and courts in that neighbourhood. Then I took the eastern direction, and soon became familiar with the most squalid haunts.

My method was to wander from street to street, looking at every poorly-dressed girl I met. Often I was greeted with an impudent laugh, that brought back the sickening mental pictures I have mentioned; and often I was greeted with an angry toss of the head and such an exclamation as, "What d'ye take me for, staring like that?"

These peregrinations I used to carry far into the night, and thus, as I perceived, got the character at my hotel of a wild young man. The family solicitor wrote to me again and again for appointments which I could not give him.

It had often occurred to me that in a case of this kind the police ought to be of some assistance. One day I called at Scotland Yard, saw an official, and asked his aid. He listened to my story attentively, then said: "Do you come from the missing party's friends, sir?"

"I am her friend," I answered—"her only friend."

"I mean, of course, do you represent her father or mother, or any near relative?"

"She is an orphan; she has no relatives," I said.

He looked at me steadily and said: "I am sorry, sir, that neither I nor a magistrate could do anything to aid you."

"You can do nothing to aid me?" I asked angrily.

"I can do nothing to aid you, sir, in identifying a young woman you once heard sing in the streets of London, with a lady you saw once on the top of Snowdon."

As I was leaving the office, he said: "One moment, sir. I don't see how I can take up this case for you, but I may make a suggestion. I have an idea that you would do well to pursue inquiries among the Gypsies."

"Gypsies!" I said with great heat, as I left the office. "If you knew how I had already 'pursued inquiries' among the Gypsies, you would understand how barren is your suggestion."

Weeks passed in this way. My aunt's ill-health became rather serious: my mother too was still very unwell. I afterwards learnt that her illness was really the result of the dire conflict in her breast between the old passion of pride and the new invader remorse. There were, no doubt, many discussions between them concerning me. I could see plainly enough they both thought my mind was becoming unhinged.

One night, as I lay thinking over the insoluble mystery of Winifred's disappearance, I was struck by a sudden thought that caused me to leap from my bed. What could have led the official in Scotland Yard to connect Winifred with Gypsies? I had simply told him of her disappearance on Snowdon, and her reappearance afterwards near the theatre. Not one word had I said to him about her early relations with Gypsies. I was impatient for the daylight, in order that I might go to Scotland Yard again. When I did so and saw the official, I asked him without preamble what had caused him to connect the missing girl I was seeking with the Gypsies.

"The little fancy baskets she was selling," said he. "They are often made by Gypsies."

"Of course they are," I said, hurrying away. "Why did I not think of this?"

In fact I had, during our wanderings over England and Wales, often seen Sinfi's sister Videy and Rhona Boswell weaving such baskets. Winifred, after all, might be among the Gypsies, and the crafty Videy Lovell might have some mysterious connection with her; for she detested me as much as she loved the gold "balancers" she could wheedle out of me. Moreover, there were in England the Hungarian Gypsies, with their notions about demented girls, and the Lovells, owing to Sinfi's musical proclivities, were just now much connected with a Hungarian troupe.

VII

Sinfi's Dukkeripen

I

THE Gypsies I had never seen since leaving them in Wales, and I knew that by this time they were either making their circuit of the English fairs or located in a certain romantic spot called Gypsy Dell, near Rington Manor, the property of my kinsman Percy Aylwin, whither they often went after the earlier fairs were over.

The next evening I went to the Great Eastern Railway station, and taking the train to Rington I walked to Gypsy Dell, where I found the Lovells and Boswells.

Familiar as I was with the better class of Welsh Gypsies, the camp here was the best display of Romany well-being I had ever seen. It would, indeed, have surprised those who associate all Gypsy life with the squalor which in England, and especially near London, marks the life of the mongrel wanderers who are so often called Gypsies. In a lovely dingle, skirted by a winding, willow-bordered river, and dotted here and there with clumps of hawthorn, were ranged the "living-waggon" of those trading Romanies who had accompanied the "Gryengroes" to the East Anglian and Midland fairs.

Alongside the waggon^s was a single large brown tent that for luxuriousness might have been the envy of all Gypsydom. On the hawthorn bushes and the grass was spread, instead of the poor rags that one often sees around a so-called Gypsy encampment, snowy linen, newly washed. The ponies and horses were scattered about the Dell feeding.

I soon distinguished Sinfi's commanding figure near that gorgeous living-waggon of "orange-yellow colour with red window-blinds" in which she had persuaded me to invest my money at Chester. On the foot-board sat two urchins of the Lovell family, "making believe" to drive imaginary horses, and yelling with all their might to Rhona Boswell, whose laugh, musical as ever, showed that she enjoyed the game as much as the children did. Sinfi was standing on a patch of that peculiar kind of black ash which burnt grass makes, busy with a fire, over which a tea-kettle was hanging from

the usual iron kettle-prop. Among the ashes left by a previous fire her bantam-cock Pharaoh was busy pecking, scratching, and calling up imaginary hens to feast upon his imaginary "finds." I entered the Dell, and before Sinfi saw me I was close to her.

She was muttering to the refractory fire as though it were a live thing, and asking it why it refused to burn beneath the kettle. A startled look, partly of pleasure and partly of something like alarm, came over her face as she perceived me. I drew her aside and told her all that had happened in regard to Winifred's appearance as a beggar in London. A strange expression that was new to me overspread her features, and I thought I heard her whisper to herself, "I will, I will."

"I knowed the cuss 'ud ha' to ha' its way in the blood, like the bite of a sap" [snake], she murmured to herself. "And yit the dukkeripen on Snowdon said, clear and plain enough, as they'd surely marry at last. What's become o' the stolen trúshul, brother—the cross?" she inquired aloud. "That trúshul will ha' to be given to the dead man agin, an' it'll ha' to be given back by his chavo [child] as swore to keep watch over it. But what's it all to me?" she said in a tone of suppressed anger that startled me. "I ain't a Gorgie."

"But, Sinfi, the cross cannot be buried again. The reason I have not replaced it in the tomb,—the reason I never will replace it there,—is that the people along the coast know now of the existence of the jewel, and know also of my father's wishes. If it was unsafe in the tomb when only Winnie's father knew of it, it would be a thousandfold more unsafe now."

"P'raps that's all the better for her an' you: the new thief takes the cuss."

"This is all folly," I replied, with the anger of one struggling against an unwelcome half-belief that refuses to be dismissed. "It is all moonshine-madness. I'll never do it,—not at least while I retain my reason. It was no doubt partly for safety as well as for the other reason that my father wished the cross to be placed in the tomb. It will be far safer now in a cabinet than anywhere else."

"Reia," said Sinfi, "you told me wunst as your great-grandmother was a Romany named Fenella Stanley. I have axed the Scollard about her, and what do you think he says? He says that she wur my great-grandmother too, for she married a Lovell as died."

"Good heavens, Sinfi! Well, I'm proud of my kinswoman."

"And he says that Fenella Stanley know'd

more about the true dukkerin, the dukkerin of the Romanies, than anybody as were ever heard on."

"She seems to have been pretty superstitious," I said, "by all accounts. But what has that to do with the cross?"

"You'll put it in the tomb again."

"Never!"

"Fenella Stanley will see arter that."

"Fenella Stanley! Why, she's dead and dust."

"That's what I mean; that's why she can make you do it, and will."

"Well, well! I did not come to talk about the cross; I want to have a quiet word with you about another matter."

She sprang away as if in terror or else in anger. Then recovering herself she took the kettle from the prop. I followed her to the tent, which, save that it was made of brown blanket, looked more like a tent on a lawn than a Gypsy-tent. All its comfort seemed, however, to give no great delight to Videy, the cashier and female financier-general of the Lovell family, who, in a state of absorbed untidiness, sitting at the end of the tent upon a palliase covered with a counterpane of quilted cloth of every hue, was evidently occupied in calculating her father's profits and losses at the recent horse-fair. The moment Videy saw us she hurriedly threw the coin into the silver tea-pot by her side, and put it beneath the counterpane, with that instinctive and unnecessary secrecy which characterised her, and made her such an amazing contrast both to her sister Sinfi and to Rhona Boswell.

After Panuel had received me in his usual friendly manner, we all sat down, partly inside the tent and partly outside, around the white table-cloth that had been spread upon the grass. The Scollard took no note of me, he had no eyes for any one but Rhona Boswell.

When tea was over Sinfi left the camp, and strode across the Dell towards the river. I followed her.

II

It was not till we reached a turn in the river that is more secluded than any other—a spot called "Gypsy Ring," a lovely little spot within the hollow of birch trees and gorse—that she spoke a few words to me, in a constrained tone. Then I said, as we sat down upon a green hillock within the Ring; "Sinfi, the baskets my aunt saw in Winnie's hand when she was standing in the rain were of the very kind that Videy makes."

"Oh, *that's* what you wanted to say!"

said she; "you think Videy knows something about Winnie. But that's all a fancy o' yourn, and it's of no use looking for Winnie any more among the Romanies. Even supposin' you did hear the Welsh gillie—and I think it was all a fancy—you can't make nothin' out o' them baskets as your aunt seed. Us Romanies don't make one in a hundud of the fancy baskets as is sold for Gypsy baskets in the streets, and besides, the hawkers and costers what buys 'em of us sells 'em agin to other hawkers and costers, and there ain't no tracin' on 'em."

I argued the point with her. At last I felt convinced that I was again on the wrong track. By this time the sun had set, and the stars were out. I had noticed that during our talk Sinfi's attention would sometimes seem to be distracted from the matter in hand, and I had observed her give a little start now and then, as though listening to something in the distance.

"What are you listening to?" I inquired at last.

"Reia," said Sinfi, "I've been a-listenin' to a v'ice as nobody can't hear on'y me, an' I've bin a-seein' a face peepin' atween the leaves o' the trees as nobody can't see on'y me; my mammy's been to me. I thought she would come here. They say my mammy's mammy wur buried here, an' she wur the child of Fenella, an' that's why it's called Gypsy Ring. The moment I sat down in this Ring a mullo [spirit] came and whispered in my ear, but I can't make out whether it's my mammy or Fenella Stanley, and I can't make out what she said. It's hard sometimes for them as has to gnaw their way out o' the groun' to get their words out clear.* Howsomever, this I do know, reia, you an' me must part. I felt as we must part when we was in Wales together last time, and now I knows it."

"Part, Sinfi! Not if I can prevent it."

"Reia," replied Sinfi, emphatically, "when I've wonst made up my mind, you know it's made up for good an' all. When us two leaves this 'ere Ring to-night, you'll turn your ways and I shall turn mine."

I thought it best to let the subject drop. Perhaps by the time we had left the Ring this mood would have passed. After a minute or so she said,

"You needn't see no fear about not marryin' Winifred Wynne. You *must* marry her; your dukkeripen on Snowdon didn't show itself there for nothink. When you two was a-settin' by the pool, a-eatin' the breakfiss, I was a-lookin' at you round the

corner of the rock. I seed a little kindlin' cloud break away and go floatin' over your heads, and then it shaped itself into what us Romanies calls the Golden Hand. You know what the Golden Hand means when it comes over two sweethearts? You don't believe it? Ask Rhona Boswell! Here she comes a-singin' to herself. She's trying to get away from that devil of a Scollard as says she's bound to marry him. I've a good mind to go and give him a left-hand body-blow in the ribs and settle him for good and all. He means mischief to the Tarno Rye, and Rhona too. Brother, I've noticed for a long while that the Romany blood is a good deal stronger in you than the Gorgio blood. And now mark my words, that cuss o' your feyther's 'll work itself out. You'll go to his grave and you'll jist put that trúshul back in that tomb, and arter that, and not afore, you'll marry Winnie Wynne."

Sinfi's creed did not surprise me: the mixture of guile and simplicity in the Romany race is only understood by the few who know it thoroughly: the race whose profession it is to cheat by fortune-telling, to read the false "dukkeripen" as being "good enough for the Gorgios," believe profoundly in Nature's symbols; but her bearing did surprise me.

"Your dukkeripen will come true," said she; "but mine won't, for I won't let it."

"And what is yours?" I asked.

"That's nuther here nor there."

Then she stood again as though listening to something, and again I thought, as her lips moved, that I heard her whisper, "I will, I will."

III

I HAD intended to go to London at once after leaving Gypsy Dell, but something that Sinfi told me during our interview impelled me to go on to Raxton Hall, which was so near. The fact that Sinfi was my kinswoman opened up new and exciting vistas of thought.

I understood now what was that haunting sense of recognition which came upon me when I first saw Sinfi at the wayside inn in Wales. Day by day had proofs been pouring in upon me that the strain of Romany blood in my veins was asserting itself with more and more force. Day by day I had come to realise how closely, though the main current of my blood was English, I was affined to the strange and mysterious people among whom I was now thrown—the only people in these islands, as it seemed to me, who would be able to understand a love-passion like

* Some Romanies think that spirits rise from the ground.

mine. And there were many things in the great race of my forefathers which I had found not only unsympathetic to me, but deeply repugnant. In Great Britain it is the Gypsies alone who understand nature's supreme charm, and enjoy her largesse as it used to be enjoyed in those remote times described in Percy Aylwin's poems before the Children of the Roof invaded the Children of the Open Air, before the earth was parcelled out into domains and ownerships as it now is parcelled out. In the mind of the Gorgio, the most beautiful landscape or the most breezy heath or the loveliest meadow-land is cut up into allotments, whether of fifty thousand acres or of two roods, and owned by people. Of ownership of land the Romany is entirely unconscious. The landscape around him is part of nature herself, and the Romany on his part acknowledges no owner. No doubt he yields to *force majeure* in the shape of gamekeeper or constable, but that is because he has no power to resist it. Nature to him is as free and unowned by man as it was to the North American Indian in his wigwam before the invasion of the Children of the Roof.

During the time that I was staying in Flintshire and near Capel Curig, rambling through the dells or fishing in the brooks, it was surprising how soon the companionship of a Gorgio would begin to pall upon me. And here the Cymric race is just as bad as the Saxon. The same detestable habit of looking upon nature as a paying market garden, the same detestable inquiry as to who was the owner of this or that glen or waterfall, was sure at last to make me sever from him. But as to Sinfi, her attitude towards nature, though it was only one of the charms that endeared her to me, was not the least of them. There was scarcely a point upon which she and I did not touch.

And what about her lack of education? Was that a drawback? Not in the least. The fact that she knew nothing of that traditional ignorance which for ages has taken the name of knowledge—that record of the foolish cosmogonies upon which have been built the philosophies and the social systems of the blundering creature Man—the fact that she knew nothing of these gave an especial piquancy to everything she said. I had been trying to educate myself in the new and wonderful cosmogony of growth which was first enunciated in the sixties, and was going to be, as I firmly believed, the basis of a new philosophy, a new system of ethics, a new poetry, a new everything. But in knowledge of nature as a sublime consciousness, in knowledge of the human heart, Sinfi was far more learned than I. And be-

lieving as I did that education will in the twentieth century consist of unlearning, of unloading the mind of the trash previously called knowledge, I could not help feeling that Sinfi was far more advanced, far more in harmony than I could hope to be with the new morning of Life of which we are just beginning to see the streaks of dawn.

"I must go and see Fenella's portrait," I said, as I walked briskly towards Raxton.

When I reached Raxton Hall I seemed to startle the butler and the servants, as though I had come from the other world.

I told the butler that I should sleep there that night, and then went at once to the picture gallery and stood before Reynolds' famous picture of Fenella Stanley as the Sibyl. The likeness to Sinfi was striking. How was it that it had not previously struck me more forcibly? The painter had evidently seized the moment when Fenella's eyes expressed that look of the seeress which Sinfi's eyes, on occasion, so powerfully expressed. I stood motionless before it while the rich, warm light of evening bathed it in a rosy radiance. And when the twilight shadows fell upon it, and when the moon again lit it up, I stood there still. The face seemed to pass into my very being, and Sinfi's voice kept singing in my ears, "Fenella Stanley's dead and dust, and that's why she can make you put that cross in your feyther's tomb, and she will, she will."

I left the picture and went into the library: for I bethought me of that sheaf of Fenella's letters to my great-grandfather which he had kept so sacredly, and which had come to me as representative of the family. My previous slight inspection of them had shown me what a wonderful woman she was, how full of ideas the most original and the most wild. The moment a Gypsy-woman has been taught to write there comes upon her a passion for letter-writing.

Nothing could be more striking than the contrast between the illiterate locutions and the eccentric orthography of Fenella's letters and the subtle remarks and speculations upon the symbols of nature,—the dukkeripen of the woods, the streams, the stars, and the winds. But when I came to analyse the theories of man's place in nature expressed in the ignorant language of this Romany heathen, they seemed to me only another mode of expressing the mysticism of the religious enthusiast Wilderspin, the more learned and philosophic mysticism of my father, and the views of D'Arcy, the dreamy painter.

As I rode back to London, I said to myself, "What change has come over me? What power has been gradually sapping my

manhood? Why do I, who was so self-reliant, long now so passionately for a friend to whom to unburthen my soul—one who could give me a sympathy as deep and true as that I got from Sinfu Lovell, and yet the sympathy of a mind unclouded by ignorant superstitions?"

With the exception of D'Arcy, whose advice as to the disposal of the cross had proclaimed him to be as superstitious as Sinfu herself, not a single friend had I in all London. Indeed, besides Lord Sleaford (a tall, burly man with the springy movement of a prize-fighter, with blue-grey eyes, thick, close-cropped hair, and a flaxen moustache, who had lately struck up a friendship with my mother) I had not even an acquaintance. Cyril Aylwin, whom I had not seen since we parted in Wales, was now on the Continent with Wilderspin. Strange as it may seem, I looked forward with eagerness to the return of this light-hearted jester. Cyril's sagacity and knowledge of the world had impressed me in Wales; but his cynical attitude, whether genuine or assumed, towards subjects connected with deep passion, had prevented my confiding in him. He must, I knew, have gathered from Sinfu, and from other sources, that I was mourning the loss of a Welsh girl in humble life; but during our very brief intercourse in Wales neither of us had mentioned the matter to the other. Now, however, in my present dire strait I longed to call in the aid of his penetrative mind.

VIII

Isis as Humourist

I

ON reaching London I resumed my wanderings through the London streets. Bitter as these wanderings were, my real misery now did not begin until I got to bed. Then began the terrible struggle of the soul that wrestles with its ancestral fleshly prison—that prison whose warders are the superstitions of bygone ages. "Have you not seen the curse literally fulfilled?" ancestral voices of the

blood—voices Romany and Gorgio—seemed whispering in my ears. "Have you not heard the voice of his daughter upon whose head the curse of your dead father has fallen a beggar in the street, while not all your love can succour her or reach her?"

And then my soul would cry out in its agony, "Most true, Fenella Stanley—most true, Philip Aylwin; but before I will succumb to such a theory of the universe as yours, a theory which reason laughs at and which laughs at reason, I will die—die by this hand of mine: this flesh that imprisons me in a world of mocking delusion shall be destroyed, but first the symbol itself of your wicked, cruel old folly shall go."

I would then leap from my bed, light a candle, unlock my cabinet, take out the cross, and holding it aloft prepare to dash it against the wall, when my hand would be arrested by the same ancestral voices, Romany and Gorgio, whispering in my ears and at my heart,

"If you break that amulet, how shall you ever be able to see what would be the effect upon Winnie's fate of its restoration to your father's tomb?"

And then I would laugh aloud and mock the voices of Fenella Stanley and Philip Aylwin and millions of other voices that echoed or murmured or bellowed through half a million years, echoed or murmured or bellowed from European halls and castles, from Gypsy tents, from caves of palæolithic man.

"How shall you stay the curse from working in the blood of the accursed one?" the voices would say. And then I would laugh again till I feared the people in the hotel would hear me and take me for a maniac.

But then my aunt's picture of a beggar-girl standing in the rain would fill my eyes and the whispers would grow louder than the voice of the North Sea in the March wind: "Look at *that*. How dare you leave undone anything, howsoever wild, which might seem to any one—even to an illiterate Gypsy, even to a crazy mystic—a means of finding Winifred? What is the meaning of the great instinct which has always conquered the soul in its direst need—which has always driven man when in the grip of unbearable calamity to believe in powers that are unseen? What though that scientific reason of yours tells you that Winifred's misfortunes have nothing to do with any curse? what though your reason tells you that all these calamities may be read as being the perfectly natural results of perfectly natural causes? Is the voice of man's puny reason clothed with such authority that it dares to answer his heart, which knows nothing but that it bleeds?"

The terrible facts of the case *may* be read in two ways. With an inscrutable symmetry these facts may and do fit in with the universal theory of the power of the spirit-world to execute a curse from the grave. Look at that beggar in the street! How dare you ignore the theory of the sorrowing soul, the logic of the lacerated heart, even though your reason laughs it to scorn?"

And then at last my laughter would turn to moans, and, replacing the cross in the cabinet, I would creep back to my bed ashamed, like a guilty thing—ashamed before myself.

But the more I felt at my throat the claws of the ancestral ogre Superstition, the more enraged I became with myself for feeling them there. And the anger against my ancestors' mysticism grew with the growing consciousness that I was rapidly yielding to the very same mysticism myself. And then I would get up again and take from my escritoire the sheaf of Fenella Stanley's letters which I had brought from Raxton, and read again those stories about curses, such as that about the withering of a Romany family under a dead man's curse which Winnie had described to me that night on the sands.

II

I WAS delighted to be told by Sleaford, whom I met one afternoon in Piccadilly, that Cyril had returned to London within the last few days. "He is appointed artist-in-chief of the new comic paper, *The Caricaturist*," said Sleaford, "and is in great feather. I have just been calling upon him."

"The very man I want to see," I replied.

Sleaford thereupon directed me to Cyril's studio. "You'll find him at work," said he, "doin' a caricature of Wilderspin's great picture, 'Faith and Love.' Mother Gudgeon is sittin' as his model. He does everything from models, you know."

"Mother Gudgeon?"

"A female costermonger that he picked up somewhere in the slums, the funniest woman in London: haw! haw! I promise you she'll make you laugh when Cyril draws her out."

He then began to talk upon the subject which interested him above all others, the smartness and swiftness of his yacht. "I am trying to persuade your mother and aunt to go for a cruise with me, and I think I shall succeed."

He directed me to the studio and we parted.

I found Cyril in a large and lofty studio in Chelsea, filled with the curiously carved

black furniture of Bombay, mixed, for contrast, with a few Indian cabinets of carved and fretted ivory exquisitely wrought. He greeted me cordially. The walls were covered with Japanese drawings. I began by asking him about *The Caricaturist*.

"Well," said he, "now that the House of Commons has become a bear-garden, and t'other House a wax-work show, and the intellect and culture of the country are leaving politics to dummies and cads, how can the artistic mind condescend to caricature the political world—a world that has not only ceased to be intelligent, but has even ceased to be funny? The quarry of *The Caricaturist* will be literature, science, and art. Instead of wasting artistic genius upon such small fry as premiers, diplomatists, and cabinet ministers, our cartoons will be caricatures of the pictures of Millais, Leighton, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Madox Brown, Holman Hunt, Watts, Sandys, Whistler, Wilderspin: our letterpress will be Aristophanic parodies of Tennyson, Browning, Meredith, Arnold, Morris, Swinburne; game worth flying at, my boy! The art-world is in a dire funk, I can tell you, for the artistic epidermis has latterly grown genteel and thin."

Already I was beginning to ask myself whether it was possible to make a confidant of this inscrutable cynic. "You are fond of Oriental things?" I said, wishing to turn the subject. I looked round at the Chinese, Indian, and Japanese monstrosities scattered about the room.

"That," said he, pointing to a picture of a woman (apparently drunk) who was amusing herself by chasing butterflies, while a number of broad-faced, mischievous-looking children were teasing her—"that is the masterpiece of Hokusai. The legend in the corner is 'Kiyô-jo chô ni tawamureru,' which, according to the lying Japanese scholars, means nothing more than 'A cracked woman chasing butterflies.' It was left for me to discover that it represents Yoka, the goddess of Fun, sportively chasing the butterfly souls of men, while the urchins, the little Yokas, are crying, 'Ma! you're screwed.'"

"But what are these quaint figures?" I asked, pointing to certain drawings of an obese Japanese figure, grinning with lazy good-humour above several of the cabinets.

"Hotei, the fat god of enjoyment."

"A Japanese god?" I asked.

"Yes, nothing artistic is quite right now unless it has a savour of blue mould or Japan. Wonderful people, the Japanese, to have discovered the Jolly Hotei. And here is Hotei's wife, the goddess-queen Yoka herself—the real masquerader behind that

mystic veil which nas so enveloped and bemuddled the mind of poor Wilderspin. She is to figure in the first number of *The Caricaturist*."

He pointed to an object I had only partially observed: a broad-faced burly woman, of about forty-five years of age, in an eccentric dress of Japanese silks, standing on the model-throne between two lay figures. "Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "why, she's alive."

"An' kickin', sir," said a voice that was at once strident and unctuous. Owing to the almond shape of her sparkling black eyes and the flatness of her nose, the bridge of which had been broken (most likely in childhood) she looked absurdly like a Japanese woman, save that upon her quaintly-cut mouth, curving slightly upwards horse-shoe fashion, there was that twitter of humorous alertness which is perhaps rarely seen in perfection except among the lower orders, Celtic or Saxon, of London. Her build was that of a Dutch fisherwoman. The set of her head on her muscular neck showed her to be a woman of immense strength. But still more was her great physical power indicated by her hands, the fingers of which seemed to have a grip like that of an eagle's claws.

I then perceived upon an easel a large drawing. "I have not seen Wilderspin's 'Faith and Love,'" I said; "but this, I see, must be a caricature of it."

In it the woman figured as Isis, grinning beneath a veil held over her head by two fantastically-dressed figures—one having the face of Darwin, the other the face of Wilderspin.

"Allow me," said Cyril, "to introduce you to the Goddess Yoka, the true Isis or goddess of bohemianism and universal joke, who, when she had the chance of making a rational and common-sense universe, preferred amusing herself with flamingoes, dromedaries, ring-tailed monkeys, and men."

"Pardon me," I said; "I merely called to see you. Good afternoon."

"Allow me," said he, turning to the woman, "to introduce to your celestial majesty Mr. Henry Aylwin, a kinsman of mine, whose possessions in Little Egypt are as brilliant (judging from the colours of his royal waggon) as are his possessions in Philistia."

The woman made me a curtsy of much gravity.

"And allow me to introduce *you*," he said, turning to me, "to the real original Natura Mystica,—she who for ages upon ages has been trying by her funny goings-on to teach us that 'the *Principium hylarchicum* of the cosmos' (to use the simple phraseology of a

great spiritualistic painter) is the benign principle of joke."

The woman made me another curtsy.

"You forget your exalted position, Mrs. Gudgeon," said Cyril; "when a mystic goddess-queen is so condescending as to curtsy she should be careful not to bend too low. Man is a creature who can never with safety be treated with too much respect."

"We's all so modest in Primrose Court, that's the wust on us," replied the woman. "But, Muster Cyril, sir, I don't think you've noticed that the queen's *fother* eye's got dry now."

Cyril gravely poured her out a glass of foaming ale from a bottle that stood upon a little Indian bamboo-table, and handed it to her carefully over the silks, saying to me,

"Her majesty's elegant way of hinting that she likes to wet both eyes!"

Such foolery as this and at such a time irritated me sorely; but there was no help for it now. Whether I should or should not open to him the subject that had taken me thither, I must, I saw, let him have his humour till the woman was dismissed.

"And now, goddess," said he, "while I am doing justice to the design of your nose—"

"You can't do that, sir," interjected the creature, "it's sich a beauty, ha! ha! I allus say that when I do die, I shall die a-larfin'. They calls me 'Jokin' Meg' in Primrose Court. I shall die a-larfin', they say in Primrose Court, and so I shall—unless I die a-cryin'," she added in an utterly different and tragic voice which greatly struck me.

"While I am trying to do justice to that beautiful bridge you must tell my friend about yourself and your daughter, and how you and she first became two shining lights in the art world of London."

"You makes me blush," said the woman, "an' blow me if blushin' ain't bin an' made *fother* eye dry."

She then took another glass of ale, grinned, shook herself, as though preparing for an effort, and said,

"Well, you must know, sir, as my name's Meg Gudgeon, leaseways that was my name till my darter chrissened me Mrs. Knocker, and I lives in Primrose Court, Great Queen Street, and my reg'lar perfession is a-sellin' coffee 'so airly in the mornin', and I've got a darter as ain't quite so 'ansom as me, bein' the moral of her father as is over the water a-livin' in the fine Straley. And you must know, sir, that one 'ot summer's day there comes a knock at our door as sends my 'eart into my mouth and makes me cry out, 'The coppers, by jabbers!' and when I goes down and opens the door, lo! and be-

hold, there stan's a cnap wi' great goggle eyes, dressed all in shiny black, jest like a Quaker." (Here she made a noise between a laugh and a cough.) "I allus say that when I do die I shall die a-larfin'—unless I die a-cryin'," she added, in the same altered voice that had struck me before.

"Well, mother," said Cyril, "and what did the shiny Quaker say?"

"They calls me 'Jokin' Meg' in Primrose Court. The shiny Quaker, 'e axes if my name is Gudgeon. 'Well, sez I, 'supposin' as my name is Gudgeon,—I don't say it is,' says I, 'but supposin' as it is—what then?' sez I. 'But is that your name?' sez 'e. 'Supposin' as it was,' sez I, 'what then?' 'Will you answer my simple kervation?' sez 'e. 'Is your name Mrs. Gudgeon, or ain't it not?' sez 'e. 'An' will you answer my simple kervation, Mr. Shiny Quaker?' sez I. 'Supposin' my name was Mrs. Gudgeon,—I don't say it is, but supposin' it was, —what's that to you?' sez I, for I thought my poor bor Bob what lives in the country had got into trouble agin and had sent for me."

"Go on, mother," said Cyril, "what did the shiny Quaker say then?"

"Well then, sez 'e, 'if your name is Mrs. Gudgeon, there is a pooty gal as is, I am told, a-livin' along o' you.' 'Oh, oh, my fine shiny Quaker gent,' sez I, an' I flings the door wide open an' there I stan's in the doorway, 'it's her you wants, is it?' sez I. 'And pray what does my fine shiny Quaker gent want wi' my darter?' 'Your darter?' sez 'e, an' opens 'is mouth like this, and shets it agin like a rat-trap. 'Yis, my darter,' sez I. 'I s'pose,' sez I, 'you think she ain't 'ansom enough to be my darter. No more she ain't,' sez I; 'but she takes arter her father, an' werry sorry she is for it,' sez I. 'I want to put her in the way of 'arnin' some money,' sez 'e. 'Oh, do you?' sez I. 'How very kind! I'm sure it does a pore woman's 'eart good to see how kind you gents is to us pore women's pooty darters,' sez I,—'even shiny Quaker gents as is generally so quiet. You're not the fust shiny gent,' sez I, 'as 'ez followed 'er 'um, I can tell you,—not the fust by a long way; but up to now,' sez I, 'I've allus managed to send you all away with a flea in your ears, cuss you for a lot of wicious warments, young and old,' sez I, 'an' if you don't get out,' sez I—'My good woman, you mistake my attentions,' sez 'e. 'Oh, no, I don't,' sez I, 'not a bit on it. It's sich ole sinners as you in your shiny black coats,' sez I, 'as I never do mistake, and if you don't git out there's a pump-andle behind this werry door, as my poor bor Bob brought up from the country for me to sell for him—' 'My

good woman, sez 'e, 'I am a hartist,' sez 'e. 'What's that?' sez I. 'A painter,' sez 'e. 'A painter, air you? you don't look it,' sez I. 'P'raps it's holiday time with ye,' sez I, 'and that makes you look so varnishy. Well, and what do painters more nor any other trade want with pore women's pooty darters?' sez I,—'more nor plumbers nor glaziers, nor bricklayers, for the matter of that?' sez I. 'But I ain't a 'ousepainter,' sez 'e; 'I paints pictures, and I want this gal to set as a moral,' sez 'e. 'A moral! an' what's a moral?' sez I. 'You ain't a-goin' to play none o' your shiny-coat larks wi' my pooty darter,' sez I. 'I wants to paint her portrait,' sez 'e, 'an' then put it in a pictur.' 'Oh,' sez I, 'you wants to paint her portrait 'cause she's such a pooty gal, an' then you wants to make believe you drawed it out of your own 'ead, an' sell it,' sez I. 'Oh, but you're a downy one, you are, an' no mistake,' sez I. 'But I likes you none the wuss for that. I likes a downy chap, an' I don't see no objection to that; but how much will you give to paint my pooty darter?' sez I. 'P'raps I'd better come in,' sez he. 'P'raps you 'ad, if we're a-comin' to bisniss,' sez I; 'so jest make a long leg an' step over them dirty-nosed child'n o' Mrs. Mix's, a-settin' on my door-step, an' I dessay we sha'n't quarrel over a 'undud p'un or two,' sez I. An' then I bust out a-larfin' agin—I shall die a-larfin'." And then she added suddenly in the same tone of sadness, "If I don't die a-cryin'."

"Really, mother," said Cyril, "it is very egotistical of you to interrupt your story with prophecies about the mood in which you will probably shuffle off the Gudgeon coil and take to Gudgeon wings. It is the shiny Quaker we want to know about."

"And then the shiny Quaker comes in," said the woman, "and I shets the door, being be'ind 'im, and that skeers 'im for a moment, till I bust out a-larfin': 'Oh, you needn't be afeard,' sez I;—'when we burgles a Quaker in Primrose Court we never minces 'im for sossingers, 'e's so 'ily in 'is flavour.' Well, sir, to cut a long story short, I agrees to take my pooty darter to the Quaker gent's studero: an' I takes 'er nex' day, an' 'e puts her in a pictur. But afore long," continued the old woman, leering round at Cyril, "lo! and behold, a young swell, p'raps a young lord in disguise (I don't want to be pussonal, an' so I sha'n't tell his name), 'e comes into that studero one day when I was a-settlin' up with the Quaker gent for the week's pay, an' he sets an' admires me, till I sets an' blushes as I'm a-blushin' at this werry moment; an' when I gits 'ome, I sez to Polly Onion (that's a pal of mine as lives on the ground floor), I sez, 'Poll, bring my

best lookin'-glass out o' my bowdore, an' let's have a look at my old chops, for I'm blowed if there ain't a young swell, p'raps a young lord in disguise, as 'ez fell 'ead over ears in love with me.' And sure enough when I goes back to the studero the werry nex' time, my young swell 'e sez to me, 'It's your own pooty face as I wants for *my* moral. I desay your darter's a stunner—I ain't seen her yit—but she cain't be nothin' to you.' And I sez to 'im, 'In course she ain't, for she takes arter her father's family, pore gal, and werry sorry she is for it.'

At this moment a servant entered and said Mr. Wilderspin was waiting in the hall.

All hope having now fled of my getting a private word with Cyril that afternoon, I was preparing to slip away; but he would not let me go.

"I don't want Wilderspin to know about the caricature till it is finished," whispered he to me; "so I told Bunner never to let him come suddenly upon me. You'd better be off, mother," he said to the old woman, "and come again to-morrow."

She bustled up and, throwing off the Japanese finery, left the room, while Cyril removed the drawing from the easel and hid it away.

"Isn't she delightful?" ejaculated Cyril.

"Delightful! What, that old wretch? All that interests me in her is the change in her voice after she says she will die laughing."

"Oh," said Cyril, "she seems to be troubled with a drunken son in the country somewhere, who is always getting into scrapes. Wilderspin's in love with her daughter, a wonderfully beautiful girl, the finding of whom at the very moment when he was in despair for the want of the right model gave the final turn to his head. He thinks she was sent to him from Paradise by his mother's spirit! He does, I assure you."

"Wilderspin in love with a model!"

"Oh, not *à la* Raphael."

"If you think Wilderspin to be in love with any woman, you little know what love is," I exclaimed. "He is in love with his art and with that beautiful memory of his mother's self-sacrifice which has shattered his reason, but built up his genius. Except as a means towards the production of those pictures that possess him, no model is anything more to him than his palette-knife. Shall you be alone this evening?"

"This evening I dine at Sleaford's. To-morrow I am due in Paris."

Wilderspin, who had now entered the studio, seemed genuinely pleased to see me again, and told me that in a few days he should be able to borrow "Faith and Love" of its owner for the purpose of beginning a

replca of it, and hoped then to have the pleasure of showing it to me.

"I observed Mrs. Gudgeon in the hall," said he to Cyril. "To think that so unlovely a woman should, through an illusion of the senses, seem to be the mere material mother of her who was sent to me from the spirit-world in the very depths of my despair! Wonderful are the ways of the spirit-world. Ah, Mr. Aylwin, did it never occur to you how important is the expression of the model from whom you work?"

"I am not a painter," I said; "only an amateur," trying to stop a conversation that might run on for an hour.

"It has never occurred to you! That is strange. Let me read to you a passage upon this subject just published in *The Art Review*, written by the great painter D'Arcy."

He then took from Cyril's table a number of *The Art Review*, and began to read aloud:—

"It is a curious thing that not only the general public, but the art connoisseurs and the writers upon art, although they know full well how a painter goes to work in painting a picture, speak and write as though they thought that the head of a beautiful woman was drawn from the painter's inner consciousness, instead of from the real woman who sits to him as a model. Notwithstanding all the technical excellence of Raphael, his extraordinary good luck in finding the model that suited his genius had very much to do with his enormous success and fame. And with all Michael Angelo's instinct for grandeur, if he had not been equally lucky in regard to models, he could never adequately have expressed that genius. It is impossible to give vitality to the painting of any head unless the artist has nature before him; this is why no true judge of pictures was ever deceived as to the difference between an original and a copy. It stands to reason that in every picture of a head, howsoever the model's features may be idealised, Nature's own handiwork and mastery must dominate."

Here Cyril gently took the magazine from Wilderspin's hand, but did not silence him. "As I told you in Wales," said he to me, "I had an abundance of imagination, but I wanted some model in order to realise it. I could never meet a face that came anything nigh my own ideal of expression as the purely spiritual side of the beauty of woman; and until I did that I knew that I should achieve nothing whereby the world might recognise a new power in art. In vain did I

try to idealise such faces as did not please me. And this was because nothing could satisfy me but the perfect type of expression which not even Leonardo nor any other painter in the world had found—the true Romantic type.”

“I understand you, Mr. Wilderspin,” I said. “This perfect type of expression you eventually found—”

“In the daughter,” said Cyril, “of the goddess Gudgeon.”

“By the blessing of Mary Wilderspin in heaven,” said Wilderspin.

And then the talk between the two friends ran upon artistic matters, and I heard no more, for my mind was wandering up and down the London streets.

Wilderspin and I left the house together. As we walked along, side by side, I said to him: “You spoke just now of your mother’s blessing. Am I really to understand that you in an age like this believe in the power of human blessings and human curses?”

“Do I believe in blessings and curses, Mr. Aylwin?” said Wilderspin, solemnly. “You are asking me whether I am with or without what your sublime father calls the ‘most powerful of the primary instincts of man.’ He tells us in *The Veiled Queen* that ‘Even in this material age of ours there is not a single soul that does not in its inner depths acknowledge the power of the unseen world. The most hardened materialist,’ says he, ‘believes in what he calls sometimes “luck” and sometimes “fortune.” Let me advise you, Mr. Aylwin, to study the voice of your inspired father. I will send a set of his writings to your hotel to-morrow. And, Mr. Aylwin, my duty compels me to speak very plainly to you upon a subject that has troubled me since I had the honour of meeting you in Wales. There is but one commandment in the decalogue to which a distinct promise of reward is attached; it is that which bids us honour our fathers and our mothers. Good-day, sir.”

IX

The Palace of Nin=ki-gal

I

SHORTLY after this I met my mother at our solicitor’s office according to appointment. As she was on the eve of departing for the Continent, it was necessary that various family matters should be arranged. On the day following, as I was about to leave my hotel to call at Cyril’s studio, rather doubtful, after the frivolity I had lately witnessed, as to whether or not I should unburden my heart to such a man, he entered my room in company with Wilderspin, the latter carrying a parcel of books.

“I have brought your father’s works,” Wilderspin said.

“Thank you very much,” I replied, taking the books. “And when am I to call and see your picture? Have you yet got it back from the owner?”

“‘Faith and Love’ is now in my studio,” he replied; “but I will ask you not to call upon me yet for a few days. I hope to be too busily engaged upon another picture to afford a moment to any one save the model—that is,” he added with a sigh, “should she make her appearance.”

“A picture of his called ‘Ruth and Boaz,’” interposed Cyril. “Wilderspin is repainting the face from that favourite model of his of whom you heard so much in Wales. But the fact is the model is rather out of sorts at this moment, and Wilderspin is fearful that she may not turn up to-day. Hence the melancholy you see on his face. I try to console him, however, by assuring him that the daughter of a mamma with such a sharp appreciation of half-crowns as the lady you saw at my studio the other day is sure to turn up in due time as sound as a roach.”

Wilderspin shook his head gravely.

“Good heavens!” I muttered, “when am I to hear the last of painters’ models?” Then turning to Wilderspin, I said,

“This is the model to whom you feel so deeply indebted?”

“Deeply indebted, indeed!” exclaimed he in a fervid tone, taking a chair and playing with his hat between his knees, in his previous fashion when beginning one of his monologues. “When I began ‘Faith and Love’ I worked for weeks and months and

years, having but one thought, how to give artistic rendering to the great idea of the Renaissance of Wonder in Art symbolised in the vignette in your father's third edition. I was very poor then ; but to live upon bread and water and paint a great picture, and know that you are being watched by loving eyes above,—there is no joy like that. I found a model—a fine and a beautiful woman, the same magnificent blonde who sat for so many of the Master's greatest pictures. For a long time my work delighted me ; but after awhile a suspicion, and then a sickening dread, came upon me that all was not well with the picture. And then the withering truth broke in upon me, the scales fell from my eyes—the model's face was beautiful, but it was not right ; the expression I wanted was as far off as ever ; there was but one right expression in the world, and that I could not find. Ah ! is there any pain like that of discovering that all the toil of years has been in vain, that the best you can do—the best that the spiritual world permits you to do—is as far off the goal as when you began ?”

“And so you failed after all, Mr. Wilderspin ?” I said, anxious to get him away so that I might talk to Cyril alone upon the one subject at my heart.

“I told the model I should want her no more,” said Wilderspin, “and for two days and nights I sat in the studio in a dream, and could get nothing to pass my lips but bread and water. Then it was that Mary Wilderspin, my mother, remembered me, blessed me—sent me a spiritual body—”

“For God's sake !” I whispered to Cyril, “take the good madman away ; you don't know how his prattle harrows me just now.”

“Ah ! never,” said Wilderspin, “shall I forget that sunny morning when was first revealed to me—”

“My dear fellow,” said Cyril, “to tell the adventures of that sunny morning would, as I know from experience, keep us here for the next three hours. So, as I must not miss my train, and as you cannot spare a second from ‘Ruth and Boaz,’ come along.”

While I was accompanying them through the corridors of the hotel, Cyril said : “You say he is not in love with his model ? Don't you see the sulky looks he gives me ? I was the innocent cause of an unlucky catastrophe with her. I'll tell you about that, however, another time. Good-bye ; I'm off to Paris.”

“When you return to London,” I said to Cyril, “I wish to consult you upon a matter that concerns me deeply.”

II

ON re-entering my room, as I stood and gazed at my father's book *The Veiled Queen*, I understood something about that fascination which the bird feels who goes fluttering to the serpent's jaws from sheer repulsion. “Am I indeed,” I asked myself, “that same Darwinian student who in Switzerland not long since turned over in scorn these pages, where are enshrined superstitious stories as gross as any of those told in Fenella Stanley's ignorant letters ?”

In a chapter on “Love and Death” certain passages showed me how great must have been the influence of this book on Wilderspin, and I no longer wondered at what the painter had told me in Wales. I will give one passage here, because it had a strange effect on my imagination, as will be soon seen :

“There is an old Babylonian tablet of Nin-ki-gal, the Queen of Death, whose abode the tablet thus describes :—

To the house men enter, but cannot depart from ;

To the road men go, but cannot return ;
The abode of darkness and famine,
Where earth is their food—their nourishment clay.

Light is not seen ; in darkness they dwell :
Ghosts, like birds, flutter their wings there ;
On the gate and the gate posts the dust lies undisturbed.

Another part of the inscription describes Nin-ki-gal on her throne scattering over the earth the “Seeds of Life and Death,” and chanting her responses to the Sibyl, and to the prayers of the shapes kneeling around her, the dead gods and the souls of all the sons of men. And I often wonder whether my ancestress, Fenella Stanley, had any traditional knowledge of the Queen of Death when she had her portrait painted as the Sibyl. But whether she had or not, I never think of this Babylonian Sibyl kneeling before Nin-ki-gal, surrounded by gods and men, without seeing in the Sibyl's face the grand features of Fenella Stanley.

THE SIBYL.

What answer, O Nin-ki-gal ?
What answer, O Nin-ki-gal ?
Have pity, O Queen of Queens !

NIN-KI-GAL.

Life's fountain flows,
And still the drink is Death's ;
Life's garden blows,
And still 'tis Ashtoreth's ;^o
But all is Nin-ki-gal's.
I lent the drink of Day
To man and beast ;
I lent the drink of Day
To gods for feast ;
I poured the river of Night
On gods surceased :
Their blood was Nin-ki-gal's.

THE SIBYL.

What sowest thou, Nin-ki-gal ?
What growest thou, Nin-ki-gal ?
Have pity, O Queen of Queens !

NIN-KI-GAL.

Life-seeds I sow—
To reap the numbered breaths ;
Fair flowers I grow—
And hers, red Ashtoreth's ;
Yea, all are Nin-ki-gal's !

THE SIBYL.

What knowest thou, Nin-ki-gal ?
What showest thou, Nin-ki-gal ?
Have pity, O Queen of Queens !

NIN-KI-GAL.

Nor king nor slave I know,
Nor tribes, nor shibboleths ;
But Life-in-Death I know—
Yea, Nin-ki-gal I know—
Life's Queen and Death's."

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And what was the effect upon me of these communings with the ancestors whose superstitions I have, perhaps, been throughout this narrative treating in a spirit that hardly becomes their descendant ?

The best and briefest way of answering this question is to confess not what I thought, as I went on studying my father's book, its strange theories and revelations, but what I did. I read the book all day long : I read it all the next day. I cannot say what days passed. One night I resumed my wanderings in the streets for an hour or two, and then returned home and went to bed,—but not to sleep. For me there was no more sleep till those ancestral voices could be quelled—till that sound of Winnie's song in the street could be stopped in my ears. For very relief from them I again leapt out of

* Hathor.

bed, lit a candle, unlocked the cabinet, and taking out the amulet, proceeded to examine the facets as I did once before when I heard in the Swiss cottage these words of my stricken father :—

"Should you ever come to love as I have loved, you will find that materialism is intolerable—is hell itself—to the heart that has known a passion like mine. You will find that it is madness, Hal, madness, to believe in the word 'never' ! You will find that you *dare* not leave untried any creed, howsoever wild, that offers the heart a ray of hope."

And then while the candle burnt out dead in the socket I sat in a waking dream.

III

THE bright light of morning was pouring through the window. I gave a start of horror, and cried "Whose face?" Opposite to me there seemed to be sitting on a bed the figure of a man with a fiery cross upon his breast. The strange wild light upon the face, as if the pains of the heart were flickering up through the flesh—where had I seen it? For a moment when, in Switzerland, my father bared his bosom to me, that ancestral flame had flashed up into his dull lineaments. But upon the picture of "The Sibyl" in the portrait-gallery that illumination was perpetual !

"It is merely my own reflex in a looking-glass," I exclaimed.

Without knowing it I had slung the cross round my neck.

And then Sinfi Lovell's voice seemed murmuring in my ears, "Fenella Stanley's dead and dust, and that's why she can make you put that cross in your feyther's tomb, and she will, she will."

I turned the cross round : the front of it was now next to my skin. Sharp as needles were those diamond and ruby points as I sat and gazed in the glass. Slowly a sensation arose on my breast, of pain that was a pleasure wild and new. *I was feeling the facets.* But the tears trickling down, salt, through my moustache were tears of laughter ; for Sinfi Lovell seemed again murmuring, "For good or for ill, you must dig deep to bury your daddy."

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What thoughts and what sensations were mine as I sat there, pressing the sharp stones into my breast, thinking of her to whom the sacred symbol had come, not as a blessing, but as a curse—what agonies were

mine as I sat there sobbing the one word "Winnie,"—could be understood by myself alone, the latest blossom of the passionate blood that for generations had brought bliss and bale to the Aylwins.

o o o o o o

I cannot tell what I felt and thought, but only what I did. And while I did it my reason was all the time scoffing at my heart (for whose imperious behoof the wild, mad things I am about to record were done)—scoffing, as an Asiatic malefactor will sometimes scoff at the executioner whose pitiless and conquering saw is severing his bleeding body in twain. I arose and murmured ironically to Fenella Stanley as I wrapped the cross in a handkerchief and placed it in a hand-valise: "Secrecy is the first thing for us sacrilegists to consider, dear Sibyl, in placing a valuable jewel in a tomb in a deserted church. To take anyone into our confidence would be impossible; we must go alone. But to open the tomb and close it again, and leave no trace of what has been done, will require all our skill. And as burglars' jemmies are not on open sale we must buy, on our way to the railway-station, screwdrivers, chisels, a hammer, and a lantern; for who should know better than you, dear Sibyl, that the palace of Nin-ki-gal is dark?"

IV

As I hurried towards the Great Eastern Railway station, I felt like a horse drawn by a Gypsy whisperer to do something against his own will, and yet in the street I stopped to buy the tools. Reaching Dullingham in the afternoon, I lunched there; and as I walked thence along the cliff, towards Raxton, I became more calm and collected. I determined not to go near the Hall, lest my movements should be watched by the servants. The old churchyard was full of workmen of the navy kind, and I learned that for the safety of the public it had now become necessary to hurl down upon the sands some enormous masses of the cliff newly disintegrated by the land-springs. I descended the gangway at Flinty Point, and concealing my implements behind a boulder in the cliff, ascended Needle Point, and went into the town.

I had previously become aware, from conversations with my mother, that Wynne had been succeeded as custodian of the old church by Shales, the hump-backed tailor, and I apprehended no difficulty in getting the keys of the church and crypt from my

simple-minded acquaintance, without arousing his suspicions as to my mission.

Therefore I went to the tailor's shop, but found that Shales was out, attending an annual Odd-Fellows' carousal at Graylingham. Consequently I was obliged to open my business to his mother, a far shrewder person, and one who might be much more difficult to deal with. However, the fact of the navvies being at work so close to a church whose chancel belonged to my family afforded an excellent motive for my visit. But before I could introduce the subject to Mrs. Shales, I had to listen to an exhaustive chronicle of Raxton and Graylingham doings since I had left. Hence by the time I quitted her (with a promise to return the keys in the morning) the sun was setting.

But, as I walked along Wilderness Road towards the church, a new and unexpected difficulty presented itself to my mind. I could not, without running the risk of an interruption, enter the church till after the Odd-Fellows had all returned from Graylingham, as Shales and his companions would have to pass along Wilderness Road, which skirts the churchyard. Shales himself was as short-sighted as a bat; but his companions had the usual long-sight of agriculturists, and would descry the slightest movement in the churchyard, or any glimmer of light at the church windows.

I would have postponed my enterprise till the morrow; but another important appointment at the office of our solicitor with my mother, precluded the possibility of this. So my visit to the catacomb must perforce be late at night.

Accordingly I descended the cliff and waited to hear the return of the carousers. There I sat down upon the well-remembered boulder, lost in recollections of all that had passed on those sands, while over the sea the night spread like the widening, darkening wings of an enormous spectral bird, whose brooding voice was the drone of the waves as they came nearer and nearer. Then I began to think of what lay before me, of the strangeness and wildness of my life.

Then I recalled, with a shudder I could not repress, those sepulchral chambers beneath the church, which, owing, I believe, to the directions in an ancestor's will, had been the means of saving it from demolition after a large portion of the churchyard had been condemned as dangerous. Raxton church is the only one along the coast that can boast a crypt; all the churches are Perpendicular in style, too late for crypts; a fact which is supposed to indicate that Raxton was, in very early times, a sea-side town of great importance; for the crypt is much