WHITEHOOD AND BLUECAP
A "XMAS BOUCH" WITH TWO BRANCHES

BY VINCENT PYKE AND THORPE TALBOT

DUNDON : JOSEPH BRAITHWAITE, AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.
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WHITE HOOD:

A TALE OF THE TERRACES,

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"WILD WILL ENDERBY," "GEORGE WASHINGTON PRATT,"
&c., &c.

"The Gods are just; and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us."

PROLOGUE.

High up amongst the mountains of Western Otago are those interesting fragments of a pre-historic world, familiarly known as "The Terraces," built up, grain upon grain and pebble upon pebble, by Nature's plastic hand, in that remote period when the interior of Otago consisted of a vast series of lakes, severed from each other sometimes by intervening ranges, sometimes by huge moraines. Coastwise these lakes were belted round by rocky ramparts of such great altitude that when the island did, at intervals of a few million years—as scientists tell us—take her periodic dip beneath old ocean, the waters thereof penetrated not within those mighty barriers. For not anywhere—neither on the surface of the earth nor in the bowels thereof, so far as man has yet forced his way—have any traces of marine life been found in that region. Shells of a fresh water mussel are found embedded in the clays
which overlie the coal deposits, and the same species may be gathered in the running streams now. And in the extensive masses of "sinter" scattered along the margins of the old lake-beds there are immense numbers of tiny spiral shells, scarcely perceptible to the naked eye. But these are also of fresh water origin; and these are all.

The more ancient of the Terraces are about five hundred feet above the level of the yet existing lakes—Haweia, Wanaka, and Wakatipu—but they, in geological argot, have been so "degraded" and "eroded" in the course of time, that their position and outlines are barely traceable by the educated and practised eye. Lower down there are others so fresh and smooth, so mathematically true in their proportions, and so perfect in form, that they seem comparatively the work of yesterday. Time has wrought but little change in them. Yet an incalculable space of time must have elapsed since they formed the beds and margins of the great lakes by whose agency they were deposited as we now behold them. Far below their surface the rivers now find their way to the sea through rocky gorges, cut by the irresistible glaciers, which ground and tore the opposing mountains in their onward path, leaving everywhere the scars whereby their action is made manifest to the readers of the stone Bible.

It is on these Terraces (many of which are of considerable extent), and in the creeks which intersect them, that our gold miners pursue their avocations, sluicing away the river frontages and burrowing into their inmost recesses, in search of the golden grains which, in greater or less quantities, are dispersed throughout. Theirs is a life of great hardship, and laborious in the extreme; but it is one which seems to elicit the kindliest feelings and most manly sentiments of our common nature—as such lives ever do, on sea or land, save where "the slime of the serpent" has corroded the hearts of men.

Picture to yourself; then, one of these natural Terraces, green with the late autumn rains, and set
amidst stupendous snow-capped mountains, with a river—or, more properly, a torrent—brawling and foaming in its rock-bound and boulder-strewn channel a hundred feet below. Irregularly scattered over the level plateau are some two score huts, constructed of rough slabs of native timber, and well plastered with clay in the chinks, "to keep the wind away." These are the habitations of the miners. The musical clinking of hammers on the anvil proclaims the presence of a blacksmith's forge; and, conspicuous by their greater size and more pretentious appearance, are two buildings—one being the ubiquitous "General Store," where every description of merchandise is sold; the other, a public house, rejoicing in the name of "The Maori Hen Hotel," where alcoholic liquors of great potency, but of doubtful purity, are vended.

Behold, then, the scene. There—in that wild and distant region—it was that the events which I am about to narrate occurred.

Let me now introduce to you the actors in the drama.
CHAPTER I.

It was evening—the soft evening of the "Indian summer," which makes autumn, in inland Otago, the most delightful season of the year. A gentle breeze, fragrant with the delicate odours of sweet-scented grasses, whispered lovingly through the valley. The lower peaks of the mountains were enfolded in a purple haze, save where a westerly ravine admitted a stream of silver light; and their snowy summits were tinged with the roseate splendours of the setting sun—such as Gully and Barraud, and, in a lesser degree, Hodgkins and Huddleston, have transferred to canvas with remarkable fidelity; but of which the full glory cannot be conceived by those who have never witnessed the reality.

It was evening. The metallic echoes of the smithy were hushed, and the faint clicking of billiard balls, proceeding from the direction of the Maori Hen, denoted that for at least one portion of the community play had temporarily superseded work. Around the door of that hostelry lounged a few men, clay-stained, blue-shirted, with bronzed visages and "bearded like the pard," smoking short pipes, and comparing notes on the proceedings of the day. In front of the Store a string of weary-looking pack-horses were patiently waiting for their burdens, to be borne on the morrow over rough mountain tracks to yet more remote localities. On the rearward slopes, goats were leisurely browsing: and in the foreground a group of children, guiltless of shoes or stockings, were playing—

"Turning to mirth all things of earth,
As only childhood can."
Now and then a woman flitted from hut to hut, or went down to the water-race which traversed the Terrace for a pail of the clear, cool fluid; and miners trooped past, returning from their "spell" of labour.

Presently there came by two men, both young—under thirty, let us say. One of them was tall, shapely as an Adonis, and muscular as a Hercules, with fair hair and a goodly smiling face, such as women love to look upon and men take kindly to. His companion was of a widely different type. Short of stature, and somewhat ungainly in figure, with straggling beard and hair of no particular colour—hovering, indeed, between black and brown. Yet you could not return the glance of his honest gray eyes for two seconds without instinctively feeling that he was a man to be trusted.

As they plodded silently across the Terrace, there came forth from one of the primitive dwellings I have described—a girl.

Only a girl! That was all. But her appearance effected an instantaneous change in the demeanour of both men—as an electric spark might have done—only more pleasantly.

Over the face of each there passed a smile as they beheld her. But a keen observer would have distinguished betwixt the twain. In the smile of the taller man, whom you will know hereafter as "Handsome George," the elements of vanity and pleasure were visibly blended. The smile of his companion—mate if you will—who was popularly known by the sobriquet of "Dusky Jim"—betokened pleasure also, but combined with an expression of reverential admiration, such one might bestow on a picture of the Madonna.

In the last sentence the characters of these men are written. He that hath eyes to see, let him see. If you, my reader, are unable to do so, pray close the book, and pass on.

The girl smiled also as she came daintily tripping towards them, clad in light-coloured flowing drapery,
not so long as to conceal her tiny foot and well-formed angle, nor so loose as to destroy the symmetry of her waist and bust. Her head, sitting well on her shapely neck, was crowned with a glorious wealth of silky golden hair, which shone out with pleasing contrast from beneath and around a little white hood, artistically fabricated, of some fleecy material, suiting well the soft blue eyes which irradiated her countenance. The pretty petite figure, backed by the sombre mountains, seemed as much out of place in that locality as Psyche in Hades; and little wonder was it that not only our two special acquaintances beheld her with pleasure, but also every other miner, as he passed her, turned to look again at the picture.

The girl was the first to speak. "Good evening, George," she said, or rather cooed; for she had that soft and gentle voice which Shakespeare declares to be "an excellent thing in woman." "Good evening, George. Did you see my goats as you came along?"

"No," he replied, "I did not, Miss Mary. Have you lost them?"

"I hope not, indeed," said Mary, "but they generally come home at sundown, and they have not yet made their appearance."

One word of explanation. In those remote districts milk producers of the bovine species there were not, and of necessity goats constituted the sole resource of the miners' dairy.

"I am going to look for the silly creatures," she continued.

Said Dusky Jim, and he spoke very shyly, as one all unused to converse with women, "I think I saw them, Miss Mary, on the Terrace beyond the creek. Perhaps they can't find their way. I think—yes, I'm sure they were yours, for they had little bells on their collars. If you please, I'll go back and fetch them for you."

"Oh! thank you ever so much, Jim," and as she said it, she put her little hands together with a gesture of thanksgiving, and beamed upon the poor fellow
with such a pleasant, sunny expression, that his face was literally suffused with blushes. "I am so glad I met you."

"Yes, Jim," said George, approvingly; "That's right. You go and get Miss Mary's goats, and I'll wait at Ned's hut till you come back."

And Jim went.

Ned Austin was Mary's brother. He had been out in the colonies some years, when his father and mother sickened and died, within a few months of each other. Then he betook him of the little sister whom he had played with on the paternal hearth in the happy days of childhood; and he sent home the necessary funds to bring her out. He had his reward when he met and kissed the handsome girl, of seventeen summers, whom he had only remembered as a pale-faced and somewhat scraggy child, in short frocks, eight years before. He felt proud of his new acquisition, and not without cause. She was a sister of whom any brother might excusably feel proud; for she was as good as she was handsome. She made her first appearance on the Terrace about three months prior to the date of the events I am narrating, and made no small sensation amongst the miners, many of whom would, metaphorically, have given their eyes out of their heads for a gentle word or a kind glance from her. But the saucy little beauty was very reserved after her fashion, and held herself aloof from ordinary intercourse; wherefore her female neighbours averred that she was a vain "stuck-up thing;" and the men smiled and stroked their beards, and said that they guessed "Miss Mary" knew what she was about. Her brother, naturally reticent, discouraged almost all and every approach towards anything beyond mere acquaintance; but George Gifford and Jim Trevanna happened to be his mates—working in the same claim indeed—and thus there occurred frequent opportunities, which Handsome George, who was quite conscious of his good looks, had certainly not neglected. Jim, on such occasions, generally played the mute's part,
smoking his cutty-pipe in solemn silence, and furtively admiring the trim damsel, as she flitted about the hut, or bent over her sewing. George was a special favourite with Ned Austin, as with many others; but Jim—well, in mining parlance he was generally regarded as a good-natured "duffer."

But let us return to our muttons, or rather our goats. When Jim reached the bank of the creek, he could not help looking back. (Ah! that fatal propensity of looking back. Will the lesson taught by the fate of Lot's wife never have any salutary effect upon the children of Adam?) A strange pang smote him, as he saw Handsome George and Mary strolling along, chatting and laughing in friendly companionship.

"I wish she cared half as much for me as she does for her goats," he muttered. "But there—what's the good? I know I ain't the sort of man that a girl like that would care for; Handsome George is the fellow for the like of her. Ah! why didn't God make me better looking, when he was about it?"

Forgive his irreverence, my friends. It was a curious question, and one not easily to be answered. What saith Dogberry?—"Reading and writing come by nature; but to be well-favoured is the gift of Fortune." And Fortune is a capricious goddess, who, rather than Justice, should be represented as being blind; whereas Justice should be very open-eyed, properly to fulfil her functions.

The vagrant goats gave their pursuer some trouble. They were inclined to be perverse and frolicsome, and led Jim a weary dance before he succeeded in capturing them. By the time he had done so, twilight had set in. As he returned, leading one with each hand, he had to pass the "Maori Hen," at the door of which stood a woman. You could not see what she was like by the uncertain light, except that she was young and dark-haired. But her voice was singularly rich and mellow.

"Eh! Jim," she said, "how long have thee been a goat-tender?"
“They are not mine,” he replied, “They belong to Mary Austin. She lost them—confound the wretches—and I've had a smartish hunt after them.”

The woman stepped forward with a resolute stride, and stood before him. “Tell me, where is George?” she demanded.

“Why, he is up at Ned’s hut, waiting for me; that is, if he hasn’t got tired, and gone home.”

“Ah! George is very often at Ned’s now, isn’t he—since that sister of his came up here?”

“I don’t know, Bessie. Good night.” and he attempted to pass on, but in vain.

“Tell me,” she said, with a voice imperative, “Is it true that he is courting that girl?”

“I don’t know,” he replied, “and I don’t want to know. You had better ask him yourself.”

“Thou poor fool!” exclaimed the woman, scornfully. “Thou’rt only fit to fetch and carry. Thou’rt out hunting goats for ‘Miss Mary’—oh! yes, I know—it is always ‘Miss’ Mary—(words cannot convey any idea of the bitterness which she threw into the phrase)—while thy mate is making love to her. Don’t tell me. It is true, and thou knows it.”

“I don’t know anything about it,” persisted Jim. “Please let me get along. I want to get rid of these confounded animals.”

She moved so as to allow him to pass, but remained standing on the track, eagerly watching, until the two men came forth from Ned Austin’s hut, and disappeared in the opposite direction.

“Yes,” she said; “I will see him myself. Better for thee, my Handsome George, that thou had never been born than play the fool with me, for that baby.”
CHAPTER II.

It was a small hut wherein George and Jim resided, and scant of furniture—two rough "stretcher" bedsteads, heaped with blankets, a small, rude table, a few stools of home manufacture, and a couple of stout sea chests, nearly completing the inventory. If any one had looked into it on the evening wherewith my story opens, they would have seen Jim busy over a brisk log fire, busily engaged in cooking the savoury chops which formed the basis of their frugal supper, whilst George was busily adorning himself, as best he might under the circumstances, before a very small looking-glass suspended from the wall. Presently Jim transferred the contents of the pan to a plate, which he placed on the table—guiltless of cloth or covering—with a loaf of bread, some salt and a couple of plates, knives and forks, two tin pannikins, and a small tin boiler, called a "billy," filled with steaming tea.

"Supper is ready, George, when you've done titivating yourself." Thus announced Jim.

"What's the matter now, old man?" queried George. "You don't look happy, and you don't speak happy. Have Miss Mary's goats given you too much trouble?"

"No; and I ain't happy. I'm downright tired of this life, and I'll sell out if I can, and go away—somewhere."

"But what for? What's wrong with you?"

"Everything is wrong, George. I'm wrong myself. I'm wrongly made, and wrongly put together, and—dash it! Never mind what. Come to supper."

They sat down in silence, and in silence they
commenced and continued to eat—George wondering why Jim was so unusually out of sorts, and Jim never once lifting his eyes to the other’s face.

Whilst they were thus occupied, the door opened, and a shock-headed, bare-footed urchin came in. He held out to George a letter. “Here,” he said, that’s for you.”

“Who is it from?” George asked.

“I warn’t to say. She’ll hide me if I do,” and before any further question could be asked he had disappeared in the outer darkness.

Then Jim looked up, eying the letter suspiciously as George opened it. Apparently its contents were of the briefest, for its recipient barely glanced at it—then threw it into the fire. As he did so, he caught his companion’s anxious look. “You need not stare at me as if I had committed murder,” he said. “What on earth ails you to-night?”

“Who’s it from?” asked Jim, sententiously.

“Well, if you particularly want to know, it’s from Bess Humphreys. She wants me to go down to the Maori Hen to-night to see her, and I shan’t. That’s all.”

“Yes,” said Jim Trevanna, “she was speaking to me to-night about you. Take care, George—you’ll have some trouble with that woman yet. She’s jealous, George; and no wonder.”

“Let her be. I can’t be bothered with her nonsense. Anyhow she won’t see me to-night, for I promised Ned Austin to smoke a pipe with him, and there I’m going.”

“Jim got up from the table and paced to and fro for a few seconds. Then he stood before George, and said:—“Look here, mate: I never interfered with you yet, and I don’t want to now; but I must. You are carrying on with two women; and I wouldn’t mind if you carried on with twenty, so far as that’s concerned. But that girl—Miss Mary, I mean—is far too good for any dash’d nonsense; and if you don’t mean to do what’s right by her, for God’s sake leave her alone.”
"What the deuce do you mean by lecturing me in this fashion," angrily retorted George. "What business is it of yours? Hang me if I don't think you're in love yourself. Which is it, Jimmy? Mary Austin, or bonnie black Bess? Eh? Say it's Bess, old boy, and go up and act as my proxy to-night. Pon my soul, you're welcome."

And the handsome fellow laughed gaily. The notion of Dusky Jim playing the lover seemed to him a most excellent conceit. But the laugh was not echoed by Jim, whose face assumed a gray ashen hue as he listened to the careless mocking words. He was silent for a brief space, but the twitching of his lips made it evident that he was undergoing a severe internal conflict.

"George," he said, and he spoke slowly and deliberately in a semi-tone—his voice vibrating with suppressed emotion—"George Gifford, you and I have been mates for some years now; and you've been a pretty wildish chap; you know you have, though I have never had any words with you about it. But I can't stand by and let you 'play the fool,' as Bess Humphreys said, with that young girl. No; I can't, and I won't."

"Oh ho!—Bonny Bess said that, did she? What the mischief have you and Bess to do with it? You, anyhow? Bess might have some right to talk; I admit that. But what right have you, I should like to know?"

"Right?"—and the word was almost a sob. "No; God help me, I have no right—no right. I don't think I've got any right to live. But I can't let it be. What is Ned Austin thinking of to encourage your coming to his place? He don't know you so well as I do, or I'm sure he wouldn't."

"Hadn't you better go and tell him what a shocking example I am? Pshaw, Jim! let Ned alone to look after his sister. I never saw you in such a temper before, and I think I've had enough of it; so I'll just bid you good night—I'm off to Ned's; and if
Miss Bessie comes here, why, you know, you can just entertain her for me. Ta-ta."

And lighting his pipe he went jauntily away, leaving Jim alone with his thoughts and his fears.

That night George sat by the fireside in Austin’s hut, cosily—chatting with Ned and smiling with Mary. She was fashioning another white hood; and from silently admiring the play of her deft fingers as she went on with her work, he took the hood out of her hand to examine it. As he did so, a slight sound caused him to turn and glance at the uncurtained window. What he beheld there paled his countenance, and caused him to drop the hood from his hands.

"Gracious God!" he exclaimed.

"What—what is it?" asked brother and sister in a breath.

"Nothing," he answered.

"Nothing?" Yes, nothing. Only a woman’s face peeping in upon them. A face distorted with rage—a face with bright piercing eyes, sparkling with passionate wrath. It gleamed upon him for a single second; a clenched hand was swiftly shaken with a menacing gesture, as he gazed. Then it vanished.

"I feared I had spoiled your hood, Miss Mary," he said, by way of explanation.

"Why, you look as if you had seen a ghost," cried Mary. "I declare you gave me quite a start."

"Well, I thought some one was looking in"—it was Ned who spoke. "And this isn’t the first time either. You must rig up a blind to the window, Polly."

Whilst speaking, he rose and moved towards the door, as intending to open it and look forth. Just then, whether by accident or design, George upset the table, and thereby effectually hindered the execution of Ned’s intention. First, there was the candle to pick up and re-light. Then there were the contents of Mary’s work-basket to be gathered up. By the time these things were accomplished it was too late to look for the owner of the face. But George had recognised
it as the face of a woman whom he had wronged, and had just cause to fear.

"What a clumsy fellow I am," he said, outwardly bewailing the slight catastrophe, and inwardly congratulating himself on the result. Nobody contradicted him; but Mary said—_apropos_ of nothing that had occurred, but following some train of thought—"Where is Jim? He never comes to see me now. Is he at the Maori Hen?"

And George guiltily answered "Yes, perhaps he is."

When, at last, he went away, said Mary to her brother—"Ned, why don't you ask Jim to come up sometimes? I can't think what he stays away for. He is always very kind to me, though he doesn't say much."

Jim Trevanna, left by himself, sat for a while over the fire, smoking his pipe, and brooding over George's "carryings on," as he phrased it. Then he extinguished the "brief candle," and betook himself to his blankets and to sleep. But his slumbers were of short duration. Some one shook him roughly by the shoulder; and, starting up, he saw, by the light of the yet glowing embers, that the intruder was none other than Bess, of the Maori Hen.

"What do you want here, Bess, at this time of night?" he asked.

"Don't talk. Listen to me," she said; and there was the same imperative ring in her voice that I have told you of. "He is down at Austin's again to-night. I know it. I saw him there just now, smiling at _her_. And I sent to him to come and see me to-night, and he wouldn't—the wretch. No, he wouldn't. Dost thou know that? He couldn't come to me, but he can go to she."

"Well, well," said Jim—he was worried sufficiently without this new infliction—"What have I got to do with it?"

"Thou, thou fool," she answered with infinite scorn, "Nothing at all. I only want thee to give him
a message. Tell him from me, I must see him to-morrow morning. I must and will see him to-morrow morning. Tell him that. Be sure thou do, Jim; and let him dare to stop away. That's all."

And with a swirl and a rush she swept out of the hut, leaving Jim to get up and close the door after her.

"I wish I were out of this. Bless'd if I don't," he soliloquised. "It's getting too hot for me. Lord! what can I do? I don't rightly know what them parsons mean by being 'born again,' but if I could be born better looking and more proper like, I wouldn't much mind trying it on for once. It couldn't be no worse than tooth-drawing anyhow."

And, with these reflections, he buried his head in the blankets, and went to sleep again.
CHAPTER III.

The morning dawned—bright, and calm, and cool. All nature was hushed in profound repose; and the intense silence which prevailed was only broken by the musical cadences of the river, rippling and seething in its rocky bed. As the sun's advance began to light up the rugged scenery, the gathering vapours rolled upwards, forming fleecy cloudlets along the face of the mountains, as they ascended to the lofty snowy peaks, which glistened in the warm light whilst yet their base was shrouded in deep shadows. And now from the chimneys of the little settlement there floated tiny wreaths of thin blue smoke, bearing witness that the dwellers therein were once more astir—that for them another day of toil had commenced. Presently, from behind a sky-kissing pinnacle up rose the orb of day, flooding the Terrace with sunshine; and then the miners began to issue from their huts, and to resume their accustomed labours.

"I think you had better see that girl at the Maori Hen," said Jim Trevanna, as he stooped to light his pipe with a fire-stick from the hearth.

"Bother the girl at the Maori Hen," was the testy reply, "I am getting sick and tired of her. She worries me."

"Perhaps she has cause to, George," said his mate, sententiously.

"What is it to you, if she has? I wish you would mind your own business and let mine alone. I can't think what has come to you; you seem quite changed of late."
“Perhaps I am changed. I don’t feel quite right, I know. Look you here, George. I am sorry if I’ve said anything to anger you; but I am fearful of mischief, and I can’t hold my peace. Take my advice, or leave it, as you please. I say again, you had better see Bess this morning. I am going to the claim.”

And, without further parley, he shouldered his pick, and departed.

“Hang it all!” ruminated George. “What a nuisance it is when a woman sticks like a burr, after a fellow has ceased to care for her. I’ll go and see her, and just give her a piece of my mind. Why can’t she let one alone?”

Why not, indeed? Why cannot a woman be content to sit down with her misery, with folded hands and in meek submissiveness, when a man has “ceased to care for her,” who once did care for her—overmuch? Have not the teachings of five thousand centuries taught her that, as the weaker vessel, it is her place to endure, and man’s to enjoy? Such, at any rate, is the human code; the Divine code orders otherwise; but rarely is it heeded by the nobler animal.

Bess was waiting for him. Between the inn and the hut there was a huge pile of weather-worn, lichen-encrusted rocks, that had fallen from the mountains, or been transported thither by glaciers in the Titanic age, and which from a fancied resemblance of the upper stone to a Kilmarnock bonnet was popularly known as the “Scotchman.” Under the lee of these stood Bess, ready to intercept him. So still and motionless was she that she seemed a living statue, set in a framework of light and shade. Jim saw her as he passed, but said nought. He only whistled softly, and muttered under his breath, “George is going to have a bad time for certain.”

A few minutes later George came forth from the hut. As he approached, she came forward and confronted him, and the action brought her into the sunlight.

She was undeniably handsome—a large-limbed
Helen, or a Cleopatra—tall of stature, with a finely-developed voluptuous form. Her luxuriant blue-black hair came low down on her forehead, so as to leave but scant space above the long, flexible eyebrows. Her eyes—large, black, and piercing—were now so full of fire withal, that the beholder quailed before their intense lustre; and her perfectly straight nose terminated in thin nostrils, which visibly quivered and dilated under the influence of great excitement. Her mouth was large but shapely, and remarkable by reason of the fixed compression of the full ripe lips; and her square-set lower jaw and somewhat massive neck, denoted great power and resolute will. Altogether, you would come to the conclusion that here was a woman of great vitality and much force of character—capable of being exercised for good or evil, as circumstances might surround and sway her.

Yes; George quailed as her big eyes flashed out upon him, and he turned his own away, guiltily. He had proposed to himself to "give her a piece of his mind," as you know; and now, when he encountered the gaze of the woman he had injured, conscience made a coward of him. Nevertheless he tried to assume his wonted air of bravado—and failed in the attempt.

"Well, Bess, my bonnie lassie," he said with a mocking smile, but without looking at her, "you told Jim you wanted to see me, and here I am. What is it about? I can't stay long, for I'm behind my time already."

The woman perceptibly shivered; but not with cold.

"Yes, I did want to see thee," she said, in a deep low voice, betraying suppressed emotion, and with something that was almost a sob catching her breath. "There was a time, and not so far back either, when I shouldn't have had to send for thee. Thou couldst come to me then without any sending; aye—and stop too as long as I'd let thee."

"Well, well, Bess; never mind that now. That sort of thing can't last for ever, you know."
The heartless speech inflamed the woman to yet greater wrath.

"What!—Never mind it? 'Tis well for thee, George, to say 'never mind'; but I must mind it—aye, and suffer for it, maybe. Thou'st told me many's the time how thou loved me, and I believed thee, to my cost. And now it 'can't last,' eh? But I tell thee, it shall last. Dost think I'll stand by and say nought, when I see thee leaving me for that pale-faced wench of Ned Austin's, thou'rt so sweet on?—Never, George; thee had better believe it."

"Oh-ho! So you are jealous, are you? Well, you have no call to be, then. And if you are—suppose I am sweet on Mary Austin, or any other girl, I don't see what concern it is of yours. There's plenty other lads than I about, and I'm sure I shouldn't be jealous if you were sweet on some of them. Tell me what you want, and let me go to work."

She came closer to him, and laying her hand upon his arm, compelled him to look at her.

"How dare thee say such a thing? As if I should be likely to care for any other lad but thyself. I'll tell thee what concern it is of mine. I want to know when thou dost mean to fetch the wedding-ring and make an honest woman of me."

He tried to laugh it off, and turned as to go away, without replying. But she gripped him so firmly that he could not relieve himself without violence.

"I will know," she insisted. "I will not be put off any longer. Not one foot shalt thou budge, my Handsome George, till I've got a solemn promise from thee. Not that thy promises are much worth, as I know, to my sorrow. Oh! George, George," she cried with a sudden revulsion of feeling, "Don't leave me. I love thee so as I cannot give thee up. Only make me thy wife, and I'll love thee and be thy slave all life-long. Tell me thou art only joking, and I'll forgive thee; but for God's sake don't leave me, or I shall die."

She clung to him with a tenacity begotten of love
and despair. But as the woman melted, the man hardened. "Pooh! Bess, you are worth twenty dead women yet," was his reply to her appeal. "And I can't make any promises about it. There's no need to hurry."

"But there is, George," she persisted. "There is indeed. Too much need, Heaven help me.—Listen—" and, throwing her arms around his neck, she whispered something—only a few words—but they visibly affected him.

"Is that true, Bess?" he asked. "On your soul, is it as you say?"

"Aye, indeed, it is true; upon my soul it is. Oh! George, pity on me. I have neither father nor brother to take my part, nor mother nor sister to comfort me. Only thee, George, that I trusted so; and if thou art false to me now, what can I do?"

She burst into a passion of tears, as she lavished caresses upon him; and the dormant sense of manhood faintly stirred in his breast. Before he left her, he had renewed his vows, and promised to marry her; nay, to make "assurance doubly sure," he swore it. And still, with characteristic weakness, trifling with Time the Avenger, he sought to put off the marriage-day. "I cannot manage it just now. There's a hut to build, and things to get, and I should like to have some more gold out of the claim first. But it shall be soon, Bessie; never fear."

And the woman believed, and forgave him, because of her exceeding love.

*  *  *  *  *  *  *  *

"Where's Handsome George this morning?" queried Austin, as Jim stepped into the claim.

"I don't know," said Jim.

"Oh! come now; that cock won't fight. You never can tell a lie properly, you know; for your face always contradicts your tongue. You know well enough, and guess I do, too. He's up at the Maori Hen, spooning with Black Bess—that's his little game. She came peeping in at the window last night, looking for
him, I reckon; and Master George capsized the table, to stop me from going out to see. He thought that I wasn’t up to his dodge; but I was, though I didn’t let on because of Mary."

Now, Jim had no intention of divulging his fears and suspicions to Mary’s brother; but the words dropped from him involuntarily—“Don’t you think it would be as well, if you didn’t have him to your place so often?”

Ned stopped work, and leaning on his long-handled shovel, regarded his mate with a puzzled expression of countenance. “Why, what for? I am not so mortal fond of Bess Humphreys as to turn him away that he may go courting her. Why, what—oh! Jerusalem!” he exclaimed, as another possible explanation of Jim’s meaning occurred to him. “You don’t think—no, you never can suppose—that he is after Mary? Man alive! she wouldn’t look at him, for all as handsome as he is. No, no. Handsome is as handsome does; and for me, I wouldn’t allow it if she did. He’s a deal too gay for my little girl.”

Jim, answered irrelevantly, “I’m going up the race to turn on the water.”

For many nights thereafter George Gifford was rarely a visitor at Austin’s hut; and, somehow, Jim Trevanna dropped into his place. He was but poor company, as Ned remarked, his conversation being mostly of the monosyllabic order. He would sit quietly, smoking his pipe, and listening to Ned’s performances on the violin, which he played with some skill and effect, and watching “Miss” Mary at work—and was seemingly happy in being permitted to do so. And sometimes he and Ned would have a game of draughts or backgammon. But much talking clearly was not his forte.

Said Mary, on one of these occasions, “Where’s George?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, Miss Mary.

“Is it true that he has taken up with that bold-looking woman at the Maori Hen,” continued Mary,
with an almost imperceptible toss of her pretty head. You see, angels in petticoats are capable of being a trifle censorious at times.

The question was an awkward one for Jim. To be loyal to his friend, he must be false to himself, and untrue to the fair young girl beside him. So he fell back on his usual formula—"I don't know."

"No," said Ned, "Jim never knows anything he don't want to. Reckon you needn't ask him, Polly."

"Good old Jim!" said Mary, soothingly. "It is a shame to tease you."

Jim looked up, and caught her soft, kind eyes gazing upon him so sweetly that he forthwith blushed like a peony. He said he "thought it was about time to go." Nevertheless he did not go for a full hour or more thereafter.

After a little while George began to visit more frequently at the Austins, and then the conversation flowed more freely and cheerfully. At such times, Jim always found or made some pretext for shortening his stay, despite all efforts to induce him to remain. In truth, the talk and the laughter vexed him—he would not, even to himself, confess wherefore. He knew that it was pleasant to gaze on Mary's face with silent admiration, and sweet to listen to her voice; and he knew also that he was pained when that face smiled upon another, and that voice vibrated in another's ear. But he entertained so modest an opinion of himself that he would as soon have thought of crying for the moon as of aspiring to the favour of the woman whom yet he loved, with a love the intensity of which he was unaware of, but which he hugged to his bosom with miserly avidity, and jealous secrecy.

And Bessie!—Her troubles were thickening. George was again growing cold and indifferent. The momentary twinge of conscience which her passionate grief had evoked was fading away. Despite her prayers and remonstrances, the marriage-day had not been fixed; and, neglecting her, he now passed most of his evenings in the company of her unwitting rival.

Evidently a thunderstorm was brewing.
CHAPTER IV.

Some weeks — a whole month — passed; matters gradually becoming worse and more complicated, when suddenly the storm-cloud burst. A simple thing brought it about.

There was "a dance" at the "General Store." A circumstance, sufficient in that quiet community to incite the whole population to deeds of "derring-do," had occurred. The occasion was this: The proprietor of the establishment known by the above designation — who was a dealer in all kinds of wares, from mouse-traps to muslins, and from sugar to shovels, and was also, not altogether unjustly, accredited with supplying ardent liquors, under the rose — had enlarged his mind and his premises to the extent of building a new store, constructed of real weather-boards, primarily of Baltic construction, and "packed," at great expense, from the township at the foot of the ranges. To celebrate the event he invited all his friends and customers (synonymous terms, by the way) to assist in a "Grand Opening Ball." And, nothing loath, they came, and came punctually to the time, thereby setting a good example to their betters in the social scale, who delight, in ball-room or church, to come late, and so attract attention — a very different thing from respect, my friends.

They were there in great force — the men and women of the Terraces. Not attired in faultless evening costume, but yet in their best, which, as often as not, consisted of blue shirts and moleskin continuations for the gentlemen, and cotton gowns for the
ladies. Of little concern was this to them. Had their mortal frames been encased in broadcloth and silk, it would not have altered their natures, nor increased their enjoyment one whit. Some of the women brought their babies with them, but there was always a kind friend to hold them when their mothers participated in the dance; and some of the men brought their pipes, but they politely laid them aside when they led out their partners.

There was music too, and very good of its kind. Two violins, a clarionet, and a cornet had been mustered for the occasion; and the performers were much more skilful and efficient than my town-dwelling readers may suppose. It was considered proper and decorous by the Master of the Ceremonies to open the "Ball" with a quadrille; but round dances, you may be sure, were the order of the night. The "mazy waltz" was the favourite,—

"But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels,"

and one and all footed it merrily, and, truth to tell, somewhat tumultuously, only pausing occasionally for the gentlemen to assist the ladies to refreshments after the most approved mode.

Handsome George was there, in his best "war-paint," gaily flirting with maids and matrons, but chiefly paying his attentions to Mary Austin, who waltzed, and jigged, and reeled with him to his heart's content. Never had she looked more lovely than now, when whirling around in a gauzy texture, of some name unknown to me, she lent the innocent enthusiasm of her young life to the ephemeral mirth of an evening, long to be remembered. She was the belle, and George was the beau of the ball. And Dusky Jim was there, moody and silent, sitting in corners, and dancing not at all. And Bess Humphreys was there, not dancing, but refusing, indeed, all invitations to join in the active festivities of the night. Once George approached her, and, serenely smiling, said, "May I have the pleasure of the next dance with you, Miss Humphreys?"
Her eyebrows vibrated, and her nostrils dilated, as she looked steadily at him, "curving a contumelious lip," with a look which should have "Gorgonised" him, to borrow the poet-laureate's phrase.

"No, I cannot; thou knows I cannot; thou knows why I cannot. But, George; keep thee away from that wench of Austin's. I cannot abide to see thee with her so much."

"Don't be foolish, Bess."—That was all his reply; and then he left her again to seek the more congenial society of Mary Austin; and the Prometheus vulture went on with his work.

"On with the dance." Jim grew moodier still, and Bess more miserable. Both followed the motions of the dancers with their eyes,—Jim with utter despair depicted in his—Bess with wrath gleaming from hers.

Presently there was a lull in the festivities, and George went forth. Jim followed him.

Jim's demeanour had not been unobserved. "I think there's something up between those fellows," said one onlooker.

"I'm certain sure there is," said another.

"What's the matter?" asked a third.

"Oh, Dusky Jim was always a sulky brute!" exclaimed a fourth. And thus the comments went on. Only one voice pleaded for poor Jim.

"I am quite sure it is not Trevanna's fault if anything is amiss."

It was the voice of Mary Austin.

The night was calm and still, as the day had been; but heavy clouds obscured the sky and hid the stars from view. The river rushed and roared in the gorge below, with a sullen murmur, rising and falling, as the current of air created by its own motion varied. The sounds of revelry had temporarily ceased, though yet the merry laughter echoed from within the store. "George," cried Jim Trevanna, and his voice was that of plaintive entreaty—

"What the deuce do you want?" exclaimed George,
turning fiercely upon him. "Why do you dog my footsteps in this way?"

"Perhaps because I am a dog, and want to warn you. You must not carry on as you are doing with Miss Mary. You must not, and you shall not, George, and I tell you so."

"You tell me so! Do you, now? This is too good, Jim. Are you in love with her yourself? Do you think for a moment such a pretty girl as that would ever care for a fellow like you? You had better go home and put your stupid head under the blankets."

Jim made no answer. He could not endure his pain and speak; so he turned on his heel and walked away, followed by a mocking laugh from George, who sauntered slowly towards the "Scotchman" rock.

"Poor little Mary," soliloquised Jim, "she is so good and so innocent; and he cares nothing for her except as a toy, to be played with, and broken and thrown away. The Lord help her. It seems I can't do anything; and he—he will do with her as he has done with the other. Why can't Ned see it, I wonder?"

His soul filled with miserable fancies and forebodings of evil, he groped his way feebly along for a hundred yards or more. Then he turned, thinking to go back to the Store. As he did so he saw that which shocked and almost stunned him. A woman—her drapery proclaimed her sex—came quickly from the rear of the store; and as she flitted athwart the open space in front, the lights from the windows disclosed that she wore a white hood. One moment—less—she was thus revealed to him; then she passed into the darkness, pursuing the direction previously taken by George.

Apparently it was an assignation at which he had, unwillingly and unwittingly, "assisted."

Jim Trevanna fell on his face, upon the earth. "Oh, Lord! that it should ever come to this!" he cried in his agony, "I did think there was one good woman
left on the earth since my mother died; and now I don't, and never shall again. Oh, good Lord! that she—she—that child, that I thought so good—that she should ever come to this. Heaven have mercy on her! I can never bear to look on her face any more!"

After a while he picked himself up, and blindly, tearfully stumbled, rather than walked towards his hut. The dark, cloud-encumbered night was so much in consonance with his feelings, that he instinctively hailed it as in some sort a relief to his misery; to which for a brief space he felt almost reconciled; as men—aye, and women also—do oft-times force themselves to be reconciled to the inevitable. Then again it pressed upon him with irresistible force.

"George?" (he was apostrophising his absent mate)
"George! I have loved you as a brother, but by the God above us, if you deceive that girl, I'll kill you—I will—I'll kill you!"

The latter words he uttered in a loud tone, raising his clenched fists as he did so. He did not see—he was too stupified by his passion of love and misery to see or hear two men, who just then passed him in the darkness.

Said one of them, "Did you hear that? Who is it?"

Said the other, "Why that's Dusky Jim. Guess he's been liquoruring up too much."

"Just so," said the first speaker; "That's always the way with that sort of fellow; 'tis either a drunk or a drought."

And they went gaily on, and joined in the dance at the Store,—wherefore not? Wherefore should they halt, or stay their enjoyment merely because a brother was perishing for want of a sympathetic word? There was no reason why they should; nevertheless, had they done so, and remained with Jim for a few minutes, much wretchedness might possibly have been spared to some of those whose story I am telling.

Jim sat down on a projecting boulder-stone, and buried his face in his hands. Presently he got up, and
paced to and fro; then he sat down again. He derived no comfort from these changes of position; but mere motion was a necessity to him. The strains of the dance music rose and fell on the night air; and the symphonious tread of the dancers' feet came cheerily on the ear, but he heeded not. He could think of nothing but Mary, his beloved one—for in this, his hour of agony, the truth would not be denied, nor put aside—he could think, I say, only of her—could picture nothing to himself, but his secretly worshipped "White Hood," and Handsome George. What need to speculate on the quips and cranks, and turns that the poor fellow's fancies took during those wretched moments; moments which seemed lengthened out to hours of agony, such as the Procrustean bed could never have inflicted.

How long this agony was protracted he never knew. All at once there rang out on the still air the sharp crack of a pistol shot.

Now a shot, more or less, was not an unusual occurrence in those days; most of the miners kept guns or pistols for the protection of their houses and their tail-races, both of which were liable to be invaded occasionally by the members of that promiscuous class who do not much care to live by "honest labour." Occasionally the weapons were discharged for the purpose of cleaning them; therefore none of the revellers took notice of this particular shot. As for Jim Trevanna, the only effect it had was to rouse him sufficiently to induce him to get up from the boulder, and go on to his hut.

Without undressing, he threw himself on his bed. He offered up no prayer; be besought no blessing. All he said was—"Poor little Mary!—And I love you so!"

When man or woman is in earnest, few and scant are the words they utter. Effusiveness is but the outcome of falsehood and hypocrisy. What can equal the intensity of that little phrase—"I love you?" Only one verb and two pronouns, my friends; but can the poetic wealth of Homer or Virgil surpass it?

Jim loved Mary with that love which alone is true,
being neither sensuous nor sensual;—a love that few women and still fewer men ever experience;—a love which once conceived is insusceptible of change or decay, and which never comes twice in a life-time to any. And therewithal he was jealous, with that fierce jealousy which deems even the impress of another's lips on the loved one's hand an outrage and a sacrilege.

And now White Hood was with Handsome George, the man whom weak women petted and admired, and brothers and lovers shunned, and husbands regarded with holy hatred. Had he not cause for his jealousy?

He could not rest; sleep would not visit him. He rose from the bed and went forth.

Still from the dance-room came faintly the sounds of harp and violin, of clarionet and cornet, and still the many twinkling feet kept concord. He looked around. The clouds had parted, and through the rifts appeared the Southern Cross, and belted Orion shone triumphantly. The melancholy wekas were calling to each other on the river bank, and the early village cocks were hailing the coming dawn with lusty rivalry. Moved by what impulse he knew not, he went back to the Store. But when he approached the door he could not enter. The sweet sounds of the music were discordant to him in his then mood. All things were displeasing. He seemed hateful to himself. Why was I ever born?” he muttered. “And born so badly. Surely they might have done better.”

By “they” he meant his immediate progenitors, on whose shoulders he was wont to lay the blame of his physical shortcomings. Parents have much to answer for to their children; a fact which the world has not yet fully realised, as it will some day, when the breeding of human beings comes to be considered as of equal importance with the breeding of cattle. The principle of natural selection does not always include the selection of the fittest.

Jim wandered to and fro—to and fro, with devious and uncertain steps, not heeding whither he went. As
the daylight increased, paling the "ineffectual fires" of
the lamps, the dancers began to emerge from the Store,
and wend their way homeward. As they passed, many
spoke to him, and gave him, "Good morning;" but he
answered them not at all. Troubled by tumultuous
thoughts he kept on his way "muttering his wayward
fancies to himself." A sudden gust of air blew off his
hat, and sportively whirled it away in the direction of
the "Scotchman." He followed it listlessly, and turn-
ing a jutting corner of the rocks, perceived a man lying
face downwards on the ground.—"Happy devil!"—he
cried.—"Blest if I don't think I'll get tight myself."

He thought it was one of the revellers, who had
been drinking "not wisely, but too well," and was
sleeping off the effects of his debauch. But when he
approached more near, he saw to his great horror that
it was George Gifford, lying in a pool of blood; and his
horror was intensified when he observed the white
hood, tightly clenched in George's hand.

"Oh my good Lord!" he cried. "What does this
mean? Surely—surely he must have wronged her
wickedly, before that sweet, innocent girl could have
done such a thing as this."

His first impulse was to disengage the hood from
George's hand and secrete it in his bosom. As he did so
some drops of blood fell on his clothing, but he never
noticed them. His only thought was how to screen
Mary.

Then he turned the body over, and felt for the
beating of the heart. Yes, it was still beating, though
very faintly. "Thank God!" he whispered.

As he was still bending over it, some men came
by.

"Hullo! what's up, mate?"—they asked in a
breath.

"I don't know. I think George has been shot," he
answered.

"Shot? yes; I should say so," cried one. "And
here's the pistol"—(it was lying near the body with
one chamber discharged.) "Why, it's Gifford's own
revolver. I've seen it many a time, and here's his initials—'G. G.'—on the butt."

"And here's your hat Jim," said another, handing it to him. "And man alive, there's blood on your shirt."

Jim looked, and saw a great red stain on the bosom of the white shirt, which he had donned in honour of the ball. But he said nought. Was not the white hood resting on his heart?
CHAPTER V.

They fetched George's stretcher from the hut, and laying him on it carried him thither. The bullet had struck him behind and above the right ear, passing under the scalp, and making its exit at the temple immediately behind the eye. So much was discernible. What further injuries he had received could not be ascertained. Much blood had been lost, but it had ceased to flow. So they tenderly washed the wounds, and bound the head in a wet bandage. Then the love of nostrums displayed itself. One opined that Holloway's ointment should be applied; another that spermaceti was "the sovereign st thing on earth;" a third strongly recommended a dose of chlorodyne; and a fourth declared in favour of "pain-killer." Fortunately, none of these met with general acceptance, and in the end a little weak brandy and water was administered. Then a horse was caught and saddled in haste; and a lusty young miner volunteered to ride into the nearest township—a distance of twenty miles—for a doctor.

When these matters had been arranged, Jim said, "I don't know that you need stop any longer. I'll attend to him, boys."

Upon this hint they left the hut, but hesitatingly; and when outside they held a conference amongst themselves.

"I don't much care to leave un aloane wi' that chap," quoth a sturdy Westcountryman. "Darn I, if I'd like to say as he didn't do it his-self. Why look at un. He do look downright queer for sure. That he do."
“And he han’t been to bed,” responded another.
“Didst thou take note ’o that?”

And so the chorus went on; each recalling some particular of suspicious appearance.

Discovered bending over the wounded man—hatless, dishevelled, haggard of look, and silent when questioned; his clothing blood-stained; the pistol—which, being the property of George, must needs have been accessible to his mate—found lying alongside the body; the bed undisturbed; what wonder that Jim Trevanna, who was never a favourite, owing to his reticence of speech, his ungainly form, and unpleasing aspect—what wonder, I ask, that he was regarded with suspicion?

“Let’s take turn about to stop wi’ un,” suggested the Westcountryman, “Why, he might finish un off, if so he he bean’t looked after.”

The suggestion was adopted, and despite Jim’s remonstrances they carried it out; and a good-natured lumpish boor insisted on taking his “innings,” as he termed it.

And all the time the white hood rested on Jim’s heart. His anxiety was to destroy it. Light as was its weight, it oppressed him. His eyelids waxed heavy, but he dared not suffer himself to sleep, lest by some inadvertence the hood should be discovered. There was no safe place of concealment within the hut, and he could not burn it in the presence of a witness. So at last he went out, on some pretence, and wandered about the Terrace till he found a convenient rock underneath which he concealed it, intending to remove and destroy it when opportunity served.

It is a remarkable fact that innocent men often perform honest actions in a stealthy and suspicious manner; whilst guilty men go about their villainous business in a bold open way which disarms suspicion. Hence rogues escape, and true men pay the penalty.

Jim looked around, and not seeing any person, he congratulated himself on having successfully got rid of the guilty testimony. And within five minutes there-
after the stone was lifted, and the hood examined. Keen and jealous eyes had been watching him.

About mid-way between the Terrace and the township there was a police-station, whereat the majesty of the law was represented by Senior-constable Corcoran. Upon him the messenger who had been despatched for the doctor respectfully waited, and detailed to him the occurrences of the morning, with only a pardonable amount of exaggeration.

Now, Senior-constable Corcoran was an excellent average specimen of "the Force." He was a smart officer, and shrewd withal; but he had two faults—excess of zeal, and a burning desire for promotion, which in a general would be called ambition. Laudable faults, you will say, and I agree with you. But zeal has been held to be a fault by every government, from the days of Talleyrand downwards. Not in theory, but in practice, you will understand.

"Here," thought Constable Corcoran, "is a good case. Bedad, it's a stripe I'll get if I work it up properly."

And forthwith he buckled on his armour, and proceeded at full gallop to the Terrace, to arrest "the criminal," as, in his mind, he had already designated Jim Trevanna.

Before the arrival of the constable quite a crowd had collected about George's hut. Such an interesting event had never before occurred in the district, and the inhabitants made the most of it. They felt that it would give to the locality an enviable notoriety. The newspapers would be full of it; and one and all strove to, in some way, connect themselves with the affair. Every man or women who had even exchanged "the time of day" with Jim or George a month before had something to say upon the subject. Imagination flew on silken wings; and a whole and complete version of the matter, wherein George was made to appear as a virtuous victim, and Jim as an unmitigated ruffian, obtained circulation and gained credence. The miners who had overheard Jim declare that he would "kill
him" contributed their quota to the rumours, you may be sure, and felt considerable elation at being able to do so. And Jim, tortured by questions to which he invariably replied with his customary "I don't know," certainly aided by his taciturnity to confirm evil reports.

Ned Austin gathered all the news, true and false, and retailed it to his sister. "I reckon that beggar has done it," he concluded.

"No," said Mary, who listened to the recital, pale but fearless. "No, Ned; I don't believe a word of it."

"Then who could have done it, I should like to know?"

"Whoever it was, I am sure it wasn't Jim. You may take your bible-oath of that. I don't care what folks say! I know Jim Trevanna never did do it."

Bess Humphreys came down, and tearfully, even frantically, begged to be allowed to act as George's nurse. But her beseechings were of no avail, and a white-haired old woman was installed as chief attendant.

By-and-bye up rode Senior Constable Corcoran; who, by virtue of the business whereon he was engaged, was received with much awe and admiration by all Her Majesty's liege subjects there assembled. Dismounting from his Bucephalus, he strode up to Jim, with all the dignity of authority encased in blue cloth, and decorated with belts and silver buttons, and, placing his hand on his shoulder, said, "James Trevanna—is that your name."

"Yes," replied Jim.

"Then I arrest you in the name of Her Royal Majesty, Queen Victoria, for the murder of your mate—George Gifford."

Jim stared at him blankly. "But he isn't dead," he expostulated.

"That makes no difference. It's the intent that the law respects; and it is my duty to caution you that anything you say will be used as evidence against you. Now, show me the place where you shot him."
And Jim only answered, "I don't know." The white hood still rested on his heart, although he had buried it under a rock.

For many hours George remained insensible, but about noon he began to moan, and by the time the doctor arrived he was in a state of high delirium, and raving. But his utterances were so wild and incoherent that nothing certain could be gathered therefrom. Only he seemed to imagine himself in the presence of some woman, whom he alternately besought with words of endearment, and reproached with phrases of defilement. But no name ever escaped his lips. Once he called upon Jim to "mind his own business, and leave him alone." That was all.

"Ah!" said the medico, after careful examination, "concussion of brain—severe too, very—petrous portion of temporal bone badly fractured. Hem!—internal meatus of ear implicated and lining membrane inflamed. Dear me!—meningitis—very little hope. Must send for the magistrate. Aye, aye!—may have a lucid interval, and if so his deposition will have to be taken. Just so!—where is the scoundrel who shot him?"

"Sure he's here, sir," pronounced the constable, who had already tried, convicted, and sentenced Jim, in his own mind, and would have been greatly shocked if anyone had ventured to hesitate a doubt of his guilt.

Then a controversy arose between the doctor and the constable, the doctor insisting that it was the constable's duty to go for the Magistrate, and the constable averring that it was his duty to take the prisoner with him. To this proposition the doctor demurred. "Confound you!" quoth the medico, "don't you know better than that, you omadhaun? The accused must be confronted with the dying man to make his deposition admissible as evidence. Don't tell me; I know there are exceptions, but they don't apply in this case."

But, despite the doctor's remonstrances, Senior Constable Corcoran would not lose sight of his prisoner; and eventually the matter was compromised by sending
a messenger down to head-quarters, requesting the Magistrate's attendance.

In due course that functionary arrived. He was a young man, of grave aspect and unpretentious demeanour, with a patriarchal beard of surprising dimensions. Long and patiently he waited, for it was midnight before delirium ceased and consciousness returned. Then the Magistrate endeavoured to elicit somewhat of the facts from the sufferer. With difficulty George was made to understand what was required of him; and when he did so, he refused to take an oath, or to implicate any person as the offender. All he could be induced to say, was, "I know who did it—I won't say who it was. It wasn't Jim."

Soon he lapsed into a state of coma, from which it was found impossible to rouse him; and before the sun rose again, George Gifford had "joined the majority."

Under ordinary circumstances his dying declaration would have sufficed to exonerate Jim; but the Magistrate entertained reasonable doubts whether George fully understood the questions put to him; and the circumstantial evidence was so strong, that he deemed it his duty to remit the case to the Supreme Court for further enquiry. Consequently, Constable Corcoran had the satisfaction of escorting his prisoner to the gaol; and after the usual preliminary investigation, James Trevanna was formally committed for trial on the charge of "Wilful Murder."

And the British public said, as with one voice, "That is right. The wretch ought to swing for it."

But Mary said,—"He never did it. I don't care what anybody says. Jim is as innocent as an unborn babe."

And Jim, in the enforced solitude of his cell, said, "Better I than her! let it be."

And Bess Humphreys gave vent to her lamentations with exceeding vehemence.
CHAPTER VI.

The trial came on. The Grand Jury found a true bill, and Jim, looking more pale and haggard than ever, was placed in the dock. He was unrepresented by counsel, and when called upon to plead he answered, "Not Guilty." Then he looked around with a weary, listless expression, which suddenly changed when he observed, amongst the multitude who thronged the Court, to "assist" at the performance of the human tragedy about to be enacted—Mary Austin:

He cast one long despairing look on her, and she returned his gaze, with terror and commiseration depicted on her features. He trembled slightly as their eyes met, then drew himself up and betrayed no further sign of weakness. If it must needs be, he would cheerfully encounter a shamed death for her sake, but why, he asked himself, had she come thither to witness the sacrifice?

The Crown Prosecutor was a man of great forensic ability, and much honesty. He entirely believed that Jim was guilty, and, in consequence, exerted himself to secure a conviction. In his opening speech he detailed with great accuracy and precision all the evidence that had been garnered by Sergeant Corcoran, who had already achieved the coveted "stripe" in reward for his vigilance. The suspicious circumstances, wherewith you have already been made acquainted, were impressively set forth. Then the learned gentleman went on to say:—

"Gentlemen of the Jury, it is my duty to tell you that, in his dying moments, the murdered man made a
statement, not on oath, to the Magistrate, that the prisoner was not the perpetrator of the offence wherewith he is charged. But that statement was made during a brief interval of semi-consciousness, between a period of delirium, and another and subsequent period, when the dying man was in a comatose condition; and it is at least doubtful whether he was sufficiently sensible to understand the effect of the questions then put to him, or of the answers which he gave. But, gentlemen, there is a species of unspoken evidence to which exception cannot be taken. Men and women may, and sometimes do, give untrustworthy and false evidence in a Court of Justice, either from mistake, or, as in some instances from malice—wilfully; but circumstances cannot lie, and I shall put witnesses in the box to prove a circumstance which is, to my mind, conclusive as to the guilt of the prisoner. When the body of George Gifford was being prepared for burial, there was found in his right hand a small strand of white woollen yarn. A small strand, gentlemen—not more than one inch and a half in length—but yet long enough and strong enough to form a noose wherewith to hang the murderer. For, gentlemen, that small piece of wool formed a portion of a peculiar head-dress, termed, I believe, a hood, worn by a young lady, whom I shall also produce, and respecting whom, feelings of rivalry existed between the prisoner and the murdered man. And I shall further bring before you a witness who will be able to give evidence of the fact, that on the morning of the murder, some hours after the discovery of the deed, the accused was seen to deposit, underneath a rock in the vicinity, a white hood, or head-dress, from which is missing just that very strand of yarn that was found in the hand of the murdered man. That hood will be produced before you; and you will find that it is saturated with blood—human blood, as will be shown by the evidence of professional experts, and corresponding with the blood-stains discovered on the shirt and trousers worn by the prisoner on the night when the
crime of which he stands accused was committed. Gentlemen, the issues of life and death are in your hands. God forbid that by any words of mine you should be induced to convict an innocent man; but it seems to me impossible that upon the evidence which I shall bring before you in this case, you can arrive at any other conclusion than that the prisoner at the bar is guilty. I will now call the first witness."

During the delivery of that portion of the Crown Prosecutor's address which I have quoted, Jim had quite made up his mind as to the course he would pursue. He was willing to give his life for the woman he loved; but that she should appear as a witness against him was more than he could bear. No; she should not add to the guilt already on her soul by committing perjury. He could, and would save her from that. And she looked so innocent all the time! "Good God!" he thought, "are all women like that, I wonder."

"You needn't trouble to call any witnesses," he said. "My lord—your Honour, I plead GUILTY."

The Judge—than whom a more humane man never occupied the judicial Bench—expostulated with him thus—"I think, prisoner, you should allow the case to go to the jury."

"No, your honour: I plead Guilty."

There was a murmur of dissatisfaction amongst the spectators. They were about to be deprived of the spectacle they had come forth to witness; and they felt as a Roman audience might have done, when gladiators refused to butcher each other, or tigers hesitated to tear the flesh of martyrs. So they turned their thumbs downwards.

"Prisoner," again remonstrated the Judge, "you are charged with having committed "Wilful Murder," and there is also a second count against you, charging you with the lesser offence of manslaughter. If you acknowledge the more heinous crime of murder, the penalty is death. But if you had a quarrel with the deceased man, George Gifford, and slew him in the heat
of passion, the law regards such an offence as manslaughter only, and provides that the punishment shall be imprisonment for such a term as may fitly meet the circumstances of the case. I ask you, therefore, to which of these offences do you desire to plead guilty?"

"I don't know," said Jim, "I plead guilty."

"Do you know that you are throwing away your life by the course you are taking?"

"I don't know. I plead guilty."

"Then it is my painful duty to instruct the jury to bring in a verdict accordingly."

And the jury hastened to obey the instruction. They also had been deprived of the anticipated entertainment of listening to the particulars of this interesting case, and were correspondingly displeased.

There was a commotion in the Court. Mary Austin had fainted, and had to be taken out. When order had been restored, the Judge said:—

"This is a very extraordinary case, and I am inclined to doubt the prisoner's sanity. The verdict of the jury will be recorded; but I shall remand the prisoner for sentence, and meantime I shall cause a medical examination of his mental condition to be made."

The medical examination resulted in a colourless report. To all questions Jim obstinately refused answer, sheltering his reticence under the accustomed phrase—"I don't know." The puzzled medicos could make nothing of "the case." They reported that the prisoner was "sullen and taciturn," and hesitated an opinion that he was suffering from mental depression nearly akin to dementia, which might possibly be the result of remorse for the crime he had committed. But on the other hand, they said, the crime might have resulted from dementia. Which was the cause and which the effect they were unable positively to declare.

Then the clergy took him in hand, with an equally profitless outcome. In vain they talked to him of his soul, and painted the terrors of eternal judgment, after
the most approved ecclesiastical fashion. He paid little heed to their exhortations, although seven good men of different denominations offered him the free loan of their own private latch-keys to the gates of Heaven. "I don't know nothing about it, and I don't want to," said the "hardened sinner," who was yielding up his life for another. The parsons sighed in concert, and agreed that it was "a most melancholy case," and being tender of heart and compassionate, they vigorously bestirred themselves to save him from the hangman's knot. Sentence of death had been pronounced, almost as a matter of form; for the learned Judge was himself convinced that there was something unexplained, and he leaned to mercy's side. The end of it was, that after Jim had resigned himself to quits his life and all the misery of it, he was respited, and his sentence was commuted to "imprisonment for life," which meant about eleven years as the prison regulations then stood, providing his conduct was good. Strange to say, he was not at all grateful for the concession. When the gaol chaplain, who had been indefatigable in his exertions on Jim's behalf, communicated the news to him, he turned upon him with more fire than he had ever before shown, and asked—"Why didn't you leave me alone? I don't want to live!" And the horrified chaplain evacuated the cell in despair.

Very different was his demeanour when, later on, in the same day, the doors of the cell were thrown open for the admission of Ned and Mary Austin. This was the most painful trial he had yet been called upon to endure. He did not reason about it. He thought instinctively—'How cruel women are! Could she not be satisfied without coming to gloat over her victim?—and she looked so fair, and fresh, and innocent!'

Yet the pain was mingled with pleasure. 'It was good of her,' was his second thought 'to come into that gloomy place, and console him with her bright presence and sweet words. She knew, of course, that he was voluntarily suffering the penalty which, by right,
should herself have suffered. And she wanted to show her sympathy with him—her gratitude to him. Yes; that was it.'

"It is very kind of you, Miss Mary," he said.

Ah! the rainbow ever spans the sky, let the tempest rage as it will.

Brief was the time allowed for the interview; and, after the first salutation, Ned considerately withdrew, leaving his sister alone with Jim.

"Dear old Jim!"—said the girl, and she knelt before him, as he sat on the bed of his wretched pallet. —"Why did you do it?"

He looked down into the blue depths of her lustrous eyes, which met his own unshrinking, and wondered with exceeding wonder how so much guile could be harboured in that frail fair form. His lips twitched convulsively, but for a time he was unable to utter a word. At last he cried out—"Oh, Mary! because I love you." And further speech was drowned in convulsive sobs.

She tried to check this burst of anguish—to stay those tears which came from the heart, through the medium of the eyes. She held him in her arms, and kissed him tenderly; and in that supreme moment, spurning the conventional usages of civilized hypocrisy, she confessed—

"And I love you, Jim. I always did love you. I never thought to say so, but I cannot help it. Oh! my love,—my life! How could you do such a thing?"

You see, these two were playing at cross purposes. When Mary asked—'Why did you do it?' she meant—'Why did you shoot him?' But Jim, being fully persuaded of her guilt, understood her to mean—'Why did you plead guilty, being innocent?'

Prison rules are pitiless. Had these two only been allowed five minutes' further intercourse, the mischief afterwards wrought would probably have been avoided. But the heavy key of the warder harshly grated in the lock; and Mary, drying her eyes as best she could, was
compelled to quit the cell, leaving Jim in a state of glorified bewilderment. What cared he that she had committed the crime which it had fallen to his lot to expiate? What was it to him even that her hand were blood-stained? “She loves me!” was his one exultant thought. And in the presence of that thought, her great offence was condoned, and the record obliterated. From that hour his demeanour changed, his sullenness ceased, and he became cheerful. He was uplifted and ennobled by the knowledge of his loved one’s love.

So Jim Trevanna wore the felon’s garb and wrought on Bell Hill with other convicts;—“among the faithless, faithful only he.” And Mary went back to the Terrace with her brother Ned.

At the worst it was only eleven years’ servitude. Eleven of the best years of his life it is true; but he rejoiced in the thought that it was for the sake of Mary, and bore his punishment bravely.

“For her sake!”—he said to himself every morning, as he went forth to his toil. “For her sake!”—he repeated every night, as he cast his weary form on his pallet.
CHAPTER VII.

GEORGE GIFFORD was buried in a little gully which had been extemporised as a cemetery; and all the population of the Terrance suspended work to attend the funeral. Bess was there, clad in the garments of woe; and the people were awed when she knelt by the side of the grave, and with streaming eyes, and hand upraised to Heaven, invoked the Divine vengeance "on they who had caused his death." "Puir lassie!"—said a kind-hearted old Scotchman. "He was aye her lover, ye ken. It's no surprising she tak's it sae much to heart."

She wore black from that day forth. In the brief words that escaped her lips, she betrayed intense hatred of Mary, and expressed measureless contempt for Jim. Any allusion to the subject she resented so fiercely, that the frequenters of the Maori Hen ceased to speak of it in her presence. Once when reference was casually made to Jim as the slayer of Handsome George, she retorted angrily:—"Thou knows nought about it. Jim Trevanna had no more to do with it than thyself. But he's a fool—that's what he is—a poor, stupid fool."

So here were two women who protested that Jim was innocent. For Mary never lost an opportunity of declaring her disbelief of his guilt, at which wiseacres sneered and wondered. "What possessed those two girls," they asked each other, "that they should stand up so stoutly in the fellow's defence, when the circumstances were so strong against him?—Besides, had he not confessed that he was guilty?—Pshaw! it was only just like women," &c., &c.
As for Mary, she seemed to have passed through a century of suffering—so pale was her face, so sad her eyes, so downcast and depressed her manner.

Thus matters went on, and Autumn faded into Winter, and King Frost chained up the birth-places of the streams, and the river dwindled in its bed, and the snow shrouded the lower hills, and at last carpeted the Terrace itself. Then an event occurred.

It was a frequent custom of Mary’s to visit the Scotchman rock, which seemed to have a terrible fascination for her. One night, when Ned had gone down to the Maori Hen, leaving her alone, a morbid desire overcame her to look upon the scene of the tragedy I have narrated. So she donned her white hood,—for she had replaced the one which figured so conspicuously on that fatal ball-night and, by implication, at the trial, and went out. The full moon was shining brilliantly in an unclouded sky, with Venus in courtly attendance; and there was just such a sprinkling of snow, as sufficed to light up the surface of the earth without impeding the steps of the wayfarer. The wind moaned through the crannies and crevices of the rock, as through a gigantic Eolian harp, with a weird unearthly sound, keeping time with the murmurs of the river, hoarsely surging in its unceasing travail, and the plaintive cries of the night-bird, like to the wailings of lost spirits, added to the solemn influences of the hour.

Soothed yet subdued by the grave harmonies of Nature, Mary wandered on from the rock to the edge of the Terrace, where she stood, looking down on the shrunken stream, chafing and fretting amidst the rocks that obstructed its course a hundred feet below; and in the undisturbed stillness of the night, she reflected sadly upon the wretched events which had destroyed one life and wrecked another. So absorbed was she in her thoughts, that she failed to hear stealthy footsteps approaching, and was unaware of another’s presence till a hand fell heavily on her shoulder. Whether startled by the shock she missed her footing, or whether she
was pushed over; Mary never could tell, but the next instant she fell over the precipitous bank. In her descent she clutched a small shrub, and clung to it with the tenacious grasp of desperation. Then she looked upward to see whom her assailant might be; and her heart sank within her when she recognised the features of Bess Humphreys.

"For mercy's sake help me to get up, Bess," she cried. "What on earth made you frighten me like that?"

"Because I hate thee," came the reply, in deep stern tones, hissed, rather than spoken, through the close-set teeth. "Because thou robbed me of the man I cared for, and who cared for me till thou came between us with thy white face and minding ways. Thou'rt the cause of his death—not Jim Trevanna. He would have made me his lawful wife belike, only for thee, as he had a right to do, for I carry his child, who will never know his father. Now thee canst go to him, if thee likes, for thou shall drown in the river, and I'll stop to see thee."

"Oh Bess; don't be so cruel," the terrified girl appealed. "I never came between you and George. I never cared for him in that way. Do, Bess, help me up."

"No; not if thou offered a thousand pounds I wouldn't. Thou'rt a false liar, and thou shall die for it. Didn't he snatch thy hood off my head you night, and tell me as I weren't fit to wear it? I—that he had loved, and kissed, and had in his arms so often: 'Twere that made me shoot him. Aye!—I did shoot him; and I've as good as been in hell ever since. And you poor fool is on Bell Hill for it; and thou'rt the cause of it all."

"Oh! no, no, Bess; don't let me drown. I've never done you any harm, I swear it," the girl appealed once more.

But appealed in vain. Bess stamped the ground with her foot as if impatient of the delay.—"Oh! I wish I could reach thee," she cried. "If I could I'd push
thee down, thou smirking devil. But I can't; so I'll just bide and watch thee till thou tumbles into the river. Lord! what a pretty corpse thou'lt make for a crowner's quest!"

And she shrieked exultantly with diabolical mirth, as she stood, with clenched hand upraised, looking down upon her victim.

Poor Mary held on with all her strength to the frail branch, with her pale face upturned to the pitiless moon, and the yet more pitiless woman above her; and a great horror seized her as she listened to the angry roar of the boiling flood below, tossing its white foam aloft as if reaching for its prey. The muscular tension was too much for her. She felt her grasp relaxing and cried aloud for help; but human help there seemed none. Her head sank upon her shoulders, and the shadow of the Valley of Death fell upon her soul.—

"Holy Virgin, have pity upon me!" she murmured in her exceeding anguish. Then she resigned herself to her fate.

Hark!—What was it she heard?—Tramp—tramp—tramp came the sound of many feet, hurrying over the frozen ground; and a welcome voice cried aloud—

"Hell-cate!—what are you about?" Another moment and the figure of Bess Humphreys disappeared, and Mary's brother bent over the cliff.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, as he marked her position, about ten feet below the brink, "I can't reach her. Hold on, Mary dear, till I fetch something to pull you up with."

"I can't," she faintly sobbed. "I can't Ned. I must let go if you don't help me quick."

A burly miner came to the rescue. Unwinding the long plaid in which he had carefully enwrapped himself, he lowered it to the girl; saying in grave, quaint tones:

"Tak' a guid grip of that, lassie, and hauld on tae the bit bush, till ye hae it weel in han'."

And thus was Mary rescued.

There had been a triangular duel of observation.
that night. Bess had seen Mary go towards the Scotchman rock, and had followed her; and Ned, who was cognisant of the hostile feeling entertained by the former, suspected that some mischief was afloat, when it was found that Bess had left the hotel. His thought was that she had gone to the hut for the purpose of annoying Mary; and he hurried homeward to protect his sister. But on his way thither he heard cries for help; and by the bright light of the moon he saw Bess, standing on the verge of the Terrace. The men who accompanied him happened to be passing at the time, and he called to them to "come on;" a call which they responded to, arriving just in time to save Mary from a painful and untimely death.

To say that Mary was subsequently ill is feebly to express the effect of the physical shock from which the poor girl suffered; and utterly fails to convey any idea of the mental pain she endured. Her constant thought was—"Jim is innocent. I always said he was, though he did plead 'Guilty.' That mad wench killed George Gifford. She owned to it, when she had me down the bank. Can nothing be done to get him out of goal?"

"That mad wench"—Bess Humphreys, to wit—was held in close custody till Sergeant Corcoran came again to the Terrace, his services being "requisitioned" to convey her to the nearest "lock-up;" whence she was speedily removed to the lunatic ward of the Hospital. For the joint medicos of the district agreed that she was suffering from "puerperal insanity, originating in physical causes," as in fact she was. She became a mother; and then fever set in, and she rapidly sank and died. During the interval, and only two days before her death, conscience smote her, and she made a full confession of the crime she had perpetrated. The grave young magistrate attended, and carefully took down her dying deposition, which in effect was as follows:—

"She had obtained the pistol from George a few days before for the purpose of shooting a weka,* which

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*Weka is the native name of the Wood-hen, or, as it is sometimes called, the Maori-hen.
infested the poultry-yard, and destroyed the eggs. On
the night of the dance her anger was excited—to use
her own phrase, she was ‘aggravated’—by the con-
spicuous and persistent attentions which George lavished
on Mary; and in her wrath, she fetched the pistol
with a confused and uncertain notion of punishing her
supposed rival. When George left the room with
Trevanna, as I have already narrated, she picked up
the white hood which Mary had thrown on a bench,
and putting it on, followed him. Then there ensued a
quarrel, with much and violent recrimination on her
part, and cool contemptuous language on his. At last
he tore the hood from her head, declaring that such a
woman was not worthy to wear anything that belonged
to Mary Austin; and, enraged at the taunt, she drew
the pistol from her pocket, and shot him as he turned
to quit her.”

Having thus made her peace with man, her spirit
departed. Then when such memories were inutile and
valueless, an astonishing number of persons suddenly
remembered a surprising variety of circumstances, cor-
roborative of Jim Trevanna’s innocence. One man
could recollect that he had seen Jim sitting on the boulder
when the shot was fired. Another had noticed that
Bess was out of the dance-room at the time; and yet
another had seen her going forth with the white hood
on her head. Also, the landlord of the Maori Hen
could recollect that the pistol had been lying on a shelf
in the bar for a week or so before the event happened.
Strangely enough none of these circumstances had been
thought of when the life and liberty of an innocent
man were in jeopardy.

Bess Humphrey’s deposition was transmitted to
the Governor, together with a memorial praying for
Jim’s release; and both were in due course referred to
the Judge who had tried the case. When that function-
ary received them he was greatly moved, and
reverently quoted Scripture—“Greater love hath no
man than this, that a man lay down his life for his
friends.”
His recommendation opened wide the prison gates, and Jim received a "free pardon" for an offence he had never committed. The public regarded him almost as a hero. I think he was altogether one. His comely mind was more than an offset to his uncomely person. But he never esteemed himself for the self-sacrifice, which to his mind was only a simple thing—love being the guiding motive. Rather he felt abased by the reflection that he had suspected Mary of a criminal act. But she forgave him. His devotion to her—his willingness to suffer for her—sufficed to atone for the offence, and her love sustained no diminution in consequence.

He returned to the Terrace, and the miners gave a public dinner in his honour; and the local orator sat in "the chair," and proposed his health in terms of glowing eulogy, to Jim's great discomfiture. And then he had to reply, and all he could say was—

"Mr. Chairman, and gents all, you're very kind; but I'm sure I don't know what I've done to deserve it. I—I feel—that is, I feel—I don't know—"

And then he broke down. Whereupon there was great cheering, and clapping of hands, and stamping of feet, and violent thumping of the long-suffering and much-enduring table.
EPILOGUE.

It was Christmas eve. The day had been excessively hot; and Jim Trevanna was sitting by the open door of Austin's hut, placidly smoking his pipe, and silently regarding "Miss Mary." Ned looked at him curiously for some time. Then he said—

"Jim; have you got eyes to see with?"

"Yes," said Jim, amazedly.

"And have you got a tongue in your stupid old head?"

"I don't know—that is—yes; of course I have."

"Well, you see, Balaam's ass had eyes, so as he could see the angel of the Lord. And though, I reckon, such as he can't do much in the way of speechifying, he could talk to some account when it were required. Blest if I don't think you're a precious sight stupider than that ass."

And thereupon he thrust his hat upon his head, and went down to the Maori Hen. Jim turned to Mary with the most innocent look in his honest eyes; and, said he, "Whatever is the matter with Ned?—What does he mean, Miss Mary?"

Mary blushed a little, and laughed a little—a silvery, rippling laugh. Then she said, very softly—

"Jim, what made you plead guilty when you were innocent?"

"Because I love you, Miss Mary," bashfully responded he.

She pouted—"Are you never going to say more than that?"

"I don't know," he answered.

"Then I must know for you, you good old fellow. Jim, dear, you can go to the Priest whenever you like."

And the White Hood nestled in his bosom.
"If," said Marion Medway, following with earnest eyes the heavy flight of a great white sea-bird, "if it passes the ship thrice on this side where I am standing, I will take it as a sign that I am to be happy in this lovely land; if not—"

"Pardon me—your veil is in danger of being blown away. Shall I fasten it for you?"

So intent had Marion been upon her self-devised ornithomancy that the interruption both startled and annoyed her.

"Thanks, I need not trouble you," said she curtly, as she crumpled the rescued strip of black gauze and thrust it into her pocket, without so much as a glance at the officious individual who had suggested its jeopardy. But Gower Hamilton was not to be put off so easily. He had haunted the slender, graceful, crape-clad figure all through the few hours' voyage from Wellington, longing and waiting for opportunity of speech, which, having now come, he determined to make the most of, even at the risk of snubbing and abasement.
"That is a very fine gull," said he, edging a little nearer the lady, and pretending much interest in the bird.

"Very," was the laconic response.

"If I had a crooked pin, a bit of twine, and a morsel of beef," said Gower Hamilton, taking a sudden and unreasonable spite against the whole race of sea-fowl, "I'd hook that fellow, and end his fun. Then, perhaps, my lady would condescend to turn her eyes this way, even if she considered the game inferior." Needless to say that these observations were not uttered aloud.

The gull flew forward till it was just opposite to Marion, then poising itself uncertainly a second, wheeled sharply, and winged its way lazily sternward.

"One disappointment," murmured Marion, thus interpreting her feathered augur, "one disappointment at least."

Now Gower Hamilton decided to try his luck again.

"Do you like Picton?" enquired he, adding mentally, "She can't say only 'Very,' to that; she will have to tack on another word or two anyhow, or else sacrifice her grammar."

"I don't know Picton," said Marion, still not looking. The sea-bird was almost abreast of her again, and she caught her breath with anxiety as she watched its movements. Flap, flap, went its heavy wings, and it dipped its fair broad breast in the sea and flew back.

"Another disappointment," said Marion, sighing.

"Northern New Zealand is rather pretty; don't you think so?" hazarded Gower presently, wondering in his heart what there was so confoundedly interesting about that gull!

"Pretty!" exclaimed Marion, with sudden enthusiasm. "Pretty! It is lovely. I think New Zealand—all that I have seen of it—beautiful beyond description."

This was the right chord evidently, and Gower-
followed up his advantage with much self-gratulation, and said—"I like to hear you say that. I have seen a few other places, some of them very pretty; but New Zealand, I think, beats them all—some parts of it, that is. Dunedin is my favourite place."

"Dunedin?" exclaimed Marion, eagerly. "Do you know Dunedin? I am going there to live."

"No! Are you? When?"

"After I have visited Picton."

"We must be friends, then, after this. I, too, am going to Dunedin after Picton. Dunedin is my home. My old folks were among the early settlers, and I was born there, or would have been if I had waited a few months longer. As it was, I was in too great a hurry, and so got into existence somewhere at sea. Owing to that, I shall never be able to sympathise thoroughly with the fellow who bragged so about his foot being on his native heath (by-the-bye I wonder if he was a one-legged man!) but the nearest approach to the feeling expressed by him is always awakened in me by a sight of Dunedin."

"Is it a beautiful place?"

"Do you know I would rather you would wait and judge for yourself. I am bad at description, and given to exaggeration besides. Have you friends at Picton?"

"Yes; not exactly friends though. They are old friends of my mother's. I don't think I have ever even seen them."

"And your mother? Is she travelling with you?"

Now this question was out of taste and superfluous, for he had seen the girl's lonely embarkation at Wellington that day. When now she turned upon him, her wide grey serious eyes wet with a sudden rush of tears, he wished his tongue had been cut out ere it had framed the unfortunate and impertinent enquiry.

"My mother!" said Marion, "My mother is dead."
"Oh! I am so sorry," said Gower, in distress.
"I would not for the world have said a word if I had known—if I had thought—"

Pray, don't mind. It was so strange to hear any one mention her. I have had no one to speak to since it happened; and I have been so—so lonely sometimes. I—I haven't got used to being without her yet. It is such a little while since she had to go, and we had been so much to each other for so many years."

Gower Hamilton did not know what to say or do. Crying women in the abstract he hated—as we all do—but this individual case of a crying woman wrought upon him strangely. He wanted to comfort her, to soothe her with tender words and caresses; and all that was, of course, out of the question on a crowded deck. Moreover, there was one particular female sitting a few paces distant—a woman, bony, sour-visaged, and unpleasant to the eye—an old maid of virulent type, surely—(no woman having known the pleasures and pains of matrimony and maternity could ever look so sour and hard!)—who had kept her basilisk glance fixed on this young couple with vigilant malignant curiosity ever since they first entered into conversation. Between wishing that he could throw this person overboard, and longing to comfort the tearful girl beside him, poor Gower was sorely overset and at a loss.

"I am so sorry," stammered he again.

"I didn't mean to cry," said Marion presently, "but I could not help it. It is over now;" and she tried to smile, but made a miserable failure of it.

"So you are going to Dunedin to live?" said Hamilton, eager to divert her mind from unpleasant thoughts. "Have you friends there?"

"One, an aunt. My only friend in the world now."

"Whereabouts in Dunedin does she live? Perhaps I know her. May I ask her name?"

"It is M'Kenzie—Miss Marion M'Kenzie. I am named after her."
"M'Kenzie! Does she live near the Town Belt?"
"Yes."
"Why, thou, of course, I know her. My people live within cooce—quite near to her."
"Do they? I have not seen her since I was quite a little child," said Marion, eyeing him wistfully. "Would you mind telling me what she is like now?"
"I wish I could! But the fact is, I don't remember her. I have been located at Wellington for the last year or two; and even when I lived at home I didn't see much of the neighbours. My sisters know her very well though."

Marion looked disappointed that he could not tell her more.
"So your name is the same as your aunt's," remarked Gower after a pause, "Miss Marion M'Kenzie?"

"Oh no! It is only the baptismal name I have. Aunt Marion was my mother's eldest sister."

Gower fell to wondering what her other name might be; yet felt, as he watched the fair delicate face—so touchingly attractive in its present melancholy—that he would be content with sweet-sounding "Marion" all his life, might he but have sole and complete right to call her by it.

"We are getting pretty near the end of our voyage now. And, by Jove! there's the dinner bell. Do you feel hungry?"

"Not at all," said Marion.

"Neither do I," responded Gower, untruthfully. Blessed with the voracity of appetite and perfection of digestive apparatus natural to six feet or so of sound and healthy humanity, he was pretty generally hungry at meal times. And the sea breeze had done its best for him to-day. However, he contrived to look as if dinner were the least interesting subject in the world to him at any time, and particularly just now; and he leaned over the bulwarks close to Marion, and pointed out the scenery to her. The sea gull was gone, and Marion's interest in it was almost gone too. Yet she
sighed a little with superstitious apprehension as she saw him fly off without having passed the vessel on her side more than once.

The little "Hiriwa," glided swiftly over the smooth blue water, and fast approached the entrance to the channel—a fairly wide cleft between the rugged fern-fringed cliffs that front Cook's Strait on the western side. A pretty enough entrance; but at least one-half of it bristling with jagged rocks both below and above water, so that the deep-water channel through it is comparatively small.

The sea was as calm as a mill-pond, and the passengers (the Hiriwa was carrying her full complement this trip) were enjoying themselves immensely. Even the tide-rip off Terawiti had not spoilt their appetites, so the sound of the dinner-bell tempted most of them down stairs. Only a few of them remained above, finding greater attraction in the loveliness of the sea and land, all radiant with the glory of the setting sun. The Hiriwa was not often so crowded as upon this occasion, nor carried she often so interesting a variety of passengers; circumstances which may be accounted for by the season, which was Christmas Eve.

There were distinguished persons on board: a Bishop notably—a fine, tall, soldier-like man, whose handsome presence and good deeds are equally well remembered throughout New Zealand, though he has been sleeping the long sleep for some time now. He was bound to Picton for the performance of a special Christmas service, and was accompanied by his wife, the noble, true-hearted woman who shared his labours for so many years.

Then there was a certain stalwart Judge, well known throughout the colonies for other characteristics, besides his perfect knowledge of law, and able administration of the same. Him, the lady-passengers eyed with the curiosity which the sex is apt to experience about any one who achieves a reputation for gallantry. To the said ladies' masculine friends, he was an object of distrustful interest; and each felt a sensation of re-
lief when the Judge devoted himself with his usual politeness to a fair dame, who was travelling alone, and to whom he was evidently no stranger.

Besides the Bishop and the Judge, a saint and sinner, whose simultaneous presence on board the steamer, and good-humoured occasional converse with each other, strongly evidenced the aphorism that “extremes meet,” there were present sundry representatives of the noble volunteer force, taking a holiday trip with their wives and sweethearts; or alone, in cases where those pleasant appendages were lacking.

And there was a canny old Scotchman with his “guid wife,” bound on a long-promised visit to “an auld Scotchman” at Picton.

Also a handsome Devonshire lass, a “new chum,” whose flashing eyes, brilliant complexion and glistening white teeth, had already wrought serious damage among the hearts of unengaged volunteers.

And highly conspicuous among the rest, was a Yankee, ex-captain—a man commanding a ready flow of language—a man much given to alcohol, boasting, and betting. At present he was out of a billet, “down on his luck,” as he expressed it; and was wiling away his time by taking a free run in the Hiriwa, over a familiar bit of sea; and by harassing the Hiriwa’s commander with a verbal display of his own superiority over that individual in the matter of coast knowledge.

“Say, Cap!” he sang out suddenly, “whar in ’nation are ye steerin’ to?” The vessel was at this time about three hundred yards from the entrance of Tory Channel. “Keep more to starboard, caint ye? The tide’s runnin in like a millrace, and if it takes her full on the beam, you’ll have her on the rocks as sure as God made little apples.”

“You be hanged simply!” growled the fat little Captain, from the bridge, “I haven’t been in an’ out this place every hour o’ the day an’ night for years, to be taught anything by a Yank. I know my way about.”

“Know yer way about? I guess ye dew. Yew’ll
know your way to the bottom in about five minutes as yew’re a steerin neow; an’ small matter tow if yew only went down alone. By the Lord she feels it!” continued he, as the vessel neared the rocks. “There yew air! Now you pie-a-wan-wan-picked-up-along-shore-hawbuck, get her eout o’ that ef ye kin. You’ve a head, and so’s a scupper-nail and a pumpkin, and I’d like tow know which is the whichest. Sailed on a Friday,” said he, confidentially addressing the mizen-mast, “with a butter-keg for a skipper, and a Bishop aboard at that! Any one of the three was enough to bring us to grief, but the lot together makes it a credit. There she goes! Lord, have mercy on the women!”

The Captain now saw the danger; and the signals, “Stop her! back her!” rang out in quick succession, but too late. Hardly had the engines been reversed when the boat rose on a long roller, sweeping towards the channel entrance, and cracked down on a sunken reef amidships, with a shock that shuddered through her from stem to stern. Another roller lifted her, and then came a second shock, snapping the screw clean off and smashing the rudder. Then the steamer slid over the reef into deep water, and drifted helplessly with the tide down the Channel, broadside on, with the water pouring into her from a big leak amidships, where she had first struck. The pumps were set to work, but the water rose too fast, and in a quarter of an hour the engines stopped altogether.

The Hiriwa, however, was built in three compartments, and the fore and aft divisions appeared free from leaks; but it was presently found that the door in the partition dividing the aft and midships had somehow got jammed open in such a way, that shutting it altogether was an impossibility, so that the water steadily though slowly found its way to the stern of the boat, which, at all times sank too deep. Still there was no danger of her going down for two or three hours at least. This the passengers did not know, however, and the panic was tremendous.

The diners rushed impetuously on deck, the last
to appear being the Bishop, who seemed sorely inclined to read the commination service over the Captain. Like the Psalmist under trouble, (the exact nature of which does not just at present occur to me) this holy man "kept silence even from good words, but it was pain and grief to him" evidently. A splendid sailor himself, he could fully comprehend the skipper's awful blunder.

Everybody believed at first that the steamer was rapidly sinking; that some at least would have to fight the waves for dear life; and the effect of this notion was curiously varied.

The ladies mostly followed the general tendency of the sex, under such circumstances,—the tendency to scream, catch hold of "other parties," and repent publicly and volubly of their sins.

The Yankee seemed rather to enjoy the situation; probably because from the first he had the full measure of the disaster, and knew that anyway he was safe, being able to swim like a fish, and the shore was scarce two hundred yards distant. He took a malicious pleasure in playing upon the feelings of the passengers.

"Get to prayers, beloved friends and brethren," yelled he, in his unmelodious twang. "The angel is waitin' for yew, an' the skipper of this craft is the one appointed by special providence to steer yew straight tew the shore. "My Lord," addressing the Bishop, "Will you give out the hymn, or shall I?" Beloved victims of misplaced confidence, prepare to sing your last and loveliest, like dying swans. Page eleven thousand and ninety-nine—ahem!—

"Ye little hills, why hop ye so?  
Ye hills, why dew ye hop?  
Is it bekase ye're glad tew see  
His grace the Lord Bishop?"

"Ye little fishes in the sea,  
O sing and never stop!  
'Taint every day ye git the chance  
To eat a Lord Bishop."

But the humour of all this was little appreciated. The women screamed louder than ever. Some pas-
sionately besought the Bishop to help them save their souls; others swarmed round the Judge, with an instinctive trust in his size and well-known susceptibility to the cry of distressed femininity, and entreated him for corporeal safety. The Judge was already engaged, however, with one long arm supporting the fair dame aforesaid, who had developed symptoms of fainting and hysteria. With the other arm he warded off the besieging group, explaining that he thought "one at a time a great moral principle," but that there was a prospect of all getting safely to shore if they would but have patience.

The old Scotchman commenced to strip for a swim, but was much hindered by his wife, who clung about him with heart-rending cries. "We maun e'en droon thegither, John," wailed she. "It's a sair, an' unco indecent endin' for twa respectable people like you an' me; and I've aye been a guid an' faithful wife till ye, John. But it's a comfort, ye ken, that we'll e'en droon thegither."

"The de'il a bit!" exclaimed John, whose views did not coincide with hers at all. "We'll swim thegither, gin ye're willin' an' able; but gin ye're on for droonin', auld woman, ye maun e'en gang yer ain gait. I'll no droon—no me!"

A buxom lady, with a boy companion, rushed about wildly. "Somebody throw me overboard!" she shrieked with frantic gestures. "Somebody throw me overboard, please. All this has happened through me. It's a judgment—a judgment! I'm the Jonah! Will nobody throw me over?"

"O Judge!" cried that gentleman's companion, coming to with surprising suddenness, "do go and find out what she's done. If it's anything very wicked, and she has brought death upon us, it's quite proper she should be thrown overboard."

"Bosh!" said the Judge. "It's like her consummate conceit to fancy Providence would sink a steamer on her account. The idea! But I must make her stop that noise anyhow."
Seizing the lamenting lady, he began a severe re-
monstrance; but the sense of sin was still strong upon
her. "Throw me into the sea, please," she cried,
gripping him as tenaciously as if she expected her re-
quest to be carried out, "I'm the Jonah—the wicked
Jonah; throw me into the sea."

"I would with pleasure," replied the Judge, "only
I don't see a whale handy to carry out the rest of the
programme. Still, if you'd like to be chucked over on
general principles, you know—why—"

"Oh! I'm a miserable sinner!" she broke in.
"Don't you come near me, Phil!"—this to her youthful
escort. "Don't you come near me again. Once safe
on land never, never will I see you again. Phil, you've
a deal to answer for. I was a respectable woman
till—"

"Come, that will do," interrupted the Judge;
"Nobody wants to know about you and Phil. Only
you'd better stop that squealing and stick to him a
little longer, at least until you get on dry land once
more."

At this moment, the chief officer, emerging from
the engine-room, sang out that the vessel would float
for three hours yet—an announcement that eased the
public mind considerably. The sour-faced female who
had displayed such interest in Marion Medway, and
Gower Hamilton especially, recovered herself. She
made a sudden pounce upon the Devonshire damsel
who, seated flat on the deck, was rocking herself to
and fro, and moaning piteously.

"Child of sin!" exclaimed the spinster, in a tone
of vicious religion, "get on your knees this instant and
pray for salvation."

"Iss, ma'am," sobbed the girl, with an effort to
do as she was told. "Iss, ma'am. O, 'tain't six
months since I wer yawking in the dimpse with Ike
Beer up to Kirton, and now we're gwine to be drowned
in the watter like rattens. Iss sure—like rattens."

"Turn your thoughts heavenward," said her com-
forter; "look not back upon the filth and mire of
earthly pleasures that you have waded through. Confess and repent of your manifold sins, and cease to lust after the flesh."

"I never did hanker much after it," cried the poor damsel, vaguely interpreting flesh as butchers' meat. "I could live for ever on home-made bread and cream—"

"Little fool!"—with a savage shake—"do you think I care about your carnal appetite? I meant your degrading anxiety about worldly pleasures, your scandalous craving for the admiration and company of deceitful men. Have I not observed all day your disgraceful carryings-on with those young ruffians in uniforms? Out upon you! What can come of it all save weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth?"

But here the chief mate came to the rescue. Two of the steamer's boats had by this time been lowered, and the ladies were being assisted in.

"You'll answer for this one day, Mr Mate," said the spinster, when, with unceremonious disregard of her, the Devonshire girl was helped over the side. "I had just got that poor wanderer nicely under conviction. In two minutes more her soul would have been saved, and then drowning would not have mattered."

"Are you insured, ma'am?" enquired the mate, contemplating her gravely.

"No, sir; I am not. I put my trust in Providence, and don't believe in paying premiums to ungodly Insurance Companies; that is,"—suddenly correcting herself—"that is—unless it's fire!"

"It's all right then," said the mate, putting on an air of relief, "I was afraid some Insurance Company might be making a loss over you; but as you're not insured, and are safe on the track for heaven—"

"Heaven!" shrieked the woman, clasping his arm agonisedly, "You don't mean that the ship is going down?"

The mate nodded.
"Here! hi!" yelled the spinster, quitting her hold and flying to the side of the vessel. "Hi! stop the boats! Wait for a lady, you brutes! Would you see me drown before your very eyes?" And she fought her way over into the nearest boat with a strength, and activity, and general springiness beyond her years.

The ladies were now all safely embarked. The Bishop had handed down his wife, giving her his blessing and a large rug, both very good things in their way; the Judge had deposited his fair charge in the same small craft as gently and comfortably as was, under the circumstances, possible.

"Can't you come too, and take care of us all?" said she, plaintively.

"Nothing I should like better," was the reply; "but the Bishop and I must be the last passengers on board, according to etiquette. Besides, there's my dinner."

"Your dinner?"

"Yes; I was hurried, you know; and, moreover, I was allowing a margin for oysters at Picton. Now there is a dark uncertainty about one's chance of those blessed bivalves, so I must fill up—I must, indeed. Good-bye. But stay?"

He rushed away, returning in a few seconds from the cabin. "Here, take these," said he, passing down a pair of blankets, snatched from the nearest berth, and a tin of biscuits. "You will probably feel the good of them before morning if you have to roost on yonder hill-side."

The boats shoved off amidst a shower of adieux, Gower Hamilton waving his hat to Marion as she sat in the stern of the first that started. He had had the greatest difficulty to persuade her away.

"I would as soon drown in the ship as in a boat," she had said. "I am not frightened here, but those screaming women would drive me distracted."

"But they won't scream in the boat," he had replied, "and there is no danger of drowning, anyway.
We shall all get ashore; but the women must go first, of course. Come, let me help you down.”

She was leaning against him, and his arm was round her. In the first shock of the wreck she had turned to him, clingingingly, and he had not loosened his hold of her since. “No; I don’t want to go. Let me stay, please. If I leave you I shall be afraid.”

“Marion!” he had said, tightening his clasp and bending over her, until his yellow beard touched her cheek and dark hair. And she, seeming not to notice the familiarity, had turned her face upward to him trustfully. “Marion, you must go. Do you think I will not follow you as soon as I can? But I must stand by the ship a little longer with the rest of the men, and it would be absurd for you to remain with me. Come, be reasonable, and don’t make it so hard for me to lose sight of you.”

“I should only hamper you if I stayed, of course?”

“Of course. How could I do anything while your safety was doubtful?”

“Then your safety will be doubtful if you remain?”

“No, no; I didn’t mean that. Come, no more words and waste of time; you must go.”

Very reluctantly she yielded, and suffered herself to be put into the boat.

“By-the-bye, have you any luggage aboard?”

“Yes; two small trunks.”

“What name on them?”

“Medway—Marion Medway.”

“All right. Good-bye. I shall see you again directly.”

This query respecting luggage was suggested by the sight of the Judge busily engaged hauling up his carpet-bags, &c., from the hold, where a sailor, for “a consideration,” was hooking them on to a rope.

“I say, old fellow,” cried Hamilton to the sailor—”I say, while you’re about it, fish up two trunks labelled Miss Marion Medway, and a big portmanteau with G. H. on the ticket, will you? and here’s a crown,
for you," spinning the coin down into the man's ready hand.

Now were to be seen two large whaling boats pulling off from the whaling station on the north shore; and the Bishop suggested to the skipper that they and the ship's boats, on the return of the latter, should be set to tow the steamer ashore and beach her. But the little man was too used up to give orders about anything, and some of the remaining passengers clamoured that they should be put ashore first, so that the only plan by which the little Hiriwa could have been saved had to be given up.

"Yah?" snarled the Yankee, scattering scorn round liberally, "so the poor, pretty, sensible little thing's to be left to her misery and destruction because a thumpin' damned lumber-head of a skipper smashes her on a rock, and a few ugly skunks think so much of their precious carcasses that they won't give her one chance of bein' saved. Why, the hull bilin' of yer ain't worth a single plank of her pretty deck! It's an almighty pity there ain't a few more captains like this partikler cuss. If there was, heaven and the other place would soon be so chock-full that there'd be no more fightin' as to which ought to git the biggest lot o' souls. Lord! haow I dew wish I could act the way the spirit moves me this minute! What a high old feedin' time the fishes 'ud have for a day or two?"

The boats soon returned for a fresh load. As the vessel drifted down the channel with the rising tide, the passengers were landed in batches all along the nearest shore (which happened to be the southern), the last lot being set down some three miles from the first; and the last lot had quite the best of it, for there was a farm only about a mile inland from them, whither they soon found their way, and were most hospitably welcomed. One of the whaleboats bore off the Bishop, the captain, and others, to the shore. In the other, bound for Picton, went the Judge and Hamilton, with their rescued luggage, and the Yankee. The men pulled off heartily to the chant of a good old
whaling chorus, and the little steamer drifted calmly to her death.

Picton was reached before nine o'clock. This little town, as most New Zealanders are aware, lies at the very end of Queen Charlotte's Sound, and, at the time of our story, consisted Chiefly of a pier and a public-house. There were divers other habitations certainly, but nothing that could be conscientiously called a street. The pier and public-house formed the distinctive features of the town.

Picton lies on a flat, and is surrounded by low, but steep hills, through a gorge in which now runs the railway to Blenheim. There is an uninhabited inlet of the Sound near Picton which resembles that place—in the dark—so closely that once on a time a steamer, the Phœbe, ran bump ashore there, firmly believing she was going to Picton. She was not injured—only delayed for a tide—and the mate in charge of the deck excused himself for the mishap by saying that he had firmly believed they were making Picton, because he had smelt the bloaters (Picton's only export), and that that was "the only way to tell the damned place without a moon."

Fortunately for him, a large shoal of herrings had been driven ashore at the spot in question by some porpoises ten days before, and were lying there in high condition, so the mate's plea was held valid. From all this it may be readily inferred that the town did not present a striking appearance to the eye of the unprejudiced traveller. The days of the rise of Picton were those of the first diggings at Marlborough. When those diggings collapsed, Picton shrank like a drying bloater. One good thing remained, however—oysters. But man cannot live by oysters alone. Excellent assistants—admirable by way of a change; when taken as a constancy they become monotonous. Yet any traveller doomed to spend some hours at Picton may feel that "the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb" as he enjoys a feed of those most delicious of shell-fish fresh from the sea. It is an appropriate
fish for Picton, too—not given to unbecoming liveliness any more than is the town. In the time of which we write, if three men and a duck were seen in the principal thoroughfare at one and the same time, the place was considered excited. When the owner of a house wanted to leave, he carefully boarded up his windows, gave up his fire-insurance to the Bank as security for his over-draft, and prayed for a conflagration. As to letting a house, such an idea never entered the mind of the wildest enthusiast. Yet Picton had a Resident Magistrate, a Customs officer, a Postmaster, a Telegraphist, a Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages, an Immigration officer, and a Sheriff. This apparent extravagance may be judged leniently when it is explained that all these gorgeous offices were concentrated in and upon one individual. He was not overworked either, his time being taken up chiefly with forwarding blank returns during the week, and reading prayers in the English Church on Sundays. But all this en passant.

When our shipwrecked trio reached this peaceful city, a rush was made for the telegraph office, where a youth, temporarily in charge, was just retiring for the night.

"Go to Jericho!" shouted he, in response to the energetic rapping at the door, "Cutting up your blooming shines! Go to Jericho!"

A word about the wreck, however, brought him out speedily, in very scant attire.

"Now," said the Judge, "lose no time, but see if they are awake at White's Bay and Wellington."

Click-clack, click-clack, click-clack.

"White's Bay's all right, sir."

"Now Wellington."

More clicking and a longer reply.

"Wellington says he's just going to bed, sir, and he'll be blowed if he'll stop up for anybody!"

"Tell him he'll get the sack. No—stay—just wire 'Hiriwa wrecked,' then he'll wait for particulars."

This done, the answer came promptly, "Fire
away;" and the following telegram was despatched at once.

"To agent of Hiriwa Steamer, Wellington.

"Hiriwa wrecked in Tory Channel. Passengers roosting along southern shore. Send steamer to pick them up at daybreak."

"Wire a copy of that to Featherstone, the Superintendent," said the Judge, he'll make that agent lively, I'll answer for it."

"Yes sir; shall I try Nelson, too, sir?"

"Nelson! Well, you can if you like, but it's my belief nothing short of nitro-glycerine would rouse up Sleepy Hollow, at this time of night."

With that, the Judge went off to his "blessed bivalves;" the Yankee, too, spread exaggerated wreck-news among such people as he could find awake; and Gower Hamilton, after storing his luggage, obtained with much difficulty and pecuniary outlay, a boat and men to row him back to the Channel, the whalers being too fatigued after their long pull.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESCUE. CHRISTCHURCH AND DUNEDIN.

It was a little after eleven o'clock when Hamilton was landed at the point nearest the farm. Making his way speedily to the homestead, he found there some sixty people severely testing the resources of the establishment; and was just in time to make one of a party of young fellows starting forth with tea, sugar, bread, kettles, and blankets, to the relief of the ladies who were still exposed on the shore at some distance. A young squatter from a neighbouring station offered himself as guide, and away they went, laboriously scrambling over the rough tracks along the top of the steep tussocky hills by which Tory Channel is on both sides bounded.
Gower, in the haste of a new glad excitement, got somewhat ahead of his companions, until a halt was called by their guide, out of pity for two who had given in at last, after many mishaps and tumbles.

"It is rough walking, I grant you," said the young squatter, sympathetically, "but we must be pretty near the end now, and the moon's due at midnight. It can't lack more than a quarter of an hour of that now, I reckon, so we'll have a short spell till she rises. Lucky the night's so warm and still. Look below at the water."

It was worth looking at, motionless and intensely black, but everywhere closely flecked with star-gold; while the shrubs and the rocks along the shore took the weirdest shapes in the darkness two hundred feet below. The men stood watching in that dead silence—that is begotten of awe and admiration, until presently the reflected stars waxed fainter and fainter, and then suddenly all the eastern sky became flooded with silvery radiance, and the moon, fair and pale, but out of shape with age, shot into sight above a distant range. And at the same moment there rang through the still night in sweetest feminine chorus, the beautiful Christmas hymn:—

"Hark! the Herald Angels sing."

"What's that?" exclaimed Carey, one of the relief party.

"Hush! it's the women," whispered his friend Vere, "we've stumbled upon the camp unawares."

They were indeed within two hundred yards of where the ladies had camped—after a fashion—near a patch of manuka scrub.

"It is the first hour of Christmas Day," said Vere, as the sweet solemn music died away over the hills and sea. "And the women folk have remembered it. What a time it is since I heard that hymn before; and what a grand old hymn it is! It beats Milton's Ode to the Nativity hollow. Fancy the author of it being unknown!"

"Well, God knows him, Carey," said Vere, feeling
very reverent and somewhat sentimental, "and I suppose that is the main thing, after all."

"We'd better get on now," said the young squatter, but they were scarce half the distance nearer, when they were again brought to a silent standstill. A round full contralto voice rang out on the air in these quaint verses:

As Joseph was a walking
He heard an Angel sing:
"This night shall be the birthnight
Of Christ our Heavenly King.

"His birthplace shall be neither
In house nor in hall,
Nor in the place of Paradise,
But in the oxen's stall.

"He neither shall be rocked
In silver nor in gold,
But in the wooden manger,
That lieth in the mould."

As Joseph was a walking
Thus did the Angel sing;
And Mary's son at midnight
Was born to be our King.

Most readers will remember this strange musical old carol in Kingsley's "Westward Ho!"

"That's that Devonshire beauty," cried Vere, enthusiastically, "she told me she could 'sing to church' as she called it. Bravo, Devon!" he shouted, as they broke suddenly in upon the petticoat convention near the manuka, and were welcomed with a joyful heartiness that can only be understood by those who have seen the feminine Briton kept many hours without her tea.

Gower Hamilton walked rapidly up to the slender black-robed figure, his searching eyes so quickly distinguished from the rest.

"Have you been very cold? Did you land safely? Have you had anything to eat?" were his breathless questions as he totally enveloped her in the big blanket he had brought from the farm.
"Thanks,—I don't want to be smothered, I am not cold, and I don't care to be robed in a blanket, as if I were a lubra," said Marion, laughingly, extricating herself from the woolly folds. "And now, please give an account of yourself Mr. Hamilton. You see I have found out your name. Where have you been all this while, and what doing? The other gentlemen found their way to us long ago, and then went to forage for us as if they did care whether we lived or died, which is more than some people seem to trouble themselves about."

Then he set himself to explain about the luggage and Picton, and the steamer that would be sent to pick them up; and then he wished her a Merry Christmas, to which she responded with the same to him "and many of them."

Then he laughed a happy laugh for mere gladness of seeing her again; and caught both her hands in his as if he had known her twenty-four years, instead of not much more than half as many hours.

"Strangers should not be so familiar," said Marion, trying to draw herself away.

"Thanks for the rebuke, but it is a little out of place. We are not strangers."

"Why, it is but a few hours since we first——"

"O yes, I know,—if you count by actual lapse of time. But that is not at all a wise or proper system of computation. There was once a little nigger who, being asked his age, made answer thus:—Countin' by what mudder says, I'se 'bout eleben, I guess; but count me by de fun I'se had, and golly! I'se mos' a hundred. You see, we must reckon time by the fun we have."

"And the being shipwrecked, and cast on a desolate island, come in the category, of course."

"In this particular instance, yes,—decidedly. Now, do let me hold your little hands in mine until they get warm. They are like two small pieces of ice. Do, Marion?"

"No, you must not; and you ought not to call me by my Christian name."
“No? why not? you did not talk like this a few hours ago on the steamer.”
“I was frightened then.”
“I wish you were frightened now, and always—”
“O what a wicked wish!”
“So that I might hold you in my arms and say what I like without getting snubbed. Marion—no, it is no use your protesting—I shall never be able now to call you by any other name—”
“Though it would smell just as sweet,” said she, mischievously.
“Now, girls should never be impertinent,” said Gower, “it does not become them. What I was going to say is this—we two—”
“See how industrious your friends have been,” interrupted Marion, true to herself as a woman in trying to escape hearing what she very truly wanted to hear. They have built the fires, and I do believe that furthest kettle from here is boiling. O! I should so like a cup of tea.”
“And you shall have one in less than a minute,” cried Gower, hastening off at once, his own heart beating at almost as furious a rate as hers, though not so nervously. They were just at an age, these two, when love can be sudden and yet most genuine; when prudence, and propriety, and etiquette all have to stand aside—at least for the man—and yet neither he nor she thinks worse of the other for what mature people would in him call “impudence,” in her “forwardness.”

The kettles all boiled with considerate celerity; tea—hot, strong, and fragrant—was passed round industriously, and so this impromptu midnight picnic went on pleasantly beneath the fair white Christmas moon. There was some atrocious flirting carried on, it must be owned, but as almost everybody present had some individual business of this kind to attend to, people had not time to notice each other much, and so there was never much said about it. Sundry love affairs that had been in bud an unconscionable time, took this opportunity of coming into the sudden full
blossom of engagement, even to the naming of wedding days; and people who would probably never have seen anything interesting in each other during whole years of ordinary prosaic existence, under the influence of this adventure, with its spices of peril and leaven of romance, struck up ardent friendships, and made promises of constancy, and all the rest of it.

Despite losses of luggage and divers other inconveniences, there were very few who sorrowed inconsolably about this shipwreck; and there was not one who did not look round a little regretfully, when, about five o'clock in the morning, the boom of a gun that "set the wild echoes flying" told that Wellington had sent a steamer to the rescue.

By breakfast time they were all in Picton. Hamilton discovered the residence of Marion's friends, and thither conveyed and left her; first taking care to ascertain the probable time of her departure from there. When, in two days she returned to Wellington, she was not at all surprised to find him on the pier—evidently waiting.

"So you did come," was his greeting. "I was half afraid your friends would not give you up after all, and that I should be disappointed."

"You don't mean to say you were expecting me!" she exclaimed, with a look of mendacious surprise.

"I was hoping for you," said he, "and I didn't mean to go on to Dunedin till you came. You need some one to look after your luggage, you know; and two people who have been shipwrecked together—but there's the Dunedin steamer whistling. She'll be off directly now, so we'd better get aboard. I'll see you settled first, and then come back for your luggage. Leave everything to me."

She did, for she was glad to be taken care of in this fashion. In all her lonely sea-sick voyaging from Melbourne she had had none to care for her. It had been a long trip, too—via Sydney for Auckland. She had taken this route instead of the short one, via Bluff to Dunedin, in order to contrive this special Picton
visit for her dead mother's sake; and now all the
wearisomeness and desolation seemed compensated.

"I feel brave and hopeful about the change in my
life now," said she to herself, watching with satisfac-
tion Gower Hamilton busy with her trunks and odds
and ends of belongings. "Even the memory of Aunt
Marion's cold hard invitation to come and live with
her doesn't seem to hurt me now."

Next morning the steamer was at Port Lyttelton.
Marion went into raptures about the uneven pictu-
resque little town, the high, bald hills, with their ten-
der lights and shadows, and the beautiful bay.

"If you like this you will love Dunedin," said
Gower; "but let us run up and see Christchurch. The
steamer stops here till evening."

Just in time to catch a train. In half-an-hour
they were in the City of the Plains. They inspected
its shops and buildings; saw its promise of a cathedral
(a promise now making rapid signs of fulfilment);
noticed its queer shed of a post-office (a handsome
substitute stands now in Cathedral Square); visited
its highly creditable Museum and Botanical Gardens;
and enjoyed an hour's pull on its one beautiful feature
—the willow-fringed river Avon.

"Well, how do you like Christchurch?" enquired
Hamilton when they were on their way back to the
Port.

"As a city—not at all," said Marion, decisively.
"If it were not for the planted trees it would be un-
bearable. The style of architecture is abominable, and
it is to be hoped there will be an improvement in it
before the building of the cathedral is proceeded with.
And what an extraordinary taste is displayed in the
matter of house-colouring! One would think the
people had chosen those dingy browns and drabs for
the same reason that economical poor women choose
dingy-coloured gowns—that they may not readily show
the dirt, being the colour of dirt already."

"What a severe young critic this is!" remarked
Gower, addressing the roof of the railway carriage.
"Well, I do so like what is pretty and bright. And just think what a place Christchurch would be without its trees and its river! And even now, just fancy having to walk all over a place in order to see it! I like to stand on a hill whence I can behold everything at once."

"What insatiable greed! But if that's what you like, Dunedin will suit you 'right down to the ground,' as the Yankees say. You will be able to stand on your aunt's front door-step and inspect the unmade beds in your next-door lower-situated neighbour's attic story."

Marion laughed. "I am glad to know Dunedin is not flat," said she. "I detest level land, and I have a theory that there is a strong affinity between soul and scenery. People who live in level, monotonous country must in time, I think, get into a level, monotonous line of thought. There is nothing to widen or elevate the range, and the human mind has a general tendency to narrow and limit itself selfishly, so that it needs all it can get of outer influences to keep it above a prejudiced, illiberal level. It is good to get on the top of a mountain and look out, and out, till one forgets one's little woes and worries; and all the petty details of life dwindle into nothing in the contemplation of the vastness and grandeur of the world around and beyond us. People's surroundings must influence their characters, even if they are so busy with the labour of living that they have no time to pay heed."

"Well, if you are going into metaphysics like this," said Gower, "I must cry parley until I've read up on the subject. All the same, I agree with you in preferring hilly countries to flat ones. And, now I come to think of it, I shouldn't wonder a bit if the reason the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were such a bad lot was because they dwelt upon the plains."

"That bit of Scripture history will be a splendid argument in favour of my theory," laughed Marion. "What a fine point I shall score in future when advancing it!"
Another night's voyage and the steamer entered Otago Harbour. Marion, restless and anxious, was early astir, and Hamilton found her on deck long before the breakfast hour.

"Well, what do you think of this?" he asked, as the morning sun, dispersing a soft grey mist, revealed one little inlet and promontory after another, and gilded the distant tops of the bold headlands of Port Chalmers.

"Don't speak to me," said Marion, gazing upon all ecstatically; "let me feast my soul in peace. O, it is beyond all I ever imagined!"

Should there be any who think her rapturous admiration exaggerated, I would bid them remember that Marion Medway was comparatively untravelled, therefore unable to draw comparisons to any great extent. What she saw now came nearest to her idealistic sense of the beautiful of anything she had ever beheld, and her enjoyment was great accordingly. Mind, I am not seeking to excuse her admiration—that were to pay a poor compliment to scenery that must rank among the loveliest in the world. But it is as well to offer a word of apologetic explanation to the far-travelled ones who, having memory of forest marvels and Alpine splendours in other countries, may object to any fuss about the beauties of this.

It was almost noon when Gower Hamilton, packing his charge and her sundry properties into a cab at Dunedin, gave the driver her address, and bade her good-bye.

"Only for the present," he added, retaining her hand a moment. "My sisters will look you up tomorrow, and we shall meet again very soon."

The cab had a steep pull up the hill to Miss M'Kenzie's residence, a pretty cottage built in the T style, so popular in Dunedin. It was situated at the very summit of a steep incline from George street. A tidy little maid responded to Marion's knock.

"Is this Miss M'Kenzie's house?"

"'Deed aye."
"Is Miss M’Kenzie within?"
"She is that. She disna gang oot muckle."
"Will you tell her I wish to see her?"
"Aye. Come ben tae the parlour, mein."
Marion complied. A moment later there entered to her a tall, slim lady—handsome, but severe-looking.
"Aunt, I am Marion?"
"Sae I pairceeeve," said Miss M’Kenzie, coolly and deliberately. Marion’s outstretched hand remained unnoticed. "There’s nae mistaking Isabella’s features, whilk ye hae inherited in a degree that’s extraordinar’. Ye’re quite wee, I houp?"
"Quite, thank you," replied Marion, choking back the sob in her throat. "I was not sanguine, God knows," she said within herself, "but this is even worse than I expected."

What made it sadder was that her aunt strongly resembled her dead mother, looking only harder and colder and colder than she could ever have looked. It was, Marion thought, as if her mother had come back after a long absence—but come back without a soul.

"Does yon eab hau’d yere luggage, Marion?"
"Yes, aunt."
"Then we’ll e’en get it intil the hoose. It’s ill wark keeping the mon waiting when he’ll aiblins pit on an extra saxpence for ilka extra meenit."
"I will settle with him," said Marion, going hastily out for that purpose, and to gain mastery over herself.

"Hoo muckle did he chairge?" enquired her aunt upon her entrance.
"Three-and-sixpence."
"Aye, rank doornricht robbery! A-weel, ye’d better come to yere room and tak’ off yere things noo. It’s nigh upo’ my dinner hoor. I suppose ye can wait till then for refreshment?"
"Most certainly."
"Varra weel. But dinna disarrange the anti-
maeassars," said Miss M'Kenzie, as Marion, in passing, accidentally swept one from a chair. "Of a' things, I maist abhor untidiness."

"I will remember," said Marion, and her tone brought all Miss M'Kenzie's attention to her face.

"Aye, aye," said she, calmly, "I see features are no' the only thing ye've inherited frae my sister Isabella. She's apparently handed doon a spice o' her temper as weel."

Marion turned on her savagely. "Do and say what you like about me, Aunt Marion," she said, "but don't say one word against my mother, or I'll leave your house at once."

"And maybe it's no' me would be the greatest sufferer by that proceeding."

"I don't care who would be the sufferer!"

"Weel, nac mair dae I, ye ken. And noo, gin ye're owre yer raging, ye'll maybe condescend to follow me."

Once in the room allotted to her, poor Marion gave her bursting heart full way. Here was a home coming!

"Better I had been really wrecked and drowned," sobbed the girl. "How glad this woman would have been if I had! My mother's sister! I'll never believe it. There must have been a mistake somewhere. This unfeeling being and my gentle tender mother could never have been born of the same woman."

Presently she was called to dinner, and with sudden resolution to make the best of things for the present, she followed the little maid to the dining-room. There sat Miss M'Kenzie, calm and stately, bearing no trace of resentment in tone of voice or face as she invited her niece to partake of this or that—no sign of even recollection of the past brief storm.

"Have I been here a hundred years?" said Marion when, after a long, smooth afternoon and evening, she retired to bed. "I feel as if I had, and as if all my life till to-day were a dream. Or is this the dream—from which I shall presently
awaken to find myself back with my mother? O! mother! mother!"

Then tears, bitter and plentiful, and afterwards troubled slumber.

CHAPTER III.

NEW YEAR AND NEW FRIENDS.

Early next day came Hamilton's three sisters—Millie-
cent, Grace, and Alice—and their cousin, Miss Nellie
Dale, a young lady of the period, strongly addicted to
slang.

"Gower has been telling us about the wreck," said
Millicent to Marion, when they had made ac-
quaintance, "and raving so about his 'fellow sufferer,'
as he calls you, that we could not wait any longer to
know you. I hope you are not offended at our coming
so soon."

"No, indeed," said Marion, earnestly, "I am very,
very glad."

"But our main reason for coming," said Nellie
Dale, "was really to get you to come to our jolly party
to-night."

Marion looked round enquiringly.

"To-night being the last of the old year," said
Millicent, in explanation, "we are going to have our
usual sitting-up party to welcome the New Year in."

"And it's such awfully splendid fun," chimed in
Nellie Dale. "You'll come, won't you?"

"I should dearly like to," said Marion, hesi-
tatingly, "but—I only arrived yesterday, you know,
and my aunt might not like—"

"Dinna consee me, I beg," said Miss M'Kenzie
sharply, "I've spent Hogmanay my lune this mony a
year noo, and I'm no sure that I care to spend it any
ither gait."
"But why not join us this once, Miss M'Kenzie," said Millicent, anxious to make things pleasant.
"Mamma often says that we see far too little of you, considering we are such close neighbours. Pray come."
"My days are gane by for sic gay doings, Miss Hamilton," replied the elderly lady, smiling grimly.
"I'm muckle obleeged all the same, but your pairty would be nane the merrier for an auld ghoulsome woman like me glowerin' owre it."
"O, Miss M'Kenzie! how can you? Come, now; be persuaded."
"Na, na; ye maun excuse me."
"But you will let your niece come?"
"Sairtinly, gin it please her."
"Then I will, gladly," said Marion, eagerly.
"What time shall I come? and where is your house?"
"Well, we are a little lower in the world than you," laughed Millicent. "I hope you won't consider that you lose caste by descending to us. Look here—out of the window. You see that shingled roof with the ugly chimney-pots? That's our place; not far off, is it? But lest you tumble down the steep in getting to us, Nellie here shall run up for you at five o'clock. The real fun does not set in till ten, or later; but we always go into town after tea to look at the shop windows decked out for the season."

When they were gone, Marion, cheered, yet apprehensive, looked earnestly at her aunt.

"I hope you won't mind my leaving you alone. Aunt Marion," she said, her impulsive heart reproaching her for leaving the old lady in loneliness while she went forth to enjoyment.

"I'm no that accustomed to society that I'm likely to pine after yours," was the uncivil reply, "but maybe you'll explain, Miss Marion Medway, hoo ye got see easily acquaint wi' thae young ladies' brither. I'm my young days, folk didna rin intil ane anither's arms at first sicht."

"Aunt, I told you all about it in my letter from Picton. Mr. Hamilton it was who saved me from the
wreck. I daresay I might have been drowned for naught any one else would have cared. At any rate, my luggage would certainly have gone down to the bottom but for him."

"Weel, a' that's richt eueuch, but there's ane thing ye'll please be mindfu' o'; I'm no gaun tae hae my peace disturbed and my expenses increased by ony tea drinking veesitors; and gin ye gang oot tea drinking, yere freens will e'en expec' tae be askit back."

"Don't alarm yourself!" flashed Marion, hot and red—yesterday's annoyance had been almost forgotten, now it all came back—"I'm not likely to ask anyone else to come where I myself am so unwelcome. And pray do not dread any extra expense on my account; there are twenty pounds," casting a small leathern purse of sovereigns on the table, "it is all I have left of the proceeds of the sale of my mother's furniture in Melbourne—not much—but enough perhaps to pay for my lodgings with you until I can obtain some employment."

"Employment!"

"Yes, you cannot suppose I intend to stay longer than I can help, where I am so evidently a trouble and an intruder. I shall lose no time in finding something to do by which I can earn my own living."

"Deed ye'll dae naething o' the kind. I'll no be disgraced wi' a niece o' mine ganging oot tae sairvice; sae make yersel' easy. Marion, what gars ye flee oot at me sae?"

"What makes you treat me so unfeelingly—so abominably?" said the girl angrily.

"I'm no conscious o' having dune sae."

"But you have. I have not been in your house more than twenty-four hours and you have already insulted me twice.—First, through my mother, whom I cannot think of as your sister,—and now by warning me not to add to your expenses. Believe me I will not."

Here, to her niece's great astonishment, Miss McKenzie began to cry. There was one hysterical sob,
and then two big slow tears that seemed to force their way with difficulty out of the faded eyes, and down the wrinkled cheeks. In a moment there was an utter revulsion of feeling in Marion.

"O aunt, I am so sorry," she began, full of remorseful penitence. "It has all been my fault. Don't cry—please don't.

"I dinna ken what ye expectit o' me," said Miss McKenzie, whimpering. "It's no an easy thing tae gie up ane's auld ways tae pleasure young fowk, and in my ain young days it wasna lookit for. Gin ony body had to give in it wasna the auld people. I'm no a fussing fashing woman, sae aiblins I havena made sae muckle o' yer coming here as ye wantit; but—but Isabella's child maun be some dear tae me, and it's gey hard tae be flown oot at this gait."

"O aunt, forgive me." But warding off her niece's advances, Miss McKenzie quitted the room in reproachful dignity, drying her eyes as she went.

At five o'clock exactly, Miss Nellie Dale put in an appearance.

"I am quite ready," said Marion, fastening the last button of her glove. "I won't keep you waiting a second, Miss Dale."

"Call me Nellie, or we shan't be friends," cried that young lady. "I awfully hate to be called Miss, and for that reason I intend to be called Mrs. as soon as ever I can. I shall call you Marion whether you like it or not. You see I know your pretty name already. Why, you've been crying?"

"O no," said Marion, averting her head. They were now on their way down the hill.

"Yes, you have. You shouldn't tell tarradiddles; it's wicked. Come now, let me look at you, and own up."

"O it is nothing—really."

"I know better. And it's that old frump of an aunt that's done it."

"O hush! you shouldn't speak like that."

"What has she been doing to you?"
“Nothing. It’s only that she and I are a little strange to each other’s ways, and—and—”

“There! there!” cried Nellie, soothingly, throwing both arm around Marion as they stood together near a stunted fern tree. “Don’t cry, there’s a pet. It mustn’t cry its pretty eyes up, because somebody will be sure to notice. Do you know I ought to hate you as the — ahem! — hates holy water, instead of loving you like this. You’ve stolen one of the best strings of my matrimonial bow. I may as well tell you I’m a husband-hunter. It’s no secret; everybody knows it. You see it’s dire necessity. My dad has got eight of us to dispose of;—I’m the best looking of the crowd, so you may guess what an ugly lot the rest are. We cannot dig—to beg we are ashamed,—as the man in the Bible says; and nothing but getting married will save us from one or other of the above-mentioned unpleasantnesses. I’ve been doing my level best to start a wedding panic in the family for years, but the men are shy, dear, too awfully shy. Now, one of my chances was cousin Gower. And I came down this Christmas for the express purpose of making one final attempt to run him in. And, lo! a stranger has coolly jumped my diggings, and Nellie Dale will have to strike out for a new location.”

“But really I——” began Marion.

“O don’t apologise!” interrupted Nellie, with a comical air of resignation to fate. “It is an accident I know, and I always make a liberal allowance for accidents in my speculations. Lucky for me that I do. Come along; here’s the house. We’ll go right up to Milly’s den at once; all the girls are in there, I’ll bet.”

They were; and Marion found herself suddenly the centre of a group that seemed chiefly made up of bare white shoulders, arms, and feet, and clouds of dishevelled hair. The girls were having a romp, and their whirlwind fun was irresistible. In a very little while our heroine had forgotten her woes, and was laughing and tumbling with the merriest. A sudden ringing cry of “tea!” caused a regular stampede; a tempera-
tuous scrubbing of faces and brushing of hair; a confused donning of shoes and stockings, dresses and ribbons; and then a small feminine army trooped downstairs radiantly, and swarmed into the dining-room.

"See that sandy-bearded man over there?" said Nelly Dale, with a most unmaidenly wink at Marion, as the two entered the room together. "Don't get so red in the face, dear, he's coming this way. O, what a splendid spread Aunt Hamilton has made this time!" eyeing the luxury-loaded table admiringly. "If there's one thing more than another calculated to make a party sing Hallelujah, it's a spread like that."

Gower reached them now, and welcomed Marion more with eyes and hands than with words. Then he introduced her to his father and mother, and such friends as could be conveniently got at in the crowded apartment.

As Millicent Hamilton had said, the real fun did not commence till about ten o'clock. Then, the dining-room being cleared for action, dancing set in, and continued until the hands of the big clock on the chimney-piece pointed a quarter to twelve. At this moment Mr Hamilton clapped his hands, and music, laughter, and flying feet were suddenly stilled. An intense hush prevailed till the clock sounded the first stroke of twelve, and then Gower's father sent up a brief, hearty prayer. "Health, happiness, and the help of God be with us all through this New Year of our pilgrimage!" Everybody said "Amen!" and then there was a general rush for the front door, which, being opened, revealed a handsome infant nigh two yards long, whose bearded face smiled out absurdly from the fillis of a huge cap, and whose swaddling-clothes fitted most grotesquely. It was the baby New Year, personated according to custom by one of the guests. He was borne in bodily by his friends, and put through such a course of coddling and nursing as was nearly the death of him. He bore it all with creditable patience, until they strove to administer a dose of Gregory's mixture; then he hit out with super-infantine vigour,
and doubled up three of his nurses, who declared that as far as they were concerned the ceremony was at an end. A little later the merry party dispersed.

"O, how happy I have been!" said Marion, on her way home under strong escort.

"Yes, and there's more to come," cried Nellie Dale. "Did you tell her about the pic-nic, Gower?"

"Of course I did, and of course she's coming," was the reply.

"If my aunt——" began Marion, faintly.

"Your aunt be bothered?" snapped Nelly the Irreverent. "If she makes any fuss I'll argue with her. I've a very good mind to serenade her to-night. I can sing basso, and she'll think it's Gower smitten with her."

"You'll have the police down on you if you venture on any larky tricks here, my lady," said Gower.

"Not possible to-night, dear coz," she answered, confidently. "All the police are tight, and singing Auld Lang Syne by this. Hear them?"

Some one was singing it, evidently, for the night-air rang with it, and tin-kettle accompaniments.

"At nine o'clock, Marion," said Nellie, when they were parting, "I will call for you. Mind you are ready, for the waggonettes will be waiting."

Miss McKenzie was rather amiable in the morning, so Marion set off feeling specially cheerful. The pic-nic was to be at the Water-fall, and waggonettes conveyed the whole party to the foot of the ravine that leads to it. There they left the vehicles waiting, and climbed the hill to the Fall, leaving the more picturesque creek route for the return journey. Every foot of the way was a joy and a delight to Marion, and when a sudden turn and downward slope of the track brought her to the opening of the grotto palace—with its tender-tinted upholstery of ferns and foliage—where Prince Cascade dwells in cool and silvery solitude, her admiration knew no limit. To describe Nichol's Creek water-fall to people who know it would be supererogatory; to people who don't know it,
any attempt at description on my part would fail utterly to convey any idea of its exquisite though somewhat miniature beauty. So I will e’en let the lovely thing alone, and get on with my people. Some gathered rare specimens of ferns and lichens; others wandered off in groups and couples, gossiping or love-making. Some climbed and romped over the huge wet boulders in the ravine. Presently there was tea. The gentlemen, however, required something stronger to support their sinking frames, which was only what was to be expected after they had carried the kettles and provisions all the way from the waggonettes, and otherwise worn themselves out by building bowers and kindling fires. When the sun began to wester, and chilly little breezes came creeping through the grotto, the company agreed that it was time to go home, and began their pleasant but difficult descent of the ravine.

It was when they were in that weird spot where the gloomy weeping rocks stretch up steep and dark till they meet in dense green foliage overhead, and the echoes of the murmuring stream resolve into strange sounds like voices, that Marion and Cower found themselves alone together. He was helping her over the rough places, and one big slippery boulder standing right in the way necessitated that he should carry her a little space.

"Put your arms round my neck," he said. "Clasp me,—hold me close, Marion,—my Marion."

"You are carrying me too far," she cried; "put me down now, please."

"No, not yet; I love to carry you."

"O, please, put me down. What if the others should see?"

"They are too far ahead. Besides, I shouldn’t care if they did. I will not put you down till I have told you something and asked you a question."

"Then be quick, for I hear goblins talking in the water, and I am getting frightened."

"Never mind the goblins. If you were a naiad—Undine herself—and all your spriteriends were cry-"
ing for you, I would not let you go—I will never let you go—for I love you."

She quivered in his arms, and fought a little to get free, but he was too powerful for her; his heart beat so that she could hear each throb; his face was close to hers; his eyes looking into hers; his lips so near her own that what could they do but meet? and so she trembled and flushed, happy and helpless, and rested there with him a little.

"My pretty one! my sweetheart! my own."

Nothing strikingly novel in all this, you know. All you young folks—and old folks too, for that matter—know something about this kind of experience, I doubt not.

"When will you marry me, Marion? When shall we be married?"

This precipitous question roused and startled her.

"O, pray, put me down now; do?"

"Not till you answer."

"But I will not answer."

"But you must."

"But I will not—at least, not here. O, do let me go."

She escaped and fled, stumbling and tripping over the rocks until she overtook the advance party; and no further opportunity had he with her till late that night, when he was taking her home from his father's house.

"Now, Marion, tell me."

"What?"

"When we are to be married?"

"O, how can I?"

"Then I will tell you. This day three months, when I come down for the Easter holidays."

"O, no,—impossible! Why, I have only known you a week?"

"And you can't love me well enough in so short a time?"

"I—I—did not say that."

"And you didn't mean it?"
"N—no."

"Then God bless you for that, darling, at any rate. And now, why won't you say yes to the wedding?"

"I couldn't, Gower. It would not be fair. You have known me such a little while, you—"

"It doesn't take a man twenty years to know his mind about the woman he would like to marry."

"No, but this is only a week. Your mind might change."

"Won't you take the chance of that, Marion?"

"Yes; but in such a way that the change may come not too late."

"If you cared for me half as I care for you, such a thought as change would never enter your head. Look here," grasping her wrist with sudden violence, "Is there not someone else that you really do care for—that you want to put me off for? Someone in Victoria?"

"How can you think so?" she burst forth passionately, and then she began to cry.

"O Marion, my pet, forgive me!"

"If there were anyone else, should I not have told you?"

"Well, you ought."

"And would! Why should I deceive you?"

"Then why are you so cold and prudent; as if you had had forty years' experience of the vanities and illusions of life?"

"I am twenty-one almost," (this with much dignity) "and if a woman ever has any sense she ought to have it at that age. And I feel that it would be wrong to marry you when you scarce know me. After a while you may see peculiarities in me; defects in my disposition that will turn you against me."

"What an idea! If it comes to finding out faults and failings, it strikes me it would be you who would soonest repent the bargain. You've no idea of the defects in my character."

"Then how unfair to propose to tie me up before I have a chance to find them out," said Marion, feebly trying to jest.
There was considerable further argument between the twain; but the girl was firm, though her heart fought her lover’s battle as strongly as he himself fought it. And at last they parted with not even a definite engagement, Marion insisting that he should preserve all his freedom until he knew better whether he was really ready to give it up.

“I shall never know better,” he said finally, “but perhaps it will be best as you say. It is certainly very sensible of you to keep your own awhile, and not bind yourself to a fellow you have such a shaky opinion of.”

“Oh, don’t! You know it is not that. I can never be more bound to you than I am now—by my love for you, Gower.”

That contented him somewhat, you may imagine; and two people had happy dreams that night.

“What a wonder you are!” exclaimed Nellie Dale to Marion when, after much skilful and vigorous pumping, she had discovered everything from Gower. “It seems to me clear flying in the face of Providence, letting him go back to Wellington free for any other girl to pick up. You’ll be wiser when you’re a year or two older, my child; and I only hope you may not then have need of your wisdom. What if he falls in love with someone else?”

“Why then we shall both have cause to rejoice in my present folly,” said Marion. “Fancy how horrible it would be if such a falling in love came too late?”

CHAPTER IV.

SHADOWS.

Christmas Eve again. And Marion stood at a window, looking out over the scene beneath and before her with melancholy eyes that saw nothing. Yonder rolled old ocean, bluer than the sky it reflected, white-tipped here and there with the feathery crests of
waves, petulantly foaming near the obstinate rocky islet that lay in by the beach and was indifferent alike to storms and smiles. And yonder stood the fair, high hills of the Peninsula, tinted and beautified by the warm, bright sunlight. Westward lay the pretty villa-built townships of Melrose, Nevada, and Roslyn, rendered picturesque by frequent patches of dark green foliage; and nearer, and all around, fair Dunedin city itself, with its manifold slender spires and myriad bright-looking buildings; Knox Kirk here, and First Church over yonder, suggestive, in their graceful, delicate architecture, of fairy work rather than the labour of man. Right below where Marion stood beamed Pelichet Bay, smooth and azure, with one tiny, white-sailed craft skimming its surface like a bird. North-east was Manuka Hill, clothed in dense luxuriance of bush; and a little beyond, lo! God's acre, with its narrow green mounds and pale stone records. Further east the picturesque, diminutive township of Opohe; below that, pretty North-east Valley. Nearer, ran the Water of Leith musically over its pebbly bed, much hidden by bridges and tall buildings till it won away down by the Botanical Gardens. Quite close stood forest-clad Pine Hill, and from there the eye glanced instinctively over to Flagstaff, a group of mountains about whose bleak and unresponsive peaks amorous white clouds continually creep and cling and nestle in misty adoration.

Over all this loveliness Marion Medway's beauty-loving eyes wandered without heed. Because that her heart was heavy, and life had begun to seem made up of heartaches and disappointments. She was still with her aunt, having for her aunt's sake abandoned that first angry scheme of independence. And the two lived peaceably together—that is, they did not quarrel—but the girl had long since given up hope of winning the woman's love. She had tried very hard for it in the first months of their existence together, and had failed. Not that Miss M'Kenzie was really a cruel woman; but a long life of loneliness had dried up the
fountains of her affection, and warped her sympathies. Years wrought a process of acidification in her, as time does in beer. Her stream of life had run narrowly between two walls of selfishness until now it had lost power to widen or alter its course; had shunned the sunshine of human love so long that it had forgotten how to sparkle and reflect the beams. So Marion, finding all her advances ignored or repelled, all her little attentions misinterpreted and turned against her, at last gave up and contented herself with duty. And duty—given or received—to Marion, who needed love as flowers need the sun, was like bread and water diet to a man who values life only for its cakes and ale.

Death had been near her again this year, and had taken away two friends, Gower Hamilton's father and mother. For these two pilgrims the last mile of life's journey had been suddenly shortened, and a broad, white stone in the cemetery yonder covered them both. They could not endure to be separated—they who had travelled hand in hand these thirty years and more—so when the one was called, the other gat quickly ready and hastened after. Strangers abode in the house with the shingled roof and the ugly chimney-pots, for now the old folks were gone, the Hamilton girls were dispersed among friends, and Marion, looking down at it, was smitten with a keen and bitter sense of loss and desolation. But presently her attention was drawn from the house to a plump, black-robed feminine figure that laboriously made its way up the steep zig-zag path from the street below.

"It is Nellie!" she cried, with a glad throb, as she flew to the door and opened it. "O, Nellie, how glad I am to see you!"

"Then let me sit down, for I'm nearly dead," replied that young lady, gaspingly. "It's no use—if I continue to make flesh as I have been doing this past year, I shall have to give up all matrimonial schemes and activity, and settle down to get sufficiently fat to start myself as a show. The Fat Lady of the Southern Hemisphere—girth, so-and-so; weight, so much; you
know the style of thing. Declare I've eaten chalk and slate pencils enough to make my interior like a quarry; I've drunk vinegar enough to sour my very soul; and all to what purpose? The only thing I can think of that would be likely to bring me down is a life with your aunt; and of course she wouldn't have me at any price. By-the-bye, is she in?"

"No; some friends came this morning and carried her off to Caversham."

"What a blessing! Ask Janet to make me a cup of tea—will you—like a dear good soul? And now, what news? When is Gower coming down?"

"Not at all. I had a letter from him this morning, in which he says he is going to spend his holidays with some bachelor friends, visiting the Hot Lakes and Sulphur Springs in the North Island."

"Then I sincerely hope they'll all tumble in and get boiled! I do. Gower is a brute."

"Why?" said Marion, up in arms at once for her lover, though of all her sad thoughts to-day, this had been the saddest, that Gower's promised Christmas visit, to which she had looked forward with intensest longing, was not to be.

"Why, because he ought to have come down here as he promised. Thanks, Janet,—this is refreshing! Tea is thinning in its effects, it is said, so thank heaven I am not debarred from my one consolation in life. But it's all your fault Marion."

"What is? that tea is thinning?"

"No; you know what I mean. Why didn't you marry him when he first wanted you to?"

"You know well enough why."

"Absurd scruples about the short acquaintance. Then why didn't you the last time he was down?"

"Nellie, how could I?"

"O you mean the funerals! Well, the wedding could have been as quiet as you liked."

"Nellie, you have no feeling, or you couldn't talk like that. How could we have had any happiness when his father and mother were scarce buried?"
“Well, I know Gower didn't view it in that light, and men are generally the best judges in these matters.”

“I couldn’t marry him so soon after the deaths.”

“So you let him go off in a temper. And he’s never written to you the same since, has he? Come now, own the truth.”

“What do you know about my letters, Nellie Dale?”

“My dear, do you think I’m a fool? Why, you’re as easy to read as a book, and I’ve seen your spirits go down and down every week. Do you think I didn’t guess the reason? However, I don’t back Gower up in this last brutality. He ought to be ashamed, but men never are. Is that waggonette coming up here, I say?”

“Where? what waggonette?”

“It is, I declare! And ‘Blue Cap’ the squatter is in it, I’ll stake my existence. I’m off!”

“No, why should you go, Nellie?”

“Because no one shall accuse me of not leaving a man a fair field, you know. Now, Marion, is your chance of paying Gower out.”

“Nellie!”

“A man with unlimited money, and a man you can do exactly as you like with. Why, all the town is talking of the way he neglects his station for you.”

“Well, I don’t want him to.”

“Of course not. People never do appreciate the good things thrown in their way.”

“Is a deformed man a good thing?”

“A deformed man! Why his face is beautiful, and his hands and feet are lovely.”

“Pity you can’t marry him yourself, since you are so enthusiastic about him.”

“Ah! a pity indeed! But there’s no such luck for poor me. If he were only a little taller, and had straight shoulders, he would be perfection. The trap has stopped. It is he, Marion. I’ll stop if you’ll do one thing.”
"What is it?"
"Help me to find out what it is he hides under his blue cap."
"How can I? he never takes it off."
"No; but once I knew a man who wore a wig; and I wasn’t certain that it was a wig, and I wanted to know, so I took occasion one night to brush it hard with my sleeve, and off it came."
"Well?"
"Well, can’t we accidentally knock off the blue cap?"
"Certainly not. I wouldn’t be guilty of such a thing. Besides, I don’t care in the least to know what is under it."
"In that case, no more do I. Good-by, dear. I daresay it’s only baldness, but the man with the wig had a sore place on his cranium."

Miss Nellie popped out by the back door just as Marion’s visitor, or visitors rather, entered at the front.

A young man with a mournful face, and great dark eyes that were wistfully meditative, like the eyes of many dumb animals. In stature he was unnaturally short, yet his figure was shapely, save that one shoulder rose a little higher than the other. His hands and feet were as Nellie Dale had said, beautiful. On his head, and set somewhat far back, so that all the white handsome forehead was visible, he wore a cap of blue velvet; that rich dark blue, called by those skilled in judgment of colours—royal. It was a quaintly-shaped cap: square, but worn diamond wise; that is, with one point projecting a little in front, another at the back, and the other two standing off widely above the ears. What could be seen of the wearer’s hair was dark brown, curly, and glossy. With this man was an elderly lady, his mother, who thus addressed Marion after the exchange of ordinary greetings: "My son would have me come to-day, Miss Medway, to ask you to go with us to the waterfall to-morrow."

"But I cannot, Mrs. Scariff," she replied in a voice grown suddenly sharp with the pain of memory. "I
have only been once to the Waterfall, and I do not wish to go again.” Her heart added a sentence “unless I go with Gower.”

“But it is very lovely, I’ve heard.”

“Very lovely,” said Marion. “See, here is a picture of it.”

Marion was an artist, but cela va sans dire. One so keenly appreciative of Nature’s beauties must needs be that. Yet everyone possessing an artistic soul does not get the great advantage of cultivation that she had had; that skilful cultivation that empowered her to perpetrate in true colours everything that she loved and admired.

“Very beautiful indeed,” said Mrs. Scariff. “Yet, if all I hear about the difficulty of access be true, why—I think, Linfield, I would sooner see it in this lovely picture, than trouble to climb to it.”

“My dear mother, I would not drag you to it for the world against your will.”

“Nay, I’m willing enough, if you wish it, and Miss Medway will go.”

“But I cannot go, Mrs Scariff.” And the tone was sufficiently decisive to prevent further persuasion.

“In that case we will be content with the picture, my mother.”

“Play us something, Mr Scariff,” said Marion; and he obeyed, making Miss McKenzie’s old piano the interpreter of the strangest, sweetest music.

“I always feel better after hearing you play,” she said again, when he paused a while; and his face flushed with sudden, passionate gladness at her words.

“If you heard him upon his own organ up at Blue Cap,” said Mrs Scariff, proudly, “you would be entranced.”

“Hush, mother!” said he, with a smile. “You should always wait till a man’s back is turned before you praise him.”

“On the contrary, Linfield, that is always understood to be the best time for back-biting,” replied Mrs Scariff.
They were not brilliant conversationalists, these two. What Mrs Scariff said was uttered in a stiff, old-fashioned style, and her son was constrained and shy in manner, so that, except in the matter of music, Marion was never greatly entertained by their visits. She was very glad this day when they took their departure, and left her free to do a thing she was bent on doing, yet, woman-like, repented as soon as done. This was no other than inditing a short, hot, reproachful letter to Gower Hamilton. She did make an attempt to recall Janet after she had despatched her to the nearest letter-box, but too late—the girl was out of sight and hearing. Now there was nothing to do but wait for the reply—which never came. And the why and wherefore were thus: The letter did not reach Gower Hamilton until his return from his holiday trip. When he received it, and read it, his temper grew as hot as that displayed in the letter—perhaps hotter, because he knew he was in fault, and that knowledge always increases a man's resentment against the one who points it out to him. So he wrote half-a-dozen furious letters, tore them up under a sudden sense of the meanness and injustice of them, and decided to let the matter rest a few days. At the end of that time he had softened, and so went to work with his pen again. He did not want to be harsh, and he did not want to be self-condemnatory; and the end of it was, he made a little bon-fire on his office-hearth with these the results of his second efforts. Then came a new influx of legal business (Gower was a lawyer), and many worries as a consequence; and so from day to day he put off writing, until at last he resolved not to write at all, but to seize the first few days he could call his own and run down to Dunedin. And he would have no more nonsense then, he told himself; married she would have to be, and she should come back to Wellington with him. And he studied the newspaper columns of "For Sale," and "To Let," and never passed an upholsterer's window without looking in.
That the delay of a few weeks could possibly make any difference he never dreamed. That the days of his silence would be counted and bemoaned in secret by the desolate heart-wounded girl never occurred to him. That all his cool, brief epistles of late months had cut her to the quick with their suggestion of his becoming weary of her never entered his mind. Above all, this last broken promise of his, touching the Christmas visit—he held it lightly on his conscience, as men do hold such things, and had never a thought that to her it was like a bitter farewell blow. So with a fine feeling of contented proprietorship, he laid out his plans and passed his time pleasantly.

In the beginning of March, just as he was contemplating a holiday, there came to him from Christchurch a new client—a widow, young and pretty, who besought him with touching earnestness to attend to her case personally. Now, being engaged to, and anxious about, one pretty woman does not preclude the possibility of a man’s being interested in another. Indeed, instances have been not unfrequently known where even the possession of a wife and large family did not hinder a man from a remarkable deal of such outside interest.

Then Gower was not altogether proof against the subtle flattery conveyed in this sign of the spread of his professional reputation. If people would come all the way from Christchurch to secure him!—well, he returned with the widow, and won her case with honours. And during this time Marion Medway got a letter from Nellie Dale, who was on a visit to friends in Christchurch:—

"My dear Marion,—

"What I have to tell you will vex you awfully, but yet it is best you should know. That precious cousin of mine is engaged to a widow. I don’t know this from himself; in fact, he is so much taken up with her—and so ashamed of himself besides, I suppose—that I haven’t been able to get hold of him alone.” (The fact was, Gower had carefully avoided
his cousin, knowing her tendency to interference, and not wishing to give her the first chance of explaining things to his sweetheart. "But there's no doubt of its truth, dear; nor that the widow is a clever, unscrupulous woman of very queer repute, though she is pretty, and that's a fact. Gower has been scudding about Christchurch with her in a way that would be perfectly shameless if they were not engaged, and last night they had a private box at the theatre. It is said she went up to Wellington after him, and there is no doubt they've been carrying on together for some time. Dear Marion, I am so sorry, because I know how you will feel; but cheer up, there are as good fish in the sea, you know. It is very hard, this sort of thing, and after I've once told Gower my mind, I'll never speak to him again—just to show him how I take it.

With love, dear Marion, yours,
Nellie."

"Gower! O, my love, my love! how can I bear it?" moaned Marion, when she read this. Then she thrust it hurriedly into the fire, as the little maid announced Mr Scariff. When, an hour later, Mr Scariff returned to his hotel, his mother knew before he spoke what had happened to him.

"It is done, then," she said, with a sigh, half of relief, half of apprehension.

"Yes, it is done," he answered, taking both her hands in his. "She is mine, mother! she is mine!"

"Did she say anything about anyone else that she had ever cared for, Linfield?"

"No. Why?"

"Because I heard accidentally to-day that she had been engaged to someone."

"Then it's a lie!" said he, savagely. "Show me who said it, and I'll rend their tongues out."

"Linfield! for Heaven's sake—"

"There, mother, forgive me; but you shouldn't have told me. Don't be frightened. I'm quiet again now. What do I care what they say? She is mine
now. She cares for none but me. She loves me. My queen loves me!"

"When is it to be, Linfield?"

"Soon. O, very soon. She herself said there was no need for delay. Is not that sufficient proof that she loves me?"

"Surely, surely, Linfield, My son,"—this with exceeding timidity—"my son, did you take off your cap?"

"No; I dared not."

"Hadn't it been better to tell her, think you?"

"No, no; not yet. Let her get used to the rest first—to my dwarfish figure and my crooked shoulder."

"But you will tell her—show her before the marriage?"

"I may. I don't know yet. If I find she loves me very dearly, I will. If she is shy, I will not. Mother, I couldn't give her up now. When it is over—the marriage—she will be mine beyond repentance. I think I dare not tell her till then."

With a sudden bound he mounted a chair and stood before the mantel-piece mirror. Then he took off the Blue Cap. And then was revealed on either side of his head a horn, and between the two a tuft of red brown hair—coarse hair like that which grows on a bull.

"God help me!" cried Mrs. Scariff, covering her eyes with her hands.

"What, after all these years, mother! How then would she bear it if the sight of it so horrifies you? Mother, mother, why didn't you smother me in my cradle?"

"Because you were all I had, Linfield, and I loved you. And I covered it up, my son, and tried to think it was not there."

"So have I covered it up and tried to think it is not there. And so I will now. Stop crying, mother, so little would send me mad to-night. Afterwards, when she is my very own, there will be no more of the bull-rages, and we will all forget the horns. And the
blue cap becomes me, you know; and I will take care never to make her ashamed by letting anyone see what is beneath. Fancy all these years that have passed without anyone knowing, save you and Hannah! But I wish—even now I wish the old wish, O mother, that the bull that killed my father under your very eyes six months before my birth—had killed you too!"

"Linfield, cease!" cried the mother, ghastly pale, and trembling with the old horror that was ever fresh to her. "My son, have mercy!"

But the wedding went off without the blue cap ever being lifted; and when Gower Hamilton came at last to put his pretty three-months' design into execution, it was only to find that his bride was lost to him that very day, and to realise for the first time how dearly he loved her.

CHAPTER V.

CORRESPONDENCE AND CONVERSATION.

"Blue Cap,
"October 16th, 18—.

"My Dear Aunt,—

"You do not say in your last letter whether you intend coming up here or not. I wish you would, though there is very little to offer in the way of temptation. Blue Cap is always the same, and it is not a pleasant sameness. If you will not come here, suppose you invite me to come to you for a little time? Would not you like to see me? I am a great deal altered, and am far from well lately. The weather has been so cold. I am pining for a breath of Dunedin
air,—for a sight of Dunedin loveliness from your pretty bow-window. Dear Auntie, write soon and say when I may come.

Your affectionate niece,

"Miss M'Kenzie, London street, Dunedin."

"Dunedin,
"October 16th, 18—

"My Dear Niece,—

"The tenor of the letter I have just received from you leads me to infer—as I have suspected for some time—that you are repenting your ill-judged and indecently hasty marriage. Also, that you are speering for an invitation to my house without the knowledge or consent of your husband. Please to understand me then, clearly and once for all, that the fault of your reckless step is entirely your own, and you must bide the consequences; and that under no circumstances will I lend myself to deceit or double dealing. If you desire a change, make your husband aware of your wish; if you weary of his home, tell him so; do not send your complaints abroad. Doubtless if you, in a proper spirit of subjection and respect, ask Mr Scariff to take you to Dunedin for the sake of your health, he will not refuse; and in that case you will go to an hotel, which will be better than my dwelling, where accommodation is so limited. And concluding this letter, I would like to say that, now I have settled again into my old groove of solitude, I feel as if visitors would only unpleasantly disturb me. I am too old a woman now to bide being fashed. Trusting your health will soon improve, I remain

Your affectionate Aunt,

M. M'Kenzie,

"Mrs M. Scariff,
"Blue Cap Station, Otago."

"No chance for me there, then," said Marion, in soliloquy, when she had read this. "How the pride
must be taken out of me when I could deliberately beg for an invitation that I might have known would be refused, and refused with insult! Well, my dear Aunt, you shall have no further opportunity of drawing inferences as to my condition of mind, I'll take good care. Now, I will write to Nellie Dale."

"Blue Cap,
"October 20th, 18—.

"My Dear Nellie,—

"You complain of the brevity of my letters, and of my reticence in respect to my home and my life in it. The brevity, dear, is the result of having nothing of interest to tell. The other complaint I will at once put an end to by describing Blue Cap in full, and the method of existence—my existence, here. You know the geography of the place, I think. If you do not, let me tell you that we are situate about eight miles from Clinton, the nearest town, and six from Popotunca Gorge, which is on the Invercargill road. To the Gorge I have been twice,—to Clinton not at all since the evening I passed through it as a bride. Mr Scariff goes nowhere where there are people, and as I know no one in all this region, I stay at home. The Blue Cap homestead is located on the slope of a hill. The interior is both comfortable and tasteful. Mr Scariff superintended all the upholstering and furnishing, I believe, and he certainly has a keen eye for the beautiful and harmonious. You would, I know be well pleased with the room I am writing in now—a room that has been re-arranged by Mr Scariff for my own special use since our marriage. Well, so much for the inside; but outside,—oh, what unutterable dreariness! Once in Victoria my mamma and I, going a long journey, had to cross a vast plain, and I recollect being so wrought upon by its monotony that I cried and said if I were compelled to live where I could see nothing else I should soon go mad. Would you believe that now I should consider a plain absolute paradise by comparison with the view that meets my daily
vision here? I stand at the drawing-room windows and look westward upon hills, barren, tussocky hills; eastward, from the kitchen—again hills, barren, tussocky hills; southward, from my own rooms—the same; while north, rises the hill, barren and tussocky like its brethren, on the side of which the house is built. And oh! the sense of confinement, of limit, of imprisonment, that seems to tighten and oppress one’s very breathing! Sometimes at first, impelled by a vague idea of escape from the awful feeling of being walled in, I used to go out and climb the bald slopes; but only to find the same beyond. Hill after hill, “in unlimited series,” the only changing feature in the scene being a whitey-brown creeping mass here and there, afar off, that I knew to be a flock of sheep. A mass now square, now circular, anon triangular; now dense, then scattered, according as the browsing animals follow their inclinations. Sometimes I have seen a herd of cattle—a delightful change—their variegated hides giving a tinge of colour in happy contrast with the everlasting brown-green hue of the land. But for a long time now I have seen none of these things even, for I have not been out. Virtually I am a prisoner here—Mr Scariff so dislikes my going out alone, and I am so reluctant to call him from his station and farm matters to be my escort. Since Dainty (my pony) and I some months ago climbed the highest peak we could find, and got into trouble on our return for going so far, I have not been a mile from the house. After all, it is pleasanter, I think, to crouch reading over my big fire of peat and lignite than to go roaming over those dreary hills through a cutting wind. It seems to be always blowing here, and always from the coldest quarter. The wind goes right through me, and seems to turn my thin Victorian blood into so much ice. I used to find Dunedin cold enough sometimes, but I am convinced that this place is several hundred degrees nearer the North or South Pole (whichever is the coldest) than Dunedin, though I daresay maps and geographies don’t favour my theory. There is a garden
in front of the house, but flowers won’t thrive in it, and I don’t blame them. And there is a dwarfed wattle under my window which is striving against circumstances, and giving a few pale-gold indications of victory. In Victoria the wattle-blossoms have been, and almost gone ere this. Here, with a cold sun, and a colder wind, and great patches of snow still upon the hill-tops, I am afraid my little friend has poor chances of believing in the existence of such a season as Spring. How I watch and caress every tiny cluster of tender buds, and wait with impatience for the familiar fragrance that I always call the yellow smell, because, through Australian recollections, the colour and the scent are so intensified in my mind! A little way from the house is a small plantation of young gums, round whose smooth grey trunks I often throw my arms, and cry with sick longing for my dear old Victoria, whence they—and I—are transplanted. Save for these, not a tree grows anywhere in sight, and save for these I often think I could not live.

"Mrs Scariff has been ill all the winter with rheumatism. She is a dear, good, patient soul, and nursing her would be a pleasure only for the pain one knows she suffers. Of Mr Scariff I do not see a great deal. He is busy during most of the day with station affairs; when he has leisure he stays generally in his own room, where his organ is, and gives his few hearers a foretaste of heaven with his wonderful angelic music.

"The only people I ever see, beside Mr Scariff and his mother, are the house-servants—Hiram and Hannah—a comical old Yorkshire couple, who came from England with the Scariffs. All the other servants, or “hands,” have their quarters in huts some distance from the homestead; and as for strange visitors, never, by any chance, do I see one.

"Now I think I have told you everything that you can want to know, dearest Nellie. And Nellie, darling Nellie, can you exercise a little self-denial for the sake of an old friend, and tear yourself away from the
delights and dissipations of town life for a week or two? Say you will, and say when you will come, and I will meet you myself at Clinton, and will be for ever afterwards

"Your most loving, grateful

"Marion.

"P.S.—By-the-bye, pray don't worry yourself any more about having 'put between,' as you express it, me and your cousin Gower. You acted for the best, dear, and believed exactly what you said, I know, and, at any rate, it is worse than useless to harass yourself about the mistake now. Write at once and say when you will come to Blue Cap.

"Miss Nellie Dale,
"Armagh-street, Christchurch.

Marion had just addressed her envelope, when there came a rap at the door of her sanctuary.
"Come in," she cried, and the master of Blue Cap entered.
"Busy writing?" said he, eyeing the letter suspiciously.
"No; I have finished."
"May I see?"
"Certainly, if you are curious."
He took the letter, and Marion walked away from him to the piano, where earlier in the day she had been reading "Oakshott Castle," and improvising an air for one of Lord Oakshott's poems.

"I would God would sever
These memories from me,
I hear only for ever
The rush of the sea,"
sang she from the book which lay open before her.

"Why not have told the truth here and said that you hated to have me as your escort, and that you stay indoors because you have thus a chance, by locking yourself in here, or staying with my mother, to keep out of my way and escape being alone with me?" said Linfield Scariff, pausing at one portion of the letter.
Marion, if she heard, seemed not to heed. She went on with her composition, a mournful, melancholy air that, with her voice, sounded like nothing so much as the moaning of the wind through telegraph wires.

"I would I were lain
   In the wild, driving sand,
   You might pass me again,
   And kiss my dead hand,"

she sang softly, her fingers bringing out the plaintive accompaniment, her heart aching with the pathos of sound and the yet greater pathos of the words.

"Marion!"

"Well?"

"Who is this woman you are writing to?"

"You know as well as I. This is not the first time you have read our correspondence."

"But you never told me she was the cousin of the man—the man you were engaged to?"

"Did I not? I suppose occasion did not offer."

"And you are inviting her here?"

"Yes, why not? She is the only woman I can invite here, since my aunt will not come." She went on with her song—

"I would I were dead
   By the shore of the sea—"

"Marion!" said her husband, suddenly coming near to her, his great eyes wide and strained with the intensity of hungry love; "Marion, is there naught I can do to make you content with me? Is it possible that a man may love a woman as I love you and get nothing but hatred in return for ever?"

She turned her face to him, and her eyes fell on the blue cap, the two side points of which stood strangely in shape of what was beneath. He noticed the almost imperceptible shiver that ran through her.

"Tell me," he said, "if you had known from the beginning—if I had told you, or showed you, what was under the cap, instead of letting you see when it was too late, would that have made any difference? Was
it the deceit that made you hate me? Remember, you deceived me a little, too."

"Linfield! Linfield! why go through all this again? What use to travel old painful ground? Do you think I am not sorry for you? Let us make the best of our great mistake, and talk of it no more."

"I could make the best of it—a very happy best—if you would; but you continually crave for something or some one else."

"How do you know that? I never say so."

"Do you think I cannot read you?"

"Well, and if I do crave change, there is little to wonder at, I think! Life here—the life we live—would surely be intolerable if one had the gods for companions. Linfield, you drive me to complaint. Think what my existence has been since you brought me here! Month after month, and not a living being to enter the house save our three torpid selves, and Hiram and Hannah. And look at the prospect out of doors! Why, even love would wear out under such wilting influence."

"And when there is no love," said he, bitterly, "it must indeed be a trial."

"It is," she said, looking at him defiantly, yet shrinking a little as she saw his eyes dilate, till the white showed all round as in an animal waxing furious.

"One of these days you will drive me mad, Marion."

"Or you me," she replied. "If you are going to give way to your present paroxysm, pray quit me in time. I am too tired to-day to bear the spectacle."

"Tired! what with? You have not been out?"

"No; you need not look at me so suspiciously. I have not been out, I tell you. I am tired, not with anything, but of everything. I wish I were dead!"

"I wish you were! Good God, how I wish you were! I could take you now by the hair and by the throat and hold you till you were dead; and then I should die too. Do you think I could stay an hour
behind you? O, in your intense selfishness you never stop to think of the hell you put me through every day of your life! Why did not you tell me in time that your heart and soul were full of another man? I could have let you go then. That was the best time of my life—when I was softened and humanised by my love for you and my faith in you. I could have done a noble action then. I could have made a sacrifice. There was hope then of my forgetting that I was what I am. But now!—why, Marion, why did you ever tell me that you had no love for me?"

"You drove me to it."

"Yes, I pestered you with mine for you. I entreated you for the words my heart hungered for, only to find that they were all said long before to him you had given yourself to, and that you married me for spite. Great heaven! is there any wonder that I am all a demon again?"

He snatched the blue cap from his head, and shook the red tuft of hair that showed in such hideous contrast with the other soft brown locks. His eyes flashed with animal fierceness upon her, and his breath came hot through his foaming lips. He meant strangely as he moved his head up and down with the motion of a bull about to charge; and the short-pointed horns gleamed white in the twilight.

With a sudden rush he was almost upon her; but she passed swiftly round the table and escaped him. In another moment she was outside the door, and had it securely locked.

"Safe once again!" she gasped, leaning pallid and trembling against the passage wall, and listening to the awful sounds from the room she had quitted.

"Safe once again; but God help us! what will be the end?"

Passing down to the kitchen, she gave Hannah the key of her room.

"You had better go and see to your master," said she. "And, Hiram, when all is quiet again, I want you to go to Clinton to post a letter."
"Yah want him to be off on t' spree ag'ain, I sup-
poise," said Hannah, glancing round irately.

"For t' love o' God, ould wench, drop thy din-
ing!" quoth Hiram.

"Niver!" retorted his spouse; "niver, till thy
dom'd heead drops off, as I nobbut wish it sooin may,
soa nah then! Dost think I dumnot untherstand that
swaller-tail and bell-topper hat tha's gotten on? Dost
iver put 'em on except when tha's hankering after a
burst?"

Here Hiram began to perform a kind of solemn
double shuffle, nothing but his feet moving; the rest of
his body and his face preserving a stiff gravity that
was ludicrously enhanced by the "swaller-tail" coat
and tall hat.

"Drop tha differin!" shouted Hannah, making at
him with a big wooden porridge thible. "Thee girt,
ugly, flaysome seeght, I'll put a stop to tha hopping,
see if I doant! Dang thee for a ill-bred, graceless
good-for-nowt, drunken, elaght-heead! T' Lord forgi'
me for forgetting' mysen ovver sich a worthless God-
forsa' en lump!"

Marion retreated, being too well accustomed to
this kind of kitchen scene to take much interest in it,
and unable in her present mood to find it amusing, as
she did sometimes. It was not till afternoon of the
following day that Hiram got away to post the letter,
the chief reason being that Hannah had got possession
of and hidden the coat and hat, and without these it
was impossible for Hiram to go any distance from
home, at least with any satisfaction to himself. He
discovered the hiding-place at last, and retreated be-
hind the stable to don the articles in peace. But ere
he had properly mastered the coat, Hannah espied
him. Her hands were all floury; so was her nose.
It always got so when she was baking, yet nothing
would exasperate her so much as an insinuation that
she wiped it on the back of her hand. She had in one
plump red fist the rolling pin; in the other a flour-
dredger. Hiram saw her almost as soon as she saw
him, and off he started—she in pursuit. The swallow-tail hung by one sleeve; in the other hand Hiram clutched his bell-topper. The chase was down-hill, and brief, but exciting. With one bound Hiram cleared the high gorse fence, and with one bound poor Hannah went into it. For a moment all that could be seen of her was a confusion of white under-drapery and struggling red legs (Hannah affected scarlet hose, home-knitted), then she slowly extricated herself from the cruel thorns, and, rubbing her wounded arms and face, realized that Hiram was out of sight over the next hill.

"This'll be t' seventh burst sin' t' New Year," she shouted, shaking the flour-dredger in the direction of his disappearance, "and I nobot wish 'at ye'll tum'le into some hoile, or get sunk in t' peat bog, so's it'll be yer last. And dom yer drunken pictur, say I! Soa nah then!"

All this Marion witnessed and heard, but wisely kept out of the way.

The letter Hiram posted was the one to Miss Dale. In due time came the reply:—

"Christchurch,
" October 30th, 18—.

"My Dearest Marion,—

"What amuses me is your giving me such a lively description of your delectable location, and then asking me coolly to go there! It is really too rich. But seriously, dear, I should be glad to oblige you, and the dullness you so graphically describe would not frighten me from coming—indeed I don't sympathise with your dullness at all. Given a well-furnished house, a husband, an organ, a boudoir, and a pony, I don't see what more a woman can want! But as I was saying—only I always get off the track in writing, somehow—nothing you tell me about your place would deter me from coming but the utter manlessness of it. Do not suspect me of any reflection upon Mr Scariff. On the contrary, if you could only
guarantee me such another man as he (as rich, too), I would be with you as fast as coaches would carry me. But, dearest, do consider my increasing years and diminishing chances, and ask yourself conscientiously how I could be expected to go up there, where, by your own showing, matrimony would be impossible since there are no men? Just now, particularly, it would be madness, for lo! on the horizon of my future “a little cloud, no bigger than a man’s hand,” which promises to “break in blessings o’er my head” if I mind my p’s and q’s. (Scripture in the above a little mixed, but you know I mean well.) In other words, there is a gentleman, a leetle elderly, but very nice, who is, it seems, on the point of yielding to my fascinations. You will agree with me that such a chance is not to be rashly trifled with. He cometh even now—I see him from the window—to take me for a drive, so I must hurry up and buckle on my armour. If I fail to take this scalp I shall bury my boomerang (or tomahawk, which is it?) in permanent despair. Farewell, dear; keep up your pecker—and wish me luck! If I catch him I’ll come at all hazards, and spend a few weeks with you after the honeymoon.

“Yours affectionately,

“NELLIE DALE.

“Lord, how sick I am of that DALE?”

Before Marion answered this letter, there came another from the same quarter:

“Christchurch,

“November 10th, 18—.

“My Beloved Marion,—

“I’ve caught him! We start on the wedding trip in about an hour. The breakfast is just over. He proposed the very day I last wrote to you, and begged me to fix an early date. And that I did, you may depend, having a keen knowledge of man’s uncertainty, and the mutability of human—especially matrimonial—affairs. I gave him a brief sketch of family history, and of the troubles that beset the
daughter-afflicted author of my being, by way of excusing my very unmaidenly promptitude. He politely announced his thankfulness for any circumstance, calamitous or otherwise, that tended to expedite the 'happy event,' and so now it has 'come off.' He is not a boy, as I think I told you before, but I fancy he is docile and tractable. If he ever asserts himself too much, I shall of course explain my views on things in general. He will then discover that to preserve the peace and harmony so beautifully essential to nuptial happiness it will be necessary to let me have my own way in everything. You hear me! But I fancy I shall have no difficulties. I have great faith in his common-sense—already displayed in his liberal choice of wedding presents, and in my own capacity for skilful handling of the matrimonial ribbons. And now for my best bit of news, which I have been saving up, just as in childhood's happy hours I used to save up my nicest bit of jam tart—for a last delicious mouthful. Mr Cook, my husband, has some relatives living on a station adjoining yours. And they have invited us to visit them! And we are going to! And we shall be there in about a week!!! And we shall very likely stay there until our new home is prepared for us in Wanganui, where we are to go and live happy ever afterwards!!! The name of the people and of the place near you is Melrose. And now I must run. We are going to Dunedin in the Tararua, which sails at two.

"Yours joyfully,

"Nellie Cook.

"P.S.—Out of the Dale at last, which to me is equivalent to being 'out of the wood,' therefore I may surely holler!!"

Marion hesitated long over this epistle. Should she show it to her husband, or should she not? He had been calm—almost lethargic—since his last outburst; but she was afraid. The scenes were so horrible; her sense of her own helplessness and desolation.
so cruel during and after them. *Was it her duty to stay here always and bear this horror? How long might it not last, growing worse and worse as time went on? Yet she had brought it on herself, and pity was as yet not gone all to hatred, and so, if only she might have some little help and mitigation like this promised meeting with Nellie, she might bear it and do what was right.*

"And even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea,"

she murmured, her sad eyes wandering over the barren, bleak hills, the sight of which was so bitterly irksome to her.

But the letter! Acting upon a sudden thought, she hastily pencilled on a slip of paper—

"**DEAREST NELLIE,—**

"Don't wait for me to come first to Melrose, but hasten hither at your earliest opportunity. And say nothing about this note.

"In haste, yours,

"M. S."

This she put into an envelope, and then went in search of Hiram. The old man was in the yard.

"Hiram?"

"What is it?"

"Would you like to go to Clinton to-night?"

"Can ducks swim? What is it for?"

"See, I want this note taken to Melrose Station, with the message that Mrs Cook is to have it as soon as she arrives. And no one here must know. And, Hiram, here is half-a-sovereign."

The old man's eyes sparkled.

"But hah the divil am I to get my cwoate and tile?"

"O never mind the coat and hat this time, Hiram, dear, good Hiram. Go as you are this once."

"Here yah are, then. Gi' me t' paaper an' t' brass, and let me side aht o' this afore t' owd woman
cops me. And do yah get off indoors afoore shoecomes aht and suspects summut."

So Hiram sped off on his errand, and "t' spree;" and Marion went back to the house to plan the easiest way of revealing her good news where she well knew it would be ill received.

CHAPTER VI.
THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

In the following week came visitors to Blue Cap. Mr and Mrs Cook, and three of the Melroses—a brother and two sisters—all on horseback. Old Mrs Scariff was up that day for the first time after a long bout of rheumatism, and owing to her persuasion it was that Marion accepted an invitation to go to Melrose for a few days.

"Why will not you come, too, Mr Scariff?" said the eldest Mrs Melrose, addressing Linfield.

"I am not fond of society," said he, sulkily.

"As a bachelor you had, perhaps, some excuse for seclusion," continued Miss Melrose, gaily, "but in your new character of benedict a hermit existence is very unbecoming: so pray come forth to-day." But the small well-meant pleasantry fell flat.

"How pinched and haggard you look now the flush is gone off your face!" exclaimed Nellie, between the effusive embraces she was bestowing upon Marion, in the privacy of the latter's chamber, whither the two had withdrawn for Marion to don her riding-habit.
"That sulky brute has been ill-using you. You've been moped to death in this desolate hole."

"It has been rather dull up here," said Marion,
evasively, "and I have not been well. The cold weather tried me so; but this visit of yours, and going to Melrose, will put me right."

"Why haven't you made Mr Scariff take you from home sometimes? You ought to have spent the winter in Dunedin."

"Everybody can't skilfully handle the matrimonial ribbons as Mrs Cook can," said Marion, with a laugh. "But, seriously, Mr Scariff dislikes town so, it would have distressed him to go."

"He didn't mind living in town for months when he was paying court to you. Certainly, one seldom saw him outside a waggonette."

"He dislikes people to look at him."

"Then why does he court notice by wearing that absurd cap? No one would look at him a second time but for that. Not but what it is very becoming to his style of beauty. Marion?"

"Well?"

"Now, you know I've been dying for months—"

"How well the process agrees with you, Nellie?"

"Be quiet!—dying for months to know the secret. You know it, of course, and you can have no possible motive for withholding it any longer from me. I am a married woman now, like yourself—and a model of discretion. Now tell me, dearest, do; what is there under the cap?"

Marion looked at her gravely and steadily. "You are sure I can trust you, Nellie?"

"On my honour, Marion!"

"And you won't be alarmed?"

"No. Great heaven! what is it?"

"Nellie—bend nearer—it is—his head!"

"Oh! oh! you exasperating baggage! But I'll pay you out for this. But really—really now—do you mean to say there is nothing else?—that he wears the cap merely for ornament?"

Marion moved her head with a nodding shake that might have been interpreted any way.

"And I suppose the same conceit led him to call
this place after the cap! Well, I shouldn't have
thought he'd had so much of the coxcomb in him."

"No, it was not he who christened the station,
Nellie. It had no name, Hannah told me, until the
different hands employed at different times called it
Blue Cap to distinguish it, and now the title sticks
to it."

"And there couldn't be a better. And the whole
thing is so deliciously suggestive of mystery, I almost
envy you, Marion. There isn't an iota of romance
about Mr Cook. Are you ready now?"

"Quite."

"Then we'll be off. I say, Marion?"

"Yes, Nellie."

"You are sure you forgive me that miserable
mistake about Gower? It did look so like a case
between him and the widow. You are sure you don't
bear me a grudge, dear?"

"Nellie; hush, hush, now and for ever! I never
had a thought of blaming you. The only thing that
will ever give me a grudge against you will be
further mention of the thing. Have you got my
parcel? Then come."

Linfield helped Marion to her saddle. "If you
would rather I stayed at home, I will stay," said she,
smitten suddenly with the sight of his face. He must
have had a hard fight with himself to look like that.

"No, I do not want you. Go," he said. "You
mustn't expect Mrs Scariff home for a day or two at
any rate," shouted Nellie from her curveting steed at
a little distance.

"Mrs Scariff is her own mistress, and may stay
away as long as she pleases," was Linfield's response
as he turned abruptly and went indoors.

Despite the check upon her spirits, how
Marion did enjoy that hour's ride over the hills to
Melrose! What new life came to her with the bright
free breeze—the genial welcome at the homestead—
above all, the sense of liberty, to which for months she
had been a stranger!
“If only I can have a little relief like this sometimes—once in a year—in two years—something to look forward to, and back upon, I think I can bear the rest,” she said to herself as soon as she was alone in the little chamber allotted to her by her friendly hosts. “And perhaps I can be kinder to him too. God knows I would try. And I have tried, though failing frequently, I know. But has it not been hard? O heavens, so hard!”

A week later she and Nellie were riding back from a visit to Blue Cap for relays from Marion’s wardrobe.

“Get off here, Marion,” said Nellie, herself dismounting at the Melrose slip-panel. “Get off here, and go up to the house through that grove of gum trees, while I take the horses round to the stable.”

“But why?” asked Marion, surprised.

“Never mind why; just do as I tell you.”

And Marion did, in laughing apprehension of some practical joke. Looking back over her shoulder as she walked, she was quite half way through the gum plantation when the sound of a footfall in front of her caused her to turn her head.

For a moment her heart stood still; then she ran blindly forward, with a short bitter cry.

“Gower!”

Instinctively his arms opened to her, and folded her fast and close as in the old time. Only for a moment. Then he put her away, and looked at her sternly as he held her at arm’s length; and she knew at once that he was as innocent of this meeting as she was.

“How little you cared for me” he said; and these were his first words to her after all that time. And he knew they were false, for he read in her wide wet eyes all the old love that was burning deathlessly in his own heart.

Half-an-hour afterwards, Nellie—who was lying in wait—caught Marion on her way to her room.

“Why, you’ve been crying, I declare.” she ex-
claimed, seizing her by the hands. "What for, in the name of everything? What is wrong? Aren't you much obliged to me for getting him here?"

"Then it was you who got him here?"

"Yes; he knew nothing about it till he saw you; had no idea Melrose was near Blue Cap. He was off for Invercargill when I trapped him into turning aside to visit me. Wasn't it clever? Aren't you glad?"

"Glad? No, I am sorry. Was it not enough that your malicious scandal parted us, but you must needs make my misery greater now by bringing us together again?"

"Well, I'm blest!" cried Nellie, in angry amazement. "This is too much; What can you mean by misery, Marion?"

"What is it but misery to see him now? O Nellie, Nellie, what shall I do?"

"Do? Why, leave off acting like a fool and pitching into me," said Nellie, sayagely. "What on earth is the good of getting tragic over a thing like this? But it serves me right for my officiousness. Yet, how was I to know? I thought you would be glad?"

"So I am glad,—God help me! So abjectly—sinfully—painfully glad, that—see!—I kiss your hand, Nellie."

"There—don't! Marion, I shall never half understand you. Be reasonable, do. After all, there's no harm in your seeing him again, you know."

"No harm?"

"No. A married woman has a right to a little flirtation, and whether it's with a new sweetheart or an old one doesn't much matter, that I can see. Look at me! Do you think I get melo-dramatic over Tom Melrose, with whom I flirt all I can? Yet if I had had my choice do you think I would not rather have had him for a husband than the one I've got? But my not getting him is no reason I should never see or speak to him, I hope."

"But it seems a sin," said Marion, nervously
clasping and unclasping her trembling fingers above her throbbing heart.

"Sin! Fiddlesticks! And if it is,—a spice of sin makes it all the better. One goes back to one's husband afterwards with all the zest of repentance."

"God help me!" said Marion, "I think I will go back to mine to-night."

"Now for the love of heaven, Marion, do nothing so idiotic. If you do I shan't know what to say for myself here. Pray, pray promise that you will sleep over it at any rate. That is the least you can do to oblige an old friend like Nelly."

* * * * * * *

"To-morrow I will fetch her home," says Linfield Scariff, pacing the floor of his mother's room with quick uneven strides. "In three weeks how often have I seen her? Twice; twice. I have seen my wife only twice."

Mrs Scariff watched him nervously.

"You should have gone with her, Linfield."

"Yes," he hisses, wheeling round on her sharply; "yes, I am a pretty subject for junketing and merry-making, am I not? I should look well taking a mallet at croquet, or making one in a game of romps, should I not? Look at me. Good God! Look at me!"

"Linfield, don't—don't."

"She shall come home to-morrow, mother. I will fetch her."

"Aye, an' show yersen madder an' selfisher nor-iver," here interrupted old Hannah, putting her head in at the door. She has been listening, as she always does, unscrupulously, and puts in her word again according to habit when a subject interests her. "Yah ought think t' young maistress wa'nt made o' flesh and blood t' way yah've prisoned her oop i' this God-forsa'en place sin' i'ver yah wed her. Shoo'd nobbut sarve ye proper if shoo ran off wi' somebody, nah then?"

"Leave the room, woman!" shouts her master, furiously.
"Well, I'm goan," is the retort, "for sewerly I'se gotten summat better to dew nor to stop here bannin' words wi' yah. Only yah'd better mark what I say baght t' young maistress, any rate."

On the very next day Melrose was surprised by an unwonted visitor. Nellie ran down with the news to Marion, who was walking in the gum plantation with Gower Hamilton.

"Are you glad to see me, Marion?" asked her husband, as she entered the room where he waited.

"Why did you come?" said she.
"I came to take you home."
"What for? Is your mother worse?"
"No; but I want you home, Marion. You have been away long enough."
"But I am happy here, and the Melroses are not tired of me yet."
"Likely enough. But a husband may surely expect at least a little of his wife's time and society."
"One would think you had had enough of mine in the last eight months."
"Or you of mine; which is it?"
"Have it that way, if you will. But I do not wish to go home to-day."
"But, Marion, I cannot bear it longer without you. Marion, be pitiful to me. Oh, my heart's darling, give me a little love in return for all mine. Is there nothing I can ever say or do to win you?"

His face was very white and wistful, his great brown eyes were full of passionate woe and longing; and Marion's sad grey ones filled with swift tears as she looked at him.

"I will go home with you, Linfield," she said, in a resolute voice. "I will go home with you, and stay there always if you wish it."

But she shrank, as she never could help shrinking, from his arms which would have embraced her; and he saw her movement. Quick as thought came the change in his mood. "By God, you shall!" he shouted, gripping her wrist with sudden force. "You shall stay
there till you are glad to be near me—in my arms—instead of revolting from my merest touch. You shall."

"Let go my arm, Linfield, she said, with assumed calmness. "Don't hurt me in that brutal way. And don't think to domineer over or frighten me. If you make the least exhibition of yourself here before my friends I will never go to Blue Cap again. If you are quiet I will get on my habit and order Dainty at once. Now, let me go."

How they got home Marion never knew. The last thing she distinctly remembered was her own backward glance of yearning towards where Gower Hamilton stood, unaware of her departure, his yellow beard aglint in the light of the setting sun, and her feeling of thanksgiving that he did not see her. The rest of the journey was chaos. Blue Cap reached, she passed hastily to her room and locked herself in.

"Lord of heaven! is every mistake as cruelly avenged as this of mine?" she cried, in passionate abandonment, "and must the punishment continue for ever? Will death never come to one or other of us and end the misery?"

She stayed in her room two days; on the morning of the third she came forth again with a fixed plan of action in her mind. In the breakfast-room she found Linfield and his mother; the former looking quiet, but bearing in his face traces of a cruel past struggle. He let his eyes rest with an expression of wistful weariness on his wife as she entered and seated herself not far from him.

"I am going away to-day, Linfield," she said.
"Yes?" said he, indifferently,—"To Melrose?"
"No, further than that. I am going to Clinton."
"To Clinton?" exclaimed old Mrs Scariff. "What to do there, Marion, my dear?"

"It is time that Linfield and I should part, Mrs Scariff. I have borne all that I can bear, and now I am going away for ever."

While she was speaking he drew near to her, his features gradually setting themselves in a look of
fierce despair. And now he suddenly caught sight of a bow of bright scarlet ribbon that she had fastened in her hair because she fancied it lightened up her own distressed pale face a little.

Now, in all her knowledge of Linfield Scariff, she did not yet know his deadly horror and rage at sight of the colour of red. She had never worn it before; indeed she seldom wore anything so bright.

"The ribbon, Marion!" screamed old Mrs Scariff; "Take off the ribbon—quick!"

But too late. Before she could save herself he had her in his arms, shaking her—worrying her—like a mad animal. The ribbon he tore out and rent to shreds with his teeth."

"Curse you! Damn you! Curse you!" he howled, flinging her from him, and rushing wildly about the room, tearing and breaking all before him. "You have roused all the devil in me at last. You will leave me for ever, will you? You will shrink and shiver at touch of me, will you? You will go to Clinton,—to Melrose. To Melrose where there are friends, old and new. Handsome, shapely men—men, not brutes, with horns and deformities. Tell me, my beautiful one, is your lover at Melrose that you are so anxious to go?"

"Yes, he is," cried Marion, gathering herself up in a fury of rage and pain. He had hurt her sorely where he had gripped her soft flesh. "Yes he is, and I will go to him. Fool that I was to come back here when I might have stayed with him and defied you! I will go back to him, you fiend. How I wish you were dead! I will ask him to let me be anything to him, anything—only to take me away from the creeping hideous horror I feel at sight of you. What are you going to do?" For he had caught her again by this, and was carrying her to the door.

"Put me down, you fiend! What are you going to do?"

"Shall I tell you?" he said, holding her in his strong shapely arms as if she had been the merest infant. "Shall I tell you, my wife, my pretty wife?
I am going to fasten you up till you are dead—dead! And then I will send for your lover and show him. And I will tell him how I kept and tortured you, and shut the light out from you till your soul fled away in despair. How will he like to know all that, think you? And then I will let my soul loose in search of yours, so that even in hell you may not escape me, my own! my own?"

Despite her struggles he bore her to her room, shutting the door upon his mother and old Hannah, who had followed, crying helplessly. But here Marion escaped him, and, springing through the open window, ran swiftly down the slope. Ere she reached the foot she felt the strong arms about her again; and she was carried back, though she fought with all the fierce energy of despair.

"Must I tie you then, my beauty?" he said, mockingly; "must I tie your hands?" deliberately doing so with a handkerchief, "and take away your clothes?" tearing them off her back. "Now rest quietly," he continued, flinging her on the bed, "until I put all your garments out of your reach. You will scarcely care to travel to your lover naked across the bleak hills."

From the huge wardrobe in the corner he dragged all her dresses and linen, tossing them in a heap into the passage. Then he went out, locking the door after him. Marion tore at her fetters with her teeth, beat her bound hands wildly upon the door, then, rushing to the window, struck them through three panes of glass successively, and shrieked through the apertures. Then Scariff came, carrying boards, nails, and a short ladder to the outside of the window; and with horrible deliberation he proceeded to nail it up, one board after another being securely fastened, until all the interior of the room was in darkness, and Marion fell back in a dead faint. When she revived she found Scariff standing over her, bathing her head and face, and she found that she had been clothed in her night-dress while insensible. Not another garment was in the room.
“Linfield, let me out,” said she, pitifully; putting up her hands, which were now unbound, but all torn and bleeding from contact with the broken window-panes. “Let me out, Linfield.”

For all answer he left her, locking the door again; and she, weak and cowed, crept crying to bed. From Linfield’s room came presently strange sounds—cries scarcely human,—heavy blows and falls,—which lasted an hour or so, then suddenly ceased.

“Has he killed himself, I wonder?” said Marion, listening. But she felt too tired to listen or care for anything more, and after a little while sleep came to her.

CHAPTER VII.

STORM.

Christmas Eve at Melrose. The day had been hot and oppressive, and the sun had sunk wrathfully to rest behind a dense, lurid mass of clouds. High overhead the sky was still azure, and two or three stars were peeping forth, pale and timid, as if doubtful of their reception. But the clouds, mounting higher and higher with sullen sloth, soon extinguished them, and the gloom and intense stillness presusive of thunder prevailed everywhere. Now and then the huge, bulging, inky pall was cleft with fiery suddenness by lightning tongues that darted athwart and across in weird, blue, zigzag lines. Then darkness won again.

On the broad verandah of the homestead stood Gower Hamilton and his cousin Nellie in close proximity—she watching the weather with much satisfaction, he gazing moodily out with an anxiety in his face that was utterly unconnected with the prospect of electric disturbance.
"Nothing like a thunderstorm for clearing the air," remarked Nellie. "We shall have a lovely Christmas day, Gower."

"Nellie!" he exclaimed, with entire irrelevance, "I can't bear it much longer. I must see her."

"What's the matter with the man now? How can you expect to see her when she is ill in bed?"

"I don't believe she is ill in bed. That man lied yesterday when he said so. I could see it in his face. Fools that we were not to insist upon seeing her!"

"Speak for yourself, my cousin. I hope that I have a stronger sense of good manners than to force my way into a man's house when he clearly shows his objection to my entrance."

"I am almost certain," said Gower, "that I heard a cry from the house as we stood there talking to him."

"I heard nothing but the gobbling of the turkeys in the yard," said Nellie.

"I know she is in trouble," continued Gower, paying little heed to his cousin. I have felt that trouble was near her ever since that day she left us so abruptly. Yesterday and to-day I have been unable to rest for the feeling that she is in need of help—in need of me. Last night she called me; I heard her as plainly as I now hear my own voice; and I was broad awake."

"O, for heaven's sake, have done! Don't startle one out of one's wits with your queer notions!"

"I beg your pardon, Nellie. I didn't mean to startle you."

"There, now, you are huffed. Unlucky me! I am always putting my foot in it. Gower, don't be cross."

"I'm not cross, Nellie. And you are the only one I have to speak to about her. I must go to her if this thing continues."

"And suppose you see her, what then?"

"I will persuade her to come away with me."

"O, you will? Have you said anything to her, may I ask?"
"I have asked her to go away with me, if that's what you mean."

"O, you have? And what did she say?"

"She cried, poor thing, and talked of the sin of it; as if it would be so great a sin as wearing her life out with that man whom I know she hates."

"How do you know she hates him?"

"Couldn't I see? Why, her eyes are constantly full of a hateful fear of him. I could go now and drag him out, and kill him—kill him!—and never feel the slightest remorse. O Nellie, what spirit of evil possessed you to write that false fatal letter from Christchurch?"

"Gower, don't! Don't for pity's sake. Do you think I ever cease to reproach myself? Many and many a time I have wished that my right hand had been paralysed before it penned that letter. Yet surely it was not all my fault. You neglected her, and took up with that other woman."

"I never thought of that other woman! But it's true about the neglect. I did neglect her, my poor little love. My poor little Marion! God forgive me—to think that a man could neglect that which was dearer to him than his own soul!"

"I have my own opinion about the strength and value of a man's affection," said Nellie, scoffingly. "You always care for a thing in proportion to its inaccessibility. So she talked of the sin of running away with you, did she?"

"Yes. Do you think it would be a sin, Nelly?"

"Nay, don't ask me. We all know what the world would call it."

"And what have we to do with the world? I would take her away somewhere where no one would know. We would be all the world to each other."

"Yes, said Nellie," Men have talked like that often before to-day. Witness the many shipwrecks of women's lives as a result. The beauty of it is, a man doesn't lose his world through so trivial a fault as that
of running away with another man's wife. In the eyes of the greater half of this world such a thing is looked upon as rather a feather in his cap; the sternest of his judges refer to it lightly as a misfortune he couldn't well avert. But the woman!—ye gods! what epithet is vile enough to be applied to her by all save those who, out of their own stronghold of virtue or vice undetected, can cast at her a kind of cheerful pity, more humiliating than condemnation? And the most edifying feature in such affairs is that the man himself almost always, sooner or later, repents him nobly of his share in the transgression, and gets him back into his world, carefully shutting her of whom he is a wearied outside. If he is a brute, he slams the gate upon her rudely, and lets her do as she may; if he be a man of feeling (save the mark!) he closes it gently in her face with some trite sophism, and perhaps an offer of pecuniary reparation."

"Well, Nellie, if your homily is through, I think I'll retreat."

"Of course, that is what every man does when an argument goes against him, and he knows he has not a leg to stand upon."

"Which is exactly every man's case when a woman is his opponent in the argument. But Nellie, you ought to know and feel that I could never act to a woman in the way you have been outlining."

"Every man is a bright and shining exception to the rule—in his own opinion, my cousin. Every man not an absolute and deliberate villain, firmly intends to do all that is noble and honourable under all circumstances. But———here comes Mary Melrose. I must go indoors."

Three hours later, when the house was all in darkness and apparent slumber, Gower was in the stable, stealthily saddling his horse by the dim light of a lantern. Presently the touch of a soft white hand on his shoulder startled him, and he turned and clasped it with a short glad cry; only to relinquish it the next moment disappointedly.
"Why, whom did you think it was?" said Nellie, with a nervous little laugh.

"O, I don't know. I was thinking of Marion. What brings you out here, Nellie?"

"Anxiety about you. I heard you creeping out, and scented mischief. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to Blue Cap."

"In the dead of the night? Gower, you must be stark staring mad."

"It's no use, Nellie. I must go to her. She is continually crying out for me, and I must go."

"Your brain is turned. I'll rouse the house."

"Pray, do not. I shall go whether you do or not. You had best let me go quietly."

"Then, saddle my horse and I will go too."

"But that is absurd. What would Mr. Cook say?"

"Mr. Cook is fast asleep. He didn't even hear me get up. Look here, Gower, if you go to Blue Cap, I go, so there's an end. What are you going to do when you get there?"

"I don't know—now. I shall know when I do get there. Perhaps nothing but wait near the house."

"And Scariff will catch you prowling, and there will be murder. Have you got your revolver?"

"Of course I have."

"I knew. Gower, don't go, for God's sake!"

"I must, Nellie. She wants me. I can't get the sound of her and the sight of her out of my mind for an instant. Trouble is with her and she needs me."

"Then saddle my horse too. No, it is no use talking. If you go, I go. And anyway, it will be wiser and better for you to take me. If there should be anything—a woman is always more useful than a man. Saddle my horse: I'll be back in two minutes."

In less than ten, the two were riding together slowly and cautiously through the black night.

"I awakened Mr. Cook," said Nellie, "and told him of this mad mission, lest he should miss me later and alarm the house. Hear the thunder! Upon my
word we are a brace of fools,—I the bigger one of the two."

"Go back, Nellie."

"No, it's a case of excelsior now. And, hardened sinner as I am in a general way, I could scarcely rest comfortably in my bed knowing your prospects of being shot or ultimately hanged for shooting somebody else. Let us get on, in heaven's name?"

They rode a long time now in silence, and the storm, sluggish heretofore, made sudden haste to overtake them. Flash after flash of lightning made all things livid; peal after peal of thunder echoed with a peculiar metallic ring among the hills.

"Nellie, it is dreadful for you to be out in this."

"O never mind me! Where are we now, Gower?"

"I'm afraid we've missed our track a little. We ought to be near the Blue Cap boundary now, but that last flash showed me nothing but hills and a bridle path that I firmly believe to be the Clinton one."

"O what shall we do?"

"Stop a moment," said Gower, "I'll get down and lead your horse, in case of fright."

Too late. One blinding glare and awful crash, even as he dismounted, started Nellie's horse off at a mad gallop, and when he strove to get on his own again for pursuit, the frightened animal stood on its hind legs and fought at him. A fearful ride was that for Nellie—clinging closely and desperately to the saddle until at last she was brushed suddenly off by the upper half of the stable door at Melrose. Bruised and shaken, she thanked God that the brute's instinct had guided it home; and then she gathered herself up and crept quietly into the house and to her room, there to find Mr. Cook just putting on his clothes preparatory to giving an alarm on her account after all.

Meantime Gower was doing all he could to soothe and master his steed. And finding it impossible to get on its back again, he was fain to stand close beside it and screen his eyes from the lightning against its quivering neck. And so time passed. By one of the
flashes he made shift to examine his watch, and discovered that there lacked but ten minutes of the hour of midnight. And swiftly and strangely his mind went back three years to when, just at the same hour of the same night, he stood looking down the steep hills into the star-flecked water of Tory Channel, to be presently roused by sweet holy singing.

The rain beat upon him in big heavy splashes; the horse winced and trembled with every blue flash and roaring peal, but Gower, busy with the past, scarce heeded the present until a voice—Marion's voice, he could not mistake it!—called to him. The first sound of it was faint and hoarse—then it rang out loud and full of anguish—with his name. “Marion, love, I am here!” he answered, flinging the bridle from his arm and thus releasing the horse, which bounded off with a terrified whinny.

“Marion, my darling, come to me!”

A great broad flash of vivid lightning irradiated heaven and earth, and revealed her to him where she stood, scarce two yards distant. How plainly he saw her! every outline of her figure distinctly visible under the thin white robe that clung close and wet about her; her hair, all glistening with rain drops and sweeping past her waist; her face—ah! me, how thin and haggard it had grown!—white and drawn with terror; her wide, grey, loving eyes full of woe; her hands outstretched to him in eloquent appeal.

The light was gone ere he could reach the place where he thought she stood, and the next flash showed him that she was a little further off. In the two seconds of its continuance his eyes took in every detail of her appearance again, even to the mud stains on her saturated robe, and the bruises and scratches on her small bare feet. Again he missed her—the lightning withdrawing its aid. He wandered about, feeling for her with extended arms, and he uttered her name with a loud prolonged cry.

“Marion, once more! O my soul—let me see you once more!”
Then came another dazzling flame from heaven, showing him the hills, the tussocks, the rain—but not Marion. His eyes beheld her never again. The morning stars, peeping through the rent curtains of the abating storm, saw him dragging his exhausted limbs, slowly and by instinct rather than by design, towards Melrose, after hours of wandering futile search among the barren hills near Blue Cap.

* * * * *

At Blue Cap, at ten o'clock of that Christmas Eve, the only living being apparent in the gloomy house was Hannah. She was in the kitchen preparing dough for to-morrow's bread in a deep wooden trough. Anger lent vigour to her arms (Hiram had been absent—as had been the swallow-tailed coat and high hat—since early morning), and she pummelled the unoffending mass before her severely, muttering spitefully the while—

“Ah wish she was dead, ah dew! T' place is a perfect hell upon earth—nowt else. T' owd maistress locked oop, and young maistress locked oop. T' maister a romping lunatic, and Hiram off augean. And t' thunder 'll turn this blessed duff sour afore morning, as sewer as owt! Ah nobbut wish ah was dead and buried, soa nah then! Lord! what's that? Eh! hah yah did fley me. I thowl it was a boggart!”

It was Marion.

“Hahiver did yah get aht o' t' rume?”

“Shall I tell you?” said her mistress, laughing strangely. “I used my candle to the door-post, and burnt all round the lock till it was loose.”

“Eh! I thowl I smelt burning. Yah mought ha' setten fire to t' whole place.”

“I would—if he were still in it. But as I knew he was out I was careful. He came whining and crying with his hideous penitence and love-making, and I knew that, finding me obdurate, he would go out on the hills for an hour to calm himself. Curse him! he has turned me utterly at last. ‘Forgive me and promise to stay with me, Marion,’ he wails, ‘and
you shall come out, and this shall never happen again? Curse him! I would die rather than ever speak a kind word to him again. What day is this, Hannah?"

"Twenty-fourth. Christmas Eve."

"The time of peace and good will! Good God! And I have not seen the light of day for a fortnight! Hannah, what were those noises in his room the other night? I thought and hoped he was killing himself."

"Noa; noan such luck! He was nobbut smashing things. Theer isn't a article in his rume but's brokken into little bits—t' organ and all."

"Was it that that shrieked so?"

"Happen it wer. I deean't know, and I'm past caring."

"Where is his mother?"

"Locked oop, same's yeh wor."

"Hannah, where are my clothes?"

"Brunt i' t' fire—ivery blessed stitch."

"Then give me some of yours; quick."

"Nay, I dursn't. Whet to dew with?"

"Why, to put on, of course, so that I may get out of this. Come, quick, Hannah; he will be back directly. Come!"

"Nay, I dursn't. Besides, yah couldn't goa nowheer a neight like this—pitch-dark; and hark to t' rum'ling o' t' thunder?"

"Hannah, do as I bid you."

"Noa; nah, maistress, dunnot dew owt 'at's fulish."

"So you won't? Then I'll go as I am. I thought I had a friend in you, but I see I am mistaken. You are as bad as he is. No, you shan't detain me. Let go;—and think how you would feel if you had a daughter used as I have been since I first came here. Don't touch me."

She ran out into the night, Hannah following. But the white figure vanished quickly in the darkness, and the old woman came back alone.

"I mought ha' gi'n her a rag or two to cover her," she said tearfully, "and a shoe to her foot. And I wad
ha' done, if shoo'd nobbut waited. But shoo'll be back agean directly, sewerly."

Presently in came Scariff. He stood a few minutes leaning wearily against the door-post, unheeding the old woman who, pretending to be busy with her bread, studied him furtively. He looked very human now in his unutterable sadness. Nothing of rage or madness in his face now. Nothing but trouble. Trouble that had drawn his mouth into a sorrowful curve and strained his eyebrows upward into an expression of infinite pain and distress. His great bovine eyes wore a filmy look, such as comes from intense suffering or the approach of death. He drew his breath heavily, and as if it suffocated him; every breath a deep laboured sigh. His slight but strong frame gave signs of utter fatigue and lassitude.

"Tha’s worn thysen aht, I wot," muttered Hannah to herself sadly. She had nursed him in his infancy, and her heart ached just now with the memory of a fair innocent baby-face under a blue cap, which had hidden then, as now, his weird deformity. "Tha’s worn thysen aht at last. But too late for peace, my lad, for tha’s worn her aht as well."

He quitted the kitchen and went up the house passage, and the next moment Hannah knew he had discovered his loss.

"Where is she?" he cried, rushing back and clutching her fiercely.

"Where’s who?"

"You know. Tell me quickly. And no lies, or I’ll strike the life out of you."

"Then dew yahre warst, yah mad murdering devil!" cried Hannah, striking out viciously with both hands and feet. "I doan’t know wheer shoo is, but if I did I’d be torn to little bits sooner nor tell yah, soa theer nah!"

He flung her from him and tore out of the house, and directly afterwards Hannah heard the clatter of horse’s hoofs as he galloped down the slope.

Meantime, Marion, in her scanty night robe, was wandering on and on; running and stumbling down
the hills; clambering and panting up them; feeling all the while strangely elated and giddy. She thought she was on the road to Melrose until her feet slipped over the ankles in a peat-bog that she knew to be in the opposite direction.

"Never mind! I will get to the Invercargill road," she said "and perhaps find my way to Clinton, where surely someone will take me in."

Carefully skirting the bog, she came to the last wire fence on the Blue Cap land, and scrambled through, getting sorely scratched by the gorse that grew about it. Now she was on the high road; and she quickened her pace; getting over the rough ground with almost incredible swiftness. She felt so strong and glad. The rumbling of the approaching storm merely made her laugh. The lightning dazzled her; but she held up her arms gleefully to each flash, and remarked aloud on the ghastliness it imparted to her fair skin. Once she fancied she heard the sound of a horse galloping, and she crouched by a tussock at the roadside, and tremblingly listened. But nothing came of it, so she started on again. Presently she found herself making a steep awkward descent, and the murmur of water fell on her ear. Then she knew she was near Popotunoa Gorge, through which the creek foams and bubbles merrily, breaking into numberless tiny cascades, and forming manifold small deep pools, wherever a rock has fallen from the hills above, and stemmed or turned the current. She had gained the rough road scarped out of the hillside, and was half-way through, when the fury of the storm stopped her progress. Crouching and shrinking with her face in her hands, she heard nothing of the beat of a horse's hoofs approaching; saw nothing until, without any warning, she found herself clasped in Linfield Scariff's arms. With a hoarse frightened cry she escaped, and fled back along the road. Down into the Gorge, over the wet slippery boulders, and across the creek she sped; Linfield in close pursuit, now almost grasping her in the light of blue flame from above, now losing her utterly in the intense succeeding darkness. She reached the opposite
side and began to climb; clinging to, and dragging herself up by the tussocks; and she had ascended to within a few yards of the top before her pursuer caught her by the skirt of her robe. Then went out the ringing, terrified, despairing cry: —

"Gower! Gower! O Gower!"

Ere the last sound had died on the troubled air, Linfield stood alone, holding only a shred of white linen in his hand. And below him in the creek lay a white lifeless heap with the water bubbling greedily over it. Moaning piteously, he scrambled down, and awaited another flash of lightning to show him the sight again. Five miles away, at the same moment, Gower Hamilton was waiting for the same light to reveal to him once more his white drenched love. When the light came, Gower beheld naught but bald drear hills and a storm-racked sky, but Linfield Scariff saw where to stoop and gather up from the stones and the water his slain wife.

In the pearl grey dawn of the new Christmas Day toiled the master of Blue Cap wearily home with his wet dead burden.

"Yah've gotten her then, thank God!" cried Hannah, whom much anxiety had kept from bed all night. "And shoo's fainted, poor lamb! Here, give her over to me at oost."

"Stand aside, Hannah," said Linfield gently. "Don't you see she's dead?"

The old woman fell back in her horror, and he passed on into Marion's room and laid the limp body on the bed.

When Hannah and the poor mother came presently, they found him crouching beside it on the floor, his hands clasping and his lips pressing the two small blood-stained feet. So close and passionate were the grasp and kiss that it was some minutes ere they realised that he no longer breathed; that his troubled spirit, like Marion's, was for ever done with life's storms, and had gone forth into the great eternal calm.
IN VITA NON DISJUNCTIA.

Out on the mountain, weary and worn,
Downcast, depressed, deserted, forlorn,—
On the ragged edge of a jutting stone,—
In a wide, wide, blinding waste of snow;
Sat a man, unaided, unfriended, alone.
Nothing but snow—dazzling snow,
Before him, behind him, above, below;
And the feathery flakes were bitterly borne
On the chill night-air as he made his moan,
There on that desolate mountain alone.

"Oh God!—my God!—Is this, then, the end
Of a life I had hoped with my love to spend—
With my love, my darling, my Alice, my own?
I have wrought for years for the tempting gold,
That I have in the belt that is round me girl;
For her sake I have wrought night, morning and noon,
And what is it now but so much dirt?
Some aid, oh Heaven!—some aid, oh! send,
Let it come to me quickly—come to me soon,
For I sink, bewildered, and sick, and cold."

Response there was none to the lost one’s cry,
And the snow fell thicker and faster around,
With a dreary, death-like absence of sound,—
Shrouding the earth and obscuring the sky;
And he felt that his heart was turning to stone,
As he sank in despair on the sheeted ground,
And sobbed "No hope! I must needs then die;
I shall see thee no more, sweet Alice—good-bye!
My bones some day, perchance, may be found
Here on this desolate mountain alone."

* * * * *

Bright was the fire on the cot’s hearthstone,
But Alice stood by the window-pane,
Looking forth, pale and woe-begone—
"My love—my love! shall I see you again?
I know that men have gone forth to save,
But fierce is the storm, and their quest may be vain.
And life ere this, God wot, may have flown.
Oh, would I were strong—oh, would I were brave!
To snatch my love from a snow-wreathed grave,
There on that desolate mountain alone."

Night's curtain fell, and the bright stars shone,
And the pitiless snow ceased to vex the earth,
But Alice stood at the window still, —
"They are strong men and true, and they have the will—
If they find him too late, what is life to me worth?"
Then a light appeared on the crown of the hill,
And she cried aloud with hysterical mirth,—
"Living or dead, he is coming—my own—
They have found him, nor left him in dismalst death,
There on that desolate mountain alone."

Slowly the life-blood began to flow
Through the frozen veins of the rescued one,
As he lay with his head on fair Alice's breast;
And he murmered in accents feeble and low,
"Surely this is eternal rest?"
An angel's arms are around me now,
An angel's tears bedew my brow,
And an angel's lips are on my lips press'd.
Thank God!—thank God!—oh, Alice my own,
I am not on that desolate mountain alone."

Vincent Pyke.

MORTE CONJUNCTI.

A narrow strip of sunburnt land
Far out in an open sea,
A mile and a half of rock and sand,
With a single stunted tree;
Ocean to eastward, ocean to west,
Northward and southward, the great unrest
Of ocean-eternity.
A burning sun and a dying man—
   And the waves wash lazily by,
For what care the waves for one life's span,
   Who have seen their millions die?
Yet their splash and murmur and musical moan
Soothe the passing soul with sweet monotone—
   'Neath the cloudless azure sky.

On the bark of the sun-scorched tree is scored
   A record bitter and brief—
"A ship gone down with all on board,
   Save one who is past relief;"
And the glazing eyes of the dying man,
Grown weary of all the broad blue span,
   Find joy in a falling leaf.

And his lips form into a ghostly smile,
   As it touches his helpless hand,
And he looks on it tenderly the while
   His thoughts fly far to the land
Where a waiting woman treasures a leaf,
Plucked from his breast in the moment brief,
   Of a last good-bye on the sand.

Forgotten now is the torturing thirst
   That maddened him three long days,
Forgotten the stretch of sea accurst,
   And the sun's relentless blaze.
For the soul, released from the pain-rack'd frame,
Soars gladly forth as the one dear name
   Goes up through the heat-wrought haze.

"Miriam!" and the harsh cracked voice
   Says never another word;
And the rising tide with the dead feet toys
   Unheeded and unheard;
And the mighty pitiless broad expanse
Is undisturbed in its calm hot trance
   By even a passing bird.

* * * * * * *

An open casement's deep recess
   High over a busy street,
And a woman worn with the weariness
Of listening for the beat
Of a well-known step in the hurrying rush,
The mighty and daily hurry and crush
Of a myriad thronging feet.

A white wan face, and a loving heart
Grown sick with its hope deferred;
Pale hands that nervously clasp and part,
And the eyes of a imprisoned bird,—
Dark, passionate, yearning eyes that gaze
Out over the land till in tearful haze
All vision is drowned and blurred.

"The promised time is past, O love,
And my soul is afaint for thine;
I hunger and thirst for thee, my love,
Who sendest nor word nor sign;
And the silver cord is stretch'd to its length,
For longer waiting I have no strength,
O love that I still call mine!

"Lo! here is the leaflet worn to dust
By the throbbing heat of my breast—
Of my aching heart that surely must,
In fullness of time find rest;
Yet not till it leans upon thine, I know,
And forgets this season of waiting and woe,
In the gladness of love-joy blest.

"O love! my love! wherever thou art,
Whether on land or sea,
Be not thou deaf to this cry of my heart,
If thou ever hadst heart for me;
See, I stretch out my hands and I listen, dear,
Call only my name—I shall surely hear—
And my soul will go forth to thee!"

The tread of a thousand feet and more
Goes on in the street the same,
But above the rush and above the roar
Is borne on the breeze a name:
"Miriam!" crieth the far-off voice,
And her ears grow deaf to all earthly noise,
And her dark eyes light with flame;
And her pale lips part in a swift glad smile,
   And the leaf-dust falls in the street
As she stretches her arms out fondly while
   She rises her love to greet;
Then the eyes wax dim and the hands grow cold,
And sorrow is past like a tale that is told,
   For her soul and her love's soul meet.

**Thorpe Talbot.**

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**THE END.**

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**ERRATA.**

Page 31, line 6, for “jealously,” read “jealousy.”
Page 46, line 4, for “hand” read “hands.”
Page 48, for “night bird” read “night birds.”
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