

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

Willing to Die

 Publio

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Minden jog fenntartva!

TO THE READER.

ORNAMENTAL CAPITAL 'F'

irst, I must tell you how I intend to relate my story. Having never before undertaken to write a long narrative, I have considered and laid down a few rules which I shall observe. Some of these are unquestionably good; others, I daresay, offend against the canons of composition; but I adopt them, because they will enable me to tell my story better than, with my imperfect experience, better rules possibly would. In the first place, I shall represent the people with whom I had to deal quite fairly. I have met some bad people, some indifferent, and some who at this distance of time seem to me like angels in the unchanging light of heaven.

My narrative shall be arranged in the order of the events; I shall not recapitulate or anticipate.

What I have learned from others, and did not witness, that which I narrate, in part, from the hints of living witnesses, and, in part, conjecturally, I shall record in the historic third person; and I shall write it down with as much confidence and particularity as if I had actually seen it; in that respect imitating, I believe, all great historians, modern and ancient. But the scenes in which I have been an actor, that which my eyes have seen, and my ears heard, I will relate accordingly. If I can be clear and true, my clumsiness and irregularity, I hope, will be forgiven me.

My name is Ethel Ware.

I am not an interesting person by any means. You shall judge. I shall be forty-two my next birthday. That anniversary will occur on the first of May, 1873; and I am unmarried.

I don't look quite the old maid I am, they tell me. They say I don't look five-and-thirty, and I am conscious, sitting before the glass, that there is nothing sour or peevish in my features. What does it matter, even to me? I shall, of course, never marry; and, honestly, I don't care to please any one. If I cared twopence how I looked, I should probably look worse than I do.

I wish to be honest. I have looked in the glass since I wrote that sentence. I have just seen the faded picture of what may have been a pretty, at least what is called a piquant face; a forehead broad and well-formed, over which the still dark-brown hair grows low; large and rather good grey eyes and features, with nothing tragic, nothing classic—just fairly good.

I think there was always energy in my face! I think I remember, long ago, something at times comic; at times, also, something sad and tender, and even dreamy, as I fixed flowers in my hair or talked to my image in the glass. All that has been knocked out of me pretty well. What I do see there now is resolution.

There are processes of artificial hatching in use, if I remember rightly, in Egypt, by which you may, at your discretion, make the bird all beak, or all claw, all head, or all drumstick, as you please to develop it, before the shell breaks, by a special application of heat. It is a chick, no doubt, but a monstrous chick; and something like such a chick was I. Circumstances, in my very early days, hatched my character altogether out of equilibrium.

The caloric had been applied quite different in my mother's case, and produced a prodigy of quite another sort.

I loved my mother with a very warm, but, I am now conscious, with a somewhat contemptuous affection. It never was an angry nor an arrogant contempt; a very tender one, on the contrary. She loved me, I am sure, as well as she was capable of loving a child—better than she ever loved my sister—and I would have laid down my life for her; but, with all my love, I looked down upon her, although I did not know it, till I thought my life over in the melancholy honesty of solitude.

I am not romantic. If I ever was it is time I should be cured of all that. I can laugh heartily, but I think I sigh more than most

people.

I am not a bit shy, but I like solitude; partly because I regard my kind with not unjust suspicion.

I am speaking very frankly. I enjoy, perhaps you think cynically, this hard-featured self-delineation. I don't spare myself; I need not spare any one else. But I am not a cynic. There is vacillation and timidity in that ironical egotism. It is something deeper with me. I don't delight in that sordid philosophy. I have encountered magnanimity and self-devotion on earth. It is not true that there is neither nobility nor beauty in human nature, that is not also more or less shabby and grotesque.

I have an odd story to tell. On my father's side I am the grand-daughter of a viscount; on my mother's, the grand-daughter of a baronet. I have had my early glimpses of the great world, and a wondrous long stare round the dark world beneath it.

When I lower my hand, and in one of the momentary reveries that tempt a desultory writer tickle my cheek slowly with the feathered end of my pen—for I don't incise my sentences with a point of steel, but, in the old fashion, wing my words with a possibly too appropriate grey-goose plume—I look through a tall window in an old house on the scenery I have loved best and earliest in the world. The noble Welsh mountains are on my right, the purple headlands stooping grandly into the waves; I look upon the sea, the enchanted element, my first love and my last! How often I lean upon my hand and smile back upon the waters that silently smile on me, rejoicing under the summer heavens; and in wintry moonlights, when the north wind drives the awful waves upon the rocks, and I see the foam shooting cloud after cloud into the air, I have found myself, after long hours, still gazing, as if my breath were frozen, on the one peaked black rock, thinking what the storm and foam once gave me up there, until, with a sudden terror, and a gasp, I wake from the spell, and recoil from the white image, as if a spirit had been talking with me all the time.

From this same window, in the fore-ground, I see, in morning light or melancholy sunset, with very perfect and friendly trust, the shadowy old churchyard, where I have arranged my narrow bed shall be. There my mother-earth, at last, shall hold me in her bosom, and I shall find my anodyne and rest. There over me shall hover through the old church windows faintly the sweet hymns and the voices in prayer I heard long ago; there the shadow of tower and tree shall slowly move over the grass above me, from dawn till night, and there, within the fresh and solemn sound of its waves, I shall lie near the ceaseless fall and flow of the sea I loved so well.

I am not sorry, as I sit here, with my vain recollections and my direful knowledge, that my life has been what it was.

A member of the upper ten thousand, I should have known nothing. I have bought my knowledge dear. But truth is a priceless jewel. Would you part with it, fellow-mourner, and return to the simplicities and illusions of early days? Consider the question truly; be honest; and you will answer "No." In the volume of memory, every page of which, like "Cornelius Agrippa's bloody book," has power to evoke a spectre, would you yet erase a line? We can willingly part with nothing that ever was part of mind, or memory, or self. The lamentable past is our own for ever.

Thank Heaven, my childhood was passed in a tranquil nook, where the roar of the world's traffic is not so much as heard; among scenery, where there lurks little capital, and no enterprise; where the good people are asleep; and where, therefore, the irreparable improvements that in other places carry on their pitiless work of obliteration are undreamed of. I am looking out on scenes that remain unchanged as heaven itself. The summer comes and goes; the autumn drifts of leaves, and winter snows; and all things here remain as my round childish eyes beheld them in stupid wonder and delight when first the world was opening upon them. The trees, the tower, the stile, the very gravestones, are my earliest friends; I stretch my arms to the mountains, as if I could fold them to my heart. And in the opening through the ancient trees, the great estuary stretches northward, wider and wider, into the grey horizon of the open sea.

The sinking sun askance,
Spreads a dull glare,
Through evening air;
And, in a happy trance,
Forest and wave, and white cliff stand,
Like an enchanted sea and land.

The sea-breeze wakens clear and cold,
Over the azure wide;
Before whose breath, in threads of gold,
The ruddy ripples glide,
And chasing, break and mingle;
While clear as bells,
Each wavelet tells,
O'er the stones on the hollow shingle.

The rising of winds and the fall of the waves!

I love the music of shingle and caves.
And the billows that travel so far to die,
In foam, on the loved shore where they lie.
I lean my cold cheek on my hand;
And as a child, with open eyes,
Listens, in a dim surprise,
To some high story
Of grief and glory,
It cannot understand;
So, like that child,
To meanings of a music wild,
I listen, in a rapture lonely,
Not understanding, listening only,
To a story not for me;
And let my fancies come and go,
And fall and flow,
With the eternal sea.

And so, to leave rhyme, and return to prose, I end my preface, and begin my story here.

CHAPTER I. an arrival.

ORNAMENTAL CAPITAL 'O'

One of the earliest scenes I can remember with perfect distinctness is this. My sister and I, still denizens of the nursery, had come down to take our tea with good old Rebecca Torkill, the Malory housekeeper, in the room we called the cedar parlour. It is a long and rather sombre room, with two tall windows looking out upon the shadowy court-yard. There are on the wall some dingy portraits, whose pale faces peep out, as it were, through a background of black fog, from the canvas; and there is one, in better order than the others, of a grave man in the stately costume of James the First, which hangs over the mantel-piece. As a child I loved this room; I loved the half-decipherable pictures; it was solemn and even gloomy, but it was with the delightful gloom and solemnity of one of Rebecca Torkill's stories of castles, giants, and goblins.

It was evening now, with a stormy, red sky in the west. Rebecca and we two children were seated round the table, sipping our tea, eating hot cake, and listening to her oft-told tale, entitled the Knight of the Black Castle.

This knight, habited in black, lived in his black castle, in the centre of a dark wood, and being a giant, and an ogre, and something of a magician besides, he used to ride out at nightfall with a couple of great black bags, to stow his prey in, at his saddle-bow, for the purpose of visiting such houses as had their nurseries well-stocked with children. His tall black horse, when he dismounted, waited at the hall-door, which, however mighty its bars and bolts, could not resist certain magical words which he uttered in a sepulchral voice—

"Yoke, yoke, Iron and oak; One, two, and three, Open to me." At this charmed summons the door turned instantly on its hinges, without warning of creak or rattle, and the black knight mounted the stairs to the nursery, and was drawing the children softly out of their beds, by their feet, before any one knew he was near.

As this story, which with childish love of iteration we were listening to now for the fiftieth time, went on, I, whose chair faced the window, saw a tall man on a tall horse—both looked black enough against the red sky—ride by at a walk.

I thought it was the gaunt old vicar, who used to ride up now and then to visit our gardener's mother, who was sick and weak, and troubling my head no more about him, was instantly as much absorbed as ever in the predatory prowlings of the Knight of the Black Castle.

It was not until I saw Rebecca's face, in which I was staring with the steadiness of an eager interest, undergo a sudden and uncomfortable change, that I discovered my error. She stopped in the middle of a sentence, and her eyes were fixed on the door. Mine followed hers thither. I was more than startled. In the very crisis of a tale of terror, ready to believe any horror, I thought, for a moment, that I actually beheld the Black Knight, and felt that his horse, no doubt, and his saddle-bags, were waiting at the hall-door to receive me and my sister.

What I did see was a man who looked to me gigantic. He seemed to fill the tall door-case. His dress was dark, and he had a pair of leather overalls, I believe they called them, which had very much the effect of jack-boots, and he had a low-crowned hat on. His hair was long and black, his prominent black eyes were fixed on us, his face was long, but handsome, and deadly pale, as it seemed to me, from intense anger. A child's instinctive reading of countenance is seldom at fault. The ideas of power and mystery surround grown persons in the eyes of children. A gloomy or forbidding face upon a person of great stature inspires something like panic; and if that person is a stranger, and evidently transported with anger, his mere appearance in the same room will, I can answer for it, frighten a child half into hysterics. This alarming face, with its black knit brows, and very blue shorn chin, was to me all the more fearful that it

was that of a man no longer young. He advanced to the table with two strides, and said, in resonant, deep tones, to which my very heart seemed to vibrate:

"Mr. Ware's not here, but he will be, soon enough; you give him that;" and he hammered down a letter on the table, with a thump of his huge fist. "That's my answer; and tell him, moreover, that I took his letter,"—and he plucked an open letter deliberately from his great-coat pocket—"and tore it, this way and that way, across and across," and he suited the action fiercely to the words, "and left it for him, there!"

So saying, he slapped down the pieces with his big hand, and made our tea-spoons jump and jingle in our cups, and turned and strode again to the door.

"And tell him this," he added, in a tone of calmer hatred, turning his awful face on us again, "that there's a God above us, who judges righteously."

The door shut, and we saw him no more. I and my sister burst into clamorous tears, and roared and cried for a full half hour, from sheer fright—a demonstration which, for a time, gave Rebecca Torkill ample occupation for all her energies and adroitness.

This recollection remains, with all the colouring and exaggeration of a horrible impression received in childhood, fixed in my imagination. I and dear Nelly long remembered the apparition, and in our plays used to call him, after the goblin hero of the romance to which we had been listening when he entered, the Knight of the Black Castle.

The adventure made, indeed, a profound impression upon our nerves, and I have related it, with more detail than it seems to deserve, because it was, in truth, connected with my story; and I afterwards, unexpectedly, saw a good deal more of the awful man in whose presence my heart had quaked, and after whose visit I and my sister seemed for days to have drunk of "the cup of trembling."

I must take up my story now at a point a great many years later.

Let the reader fancy me and my sister Helen; I dark-haired, and a few months past sixteen; she, with flaxen, or rather golden hair and large blue eyes, and only fifteen, standing in the hall at Malory, lighted with two candles; one in the old-fashioned glass bell that swings by three chains from the ceiling, the other carried out hastily from the housekeeper's room, and flaming on the table, in the foggy puffs of the February night air that entered at the wide-open hall-door.

Old Rebecca Torkill stood on the steps, with her broad hand shading her eyes, as if the moon dazzled them.

"There's nothing, dear; no, Miss Helen, it mustn't a' bin the gate. There's no sign o' nothin' comin' up, and no sound nor nothing at all; come in, dear; you shouldn't a' come out to the open door, with your cough in this fog."

So in she stumped, and shut the door; and we saw no more of the dark trunks and boughs of the elms at the other side of the courtyard, with the smoky mist between; and we three trooped together to the housekeeper's room, where we had taken up our temporary quarters.

This was the second false alarm that night, sounded, in Helen's fancy, by the quavering scream of the old iron gate. We had to wait and watch in the fever of expectation for some time longer.

Our old house of Malory was, at the best, in the forlorn condition of a ship of war out of commission. Old Rebecca and two rustic maids, and Thomas Jones, who was boots, gardener, hen-wife, and farmer, were all the hands we could boast; and at least three-fourths of the rooms were locked up, with shutters closed; and many of them, from year to year, never saw the light, and lay in perennial dust.

The truth is, my father and mother seldom visited Malory. They had a house in London, and led a very gay life; were very "good people," immensely in request, and everywhere. Their rural life was not at Malory, but spent in making visits at one country-house after another. Helen and I, their only children, saw very little of them. We sometimes were summoned up to town for a month or two for lessons in dancing, music, and other things, but there we saw little more of them than at home. The being in society, judging by its effects upon them, appeared to me a very harassing and laborious profession. I always felt that we were half in the way and half out of sight in town, and was immensely relieved when we were dismissed again to our holland frocks, and to the beloved solitudes of Malory.

This was a momentous night. We were expecting the arrival of a new governess, or rather companion.

Laura Grey—we knew no more than her name, for in his hurried note we could not read whether she was Miss or Mrs.—my father had told us, was to arrive this night at about nine o'clock. I had asked him, when he paid his last visit of a day here, and announced the coming event, whether she was a married lady; to which he answered, laughing:

"You wise little woman! That's a very pertinent question, though I never thought of it, and I have been addressing her as Miss Grey all this time. She certainly is old enough to be married."

"Is she cross, papa, I wonder?" I further inquired.

"Not cross—perhaps a little severe. 'She whipped two female 'prentices to death, and hid them in the coal-hole,' or something of that kind, but she has a very cool temper;" and so he amused himself with my curiosity.

Now, although we knew that all this, including the quotation, was spoken in jest, it left an uncomfortable suspicion. Was this woman old and ill-tempered? A great deal was in the power of a governess here. An artful woman, who liked power, and did not like us, might make us very miserable.

At length the little party in the housekeeper's room did hear sounds at which we all started up with one consent. They were the trot of a horse's hoofs and the roll of wheels, and before we reached the hall-door the bell was ringing.

Rebecca swung open the door, and we saw in the shadow of the house, with the wheels touching the steps, a one-horse conveyance, with some luggage on top, dimly lighted by the candles in the hall.

A little bonnet was turned towards us from the windows; we could not see what the face was like; a slender hand turned the handle, and a lady, whose figure, though enveloped in a tweed cloak, looked very slight and pretty, came down, and ran up the steps, and hesitated, and being greeted encouragingly by Rebecca Torkill, entered the hall smiling, and showed a very pretty and modest face, rather pale, and very young.

"My name is Grey; I am the new governess," she said, in a pleasant voice, which, with her pretty looks, was very engaging; "and these are the young ladies?" she continued, glancing at Rebecca and back again at us; "you are Ethel, and you Helen Ware?" and a little timidly she offered her hand to each.

I liked her already.

"Shall I go with you to your room," I asked, "while Rebecca is making tea for us in the housekeeper's room? We thought we should be more comfortable there to-night."

"I'm so glad—I shall feel quite at home. It is the very thing I should have liked," she said; and talked on as I led her to her room, which, though very old-fashioned, looked extremely cosy, with a good fire flickering abroad and above on walls and ceiling.

I remember everything about that evening so well. I have reason to remember Miss Laura Grey. Some people would have said that there was not a regular feature in her face, except her eyes, which were very fine; but she had beautiful little teeth, and a skin wonderfully smooth and clear, and there was refinement and energy in her face, which was pale and spiritual, and indescribably engaging. To my mind, whether according to rule or not, she was nothing short of beautiful.

I have reason to remember that pale, pretty young face. The picture is clear and living before me this moment, as it was then in the firelight. Standing there, she smiled on me very kindly—she looked as if she would have kissed me—and then, suddenly thoughtful, she stretched her slender hands to the fire, and, in a momentary reverie, sighed very deeply.

I left her, softly, with her trunks and boxes, which Thomas Jones had already carried up, and ran downstairs.

I remember the pictures of that night with supernatural distinctness; for at that point of time fate changed my life, and with pretty Miss Grey another pale figure entered, draped in black, and calamity was my mate for many a day after.

Our tea-party, however, this night in Mrs. Torkill's room, was very happy. I don't remember what we talked about, but we were in high good-humour with our young lady-superioress, and she seemed to like us.

I am going to tell you very shortly my impressions of this lady. I never met any one in my life who had the same influence over me; and, for a time, it puzzled me. When we were not at French, German, music—our studies, in fact—she was exactly like one of ourselves, always ready to do whatever we liked best, always pleasant, gentle, and, in her way, even merry. When she was alone, or thinking, she was sad. That seemed the habit of her mind; but she was naturally gay and sympathetic, as ready as we for a walk on the strand to pick up shells, for a ride on the donkeys to Penruthyn Priory, to take a sail or a row on the estuary, or a drive in our little pony-carriage anywhere. Sometimes on our rambles we would cross the stile and go into the pretty little churchyard that lies to the left of Malory, near the sea, and if it was a sunny day we would read the old inscriptions and loiter away half an hour among the tombstones.

And when we came home to tea we would sit round the fire and tell stories, of which she had ever so many, German, French, Scotch, Irish, Icelandic, and I know not what; and sometimes we went to the housekeeper's room, and, with Rebecca Torkill's leave, made a hot cake, and baked it on the griddle there, with great delight.

The secret of Laura Grey's power was in her gentle temper, her inflexible conscience, and her angelic firmness in all matters of duty. I never saw her excited, or for a moment impatient; and at idle times, as I said, she was one of ourselves. The only threat she ever used was to tell us that she could not stay at Malory as our governess if we would not do what she thought right. There is in young people an instinctive perception of motive, and no truer spirit than Laura Grey ever lived on earth. I loved her. I had no fear of

her. She was our gentle companion and playmate; and yet, in a certain sense, I never stood so much in awe of any human being.

Only a few days after Laura Grey had come home, we were sitting in our accustomed room, which was stately, but not uncomfortably spacious, and, like many at the same side of the house, panelled up to the ceiling. I remember, it was just at the hour of the still early sunset, and the ruddy beams were streaming their last through the trunks of the great elms. We were in high chat over Helen's little sparrow, Dickie, a wonderful bird, whose appetite and spirits we were always discussing, when the door opened, and Rebecca said, "Young ladies, please, here's Mr. Carmel;" and Miss Grey, for the first time, saw a certain person who turns up at intervals and in odd scenes in the course of this autobiography.

The door is at some distance from the window, and through its panes across that space upon the opposite wall the glow of sunset fell mistily, making the clear shadow, in which our visitor stood, deeper. The figure stood out against this background like a pale old portrait, his black dress almost blended with the background; but, indistinct as it was, it was easy to see that the dress he wore was of some ecclesiastical fashion not in use among Church of England men. The coat came down a good deal lower than his knees. His thin slight figure gave him an effect of height far greater than his real stature; his fine forehead showed very white in contrast with his close dark hair, and his thin, delicate features, as he stepped slowly in, with an ascetic smile, and his hand extended, accorded well with ideas of abstinence and penance. Gentle as was his manner, there was something of authority also in it, and in the tones of his voice.

"How do you do, Miss Ethel? How do you do, Miss Helen? I am going to write my weekly note to your mamma, and—oh! Miss Grey, I believe?"—he interrupted himself, and bowed rather low to the young governess, disclosing the small tonsure on the top of his head.

Miss Grey acknowledged his bow, but I could see that she was puzzled and surprised.

"I am to tell your mamma, I hope, that you are both quite well?" he said, addressing himself to me, and taking my hand: "and in good spirits, I suppose, Miss Grey?" he said, apparently recollecting that she was to be recognized; "I may say that?"

He turned to her, still holding my hand.

"Yes, they are quite well, and, I believe, happy," she said, still looking at him, I could see, with curiosity.

It was a remarkable countenance, with large earnest eyes, and a mouth small and melancholy, with those brilliant red lips that people associate with early decay. It was a pale face of suffering and decision, which so vaguely indicated his years that he might be any age you please, from six-and-twenty up to six-and-thirty, as you allowed more or less in the account for the afflictions of a mental and bodily discipline.

He stood there for a little while chatting with us. There was something engaging in this man, cold, severe, and melancholy as his manner was. I was conscious that he was agreeable, and, young as I was, I felt that he was a man of unusual learning and ability.

In a little time he left us. It was now twilight, and we saw him, with his slight stoop, pass our window with slow step and downcast eyes.

CHAPTER II. our curiosity is piqued.

ORNAMENTAL CAPITAL 'A'

nd so that odd vision was gone; and Laura Grey turned to us eagerly for information.

We could not give her much. We were ourselves so familiar with the fact of Mr. Carmel's existence, that it never occurred to us that his appearance could be a surprise to any one.

Mr. Carmel had come about eight months before to reside in the small old house in which the land-steward had once been harboured, and which, built in continuation of the side of the house, forms a sort of retreating wing to it, with a hall-door to itself, but under the same roof.

This Mr. Carmel was, undoubtedly, a Roman Catholic, and an ecclesiastic; of what order I know not. Possibly he was a Jesuit. I never was very learned or very curious upon such points; but some one, I forgot who, told me that he positively was a member of the Society of Jesus.

My poor mother was very High Church, and on very friendly terms with Catholic personages of note. Mr. Carmel had been very ill, and was still in delicate health, and a quiet nook in the country, in the neighbourhood of the sea, had been ordered for him. The vacant house I have described she begged for his use from my father, who did not at all like the idea of lending it, as I could gather from the partly jocular and partly serious discussions which he maintained upon the point, every now and then, at the breakfast-table, when I was last in town.

I remember hearing my father say at last, "You know, my dear Mabel, I'm always ready to do anything you like. I'll be a Catholic myself, if it gives you the least pleasure, only be sure, first, about this thing, that you really do like it. I shouldn't care if the man were hanged—he very likely deserves it—but I'll give him my house if it makes you happy. You must remember, though, the Cardyllion people won't like it, and you'll be talked about, and I daresay he'll make nuns of Ethel and Helen. He won't get a great deal by that, I'm afraid. And I don't see why those pious people—Jesuits, and that sort of persons, who don't know what to do with their money—should not take a house for him if he wants it, or what business they have quartering their friars and rubbish upon poor Protestants like you and me."

The end of it was that about two months later this Mr. Carmel arrived, duly accredited by my father, who told me when he paid us one of his visits of a day, soon after, that he was under promise not to talk to us about religion, and that if he did I was to write to tell him immediately.

When I had told my story to Laura Grey, she was thoughtful for a little time.

"Are his visits only once a week?" she asked.

"Yes," said I.

"And does he stay as short a time always?" she continued.

We both agreed that he usually stayed a little longer.

"And has he never talked on the subject of religion?"

"No, never. He has talked about shells, or flowers, or anything he found us employed about, and always told us something curious or interesting. I had heard papa say that he was engaged upon a work from which great things were expected, and boxes of books were perpetually coming and going between him and his correspondents."

She was not quite satisfied, and in a few days there arrived from London two little books on the great controversy between Luther and the Pope; and out of these, to the best of her poor ability, she drilled us, by way of a prophylactic against Mr. Carmel's possible machinations.

It did not appear, however, to be Mr. Carmel's mission to flutter the little nest of heresy so near him. When he paid his next visit, it so happened that one of these duodecimo disputants lay upon the table. Without thinking, as he talked, he raised it, and read the title on the cover, and smiled gently. Miss Grey blushed. She had not intended disclosing her suspicions.

"In two different regiments, Miss Grey," he said, "but both under the same king;" and he laid the book quietly upon the table again, and talked on of something quite different.

Laura Grey, in a short time, became less suspicious of Mr. Carmel, and rather enjoyed his little visits, and looked forward with pleasure to them.

Could you imagine a quieter or more primitive life than ours, or, on earth, a much happier one?

Malory owns an old-fashioned square pew in the aisle of the pretty church of Cardyllion. In this spacious pew we three sat every Sunday, and on one of these occasions, a few weeks after Miss Grey's arrival, from my corner I thought I saw a stranger in the Verney seat, which is at the opposite side of the aisle, and had not had an occupant for several months. There was certainly a man in it; but the stove that stood nearly between us would not allow me to see more than his elbow, and the corner of an open book, from which I suppose he was reading.

I was not particularly curious about this person. I knew that the Verneys, who were distant cousins of ours, were abroad, and the visitor was not likely to be very interesting.

A long, indistinct sermon interposed, and I did not recollect to look at the Verney pew until the congregation were trooping decorously out, and we had got some way down the aisle. The pew was empty by that time.

"Some one in the Verney's pew," I remarked to our governess, so soon as we were quite out of the shadow of the porch.

"Which is the Verney's pew?" she asked.

I described it.

"Yes, there was. I have got a headache, my dear. Suppose we go home by the Mill Road?"

We agreed.

It is a very pretty, and in places rather a steep road, very narrow, and ascending with a high and wooded bank at its right, and a precipitous and thickly-planted glen to its left. The opposite side is thickly wooded also, and a stream far below splashes and tinkles among the rocks under the darkening foliage.

As we walked up this shadowy road, I saw an old gentleman walking down it, towards us. He was descending at a brisk pace, and wore a chocolate-coloured great-coat, made with a cape, and fitting his figure closely. He wore a hat with a rather wide brim, turned up at the sides. His face was very brown. He had a thin, high nose, with very thin nostrils, rather prominent eyes, and carried his head high. Altogether he struck me as a particularly gentleman-like and ill-tempered looking old man, and his features wore a character of hauteur that was perfectly insolent.

He was pretty near to us by the time I turned to warn our governess, who was beside me, to make way for him to pass. I did not speak; for I was a little startled to see that she was very much flushed, and almost instantly turned deadly pale.

We came nearly to a standstill, and the old gentleman was up to us in a few seconds. As he approached, his prominent eyes were fixed on Laura Grey. He stopped, with the same haughty stare, and, raising his hat, said in a cold, rather high key, "Miss Grey, I think? Miss Laura Grey? You will not object, I dare say, to allow me a very few words?"

The young lady bowed very slightly, and said, in a low tone, "Certainly not."

I saw that she looked pained, and even faint. This old gentleman's manner, and the stern stare of his prominent eyes, embarrassed even me, who did not directly encounter them.

"Perhaps we had better go on, Helen and I, to the seat; we can wait for you there?" I said softly to her.

"Yes, dear, I think it will be as well," she answered gently.

We walked on slowly. The bench was not a hundred steps up the steep. It stands at the side of the road, with its back against the bank. From this seat I could see very well what passed, though, of course, quite out of hearing.

The old gentleman had a black cane in his fingers, which he poked about in the gravel. You would have said from his countenance that at every little stab he punched an enemy's eye out.

First, the gentleman made a little speech, with his head very high, and an air of determination and severity. The young lady seemed to answer, briefly and quietly. Then ensued a colloquy of a minute or more, during which the old gentleman's head nodded often with emphasis, and his gestures became much more decided. The young lady seemed to say little, and very quietly: her eyes were lowered to the ground as she spoke.

She said something, I suppose, which he chose to resent, for he smiled sarcastically, and raised his hat; then, suddenly resuming his gravity, he seemed to speak with a sharp and hectoring air, as if he were laying down the law upon some point once for all.

Laura Grey looked up sharply, with a brilliant colour, and with her head high, replied rapidly for a minute or more, and turning away, without waiting for his answer, walked slowly, with her head still high, towards us.

The gentleman stood looking after her with his sarcastic smile, but that was gone in a moment, and he continued looking, with an angry face, and muttering to himself, until suddenly he turned away, and walked off at a quick pace down the path towards Cardyllion.

A little uneasily, Helen and I stood up to meet our governess. She was still flushed and breathing quickly, as people do from recent agitation.

"No bad news? Nothing unpleasant?" I asked, looking very eagerly into her face.

"No; no bad news, dear."

I took her hand. I felt that she was trembling a little, and she had become again more than usually pale. We walked homeward in silence.

Laura Grey seemed in deep and agitated thought. We did not, of course, disturb her. An unpleasant excitement like that always disposes one to silence. Not a word, I think, was uttered all the way to the steps of Malory. Laura Grey entered the hall, still silent, and when she came down to us, after an hour or two passed in her room, it was plain she had been crying.

CHAPTER III. the thief in the night.

ORNAMENTAL CAPITAL 'O'

f what happened next I have a strangely imperfect recollection. I cannot tell you the intervals, or even the order, in which some of the events occurred. It is not that the mist of time obscures it; what I do recollect is dreadfully vivid; but there are spaces of the picture gone. I see faces of angels, and faces that make my heart sink; fragments of scenes. It is like something reflected in the pieces of a smashed looking-glass.

I have told you very little of Helen, my sister, my one darling on earth. There are things which people, after an interval of half a life, have continually present to their minds, but cannot speak of. The idea of opening them to strangers is insupportable. A sense of profanation shuts the door, and we "wake" our dead alone. I could not have told you what I am going to write. I did not intend inscribing here more than the short, bleak result. But I write it as if to myself, and I will get through it.

To you it may seem that I make too much of this, which is, as Hamlet says, "common." But you have not known what it is to be for all your early life shut out from all but one beloved companion, and never after to have found another.

Helen had a cough, and Laura Grey had written to mamma, who was then in Warwickshire, about it. She was referred to the Cardyllion doctor. He came; he was a skilful man. There were the hushed, dreadful moments, while he listened, through his stethoscope, thoughtfully, to the "still, small voice" of fate, to us inaudible, pronouncing on the dread issues of life or death.

"No sounder lungs in England," said Doctor Mervyn, looking up with a congratulatory smile.

He told her, only, that she must not go in the way of cold, and by-and-by sent her two bottles from his surgery; and so we were happy once more.

But doctors' advices, like the warnings of fate, are seldom obeyed; least of all by the young. Nelly's little pet-sparrow was ailing, or we fancied it was. She and I were up every hour during the night to see after it. Next evening Nelly had a slight pain in her chest. It became worse, and by twelve o'clock was so intense that Laura Grey, in alarm, sent to Cardyllion for the doctor. Thomas Jones came back without him, after a delay of an hour. He had been called away to make a visit somewhere, but the moment he came back he would come to Malory.

It came to be three o'clock; he had not appeared; darling Nelly was in actual torture. Again Doctor Mervyn was sent for; and again, after a delay, the messenger returned with the same dismaying answer. The governess and Rebecca Torkill exhausted in vain their little list of remedies. I was growing terrified. Intuitively I perceived the danger. The doctor was my last earthly hope. Death, I saw, was drawing nearer and nearer every moment, and the doctor might be ten miles away. Think what it was to stand, helpless, by her. Can I ever forget her poor little face, flushed scarlet, and gasping and catching at breath, hands, throat, every sinew quivering in the mortal struggle!

At last a knock and a ring at the hall-door. I rushed to the window; the first chill grey of winter's dawn hung sickly over the landscape. No one was on the steps, or on the grey gravel of the court. But, yes—I do hear voices and steps upon the stair approaching. Oh! Heaven be thanked, the doctor is come at last!

I ran out upon the lobby, just as I was, in my dressing-gown, with my hair about my shoulders, and slippers on my bare feet. A candlestick, with the candle burnt low, was standing on the broad head of the clumsy old bannister, and Mr. Carmel, in a black riding-coat, with his hat in his hand, and that kind of riding-boots that used to be called clerical, on, was talking in a low, earnest tone to our governess.

The faint grey from the low lobby window was lost at this point, and the delicate features of the pale ecclesiastic, and Miss Grey's pretty and anxious face, were lighted, like a fine portrait of Schalken's, by the candle only.

Throughout this time of agony and tumult, the memory of my retina remains unimpaired, and every picture retains its hold upon my brain. And, oh! had the doctor come? Yes, Mr. Carmel had ridden all the way, fourteen miles, to Llwynan, and brought the doctor back with him. He might not have been here for hours otherwise. He was now downstairs making preparations, and would be in the room in a few minutes.

I looked at that fine, melancholy, energetic face as if he had saved me. I could not thank him. I turned and entered our room again, and told Nelly to be of good courage, that the doctor was come. "And, oh! please God, he'll do you good, my own darling, darling—precious darling!"

In a minute more the doctor was in the room. My eyes were fixed upon his face as he talked to his poor little patient; he did not look at all as he had done on his former visit. I see him before me as I write; his bald head shining in the candle-light, his dissatisfied and gloomy face, and his shrewd light blue eyes, reading her looks askance, as his fingers rested on her pulse.

I remember, as if the sick-room had changed into it, finding myself in the small room opposite, with no one there but the doctor and Miss Grey, we three, in the cold morning light, and his saying, "Well all this comes of violating directions. There is very intense inflammation, and her chest is in a most critical state."

Then Miss Grey said, after a moment's hush, the awful words, "Is there any danger?" and he answered shortly, "I wish I could say there wasn't." I felt my ears sing as if a pistol had been fired. No one spoke for another minute or more.

The doctor stayed, I think, for a long time, and he must have returned after, for he mixed up in almost every scene I can remember during that jumbled day of terror.

There was, I know, but one day, and part of a night. But it seems to me as if whole nights intervened, and suns set and rose, and days uncounted and undistinguished passed, in that miserable period.

The pain subsided, but worse followed; a dreadful cough, that never ceased—a long, agonised struggle against a slow drowning of the lungs. The doctor gave her up. They wanted me to leave the room, but I could not.

The hour had come at last, and she was gone. The wild cry—the terrible farewell—nothing can move inexorable death. All was still.

As the ship lies serene in the caverns of the cold sea, and feels no more the fury of the wind, the strain of cable, and the crash of wave, this forlorn wreck lay quiet now. Oh! little Nelly! I could not believe it.

She lay in her nightdress under the white coverlet. Was this whole scene an awful vision, and was my heart breaking in vain? Oh, poor simple little Nelly, to think that you should have changed into anything so sublime and terrible!

I stood dumb by the bedside, staring at the white face that was never to move again. Such a look I had never seen before. The white glory of an angel was upon it.

Rebecca Torkill spoke to me, I think. I remember her kind, sorrowful old face near me, but I did not hear what she said. I was in a stupor, or a trance. I had not shed a tear; I had not said a word. For a time I was all but mad. In the light of that beautiful transfiguration my heart was bursting with the wildest rebellion against the law of death that had murdered my innocent sister before my eyes; against the fate of which humanity is the sport; against the awful Power who made us! What spirit knows, till the hour of temptation, the height or depth of its own impiety?

Oh, gentle, patient little Nelly! The only good thing I can see in myself in those days is my tender love of you, and my deep inward certainty of my immeasurable inferiority. Gentle, humble little Nelly, who thought me so excelling in cleverness, in wisdom, and countless other perfections, how humble in my secret soul I felt myself beside you, although I was too proud to say so! In your presence my fierce earthy nature stood revealed, and wherever I looked my shadow was cast along the ground by the pure light that shone from you.

I don't know what time passed without a word falling from my lips. I suppose people had other things to mind, and I was left to myself. But Laura Grey stole her hand into mine, she kissed me, and I felt her tears on my cheek.

"Ethel, darling, come with me," she said, crying, very gently. "You can come back again. You'll come with me, won't you? Our darling is happier, Ethel, than ever she could have been on earth, and she will never know change or sorrow again."

I began to sob distractedly. I do really believe I was half out of my mind. I began to talk to her volubly, vehemently, crying passionately all the time. I do not remember now a word I uttered; I know its purport only from the pain, and even horror, I remember in Laura Grey's pale face. It has taken a long and terrible discipline to expel that evil spirit. I know what I was in those days. My pilgrimage since then has been by steep and solitary paths, in great dangers, in darkness, in fear; I have eaten the bread of affliction, and my drink has been of the waters of bitterness; I am tired and footsore yet, though through a glass darkly, I think I can now see why it all was, and I thank God with a contrite heart for the terrors and the mercies he has shown me. I begin to discover through the mist who was the one friend who never forsook me through all those stupendous wanderings, and I long for the time when I shall close my tired eyes, all being over, and lie at the feet of my Saviour.

CHAPTER IV.

my father.

ORNAMENTAL CAPITAL 'F'

orth sped Laura Grey's letter to mamma. She was then at Roydon; papa was with her. The Easter recess had just sent down some distinguished visitors, who were glad to clear their heads for a few days of the hum of the Houses and the smell of the river; and my father, although not in the House, ran down with them. Little Nelly had been his pet, as I was mamma's.

There was an awkwardness in post-office arrangements between the two places then, and letters had to make a considerable circuit. There was a delay of three clear days between the despatch of the letter and the reply.

I must say a word about papa. He was about the most agreeable and careless man on earth. There are men whom no fortune could keep out of debt. A man of that sort seems to me not to have any defined want or enjoyment, but the horizon of his necessities expands in proportion as he rises in fortune, and always exceeds the ring-fence of his estate. What its periphery may be, or his own real wants, signifies very little. His permanent necessity is always to exceed his revenue.

I don't think my father's feelings were very deep. He was a good-natured husband, but, I am afraid, not a good one. I loved him

better than I loved mamma. Children are always captivated by gaiety and indulgence. I was not of an age to judge of higher things, and I never missed the article of religion, of which, I believe, he had none. Although he lived so much in society that he might almost be said to have no domestic life whatever, no man could be simpler, less suspicious, or more easily imposed upon.

The answer to Miss Grey's letter was the arrival of my father. He was in passionate grief, and in a state of high excitement. He ran upstairs, without waiting to take off his hat; but at the door of our darling's room he hesitated. I did not know he had arrived till I heard him, some minutes later, walking up and down the room, sobbing. Though he was selfish, he was affectionate. No one liked to go in to disturb him. She lay by this time in her coffin. The tint of clay darkened her pretty features. The angelic beauty that belongs to death is transitory beyond all others. I would not look at her again, to obscure its glory. She lay now in her shroud, a forlorn sunken image of decay.

When he came out he talked wildly and bitterly. His darling had been murdered, he said, by neglect. He upbraided us all round, including Rebecca Torkill, for our cruel carelessness. He blamed the doctor. He had no right, in a country where there was but one physician, to go so far away as fourteen miles, and to stay away so long. He denounced even his treatment. He ought to have bled her. It was, every one knew, the proper way of treating such a case.

Than Laura Grey, no one could have been more scrupulously careful. She could not have prevented, even if she had suspected the possibility of such a thing, her stealing out of bed now and then to look at her sick sparrow. All this injustice was, however, but the raving of his grief.

In poor little Nelly's room my father's affectionate nature was convulsed with sorrow. When he came down I cried with him for a long time. I think this affliction has drawn us nearer. He was more tender to me than I ever remembered him before.

At last the ghastly wait and suspense were ended. I saw no more strange faces in the lobbies; and the strange voices on the stairs and footsteps in the room, and the muffled sounds that made me feel faint, were heard no more. The funeral was over, and pretty Nelly was gone for ever and ever, and I would come in and go out and read my books, and take my walks alone; and the flowers, and the long summer evenings, and the song of birds would come again, and the leaves make their soft shadow in the nooks where we used to sit together in the wood, but gentle little Nelly would never come again.

During these terrible days, Laura Grey was a sister to me, both in affection and in sorrow. Oh, Laura, can I ever forget your tender, patient sympathy? How often my thoughts recall your loved face as I lay my head upon my lonely pillow, and my blessings follow you over the wide sea to your far-off home!

Papa took a long solitary ride that day through the warren, and away by Penruthyn Priory, and did not return till dark.

When he did, he sent for me. I found him in the room which, in the old-fashioned style, was called the oak parlour. A log-fire—we were well supplied from the woods in the rear of the house—lighted the room with a broad pale flicker. My father was looking ill and tired. He was leaning with his elbow on the mantel-piece, and said:

"Ethel, darling, I want to know what you would like best. We are going abroad for a little time; it is the only thing for your mamma. This place would kill her. I shall be leaving this to-morrow afternoon, and you can make up your mind which you would like best—to come with us and travel for some months, or to wait here, with Miss Grey, until our return. You shall do precisely whatever you like best—I don't wish you to hurry yourself, darling. I'd rather you thought it over at your leisure."

Then he sat down and talked about other things; and turned about to the fire with his decanter of sherry by him, and drank a good many glasses, and leaned back in his chair before he had finished it.

My father, I thought, was dozing, but was not sure; and being a good deal in awe of him—a natural consequence of seeing so little of him—I did not venture either to waken him, or to leave the room without his permission.

There are two doors in that room. I was standing irresolutely near that which is next the window, when the other opened, and the long whiskers and good-humoured, sensible face of portly Wynne Williams, the town-clerk and attorney of Cardyllion, entered. My father awoke, with a start, at the sound, and seeing him, smiled and extended his hand.

"How d'ye do, Williams? It's so good of you to come. Sit down. I'm off to-morrow, so I sent you a note. Try that sherry; it is better than I thought. And now I must tell you, that old scoundrel, Rokestone, is going to foreclose the mortgage, and they have served one of the tenants at Darlip with an ejectment; that's more serious; I fancy he means mischief there also. What do you think?"

"I always thought he might give us annoyance there; but Mandrick's opinion was with us. Do you wish me to look after that?"

"Certainly. And he's bothering me about that trust."

"I know," said Mr. Wynne Williams, with rather gloomy rumination.

"That fellow has lost me—I was reckoning it up only a day or two ago—between five and six thousand pounds in mere law costs, beside all the direct mischief he has done me; and he has twice lost me a seat in the House—first by maintaining that petition at King's

Firkins, a thing that must have dropped but for his money; he had nothing on earth to do with it, and no motive but his personal, fiendish feelings; and next by getting up the contest against me at Shillingsworth, where, you know, it was ten to one; by Heavens! I should have had a walk over. There is not an injury that man could do me he has not done. I can prove that he swore he would strip me of everything I possessed. It is ever so many years since I saw him—you know all about it—and the miscreant pursues me still relentlessly. He swore to old Dymock, I'm told, and I believe it, that he would never rest till he had brought me to a prison. I could have him before a jury for that. There's some remedy, I suppose, there's some protection? If I had done what I wished ten years ago, I'd have had him out; it's not too late yet to try whether pistols can't settle it. I wish I had not taken advice; in a matter like that, the man who does always does wrong. I daresay, Williams, you think with me, now it's a case for cutting the Gordian knot?"

"I should not advise it, sir; he's an old man, and he's not afraid of what people say, and people know he has fought. He'd have you in the Queen's Bench, and as his feelings are of that nature, I'd not leave him the chance—I wouldn't trust him."

"It's not easy to know what one should do—a miscreant like that. I hope and pray that the curse of——"

My father spoke with a fierce tremble in his voice, and at that moment he saw me. He had forgotten that I was in the room, and said instantly:

"You may as well run away, dear; Mr. Williams and I have some business to talk over—and tiresome business it is. Good night, darling."

So away I went, glad of my escape, and left them talking. My father rang the bell soon, and called for more wine; so I suppose the council sat till late. I joined Laura Grey, to whom I related all that had passed, and my decision on the question, which was, to remain with her at Malory. She kissed me, and said, after a moment's thought:

"But will they think it unkind of you, preferring to remain here?"

"No," I said; "I think I should be rather in the way if I went; and, besides, I know papa is never high with any one, and really means what he says; and I should feel a little strange with them. They are very kind, and love me very much, I know, and so do I love them; but I see them so little, and you are such a friend, and I don't wish to leave this place; I like it better than any other in all the world; and I feel at home with you, more than I could with any one else in the world."

So that point was settled, and next day papa took leave of me very affectionately; and, notwithstanding his excited language, I heard nothing more of pistols and Mr. Rokestone. But many things were to happen before I saw papa again.

I remained, therefore, at Malory, and Laura Grey with me; and the shadow of Mr. Carmel passed the window every evening, but he did not come in to see us, as he used. He made inquiries at the door instead, and talked, sometimes for five minutes together, with Rebecca Torkill. I was a little hurt at this; I did not pretend to Laura to perceive it; but in our walks, or returning in the evening, if by chance I saw his tall, thin, but graceful figure approaching by the same path, I used to make her turn aside and avoid him by a detour. In so lonely a place as Malory the change was marked; and there was pain in that neglect. I would not let him fancy, however, that I wished, any more than he, to renew our old and near acquaintance.

So weeks passed away, and leafy May had come, and Laura Grey and I were sitting in our accustomed room, in the evening, talking in our desultory way.

"Don't you think papa very handsome?" I asked.

"Yes, he is handsome," she answered; "there is something refined as well as clever in his face; and his eyes are fine; and all that goes a great way. But many people might think him not actually handsome, though very good-looking and prepossessing."

"They must be hard to please," I said.

She smiled good-naturedly.

"Mamma fell in love with him at first sight, Rebecca Torkill says," I persisted, "and mamma was not easily pleased. There was a gentleman who was wildly in love with her; a man of very old family, Rebecca says, and good-looking, but she would not look at him when once she had seen papa."

"I think I heard of that. He is a baronet now; but he was a great deal older than Mr. Ware, I believe."

"Yes, he was; but Rebecca says he did not look ten years older than papa, and *he* was very young indeed then," I answered. "It was well for mamma she did not like him, for I once heard Rebecca say that he was a very bad man."

"Did you ever hear of mamma's aunt Lorrimer?" I resumed, after a little pause.

"Not that I recollect."

"She is very rich, Rebecca says. She has a house in London, but she is hardly ever there. She's not very old—not sixty. Rebecca is always wondering whom she will leave her money to; but that don't much matter, for I believe we have more than we want. Papa says, about ten years ago, she lived for nothing but society, and was everywhere; and now she has quite given up all that, and wanders about the Continent."

Our conversation subsided; and there was a short interval in which neither spoke.

"Why is it, Laura," said I, after this little silence, "that you never tell me anything about yourself, and I am always telling you everything I think or remember? Why are you so secret? Why don't you tell me your story?"

"My story; what does it signify? I suppose it is about an average story. Some people are educated to be governesses; and some of us take to it later, or by accident; and we are amateurs, and do our best. The Jewish custom was wise; every one should learn a mechanic's business. Saint Paul was a tent-maker. If fortune upsets the boat, it is well to have anything to lay hold of—anything rather than drowning; an hospital matron, a companion, a governess, there are not many chances, when things go wrong, between a poor woman and the workhouse."

"All this means, you will tell me nothing," I said.

"I am a governess, darling. What does it matter what I was? I am happier with you than ever I thought I could be again. If I had a story that was pleasant to hear, there is no one on earth I would tell it to so readily; but my story— There is no use in thinking over misfortune," she continued; "there is no greater waste of time than regretting, except wishing. I know, Ethel, you would not pain me. I can't talk about those things; I may another time."

"You shan't speak of them, Laura, unless you wish it. I am ashamed of having bothered you so," I kissed her. "But, will you tell me one thing, for I am really curious about it? I have been thinking about that very peculiar-looking old gentleman, who wore a chocolate-coloured great-coat, and met us in the Mill Walk, and talked to you, you remember, on the Sunday we returned from church that way. Now, I want you to tell me, is that old man's name Rokestone?"

"No, dear, it is not; I don't think he even knows him. But isn't it time for us to have our tea? Will you not make it, while I put our books up in the other room?"

So I undertook this office, and was alone.

The window was raised, the evening was warm, and the sun by this time setting. It was the pensive hour when solitude is pleasant; when grief is mellowed, and even a thoughtless mind, like mine, is tinged with melancholy. I was thinking now of our recluse neighbour. I had seen him pass, as Miss Grey and I were talking. He still despatched those little notes about the inmates of Malory; for mamma always mentioned, when she wrote to me, in her wanderings on the Continent, that she had heard from Mr. Carmel that I was well, and was out every day with my governess, and so on. I wondered why he had quite given up those little weekly visits, and whether I could have unwittingly offended him.

These speculations would recur oftener than perhaps was quite consistent with the disdain I affected on the subject. But people who live in cities have no idea how large a space in one's thoughts, in a solitude like Malory, a neighbour at all agreeable must occupy.

I was ruminating in a great arm-chair, with my hand supporting my head, and my eyes fixed on my foot, which was tapping the carpet, when I heard the cold, clear voice of Mr. Carmel at the window. I looked up, and my eyes met his.

CHAPTER V. the little black book.

ORNAMENTAL CAPITAL 'O'

ur eyes met, I said; they remained fixed for a moment, and then mine dropped. I had been, as it were, detected, while meditating upon this capricious person. I daresay I even blushed; I certainly was embarrassed. He was repeating his salutation, "How d'ye do, Miss Ware?"

"Oh, I'm very well, thanks, Mr. Carmel," I answered, looking up; "and—and I heard from mamma on Thursday. They are very well; they are at Genoa now. They think of going to Florence in about three weeks."

"I know; yes. And you have no thoughts of joining them?"

"Oh! none. I should not like to leave this. They have not said a word about it lately."

"It is such a time, Miss Ethel, since I had the pleasure of seeing you—I don't mean, of course, at a distance, but near enough to ask you how you are. I dared not ask to see you too soon, and I thought—I fancied—you wished your walks uninterrupted."

I saw that he had observed my strategy; I was not sorry.

"I have often wished to thank you, Mr. Carmel; you were so very kind."

"I had no opportunity, Miss Ethel," he answered, with more feeling than before. "My profession obliges me to be kind—but I had no opportunity—Miss Grey is quite well?"

"She is very well, thanks."

With a softened glory, in level lines, the beams of the setting sun broke, scattered, through the trunks of the old elms, and one touched the head of the pale young man, as he stood at the window, looking in; his delicate and melancholy features were in the shade, and the golden light, through his thick, brown hair, shone softly, like the glory of a saint. As, standing thus, he looked down in a momentary reverie, Laura Grey came in, and paused, in manifest surprise, on seeing Mr. Carmel at the window.

I smiled, in spite of my efforts to look grave, and the governess, advancing, asked the young ecclesiastic how he was? Thus recalled, by a new voice, he smiled and talked with us for a few minutes. I think he saw our tea-equipage, and fancied that he might be, possibly, in the way; for he was taking his leave when I said, "Mr. Carmel, you must take tea before you go."

"Tea!—I find it very hard to resist. Will you allow me to take it, like a beggar-man, at the window? I shall feel less as if I were disturbing you; for you have only to shut the window down, when I grow prosy."

So, laughing, Laura Grey gave him a cup of tea, which he placed on the window-stone, and seating himself a little sideways on the bench that stands outside the window, he leaned in, with his hat off, and sipped his tea and chatted; and sitting as Miss Grey and I did, near the window, we made a very sociable little party of three.

I had quite given up the idea of renewing our speaking acquaintance with Mr. Carmel, and here we were, talking away, on more affable terms than ever! It seemed to me like a dream.

I don't say that Mr. Carmel was chatting with the *insouciance* and gaiety of a French abbé. There was, on the contrary, something very peculiar, both in his countenance and manner, something that suggested the life and sufferings of an ascetic. Something also, not easily defined, of command; I think it was partly in the severe though gentle gravity with which he spoke anything like advice or opinion.

I felt a little awed in his presence, I could not exactly tell why; and yet I was more glad than I would have confessed that we were good friends again. He sipped his cup of tea slowly, as he talked, and was easily persuaded to take another.

"I see, Miss Ethel, you are looking at my book with curious eyes."

It was true; the book was a very thick and short volume, bound in black shagreen, with silver clasps, and lay on the window-stone, beside his cup. He took it up in slender fingers, smiling as he looked at me.

"You wish to know what it is; but you are too ceremonious to ask me. I should be curious myself, if I saw it for the first time. I have often picked out a book from a library, simply for its characteristic binding. Some books look interesting. Now what do you take this to be?"

"Haven't you books called breviaries? I think this is one," said I.

"That is your guess; it is not a bad one—but no, it is not a breviary. What do you say, Miss Grey?"

"Well, I say it is a book of the offices of the Church."

"Not a bad guess, either. But it is no such thing. I think I must tell you—it is what you would call a storybook."

"Really!" I exclaimed, and Miss Grey and I simultaneously conceived a longing to borrow it.

"The book is two hundred and seventy years old, and written in very old French. You would call them stories," he said, smiling on the back of the book; "but you must not laugh at them; for I believe them all implicitly. They are legends."

"Legends?" said I, eagerly—"I should so like to hear one. Do, pray, tell one of them."

"I'll read one, if you command me, into English. They are told here as shortly as it is possible to relate them. Here, for instance, is a legend of John of Parma. I think I can read it in about two minutes."

"I'm sorry it is so short; do, pray, begin," I said.

Accordingly, there being still light enough to read by, he translated the legend as follows:—

"John of Parma, general of the order of Friars Minors, travelling one winter's night, with some brothers of the order, the party went astray in a dense forest, where they wandered about for several hours, unable to find the right path. Wearied with their fruitless efforts, they at length knelt down, and having commended themselves to the protection of the mother of God, and of their patron, Saint Francis, began to recite the first nocturn of the Office of the Blessed Virgin. They had not been long so engaged, when they heard a bell in the distance, and rising at once, and following the direction whence the sound proceeded, soon came to an extensive abbey, at the gate of which they knocked for admittance. The doors were instantly thrown open, and within they beheld a number of monks evidently awaiting their arrival, who, the moment they appeared, led them to a fire, washed their feet, and then seated them at a table, where supper stood ready; and having attended them during their meal, they conducted them to their beds. Wearied with their toilsome journey, the other travellers slept soundly; but John, rising in the night to pray, as was his custom, heard the bell ring for matins, and quitting his cell, followed the monks of the abbey to the chapel, to join with them in reciting the divine office.

"Arrived there, one of the monks began with this verse of the Thirty-fifth Psalm, 'Ibi ceciderunt qui operantur iniquitatem;' to which the choir responded, 'Expulsi sunt nec potuerunt stare.' Startled by the strange despairing tone in which the words were intoned, as well as by the fact that this is not the manner in which matins are usually commenced, John's suspicions were aroused, and addressing the monks, he commanded them, in the name of the Saviour, to tell him who and what they were. Thus adjured, he who appeared an abbot replied, that they were all angels of darkness, who, at the prayer of the Blessed Virgin, and of Saint Francis, had been sent to serve him and his brethren in their need. As he spoke, all disappeared; and the next moment John found himself and his companions in a grotto, where they remained, absorbed in prayer and singing the praises of God, until the return of day enabled them to resume their journey."

"How picturesque that is!" I said, as he closed the little book.

He smiled, and answered:

"So it is. Dryden would have transmuted such a legend into noble verse; painters might find great pictures in it—but, to the faithful, it is more. To me, these legends are sweet and holy readings, telling how the goodness, vigilance, and wisdom of God work by miracles for his children, and how these celestial manifestations have never ceased throughout the history of his Church on earth. To you they are, as I said, but stories; as such you may wish to look into them. I believe, Miss Grey, you may read them without danger." He smiled gently, as he looked at the governess.