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## Second Thoughts Best.

By Miss Sedgwick.

“Grace, being the soul of your complexion, shall keep the body of it ever fair.” *–Measure for Measure*

It is a common saying, that no individual profits by another’s experience,—there are few, we believe, that profit by their own; few to whom may not be justly applied that striking saying of Coleridge that “experience is like the stern lights of a ship, which only illuminate the way that is passed.” But, of all the scholars I have ever known in this ever-open school of experience, my friend, Mrs. Dunbar, is the most unteachable. With a fair portion of intellect, with a quick observation, and fifty years’ acquaintance with the world, she is as trustful, as credulous, and as hopeful, as, when a child, she believed the rainbow was a rope, of *substantial*, woven light, with a golden cup at the end of it; that there was a real man standing in the moon, and that the sky would, one of these bright days, fall,

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and we should catch larks. Being of a benevolent and equable temperament, her credulity has the most happy manifestations. Her faith in her fellow-creatures is implicit, and her confidence in the happiness of the future unwavering; so that, however dark and heavy the clouds may be at any given moment, she believes they are on the point of breaking away.

I have known but a single exception to the general and pleasant current of my friend’s life. One anxiety and disappointment crossed her, which even her blessed alchymy could not gild or transmute. Her husband lost all his fortune; this was not *the* cross. Mrs. Dunbar said, she saw no reason why they should not take their turn on Fortune’s wheel; she did not doubt they should come up again, and, if they did not, why, her own private fortune was enough to secure them from dependence and want. Her husband had none of her philosophy, or, rather, happy temperament;—philosophy gets too much credit. He had an ambitious spirit, and his ambition had taken a direction very common in our cities; an aspiration after commercial reputation, and the wealth and magnificence that follow it. Mr. Dunbar had mounted to the very top rung of the ladder, when, alas, it fell! and his possessions and hopes were

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prostrated. A fever seized him in the severest hour of disappointment, and the moral and physical pressure killed him. But this was not *the* cross. Mrs. Dunbar loved and honored her husband, without having any particular sympathy with him. He imparted none of his projects to her, and neither interfered with nor participated her quiet, every-day pursuits and pleasures; so that no

harmonious partnership could be dissolved with less shock to the survivor. Mrs. Dunbar, beside the common-place solaces, on such occasions, such as, “We must all die,” “Heaven’s time is the best time,” had a particular and reasonable consolation in being relieved from the sight of unhappiness that she could not remove or mitigate. This was not selfishness, but the necessity of her nature, which resembled those plants that cannot live unless they have sunshine, and plenty of it.

Mrs. Dunbar had one son, Fletcher, a youth of rare promise, who was just seventeen at his father’s death. He most happily combined the character of his parents,—the aspiring and firm qualities of his father, and the bright spirit of his mother. His education had been most judiciously directed by his father; and his mother, without any system or plan whatever, had, by the sponta-

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neous action of her own character, most happily moulded his affections. At seventeen, Fletcher Dunbar seemed to me the perfection of a youth; with a boyish freshness and playfulness, and a manly grace, generosity, and courtesy. Much more attention than is usual in our country had been given to the adornments of education; but his father, who had all respect to the solid and practical, had taken care that the weightier matters were not sacrificed; and he had a prompt reward. So capable and worthy of trust was Fletcher at his father’s death, that the mercantile house in which he was clerk offered him, on advantageous terms, an agency for six years, in France and England. Mrs. Dunbar consented to his departure. But this parting of the widow from her only son, her only child, and such a child, was not *the* cross. “There was nothing like throwing a young man, who had his fortune to carve, on his own responsibilities,” she justly said. “Fletcher would get good, and not evil, wherever he went. She should hear from him by every packet, and six years would soon fly away.” And they did, and this brings me to the story of that drop, that diffused its bitterness through the cup of my friend till now had preserved sweet and sparkling.

The six years were gone; six years they had

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been to Fletcher, of health, prosperity, and virtue. I need say nothing more for a young man, who had been exposed to the temptations of London and Paris. The happy day and evening of his arrival had passed away. Uncles, aunts, and friends had thronged to welcome him, and gone to their homes, and Mrs. Dunbar was left alone with Fletcher and Ellen Fitzhugh.

I have said, that Mrs. Dunbar had but one child; but, if it be possible for the bonds of adoption to be as strong as those of nature, Mrs. Dunbar loved Ellen as well as if she had been born to her. This instance was enough to prove, that there may be the happiness of a maternal affection without the instincts of nature, or the feeling of property in the object, which more selfish natures than my friend’s require. Ellen was the child of a very dear friend of Mrs. Dunbar, who, from a goodly portion of nine daughters, surrendered this, the fairest and best, to what she then deemed a happier destiny than she could in any other way secure for her.

I do not believe Mrs. Dunbar could have told which she loved the best, Ellen Fitzhugh or her son; in truth, they were so blended in her mind that they made but one idea. When she saw Ellen, Fletcher was in her imagination; when she

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thought of Fletcher, Ellen was the present visible type through which her thoughts and affections went out to him.

Now he had returned; they were under the same roof;—Fletcher was three and twenty, with a handsome fortune to begin the world with; and Ellen was just eighteen, with

> "a countenance, in which did meet
> Sweet records, promises as sweet;
> A creature not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food;
> For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
> Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles."

Never was there a fitter original for this beautiful description of the poet, than Ellen Fitzhugh; and could there be any thing more natural that Mrs. Dunbar's firm belief, that Fletcher would set right about weaving into an imperishable fabric of golden threads she had been spinning for him?

The first evening had passed away; the old family domestics had received from Fletcher's hand some gift "far fetched," and enriched with the odor of kind remembrance; and Mrs. Dunbar and the young couple lingered over the decaying embers, to talk over the thousand particulars that are omitted in the most minute correspond-

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ence. "Pray tell me, Fletcher," asked Mrs. Dunbar, "who was that Bessie Elmore you spoke of so frequently in your last letters?"

"Bessie Elmore! Heaven bless her! She was the daughter of a lady who was excessively kind to me the last time I was in London. She bore a striking resemblance to Ellen, so I called her *cousin*,—a pretty title to shelter a flirtation;—I should inevitably have lost my heart, but for the presumption of asking her to give up her country."

"Was she very like Ellen?"

"Excessively; her laugh, too, always recalled Ellen's. She was a charming little creature!"

Ellen blushed slightly, and Mrs. Dunbar's happy countenance smiled all over as she said, "Ellen is very English in her looks."

"Yes, aunt, a 'rosy, sturdy little person,' as English Smith used to call me."

"Not too sturdy, Ellen," said Fletcher, "and not too little,—just as high as our hearts, mother, is she not?"

"She has always just filled mine," replied the delighted mother, who had already jumped to the conclusion that the affair was as good as settled, and the wedding, and the happy years to follow, floated in rich visions before her. She ventured on one question she was anxious to have

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settled. "You have no occasion to go abroad again, Fletcher?"

"None. A happy home, in my own country, has long been my 'castle in the air,' and now, thank Heaven, I can give it a terrestrial foundation."

"Ellen is not the person to relish this 'taking for granted,'" thought Mrs. Dunbar; Fletcher should be more reserved.

Fletcher soon turned the current of her apprehensions. "Pray," he asked, "what is the reason, Ellen, that you and my mother have so seldom mentioned Matilda Preston in your letters of late?"

"We have seen much less of her than usual the winter past. Matilda cannot

'To a party give up what was meant for mankind.'

I suppose you know she has been a 'bright and particular star' this winter,—a belle?"

"Has she? I am sorry for it!"

"So is not Matilda. She enjoys her undisputed reign. She has, to those she chooses to please, captivating manners, and you know she is talented. The beaux, of a score of years standing, declare there has been nothing like her in their time. She is beset with admirers and lover. She says she is obliged, when she goes

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to a ball, to keep an ivory tablet under her belt, with a list of her partners. Some wag pasted up on Carroll Place, where the Prestons live, '*Apollo's Court*,' on account of the perpetual serenades there. Poor Rupert Selden told me, he has thrown away half a year's commissions on bouquets and serenades to her, which, in his own romantic phrase, had 'ended in smoke.' She is said to be engaged."

“Engaged!” Fletcher bit his nails for two or three minutes in deep abstraction, and then added, “To whom is she engaged?”

“Pray don’t look so distressed, cousin; I only reported it as an *on dit*,—I forgot your flame for Matilda.”

“Pshaw, Ellen! but who is the person?”

“The preeminent person at the present moment is Ned Garston.”

“Ned Garston! a monkey, --impossible!”

“Oh, he is much improved by foreign travel, and, if still a monkey, a romantic monkey, a monkey *en beau*. He has put himself into the hands of some Parisian master of the science of transforming the deformed, and has come forth the *tableau vivant*, copied after a famous picture of some Troubadour in the Louvre.”

“What do you mean, Ellen?”

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“I mean, that Ned Garston’s very pretty, black hair hangs in hyacinthine curls over the collar of his coat,—that he wears tresses, like a girl’s, on each side of his face, and mustachios and whiskers that would befit a grand Sultan. The girls call him ‘the Sublime Porte.’”

“And is it possible that Matilda Preston, that gifted, beautiful creature, is going to throw herself away upon this Jackanapes?”

“How wildly you talk, Fletcher!” interposed his mother, “you have not seen Matilda Preston since she was a mere child.”

“But a rare child, my dear mother; Matilda Preston, at thirteen, was a fit model for sculpture and painting. She moved like a goddess, and her faculties were worthy such a form. Lord bless me, what a sacrifice!—is it a sacrifice to Mammon, Ellen?”

“Do not insist that the sacrifice is certain,”—

“I have no doubt it is his fortune,” said Mrs. Dunbar, for the first time, I believe, in her life, turning a scale against an absent person that might have been struck in her favor, “that is to say, fortune and style. Garston has the most showy equipage in the city, and his family, you know, are all in the first fashion.”

“The fashion would have more influence with

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Matilda than fortune, I suspect. You know, aunt, she refused Stanhope Gilmore, who is very rich, and very clever into the bargain."

"But you remember, Ellen, she told us her father would never have consented to her marrying a *loco-foco*."

"Loco-foco! what the mischief is that, mother?"

"Why——the lowest of people—an agrarian, you know—a Tory."

"What does my mother mean, Ellen? I never heard such a confusing combination of terms."

"You surely know what we mean by Whigs and Tories?"

"Not I."

"Do you never read our newspapers?"

"Very seldom,—never the party papers. An American abroad is ashamed of the petty wrangling, virulence, and vulgarity of our political papers. We care only for the honor and prosperity of the country at large. We love our countrymen, by whatever name they are called, and it makes us heart-sick to take up one of our popular journals and see it proclaimed, that 'a crisis is at hand!'—that 'the country is on the brink of ruin!'—that 'the constitution is in jeopardy!' and can only be saved by a doubtful ma-



jority, rallying with all their strength against a corrupt *faction*, about to prostrate the liberties of the country! The only way to keep your temper is never to look into a newspaper. But, pray, can you tell me what are these loco-foco Tories?"

Poor Mrs. Dunbar never disturbed the serene heaven of her mind with politics. She received a very vague impression from the persons she associated with, and in accordance with this impression, she now replied, "I don't know precisely,—I remember my father talking about the Tories in Revolutionary days being the enemies of their country, and I suppose it is just the same now."

Mrs. Dunbar answered in good faith. The changes of the last sixty years, the new formations, and the remodellings; the old parties with new names, and the new parties with old names, still existed in her mind as the ideas had originally entered it, as banded Whigs and Tories. Fletcher laughed at her reply and said, "I see, my dear mother, you are just where I left you. The loco-focos, I take it for granted, Ellen, are the administration party."

"Yes."

"And Stanhope Gilmore, sprung from the most aristocratic family in the State, is a loco-foco?

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and Matilda Preston's father, of a purely democratic origin belongs to the aristocratic party?"

"Just so."

"Well, thank Heaven, our party associations may make a great uproar, but they can never have the element of danger while they are so unstable and accidental!"

A ring at the door, and the entrance of a note "To Miss Fitzhugh," cut the thread of Fletcher's generalizations. He cast his eye on the note, and exclaimed, "That I am sure is from Matilda Preston, though I have not seen her writing for six years. If there is nothing private in it will you allow me to look at it, Ellen?"

"Certainly, there is nothing private, only such a strange proposition!"

"Read it aloud, please, Fletcher," said Mrs. Dunbar; and Fletcher read as follows:

"Dearest Ellen,

"You are engaged to go to Mrs. Reeves's costume-ball to morrow evening. Some tiresome people have been persuading me to appear as Rebecca. Now I am well aware, that, in the article of beauty, I am not fitted to impersonate the lovely Jewess, but I am half inclined to try it, because I can so well arrange a dress for the

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character. Mamma has a remnant of a last century's dress, a bright yellow India silk, embroidered with silver, that, with my ostrich feather and *agrafe*, will do admirably for the turban. I do not quite comprehend Rebecca's s*imarre*, but I think the bodice of my brocade will do as substitute.

"My note was interrupted by a visit from Madame Salasuar. She offers me her diamonds,—*à bas* pride, I'll wear them. They are essential to give the Eastern character of magnificence. Then, you know my 'sable tresses,' my 'aquiline nose,' my 'dark complexion,' and my 'Oriental eyes,' as De Ville will call them, will all work in as accessories, to give a *vraisemblance* to the *tableau vivant*.

"Now, my sweetest Ellen, I cannot appear as the Jewess, unless you accompany me as the Lady Rowena. Pray,—pray do not refuse me, why should you?

"Perhaps you think '*l'obscurité convient aux femmes'*; — my dear, it will come soon enough when there are kitchens and nurseries for us to supervise,—let us buzz a little while in the sunshine first.

"Do you know a possible Ivanhoe among the invited? I do not. My acquaintances are all

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party-going, unknightly gentry enough. Garston proposes to appear as Brian de Bois-Guilbert!!! The perverse winds and waves! if they had but sent us Fletcher Dunbar!" (Here the reader blushed, smiled, and hesitated. "Read on, my son," said his mother impatiently, and on he stammered.) "A Palmer's dress, in which you know Ivanhoe first appears, would have been just the thing for Fletcher's advent from foreign land, though the uprooted oak, the device of his shield at the tourney, and the motto, *Desdichado*, (Disinherited,)" would have ill fitted dear Mrs. Dunbar's heir-apparent. It is so intolerably provoking that he has not arrived, when he is probably within two days' sail of us. He is so clever and with such a born-hero look! Perhaps, after all, he might be cross and refuse; so let us be philosophers, and do as well as we can without him. You, dearest Ellen, will not refuse me? You will be the 'Queen of Love and Beauty'; I only the poor Jewess, who, you remember, the Prior of Jorvaulx swore was far inferior to the lovely Saxon Rowena."

"Is Matilda Preston out of her head?" exclaimed Mrs. Dunbar. "A fitting character for you, truly, Ellen, that pompous, cold, disagreea-

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ble, insipid Rowena. Don't think of it, my dear child."

"I shall not think of it for other reasons, aunt. I cannot conceive of any thing more absurd than for me to personate a beauty,—a *tall* beauty, too! born 'to the exercise of habitual superiority, and the reception of general homage.'"

"I see no objection in that, my dear child. There are not half a dozen readers of Ivanhoe, who remember whether Rowena was tall or short; and as to beauty, that is, as to what is really engaging and captivating, I am sure"——

"Pray, dear aunt,"——

"The servant is waiting for an answer," said Mrs. Dunbar's maid.

"He shall have it instantly," replied Ellen, taking up her pen.

"Stop one moment, my dear cousin," said Fletcher, laying his hand on hers; "if it is not too disagreeable to you, say Yes. I should particularly like surprising Matilda, and joining you at this ball in the way she proposes. I do not see, that, in merely dressing in costume for Rowena,

and calling yourself that name, you arrogate yourself beauty, and queenship, and all that. Where you make one of a group, the resemblance is a matter of inferior consequence.

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Matilda's Jewess will be so striking, that she will shelter all our imperfections."

Ellen still hesitated, and looked perplexed, and Fletcher added, "I see it annoys you, — it is a sacrifice of your prepossessions, — write the note as you at first intended."

The word sacrifice seemed to Ellen to set her reluctance in a ridiculous light, and she felt ashamed of having hesitated, at this moment of Fletcher's return, to acceded to a request that involved pleasure to him. "I will write it as *I should* have intended, if I had not been more thoughtful of myself then of others' pleasure. You must make up your mind, aunt, to my doing the Lady Rowena too much honor! Shall I tell Matilda I can find an Ivanhoe, and that we will meet her at Mrs. Reeve's at ten?

"Thank you, Ellen, — yes, — but pray don't give a hint of my arrival; let us see, what was the Palmer's dress, — do you remember, mother?"

Mrs. Dunbar did not; but, believing and hoping in her heart it would be something so unsuitable as to induce Fletcher to abandon the project, she eagerly sought the first volume of Ivanhoe on the book-shelf, and gave it to him. Fletcher opened at the entrance of the Palmer into Roth-

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erwood. " 'A mantle of coarse, black serge,'" he read aloud, "admirable! that is easily got up, and can be easily thrown aside. 'Coarse sandals bound with thongs on his bare feet.' By your leave, Sir Palmer, I shall not meddle with those. 'A broad and shadowy hat, with cockle-shells stitched on its brim.' Excellent! 'A long staff shod with iron, to the upper end of which was attached a branch of palm.' As we are not to tramp to Holy Land, we will omit the shoeing. The branch of palm is the grand point. That can be got from my old friend Thorburn."

"And what is Ellen's dress to be?" asked Mrs. Dunbar, — "I hope that will not be forgotten."

"My dear mother, forgive me, —Ellen was busy with her note, —finished and sent is it! – you always execute while others are planning, Ellen. Ah, here is the description; 'Hair betwixt brown and flaxen,' — yours has a touch of the auburn, — the Saxon red."

"Red!" interposed Mrs. Dunbar, "Ellen's hair red! It has a true golden tinge."

"*Red* gold, mother."

“At any rate, Fletcher, it is not red, flaxen, or brown; I might have remembered Rowena’s hair was flaxen, — everything about her was unmeaning.”

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“ ‘Her hair,’ ” proceeded Fletcher, “ ‘was braided with gems.’ ”

“Le Fleur will manage all that,” said Mrs. Dunbar, “with my set of pearl.” She began to feel a little womanly interest in the getting up of the dress.

“‘A golden chain,’ ” proceeded Fletcher, “‘to which was attached a small reliquary of the same metal hung round her neck.’ That, my dear cousin, you must allow me to manage, that is, if a cross will do in place of a reliquary, and, as they are both symbols of the same religion, I do not see why it will not.” He unlocked a very beautiful dressing-case, which he now told Ellen he had brought for her, and took from it a rich gold chain, with an exquisitely wrought cross attached to it. “I brought this prophetically,” he said, clasping it round Ellen’s neck.

“Would the chain, and not the *cross*, had been prophetic!” thought Mrs. Dunbar, and she heaved a deep sigh.

“The memory of affection is always prophetic, Fletcher,” said Ellen; “it links the memory of past to future kindness.”

“What, my dear?” asked Mrs. Dunbar; “I don’t clearly understand you.”

The chain and the cross were too suggestive

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to Ellen’s mind to admit of any very clear explanation. Fletcher’s quick eye perceived her embarrassment, and imputing it to the awkwardness that very commonly attends receiving a gift, he went on with the book. “ ‘Her dress was an under gown and kirtle of pale green silk.’ ”

“Your new gown is the very thing, Ellen,” interrupted Mrs. Dunbar; “how fortunate! *green,* your own color.”

“Ellen’s color the emblem of desertion! mother?”

“No, no indeed, Fletcher; no one who has ever loved Ellen could forsake her.”

Fletcher, all unconscious of the feeling that was bubbling up from his mother’s heart, coolly proceeded in his trying process. “Here is a stumbling-block! ‘The Lady Rowena wore a long, loose crimson robe, manufactured of the finest wool, which reached to the ground.’ ”

“A stumbling-block? By no means, Fletcher; Amande can convert my India shawl into such a robe without the least injury to it, and I’ll answer for it the Lady Rowena’s mantle was dowlas to that. Is there any thing else?”

“ ‘A veil of silk interwoven with gold.’ ”

“My Brussels lace will be just the thing; it is magnificent, and will shelter without concealing.”

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At another time Ellen’s right joyous spirit would have found merriment enough in the project of arraying her little, unobtrusive person in a crimson robe, flowing to the ground, and at the simplicity of good Mrs. Dunbar, in supposing she could carry off any thing “magnificent.” She had another kind of veil to wear, for the first time in her life, to conceal her feelings, and to assume cheerfulness she did not feel.

Mrs. Dunbar retired for the night. Ellen, after despatching some trifling home affairs, was following her, when Fletcher, who had been leaning abstractedly on his elbow, said, “Ellen, do not go; I have something to say to you.” Ellen turned with a beating and foreboding heart. “Tell me, Ellen, honestly, is it your belief that Matilda Preston is engaged to Garston?”

“I do not believe she is.”

“Why are you in such haste? Sit down, — there, thank you; but do not look as if I had murder to confess, — I have only to tell you the weakness and the strength of my heart. You know, my dear Ellen, — cousin, — sister, I should rather call you, for, without any tie of blood, no sister was ever dearer, there is no one but you to whom I can communicate my feelings, projects, and hopes, —from whom I can take coun-

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sel. To begin, then when I left America you and Matilda Preston were very intimate. I do not find you so much so now; what is the cause of this alienation?”

“There is no alienation, Fletcher; we are intimate still.”

“Affectionately intimate?”

“Matilda is very kind, — very affectionate to me.”

“And you not so to her? I am sure you never repelled affection with coldness. There must be some reason for this. My mother, too, seems to have a prejudice against Matilda; pray be frank with me, Ellen.”

Frankness was Ellen's nature. She was one of the few beings in this world, who are thoroughly and habitually, by nature and by grace, true. For the first time a cloud had passed over her clear spirit. She began to speak, faltered, began again, and finally said; "It may be more mine than Matilda's fault, that we are less intimate than formerly. Our circumstances, our tastes are different. I think Matilda is much what she was when you left us, — that is, — that is, allowing for the difference between a school-girl and a belle, Fletcher."

"A belle! — how I hate the term. But how

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could it be otherwise in a city atmosphere, with Matilda's beauty, talents, and accomplishments? I see she is not quite to your taste, Ellen; I am sorry for it, but this is better than I feared. Now for my confession is brief. When I left you, I was a reserved boy. Neither you, nor my mother, probably, ever suspected my predilection, but for two years I had been desperately in love with Matilda Preston. I believed she loved me. We exchanged many a love-token, many a promise. It is true she was a mere child, I a mere boy; but there are such childish loves on record, Ellen. The germ of the fruit is in the unfolding bud. It may, after all, have been, on her part, a littler innocent foolery, forgotten long ago; but, if so, I was coxcomb enough to take it all in dead earnest. Through my six years of absence I have cherished, lived upon, these remembrances. All my projects, all my successes have blended with the thought of Matilda; and, blessed by Heaven in my enterprises, I have now come home determined to throw myself at her feet, if I find her what memory and a lover's faith have painted her." Fletcher fixed his eye on Ellen. Hers fell. "Will you not, — *can* you not, Ellen, give me a 'God speed'?"

The flush on Ellen's cheek faded to a deadly

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paleness. After a moment's hesitation, she summoned her resolution; and, raising her eye to meet Fletcher's, replied, with a tolerably steady voice, "do not ask a 'God speed' of me now Fletcher; — wait till you have seen Matilda, and studied her character, as you to study that on which the happiness of your life is to depend; and then, if your ripened judgment confirms your youthful preference, you shall have my" — "God speed," she would have said but her honest tongue refused to utter the word to which her heart did not answer, and adding, "my earnest wishes, — my prayers," she burst into irrepressible tears, and, horror-struck at what she feared was a betrayal of her true feelings she fled, without even a "good night," to her own apartment.

The truth did once flash across Fletcher's mind. "It is a phenomenon to see Ellen in tears, save at some touching tale or known grief," he thought; "Ellen, with her ever bright buoyant spirit, — her 'obedient passions, will resigned.' Has my dear, imprudent mother, with her equal fondness for us both, been kindling a spark of tenderness in Ellen's heart?" The thought was no sooner conceived than rejected. There was no latent vanity in Fletcher's mind to please itself with cherishing it. It was happily improbable,

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and it soon gave place to thick-coming and most pleasant fancies. But one cloud hovered over them, — Mrs. Dunbar's and Ellen's all too evident distrust of Matilda. "I will 'study her character,' and abide by the decision of my 'ripened judgment,' " resolved Fletcher. Alas for the judgment of a young man of three and twenty as to talented beauty of nineteen with the desperate make-weight against it of a long-cherished love!

When love takes possession of a mind perfectly sane in other respects, it acts like a monomania. This one idea has on independent existences, a complete ascendency, and absolute rule. The faculties of perception, comparison, judgment, have no power to modify, — the will no control over it. An angel, surely, should keep

> "Strict change and watch, that —
> No evil thing approach or enter in"

the paradise of the affections.

The trials of the evening were not over for Ellen. It was her invariable custom to undress in Mrs. Dunbar's apartment, and to have a little gossip over the interests of the closing day, and the anticipations of the leaf of life next to be turned, before they parted for the night. This is the

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hour, that, of all others, unlocks the treasures of the heart. Memory pours out her hoarded stores and young hope shows, by her magic lantern, her visions of the future.

Ellen had often sat with her loving friend over the dying embers, reading and re-reading the passages in Fletcher's letters, where he dwelt on the fond remembrance of home. Every mention of Ellen, and the letters abounded with them, his mother repeated and repeated, and always with an emphasis and smile, that sometimes made Ellen's blood tingle to her fingers' ends. And yet, simple as a child, the good woman never dreamed that she was communicating her faith and hopes, and awakening feelings never to sleep again. This she knew, as a matter of principle and discretion, would not be right; and, while she never said to Ellen, in so many words, "My heart is set on your marrying Fletcher, and I am sure his is, even more than mine," she did not suspect she was conveying this meaning in every look, word, and motion. And even now, when the pillars of her "castle in the air," were tumbling about her head, she had no apprehension that Ellen would be crushed by them. They were to meet now for the first time, with the most painful feeling to loving and trusting friends, that

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their hearts must be hidden with impenetrable screens; but, such was the transparency of dear Mrs. Dunbar's heart, that, put what she would before it, the disguise melted away is the clear light, — to tell the truth, Ellen's was little better; her safety was in the dim sight of the eye to be eluded.

She washed away her tears, called up all the resolution she could master, and repaired to Mrs. Dunbar's apartment, whom she hoped she might find by this time in bed, and get off with her "good-night kiss"; but, instead of this, she was pacing up and down the room, not a pin removed.

"Dear aunt, not in bed yet?"

"No, my dear child, — I did not feel like sleeping the first night, you know, of Fletcher's being here; — it's natural to have a good many wakeful thoughts of past times, and so forth." While saying this she had turned her back, and was busying herself at the bureau, the tone of her voice, and the frequent use of her handkerchief, conveying the state of her feelings as precisely to Ellen, as her streaming eyes would, had she shown them.

"Now you are at the bureau, aunt, please to take out your crimson shawl," said Ellen, luckily hitting on an external object to engage their

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attention. Mrs. Dunbar fumbled at the drawers long enough to give herself time to clear her voice and dry her eyes, and then, throwing the shawl in to Ellen's lap, she said, "You are welcome to that, and every thing else I have in the world, God knows, my dear child; but I don't wish you to go to Mrs. Reave's to-morrow evening, — I don't think you will enjoy yourself."

"It's no very rare thing, at a party, not to enjoy one's self, aunt. I shall certainly have the pleasure of obliging Fletcher."

"That's true, Ellen; — but then it was not like him to ask you, when he saw it was so disagreeable to you. I don't see why he should set his heart upon this foolish Ivanhoeing."

"But you see *why he does*, aunt." Ellen spoke with a smile, melancholy, in spite of her efforts.

"Yes, I do, I do!" cried Mrs. Dunbar, her tears gushing forth afresh; "I see that Fletcher has the most unexpected, incomprehensible, unreasonable, unfortunate, strange, dreadful, wonderful, and amazing interest in Matilda Preston. I had never so much as thought of it, — it's insanity, Ellen, — he is as blind as a beetle."

"It is a blindness, aunt, that is not likely to be cured by the presence of Matilda Preston."

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"That's just what I feel, Ellen. Men are always carried away with beauty. I thought Fletcher was an exception; but he is not, or he would tell the gold from the glittering."

“But, aunt, you do Matilda and Fletcher injustice. She has fine qualities; and, if what you now expect should happen, you will look on Matilda with very different eyes.”

“Never, Ellen, never in the world, —she will always seem to stand between men and —I mean, — I mean, — I can’t tell you, Ellen, what I mean. But this I will say, come what will, no one can ever take your place to me, —you are the child of my heart, — you have grown up at my side — I can never love another daughter; — whomever you marry, Ellen, wherever you go, your home shall be my home.”

“No, no, aunt,” said Ellen, hiding her tearful face on the bosom of her faithful friend, “I shall never marry, — *never*.” And before Mrs. Dunbar could reply, she gave her good-night kiss and left the room.

“Is it possible she could have understood me?” exclaimed Mrs. Dunbar. After a little reflection she quieted her apprehensions with the thought that she had a hundred times before spoken just as plainly, and Ellen had not suspected what she meant. She was like the child, who, shutting his own eyes, fancies no one can see him.

When Ellen left Mrs. Dunbar’s room, she went mechanically down stairs to perform her last household duty, which was to see that the doors were secured. On the floor, at the street-door, she perceived a note; and, on taking it up, saw it was addressed to a Miss Little, Miss Preston’s dress-maker, who lived opposite the Dunbars’ dress-maker, who lived opposite the Dunbars’. It had been accidentally dropped by Miss Preston’s careless servant. It was unsealed, and Ellen, taking it for granted it related to something about the costume for the Reeves party, and that it might be important to have no delay in getting it into the hands of the *artiste,* rang the bell for the servant, intending to send it, though the hour was unseasonable. Diana, Mrs. Dunbar’s crippled old cook, called out from the kitchen stairs to Miss Ellen, that “Daniel had just gone up to bed.” Daniel, like his pagan mate, Diana, had lived out, and overstayed his lease of threescore and ten with kind Mrs. Dunbar; and Ellen, hesitating to call him down, ventured to open the note, to see if it were a matter of any importance. It contained only the following three lines:

“Pray, Miss Littell, if you have any dealings



with Mrs. D.’s family, do not mention that you informed me of the arrival of her son.

“M. P —.”

“I thought so!” exclaimed Ellen, involuntarily. “What is it, Ellen? What did you think?” asked Fletcher, who, unheard by her, had just come into the open door for something he had left behind.

“Oh, nothing, — nothing at all,” said she. He playfully attempted to wrest the note from her hand, till, seeing she anxiously retained it, he desisted, and she returned to her own apartment, where she breathed freely for the first time for many hours, and where she spent a

long, sleepless night in expelling from her mind her shattered hopes, and forming her plans for the future.

"Ought I not," she said, in her self-examination, "to have obeyed the first impulse of my heart, and when Fletcher appealed to me, to have told him frankly my opinion of Matilda." After much meditation the response of her conscience was a full acquittal. She had done all that the circumstances of the case and her relations to the parties allowed, in withholding her 'God speed' till Fletcher's ripened judgment should authorize his decision. She reflected, that Matilda's char-

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acter had seemed to her to have the same radical faults six years before, that it had now, and that, in spite of them, Fletcher loved her then. Perhaps she judged those faults too strictly. Perhaps her judgment was tinged by her self-love; for she was conscious, that, in the points so offensive to her, she was constitutionally the opposite of Matilda Preston. She looked again at Matilda's discrepant notes of that evening, and charitably allowed, that she had at first felt too much displeasure at what struck her as absolutely false, but what, after all, might be an innocent stratagem to get up a dramatic scene, and perhaps to shelter emotions at a first meeting with Fletcher. "But oh, Matilda, why *always* a stratagem? Why never let the appearance answer to the reality? Why never trust yourself to simple truth?" Because Matilda was afraid, that truth would not serve her so well as she could manage for herself. We have no doubt our friends, the Phrenologists, would, with a very fair intellectual development, have found a great predominance of the organs of self-esteem, love of approbation, and cautiousness on Matilda's head. She had an intense love of admiration, not merely of her personal charms, for her preëminent beauty was settled by universal suffrage, and she

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had no anxiety about it; but she would be thought, in all the circle of her acquaintance, to be the most capable of disinterested friendship and of self-sacrificing love; her tastes were in favor of all the virtues, — she really wished to be amiable and excellent; but the virtues have their price, and they will not abate one jot or tittle; — that price is self-abasement, self-forgetfulness, and generosity. "Hard it is to climb their steeps;" and they can only be achieved by painful and persevering efforts. At the first real trial appearances vanish like vapor, — there is no cheating in the long run in the matter of goodness.

With all Matilda's fine taste, with her susceptibility to opinion, and her eager desire of praise, she was no favorite. Her intense selfishness would penetrate all disguises, — her consciousness of herself was always apparent, — there was never a spontaneous action, word, or look. In all this she was the very opposite of Ellen, who, most strictly watchful of the inner world, let the outer take care of itself. This gave a freedom and simplicity to her manners, and a straightforwardness to all her dealings, that inspired confidence. Matilda, in the midst of her most brilliant career, had, whenever silent, an expres-

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sion of care and dissatisfaction, — a rigidity and contraction of the upper lip, (often criticized as the only imperfection of her beauty,) that betrayed the puerile anxieties in which she was involved, the web she was perpetually weaving or raveling. There is no such tell-tale as the human countenance, or rather, we should say (with more reverence) God has set his seal of truth upon it, and no artifice has ever yet obscured the Divine impression. Ellen Fitzhugh's lovely face was the mirror of truth, cheerfulness, and affection.

"There is no use," thought Ellen, as she pursued the meditations in which we left her, "in trying to conceal my feelings, — I cannot, — I never did in my life, — I must just set to work and overcome them. Dear Mrs. Dunbar, all those sweet fancies that you and I have been so busily weaving, the last six years, must be sacrificed at once and for ever; and I must just learn to think of Fletcher, as I did when a little girl,— as a dear, kind brother; — that should be, — it *shall be*, enough." This resolution was made with many showers of tears, and sanctified with many prayers, ejaculated from the depths of her heart; and, once made, she set about, with most characteristic promptness, contriving the means for carrying it into execution.

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"In the first place," thought she, "I must have something extraordinary to occupy me, or I shall be constantly, and oh how painfully, watching Fletcher's every look and action; in spite of myself, I shall be hoping and fearing. This must not be, for I know how it must all end! It occurred to her, that it was nearly as important to divert Mrs. Dunbar's attention as her own, and a lucky thought came into her head. Mrs. Dunbar's physician had been urging her, for some weeks, to have a little wen removed, that was growing in a dangerous neighbourhood to her eye. Mrs. Dunbar was timid and procrastinating; but, with Fletcher's aid, Ellen felt sure of persuading her this was the very best time for the operation. Then she determined at once to put in execution a project she had conceived, of teaching a poor, young blind girl, a pensioner of Mrs. Dunbar's, music. Ellen was an accomplished musician; and she certainly was not over sanguine in believing, that the prospect of qualifying a drooping, dependent creature to earn an independent existence, would make sunshine for some hours of every day.

With these, and other similar plans in her head, which were necessarily deferred till after the Reeves ball, Ellen appeared the next morn-

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ing with a light and strong heart, and a correspondent face, voice, and manner. Oh, if rightly put to the test, what unthought of powers there are in those who every day yield themselves the passive victims to uncontrollable circumstances;

> "powers
> That touch each other to the quick, in modes
> Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive,
> No soul to dream of."

Ellen talked over with Fletcher, with real interest and unaffected cheerfulness, the arrangements for the evening. If she had put into action all of Talleyrand's diplomacy, she could not so thoroughly have convinced him, that his surmise of the preceding evening was unwarranted. Half of Mrs. Dunbar's griefs were removed by the conviction, that her favorite did not share them!

We could fill a volume with the details of the ball, and the circumstances of the following six weeks, and all the developments of character and feeling which came from them; but we must cut down our history to the dimensions of its Procrustes' bed. We must say for our favorite Ellen, that, bating a few inches of stature, she did honor to the character she reluctantly assumed. Her usually sparkling eyes were languid from the sleeplessness of the preceding night, and

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her color, which, in heated rooms, was apt to be uncomfortably high, was abated and fluctuating, and her dress, so happily arranged and judiciously modified, that the Saxon beauty, for once, fairly divided the suffrages with the brilliant Rebecca. But with the mere externals ended all resemblance to the truth of the characters. The Palmer, the Christian devotee, had nor eye, nor ear, but for the proscribed Jewess; and Rebecca was all delight at finding, beneath the broad brim of cockle-shells, and the *Slavonian*, the contour and air of a very elegant young man, who, she felt assured, had returned no less her ardent lover than the boy she had parted with six years before. She managed her prepared surprise so awkwardly, that Ellen wondered at Fletcher's blindness. He was indeed blind! As to poor Garston, he was so enchanted with himself in the Templar's costume, that he never once dreamed how near he was to a more portentous overthrow than that of his prototype on the field of Ashby de la Zouch.

We must pass over the next six weeks with merely saying, that Ellen executed her plans, — that Mrs. Dunbar found, in the complete success of a dreaded operation, a very considerable counteraction to what she still maintained was by far

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the greatest grief of her life. But it was plain, that even in no selfish grief could her benevolent feelings be merged. She was exceedingly excited with Ellen's marvellous success with her musical pupil, and she had the most eager pleasure, every day, in the result of a subscription Ellen had set on foot for the yet unpublished book of a poor author, or, rather, a very poor man, and good author. We must confess, that Ellen had her hours of conflict, agitation, and despondency, when life was a burden; but even then, though the eclipse seemed total to her, she saw light beyond the shadow. Is there ever total darkness to the good?

Fletcher made her his confidante. This was a pretty severe trial; but she tried to feel, and did feel, in some measure, the sympathy he expected; and she was prepared by degrees for the final communication, that he and Matilda had plighted faith. In spite of her resolutions and efforts she turned excessively pale, and tried in vain to command her voice to speak; but this did not surprise Fletcher. All deep emotions are serious. He had never himself been more so than at this moment of the attainment of the dearest, the long-cherished wish of his heart. One hour before he had felt a pang that he in vain tried to

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forget, when, while their mutual vows were still warm on their lips, Matilda had left him in haste, lest she should not be the first at the opening of a newly-arrived case of French millinery! He painfully contrasted this with Ellen's emotion, — with his own; and a thought arose through the mists of his mind, repressed as soon as perceived, that there were more points of sympathy between him and Ellen Fitzhugh, than he had found with Matilda.

As to poor Mrs. Dunbar, whom Ellen trusted she had quite prepared for the crisis, she took to her bed, upon the first intimation of it, with a head-ache that lasted, unintermitted, as never had head-ache, or *heart-ache*, with her before, for three days. In vain Matilda came to ask her blessing. Mrs. Dunbar was unaffectedly too ill to receive her. "With God's help and time," said the good lady to Ellen, "I will do my duty to Fletcher's wife; but as to seeing Matilda Preston now, that's quite impossible, — and as to ever loving her as a child, as I do you, my own dear Ellen, that's not to be looked for.—' The wind bloweth where it listeth.'" Mrs. Dunbar was no philosopher; — her instincts alone had led her to the discovery of the great truth, that our volitions have no power over our affections.

Ellen, now that all was decided, kept her eye

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resolutely on the bright side. "I am very sorry, aunt," she said, "you did not feel equal to seeing Matilda this morning; I have seen her more brilliant, but never one half so interesting. Love has given an exaltation to all her feelings, — has breathed a soul into her face. There was a gentleness and a deference in her manners to Fletcher, that is quite new to her. She feels his superiority, and it may work wonders on her character."

"Do you think so, Ellen?—well,—for Fletcher's sake, — God bless him! — I'll hope for the best. I am not an observing person, Ellen; but I have often remarked, that love, like showers from Heaven, is reviving to the thinnest soil, and every thing is fresh, and sweet, and beautiful for a little while; but the flowers soon fade, — the grass withers, — nature will take a natural course."

"But, aunt," replied Ellen, with a smile, "may not grace subdue nature?"

"No, my dear, no; it may help nature on in its own way, but not change it. I am sure I have tried my best for the last six weeks to put down nature; but it is too strong for me, Ellen." Mrs. Dunbar wiped away a flood of tears, and then went on. "Ellen, I have been thinking this was a good time, while we are all

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so wretched,—I mean, while I am,—to speak to Fletcher about looking over that private desk of his father's. Will you take it to him, dear? You know I have never looked into it. Before strangers come into the family, it is best to have papers that concern no one but us, disposed of.

You need not say that to Fletcher; but I can trust you, dearest child, to say nothing to him that appears unfriendly to Matilda; — just give him the desk and key."

Ellen did so; and, at the first leisure moment, Fletcher sat down to its examination. He found nothing of particular interest till he came to a file of letters, marked, "Correspondence with Selden Fitzhugh." Before transcribing the only two letters of interest to the reader, it is necessary to premise, that the elder Dunbar and Fitzhugh had been intimate from their childhood, and that, after their marriage, the closest friendship united their families. A letter from Fletcher's father to his friend, which seemed to have been written soon after his failure, ran thus:

"Dear Fitzhugh,
"My ruin is total. The labors, the enterprises, the successes of twenty years, are wrecked, — nothing remains. I am the victim, in part, of the

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folly of others, in part, I confess it with shame, of my own grasping. I had competence, I desired riches, and thus it has ended. But the worst is to come, my dear friend. I have made shipwreck of your little fortune, as well as of my own hopes. I have been obliged to give up all my property to satisfy my indorsers, according to the received notion, that debts to them are debts of honor, and I have not wherewith to pay a penny of the thirty thousand dollars you trusted to me without bond, mortgage, or security of any sort. This is the requital of your generous, but too rash friendship!

"Fitzhugh, I am a heart-broken man. My hope and energy are gone. If it were not so, I might promise you a day of restitution, —I should expect it myself; but all before me is dark and dreary. Even now I feel as if a fever were drying up the fountains of life. Forgive me, — pity me, my dear friend; I curse my own folly. You will not curse me, but, believe me, I would coin my heart's blood to make you restitution.

"Your miserable friend,
"F. Dunbar."

The following answer to Mr. Dunbar's letter

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was dated at Mr. Fitzhugh's country residence; and written a week later than his.

"Dear Dunbar,
"I am truly sorry for your misfortunes; but, my dear fellow, take heart of grace. If you have made a total shipwreck, as you say, why so has many a good fellow before you. The storm will pass, — you can fit out again; only don't carry quite so much sail, and take out a clearance for some other port than *El Dorado*. As to my money, believe me, on my honor, after the first surprise and shock were over, the loss has not given me a moment's uneasiness. I would not have put the money at risk for myself, or you, if I had not secured

an adequate provision for my good wife, and *eight* dear little girls, and Ellen into the bargain, if ever she comes home to us. Our wants are moderate, and our supplies sufficient; and, believe me, a few thousand dollars to be added to the inheritance of each of my girls would not make one of our bright hours brighter. They will never hear of the loss, for I have taken care they should not count upon money that I had subjected to the chances of mercantile life. I have been thus particular to tranquillize you, my dear friend. If finally you

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retrieve your circumstances, you will pay the debt, and all will be well; — and, if you never pay it, — why it will be just as well.

"Ever faithfully yours,

"SELDEN FITZHUGH."

"God bless and reward you, noble, *dear* friend," was an indorsement on the back of this letter, dated two days before Mr. Dunbar's death, and written by himself, evidently with a weak and tremulous hand.

Fletcher had read and re-read the letters, and had sat for an half hour meditating on their contents, when Matilda, who had called, on an appointment with Ellen, opened the door, and, seeing him deep in occupation, was retreating, when he said, "Pray come in, Matilda, you are the person I most wished to see."

"That, I trust, is not very singular! But what is the matter, Fletcher? Are you making your will?"

"I am thinking over the disposition of my worldly effects," he replied, with a very faint smile. "Will you read these letters, Matilda?"

"Yes; but, for Heaven's sake, don't look of solemn; I should think they were from the dead to the living."

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"They are,—read them, and tell me what you think of them."

Matilda read his father's, while Fletcher perused her countenance with a far deeper interest than she evinced. "I see nothing very particular in this," she said. "Your poor father seems to have taken his failure sadly to heart. I never heard before that Mr. Fitzhugh lost by him. But the Fitzhughs are very well off for the country, and I suppose it did not matter much. Ellen was probably adopted by your mother as an offset."

"No; my mother never knew any thing of the business."

"No! Oh, I forgot,—Ellen has lived here all her life. But why are you so sad, dear Fletcher,—there is no use in fretting over past troubles?"

"You have read but one of the letters, Matilda," said Fletcher, coldly, without noticing her last reply!

"So I see; but I was thinking so much more of you than of the letters!" She read Mr. Fitzhugh's. Fletcher's eye was riveted to her face; there was no change of color, no moistening of the eye, the return messages of a kindred spirit to a generous action. "How well he took it!"

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she said in her ordinary tone of voice. "I have often hear your mother say, that Ellen was just like her father, making the best of everything,— 'from evil still educing good.'" Matilda saw that Fletcher expected something more from her; but what, exactly, she could not divine. "Mr. Fitzhugh's letter must have been a balm to your father's wounded spirit, just as that sad time," she added, and paused again. A servant entered and filled the awkward interval with some good reason why Miss Ellen would not keep her appointment.

"I am not sorry," said Matilda, when the door closed, "for now, dear Fletcher, you will go with me."

"No, Matilda, I cannot."

"But you will," she urged, laying her hand persuasively on his shoulder, and with a look that would have seemed to defy denial. "Come, come away, Fletcher, from these musty papers,—you will be devoured with blue devils; come, I must go, and I will not go without you."

"You must excuse me."

"You are unkind, Fletcher," said Matilda, and her starting tears showed that she could feel keenly. Her pride would not brook any further entreaty, and she abruptly left the room, not doubting, however, that she should be intercepted, or

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immediately followed by her penitent lover. But she reached her own home unmolested, and retired to her own apartment, hurt and offended, and resolved, when Fletcher should come to his senses, to be unrelenting. There was ring after ring at the street-door, and visiter after visiter was announced; but the only one she cared for came not, and to every one else she was denied. At last the servant brought a note from Fletcher. "There must be something more than one note," thought Matilda, as she broke it open. The current of her feelings was somewhat changed as she read what follows:

"My Dearest Matilda,

"Forgive me, I pray you. I have seemed unreasonable and sullen to you, and I have done you in my heart more wrong than I have expressed. That heart is wholly yours, and no feeling it harbors shall ever be hidden from you. The truth was, that I expected the letters would have called forth more feeling than they did. I ought to have rejected (and have since), that our feelings depend much on our humors,—that your mind was preoccupied,—and that, having no particular interest in the parties, you could not participate the strong and painful sympathy

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that then thrilled every nerve in my frame. I was wrong, and again, on my knees, I beg you to forgive me! I have bound myself to tell the whole truth; and must confess, that I expected still more,— that I expected you would anticipate the conclusions which of course were instinctive with me; but I should have remembered, my dear Matilda, that women, having no business habits or notions, the duty devolving on me at this moment would not have occurred to you. That duty plainly is, to pay my father's debt to the Fitzhughs. There is no legal obligation, but a moral obligation, and an added debt of gratitude, that no human law could make more binding, or could invalidate. If I had a family dependent on me, there might be a question; but, situated as I am, there can be none. The debt, with its accumulation of interest, will swallow up nine tenths of the property I have acquired; but, with the remnant, with rare experience *for three and twenty*, with business talents, and a fair reputation, I shall soon go forward again. That event, which is to be the crowning joy of my life, must be deferred for two years. This is no small trial of my philosophy,—of my religion (for I will use the right word); but, with this bright reward ever in view, no labors, no difficulties will daunt my

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spirit. Dearest, *dearest* Matilda, forgive me for having for a moment doubted you. It was the first time. I believe, as I believe in all truth, it will be the last."

The following brief note, in pencil, was returned by the servant:

"Come see me at nine, this evening. I shall be alone and disengaged then, and not till then. In the mean time, make no disclosures of your inventions to your mother, to Ellen, or to any one."

The interval was one of reposeful confidence to Fletcher, and of that celestial joy that springs from an ability, and an immovable resolution, to perform a right action at a great personal sacrifice. We claim for him no great merit in yielding the money. Any right-minded *young* man full of health and hope, and conscious capacity, might have done this without a pang; but Fletcher was a passionate lover, and he had to encounter the miserable uncertainties of a hope deferred.

Let us see how the interval was passed by Matilda. After much agitating self-deliberation,

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she called her mother to her counsel. Mrs. Preston was the prototype of her daughter, save that what was but in the gristle with the daughter, had hardened into bone with the mother, and save that Matilda, from having had an education very much superior to Mrs. Preston's, had certain standards and theories of virtue in her mind's eye, that had never entered the mother's field of vision. Matilda, too, from having been all her short life in fashionable society, did not estimate it as so high a rate as her mother, who has paid for every inch of ground she had gained there.

Matilda related her last interview with Fletcher, and showed his note. "Do you believe," said Mrs. Preston, after reading it, "that Fletcher Dunbar will be so absurd as to adhere to this plan?"

"I am sure he will. He is perfectly inflexible when he makes up his mind to what he thinks a duty, however ridiculous it may appear to others."

"Of course, my dear, you are absolved from your engagement."

"If I choose to be."

"If I choose! My dear Matilda, you know how much it was against my wishes that you should form this engagement,—that you should

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give up the most brilliant match in the city for what, at the very best, would be merely a genteel establishment. But the idea of your going into the shade at once, giving up everything, and living, perhaps, at lodgings, or setting up your housekeeping with two servants that you must look after all day, and spend your evenings making your husband's shirts, by a single astral lamp, ride in an omnibus (you might ride in that splendid carriage), and treat yourself, perhaps, to one silk gown a year,—and all for what? To humor the notions of a young man, who is in no respect superior to Garston, except that he is rather taller, and has a straighter nose, and darker, larger eyes, not much larger either!"

Mrs. Preston had struck a wrong note. Matilda shrunk back from the path her other was opening, as the images of her two lovers passed before her.

"Oh, mamma," she exclaimed, "there is a horrid difference between them; and if I only could persuade Fletcher to abandon this notion"—

"Well, my dear, in my opinion, if he loves you, he will;— if he does not, why then you lose nothing and gain everything. Luckily your engagement is a secret, as yet, and you have

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taken no irretrievable step. Garston was here this morning,—a look could bring him back to you."

"But, mamma, to give up what I have been so long dreaming of?" "Yes, and whatever young girl dreams of, and wakes up betimes to pretty dull realities. How should you like, for instance, to wash the breakfast things, and stir up a pudding,—to wash and dress your children, and make a bowl of gruel for your dear mamma-in-law?"

"Oh detestable!" Matilda pondered for a few moments, and then said, "I really think, if Fletcher loves me, he will sacrifice his feelings to me. I am sure he owes it to me, after the sacrifice I made to him;—I have certainly proved myself disinterested, but I do not like to be treated as if I could be set aside, and wait for the working of any fancy that comes up. I will tell him so,—I am resolved. He must take the responsibility of deciding it."

The evening came, and, when the clock struck nine, Fletcher entered Miss Preston's drawing room, his fine countenance beaming with the serenity and trustfulness of his heart; but Matilda's first look sent a thrill through it, that was like the snapping of the chords of a musical instrument at the moment it is felt to be in perfect

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tune. She advanced towards him, and gave him her hand as usual, and she smiled; but it was a mere muscular movement, the expression was anything but a smile. Her beautiful face had all the rigidity that a fixed and painful purpose could give to it; but it was a purpose that depended on a contingent, and to that contingent the smile and the responding pressure of her hand were addressed.

Her eyes were red and swollen, and, for the first time, her dress was not elaborately arranged.

She spoke first, "You do not love me, Fletcher!"

"Not love you, Matilda! God only knows how tenderly I love you."

"No, Fletcher, you do *not* love me,—the truth has broken upon me with irresistible proof."

"What do you mean, Matilda? What have you heard? Surely it is not—it cannot be"—

"*It is*, Fletcher. Your note has nullified our engagement. I have judged you by my own heart. I have questioned, examined that, and I am sure that no fancied duty,—no *absolute* duty could have forced me,—much less persuaded me at its first intimidation, to expose the happiness that was just within our grasp to the hazards of time."

Fletcher poured out protestations and prayers,

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and concluded with assuring Matilda, that, “if she would share with him, at the present moment, his acted fortune, if she would at once risk the uncertainties that he must encounter, he should be a happier and prouder man than all the wealth in the world could make him.”

Matilda burst into tears. “It is not right,—it is not generous,” she said, “to put what you consider a test to me. It is none. You must acquit me of any groveling care for money. You have but to look six weeks backward to remember, that the first fortune in the city was waiting my acceptance, and fashion, and brilliant family connexions. I sacrificed all, without a shadow of regret, to you, and now I am thought very lightly of in comparison with a fancied duty.”

“A *fancied* duty? Good Heaven!”

“A real duty, then; but so questionable, that nine men out of ten would pronounce it no duty at all. It is *not* the money. I care as little for that as you can; but it is the terrible truth you have forced on me,—you do not love me.”

“Matilda, you wrong yourself,—you wrong me.”

“Prove it to me then, Fletcher. Let our relations be what they were yesterday,—burn those letters, and forget them.”

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“Never!” cried Fletcher, indignantly, “so help me God,—never.”

“Then the tie that bound us is sundered,—our engagement is dissolved.”

“Amen!” said Fletcher, and he rushed from the house,—his mind confused and maddened with broken hopes, disappointed affection, and dissolving delusions.

There is one painful but sure cure for love. The slow-coming, resisted, but irresistible conviction of the unworthiness of the person beloved.

* * * * *

A little more than two years had passed away, when one bright morning, at the hour of ceremonies visiting, a superb carriage, looking more like a ducal equipage than one befitting a wealthy citizen of a republic, drew up a Mrs. Dunbar’s door. The gilded harness was emblazoned with heraldic devices, and a coat of arms was embroidered in gold on the hammer-cloth, and painted on the pannels. The coachman and footman in fresh and tasteful liveries, were in the dickey, and the proprietor of the equipage (in appearance a very inferior part of it) was seated on the box with a friend. Within the

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coach was a lady, magnificently dressed in the latest fashion. She seemed

> "A perfect woman, nobly planned
> To warn, to comfort, and command;"

but she had thwarted the plan,—she had extinguished the "angel light," — she had herself closed the gates of Paradise, and voluntarily circumscribed her vision to this world. She had foregone the higher element for which she was destined; but the wings she had folded for ever betrayed by their fluttering her disquietude with the way she had chosen. The face that, turned heavenward would have reflected Heaven, was fixed earthward, and the dark spirits of Discontent and Disappointment brooded over it.

There is a baser traffic going on in this world of ours, than that which the poet has immortalized in his history of Faust, carried on under the forms of law, and with the holy seal and superscription of marriage.

The lady alighted from the coach and was on the door-step awaiting her husband. He did not move, the footman had rung the bell, and Mrs. Dunbar's servant stood awaiting the *entrée*.

"Are you not going in with me, Ned?" she asked.

"Not I,—I hate bridal visits."

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"Oh, come with me, I entreat you," she said, earnestly.

"It's a bore! I can't. Bob and I will drive round the square, and take you up as we return."

The lady looked vexed and embarrassed; but there seemed no alternative.

"Is there much company in the drawing-room, Daniel?" she asked.

"None, ma'am. Miss Ellen, that is, Mrs. Dunbar, the bride,—Miss Ellen that was,—don't see company in a regular way, as it were."

"No? I heard she did. I'll leave my card now."

While she was taking it from her card-case the door opened, and Fletcher Dunbar, with a manner the most frank and unembarrassed, advanced, and offered her his hand. "Pray, Mrs. Garston," he said, "do not turn us off with a card; we are at home, and, like all happy people, most happy to hear congratulations."

Matilda Garston had not been under Mrs. Dunbar's roof since the memorable morning, when she found Fletcher at his father's desk. How changed was life now to all parties! Fletcher

had awakened from the dream of boyhood to a reality of trustful love, to which his "ripened judgement" had set its seal.

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Ellen, who had resigned her hope of reigning in Fletcher's heart, was not its elected and enthroned queen. She looked like the embodied spirit of home, and domestic love and happiness. The two young women contrasted like the types of spiritual and material world.

Our good friend, Mrs. Dunbar, was at the acme of felicity. It would have been in vain for her to try to express the overflowing of her heart, and try she did not. It sparkled and ran over like a brimming glass of champagne.

"I am truly glad to see you here again, Matilda,—Mrs. Garston, I mean," she said; "I really am, my dear. And now we have met, old friends together, I will tell you, that I never had one hard thought, no, not one, at your breaking off with Fletcher. It was providential all round. Fine pictures should have fine frames;—you, my dear, just fit the one you are set in, and our little Ellen was made to be worn, like a miniature, close to the heart. I used to be a believer in *first love,* now I think '*second thoughts best.'* "