SILKEN CORDS

MAUD JEAN FRANC
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INTRODUCTION.

With little by way of introduction to offer our readers, we commend to them another of our Australian Tales, trusting that "the bow drawn at a venture" may find its mark—that some "iron fetters" may be snapped asunder, some silken cords strengthened, and that the effort may not prove altogether vain.

MAUDE JEAN FRANC.

North Adelaide.
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CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE BAR OF SUNSHINE BETRAYED.

How many hearts are gladdened by the bright, the beautiful sunlight of heaven! How many dark places enlightened and cheered! Not alone on the gay and lovely, not only on the fair and excellent, is its brilliancy bestowed, but into the solitary hut it sends its joybeams, into the prison cell it throws its rays of consolation, through the chamber of sickness it scatters its cheering scintillations, lightening, may be, many a bowed heart of its burden, soothing many a sorrowful heart, and throwing long, golden bars of glory into many a dark and dreary place of earth's sojourners.

One brilliant morning beam—a veritable bar of gold—stole through the uppermost pane of a dingy window in a lawyer's office in one of
Adelaide's by-streets, some eighteen or nineteen years ago, and fell upon the ink-spotted, paper-crowded desk, and partly over the dark waving hair of a young man, whose pen was lazily moving along an open folio, as though already weary of its employment. A more unpromising, unpresentable place that bar of sunshine could scarcely have selected to enlighten than that dusty office, with its four dirty walls, its begrimed floor, its unwashed windows, and its fireplace, innocent of either paint or whitewash, choked up, and strewn with crumpled, soiled, and torn papers, morsels of discarded briefs and legal documents of all kinds in a dilapidated condition. Torn envelopes, scraps of pink tape, half-used pens, and a plentiful bespatterment of ink, not only there, but on ceiling, floor and walls, completed the embellishment. There were no blinds to the windows—indeed, they would have been perfectly superfluous; for a blank stone surface—the wall of the next house—was quite sufficient abstraction; saying nothing about the complexion of the windows themselves, which were warranted to exclude as much of heaven's light as possible. It was, as we have before said, only
through the uppermost pane of one of these windows that the sunbeams could force an entrance; and certainly as it shot obliquely in, had it possessed the power of choice, it could not have selected a pleasanter spot in the office for a resting-place. There were three desks and three writers—all as different as it is possible to conceive in personal appearance, mind, and manners; but there was an especial attraction in the particular corner visited by that sunbeam. A glass of violets, nestling among their green leaves, stood sentinel over the dry law papers, breathing out an incense, and shedding rich perfume all over the office. They had cost their owner threepence in hard cash, but he had received twenty times their value in the pleasant thoughts and memories they brought with them, and from time to time a pair of dark eyes lingered with loving gaze upon them. To him they were as friends—almost making him forget that he was an exile in a strange land, far away from dear home-scenes and home faces.

Louis Conway had been but a very short time in the colony, and but a week in his present situation; he was therefore new to the climate, to
the ways, and to the manners of those around him, and felt at times very much a stranger indeed. Not that he saw anything greatly to dislike; he was scarcely prepared to find so much to admire and enjoy in the land of his adoption—that is in the city of Adelaide—for far beyond its boundary he had not been. He had known something of town life before—too much for his own pleasure. The routine of the lawyer's office had been familiar to him in the home-land—familiar and distasteful. He had not come to Australia, 16,000 miles across the ocean, with the wish and intention of resuming that routine. Country life was more to his taste; and the vague idea of possibly obtaining land of his own, of building thereon a pretty little house, of gathering round it a lovely garden, beyond which should arise out-houses and barns, and pasture land, and finally sending home for his widowed mother and sisters to share in its delights, was a fond dream of his own and theirs. Poor fellow! With a very small capital, and no friends in the colony, the desolation of those first few weeks before he obtained employment almost dissipated the bright dreams of the future. He saw with dis-
may the little money he possessed rapidly melting away in the purchase of mere necessaries—in the mere lodging of his body; and he was at last thankful to obtain an engagement of the very same character with that he had left behind in England, and which, fortunately for him, at the time he applied, armed with the credentials he had prudently brought from home, had become vacant, owing to the departure of one of the clerks for the Sydney diggings, which just then were making some noise in Adelaide. Safely installed in a tolerably lucrative berth, he recommenced the old plodding work, though he wrote cheerfully to his mother by the next mail, telling her that the remuneration was so much higher than that he received in England, that he still hoped by-and-by to save sufficient for the purchase of the land, and their future home.

It was a pleasant season to enter on colonial life—the early spring, replete with soft sunshine and flowers. How joyfully he hailed the first violets that caught his eye, as, tied up in little bunches, they stood ready for sale in a fruiterer's shop, closely flanked on one side by a heap of large Sydney oranges, and on the other by red
capsicums and cocoa-nuts. Those dear little violets!—his mother's favourite flowers! They always made him think of her when he looked into their blue eyes. His father's grave in the quiet churchyard, beneath the spreading shadow of a yew-tree, was thick with their green leaves and blue blossoms. He had helped to place them there. What strange home memories they possessed for him! His pen had been working but slowly during the last few moments, for that golden beam was the harbinger of the single stroke that presently rolled forth solemnly from the clock outside the door. It was one o'clock, and the interval for dinner.

There was a simultaneous movement in the office. The senior clerk, an elderly man, grave and grey, took his hat and went out. He regularly dined at a restaurant in the neighbourhood, while the occupant of the other desk, following Louis' example, threw down his pen, pirouetted on his heel twice round the office, and finally seizing on a neat little lunch-bag, commenced an immediate attack on its contents. He was a young man, just about the age of Louis—two or three-and-twenty—but very fair, with light curly
hair and blue eyes, that seemed brimful of fun and mischief; just now, however, they wore a half contemptuous expression—half contemptuous, half surprised—and were fixed on his companion, who, regardless of his paper of lunch—a very simple lunch it was, merely a saveloy and roll—was leaning forward, his head upon one hand, while the fingers of the other were carefully arranging the leaves round his violets—thoughtfully, dreamily arranging them, for thought and dreams had both passed the boundary of those four walls, and other scenes and other forms were before his mental vision.

"You are mightily fond of flowers, Conway!" were at length the words that burst from the curling lips, as they paused in the mastication of a pasty. "I don't remember seeing any one make so much fuss over them before, with the exception of my sister Nellie; and I tell her she worships them a great deal more than they deserve."

"Are you no lover of flowers?" asked Louis, quietly going on with his employment, and arranging leaves and buds with artistic skill and fingers.
"Ah, I like them well enough—like to see them, I suppose. I like them in a garden; but I should never think of stooping to gather a flower myself, if they were never gathered for me; much less lay out pence upon them for my own pleasure, as you say you do. Have they no garden where you lodge?"

"No; nothing but a bare yard, about which a dozen miserable fowls run rampant."

"I don't know, for my own part, how you get on living there. North Adelaide, at least some portions of it, is all very well; but that little, dark, miserable Margaret Street, gives one the vapours to look at it. What made you choose that place, of all others, to lodge in?"

"I've two or three reasons. First, because I preferred to live outside your city, though not too far away. A walk over the hill is pleasant and healthy after sitting all day. And secondly, motives of economy have greatly influenced my choice. Lodging is comparatively cheaper there than in any other place I have heard of like respectability; and for the most part the tenants of Margaret Street—dark little street as it is—come under the order of genteel."
"Well, there, I believe you are right; but for my part, I'd sooner live in the very heart of Adelaide than in such a dead-alive place."

"Nevertheless, however you may stigmatize the place, I have a snug little room. Small though it is, my books and the flowers I take home enliven it; I look at them, and find it not very dull after all. Besides," he added, somewhat more slowly, but yet with determined utterance, "I do not intend to remain where I am, or as I am. I did not leave England and come over the ocean to South Australia for that. I have another purpose to live for though, after all," he added with a sigh, leaning both elbows on the desk, and his head in his hands, "I am afraid it will be but slow work, economize as I may."

There was silence in the office for a few moments, during which the lazy hum of a large fly trying its wings in the spring sunshine was plainly audible, and the slow steady tick of the clock in the passage told out the minutes as they passed. Andrew Macdonald went quietly forward with the contents of his lunch-bag, for just then the volubility of speech had forsaken him,
and he could think of no reply. Careless himself, thoughtless of the future, with no particular aim in view but self-gratification, he could scarcely understand the hopes and ambitions at which his companion darkly hinted. This, however, was a state of things that never long continued with him. He presently shook off the feeling that oppressed him, and exclaimed,—

"Come, come now! This will never do. Slow work! Yes; so it is—confoundedly slow. I say that every day of my life, often as Nellie scolds me for it; but then, what's the use. A fellow must work in some way, I suppose; as well this way as any other; and its gentlemanly, at any rate. Besides, it won't help one forward to stew over it; it only makes the slow work slower still—Nellie is right there. It's no use to sit brooding over what can't be helped—'Grin and bear it.' Besides, come what may, grub is not to be despised; so I advise you to turn yours to the same account as I have mine, that is if you are not contemplating making a starve of it, and I should think such a likely young fellow, strong and active, and clever too, had no occasion for that sort of thing."
Louis smiled in spite of his moodiness, for it was almost impossible to avoid it after a glance at the face in his neighbourhood; but he did something else also, he roused himself, and drew the neglected paper of lunch towards him.

"I do believe you are right," he exclaimed, cutting slices off his saveloy, and commencing an attack upon his roll. "Work of any description, slow or otherwise, cannot be accomplished without a supply of strength."

"And, unfortunately, we are not like bees—we cannot feed upon flowers, however we may worship them," said Andrew significantly.

"No, indeed!" replied Louis, now fairly laughing; "the body wants more substantial fare." Nevertheless, that bar of sunshine and the perfume of those violets considerably sweetened the morsels that went to the formation of bone and muscle. He was thankful in his heart for their possession—thankful that God's beautiful world was not all a barren waste; but that even its desert places might be made to blossom as the rose. Yet all this he kept within his own heart, scattering more carefully for the future his pearls, for he saw they were but little appreciated or
understood. At a glance he saw that, however much he might like Andrew Macdonald—and little as he knew of him at present, he did like him—there were many feelings that they could never share in common; feelings, and thoughts, and sympathies as incomprehensible on the one side, as they were treasured and rejoiced in on the other. Had he known a little more of his new friend, he would have found that the difference extended beyond feeling and thought—that the motives of action, the daily life, were all under other influence, and widely diverse from his own. Yet, nevertheless, won by the merry, laughing blue eyes, by the fair handsome face, with its crown of golden curls, more especially by his frank, almost boyish manners, Louis Conway's stranger heart easily gave entrance to Andrew Macdonald's first overtures of friendship.
CHAPTER II.

LITTLE MARGARET STREET.

What changes time brings in its rear! How it transforms the wild waste into the crowded city, turning the green hill-side into the busy mart, the flourishing market-place; and certainly nowhere are its footsteps more plainly visible than in our colonies—in our own Adelaide. We go not back to the primitive days of verdant slopes and fine old gums, beneath whose shadow rested the kangaroos in safety from the onslaughts of the white man—when the wild bee, with its loud monotonous hum, drank the honeyed nectar from the red gum blossoms where our city now stands, and the Torrens had no bridge. We have only to do with the changes of the last twenty years; and even these are many and varied. Twenty years back, our townsfolk were contented with the narrow footbridge that spanned the lofty banks of the river, forming the communicating medium between North and South Adelaide—the narrow footbridge and the ford. Twenty years
back Trinity Church, with its clock noted for never revealing the true time, looked out on far different surroundings than it does at the present time. No railway-station then raised its pretentious walls along North Terrace. No puffing train shot its huge length, like a flying serpent, under the very shadow of the gaol; but few spires looked upwards to the sky among the city shops and houses. Those very shops are no longer the same. They are most of them rebuilt, remodelled, and transformed. Hundreds of buildings have sprung into existence since those days; and now where once might have been seen whole rows of drays, with their stubborn but patient-looking, rudely-yoked bullocks, we have our car-stands, our safety-cabs, our glass coaches!

The very pavement of our streets bears witness to the flight of time. The primitive paths of old have all vanished, and broad, beautiful paving-stones, pleasant for the foot to tread upon, have taken the place of roughly-hewn, fragmentary pavement, or deeply-indented ruts, fitted only for the entrapment of unwary feet. Happy and fortunate indeed that it is so; for in these days of exalted heels what accidents might not have
occurred. What visions of sprained and twisted and fractured ankles rise before us!

But the changes are not peculiar to South Adelaide. They have traversed the broad bridge that has superseded the tiny footway of old, and have fenced in the Park Lands, cutting down the fine old gums, and planting in their place a variety of trees of different descriptions of foliage. Some of the old houses yet remain, it is true. Now and then we recognize them; but even these are so built up, so surrounded by other and more ostentatious buildings, so hemmed in by terraces and squares, and so overshadowed by their aristocratic neighbours, that day by day they are shrinking out of notice. By-and-by their very existence will be forgotten.

There are some places, however, over which time appears to effect little change; months roll away—years succeed—but no visible alteration can be traced in either houses or walls. Little Margaret Street is one of these places. A gloomy unpretending little street it was then—gloomy and unpretending it still remains, though perhaps the lapse of time may be seen in its wear and tear, in the colour of what was once white paint,
and in the general low-browed appearance of the verandahs. Gardens in front of the dwellings there were none, though the verandah of each was carefully parted off from the strip of footpath by neat low palings and a little gate. And yet, notwithstanding the sombre look of the narrow street from the Dover Castle at the one extremity to the last house at the other, the denizens thereof were often roused by canary song from their slumbers, and in the long summer evenings sweet strains of music meandered through the open windows of more than one dwelling, and visions of fair forms, of fresh youthful faces, came between parted curtains, and snatches of song and sounds of merry laughter, floated on the air. After all, Little Margaret Street had some life within it—it was not all gloom.

The house which contained the one little room occupied by Louis Conway—the little room to which he carried his flowers—the one little room that stood to him in lieu of home—had this redeeming feature, that it was the very end house of the street, so that the fresh pure air that came from the glorious hills beyond up the green slope
that led from the Park Lands (a sunny green slope it was then, gentle readers, though now stately houses occupy its space, and high walls, surrounding lordly gardens have taken the place of the yellow dandelion) freely entered at the open doors and windows. That little room had one other charm in the eyes of Louis—a side window with a view of the hills. He could overlook the tops of the Adelaide houses (not very high many of them were in those days), and become familiar with all the indentations, and curves, and elevations of the beautiful range. He could refresh himself and rest his eyes with the green slope of those hills and their splendid grassy burden. On—on through the Park Lands, with its noble gum-trees, to the little white footbridge and Government House, his gaze could go with but little interruption. It was a great, a rare pleasure to him. For the window that fronted the street he cared but little, though through that he could, when he chose, enjoy a view of life in another phase—the human. For each of the two houses so closely opposite to his own as to be but half-a-stone’s cast distant contained large families of sons and daughters, most of them in
the grown or growing-up stage, and all affording him new and vivid views of the colonial life on which he had now fairly entered.

Yes; even in that dull, unpromising Margaret Street he had found a pleasant little home. He thought so more than ever as he walked slowly over the Park Lands that evening, with his bunch of violets carefully folded in paper to protect them from the heat of his hands; and entering the open door, with its carefully swept passage, hung up his hat upon its accustomed peg, and turned into his own particular room, beautifully and spotlessly prepared for his reception. It did not require much furniture to make that morsel of a room complete, and it had not much. The place was entirely covered with white matting, a thick knitted rug of scarlet and black cloth, telling the tale at once of thrift and industry, stretched comfortably before the immaculately white hearth, now filled with green boughs—for though more inured colonials might still shiver in the chill mornings and evenings of the early spring, Louis Conway, so recently from a colder climate, with the memory of its ice and snow still lively in his bosom, pronounced it warm. The sofa, of colonial
manufacture, unpolished cedar, and without a back—his bed by night, and then comfortably furnished with a store of white sheets and blankets—was neatly covered by day with a pretty dark chintz. So were the two boxes that did duty as settles, and seemed to eke out the slender complement of chairs, which were limited to three; two straight-backed cedar in all their first fresh polish, decidedly new—looking almost distressingly so, and one huge old-fashioned monster of an elbow-chair, carefully cushioned, and covered with the same dark chintz as sofa and settles. A small, but heavy, old claw-footed table stood in the centre of the room, covered with a dark green cloth, in the middle of which stood Louis's own desk. A large inkstand laden with pens, a fanciful paper-weight—the delicate fingers of a lady's hand—holding two or three letters beneath their tips, and two or three books—all dusted and as nicely arranged as he could desire. The sofa stood beneath the front window; before his favourite window a morsel of a table was placed, a pretty crochet couverette concealed the homeliness of this, and, resting in a tiny wool mat, a delicate vase, filled almost to the brim with cool fresh
water, stood waiting for the offering of flowers he had brought home with him. Louis Conway was right: a very sunny, even a pretty room it was, with its one little sideboard and shelves, neatly fitted with his books, and its long white window-curtains and green blinds. And this evening he was particularly sensitive and susceptible, eagerly taking in an inventory of all his pleasant things, as for a few moments leaning back in that old, but most comfortable of easy chairs, he gave himself up for a brief period to refreshing rest, before the well-known knock at his door should summon him to tea.

It was a quiet, orderly little household altogether he had entered. His landlady was a widow, long past middle age, small of stature, thin, almost to emaciation of form, but every inch a lady, in spite of a meagre purse and uncongenial work and surroundings. A kind, considerate, attentive landlady he found her in after-times, though at the period we have introduced him to our readers, he had not half discovered the natural kindness of her heart, and winning softness of her disposition; for his own English reserve had almost as great a reserve on her part to encounter in those first few days.
An orderly little household we said—and so they were; for Mrs. Layton had three children left to comfort and console her when her husband died. The eldest, a daughter, Louis Conway had scarcely seen, for she left home before he did in the morning and returned later. A passing vision of a slight and pretty girl, with delicate features and dark curling hair, were all at present that had gratified the curiosity he may have been presumed to feel. It was much the same with the son, a youth of fifteen, engaged in a mercantile office in the city, and who breakfasted very early with his sister, and left at the same time every morning with her. Those with whom Louis Conway was thrown into daily intercourse and companionship, were simply Mrs. Layton herself and her little daughter Milly, whose bright black eye and ready smile somewhat belied and contradicted the demure, quiet little manners of the pretty child. Milly Layton became a favourite with Louis, and soon lost all traces of her former shyness. It was her careful fingers that had filled the vase with water for the flowers she knew he would bring, and which gave her as much delight as himself.
Altogether, then, Louis felt he had ample reason to congratulate himself upon having met with so pleasant a home in the strange land; for the first week or two of life in one of the customary boarding-houses that existed some eighteen or twenty years ago in Adelaide, had been anything but happy or home-like. Here he could indulge his mind—read and write, or walk abroad with perfect freedom and comfort; his quiet little room always looked its welcome on his return, and his violets bestowed their modicum of fragrance to cheer and elevate his senses.

"A dead-alive place!" Andrew Macdonald termed it. Well, so it might be to some—possibly to himself; but to Louis it bore a different aspect; and that night especially it seemed as a veritable little sanctuary to him. He looked round complacently upon his books—those dear, quiet companions of his solitary hours—and wondered in his heart whether his friend Andrew's indifference to the beauty of flowers extended also to the love of literature. If so, no wonder that he thought Margaret Street a dead-alive place, and no wonder that he pitied him.

And though that day, Louis Conway, in the
performance of the daily routine he so disliked within the four dirty walls, and before that ink-spotted desk, had been inclined to despond, and to grow weary of his allotted task—in the renewed review of the benefits that yet beset his path, the mercies that yet crowned his days, the comforts that yet attended his footsteps, he ended the day with a hearty thanksgiving to the Bestower of every perfect gift. Greviously ashamed of his murmuring spirit, he lay down on his comfortable pillow that night, and acknowledged his unworthiness of the blessings that surrounded him, and sought forgiveness where it may always be found.
CHAPTER III.

ANDREW AT HOME.

ANDREW MACDONALD turned from the office-door at the same moment with Louis Conway. His "Good-bye, old fellow!" rang cheerily forth, and gave a pleasant echo in his friend's ear half across the Park Lands. Their way led in opposite directions, though each outside the city; for, though Andrew professed a predilection for town life, he lived nevertheless beyond the roar and bustle of its tide, and nearer to the hills than Conway himself. Perhaps for that very reason town life was more appreciated. Perhaps his very familiarity with the quiet and calm of nature—her trees and flowers—gave him a distaste for them. It is so with some minds, though not with all—not indeed with all; and there are minds to whom the rattle and murmur of wheels, the wave of fashion, the sparkle and sheen of glittering wares, are music and beauty both, far surpassing nature's bestowings. Let them enjoy their city life, and wear the "iron fetters" of its fashions, and bend their proud
necks to its rule. Give us the delights of country life; the sweet communion of nature and of nature's God; the loving influence of birds and flowers, softly drawing us upwards, and onwards, and heavenwards, with "silken cords."

"Precious dull it must be for him, poor fellow! poked up in that dark dreary street by himself; not a creature to speak to!" Andrew exclaimed, as for a moment he stood watching the firm, retreating footsteps, even till they passed the precincts of Government House, and were lost from view. "Dull enough I find it with a home and friends; but it must be worse for him, stranger as he is in the colony. Well, if he and I get better acquainted, we'll soon get him out of that;" and, placing his hat more firmly on his head, he turned suddenly into Hindley Street, and entered the first tobacconist's shop to purchase cigars. It was an old and familiar lounging-place for the fast young men of Adelaide, but this evening the shop was empty. The master himself was absent, and Andrew received his cigars from an assistant, coolly lighted one, and again slowly sauntered out; and this time home-wards.

It was not his usual habit. There were eyes at
home that often ached with watching for him, sometimes even past the midnight hour. And yet he was to be pitied as well as sorrowed for. Nature had lavishly bestowed her gifts upon him. Bright, witty, clever, and good-looking, many a trap was laid for his unwary feet—many a temptation beset his way that one less highly-gifted might readily have escaped. He had many friends—young men like himself—gay, full of life, and votaries of pleasure. Questionable friends some of these, in whose ears the rattling of the dice-box, the song of the inebriate, was music,—whose nights were spent in revelry, and whose morning penalty was the aching head, the red and blood-shot eye: men of whom might truly be written, "God was not in all their thoughts," though His holy name was often blasphemously on their lips! Andrew Macdonald had not entered into all their secrets. They were luring him on—seeking to bind him with their iron fetters—winding the cruel links with glittering gold or rosy flowers; but, happily for him, home had its attractions still, and the meshes of affection held him back from many a false step. Thesilken threads of sisterly love gently drew him away from many a powerful temptation.
A pretty home it was, somewhere under the hills, and not far distant from them (a ride and a walk from town both), nestling away in a fruit and flower garden, and entirely surrounded by a high hedge of kangaroo, neatly and trimly cut. The verandah was a mass of climbing roses, mingled with the yellow and white jessamine, and a thousand lovely flowers blossomed in close proximity to the house. It was not a large house—not famous for architectural beauty; but the creeping tendrils concealed the ugly stone walls, and the flower-borders on every hand, with their exquisite mosaic of colours, threw enchantment over all with liberal hand.

Andrew thought of the one little bunch of violets that had been filling the office with perfume all the day as he entered the side gate that led through the garden, and looked from side to side at the thick borders of round green leaves, beneath which blue and white violets were hiding their sleepy eyes in profusion. How little he had thought of them till that moment! Now, wet with the descending dew, their pure incense came wafting to his senses with a tale of their own. They reminded him of the many daily benefits
that crowned his way—benefits equally slighted, equally disregarded, equally valued—benefits that he enjoyed beyond many of his companions—far beyond those of his fellow-clerk in particular; and what was he more than others that he should receive more? He did not indeed continue his meditations by ascribing all to the bountiful hand of an All-wise Creator—a Father and a Friend, because he had not learned to look so far. That he was better off than some others he readily admitted, and he was willing to place it to the account of his "good luck;" nevertheless it was with a mind strangely softened, and eyes feebly enlightened to a sense of the goodly gifts he possessed, which comparison with the life of another brought, that he stood for a moment upon the door-mat underneath the verandah, looking out with a pleased eye upon the glowing beds of flowers, now bursting forth into perfection of bloom, acknowledging—as though just awakened to a consciousness that it was so—that they really looked very "first rate." What a truth is it that we must not look above but below us if we would obtain happiness or contentment. It is in the valley of humility the herb loves to grow; the
air of the heights chill and nip and freeze its delicate blossoms.

"Home is tolerably jolly after all!" exclaimed Andrew, with a satisfied smile, as he entered the open door, and threw his hat upon its accustomed peg. As he did so a soft voice from the adjacent parlour uttered a quiet,—

"Is that you, Andy, dear?"

"Yes, Nellie. Am I not a good boy? Have I not come home in capital time to-night?" he replied, going forward into the pleasant room, over which twilight was softly creeping. A gentle breeze, flower-laden, came in through the open window softly waving the curtains to and fro, very softly and dreamily, and pleasantly it seemed; for the evening was warm, yet, after all, it was but early spring and twilight in that early spring has its dangerous dews—its chill night air; so Andrew thought, and after kissing his sister, he closed the window, saying,—

"This air is too chill for you, Nellie. You ought not to be at the open window at this time in the evening."

"I did not think of it, dear Andy; it has been so warm all day, and is so pleasant now," was the
loving reply, as the soft violet eyes were turned fondly on him. "I was so wishing for you to come home. I have been rather lonely to-day. Papa and mamma are both out, and I do so long to hear you play; it always does me good."

For once Andrew was glad that he had returned home, and had it in his power to please her—glad, too, that he had resisted other inclinations. How could he feel otherwise as he gazed at the slight figure lying supported by pillows on the sofa beneath the windows. The fair white face marked by suffering, and yet so tranquil and sweet, with its wealth of golden curls, as a rich setting to the blue-veined forehead. How could he regard any sacrifice as too great, or regret any effort he had made to give her pleasure? Yet, dearly as he loved her, he often did forget her when beyond her gentle influence; for Nellie Macdonald was a helpless invalid—a weakness of the spine held her almost constantly a prisoner to her couch. Sometimes, indeed, she was wheeled through the garden among her favourite flowers on a little carriage contrived purposely for her, so contrived that it could form a couch when needful; and in warm summer days she often lay
under the trees in the shadow, with her favourite companions—her books, her little dog (a tiny King Charles), and her flowers. But books and flowers, fondly as she regarded them, were little in her estimation compared with the passionate love she bore for her brother Andrew—her only brother. How she hailed his coming, how she sighed over his departure, and how proudly she regarded him and all that he did, was better known to herself than to any one else. He warmly returned her affection; for not even excepting his mother, his darling sister Nellie had all the best portion of his love. He grieved her often, too—all the more because of the deep affection between them. She sorrowed bitterly for the hours he spent away from home—the hours that were beyond those allotted to business—hours that she feared were but questionably employed. It was not the selfish sorrow because he chose other company to hers, that some might have felt, that some sisters do feel. She could have borne that, had it been only that; but she knew that it was not so. The very depth of her love comprehended the slightest change in his character. Her sensitive organization vibrated under the
variation of his voice. She trembled for the earthly idol that she had set up in her heart of hearts, and wept over the temptations that she knew beset his way. Alas! poor girl, it was all she could do. She could not shelter him from his tempters, and to pray for him she had not learned.

Yet there was one thing in her weakness she sought to do, and many times it proved effective. She endeavoured to make home more pleasant, more attractive to him. She studied problems in chess that she might prove a more interesting and better antagonist for him. She practised the songs he cared for, that the addition of her sweet voice might stimulate his vocal efforts. She coaxed him to play in the evening, borrowing or purchasing new music, to prevent him wearying of the old. She read books that he liked, and talked them over with him. A hundred little arts and winning actions she had to draw him, as with silken cords, away from his wild companions to the quiet security of home. Her love was not unsuccessful—it was frequently rewarded. Home was all the brighter and fairer and more interesting for the presence of that fragile invalid. What a mission she had to perform!—a mission
which, even in her weary hours of pain and weakness, was ever present with her, imperatively pressing its duties upon her. To her it was indeed a mission of love.

But that evening other influence had been at work; the force of other example had turned Andrew's footsteps homewards. Whatever the influence, how welcome that coming home was, the flush that rose to the thin cheek of his sister, the light that beamed in her eyes on his entrance, sufficiently told, even had not the glad ring of her voice betrayed the fact. He was home again—for a little safely sheltered from evil influences—that was enough for her; she made no inquiries as to the motives or cause.

He presently closed the curtains, and as he did so she rang a little bell for the lamp and tea. "And so you have been all alone to-day, Nellie!" he exclaimed in a playful tone. "Where is Maggie? is she away, too?"

"Oh, yes; poor Maggie! The Dawsons called for her; they were going to the bay. It was such a nice opportunity, such a pleasant change I insisted upon her going, for she did not like to leave me."

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“Did she not? My poor Nellie! always unselfish. And what have you done with yourself all day?”

“Oh, I have read, and worked, and copied music. I have finished those waltzes. You must let me hear them by-and-by, dear Andy. I feel sure I shall like them, and so will you too. But here comes tea now. I shall enjoy it tonight, because you are here; and I am sure you must be ready for it.”

She did enjoy it, for he waited upon her tenderly, anticipating her wishes, and tempting her appetite, amusing her meanwhile with scraps of town news and little incidents of the day, to which he found her a ready and attentive listener. A pleasant, an attractive, a delightful little tea that was to both of them.

“By-the-bye, Nellie,” he exclaimed at length, as his eye fell upon a tiny basket, whose moss-crowned border held a saucer of violets—“by-the-bye, I have discovered another flower-worshipper besides your own sweet self, and one every whit as enthusiastic an admirer.”

“Have you?” said Nellie, smiling—she was so accustomed to be teased for her flower worship,
as he called it,—"I am glad to hear it. But who is it, dear Andy?"

"Who? Why our new clerk. What do you think of that, sister mine? An enthusiastic admirer of flowers in a lawyer's office, among musty, musty law-books and old deeds. One who positively spends his hard-earned cash, too, in buying bunches of violets, because such a thing as a flower dare not so much as hold up its head among the miserable fowls that wander about in the yard belonging to the place at which he boards."

"Poor fellow! how sorry I am for him! But Andy, are not his friends in Adelaide?"

"No; he has no friends here. His mother and two sisters are in England, waiting, I fancy from something he said, till he is rich enough to send for them. A jolly time first that will be, I am afraid, if he saves ever so much. He works over hours though—that may help. He is a nice fellow too. I like him; and I tell you what, Nellie, I could not help thinking this evening that I am a precious sight better off than he is, though I do grumble sometimes."

She laid her head gently on his shoulder, and
Kissed the hand she had taken in hers. Tears were in her eyes, but she did not let him see that; for a sudden hope had sprung up in her heart that a new element for good was working for her brother and with her—that another silken cord was entwining with the slender one already woven. She did not say so; she only presently exclaimed,—

“Dear Andy, you must ask him here.”
CHAPTER IV.

"THIS WAY BOUND TO TEMPTATION."

"I say, Conway!" exclaimed Andrew Macdonald, a few mornings after the occurrences of the previous chapter, suddenly flinging down his pen, and making by the action a long black stroke over a spotless sheet of foolscap, upon which he was preparing to write; "I say, Conway, I never see you about town in the evening. You don't mean to say you play 'good boy,' and go straight home, and, what's more, sit mewed up in that close little room of yours in Margaret Street—do you?"

"Yes, I generally do; but I do so because I like it, and find nothing to call me to town. I have been too short a time in the colony to form many friendships."

"And staying shut up in your room is not the way to make them, however long you may be here," said Andrew. "I know a lot of nice fellows; I'll engage to introduce you. Come—is it a bargain? I can tell you we have jolly times.
It's better than stewing over your books till your brain is addled, and your face as long as a fiddle."

"I thank you," said Conway, with a slight smile; "but I am afraid our tastes will scarcely correspond. Your friends are too gay for me in every sense of the word."

"Gay! What do you call too gay? Why surely you don't mean to say that there is any harm in a fellow having a spree once in a way? I know this—we have some splendid evenings, plenty of decent wine, a first-class supper, and a good commingling of 'the feast of reason and the flow of soul,' enough to satisfy a bookish young fellow like you, Conway."

"I have been always inclined to believe that 'when the wine is in the wit is out,'" said Louis, drily, continuing his copy with steady undeviating strokes. "Your evening's enjoyment involves heavy recompense, if I may judge by appearances the next day; and I think more than once you have exhibited an empty purse."

"Yes—hang it! The governor keeps one tight, and old Bowden's salaries are not enough for a fellow if he wishes to see life."
"Well, Macdonald, as I have no governor, tight or not tight, to depend upon—in fact, have only my own exertions to provide for me all I need, you must see that it is better for me to exist without 'life'—or what you term life," said Louis, quietly.

"Come, come, old fellow, you don't get over me in that way," exclaimed Andrew, facing round upon his stool with a knowing shake of the head. "You get a precious sight more than I do from Bowden. You know you do. And what a lot of engrossing you brought in the other morning. Why man you must be positively rich!"

Louis smiled and shook his head. "Couldn't have done that engrossing, take notice, if the evening previously I had been out 'seeing life,'" he answered meaningly.

"Well, but you don't write every evening like that, do you? If you are going on at that rate I should say any one might take a six months' lease of your life."

"I do not write all the evening. I am very fond of reading, Macdonald; besides that I generally indulge myself with a walk for an hour or two."
“Where?—in town? I never see you.”

“No, I suppose not. I seldom walk to town without it is to attend some meeting—scarcely even that. I have enough of it in the day. I like best to refresh myself with a country walk, sauntering along the Walkerville Road (there are some pretty gardens along that road, Macdonald, particularly on the banks of the river). Sometimes I walk to Hackney, round by the Company’s Mill (nice houses and gardens, too, that way), and so on to the Botanical Gardens. And sometimes I take a turn up and down the Park Lands under the old gums, or simply from Finnis Street to Margaret Street, up and down the hill, where I have the full benefit of the fragrance of a hedge of sweetbriars, which in itself is a world of enticement.”

“Bless me! what an enthusiastic pedestrian. What a solitary, gloomy sort of fellow you must be.”

“On the contrary, I am fond of society when it is of the right sort.”

“And what, may I ask, do you consider the ‘right sort’? said Andrew, with a half sarcastic, half contemptuous smile.
"The kind that leads me into no extravagance beyond my income, for one thing—that will do me good and not harm—and leaves neither an aching head or heart behind it," Louis gravely replied. And for a short time there was no sound in the office but the swift movement of the pens and the loud tick of the clock, for Andrew had turned hastily and pettishly round to his desk, removed the blotted sheet, and resumed his work upon a second without reply. He felt angry with Conway. He was angry with himself because he was forced to acknowledge that the right was on his friend's side, for it was honourable to avoid exceeding the income; but in view of certain debts of his own yet unliquidated, which were the constant incubus of his daydreams—for Andrew was not yet hardened to these things—he did not like to be reminded that his own course was dishonourable. He did not care either to have the memory of headache or heartache brought up before him. "Life" was made up of just such things; it was not meant to be moped away, he thought, and so he presently said.

"I am of the same opinion," replied Louis,
smiling. "There is nothing moping in nature; and you are very much mistaken if you think I am of the moping order. At home—in England I had a nice circle of friends—young men of intellect and spirit, capital companions for a winter's evening; but here, as I said before, I am a comparative stranger. Yet, though I am in consequence much alone, I do not mope; I have no time for that."

"Glad to hear it," said Andrew incredulously. "Don't know how you manage it though," he muttered, going on rapidly with his pen.

"Come home with me some evening," said Louis, now fairly laughing. "Come to-night if you will; you will form a better idea of how I dispose of my time if you do, and may perhaps feel a little more favourably disposed towards poor little Margaret Street."

"Beard the lion in his den—eh?" said Andrew, with returning good humour. "Very well, I agree to that, if you will promise me an evening in return."

"With certain provisos, I will," said Louis rather gravely.

"Ah, hang your provisos! I don't mean to
ask you among us fellows. I begin to suspect we should not amalgamate. I say, though, Conway, are you one of those sanctimonious ones who are always tilting against every amusement, and calling it sin? because, if you are, I think you are too good a fellow for that sort of thing."

"I should not state it so," replied Louis, with a slight accession of colour. "I am one of those who desire to be guided in all that I do by the laws and rules laid down in a certain old-fashioned book: in plainer words I have long since taken the Bible for my guide, and wish to regulate my life by it, and I hope I always shall tilt against sin and evil whenever I see it—in myself or others."

What Andrew might have replied—whether a caustic speech was awaiting its opportunity, or a contemptuous laugh would have followed this bold avowal of the principles of action that guided Conway's daily life—we cannot say; for at that moment the principal of the firm—Mr. Bowden—himself entered the office, and requested Conway's attendance, leaving Andrew alone to chew the bitter cud of his own thoughts, and cool down from the fierce heat to which he had been rapidly rising.
He saw little of Conway the remainder of that day, for he continued engaged in some very particular work in Mr. Bowden's own especial office; nor did he accept his invitation to accompany him home in the evening. Indeed, after the morning's avowal he felt little inclination for doing so—at any rate, not that day at least. "It's no use his attempting to cram me with his religion," he said to himself. "I daresay he's none the better for it. At any rate, I won't have it. It's all cant. I'll soon put it down."

Did he really believe it when he said so? Had not the very little intercourse he had had with Louis Conway convinced him that at least he was truthful? We think so, dear readers; but just then he was angry, because he could not help liking his friend in spite of his "cant"—in spite of everything contrary about him.

He did not take tea in Margaret Street, neither did he go home. He felt irritated and irritable, and home was just then distasteful. His sister had pressed him so earnestly to return early that evening. A friend or two of Maggie's were visiting at the house, and they wanted his skilful fingers and voice to take part in some glee's,
"The glees might go," he said to himself contemptuously, as he slowly sauntered down Rundle Street.

"A fellow can't always be dancing attendance on a parcel of girls," he muttered gloomily, as he walked along with his eyes cast down to the ground—gloomily, for the memory of one sweet face seemed to rise up reprovingly before him. There were two or three things conspiring together to cause his gloom. He had been dunned that day by a pressing creditor, who had only been prevented from sending in his bill to his father by a promise and a pound or two on account. For worlds Andrew would not have had the bill reach home with all its betraying items: its wine suppers, its nobblers! What a storm it would bring over the quiet home atmosphere. His father's wrath—his mother's bitter lamentations—Maggie's upbraiding—but, above all, Nellie's distress and tears. That cut was worse than all. He had half made up his mind never to touch a card again. How could he avoid it now! That bill must be paid if he would not be utterly and hopelessly exposed. He would win, and silence the noisy claimant. Thinking
thus, and not looking where he went, he presently ran against a gentleman who stood on the footpath full in his way.

"Hallo! that you Macdonald! Why you are the very fellow I wanted. Jones tells me he promised you your revenge the other night. Are you never going to take it?"

"Trust me for that," replied Andrew, brightening up; "of course I am; and if he's ready, as well to-night as any other time. Where shall we meet him?"

"Oh, in the old place—can't be a better. Where have you been all this time? Tell you what—begun to think your bad luck had turned you rusty, or something to the same purpose, or that the governor had twigged you—eh?"

"Nothing of the sort," replied Andrew, rather haughtily. "When I feel inclined for play you may reckon upon seeing me. I've had other engagements lately."

"Oh," said his companion; but he did not add any more just then, for something in Andrew's manner warned him not to do so. He cast two or three covert and suspicious glances at him as they walked along, talking on indif-
ferent subjects. Andrew was little inclined for conversation.

"What if he lost," were words that perpetually occurred to him. He would not allow himself to think of them. He tried to stifle the little voice within that whispered clamorously of his wrongdoing, and presently, as they reached the place of rendezvous, the back room in a public-house in one of Adelaide's back streets, he called for brandy more effectually to silence the faithful monitor. The brandy heated his brain and excited his spirits, which his companion noticing, pronounced him "all right," and "sure to win"—to "do Jones to nothing." He thought so too, and gaily brandished the cards in the face of his antagonist, who entered shortly after.

"I see you intend to take full revenge, old buck," was the elegant and laughing reply of the young man in question, bestowing a hearty shake of his hand on Andrew, and a knowing side wink to his other friend. "You mean I shall lose this time." He intended it himself. "It will never do to frighten the poor fellow with a run of bad luck," he had said in confidence to that friend; "he is but a raw hand yet, and
these raw hands want cautiously drawing on—enticing into the meshes. I confess I thought we had lost him entirely, for he has not been about town these last few days. We can’t afford to lose him—he’s worth plucking; but I’m half suspicious of that new clerk in Bowden’s office. We must have our eyes on him. It will never do for Andrew to get upon too friendly terms with him, if he is what I take him for—one of your over-righteous sort, always setting up to regenerate their neighbours."

"And to-night you intend to let Macdonald win."

"Yes; it will be best in the end. We shall not lose by it. I’ve tried the dodge before."

How well had these adepts in art calculated on the weakness of human nature! Andrew on entering that room had resolved that it should be for the last time he would ever venture his hand at cards. He left it elated and excited, as much by the fumes of the brandy as by the golden winnings his pocket-book contained. All his good resolves had vanished into thin air. What! play no more when his luck had turned? The idea was an absurd one. Alas!
the iron fetters were closing round him, and he forgot the gently twining silken cords of love that would have drawn him away from their powerful clasp. And yet, verily guilty and shame-faced he felt, as long after midnight he reached his home, creeping in at the unfastened window of his little room, left purposely unfastened for him at the instance of poor Nellie, and knew that one pair of eyes at least were sleepless, one pair of ears were eagerly listening, and catching the sound of the prodigal’s return. The very fact of having to steal to his own room like a thief was convicting, and Andrew was not so lost to good as to be impervious to its degradation. He was conscious of evildoing. What then? Why, the desire to keep it secret from those he loved was strong in him. He did not wish to bring down the grey hairs of his father with sorrow to the grave; he did not wish to break his mother’s heart, or add one more pang than possible to his suffering sister; and yet he was going the way to do all this, for secrets will out when least desirable or expected, and he could not expect his always to remain in concealment. For that night at least he hoped and believed he was safe.
He had taken off his boots in the verandah before entering the window, and the night wind that had risen within the last hour was playing strange vagaries with the trees and leaves in the verandah, and aided and covered his retreat; but, as we said, there were ears too eagerly listening to be easily deceived. The scarcely audible closing of the casement sent a flash of pain and heavy palpitation to his sister Nellie's heart, and daylight stole in through the curtains in her room before her weary eyes were closed in sleep.
CHAPTER V.

MAGGIE'S ATTRACTIONS.

Nine strokes from the little clock on the parlour mantelpiece—nine full clear strokes. It was a pretty little thing in its marble casing, and kept time wonderfully well for a thing so pretty. The useful and the ornamental do not always amalgamate, especially in the matter of clocks, and the beauty of the outside is no index unfortunately to the value and constancy of the workings within. But whether of French or German origin, that timepiece of the Macdonalds' was nevertheless a little truth-teller, and did its work thoroughly and well.

Nine clear strokes—so late that the sun would have forced its way into the pretty parlour, fading both curtains and carpet, had not Maggie's careful hands drawn down the blinds and arranged the drapery to exclude all such invasion. She was at her morning's work, arranging and dusting, and restoring to perfect order everything that had been disturbed on the previous
MAGGIE'S ATTRACTIONS.

evening; for the friends expected had paid their visit, though the truant brother had not been there to entertain them, and there were many little evidences here and there bearing witness to the evening's pleasure.

There were the music-books scattered over the piano, some heaped upon a chair, some lying on the ground. The wax candles were still resting in their places; they had been extinguished but not removed, and had their own tale to tell. Books of various descriptions, opened and closed, lay in confusion over the table, in company with a portfolio of exquisite drawings and paintings, all loose and disarranged, the work of Nellie Macdonald's graceful fingers. Flowers in vases about the room were drooping for want of fresh water, and among the rest of the things on the table was a pack of cards, fresh and new, left just as the game was finished, just as they were thrown down at its conclusion. Two or three of them had fallen to the floor; the knave of clubs fell uppermost. Was there nothing suggestive in that card to Maggie, as she picked it up, and, placing it amongst its fellows in the pack, consigned it to a little work-table drawer till the
next social occasion should need its disinterment? No, absolutely nothing. It was a card, and nothing more to her, and a very harmless card in her estimation. She had been brought up in this feeling, and could associate nothing evil with the morsel of coloured pasteboard. She had played cards from her infancy—had gone into ecstasies of amusement over the boisterous game of "grab"—laughed to excess at "old maid" and its droll "consequences"—become excited over "speculation"—and given absorbed attention and interest to the more abstruse and refined games. But that harm could follow this playing never once entered her dreams. They never played for money—never; that her father would not allow. They sometimes, to be sure, stipulated for a few lollies; but even these were an innovation of their own—"just to increase the interest of the game." Strange that it never occurred to the sisters that if they needed the stimulus of gain, even though but a few paltry lollies, their brother was not likely long to remain content with such winnings. Strange, too, that they never thought of associating his late hours and a gambling
propensity together. They knew, indeed, that the company he kept was leading him far wrong—knew that by the pale cheeks and red eyes that bore witness next morning to the last night's dissipation, by the aching head and languid movements. But they never placed cards in connection with his other follies or sins—never.

Nellie wept in silence over her darling brother's errors, striving, meanwhile, to throw over them the mantle of love. Not so Maggie. Dearly she loved her brother too; but she was angry with his follies, and felt degraded by his conduct. Her proud little head could not brook association with one who levelled himself with the very beasts of creation. So she thought, and so she said; for Maggie was not wont to keep her thoughts to herself, and Andrew always had the full benefit of them. Not before his mother; Mrs. Macdonald was weak and frail, and even Maggie was careful to invent excuses, and so to guard her from all knowledge of the sinning of her only son. Not before his father; for she dreaded the explosion of anger that would heavily fall on Andrew's devoted head from the stern old man, whose naval discipline disposed
him to severity, and who, abstemious and rigidly observant of outward decorum from his youth up, was less likely to tolerate any deviation in the conduct of his son. Not well, not wisely was this connivance of the sisters to conceal their brother's faults from those most likely to lead and guide him. Poor Andrew! a thousand little incidents were conspiring to draw him away from the right, and unfortunately he was too easily drawn.

Nine o'clock! Andrew had started for town some half-hour previously—not without his private lecture from Maggie respecting his broken promise, his late hours, and his morning appearance, a lecture to which he deigned no other reply than that most significant of colonial phrases—"shut up!" and now, under the influence of these last words, and the angry recollection of the previous evening's disappointment, Maggie went brusquely about her work, closing windows and drawing down blinds with an air as though they had been participators in the general evil. There could be no doubt that that little parlour was thoroughly cleaned that morning. Maggie generally did thoroughly whatever
she set about, and this was one of the offices she never left to the servant's hands, or ever accepted the least assistance in completing. This morning, however, it was finished with an energy, the result of her own active thoughts. Swept, dusted, and aired, and all in beautiful condition and order, waiting for her invalid sister's reception, while her mother sat quietly darning stockings in the little back room, and Norah, the Irish help of the household, went about her own work in her own domains.

Like neither brother or sister, and yet a little like both, in that mysterious sort of way in which likenesses are traced between the handsome and the plain members of a family, Maggie, without being decidedly ugly, was yet very far from pretty. With a pair of saucy grey eyes, a nose very much retroussé, and a large mouth only distinguishable by good teeth and very red lips, with laughter-loving corners, her sole attraction was her hair, a light and beautiful brown, but so exceedingly curly that it broke into a thousand ripples all over her head, and twisted itself into the most determined and obstinate-looking ringlets, which no art could
reduce to any form or shape but that which nature had bestowed upon them. She was just about middle height, neither tall nor short, though perhaps a tendency to *embonpoint* made her appear shorter than she really was. Whatever her outward appearance, however attractive or otherwise, to strangers, she was the life of that little household: her mother’s right-hand in all things, her father’s pride and support in all his plans, and a great help in every time of need to her brother, notwithstanding the frequent little feuds between them. Attractive she was to other people too, out of the family, spite of her plain little face. There were plenty who were glad to welcome one of Maggie Macdonald’s gay laughs, or receive one of her smiles, for they were thoroughly genuine; many who were willing to do her bidding for the mere pleasure of her spirit-stirring company, and her mirth-inspiring laughter was esteemed payment in full.

But it was to Nellie in her weakness, to Nellie in her suffering, to Nellie in her sorrowful moments, that she specially proved a blessing—a ministering spirit. What silken cords of love
encircled the two sisters, drawing them closer together, entwining their hearts in one. What would Nellie have done without Maggie? and Maggie—how could she have endured the loss of Nellie, her sweet mentor, the repository of all her sorrows and difficulties from her earliest years? and yet the dread of that loss was the daily torment of her life, to guard against which all her exertions were exerted to the utmost.

That very morning, when, after preparing the room for her reception, placing cushions and pillows on the accustomed couch, raising the blind so that a view of the morning sun glancing through the jessamine foliage, which it was fast leaving in pleasant shadow, and shining all over the gorgeous flower-borders, might be cheerfully visible from within, she went to her sister's room and found her awake indeed, but so weak and exhausted that she was unable to submit to the task of dressing. A wakeful night of suppressed weeping, the cause of which Maggie was not slow to comprehend, as the traces thereof were legible enough, though she gave no hint of her discovery, every line of suffering upon the sweet
face of the invalid was intelligible to her. Maggie’s heart burned within her against the author of the mischief. “Ah! Andrew, Andrew!” she exclaimed to herself in an impatient undertone, as she half raised the blind to allow a little of the morning’s brightness and beauty admittance into the close, darkened room; “Oh, Andrew! you will kill her by your conduct, she loves you too well!”

“No; lie still, darling!” she presently exclaimed aloud, as her sister attempted to lift her head from her pillow: “lie still. You are weak and bad this morning. I shall bring you a nice little lunch here first, and then you will be ready to dress with spirit. There now!” and she shook up the pillow tenderly, and arranged the coverlet daintily, looping away the curtains of the bed so that they formed no obstruction to the view from the window. “Just amuse yourself, dear, by looking at that bonny laburnum that is brushing its blossoms against your window-panes—a perfect shower of golden blossoms, are they not? And do hear the magpie! Poor Bob! he is as glad of the fresh bright morning as we are. Listen, what a succession of sweet
gurgling notes he has to-day, poor fellow;" and imprinting a close kiss on the pale face over which was now reflecting a little of her own bright spirit, she hurried from the room to complete her intention, and provide the restorative luncheon her sister so much required.

Not a word passed for some time between the sisters respecting the subject that occupied the thoughts of both—their brother's late return on the previous night, and its probable cause. Both had heard the stealthy unsteady step along the verandah past their room, just as the clock in the parlour chimed two; to both were audible the slow pushing open of the casement, and the creeping, cautious entrance; and both, in their own particular way, were grieving for the failings of their only brother; but for some time they did not put their thoughts into words. Maggie busied herself in a hundred little friendly offices about her sister, tenderly assisting at her toilet; and when at last that was completed, and in Norah's sturdy and willing arms the slight fragile invalid was carried to her couch in the parlour, she still found anything to talk about but the one thought that was troubling them both. It
was Nellie who at length burst through the silence, and sadly exclaimed,—

"How did poor Andy look this morning?"

Maggie was dusting an imaginary speck of dust from a little table at the end of the sofa, preparatory to placing it by her sister's side. She turned round quietly, however, at the question, and looked earnestly into the fair face now slightly flushed with anxiety, and answered half impatiently—not at the questioner, but the question,—

"How should he look, Nellie, dear, after last night's doings, with aching head and eyes that seemed ashamed of the light?"

"If we could only contrive some means to draw him from those friends of his that are leading him astray," said Nellie, with a deepening flush. "I wonder father does not notice his appearance."

"Andy takes too good care of that," replied Maggie, bitterly. "Father had been out in the garden for more than an hour after breakfast before Andy made his appearance; and dear mother's weak sight only told her that Andy was not quite well. Such a fuss she made with him;"
I wonder he was not ashamed of accepting her loving care and anxious sympathy. It seems downright wicked of him."

"Do you never hear him speak of the new clerk in the office—Mr. Conway, I think Andy called him?" said Nellie, after a few moments of painful silence had passed away.

"I have heard his name once or twice," replied Maggie, indifferently. "Why, what of him, Nellie, love?"

"I thought, I hoped, that he would have proved a good friend to Andy. From what he says, he is a very steady young man. He is a passionate lover of flowers, and I asked Andy to bring him to see ours. A really good friend could do much with him and for him."

"Yes—might cut out the old. Well, why was he not brought here?" said Maggie.

"I can't say; perhaps he cannot come: perhaps Andy has forgotten to ask him. At any rate, I shall speak about it again."

"Only don't appear too eager, Nellie, or you will spoil all," replied Maggie, with a significant glance of her eyes and curl of her mouth; "there are some natures that may be led anywhere, into
either right or wrong, but attempt to drive, and it's all over with you. Andy is, I think, one of these natures."

"Poor Andy!" sighed Nellie, turning her face to the wall, and pressing her slender fingers over her weary eyes.
CHAPTER VI.

BLIND GUIDES.

One of Andrew Macdonald's first actions on sweeping his winnings from the pocket of his friend, Percy Jones, into his own, and by doing so, more than regaining the sum he had previously lost, was to liquidate the claim the landlord held against him, and to put an end at once by so doing to the craven fear of exposure which had lately beset him night and day. He stood not a little in awe of his father, whose steady probity of conduct, unflinching principles, and stern uprightness, compelled respect, even from his wild and unstable son. Captain Macdonald carried into his household not a little of the discipline that had graced his ship in other days. He was a tall old man, grey-headed and bald, with an erect and wiry frame, betokening still the presence of strength, and a countenance upon every line of which was written an iron will. Disabled from active service by some injury he had received in a sea skirmish—we do not remember
with whom or where, or even when—he had made a home for himself and his family in Australia, retiring from more congenial duties on half-pay, and relinquishing his command over well-disciplined marines, for the quiet superintendence of his flower and fruit garden. Into what a state of perfect order and beauty this was reduced, we have already revealed to our readers; for beneath all the sternness of countenance and manner, there was a real love for the beautiful that could not be concealed. It became his pleasure and his pride to produce rarer flowers than his neighbours, and his superb growth of fruit and vegetables added a handsome revenue to the income of his household.

It had been the one disappointment of his life that his only son showed so little inclination to embrace a profession from which he had himself obtained so honourable a discharge. But so it was! and Andrew from a very early age had shown a decided prejudice against the sea itself, and all pursuits pertaining thereunto. The captain—iron will as he possessed—was too good a sailor to endeavour to force an inclination so violently opposed to all maritime employments.
And when the law was suggested as a more congenial profession, he gave a tacit consent to its substitution, only stipulating that whatever occupation was adopted must then and for ever be abided by. And so Andrew, after his schoolboy days were over, had taken up his position at the ink-spotted desk in Mr. Bowden's office, between the four dirty walls aforesaid; and there, in spite of many restless and rebellious feelings, in spite of many a wandering inclination, he still remained, contenting himself with the recollection that if it were slow, it was at least a remunerative and gentlemanly profession; and at any rate the pen and the parchment were very superior to salt water.

This wandering inclination of his—the tendency to fret and fume at the slowness of his employment, the ever-swaying to and fro of his will according to the employment he was in, and the evident bent of that will to follow the ways of those whose course was decidedly not upwards—he carefully concealed from the knowledge of his father, aided and abetted by both sisters and mother. From a little child they had sheltered him in loving arms, and by loving
devices—his mother at least and sister Nellie—from many a harsh word, from many a well-merited punishment. Not well, not wisely, had they done so; for the young tree required training and pruning, and, wanting that, had twisted in and out with many an unsightly curve. The slender stem had forced its own course with wild and tortuous twinings; and so the boy became the man, of whom might be written, "unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

The winnings of that evening proved just sufficient to cover the tormenting debts, leaving nothing over for future speculation. So far a good was accomplished, and all might yet have ended well had it indeed ended there. But this was not likely to prove the case. It had never been intended by either Jones or his friend to relinquish their victim so easily; but simply to afford an inducement for him to prolong his "run of good luck." The gold of that night was a decoy for future capture. Not more eagerly does the little fish snatch at the glittering insect that covers the barbed hook than did Andrew, in his folly and wilfulness, take in the golden bait that drew him on to future ruin.
Certainly he should play again. What should withhold him? He had won—was likely now to win again. “It was an easy, a pleasant way of turning in the cash, and a precious sight better than plodding at a desk all day.” So thought he, hugging his iron fetters more closely to him; and with such thoughts he fortified himself against the compunction brought by the morning headache—the conviction that followed Maggie’s words, and it is very possible that again he might have been tempted to make another night of it had not the emptiness of his pockets rendered it purely impossible, for though strongly pressed to do so, he would not speculate with borrowed money. He had not gone so far in the downward course as this, and so the hearts of his mother and sisters were rejoiced by his returning early, and spending every evening for nearly a week quietly at home. Poor Nellie revived so much under the influence of this improvement that she sat up every night beyond her usual hour that she might devote herself to his amusement. The piano discoursed sweet music under his skilful fingers; the three voices blended most harmoniously in song; and the first two or three
evenings passed very pleasantly away, particularly as a friend or two from the neighbouring hills dropped in, and added to the cheerful coterie. Nellie forgot in those pleasant hours even an inquiry for the quiet dweller in Margaret Street; forgot his love for flowers, the good his company might do her brother, everything indeed but that her dear Andy was actually at home, and not restless, not unhappy. But, unfortunately, the fourth evening, though he returned at his ordinary hour, he soon began to manifest symptoms of extreme restlessness and ennui. He ran his fingers listlessly over the keys, rattled carelessly through two or three polkas, struck a few chords of "Stabat Mater," wandered from that to "Agnus Dei," from thence into a "Reverie in B flat," winding up all by an Irish jig, that set poor Norah dancing in the kitchen; after which last he closed the piano with a bang, declaring it "wretchedly out of tune." Poor fellow! it was the harp within that had lost its tone; its wires harmonized with nothing that vibrated upon them.

"I tell you what, girls, it's miserably dull up here in the evenings," he at length impatiently
burst forth, throwing himself full length upon the sofa, with his arms above his head. "It's all very well for an evening or two, but who can stand moping to death?"

"I don't see any need of moping to death," said Maggie, half angrily.

"Ah!—well; it's good enough for girls, no doubt. They have their crochet-work to satisfy them," said Andrew, sneeringly; "but for us fellows it's awful slow."

"You used to be so fond of music, Andrew dear," said Nellie's soft loving voice.

"Well, so I am; but a fellow don't always want to listen to his own music; and I should think you and Maggie must be awfully tired of hearing the same old pieces strummed over and over again—for I am."

"Oh no! you play so many, there is plenty of variety."

"Glad you think so. Wish I did. At any rate I get jolly tired, I know that. I wish we lived nearer town. One could take a stroll down there then, when sick of the inside of the house."

Nellie suppressed the sigh that rose to her lips, but she inwardly congratulated herself that they
did not live near town; while Maggie exclaimed brightly,—

"Take a turn in the garden: it's a splendid moonlight night, and lovely out there;" and she turned aside the curtain, and drew up the blind, letting in a full view of the moon, lighting trees and flowers as she spoke.

"Nothing worth seeing out there—wretchedly dull!" was Andrew's verdict.

"Father does not think so," said Maggie, significantly; and she pointed out the erect figure of the captain, who, pipe in hand, was slowly pacing up and down the broad path that led from the verandah to the side gate, with its broad border of violets.

"Father!" shouted Andrew, springing up from his prostrate position with a sarcastic laugh.

"The society of his flowers and trees is quite enough for him. But I say, Maggie," he continued, as he watched the old man in his walk, and marked the firm decided tread as he paced up and down, just as he must often have trod the deck of his own ship, "what a time of it father's men must have had. Shouldn't have liked to serve under him—should you?"
“They liked him, though,” said Maggie, bridling for her father’s honour.

“More fools they,” said Andrew, contemptuously.

“Why, Andy dear?” Nelly mildly expostulated.

“Oh, Nelly darling, I mean nothing bad; so don’t frighten your dear little self. I’m out of sorts to-night—out of humour, I suppose Maggie would say. It’s slow work here. Can’t you think of something for a fellow to do?”

“A game of cards,” suggested Maggie.

“Cards—eh! out with them. That’s the ticket! Now, Nellie, just rub up your wits. We’ll have a regular game of it to-night.” “As well that as anything,” he thought to himself; “it will at any rate keep my hand in.” He knew that his sisters were no mean antagonists, and the game soon became absolutely exciting; for to Andrew’s vivid imagination the lollies became gold—the gold that in the future he was to win; and imagining thus, with such motives before him, he played with a zeal and earnestness that kept his companions’ wits truly on the alert. Yet nevertheless he won then—won every game, and triumphed accordingly.
Could they have read the thoughts and intents of their brother's heart, those two fond sisters, or have guessed for a moment the causes that stimulated and excited them that evening; if but for a moment had dawned upon them the reason for all this eagerness and earnestness over their simple game; or that their hands were unconsciously leading their brother to his downfall—

with what a different spirit would they have regarded those innocent morsels of coloured cardboard!
CHAPTER VII.

OVERTASKED.

It had so happened for some days that there had been little intercourse between Andrew Macdonald and Louis Conway, for the simple reason that the latter had been almost constantly employed under Mr. Bowden's own eye about some very particular work. All hands, indeed, had enough to do, for two or three important cases were pending, and those who chose to work over-hours had ample opportunity of doing so. Louis Conway was among the number; and every evening he carried away a fresh roll of paper, returning it beautifully finished every morning. Mr. Bowden was beginning to discover the value of his new clerk, and tremulously alive to the attractions of the gold now turning up in such amazing quantities in the adjacent colonies, he offered a counter-attraction in the shape of a small increase of salary, and supplied as much work for over-hours as Louis could possibly undertake. Certainly it was in every way his in-
terest to do so; since more beautiful engrossing had never passed out of his office; for whatever Louis undertook he did it with all his might, and most thoroughly, whether it was his taste or no.

It was pleasant to know that every week he was enabled to lay by a sum for the purpose that had brought him to Australia, and that his savings were gradually becoming something definite; but the close application, both in and out of office hours, was scarcely wise, even though it added to his store, and could not long be continued without making its pressure felt. It began by almost imperceptible degrees, by the slow, languid, flagging step, the diminished appetite, the restless nights; and as the days grew longer, and the sun’s rays more powerful, these symptoms of an overtasked mind made themselves more distinctly visible, not only to himself but to those around.

"Mamma," said little Milly Layton, one morning as the trio sat at breakfast in the tiny little room at the back of the house, whose small neatly-curtained window looking out upon the back yard, with its brood of cackling ducks and hens, and its solitary bush of native geranium, the one
green thing about the yard, shrinking away into a corner, as though conscious of uncongenial society; "Mamma, you sometimes say too much play is a very bad thing—do you not think that too much work may be quite as bad?"

"Not much fear of that for you, Milly, my child," replied Mrs. Layton, looking up from her plate with a smile; "I never knew you in danger of that."

"No, mamma," said Milly laughing and blushing; "I know I am idle enough."

"What then, Milly? Are you afraid that I am overworking myself."

"I think you do sometimes, mamma. But just then I was not thinking of you;" and the quick shy, half-saucy glance that met Conway's eye gave point to the words.

"She is thinking for me, Mrs. Layton," he said with a smile, awakening from a dream into which he had fallen, while his plate and cup stood before him scarcely tasted. "I believe you are right, Milly; it is very possible to do more work than either body or mind will endure with impunity."

"Yes, Mr. Conway, very possible; and I am
afraid you are suffering from this," replied Mrs. Layton, kindly. "Pardon me, but I have noticed how little appetite you have, and you seem far from well. Would it not be wise to relax a while?"

"I feel it will be imperative to do so, Mrs. Layton, though it will be done very unwillingly. I have been rather too hard at work the last few days, and must take a 'spell,' I suppose, as my little friend Milly suggests, though I do not very well understand how she has discovered that I am working too hard. How was it, Milly?"

"Oh, I see you writing so much, Mr. Conway, all the time you are at home. Such big ugly rolls of paper you bring home and take away. You don't have any time to go out walking either, and you have not brought home any flowers for the vase for ever so many days, though I get fresh water ready every afternoon."

"Conclusive evidence!" said Louis, laughing and rising. "Well, Milly, I will take your advice, and will bring home no 'ugly roll of paper' tonight, and you may get the vase ready for the prettiest little nosegay I can buy in town; for really it will never do for me to think of being idle."
"I am glad he is so reasonable and so easily convinced," said Mrs. Layton, to her little daughter, who was dancing about, and clapping her hands with delight, as she watched him slowly taking his way across the Park Lands, with the "ugly roll" he had promised to leave behind him, and thought of the flowers she should have the pleasure of arranging in the evening. "There are not many men who would be so reasonable. I have been wishing to say something; for, poor fellow, he has looked quite ill the last day or two. However, I am glad, Milly, you have managed it for me."

It was a warm morning. Spring was advancing rapidly now; the flowers were in perfection of beauty; and the sun sometimes looked forth with a promise in his hot beams of what the summer would bring forth. There had been already one or two hot winds, as avant courriers of coming days. That morning the wind blew from the north with a degree of sultriness that was anything but agreeable, and the dust flew in clouds along the roads; for in those days the streets of Adelaide were not so well watered as they are now, and our city inhabitants had to endure as
best they might cloud upon cloud as they traversed the footpaths, whenever the slightest modicum of wind was present to raise it.

It was with very languid footsteps that Louis Conway took the way to Mr. Bowden's. The office at that time in the morning was comparatively cool. The room was in shadow, and the closed windows excluded all entrance of the hot wind. It was pleasant at least to be out of reach of that, and beyond the influence of the sunbeams; for that day at least Louis felt he could better understand and take in the full beauty of the words, a "covert from the heat;" "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The idea was almost as refreshing as the draught of cool water from the monkey-bottle, with its memory of "living waters," and "still waters," and "cold waters," all fresh from the Bible-reading of the day. And when he took his seat at the desk something very pleasant there greeted him—a small but exquisitely arranged bouquet of choice roses, all glowing in beauty, and carefully placed in the glass of water he usually devoted to his flowers. Who had placed them there? No one was in the office when he entered;
the hour was an early one, and yet he certainly
was not the first arrival. Had Macdonald been
there. Ah, yes, there was his lunch-bag; he had
brought the flowers; that was convincing. They
looked up with the pleasant smile of friends, and
what a welcome they seemed to afford!

Presently after the senior clerk, Mr. Horn,
came in, and both began preparations for the day’s
employment.

“You get through a good deal of work, Mr.
Conway,” he exclaimed while sorting his papers;
“but don’t stick too closely—be advised by me.
You are not looking well, and in my opinion you
overdo the thing. Money will not make up for
lost health.’’

The second time that day for such advice to be
given! Certainly he ought to take the warning.
But it was scarcely needful; he felt his strength
was flagging, and that it would not be possible,
however much he desired it, to keep on as he
had done; so he simply replied,—

“I am not quite well, Mr. Horn. Perhaps the
change of climate may have something to do
with that. I suppose I must expect to feel the
difference some way, though I believe I have kept
too close to the pen lately. I shall rest after-hours for a while, or any rate, take less work home to do."

"You will act wisely," replied his companion, who was a man of few words, and quickly resumed his pen, contented with the simple fulfilment of what he considered his duty. He had growing boys of his own; and had lost a son of about the same age as Louis by over-application to the desk. Care, as well as time, had wrought the lines upon his brow, and woven silver threads among his dark locks in profusion, and left him bald; and care as well as time had made him a quiet and a thoughtful man, plodding on from day to day at his desk, the same dull routine, week in and week out, apparently seeking and desiring nothing better.

Andrew Macdonald did not come in till the old clock was chiming forth its single stroke, and Louis Conway was again the sole occupant of the room. He came leaping up the stairs, and entered with a bound, making instant onslaught upon his dinner-bag, and sat with round eyes watching Louis, as in his old position he leant dreamily over his flowers, arranging and re-arranging their
leaves and petals, with his sandwiches untasted and pushed far from him.

"Hallo, Conway my boy! Nellie did not send those flowers, nor did I bring them to take the place of 'grub.' What a queer fellow you are. A few flowers can send you to dreamland in a moment!"

"I don't know that I was dreaming," replied Conway, with a smile, waking up; "I scarcely believe I was thinking of anything—nothing at any rate with any connection. Did your sister send these flowers? I am sure I am much obliged to you and her. They are indeed beautiful, and so fresh and sweet. I cannot think how you managed to bring them in such perfection."

"But what's the matter with you, mate?" Andrew presently asked, looking fixedly on his friend. "What ails you?—are you going to be on the sick list? Ah! it is as I said; you have overdone it. I knew you would. You'll have to drop that over-work if you want to save yourself, and you're a little too good to throw away in this fashion. You'll have to drop it, I tell you."

"For a time, Andrew."
"For a time! For the summer months at least. You are a new chum, understanding nothing of heat. Yet, come, come! the world was not made in a day, and it's not the least bit of use your being in such haste to make your fortune. You can't do it after that fashion. Ah! by-the-by, do you know the English mail is in? I thought that would rouse you. Where are you going now?—to the Post-office? Sit down and take your dinner first, man!" But he spoke vainly now; for snatching up his hat with a laugh, Louis went down stairs two or three at a time, as if he and langour had nothing in common, forgetting the dust and hot wind, and everything unpleasant, in the joy with which he welcomed his mother's letters.

Louis Conway had very little inclination to take to his neglected lunch when he returned heated and flushed from his rapid walk through dust and hot wind to the Post Office. He had torn open his mother's letter as he walked along the street, and had read enough to convince him that all was well at home, and reserved the rest for the shelter of the office.

But Andrew could not let him alone, and as a
Louis spread out his letters, pushing still further out of reach his slices of bread and meat, as though ignoring their presence, presently exclaimed, "Excuse me, Conway, for interrupting you; but is it your intention to give the go-by to food altogether?"

"I have no appetite to-day," replied Louis. "My dear fellow, I cannot eat, and it's no use in the world trying when one is not hungry."

"I don't know about that; it's hard, I suppose, but I can't say I know much about it from experience. I am generally gifted with a pretty capacious appetite," said Andrew, laughing. "I do remember though once having low fever, and wondering how any one could take pleasure in eating. And, by-the-by, Conway, I shall think you have a touch of the same disorder if you walk like you do, and refuse your food day after day, as you have done the last week."

"I hope not," said Louis gravely. "I am not very well, certainly. Remember I am fresh to the climate, and have been at it rather too closely with my pen. If I relax I shall soon be right."

"You need a change now, that's easy to see. Come home with me to-night. Come and look
at my father's flowers. If you can admire those, you will suit the governor all to pieces."

"Thank you," said Louis; "I will with pleasure, if you have no objection to walk over to Margaret Street first with me. I should like to let Mrs. Layton know that I shall be absent tonight. It would not be kind to allow her to wait up needlessly for me."

"Just as you like, old fellow—just as you like; though I must say it is about the last thing I should have thought of doing. Now then, fire away, read your letters; I won't interrupt you again."
CHAPTER VIII.

NEW INTRODUCTIONS.

Very interesting and pleasant letters they were that mail, both from mother and sisters. They came to Louis like a tonic, bracing him up for new action; for the news they contained was all bright and cheerful. The unexpected payment of a large, old, and almost despaired-of debt had made the path of his widowed mother far smoother, and it took away a heavy burden from her son's heart as he read of it. He read, too, other news that afforded pleasant surprise—the engagement of his eldest sister Letty to a friend of his own, whose position warranted the conclusion that the match was a good one. The marriage was not to be long delayed, but, better than all, the promise had been given to the bride elect that whenever her mother and sister sailed for the Australian shores he would accompany them, and make a home in the new country for her. All this was bright intelligence for Louis. It did him far more good than medicine, and was more invigor-
ating than the choicest wine to his languid frame. It cheered him all through the long office hours, carried his pen swiftly and contentedly over the dreary briefs, and Andrew declared, as they took down their hats, and started together over the Park Lands for Margaret Street, that he already looked twenty per cent. better for their perusal.

"Well, it was a snug little place after all, this room in Margaret Street," Andrew was obliged to confess; "pretty, and snug, and cosy, but not jolly—no, certainly not jolly in the real acceptation of the word; too quiet, and dull, and all that. Yes, the books were first-rate for a lover of books, and everything was nice and clean about the house. Nevertheless he wished his friend in a more rowdy sort of place." His friend thanked him, but did not reciprocate the wish.

"Oh, come along, mate; never mind those flowers;" he said at last, with a soupçon of impatience in his voice, as he watched Louis carefully, and somewhat leisurely, unfolding his choice little rose bouquet from its many protecting wrappings of soft paper. "Never mind those flowers; toss them out of the window. You shall have a perfect surfeit of them before morning,
and as many as you like to take the trouble to carry away besides."

"Never waste a good thing," said Louis, quietly smiling, and going on with his work. "I have a little friend here who loves flowers, and takes great pleasure in arranging them for me. I will just consign them to her care, and relieve Mrs. Layton of any further trouble on my account for to-night, and then we will go."

Milly came bounding forward to receive the flowers, with beaming face and an exclamation of pleasure. She stopped short, however, when she saw that Louis was not alone, a bright blush spreading over her face, to hide which she ran off with both flowers, and vase to the next room.

"What a pretty child!" exclaimed Andrew, as they turned from the house. "I've no great admiration for children in general, but, by George! if this one was a few years older, I should say it would be a case."

"Not with me," replied Louis. "Milly is a nice little girl, and has no nonsense about her; don't put it into her head."

"Oh, she did not hear me, the shy little puss; but let me tell you, she is very different to most
colonial girls if the nonsense is not there already. Precocity is the order of the day here, and flirtation begins from the very cradle. You will find that out among other things, my boy, when a few more hot winds have blown over your head.”

“I shall be sorry to find it so. I hope for the honour of Australian girls that it is an exaggeration. To me ‘fastness’ has no charm, and no power of repartee; no quickness of retort can equal, in my opinion, the beauty of modesty.”

“Ha, ha!” shouted Andrew. “Hear him! hear him!—

‘Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.’

That’s your style, is it? Our Australian lassies won’t do that, no fear! They take care to be seen and heard too!”

“Not very complimentary to your sisters, Macdonald,” said Louis, with grave reproof in eye and voice.

“Oh! they are out of the question, of course, altogether,” replied Andrew; “besides, old fellow, they are not Australian girls, excepting by adoption, but genuine slips from Auld Reekie. Even
the accent clings slightly to their tongues as it does to mine; half naturalized as I have become.”

The sun was sinking lower and lower in the west as Louis and his friend left the city streets and set their faces towards the hills. They were just in time to catch the solitary homeward car, and to secure the last two places. Andrew usually walked home; but partly on account of a wish to be home in time for the family tea, partly on account of his friend, whose strength was apparently easily exhausted, he urged him forward that he might have the opportunity of the ride.

A pleasant thing it was that ride, even in the jolting car, and over roads of different construction to the roads of the present day. “Anywhere out of the street, and the dust, and noise; anywhere into the neighbourhood of hills; those exquisite hills, all glowing with purple and crimson,” thought Louis, as he leant somewhat wearily back in his seat, and looked from side to side with eyes that drank in refreshment from the sight of the little roadway cottages, and their tiny gardens, from the green hedges, furze, and kangaroo, impervious to summer heat, from
bowery trees, and waving wheat-fields, and orchards of fruit, and verdant vine-branches, which rapidly crossed his vision. Now and then some pretty little detached dwelling, half hidden among trees and tendrils, met his view, with broad verandah and gothic pointed roof. Such a home as that he was working for; to such a home he yet intended, if God spared him, to welcome his mother and sister. Beyond those hills, perchance; out of the reach of the Adelaide dust, but after the same model. "How long first?" He went into a dream over that—a dream that was not interrupted, for Andrew was engaged in discussing a knotty point of law with a neighbour, bestowing a little advice con amore, and they were at the end of their journey before either was aware of it.

A pleasant termination Louis thought it, as he walked with his friend up the shady path from the little side-gate. A few stray sunbeams stole in between the topmost branches yet, but the hot winds had passed very lightly over the violet borders, which were thick and luxuriant as ever, though without their fragrant blossoms. These hot winds were kept out as much as possible by
the high hedge and an inner regular row of almond-trees. They had done but little injury at present within those boundaries.

"I wonder no longer at your calling Margaret Street dark and dreary in contrast with this," said Louis pleasantly, as they approached the house.

"Oh, for that matter, it's a pleasant place enough, but awful slow. A fellow gets tired after a while of looking at trees and so forth; why even you would."

"I hope I may be tried yet," said Louis drily; "I don't think I should."

If Louis had any doubt as to favourable reception, the doubts were soon dissipated. Pleasant words, and greetings, and smiles, met him on every hand, even the stern old captain, after a few close scrutinizing glances, emerged from his shell, and found his son's friend an agreeable guest. A fortunate visit he had made to Scotland a few months before he set sail for Australia had familiarized him with many a spot still green in the memory of the old captain. A reference to his recent voyage, with its two or three incidents of storm and calm brought out the old man's
nautical experience in full swing. From that subject he launched into topics nearer home; the mineral, the vegetable, the floral productions of the land of his adoption; and delighted by Louis's eager attention and animated countenance, he was just about to drag him forthwith into the garden, in order more fully to illustrate his subject, when a neighbour opportunely arrived to urge his presence at a district meeting, much to his own annoyance and his children's relief; for they were beginning to think, and with reason too, that their father intended entirely to engross their brother's friend and guest, leaving but little chance for their becoming better acquainted with him.

"You stay to-night, of course?" said the captain, as he hastily took his leave. "I shall yet have an opportunity of showing you my improvements. It may stand you well in the future. I'm a practical man, sir,—a practical man. Don't talk of what I can't do,—never did, as you shall see." And the old man unbent from his sternness, followed his impatient neighbour from the house, leaving the rest to resume their tea and conversation.
That pretty room, with its neat china tea service, its table profusely spread, its surrounding of kind faces, took Louis back in memory to England again. Yet the faces were different, new, and fresh. A lovely creature he thought Nellie Macdonald, but one upon whose loveliness he legibly traced the inscription, "passing away;" so delicate, so ethereal, her loveliness seemed to him. He wondered not at the love by which she was regarded. Maggie recalled his own eldest sister a little to mind; not certainly in appearance, but a little in manner. He liked her, as most people did that knew her, and enjoyed the laugh that her ready wit always brought. She was the life of the party. As to his friend, Andrew at home, and Andrew in town, he soon discovered were two very different characters. The "silken cords" were in full sway here, that was visible enough; and Louis marked the filial attention with which he waited on his mother, his thin, delicate little mother, so quiet, so retiring, yet so kind and earnest in her welcome, that he could not help thinking of his own mother whenever he looked at her. He recognized too the strong love that subsisted between
Nellie and her brother. How she covertly regarded him, watched every look, anticipated every wish, and acquiesced in every proposal. "Was this the right discipline for Andrew Macdonald?" he asked himself more than once that evening; he thought not.

The cards were not needed that night, at least there was no attempt to draw them from their concealment. Pleasant talk, and music, and tuneful voices blending in harmony, and bright laughter succeeded one another till the evening wore rapidly away. It was at a very late hour they separated, Andrew sharing his room and bed with his friend.

"Oh, Maggie, dear!" said Nellie, as her sister came to her bedside for a good-night kiss. "Oh, Maggie! I do hope Andy will keep Mr. Conway for his friend. I have faith in this young man; he looks good, and I am sure it will be good for Andy to be much with him; it may draw him away from the bad."

"Only mind what I said once before, Nellie, darling; don't be too eager," laughed Maggie, as she kissed again the cheeks sadly flushed with excitement and fatigue.
CHAPTER IX.

CONFESSIONS.

It was Louis's first introduction to the interior of an Australian garden, and his feelings were all pleasurable and hopeful. Many times he had lingered outside the wall or palings that came between him and the fair flowers he so much admired; but it was the first time his feet had freely trod the pleasant paths—the first time he had had full and free permission to wander at will beneath the shady trees. He certainly frequently availed himself of the privilege of sauntering in that place of public resort, the Botanical Gardens (very different were those gardens at that period to their present beautiful and exquisite order and arrangement—sans fountains, sans statuettes, sans rare flowers, sans everything); but this was more like home, bowery, retired, secluded, with shady almond-tree walks; huge Turkish fig-trees, whose broad and fan-like leaves bending to the very ground deepened the shade and formed natural bowers, beneath which rustic seats and a tiny table awaited the will and
pleasure of the owners. Flower-beds everywhere rendered the air rich with perfume; tropical beauties mingled with the fair roses and lilies of home, wreathing and twining in endless variety—so it seemed to him. Captain Macdonald's pride in his garden was a very pardonable one, Louis Conway thought, for the order was exquisite—even as the beauty. To maintain that order an amazing amount of trouble must be incurred, and something of this he had ample means afforded him of judging in the morning; for he rose early, and was out just as the first sunbeam burst through the rosy cloud—not earlier than the captain, however: he had been up half an hour, and purposely lingered near the house that he might have the pleasure of the company of his son's guest all to himself.

"Good morning, good morning, Mr. Conway; glad to see you like early rising, sir. Nothing like the morning air. Wish my boy could think the same."

"I generally do rise early," replied Conway, smiling; "I have always been used to it; but such a morning as this, and such a garden, is an additional inducement. You promised to show
me all your plans and improvements, captain; and, as I hope one day to form a garden for myself, I shall be glad of all the advice I can receive on the subject.

"You shall have it and welcome," replied the old man, striding proudly forwards. "And first for the irrigation. It is my own contrivance, and I think as perfect as possible;" and off he went, with Louis after him, nothing loth, and for the next two hours he was a most interested and attentive listener to the history of that garden's formation, its failures and successes, its disappointments and triumphs. Such a listener Captain Macdonald had seldom before been so happy as to encounter. Louis had enjoyed strolling through the garden on the previous evening, sauntering quietly along, with Maggie and Andrew for escort, beneath the shade of the trees, and along the margin of the creek that, fortunately for the captain's irrigation purposes, passed the gardens most remotely from the house. He had quietly taken in its beauty previously, and thus was more at liberty to listen to the intricate ways and means by which so much perfection had been achieved. He came in to
breakfast looking rather weary, but bright and cheerful, and better for his morning walk, and able to appreciate the hot ham and eggs and coffee and cream that Maggie's busy hands were dispensing, together with the excellent buttermilk scones that Scottish hands know so well how to prepare.

"Well, old fellow, have you seen all that is to be seen of our snuggery?" exclaimed Andrew, as he took his place with the rest at the table. "I heard you hook it, but for the life of me couldn't rouse. Always feel so confoundedly sleepy in the mornings. Besides, I knew you would have father to do the honours, and he can manage that business better than I can."

"I have had a rare time this morning," replied Louis warmly; "a treat I had scarcely anticipated the good fortune to enjoy in Australia, sanguine as I have been on the subject."

"A treat then I hope you will often experience," returned Andrew; "it is easily come-atable if you really think it so. For my part, these scones of Maggie's are more to my taste. Try them, mate, and see if you can appreciate that species of effort among the flowers."
“Miss Maggie will have no reason to doubt on that subject, I think,” said Louis, with a bow and a laugh; “I do not know that ever I tasted anything of the kind quite so good—certainly not in Australia.”

“You know something of scones though, if you have visited Scotland, I should think,” said Maggie, archly.

“I first formed their acquaintance there, but certainly little expected to renew it so many thousand miles away,” Louis replied rather gravely; for that visit to Scotland had not been one of pleasure, but consequent upon his father’s death, and there were some circumstances about it that vibrated rather painfully on his memory just then. He shook off the feeling, however, and a merry encounter of lances succeeded—“Scottish haggis,” “Scotch whisky,” and Scottish scenery all coming under consideration, winding up with the literati of Scotland, with Scott, and Burns, and the Ettrick Shepherd, and Scottish reviewers, this latter portion of the conversation being tacitly resigned to Maggie and Louis, the latter of whom was presently reminded of the fact by an exclamation from Andrew that
his father had thrice asked for another cup of coffee without attracting the slightest attention, and for his own part a few more hot scones would be very acceptable. With a blush and a laugh, and a merry retort, Maggie rose to fill her father's cup, and replenish the plate of scones, and the Scottish poets and reviewers were merged in topics of more general interest. The breakfast hour passed rapidly and cheerfully away, and the time for departure to the office came all too soon. Louis did not leave without many warm invitations to renew his visit soon. He carried away with him a magnificent bunch of flowers, gathered by the captain's own hands. "An immense favour from the governor," Andrew declared it to be, and proving that he had walked thoroughly into his esteem.

"I wish, for father's sake, I was more after your stamp, Conway," he suddenly exclaimed as they walked to town. "Somehow I can't like anything that he wishes me to like; the perversity of human nature I suppose you would say," he added with a comical grimace. "I'm rackety and restless enough, goodness knows, for a sailor, but then I abominate the sea; the very
sight of its waves turns me inside out. I'm wretchedly sea-sick on the smoothest sea. Besides, I should hate the life; it's horridly monotonous, and the service is altogether too orderly, and too much under order, to suit my stomach. Then as to the more quiet pleasures that father seems so thoroughly engrossed in—this flower and fruit-garden business—I can't for the life of me see the pleasure. There's a great deal of toil, I know that; for now and then father gets me to lend a hand with a spade in the busy season (fine blisters I get on this delicate palm of mine for my pains), or Maggie coaxes me to help her gather fruit for the market—to gather, mark, not to arrange it, trust her for that. She does that part of the work herself, and pretends that I have no more taste than a bear, and I verily believe she is right. All very well this; but I tell you it does not suit me. It seems tame and spiritless. I can't see what you can find to like in it."

"How about the pursuit you have chosen—the law?" asked Conway, quietly ignoring the last words.

"The law!" said Andrew impatiently; "the
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law! I took it like a man takes his wife—for better for worse, and suppose I must abide by it. But I can tell you, Conway, between ourselves, I shall never make a lawyer, never rise. I've no head for it, no inclination,—can't give my mind to it,—hate all the dry technical terms, and dry fusty documents. It's no use. I shall disappoint father again, and enrage him into the bargain, for I hate the law. I hate drudging on from week's end to week's end, from year's end to year's end, the old monotonous round. It's slow! it's awfully slow. Why, you hate it yourself; I know you do!"

"I certainly do not like it, though my dislike is founded on other reasons than your own," replied Conway, thoughtfully. "But then I have always had another purpose—a fixed purpose, mind you—in coming to this colony. If you do not like the law, and, excuse me, are determined not to succeed in the profession, what do you intend to supersede it? What shall you do?"

"Abide by my choice, I suppose," said Andrew, gloomily. "The agreement between the governor and myself, when I declined risking my neck at the mast-top, or making myself food
for the fishes, was, that whatever choice of busi-
ness or profession I then made, it must be a
permanent one. And you see, I know that
placing me with old Bowden made a considerable
hole in his savings. I hate to disappoint my
mother and sisters as well; for they look forward
to such great things from me by-and-by, if I will
but be steady. Steady! bless their little hearts,
they know nothing at all about it. No, hang it!
if it had not been for that promise, and the dis-
appointment consequent on its breakage, do you
think I would have remained contentedly, day
after day, or seemingly contentedly, chained to
a desk, a mere passive quill-driver, while a turn
of a spade might make my fortune and a fortune
for us all? Not I; I would have been off, I tell
you, to the Sydney diggings long ago but for
those at home."

"All are not prizes there, Andrew; there are
plenty of blanks," said Louis, significantly.

"Blanks, eh! but the chance, man, the chance
of turning up the prize, that's it; the excite-
ment, and the expectation, and all that sort of
ting. Something to rouse a fellow up, that!"

"And the hardships, and the disappointments,
and the hard work too. Have you taken account of that?"

"I can handle a spade well enough; the sight of the gold would more than make up for it all."

"If you found it," replied Conway. "Remember, spade-work brings blisters—eh, Andy?"

"Confound it, yes; but gold is an excellent salve. I tell you but for those at home I would have been off long ago. I don't know whether I shan't now; for this is humdrum work. The new diggings in Victoria are making a stir now, just commencing. What say—will you join me? Worth a trial; now own it is."

"I have not thought much about it at present," returned Conway; "and I never do anything without thought."

"Think about it, then," said Andrew, eagerly, "and let me have the benefit of your thoughts. Come now, why should not we make our fortunes as well as anybody else? What's the use of plodding on here for nothing?"

"Do not give Mr. Bowden the benefit of your thoughts," replied Conway, gravely; for they had just reached the office. "I am by no means clear that the step you propose would be either a good
one or a wise; but I confess that a few words from your father have slightly unsettled my thoughts on the subject."

"From father! What, about the diggings? Whatever did the governor say? Persuaded you to go—eh?"

"Not exactly. The accounts from Victoria are very exciting. But be quiet, Andrew. The office is scarcely the place for discussing this."

"Mind, I shan't let the matter drop through," said Andrew, tossing up his cap to the ceiling and catching it again. "I'm bent upon finger-ing the gold, as well as hearing about it."
CHAPTER X.

ON THE SICK LIST.

Man proposeth, but propose he may, for, after all, the disposing rests with a greater than he—with One who "seeth the end from the beginning," who "knoweth the way that we take," and chooseth our lot for us. Happy is it for us that it is so; happy is it that we are not left to decide our own pathway, to choose our own trial, to mete out the measure of our own joys.

It was not in the power of a day or two's recreation—an evening's respite from mental toil—to repair the mischief those many hours of overwork had occasioned. A little brightened up, a little excited, and consequently concluding himself considerably better, Louis Conway had resumed his seat in the office. But his strength flagged wearily before the long, long hours as the day had passed. Had the hours ever seemed so long before? was ever a day of such dreary length? No wonder he thought it long, for his head ached heavily, the arteries pulsated and
throbbed with every noise without or within the office. He could scarcely endure the scratching of his own pen, languidly as it passed over the paper. His hands burned feverishly, and alternate flushes of heat and cold passed over him at intervals. Was he really going to have an attack of illness? Was it coming on him at last? Ill in a foreign land, far from home, among strangers! No mother's hand to cool the fever of his brain; no sister's voice to soothe the irritated nerves! Yet, not alone; no, he was not alone. He felt that. He rejoiced in the midst of his weakness and pain at that, and drank in the meaning of the precious words of One who cannot lie, with eager thankfulness, with childlike faith and confidence. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." "A friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Mother! Father! Friend! Yes, he possessed them all in One; and amid his increasing illness he leant as a weary child upon those promises, and rejoiced in this truthfulness and security.

The early morning had been pleasant, soft,
and balmy, though even then the sun gave promise of what it would yet do in the course of the day. Before Louis and Andrew reached town the heat had much increased, and the wind showed signs of veering round to the north. Tokens of heat were thickening on every side, and over the distant grass paddocks the strangely curious undulating motion so often seen in summer, occasioned by intense heat, and in the distance looking so like rolling undulating waves of the sea, began to be visible. Two or three whirlwinds suddenly gathered in their way, catching up in their course all they encountered, sticks, papers, and even small stones, and travelling along in dark columns over the road, till, suddenly dissipated, the particles of dust flew off in all directions, a sure prognostication, a sure indication rather, of heat.

The office, on their first entrance, was comparatively cool, and Louis, parched with thirst, drank eagerly two or three glasses of water in succession. It was the very thing he should not have done; but what is so impatient as thirst, and what arguments will avail against a parched-up mouth or throat in the presence of the crystal
fluid? The sudden chill that succeeded to the heat he had before experienced, betrayed the imprudence too surely, but too late; and the headache that immediately followed the chill soon convinced him of his folly.

It was hot everywhere that day; stifling it seemed at times in the office—for the hot wind found means to penetrate crevices of a hair's-breadth dimension, and entered with every fresh opening of the door.

"I say, old boy," said Andrew, towards evening, suddenly looking up from his desk at Louis, who at the moment was leaning his weary, aching head upon his hand, unable even to guide his pen, "I thought this morning you were twenty pounds better for your visit home with me, but, by Jove! I believe you are twenty pounds worse; the improvement was a mere flash in the pan. What have we done to make you so—eh?"

"Nothing," said Louis, in a low tone, "nothing: it has been coming on some time. The visit, pleasant as it was, could not ward it off long. I thoroughly enjoyed that. But this hot day, the hot wind, and my own carelessness in drinking profusely of water while heated, has, I believe,
hurried matters. I do feel ill, but shall be better perhaps after a night's rest."

"Come home again with me, and let mother nurse you. She's a good one, I can tell you, and a first-rate doctor too—and so is Maggie," said Andrew, eagerly.

"No, thank you, Andy; it would never do to transform a guest into a patient, or your pleasant home into an hospital."

"Nonsense! I can answer for mother. She will be glad to wait upon you, if you will let her."

"Oh! I hope this illness will be merely temporary," and he pressed his hands more closely to his aching head as he spoke, and relapsed into silence. The entrance of Mr. Bowden presently after caused him again to look up, though a dart of pain ran like a flash of lightning through his temples. That gentleman had a roll of papers under his arm, and was just on the point of asking how much he could undertake, but he stopped short with the first glance into the face of his clerk, and exclaimed,—

"Hallo, Mr. Conway! you ill? Bless my soul! I hope not."

"I'm afraid so, sir; the symptoms are very much
like it," replied Conway, with an effort at smiling, which little accorded with his pale face and contracted brow.

"Done himself up, sir; too much overwork; change of climate; heat of weather; and so forth in addition," said Andrew, contemptuously; the contempt for Mr. Bowden, not for Louis.

"A cause that is never likely to affect you, Mr. Macdonald," replied Mr. Bowden, with sarcasm, in reference to the overwork. "I see I may as well put these into other hands," he continued, turning more kindly to Louis. "You had better take a day or two's rest; a 'spell' may set you to rights. What do you say to coming home with me? Mrs. Bowden will give you a hearty welcome, I am sure. I think you told me you have no friends in the colony."

"None, sir; but my landlady is a kind and considerate one, and I think I cannot do better than go to my own little room. I am sure she will not neglect me. Thank you very much, sir, for your kind offer. Perhaps, after all, I may be better for a day or two's rest."

"I shall drive you home at any rate, and I strongly advise you to see a medical man. No-
thing like taking things in time. You are threatened with a touch of low fever, I suspect. You are not yet seasoned to the climate. But take it in time, and it may be arrested. Just lock up your desk, Mr. Conway; it is just time to close. I shall have the trap round in a few moments.’’

“I shall come and see you to-morrow, old fellow, never fear. But I expect you’ll be right in a couple of days—as right as ninepence,” said Andrew, by way of parting words.

And so Louis Conway went home to his little room and his anxious landlady, far worse than he left her, awakening all the sympathies of her motherly heart by his utter prostration and weakness and evident suffering. He judged correctly, for she proved herself even beyond his belief both kind and considerate and enduring.

“Just what I feared, sir; he’s been working too hard,” she exclaimed to Mr. Bowden, as he assisted her to place Louis in the large easy chair in a half-fainting condition, and stood by awaiting his recovery, which she was endeavouring to produce by inserting a spoonful of brandy
between the pale lips, and bathing the burning
head and brow with eau de Cologne.

"Well, you see we've been pressed with work
in the office lately," said Mr. Bowden, in reply,
excusing himself for giving overwork. "Conway,
too, is a first-rate hand. It's too bad to lose
him, even for a day or two. I don't know what
we will do without him. You must please do
the best you can to bolster him up again, Mrs.
Layton."

"For his own sake I shall do that, sir," Mrs.
Layton replied, with quiet dignity. "I am a
mother, and can feel for him, poor fellow! far
from home and friends, and in a strange land.
He shall not want for care and attendance."

"That's right; and anything I can do you
will let me know: and now I will hurry home,
for I must work hard myself to-night. I will
send my own medical man to-morrow, Mrs. Lay-
ton;" and he bowed himself away, leaving Mrs.
Layton to continue her kind ministrations, and,
with the aid of her little daughter, to prepare a
comfortable bed for the weary patient, who was
presently after sufficiently restored to avail him-
self of it.
"I fear I am likely to be a sad trouble to you, Mrs. Layton," he said wearily; "but I believe I am right in understanding your kindness, and in trusting to you. I am not without money. Do not let me be burdensome to you."

"If you trust me, you will pay me as I like best, Mr. Conway," replied Mrs. Layton, gently. "Do not refer to money; that will be all right. I have perfect confidence in that. But I am a mother, with a mother's feelings, and though not your own mother, do not think I should care to neglect you. My own son might be ill, and needing care; should I not be grateful to anyone who would care for him?"

"I trust in you perfectly, Mrs. Layton."

"And I think I am not mistaken, Mr. Conway, your trust and confidence is placed on One higher still—on One 'who knoweth our frame, who remembereth that we are dust'—who is 'touched with a feeling of our infirmities, having been alike tempted Himself.'"

"Yes, you are right. I ought to trust. I do. He has never failed me, and will not now."

"He will not indeed; and now I shall go and get your tea. You must try to take a little
nourishment. I have some chicken broth, made purposely for you. A few spoonfuls will revive you;” and the kind motherly woman glided softly from the room.

Louis turned with a sigh upon his pillow—a sigh of uneasiness and pain, but also a sigh of relief and satisfaction: satisfaction with his neat fresh little room, that had been closely shut up all day against the hot wind, and was cool and fresh; satisfaction with his kind nurse, and relief at the two or three days for recruiting he had gained. The quiet rustling of the muslin curtains moving softly to and fro in the evening breeze, for it was no longer a hot wind, the dreary buzz of a large fly as it hovered over the vase of flowers, the distant murmur of voices coming from the opposite house,—all conspired together to lull him to forgetfulness. When Mrs. Layton again entered, he was asleep.
CHAPTER XI.

ANDREW'S SCOTTISH GREETING.

"Raised to the seventh heaven of expectation to have one's hopes dashed down to the very ground! Too bad! confoundedly too bad! but can't be helped, I suppose." So Andrew Macdonald muttered, as he turned from the office door, after watching Mr. Bowden drive off with his friend in the direction of Margaret Street, and stood for a moment, as he often stood, undecided which way to take; not indeed from the lack of friends, or of a dozen places in any of which he might have received a welcome; but from mere indecision of character, a most unhappy trait, the misery of its possessor, the bar to all prosperity or happiness.

"Home should it be?—not home, most certainly." He was not exactly in the mood to encounter an evening alone with his sisters; he was equal to neither Nellie's fond endearments nor Maggie's playful reproofs. He was restless, moody, and disappointed; angry with himself and
his feelings, equally angry, though most irrationally so, with Louis Conway, for becoming ill at so unpropitious a time. He had been closely engaged all day with his pen, chiefly in the other office, and he had had little opportunity for chance word or look, certainly none for touching on the theme that just then was of engrossing interest to him, the golden stores of mother earth. And now, when he had been looking forward all day to a tête-à-tête walk to North Adelaide, and another gold-field colloquy, Louis himself had put that out of the question by going home ill! Was ever illness more provoking or inopportune?

All sorts of speculations had passed through Andrew's brain that day, very far at variance with the words that followed his pen, as the many mistakes and erasures testified. He had found time to scan the newspapers at his dinner, which he took at the dining-rooms, and not in the office, and what he read there of the golden nuggets of Ballarat, was seriously to the detriment of the duck and green peas with which he had promised to regale himself. Nor was he alone in his enthusiasm; the excitement was
spreading, the news of the day was turning absolutely *yellow*. People were beginning to eat gold, drink gold, and dream of the huge nuggets they were never destined to see. It was at present but a young beginning; but a beginning it was. The fever had communicated itself with the South Australian population—henceforth its progress was rapid.

From the few quiet words of Louis, Andrew had augured so much. He was positive now that somewhere in his friend's composition there was an answering chord with his own, and that, after all, the gold fever would not leave him unscathed. Why indeed should it? He had reason enough to desire to make money: for that he had left England, for that he had sat closely, working and slaving night and day, till the result was an attack of illness. Why should not he take the "short cut" to wealth, and turn it up with the pick and spade, far more effective weapons in his opinion than the silver pen, especially when ploughing beneath a gold-bearing soil. But the aggravation of it was this illness coming just in the worst possible time. Well! it might not last long, and then hurrah for the diggings!
For the time being he forgot the ties that bound him to his profession, he forgot Mr. Bowden's title to his services, his own promise to his father, his future as a lawyer altogether. The obstacles were thrust upon one side, and only the golden future apparent. There were no blanks in its horizon; all prizes—golden prizes. Louis's chance word that his father viewed with no unfavourable eye those distant gold-fields had fired the train that already lay in the cavities of his heart, and such a train was not likely to miss execution.

He was standing irresolutely near the door of the office, decidedly, as we have before said, not in a mood for an evening at home, where he knew most of the members would vehemently oppose any broaching of the subject in question, quite as little disposed to encounter the tender friendship of Messrs. Jones and colleague, for his purse was not in a very flourishing state, and he did not choose to hazard the little he had, or to betray how little that was, for the time being at least.

A pleasant change was stealing over the heated atmosphere, and some of the bracing sea breeze
swept over his brow as he turned his face in the
direction from whence the sea breezes came. He
was just hailing it with the rejoicing well under­
stood by those who have gasped all day under
the influence of a hot wind, when he felt a hand
on his shoulder, and a hearty voice hailed him.

"Why, Macdonald, old fellow, where have you
been to all this time? It's many a day since
we've seen you. The girls would have it that
you had gone to the diggings; but I didn't be-
lieve that."

"Perhaps they were more nearly right than
you, Willie—at any rate my thoughts have been
there if my body was not."

"Whose thoughts are not there now-a-days,
I should like to know, if they take the trouble
to read the newspaper accounts? I tell you it's
horridly exciting—and tantalizing into the bar-
gain."

"How so?" said Andrew, with the true Scot-
tish accent of quiet surprise.

"Why, of course when one occupies a good
Government post, with regularly increasing emo-
lument, it's not a thing to be lightly thrown up;
on the other hand, these accounts of ready-made
fortunes certainly do make a fellow's mouth water. That's my view of the matter; don't you take it?"

"Yes; I take it fast enough," replied Andrew. "At the same time I should like to go in for the ready-made fortune."

"Wish you may get it! But pending that, whither are you bound? Do you feel disposed to pay an old debt you owe us, and make your apology to Maude and Conny in person? Come, there's a good fellow; I can give you a prime cigar, Maude an excellent cup of tea, and I see you have nothing better to do."

"You're right; I have nothing better. But I warn you I am out of sorts this evening, and nearly as crabbed as a bear. If you feel disposed to endure me I'll come; but I don't think that Miss Clyde or Miss Conny either, with all their good nature, will thank you for such a visitor."

"Ah! we will endure you, never fear; make you endurable. But what's the matter? What makes you so down in the mouth, Macdonald? Ah! I see; a touch of this horrid gold fever."

"It's no jesting matter with me," replied Andrew, half angrily.
“No; really! Well then I’ve lots of news at home for you to look over; the girls are nearly as mad as yourself, and I verily believe Maude would like to see me throw up my situation tomorrow, and set off with a ‘cradle’ and ‘billy’ and ‘swag’ and what not, to secure the handsome fortune she believes is waiting the action of my pick.”

“A sensible girl too. I wish my sisters had as much pluck; but I believe they would rather hold a fellow back than push him forward.”

“Not a word against Miss Maggie, Macdonald; I won’t have it. I warrant she acts for your good. But I must say it’s mean and shabby that you never bring her to see the girls; they used to be such friends. Maude will be on to you, my lad.”

They had been walking along as they talked, and reached the house sooner than Andrew expected, though it was a good walk; almost at the extremity of West Terrace; a neat little house, standing in a small garden containing a few flowers and a good many shrubs and trees. The healthfulness of the vicinity of these to the very windows of the house was questionable. Shady
and cool it certainly was when the sun shone its brightest; but in the absence of sunshine, dreary and sombre in the extreme. The shrubs too, standing so near the road, caught all the dust, and seldom had a green tint to offer. We like the cypress and the pine as ornamental shrubs; but not alone—certainly not alone—nor mingled with other sad-hued evergreens. There must be brighter tints here and there to relieve the eye, or it wearies with the sameness, and becomes depressed with the dull monotony, and not even the cool shade from the scorching noon-day sun is sufficient compensation.

To the Clydes there was nothing sombre or monotonous in the trees and shrubs that filled their garden almost to the exclusion of flowers. They liked the shade, the seclusion that double row of pines afforded. They rejoiced in the depending branches of the fine old acacias, and the huge tobacco-tree at the opposite corner. They would have deemed it perfect sacrilege to cut them down; not indeed that they themselves were gloomy, morose, or melancholy people in the least; on the contrary, Edward Clyde and his two sisters, Maude and Constance, were
as merry a trio as existed in Adelaide or its neighbourhood. But they had lived in London, and had learnt, or acquired, the love of the Londoner for seclusion; so in the absence of high impenetrable walls, they clung to the trees. The house had been taken in the first instance for its surroundings, and these had been fostered till they had fully realized all the retirement that was desired. The sisters sat under the verandah and worked or read. The brother walked, or smoked, or drank with his friends, or without them, as the case might be, as unreservedly as though the house had been much farther from the road than it really was, fully satisfied with the barrier that was raised between them and curious eyes.

"Oh! Edward, is not this a pleasant change?"

A bright voice came somewhere from between the labyrinth of leaves and branches, as closing the little gate behind them, Clyde and Andrew walked together to the house, which in fact was but a step or two from the gate. But the voice was not the only greetings they were to encounter—for a tame magpie flew forwards, clamouring vociferously for attention, and singing over and
over again in its sweetest tones—not its own wild native gushing melody—but “Auld lang syne.” It was that Scottish greeting that roused up the “auld countrie” in Andrew’s heart, and what Scotch heart of man or woman, be they ever so colonial, is there that will cease to vibrate to the melodies of their own “auld” land? We honour them for it, and deeply sympathize with the feeling, albeit no Scottish blood flows in our own veins.

Magpie, however, had no recognition of kith or kin, though the bonny notes of Scotland were thrilling her throat, for she rewarded Andrew’s affectionate demonstration by a sharp, unfriendly peck and claw, which scattered all Scottish romance to the winds.

“Of a different clan, no doubt,” said Clyde, laughing; “she don’t see the tartan, Macdonald, that’s it,” and he took up the noisy bird in his hands, and smoothed its ruffled plumage, and hushed it into stillness, as one would hush a froward child.

“Mr. Macdonald has been away so long that poor Maggie has no right to recognize him,” said the same bright voice, with its softened Scottish
accent, from among the trees, and Andrew turned at once to exchange greetings; and made his peace with the mistress of the enraged bird—Maude Clyde.
CHAPTER XII.

FEMININE AGENCY.

There were two elements in the composition of the Clydes—the Scottish and the English, and to their friends both these elements were plainly visible. The one occasionally predominated over the other, but both were evident. Their father had boasted of a Scottish descent and of chieftain's blood. Their mother was of gentle English birth; but father and mother had long been dead, and their three children, left alone in Australia, had imbibed many of its ways, its manners, and its customs, united together by ties of very strong affection.

They were a happy little family, and, as we have before intimated, a merry one; and many a pleasant evening Andrew had spent among them in time past, till the intimacy almost bore promise of becoming something nearer. Maude Clyde, with her pretty lively manners and brilliant dark eyes, was no little attraction to our fair young Scotchman. But Andrew was proud as well as
fair, and it did not take him long to make the discovery that Maude Clyde's friendship was never likely to become either deeper or warmer for him, and that therefore it would be quite as well for him to venture no farther; and so by degrees his visits fell off, till, as Edward Clydo said, a long time had elapsed since he had been near the place; not that there was much waste of sentiment over the matter—a very little amount of that sort of thing does for these practical times: the fancy had been but a passing one, and the discovery that there was no chance of reciprocation proved quite sufficient to nip it in the bud. He had therefore little hesitation in entering her society again at her brother's request, and met her with the same frank, free, and open face as ever.

"You do not cherish a spirit of revenge, Miss Clyde, do you?" he said, laughing. "I am not going to make any apology for the past, so don't think it."

"Pretty well indeed for a beginning," said the young lady, bridling. "What, may I ask have you condescended to come for?"

"For a cup of tea, Miss Maude; one of your
rare good ones. Ned promised I should have it."

"He had no right to promise any such thing."

"Oh, but I know you will take pity on me after this hot day. I'll be a better boy in the future!"

"That alters the case. Come, Edward, we were waiting for you; the fish is just fried to a nicety. We got what you wanted so much. Come, make haste, that you may have it while it is hot, and do credit to Conny's cookery;" and throwing open the parlour door, Maude ushered her brother and his guest into the tiny room and daintily arranged tea-table, where Constance herself had just made her appearance, flushed, from the kitchen fire.

"Couldn't trust Mary's hands, you see," she said with a pleasant nod at Andrew. "Sure and she'd cook them all to bits entirely! so I turned cook myself—and you gentlemen ought to feel very much flattered."

"We'll show you how much in a very short time, Conny," replied her brother, with a comic grimace. "I hope you like fish, Macdonald."

"Indeed I do; we do not get much at home. It is always a 'rare bit' with us."
"You need not flatter yourselves, young ladies, that either your fair faces, your excellent cup of tea, or your fish, have attracted this truant hither," said Edward, significantly, after an interval of laughing banter, and more substantial fare had been discussed.

"I, for one, am not in the least flattered," said Maude, with elevated eyebrows.

"What is the attraction, then, Eddy?—your own sweet self?" asked Conny merrily.

"No indeed; no fear of his stirring a foot to West Terrace for love of me. No, no, girls. He is wooing more attractive metal. Give him all the news of the gold-fields that you can. He's rabid on that point."

"Hurrah! a most sensible madness—method in it!" exclaimed Maude, with kindling eyes.

"I wish he would bite you, Edward—if indeed the gold fever is as infectious as they say it is."

"We've lots of news," said Conny, with more enthusiasm than grace; "enough to win an anchorite from his cell."

"But not to stir the sluggish blood of a Government clerk," said Maude, with quiet satire, looking askance at her brother.
He laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "All the better for you, Maude," he returned.

"How so? I don't see it. I can't see why you may not make a fortune as well as any one else, and why we may not help," said Maude, with heightened colour.

"You help, Miss Maude!" asked Andrew in amused tones. "Surely you don't contemplate going to the diggings! I should imagine it no place for ladies from all the accounts I have seen, both of Sydney and Victoria."

"But indeed we do," replied Maude. "Women may make fortunes as well as men, I suppose, in one way or other, and there are at least a dozen different ways at the diggings. Besides, there will be cooking wanted and washing—there must be women to do that."

"By no means must," said her brother.

"You would not like it," said Andrew, with a grave shake of the head.

"Like it! For a permanency, no; but I could put up with any amount of 'roughing' for a time with such an end in view."

"We will have the tea-things removed, and then collect evidence," said Constance, gaily.
“When Mr. Macdonald has seen that, he will not wonder at our eagerness. Besides,” she added archly, “this Government situation, though it is very well, and permanent enough for Edward, has nothing permanent in it for us; for, of course, he will marry some time, and have a wife to keep. Now, if we get a chance of handling some of this gold, we shall be provided against all such contingencies.”

Plenty of evidence, and strong, the two young ladies laid before him, and under the influence of their reasoning, Andrew saw occasion enough for their desire to partake of the plunder; though how it was all to be accomplished was not so easy to decide. He became quite as excited as they were over the marvellous tales they read and related, of immense nuggets turning up in unexpected places—of splendid little pockets of gold discovered by the mere fossicker—of women merely scratching up the earth at the very tent door with a common dinner-knife, rewarded for their trouble by large lumps of the glittering ore—of exquisite and valuable specimens picked up by children in their play. As an argument for feminine labour, the young ladies cited the
case of two young American girls, delicately brought up, who with only a wheelbarrow and an old black servant, had retrieved their father's bad fortunes at the Californian diggings. It was an evening of excitement from beginning to end, and Andrew rose up to take his leave, with his ideas in confusion, but one resolve looming out of their midst—that whoever stayed away from the gold-fields, he would not.

"Why should not you make up a party—you and Edward, and your friend, Mr. Conway?" said Maude, as they stood in a group at the street-door. "I should say it would be the very thing; and Conny and I will keep the tent, and cook and wash for you. Why, it's a famous chance, Mr. Macdonald. You may never have such an opportunity again."

"You must talk Ned over; I don't need it, Miss Clyde. I'm willing enough—though, of course," he hesitated, "there are a few things I must see to first."

"That is the case with us all, I fancy, Macdonald," laughed Edward Clyde. "There's no rushing into these things without plenty of thought, and contrivance, and arrangement; and
as to our being a good party—why—I don’t know—all green hands, not one experienced miner amongst us. A pleasant party we should be and a merry one; but, according to my idea, there are a few more requisites for the diggings.”

“In my estimation, the principal requisite of all is the will—the way would soon follow,” said Maude, retreating into the house, and sending her words after her like a parting missive.

“Maude is so positive in her ideas and actions,” said her brother, with a vexed laugh; “but, after all, she has the energy of the family, and in this case perhaps it would not be a bad spec’ just to work it out as she has planned it. What say you,—can you do it? And this friend of yours—is he game?”

“Just now, as bad luck will have it, he is ill,” returned Andrew, in an injured tone; “but I shall see him to-morrow,” he added, brightening up, “talk to him too if he is well enough, and he may be. I expect there will be a pretty row at home when I mention the subject. I’ve no idea of getting off easily, I can tell you. I dare say I shall have hard work to raise the ‘needful,’ but go I must and will in some shape or fashion. It’s
easy work for you, Clyde, who have only your own will to consult."

"All very well if I could go alone; but I tell you, my lad, I mistrust these diggings for girls. Girls especially brought up like Maude and Conny; and yet I don't see how I can leave them behind. I scarcely know what to do."

"Take them with you, mate; it won't hurt them, they'll rough it, never fear. Two strong healthy girls, as they say they are, and as they seem, will be an acquisition, I should think, and surely three of us can manage to protect and take care of them, be the diggings what they may."

"They have won you completely over to their view of the matter, I see," said Edward, shaking his friend's hand as they parted.

Slowly and musingly Andrew Macdonald turned his footsteps homewards. His thoughts were busy with the future, and the ways and means by which the future he desired must be realized. Could he once get his father to see with his eyes — could he anoint his vision, or throw over it a little of the glamour of the gold-fields, and he knew his way would be clear. The effort must be made, though slowly, quietly, he must feel his
way. But, after all, that was the rub. He mi-
doubted the influence of all the newspaper columns
in the world to turn the old man from his pre-
conceived purpose. He feared that as he had
been destined for a lawyer, as far as his father's
will was concerned, a lawyer he must remain, and
then farewell to all hope of assistance from his
purse. What then? Then other means must be
tried—other resources discovered; money must
be made, for go he must and would.

To-night, however, there was no need of
anything but quiet self-consultation. His sisters
wondered what made him so dull and moody, the
illness of his friend, as he himself phrased it,
scarcely warranting so much gloom. Something,
too, had given him a new interest in the paper,
for he eagerly seized upon it, and pored over it,
long and fixedly. He said nothing, however,
only quickly took his supper and went to bed,
though not to sleep.
CHAPTER XIII.

PATIENT WAITING.

While Andrew was going over the romance of the gold-fields with his enthusiastic and excited companions, realizing in prospective most unheard of fortunes, and erecting mentally innumerable airy castles, Louis Conway was practically experiencing that even a downy pillow has thorns for an aching brow, and the most carefully arranged couch may prove insufficient to soothe the uneasiness and pain of fevered limbs. He did not think much that night; the bright flashes of flame that darted before his eyes with every movement, especially with any mental effort, precluded anything short of entirely passive submission. He recognized through all his pain, however, that he was in good, kind, motherly hands—hands that though they had seen much work, and had lost their graceful form and delicate texture, were yet tender and gentle in their manipulations. How the cool touch of those hands upon his burning brow reminded him of his
mother! But he did not know that through the dreary hours of the night, when reason tottered on its throne, and snatches of delirium visited his fevered brow, that again and again he called her "mother," and spoke of home in such thrilling accents of earnest longing that brought the tears to her eyes and a throb of pity to her woman's heart.

Mr. Bowden had been as good as his word. He had sent his own medical attendant immediately on his return to town, and an hour after his removal to Margaret Street, Louis was under the skilful treatment that was necessary to arrest the progress of a disease so lingering in its character, so fatal in its effects, as the one from which he was suffering. Dr. March trusted that his early attendance might enable him to stay the fever and reinstate the shaken nerves; and he spoke cheerfully of a few days' rest, and then of renewed health and strength, and though with his fiercely aching head, and weary limbs, and drooping heart, Louis was not able to take in all the comfort the doctor meant to bestow, there was certainly some reason to hope in his words, and a few days would not be of so much conse-
quence after all. The rest was no longer a matter of choice—it was imperative—it was compulsory.

All through the night he had suffered extreme agony—agony that precluded thought, and left him, as we before said, a passive sufferer. But towards morning the regularly administered medicine began its soothing effects, and he gradually sank into a sleep, certainly not an untroubled one at first, but preferable to the dreary wakeful hours of anguish and delirium; and Mrs. Layton was able to retire from her post at his pillow to obtain a little much-needed rest for herself, resigning her seat to her son, who had risen and offered to watch by the patient till morning. The watch was scarcely needed, for Louis's sleep became gradually more serene; and when the morning sun stole in at the corner window, from which it was carefully excluded by the gently down-drawn blind, he was sleeping peacefully and tranquilly as a child. He did not wake till the brother and sister had breakfasted and taken their usual departure, nor indeed till long after Milly and her mother were alone in the house. When Mrs. Layton again entered the
room, a short time after the house was quiet again, she found her patient sitting in the large chair, looking pale and weak, but without the wild light in his eyes that had so much alarmed her on the previous evening.

His head was better, he told her, but he was strangely weak and low. She saw he was, and quietly hurried her preparations, first administering the medicine that had already relieved him, and then deftly putting things comfortably straight around him—arranging a delicate little breakfast on the table at his side, while Milly placed within his reach a pretty fancy basket of fine ripe strawberries, reposing in their green leaves. He stretched out his hand eagerly towards them, and smiled.

"Why, Milly, where did you get these?—fresh from England?" he asked her in a weak voice.

"Ah, no!" said Milly, laughing; "they came out of an Australian garden."

"I am afraid you have been too lavish on my behalf, Mrs. Layton," he said rather gravely. "It is very kind of you; but please to remember that my means are not inexhaustible."

"I will not forget; but you must also remem-
ber that patients have nothing to do with the provision of their table, excepting to enjoy to the best of their ability," replied Mrs. Layton, smiling. "However, Mr. Conway, to prevent you having any scruples on the score of these strawberries, I must tell you that they came early this morning, with Mrs. Bowden's compliments, and hopes that they would prove refreshing to Mr. Conway."

"More so than anything else could possibly have done," replied Louis, again robbing his basket, and less scrupulously than before; for strawberries in those days were among the luxuries of life, grown comparatively by few, and three or four shillings a pound, or even higher in price than that. A strawberry feast was reserved for colonists of the present day. "The very sight does me good," he continued presently; "they look so thoroughly English. Come, Milly, help me to eat them."

"Oh, no indeed, Mr. Conway! I am sure I shall not. You must eat up every one. I am so glad Mrs. Bowden sent them. I thought you would like them, because they are English fruit."

"I do, Milly."
"A few at a time," suggested her mother, "and something more substantial between. Strawberries are refreshing for a fevered mouth, but you want something besides to keep up the strength."

Plenty of everything he had; nourishing and tempting jellies and wines, and indeed all that the doctor could devise or order. He did not keep his bed, but lay back in his large chair, certainly not looking much as though two or three days' rest would restore him. So thought Andrew, as he paid his promised visit in the evening, and he made up his mind at once that the "diggings conversation" must be deferred. Louis was, he saw, little fitted for conversation of any kind, and concluding that the greatest proof he could give of his friendship just then was to leave him to perfect rest, he soon took his departure.

"What is the doctor's verdict, Mrs. Layton?" he asked in a low voice, as that lady showed him to the door. "Does he give any hope of Conway's being soon about again?"

"Well, sir, he says he hopes he will. He believes the violence of the attack is cut short,
and that care and rest will soon restore him. He has both these, Mr. Macdonald."

"Poor fellow! It's jolly hard, though, to be forced to lie by. A pity he would work so hard. I never do."

"Perhaps you have no occasion," said Mrs. Layton, with a peculiar smile; for she had quietly taken the measure of the young man before her. "Do you know anything of this," she presently and gravely added—"'I will both hope and quietly wait for Thy salvation'? I think your friend does."

"I do not understand you, Mrs. Layton," said Andrew, turning round with widely open eyes, as though she spoke in a strange language.

"No; I was afraid not, Mr. Macdonald. Then it will be impossible also for you to understand that it is less hard for your friend to endure this lying by and illness than it would be for you in the same case."

"No, I can't see for the life of me why it should be. I know I'm naturally jolly impatient, and—well, I suppose from what I have seen, he is not—if that's what you mean. But in his case I should be worse, for he has neither home, mother, nor sisters near him. I have all."
"He has One greater than all these—One powerful to comfort and sustain—One who can bring healing, who sends both the affliction and the healing, when and how He pleases, for His own wise ends. Your friend is content to abide His will, Mr. Macdonald, because he knows it is a will of love."

"Ah, now you are quite beyond me, Mrs. Layton. Conway does, I believe, understand these things. Can't say I do. Good-night. I shall come again to-morrow, if I can; and you must let me know anything I can do, fetch, or carry."

"Poor fellow!" thought Mrs. Layton, as she watched his receding footsteps, and thought of the wandering sheep without a shepherd the—traveller without a guide. "Poor fellow! and all that he ought to know he knows not."

"Poor fellow!" said Andrew to himself; "he must be dreadfully moped with that solemn old lady round him all the time. I do pity him, and hope he will soon get well and out of it." And yet while he said this, he remembered that day in the office when his light words had caused Louis to show his colours, and declare upon whose side he stood. He remembered that, and came
to the conclusion that perhaps, after all, Mrs. Layton's ways were pleasant to her patient. He readily believed now from what he had seen that Louis would "quietly wait," and patiently submit to his illness. The force of that example was a fine invisible silken thread that entwined itself among Andrew's thoughts, a silken chain with an upward tendency.

Anything but patient he felt himself. This illness of his friend's fretted him, and not entirely because for a time it frustrated plans of his own. He was becoming attached to Louis; he missed him from his seat in the office; he missed his pleasant companionship, and he would have taken him off home at once to have Maggie's and his mother's nursing, if the doctor had not forbidden any such proceeding at present.

He had made but little progress in the "diggings" course. He had not seen Edward Clyde again. He did not wish to do so till he had something more tangible to tell him of his friend's convalescence—of his own probable success. Probable? Alas! for the present it was very problematical. He had not even ventured to moot the question in the family circle.
Nellie, indeed, had discovered the interesting newspaper paragraphs over which he pored so long every night, and in tears had shown them to her sister.

"Just what I was afraid of, Maggie," she faltered. "I have noticed how restless he has been for some time, and a great deal more lately. I am sure his employment is getting irksome to him; and Maggie, dear, I am so afraid that he will never make a lawyer after all."

"Of course not, Nellie, darling. If he gets these gold diggings into his thoughts they are sure to unfit him for business. It is a perfect mania—a perfect intoxication, I think; and, Nellie, I would not tell Andrew for the world, but I heard to-day that young Nelson is just on the eve of starting for Victoria, and ever so many more with him. Between ourselves, sister mine, I must confess it is a great temptation—a temptation that, if I were a man, I do not think I could resist. I really believe I should start off too!"

"Oh, Maggie, darling, don't!" said Nellie plaintively; and Maggie kissed her sister and laughed, but did not withdraw her words.
CHAPTER XIV.

A VOYAGE IN PROSPECT.

It was slow work, the process of getting well: trying to both faith and patience, perhaps more trying when positive illness ceased, and the weakness consequent on it only remained, such weakness of both mind and body that, for the present, work was out of the question. Day after day passed, and the quick renewal of perfect health seemed doubtful, while diminishing funds and friends, who in the ordinary nature of things could not be expected to continue their kind ministrations for ever, continually presented themselves to his mind. And yet, for the most part, Louis was enabled "in patience to possess his soul," to trust for the future, and to wait its development—of one thing assured, that what a Father's hand bestows, a father's wisdom devises, whether of weal or woe, must be well.

Had Mr. Bowden known the doctor's advice to his patient, for his own sake he certainly would not have endorsed it, and Louis himself was not
A little troubled and perplexed by it. To be told that he needed an entire cessation from all mental labour for at least some time to come, that it would be better for him to throw aside the pen, even for the spade, anything indeed, rather than resume the long office hours and evening work, while his nervous system required the bracing influence of manual labour, was tantalizing, because it did not appear possible. Louis could but acknowledge that the doctor was right, and the advice tallied with his inclination; but then the labour must be for himself, if of that kind to forward his own future, and that for the present he was not likely to obtain. This illness had thrown him farther off his object than ever.

"A short sea voyage, say to Melbourne and back, would just be the thing for you, Mr. Conway," said his cheerful medical friend one evening just as he was taking his leave. "The tonic of sea breezes is worth all the tonics I can offer, and if you can't manage a voyage, try what Brighton or Glenelg will do for you."

"As well the one as the other," thought Louis, rather sadly, after the doctor had departed, one almost as much beyond the resources of the purse
as the other. But it set him musing, musing deeply over the ways and means, and at last carried him back to the conversation he had had with Andrew Macdonald just previous to his illness, concerning the new gold-fields in Victoria. What if he also tried his hand at the diggings! Not very strong to dig he felt just then, but if sea breezes and a sea voyage were to restore him he might as well get them and go with some purpose in his hands. Yes, certainly the way was clearing, becoming more defined. Two or three weeks back and he would have thought it wrong to have thrown aside the present certain employment for an uncertain speculation. It was different now. He must work, and if office-work was not likely to suit him, why not take spade and cradle and dig for gold. Was not gold the gift of God as much as the herb of the field—the fruit of the trees—the water of the spring? Gold made for man's use, as well as the iron, and the lead, and the minor metals of earth? Who could tell whether a blessing might not attend his efforts? And a little thrill of pleasure shot through his veins as the thought occurred that he might perhaps thus more quickly acquire the
means of raising his future home, and all the earlier his mother and his sisters might be sent for to share it with him. The very hope quickened the languid blood in his veins, and tinged his pale cheek with a flush, and he surprised his kind landlady very much by suddenly walking out for the first time for many days, and taking his old place at the tea-table with Milly and herself.

"I am so glad to see you better, Mr. Conway," she exclaimed, bustling about to make things more comfortable, and to add two or three little delicate additions to the tea-table. "It is so pleasant to see you in your old place again."

"It is very pleasant to be here," said Louis, and with the spur of new thoughts he took his tea more heartily than wonted, and kept up the ball of conversation till the half-hour was over, walking again back to his room. But though his thoughts were still busy, he was soon weary, and his face was very much paler when his friend, Andrew Macdonald, made his appearance.

"Better, are you?" he exclaimed, with an earnest gaze. "Are you sure you are better?" he eagerly asked, yet doubtingly. "Mrs. Layton
tells me you are, and I suppose in a general way her word is worthy of credence.”

“Yes, I am better—much better, thank you. But just now I am rather tired. I have been making a little extra exertion, that’s all—just by way of experimenting upon my stock of strength; and I find that at any rate it is increasing.”

“Glad to hear it, I’m sure,” said Andrew; “you’ve had a weary time of it the last three weeks. Old Bowden’s getting impatient, and if he’s not, I am.”

“Does my absence make you extra work?” inquired Louis, with a half smile.

“No fear! not if I know it. Extra work indeed! No, no; you won’t find me falling sick of extra work for all the old Bowdens in the world,” said Andrew, with a significant shrug of his shoulders.

“There was work enough on hand when I fell ill. I thought a little extra might have fallen to your share.”

“No fear! Old Bowden tried it on, but he was foiled. No extra hours for me, thank you; and I should think you had enough of them by this time.”
“Yes,” said Louis, rather wearily, for he was still weak. “Yes; I do not think I shall undertake anything of the sort again. Has Mr. Bowden filled up my place yet?”

“Filled up your place? Not he; he knows your value too well. There’s an extra hand for the time being at work till you return—that’s all.”

“I think it scarcely likely that I shall return,” replied Louis, quietly cutting the leaves of a new magazine that the English mail had brought him, but which was still unread, without raising his eyes.

“What!” exclaimed Andrew, facing suddenly round and confronting his friend, for he had walked to the window, and was studying a small book of engravings that he had discovered on the table. He threw down the book as he uttered his single exclamation of surprise.

“Dr. March advises me to give up the pen,” said Louis, with a scarcely suppressed smile at his friend’s astonishment.

“And what the dickens will you do then?” exclaimed Andrew, subsiding into a seat as soon as his astonishment would let him—“turn shepherd? or storekeeper? or counter jumper?”
"I think not," exclaimed Louis, fairly laughing now. "The life of a shepherd, from all I hear of it, would prove too idle, too dreary, too monotonous for me. I cannot ride, so stock-keeping is out of the question, and I have no acquaintance with trade." And as Andrew made no answer, but still continued to look at him with open-mouthed astonishment, he presently added, "Dr. March suggests a short sea voyage."

"A sea voyage with nothing at the end?" almost shouted Andrew. But the next moment a dawn of intelligence broke like sunshine over his face, and he sprang to his feet. "I have it—I have it! A voyage to Melbourne, with the diggings as a climax! That's it—the very thing! Why, my dear fellow, that talk we had about the diggings has never been out of my head the whole time of your illness. This caps all!"

"It has only just recurred to mine," replied Louis; "and, on reflection, all things considered, I believe I cannot do better than to try what the pick and spade will do after the strength that the doctor says the sea voyage and change of scene will put in me."
"Night after night I have been here to see you with the thought burning in my heart, but not daring to mention it while you were so weak, and here you are the first to broach the subject!" said Andrew, excitedly. "Have you seen the papers lately?"

"No," said Louis; "but I must try to do so."

"You shall—no fear! A friend of mine has any amount of diggings intelligence. He's a fine young fellow—a Government clerk. He gets the Melbourne papers regularly. I'll bring you a heap of them to-night."

"To-morrow will do, thank you, Macdonald; talking is sufficient excitement to-night, for I must not throw myself back by presuming too much, and thus unfit myself for future action. How about yourself, though? Is there any probability of your trying the diggings?"

"Probability! I should rather think so. Why, I should be a jolly fool to stay here plodding at the desk, while others are turning out the gold and making their fortunes in Victoria. I have only been waiting for you to recover, and so has Ned Clyde. He will make an excellent third."
"So you made sure I should go?" laughed Louis.

"Of course I did. I knew you were not so enchanted with your work as to let a good chance pass you. Why, man, you would be years accumulating what you may make perhaps at the diggings in a few hours."

"Perhaps—yes, perhaps," returned Louis; "blanks as well as prizes—we must remember that. But what does your father say on the subject? I hardly thought you would have gained his consent."

"I have not at present, because I have said nothing to him about it," replied Andrew hurriedly. "Oh, he must come round, of course. He must see that it's worth while. I should cram him with all the latest news;" and then he spoke of his evening with the Clydes—of the proposed plan of procedure—of Maude and Constance Clyde's proposition; at which Louis smiled and shook his head.

"I should say that was not very feasible," he replied. "Of course I know nothing of the young ladies, or of their fitness or unfitness for roughing it, as we shall have to do; but for my
part I cannot think the diggings at all a suitable place for ladies."

"They are determined to go with their brother nevertheless, and will allow no difficulty in the matter," replied Andrew, laughing. "They are first-rate girls—regular strong Scotch girls, too; for I think they take more after their father's side of the house than their mother's—Maude particularly. They mean to wash and cook for our party, besides fossicking on their own account, though they are ladies, Conway, by birth and education at any rate. Trust me, Maude and Conny are both able to stand up for their own rights, saying nothing about the protection which their brother and his mates are bound to give them. Come and see, and judge for yourself."

"But, Macdonald, about yourself. Your father seems so bent upon your keeping to your profession. I would not advise you to do anything without his consent. I do not think it would be right."

"I must get it, then, for go I certainly shall; all the worse for me if he won't give in. I shall have to go with a short purse—that's all."
"He is an old man, remember, and you are his only son."

"All the more reason he should let me go and make a fortune quick for them all. Well, I'm off—off home too. I must set that wheel going to-night, before I sleep. You shall know the result to-morrow."
Stiffly hot again: not the shadow of a breeze stirred the jasmine or rustled among the vine leaves that depended from the verandah, sheltering under their ample canopy purple and green clusters of luscious grapes. The evening was sultry in the extreme. The sun had gone down in rich and gorgeous colours; its violet and crimson and orange glowingly contrasted with piles of heavy black clouds and long dashes of salmon-coloured and grey. A storm was brooding—a fierce wild storm; the air was heavy with it, but as yet it stirred not even amidst the uppermost branches of the trees, nor caused a leaf to tremble on its spray. The very birds were silent: here and there, indeed, a solitary pair were visible, noiselessly making for their nests, as though under the mysterious influence of the electricity that hung round them.

Out in the verandah, reclining amid the cushions in her lounging chair, lay Nellie Mac-
Donald, gazing through the trees at the masses of cloud, now lighted up with crimson, now with golden glory. It had been a trying day, for to her the heat was always distressing, and throughout the day that had been very great. But there were other things besides the sultriness in air and atmosphere that oppressed and troubled her that evening; and from the looming storm-clouds, between which, as the evening shadows came on, fitful flashes of lightning began to play, she turned an anxious gaze in another direction, to a narrow garden path, along which her brother was pacing to and fro—not with the measured step of his father, but with hurried impatient footsteps, that spoke of a different temperament, and far from a composed state of mind.

He had not told her, she had not asked him, the cause of his restless, troubled mood. She scarcely needed to inquire, for in her own mind that had been settled long before. Since the evening their first suspicions had been awakened, the two sisters had often talked over what they felt was coming upon them; though for worlds they would not have permitted word or thought of theirs to reach Andrew’s ears.
"It will come quite soon enough, this determination of his, Maggie; no words of ours should hasten it."

"No, Nellie, darling; but if it depended alone upon me, no word of mine should prevent it," Maggie warmly replied. "Only for father; and, Nellie, I don't think, I really don't think his consent will ever be gained."

"Andy ought not to go without it—how can he?"

"I don't know, dear; I hope he won't think of it. But I really think if his mind is set upon going (and though he has not said anything about it, I'm sure it is), why, I think it would be the best thing father could do to let him go. It might steady him. He will never like the diggings, and would be glad to get back, and I dare say things may be arranged with Mr. Bowden."

"Father will never consent," said Nellie, tearfully. "Poor Andy, I wish he could be happy at home."

"Well, but, Nellie, darling, just consider; all these accounts are enough to unsettle and turn the brain of any man, be he young or old. The last accounts especially are very exciting, and I
am sure I am not in the least surprised to hear that many of the country districts are losing all their men, and that overland digging parties are daily on the increase—so say the papers. And even I have heard of numbers we know very well—the Thompsons, the Gordons, the Roberts's, the Celths—all off one way, by land or sea, for this land of gold. Old Roberts at the Post-office regularly greets me now with a, 'Well, Miss, another party's off to these diggings. I shall have to go myself soon.' It is a standard joke that last.'

"Yes, it would come soon enough, it was coming." Nellie thought so as she lay still looking from the restless clouds to her restless brother. He presently quitted the path up and down which he had been taking his solitary march, and came and threw himself on the bench at her side.

"Whew! hot as fire! not a breath indoors or out," he exclaimed.

"We shall have a change soon, Andy, dear," said Nellie, coaxingly.

"Not before it's needed. The storm's a jolly long while brewing—if it means to come."
"The clouds are gathering very fast and heavily now; and look! what a flash of lightning that was!" Nelly gently continued. "It will be pleasant by-and-by; there must soon be a change."

"A change!—eh, Nellie; that's just what's wanted, and a thorough change too. This dead-alive work won't suit me. There must be a change, and that soon too!"

It was coming—the disclosure—Nellie felt it, and grieved to her finger ends. The storm she had dreaded was about to break over her bowed head—not those black piles of vapour that still gave out but transient gleams of fire, withholding the rain and wind from the parched and weary earth, but the mental storm that had so long been hanging its sable draperies near her brother's mind; and presently there was the flash, then the thunder-peal, and then the full raging torrent of words, passionate words, that told of long pent-up desires, and discontentment, and restiveness unrestrained, swept over her, and finally came the resolution of bursting through every bond, of cutting away every restraint, and taking the desired freedom.
"It's no use, Nellie, my dear. Father should remember I am no longer a boy, and I won't consent to be treated like one. I hate the law; I hate the desk. I'm neither fitted for the one nor the other, though I have nearly served my time out."

"Don't tell father so, Andy dear," said Nellie in her low, loving way, taking his restless hand in her own little trembling fingers.

"It's a fact though, Nellie."

"You think so now, Andy, but perhaps after a time you may be glad to get to them again." Her voice trembled now, and there were tears in her eyes, but the twilight was deepening every moment, and they were not seen.

"Well but, Nellie, I must go. I must try these diggings as well as the rest. Why, it may be the making of us all. I wonder you can't see that."

"We have enough as it is," sighed Nellie.

"While father lives; but remember his pay ceases when he dies," said Andrew; "and I fancy there will not be much left besides."

"Something will turn up when the time comes, Andy, dear." Nellie's voice was fast becoming
choked, she could not have added another syllable.

"Better that it should turn up beforehand, and so it shall—the gold, I mean, with my pick. I tell you, Nellie, I mean to go. I must and will. Father must give way. I shall ask him to-night, and if he won't give his consent I shall go without it—that's all. Whew! what a flash! My word, here comes the storm at last in torrents. Let me carry you in, darling; we shall have a stunner in a moment." He lifted her in his strong arms as he spoke, and as she put her slight arms round his neck and leant her head on his shoulder, he felt her tears on his cheek, and knew they were for him. He made no remark, though it pained him, troubled him, for a heavy peal of thunder followed the lightning-flash, rolling and reverberating like heavy artillery through heaven's expanse, and then, as through the riven clouds, there passed a deluge of the pent-up rain, large heavy drops bowing down the withered heads of the drooping flowers, and pattering on the roof as though they would force an entrance. The atmospheric storm was breaking over them in all its fury. The trees bent beneath the wild blasts
of wind that suddenly rose, sweeping the withered leaves from the stem, and the fruit from the bough, and rushing round and round the house, and in at every open door and window. For a little time talking was out of the question. Nellie lay with clasped hands in the shadowy parlour, looking out upon the illumined heavens as flash after flash swept grandly across them, and listening to the thunder-crashes that echoed from the not-far-distant hills. It was all grandly beautiful, but she was not thinking of either. Her thoughts were with her brother, and trembling for his future—trembling for him, and for the difficulties which she was sure lay thickly across his path. For the storm without she had no fear, but from the storm their little sitting-room that evening was to witness she timidly shrank.

"All alone in the dark, Nellie, dear? I had better light the lamp. It's a glorious change this—is it not? We shall be able to sleep to-night."

"No, Maggie; don't light the lamp yet. I'm very tired to-night, and should like to go to bed," said Nellie, in a low voice. "Andy will carry me to our room, won't you, dear?"

"Then I'll run and light the lamp there,
Nellie," said Maggie, leaving the room. There was a revelation in her sister’s voice which she was anxious yet dreaded to unravel.

"Nellie, dear, you mustn’t fret about me; I shall be all right," Andy whispered, as he tenderly lifted her from her couch.

"I dare not sit up, dear; I could not bear to hear it," she whispered, kissing him. He felt the tears were there still. "But oh, Andy, don’t be rash!"

"It’s all out, Maggie—it’s all out," faltered Nellie, with a free burst of tears when left alone with her sister. "Andy will go, he says, whether father agrees or not. Oh, Maggie, love, do your best to smooth matters; try to get father to consent, if it must be; it will be so hard for Andy without. And, Maggie, shut the doors after you; I don’t want to hear; only when it’s over tell me—I shall not be asleep."

The storm without continued to rage wildly throughout the evening, but a thousand times worse was that which spent its fury in the quiet little sitting-room, where father and son, mother and daughter, were gathered with closed windows against the wind and the rain of the external
world. Bitter words, unkind upbraidings, contempt of restraint, and cruel sarcasms, were bandied about from father to son. The father's will was harsh and unbending, the son's defiance cruel. Mrs. Macdonald sat in tears, only now and then uttering words of entreaty. Maggie, coaxed and stormed, sprang up and sat down, and tried to force her reasoning into hearing, but vainly. The captain was positive, his son determined; and so the conference ended.

"Go, sir—go if you will, but not a penny shall you have from me," were the final words of the stern old man, as he turned out under the verandah, preferring to do battle with the storm he had encountered many a time to waging war with an insubordinate son.

"Never mind, mother," said Andrew, a moment after, for the first time noticing her tears as his father left the room. "Never mind, if I go penniless I will bring back plenty of gold to you and the girls. We shall be happy enough some of these days, and father will believe I am right then."

"Oh, if you would but stay, Andy," said his mother, leaning her head on his shoulder.
“It wouldn’t be a bit of good, mother; I couldn’t settle. I should be like a fish out of water; whereas, if I go and try my fortune, whether I succeed or not, I shall feel more like sobering down.”

“God grant you may, my boy! It will be a sore trial to me, and your father is hard to forgive.”

“I’m not asleep, Maggie,” said Nellie, softly, as her sister entered at her usual hour, and began gently moving about the room, and quietly preparing her bed.

“It’s all up, Nellie, dear—all up!” whispered Maggie, bending over her sister, and fondly kissing her. “Such a breeze! and such an end!”

“Is father very angry?” faltered Nellie, hiding her face in her pillow.

“Yes—very. He says Andy may go, but he shan’t have a penny from him, and Andy declares he will go, so how he will manage I can’t say; I am afraid but badly.”

That question did not trouble Andy much. The storm still raged without as he sought his pillow, but that within had passed over. He had
dreaded it more in action than result. His way now lay open before him. Go he would, though penniless. He was sorry to distress his mother and sisters, Nellie especially, for Maggie evidently sympathized with him; but he had no thought of breaking his father's heart—no idea of the love that lay behind all that sternness, or how with one crushing blow he had prostrated all his father's fond hopes for the future of his son. Such ideas never entered his head, or occurred to him as possible, and therefore they never troubled him. The breeze he had expected had come and gone. He lay awake pondering "ways and means," but without any definite result, and with the lulling of the tempest he too towards morning fell asleep, dreaming that he had discovered an enormous nugget, and that his only trouble was how to carry it home.
CHAPTER XVI.

ANDREW’S DIFFICULTIES.

The bursting of the storm had dispelled some of the ugly mists and heated vapours that had been hanging for some time past round Adelaide, fraught with low fever and twenty other ailments. A fresher purer air came from the west, and trees, and hills, and even the withered Park Lands, looked up brighter and greener for its presence. There were some pleasant days after that, in which Louis Conway gained strength wonderfully, taking slow walks in the neighbourhood of the Park Lands, or of the Company’s Mill, or along the Walkerville Road, as he had formerly done, and now and then a drive to the Bay in Mr. Bowden’s trap—both trap and boy to drive being lent for the occasion. It was almost too bad, Louis thought, to accept this kindness after his meditated desertion, but Dr. March took care to make that matter straight; and though Mr. Bowden sincerely regretted the loss of so efficient a clerk, he had nevertheless
the good sense to see the necessity of the case—at any rate for a time.

"Not but what I think a month at Glenelg would be of equal service to you, Conway," he said one evening, when he had driven over to North Adelaide, before leaving town, to see his ex-clerk. "Dr. March thinks a good deal of a sea voyage—more than I do. I suppose you intend trying the diggings, if you get strong enough."

"Yes; that is my intention."

"Well, I suppose it's natural, though a bad job for me, and for others too—if we lose all our clerks. One half the men are mad, I believe."

"There is scarcely a household in North Adelaide that has not some member leaving for Victoria, or there already," said Louis, smiling.

"No wonder, with such glowing accounts as the newspapers are crammed with. I only hope they are half true."

The literature of the gold-fields had flown in a steady tide upon Louis from the evening of his first disclosure of his plans to Andrew. His own rather slender resources had been reviewed, and his plans laid accordingly. A cabin passage
would be out of the question—that he soon decided; but he was gaining strength, and had made up his mind to "rough it" to any extent. He was not alone in his resolve, for Edward Clyde declared his full intention to share the steerage with him, and Andrew Macdonald's funds made the same course imperative.

"I would rather not have taken the girls," said Edward Clyde to Louis, one evening, as the three sat together consulting over plans for their speedy departure; "but go they will, and I find that with true Scottish forethought they have been quietly gathering funds of their own for some time past, and are quite equal to paying their own passage in the cabin. We have friends in Melbourne, however, and I should try to get them persuaded to stay there, instead of going on to Ballarat."

"The best thing for them," said Louis drily.

"If they wait—though they won't—they must just rough it with us. They protest against being a hindrance, and if they don't mind, I don't see why we should."

It was an easy thing for Louis Conway, with no one but himself to please, and with even hi,
decision aided by medical advice, to plan and arrange his future course. Scarcely less so for Edward Clyde, whose sisters strongly urged what at first he was reluctant to do—that is, to relinquish a certainty for what in its real aspect was decidedly a speculation, and consequently might fail. But for Andrew Macdonald it was a different thing altogether. His home influences were all strongly opposed to the step; but as the "silken cords" of love failed to hold him from his resolve, so the, to him, "iron fetters" of a father's will were equally unable to restrain him. His first step at the close of the week of storm was to announce his intention to Mr. Bowden, and in spite of the anger, protestations, and contempt lavished on him by that gentleman, to throw up his situation.

"Andrew Macdonald," exclaimed the lawyer as a parting home thrust, "you'll never do any good for yourself—never; it does not take a prophet to see that; and, what's more, you will bring down your father's grey hairs to the grave."

"I don't think it, Mr. Bowden," replied Andrew, haughtily. "Father is made of sterner stuff than that."
“I suppose you will allow this—that if I chose I could enforce the fulfilment of your time with me.”

“I can’t dispute it, certainly,” replied Andrew, with a laugh; “but I’m sure you’d a jolly sight rather get rid of, than keep me on against my will. That would benefit neither of us by long chalks; and, after all, Mr. Bowden, I don’t see that there’s any reason to kick up a row about it. It’s a natural thing that a fellow should want to go and do what others are doing—to finger the gold, and to stand the chances with the rest of making a fortune.”

“You may well say the chances,” said Mr. Bowden, with a sneer.

“Well, the chances, and I suppose I am as good for them as anybody else. It is chance after all, and not industry, or any of the other of the first-class virtues, which I have not got, that are needed for the diggings. With plenty of muscle and will, I say, I stand as good a chance of bringing home a fortune as any one else.”

“Eh! and as good a chance of losing it as soon as made,” replied the lawyer, turning on his heel with a strong expression of contempt,
and leaving Andrew to gather up his traps and vacate at leisure.

He had little comfort at home now. His father entirely ignored his presence. His mother's care-worn, grieved expression sent remorse to his heart every time he looked at her. Nellie's increasing weakness kept her a prisoner to her own room. He felt—though she did not say—that she was silently fretting about him. Maggie alone, after vainly attempting to argue, to reason, to scold him out of his expedition, tacitly acquiesced in it, by assisting in his preparations to the utmost of her power. Nellie's assertion was more correct.

"It will never do for Andy to go penniless to these diggings, Maggie," she exclaimed a morning or two after the outbreak, as Maggie came into the room to take away her empty breakfast cup and tray. "I am so afraid lest he should fall into some evil way of obtaining money—the temptation is so strong. He must have help."

"I see that, too, Nellie, my darling; but how? That's the matter—how? Father is not likely to be turned from his will, and mother can do nothing, as we know."
"You and I must, then," said Nellie, faintly smiling. "I have made up my mind upon the subject, Maggie; it must be done. See here, darling," and she drew from beneath her pillow a small ebony box, and touching the spring, the lid flew up, disclosing bracelets, earrings, and necklace of delicate pearls, snugly imbedded in rich violet velvet.

"My dear Nellie! Aunt Annie's parting gifts! Ah, no—no—no; you must not; you ought not; it would not be right."

"I shall never need them, Maggie—never. I would not part with them for a trifle; but this is no trifle."

"Andy does not deserve such a sacrifice; it ought not to be made for him, darling," said Maggie, indignantly. "I know well how you value them for Aunt Annie's sake."

"Yes, dear—not for their own; but Aunt Annie herself would approve, and I do not need them to make me remember her. Will you try to sell them for me, Maggie? It is not a very pleasant task—perhaps not a very easy one; but will you try, dear?"

"You never asked a harder thing, Nellie,"
said Maggie, the tears coming into her eyes, as she closed the case on the delicate pearls, and put them out of sight. "If I had but a single article of value myself, I would say no at once; but unfortunately I have not. My jewels are all paste."

And would Andy have consented to such a disposal of his sister's treasures? We are scarcely prepared to say; for when the need is great, and the pocket low, and the wherewithal difficult to obtain, the mind sometimes becomes reconciled to things that wear a very selfish aspect, and the finer feelings of the heart are held down by the keener pressure of external requirements. Low enough in pocket he was; for on counting up his funds he found to his dismay that a very few shillings would remain after paying his steerage passage, and that there would be absolutely nothing for essential equipment—for the blankets, the "billy," the "pannikin," and other little requisites, which he had been assured were necessary to his future comfort and prosperity as a digger. Once or twice he half resolved to risk the little money he had, and try his fortune with cards once more. But a nameless kind of fear
that chance in that direction might not favour him, and that the loss of all would compel his remaining at home, made him relinquish that design. He half wondered he had seen nothing for some time of either Jones or his associate, especially as lately he had been constantly about Adelaide, and had several times passed their place of rendezvous. He came to the conclusion at last that they had been touched with the gold fever, and had left for Victoria. A certain dash of pride prevented his confiding his difficulties to his friends, Conway and Clyde. He merely told them that his father's refusal to help him would make him short in funds, but he trusted in some way or other to make up deficiencies. Forming a parcel of several of his best books, at least of those whose decorative bindings were likely to prove the most attractive, he carried them off to Adelaide, disposing of them at a second-hand book shop for about a quarter of their value; but even the few shillings they brought him would prove a help. A handsome fishing-rod and apparatus followed suit. Regretfully he disposed of these, very far below the price he had given for them. No more pleasant fishing expeditions with
a merry party to the bay, he thought sadly, but the next moment he laughed at the thought, for was not he going in for golden winnings? The purchase of fishing-rods or anything else would come easy when they were obtained. It was a small sum he scraped together after all; for the hitherto treasured articles he turned into cash, in common with others, he found it a very different thing to sell and to buy.

Meanwhile Maggie had been more successful—perhaps because she had found a friend in the jeweller to whom she conveyed her sister's treasures. He had long been acquainted with the family, and sympathized with the girls in their anxiety to help their brother, while at the same time he thought it a pity that Andrew should be so determined to pursue his own way when it was so seriously opposed to his father's will. After all he thought it a very natural thing that the young man should desire to give the wheel of fortune a push if it lay in his power. He might possibly return the wiser for the trial. But what to Maggie was of more importance than all his kind speeches was the handsome sum he offered for Nellie's pearls, and the promise he
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gave her that he should lay them on one side that they might hereafter be redeemed. She returned home much brighter than she went. Nellie saw by her smile that she had been successful.

"And they are not lost after all, dear," she whispered gently. "If Andrew really gets gold at Ballarat, you will soon have your treasures back. Mr. Harris was so kind and sympathizing, and I think he believes Andy will make money—so many have. But, Nellie, dear, it will never do to let the poor boy have all this at once—he is so reckless. Suppose you give him half, and entrust the other half to young Conway. I am sure he is trustworthy, and there may come a time when Andy will need money even more than he does now."

"But how can we see Mr. Conway?"

"I will manage that, Nellie, my darling. I am pleased with this day's work, and the hope that you may yet have the pearls back. Andy is in the garden—shall I tell him what you have done? He must know, and it is better to give him the money at once, for he seems terribly cast down, poor fellow."
CHAPTER XVII.

OVER THE BILLOWS.

And so, by the help of Nellie's treasured pearls, Andy found his way suddenly made smooth for him when he least expected it. "She should never, never repent her loan," he assured her, as he kissed her again and again. "He would soon be able to remit enough to redeem the pearls—that should be the first result of his gain. She was a dear, good little sister, a jewel in herself!"

"I could not bear to think of your wanting, Andy, dear," she said with a sad smile, the flush deepening on her pale cheeks.

"Oh, you've set me up, Nellie, darling. I shall do first-rate now. Won't I go in for the gold, never fear, and in a way that will astonish the natives!"

"But don't stay too long away, Andy. Perhaps—I don't know—but I sometimes think I shall not live long," whispered Nellie, hiding her face on her brother's shoulder.

"Now, Nellie, you are nervous. Nonsense,
darling! You'll live to hear me tell all my adventures, and to enjoy the gold I bring home,” said Andrew rather uneasily; as he clasped the fragile figure to him, and felt how fragile it really was. “See, darling, will you look at this belt? I think the buckle needs a stitch or two.”

And Maggie went to Louis Conway one evening, when she knew her brother was safe in a contrary direction. She found him alone in his little sitting-room in Margaret Street, seated at the table, writing English letters, for the mail was going out; but he rose instantly when she entered, and placed the large chair at her disposal. There was surprise in his voice as he exclaimed,—

“Miss Maggie!”

A surprise which she, smiling, acknowledged was just, but which quickly disappeared as she unravelled the mystery, and gave the reason for her visit.

“Andy is so reckless in money matters, Mr. Conway,” she concluded. “If he had the whole of the money there would most probably come a time of need for which he had no cash; and, as he does not know of this, if you will kindly keep
it for him—as you go together—and will just let him have it as he requires, we shall feel so much obliged to you."

"You do me great honour in confiding in me, Miss Macdonald," replied Conway, warmly.

"Will you tell your sister that I shall only be too glad to do everything to assist your brother that I possibly can?"

"I will, Mr. Conway. Dear Nellie! it will be such a comfort to her. She is so fond of Andy—so full of fear respecting him."

"And I am afraid she is very delicate."

"Oh, she is!" replied Maggie, the tears coming into her eyes. "She thinks herself that she will not live much longer."

"And what of her hope for another world? Forgive me, Miss Maggie," said Conway, gravely; "but I like to know that my friends are safe for eternity, however slight their tenure of existence here."

"We know so little of these matters," replied Maggie, the tears again starting to her eyes. "Since you were at our house, indeed, something you said has set Nellie thinking. She told me so once, and I see it often in her face since."
“And I shall have no time to call before I leave now, Miss Macdonald. Perhaps it would not be expedient,” said Louis regretfully; “but I will write to your sister before I leave; and if she will allow me, will now and then send news from Victoria of your brother’s well-being. Meanwhile, Miss Maggie, remember it is ‘not in time of sickness or weakness we should seek a Saviour, but in health and life we should yield to Him our best.’”

Louis Conway fulfilled his promise, and Nellie received a kind and earnest letter, renewing his assurances of care for her brother’s welfare, but chiefly dwelling on the theme that lay nearest his own thoughts. He made no apology for introducing the subject. It was kindly, feelingly, and naturally done. The simple plan of salvation by Jesus gently urged upon her consideration. His love, which is above every other love, warmly pleaded. How many tears were shed over that letter he never knew, or how day by day it was treasured, and read, and pondered over, while the little Bible, hitherto valued simply for Aunt Annie’s sake, in its rich velvet cover and clasps, became her daily and hourly companion. It was
the dawn of new ideas—new feelings in Nellie's mind. The spirit was obtaining the victory over the failing body. God was blessing His word.

But meanwhile there was a sorrowful parting on earth. Andy's final wrench from home was a painful one. Not that all the silken cords that had encircled his path from his earliest years were snapped asunder. They were too closely entwined round his heart to be easily broken, and he went forth on his way fully conscious of their influence.

The parting with his sisters and mother took place at night. It cost him a sleepless pillow, and he lay tossing about till early morning, restless and uneasy, and half-disposed to relent. His father had refused a farewell clasp—had uttered no good-bye, for he could not readily forgive this last act of insubordination on his son's part. In his view of the case he was marring all his future. His instability would prove his ruin—of that he felt assured; but with all his anger there was mingled grief, only the natural sternness of his character had the victory, and the softer feeling was illegible to poor Andy,
who could read nothing but harsh injustice in every action—especially the closing one.

The long weary night came to an end at last, and with the first 'rosy peep of dawn, resolved that no second parting should unnerve him, or shake him from his purpose, Andy hurriedly dressed, collected the one or two possessions of his that he intended to take with him (the principal were in Adelaide waiting embarkation), and turned his back on his pretty home, with all its pretty surroundings and loving hearts. Something like a foreboding of evil stole over him, and sent a chill to his heart as he stood for a moment looking back at the windows with their down-drawn blinds. How quiet and peaceful all looked in the grey morning light! No curling smoke—no open door. Should he ever pass the threshold of that door again? Would the same little circle welcome him into their midst on his return?—the same unbroken circle to be gladdened by his tales and his gold? He shook on one side the chilling doubt that crept over him as he stood looking towards one little window at the side of the house, and passing quickly through the gate, turned his
back upon all, and commenced a rapid walk towards town.

The whole party were to embark that day, and with a favourable wind they expected to be clear out of port before evening. There yet remained a few minor matters to settle—a few purchases to make. Louis Conway and Edward Clyde had appointed a place of meeting, and those last purchases appertaining to their diggings' life were to be made in company. Maude and Constance were to remain till mid-day at a friend's house at the Port, when they were also to take possession of their cabins. By the time Andy Macdonald had reached Adelaide he was in a condition to laugh at his own forebodings. The prospect before him was all rose-tinted again—all at least beyond the sea that had no charm for him, and certainly in being willing to endure all its upheavings and rude tossings to and fro, was proof sufficient of his strong desire after the land of gold.

Louis Conway had reduced his luggage to the smallest possible compass. The greater portion of his belongings he had consigned to the care of his landlady till his return. Edward Clyde
also had stored a portion of his furniture that they might not feel quite homeless in the event of their return, though he thought that return rather problematical.

"We are much more likely to settle in Melbourne," he said, with his usual merry laugh; "and, to tell you the truth, I believe that city will agree better with the ideas of my sisters than Adelaide. Besides, we have many friends in Melbourne, and if I don't get gold, perhaps I may happen on a good thing by way of a situation."

"Don't get gold! Hi, mon! what are you thinking of?" shouted Andy. "You will get gold—you must."

He had lost some of the rose-tints from his dreams before evening. A favourable wind had sprang up soon after they had fairly embarked; and before the sunbeams had faded from the beautiful Adelaide range of hills, they were out at sea, tossing on the upheaving waves, riding on the backs of the crested billows, and suffering in all its hideous variety of torture from the terrible mal de mer. No exception in cabin or steerage—at least superior accommodation did not
produce the exception. A few there were who, either from greater experience with the jostlings of Neptune and his buffeting waves, or else from naturally strong stomachic organs, could afford to laugh at their weaker brethren, while they themselves partook of the evening meal with admirable gusto. None of our friends were among this favoured number, though certainly Louis Conway suffered the least, as Andy Macdonald was as assuredly the worst of the whole group, ladies included. The steerage—even the cabins—were crowded with an eager, excited set of passengers, whose whole conversation was gold—gold—gold, till sea-sickness prostrated them and their golden dreams together. Maude and Constance were nearly the only lady passengers. There was indeed a young and pretty bride of a few weeks old, who had insisted upon accompanying her husband, and sharing his hardships and dangers. Young and pretty she was, but of the working class, both willing and able to work, and to "rough it." The complement of feminine passengers was made up by a middle-aged woman of the same class, with three or four stout girls whose husbands and sons were consigned to
the steerage, and a fair delicate lady, the wife of a medical man who had already preceded her to Melbourne, and whom she expected to meet in that city. There she was to be given into the charge of friends with her little boy, who accompanied her, while her husband proceeded to Ballarat to make his fortune by dint of medical skill, if not by digging.

"I shall be nearer to him, and that will be something," she said to Maude, while a faint blush spread over her fair cheek. "We shall not have the sea between us at any rate;" and Maude, as she looked from her to the handsome but dissipated countenance of the doctor worn in a locket at the end of her chain, wondered in her heart whether he was worthy of so much love and confidence. She feared not. But conversation soon became out of the question. The ladies lay prostrated in their cabins; the gentlemen were in little better condition, while the steerage told unutterable tales.

Poor Andy! could he once have set his foot upon solid land, as in those terrible upheaving moments he desired, the gold might have gone to the bottom of the sea for all he would have cared
A few rough billows, a little rolling from side to side, had cured his gold fever, at least for the time being, for he was wretchedly ill.

Yet amid all—rough winds, and heaving waves, and crested billows—amid crowded, coarse, comparatively rude fare, and worse stowage—they were rapidly and cheerily proceeding on their way to the El Dorado of their hopes. If the winds were rough they were favourable, and after the first two or three days, one after another white and ghost-like figures wrapped in dreadnoughts or pea jackets issued from cabin or steerage to recover health and spirits in the bracing sea breeze, and to enjoy with what zest they might the fare in different degrees of excellence as it was provided for them by the ship’s purveyor. Andy was still a prisoner in his berth, and would still have remained so but for the care of his friends, Edward and Louis. With a little friendly assistance they carried him upon deck upon his mattress. A ghastly spectacle to look upon, poor fellow! he was, with neither strength nor spirit to rouse or lift his head. He told them faintly “they had better pitch him into the sea at once.” But they managed to procure some
good beef-tea from the cabin cook, and to administer this by spoonfuls, till a little of the colour came back to his face, and this, with the addition of the soft sunlight and sweet fresh sea breeze, now less wild in its vagaries, did something to revive the desire after life so strongly dominant in the human breast, which takes indeed sea-sickness in all its horrible variety to eradicate.
CHAPTER XVIII.

GOLD.

Far be it from our intention to enter into the details of diggings life, with all its usual accompaniments of the rude, the wild, and perilous. Ballarat, with its canvas streets well lined with stores, of which every other one was a "shanty," where liquors were obtainable of every kind, and provisions and clothing were to be had at fabulous prices, has been repeated again and again in every particular throughout the various gold-bearing districts, and is now a familiar picture to the Australian mind, if not to the dweller in the home land. Hither rushed in motley crowds, people of all nations, and beyond the canvas walls the ground was already perforated everywhere in the eager search of the multitude for gold. Scenes of rioting—scenes of wild dissipation—were daily transacting among those tents; cries of murder, shrieks of rage and agony, mingled with the drunkard's song and shout, and the orgies accompanied by the baying of innumer-
able dogs of all size and species, nightly rent the air, only proving the truth of the assertion that "the love of money is the root of all evil."

As far as possible from Canvas Town, within the range of the gold, our friends had established themselves and their tents, partly for their own comfort and peace, partly on account of the ladies of their party; and here they endeavoured to throw all the energies into the pick and shovel they had hitherto given to their pens. It was no child's play, indeed, to unsophisticated hands—hands softened by all absence of manual labour, and in those first days there were terrible blisters raised in every soft palm, saying nothing about aching limbs and weary frames; but the gold in prospect was stimulating enough to enable them to laugh at these minor discomforts, and the first find of nuggets compensated for all their toil. Maude and Constance Clyde especially, were triumphant that their resolution to come to the diggings had remained unbroken, in spite of the ridicule and laughter that had been levelled at them by Melbourne friends, in spite of the fearful pictures of wretchedness, and depravity, and crime, that had been drawn with an especial
view to their benefit. Besides the careful tending of the tent, assisted by the attendance of three dogs, who stood guard during the absence of their masters; besides the cooking, which was nicely prepared, and as daintily served as circumstances could possibly allow, considering the primitive nature of the cooking implements and the outside fire; besides the necessary washing and mending for themselves and their party, which admitted them to a share in the gold found, they had a little source of private emolument of their own, and it soon became noised abroad that excellent jumpers of good stout stuff, with none of your half-yard stitches, but regular neat little seams, were to be had at Clyde's tent at reasonable prices, payable either in nuggets or cash, as most convenient. The girls soon had their hands full. In leisure moments though, they did a little of "fossicking," armed with table knives, just within view of their tents, and more than once they had turned out some very pretty nuggets to add to their store.

Louis Conway had thoroughly recovered from his illness. The voyage had done wonders for him; he was both stout and well, and deeply
embrowned by exposure to sun and wind. The same energy which had characterized his attention to penmanship was given to the pick. He worked with a will—with his whole might, nor did he falter though it was often without success, for our diggers were not more highly favoured than others of their kind. There were many holes bottomed without ever showing the colour, many a pan of washdirt riddled without the discovery of a grain of gold. Yet altogether, though for a long time unsuccessful, they were a cheerful happy party, and spent pleasant evenings after the labours of the day were over in the shelter of their common tent, not the less agreeable from the presence of their lady companions, who sewed, and chatted, and laughed with and at the diggers, whether the day's work had proved golden or not.

To Andy Macdonald exemption from office-work was in itself delightful, and after he had recovered from the sea-sickness that had so terribly affected and reduced him, he was all excitement and spirit in his search for gold. The first find, albeit worth but a few pounds each when distributed amongst the party, threw him into a
panic of excitement. He wrote home glowing accounts to his sisters and mother, telling them that he was now on the high road to wealth, and that they might consider their fortunes as made. A part of his first winnings, according to promise, he sent to Nellie, in return for her loan, promising the rest with the next lucky find. What happy hearts that letter made, when at length it reached its destination! How bright the future looked in the distance, as Andy depicted it in glowing language! Conway's letter that came with it, calm and quiet and serene as it was, spoke so well of Andy that it greatly added to the brightness, for they felt their idolized brother was in such good hands.

And so the summer passed away, and autumn came, and brought in its train cold nights and chilly mornings. Preparations for the coming winter became absolutely needful, especially as Maude and Constance Clyde signified their intention of wintering there with the rest. The leisure of one day was accorded to the erection of a chimney in the large tent, and lining the walls with double canvas. Clumsy enough in appearance it was, as under such inexperienced builders
it was likely to be, but it was large, and wide, and comfortable, and gave altogether a different aspect to their tent life; and after that the days grew shorter and shorter, and the time for work was more and more curtailed. The long evenings brought plenty of leisure, which each employed according to their various inclinations. Books, the pen or pencil, and needlework helped to pass away their time, and sometimes the occupants of neighbouring tents would join them, and a perfect chorus of voices would make the dark nights vocal. Andy cared nothing for books, he hated the pen, but music he delighted in; and having one day an opportunity of cheaply purchasing an excellent flutina, he soon played with such proficiency, with such taste and expression, that its melody proved an excellent addition to their evening concerts.

But in spite of music, their long winter evenings were distasteful, and were becoming wearysome to him; and to one who imagined that a fortune was to follow every stroke his pick made in the solid earth, the slow progress they had hitherto made was tantalizing in the extreme. He began at last to betray his restlessness, and
to fidget in and out of the tent in the evening, and finally, greatly to Conway's alarm, to form excuses for a nightly visit, or nearly so, into Canvas Town, the result of which was too evident on his return. Two or three times Edward Clyde accompanied him, but the presence of his sisters was sufficient restraint upon his movements, if his own inclinations had at all led to dissipation; and when Andy again asked for his company he flatly told him that he thought they would be better at home.

"What's the use? It's only just throwing away your money, and nothing to show for it," he said, looking up from his work as Andy addressed him. "The other evening was enough for me."

"What a dull fellow you are becoming, Ned," replied Andy with a laugh. "Mewed up here, we can't see a thing, and I'm sure there's plenty of life on the diggings."

"Rather of a wild sort," replied Clyde, shrugging his shoulders; "questionable too. For my part, Andy, I think it best to keep clear of the shanties; and if you want to make your fortune, I advise you to do so too."
"Well, you are a muff!" replied Andy, contemptuously. "If you would only have a good game at cards to enliven the evening, why it would be something; but law! I only just hinted the thing to Conway the other evening, and blessed if he didn't read me a sermon half-an-hour in length."

"And he had the right of it," said Edward Clyde rather gravely; "and though I don't pretend to see with him in all his reasonings, yet I know the evil of cards too well to desire to touch them again. 'A burnt child dreads the fire.' You know that old proverb, Andy?"

"Eh, man! but bad luck one time brings good fortune another," returned Andrew testily.

"No, no; not according to my idea of matters and things," said Clyde shaking his head. "I've had enough of it. My golden gains, hardly won as they are, shall never be frittered away in that manner, and it would be well if you thought so too."

"So you won't come?"

"No, thank you. A good fire, a good book, pleasant chat, and a comfortable pipe, will answer well enough for my evening's entertainment, and
ought to do for yours,” said Edward Clyde, collecting together his tools, and preparing for “home,” while Andy, resolving to “gang his ain gait,” took the shorter path to the township, where bright lights, like gleaming stars, were already luring the unwary steps, like the fatal “will-o’-the-wisp,” to certain destruction.

With Andy Macdonald’s lively laughter-loving disposition and musical abilities, as well as his fondness for cards, he soon made friends for himself, beyond the circle that gathered round the blazing hearth—friends of a far more questionable class. By degrees he more frequently absented himself from his own party, and long after midnight it became too often his habit to reel into the tent, stumble along the floor, and fling himself just as he was upon his “bunk,” where he lay in besotted slumber till morning. Conway was greatly disturbed. He reasoned with him constantly on the subject, even with the tenderness of a brother—reminding him of his sister Nellie—of the hopes he was blazing—of the life his bad conduct would be sure to shorten—of his own soul’s danger. To Andy they were at times but idle words, or, if he did feel, he laughed the
influence off, and protested against the danger. "A fellow might as well be jolly as mope," he said in reply, and he went his own way, yielding more and more to the iron fetters, and less and less to the silken chains that would have drawn him so tenderly away from his danger.
CHAPTER XIX.

EVIL INFLUENCES.

It happened that for a long time there was but little good fortune following the spades of the diggers. They were getting gold certainly—“earning wages,” they called it, and but little besides. But they had as certainly never come over the sea and toiled hard for merely that. It was the hope of higher gains that still lured them on, and prevented them giving up in disgust; for the kind of life they were leading was anything but agreeable, though they each tried to make the best of it, and to divest it of some of its disagreeables by clinging closely to a few of the civilizations of society around them. Still there was a general looking-forward to the time when farewell might be consistently said to its pepper-box holes and heaps of “mullock,” the object of their venture being fairly obtained.

To Edward Clyde especially this expenditure of time, wearing of limbs, and wasting of fibre was distasteful. As he had before said, his
sisters had really twice his energy in their composition. The work of the office had suited him exactly. It was regular—it was laid out for him—the day's work in the day's hours. He confessed too, to a weakness for a comfortable carpeted room and easy chair, for viands cooked in proper utensils, and to a well-set table; and many a sigh he heaved at night when he got into his hard "bunk," and remembered the blessing of white sheets it had once been his to enjoy, and the immeasurable superiority of soft feather pillows over the hard, unyielding roll he dignified by the name of bolster. Easy all this was to bear, comparatively easy at least, had the gold been turning its bright face towards them. But the memory of the snug little home they had broken, the lucrative situation he had relinquished, the ease he had ruthlessly destroyed, for all of which he received no equivalent, was more than his patience could quietly endure.

"Well, Maude," he exclaimed one evening, as with his pick over his shoulder he came slowly sauntering into his tent, where his sisters were busily engaged with a hot supper in active preparation. The evenings were both wet and cold
now, and fire and hot supper were welcome. "Well, Maude, are not you almost tired of this kind of life? I am."

"Ah now, Ned, don't be faint-hearted because to-day has again proved a blank," said Maude, looking up from the fire, over which she was frying something very palatable. "It is a dull day too, preparing for a wet evening," she added with a glance out at the tent door, where in the distance huge masses of cloud were visible, and a general grayness in the appearance of the sky, that betokened rain not far off.

"But I don't believe you can so easily resign yourselves to this kind of life as you pretend, girls. It's not likely. How much the worse and what the better, are you for it, I should like to know? What are you doing for yourselves by these privations?"

His sisters looked significantly at each other and smiled. "Come, Ned," replied Conny from the potatoes she was just dishing. "I think after all, our party have not a great many privations to complain of. We have taken care to be well supplied, and you have got some gold, though at present the lucky hole has not been touched."
"I see you are not disposed to give up yet, if your brother is, Miss Conny," Louis exclaimed, who at that moment entered with Andy. "He has been very downcast all day. You must give him a good cup of tea to cheer him up, and put him in humour to submit a while longer to the life he is so weary of. Don't look at our canvas walls, Ned; look at the plentifully-spread table, and be contented," he continued, laughing as he went out into his own particular tent to remove the traces of yellow earth from hands, face, and vestments, followed by both Edward and Andy.

"Do something else besides look. If you want things in perfection—that is, hot—you must be quick," Maude laughingly called after them.

"Joking apart though, Conway," said Andy, after they had some time been comfortably seated at supper, and the ample provision had considerably diminished, "I don't see the use of sticking in one place just with the hope of reaching the gold, of which, for all we know, there may be a jolly small proportion, and is according to our own experience. I can't stand much more of it—that's flat; and if neither of you will,
I shall be off the first handy 'rush,' bag and baggage by myself."

"Where gold has been found, gold may be," returned Conway, gravely. He always looked grave when Andy talked of going away, and latterly he had done this very frequently. "In my opinion the ground we have is not half worked, and there are abundant indications of the presence of gold. I think it would be foolish to give up because we have lately had but little success."

"We might go farther and fare worse," said Maude.

"And by going farther we might make a pile at once. There are two sides to the question, Miss Maude."

"Might! or we might make it here."

"Ah, well! I shan't try it much longer for one. I came here for a fortune. I have as much right to one as anybody else; but I shan't get it by staying chained to one spot, that's certain." And he rose as he spoke, and drew on his rough pilot coat, preparing to go out.

"The night will be a rough one, Andy. I would not venture out if I were you," said Edward Clyde.
"Oh, it won't hurt me. I'll just walk down to the store and back. I want to see Blackley."

"We 'shall be a pleasant little company presently," said Maude. "I advise you to stop. Herman Schultz and Frederic Hartz are coming to-night, and Hanson and his young wife. We shall have some music worth joining in, I assure you."

"I shall be in again, in an hour most likely."

"Such a miserable night! Why, it is drizzling now," Conway exclaimed, looking out and hastily withdrawing into shelter again.

But Andy was not to be persuaded, for unhappily it is more easy to be 'enticed from the good than the evil that surrounds the path, and the silken cords prove very weak against the iron fetters of a perverted will. Conway could not readily resign his friend; he followed him outside.

"Have you heard lately from home, Andy?" he asked rather gravely as he did so.

Andy faced suddenly round. "No," he exclaimed in an altered voice. "Have you? Anything the matter at home?"

"Not more than usual," replied Louis slowly.
"I have at least heard nothing fresh; but there might be, especially if your poor sister heard that her brother was falling into evil ways."

"Nellie!" exclaimed Andrew, angrily. "Why, no one would be such a sneak as to tell her, and she won’t know anything she ought not without—that’s certain."

"She must know some time; she will hear in some way. No, do not look angrily at me. I should be sorry to add one drop of bitterness to her full cup. But you have not written to her lately. She will suspect, and a state of suspense is bad enough at any time, and in her delicate state of health a thousand times worse."

"What a croaker you are, Conway!" said Andy uneasily. "I must write—that’s all."

"Why not do it at once—to-night? What’s the use of delay? A hundred things might happen. No time like the present. A few lines home would cause a great deal of happiness, Andy."

"But what’s a fellow to write about? If we’d had a good find it would be something to tell; but you know we haven’t seen the colour for several days. It gives a fellow the blues to think of, saying nothing about writing."
“No need to dwell on that subject,” replied Louis, “unless to express hope for the future. Speak of yourself. Give them little items of interest. It will be a better evening’s work than that on which you are bound.” Andy stood a moment in irresolution, looking up at the sky, over which dark masses of clouds were slowly passing, through which the stars gleamed palely. The moon, when between those masses she did peer into view, had a watery veil across her fair face, and threw but a faint and sickly light over the path that led to Canvas Town. The lights dotted thickly here and there among its tents, but more so the sound of music that just then rose amidst its usual clamour and dust, dispelled the momentary indecision.

“I can write to Nellie when I come home. I shan’t be long, old fellow, so make your miserable life happy,” he suddenly exclaimed, and plunging forward into the moonlight, he was presently threading his way beyond either sight or hearing, while Louis turned sadly into the tent again, now neatly cleared for the enjoyment of the evening.

“He will go,” he sadly said as he entered.
There is no staying him. I am afraid he is after no good."

"Not if he has anything in common with that Jones, who used to be about Adelaide when we were there," said Edward Clyde. "I heard he had left for the diggings before we left, and I caught sight of him when I was last at the store. He was differently dressed, but I am sure it was he. I thought I saw him prowling about here to-day."

"Who and what is he?"

"Who he is, is more than I can tell you—that is as to his antecedents. He is a gambling sort of chap—lives by his wits, I suppose; for he has no ostensible way of living. Anyhow, he is a bad companion for such a fellow as Andy, and I am afraid it will be all over with him if he gets into his toils."

"How should he do so? What should draw him to Andy?"

"Such men as Jones soon make discovery of fish for their net. An easy, merry-hearted, reckless sort of fellow, with such inclinations as Andy, is sure to fall into the hands of sharpers. They are so easily gulled. But the fact is Andy knew
this man in Adelaide, unfortunately,” said Clyde.
“Not to much purpose it would be his getting
gold if it is to be lost in play, as you may be
sure it will.”

Not even Hermann Schultz or Frederic Hartz
had power, either with their agreeable company
—for they were educated and intelligent men—
or with their sweet harmonies—for they were
accomplished musicians—to dispel the gloom
that rested upon Louis Conway’s spirits all that
evening. It rained heavily, and the wind moaned
a dismal accompaniment to his thoughts. They
were sometimes off among the shanties in the
distance, wandering after Andy, for he did not
return as he had promised; sometimes they were
in that pretty sequestered little home among the
violets and roses, as last he saw it, or with the
tall unbending grey-headed captain, sorrowing in
secret over his unstable son, the half of whose
misdeeds were unknown to him; or with the
timid anxious little mother, so proud of her only
boy, so unwilling to believe anything evil against
him; or with the slender drooping form of Nellie,
“passing away” as he felt she was, yet yearning
for a line, but a single line, of intelligence and
hope from her brother. And he—that brother; where was he? What new downward path was he choosing? What new fetters were forging for his hands? and how could that downward path be stayed? All persuasion, all advice, seemed thrown away. A laugh, or a sneer, or a scoff, met every effort at what he ridiculed as "preaching;" and knowing that only One could touch the heart, and control the passions, and remove the unbelief, and guide the erring footsteps, Conway never ceased to pray for his erring friend.
CHAPTER XX.

NELLIE.

Winter with us comes in kindlier form than it assumes in the dear old home country, where it veils the bare branches with a mantle of snow, and binds the ground in its black frost mail. It does not rob us of all our verdure. True, it shakes all the leaves from our poplars, and the tall handsome skeletons turn upwards, without a veil, towards the sky; the foliage of the almond fades and falls, and the graceful willow loses its delicate drapery, and depends its bare uncovered branches, graceful still, even to the very margin of the waters. The fruit-trees, too, have not forgotten the old habit of shedding their leaves, and carpeting the ground with beds of crimson and yellow and brown, as in the gardens and orchards of England. But the eye does not weary for lack of green even then. Heaven opens its flood-gates upon us, and the pastures gather verdure beneath the precious moisture, and all waste places, dried and parched by the heat of the
summer's sun, glow in new beauty and blossom like the rose.

The little side gate that led into the avenue, with its thick border of violets, in Andy's old home, was slowly opened by Maggie one wintry afternoon, and as reluctantly closed behind her. Half-an-hour before she had more hopefully trodden the path, and passed beyond the precincts of that gate; for the mail from Melbourne was in, and her feet were turned in the direction of the post-office.

"We shall surely hear from Andy by this mail," she had cheerfully exclaimed to her sister, as she tied on her bonnet and wrapped herself closely in a warm shawl, for it was exceedingly cold, though the sun looked pleasantly out, wooing the flowers into bloom with the warmth of its rays, which after all were scarcely warm enough to do that; and Nellie had smiled feebly from her pillows, for wintry days, and Andy's absence, and doubts respecting his well-being, had told painfully upon our gentle invalid, who was no longer able to leave her bedroom—no longer able to enjoy the change to her favourite sofa. With her truly it was "the beginning of the end."
Poor Maggie! With such buoyant footsteps she had traversed that garden-path, stooping to gather a knot of violets as she passed the thick borders, and arranging the sweet perfumed blue things amidst clustering leaves as she walked briskly along, a tiny gift for the postmaster's sick daughter. "He must have written this mail, there must be a letter," she kept repeating to herself, as though to increase her assurance by so doing. "Two mails, and not a word! Ah, certainly there will be a letter this time!" Alas! the disappointment was only the more painful for this confidence. A glance at the postmaster's face as she entered the store, and hope sank fathoms down in her heart. She could scarcely find spirit to ask,—

"No letter, Mr. Roberts?" for that was the verdict she read in his countenance. It scarcely needed the shake of the head, and the words that followed in reply,—

"No, Miss Macdonald, none."

"I do not understand it—I cannot understand it," said Maggie despondently, sinking into a chair. "The last two mails there has been nothing for us, and this is the third! Andy must
have written, and the letter has been lost through the post."

"He may not have had yours, miss."

"Perhaps not; but even then he ought to write, he ought. It is cruel for my poor sister's sake that he does not, it is just killing her."

"Well, miss, but I don't think as how you ought to take it so to heart. There are plenty of others in the same boat: young wives and old wives, brothers and sisters, who have gone away disappointed. Some of them were at their wit's end, for they expected gold by the mail, and, missing that, are plunged into difficulty and distress. Bless you! you haven't an idea what these diggers are. There's a regular rush and fight at the post-office for letters at the other end. No wonder some of them gets lost. It's best to think 'no news is good news,' take my word for it, miss."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Roberts, I think so too; but it is harder work to make my sister think so. She feels it more than mother; she was so fond of Andy."

"Does she seem any worse, miss?"

"Yes," said Maggie, the tears coming into
her eyes. "The doctor does not think she will see another spring; and I am afraid," she added rising, "all this will hasten her decease."

She turned from the store, leaving her forgotten bunch of violets upon the counter unbestowed. Old Roberts took them up, and his eyes followed her slow drooping footsteps, taking the homeward path. He shook his head as he went forward with them to an inner room, for he knew their destination, and knew also the pleasure they would give to his sick child.

"Poor things!" he murmured to himself "poor things! 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' Always so—always so. It may be the young fellow has written, or it may be not. Quite as likely the last. The diggings are no place to steady unsettled blood, or to reduce a wild one to a sober citizen. Well for them they don't know half its dangers and temptations. Poor things! Nice girls, both of them."

It was no wonder that with disappointment throbbing through every vein, and heavily depressing her, that Maggie's footsteps flagged wearily on her homeward journey. She could have better borne the disappointment herself
had there been none to share it with her. But her fears were for Nellie—for the effect that this continued despondency would have upon her.

"Cruel—cruel!" she murmured to herself, as she slowly opened the gate. "I don't believe the letter is lost, for I don't believe it has been written. He has got into evil company again, and it has made him hard and careless, and forgetful of us all. It must be so, or surely Mr. Conway would have written, and he evidently does not like to write. Poor darling Nellie! I wish she did not feel it so much," and Maggie nerved herself to give as hopeful an answer as possible, to instil hope where she felt none.

"No letters, Maggie?" It was a hopeless, sorrowful voice that asked the question, the reply to which she read in her sister's face, and sadly turned her face to the wall.

"No, darling; but a thousand things may have happened, Mr. Roberts says. Letters are often lost at the diggings. You know Andy told us what a rush there is at the post-office for letters. There are plenty of others to share our disappointment. Perhaps next time we may have a really golden letter. Andy may be wait-
ing for that. It's not worth while to fret, dear. Mr. Conway would be sure to write if anything was very wrong.”

“I don't know how it is,” said Nellie, in a low sad voice—sweet still, but so sad; “I scarcely can tell how it is; I have no sanguine hope for Andy. The silken cords of love seem so powerless to hold him; they used to be more potent, but he has got beyond their influence. I am afraid the last lingering spark of that power has gone.”

“Oh! only for a time Nellie, dear. Besides we don't certainly know that he has not written. We can't be sure that he is falling into wrong again.”

“Not certain,” said Nellie faintly; “but there is the dread, dear—the dread, knowing what we do of him, and how easily he is led into wrong.”

Yes, Maggie knew more than she would have liked to tell her sister of Andy's failings; the knowledge had come out lately through a quondam friend of how his money had gone—of his increasing passion for play, and the evil associations it led him into. Would there be the same associations, the same dangers, at the dig-
gings? Latterly, from what she had read and heard, she feared it would be so. But this knowledge she carefully kept from Nellie. Her fears were vivid and painful enough, founded solely upon the past. She suffered cruelly.

"I shall write to-night," said Maggie, thoughtfully,—"write both to Andy and to Mr. Conway."

"Yes, dear, do; and, Maggie, will you try and bolster me up after I have taken that reviving medicine that came last? I want so much to write a little letter to Andy myself. I may never have strength to do it again; and, Maggie, I don't think I shall. Don't cry, dear, don't. Since I have learned to love the Saviour, and to feel that His kind arms are bearing me up, I shall not be sorry to go, and you would not wish to keep me in all this sorrow and weakness and pain—would you, dear? Who knows! perhaps I may yet be a ministering spirit to watch over our poor Andy, and to lead him by silken cords of loving influence to the right."

Yes; Maggie felt it would soon be that—that at least her gentle ministering service on earth was nearly over. Nellie was fast leaving
them, fast fading from their loving embraces, wasting rapidly. The little transparent fingers were scarcely able to hold the pen as they feebly traced words of loving warning and a last adieu to her wandering wayward brother. “But it must be done,” she said, and every loving word was finished, and carefully fastened up in a tiny envelope; for what she had said—that last farewell—was to be sacred to Andy alone. That done, her mission completed, and the light went from her eyes, and the flush from her cheek, and such a mortal paleness succeeded, that in distress and alarm Maggie summoned her father and mother.

“What is this?” exclaimed the old captain angrily. “Why, Maggie, have you been mad enough to suffer her to kill herself by writing?”

“Oh, father! she wanted so to write. Poor Andy! she says it will be the last time she can write to him.”

“That boy will be the death of us all,” replied the old man, turning hurriedly away, and dashing his hand across his eyes as he did so. That boy lay very near his heart still, spite of his seeming hardness. He was his son—his only son,
and the father's heart needs at times must bleed for the wanderer.

"Not gone yet, dear mother," said Nellie, feebly, opening her eyes with a gentle smile. "I was almost home, but not quite. You will have to bear with me a little longer."

To bear with her! How gladly would they keep her—father, mother, sister, even though twice the labour of attendance were needed. Their gentle loving Nellie—their sweet obedient child, and latterly their little minister of the good tidings of peace! Slowly, very slowly, the colour came back to the still snowy cheek—a tint of colour after all, and nothing more; the livid setting of the violet eyes remained, and a shadow lingered on the fair brow—a strange deep shadow that they trembled to see.
CHAPTER XXI.

IRON FETTERS.

Little thought Andy, while he plunged deeply into debt and difficulty and dissipation of all kinds, with a zest which his freedom from surveillance or command of any kind increased a thousand-fold, that in his quiet home among the roses and violets, his sister Nellie was passing away, and that his unkindness was helping forward her departure. Had he thought more he would have acted less wildly. But he banished thought; he pshawed away all fear. He would not listen to words, but just went on his own way, making for himself a far harder bed than that into which he crept just at the dawn of day, a poor besotted helpless inebriate. His dissipation, as might well be expected, was rapidly telling upon his constitution. His eyes were inflamed, his face sadly sunk and pallid. He was losing his appetite too; for who can give himself over to the demon power of strong drink and gain anything but burning, insatiable thirst, failing and shaking
limbs, and visions of madness! He drank now upon all occasions: the first thing in the morning, to revive him—the last thing at night, to send him to sleep. He drank for "good luck;" he drank to bury the thoughts of ill-fortune, for the gold would only turn up as yet in barely payable quantities, and his "luck" at cards had apparently vanished, rendering him only more determined and desperate. What a wreck he was becoming—what a change a few months had wrought! Louis Conway was in distress and despair as he looked at him.

Though always intending to go—though constantly expressing his determination to do so—Andy had hitherto continued with them, and they had all done their utmost to wean him from his bad associates, though tried in vain. But one evening he returned home earlier from his customary haunts, and burst in upon them in a more sober condition than he had been for some time past, exclaiming as he did so,—

"Well, mates! well, girls! I'm off to-morrow bag and baggage. Alone, too, if you won't go. There's a first-rate 'rush' only four miles from this, t'other side of Canvas Town. They're
turning the gold out by shovelfuls, according to all accounts."

"Don't do to credit all accounts," said Conway significantly. "I'd rather trust to the evidence of my own senses. Ned and I lighted on something good to-night just after you left. Look here: a splendid nugget that, worth showing amongst us; and look at these! There's more too, where these came from; better stay and work it out."

"Not I. Why, they're getting pounds weight yonder. Keep you your little nuggets, and if you feel inclined to work out your ground, pray do so, but don't ask me!"

"Andy, have you written to your sister yet? I don't think you have."

"No; blest if I ever find anything to tell her; nothing at any rate she would like to know."

"I am afraid not indeed," said Conway, gravely. "You could not tell her what a wreck you are making of yourself, or how you are blasting all hopes both in this world and the next!"

"Croaking and sermonizing again as usual," said Andy, impatiently. "A little of that sort of
thing will do, mate. I'll write, but it shall be when I come back with my pockets crammed from this 'rush.' I'll send them gold then, and that will put everything to rights."

Has gold indeed that power? We trow not. It cannot soothe the sorrowful heart; it cannot heal the wounded spirit; it cannot, even for an instant, hold back the quivering life from the parted lips, or wrest one hour from the hand of death. All-powerful gold! and yet how powerless to purchase that which life holds dearest—to heal those wounds of soul and spirit which are so hard to bear.

It was not gold that was needed in the little household to which Andy was all in all. Gold could not win back the joy that his absence had banished from the hearthstone. Did he really think it could? Did he indeed flatter himself that money would compensate father, mother, or sisters for the loss of their hope, their pride, in the only son and brother? He did not think, and herein lay the danger. He put away thought from him. He sought to live in the present, or to tint with his own roseate hue their future. And yet he had not forgotten them. The fortune
that he had determined on winning was for them—the golden gains were for those at home to share. In a few weeks perhaps he should see them all again, and spread his golden treasures before them—riches, treasures—that it might have taken years of humdrumming in old Bowden’s offices to acquire, or even dream of acquiring.

How hard they all tried that evening to induce him to relinquish the distant “ rush” for the more certain gold now—the morning’s work would show how certain. Why should he not remain and share?

“Not he, indeed—he had no faith in anything; but ounce nuggets turning up there—he was going in for pounds. By-and-by he should be able to afford to laugh at them all—to snap his fingers at them all, to snap his fingers at the diggings, and in future play the independent gentleman. He would make his own fate!” These were his concluding words as they each betook themselves to bed. In the morning—before they were awake—he had rolled up his blankets, collected his tools, and was off.

Off, but not alone. Andy was not one to court
solitary work, or even solitary gain, and his companions knew that—knew also that their company had become distasteful—that more congenial society awaited him. Edward Clyde declared that Jones was at the bottom of it all, and that he would take care not to be quit of Andy till he had got all out of him he could get.

"He thinks he will have a stronger hold of him if he has him altogether, and I fear he will," he continued indignantly. "The fellow hates work himself, but you may depend upon it, intends to be a sleeping partner in the concern. All the profits will most conveniently flow into his own pockets. You will see that I am right."

"But whatever possible benefit can it be to Andy to have such a partner?"

"Oh, trust Jones for enticing and alluring. He understands that part of the business excellently well. He will make a brass farthing a sovereign in Andy's estimation; for unfortunately he understands too well the kind of bait that goes down best with him. I have no patience with Andy—not an atom!

"With a different father, I cannot help thinking poor Andy would have turned out differ-
ently," said Conway, sighing as he remembered what his own father had been to him. How thoroughly he had found in him a friend as well as a parent, and how contrary in every respect Andy’s childish days must have been. The captain was too stern, too decided a disciplinarian to depart from his preconceived notions of parental authority. He could well imagine that but little confidence had ever existed between Andy and his father. What a world of sorrow might have been spared to each had it been otherwise!

Andy was off—that was certain. There was no alternative but to work without him. They would have gone to their work with better spirits but for his departure. As it was, they had seen sufficient the evening before, and obtained sufficient to excite their most sanguine hopes. They were working not far from the tents, and Maude and Constance, sharing in the excitement, looked out every now and then to see if there were any signs of prosperity on hand. But there were other diggers around; for the very fact of their remaining in one spot so long had led to the idea that "the flash Adelaide chaps," as they were called, were making a "pile," only they wished
to keep it snug. And so, frequently as the sisters looked, they saw no sign, and could make out neither success or non-success. They were compelled to wait the usual hour of return.

What an evening that was! Their most sanguine expectations had been realized; the gold was abundantly repaying them for all their toil, and, when divided among them—not forgetting Andy’s share, which they mutually voted to him—included handsome sums for each.

“At this rate we shall soon be able to bid good-bye to the diggings,” said Edward Clyde, meaningly; for not even its gold had reconciled him to a permanent stay. It was with very joyous feelings the whole party next proceeded to transmit their winnings to a place of safety, and finally to the safe custody of the Melbourne bank.

“A little more of this,” said Conway, with quiet thankfulness, after the safety of their gold was confirmed—“a little more, and I too shall have gained the requisite sum for bringing my dear mother and sisters to these shores. How I have longed to raise a pleasant home for them, but how little expectation I had of realizing it so soon!”
"And we too—Maude and I—have we not been right in insisting upon coming to the diggings—eh, Ned?"

"I dare say you have, Conny, though you should have shared with me if you had not."

"Eh!" laughed Maude; "but Conny and I have a neat little secret hoard of our own. It has accumulated from one source or another till it has become a nice round sum; so that with the share we take as tent-keepers, or whatever you like to call us, we may consider ourselves very well dowered; and after this, Mr. Ned, be it understood, you are quite at liberty to fall in love and get married as soon as you please, since Conny and I need no longer be looked at in the light of encumbrances."

"Thank you for nothing," replied Edward, roguishly. "So you have been fossicking on the sly, have you? Very fine, truly. Well, I thought you were at some quiet sport of your own."

"At any rate your sisters are fully entitled to all they have got, or can get," said Louis, warmly. "I am sure for one I must say we should have been very uncomfortable without
them. They have kept up such brave strong hearts and unshaken nerves through all, and have helped to keep us up too—all but poor Andy, and he would have his way."

Yes, amid all this joyous congratulation Andy was absent. He no longer yielded to the silken cords; they were now as the green withes in the hands of Samson—powerless to bind him, and he little comprehended how fast the "iron fetters" of sin and evil were enfolding him, or how helplessly day by day he was yielding himself up to their influence.

Poor Andy! turning more and more from the right way—sinning more and more against his own soul. Into that soul shall yet the iron press; "for the way of transgressors is hard." Is there none to arrest his erring footsteps, and lead him back into safe paths?
CHAPTER XXII.

FALLING ASLEEP.

Many a rough wintry wind had swept over Captain Macdonald's garden; many a driving, soaking rain had penetrated its soil, fertilizing and bearing promise, in its vivifying drops, of future beauty and verdure. The winter was passing over now, and here and there signs of coming spring were visible. The warm sunshine woke the monthly roses into new loveliness, and the violets began to betray their existence by their sweet, pure perfume. The slender branches of the willow were covering now with a delicate drapery of tiny leaves, and the poplars were fast losing their stiff and bare appearance. There were buds upon the fruit-trees—buds that at present only gave that indescribable bloom, that uncertain roseate tint to the naked branches, that reminds one of the first flush of summer's dawn; and on one or two early almond-trees there were pure white blossoms. Oh, certainly these were harbingers of spring; the winter, indeed, was passing away.
Externally all wore its usual aspect of rest and peace. Through the open windows, with their soft white drapery or flowing damask, the same pleasant scenes of quiet and order were visible. At the door, basking in the sunbeams upon the door-mat, the great house-dog lay tranquilly dozing, scarcely a dream disturbing his repose; and along the parlour window-sill, over which the morning sun yet lingered, a fine black cat, whose glossy fur gleamed like velvet in the sunshine, had stretched its lazy length, luxuriating in the genial warmth.

And yet there were some little signs to one accustomed to the house and the household's ways, which bore significance enough, though a stranger might have passed them unnoticed. Trifles, too, they were; but in some cases trifles stamp their impress. In bright sunny weather, before the door there usually swung the canary's cage, and rich, overpowering gushes of melody came pouring forth from the never-weary little throat, thrilling for very joyousness among its bower of roses and leaves. It had been carried round to the side of the house now, where the sunbeams came but rarely, and its song was
hushed, as it aimlessly hopped from perch to perch, pecking at its sugar in a melancholy way, or scattering the sand and seed that strewed the floor of its pretty prison, with impatient, restless feet. The magpie, too, was a prisoner here—poor "Bobbie," as they called him—chained by one foot to his perch, a disconsolate prisoner silently discussing the abundant provisions that were intended to compensate for its loss of liberty.

No sound without, save the toying of the spring breeze with the clinging tendrils, climbing to the chimney-tops, or the distant echo of a spade entering the softened earth at lazy intervals, or now and then the short, impatient tramp of a horse’s hoof; for beyond the violets, without the little gate, the doctor’s horse was fastened, and stood irritably champing his bit, and wondering, perhaps, at his long detention. From within there rose a low murmuring of voices, mingled with half-stifled weeping. There was sorrow there, though peace was there too.

There were footsteps along the passage, and presently the doctor, followed by Maggie, came out, and stood, hat in hand, beneath the verandah. His countenance was very grave, for he
was a man of feeling, in spite of his profession. Close familiarity with scenes of death and sorrow had not steeled his heart or blunted his affections.

It was a warm clasp of the hand he gave to Maggie, as they stood a moment together in the verandah; and his voice was low and kind as he said,—

“You have much to be thankful for, Miss Maggie. Your sister is perfectly free from pain. I scarcely hoped this.”

“But is there no hope of life?—no hope, doctor?” Maggie’s voice was choked and hopeless as she asked the question. She felt what the answer must be, though she waited for it.

“None, Miss Maggie—not the slightest; surely you have long known that. The end has been long coming; it was but a matter of time. Trouble has doubtless hastened it—mental trouble, but that is all; it would have come under any circumstances; it must have done so, considering the nature of the complaint—the disease. You have only now to be thankful that it has come so peacefully—so free from the pain that has been your sister’s sad portion all her
life. No wonder that she experiences such strange peace and rest now."

Ah! but the doctor, kind and clever as he was, did not possess all the secret of that peace. Maggie felt that. Her dying sister's peace and tranquil joy had another source than the mere freedom from bodily pain. That, indeed, was rest; but it was the "peace that passeth all understanding" that possessed her soul.

"I shall be in this neighbourhood all day," the doctor presently said. "Should you want me, you can hear of me at Roberts's store, though I fear I can be of no further service. I do not think you will require me," he added, turning away. "Your sister will probably pass in sleep. She has already done with suffering."

"Yes, done with suffering—here and for ever. Bless God for that!" Running into the parlour, and throwing herself upon the sofa, upon which poor Nellie had so often vainly tried to rest, Maggie buried her head in the cushions, and gave way to a passionate burst of tears.

"Oh, Andy, Andy!" she said again and again, "how bitter all this will be when you hear of it. A few hours more, and you will have no loving
sister to take your part. And I?—what shall I do?"

"Go to her Saviour," was the whisper of her own heart; "take your burden to Him who has promised to sustain; take sins and sorrows to Him who bore their weight upon the cross—who will both care for you and help you."

Nellie was dying. Yes, her long path of suffering had come to a close. The thorns and the brambles that had often wounded her painfully had given place to the green pastures and the springing flowers. Already she had entered the sweet land "Beulah," and the bells of the celestial city were vibrating upon her ear. Spring had indeed come for her: the "everlasting spring," the "never-withering flowers." For her there would be no more wintry winds—no dreary storms. Gently she was entering on her rest—gently gliding into the Saviour's bosom. How could they mourn when they watched the grey shadow stealing over the sweet face, and saw that the lips were smiling amidst their pallor—a foretaste of unspeakable bliss resting upon them!

Maggie at last stole quietly back into the little white chamber, where her mother and a friend
were silently watching; for it was but little that our Nellie needed now. She was fast leaving them. Through the night she had been wakeful and restless, and had spoken her last words—had spoken much of the hope that was within—of the home to which she was going—of the joy and peace in believing. She had spoken, too, of her hopes for Andy.

"The 'iron fetters' have the mastery now, dear mother," she had said, in her low, sweet, clear voice. "They are binding him a fast captive, and will make him suffer bitterly, perhaps even to death. But never fear, the 'silken cords' shall have the victory. I feel it—I am sure of it. Mother I shall see dear Andy again, where no sin or sorrow shall come between us!"

It was the last time she mentioned his name. With morning dawn the restlessness gradually subsided, and with it went all pain. She slept long and peacefully, and when she woke it was with the shadow of death upon her brow. It needed not the doctor's words to confirm their fears. Death was too legibly written there.

Up and down at the back of the house, with heavy footsteps and slow, the old captain was
walking. His heart was hot within him; but he was not feeling like Jonah, that he "did well to be angry;" only with the woman of Zarephath, that God was "calling his sins to remembrance." In mercy He was doing this by shattering his idols, and showing him how feeble was the reed on which he had leaned till it had pierced his hand. Poor old man! he could not look upon his dying daughter; he could not watch the life-blood stealing from her face, leaving behind the sombre shadow, round which there lingered no uncertainty. He could not bear to note the fluttering breathing less and less visibly stirring the parted lips. Up and down, in his soul's bitterness, he paced. He could scarcely endure his own thoughts. His son had gone from him—his only son, from whom he had expected so much, for whom he had so ardently longed; and now his little suffering yet ministering angel was winging her flight. How could he say, "Thy will be done"? How could he feel that "judgment was tempered with mercy," or that a Father's love had directed the strokes of the rod?

The sun grew warmer as the day advanced, and shone pleasantly through the parted curtains, and
in at the lifted window. The little room, with its quietly-weeping watchers and its atmosphere of death, would have been close but for the soft spring breeze that wandered freely in, bringing with it all pleasant perfumes—the breath of the violets above all. Softly against the upper panes the tendrils of the jasmine swept to and fro like the flutter of angels’ wings. So quiet, so calm it was within and without; for those who watched sat almost breathlessly now, fearing to break the slumber that told so much of peace and rest.

They need not have feared. There she lay, with her long golden curls crushed and tumbled, but beautiful even in their disorder. The violet eyes closed, and round them those dark ominous shadows lingered, setting also their seal upon the little mouth that had so many times been contracted with pain. But there was no pain in the still, calm, wax-like features now, so lovely even in dying. How fitfully the breath came and went—how motionless lay the slender white hands, half folded together on the counterpane—“So He giveth His beloved sleep.”

Still sleeping on—sleeping still, as the shadow deepened and rested more heavily on lip and brow.
The breath grew fainter and fainter, and the three weeping watchers gathered more closely round the bed. She heeded not their weeping now. There were no last words for her to say. Nellie had looked her last upon earth. The soft spring breeze, the scent of her favourite violets, were all unfelt; the outward senses were closing. There was no opening of the blue eyes—no unsealing of the pale sweet lips. A little quivering of the eyelids, a tremulous movement of the mouth, and Nellie had left them—sleeping out her life into her Saviour's arms.

A moment's hush—a moment's dread uncertainty, and the voice of bitter wailing! No fear to wake the sleeper now—no fear to grieve the loving heart, whose pulsations were for ever stopped. The days of Nellie's mourning were over; her joy, her rest was eternal!

A few hours later, and Maggie, pale and worn with grief and with watching, sat before the desk, vainly striving to write her sorrowful news to Andy. How could she do it? and how could her letter reach him. Surely had he ever received that last farewell note from Nellie, he would, he must have replied. There must be something
wrong, very wrong, in the postal arrangements; and yet this letter must be sent. And so, with all its sorrowful details, brief as they were, and yet not without a little of the darling’s peace and joy, the letter was written, ending in an urgent appeal, a beseeching appeal, that he would leave at once the diggings and all his evil companions and come home. “Nellie would have wished it, dear Andy, and she said she would watch over you. Let her see that you will yet be all she wished you,” were Maggie’s concluding words.
CHAPTER XXIII.

SEARCH FOR THE LOST.

There had been the commencement of a run of good luck with our friends, according to digger parlance, and in a very short time the whole party had come to the conclusion that they might reasonably strike their tents, sell up tools, utensils, and bedding, and leave the ground for less fortunate speculators. They had been in every way successful, had safely transmitted their gold to head-quarters, suffering very little loss in the disposal of their chattels, and having most happily escaped from attacks of illness, or at least cold, that might reasonably have been expected as the results of a sojourn during the very tempestuous winter months, with only the shelter of a good strong tent cloth around and above them to protect them from wind and rain. The spring sunshine was looking down pleasantly upon them on the day they made their final resolve to quit, and little tufts of grass and tiny bush flowers were everywhere making themselves visible over
the heaps of deserted "mullock," on the banks of the claims, and here and there between the tents. The hills, too, were beginning to look glorious, and wooing them to remain. But it would not do. They had generally had enough of it, and even Maude and Constance, proud of their invested gains, were anxious to return to civilized life. But for one thing they would have been a gay and happy party, as well as a fortunate, while on their way to Melbourne; for Melbourne was their destination, and in that city they had resolved to remain—at least the Clydes—partly because of the friends they had there, and of others they had formed and were likely to form—partly because the "go-a-head" character it was even at that time fast assuming gave it an additional charm to our enterprising young ladies. Their brother thought also that he should be better able to turn his money to good account; and they all promised themselves ample compensation for wintry storms and rough work and fare. Ample recompense Edward declared he should take in return for the wear and tear of his hands, the skin of which he pretended to fear would never become soft and pliable again.
“You shall see, Maude, if in slippered feet and smoking cap, and the very softest, most luxurious of easy chairs, I don’t take full vengeance for all these months of toil,” he exclaimed with a joyous laugh, as they rattled along the Melbourne road, leaving “shafts,” and “cradles, and “mullock heaps” far behind them.

“Oh, I can well believe you,” replied Maude merrily. “You have earned the right to rest, and so have we too.”

“I should think you would never want to try a digger’s life again—eh, Maude?”

“No. I went with a purpose. I am certainly not so infatuated with ‘digger’s life’ that I wish to prolong it when that purpose is accomplished. Not I, my dear brother; but I have good cause for not repenting the few months we have spent there, and so have you.”

“You have no desire, either, to return to Adelaide?”

“No,” said Maude thoughtfully: “though perhaps if I had no friends here I might wish it. But no; I think the life of Melbourne suits me best.”

“Me too,” chimed in Constance; “it is
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brighter, more active, more exciting. Adelaide is a good little place, but—well—after Melbourne, you must allow, rather tame. I see, however, that Mr. Conway does not agree with the assertion,” she added with an arch smile, as rousing from a state of reflection into which he had fallen he looked towards them with an answering beam.

“Not quite,” he replied; “South Australia has several charms for me in which Melbourne is wanting. One of the chief of those charms is, I believe, that in it I intend to make my future home.”

“Will nothing induce you to make a home in Melbourne,” said Edward Clyde, anxiously. “I should think you might turn your money to more profitable account on this side.”

“I think not—not at any rate in the manner in which I have planned my future. South Australia has all the elements desirable for my particular career. I suppose Miss Conny would call that very tame; but to me it is very pleasant, and my mother and sisters will think so too.”

“Oh, certainly, there is fine land obtainable in South Australia, and agriculture pays very well,
and will till the thing gets overdone, or the land worn out," said Edward. "You have a high price to pay for your land—that's the worst of it; but for a long time to come you may make it pay. It's a nice, comfortable, respectable sort of life too, for many of our farmers take it easily, don't do too much work—leave that to their men—and thrive on it. But I do not think I am cut out for that sort of thing—never could raise a flower in my life, and have a mortal hatred to horned cattle."

"In that case you and agricultural employments will scarcely agree," said Louis, laughing heartily. "Nevertheless I may hope some day to welcome both yourself and your sisters to an inspection of my farm and garden—only please to remember it is yet unformed, and uncultivated at present."

"Well now, if I were you, I should try to enter upon one already formed. Now's your time. House, garden, and all. I'll be bound to say there will be plenty of chances in the market, and cheap too. It will be better a hundred times, and more economical, to buy out at once, than to have to commence from the very beginning, with
unheard-of expenses, and but few hands to help you; for, remember, the gold fever is far from subsiding yet, and it will be some time before society generally shake down into their right places. At present 'Jack is as good as his master.'"

"I have no doubt you are right, Clyde, and it is well worth thinking over. If I can only manage that, I may have the pleasure of welcoming you to my own home, and introducing you to my mother and sisters and brother-in-law—that is if you think it worth while to come. Thank you for the suggestion."

"Oh, it comes only second-hand," said Edward, laughing; "but it is good advice—advice I have from thoroughly reliable authority, from a practical man, not a mere theorist like myself."

Late that night Louis Conway sat writing in a small chamber of an upper storey of one of Melbourne's then most respectable hotels. The Clydes were all hospitably entertained in the comfortable villa of their friend, Mr. Scott, a wealthy merchant of the city, who resided a little distance out of the bustle of the streets, and Louis had been warmly invited to join them;
but on the score of having much business to transact, he politely declined the invitation, and by the light of a rather feeble candle was now writing long and bright letters for the morrow's mail to both mother and sisters, and especially to his brother-in-law. There was something tangible to write about now, some really reliable news to relate. He had not merely to hold out hopes for the future. The cash was procured, and only the purchase to be made. He could not only give them some idea of how soon they might set out on their voyage, but, in order that there might be no delay, he at once enclosed a draft for outfit and passage, that they might be fully prepared if by the next mail they received the intelligence that a ready-made farmstead was waiting for them. What a vein of thanksgiving ran in and out the current of that letter! what bursts of joyous happiness! what praise to Him to whom all praise is due. God had prospered him, and would still prosper him, and would safely bring mother and son together again. No wonder that the morning light peeped in between the window curtains, making the candle that had burned down to its socket look wan
and dim before Louis remembered the time, or how much his excited mind and fatigued body needed rest.

He was seated alone at a late breakfast, indulging in the unwonted luxury of hot rolls and coffee, of course at an exorbitant price, as all things were at that period, when Edward Clyde came in unannounced upon him.

"Sorry to disturb you," he exclaimed; "but I say, friend Conway, you are 'doing it' in style this morning rather. Do you know what time it is?"

"Yes," said Louis, laughing; "but the English mail goes out to-day, and, knowing that, I got so engrossed with my letters that it was morning, and quite light, before I went to bed at all."

"Yes; I suppose you had news enough to tell," said Edward, with something like a sigh.

"In consequence whereof," continued Louis, "I slept late, and have a headache."

"That's a pity. Take a seidlitz powder after your breakfast, that will settle your headache better than hot rolls. Have you seen the morning's paper?"
"No—not yet. Is there anything particular in it?" said Louis, looking up suddenly from the roll he was buttering, struck by the un­wonted gravity of Edward Clyde's voice.

"Well, yes; news of some of our Adelaide friends, the Macdonalds."

"Not Nellie's death!" said Louis, starting to his feet; "but of course it is. Show it me; what does it say?"

"Read for yourself. It is simply a notice. They can have had no letter, no news evidently since you wrote and told them Andy had left us. It is a notice to Andy; see here it is."

And Louis slowly read it.

"Should this meet the eye of Andy Macdonald, he is earnestly entreated to return. All will be forgiven. His sister Nellie is dead."

"He has killed her, that's certain," said Clyde. "Poor little thing! how she doated on him!"

"His conduct has hastened her death, no doubt of that," said Louis, sorrowfully. But, Edward, she has been a great sufferer, and such spinal complaints as hers must terminate in
dearth. Poor Nellie! Yet I do wrong to say that, for I have full reason to believe she has exchanged suffering on earth for joy in heaven. This news may do Andy good. It will grieve him terribly; for he loved her very much. I know. There is now but one course to take.”

“What is that?”

“A search for Andy. I shall start to-day. Give me this paper, Clyde. I ought to take it with me.”

“Do you think I shall allow you to go alone?—certainly not,” said Edward warmly. “My time is my own now. I can do as I like. My sisters are in good hands; besides it may be better that we go together, for many reasons.”

“I shall be glad enough of your company—‘two heads are better than one.’” replied Louis; “but we must settle two or three preliminaries first.”

And first Louis wrote in time for the Adelaide mail a little note of deep sympathy and earnest Christian pleading to Maggie, promising immediately to seek out her brother, and, if possible, bring him back to Adelaide. Andy’s share of the money—the share they had resolved he should
have, though he had thought fit to leave them—they transmitted also to the care of his father, and then, with heavy hearts, they started on the track of the wanderer.

Once or twice they heard of him since he had left them. The "rush" he had originally visited had been pronounced a hoax, got up by one or two enterprising storekeepers, but "squashed" almost as speedily as raised. A few tents, a few holes—"shicers," as they had been declared—were still left, but the majority of those who had come in such hot haste at the first report had made a more hasty departure. Andy and his party, our friends learned, had gone forward with that majority, and encamped some miles farther onwards, at a spot from which glowing accounts were proceeding, and with a little better result. But though Louis and Edward found plenty of traces of their having been some weeks engaged in digging and yet more questionable employment, both Andy, and his friend Jones, and their mate, who, by all accounts, was several degrees lower in the social scale, had left the place, and no one seemed to know exactly whither they had gone.

"It's a pity, that it is, mate," said the bearded
digger to whom they had applied for information, "that a likely young chap as that Andy should be mixed up with such low-bred scoundrels as the other two. The tall dark, sleek man, who never does a stroke of work when he can help it, is a thorough blackleg, and trust me, he'll come to his deserts yet. Why, he was obliged to cut and run from this. He was taken with false dice up his sleeve. And as to the other, why, in my opinion, he's only fit for the hangman, or some such billet."

"Poor Andy!" exclaimed Louis, turning away. "We must find him. Surely by this time he will have discovered that 'the way of transgressors is hard!'"

Day after day, sometimes in one direction and sometimes in another, they pursued their search; at times beguiled by hope, with new items of intelligence, they set out briskly in the morning to encounter only bitter disappointment with the evening's close. Edward was losing heart altogether, and but that they heard no tidings of either Jones or his partner, they would have suspected foul work. Notices were posted up on trees in every direction, advertisements appeared in every newspaper, but all without response.
An accident at last, connected with some of Jones's unprincipled practices, revealed the way they had taken, and the next morning Louis Conway and Edward Clyde rapidly took their departure for the Ovens' district, full of hope, if not certainty, of soon accomplishing their object.

They were in the right track now—that was positive; for here and there from parties along the road, and in the wayside shanties, at which they were compelled to stop for provisions for themselves and their horses, very distressing tidings of Jones and his mate reached them. They heard of Andy too. "The poor young fellow seemed almost beaten out," they said, "and half sick of his companions, but the other two clung to him like leeches. No doubt he knew too much for them to care to part with him."

Sorrowful news, but news that sent them as speedily as horses' feet could take them on the track. They heard constantly fresh intelligence as they went on. It was sundown when at last they came upon the little flat to which they had been positively directed. A lovely little spot it was, circled round by hills glowing in roseate sunbeams—a verdant little spot, marred only by
the greed of man for gold; the mullock heaps and the deep sinking were everywhere. Here and there were a few tents, widely apart from each other; for this "rush" had also been deserted for newer and richer ground; but the one little black tent they wanted stood out against the sky in the distance. They cared for nothing else.
CHAPTER XXIV.

Found.

One solitary little black tent!—a meagre-looking affair, weather-beaten and torn; and so small that certainly it could contain only one occupant. There it stood, amidst all its green surroundings, for the trees were thicker here than elsewhere, and the grass was looking up from the broken ground, and flowers—lovely bell-like creepers—depended from the branches, or wreathed the mullock heaps with their graceful festoons.

The green grass, the festooned trees, and beyond all that the clear blue sky, was plainly visible through the lifted canvas doorway of the little black tent. What a pleasing sight it was to see! how calm, how peaceful, after all the turmoil and confusion and agony that had passed! So it seemed to Andy Macdonald, as alone, deserted by his mates, he lay in the extremity of a low fever, outstretched upon the floor among his blankets, with no companion but his faithful
little dog. He had gradually aroused from what appeared to him to be a very frightful dream—a dream of sin, of misery, and anguish, and now he lay in utter weakness, wondering at the silence, wondering that he was alone, but almost too weak to think out the cause. A dream? Yes, it must be a dream; he was scarcely awake yet. By-and-by he should find himself at home in his own little room; and the past—the shame, the sin, the agony, only a dream. But the soft spring breeze stole in and lifted the tangled masses of his fair hair from his fevered brow. Its touch revived him, and quickened the consciousness the fever had banished. Slowly the old scenes came like a phantasmagoria before him—the old home scenes—his mother and his sister Nellie, they with their love, their hope, their pride all centred in him; he in his own headstrong wilful way, seeking ever something new, wearying with the steady, sober pathway, and dissipating their dreams of joy by his own waywardness, his folly, and his sin. The iron fetters seemed cleaving into his very soul.

And this illness! He remembered now how gradually it had been stealing over him, how his
limbs had refused to work, how his head had failed to comprehend, and how at last, in the midst of a midnight scene of gambling and debauchery, into which his companions had literally dragged him, his eye had fallen by chance on the advertisement in the paper, the notice to himself of Nellie's death. From that moment all was indistinct—all anguish and darkness; through perils by flood, through perils by fire, through agony indescribable, he seems to have passed, waking up at last from a terrific dream to the calm beauty of a spring morning; to consciousness; but to utter weakness also and agonizing memory.

And as there he lay, passive, helpless, exhausted, and deserted, step by step of the past, as we have before said, was pictured before him. The gradual yielding to the tempter, the forging day after day of these very iron fetters that seemed now binding him to the death. What a past of sin it seemed—what a past of misery it had proved to him! Nights of dissipation, of wild revelry, of evil untold, and this, this was its climax. His companions in sin—his tempters—had left him; left him to die alone.
To die? Yes, surely this must terminate in death—this utter weakness, and no aid, no help. To die—and what of the hereafter? How vividly it rose before him—what would it bring for him?

"Ah, Nellie, Nellie, I have killed you!" again and again he wailed, and the big drops stood out upon his pale brow in his agony, and the colour faded out of his lips. "I have killed you, my darling, my sister, and now I am dying myself; and all is dark—dark—oh, so dark—I cannot see my way. Oh, but for a year—a month of life! I cannot, cannot die." And then in the agony of his distress he half rose from his bed to sink again in utter exhaustion, and almost into the silence of despair.

The soft cool breeze still fanned his heated brow, and golden bars of sunshine came through the rests in the black canvas. Soothingly and beautifully they fell around him. It was not alone the storm and the thundercloud, the lightning-flash and the raging billow, that were the creation of the God from whose presence he was seeking to hide himself. Ah! no; He had also made all things fair and lovely—all things most
beautiful. He was merciful and good, as well as just—"forgiving iniquities"—"pardoning sins." Where had he heard these words? They came on the wings of the sunshine and the breeze, followed by others as sweet and as pleasant as cool waters to a traveller in a thirsty land. "Come unto Me, ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them as wool; though red like crimson, they shall be whiter than the snow." Were they true words—words he might trust in? Would God indeed receive him in his sins, in his weakness, in his helplessness, if he came to Him now? Oh, for some human helper, some human guide! Oh, that Louis Conway once more could teach the way that he had so long despised! Was it from his lips these words had fallen? Even so—they were as the bread cast upon the waters, found after many days!

They soothed him, those beautiful words. A little slender ray of light stole in upon his darkness—a silken thread of hope gently raised the crushed, despairing spirit. But he was soon exhausted, for in addition to the weakness consequent on the fever, nothing had passed his lips
during his twenty-four hours of loneliness, and so presently the sunshine faded from his sight, and heavy darkness succeeded. Not faintness, but stupor, deep and prolonged. From that deep stupor there was again a gradual awakening; but with it came the delightful sensation of rest. Rest for the weary aching limbs—for he was lying softly, and across his brow a gentle hand was passing, and fragrant essences were cooling its fever. And a low murmuring of voices was in his ear, like sweet music it sounded to him, for he felt that he was no longer alone—no longer the poor deserted digger; but tenderly cared for and lovingly watched. But by whom? Where was he—where? Half lifting his weary eyes, they fell upon no familiar scenes. Snow white drapery shielded the light that came from a shaded lamp, and left the room indistinct and dreamy. He could see nothing else but that uncertain light, only he thought that among those murmuring voices there were some familiar tones—one voice he had so longed to hear again—and presently, in reply to a suppressed joyous exclamation, in a feminine voice, of "he's awake," that other voice came again in glad joyousness, and
the warm "Thank God!" it uttered, sent a thrill of gladness into his own soul.

"Thank God"—yes—that he was still spared; not yet cut off in his sin, and with life there was hope. "Thank God!"—it was the immediate exclamation of his own heart too, and slowly, sip by sip, he swallowed down the reviving draught that some kind hand was holding to his lips. And once more murmuring "Thank God!" he slept.

Slept a peaceful, tranquil sleep—the sleep of an infant on its mother's breast. He was cared for again. Hope had sent a little of its rainbow light across his feeble vision, and his sleep was sweet.

It is so beautiful to be cared for—to feel that loving eyes are watching your awakening—that loving hands are waiting to minister to your weakness, that loving fingers will soothe the fever of your brow, and that loving words will quiet the heart's wild throbbing. But sweeter far than all these manifestations of human love is the rest of the "everlasting arms"—the Holy Spirit's ministrations—the balm of Jesu's loving words—the power of His "Peace be still" over the wounded restless heart.
The lost was indeed found. Andy Macdonald was in kind and tender hands, watched over and cared for, and among friends. Louis Conway and Edward Clyde, when they entered the little black tent, and found the object of their eager search, scarcely hoped to restore the life that seemed trembling on the threshold, ready to quit the inanimate clay; but hoping against hope, at very great expense they had procured assistance and a conveyance, and succeeded in removing him at once, by easy stages, and under medical advice, to Melbourne. Here the Clydes took possession of him, though Louis still constituted himself his chief nurse. Mr. Scott and his excellent lady, with true hospitality, had kindly assigned him a chamber in the wing of their house farthest removed from the noise of the rest of the household, where simply the sound of birds and the murmur of the trees, or the sighing of the breeze and the perfume of the flowers, might reach him when consciousness returned. How had they watched for the signs of its return, for Maude and Constance shared in the solicitude and the care during the long weary period when it was uncertain whether life or death would
obtain the victory. The constant watching, the careful nursing, the skilful medical treatment, with God's blessing upon all, restored at last the languid circulation, and after the long sleep that succeeded that first awakening, poor Andy awoke to a clearer perception of his situation, refreshed, and with renewed life coursing in his veins.

He felt that, though he was very weak and feeble still, and scarcely cared to move or speak, or even look around him. His eye first fell upon the large window opposite his bed, from which the curtain had been drawn aside. It rested in the distance upon the waters of the beautiful Yarra, with its sunny green slopes and bowery trees. Now and then the white sails of a tiny vessel or a little fishing smack glided gently past over the silver waters—dreamily gliding, almost like things of life. Nearer still, more trees, beautiful and graceful, and verdant in all their young spring loveliness. The window itself was partly screened by a network of leaves, among which pure white rosebuds, and spotless roses of fairy whiteness softly swept against the panes. Where was he? in what lovely haven of rest and
peace had he found shelter? How sweet, how tranquil! and life anew throbbed in his pulses, bringing back hope to his heart.

There was no sound in the room but the lazy buzz of a fly, and the sweeping of those rose-leaves on the window pane; and half awed by the silence, Andy at length lifted his head from the pillow, and looked around him.

"Where am I?" he exclaimed, in so weak a voice that it shocked him—so unlike his own it appeared.

Then he saw he was no longer alone; for springing up from the recesses of a large chair in which he had been seated—not sleeping, but musing, and looking out upon the waters of the Yarra, as his friend had been—Louis Conway came softly forward to his side.

"You are among old friends, dear Andy," he returned gently. "Among those who care for you."

"Yes; I feel that," said Andy. "How did you find me out?"

"I will tell you all that another time," said Louis kindly. "When you have more strength you shall hear. Meanwhile I must get you
something to bring strength," and he rang a little bell as he spoke. Then taking up a draught he poured a spoonful out, and proceeded to administer it.

"This first, and afterwards some of Maude's celebrated strengthening decoctions," he continued, with a smile.

Andy smiled too—a feeble, weak smile. "I am low enough now, Conway," he presently said.

"'I was brought low and He helped me,'" said Louis gently. "Who knows how much mercy has been mingled with these sorrows, Andy! If only it prove a wakening from death unto life!"

"If only that!" said Andy, in a faint voice.

"The iron fetters will be removed—the silken cords will resume their influence—eh, Andy? Worth while all the anguish and misery then. The love of Jesus can unrivet the strongest fetters."

Gradually they wooed him back to life—gradually they won from him his tale of sin and suffering. Like a little child he took in the story of the cross and the crown. The pride of his heart had given way in his weakness, and left him
sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind.

"Take me home, Conway, when you go," he said one day, as seated in the large chair by the window he had been talking of home, his father, and Nellie. "I cannot rest till I have asked pardon of poor father—till he has received his prodigal son."

"We will go as soon as your strength will allow," said Louis affectionately. "Meanwhile, Andy, they know you are in good hands, and well cared for. Maggie's letters to-day—both yours and mine—will tell you that. We can afford to wait a while."
Things had fallen into much of their customary routine after Nellie's death; the daily occupations went on, but the rest that her absence made could not be filled. She was bitterly missed by Maggie. The pleasant little talks, the soothing endearing words, were all over; the delight of waiting upon and lovingly tending was past. Poor Maggie! she was entirely without companionship; for her mother, at all times a quiet, uncommunicative old lady, was much more so now. Through the day she sat with her knitting, or darning, or fiction of mending, the large old Bible spread open before her—it had been her constant companion since her daughter's death—but for her living daughter she had few words. The old captain, too, crushed, broken down, and utterly changed by his accumulated trials, scarcely noticed any one, or regarded anything, but wandered aimlessly all day about his garden, taking no pleasure in his flowers, though they were now
in their spring-tide loveliness, and allowing the gardener to follow his own inclinations, seldom even interfering with a direction. Maggie was left to her own resources—to her own griefs; and these at times she felt were becoming too heavy for her. Her bright light-heartedness was gone. The continual absence of her brother, the state of her father's health, and the extreme quiet of the little household, was preying upon her health.

And yet not even the strong persuasions of loving friends, or the advice of the medical man, could induce her to desert her post. Her mother was so weak and helpless, and her father so unlike himself. But a day or two after the funeral they had found him lying prostrate on one of the garden paths, unable to rise, a partial attack of paralysis having affected one side so much as for a time to render him nearly helpless; and though he recovered from the attack very quickly, and sufficiently so to be able to walk about unaided once more, he was no longer the same unbending, unyielding character, for not only his limbs, but in some degree his mind also, was enfeebled by the attack. No wonder that Maggie felt that it would not do for her to leave home, but that she
must silently and secretly watch over her poor father. Indeed, she had so long been the stay of the household that what they would have done without her it is hard to tell.

The canary again sang sweetly among the curling tendrils and white petals of the jasmine, and the great dog sunned himself upon the door-mat before the open door. Fresh flowers were daily gathered by Maggie’s fingers, and shed their perfume through the little room, though she who so loved them was not there to see. Everything within was sweet and fair, and yet it was a dreary little household, and Maggie wept many tears in secret, and offered up many weeping prayers that her sister’s God might be hers—that she might learn to live for Him—to trust in Him.

It was hard to wait so long for intelligence from Andy. Where was he? What evil had befallen him? For never in her heart of hearts did Maggie believe that he had received Nellie’s dying message, or seen the notice to himself in the newspaper and sent no reply; the post had failed, the letter was lost, or he had removed, and the letter had never reached him, and the newspaper had not fallen in his way. Plenty of excuses
occurred to her; anything rather than suppose him hardened, or guilty of want of love and sympathy in the midst of his other failings; and still anxiously she watched and waited—waited and watched for but a single word.

She had gone to the post-office one bright spring morning slowly and listlessly, and without a gleam of her former spirit; for though she knew there was a vessel in from Melbourne, it was hoping against hope to suppose that it had brought a letter for her. But the bright colour came into her face, and her step wonderfully quickened as she approached the shop; for in the doorway stood old Roberts himself, waving his hand to her, and in that hand was a letter. Good old man, his deep sympathy would not allow him to wait till she stood at his counter, even though it deprived him of an order.

"The Melbourne stamp upon it, miss!" he exclaimed, with a glad smile. "God grant that it bring good news this time! Is the captain better to-day?"

"No—yes—I think he is," said Maggie, joyously seizing her letter, and recognising Louis Conway's handwriting. "If this is good news,"
she added significantly, "it will do us all good, Mr. Roberts;" and smilingly she bid him good­bye, and hurried homewards.

Out of sight of the store, and of those whom she knew would in their friendship be sure to watch her, Maggie tore open her envelope with trembling, eager fingers. It was the letter written by Louis Conway before he and Edward Clyde started on their search for Andy—kind and sympathizing in every respect, and comforting too in its firm confidence that Andy would soon be found and restored to them. For the captain also there was an enclosure consigning all Andy’s share of gold to his keeping; and full of hope, and yet with eyes running over with tears, Maggie ran briskly home.

Those letters were surely worth their weight in gold, for most wonderfully did they brighten up the little household. Something of the old erect attitude, something of the old proud bearing, stole into the captain’s face and form as he read of his son’s share of gold, and thought of the probability of that son’s speedy return; and the mother’s eye brightened with love and pride and hope such as for many a day she had not ex-
perrienced. As to Maggie, her heart was brimming over with many mingled emotions, the prominent one being confidence and trust in Louis Conway's promise, and a secret joy that they would come home together. Nobody would have said in those days that she had a homely face, it was so lighted up by hope and brightened from within that it redeemed it from even a suspicion of the plain.

Those letters helped them through many days of further waiting, tedious days as they were; and then again came a letter from Louis Conway, bringing with it intelligence, of hope and fear. The lost was found indeed, but he was sick even unto death. Still all his hopes were homeward. He had been living long enough upon "husks"—he was weary of the "riotous living." His greatest desire now was to fall upon his father's neck and entreat his forgiveness, even as he had already done of his Heavenly Father.

There was both joy and weeping in the household as the letters were read, but hope after all had the victory; for Maggie held firmly to the belief that, carefully nursed and tended as Andy was, he would be sure to recover, and that perhaps the next vessel might have brighter accounts
to bring, even if it did not bring himself. Norah, in the kitchen, endorsed these sentiments with all her heart. She had dreamt of "clear wather," she said oracularly; "and sure that was a lucky drame intirely for the young masther. Faith! she knew he would soon be afther getting well, and be home once more to lighten their hearts;" and she ran about the house, singing snatches of Irish jigs, with a broad smile of pleasure on her good-natured face, till Maggie also caught the influence and smiled most heartily in sympathy.

It was a happy break in the painful quiet and monotony of the house. There was something mutually interesting to talk about—something to look forward to. Andy was coming home; there were preparations to make for his reception, to nurse him into health, and to welcome his friend."

And meanwhile the letter-writing fell chiefly to Maggie, letters to both Andy and Conway—letters we have seen which were safely received and duly appreciated. The old captain, too, was roused into something like action by the necessity of seeing about his son's money, and he again began giving directions and taking a certain
amount of interest in his garden. But his friends pronounced him breaking fast, and the doctor hinted to some of them that the next attack of paralysis would most probably prove fatal. He did not tell Maggie this; for "Poor girl," he said, "she had enough to bear, and had borne up so bravely." But Maggie still anxiously watched her father, afraid, if his absence was a little protracted, that another return of the fit had recurred. How she longed in those days for Andy to come home!

"For even if he cannot do anything, it will be so pleasant for father and son to be friendly again, and every grievance to be made up, just as darling Nellie wished it. Besides, his presence alone will be a comfort to me," she said to herself.

And one bright evening, when the sunset was so lovely that father, mother, and daughter were all gathered together to enjoy it in the verandah, Maggie, whose watchful eyes were ever turning towards a distant view of the flagstaff, with its items of intelligence, suddenly exclaimed,—

"Why, father, I do believe there is a Melbourne vessel in. Shall I fetch your telescope?" and
off she ran for the handsomely-mounted instrument, and gave it into the captain’s trembling hand.

"Yes; there was the well-known flag. What had it brought for them? letters? Should she run down to the post-office, and see? That would be the best way." And she hurriedly tied the strings of her garden hat. But the strings were yet untied, when her hands were suddenly arrested by the click of the latch of the little side gate, and the sound of well-known voices. One moment she stood bending slightly forward, looking through the vista of trees to the violet walk, the colour deepening in her cheek, and her breath coming quickly; then springing forward with the joyous exclamation of, "Oh, father! mother! it is Andy himself! They are here!" and in another moment she was in her brother’s arms.

We cannot enter into all the details of that evening’s joy and sorrow. Nellie was not forgotten in the midst of their happy reunion. That she was not by to see, saddened its happiness. The blank in the household was keenly felt by poor Andy, who, pale and still
weak from his severe illness, was scarcely able to endure so many trying emotions. Louis Conway would have left him and returned to town, but they would not hear of that. It was not to be thought of, so kind a friend as he had been to Andy, such a friend as he was to them all. For his part, he was quite willing and happy to stay, and after all it was a relief to the overcharged hearts that he did so; for no one thought of treating him as a stranger, and his tales of Melbourne life and life on the diggings were judiciously introduced, and counteracted the tension of feeling that continued emotion, either pleasurable or the reverse, is apt to produce.

It was late, indeed the clock had long chimed the hour of midnight, when the household broke up. Andy went to bed that night with new hopes for the future, and with new promises and resolutions as to how that future should redeem the past, and how the few last days of his father's life should be made glad by his dutiful conduct. The "silken cords" were again triumphant, and the "iron fetters" had fallen from his hands. His sleep might well that night be calm and peaceful.
And if there were others in the household, gentle reader, with whom sleep was coy, it was not that sorrow was in the ascendant, but that new sensations, new feelings, were now taking forcible possession, and would not be excluded.
CHAPTER XXVI.

THREE YEARS AFTER.

Three years! "A great deal may transpire in three years," our readers perhaps exclaim: and a great deal did transpire. Much of the furore of the gold diggings had died out in that time. Prosperous diggers in hundreds had returned to South Australia, laden with their golden spoil. Many—the wise and careful ones—had procured ample provision for further progress, and new dwellings began to go up in every direction, and new households were established in every habitable corner of the land. Hundreds there were also who squandered away their wealth: some at the public-house, drinking away both their gold and their lives; others in even more questionable ways dispersing the treasure they had gathered; some falling into the condition of the prodigal, who had spent all in "riotous living," but without the prodigal's repentance. But meanwhile trade prospered miraculously, and many a hard-working tradesman realized a fortune in but little
time, and with little trouble, which in another state of things years of toil would never have accomplished. Affairs flourished generally during that time, and South Australia, so low and depressed before the breaking out of the gold-fields, that her best friends declared her near to death, looked brightly up again, resuscitated by the glittering wealth that poured into her coffers. The golden stores of the sister colonies had been the saving of our southern land.

But it is not with the colony at large, however prosperous, that we have to do, or with the incomes made—and expended as soon as made—in either individual or collective cases. It is at the friends we have followed through the story's course along the current of the preceding chapters we would take a parting glance ere we make our final exit. The three years that had passed had been no idle time with any of them, but things and circumstances had greatly changed with all. A few miles from Adelaide by just a pleasant easy drive, and yet far enough from its smoke to be pure and healthy and sweet—a very pretty homestead had been reared. The house was new, or had been two years before, when the original dwelling
—a simple "pisé and daub" affair—had to sink into the shadow of its more pretentious walls. Any one could tell, glancing at the fine large fruit-trees that extended far behind the house, and at the goodly growth of the ornamental shrubs in the front, that the garden was no new institution. Louis Conway had been fortunate, as his friend Edward Clyde had prognosticated he would, and had succeeded almost immediately in obtaining the very thing he wanted—a house, and farm, and garden, ready made to his hands—a fine old garden, with a creek running through the midst, and willows on its banks, whose long drooping branches dipped into the waters below—a garden with old patriarchal fig-trees spreading their immense leaves far and wide—a garden where the fragrance of the orange and the lemon floated upon the air, and beyond all this, well-fenced land that paid for the culture. Its owner had gone mad with gold fever, and had sold out at so reasonable a price that Louis found himself left with ample funds for the working out of his plans and improvements. The house itself was but a poor affair, as we have said, but there were rooms enough, and the white-washed front was
sufficiently draped with tendrils and blossoms to relieve the roughness of the walls. Louis had no hesitation in asking his mother and sister to share his new home. Comfortably furnished, it soon presented a different aspect; and by the time the Sea Gull came into port, uniting him once more with those he loved, it had become a snug little home indeed. "At any rate they will be able to put up with it for a time," he exclaimed to himself, taking a final and pleased survey of his first possession, in the arrangement of which he had been substantially aided by Maggie Macdonald. "Next year the new house shall go up, if God prospers me;" and so it did, yet nevertheless its little "pisé and daub" neighbour remained standing.

Standing, and inhabited also. Louis need not have feared that his mother would have disdained to enjoy the shelter of its roof. She liked the little cottage, as she insisted upon calling it, though the neighbours round, less delicate and scrupulous, retained its original title—"the old hut." It was a pleasant place, nestled in among trees and flowers; a lovely little home it seemed to her in the strange new land: her son's first
freehold possession—his first home. She warmly pleaded against its destruction, and so did his sister, who was enthusiastic and enraptured with everything round her; and so Louis, who had certainly meditated its downfall, allowed it to remain, and mother and daughter remained in it too; for by the time the new house was completed and furnished, Louis had made the discovery that it required a mistress. His mother had laughingly told him it would do so, and perhaps in his secret heart he had thought so too all the time. At any rate long before the two years' end, any one peeping in at the open windows of the newly furnished house would have heard a merry voice and recognised a familiar face, bright with its own happiness, with its beautiful curling hair still resisting every endeavour to gather it into matronly arrangement. It was pleasant to hear that clear ringing laugh, pleasant and familiar, as with quick light footsteps, duster in hand, a little figure moved to and fro arranging and placing in order everything within her reach. Maggie Conway was no longer alone or dreary. She had a happy home, and a husband of whom she was very proud; and Louis's heart was all the brighter for his
merry industrious little wife, who had won the affections of both mother and sister-in-law from the very first introduction.

Just long enough the old captain lived to rejoice in the total reformation of his son—to see him diligently finishing under Mr. Bowden the course of studies he had forsaken, and daily arriving at greater excellence in the profession, and growing in stability; and then the poor old man was suddenly removed from their midst in the way they had always expected. Another attack of paralysis deprived him entirely of consciousness and power, under which he rapidly sunk. But “he had learned to look to another Captain for his orders,” he had been aroused to say, and under His rule and guidance his little vessel steered safely into the heavenly harbour; and so they “sorrowed, not as those without hope,” but looked forward to a happy reunion where partings would come no more.

And when Louis Conway, whose visits had been constant to town, and to the Macdonalds, whether Andy was there or not, who had apparently found sufficient attraction in Maggie to drive him very frequently into her company,
declared at last a wish to take her away from
them into his own possession altogether, Andy had
naïvely replied that “a fair exchange was no
robbery”—that they each had sisters, and if the
substitution of one for the other was made, he for
one would joyfully accept the condition; and so
it came to pass that there was a double wedding.
The “silken cords” were drawn closer than
ever, and all parties concerned were perfectly
satisfied.

Louis had no reason to fear entrusting his sis­
ter’s happiness to his friend’s care now, however
much he would have hesitated to do so at one
time. The change had been real, permanent,
and substantial in Andy; indeed, he was not one
to assume what he did not possess. The “silken
cords” of love had been round him, though he
recognized them not, but seemed alone under the
influence of the “iron fetters” of sin. He had
enjoyed his own will; he had walked in the way
of transgressors till, disgusted with the hard
wages he received, sick and unfriended, and at
last robbed of his gold and deserted, left indeed
to die, he had snapped the fetters, never more
willing to resume them. Intemperance, the
gambling table, and dissipation of all kinds, were now his abhorrence; and a sweet wife he found in the sister of his friend: one who helped him on in the journey of life, who aided him in every project for good, who gently drew him forward in the way of life eternal. He never quite lost his off-hand mode of speech or his superabundant and extreme adjectives: his friend often had the pleasure of hearing him declare that he had "a jolly house of his own, a jolly little wife, and as jolly a baby as all South Australia could boast." And Edward Clyde, who we would not quite forget, took his promised visit at last to Adelaide to see his old mate's farm and garden, about which he had heard such flourishing accounts. He came alone; for Maude and Constance were both married, and well married too—the one to a Melbourne merchant, the other to a sheep farmer up the country, and could only send their love and congratulations by their brother, instead of accepting the warm invitations that reached them. Edward's welcome was as hearty as he could desire, both from Macdonald and Conway. With the change in Andy he was almost awe-struck—with Louis' progress enraptured.
"Who would have thought you would have made such a place of it as you have done!" he exclaimed, after leisurely surveying both house and grounds. "Why, I remember this place long ago quite perfectly, when it was in the hands of old Brookman, and used to think it a mere wilderness of fruit-trees—nothing more. You have reduced it to perfect order; but it's just like you!"

"My natural tastes lie that way," replied Conway, smiling. "I often told you I was never meant for the desk, you may recollect."

"Yes, I know you did; but I never could see it. It's my opinion you had as much vocation for that as for this, and in fact anything you set your mind on doing you could. Ask old Bowden what he thinks of your engrossing. Why, he still cracks it up in fine style, so I hear. I say you're a lucky fellow—a pity there are not more after the same pattern."

"There are plenty more, better far," said Conway, decidedly. "It is simply the principle that is involved in the precept—' whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,' and also,' he added in a graver tone, "the remembrance
that our sufficiency is not of ourselves, but of God."

Among the guests that Edward Clyde met at Conway's hospitable table were Mrs. Layton, his old landlady, her son and two daughters. Times had brightened up with them, though not by means of Melbourne gold. The death of a distant relative had suddenly placed them in possession of a considerable competency, and as their presence was required in England to secure that possession, they had come for a farewell visit before setting sail for their native land; for even Milly, who was now growing a lovely girl, though scarcely more lovely than her elder sister, was of English birth.

"But I shall always look back fondly to Australia, though I do like England, and was born there," she said, with a half-sad smile. "And I shall always think, Mr. Conway, of the happy days you spent with us," she added merrily; "and shall always believe too that you brought us all our good fortune."
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