

A SOUL'S PILGRIMAGE

By
ANNIE BRIGHT

"O the blest eyes, the happy hearts,
That see, that know the guiding thread so fine,
Along the mighty labyrinth."

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TO
THOSE HELPERS
BOTH VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE
WHO HAVE MADE THIS BOOK A POSSIBILITY,
IT IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED
"THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THEM THAT SLEPT."

FOREWORD

THE writer of this story is an Australian journalist of good standing who has won her laurels in many departments of useful journalistic work. She is at present the editor of one of the best periodicals devoted to the study of psychic matters, *The Harbinger of Light* of Melbourne. She undertook the editorship five or six years ago, and under her control it has become the recognized exponent of the advanced views on the subject of psychic phenomena of all kinds. In this book, *A Soul's Pilgrimage*, Mrs. Bright embodies the substance of much that she has learnt in her own pilgrimage through life. I do not by this imply that it is an autobiography, but the value of such a work as this depends chiefly upon the fidelity with which it interprets the real experiences of real people. Its fundamental thesis is one which is gaining an increasing vogue in modern fiction and in modern thought, namely, the possibility of intercommunication between those who are in their bodies, and those who are disembodied. To me, this thesis has long been a verified fact, and I rejoice at every earnest effort that is made to familiarize the public with a truth which,

although much derided and despised, is destined to ere long obtain universal acceptance. In thus acting as sponsor for the good faith and high standing of the author, and also for the fundamental truth which the story is an attempt to inculcate, I do not suppose that any one will hold me responsible for every sentiment expressed in *A Soul's Pilgrimage*. It is sufficient for me to say that the author is an honest and capable woman, and that the doctrine she has to teach is in essence true.

WILLIAM T. STEAD.

PART I

“Preparation”

CHAPTER I

IN a handsomely furnished sitting-room in one of the large English manufacturing towns of the Midlands, a middle-aged lady, with two grown-up daughters, sat one evening in the early sixties in the leisurely style that belongs to families of flourishing merchants in provincial places. The house was one of the best to be found in the town, for its owner, Alderman Leslie, was a highly prosperous citizen, who could keep up a large and expensive establishment and still live well within his income. He was a self-made man, but a thorough gentleman, the soul of honour, and one who would refuse to raise his worldly position by any mean action, and was generous to a fault. “You can get well off without being mean” was one of his favourite sayings.

Money had done so much for Alderman Leslie that, although such a thing was never openly expressed, everything was really tested in the family circle by the financial standard. He was not troubled by any qualms as to the foundations of modern society. He had been so successful himself that he believed any one could be the same who took the right means, and it never occurred

to him that it was only a man here and there who could push himself to the front, and that for the toiling masses poverty was inevitable. He looked on all unsuccessful people as "paur bodies," wanting in energy and go.

Social problems were not put so prominently forward then as now. The thousands of work-people of both sexes and all ages, who passed their days in the stifling heated factories, and dwelt in the back streets and slums of his native city, only seemed to the prosperous alderman as a sort of necessary background for the successful merchants who made immense fortunes out of these wage-earners. But he was too benevolent to pass an "unemployed" man without feeling in his pocket for half a crown, and he was almost worshipped by a lot of old comrades of his early struggling days whom he never slighted. In his counting-house and home everything was managed with the precision of clock-work, unpunctuality and slovenliness of any kind being unforgivable sins. Twice a year his tailor would expect him to call to give his orders, and on a certain date the older of the two suits in wear, with probably not a stain on it, would be discarded and sent off, hat included, to an old friend who had fallen on evil days, and whose figure they exactly fitted. "I met poor old Butler to-day," Mr. Leslie said sometimes, "and he looks a perfect gentleman, in spite of his misfortunes, in those clothes I send him. It is quite lucky that even my boots and gloves fit him, and, poor devil, it keeps his spirits up to be well dressed."

Alderman Leslie was a man undoubtedly master in his own house, and his wife and daughters, as they sat that evening in the light of the setting sun, were well aware of this and shaped their daily life in strict accordance with his will.

"Now, Stella," said Mrs. Leslie, "I wouldn't have your father see you sewing after tea for anything. You know he says it is too late then to make a beginning, and if you have done all you ought to do earlier in the day there is no need to have work about in the evenings."

The lady who spoke was a comely matron of middle life, elegantly dressed in rich black silk and cap of real lace of a soft creamy colour with ribbons of a subdued shade, making a *tout ensemble* that matched well the handsomely and tastefully furnished house and its surroundings. Stella, the girl addressed, was the younger of the two daughters, and the only one of the family who seemed to resent the rigid propriety of the place.

"Oh! mother," she exclaimed, "I must finish this work to-night. I have made up my mind to take this night-dress to my poor consumptive girl on Monday. It will make her feel a bit better to have clean pretty night-dresses on as she lies there day after day in that miserable room waiting for death. I am going to make six of them, and I want you to let me bring one home each time I go to see her to send to our laundress.

"Well, of all quixotic girls, you are the worst example," broke in the elder sister, Margaret. "I wonder what you will want to do next?"

"I only wish I could do something more substantial to help them than I do," Stella murmured. "I declare I felt quite unhappy coming home the other afternoon. I had been to talk to my dying schoolgirl, and called on my way home, mother, at that deformed painter's that you let me have a Christmas dinner for, and I found him ill in bed and not a blanket to cover him. I haven't a shilling to spare from my allowance, it takes all I get to keep myself dressed to match every one at home, and father raves so if you are the least bit shabby ;

but I have thought how I can make a splendid quilt for him next week out of a lot of stuff I found in the workroom, and I shall only have to buy about a dozen sheets of wadding."

"It is quite absurd for you to bother yourself about them," said Margaret. "You won't do them any good, and we all ought to have more than we've got. I can't see why father doesn't have a landau and pair of horses. He can well afford it, and I positively detest the pony carriage that mother goes about in, and would much rather walk than get into it."

A loud ring at the front-door bell and the voices of gentlemen in the hall stopped the conversation, a faultlessly dressed housemaid announcing immediately afterwards that Mr. Miller and the Reverend Mr. Richmond were in the drawing-room.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Leslie, "your father told me he had invited them here for the evening. Mr. Richmond is the minister who takes the services to-morrow"; and Mrs. Leslie rose to leave the room, waiting at the door for one or both of her daughters to accompany her.

"Oh, Stella, you go with mother, there's a dear," said Margaret; "you always know what to say to these young University fellows, and, besides, Mr. Miller only comes to see you. He has neither eyes nor ears for any one else when you are about."

"Well, that is one reason why I want to stay here and finish this work. Another is that I am perfectly sick of these young ministers. All who have come lately are so small and namby-pamby, with nothing manly about them," and Stella set to work at a button-hole as if nothing should detach her from it.

Meanwhile Mr. Miller and the young minister sat in the drawing-room waiting for the door to be opened

and the ladies of the household to appear. There were signs of them all around. The flowers were exquisitely arranged, and the large bay window that looked into the garden was filled with red and white azalea plants in full bloom. The garden beds were perfect—laid out in ribbon fashion, with rich rows of blue lobelia, yellow calceolarias, and red geraniums according to the fashion of the time, and kept, without even a withered leaf about, by the gardener, who had supreme control. Roses in profusion, creepers and ornamental trees and shrubs, made the surroundings of the house as attractive as the interior, lavish but careful expenditure showing itself everywhere.

“How beautiful it all is!” exclaimed Mr. Richmond. “I was not expecting anything so charming, as our Churches in provincial towns have not generally such wealthy supporters.”

“Wait till you see the people, and you will say the family is unique,” said Mr. Miller. “Besides knowing how to manage a house so well, they are all musicians, and Miss Stella, the younger daughter, sings like an angel. She always seems different to the rest, though, and her class at Sunday-school simply worships her. I have been superintendent for some years, and it has been quite impossible to get the girls moved up in the usual way, because they won't go. Miss Stella has the third class, and began with them as girls of about twelve some five or six years ago, when she was in short frocks herself. They are now all young women and decline to move on. One or two of them have died, and now there is another at the point of death, and I suppose at her funeral they will all attend and sing and carry flowers, and the next Sunday be more closely united than ever. So we have given up trying to separate them, and just draft new girls in now and then to keep

up the number. They are all factory girls, many of them taken from school before they had learned much, and Miss Stella has gradually got them all to read well by letting them come one night a week to her home to go through the next Sunday's chapter."

"Well, and where is Miss Stella?" said Mr. Miller, after he and his companion had shaken hands with Mrs. Leslie and Miss Margaret.

"Oh, as usual," said Mrs. Leslie, "she is bent on spoiling one of her Sunday scholars, and is putting the last few stitches in a garment for that poor Mabel Percival."

"Did you ever hear such a name, Mr. Miller, for a factory hand?" put in Margaret, "and did you ever know any other girl wearing her eyes out for a mere pauper as Stella is doing?"

"It is astonishing, though, what real good she does," said Mr. Miller. "I went round to that girl's poor home, the other day, after Miss Stella had been there, and the sick girl said she always felt different when her teacher came into the house."

"Yes, but it is so strange," said Mrs. Leslie, "that Stella declares she never knows what to say to any one dying. She is quite a rationalist, doesn't believe in miracles, or anything she can't find in her own experience, and can't tell the girl to look to the future because she is not at all sure that there is any. So all she can do is to make her as comfortable as she can now."

"That button-hole must be done by this time," chimed in Margaret, "and I will go and fetch the naughty girl, or there'll be a row when father comes in."

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"He is quite different to all the rest who have been here," said Margaret breathlessly, as she rushed into the sitting-room. "He looks like a young Hercules,

tall and strong, with fascinating eyes, dark and soft, that look you through and through. I heard from some one that he is splendidly clever too, took Honours at the University, and is first in rowing and all that sort of thing. He is really worth looking at, though he has not said much yet, as mother and old Miller did all the talking."

"You might help me out a bit with Mr. Miller, Margaret," said Stella almost beseechingly. "I can't marry him, and it's getting serious, as I know he has written to father; and although father, to please me, told him that I was too young and inexperienced to take charge of a household of five young children, £3,000 a year, father thinks, is not to be sneezed at, and he reminded me that my elderly lover, as I call him, is only thirty-five. I want quite a different life to my present one, and it would be just the same with old Miller. I want books about me, and pictures—a changed existence altogether. I have to do all I can for the schoolgirls and others to make my life bearable. Alderman Miller is all very well, but he knows no more about literature than father, and everything but music is put in the background here. That, of course, all goes to make the place attractive; but I get tired of it, and don't want to perpetuate such a life."

"Oh, don't ask me to help you, for my advice would be to take the man with the money. But I dare say it is perplexing," added Margaret, with a smile. "Everywhere you go there is some one hanging about you, and I believe there are at least half a dozen ready to have you, if you would only give them a chance."

"And I have never been in love yet," said Stella to herself as she crossed the hall to enter the presence of the two men both anxiously expectant to meet her.

CHAPTER II

“ I SHALL never forget you coming into the drawing-room that eventful Saturday evening,” said Mr. Richmond to Stella some weeks later, when they had become great friends, and he, at least, had fallen desperately in love with the girl who was so attractive and altogether out of the common.

“ What was there different in my entry to that of the others ? ” Stella asked rather coldly, for she was not at all in love herself nor anxious for the handsome young minister to declare himself.

“ Well, thereby hangs a tale. Ordinary people would think nothing of it, but so many strange things happen in my experience that I can never bring myself to think that coincidence will account for them all. I am a most brilliant dreamer, on occasions, and have had similar experiences to those Schopenhauer relates of dreaming the night before of incidents that take place the following day. When I was at the University I got out of bed one night to assure myself that a favourite knife was safe on the chimney-piece of my room, as I had dreamt the maidservant had broken the large blade in splitting some light wood for the fire. It was all right, I found, but the next day when I returned from Lectures the girl met me, saying tearfully she had broken that knife on the chimney-piece

while splitting a chip with it when lighting my fire, and there it was broken and the girl standing exactly as I had seen it all the night before."

"I have nothing of that kind to relate, for it seems as if all our imaginative faculties are systematically crushed by the kind of life we lead, which is on the level of exceedingly dull prose. It is hard for any one whose weakness is to please everybody to get out of the groove one is born in, and this home of ours is such a luxurious, seductive groove to rest in. I have never known what it is to have to consider expense whenever anything necessary to comfort and ease is concerned. But I believe my estimable and well-beloved father detests the sight of a book of poetry, lest we addle our brains over such 'stuff,' as he calls it, and may not turn out such supreme housekeepers as mother. I had a volume of Longfellow given me the other day, and I always have it perched up while I am at the sewing machine, and I know a lot of the poems by heart already."

"I didn't know sewing machines had got into general use yet," said Mr. Richmond.

"Oh, we have the first, I believe, that was sent over from New York. Father will get us anything like that, without a murmur, as he hates to see us sewing, and he is keenly interested in all practical inventions of the kind."

"Did you ever read Shelley, Miss Stella?" was all the reply vouchsafed by Mr. Richmond.

"Not a line," said Stella. "I tell you the field of poetry is *terra incognita* to me, excepting just for pieces you come across at school; besides, poets are considered very inferior mortals here to successful lace manufacturers. I have Adelaide Proctor for my schoolgirls. I copy some of her poems in a little book

I give the class for the purpose, as well as hymns for them to learn by heart."

"Ah, well, you must let me read 'The Cloud' to you now," and Mr. Richmond drew from his pocket a well-worn little volume of his favourite poet, "and I must bring Keats with me on my next trip. These two weeks have been an unexpected treat, and it was fortunate the deacons took a fancy to me that first Sunday and got me here again, to say nothing of your father's hospitality in putting me into that luxurious spare room for the whole of my visit."

"But you have not seen half the beauties of the neighbourhood yet, in spite of your daily drives with mother. This afternoon we are all going to walk to Crofton Grove. The walk there is everything. It is five miles, mostly along the river-side under the glorious elms until you get to the grove itself, and that is simply exquisite. You walk on a grassy slope as wide as a street, over which the grand elm trees meet, making a glorious leafy arcade of a mile in length, through which the sun can scarcely penetrate. I don't think there is another place like it in England. On one side the thickly wooded ground slopes down to the river, of which you get fitful glimpses as you go along. We are a month too late for the forget-me-nots. In May the river-side is simply covered with them, and to look down through the trees to where they grow is like gazing on a blue carpet with soft greens worked into it. Then when you get to the end of the grove you cross over two fields, and come to a village of thatched cottages, the same as they have been for hundreds of years. Into one of these we shall go for tea, and although the roof is so low—you will have to stoop perhaps to get in—there will be a lovely meal prepared. Everything home-made, and cream and new-laid eggs and a red-

cheeked country girl to wait on you—so different to town teas—and when it is getting towards sundown we start home and end our walk in the twilight.”

“That sounds idyllic,” said Mr. Richmond, “and this evening we shall come across

That orbèd maiden, with white fire laden,
Whom mortals call the moon,

on our way home. So you must let me read you ‘The Cloud’ now and hear all about it.”

Stella sat entranced as she listened first to “The Cloud” and then to “The Skylark,” given in the superb style that a cultured delivery and rich voice afford, and it seemed as if a new life were opening out before her.

“Have you read any of Thomas Carlyle’s works yet?” asked Mr. Richmond as he closed the book. “They are really prose poems of a high order, many of them, although Carlyle has almost a ‘down’ on poetry and thinks nothing should be put in rhyme that can be expressed tersely without.”

“No, Carlyle is also a stranger,” said Stella. “You see what our library consists of generally speaking—splendid encyclopaedias, biographical dictionaries, books of reference of all kinds, but nothing one cares about; *Half Hours with the Best Authors* and Chambers’ publications, all good, of course, and splendidly bound, being the only things to read. I have my own French and German reading books. Father is very good about education, though, of a certain kind, and lets me go on with languages and music now I have left school, and pays cheques regularly to the teachers without grumbling. Languages have a great attraction for me, and, lately, I have translated quite a large volume of sermons by Athanèse Coquerel. I often wondered

why Dr. Blair thought I should like to translate them for him. You have heard of him, of course. He is principal of a Theological College and came here to preach at the Old Meeting, and stayed with us as you are doing. He is quite old, but likes young people, and asked me as I chatted with him one morning if I would like to translate some French pamphlets. I jumped at the idea, and wondered he had asked me instead of Margaret, who is older. I sent the first one to him when I had finished it, and literally 'walked on air' for joy when I got his letter saying it was excellently done, and sending a whole volume to translate. How my hand ached with copying so many pages, but it is the only thing I have really enjoyed for a long time. I get quite carried away with books, and if it is a poem like Longfellow's 'Resignation,' for instance, that I know by heart, put it out of my mind when I turn to life again as very beautiful but only a figment of the imagination with which this world has nothing to do."

"To me ideas such as real poets give us are the only realities," said Mr. Richmond. "For instance, that verse out of Longfellow's 'Resignation' that you are familiar with—

There is no Death, what seems so is transition,
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call Death—

is to me a piece of solid fact. I should not have given up a lucrative calling and taken to the pulpit but for the desire that I have to awaken people to a knowledge of the transitoriness of much they hold as certain, solid good."

"But when once you have broken away from orthodoxy, as you and all of us have done, there seems nothing to assure one of a future life, or, in fact, any-

thing but what is tangible and in sight. Longfellow and the other poets, as well as what are called the inspired writers of the Bible, may all be the victims of a delusion, and I can't believe anything just because I am told it is the right thing to do. Although father is such an out-and-out freethinker, we went to Church of England schools and great attempts were made to convert us. All our friends, nearly, are church people, and I went through a sort of religious fever when I was fourteen, an experience that was perfectly horrible at the time. We had Scripture lessons once a week from the clergyman of the parish when I was at boarding school, and as I was well up in the Bible and could answer questions quickly, I was placed at his right hand as a sort of show girl. One afternoon he took the Church Catechism, as some of the girls were to be confirmed, and I shall never forget his horror when I told him, innocently enough, I had never been christened. Father took advantage of the Act making simple registration legal for all civil purposes, and was delighted, as I have often heard him say, to have done with all 'that sprinkling tomfoolery.' This clergyman, however, was a pronounced Evangelical, and in addition to the remarks I had to submit to from him and my properly christened school-fellows, I had to undergo a worse ordeal, as we all went every Sunday night to hear him preach at a sort of mission hall near the school. To my dying day I shall never forget the terror his sermons caused me. He described the tortures of hell awaiting all unconverted, unbaptized persons with so much vehemence and fiery oratory that 'not being baptized' became a perfect nightmare to me. I told father, when I went home, and asked him if it mattered not being christened, and he laughed immoderately, with great guffaws and in the most contemptuous

manner, at the idea, and said he wondered in these enlightened days that people should be allowed to give vent to such nonsense. 'A lot of crawling idiots,' he called the whole tribe of orthodox parsons.

" 'What if father might be wrong?' I thought. We girls had no chance to think it out for ourselves and were both naturally reverential, and father's levity pained me. I went back to school more disturbed than ever, and meditated on the after-life and hell until I thought my brain would burst. Father and mother were very dear to me, and I was certain that even if I got safe to heaven it would be madness to me to think of them being in a place of torture. I would rather not have heaven at all on those terms. I think I must have got near to brain fever, for, one evening, I sat perfectly helpless during the preparation of lessons, my head having been racked until it could bear no more, and an intolerable pain across my brows gradually extending all over my head preventing me doing anything. 'Miss Stella Leslie!' the teacher in charge called out in angry tones, 'I have been watching you for half an hour and you have not done a single lesson.' 'My head aches so badly, I must leave them to-night,' I fairly sobbed out in anguish. 'You look in perfect health, and you cannot leave your work without permission from the head mistress.'

" I don't think elders have any idea what children suffer, and I went like a condemned criminal out of the schoolroom to interview the awful head mistress. She sate in state, a very majestic maiden lady, in her drawing-room, when I entered it shaking with terror. 'Why are you not doing your lessons?' she began sharply. 'Because I feel so ill that I cannot look at a book,' was my trembling reply. 'Come here, and let me look at you, and put out your tongue,'

and I advanced, a poor miserable girl, though I have often laughed since when picturing the scene. 'There is nothing the matter with you I am sure, it is sheer laziness; your tongue is perfectly clean and intensely red. But oh! I did not feel your pulse, was the last thing I heard, as my bursting head seemed unable to remain steady any longer, and I fell down on the carpet in a swoon. Then there was a rushing about, and I found myself in a nice bed soon after and mother there kissing me. She had been sent for as my seizure had alarmed the whole school. 'It is a mental trouble, the doctor says,' I heard the principal remark to my mother, 'and the girls say she has been much quieter lately with no fun in her, and bothered about not being christened.' I was taken away from that school, thank goodness, and heard no more of that man's sermons.

"Some day I will tell you how I got to my present standpoint. I had to think it all out for myself, and so had Margaret. But she went back to orthodoxy. She is very orderly, as you know, and says she must have it set down for her in black and white what she is to believe—I, on the contrary, have to question the foundation of things and ask by what authority these dogmas are to be forced on my acceptance."

CHAPTER III

NOW, Mr. Richmond," said Stella, as they walked in Crofton Grove on the return journey that evening, "did you ever see anything so beautiful as this place in the setting sun? I really think I love trees more than flowers, and if one must be deprived of either, should vote for the oaks and elms and their charming companions to remain. Just look at the various tints of green the trees have. They shade up from the most tender emerald to that dark sombre green of the cypresses there by the churchyard that heightens, by contrast, the spring beauty of all the rest."

"It has been a most delightful excursion, altogether, Miss Stella, and as soon as we had crossed the river in the ferry-boat with that old Charon working the chain, I felt suddenly transported to a new country. One might have been miles from any city, for the thatched cottages in the village by the river-side looked as if they had been there from time immemorial. And then the old church and the places you showed me frequented by Henry Kirke White put me into a poetic mood straight off."

"It is a strange thing," said Stella, "that I never feel tired walking beside a river or on the seashore. Of course, I am a born walker, and have the reputation

of going quicker than any other girl in town, but I was out all the morning on foot and then came the five miles here ; now we have rested a little and had tea I am just looking forward to the five miles home, as we shall have the effect of the river and trees in twilight with soft subdued moonlight over all. Some of those elms on the river-side are five hundred years old, but one or two of them were uprooted last winter by the terrific gale that swept over the centre of England."

"Do you ever come here in winter ?"

"Very occasionally ; only when there is a hoar-frost. I think Crofton is never completely out of my mind, and if there is hoar-frost on a bright winter's morning I get Margaret or some one to come for a swift walk, as it is fairyland then up here. But spring and early summer are the best, and I love to come to see the miracle of the spring. How the dry twigs gradually burst into clusters of leaves is a new wonder to me each year, and I hail the first show of green in the silver beeches in our garden with delight."

"But I wonder, Miss Stella," said Mr. Richmond, "that you can see this perpetual miracle and doubt a hereafter for ourselves. Nothing perishes but lives again in some form or other, and surely we who wonder at all this and have the hearts to appreciate it should trust to a similar awakening for our own souls."

"Ah, there it is—trust again, the word I have got quite wearied of in my talks with you young ministers. No, I would rather not enter into that. I only got peace when I made up my mind that no one can be sure of anything concerning our future state, if there be any, and also that I am as able as other individuals, be they called pope, priest, or minister, to decide these things for myself—that any one else's opinion but my own must be valueless to me. If there have been

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revelations and miracles at any time in the world's history, there ought to be the same now or the Supreme Being is not as just and fair as good earthly fathers are. Therefore I doubt the credibility of any stories, Biblical, ecclesiastical, or traditional, that have not come within my own experience."

"But one thing I do not understand, Miss Stella. What makes it worth your while to work at the Sunday-school as you do, and help as many unfortunates as may be, if this life ends all? Why not simply enjoy yourself?"

"Well, one thing is that I get my only real enjoyment out of that class at Sunday-school. I never speak of my doubts to those girls, of course, and now I have come to see that Jesus was a man like ourselves—however much nobler or greater matters not—His life is my constant example. I can tell you, as we are on the subject, that I used to get quite angry when the church people prated so much about the goodness of Christ. It seemed to me that I would be good too, if I were divine like they said He was, God Himself in fact—but there was no chance for people with the fallen natures we are credited with. When I came to believe in the manhood of Jesus, His life and teachings became an inspiration to me. I felt His sufferings were real sufferings like those of all of us and that His love was divine. You know Paul said that 'The Temple of God is holy, which temple ye are,' and I believe there is a pervading universal spirit that we receive as much of as we strive to get."

"Well, if you have got as far as that, what makes you disbelieve the rest, the resurrection of Christ and His promises about the future life?"

"Ah, there my rationalism comes in," rejoined Stella. "You know we cannot rely on the Gospel narrative as

being free from later interpretations to suit the minds of those who formulated a sect after the crucifixion of Jesus, and in your sermon last Sunday you showed conclusively that none of the gospels were written by eye-witnesses but made up of earlier ones or from traditions; and even in these days how little we can rely on narratives of events that happened fifty years ago and have passed by word of mouth of unskilled observers on to us. And unless for such a marvellous thing as the resurrection I have my own evidence, it has no interest for me. One thing we are sure of; we are here in a beautiful world, and it is our duty to be as loving and helpful as we can to each other."

"Have you been reading Matthew Arnold, Miss Stella—I mean his poems?"

"I have only just heard his name and have not read anything of his. What are his verses like?"

"Oh! one of his I read just lately reminds me so much of your position. In writing of those who disbelieve and live the life of brutes 'without a plan' he pleads for a better way and says—

Hath man no second life? Pitch this one high!
Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sin to see?—
More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!
Was Christ a man like us? Ah let us try
If we then, too, can be such men as he!"

"One thing always strikes me as strange," said Stella, "that the same thoughts come to minds that have no intercourse with each other. I have never seen a word of Matthew Arnold's, and yet those beautiful lines are exactly what I think although lacking Matthew Arnold's exquisite diction. Emerson says when we meet in books our own half-expressed thoughts they rebuke us for not being more confident about them, but I have never expressed myself so openly as

I have to you to-night. Crofton Grove seems to awaken one's sensibilities."

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"Oh! here you are, Stella," said Margaret, running up breathlessly. "Father and all of us have been looking everywhere for you, and we must walk quickly now, or it will be dark before we get home."

"Father is awfully angry with you for going off after tea," Margaret added under her breath, as they hurried on to catch the others, "and I suppose this unfortunate man is another of your victims."

CHAPTER IV

“IT is just as well Mr. Richmond leaves on Monday,” said Alderman Leslie to his wife that evening. “It would be a crying shame if a nice girl like Stella were to get entangled with a young minister with nothing a year for certain. Personally, I would much rather she took Mr. Miller than any of them.”

“But she doesn’t seem to care much about any one,” said Mrs. Leslie deprecatingly. “She assures me, and I can always believe her, that all the time she and Mr. Richmond were away walking in the grove this evening that they were talking religion, and declares that no such thing as a word of love passed between them. I dare say Mr. Richmond, like Mr. Miller, is afraid to speak to her for fear she should say ‘no’ right off, though I am sure he is immensely taken with her. She says she can never get into an interesting talk with any man, but some one comes up and says ‘flirting again,’ when it is the last thing she is thinking of.”

“I am always afraid of Stella throwing herself away on some man as she does on these poor people she messes over. She is too quixotic altogether,” said Mr. Leslie. “Margaret would never forget her position like that, though she is not half so taking—bosses everybody too much. If there was no such thing as money to consider, Mr. Richmond might do, though he has been brought up in a much rougher school than our

girls. But fancy, Stella, having to manage on a few hundreds a year. Why, she would have to carry her baby about with her if she had one. It is preposterous and horrible to contemplate. Poor old Miller is dreadfully cut up already, and sees he is being shoved aside by a mere beggar."

"Ah, well, he will be gone soon," said Mrs. Leslie soothingly; "and look at the number of fellows who have been here, many of them apparently taken with Stella, and we hear nothing more about them."

"But I have a sort of presentiment about Stella and this man. They seem to have endless subjects on hand to talk over, and I really never saw any one's face change like Stella's when she is greatly interested. I don't wonder at the man being gone on her. I should be myself. Why, even that old married man, Mr. Morley, who came to Alice's wedding with his wife, said he never saw such a lovely expression in eyes before, and prophesied then that the third daughter would be the next bride. He told me the other day that one reason why he and Mrs. Morley call so often to take Stella for a drive is that they both like to look at her eyes, that it does them good in some way."

"And, poor girl, she often says how she wishes she was good looking, as she admires beauty in others so much, and told me one day she never expected any one to fall in love with her. 'There is really nothing to admire in me, mother,' she said, 'and yet I have so many admirers.'"

"Why, she is much more attractive than many professed beauties," Mr. Leslie rejoined indignantly, "and I always have to give her a kiss myself when she is very much in earnest over anything, and her singing seems to me like no one else's. At Mrs. Leaver's party the other night, a gentleman said to me when she

had just sung that Serenade of Schubert's, that he never expected to hear it sung again the same, that it thrilled him through and through. But I shall get quite rampant if I think much more about Mr. Richmond and Stella, and be inhospitable enough to send him to an hotel the first thing to-morrow morning on the plea that I have unexpected visitors."

It is tolerably certain that, if Mr. Leslie's threat had been carried out, this story would not have been written. Stella would have settled down, like her sisters, to the dull level of life she had grown accustomed to, and the gleam of poetry that had dazzled her imagination for the moment would have died out with the departure of Mr. Richmond. But our fate does not rest entirely in our own hands, and in the storm and stress of later life, Stella would acknowledge, even through bitter tears, "the guiding thread so fine" and recognize "the divinity that shapes our ends," as we stumble along the rocky road leading to the distant goal.

CHAPTER V

SUNDAY was a busy day with Stella. Before any of the others were up she was breakfasting alone, ready to start for the mile walk to the Sunday-school. She played the harmonium in the schoolroom for the opening hymn before the classes were formed, and it was exhilarating to her to hear the hundreds of young voices singing the familiar tunes and to be herself guiding the whole. At Anniversary times, she did all the rehearsing, and would play the large organ in the chapel before the service on Anniversary Sunday while the children sang their hymn over for the last time before the congregation came in.

“How well you are looking this morning, Miss Stella,” said Mr. Miller, as he stood in front of the great chapel gates ready to walk in with her to the schoolroom and select the opening hymn. “I seem to have seen nothing of you for the last two weeks.”

“I am splendidly well, thank you,” said Stella. “We ought to have a full muster this glorious morning, and I am quite glad to get to Sunday-school again. Ah! there are my girls, the whole lot of them. I believe on wet days, poor things, many of them can’t come, as they have no umbrellas.”

“I wish, Miss Leslie,” said a stern maiden lady, superintendent of the girls’ school, who came up at the

moment, "that you would discountenance parasols and flowers this summer among your girls. I make a point, with my class of elder girls, of impressing on them the duty of getting umbrellas and goloshes first of all."

"Oh, I can't do anything of that kind," said Stella. "It is too absurd for me to be sitting at the head of the class in all my new summer rig-out, this silk frock and white lisse bonnet, and preach down their own desire to look fresh and bright this fine weather. I would much rather start a subscription to buy an umbrella each for the girls. What do you say, Mr. Miller?" said Stella, turning to him as the male superintendent.

"Oh, I always think your ideas splendid, and I have left off being 'policeman,' as you call it, to see that no boys shirk attending morning service, since you showed me a better way."

"I don't believe in your sympathetic mode at all," said Miss Horrocks. "Half of the girls in the Sunday-school would not be in their place in chapel if I did not stand at the entrance and drive them back."

"You never see mine running away, though, Miss Horrocks," Stella replied with a smile, "and I would much rather they liked to stay than that they should be forced against their will. I talk to them about the sermon and help them to understand."

"Oh, your class is altogether spoiled, and quite beyond general control," Miss Horrocks retorted indignantly. "It is not with my consent that their refusal to be advanced to my class or the second has been acceded to. It is demoralizing to the whole school."

"They are waiting for you at the harmonium," whispered Mr. Miller to Stella.

"Have you heard how Mabel is this morning?" she asked one of the girls, as she passed her smiling group of scholars.

"Very bad and longing to see you," said the girl nearest to her.

"I shall see her to-morrow," was the reply, and Stella passed on, with all eyes fixed upon her, to the harmonium. She played the hymn over with such verve and precision that the whole school seemed to start as one voice when the signal to begin was given by Mr. Miller, and she felt more thrilled than ever by the fresh young voices.

"Have you all learnt your verses?" was the first question put by Stella to the young girls gathered round her in the classroom. "I have copied you a lovely piece for this week," and she produced eighteen small memorandum books and read out of one of them Adelaide Proctor's lines commencing :

What is life, Father ?

"I know that you have all hard times working in the factories and I can't do much to change your lives, but if you know lines like these by heart, it helps you wonderfully to bear things. In dark moments if you can say—

My child, though thy foes are strong and tried,
He loveth the weak and small,
The Angels of God are on thy side
And heaven is over all,

and try to believe it is all true, you will feel so much better."

Then she listened while each one read the poem aloud to her.

"Now I want you to tell me, before we take the day's lesson, if any of you have seen Crofton Grove.

"Fancy! not even one of you and it is so near?"

"Well, if you will like it, I am thinking of taking you all there to tea next week, instead of your coming

to our house as usual once a year. If you can take half a day, I shall meet you at the ferry with one of my cousins and we shall have a great time. We shall have tea in one of the cottages, and it will do you good to get out so far."

No need that morning to say, "I shall see you all in your places in the gallery." Sunday and their teacher made the only brightness in the monotonous lives of drudgery of these lace and hosiery workers, and all the week they thought of the Sunday morning's meeting.

School over, Stella settled herself comfortably in the large family pew belonging to Alderman Leslie, to wait for the service. Presently the congregation flocked in, a large and brilliant one this bright June morning. The member for the borough with his family drove from his country seat in a carriage and pair of splendid horses, open landaus and broughams put down their fashionably attired occupants, the large parish church a hundred yards higher up the street could not boast of half so distinguished a congregation as the unorthodox one that assembled at the Old Meeting House. The mayor and his wife and daughters were there in splendid array, and lots of influential people—the town clerk, a wealthy lawyer, and his wife being prominent supporters of the Socinian faith, as the local clergy dubbed it.

The chapel was a large square old-fashioned ugly building that would hold about eight hundred persons, and this morning it was almost full. It was the pride of the wealthy and fashionable adherents of the congregation that had grown out of the famous Exodus of 1662 when the Act of Uniformity was passed, and hundreds of clergymen of the Established Church left their livings, that their Sunday-school was larger than any other in the town, having over five hundred children in regular attendance. At any public festival where the

schools walked in procession, the children of the Old Meeting headed the lot, the order of precedence being given according to the number of scholars on the rolls. The worthy town clerk was a teacher himself, so even justice had to be meted out, however much the local clergy might squirm.

Unkind critics called the Old Meeting House the Home for the Destitute, for many, like Alderman Leslie, attended the place more as a sop to public opinion, that expected people to belong to some church or other, than for any need he felt for public worship. Many wealthy Jews among the merchants of the town, who had come over from Germany, attended the services and contributed largely to the revenue of the chapel, as it was a sort of centre of liberalism ; and although it was whispered that the wives resented the giving up of the Jewish observances, there was no synagogue to attend, " and it was better for business," their husbands assured them, to be identified with such a rich and imposing body of religionists as those who gathered at the Old Meeting. Besides, there was never a word that an enlightened Hebrew could not endorse, either in the service or the scholarly sermons that were usually given there on the Sunday.

Stella felt an unusual thrill when the door of the ugly pulpit that was built in the large bare wall facing the congregation opened, and Mr. Richmond, in flowing silk gown, entered. It was not often they had such a splendid specimen of a man in the pulpit, and all through that service Stella felt that she was in the mind of the young and eloquent preacher. He read the lessons with a certain dramatic force seldom met with, and the story of " The Prodigal Son " that formed the second reading seemed to have a new and exalted meaning given to it.

Stella looked round the congregation, but very few

appeared to be specially interested in what was going on. Her father, as usual, had his penknife out, giving delicate touches to his already perfect finger nails. He said at dinner that he was pondering all through the sermon how this awfully ugly old chapel could be got rid of and a new one built in its place. He saw a vision, he said, of Gothic arches and chancel, with choir and organ at the back of the preacher, who would have a carved oak pulpit on the one side and a reading-desk at the other, like clergymen in the Established Church.

During the prayers, all but the few pious people sat and looked about, and one professor of science, who only went to hear the sermon, amused himself by counting the number of persons who were presumably following the minister in the long prayer that preceded the sermon. "The fingers of both hands accounted for them all," he told Stella when they met outside after the service, "and I can't see why they keep up the farce of having prayers at all."

The sermon was quite up to date, bristling with all the new facts of geology then "in the hey-day of a romantic boyhood," as the preacher put it. He showed conclusively from geologic research and classification that the story of a six days' creation in the Bible was pure myth, and that millions of years have elapsed in the formation of the crust of the earth as we know it. Then he turned to astronomy, of which he was a profound student, and claimed that the theory propounded by Guillemin and other astronomers, that the earth was thrown off from the sun a mass of gaseous vapour, was borne out by all that was known of the planetary system, and confirmed the geologists in their statements concerning the gradual cooling of the earth and the planets, and the age of the different strata. It was all so convincing to Stella that she wished every one could hear and

they would be persuaded to at once give up orthodoxy. Then she thought of the poor, and realized how they could never read or understand these things and would go on believing all that was in the Bible. They could not go into the question of the age of manuscripts that composed the New Testament, or understand geology and astronomy, and she sighed at the hopelessness of the task.

"I never can see how we can get at the masses with our negative faith," said Stella the next day to Mr. Richmond. "I don't wonder at them all crowding into the Catholic churches and the Wesleyan, or anywhere that they can have definite promises held out to them about the future life without any question of the reliability of Gospel narratives, the Creation and so on."

"You and I together might move the world if we gave our hearts to it," said Mr. Richmond. "Will you let me tell you, Miss Stella, about that first evening I saw you? As you entered the drawing-room I said to myself, 'Here she comes at last!' as you seemed the very embodiment of a vision of my future wife as she was shown to me years ago when I first went to London University. Every detail of your dress was there. The clinging frock of silk with soft lace falling about your neck, the hair dressed the same; but it was your eyes that attracted me most as being those I had been looking for ever since."

"But I am the last person to be shown in a picture to any one, I should think; they would be sure to conjure up a beauty," Stella interjected.

"You don't know how you look to other people. To me you are downright beautiful because I see your soul shining out of your eyes. I assure you that at times you are perfectly bewitching and irresistible. But it is your goodness and frankness and womanliness that

draw me to you so strongly that I feel I cannot go away to-day without some word of the passionate longing I have to hear you say you have some feeling for me in return. I did not mean to be carried away like this, and feel a traitor in this beautiful home of yours to utter one word to tempt you out of it. The life of most of our ministers is one of privation for such as you, but something compelled me to speak this morning. Hardship is nothing to me, and I have been invited and urged by the Principal of our College to go out to Australia as the minister of a congregation there."

"I cannot say," said Stella, "what you wish. I have a feeling that some change in my life is impending, but I must have time to think. It is of no use for me to pretend that I am in love, so please don't take my hand"—as Mr. Richmond drew near—"or think of yourself as a lover at all?"

"I shall never marry any one else," said Mr. Richmond. If you can come to think of me as your husband, I swear that no woman shall ever lead a happier life or be more cared for than you. I can live alone, but once having seen and known you, I should be traitor to the highest and best within me if I did not strive to get you to share my life."

After a pause, he resumed—

"I did not tell you about my vision after all. Some of us students went to a noted wizard, as he was called, in London, to have our fortunes told. We were shown one by one into an inner room. The old man, who sat therein had a benevolent face, not a bit like a conjurer or anything of the kind. He went into a sort of trance after a while, having said in a preliminary conversation that to some sensitive ones among his sitters he was able to show the face of the woman they were to marry. 'I do not promise anything,' he added, 'but if the girl

who is to be the partner of your life is within touch of my spiritual, helpers I may be successful now. You are one greatly influenced by the unseen world, I feel your magnetism as I sit beside you.' He then went into a deep trance, and after a short time something like a cloud formed in the part of the room where he told me to turn my eyes, and out of it you gazed upon me, just as you are doing now with that sweet expectant look I have learned to love so well. I just worship you, Stella, and whatever your decision may be, you will always be the bright and particular star of my life."

"The cab is at the door, sir, to take you to the train," said the housemaid the next minute, and, after hurried adieux all round, Mr. Richmond was whirled away from the girl whose every look had so strange a fascination for him.

CHAPTER VI

“**W**HAT a difficult young lady you are to catch,” said Mr. Miller, as he at last got level with Stella after an exciting chase of two streets on the afternoon of Mr. Richmond’s departure. Stella was slight and in perfect condition, and Alderman Miller had already attained to something of the stoutness that city magnates are credited with and was quite out of breath.

“ I have just been in to see your poor Sunday-school girl and left a few trifles for her, and she told me you had gone away a couple of minutes. I seem to have seen nothing of you lately, and have had to console myself with your picture that I always carry about with me ; ” and Mr. Miller drew from his pocket a handsome case made to exactly hold a carte-de-visite.

“ Why, wherever did you get my picture from, Mr. Miller ? ” exclaimed Stella indignantly.

“ Oh, I am always in and out of the photographer’s and he let me have one, knowing we are all so intimate. ”

“ But, Mr. Miller, he had no right to let you have one without my permission. I had no idea that you were carrying my picture with you. The least you could have done was to ask if I had any objection. ”

“ But you will never let me talk to you—keep me at such an awful distance, ” Mr. Miller complained, “ and I can’t stand it any longer. You must know that I

worship the ground you walk on, and you have never given me any reason to doubt that you accepted my suit."

"Well, I did not like to be rude to my father's greatest friend; besides, I could not believe that you seriously thought of asking any girl of my age to take the head of a houseful of children. I am the youngest and have had nothing to do with managing them, and am totally unfit to undertake such a task."

"Why, my sweet girl, there is not another woman in the town who could fulfil it half so well. I know that the poor little things would have a perfect mother."

"But I have certain ideas about the bringing up of children, which could not be carried out with any but my own, and I have also determined I will never marry if the samples of married life I see around me are to be repeated in my experience. Women are spoken to by what are considered good husbands in a way that turns me cold. I could not endure to sink into a mere house-keeper, to be scolded if the cook spoils the dinner. I want a husband to remain a lover to the end."

"But, my dear Miss Stella, there will be no scolding in my house unless you like to do it yourself, and I want you to be queen or even empress there if that will suit you better. There is no need to study expense, and you can have a lady to take entire control of the children or send them away to school if you like. All I want is for you to make sunshine in my home and to try to love me a little. I shall be your lover always, and will make you as happy as the day is long."

"But I don't think you understand me, if you imagine I should be content to shirk my duty to the children and have an easy time. I could not be happy unless I took a mother's place. I should be more anxious about them than if they were my own, and it is useless to

persuade me to accept such a task or such a responsibility."

It was unfortunate for Mr. Miller that he had chosen that Monday afternoon to speak to Stella. Two offers of marriage in one day were too much for any girl. All the while that Mr. Miller was wiping his heated brow with his handkerchief and looking appealingly at her with his small pale blue eyes, the morning scene would thrust itself before her. *There* was a handsome man of great intellectual force and with eyes that seemed to look into your very soul. And Mr. Miller! Well, he was just an ordinary individual whose vision did not extend beyond his business and the luxury and comforts that money can bring. Amiable and kind, certainly, but with no aspirations beyond food and clothing.

Stella was not in love with either of these men, but she could not, after the last fortnight of companionship with one who seemed to know all she had been kept out of—the world of literature and art—deliberately take a man who appeared a mere clod beside her Adonis, just for the sake of a splendid house and income. Mr. Richmond's "vision" had affected her but little. She always suspected trickery in anything of the kind, but the recital of it had made an impression on her, as she had never seen such an illumination on a face before as when he told the story that morning.

Stella had slackened her pace while Mr. Miller was talking to her, but now they were nearing her home, and she longed to get inside the house away from him. "I shall go and play Beethoven for an hour," she thought to herself. "It always does me good."

But Mr. Miller was loth to part with her and not at all inclined to take her last words as final.

"Now, before you go in, Miss Stella, do tell me if

there is any one else who has attracted you? I can't believe that you intend to throw me over. I have been making great improvements in my house and grounds for many months in view of having you to share their beauties with me, and I spoke to you this afternoon, with the full concurrence of your father and with his expressed desire that we should be formally engaged straight away."

"I am not engaged to any one," said Stella, "but do not, please, say anything more to me on the subject and do put me out of your thoughts. I can see, now, I ought to have been more guarded in my manner, but I wanted to keep you my friend. Do let us be friends and nothing more, and forgive me if I have pained you. No, don't come in, I am tired out for once, and must be alone and rest."

CHAPTER VII

THERE was great excitement in Alderman Leslie's house the day following the interview between Stella and Mr. Miller. By the morning post came a letter from Mr. Richmond to Alderman Leslie which had made him fume and swear. "The cheek of the man!" he exclaimed at the breakfast table, "to think of proposing for one of my daughters. He is very candid and says he has nothing but his education and ability, but will devote his life to Stella's welfare and happiness, and has the decency to apologize for what seems a breach of hospitality, but pleads that he never met a girl like Stella before, and can never marry any one else."

"Well, you know I always liked Mr. Richmond," Mrs. Leslie ventured to say, "and he has written me the sweetest note of thanks for our kind entertainment of him."

"Entertainment be blowed!" said Mr. Leslie furiously. "I wish to goodness he had never entered the house, and, really, all you women are fools. I should like to know what his friends and family are like. He told me he had been nearly starving once or twice in London, when his scholarship money was exhausted. He gave up a good profession, too, to train as a minister, and had scarcely enough to subsist on while preparing for the examinations."

"I wish I had known. I would have sent him a hamper up now and then of home-cured tongues and

bacon and pork pies in the winter time," Mrs. Leslie remarked mildly.

"Oh, shut up!" was all the answer vouchsafed, and presently Mr. Leslie banged the door after him on his way to his office, as Mr. Richmond was not there to be assaulted in person.

Stella had a letter all to herself. She found it on her plate at the early breakfast, and she and Margaret were in the midst of strawberry-jam making in the kitchen when Mr. and Mrs. Leslie came down at nine o'clock.

Stella had slipped her letter into her pocket before Margaret saw it, and was now intent on jam making, intending to read it quietly to herself when their work was over. It was her first real love letter and quite a sacred thing to her.

The girls made a pretty picture in the kitchen that summer morning. The house was built in the Gothic style, and the kitchen at the back of the three sitting-rooms was as perfect in its way as any part of the home. It was a complete building to itself. The roof had open rafters of polished cedar, like a church, and the floor was of red and white Minton tiles. Not a stain or spot was allowed to be on the tables or the handsome dresser that filled up one whole side of the kitchen. The latter was made to order, like all Alderman Leslie's furniture, and was quite unique of its kind. Large cupboards on each side with glass doors showed the beautiful dinner and dessert services that were used on special occasions, while in cupboards below, with sliding glass doors, were breakfast and tea services, only taken out when wealthy friends came to stay, or a dance was given, when tea and coffee would be served in the fairy-like cups in the breakfast-room as the guests arrived, and before the dancing commenced in the large dining-room and hall.

Margaret and Stella both wore the fresh cambric dresses that English girls appear in at breakfast on summer mornings ; their hair was arranged as neatly as if for dinner, and large white linen aprons with bibs completed quite an effective costume. They were picking an ample dish of strawberries, weighing each pound carefully and turning it into the bright copper preserving pan. Rows of small white jars were on the dresser ready to be filled, and crushed loaf sugar was in a bright tin waiting to be weighed in its turn. Such a thing as bought jams or pickles were never heard of in Alderman Leslie's house. It was only bad house-keepers, Mrs. Leslie affirmed, who bought either and who failed to cure sufficient tongues and bacon and hams for the use of the household. Everything was done so skilfully that a failure in the preparation of these was unknown. The two girls were expected to attend to all the jams and cakes themselves, the cook undertaking the heavier duties, under Mrs. Leslie's own supervision, of salting the bacon, and making the pork pies and sausages at Christmas time. The storeroom was a sight to behold with its loaded shelves all round, one side taking in endless pots of jam, every available preserving fruit being represented there ; while on the other side were ranged all the kinds of pickles and sauces known to Mrs. Leslie, from the humble red cabbage and walnut to pickled mushrooms, which she preserved herself and only brought out on special occasions. Then there were the casks of ginger and elder wine in the cellar below ; the latter brought out at Christmas time and served hot, while the ginger, bottled and bright as champagne, pleased the girls' friends, although Mr. Leslie despised any home-made stuff of the kind, and had his cellar filled with the best foreign wines he could procure.

"I wonder what father banged the door for," said Stella, weighing the last pound of strawberries: "it is always the precursor of a storm."

"Oh, perhaps the coffee was cold," said Margaret. "I thought cook had it on the table too soon. It is the only time dad is unpunctual. He is always late at breakfast."

"And he is so unreasonable," said Stella; "he wants everything hot to put in his mouth at whatever time he strolls down."

* * * * *

"Your father has had a letter from Mr. Richmond, said Mrs. Leslie to Stella as, the jam-making finished, she and her younger daughter were driving in the pretty pony carriage that always came at eleven for Mrs. Leslie's daily outing.

Stella had taken the reins, and the youth in buttons, who attended to the stable and outside work, took his place in the back seat.

"Let us get right out of town to-day, mother," said Stella. "I know of a lovely drive round by the coppice that will only take two hours and I am just stifling. Everything looks different in the open air."

"Your father is very angry—furious, in fact—about Mr. Richmond to-day, for he has written to formally propose for you. I don't know whatever we shall do at dinner time, for there is sure to be a scene, and it does upset me so."

"Oh, we won't say anything to him, mother, and it will perhaps have blown over a bit. You know he never does say anything before Margaret and me when he gets letters of the kind. I never knew for some time that Mr. Holmes, of Manchester, had written to him. It didn't matter, because I did not care whether I saw him again or not."

"He will write Mr. Richmond a most cutting reply to-day," said Mrs. Leslie. "He was more angry than I ever saw him."

Stella knew a place where yellow primroses grew near the road they went that morning. When well out in the country they stopped on a byroad with fragrant hedges on each side close to a pretty thicket, and Stella led her mother through the trees by a path she knew to where the ground was thick with the lovely blossoms.

"Let us gather a great handful, mother, and I will arrange a charming bowl of them with their own leaves for the centre of the hall table. Father always gets softened down by anything pretty."

By the time they had finished gathering primroses it was nearing the early dinner hour, and the pretty cream pony, tired of waiting and strong and fresh with good feeding and grooming, dashed along the country roads homeward at a tremendous pace.

"Just see, mother, how she knows if I merely put my hand back as if to take the whip. Isn't she a lovely creature? I would much rather drive out like this than with the carriage and pair Margaret is always longing for."

"Ah, but you are different, Stella, and take delight in the small things."

"Oh, what a blessing!" Stella exclaimed, as they approached the house. "Old Miller is coming up the street with father to dinner, and there are never rows before company. We shall be as sweet as sucking doves. Though I wish Mr. Miller wasn't always so sugary. He never contradicts me, and sits drinking in every word I say."

"Why, your pony chaise looks as if it had been to a flower show," said Mr. Miller to Mrs. Leslie, as he helped

her to alight and took the great bunches of primroses from Stella.

"Yes; we have been to a place I have never seen before that Stella knows all about, where primroses are as thick as the grass."

"I wish you would take me there," murmured Mr. Miller in Stella's ear, and he squeezed her hand so tightly in his welcoming grasp that she was quite startled. It was only some old friend now and then who ventured to do such a thing, and always in a paternal manner. She hoped Mr. Miller was not growing desperate.

"Come into the garden, Mr. Miller, and see my roses while dinner is being brought in," said Mr. Leslie. "I got them at the nursery last year, all new kinds, and they are flowering so well. But I wonder who has been at the cat-trap? The gardener and I are just in despair about the cats. They knock off the heads of some of the best flowers—always seem to choose the best—and each day, lately, we have caught one. But some one has opened the box and not set it right again."

"I believe it was Stella," said Margaret, coming up. "She said that before breakfast this morning she heard a faint mewing in the box and found the loveliest kitten she ever saw, and couldn't bear the idea of the gardener carrying it away in the bag she sees the others go in. She daren't keep it, she said, as no animals are allowed, so she kissed it on the forehead and put it over the garden wall and it scampered away quite happy. That was the tale she told me at breakfast time, and we both screamed with laughter at the escape she had, for she had only just time to put the box back when Randall appeared. But he never noticed the trap had been touched."

"You don't mind, father, do you?" said Stella, running up, laughing. "I never saw such a sweet innocent face as the kitten had, with large blue eyes that looked straight at you. It was a pretty grey one, mottled all over."

"Oh, we are always having to put up with some tomfoolery or other from you," said her father good-naturedly. "But you forget consequences. This kitten will develop into a big marauder by and by and knock buds off like the rest of his tribe."

"You are always so good to young creatures," said Mr. Miller to Stella, trying to entice her down a path to the fernery. But Stella would not be beguiled, and soon they were all at dinner, a merry laughing party, the storm of the morning having completely passed away.

"We will have one of the best bottles of port in the cellar to-day," said Mr. Leslie, after the cloth had been drawn and desert left on the table. "Out of the '48 bin," he whispered to the housemaid, with directions to decant it carefully.

"Stella and I have calls to make," said Margaret, both the girls bidding Mr. Miller good-bye as they left the room; and Mrs. Leslie soon followed for her afternoon rest, leaving the two friends to the wine and conversation.

"I don't think you need at all despair of success with Stella," said Mr. Leslie presently. They had nearly got through the bottle of wine and were both "feeling comfortable" in aldermanic phrase. I have written Mr. Richmond a letter this morning that will prevent his ever coming here again, I should think, and Stella would never keep up a clandestine correspondence. I know her too well for that. It will all blow over, for I don't believe she really cares for him; she is just a bit

flattered at his great admiration. Bide your time and it will all come right ; take my word for it, old man."

" But Stella is very determined, and when she gets a theory into her head you can't decoy her with a hundred-guinea, ring that I would like to put on her finger, or the handsomest dress procurable, like most women. I have heard her say she likes a print dress better than anything else, and I am sure when she came home this morning with that pale blue cambric on and her lap full of primroses she looked better than some women do in the richest silk."

" What saint was it," said Mr. Leslie, " who always looked like a queen in a cotton frock ? "

The conversation was getting rather beyond the depth of two aldermen with a bottle of port inside them, and they presently sauntered down town to their respective offices.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Stella began to read the love-letter that had been burning in her pocket all day, she found it as difficult to decipher as a piece of music. She had never seen such handwriting before—all dashes and dots and yet with a certain University style about it that fascinated her, not a bit like the commercial hand beloved of ledger-keepers. Each sentence, too, seemed like an entrancing bit of melody as she unravelled it.

“MY DEAR MISS STELLA,” it began—

“I could not leave you as I did to-day, with my tale of love but half told, without a few lines to you as soon as I had regained my bachelor’s quarters. Now I am here again, it seems as if I had just had a peep of heaven and have come back again with dazzled eyes to ordinary existence. The small sitting-room I am in looks so bare after your luxurious home, and I know I shall never have a much better one to invite you to, as the promulgation of unorthodox ideas is not a money-making profession. But it seems to me that your presence would transform everything, that to see you about would be better than all the riches people crave for. I wonder if it would atone to you for much sacrifice to have the undying love and worship of one like myself. Love is really everything, if we did but know it, the only

reality in this universe. I can imagine us working together to rid the world of the incubus of fear that the orthodox religion casts over everything. Where there is real love—the heart of all religions—all fear vanishes, but too many people's lives are darkened with the shadow of cruel dogmas, as you yourself experienced when a school-girl. I feel, somehow, that you are singled out for a great work, and that emboldens me to plead with you, nay, I am almost commanded to beg you to let me take your hand and lead you on the way. I know the path must be a thorny one, but I am so used to hardship that no privations affect me, and I should be always cheerful and just as you have seen me this last fortnight under all circumstances, ever ready to enshrine you in the love that shall stand between you and every trial I can save you from

“The thought of you has been so constantly with me since we parted this morning that I asked my old housekeeper to set my dinner table for two. I suppose she expected a guest to appear, but I wanted to fancy you in the vacant chair and to dream you would presently come in. And later on in the twilight, before the lamp was lit, as I sat entranced, my whole being suffused with love of you, my desire was fulfilled. Yes! for—

With a slow and noiseless footstep
Comes my messenger divine,
Takes the vacant chair beside me,
Lays her gentle hand in mine.

And she sits and gazes at me
With those deep and tender eyes,
Like the stars, so still and saint-like,
Looking downward from the skies.

I have just woke from that vision to write to you and

your father. Keep me, I pray you, always in your heart and think of me through everything as

“Yours, till death,

“A. R.”

“I wonder if any girl ever had a love-letter like that before and yet was not a bit in love herself,” thought Stella, as she read it again for the twentieth time as it seemed, until every word was engraven on her memory. Suddenly she had a vivid picture of Mr. Richmond waiting for an answer. She had forgotten that, and her father’s letter would be too cruel a blow without some word from her. “How real Mr. Richmond’s visions seem to him and his life appears to be quite independent of externals, so different to ours who live on the surface,” Stella soliloquized. “I never remember anything but the most matter-of-fact observations in our house from the time that memory begins, and we have always been kept on drill to shape our actions and appearance solely to please, until to win approbation has become our constant aim. Our inner selves are counted as nothing, and until a letter like this comes to give another view of life, I never suspected my discontent and unexpressed yearnings after a wider existence were anything but passing fancies—‘tomfoolery,’ as father expresses it. One thing is certain. I can’t marry Mr. Miller, and I know father will never make me, for he has a really noble nature. It peeps out on occasions, but he has had such a hard battle to attain his present position that worldly success is everything to him. He is so generous, too, to all about him, with not a bit of meanness in his composition, no bargaining with him but full measure pressed down and overflowing to all who serve him or to whom he owes anything. And he is so proud of us—our popularity, our music and singing,

which are talked of everywhere, and even my reputation among the poor. I must think of all this when I write my letter. Father gets quite soft-hearted at times, and when he was ill last year and I nursed him, he said it was quite heavenly to have me waiting on him. I feel that father and I would have a great deal in common if we did not shut out so entirely all but the practical side of life. How he loves grand music, too, and when we went to the Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace, he said that if there were a heaven he thought there would be great orchestras there and choruses, and he hoped he should join in. I shall never forget the thrill that the first sound of the combined instruments and voices gave me that day. There were thousands of picked voices in the chorus and over five hundred instrumentalists, all first-class performers led by Costa, and the tears rolled down my cheeks when they all began together. I had never heard anything so thrilling as the sound of so many voices mingled as into one great voice, with the clashing instruments and the great organ blending the whole. It was then that father came up to me and said about music in heaven and that he hoped to join in. He was thinking of our local Sacred Harmonic Society, of which he is a most active member. No, I cannot give any promise without his consent—but I would not be without the thought of Mr. Richmond for the world. It is a peep into something quite different to my everyday life to read his letter. And then to know him ! ”

“There is not much for me to say, dear Mr. Richmond,” wrote Stella, “as I expect by this post my father has sent a reply to your letter, and although he has not mentioned the matter to me, my mother tells me that he is entirely opposed to any engagement between us. We have known each other such a short time that I

am not surprised that your letter did not receive much consideration. Father does not take interest in many things that I do, and although he is so prominent a member of the Church and one of its chief supporters, the religious sentiment does not trouble him at all. He was estranged when a young man of twenty-two from the Wesleyan Church, of which he had been a most zealous adherent—a class leader, I believe—by dishonest and underhand conduct on the part of some leading members, and he has such an innate hatred of make-believe and cant that I have heard him say he made up his mind never to enter a church again. I think he went to the Old Meeting House when I was very young, for I remember his leading me thither by the hand. I have heard him say that in the first instance he went to the service merely out of curiosity and because he had been warned when a young man not to enter that particular church, and that he found it was just what he should like us to attend. But I know it would be a disappointment if any of us should devote our lives to spreading liberal ideas abroad—he would not think it worth while, and would like us to choose a first-class business man before anybody.

“ There is no need to settle this question right away, I am sure, and I want time to consider. I have written in this practical manner because all these worldly things have to be faced, but I am deeply touched by your letter. It is so unexpected for a matter-of-fact girl like myself to become the centre of such an idyllic dream as you tell me of. Let me assure you that I deeply appreciate your tender regard for me, and that you and your friendship are sacred things apart in a little shrine of their own, hidden from the gaze of this workaday world. I must get Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and try to become better acquainted with some of the great

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authors of whom you gave me glimpses in our talks
when you were here.

“ Believe me,
“ Yours very sincerely,
“ STELLA LESLIE.”

CHAPTER IX

“**W**OULD you tell me, Mr. Peters, what are the best things to read if you want to get to know all about the books that well-read people seem to have at their finger ends ? ” said Stella to the Rev. Mr. Clay Peters, the resident minister of the Old Meeting House, who had come with his wife to spend the evening at the Leslies’ on their return from their holiday. Mr. Peters was the first minister of advanced views who had come into her life, and there was a strong bond of friendship between this popular and gifted man and Stella. She always remembered the Sunday morning Mr. Peters had preached his opening sermon in the Old Meeting House. As usual, after the devotional part of the service was over, she had fixed herself in a corner of the pew to think about some pleasant subject while the sermon was got through. The old minister, who had been there as long as she could remember, had died and all his sermons seemed alike to Stella. She only knew when “thirdly and lastly” came that the ordeal would soon be over, and she had long since left off trying to understand the drift of what he was talking about. But that morning her attention was riveted at once. Mr. Peters was not much more than thirty years of age then, and one of the exponents of the new school of theology of which Theodore Parker was at that time the leading light.

For the first time in Stella's experience the sermon was full of matter that interested her—gave a reason for the assembling together of the congregation there each Sunday, and indicated the duty of every one connected with the place to do his or her part in the establishment of a live Church, abreast of the science of the time and active in the service of Humanity. Mr. Peters has since made his mark in journalism and literature, and to Stella's unaccustomed eyes he seemed that morning as a being of another mould altogether to the stereotyped style of minister. He was dark with a clean-cut keenly intellectual face, with eyes that blazed almost when dwelling on topics that greatly interested him. But his coming had caused the first "rows" in the Church that Stella had ever heard of. Both Mr. and Mrs. Peters were "advanced" people. There could scarcely be imagined a greater difference than that between Mr. Peters and the old minister, while Mrs. Peters delighted in shocking all the proprieties, and stirred up the rancour of the old "fossils," as Mr. Leslie irreverently termed them. She was most delicate, too, and in the early stages of consumption, but had unlimited energy and spirit at that time. She enjoyed the evenings at the Leslies' before anything, and if Mr. Peters began to air his grievances in the sympathetic ear of Mr. Leslie, would promptly exclaim, "No shop, please!" and if strangers were there be pretty sure to shock them by her familiar talk about Peter and Paul and other New Testament worthies, having something racy to say about most of them.

It was soon after Mr. Peters had settled down to his new work that Stella began to teach in the Sunday-school and to help Mr. and Mrs. Peters when she could get a spare hour or so, and it was with their assistance that she had thought out all the vexed theological

questions that had previously troubled her and had come to range herself on the side of freedom.

"Why, what has developed a taste for literature so suddenly?" said Mrs. Peters. "You will find it hard work at first, Stella, to read books requiring close attention, and I would advise you to begin with articles in the good magazines, and be determined to follow out the reasoning of any one that attracts your fancy. I found that helped me to get into the way of reading such matter."

"I believe, Stella," put in Mr. Peters excitedly, "that if you get a book to really interest you, there is nothing beyond your comprehension although you are such a gay young lady. I am always astonished that you stick to the Sunday-school and church with all your visiting, and dancing to say nothing of music, which seems to be going on all day and night at this house."

"Yes; I never knew father to come home without a piece of new music in his hand, and sometimes two or three, that we at once have to go through, and then Henry Gardiner brings his violin at least twice a week, and he plays over my new songs with me and goes right through the overtures and other duets that Margaret and I play together. There seems to be a perpetual concert going on, and father gets awfully angry if we can't read a thing straight off, and boxed my ears only yesterday because I did not sing a difficult new song at sight. He reads music himself like a book, so you see we are kept up to the mark. But I am not so frivolous, Mr. Peters, as you think. Although in the winter we dance so much and I love it, still, if I get a partner who will talk about anything sensible, I often sit out for a dance, and discuss things, and am of course, accused directly of 'flirting in a corner.' And I really want to try at least to get to know something of the great

writers. Mr. Richmond talked more about books than any one who ever stayed with us, and in his fortnight's visit he read me bits out of Shelley, and remembered long pieces from Shakespeare and Keats and Byron that he would say over while I worked."

"He is a grand young fellow," said Mr. Peters with enthusiasm, "and I hear created quite a sensation in the pulpit."

"He is much in your style, Mr. Peters, only more romantic and poetical. You are more a man of the world. He recommended me to read Carlyle, and I have *Sartor Resartus* here and am quite enjoying it."

"Ah! well, if you can read that with pleasure you can read anything. Just what I said," Mr. Peters rejoined.

"Oh, here are father and Mr. Miller coming," exclaimed Stella, "and there won't be much more time for talking."

Mr. Peters went down the garden to meet his host, and Mrs. Peters began at once to question Stella about Mr. Miller. "People say you are engaged to him, I have heard it from so many of the church people since we came back."

"He follows me everywhere," said Stella. "I can never go down town in peace now because, as I come home, he is sure to dart out of some book or music shop, where he has been waiting for me to pass, and then comes home with me. He has done it every day this week and spends all his evenings here, and I don't wonder at people talking. But I am not engaged, and don't mean to be," said Stella indignantly. "I will never undertake such a care as a family of children that are perfect strangers to me. I have never spoken to one of them. Now, do you think I ought to be expected to consent to such a thing?"

"Certainly not!" said Mrs. Peters. "I always

say 'never have anything to do with ready-made children,' though I can understand Mr. Miller wishing to put you over them. I will confess, now, that when I was so ill last winter, and you know it is only a question of time when this fatal consumption will carry me off, I extorted a promise from Mr. Peters that if I died then he would ask you to marry him. I knew you would be so good to my three children, and I could never bear the idea of an ordinary stepmother for them."

"Well! upon my word," said Stella, laughing out loud at the bare thought. "it is most extraordinary the way I get these matters arranged for me. Another old friend, that I love almost as much as you, told me only this week when she was teasing me about old Miller, that she had picked me out for mother of her children when she had a severe illness a year or two ago, and got her good man to pass his word to her when the doctor had given her up that he would not marry any one else. Fortunately, she recovered, and will probably outlive the lot of us by the look of her. She said she quite understood Mr. Miller being so desperate about it. You must be my ally, Mrs. Peters. Praise Mr. Richmond, and deprecate anything that people say about my marrying the widower."

"Oh, I will stand up for your freedom of choice, and say everywhere that your talked-of engagement to Mr. Miller is a myth. But, tell me, is it a case with Mr. Richmond? People are talking about him as well."

"Well! I know he likes me very much and there is a sort of exalted friendship between us—nothing more. I don't think, Mrs. Peters, I shall ever know what it is to be in love. It seems as if my brains work too hard or something prevents me being subjugated, and I always think that stuff in books about dying for love is

made up ; but if I am ever driven into matrimony it will not be with Mr. Miller, I promise you."

" Ah, here is Mr. Gardiner too," exclaimed Stella. " We shall have a grand evening, a lot of new songs and duets. You will forget that big row in the church that is brewing between that dreadful woman, Miss Horrocks and Mr. Peters, and I shall forget all about old Miller and never look at him."

CHAPTER X

MR. RICHMOND was thinking of many things when the two letters he was looking for so anxiously arrived. There was quite a large post for him that morning, and his old housekeeper smiled as she placed a dozen or more letters in front of him. As he turned over the heap he saw that Mr. Leslie's and Stella's were there, and he placed them in his breast pocket apart. Some of the others were about preaching engagements. He was already getting famous in his denomination and could not leave his own congregation as often as he was invited to do so. One letter was from the gentleman who had the selection of the minister for Australia, and accompanying it was a note from the principal of his college at the University—strongly urging Mr. Richmond to finally accept the appointment. "Your advanced, liberal views are just the thing for a new country like Australia," he wrote, "there is a freshness and vigour about your mind that should just suit a congregation of pioneers. They have generally more backbone than the stay-at-home people and their minds are more open to new influences. I look to you to carry the flag of our 'new school' theology to that southern land." The stipend was the same as the one he was receiving at the pretty church in Lancashire where he was at present located, but money was always a secondary consideration with Mr. Richmond.

It was quite true that "he was different to all the rest," as Margaret put it, and had a strong tinge of romance in his composition. His physique was splendid and he never seemed to be much affected by either heat or cold, and always said he should probably have joined an expedition in search of the North Pole if he had not met Stella. Of home training he had none, and although at Mr. Leslie's and elsewhere he appeared a perfect gentleman in dress and manner, he was at heart a thorough Bohemian, and despised clerical attire and most that properly constituted ministers delight in. He was one of an earnest band of young men who were attracted in the fifties by the preaching of a celebrated minister in the west of England who eventually left orthodoxy and established a free church of his own. Great excitement prevailed in the city over his public addresses on "The Atonement" and kindred topics, and on one occasion the platform was rushed by a lot of religious fanatics and the minister hurled to the ground. "We stood over his prostrate body and fought his assailants," said Mr. Richmond with great gusto, and it was evident that he dearly loved a fight of the kind. Then he gained a reputation as a speaker on debatable questions himself, and eventually went to the London University, took his degree, and entered on the work he had deliberately chosen of enlightening popular ignorance.

It seemed, as he sat considering the matter that morning, that Australia might be just the place for him. This church in Lancashire was his first settled pulpit since he left college a year ago, and he was exceedingly happy in his work and surroundings, but had not got so much into harness that he could not readily break away; and, possibly, Stella might go with him to the other side of the world; she seemed much taken with a previous letter

about it which she had read—" Ah, let me see what she says," thought Mr. Richmond as he drew the letters from his pocket. Mr. Leslie's he opened first. It was short and to the point, as all Mr. Leslie's letters were, and written in the most perfect handwriting Mr. Richmond had ever seen—like copper-plate and yet not too rigid—

" DEAR MR. RICHMOND " it ran—

" Your letter received this morning demands but a brief reply. It is, I regret to say, impossible for me to entertain a proposal of the kind you offer for my daughter, Stella. She has been brought up under such different circumstances to your own that I cannot willingly allow her to make so great a sacrifice. Nothing but misery could accrue from such a union. I am fully sensible of the sincerity of your admiration for my daughter, but must express my surprise that the incongruity of your proposal did not suggest itself to you so that we might both have been spared the pain that an abrupt refusal entails.

" Believe me,

" Faithfully yours,

" RICHARD LESLIE."

* * * * *

Stella's letter, matter of fact as it was, gave him more comfort than one filled with ever so much assurance of love. It came as a soft refreshing balm after the shock of Mr. Leslie's and in a measure supplemented it. Also it did not leave him without hope. He read over and over again the soothing words at the end, the only approach to sentimentality in her letter—" You and your friendship are sacred things apart"—and took courage. He had beside such complete trust in the guiding hand and the fulfilment of one's destiny that,

saddened as he was by Mr. Leslie's curt rejoinder, he had by no means lost heart. "How good she is!" he soliloquized, "so straightforward and genuine. Life with her would be one long romance and the thought of her overpowers everything else."

"Ah! here you are, Pilot," Mr. Richmond exclaimed as, in answer to his whistle, a splendid Newfoundland bounded into the room and, running to meet his master, placed both his paws on his shoulders and looked straight into his eyes.

"There that will do, old fellow; down, sir!" as he still kept his massive head close to his master's. "I am a bit troubled, and you know it, dear old man," he said, as he patted his glossy coat and took the paw he held up to be shaken. "There is nothing to equal the faithfulness of a dog. They care nothing about what position you are in, or how much gold is in your pocket, but stick to you right through your troubles and die beside you if need be. Come along, Pilot! a ten-mile walk along the moors and a breath of the open air will set me right. I shall see things in their true perspective." And Mr. Richmond, in soft felt hat and loose-fitting suit, dashed out on to the road with Pilot barking with joy, and in full tilt for the walk he knew so well.

CHAPTER XI

MR. RICHMOND decided that there was no answer required to either Mr. Leslie's or Stella's letter, and that he must let matters take their course. He should have a good opportunity of writing again if he finally decided to go to Australia. That could not be settled for some months. In his answer to the latest communication on the subject he wrote that he was prepared to go should his nomination be accepted by the congregation at the Antipodes, and he had enclosed a letter of his own to the Committee with the necessary credentials. Then he began to work hard as an ever potent remedy for heartache. He had a most appreciative and highly receptive congregation of hard-headed mill-owners, and some of the more intelligent workers who craved to know all he could tell them of the new light that science was shedding over Bible history. Darwin, A. Russell Wallace, Lyell, Tyndall, and Huxley in England, with Theodore Parker's lately finished work in America, furnished him material for many a brilliant address, and the young men liked him all the better because he not only gave them lively times on Sunday, but played billiards and cricket with the best of them, to say nothing of rowing and swimming, in which he was equal to all comers.

Stella was busy, too, trying to mould herself to the new ideas with which Mr. Richmond had imbued her. The week after he had parted from her, she received a

parcel addressed in his handwriting ; it was a charming edition of Shelley's poems with the inscription, "To Stella, from A. R.," and underneath a quotation written in Greek. Like Elaine, she "lived in fantasy" the next few months, reading the book in her bedroom the little quiet time she had to herself, and wishing she knew what was contained in that magical Greek motto that was as unintelligible to her as Chinese.

Margaret was much scandalized that Stella should have received the book and kept it secret from her father and mother. She had caught sight of it as they shared the same room, and, after snatching the volume from Stella, had laughed derisively at the dedication. The elder sister declared "it was a most dishonest thing to be mooning over his present up here and the others not knowing you have ever received it."

"Well, Margaret, I am surely old enough to receive a present from a friend without running to show what would only be made fun of by every one here but myself. I should not write to Mr. Richmond," Stella added, "without telling father ; but I shall most likely never hear from him again, and I shall keep this book all my life as a memento of a dear friendship."

"Oh ! you are chock-full of sentiment and nonsense," retorted Margaret, "and you are not looking after the house your week half so well as you ought to do. I wonder father has not noticed it ; in fact, he did storm yesterday when the cook had done the fish again the way that he objects to, and, of course, he never blames the servants whatever is wrong, says we are responsible. I believe you were poring over that awful book of Carlyle's when you ought to have been in the kitchen seeing the cook had proper orders. The title, *Sartor Resartus*, is quite enough for me ; I just looked into it and it seemed a farrago of nonsense."

Stella had almost finished it, and as Carlyle was the first author she had read for instruction, so he seemed the first to give her a glimpse into the meaning of life.

Much of *Sartor Resartus* was as unmeaning to her as the Greek characters in her volume of Shelley. Leaving her household, like Elaine, she would ensconce herself in her chair upstairs and try to find "a hidden meaning" in the mystic words Mr. Richmond had written, or to see if she could understand Carlyle's picturesque sentences. Some parts of *Sartor Resartus* were clear enough, and Stella particularly liked what Carlyle said about the workers and spiritual teachers. In her home such a thing as honouring workers and spiritual teachers was unheard of, for neither had any money to speak of, and both were regarded as in quite an inferior sphere to the Leslies. The large factory owners in the town who, with their wives and families, were among their regular visitors, always spoke of their employés as "hands," and Stella could not remember a sympathetic word ever being uttered about them. Stella had never taken much interest in them herself. They were all so dirty and grimy, and at Alderman Leslie's home the most superfine cleanliness prevailed, and the whole family despised people whose houses were not as spotless as their own. "Soap and water are so cheap," Alderman Leslie would say, and he boasted that when he had a smaller income and the children were young, his furniture was kept better and his grates shone brighter than three servants kept them now. "Parsons," too, as Mr. Leslie called them, unless they had large followings and received handsome salaries, were thought nothing of. So Stella stopped short when she came to Carlyle's deliverance on workers and spiritual teachers, and read over and over again his impressive words: "Two men I honour, and no third. First, the toilworn Craftsman that with

earth-made Implement laboriously conquers the Earth, and makes her man's. . . . For us was thy back so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed . . . in thee too lay a god-created Form, but it was not to be unfolded. . . . Yet toil on, toil on ; *thou* art in thy duty, be out of it who may ; thou toilest for the altogether indispensable, for daily bread." Much interested she read on further : " A second man I honour, and still more highly. Him who is seen toiling for the spiritually indispensable ; not daily bread but the bread of Life. . . Highest of all, when his outward and his inward endeavours are one ; when we can name him Artist ; not earthly Craftsman only, but inspired thinker, who with heaven-made implement conquers heaven for us. If the poor and humble toil that we may have Food, must not the high and glorious toil for him in return, that he have Light, have Guidance, Freedom, Immortality. These two in all their degrees, I honour : all else is chaff and dust which let the wind blow whither it listeth."

According to Carlyle, Mr. Richmond was doing a far grander work than Mr. Miller, who had no spiritual outlook and did not know what toil of any kind was. When she was talking to Mr. Richmond once, he told her he had given up a lucrative calling and taken to the pulpit through a desire to awaken people to a knowledge of the transitoriness of much they hold as certain, solid good. Stella wished her father would read books like these. It would at least prevent him storming and raving every time Mr. Richmond's name was mentioned. " Parsons are such cursed fools," was Mr. Leslie's usual summing up. Stella heard from her mother that behind the scenes his language was much more emphatic. " He doesn't like to say too much before you girls."

CHAPTER XII

STELLA did not get much help outside her family at this crisis in her career. Although among their friends and visitors were to be found many well-read people who were doubtless familiar with Carlyle's writings and those of other great thinkers of the time, Mr. Leslie's house was so manifestly the place for hospitality, good music, and thorough enjoyment, that a word was never spoken by outsiders on the subjects that were so all-engrossing to Stella.

Among their more intimate friends was a gentleman who has since made his mark in English parliamentary life. Mr. Fortuna was, at that time, partner in a leading firm doing an immense business in one of the staple trades of Laceborough, and was a keenly intellectual man, an eloquent speaker, and distinctly superior to the average merchants of the place. He had a charming wife and some young daughters, who had been neighbours of the Leslies for many years. There was never an important gathering at either house that did not include them all, and although Mr. Leslie and Mr. Fortuna held different opinions on many subjects, they were both liberal in politics, and there was a frank cordiality and bond of mutual esteem between them. Stella was always delighted to go to the Fortunas', and much admired their way of doing things. There was the same punctiliousness in all the domestic arrangements

as at her father's house, combined with a subtle charm and refinement that Stella missed at home. It was also something new to her to be made welcome to a "study," and to find the master of the house intent on Shakespeare, or Macaulay's *History*, then much in vogue, or some other interesting work; but Mr. Fortuna never spoke to her about books. She and Margaret and the other girl visitors would go into his sanctum on their arrival to receive his warm greeting and have their dresses admired or criticized, with a joke for each, and later Mr. Fortuna would come into the drawing-room to hear the music, and generally called for special favourites of his own—a bit of Mendelssohn or Beethoven from Margaret or a song from Stella. But on the one subject that interested her—literature—Stella felt so ignorant that she never ventured to mention it to Mr. Fortuna, although he had "dissertations," as he called them, with one girl, whom she envied greatly, on books they were both reading.

On one occasion the girls went as usual to see Mr. Fortuna, and found him sitting by his study fire, wrapped up, and forbidden to leave it by the doctor till his cold was better. Stella lingered behind the others, after they had had their little chat and joke with the invalid, and asked Mr. Fortuna if he ever read Carlyle?

"Of course, my dear; but why do you ask?"

"I am trying to understand *Sartor Resartus* myself, but I am not used to difficult reading, and it is only certain parts that are clear to me. I see, however, he wants to show us the inner meaning of everything and goes behind appearances."

"My dear young lady, it is not for girls like yourself, who are surrounded with every luxury, to inquire into these matters. If Carlyle's ideas were embraced by a majority of Englishmen, which I don't think will be the

case, at least in our time, everything that your father and all of us think so much of would tumble down like a house of cards, and there would be such an upheaval of society as this world has not witnessed before. Everything you see around you would be changed. The only aristocracy would be that of worth and intelligence, and no rich loafers would be tolerated. Do not disturb yourself about these things. Even strong men like myself do not care to contemplate what may after all be inevitable, if Carlyle's and other great thinkers' ideas are based on truth, for truth must prevail in the end. Your duty, my dear girl, lies very near to you—to make all of us as happy as you can by your singing and goodness of heart."

"But, Mr. Fortuna, I *can't* be happy even to-night when I think of scenes I have witnessed this very morning. I go sometimes to visit my Sunday scholars in their homes down in the slums of the city. One girl I know is lying there at the point of death. It is wonderful what the poor do for each other—there is more real kindness among many of them than we see in our own homes. This girl is carefully tended by an old relative who can no longer go to the factory, but the poverty, the squalor and closeness of the room appal me, and the inequality strikes me as awful when I open our garden gate and see the lovely home I dwell in. No one ever seems to give a thought to the hundreds of similar cases to the one I tell you of, and I can do nothing by myself."

"That is quite right, Stella. *You* can do nothing nor can any one of us. If one family is relieved, hundreds and thousands of others are beyond our reach. You are getting quite morbid and must shake it all off. Your chief duty is to get married, my dear. Now don't blush so much, but tell me who is to be the happy man ?

Don't throw yourself away on the parson. A little bird told me you have added another admirer to your list. Don't have him, Stella. Marry some one who can keep you decently, at least. The main thing for us is to get on in life as we find it, and, of course, to be as good to others as we can," he added quickly, as he saw Stella's face fall while he was speaking and the light go out of her eyes.

"Oh, life doesn't seem worth living under those circumstances," said Stella sadly and gravely. "But every one does not think it best to put all these subjects aside as you do. Mr. Richmond is devoting his life to the dissemination of advanced ideas of all kinds, and it was he who recommended me to read *Sartor Resartus*."

"Now, Stella," said Mr. Fortuna, shaking his finger at her, "I see very well you are falling in love with this young man."

"Honestly, upon my word, I am not. It is only his ideas that attract me, and his friendship is a new and interesting experience—nothing more. I have never had any one before to talk deep matters over with. He doesn't laugh at me and say I am chock-full of romance and sentiment when I tell him about my religious struggles, which have been greater than any one imagines, and I believe he would fight in a revolution so as to give the workers their rights sooner than put these advanced ideas aside."

"Now, I am quite sure you are in love with this young revolutionary hero," said Mr. Fortuna, laughing out loud, for he saw Stella's eyes filling with tears and he did not like scenes. "Let *me* put you through a course of reading. Get Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford* and *Mary Barton*, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Dickens and Thackeray, and leave off reading Carlyle's grim stuff."

"I have read all Mrs. Gaskell's and Charlotte Brontë's as well as Dickens' and Thackeray's books ; but can't you see that they notice all these things, especially Dickens ? The poor and their wrongs crop up everywhere."

"I had no idea, Stella, that you were so deeply moved by anything so serious. You always looks so bright and gay."

"Well, we always have to appear so whatever we really are. Dear old father thinks everything of popularity, and I don't believe he cares a bit what is going on in our minds, so long as our bodies are properly and becomingly dressed, and we are declared to be the nicest girls anywhere. But, joking apart, Mr. Fortuna, these matters are the only important ones to me, and have nothing to do with Mr. Richmond or any one else. I think I must have gone through what Wesleyans speak of as 'conversion' about three years ago. Do you remember that sort of festival we had at the Old Meeting at that time. Of course you weren't there, as you are orthodox ; but I should like you to have heard a sermon by one of our ministers, who was formerly assistant to George Dawson of Birmingham. He gave the morning address. It was on a weekday and the church was only half full, and I sat in a quiet seat by myself, away from the rest. We placed ourselves anywhere that morning. I wish I could give you an idea of that sermon. It was a picture of the higher life that we should choose, and the preacher had a pretty simile of the difficult path it was at first—the daily round of care and thought for others and denial of self—a rough path beset by thorns that tore our flesh as we pursued our way, our feet bruised by the stones that had to be walked over. But by and by the road, with the constant pressure of our footsteps, became smoother and the daily walk grew to be beautiful. Flowers sprang up by the way,

birds sang, and we realized the truth of the Psalmist's words, 'Thy statutes have become my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.' The hollowness of the life I was leading flashed upon me like a stroke of lightning, and I cried like a child in my seat, that was mercifully hidden from the congregation. It is an unheard-of thing and, I imagine, a very improper one too, to show emotion in any of our chapels. But since then these ideas haunt me and cannot be put aside."

Mr. Fortuna's countenance was a study as Stella was telling this incident, her face aglow with enthusiasm, her eyes shining with the light that appeared when she was deeply moved. He was a fine handsome man, with an eagle-like expression, Stella used to think, and with a manner so commanding and yet so courteous and really kind that any way he chose in life seemed to open before him as if by magic. That charming and courtly demeanour he retained through all his subsequent brilliant career, and he died only a year or two ago, full of years and crowned with honours from members of the royal circle down to the poorest man to whom he had given a helping hand and encouraging word.

"Well, Stella," he said at last, "I may tell you that I have gone through all this myself. When you were very young and had not begun to bother yourself about these matters, I was just as anxious as you are to do something to help the toiling masses. I was then one of them myself, and caused a sensation by springing on to the platform at a Chartist meeting and announcing myself as a champion for the people's rights. I have, however, come to see that these reforms have to be waited patiently for, and that extremists simply jeopardize their own chance of coming to the front in political life.

"It is well for us to have an ideal," Mr. Fortuna

went on. "Mine is to get into Parliament and to make my mark in the councils of the nation. Conciliation in trade disputes will be a leading plank in my political platform, and I shall also work for higher education all round. In this way my social position, which should be of paramount importance to all of us, will go on improving. Whatever you do, Stella, never lower your social rank. It is not fair, besides, to your father. Now he is one of our most honoured townsmen, President of the Working-man's College, and trustee of I know not how many important institutions and estates, his name being synonymous with honour and integrity. My dear girl, you are entitled to one of the best matches in the place. You do not think half enough of yourself. You are looking charming to-night, Stella; that pale blue dress suits you to perfection and your face is all lit up. Now go in the drawing-room, my dear, and sing me that pretty song about the shepherd maid. Leave the door open and I shall hear you quite well. And give me a kiss before you go, for old times' sake. It is only the last year or two that you and Margaret have left off being children and running to put your arms around my neck."

There was a great burst of merriment when Stella entered the drawing-room, and she was soon in the midst of the fun, singing and joining in the impromptu dance on the carpet, as if there were no such things as slums and starvation and dying factory girls in prosperous Laceyborough.

CHAPTER XIII

THE summer and autumn passed very quietly at Alderman Leslie's. Mr. Miller had left in July for a prolonged tour on the Continent, and told Stella, on saying good-bye, that it had been his great desire to take her with him, so that they could enjoy together the gaieties of Paris and admire the beauties of Italy and Switzerland in company. It was not too late, he urged, if she would go now. Just a quiet wedding and away for a long honeymoon. But Stella would only say good-bye, and nothing more, and, at the last moment, Mr. Leslie decided to go with his old friend.

Stella and her mother went to North Wales for a month by the seaside and Margaret had girl friends to stay with her.

The autumn was wearing into early winter when one morning Mr. Leslie received a letter from Mr. Richmond that required an immediate answer. It was worded so decidedly, yet in such a manly fashion, that there was nothing for it but to acquaint Stella with its contents. Mr. Richmond had received a cordial invitation from the church in Australia and had resolved to start for his new position the following year, and he courteously but firmly claimed the right to speak to Stella once more before going away, and asked permission to see her at any time convenient to Mr. Leslie.

"Come into my sanctum, Stella, and let us talk this

blessed thing over," her father said in rather an angry tone. "You are too romantic altogether," he said, as he took his easy-chair and lit a cigar, "and I want you to look at this matter from a common-sense point of view. You have never been quite the same since Mr. Richmond was here, and before you see him again I want to point out to you one or two important matters. Mr. Richmond is, I dare say, a clever young man, and will do well; but, at the best, the life of a poor minister's wife is most unsuitable for you. Surrounded as you are here, with not a thought of expense when comfort and even luxury and elegance are concerned, you would be thrust into a life that would be almost unbearable to you should you allow Mr. Richmond to persuade you to marry him. You have been so independent all your life. Thank goodness! I haven't to look to any one but myself. But a church! You have only seen the bright side of church life here, but a small congregation and a small stipend are like a hell upon earth for a decently brought up girl like yourself. You would have to carry your children about if you have any, and, very likely, to stand at the washtub, and you have never seen washing done even. That is one thing I never would stand," said Mr. Leslie parenthetically—"The smell of soap-suds in the house—and from the time you were quite a tiny girl, that nice country woman who comes now began to take the laundry work away with her each week, and it has made her a good living. It runs in our family to like nice surroundings and to have money enough to spare for everything, and you and I are so much alike in our tastes that it would be torture to you to live in squalor and dirt."

"But, father, I would never come down like that, even if I married a poor man. I have ability of some kind, I know, and I would do something on my own

account rather than become a mere household drudge and drag my children about the streets. But we needn't discuss that now, father. I haven't made up my mind to leave home yet."

"Still, I must warn you not to be led away by false ideas. Now, am I to write to Mr. Richmond to come or not?"

"Well, I should like to see him once more," said Stella, blushing. "In fact, I should feel quite sorry not to say good-bye before he goes away."

"Oh, be hanged to him!" retorted Mr. Leslie, "but I can't take upon myself to say he shan't come. I like things fought out above board, and I would rather you saw him here than elsewhere, and as you are now over age I have no right to coerce you. I'll write to him that he can come one day next week and stay the night. He is still in Lancashire, I see."

* * * * *

Stella was of a nature so highly strung that when the evening came on which Mr. Richmond was to arrive her nerves seemed to be so many hot wires, and magnetic thrills rushed painfully to her very finger tips. She was just the same when waiting for her music master's arrival, and it was an ordeal for her to go among strangers, although she and Margaret went out so much that she had lost any apparent shyness. Could she have realized how all-absorbing was Mr. Richmond's love for her, Stella should have been in the seventh heaven that evening, not in a hell of torturing suspense. It was quite true, as Mr. Fortuna said, that she didn't think half enough of herself, but she had been so constantly chidden, "kept up to the mark" as her father called it, that her sensitive nature had shrunk within itself waiting for the development that comes from sympathetic encouragement. What she felt to be her best was so

derided by Margaret and her father that she was far from the true centre that gives confidence and peace, and was painfully groping her way in the dark.

"Of course you are dressing yourself up to kill," said Margaret, as Stella put on her prettiest evening costume and added one of the few flowers that were still to be found in the conservatory.

"Well, surely I ought to look my best when a friend is coming so far to see me," said Stella pleasantly, but inwardly rebelling against Margaret's insinuation; and immediately after she was summoned to the drawing-room, where Mr. Richmond and her mother were already seated.

"Ah! here you are at last, Miss Stella," said the visitor, as he advanced with both hands extended to greet her, "and looking so bright and well."

"Yes! I don't like winter, but I think it suits me best. I suppose it is still colder in Lancashire than here?"

"Yes, we have the lake frozen over, and yesterday I played my first cricket match on skates this season. It is the greatest fun, Mrs. Leslie," he said, turning to his hostess, "particularly picking up the ball. I had lots of spills, I can assure you. Skating is one thing I shall miss in Australia. Where I am going there is never snow and only occasional light frosts."

"Then you have quite decided to go," said Mrs. Leslie.

"Oh yes; that is fixed absolutely now. I have always had a great desire to travel, though I must confess I shall regret leaving my Lancashire church. There is the nicest lot of young men there I ever met. Our cricketers yesterday were almost all those who hear me on Sunday. But there are nice people everywhere, and I expect a fair proportion will be found in Australia."

"When do you start, Mr. Richmond?" said Stella.

"Oh, about the end of July. I shall have two summers next year, for it will be nearly the dog-days when the ship sails and just the beginning of the Australian summer when she arrives at Port Jackson. There is a favourite passenger vessel, adapted expressly for families, that leaves once a year and at the time when fair weather may be expected most of the way, especially nearing Australia whose coast is rocky and dangerous in parts."

"Very glad to see you," was Mr. Leslie's greeting as he entered the room while Mr. Richmond was speaking. "I suppose you have had a cold journey."

The Leslies were hospitable before everything, and soon the supper table was surrounded by a merry laughing company, Mr. Peters and his wife having been summoned hastily, as they lived near, to join the party.

Mrs. Peters had come determined to do her best to help Mr. Richmond in his suit. "There is not a girl anywhere who would make so good a minister's wife as Stella. I think she is just made for the position," she had affirmed lately over and over again. They had only heard of Mr. Richmond but had not met him before, and were much impressed by his manly appearance and striking personality. "He is the sort of man," Mrs. Peters remarked to her husband on their return home, "that a mother would be proud of. A man with eyes like his could not fail to be a good son and a good husband. He promised to come and see us tomorrow, and I whispered I hoped he would bring Stella with him. "If I may," he said, adding, "I would lay down my life for her." One does not often see so much chivalry in a face nowadays. He looks as if he ought to have belonged to the Round Table of King Arthur."

"Yes, he is a fine fellow," said Mr. Peters, "and I hear as uncompromising a champion of the new school

of liberal theology as Theodore Parker himself. He is fortunate in his Lancashire congregation, as they are mostly thinking people and just worship him."

"I wish he would stay there," Mrs. Peters exclaimed, "for much as I would like Stella to marry him it will be a cruel exile to her. The Leslies seem to have friends all over England."

"But I don't believe that anything but going right away would induce her to accept him. She is sensible enough to know what a thorn in Mr. Leslie's side a comparatively poor son-in-law would be. Besides, Mr. Richmond is a man who would go to the stake for his opinions, and Mr. Leslie wouldn't care twopence for that kind of thing, but would want him to be 'successful' at any price. Stella always seems to me to be under some special guidance, or how could we account for the enormous difference between herself and the rest of the family? I have no doubt she will be led aright."

CHAPTER XIV

“ I WISH you would sing me something, Miss Stella,” said Mr. Richmond the next morning. “ Come into the drawing-room and let me hear ‘ Angels Ever Bright and Fair ’ again. It has haunted me ever since you sang it last summer.”

“ Oh, willingly, if Margaret will accompany me. It is a song I must always stand up to without any thought of the accompaniment. But isn’t it a bit serious for early morning ? I only sing it on Sundays, or when it is specially asked for.”

“ Well, I feel serious to-day and want some inspiration,” he whispered, as they crossed the hall and entered the drawing-room, where Margaret was already seated at the piano.

“ Be quick, Stella ! ” she exclaimed, “ because I am off shopping and am already late.”

Stella soon forgot everything in the music she delighted in. Her sweet voice seemed to Mr. Richmond like that of an angel, and she gave such breadth of expression to Handel’s exquisite melody that even Margaret seemed moved and said she had never heard it better sung.

“ I often wish,” said Stella, “ that I had a voice strong enough to fill a large hall. I do envy great singers their power of influencing immense throngs of people. As long as I live I shall never forget hearing Santley for the first time last week. There is something most

fascinating and thrilling in the timbre of his voice, and we were just frantic until he came back to sing again. Artidi accompanied him in his new song, 'The Stirrup Cup,' besides 'The Bellringer' and several others. Santley is quite young, he is only about twenty-six and must have a great career before him. I am just longing to hear him again."

* * * * *

There was no denying that Stella was always at her best when Mr. Richmond was about. He seemed to translate her into another world and to bring a new atmosphere with him, that Stella understood in later life when she had learnt to reverence and love Walt Whitman. The American poet says—

All waits or goes by default till a strong being appears.
 A strong being is the proof of the race and the ability of the
 universe,
 When he or she appears materials are overaw'd,
 The dispute on the soul stops—
 The old customs and phrases are confronted, turned back or
 laid away.
 What is your money making now? what can it do now?
 What is your respectability now?

Stella felt all this as she sat nervous and trembling after Margaret had hastily left the room, with a Parthian shot of "No spooning allowed. Father is dead against it."

Neither of them was the least disposed to "spoon," as Margaret called it, and Mr. Richmond's passionate appeal came to Stella more like a call to the Higher Life than to matrimony. Stella often wondered afterwards if, when a man had so much love to bestow, it was right for her to have simply followed her craving for intellectual and spiritual light when her heart was not seriously affected. She liked him better than any

man she had yet met, and perhaps it was not for her to feel the strong passion that others did, and it might be true, as he assured her, that love came after marriage. In their case, it must be, he said, for no woman was ever so beloved, nay, absolutely worshipped before as Stella, and that was everything in his eyes.

“ It will be such an untried path to me, Mr. Richmond, that I cannot promise to be always gay and bright as I am now if I consent to go with you to Australia. Even now I feel all the desolation and bitterness of parting ; ” and Stella shuddered and grew pale with fear, and tears rolled down her cheeks as she looked appealingly at him.

“ Come here, darling, and let me show you how I shall take care of you always ; ” and he drew her on his knee, kissing her passionately for the first time, and wiped her tears away. “ You can't imagine how I shall take care of you and shield you, as far as in me lies, from everything that would hurt you. I would not persuade you so strongly but that I have always known from the moment I saw you that I had at last met the woman in all the world for me. And, after all, if you married a wealthy man, who cannot help you to a knowledge of what life on this earth really means and its responsibilities—the gaudy trappings they think so much of, the rich food and luxurious dwelling-places, are worse than nothing, and become as dust and ashes to the earnest soul. Thank goodness ! I have in that sense overcome the world, and can look with equanimity on a splendid carriage and pair and its richly attired occupants, and feel that I would not barter my present outlook for much more than that implies—nay, for all the wealth of India. I am not given to quoting texts, but there was never a truer word spoken than ‘ What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul ? ’ ”

Ah! my Stella, if this world is not a school for the training of souls it is perfectly unintelligible."

Stella walked to the other side of the room and sat and thought for long and long. That morning seemed to her like the parting of the ways. She tried to imagine how she would feel if she threw herself into the life that Margaret and her cousins and other girls led—married Mr. Miller possibly—and deliberately turned away from the light that for the last year or two had begun to shine from a different quarter altogether. Mr. Richmond seemed to have come as a messenger from that other sphere. He would lead her and educate her, explain everything in books that seemed too deep for her understanding and worship her all the while. She knew, too, that he was deadly in earnest. No one could look at his face and doubt for a moment his faithfulness and devotion. She felt he was a man in whom there was no shadow of turning.

Mr. Richmond paced up and down the room, glancing now and again at Stella as she sat in a sort of dream. "Yes," she said at last, rising and extending her hands towards him, "I will go with you if you can be satisfied with what I can give in return for all you offer me. I can see that my training has been against the cultivation of the real and the true, and what you think so attractive in me is only a feeble longing after higher ideals than I have been accustomed to. Something in this room seems to be urging me on to what my natural prudence and the thought of the dissatisfaction my decision will create would dissuade me from. It is positively uncanny, and I can almost see that vision of myself that was conjured up for you in the wizard's cave. I can promise one thing only—to be as true and faithful in all things as lies in my power."

"Ah, you have Shelley with you, I see," said Mr.

Richmond. "Will you let me translate the mystic message I wrote in that volume when I had little hope of ever seeing you again. Let me read it to you in the light of the great joy you have brought into my life. 'Faithful unto death'—and more than that, faithful beyond the grave if souls live on, and carry with them to the unknown land whatever is truest and best in this life. Put your arms around my neck, darling, and let me feel you are mine for evermore."

CHAPTER XV

STELLA'S announcement that she had accepted Mr. Richmond's proposal and would go with him to Australia was a nine days' wonder, not only in Alderman Leslie's immediate circle, but among the crowd of old friends and acquaintances who took great interest in the two lively and popular girls and their movements. Most people supposed that Stella would eventually marry Mr. Miller, as it would be a good match as far as money was concerned, and, after all, the first question generally asked about any would-be suitor is the amount of his income.

Stella's eldest sister, Alice, who had married a younger brother of Mr. Fortuna, had led the girls in the right way and settled down comfortably as the wife of a good business man. She was exceedingly fond of her youngest sister, and told her how every one thought Mr. Richmond was not half good enough for her and that she was throwing herself away.

"Well, Alice, it is really the other way about if they did but know it. I am not half good enough for him, but it seemed as if I had to say, 'Yes.' It will turn out all right, though I shall miss all of you terribly, and I don't know what I shall do without Phyllis."

"Oh, she says she is going to Australia with Auntie Stella—that she likes her a great deal better than either her father or mother."

"Oh, that is because we make so much of her, and

her little brother and sister have put her nose out of joint. She will have to live with me almost till I go, and be a little bridesmaid on the wedding day."

"Put your hat on and ask mother to send your clothes round to grandpa's and come along with me now," said Stella, as a fair-haired little girl of five bounded into the room and made a rush for her aunt. "You don't mind her going down to see some of those poor people with me. It is only to leave a parcel I have got, and it is so lovely to have Phyllis with me."

"Oh no, go along, both of you, but don't spoil her too much. She is quite discontented when she comes home, and said the other day 'we treated her here as if she was a child and knew nothing.' What with you and grandpa and all the rest she thinks herself a most important person."

"And so she is," said Stella, laughing as they tripped away. "Children are the best of all."

Margaret Leslie was much more decided than the others about her sister's engagement, and did not hesitate to say that she detested Mr. Richmond and all his ways. Mrs. Leslie liked him very much and acquiesced in her usual quiet fashion, though her opinion did not count for much in a household where a man like Alderman Leslie ruled supreme.

But it was impossible for the father to play any but a noble and generous part when a crucial moment arrived, so after Stella had tearfully put her face up to be kissed and said her decision was final and she believed for the best, he accepted the position, gave Mr. Richmond a cordial shake of the hand, told him he was taking the best girl in the town with him, and he hoped he would duly appreciate her. Everywhere Mr. Richmond went with Stella during his subsequent visits to Alderman Leslie's he was told the same. Stella upheld her decision

quietly to herself, but could not be exuberantly happy like Mr. Richmond. The idea of leaving, perhaps for ever, her old home was quite sufficient to account for the gravity of her demeanour the last few months of her life at home.

With the exception of warm congratulations from the Rev. Mr. Peters and his wife, there was one prolonged wail of regret that she was taking a man without either money or brilliant prospects.

Sometimes Stella would sit and wonder if she could possibly face the life of poverty minus the prestige of her father's position, and would find her eyes wet before she knew, and hastily brushing away the tears would remind herself of what life must be with Mr. Richmond always beside her. They would work so hard together, and as everywhere she went in England friends seemed to spring up, she must put all doubts and fears aside and hope for the best.

The wedding was fixed for July, and Margaret, who was at heart most good-natured, besides being a capable manager, undertook all the business of the trousseau—Mr. Leslie giving orders that Stella was to have exactly the same as Alice had. Mrs. Leslie claimed the supervision and ordering of the house linen, and bought only of the very best and as much as would last an ordinary household ten years. Margaret set seamstresses and dressmakers to work, she and Stella finding quite enough to do in ordering, planning, and marking everything when finished. They merely took the mornings for this work, Margaret being determined that Stella should have a good time and see as much of her friends as possible before starting in July. Stella pleaded to have a simple white muslin for her wedding dress; she felt it would be so much more suitable for a girl who would have to live on so little. But Margaret overruled

this. "People would say we were not serving you the same as Alice," she contended, and the richest white satin was ordered, Stella then insisting that it should be made perfectly plain.

Every one wanted to see the last of Stella, so it was impossible to have anything but a grand wedding. There were old friends in distant places who must be invited, besides those near at hand, and Mrs. Leslie wrote to invite Mr. Richmond's brothers and his only young sister, who was asked to be the second bridesmaid. Mr. Richmond engaged an old college friend for the best man, but seemed besides of little importance in the general racket—"only a circumstance" Margaret called him.

"There is one thing I am so glad of," said Stella one day to Mrs. Peters, "that Mr. Miller is settled and happy. As soon as he found I had really made up my mind, he married a lady far more suitable than I would have been and rather older than himself. She was a widow, and I think he had her in reserve, for he went off at once and married her, and he is so pleasant with me when I meet him. The others have called upon her, and there it has ended. They are not to be invited for an evening till I have gone away."

Alderman Leslie's house could not accommodate the guests from a distance. Besides, the dining-room was already dismantled and being decorated with a profusion of flowers and trailing greenery for the wedding breakfast. The tables were laid round three sides of the room, so as to accommodate the half hundred guests expected after the ceremony was over—all old friends, as the reception to take place on the bride's return from her wedding trip would include every one who could claim acquaintance with Stella and wished to say farewell.

Margaret was in her element in arranging a big affair, and said if they had a dozen spare rooms she couldn't be bothered with guests at the house. So all the visitors were received at the railway station and driven to rooms engaged for them at the leading hotel, with the exception of Mr. Richmond's young sister, who was brought to the house and became one of the family circle, her pretty bridesmaid's dress, made exactly like Margaret's, being laid out ready for her approval.

The eventful morning arrived, and Stella, with strict injunctions not to move till it was time to dress, as everything was to be done for her that day, looked round the old familiar room for the last time. Her travelling dress was laid out and boxes packed, and the lovely white satin bridal costume lay there with wreath and veil, shoes, handkerchief and gloves, ready for the dressmaker to attire her in. "She wanted everything to be quite perfect," she said, and would "come herself after Miss Stella's hair was dressed and she was ready for the final touches."

The morning was grey and calm, something like Stella's mood, but by the time for her to go downstairs and be taken to the carriage by her father the sun shone out. "It will be so in my married life," thought Stella. "I shall get into the sunlight as times goes on." The bridesmaids were in the hall and looked charming in their transparent white dresses trimmed with palest green, "as Stella loved spring tints so much," Margaret said, and white tulle bonnets. And there stood little Phyllis, with expectant face, dressed in just the same material as her auntie, but with a tulle veil and soft green leaves round her fair head, holding by the hand a tiny little boy in black velvet court suit and deep lace collar. They all exclaimed as Stella came downstairs, for never had she looked so well, and when the bouquets which had

been sent by Mr. Richmond that morning were handed to the bridal party, they formed a charming group.

"It seems as though all the town has turned out," said Mr. Leslie to Stella as they neared the Old Meeting. "I suppose it is because you are going away."

It was with difficulty that the wedding carriages passed through the tremendous crowd that filled the street leading to the chapel, and Alderman Leslie had to thread his way with Stella on his arm through the packed assemblage that filled the courtyard and that seemed to be composed of all the people Stella had helped in the past. There was an atmosphere of love everywhere, and it was quite different to the curious gaping crowd. "Ah! there she is," said one man close to Stella and her father. "I shall never forget what she did for my poor girl last winter, wherever she goes."

"There are all your schoolgirls," whispered Mr. Leslie, "but don't take any notice," as Stella saw them ranged in double row, dressed in white and carrying baskets of flowers. "The inside of the ugly old chapel is just transformed," her father said again as they slowly advanced through the crowd. "Mr. Miller has been there all yesterday and since six this morning with assistants, and it is like a flower show."

And so it was. Often when Stella was away from all these scenes of her girlhood, she would recall the picture that the interior of the chapel presented that morning. It was quite full, the front part of the ground floor with wedding guests, while the rest of the building and the great galleries were crammed with fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and friends, of all who had loved and known her from her childhood. The organ pealed forth as they walked down the aisle, and when they arrived at the communion rails, the sweetest flowers were placed where she would kneel, while the whole

of the blank wall that Mr. Leslie hated so much was covered with floral devices. Trails of evergreens were everywhere, hiding the plain square pews, and Stella passed under arches of flowers all down the centre aisle.

And there was Mr. Richmond, radiant and looking handsomer than ever, with his best man, and as if to show his independent mind, he was clad in morning dress, like an ordinary bridegroom, and there was no hint of the clerical about either himself or his companion, one of the prominent preachers of the day. Stella would have liked to put her head down and sob, and rebelled a little against the gorgeousness that was accompanying her sacrifice. It seemed to her something like the incongruity that attends a nun's bridal array, when taking the vows of a spouse of Christ before assuming the black veil. She too was voluntarily accepting a life of poverty for an idea.

"What would all these people think if they knew that I am not a bit in love," she thought, as she knelt down beside Mr. Richmond, "and what would father and the rest say? But my consecration was complete when I gave my word that memorable morning, and I must go through with it."

Now Mr. Peters is reading the service in his usual impressive style, and when it was over, the vows spoken, and the ring on Stella's finger, she was surprised to hear him begin a most eloquent address to the crowded assemblage. He spoke of Stella's unequalled work in the church, of the love she had drawn around her everywhere, of the regret with which they all parted with her and their confidence in her future, finally presenting the bride on behalf of himself and Mrs. Peters with a splendidly bound Bible with a suitable inscription. As she passed out of the church on the arm of Mr. Richmond to the strains of the Wedding

March, played by their celebrated musical friend, Mr. Gardiner, the crowd gave vent to their suppressed feelings. "God bless you," was whispered in her ear by working women leaning over the aisle at the rear of the church as she passed close to them; and at the porch her schoolgirls were ready to throw roses on her path. It seemed all a dream, from which Stella did not awake until she heard Mr. Richmond returning thanks for the toast of the bride and bridegroom proposed by Mr. Fortuna. She was roused herself by his impassioned speech and the company was electrified.

Most of them had not seen Mr. Richmond till that morning, and had never heard him speak, and it seemed all at once as if Stella was justified in her choice if her husband were a man like this. He looked so noble as he stood addressing these friends of hers, and was so manly and self-contained too, and so evidently full of devotion to his young wife, that even Mr. Leslie felt reconciled, and old friends ejaculated, "What a splendid young fellow!" After the breakfast Mr. Fortuna told Stella that he recalled all he had said against the marriage. "He is a man with something in him and should make his mark," he assured Mr. Leslie, and all went as merry as the proverbial marriage bell.

PART II

“ Transition ”

CHAPTER XVI

FROM the Old Meeting at Laceborough with its large and wealthy congregation to the insignificant building and uninfluential gathering in Sydney was something more than a dramatic change to Stella. It seemed as if a deep and impassable gulf had been fixed between her and the old life at home, which by contrast appeared of such marvellous ease and luxury.

By the time the vessel reached Port Jackson years might have elapsed since she left her father in the breakfast-room the day that she and her husband set out to join the ship at Plymouth. She could recall every detail of that last morning at home : the scene was burnt into her memory, and rested there for the remainder of her life. She had stipulated that no one should go to see them off “ I have been schooling myself for the last six months,” she said, “ and have gone through the farewell already, the bitterness has passed. I do not want to be a coward at the end.” She could recall the dainty meal prepared for their early luncheon that she tried in vain to eat, and could even remember the taste of the wine her father poured out and brought round the table to her with his

cheery words : " You will soon come back, and remember there is always a place and a welcome for you." Then the last kiss to mother and Margaret and little Phyllis, who stood awed by the scene, and the final throwing of her arms round her father's neck and the tears that would not be kept back. " I will not disgrace you, father, in the new land," she sobbed out. " Fredá and I intend to do a great work there." Then she took her husband's hand and walked down the garden to the cab that was waiting for them. He did not dare to speak to her all the railway journey. His brother joined them when nearing Plymouth, but Stella sat apart under the shadow of the great darkness that seemed to have enveloped her.

She had quite regained her composure by the time the vessel had got well under way, and both she and her husband enjoyed the new experience of life at sea, took part in all the entertainments got up, and happily knew nothing of the scandal and gossip always rife in a long sea voyage. Stella found her musical training useful, and played the harmonium and led the singing at the Sunday services, although neither she nor her husband had any liking for the narrow teaching of the gloomy captain, who, although a " saved " man, as he constantly informed the passengers, appeared the least happy in the crowded company.

The time passed swiftly and pleasantly. No one could be permanently dull with Mr. Richmond about. Always in the best of spirits and anxious for nothing but his wife's comfort and pleasure, he made Stella's existence a perfect romance. At first she could not understand being never found fault with. Margaret had always been reproving her for some quixotic or unconventional behaviour, and Mr. Leslie's idea of keeping every one " up to the mark " often entailed a scold-

ing, however kindly it was meant. But Stella in Mr. Richmond's eyes was like a queen and could do no wrong. She could not help being sad sometimes, and her sensitiveness to barometric conditions, which later on was greatly intensified, first showed itself on the voyage. Sometimes it seemed impossible for Stella to join in the games as usual, and she would go to her cabin to think of her father and friends at home, and Mr. Richmond would be terribly grieved to find her in tears. But, invariably, while he was trying to cheer her, the pattering drops on the deck above would announce a coming storm, and Stella would laugh and say, "It is that beastly rain again. I shall be all right directly."

"Then put on your waterproof and come and look at the splendid storm effects from the deck. The sea is marvellously grand just now and I had come down to fetch you. The captain is quite angry because I smiled as I looked round at the tumultuous scene, and said it was 'unseemly' to laugh when a storm might presently overwhelm us. I suppose if there is one he will, as usual, be as gloomy as an owl till it is over. But the sea is always an inspiration to me and I could wish for no more glorious grave. Why don't these 'saved' people trust in the guiding hand and show their religion in their lives?"

Most of their companions on board were either returning colonists or going to friends who had kept them well informed on colonial topics. But to Stella and her husband the life awaiting them was a perfect blank.

Stella would picture herself working very hard in the Sunday-school if there was one, and striving to make the Church popular, even if it should be a very ordinary affair. She was always successful in everything she undertook, and would devote herself entirely to helping her husband in his work—that was in fact her sole

motive in marrying him. "Success always comes to those who deserve it," her father had instilled in them all from childhood, "failure being the fitting reward of fools and incapables."

It was a lovely afternoon in the early summer when the ship entered Port Jackson, and every one came up on deck to see the welcome land. Mr. Richmond was in the highest spirits, and pointed out to Stella the two Alderney cows stretching their heads out of their stalls to see the green foliage that covered the shores on either side. "How the poor beasts will enjoy browsing in a field again after being cooped up so long! just as much as we shall revel in a long walk," said Mr. Richmond.

Lots of small boats were seen approaching the vessel as she slowly sailed down the harbour, and one was pointed out to Mr. Richmond as containing members of the committee of the church he represented. What looked like a gold mace of office was in the hands of a gentleman in the stern, which, as the boat came nearer, turned out to be a splendid bunch of the small yellow sugar bananas for Mrs. Richmond, the first she had seen or tasted. Soon there were shaking of hands and congratulations, and Stella found herself in lively conversation with them all, and was carried off with Mr. Richmond to the house of one of the chief supporters of the church, where they were to be entertained for a few days.

One of the group handed Stella a parcel of letters from home, her father's containing the duplicate of a bank-draft that Mr. Leslie had given Mr. Richmond the day they left.

"I always mete out even justice to my children," said Mr. Leslie, "and it is for the same amount that I gave Alice on her wedding day, and it will ensure you a comfortable home on your arrival."

The new minister and his wife were welcomed with effusion. Stella, although quiet and unassuming, could not fail to know that there was a striking difference between herself and the ordinary poor minister's wife. Her trousseau, packed in several cases, could not have been more complete and expensive if she had been the bride of a rich Sydney merchant; their combined wedding presents took a case to themselves, while Mr. Richmond's books filled two more.

Her idea of the work that lay before her husband was that of a teacher. She had suffered so much from cruel dogmas in her childhood that she longed not only to learn herself, as she intended, from every sermon preached, but also to help others to examine for themselves the foundations of the orthodox faith, and to know something of the new light that science and scholarly criticism were throwing on the Bible. Theodore Parker's books were her constant companions on the voyage, and although she had heard that he had greatly suffered for his opinions, especially concerning slavery, and had been driven out by his congregation, still that had only helped him to gain a wider and larger audience, and he had been "successful" enough to even satisfy her father. So with Emerson he had to leave the Unitarian Church, as his views were too broad and lofty for any sect, but he had influenced the spiritual life of a whole continent.

But although she was enthusiastic, no girl was ever less fitted to properly play the rôle of a poor minister's wife, whose bounden duty it is to eagerly accept and even look for favours doled out by well-to-do members of the church. She must meet people on equal terms, not feeling either above or below any of those who formed the congregation.

From the outset Stella's heart had been drawn to some half-dozen ladies who were leaders among the rest.

Through all her coming trials these remained most steadfast and faithful friends to them both. A new meaning to the word "friend" was shown to her later on, when she realized that out of the crowd of people who shared her father's overflowing hospitality not one of them had ever been put to the test as these faithful, cherished few, and probably would have deserted him as summer friends fell away from the young minister and his wife when a critical moment arrived.

To secure friends who would be faithful to you even if you had to shelter in a hovel "far outweighed," Stella said, "the pain and tribulation she had passed through."

But for the present and immediate future there was nothing but cordial appreciation of them both, the only jarring note in Stella's mind being caused by talk of a church feud that had been raging furiously for a long time before their arrival. Stella thought "bygones should be bygones" and deprecated all mention of the church's past, a small community like this being, in her opinion, scarcely worth dividing over anything. She had never been concerned in any quarrels of the kind, and at the Old Meeting the mass of the congregation heard nothing of the various contretemps that occurred behind the scenes. She had to learn that small pots soon boil, and that for a good "row" no ground is so fertile as that of a small congregation, especially one that has got its hand in, so to speak. She wanted for her husband "a fair field and no favour," and did not doubt the result for a moment.

All the troubled past, however, seemed forgotten in the morning that Mr. Richmond preached his first sermon. The little church was well filled with intelligent, well-dressed people and the new minister made an excellent impression. He was so manly, so earnest, so full of strength and vigour that a fresh access of life

seemed to be brought into the old building. The sermon was as new to Stella as to the rest of the congregation, and she was one of her husband's most earnest listeners. It gave an indication of the work he hoped to do in this new land. He promised to give his hearers of his best and keep them acquainted with the views of the great thinkers of the day on the all-absorbing topics cast before them by the rapidly advancing tide of scientific discovery.

"In a transition age, like the present," said Mr. Richmond, "this church should be a centre of liberalism, the meeting-ground for all truth seekers, where, untrammelled by fixed creed or dogma, subjects that are tabooed elsewhere might be examined freely and fearlessly." That, in fact, was the only *raison d'être* of a congregation like theirs. The right of private judgment was a most sacred inheritance and, while claiming the fullest freedom for himself, he merely wished to hold the position of a teacher, desiring no one to be bound by his opinions. They were all learners in the great school of God, and it was their duty and privilege to "prove all things and hold fast that which is good."

Finally, he urged his hearers to strive after a lofty ideal in their daily life, "to hitch their wagon to a star" as Emerson puts it—to live in charity, that is love, with all men, slow to judge, quick to sustain and help, and all the promises of the Gospel should be theirs. The Sermon on the Mount contained the essence of every true religion, and it mattered little what people called themselves so long as they were possessed of the spirit of Christ's teaching. For themselves they would doubtless have to undergo, as the pioneers of unpopular truths much misrepresentation and calumny. History repeats itself and those in the vanguard were ever subject to the fiercest blows. "But," said the preacher, with en-

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thusiasm, his face lit up with spiritual fervour, "if we can help to relieve the world of the incubus of fear that a gloomy theology has cast around, and bring people out into the sunshine of God's love, all this is nothing. In the words of the Master we can 'rejoice and be exceeding glad, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.' "

CHAPTER XVII

IT is doubtful if among Mr. Richmond's hearers that morning there were more than half a dozen who understood the full import of his earnest deliverance. Every one was pleased, and the few reading men who kept themselves in touch with advanced religious thought were enthusiastic. It soon spread through the city that a dashing young preacher had arrived in their midst, and many a stray thinker dropped in, Nicodemus-like, at the evening services, but orthodoxy was too strong, and the little church too insignificant and unpopular, for many outsiders to be permanently attracted.

But, apart from the satisfaction that encouraging tokens of success afford, Mr. Richmond, like most men with a mission, was little affected by praise or censure. His only concern was that his message should be given as clearly and forcibly as lay in his power, leaving results to the "guiding hand" he so implicitly trusted in. No one was less disposed than he to talk "shop" or assume the ministerial rôle, but no preacher was ever more deadly in earnest. Out of the pulpit he was the most simple and unconventional of men, ready to join in any sport that was going, but in some way leading a life apart, as he never smoked and would take a glass of water where others had strong drinks. "I made up my mind when a lad," he used to say, "never to touch

intoxicating liquors or to smoke, and at the University it required all my tenacity of will to keep my vow, especially that of non-smoking. It seemed as if in self-defence I must take a pipe when I was in the midst of a jovial evening, every fellow but myself in the room puffing out volumes of smoke. I am so splendidly well, however, that I see no reason to alter my procedure in this respect."

It seemed to Stella as if he had, so to speak, conquered the world, for he appeared absolutely indifferent to almost everything she had been accustomed to or deemed necessary. How she wished sometimes that he had had some portion of her severe training in the direction of *savoir faire*. With her, every gesture, every movement in the drawing-room, or at the dinner table, in the street or public assembly, had been under strict control from the time she could remember anything, and she realized the disadvantage to their chance of success with a feeble congregation that the lack of this in her husband must be. But Mr. Richmond was miles ahead of her in spiritual power and grace, and so devoted a husband that she vowed to herself that no word of complaint or even advice should ever cross her lips. He was too large-souled a man to be suddenly turned round. It might take years for her to adapt herself to the new surroundings her marriage implied—she had to grow to them—but nothing should ever mar the romance his love had cast round her. He should never suspect even that she did not find that love came after marriage, although her admiration for his character and ability did not abate one jot. The all-absorbing love that others spoke of might grow with the passing years.

It was soon evident that life in Australia on a small income was entirely different to the same conditions in a provincial town in England. Mr. Peters and his wife had

but a slightly larger stipend than their own at the Old Meeting in Laceborough, but the rent of their pretty villa was only twenty-five pounds a year, and living was at least a third less, and the wages of their healthy country servant amounted to seven pounds a year. In Sydney a similar house would be a hundred pounds a year and, very regretfully, Stella had to give up her idea of an excellently managed and attractive household on a small scale, as the one desideratum—a decent dwelling—was denied her. It seemed at first impossible to live in the few miserable rooms that constituted the minister's dwelling-house. Two poor vestry and committee rooms had been added on to, both above and below, with the result that the place was like a continuous passage, where it would be almost impossible to preserve order and decency. The kitchen was a mere lean-to, and there was no wash-house, just a portable copper set up outside the kitchen steps. The worst part to Stella was the outlook, or rather the want of an outlook; for both sides of the house opened on to a narrow passage with a high fence down the whole length with not a vestige of view. One handsome tree at the end of the passage to the side door afforded her only gratification. She would sit and gaze at that, and let her thoughts wander to Crofton and imagine the walk by the river-side, the glorious elms and the carpet of forget-me-nots.

But when once Stella saw that the position was inevitable, that they could not possibly afford to pay rent and meet the great expense of living and pay their servant the ten shillings a week demanded, she set about to make the place as attractive as possible, and very soon transformed it into what she termed "a habitable rabbit warren." Mr. Richmond's good-humour never deserted him. He was an excellent amateur carpenter and devoted himself to making everything as ship-shape as

possible, and arranged a "den" for himself at the end of the church, where he could have his writing table and books. Stella was a capable manager in every way, and with her own hands made her bedroom quite a beautiful place with the careful of lace her friends at home had supplied, the ladies of the congregation thinking there was not a prettier bedroom in Sydney, and she tried to maintain as much order and beauty at the dinner table and in her little drawing-room as she had been accustomed to at home. She had every requisite for the purpose, but her handsome wedding gifts seemed dreadfully out of place in the "rabbit warren," she thought. Life, however, went on quite smoothly and happily. The young couple were never without invitations or friendly callers, who would come to luncheon or tea, and have supper after the evening service with their young minister. One charming young married lady, Mrs. Arbuthnot, was like a sister to Mrs. Richmond. She and her husband were almost the only church attendants who mixed in the upper circles of Sydney life. She took Mrs. Richmond to the Government House receptions and introduced her to her friends. Stella thought her the most charming woman she had ever met, and they soon became constant companions. Mr. Richmond, too, was sought out and called upon by gentlemen who sympathized with his views, were perhaps subscribers to the revenue of the church, for but family reasons could not give open adherence. But Mr. Richmond was not a society man, and as Stella would not go out without him or accept hospitality she could not return, they gradually looked to their congregation only to form their immediate circle.

But Mrs. Arbuthnot remained ever the same. She was about Stella's own age, but had been married in her teens and had already three or four tiny children around

her. Stella regarded her as the loveliest woman she had known, and the least conceited. Although she had the face and demeanour of a society beauty, she cared very little for her dress and appearance, and would carry her baby about the streets of the city with the most perfect nonchalance.

Stella often thought her father's ideas of propriety would be somewhat changed if he could see her friend, so beautiful, so well-bred and highly connected, taking her baby in her arms when she wanted to do some shopping and leaving the other three ruffians, as she called them, in charge of the nurse. She told Stella she had even done the washing when her "general" left her in a huff, though she found it dreadful back-aching work. She did not mind the "rabbit warren" in the least, though she lived in a proper house herself with large sitting-rooms like Stella had been used to, and would come and stay to lunch or dinner, quite enjoying Stella's dainty dishes, and her cheery presence was like an invigorating tonic to the already anxious minister's wife.

Then there were other families that lived further away who equally shared Stella's affection, and there were, of course, the cantankerous few who resented their minister's wife's intimacy with people superior to themselves, and whom Stella always tried to placate.

"It will never do to care a bit about what stupid people say or think," Mrs. Arbuthnot would say to Stella. "You must try and be as elastic as an india-rubber ball, and keep a steady smooth exterior whatever bumps you get."

The Sunday services went on well. As the winter approached, Mr. Richmond announced several courses of evening lectures, and the place was thronged with eager listeners to his startling and incisive criticism

on Old Testament history, many in Sydney to this day dating their first glimmer of light on the historical books of the Old Testament to what they termed Mr. Richmond's "splendid addresses."

Stella worked hard in the Sunday-school, and, although the conditions were entirely different to those at the Old Meeting, had the satisfaction of seeing the numbers in attendance increase until they reached a larger maximum than ever before. There were no poor girls to be helped in the Sunday-school at Sydney. It was composed principally of the children of the congregation, whether rich or poor, and all of them were as well or better off than Stella herself. There was no need for her to make warm winter petticoats for her girls as she did in Laceborough, and she remembered regretfully how she and her scholars all laughed the morning they wore the quilted skirts she had worked so hard at, as they bunched the girls out so much there was hardly room for the full number on the narrow forms.

But she loved young people so greatly that, soon after she was settled in her tiny home, she invited all young girls in the church who were interested in needlework to come and spend one afternoon in each week with her, when she would instruct them in any kind of plain or fancy work they chose.

Those afternoons were redeeming features in Stella's life. Mrs. Arbuthnot would come and other grown-up ladies, perhaps, to show how they wanted some work carried out, and then all would have tea in relays, and help the maid to wash up. There was never a word about religion, but "love," the heart of it, was there, and decades of years afterwards these same girls, heads of households themselves, retained their affection for Mr. Richmond and his wife.

The young minister was quite a hero among them all.

He was exceedingly fond of animals, and never minded if a dog followed his owner to church and walked up the aisle and lay down there, looking up with the rest at the minister in his pulpit. Mr. Richmond did not get fidgety and excited, and desire the wardens to turn the brute out, but explained that he set his eye upon him and kept him under control all through the service.

"There's never a bark out of a dog when I'm there, and want him to keep quiet," said Mr. Richmond, with his sunny smile.

But even at that early stage the new minister's fearless utterances in the pulpit alarmed some of the weaker vessels. One afternoon's call Stella always remembered as the first startling evidence that some of the congregation were beginning to be afraid of what outsiders would think of them. It was the preliminary herald of a storm, and this man's words proved to be the cloud not bigger than a man's hand on the clear horizon of her new life at the Antipodes. He was a most estimable man, too, but not anxious for truth so much as keeping things smooth. He evidently did not care to tackle Mr. Richmond, but opened his heart to Stella, whom he liked, and he was indeed most anxious to have no jarring note in the church.

"These Sunday evening lectures, I fear, Mrs. Richmond, are going to do us a lot of harm. You see the ground opened up is quite new to Sydney and to the majority of pew-holders, and Mr. Richmond's views are far beyond those of most of his contemporaries," quoting a few well-known fossils something on a par with the old minister of Stella's early days, whose sermons seemed all alike in stupidity, and want of definite meaning.

Stella was up in arms at once in defence of her hus-

band's position, and said she really did not see what value the church was but for its work as a pioneer of advanced thought. She never remembered meeting any one in Laceborough who resented the most advanced sermons given at the Old Meeting—the more advanced the better—and she asked herself if this was the church that they hoped would contain sturdy-minded people ready to carry the flag of the right of private judgment to a triumphant issue.

This gentleman was a representative of what Stella afterwards named the "left wing" of the congregation, and, although a worthy individual, the last man in the world who should have joined a church without a creed, and which represented freedom of thought. He "didn't want these subjects discussed," he "didn't want to be taught," he said, and "had no desire to make converts."

"I wonder you don't belong to an orthodox church," said Stella, "where everything is settled for you. You don't see, I think, what wonderful times we are living in, and that this is the only place in Sydney where the great upheaval that is going on at home concerning these very questions can be openly discussed. Why, Mr. Richmond is stopped in the street by perfect strangers and thanked for the great work he is initiating. It is only the beginning of an important movement that will rapidly extend in Australia, and I feel sure," said Stella, with tears in her eyes, "that it is our mission to help it on."

"Well, honestly, I don't care about 'the man in the street' and his enlightenment," retorted her friend.

"That is very ungenerous of you," said Mrs. Richmond gravely, "and I feel it is the hardest thing of all to have discouragement in our own household."

This gentleman stayed to tea and was apparently

as friendly as ever, but Stella distrusted him ever after, and knew that later on he was one of those who would have driven Mr. Richmond from his pulpit if possible.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER a time a little daughter opened her soft dark eyes upon the world, and her birth was the herald of much kindness to Stella from every one connected with the church. It seemed as if they all remembered she was far away from her people, and vied with each other in making their minister's wife as happy as possible. Her friends at home did not forget her. A large box arrived from England containing the most dainty garments imaginable, some of them made by Margaret herself, for the little one, and a lot of new music was put in by Mr. Leslie with the hope that Stella was keeping up her singing.

Her father wrote to her nearly every month—one of his practical common-sense letters, containing generally words of sound worldly advice as well as kindly greeting, and caution against being led away with a little temporary fuss that new arrivals occasioned.

Stella had said all the good things she could about her Sydney life, the kindness of the people, her hopes for the future, but always deplored the absence of the great forest trees she delighted in. She did not then know the beauty of the Australian Bush, and the bare straggling eucalypti in the neighbourhood of Sydney disappointed her, although, later on, she learned to love the weird old gum trees and the fern gullies on the mountains almost as much as Crofton itself. Her letters

were posted all round the circle of friends in England, and her father appeared to be more reconciled to the marriage, and to have nothing but pleasant memories of them both. But Stella did not tell him how she had lost the brilliancy of her voice, and had never sung again as in her father's house.

With every advancing year Mr. Richmond threw himself more ardently, if that were possible, into his work. His courses of evening lectures went on, and he was gradually getting a regular attendance at them of hard-headed thinkers, many of them superior artisans with their wives and families. But in his ordinary discourses it was something more than a conventional morality that he preached. It was, as he indicated in his opening discourse, the need of a lofty ideal in daily life that he constantly urged upon his hearers. Weary women who were daily teachers, perhaps, or went to business all the week, or those who had to provide for large families out of scanty incomes, often told Stella how her husband's exhortations helped them all through the week. One sermon dwelt in Stella's memory like the one she had heard in her girlhood about the daily round of duty becoming a flower-strewn path, and enabled her in the coming struggle to snatch a blessing from every fresh trial, and thus let her spirit grow instead of being crushed by the lack of worldly success.

She never remembered exactly how the sermon was brought round from the text "For where your treasure is there will your heart be also," but she found herself deeply moved by the closing sentences, which rose to a high standard of fervid oratory. There was, the preacher assured them, a treasure to be extracted from every trial, a treasure of forgiveness for every unjust aspersion, a treasure of love for all bitterness and hate, a treasure

of resignation under every loss, a treasure of trust when the elements lower and everything we deemed indispensable to our happiness is swept away—the same idea, Stella thought, that Shakespeare puts into the exiled duke's philosophical speech in the forest of Arden—

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in its head.

As the congregation went out Stella thought she saw a softened look in the eyes of most of them, and she turned to her daily work with more courage than before.

Mr. Richmond was gradually becoming known outside his own church, and he was invited to give a lecture on a week evening in one of the public halls of the city. He prepared an interesting address to accompany some large diagrams he had brought from England of ancient Assyrian cities, in the course of which he touched upon Biblical history, but in so mild and harmless a form, it seemed to Stella and others who heard it, that they were quite astounded to find Mr. Richmond's lecture the subject of a scathing leader in one of the morning journals, including a complaint that a public hall should be desecrated by heretical utterances.

To a number of the weaker vessels in the congregation, and those who had not inquired for themselves into these matters, it was a terrible thing to be condemned by the leading newspaper of the city. It was really a good means of securing publicity for the views which the church was supposed to hold, and if the majority of members of the church had been the sturdy pioneers expected in a new country, a great opportunity had occurred.

Mr. Richmond, undaunted as ever, rejoiced that his words had been faithful enough to rouse some sleepy

souls to action. "I always know I have done well when I am more abused than usual," he said, with imperturbable good-humour, and he was strongly supported in his views by a small but faithful phalanx of fervent admirers, who rejoiced in his steadfastness and earnestness.

But the alarmed "Left" was not to be lightly disregarded, and many who had never found anything to object to in Mr. Richmond's discourses were now on the alert to discover some new heresy in every fresh sermon. It was strange that one of his noblest deliverances proved to be the subject of attack, and it came from a wealthy adherent of the church, who was quite uneducated and would have found fault with the Angel Gabriel in the pulpit, if he had not duly remembered that he received his living out of the pockets of his hearers, and was not becomingly subservient both in his ideas and demeanour.

Stella had always been rather shocked by this person's lack of grammar and correct pronunciation. It startled her to hear of "a happple pudding," and to be told she could get "a homnibus" down the street, though it was not in her nature to make fun of people's ignorance which generally arose from lack of opportunity. But it did seem incongruous to her that the first serious trouble in the church arose from this member's objection to one of the most elevating discourses ever given by Mr. Richmond.

That lecture, and even the opening words of it, are still remembered by many of his hearers. The subject was "Inspiration" in its broadest sense, and the speaker's eloquence and enthusiasm had never been surpassed as he dwelt on the long procession of prophets and seers which from the most ancient times to the present had led the race onward. Moses, Elijah and all the prophets,

Jesus, Socrates and our own Shakespeare, had held the torch aloft to guide our footsteps, he declared, while a whole army of lesser lights showed the universality of the indwelling Spirit of God, who never left himself without a witness in the world. "True prophets are always poets and true poets seers," said Mr. Richmond, "for they tell us of a world where all meanness and hate, the narrowing lust of gold and the faithless coldness of the times, shall give way to the larger heart, the kindlier hand, and we shall realize what it is to bask in the sunshine of God's eternal love."

There was a solemn hush in the church as Mr. Richmond sat down. If applause had been permissible, he would have been greeted with ringing cheers; but this disaffected member went home full of indignation that "a hignorant young man, whose living depended on the voluntary gifts of the congregation, should dare to mention Jesus and Shakespeare in the same sentence." This person did not probably know a line of Shakespeare, or that if any one can claim inspiration in this world the bard of Avon must be in the first rank. It was enough that he was a play actor and that his pieces were performed at the theatres.

"Never shall another penny of our money go to support that young man in his folly," was the wrathful decision arrived at. "I am sorry for his wife, poor thing. She has seen better days, and would never do anything to bring discredit on the church. I shall never enter that place again, and the committee must be informed that our subscriptions cease from this date, and I have no doubt that many others will follow suit. What does he think his salary is for, if not to preach as we like? He is our paid servant."

CHAPTER XIX

IT was a fortunate circumstance that about this time one of the early founders of the church, a gentleman by birth and education, gifted with the rare faculty of insight and of high professional and social reputation in Sydney, returned to the colony and threw the weight of his influence entirely on the side of truth and freedom. Mr. Macalister had studied deeply the religious controversies of the time and knew the drift and meaning of attacks like those recently made on Mr. Richmond. He was not so much a champion of the minister as of freedom of thought, and recognized that the spirit displayed by Mr. Richmond's detractors was the same that had driven men like Theodore Parker and Emerson out of their pulpits. So, although there were alarming gaps in the pews, and the church's revenue had been materially lessened by withdrawals, the remainder of the congregation took courage, Mr. Richmond declaring he was prepared to take whatever salary was forthcoming so long as the battle for freedom of speech could be fought out.

To Stella it was the first step in a long martyrdom. She would not, however, have had things different. That a man, who in his daily life was so near perfection in his absolute unselfishness, who had devoted his great gifts to the furtherance of what he held to be an all-important factor in the development of humanity,

should be so maligned, misunderstood and harshly treated, stirred her nature to its depths. It was her first bitter taste of the lesson she had to learn so completely of the utter worthlessness of much so-called friendship, but it also gave her a glimpse of how much real love and goodness there is in the world, and she drew closely to her the faithful few who rallied round her in the dark hours of her intense grief and disappointment.

She had everything to learn, she found, while Mr. Richmond seemed to dwell in a serene atmosphere to which she could not yet attain, though all the while he placed her on a pedestal and simply worshipped her and the little children that were quickly coming to share their frugal home. To outsiders, perhaps, there was not much martyrdom. No! that was carried on out of sight in the depths of her spiritual nature. The first lesson to learn was that the ideas she had been reared in from her infancy concerning success and failure were erroneous, that failure in the world's eyes might be the most brilliant success, and that an enormous worldly success might prove a gigantic failure under the celestial scrutiny that examines motives and aspirations.

When she had battled through to the light after years of mental anguish she could look back and rejoice over that time of tribulation. Carlyle understood all about it when he wrote the words she had often read so glibly in her girlhood: "Mountains of encumbrance, higher than Etna, had been heaped over that Spirit; but it was a Spirit and would not lie buried there. Through long days and nights of silent agony, it struggled and wrestled with a man's force to be free; how its prison mountains heaved and swayed tumultuously as the giant spirit shook them to this hand and that and emerged into the light of Heaven."

She found her great solace in work. *Laborare est*

orare had always been a favourite motto, and her truest worship was in days of arduous labour for the church and her home and children. There were no spare funds for choir-master or even organist, and she took her share in the musical services of the church, finally undertaking them entirely. But it was hard to see dwindling congregations in the morning, even old and faithful attendants preferring the brightness and cheerfulness that a crowded church affords, though the evening lectures were always well attended.

“A church with a downhearted congregation is the most awful thing in the world to have to devote yourself to, ‘a perfect hell upon earth,’ as my father put it, ‘to any one with energy and independence,’” Stella would sometimes confess to her faithful friend, Mrs. Arbuthnot. “There is nothing to show for work done, and one is never sure of being able to pay the butcher or the baker or buy the children’s shoes.”

At that time she was feeling, as Carlyle expresses it in his *Reminiscences*, “so eagerly desirous of some humblest anchorage in the finance way among her fellow creatures—to find any honest employment by which one might regularly gain daily bread. The practical world seemed closed against her as if with brazen doors and she must perforce stand there and perish idle !” Not idle in the technical sense, for never were busier fingers than hers. Not a morsel of waste was allowed in that small household, but everything turned into dainty dishes that no rough servant must be trusted with lest she should waste any portion of the joint to be made to serve for the third day’s meal ; not a piece of material to be passed over that would make a child a presentable garment.

How she wondered at the callous way she and Margaret used to discard their half-worn dresses, while with

her now even the linings and trimmings were washed and renovated, and nothing bought until it was absolutely demonstrated that she had used up every bit of stuff available. By daylight she would be unpicking and cleaning some coat or dress that she would transform into a child's pretty costume, and through the long years of trial it was a great consolation that the children were always well cared for. There was not a penny to spend on toys or sweetmeats, but there were no happier children in the world than Mr. Richmond's. Stella would be too tired sometimes to joke and laugh, but there was a perpetual game going on when the children and their father were together. The fun he would make for them at table from every incident that occurred was inconceivable—then there were the picnics, when races were run, and, best of all, the wonderful stories told to them at bedtime, which were the daily delight of the children. "I can never understand," said Stella sometimes, "how the children are so good and obedient when you seem just like a big playfellow and nothing more."

"Oh, I have a very simple rule for that," Mr. Richmond would say. "Never threaten without performing, don't often threaten, not at all if you can help it, and always keep your promises."

* * * * *

When looking over her past life it seemed to Stella that at various times some friendly hand would be put forth to help her over a difficult place just when she was ready to sink by the way. Stella accepted the proffered aid eagerly and gratefully, but did not then realize, as was fully revealed to her later on, that our paths are guarded all the while by unseen helpers, that we are in fact "compassed about" by "a cloud of witnesses," as Paul tells us. But Stella was at that time a most

pronounced materialist, her husband's spiritual assurances being regarded by her as pleasant dreams, nothing more.

It was like a happy coincidence, therefore, when just as she was longing for definite work, a most pleasant and unexpected event happened. She was always delighted to be told that Mrs. Macalister was in the little drawing-room waiting to see her. On the feminine side she was just as remarkable for the steadfast liberality of her views as her husband, whose speeches at the church meetings always acted like a tonic on the more feeble minded. In addition, their daily lives appeared to Stella absolutely perfect and consistent, full of thought for others, and altogether superior to those of ordinary people, whether professed Christians or not. They seemed to dwell in the upper regions of thought and aspiration, never deflected for a moment by the criticism or sneers of more worldly-minded people from what they considered to be truth and justice. Mrs. Macalister was just past middle life, but still retained much of the beauty of her youth, with the sweetest expression in her soft dark eyes that Stella had ever seen.

"I have come this afternoon, Mrs. Richmond," her visitor began after the usual salutation, "to see if you would care to teach my youngest little girl of eight, and my granddaughter, Elsie Arbuthnot, about a year younger, in the morning only. It is difficult to know what to do with them, as we don't care for large schools; and still it is better discipline for the children to go out to lessons than to be taught at home, where interruptions always arise unless there is a room entirely given up to the governess."

"There is nothing I should like better," said Stella, full of eagerness; "but do you think I can teach them properly? I have, of course, had what was considered

a good education, and I am quite a French scholar, and know German fairly well, and I have been trained in a good musical school—I was in the midst of good music from the time I can remember and had the best teaching—but I have never taught anywhere but in the Sunday-school.”

“ Well, the children love to listen to you on Sundays, and that was one thing that suggested you as a regular teacher for them. I am quite sure you can do it well, or I should not have asked you,” said Mrs. Macalister.

Stella would like to have put her arms round Mrs. Macalister's neck and told her how much she had suffered the last year or two and had been longing for some definite work. But she could not explain to any one how hard she was trying to school herself to the life she had voluntarily undertaken. It was one of the secrets of her prison-house that was never revealed until she had come out into the fuller light, and it is besides a condition of spiritual growth that the battle must be fought out alone. Each must have his own garden of Gethsemane. But she said, with the bright smile now but rarely seen upon her face, that she would gladly accept the position.

It was arranged that she should teach the little girls English, French and music, and Stella was in the seventh heaven that day, not only because she would have some definite aim in life, but that she should be helping their financial position. She had been obliged to have a nurse-girl for the little children. Whatever happened, she could not bring herself to leave them to tumble about, dirty and uncared for, in the kitchen all the time she was away—and her church as well as household duties were endless. So she thought how the money earned would pay the nurse three times over. Her new pupils were besides most lovable children and well

brought up; it would be a perfect joy to her to teach them. And so it proved.

Before they came the next morning, Stella had drawn up a plan of work, and made up her mind as a leading feature that everything that was attempted should be done thoroughly, also that she would in some way make the lessons so attractive that they would take real pleasure in them. Stella enjoyed her first morning of teaching better than she ever dreamt of. She took Mr. Richmond's blackboard and chalk that he used for a young men's evening class and gave the children the first outlines of arithmetic on it, and taught them to copy on their slates the simple sum she had set down, and gave them their first ideas of numeration, and she decided to give them a short music lesson every day. She had been so well trained in all the details of the way the hands should be held, fingering, and the theory generally, that she knew exactly how to begin, and she determined that these pupils of hers should never be allowed to strum or play a single bar badly. For the other branches of education—reading, geography and history, spelling and grammar and French—Stella laid out similar plans, and the little girls followed her instructions eagerly all the morning. It would be difficult to say who enjoyed this first attempt at teaching the most, the scholars or their enthusiastic teacher.

When Stella had dismissed her school, she rushed to Mr. Richmond's den and threw her arms round his neck, saying, "I have found my vocation at last. I never enjoyed a morning so much in my life."

After a time two or three other ladies brought their little girls to Stella's morning class. The mothers were all dear friends of hers, and each pupil seemed a token of goodwill as well as an addition to their scanty income, and was welcomed with enthusiasm. But the

work gave her even more pleasure than the money, and she never forgot how her cheeks flushed when she received the cheque at the end of the quarter from Mrs. Macalister. It was the first money she had ever earned, and she felt that another dividing line had been reached in her life.

CHAPTER XX

"I CAN'T let you do all this work unaided," said Mr. Richmond to his wife when the sixth pupil had been entered on her list. "I will take entire charge of the mathematical studies. It will be an interesting thing to see what can be done with girls in that department of education if you catch them early," he added, laughing quietly to himself. "I don't see why they should not equal the boys, if they have the same amount of teaching. A smattering is no use, and it is there the mistake is made in supposing that less time will suffice for a girl than a boy to become proficient. I will give them an hour every morning, so send them along at eleven to my den with slates and pencils."

"Oh, that will be splendid!" said Stella. "I was wondering how to get in all the music lessons, and had arranged to let some of them come earlier. Now I can give from eleven to one for correcting exercises and music lessons, and you must let me have the youngest at half-past eleven for hers. Half an hour with you will be enough for little Elsie."

It was a long cry from Mr. Richmond's breaking the ground on that eventful morning to the Senior Examination at the University a decade later, when two of that band of children were in the first class with prizes and honours, only one boy being found equal to them. With some of the girls the task seemed at first hopeless,

and Mr. Richmond would often emerge from the Euclid lesson covered with chalk and almost in despair at their density. But the steady work of each day told in the long run. Line upon line in every department of education during those many years was the stock of the children's knowledge increased, no step being allowed to be taken onward until the ground was secure beneath their feet in the steadily advancing path. And there could not be found a happier band of pupils and teachers. As the children's powers increased, Stella found she must herself diligently study the next day's lessons for fear she should be caught tripping, and as she always had her "University man" at her elbow, as she laughingly called Mr. Richmond, she was educating herself all the while.

As the girls got into the intricacies of English grammar, with its hair-splitting reasons why the same words should be ever so many different parts of speech according to its position in a sentence, Mr. Richmond procured the best textbooks available for his wife, and Stella became as interested in mastering every detail of the English language as in reading the most entrancing novel. Sometimes she would have to rush into her husband's den, book in hand, to be quite sure her decision was correct, when perhaps each girl was giving a different reason why it should be the reverse.

Mr. Richmond always took the opportunity of folding her in his arms and kissing her, and would say, "Just to see you about, darling, is a constant heaven to me;" and she would hurry back, happy and generally fortified in her contention that a certain word was in that sense a pure adverb, conjunction, or preposition.

Then on bright winter or early spring days, Mr. Richmond would sometimes come into the schoolroom before work began, and say the weather was really too glorious to be poring over books. "Come, Stella," he would say,

"let us take all the girls and the babes and go to Bondi for lunch."

Then there was a cutting of sandwiches for those who were not provided, and the getting ready of "billy" for tea, and the putting together of cakes and fruit, and then to hail an empty omnibus and fill it, inside and out. "It was better than school," the girls said, "because they learnt new subjects." Every rock or shell or bit of seaweed Mr. Richmond could tell them something about, and he would keep the interest unflagging the whole time. But all this was later on, when a real schoolroom had been secured and about twenty girls were included in the list.

In the congregation everything went on fairly well, but, at its best, the church was like a millstone round Stella's neck that dragged her down, both in mind and body. She had found out that it was only about one person in a thousand who cared to earnestly and seriously study the questions of faith and dogma that had engrossed her own mind from childhood. What old conservative members of the church desired, principally, was that outsiders should not be shocked, and also that those inside their little enclosure should not be troubled with the discussion of questions that all the leading preachers in their denomination in other parts of the world were constantly bringing before their hearers. Current literature was full of allusions to the trials for heresy of the Revs. Rowland Williams and A. B. Wilson for articles in the celebrated volume, *Essays and Reviews*; of the deposition of Bishop Colenso by his metropolitan, Dr. Gray, Bishop of Capetown, for the publication of his *Pentateuch*, and the subsequent reversal of these judgments, and yet this church, the only one in Sydney unhampered by creeds, where such topics could be brought forward, was to be dumb.

"If it were not for the school I should go stark staring mad," said Stella to Mr. Richmond one evening. "I was told this afternoon that some of the original members are saying that the church is getting dangerously out of the old groove laid down by the former minister, who is, of course, delighted to cite all the cases he knows of persons being dreadfully shocked by your unguarded utterances. The approved policy seems to be to give both sides of the question and then leave the congregation in a fog as to what the preacher's real opinions are. It makes me sick to death. Why can't the old minister and all his ways be forgotten?" said Stella indignantly.

"It has always been the way," her husband replied very quietly, and, of course, every one acts according to his light. I really do not mind anything of the kind myself, in fact I expected it. You know, dear, sweet wife, I have gone through it all in my young days when a lot of us stood shoulder to shoulder with that brave Baptist minister I told you of, who was turned out of his pulpit for a sermon on the Atonement. Theodore Parker experienced far rougher treatment—actually had to preach with a loaded revolver on his pulpit cushion when he spoke in favour of the abolition of slavery, with almost every one's hand against him. Our little fight here is so paltry compared with these, and yet," said Mr. Richmond thoughtfully, "I wish the field were larger, that I was speaking to the many open-minded people there must be spread over Australasia.

"It may comfort you, Stella," he added, "to know that Theodore Parker experienced to the full the bitterness you are going through just now, for here in one of his sermons he gives a similar experience to our own. Ah, here it is," said Mr. Richmond, as he turned to his bookcase and took down a volume of the beloved teacher's works.

“ ‘Sometimes,’ ” Parker writes, “ ‘you see a minister mean in his behaviour. Mr. Littlefaith was a man of large intellectual powers, of costly education, and commensurate learning ; he had got over that superstition which blocked the wheels of most of his parishioners. They gave him the bread he ate, put on him the garments he wore, built him the house he lived in, paid for his costly books in divers tongues ; and by their actions when the parish came up before him, and in their prayerful-looking faces as they sat under his eye, they said, “ O Mr. Scholar, we cannot read your learned books ; we have not the time, nor the patience, nor the culture. Thrash out for us the kernel of that broad literary field, and then give us the pure precious grains of wheat, that we may also have the bread of life ; for why should we die, not only in trespasses and sins, but in superstition, in fear and trembling ? Point out the errors of our public creed, rebuke the sins of our private conduct.” And the minister communing with himself, said, “ No, Mr. Christian Parish ! If I tell you the truth I have learned and you have paid me for looking after, I shall get the hatred of such men as neither look after it, nor wish for it, nor see it. I think I shall tell you no such thing ! ”

“ ‘By and by another minister, simpler-hearted and younger, rises up. He sees the truth that the first minister saw, and with fear and trembling, with prayers and tears of agony and bloody sweat, he tells it to mankind with what mildness he may ; and the Philistines and Pharisees all cry out, “ Away with such a fellow. It is not meet he should live. If we cannot give him damnation in the next life we will roast him with our torment in this.” Mr. Littlefaith comes forward and casts the heaviest stone and persecutes the new minister with the intensest bitterness and hate. Of all the meanness I have spoken of hitherto this is the

meanest. It is meanness in the place of piety, meanness in the name of God.'"

Stella let her work drop on her knee as she listened to the reading and gazed earnestly at her husband's face, with the earnest uplifted look that had attracted her girlish fancy.

"But our fight seems so ignoble here," she said. "With the exception of the precious few, that savour the whole and save our lives from utter shipwreck, our best work is derided if it fails to gather in the shekels, and it seems at times as if we are forsaken—have missed our way. And I longed so earnestly to help others to freedom and light, to save them and their children from the incubus of fear it took me so long to escape from." And Stella put her head down and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Mr. Richmond walked up and down the little sitting-room greatly moved, his heart full of anguish at the spectacle. He seemed to see for the first time what a terrible trial this life in Sydney was to his wife, from whom he had never before heard a word of complaint. She was a mere shadow of the bright girl he had first seen in her father's home. Lines of care had settled on her brow, and her face had lost all the joyous eagerness that had attracted every one to her in the old life. Then he came and sat beside her, drawing her head on to his shoulder, and thought long and earnestly.

"I have been thinking, dear child," he said at last, "that it will be the best for you to take the children home for a trip. Life here is too hard for you altogether after your different experiences as a girl. I can raise money enough for the passage and can live on next to nothing while you are away. I must see this fight through, and I shall never desert my post or yield one

jot of my position. I am doing pioneer work here, and, thank God, shall make the path easier for all who come after me. Great or small, the contest is the same all the world over, and I will not shirk my duty. But it is the hardest thing of all to see you suffer."

"Leave you!" said Stella, springing to her feet. "Thank goodness, I have more spirit left than that. It is just the perpetual grind and want of joy in my life, always trying to endure patiently, that brings me down sometimes. Why, if you even persuaded me to get on board ship, I should be wretched by the time I got outside the Heads, and the children would be desolate without you, and how could you live without them? I shall be all right in the morning, and neither the pupils nor any one else shall know that I felt to-night as if deep waters were overwhelming me."

"But you must never feel forsaken, Stella, whatever happens. I always think that want of faith must be the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost they tell us of in the Gospels. In the darkest time I can always feel the guiding hand when, like a child crying in the night, I appeal for help and comfort."

"And you must remember, too, Stella," her husband went on, "that your work here is not wasted by any means. These young children you teach so faithfully every day will rise up and call you blessed when they look back on their early school-days, and remember the lessons of love and patience instilled into them. I don't think there is another woman in this hemisphere doing such important work so earnestly and unostentatiously. But you never did think half enough of yourself; they always told me that in Laceborough, and perhaps it is best," added Mr. Richmond thoughtfully. "Conceit is the ruin of half the people if they did but know it. Now cheer up, Stella, and tell me how it is that a rough

unworthy fellow like myself is blessed with the companionship of an angel?"

Stella looked up, smiling through her tears, and marvelled at the wonderful peace she saw on her husband's face. It was the first glimpse of "the peace that passeth understanding" that she realized later on, when her spiritual eyes were opened and years of tribulation had done the work of purification in her soul.

Now she could but wonder awe-stricken, and turn with renewed courage to the daily tasks that at this time were her only salvation.

CHAPTER XXI

MEANWHILE Mr. Richmond was working his hardest in his own sphere. With a view of reaching a wider audience than he could command within the four walls of his small conventicle, he began, at his own expense and risk, the publication of a monthly magazine devoted to the dissemination of liberal religious ideas. It was the first of its kind in Australia, and met with a cordial reception in Sydney and the leading cities of the other colonies. Two men who have since been premiers in their respective provinces—New Zealand and Queensland—sent lists of subscribers to Mr. Richmond after the receipt of the first number, and became responsible for its distribution each month, while from the other colonies letters were received containing subscriptions and congratulations on the appearance of so creditable and liberal a production. The get-up and printing were excellent, an emblematical device of the torch of truth being handed on, bearing for its motto Goethe's dying words, *More Light*, forming an attractive frontispiece.

In Sydney it was the occasion for many new friends to spring up. Among others a highly respected clergyman of the Church of England sought the acquaintance of the editor of the new venture through its publisher, and was amazed to find that Alfred Richmond was also

the minister of an insignificant church in the city—had not even heard his name until it appeared, minus the “Rev.,” on the title-page of the new magazines. But this clergyman was too broad-minded to let this stand in the way of a cordial friendship, and many were the telling articles that, under a *nom de plume*, he contributed as long as the journal went on. Two or three University men in the city also came forward and greatly helped Mr. Richmond with contributions and subscriptions, their excellent work being always signed by some name or initials that should not reveal their identity. All these subjects were so new to Sydney at this time that it would have entailed serious consequences on any one of Mr. Richmond's co-workers had their names been affixed to free-thought articles.

One day a rich squatter from the Clarence called at the printer's to ascertain the address of the editor of “that plucky newspaper,” and Stella was summoned from her teaching to be introduced to Mr. Clancy, who had at once found his way to the little half-hidden building where Mr. Richmond lived.

It was something new to Stella to see her husband the subject of such hearty congratulation as she found going on. Mr. Clancy was a well-read man, with a University degree, and was describing to Mr. Richmond how *More Light* had come up in a parcel of books from his Sydney bookseller. Stella had never seen such a man in their drawing-room before. He was handsome and dark-complexioned, of middle age, and with the air of good-breeding and abounding wealth that rich squatters, when well-born and highly educated, carry about with them.

“I am trying to persuade your husband to come back with me to the Clarence next week for a month's spell,” said Mr. Clancy to Stella, after she had shaken hands

and looked smilingly at their new acquaintance, who seemed like an old friend already. "It is a beastly shame for two people like yourselves to be wearing your lives out in this den, and for Mr. Richmond to be preaching in that miserable hole of a church. Why, you ought to be in a cathedral with those gifts of yours. I met a man just now who tells me you are the best preacher in Sydney by long chalks, and that he comes in at night whenever he can slip off unobserved from his wife and family;" and Mr. Clancy sat back and roared with laughter at the general stupidity of women-folk.

"I have a splendid homestead up at my station," he went on, "and am surrounded with books, my bookseller in Sydney having *carte blanche* to send up whatever new book comes out that is worth buying, and I get the leading magazines every month. Mine is a cattle station with about 17,000 head of cattle, and each year we send 1,700 prime young beasts overland to the Melbourne markets. Now, if you will come with me," Mr. Clancy went on, turning to Mr. Richmond, "we'll have fine times together. I'll put you in a red shirt and set you on a fine horse, and we will ride out in company and help muster the cattle."

"There's nothing I would like better," said the young minister regretfully, "but I am tied here at present. There is my magazine to be looked after, and we are considering a scheme for building a new church in a more central site. And, besides, there is no one to take my place. That is the cruel part of life in Australia: you have to fight the battle unaided. In England I have a dozen or more comrades within a few hours' railway journey that I could exchange with."

"Oh, hang it all!" said Mr. Clancy. "I can see you both take matters too seriously. Why don't you

let Mrs. Richmond take a hand at the services—or let them slide till the new building is up ? ”

Mr. Clancy's ideas were as large as his purse, and he put his name down there and then as a subscriber to the building fund of the new church, hoping Mr. Richmond would soon be in the open where people could find him out.

“ You are both of you too good to be in this hole of a place,” he said again, “ and I wonder you put up with it.”

“ Well, to tell you the truth these things affect me but little as long as I am doing the work,” said Mr. Richmond, “ and there are so few labourers in my particular field that it doesn't do to get disheartened. It takes all my time to imbue a little courage in many even of this congregation, but if all the free-thought in Sydney were spoken free-thought, I should be as flourishing as the Archbishop.”

“ One thing I looked you up for this morning, Mr. Richmond, was to ask you if you will see this pamphlet through the press for me,” said Mr. Clancy, producing a roll of manuscript. “ It is a piece of blatant free-thought I have put together at my leisure and I want to get it in print. But I must rely on your keeping its authorship a profound secret. None of my family suspects my infidel proclivities, and there would be a devil of a row at home if my name appeared on anything so iconoclastic. Just let me have the printer's bill and a dozen copies when it is out, and put the price at sixpence a copy, so that it may get spread about.”

Mr. Clancy did not expect his little brochure would meet with such a cordial reception. It was an exceedingly able production and at that time quite a novelty in Australia, and had a large sale throughout the colonies,

a number of prominent free-thinkers in Melbourne bringing out an edition on their own account.

Stella wondered much that a man like Mr. Clancy, with an assured income, should stipulate for his pamphlet to appear anonymously.

"I wish, Mr. Clancy," she said rather shyly, "that you would put your name on the title-page. I feel myself that I should not like to die without having dared to say what I believed on these all-important matters of faith and dogma. Every one seems to be suffering from a palsy of fear of what other people will think of his advanced opinions. This paltering to prejudice is in fact the curse of the age, and it has made my life in Sydney a martyrdom. I am beginning to see, however, that it is probably a necessary discipline, that I am not as strong as I ought to be until I can look on attacks made on Mr. Richmond's outspokenness with absolute equanimity. But I don't know when that will be," she added, laughing, "for there always appears to be some new and painful feature in every fresh attack that shatters my resolution of 'don't care' to atoms."

"I can't understand your putting up with it," Mr. Clancy retorted jocularly. "'A good time while you live' is my motto. But I can't bear the idea of death, and had a cold shiver when you mentioned dying so calmly just now."

"Well, it is not that I have any assurance of a hereafter," said Stella. "I have complete trust in Nature, that is all, though I fail to answer all her riddles, and find my only consolation in work and helping others. I haven't yet got any of Mr. Richmond's spiritual assurances. He looks on this life as only an incident in a long pilgrimage that souls pass through on their way to perfection, and is able to retain hope and cheerfulness whatever happens around him."

Just then the strains of a military band playing the "Dead March in Saul" came upon their ears.

"Ah!" said Mr. Richmond, rising, "it is the funeral of that poor lieutenant drowned in the harbour two days ago. Let us go to the front, Mr. Clancy, and look at it."

But their visitor was quite unable to move. He had turned livid and almost ghastly, and said, "Please excuse me, I can never look upon a funeral without turning deadly faint, and I am always coming across them in this beastly city. But I am better now, Mrs. Richmond; don't be anxious about me; it soon passes away."

"I am so sorry," Stella said, "and you will understand better perhaps why I am at least resigned to live in this hole, as you call it, when I tell you it was the desire I had to help to free people's minds from the fear of death and hell, that the churches' teaching is responsible for, that induced me to join hands with Mr. Richmond in his uphill task. It took me years to grow out of the horrors instilled into me by an evangelical clergyman and others, who seem to delight in frightening young impressionable people. But now I am convinced that whether there is a hereafter or not we are in loving hands, and can implicitly trust the future. I do not say there are no punishments or rewards, but do not they also come to us here in this life?"

Stella felt this was cold comfort to offer, but it was all she could give at that time. Years after, when Mr. Clancy was dead, and the wonders of the spiritual world had been revealed to her, she thought of her friend's livid face that morning and what an awakening his would be to the realities and beauties of the unseen world.

"But he would not have believed all the same if I could have laid the whole of my later experience before

him," Stella thought. She had found out that the Gospel parable was true, and that even if one rose from the dead to apprise his fellows of the fuller existence beyond the grave he would not be believed.

CHAPTER XXII

ALTHOUGH the publication of the new free-thought journal was responsible for bringing many earnest friends within Mr. Richmond's circle, and led to the discovery of a vast amount of latent liberal thought in Australasia waiting for some mode of expression, it made timid adherents of the church more alarmed than ever at their minister's audacity, and they began to ask each other whither he was going to lead them. The idea, however, of a new building in a more central position, previously discussed and approved in committee, was cordially endorsed at a general meeting of subscribers to the church.

In the preliminary stages of the undertaking, it had the inestimable advantage of the support and assistance of Mr. Macalister. That gentleman was a tower of moral strength wherever he appeared, and such a thing as a disgraceful "church row" could never have happened when he was in charge of affairs. But, most sadly for all concerned, he died unexpectedly and suddenly before the building had actually commenced, and Stella dated her darkest days from the time the grave closed over the man who was not only the best friend the church ever had, but a most undaunted champion of freedom of thought and speech.

Hitherto Stella had not lost any one by death whose

passing away affected her so deeply. It was a pouring wet morning when she went to sit with Mrs. Macalister while the funeral took place, and she never forgot the dreary scene of the hearse and string of mourning coaches standing in the rain and the sound of the coffin being borne out of the hall. The only funeral she could remember was that of a baby brother, and there seemed little sadness over that to her young mind. She and Margaret had decked the coffin with flowers and planted climbing roses round the grave, and seemed to have only pleasant memories of their little playfellow. But it was terrible to Stella to see the widow stricken down. She was so brave and good, too, though every one knew that half her life would be buried with him, for never were husband and wife more closely united.

It was not long before Mr. Macalister's death that at a church meeting the design for the new building was finally decided upon. Stella had gone with her latest baby to stay for a few days with Mrs. Macalister, and she remembered, as one of her dead friend's kindly actions, that on his return from the meeting late at night he got his wife to let Stella know before she went to sleep that work for the new building was thus far on its way. There was in fact no great obstacle to its final consummation. A Bill had been passed through Parliament to permit of the sale of a site allotted to the denomination for a church many years before, but never built on, around which warehouses and stores had sprung up, rendering the land valuable commercially, although unsuitable for congregational purposes. The sum obtained for this land purchased a handsome site in a good and central position, while the sale of the old edifice, standing as it did in a street full of handsome city residences, brought in about £2,000 wherewith to commence building operations.

Mr. Richmond worked heroically through the whole business. He had unflinching strength and energy, and was the moving spirit throughout. Among the congregation and outside friends of free-thought, made known through his monthly journal, he collected, with the help of warm sympathizers, over £600, for few could resist the magnetic buoyancy of his spirit. Whatever croaking went on within the church he never lost hope and confidence in the ultimate triumph of a liberal theology. And certainly all the signs of the times were with him.

Soon after Mr. Macalister's death, Stella, with senses over acute to every wave of feeling in the congregation, detected the first signs of approaching danger. She heard whispers that some of the disaffected members had united with others connected with the denomination in its early days and were trying to get up an organized opposition to Mr. Richmond's continued occupation of the pulpit, with the view of opening the new building under different auspices. Meanwhile the building was rapidly approaching completion, and Mr. Richmond and his friends were looking forward with hope and confidence to the opening of the structure as a turning-point in the chequered history of the congregation.

As the old church had passed into the hands of its purchaser, Mr. Richmond had removed to a house close to the new building, and it was almost pathetic to see how he watched every stone placed in position and rejoiced each day as the walls rose from their foundations. There was now plenty of room for their pupils, and it was more compulsory than ever for the minister and his wife to make an addition to their scanty income so as to meet the added item of high rent in their expenditure.

In spite of their unorthodox opinions fresh pupils were being constantly added to the list, the success of Mrs. Richmond's girls at the University examinations

attracting outsiders from divers denominations, as it was known that no mention of theological dogma was ever made in school hours. Every new girl was received with enthusiasm, the additional work not troubling Stella in the least so long as she could be doing something definite in the world that was of service to others. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over," would come into her mind when church worries were intermingled with the successes of her pupils at examinations and warm thanks from the parents for faithful work done. Some of these when paying their modest accounts would say, "We feel that no money can repay you for the interest you take in our girls"; while when some special work was achieved, perhaps a brilliant pianoforte duet that had taken weeks to bring to perfection, a substantial addition would be made to the cheque as acknowledgment of the great pleasure given by its performance. Their old friends knew that the Richmonds had all they could do to pay the rent and feed and clothe their children in the plainest manner.

The church services were meanwhile carried on in a large hall in the city, and that was the first opening of Stella's eyes to the advantage of a place where the public could enter freely, as, at the evening services especially, leading citizens were occasionally to be seen who had never entered the old building for fear, possibly, of being labelled as attendants at an unorthodox conventicle.

Mr. Richmond never spoke better, and the new faces he saw gathered around made up somewhat for the disappointment he had felt in having to give up his monthly journal. When there was no rent to pay, he could make up any small deficiency in the printer's bill himself, for he had nothing to depend on for the purpose

but subscriptions. But many of the subscribers were hundreds of miles away and communication between the colonies was not so rapid as at present, therefore he could not wait to hear of the number of regretful supporters of his enterprise who would have made special efforts to keep it going had they known in time. No ; there was nothing for it but to stop the issue of *More Light*, the name it had come to be known by.

By this time everything that could be done in the way of misrepresentation and abuse was in full swing among the disaffected members who were working against the minister. Mr. Richmond was as philosophic as ever, but Stella's life was a long drawn-out agony, although she was ever struggling to be brave and not to mind the cruel and unjust things she heard about her husband, that certain people seemed to be making a business of disseminating. Against his character and good name not a word could be said, but Stella learned for the first time how easy it is for evil-minded people to distort unconventional virtues into positive defects. "And this is the church," thought Stella, "for which we have both gladly given up our lives," as rumour after rumour reached her.

But, fortunately, unjust opposition of the kind only caused Mr. Richmond's adherents to be more devoted, and as for himself he set his foot upon the rock of truth and justice, and declared he would never give up the fight, would never be driven out so long as he was surrounded by faithful friends and had his own conscience to justify him.

Then church meetings were called to consider the position and to make and rebut charges, but as a majority of seatholders were persistently faithful to Mr. Richmond, other tactics had to be entered on. Then it was that an extraordinary plan of underground working was

entered upon—that of influencing the original trustees, a majority of whom had ceased to attend the church before Mr. Richmond's arrival and were anti-progressives, to prevent the completion of the new edifice by refusing to sign the necessary documents. It was an ignoble proceeding, and eminent counsel declared such a course to be illegal when the interests of a majority of seatholders and subscribers to the building fund were affected. But, in Mr. Richmond's eyes, litigation in church matters was an indefensible proceeding and not to be attempted, and he was prepared to wait calmly for the issue, whatever it might be.

The next step of the anti-progressive party was to constitute themselves as the only proper representatives of the church in Sydney, so as to eventually gain possession of the new building, and they elected a separate committee and began to hold morning services in a hall close to the one occupied by Mr. Richmond and his adherents.

What Stella suffered at that time, or the effect that it had on her future spiritual development, can never be known to any one but herself, until the gates of death are passed and the scroll of human life unrolled. She saw faces glaring at her husband at those awful church meetings that reminded her of a picture in her old home in England of Marie Antoinette on her way to execution, the passage lined by revolutionaries gloating over her misery and clamouring for her blood. Those faces distorted with diabolic hate were not a whit less fierce than some she saw among her husband's accusers.

The morning that the opposing party held their first service was engraven on Stella's mind ever after as one of intense suffering relieved, as usual, by some touching expressions of friendly love. As she walked

with her husband and little children to their service, they came upon a group of those whom she had to consider enemies but who had been until lately intimate friends. These all stood and watched with scornful look and contemptuous smiles the minister whom they were trying in vain to degrade.

If Stella could have seen the matter in its true perspective and laughed at its absurdity, it would have been far wiser and better. But she had suffered too keenly for that, and she entered their own hall ready to faint in despair at the condition of affairs. But the first person to meet her was the wife of a prominent opponent.

"What! you here, Mrs. Andover?" said Stella. "Why, I thought you would be at the other service with your husband?"

"I shall never desert Mr. Richmond as long as I live," was the reply, as Stella stood holding her hand. "I know the truth and nobility of his character, and I should be a traitor to the best within me if I swerved in my allegiance to him."

Then other well-known faces appeared, and by the time service began there was quite a large congregation, every one making a point of coming out, even at great inconvenience, to the morning gathering so as to show their sympathy with Mr. Richmond.

From a financial point of view there was also a decided improvement. The committee appointed to carry on the work on behalf of the minister received cheques from sympathizers who had never contributed before, but who had watched the course of events from the time Mr. Richmond had begun his Sydney career. Old friends, who had already paid their quarterly subscriptions, sent anew to Mr. Richmond's fund, and at each service the offertory was larger than ever before.

It was soon evident where the preaching power lay, and Mr. Richmond never spoke better than during the few months he stood up in defence of the outspoken utterance, in Sydney, of what he believed to be the truth.

CHAPTER XXIII

LITTLE by little the hard crust of materialism that had repressed the growth of Stella's spiritual nature in early years was being broken away by the troubles that fell thick and fast about her. For the first time, too, she saw deep lines of care on her husband's face. They were there from the time the works at the new church were stopped, and it seemed to her like the irony of fate for the cup to be dashed from his lips just as he was about to receive the first draught of good fortune that a decent building promised for his unceasing and unselfish labours.

For himself he cared but little, but it was agony to him for the cause he loved to be dragged in the mud. His co-workers and sympathizers were furious at the treatment meted out to the man whom they regarded as a veritable hero in the fight, and to unbiassed on-lookers the policy seemed suicidal. But for the present there was nothing to be done but to work, if anything, harder than before and wait for results.

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Stella's letters from home had always been the one joy of her life. She had never told her family of the bitterness of her existence in Sydney. They could not understand at that distance the untoward circumstances that impeded their work, and it was just as well, for the letters came like a refreshing balm from the old

home where no one knew what want meant, and they always cheered her.

But one eventful mail was for her the messenger of death, and it came like a bolt from the blue. There was no telegraphic communication in those days either with England or the other colonies, and the mail-boat would often come into Port Jackson almost unawares, the firing of a couple of guns announcing her arrival. Stella's teaching engrossed her so entirely that she had not heard the usual signal, and the postman's hurried knock and a handful of English letters was all the preparation she had for the news of her mother's death.

It was less than ten years since she left home, and no word had ever been said to prepare her for the shock. At home Mrs. Leslie's death was not unexpected, for the decline in health had been gradual; but for Stella there was no warning, and only a brief time back a box had arrived from the old home full of presents for them all, and among these some of the exquisite needlework for which Mrs. Leslie was famous.

In the batch of letters containing particulars of her mother's closing hours there was no line from Mr. Leslie. He was a man who never showed his feelings, and Stella knew that if her father could not write in matter-of-fact style as usual, he would let the mail go without a letter. Her last communication from him came a few months before, and Stella recalled this and every token of love and remembrance they had shown her during her exile as she sat in the shadow of her great grief.

"I shall not be able to take the music lessons this afternoon, Freda dear," she said to her husband, as he sat trying to console her. "I can't bear the sound of the piano to-day, but to-morrow I shall be all right and just as usual. The shock was so awful coming, too,

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just as I was begging you to stop making me laugh so much at little Lynette's antics and her recitation. Who would think a baby of four could recite like that?"

"I never saw such a rapid transformation from screaming farce to tragedy as the postman's handful of letters caused. But, dear child," said Mr. Richmond, "your mother will be nearer to you than ever now."

"I wish I could believe anything of the kind," Stella replied in a sad weary voice, "but it does me no good to deceive myself in that way. It is always best for me to face concrete facts, and the sooner I can realize that mother is taken out of my life and resign myself to the inevitable the better."

So Stella sat and dreamed the rest of the day. Her father's last letter was a characteristic one, and she took it from her desk to read over again and recalled the scene of its arrival last Christmas Eve, when she was in the depths of despair and its coming was like a messenger from the unseen to lighten her path. She had never let them know at home the straits they were sometimes in for money. Once she thought of telling her father, but Mr. Richmond's "No" was so emphatic when she mentioned the matter to him that she decided, for her husband's sake, to battle through to the end.

Besides, her father had told her of severe losses he had sustained through cotton speculations after the American Civil War. He had lost about £10,000, he said, in his dealings, as ordinary conditions were quite reversed, and his foresight and prudence had been for once at fault. But he had gathered from the tone of her letters, he said, that she was troubled and sent what seemed a magnificent present to her, timed so as to arrive about Christmas.

Festive seasons were always abhorrent to Stella in Sydney. If her purse would have permitted it, she

would have made a grand time for them all, and every friend she knew should have been remembered. But she could not even buy the children any Christmas toys. Spite of all she could do the tradesmen's bills had got beyond her control. Their money came in so fitfully that it was impossible to pay weekly, and she had a spasm of pain every time she saw the butcher's bill that had mounted up to £20, and every bit of meat seemed to choke her at the dinner table while it remained unpaid. She wouldn't spend a needless penny under those conditions, and she had sat finishing off pretty pinafores and dainty little garments that she had put extra work in so as to make them look like presents, and now sat waiting for the mail letters that the postman was delivering down the street.

"There is quite a batch for you, Stella," said Mr. Richmond, rushing in a few minutes later and sitting down beside her with his arm round her neck, while she opened first her father's business-like missive in his beautiful handwriting. A bank-draft for £100 was the first thing that met her eyes, and Stella could not read the letter for the tears that would not be kept back. Presently Mr. Richmond read out the brief note she was now holding in her hands. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR STELLA,—

"You know of old that it has always been one of my rules to treat you and your sisters with even justice in money matters. Alice has had a most trying year with the sickness and death of her husband, so I gave her a cheque for £100 to straighten up matters a little. Your letters have seemed sad lately and, anyway, I felt you were perhaps as much in need of help as Alice, so I sat down and made out a bank-draft in your name for the same amount. We are pleased to hear the good

news of the contemplated new up-to-date church in place of the antiquated one you found in Sydney, and also that the children are so bonnie. Kiss them all for their grandpa and with love to you both

“ I remain,

“ Your affectionate father,

“ RICHARD LESLIE.”

As it turned out this was the last communication Stella had from her father. In the letters containing particulars of her mother's death her father's health was not mentioned. Alice and her family had gone to live with him, as Mr. Leslie took great delight in his grandchildren, especially Phyllis, Stella's companion in the old days, who told her that grandpapa was going for his usual spring holiday early in April.

There was not much time to fret in Mr. Richmond's household. Two months elapsed from the day Stella received the news of her mother's death and she had again become deeply absorbed in her school work. The Easter vacation had just passed and the opening week of the new quarter proved an especially hard one, as in addition to the teaching a fresh time-table had to be made out, and new pupils kept Stella hard at work examining and classifying.

On the Friday evening she sat at nine o'clock in the drawing-room tired out, when Mr. Richmond came to fetch her for the light evening meal that was waiting for them below. This was the only hour in the day when husband and wife had time to exchange a few words together, and they would generally have some work for the church or school to discuss, most of their plans for the future being laid down while they drank their cocoa and leisurely got through the plate of bread and butter set before them.

But Stella could not go down to-night, she said. There was an appalling sense of impending loss and trouble over her, and she could only sob when Mr. Richmond took her hand to lead her from the room.

"You must come down, dear," said her husband in his pleading voice. "It never does to go without food and you will feel better in the light. This dark room is enough to give you the horrors."

But Stella was worse by the time she was seated at the dining-room table, and put her head down and cried as if her heart would break.

"You have had too hard a week altogether, poor child," Mr. Richmond said, stroking her hair and taking her thin hand in his strong firm grasp. "This blessed time-table and the new pupils and all the lessons on top of the church worry and work have been too much for you. Next week you will be better."

"Oh! it's not the work. I don't know what I should do without that, but the most horrible conviction has come over me the last hour or so that I shall never see father again. It has been impossible to fight against it, or shake it off."

"Oh, come, this is nonsense," said Mr. Richmond, laughing. "Why, this is the time of the year when he takes his first outing, and he is no doubt just now having the best of times at Torquay or Paris. And, besides, your father is not one to die before his time; all his family lived to be eighty at least, and he is only just over sixty."

But Stella did not easily get over that night's depression, although it did not prepare her in the least for the terrible news brought her about six weeks later, that at the time she was so overcome with grief at the bare thought of never seeing her father again, he was dying at home as unexpectedly to the rest of the family as to herself.

In the letters she received it was stated that on the Thursday night he retired to rest as well as usual. No one had been alarmed about him at any time, although it had been noticed that he had never regained his spirits from the time his wife died nearly four months before. During the night he was seized with some internal hemorrhage, and the hastily summoned doctors announced that the case was hopeless and that he had only a few hours to live. At the time that Stella was in an agony of grief about him he lay dying, the difference in the clock between England and the Antipodes bringing it to the very hour when, with senses still acute, he was taking leave of his family and friends and sending loving messages to the daughter so far away.

"Your leaving home was always a great grief to him," her sister Alice wrote, "although he never said much about it, but he couldn't bear to hear any one sing your songs. Just before mother's death, at a family gathering, I saw tears in his eyes while one of the girls was singing something you used to charm him with in the old days."

Stella tried in vain to account for this "coincidence," but she was then so steeped in materialism that it was many years before she realized that this was a wonderful example of the transcendent powers of the soul. Professor Crookes has recently assured the world, in his lucid explanation of "telegraphy without wires," that the process is suggestive of the well-known fact of two persons, in perfect accord and sympathy, being able to get flashes of communication under certain circumstances, although separated by thousands of miles of sea and land.

"Behold I stand at the door and knock," was the spiritual message conveyed to Stella, but she remained blind and deaf to the unseen helpers, and the much-

tried minister's wife went on her way, her eyes resolutely bent on the difficult path she was treading, where rocks seemed to loom ahead and quicksands were ever 'at hand to engulf her.

CHAPTER XXIV

THERE appeared at this time to be a fresh influx of spiritual fervour in Mr. Richmond's discourses. Of course his hearers attributed it to his severe trials and were much impressed by the ardent sympathy that lighted up his addresses, giving a sort of personal element to them that deeply touched them all. No word of complaint ever escaped his lips, and the tone of his sermons was the only revelation that even Stella had of the agony of mind through which he was passing. One Sunday evening, when the hall was crowded to excess, he announced "The Two Voices" as the subject of his discourse. It was the only poem of Tennyson's that appealed to Stella in these dark days, and Mr. Richmond had read it to her at their evening meal a few days before. "Tennyson has sounded the deeper problems of life here," he said, "and these verses suit my mood better than all his stories of knights and fair ladies, however mellifluously worded."

On the following Sunday Stella had worked hard all day in church matters—played the organ and led the singing at both services, and taught in the Sunday-school her mixed class of boys and girls that she delighted in, and was feeling entirely worn out when her husband's voice, as he stood up to deliver his address, aroused her to unusual attention. The sermons were always as new to her as to the rest of the congregation, and when

Mr. Richmond began to read the opening triplet of
"The Two Voices"—

A still, small voice spake unto me,
"Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?"—

she felt that it was his own spiritual experience that he was about to relate, and followed him almost breathlessly through his exposition of the poet's noble verse. He touched lightly on the opening portions of the piece, said they would form the subject of future elucidation, and as he recited the early hopes of the downcast soul and its earnest striving to vanquish the bitter mocking voice that spoke of defeat and loss, Stella could picture her husband as he stood in the pulpit of the Old Meeting House in Laceborough full of life and enthusiasm. He surely was speaking of himself as he declaimed the lines—

When, wide in soul and bold of tongue,
Among the tents I passed and sung,
The distant battle flash'd and rung.

I sung the joyful Paean clear
And, sitting, burnished without fear
The brand, the buckler, and the spear—

Waiting to strive a happy strife,
To war with falsehood to the knife,
And not to lose the good of life—

* * *

As far as might be, to carve out
Free space for every human doubt,
That the whole mind might orb about—

To search thro' all I felt or saw,
The springs of life, the depths of awe,
And reach the law within the law.

* * *

In some good cause, not in mine own,
To perish, wept for, honour'd, known,
And like a warrior overthrown.

* * *

Then dying of a mortal stroke,
 What time the foeman's line is broke,
 And all the war is roll'd in smoke.

* * *

Yes! but the bitter voice replies :—
 "Then comes the check, the change, the fall,
 Pain rises up, old pleasures pall,
 There is one remedy for all."

"There had been check enough in Sydney to damp the ardour of the bravest soul and to still its noblest aspirations," thought Stella. But now her husband is saying how the bitter voice is being gradually conquered, better counsels are prevailing, and the verse proceeds—

"O dull, one-sided voice," said I,
 "Wilt thou make everything a lie,
 To flatter me that I may die?"

"I know that age to age succeeds,
 Blowing a noise of tongues and deeds,
 A dust of systems and of creeds.

"I cannot hide that some have striven
 Achieving calm, to whom was given
 The joy that mixes man with Heaven:

"Who, rowing hard against the stream,
 Saw distant gates of Eden gleam,
 And did not dream it was a dream;

"Which did accomplish their desire,
 Bore and forebore, and did not tire,
 Like Stephen, an unquenched fire.

"He heeded not reviling tones,
 Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
 Tho' cursed and scorn'd and bruised with stones:

"But, looking upward, full of grace,
 He pray'd and from a happy place
 God's glory smote him on the face."

There were few in the congregation that evening but recognized that the preacher was voicing his own

experience, and Stella knew that he too had come off conqueror. Like Stephen his prayer had been answered, and he appeared almost transfigured as she looked up filled with deep emotion, and to her it seemed as if her husband's face was like that of an angel.

The bitter voice gets silenced at last, he went on, by the thought of all the good there is in life and the refusal to repine over its inevitable trials, all sent for the perfecting of our souls, he earnestly assured his listeners.

'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
More life and fuller that I want.

Mr. Richmond went on to tell of the second voice that presently made itself heard.

A little whisper silver-clear,
A murmur, "Be of better cheer!"

* * *

Stella seemed now to understand as never before the secret of her husband's unfailing courage and cheerfulness in the face of every untoward circumstance. He had the rapt attention of every one as he recited to the end the inspiring verses beginning—

"What is it thou knowest, sweet voice?" I cried.
"A hidden hope," the voice replied.

* * *

So heavenly-toned, that in that hour
From out my sullen heart a power
Broke, like the rainbow from the shower.

* * *

To feel, altho' no tongue can prove
That every cloud, that spreads above
And veileth love, itself is love.

And forth into the fields I went,
And nature's living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.

I wonder'd at the bounteous hours
 The slow result of winter showers ;
 You scarce could see the grass for flowers.

I wonder'd while I paced along ;
 The woods were fill'd so full with song,
 There seem'd no room for sense of wrong :

And all so variously wrought,
 I marvell'd how the mind was brought
 To anchor by one gloomy thought ;

And wherefore rather I made choice
 To commune with that barren voice,
 Than him that said " Rejoice ! Rejoice ! "

The words " Rejoice ! Rejoice ! " finished the discourse and seemed to echo through the building with trumpet sound. Stella played and led the singing of the closing hymn, " Sun of my Soul," with thankful heart. It seemed to carry a soothing balm with it, and every one joined in as if in sympathy with the words and music. Eventually, she thought, she would be able to shake off the giant despair that seemed to have her in his keeping, and rise to the level of her husband's faith and hope. Besides, they seemed to be getting in touch with a crowd of new-comers, who appeared over and over again at the services, now always well attended. She was beginning to hope that all might be well, and that the new building her husband had striven so hard for would be finished and opened by himself with a congregation like that evening's sympathetic one.

" Mr. Richmond never spoke better," was the general verdict as the crowd passed out of the hall and stood in groups round the entrance. " He seemed to feel every word he said."

* * * * *

Alas ! alas ! he never addressed a congregation again.

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When all was over it seemed as if the accident that led to Mr. Richmond's sudden death was one in a long train of circumstances prepared by unseen forces of which the world at present knows but little. They had both, in fact, been surrounded with signs and omens which made scarcely any impression on Stella, although to one like her husband gifted with spiritual insight the coming dire event must have cast a deep shadow around. A few weeks before the day on which he went forth on a harbour excursion, a strong athletic man in the prime of life, with the words "I shall be back, dearest, for dinner at six," and never returned, the glorious sea that he loved claiming him for its victim, he announced to Stella one morning that he had had a marvellous dream the night before. She settled herself to listen attentively, as his dreams, although rare, were intensely dramatic and realistic, and he told them so graphically that it always seemed like a piece of romance he was conjuring up.

"I dreamt, dear," he commenced, "that the church was finished as if by magic, and I stood at the reading-desk that is to be placed by the chancel talking to my friend Arthur Matheson. I knew he was dead, but I was conversing with him quite calmly about the next life—asked him what it was like and so on. He told me it was just what I said it would be in our long talks during his lingering illness—that it was a state of progression. 'I am not very high up myself,' he said, 'but I am advancing. We can grow spiritually here as well as in earth life by helping others; that is our only means of growth.' While we were conversing, the congregation began to come in for the morning service, but each one started back in horror at seeing me in friendly conversation with their lately deceased churchwarden;" and, suiting the action to the word, Mr.

Richmond sprang to his feet and showed Stella the affrighted look and shrinking gesture of them all. "There is but one interpretation of that dream," he went on solemnly and earnestly, "I shall be dead before that church is finished."

"Now it is my turn to laugh at you," his wife replied, although the gravity of his face gave her a cold shiver. "If any one dies over this church business, it will be myself; for I often feel fit to drop with weakness, and I am so thin you can count every bone in my body: and you look so splendidly well now you have only friends about you and the services all you could wish."

Strangely, too, he seemed loth to go on this last fishing excursion with his young pupils, although he was always the first to propose anything of the kind, and told a friend how he had put it off a few weeks before, as the fag-end of a gale was working itself off and he felt he ought to run no risks of tumbling about the rocks. And when it came to the evening before the fatal trip he told Stella, with a look of anguish on his face, that he did not think he *could* go, although an hour later he was busy with his young boy companions fixing up fishing lines in readiness for the trip.

About a fortnight before the fatal day he had another dream wherein he found himself in the companionship of his little boy who had died a year or two before. At breakfast, after sitting rather abstractedly for a few minutes, he said, "I dreamt last night, sweet wife, that I had passed over to the other life, and was walking beside a beautiful stream holding little Eric by the hand. We seemed to be waiting for you."

It was strange, however, that the latest omen of all failed to arouse any sense of danger in Stella's mind. "Come here, Stella," said her husband the last morning he sat at breakfast with them all, "and see if you can

find the advertisement of my lecture for to-morrow night." Stella passed the little children and went to the other end of the table and put her arms round Mr. Richmond's neck while she searched the column in vain, kissing his cheek as she leant over him.

"They have put me in the 'missing list,'" her husband said at last, and there the advertisement was—lifted bodily from its proper position and placed in the adjoining column of "Missing Persons."

Everything connected with the catastrophe was painfully dramatic and unusual. It seemed to Stella as if her husband had been taken away in some special manner—that his life's work was complete, for it was impossible to imagine him more ready for the change if he had lived far beyond the allotted span. But horror and regret were both widespread and intense at a noble life being thus cut short when on the eve of what seemed something like recognition of the message he had set himself to give, and from whose full deliverance he had never swerved.

His "faithful few" were dumfounded with grief and regret, but the fatality showed that his unknown friends and admirers were legion. Letters and telegrams full of sympathy poured in upon Stella as she sat as in a ruined temple with earthquake fissures gaping on every side, and surrounded with a dark wall of doubt from which her useless questionings returned unanswered. Father and mother and husband gone, and she left alone with little children to rear and guide along life's labyrinths. The only thing that remained for her was work—daily work, hard enough to make her forget life's bitter problems. She was literally surrounded with love. There never were such friends as hers before, and soon she would be able to rise from this place where she fell, knocked down by the last

agonizing blow, and try to face life again. She could only blame herself for one thing—that was failing to rise to the height of her husband's faith and hope and cheerfulness through the dark days. Still, she had never faltered. "It is all good for me," she had often assured her husband when the flesh was weak and her willing spirit quailed at some fresh trial; "I wouldn't have missed one experience. It is good to get to the bedrock of friendship and to see how much one can bear and live."

But she lost spirits, health, and her youthful attractiveness and gentleness of manner in the struggle. Afterwards she knew that even this was not all evil. She learned that it is better to enter the spiritual life maimed than not at all—that every pain is a ministering angel in disguise, and

That every cloud that spreads above
And veileth love, itself is love.

CHAPTER XXV

“**W**E have come this morning, dear Mrs. Richmond,” said one of two gentlemen friends whose names had been sent in to her when she was giving a lesson in the schoolroom, “to see if we can get your help in uniting the deplorable breach that had taken place in the church before your husband’s death.” Stella’s two visitors represented opposing sides in the dispute, and the one who addressed her had been a warm supporter of Mr. Richmond during his career in Sydney.

“I may tell you,” her other caller interposed, “that none on our side had any personal feelings against Mr. Richmond. It was chiefly his manner and want of tact in promulgating unpopular truths that we felt to be injudicious, and at our last committee meeting before his lamented death we discussed the propriety of handing over the church to him and his supporters to finish and occupy if they chose. There is nothing but the heartiest sympathy and friendliness for yourself, and if you can let bygones be bygones it will do much to heal the breach.”

“I wish I could,” Stella almost moaned, “but the subject is too new and painful for me to discuss much just now. It seems to me, however, that any church, professing liberal principles, that could be deaf to teachings like Mr. Richmond’s is a ghastly sham, and I really cannot see the use of it. No one could have

fought a braver fight or lived a more upright and noble life than my husband, and I could not bear to see another martyrdom. It would be equally impossible for me to sit and listen to a mealy-mouthed man who would trim his sails to suit every passing breeze of opinion.

"I don't blame any one," Mrs. Richmond went on. "I am quite sure, as he said over and over again, that every one acted according to his light, and my husband had not a bitter thought in his mind. But I have begun to see that it is a mistake to put new wine into old bottles, and that the ordinary surroundings of a dissenting church, with committee and treasurer worried about finances, is not the place to disseminate liberal ideas. You want to get out in the open among the masses—to let people come freely and hear the new gospel. Our happiest time was in the hall, and I shall never forget the faces of the people as they looked up at the preacher anxious to catch every word he said, and how they came over and over again and joined in the service and the singing as if they enjoyed it all. I began to feel, especially at the closing service, that Mr. Richmond was at last getting a hearing in Sydney."

"We knew, of course, that it would be painful to you to sit and listen to any other preacher, especially just now," the first speaker remarked; "but time softens all regrets and is a wonderful healer. In a few months, dear Mrs. Richmond, you may see things differently, and, in any case, I am quite sure you will not influence any one against letting bygones be bygones."

"Oh no! You may rely on me for that. I should even urge any one who was hesitating to put Mr. Richmond and myself entirely out of the question, and if they felt the church was doing useful work, to help in every possible way in maintaining it.

"For myself," Mrs. Richmond went on, "I must

be absolutely convinced of the righteousness of a cause to take part in it. Then I will give up everything as I did when I joined hands with Mr. Richmond—home, position, and luxurious surroundings—and I kept my hand faithfully in his all the time. But our experience in Sydney has been a great eye-opener, and for the life of me I cannot see the use of the church, excepting as a halting-place for feeble souls who dare not venture out into the open. If it were not that ordinary people think they must belong to some denomination or other, there would be no *locus standi* for it at all. For with the exception of about as many as I can count on my fingers of really religious people, who would do credit to any church, the mass of the congregation do not want to worship. It is strange that among liberal thinkers it is, as a rule, the ministers only who are spiritual-minded."

"Then you don't see any need for a church at all?" said the second speaker rather curtly. "It really is of no use our extending this visit any longer," and he rose as if to take his leave.

"Not of this kind," said Mrs. Richmond, "though I have a glimpse sometimes of what the church of the future will be, when we shall all meet as one family to give praise and thanks and take sweet counsel together, as we used to sing in one of our beautiful services. Many of us will be like sheep without a shepherd until that better day comes, for the higher thought of the time has transcended the worn-out creeds of the churches whose light has gone out of them. Here is my idea in some verses I came across only yesterday when reading Charles Bray's *Autobiography*—

O priests! who mourn that reverence is dead!
Man quits a fading faith and asks instead
A worship great and true.

I know that there was once a church where men
 Caught glimpses of the gods, believed in them,
 I dream that there shall be such church again,
 O dream, come true, come true!

If a church could be filled with men like Mr. Richmond that dream would soon be realized. But we have a long way to travel before that heroic standard is reached."

"Ah! Mr. Richmond was fifty years before his time," said his late opponent, evidently touched by Mrs. Richmond's earnestness. "People here were not ready for his message, great and true though it may have been."

"Yes, I remember," said Mrs. Richmond sadly, "how he told me one day that some seatholder had met him, and speaking of his sermon on the previous Sunday evening, said he agreed with every word of it, but he would have to wait half a century before views of the kind could be safely promulgated. 'Just as if every teacher worthy of the name must not be in the van,' my husband exclaimed vehemently. 'Why, eighteen centuries have passed since Christ gave His message of love to the world, and the churches have not yet begun to grasp its divine meaning. People are too tame and indifferent to crucify a man now, but I don't believe the teachings of Jesus would be a bit better understood or welcomed if He were to come to Sydney to-day than they were in old Judea. According to my friend's theory Christ was nearly two thousand years before his time.'"

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"Well, how is the school going on?" said her friend as if to turn the conversation.

"Oh, as well as can be," said Mrs. Richmond. "It is like a special providence that I had seven years'

apprenticeship to it under Mr. Richmond, or I should never have had the necessary confidence in myself when it means a livelihood for us all. But every one is kindness itself. One friend, a University man, is taking the mathematics for the present, and he told me just now, that he had no idea Mr. Richmond had brought on his senior girls to such a pitch of perfection—that there are few boys among his pupils who equal them. And I get offers of help from most unexpected quarters. A few days ago a gentleman, a complete stranger, called to express his sympathy, and at the end of the interview brought out quite shyly a cheque for £100 that he hoped I would accept as a token of esteem for my husband and as a tangible expression of sympathy from himself. 'If you are in want of money, Mrs. Richmond,' he went on, 'there are numbers, I know, ready to help you to almost any extent.'

"I could hardly express my thanks sufficiently for such lavish generosity, but told him that I felt I could not take it unless I was absolutely in want, as Mr. Richmond's insurance and my own little patrimony would bring me in about £80 a year, and that I was more anxious for pupils than anything. He is a real friend, for he came again next day and arranged to send his daughter at once from his up-country station as a boarder, and I have now about six boarders and more than thirty pupils altogether. All I want is to keep well, but I have long hours. I work from half-past six in the morning, when I give my first music lesson, to ten at night."

Then turning to both her friends with hands extended she begged them not to think her ungrateful for all their kindness, or ungracious if she could not join the church again. "I try to feel the 'guiding hand' like my husband did, and it does not lead me thither."

PART III

“ Illumination ”

CHAPTER XXVI

THERE seemed little before Stella now but hard work, without Mr. Richmond's discourses that she used to dwell on during the week, or his ever-cheerful presence that kept children and pupils in a quiet simmer of gaiety and happiness all the time. “ How dreary life will be for the children without him ! ” was Stella's constant thought. “ I seem to have had all the fun pressed out of me by the unaccustomed heavy yoke I have had to bear.”

All that friends said to her at this time about a future life and meeting again those who had gone before was like idle talk to Stella ; she was afraid of deceiving herself with any such pleasing nostrum, and must keep her head clear and strong for the difficult path before her.

One of her dearest friends, Mrs. Andover, one of those who stood so bravely beside Mr. Richmond through all his bitter struggle, had got imbued with the new craze of spiritualism, as Stella dubbed it, and occasionally brought messages to Stella from Mr. Richmond,

received at a circle that sat regularly at the Andover's house for development. Stella would have been scornfully angry with any one but her dear friend, whom she silently kissed and thanked, but the idea of her husband attending a *séance* and rapping out messages was too ridiculous to be seriously entertained. Besides, during the last few weeks of his ministry Mr. Richmond had delivered two lectures against spiritualism, which he looked upon as a degrading superstition.

More than a quarter of a century had elapsed since what was called Modern Spiritualism had started in the United States with the Rochester "knockings," but it was only within the last few years that public attention had been directed to it in Australia, and quite recently Charles Foster, the medium of world-wide reputation, had paid a flying visit to the colonies, causing a great stir by his psychic gifts.

But Mr. Richmond had resented this commonplace way of pretended access to spiritual spheres. "Just fancy, Stella," he said to his wife one day, "the absurdity and indecency of the whole thing! Now, if I wanted to come and communicate with you after I have passed over, the chances are, according to what these fools say, that I should have to do it through a man like Foster, who is reported to drink his bottle or two of brandy a day. And I have a holy horror of that kind of spiritualism. Even the thought of it is debasing."

Mr. Richmond thereupon prepared his lectures, which were mainly a plea for the higher spiritualism, which he claimed as the natural possession of all souls that attained exalted spheres of faith and love. He did not deny the existence of spirits and was a firm believer in the potent influence of the unseen world. Stella had often heard him quote the lines from *Paradise Lost*—

Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep,

with evident approval. But the thought of disembodied souls communicating through a medium of the ordinary type was an offence to him.

How pure at heart and sound in head,
With what divine affection bold
Should be the man whose thought would hold
An hour's communion with the dead,

was the burden of his discourse and the text on which he enlarged throughout.

It was indeed the so-called spiritualistic phenomena, where spirits play pranks as well as give serious messages, that disgusted Mr. Richmond; but if he had studied the literature of the movement, he would have found even at that early day much in which he would have been in fullest sympathy, and like many whose eyes were first opened by spiritualistic phenomena to the unseen world about them, would have probably learnt that these were merely the A B C of a great philosophy and had little to do with an actual spiritual awakening. But Mr. Richmond had had no personal experience in these matters, and looked upon table turning, planchette writing and the like as grossly materialistic, and only taken up by those who had failed to reach sublimer heights of faith and love.

But one eventful day nearly a year after her husband's death, when Mrs. Richmond had just finished her afternoon's music lessons, she was told that her friend, Mr. Rawlinson, was waiting to see her in the drawing-room. The Rawlinsons were acquaintances outside the church with whom Stella and her husband had become intimate. Their only daughter, Alice Rawlinson, had been their pupil for some years before Mr. Richmond's death, their work and lessons being highly appreciated both

by the little girl and her parents, and they now did their utmost to brighten Stella's life. Every Sunday evening the Rawlinsons called in to see how Stella and her children were faring, and they arranged that some of the music lessons should be given at their house on Thursday evenings, so as to ensure Stella a little change and a quiet hour of recreation with themselves when work was over.

Stella found Mr. Rawlinson with quite a large volume in his hand, whose author was a well-known and highly respected citizen of Melbourne. The book professed to give the writer's personal experience in the spiritualistic phenomena, which included sittings with the medium, Charles Foster, and developments that subsequently took place in his own family circle.

"This is a most remarkable book, Mrs. Richmond," said her friend, as they sat down together to look into it, "and I want us three to read it carefully together. Mrs. Rawlinson and I have just glanced at the opening pages, and we propose to begin reading it aloud next Thursday when you come over, and we can give an hour to it on Sunday evenings as well. It seems to bear the impress of truth in every line we have read."

And so it seemed to Stella. The first half of the book was composed entirely of personal experiences, and Stella wished it had been cut short at that point; for her strong sense rebelled against the latter part, which was made up of long addresses given through a trance medium, who purported to be the mouthpiece of divers great men who had once lived on earth. But the author's narrative of his own awakening to the verities of an unseen world was intensely interesting to her. All his previous training had quite unprepared him for the discovery he made in his sittings with Foster, that both past and future events could be revealed by

a perfect stranger of whose very existence he was ignorant until attracted by the wonderful reports that circulated after his arrival in Melbourne. Then occult powers of a wholly unexpected nature were developed in the author's own family, and, strangest of all, he, the son of an orthodox clergyman, had come to believe in a future life that differed *in toto* from the heaven with angels and golden harps, and a burning hell with devils incarnate, that he had been told about from his childhood. Order, peace and progression seemed to reign in the heavenly spheres as well as discipline, for advanced spirits allotted work to downcast souls full of remorse for evil done and helped brighter spirits onwards toward perfection by the same merciful means. It was just as Arthur Matheson had told Mr. Richmond in his dream, "helping others is the spirit's only means of growth."

And all on earth seemed besides to be compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses, as St. Paul says, who, though no longer in the flesh, had woke up in the next life with their interest in those left behind unchanged, and anxious, moreover, to give assurance that they were "not dead but gone before."

For the first time the future life seemed to be put in a reasonable light, Stella thought, and she and her friends acknowledged that there might be something in this man's experience.

"I am sure of one thing," said Stella, when they had read to the end—"that the writer is speaking the truth, and I have not the slightest doubt it has all happened; but still no one else's investigation is of much use to me. I am a born sceptic and, like unbelieving Thomas, must have tangible experience and something all my own before I can give in my adherence to anything so revolutionary and astounding."

"I wonder if I am a medium," said Stella one day

when she was paying a visit to her friend, Mrs. Andover, who was charmed to know that Stella had read her first book on the spiritual phenomena.

"Would you like to try the planchette?" was her friend's reply, as she produced, much to Stella's amusement, the strange-looking implement through which spirits were said to write their messages to the world.

"What an extraordinary-looking thing it is!" said Stella, laughing. "It seems too absurd to suppose enfranchised souls can have anything to do with so paltry a contrivance."

"Well! pens and ink are not very exalted instruments," said Mrs. Andover, with a cold shiver that always came over her when she talked of occult matters, "but yet see what great thoughts pour off them—thoughts that move the world."

"Ah yes!" said Stella, still laughing. "I have a young friend, a poetess, who says 'the pen does it' when I ask where she gets her beautiful verses from."

"We are just surrounded with spirits this afternoon," said Mrs. Andover, more seriously than ever. "You seemed to bring a crowd in with you, and since you began to talk some strong influence has entered the room and is trying to control me. Don't laugh any more, dear Mrs. Richmond, but come and put your hands on the planchette with me."

There was nothing, apparently, to justify Mrs. Andover's perturbation. She and Stella sat for ten minutes or more without any perceptible movement, and then, very slowly and painfully, the planchette began to move and the words "My dear wife" were scrawled out in a large round-hand.

"Is there anything more to say?" said Mrs. Andover reverently.

"No," was the answer, but as the two friends still

kept their fingers on the board it presently moved again and wrote for the second attempt "My own dear wife."

"Oh, it is awfully slow work," said Stella, rising. "I could have given a music lesson in the time the stupid thing took to scrawl out these few words, and I don't feel at all impressed. I am afraid I shall never have time for the investigation of the occult if it takes so long."

"Well, take the planchette with you and try at your leisure," said Mrs. Andover, putting it into Stella's hand as she went to the door to look for an omnibus.

"But I have no leisure," said Stella, laughing, "unless I sit up at nights, and it doesn't seem worth that."

"Put it under your cloak, dear, and something may come of it," Mrs. Andover said, while another cold shiver seemed to shake her frail body. "Mrs. Ashford or Mrs. Rawlinson may have a stronger power than I have."

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"What do you think I have brought home with me?" said Mrs. Richmond to the two young friends who since she had been a widow had shared her home, one taking all the responsibility of housekeeping and the other, an old and favourite pupil, being Stella's right-hand assistant with the school and boarders.

"Oh! surely not a planchette!" said the elder one indignantly, as Mrs. Richmond produced it. "Please don't mention the subject of spiritualism before me. It is the one thing that I cannot talk about patiently."

"Oh, never mind, Elsie," said Mrs. Richmond, turning to her old pupil. "You and I will keep it all to ourselves. We won't trouble Mary with it."

"But oh, mother," said both the girls at once, "don't have it in the place," as they took off her wraps with

loving hands and helped her to put on her house dress. "We are all so happy together without that nonsense, and you are not strong enough to have your mind bothered with it."

But all the same, when every one was in bed, Elsie would sit with her mother, as she called Mrs. Richmond, in the drawing-room and patiently wait for some message that never came. "Unintelligible scrawlings all over the paper, but never a word of sense," was their verdict, although Stella thought that if union of thought and mind was necessary, there could not be anything stronger than the tie that linked her to the sweet young girl who so cheerfully shared all her toil and lightened every trial.

With Mrs. Ashford and Mrs. Rawlinson the result was equally disappointing. For several weeks both Sunday and Thursday evenings were devoted to the planchette, and Stella always took it with her to Mrs. Ashford's, where she dined most Sundays, and she and her friend would spend the afternoon in seeing "if the stupid thing would tell them anything."

Gradually Stella got quite tired of it, and her first attempt at enlightenment ended in a blank.

CHAPTER XXVII

ALTHOUGH on all sides wonderful spiritual manifestations were being talked of, they did not come in Stella's way. Occasionally she would find in the numerous books lent her by the Andovers some piece of poetry or philosophical teaching that gave her great comfort.

"Everything I read that does not touch on the phenomena of spiritualism—that has to do simply with the workings of our own souls—I can read with pleasure," she said one day, on returning a volume of Lizzie Doten's poems to her friend; "but I can't take interest in the wonders. I can almost believe in 'The Rainbow Bridge'—the fair product of our tears and gleams of spiritual light—that Lizzie Doten tells us of, and can picture the souls passing backwards and forwards thereon, but the tilting of tables, the rappings, and even planchette writing repel me. People seem to make a pastime of it—a drawing-room entertainment. Just now it takes the place of cards, and the most worldly-minded people are as keen after some new medium they can get to their evenings as any other kind of performer.

"That is quite true," said Mrs. Andover, "but if once your eyes were opened you would go in for the

higher spiritualism. Men like Alfred Russell Wallace, Professor Crookes, and others have approached it from the scientific side, and in America, Andrew Jackson Davis, the Poughkeepsie seer, has given in the trance state the highest form of spiritual philosophy the world has ever seen. Some day I hope you will read *Nature's Divine Revelations*. It is the most remarkable book of the century, a work of transcendent genius dictated when in the trance state by Andrew Jackson Davis, an illiterate youth under twenty years of age. Ah, dear Mrs. Richmond, we are living in the midst of the greatest spiritual upheaval the world has ever seen. I am longing for the day when we shall see eye to eye on the subject."

"What is a 'trance speaker'?" was Stella's reply. "I am always hearing of something extraordinary now."

"Well, the explanation given by clairvoyants and investigators is that the soul of the medium when entranced leaves his body, which is taken possession of by some disembodied intelligence anxious to communicate with those on earth. Sometimes the entranced soul, as we are told in the New Testament, sees visions on its own account. In the Acts we read that 'Peter fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened': and in the following chapter he says again, 'I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision.' Paul, too, after his conversion, says in the same book, 'It came to pass that when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance.'"

"Yes, it is all there, right enough," said Stella, "but strange to say, although I know the New Testament almost by heart, I never regarded a trance as anything that could happen to ordinary mortals. And yet Sweden-

borg and other mystics were undoubtedly in the same condition as the apostles when they saw visions, afterwards described to the world in their writings.

"Yes, the fault of present-day religions is that they only dwell on the miracles of the past and have become deaf and blind to the wonders that are all about us. I often think of those beautiful lines Mr. Richmond was fond of. They began—

Always imploring hands we raise toward Heaven
As though to draw the consecration down,
The while its blessed mists embathe our feet.

"He was always trying to open our eyes to the ever-present miracle of life, although he despised table turning and the like, and was so scornful of mediums. It was as much as I could do to listen patiently to his lectures against Modern Spiritualism. But he knows now," Mrs. Andover added reverently, while the usual shiver passed over her frame making her look more frail than ever.

"This conversation is getting too deep altogether for me," said Stella, laughing. "I could never do my work if I were often taken behind the veil in this uncanny manner."

"And so you have given up trying the planchette?"

"Entirely," said Stella. "Three months was quite long enough to be made a fool of. It became perfectly sickening at last. No one in my circle appears to be a medium, and I could never believe anything I saw outside."

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A few evenings afterwards Stella had been working late with two pupils who were going up for the next Senior Examination at the University. They were

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the daughters of her two friends, Mrs. Macalister and Mrs. Ashford, and stayed the night at Mrs. Richmond's once a week to get through the extra work. They all knew of Stella's recent readings of spiritual literature and her abortive efforts with the planchette. These girls were like her own daughters, and when they closed the French books from which they had been reading for a couple of hours, they asked their teacher "if they might try the planchette."

"Oh, certainly," said Stella, "if it is not too late, and you don't trouble me with it. I am dead tired and shall stay here, but you can go to the dining-room and sit with Mary and Elsie till bedtime."

A few minutes later they both bounded into the drawing-room to tell Mrs. Richmond that they had persuaded the "unbelieving Mary" to try the planchette with one of them. She hates the name of spiritualism, and we had great work to persuade her, but the moment she put her hands on the wood it moved as if it was alive. They told Mrs. Richmond a lot of things that had been written "as if by magic," but it all fell on dull ears. Stella was too tired to get up any enthusiasm, and besides she was sickened with planchette. And the girls rushed back again, evidently rather disappointed at the cool reception given to the startling news they took.

Stella, in fact, never thought of the matter again until two nights later, when, after all the boarders and children were in bed, the elders were sitting together in the drawing-room.

A young friend who was staying in the house suddenly asked Mrs. Richmond, as they were all conversing quietly together, "if she might try the planchette with Mary," having evidently heard of the latter's previous exploits in that direction.

"Oh, certainly," said Stella; "anything to amuse yourselves;" and she lay back in the corner of the sofa, wearied and uninterested.

But as soon as the young people had placed a small table in front of them on which to begin operations, with several folio sheets of paper underneath the planchette, Stella was seized with an uncontrollable desire to take her place there with Mary.

Every one was astonished as Mrs. Richmond rose, evidently much moved, saying, "Will you let me take your place at the planchette with Mary for a few minutes, dear? I feel that I must go over there."

No sooner had she placed her hands opposite those of Mary on the little machine she had so far despised than it began to move in a most remarkable manner. The arms of both of them were worked as rapidly as if in a machine. They had no control over the planchette, and sheet after sheet of the paper was soon covered with writing in a clear round-hand that bore an unmistakable similarity to Mr. Richmond's peculiarly formed characters. The "p's" he always finished off separately as no one else did, and the planchette shaped this letter in the most punctilious manner, although so rapidly that they could not see how it was done.

"For twelve months I have been trying in vain to influence you, dear sweet wife," it wrote, "but you have raised a dark wall of unbelief around that a powerful band of spirits has been unable to break down. Leave off all black for me. There is no need to mourn for those who have gone before. All is light and peace and love in the heavenly spheres, for which our life on earth is but a preparation. Never envy the rich and prosperous and those that have no trials. It is, as I told you, we can only enter the kingdom of heaven through much tribulation, and sad are those who have

only lives of wasted opportunities to look back upon."

"Can you forgive me?" was the first question Stella almost gasped, as she read the writing and thought how weak and foolish had been her tears and despair.

"There is nothing to forgive. You have been toiling painfully upwards all these years and surrounded with spiritual helpers, although your eyes were holden so that you could not see them. The path was dark, but it will be illumined now for evermore. Your father and mother are here, your brothers and many friends. Dear little Eric is in my arms. He loves to hear you talk about him to his brothers and sisters. Now he is on your knee. Try and realize his arms about your neck. This room is full of spirits, many strangers to yourself but associated with me, and attracted here to-night as the time had come for the opening of your mind and that of our medium to the realities of the spiritual life."

Stella had been so impressed from her youth up with the importance of combating orthodox dogmas that she was little prepared for the answer to her next question, "Were your teachings correct?"

"In a measure only," was the prompt reply. "There is more than I knew of. Everything is so infinitely greater than I dreamed. It is almost impossible for finite minds to grasp the meaning of things. The world is never left without its teachers, but it generally stones its prophets and then deifies them. We are as children groping in the dark. Love is the secret of the universe, but few there be who find this clue to the light."

"Did you regret leaving life and the work?"

"Everything was arranged, my time had come, and I was called away to a wider and fuller existence."

"But the children and the pupils, and all who know the value of your work and feel there is no one to carry it on in the same spirit?" urged Stella in reply.

"Other teachers will arise and each soul must work out its own development, not leaning upon another. I have led the way, that is enough."

Then, after loving messages had been given to all present by the invisible band with the promise of help and guidance and further communications, the name of "Alfred Richmond" was written in the peculiar way known to them all, and Stella was left as one whose darkness had been suddenly turned to noonday light. Not a shadow of doubt crossed her mind. If heaven had suddenly opened and shown her husband with eyes fixed on that little group in the drawing-room pouring benedictions on them all, Stella could not have been more convinced, and she wondered she had been blind and deaf so long. All her previous life seemed to lead up to the wonderful spiritual outpouring of this night—her husband had been a special messenger to lead her out of the "house of bondage" where, as a girl, she was a slave to luxury and every sense, and she saw the reason of all her trials and every bitter tear she had shed in her pilgrimage upwards. As she looked round it seemed as if her poorly furnished sitting-room had become the very gate of heaven.

Years afterwards, when Stella read Gerald Massey's description of his awakening to the spiritual life, it reminded her of that memorable night. He says: "It was as if I had been suddenly taken on the deck of a vessel on a brilliant starlight night after being confined in dark hatches below."

"Ah, now I can live," Stella thought, as the whole expanse of heaven seemed open before her. "All the poet's dreams are true, and 'there is no death, what

seems so is transition,' is no longer a pleasing figment of the imagination, but an assured fact."

"If it had been any experienced medium through whom I got the communication, I should still be a doubting unbeliever," said Stella to her beloved Mary, when they sat together, both equally staggered by the events of the evening. "You knew no more than I did of spirit writing, were, besides, more of an unbeliever than myself, and you are like one of my own children whose thoughts I can read as my own."

"I shall never forget," said Mary, "the way my arms tingled and the planchette went by itself. It is a perfect miracle and a lesson to me never to give decided opinions about what is possible or impossible in the future."

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It was only fitfully that Stella slept that night. She was conscious of spiritual presences all around, and in the morning she felt that a new life had begun. She greeted her pupils with unusual warmth and the school drudgery seemed to have lost its irksomeness. The girls noticed that Mrs. Richmond was letting them all off quite easily. She was not half so punctilious or exact as usual, and did not get so excited if they made some awful mistakes in their French verbs, or went quite astray in their analysis and parsing.

The little girls of the early days, now almost grown up and looking forward to the senior examination, were shown the writing and told the wonderful story in the dinner hour; and though they were much impressed, the message from the unseen was evidently more convincing to Stella and her medium than to any one else. Friends were interested but mostly sceptical, excepting the Rawlinsons and Mrs. Ashford, who became as ardent believers as Stella herself; and Mrs. Andover was

overflowing with thankfulness and joy that her prayers had been answered, and the "crowning glory," as she said, "added to Stella's character."

"I am not half as good as you think," Stella would assure her. "I am only on the threshold."

CHAPTER XXVIII

STELLA'S life as well as that of the medium was now guided almost entirely by their invisible helpers. People would try to argue against the truth of the communications or their origin, but Stella assured them all that she was just as convinced that they came from Mr. Richmond as if the postman had brought her letters from him—say from Melbourne—written by his own hand. She had never worn anything but a simple black dress since Mr. Richmond's death, as he had so strong an aversion to mourning of the orthodox type and especially to widow's weeds, but, according to his written message—one of the first she had received—Stella discarded even this light mourning attire, and dressed herself as before his death in the quiet colours she had gradually adopted.

Every night, when all the work was done, Mrs. Richmond and Mary would sit to see what message there was for them. It was so new an experience that in those early days they felt they were in some way lacking in attention to their spiritual guests, if they failed to converse with them each day, and had not learnt that the highest spiritual communication is that of spirit with spirit, when without medium, planchette, or other go-between the soul can have unfettered communion with the spiritual spheres.

And something surprising occurred at almost every

sitting. Sometimes Stella would try to guess what message was coming when the initial word would be written, but invariably an entirely different sentence, framed in Mr. Richmond's more scholarly fashion, would form itself on the paper.

"See," Stella would say to some sceptical onlooker, "did you ever hear me speak like that. Mr. Richmond always used to laugh at my colloquial style and turned my sentences round to mean something, quite different to what I intended, and Mary is much more of a delinquent than I am in that direction."

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As is usual in church quarrels, a great deal of bad feeling had been engendered, and Mr. Richmond and his wife had often been considered as lacking in proper spirit when they failed to speak in a sufficiently disparaging manner of their opponents. "I am a good lover and a good hater," was a favourite expression of one of Mr. Richmond's committee, and he openly rejoiced if ill-luck or misfortune came to any one on the other side, especially to a man whom he nicknamed "The Prince of Sneaks"; and with all her desire for peace, Stella could not help feeling a bitter contempt for him, and several others who had misrepresented all Mr. Richmond did or said to suit their own ideas.

So it was a most unexpected message that greeted them at one of their early sittings. The names of the spirits present had been written at Stella's request, quite a long list on this occasion, including that of a Mr. Hammond, who was unknown to both Mary and herself. Then the planchette proceeded to write at once as if burdened with an important deliverance.

"Make my peace with all those who so cruelly persecuted me and endeavoured to stop my work when

on earth. There is no grief like hate ; love is the key that opens the gate of spiritual life."

"What shall I do?" asked Stella, astounded, for it was the last thing she expected, to be told to make advances to these enemies of her husband. "Do you wish me to go and see them?"

"Decidedly not," was written, as if with a lightning flash. "But when you meet any of them never withhold the hand of friendship and forgive them unreservedly. Meet halfway the slightest advance on the part of any you come across. The darkness between them and myself troubles me."

It was somewhat remarkable that shortly afterwards, when Stella was walking in one of the streets of the city, she saw approaching her on the almost deserted pavement a gentleman who was generally considered the arch-enemy of her husband, and one who had worked most persistently against him. As he neared her, Stella thought of her husband's recent message, and perhaps the softened look in her face encouraged him to stop. Anyway, he lingered a little when a few steps from her and then advanced with outstretched hand, saying, "I cannot let you pass, Mrs. Richmond, without expressing my regret at a great deal that happened in the past, and I should be really glad if you would shake hands with me again."

"Certainly," said Stella, putting her hands into his. "Both sides are led into mistakes in disputes of every kind, and I know it would be Mr. Richmond's desire that I should reciprocate every good wish of the kind."

She did not tell this quondam enemy of her occult message, for she was beginning to find it was a personal revelation she was getting, and that it was useless trying to open people's eyes to the light that had gladdened her own. It was so true and real to herself that at first

she thought it must be the same to all those who had loved her husband, but she soon discovered that the mind must be opened to receive instruction or it falls unheeded. "You can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink," is not more true than the fact that each one must acquire his or her own spiritual knowledge.

And so Stella and Mary went on with their investigations. Stella felt that she had now found what had been lacking in the church to which she had belonged, and also that she had realized what all the religious services in the world are meant for—intended to produce—communion with the spiritual world. She understood now the secret power of the Catholic Church, and how wisely its devotees are enjoined to take time for daily meditation and to go into retreat occasionally, their spiritual life being nourished by the prayers they address to a long list of saints. "It does not matter what names are given to the potent unseen presences that surround the worshippers," she thought, "so long as they believe in their power to help and save."

Mr. Richmond constantly assured her that each individual on earth was surrounded with guardian spirits, and that a pure life and lofty aspiration attracted the highest influences. For herself Stella always felt as if she were entering a cathedral when she sat down with Mary to receive her daily communication. Every word was sacred to her and of so high an order of teaching that it seemed as if she were sitting at the feet of some inspired Gamaliel, who was pointing out the realities and shams of everyday life, and indicating the way her feet should go.

Among other things she was particularly enjoined not to waste her time on indiscriminate visiting. "If there is one thing I regret more than another in my earth-

life," was written one evening, "it is the time wasted over visits to persons with whom I was not in spiritual accord. There is no greater check to the soul's development than mixing with people in whom you can take no genuine interest. It is right to be courteous to all, but make only intimates of those with whom you are in closest sympathy of thought and aspiration."

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So far no ordinary medium had come in Stella's way, and she doubted if she could as implicitly trust another as her friend Mary, who was simply a learner like herself. One day she received an invitation from a leading spiritualist, a gentleman of high standing in the city, to spend the evening with himself and family, as an American lady, a medium of repute in her own country, who had lately arrived in Sydney, was to be one of the party.

"I don't think I can go," Mrs. Richmond said to her two young friends, as she read the note to them. "I have a prejudice against mediums who advertise, and feel I should be imposed upon."

"The change will do you good, anyway," chimed in Elsie and Mary at once, "and you always enjoy yourself at the Williamsons'."

And so Stella went, and came away charmed with the gentle middle-aged lady, Madame Denver, who accompanied her home to be introduced at once to Mary, the medium.

"I will come and have tea with you, and have a sitting afterwards," said their new friend; and very strange it was on the night of this promised visit, both to Mrs. Richmond and Mary, to welcome for the first time a professional medium to their sanctum. While the two friends sat at the planchette, Madame, to their great astonishment, went into a trance, and began to describe the spirits that were about them.

"There is one," she said, "who gives his name as Hammond who has had much to do with the development of the medium, and has been attracted here with other spirits that form the band around Mr. Richmond. Neither of you knew him in earth-life. He has been trying for some time to influence the medium to speak in a trance condition, and while she sleeps is gradually preparing her to do so."

Both Stella and Mary recognized the name at once as the unknown one that was frequently mentioned as being present at their sittings.

"I see a little boy in your husband's arms," she went on, "a beautiful little fellow, bearing a striking resemblance to himself. He is in charge of spirits who love little children and receive them when cut off in early life."

"Ah!" thought Stella to herself, "the poets are, it seems, always true"—

He is not dead—the child of our affection—
But gone unto that school
Where he no longer needs our poor protection
And Christ himself doth rule.

"I am told," the trance speaker continued, "that you have been highly favoured, that few have the opportunity of receiving communications from so pure a source as yourselves. Ever since your husband's death," she said, turning to Stella, "he has had to strive hard against the prejudice he had himself implanted in your mind as well as your own disbelief in a future life. It all came about gradually, but it was like beating down a stone wall to get at your spiritual nature, although it had begun to expand even in your husband's lifetime. Earthly troubles and passionately wept deaths are potent means of unlocking the spirit.

• "You have important work to do before you die,"

she continued, " and you must endeavour to overcome your shyness and diffidence. You have powers waiting for development of which you little dream, but your delight in teaching and intellectual work of all kinds points to your proper sphere. All that has to do with literature is easy to you, while household tasks, however well performed, must be always drudgery to a nature like yours. One thing you must bear in mind. It is not good to dwell on the past. After many years another will come forward to take your hand and lead you further in the path it is intended you should take. Your husband wishes me to tell you that no regret for him or thought of disloyalty to his memory must affect you when the time comes. In the heavenly spheres, as Jesus says in the Gospels, ' they neither marry nor are given in marriage.' Union of soul with soul is the only tie and that cannot be marred by earthly associations. He wishes you to press forward and attain the prize of your high calling. There is a long road yet to travel, but helpers, both visible and invisible, will be on every side, and you must not falter or faint by the way. As you advance other guardian spirits will take the place of those who guide you now, and in the divine order of things, your husband, when his work with you is finished, will doubtless pass on to a more exalted sphere. Helping others is the means of progress in spiritual things, and each soul on its upward path is guided by the highest wisdom and love."

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Madame Denver said, when speaking of her past life, that the clairvoyant power was born with her, she thought, for from a child she had seen visions. The first thing she remembered happened when she was a little girl at school in Germany. Suddenly she saw the house where her parents lived in flames, and an old

woman being carried out, her slippers dropping off by the way. Her teachers and companions thought her mad when she told them what she had just seen, but soon found it was all true, including the incident of the old woman being carried from the burning house and her slippers dropping off. More remarkable things happened as she grew up, and her powers became well known to a large circle of friends, by whom she was always being requisitioned to "see" when they were in trouble or anxiety.

In later life, when her husband died and Madame Denver was reduced to poverty, she journeyed to America, where clairvoyants were much sought after, and had made a competence and was now on a visit to Australia for change of scene and health's sake. Stella found her a sweet-natured reliable woman, and her prognostications were fulfilled in due time, that relating to the medium speaking under trance conditions being realized a few months later.

Neither Stella nor Mary mentioned the matter again, or thought about it, as with her usual incredulity Stella was slow to be convinced of the truth of all she was told by a stranger. They resumed their sittings as before, and began to discover the limitations of their communications. It was more unsatisfactory, so far as getting in full *rapport* with their invisible instructor, than the conversation that goes on nowadays through the telephone. Sometimes, too, they were told that the aim of Mr. Richmond was to impress Stella rather than to write messages to her, and it was hinted that planchette writing or any other form of communication was only tentative, that in time it was hoped to influence her more directly.

It was pointed out that all the manifestations of genius, the marvellous productions of musicians, poets, and even

the humblest exponents of art, in its widest sense, derived their inspiration from the source of all art, and that a true child of genius was simply the facile instrument of higher powers. Stella was reminded that Mozart relates how he heard all his glorious compositions in the air, as it were, before writing them down. He would drink in the splendour of the harmonies played as though by an invisible orchestra, and then pick out the separate parts that went to form the perfect whole.

It was interesting to Mrs. Richmond to find corroborative testimony to statements of this kind in contemporary literature. She came across at that time a complete edition of the works of the Brontë sisters and remarked how Charlotte Brontë in the introductory pages, when referring to the fault found with her sister Emily for depicting so repulsive a character as the hero of *Wuthering Heights*, says something to the same effect—that when the moment of inspiration comes a writer is to be but little praised or blamed for the result.

Some weeks after the visit of the American medium, Mrs. Richmond and Mary were told one evening that it was hoped at the next sitting to put the medium into a state of trance, and that Mr. Richmond would then try to speak through her. So engrossed were they in work all the next day that it was not until the hour for sitting arrived that Stella remembered what had been told them. A gentleman and lady had asked to join the sittings once a week for a time. This was the evening fixed upon, but when Mrs. Richmond and her friends were seated ready the medium did not put in an appearance. Stella slipped out of the room, for it just occurred to her that Mary might be feeling nervous, and she found her quite cast down. "Do you remember, mother, what we were told last night about the trance?" she said. "I don't know if I can take my place as usual."

"I am so sorry, dear, that I had completely forgotten it during the day, or we would have talked it over," said Stella reassuringly. "But I have not said a word to the strangers, and possibly as they are here nothing will happen. Anyway, I feel we are in such good hands that no harm can possibly come near you."

"Yes, I am sure of that too," was the reply, and Stella and Mary went in to take their seats at the planchette.

All their sittings had hitherto taken place in the light, Stella would never even have the gas lowered, as she heard so much said in disparagement of dark *séances* and all her communications must be above suspicion. The first message written on this occasion was to the effect that the time had arrived to advance a stage onwards in their experience, and that it was hoped to put the medium into a trance that evening.

On reading this the gentleman of the party became quite excited. He had seen a trance speaker before, and the custom was, he said, to lower the lights and sing to bring about the conditions.

Stella would only have the gas slightly lowered, but agreed to have the music for harmonizing purposes, and the four sang together "Nearer my God to Thee." They went entirely through the hymn, Mary joining in all the time; but strange movements were beginning to agitate the group of sitters. The planchette had been discarded, and they had placed their hands on the small table at which they sat, which seemed to be suddenly filled with electricity. Stella's arms as well as the others were worked violently backwards and forwards, and she felt something like electric shocks all over her body, tingling down to her toes and finger tips. She had never experienced anything like it before, and her arms ached with the rapid movement, but all their

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hands seemed glued to the table, which rocked violently and shivered as if the whole texture of the woodwork were alive.

A second time they began the hymn, but when the third verse was reached, Stella noticed that Mary's voice had dropped out, and she saw she was apparently asleep in her chair. Each of the sitters addressed her, but there was no response, and Stella, quite alarmed, walked her gently to the sofa and, after seating her in the corner, again spoke to her. But she was both deaf and blind to externals. In about a quarter of an hour she opened her eyes as if from a deep sleep, and sat up astonished—could remember nothing from the time she was singing the third verse of the hymn.

The next evening Stella and Mary sat alone, and the latter went into a trance quite easily, with none of the convulsive movements of the nights before, and began to speak quietly and in the most composed fashion. The tone of the communication was the same as before, but it was a step onward for Stella and Mary to sit with hands clasped and the medium, in measured accents, entirely different from her own mode of speaking, telling of the delight Mr. Richmond felt at their success.

"Ask Mary," he said, "if she remembers one night lately in her room thinking that she saw a shadowy presence. She is becoming clairvoyant and may have great power that way if she cares to cultivate it. But these developments are more educative than anything else. You see now how true were the words of Madame Denver, and each promise fulfilled increases your confidence. If you had been simply 'looking for a sign,' you would not have got it. To those who have faith and whose spirits are *en rapport* with the spiritual world much is given."

Mrs. Richmond and Mary sat until late that night

talking over their new and wonderful experience. Everything was a blank to Mary while in the trance, and the message to her about her dawning clairvoyance and the shadowy presence in her room was both startling and convincing, as she had not mentioned the spiritual vision she had had to any one, and it was additional proof, if that were wanting, of the truth of the new development of her mediumistic powers.

Mr. Richmond explained to Stella while the medium was entranced how the spirit left the body, which was then used for the purpose of communication by himself. It was almost a repetition of Mrs. Andover's explanation, and Stella thought of the trances she had read of in the Gospels and in the writings of the mystics, and vowed she would never say again that anything is impossible.

"We know so little," she said to Mary; "we are but infants learning in the great school of the universe, and it seems as if we have to really become as little children before we are permitted to catch a glimpse of the wonders that lie around us."

"But the strangest thing of all," remarked Stella before saying good-night, "is that the Bible, especially the New Testament, is full of this kind of thing, and yet I had to get right away from churches and priests and retire within my own sanctuary before the spiritual world was opened to me. This little room seems like the gate of heaven, and I feel as if Jesus' message to His disciples was being again delivered to us." "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see" seemed to be floating in Stella's mind all through the night, and she woke the next morning with the sense that she had come to another turn in the road on her pilgrimage towards the light.

CHAPTER XXIX

IT is about time, Mrs. Richmond, that you went out a little more and heard what other people are thinking," said her friend, Mr. Rawlinson, one evening. "Come with us to a lecture that is to be given at the Victoria Theatre next Sunday by a gentleman who has lately relinquished a good profession and high social position to speak on the tabooed but important questions of free-thought in religious matters. We went to his opening lecture and found him a highly cultured man of the world, and a splendid speaker—a philosopher, too, in his way. He does not attack existing religious systems in a brutal fashion, but shows how all forms of faith are evolutionary, and serve a good purpose so long as they are vital and in accord with reason and knowledge, but points out how hopelessly divergent they are at the present time. I never listened to a more able, skilful and courteous debater."

"What is his name?" said Stella rather listlessly, for the long strain of her life in Sydney, and the remarkable turn that spiritualism had given to her thoughts, were telling upon her, and each day she was growing more unfit for her work in the school.

"Christopher Mason," was the reply. "He is a journalist by profession, I am told, and one of the best-known writers on the Australian press."

"Of course I will go," said Stella, interested at once. "I remember his name well. Mr. Richmond met him

on his last visit to Melbourne, and he promised to give a lecture up here for us when he came to Sydney. He was immensely interested in hearing of the split in the congregation and the stand Mr. Richmond had made. The only objection my husband made to his occupying the platform was that Mr. Mason was a spiritualist, but it was settled that the subject of his lecture should be fixed later on—spiritualism being only a side question with him—and he seemed to have as great a horror of phenomena-hunting as Mr. Richmond himself. At that time, however, he was only an amateur lecturer, and was still actively engaged in business as well as journalism.”

It was nearly two years since Stella had heard any public speaker, and as she took her place in the fast-filling theatre on the following Sunday night, with her friend Mrs. Ashford, who had accompanied the party, she felt quite a thrill of excitement. As she looked round she saw Mrs. Andover and several of the old members of the church, while in the stalls below it seemed as if the mass of Mr. Richmond's evening congregation was already seated. Then all around them she saw leading citizens, mostly gentlemen, although some were accompanied by their wives, while a brilliant and lively party of personal friends of the lecturer, half of whom were ladies, went round to a private box. At the hour for the commencement of the lecture there was not a vacant seat anywhere, and a buzz of anticipation went round the spacious building as the lecturer walked upon the platform, most scrupulously dressed as for an evening entertainment, and with a flower in his button-hole. On the table by which he stood was a magnificent bouquet of flowers, a reading-lamp and desk being the only other accessories.

Stella never forgot the effect that the opening words

of the lecture had upon her, and the speaker's voice seemed to penetrate quite easily to the remotest corner of the theatre. There was not a tinge of harshness in it, but great earnestness and an undertone of sadness, that Stella detected, as if the speaker had had much mental suffering. The lecture was a far more powerful indictment than any Mrs. Richmond had heard before of the popular theology, but it seemed to come from another side altogether to the one she had been accustomed to. It was from the point of view of a well-read man of the world, instead of that of a John the Baptist crying in the wilderness, for Mr. Richmond would not have at all objected to a raiment of camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins, or the simplest and poorest fare, if his preaching of an unpopular creed entailed it. But this speaker was of a different calibre altogether and more likely to catch the popular taste. He was so amusing too, a born wit and humorist, evidently, by the way he pulled himself together when both speaker and audience were getting a trifle too serious, and produced some anecdote that would set every one laughing, and then cheering vigorously at the apt illustration.

There was nothing in the shape of a religious service—neither prayers nor hymns nor Bible reading, but the only thing that jarred on Stella was the applause. The lecture itself was uplifting, for it pointed throughout to the real religion deep down in the heart of humanity, and the speaker only scoffed at the shams and make-believes that passed for religion in ecclesiastical circles. There was no mention of spiritualism, although Stella noted the lecturer's reminder that if the future life is a reality we are in eternity now, and should brush away the bogies and shams that blinded our eyes to the verities of our being.

When the lecturer sat down, after holding his audience spell-bound for about an hour and a half, it seemed as if the whole audience rose to do him honour, and cheered and cheered again. And as Stella got up from her seat to leave the theatre she saw the occupants of the stalls again on their feet waving their hats and applauding, as if anxious to give the lecturer one more salute before they went out.

"Oh, Mrs. Ashford," said Stella, "do look at that little man down in the stalls waving his hat. It is a tailor who began to come to Mr. Richmond's services a few months before they closed, and who stayed behind one night to thank the preacher for his outspokenness. He had thought all these matters out for himself, he said, when sitting on the tailor's bench sewing through the long day, and just strolled into the hall one night, little expecting to hear his own ideas put into definite shape. 'Every one I talked them over with said it was my carnal wicked nature that suggested such notions' he explained, 'and at last I kept them to myself. Do let me shake hands with you, Mr. Richmond,' he went on. 'I should feel it more of an honour than if I were proffered the hand of a king.' We often laughed about this man's enthusiasm, though Mr. Richmond looked more like crying at the time. I sat at the harmonium after playing the concluding voluntary and looked on at the scene, thinking it would make a subject for a picture if any one could catch the expression on the two men's faces. Both were lit up in the most remarkable manner. I feel now as if Mr. Richmond's work is being carried on, and I expect the little tailor was the ringleader of the last burst of applause."

"A cold shiver ran down my back," said Mrs. Ashford, "every time they began to applaud as if it were a week-night and actors on the stage, but I suppose we shall get

used to it. Men seem to take to these things naturally, for I discovered Mr. Ashford had thought the same as Mr. Richmond from the time he was at Cambridge and found he could not accept the Thirty-nine Articles, and so didn't enter the Church as his family intended. But he never let on, and when I used to ask him about religion and what he thought, as he never went to church and I had my doubts about much that I heard there, he would say, 'Oh, don't bother your head, my dear, about such things. Religion consists in paying your butcher and baker and other tradespeople regularly—all the rest is bosh.' I felt as if I could hug Mr. Richmond when I first heard him preach, and I am sure there are hundreds like myself who are longing to have these things explained."

"Yes," said Stella, "that is just what orthodox people never do. You are always to believe something or other because it is right you should—because somebody says it is your duty to do so. And I have been in revolt against this assumption of authority by churches and priests from the time I can remember anything. Everything that was put between my own soul and the heart of things, whatever it be called—God, or Nature—seemed an impertinence. And I now feel more strongly than ever that nothing is of any value in spiritual matters that is not direct and personal. 'No power or personality can stand between the individual soul and God,' I read the other day, and I feel it is absolutely true."

"Sometimes it seems hopeless to think of getting the mass of women to see this," said Mrs. Ashford, "for they take alarm directly the cry of heresy is raised, and would rather be considered unfashionable than unorthodox. It is really the women who keep the churches going."

As they left the theatre, Mr. Andover ran after Mrs. Richmond to say that he had just spoken to the

lecturer behind the scenes, and that he had expressed a wish to call on Mrs. Richmond if it were agreeable to her.

"Oh, be sure to tell him to come next Saturday afternoon, if he can, as I am never able to see visitors during the week. Will you come too, Mrs. Ashford?" said Stella, turning to her friend, "and we will try and keep him to tea and hear what he has to say about spiritualism. I am rather disappointed that he said nothing to-night."

"He always gives one lecture during the course on it," said Mr. Andover, "but says he wants to make people rationalists first, or they lose their heads."

Stella thought all the week about the lecture and wondered if Mr. Mason would be able to come on Saturday. He was very much sought after, she knew, and visited among well-to-do, fashionable people—a circle like the one she had been brought up in when a girl, but from which she had been completely cut off during late years in Sydney. All the gaiety of her young life had been eclipsed by the hardness of the struggle in promulgating Mr. Richmond's advanced ideas, but she felt it was right, even the taking of it all so seriously, otherwise she would not have been prepared for her spiritual awakening.

She was thinking how shabby her house was—she never could get used to poor surroundings—and if Mr. Mason thought much of these things, when Mary came up, on the Saturday afternoon when she was resting in her room, to say that the lecturer was in the drawing-room, and she laid his card down on the table.

"We have made each other's acquaintance already," said Mary. "Mrs. Andover has told him all about the planchette, and he was very anxious to meet me."

"Then you can have a good talk together while I get dressed, and I needn't hurry," said Mrs. Richmond.

"You look so ill, mother; what is the matter?" queried Mary anxiously.

"Only a sort of faintness that comes on now whenever I have any task before me; but run down, dear child, and I will come presently."

"We are very anxious about Mrs. Richmond," said Mary to the visitor as she entered the drawing-room "She has had such an awful time in Sydney with the church worries, and she took it all to heart so much that it seems to have taken her strength away, and, after Mr. Richmond's death, every one thought she never could go on teaching. For weeks and months she looked awful, but now she says she is just feeling the load of the church lifted; but our spiritual experiences have been a great exhaustion as well as a great delight to her, and somehow the worldly duties appear less a part of her life than before, as if something had snapped and made her lose hold of practical matters."

"Ah! that is a pity," said Mr. Mason. "That is one reason why I lecture but rarely on spiritualism, as it has a tendency to get people off the track. With myself it turned me completely round and away from the career that seemed the one thing for me until I caught a glimpse of something higher and better. But I am considered a prize fool and a follower of a will-o'-the-wisp instead of a fortune, which is, of course, an unforgivable sin as society is at present constituted. But for all that I seem for the first time in my life to be doing something useful, and was never happier, although my decision to throw up a certainty and take to the lecture platform has entailed all sorts of misfortunes and unpleasantness upon me."

Mr. Mason was wondering all the while he was talking what sort of a woman his hostess would be. He was charmed with Mary's frank unaffectedness, and it was evident from everything she said that the household was a most united one. Like many others he was

sensitive to all states of feeling, and realized as soon as he sat down in the drawing-room that the atmosphere of the place was harmonious and restful. Mr. Richmond had talked a great deal of his wife and children when in Melbourne, and Mrs. Richmond was known to be one of the most successful teachers in Sydney. But he was startled and almost shocked when his hostess entered the drawing-room. She had evidently not got over her attack of faintness, and although she gave Mr. Mason a most cordial welcome, he saw that it was a great effort to be cheerful and she bore on her face the marks of the great struggle she had gone through. Deep lines were upon her forehead, and she was evidently quite out of health and in need of some radical change in her life. But as she talked, leaning back in the corner of the sofa, her face lighted up, and when she began to speak of the wonderful experience that had so completely changed her life, she looked quite different, and Mr. Mason recognized the earnest soul shining out of her eyes and illuminating the worn and dejected countenance.

"I hope you can stay to tea and spend the evening with us," said Mrs. Richmond. "I am expecting Mrs. Ashford presently and promised to keep you if I could. She was one of your audience last Sunday and is as keenly interested as myself in free-thought and spiritualism."

And later on, when Mrs. Ashford had joined them, they formed a bright and happy party listening to Mr. Mason's description of his conversion. Stella had come to hers through gates of woe, had had to wander through hell, she always felt, before being shown the fields of paradise; but Mr. Mason had turned from a brilliant life of pleasure to his present arduous and thankless career—from dining out, where wit flavoured still more

highly the dainty dishes, where champagne flowed in a perennial stream and fair women's eyes sparkled on the lively raconteur and dramatic critic, whose bosom friends were leading actors or shining lights in legal or journalistic circles.

"There had always been an undercurrent of seriousness in my nature," said Mr. Mason, "even when I was outwardly the gayest of the gay, but it might have remained completely hidden but for a commission I had from the then leading journal in Melbourne to write a series of articles on the spiritualistic craze that seemed to have taken possession of all kinds of people there—rich and poor, cultured and ignorant, wise and foolish, being alike affected. I never can write on a subject without knowing something about it, an explanation which you may consider, Mrs. Richmond, a rather needless one." Mr. Mason said with a twinkle in his eye, "but press-men would understand; and thereupon I began to collect material and make inquiries about the matter throughout the city. I was fairly staggered at the amount of literature extant, quite enough to fill an ordinary library, and by capable authors, too, such as Robert Chambers, Professor Crookes, Alfred Russell Wallace, and other celebrated men in England; Professor Hare, Eugene Crowell, Epes Sargent, Judge Edmunds, Robert Dale Owen, and a perfect host of lesser lights in America, where I found that at least a million people were either professed believers or actively engaged in studying phenomena of all kinds. Anyway, I discovered that this was not a movement to be pushed aside with contempt and simply pooh-poohed, and, as I had a free hand from the editor of the journal, my articles took an entirely different shape to what I expected they would, and, eventually, what I started out to curse became the great blessing of my life.

"It is a most fascinating thing at first," the lecturer went on, "to go to mediums and see and hear all the wonders they produce, and to myself it was a sort of necessary baptism. One of these mediums, with an extraordinary influence about her, used to give magnetic lessons and breathed over the faces of her pupils before she began her instructions. There was some occult power in this, for since that time I have been as completely turned round from my former ideas as if any one had taken me by the shoulders and pushed me in a different direction. But, fortunately, I was able to keep my head steady, and when a time came that I was asked to subjugate my reason and judgment to another's, I sturdily refused, as I believe no person has a right to rule another's mind—that no man or woman, nor body of men, can become vested with divine authority to coerce the soul of any one into the acceptance of that which his own spirit does not make true and right for him."

"Then you are not much interested in the phenomena," said Mrs. Richmond, "and I suppose that is the reason that you looked so critically, and I thought a bit scornfully, on our planchette writing just now."

"I never despise any of these things, and I have not the slightest doubt, Mrs. Richmond, that you have had a direct and true revelation from the unseen world; but I have found that there is a limit to our progress in that direction—that we know so little of the conditions that go to produce the phenomena that it is better to get at the reality itself, of which the *séance* is simply one of many doorways. To poets, seers, and men of exalted mentality, like Mr. Richmond, no doorway of the kind is necessary—they need no medium to tell them of the glories of the spiritual life, for they appear to have direct access to it. But to men like myself—dense materialists

and immersed in the business and gaiety of life—the phenomena are doubtless useful and necessary to show them there is something outside their money-making and so forth, that cannot be ranged with their ordinary experience. This is how Alfred Russell Wallace became a spiritualist—by undoubted facts coming over and over again into his experience that could not be accounted for by any of the known laws of nature. Eventually, however, we shall find that there is nothing supernatural about any of the phenomena, it is simply that we don't know yet all nature's secrets."

"But to get a peep behind the scenes puts everything in a new perspective," said Mrs. Richmond, "and the mass of people seem to be running after such worthless things. I often wonder that the death of near relatives or even friends does not divert them from the mere amassing of wealth or the desire to get a rung or two higher on the social ladder. But it doesn't seem to have the slightest effect on them. All their anxiety is to know how the deceased 'cut up,' financially, and then they enter the whirl of competition again, jostling, snatching, and even robbing each other if they can keep within the law."

"Yes," said Mr. Mason, "they are all too busy with their 'muck-rakes,' as Bunyan described their wealth-getting implements in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, to care to look beyond. And yet," he went on, "in the present state of society you can't blame any one, especially those who have no outlook, for trying to secure a competence, as those who do not succeed in the struggle find themselves pushed to the wall and in danger of starvation. And, unfortunately, the most gifted people, and often the most deserving, are the least fitted to engage in the fight. We shall not know, Mrs. Richmond, what humanity is capable of until the age of competition

has passed. Now you can scarcely be kind to a person without being suspected of an ulterior motive or an attack on his purse."

"Yes, I have thought a great deal about that lately, especially since I have seen that it is not good work so much as a time-serving spirit that is required to 'get on' in the ordinary sense. But I had to unlearn all I was taught when a girl to see this. Father constantly instilled into us that all people who didn't succeed were fools. I have been sorry for the poor all my life, but always realized how little could be done for them."

"Yes," said Mr. Mason sadly, "all the benevolent societies and institutions in the world, and all the efforts of charitable persons, are absolutely useless—merely a salve on an ugly social ulcer—and yet every one cries out if an attempt is made to probe the cause of the disease in the body politic. Cover it up and lull the pain with soporifics, but don't disturb the patient. Oh no! everything must be hidden, even though the whole social fabric be rotten from top to bottom."

"But what is the remedy, Mr. Mason?" said Stella, with her glowing face fixed on the lecturer.

"Simply a scientific distribution of the wealth of the world, with social honours reserved for the most capable workers, so that emulation may take the place of competition, and men may be incited to do their best in the work of the world as in a game of cricket or football, for their credit's sake and not for mere pecuniary gain. Even now the best work in science, literature, art, and invention is done more for fame than cash. When once this is clearly apprehended all the scramble for wealth will cease, and a new era of civilization will be inaugurated."

"But how long shall we have to wait," said Mrs Ashford, "while in the meantime the toilers are crushed

under the wheels of the millionaires, and want and hunger stalk through the land ? ”

“ Ideas rule the world and all that any one can do is to help in their dissemination,” said Mr. Mason quietly. “ Great cataclysms like the French Revolution clear some obstacles out of the path, but ideas move slowly, and no reform can be permanent that is too far ahead of the thought of the time. Herbert Spencer, who, by the way, furnishes a notable illustration in point, of capable work performed without pecuniary reward shows, this very clearly in his *Study of Sociology*, and enjoins patience on reformers, who, although seeing how little can be done, must still be content to do that little.”

“ There seems an endless lot to talk about and the evening has gone like a flash,” observed Mrs. Richmond as she said good-night to her guests.

“ Well, can't we all come again ? ” said Mr. Mason.

“ Oh yes ! if it isn't too humdrum for you. I have given up trying to be like other people, but next time we will discuss music as well as social problems.”

CHAPTER XXX

“WELL, what do you think of Mrs. Richmond?” said Mr. Andover to the lecturer behind the scenes on the following evening, when Mr. Mason had just left an immense audience whose plaudits were still echoing through the theatre.

He appeared somewhat astonished by the question, but replied promptly, “She strikes me as a woman who does not recognize her own powers. Mrs. Richmond is quite as competent to form an opinion on most subjects as myself, but when we got on to social inequalities last evening she looked at me as if I were an inspired teacher, although, from her remarks, I could see that she had got right at the heart of the subject and had evidently been thinking about it all her life. So few women have the gift of generalization. They will go off to side issues. It is only occasionally that you meet women who can see clearly.”

“That is just what I think about her,” said Mr. Andover. “You may have heard that latterly I was opposed to Mr. Richmond’s methods, but I often told his wife that I should have listened to her with the greatest pleasure if she would have taken the services occasionally. But she laughed me to scorn and had no sympathy with any one who adversely criticized her husband. ‘I am miles behind Mr. Richmond both mentally and spiritually,’ she used to say ‘and that is

the reason you think you understand me better.' And Mr. Richmond had no keener or more interested listener in the church than his wife? She is always enthusiastic over anything she believes in, and she and Mrs. Ashford were at the theatre again to-night, in the front seat of the dress circle, drinking in every word you said. It might have been champagne by the way their eyes brightened as you warmed to your subject. Mrs. Andover and I were sitting close to them and got quite infected with their ardour."

"Ah! then Mrs. Richmond will have heard that I propose to go there again next Saturday," Mr. Mason remarked. "Mrs. Ashford and I arranged for that evening before we parted last night, as it will be the last one available before I leave Sydney."

* * * * *

It was not as a stranger that Mr. Mason approached Mrs. Richmond's house on his next visit. To a man who takes up an unpopular cause it is everything to have a few personal friends who understand his mission, and have incurred so much opprobrium themselves that they are not likely to desert him when troublous times arise. All his fashionable friends seemed as nothing to him beside this woman with the sad earnest face and sympathetic eyes.

"I wish I could tell you half what I think of your lectures," were Mrs. Richmond's first words as she sat down in her accustomed corner after her cordial welcome, "and you must be glad to be able to speak to such a multitude. That was what I always wanted for Mr. Richmond; it was like clipping the wings of an eagle for him to be tied down to church services and all the narrow ideas about the duties of ministers. He was meant for something so much wider and grander; but it is difficult to get out of a groove. We both began

to see the advantage of speaking in a public hall instead of a church for an exponent of advanced views, but his work seemed to be snapped off short before its full development."

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How long have you been lecturing, Mr. Mason ? "

" Well, strange to say, the night on which I was publicly presented with an address on severing my connexion with business and journalism and taking to the platform was precisely the date of Mr. Richmond's death. If I am destined to do something towards the fulfilment of his work in Australia, it is a remarkable coincidence; for it is not only in Sydney that Mr. Richmond's name is known. In all the leading cities of Australia and New Zealand the liberal-minded people with whom I am brought in contact always speak of him with admiration, as he was comparatively alone in Australia in the dissemination of free-thought ideas a decade ago, and has made the way easier for all who come after him."

" I am beginning to see now the use and benefit of the trials and persecution he encountered, and I suffered so keenly myself that I have learnt to sympathize with those who are also passing through the fire. You can always reckon on two regular attendants at your lectures in Mrs. Ashford and myself, and however wet the night our seats will be occupied," Mrs. Richmond added with a touch of her girlish enthusiasm. " But when are you going to lecture on spiritualism ? "

" Not this time, Mrs. Richmond. I am only giving one more lecture and the course is not long enough to take up an evening with a subject so generally misrepresented and misunderstood. It attracts just as large an audience, but you cannot imagine how difficult it is to get hold of the people when I speak on spiritualism.

I can feel them literally recoil as I begin, and it is not till I have almost finished that I can get anything like the response that comes back to me in my other lectures. And there is so much imposture about and credulity, that but for the hope of enlightening a few here and there I should not have much to say publicly on spiritualism. It always seems necessary to explain, when you avow yourself a believer in the genuineness of the phenomena, that you are not also an arrant fool, though I use rather stronger language than that sometimes. Like true religion it is a matter for the inmost soul, and all I can hope for is to turn people's thoughts towards the future life. And this is difficult, for most rationalists are such stubborn dense materialists, just as I was myself."

"And here's another," said Mrs. Richmond. "Even the last evening my husband and I spent together I brought up the subject of the future life, as I had just been reading Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*. 'I can't see, Freda,' I began, as we sat at the supper table, 'any basis at all for the hope of individual immortality. The more I think and reason about it the more convinced I am that it is a delusive hope. Why should we live again if the animals do not, for they seem to enjoy existence just as much as we do?' 'But who says they don't?' Mr. Richmond replied with his bright smile. 'I quite expect to meet my faithful Pilot again when I pass over. Nothing dies,' he added, 'and if this world is not a school for the training of souls it is quite incomprehensible.' I remembered afterwards that these last words he had used once before, when we were seated in my father's drawing-room at home the morning I consented to come to Australia with him."

"But all these minor problems are solved," Mr. Mason replied, "when you recognize the indestructibility

of spirit and that matter is only one of its manifestations. What is matter after all? The hardest mineral or metal can be resolved into mere vapour if it is exposed to sufficient heat, and modern astronomy has clearly demonstrated that the earth itself, like the other planets, was thrown off from the sun in a state of vapour, and gradually cooled down to the stage when vegetation started and animal life commenced. Our bodies that seem so solid resolve themselves into gas when the quickening spirit is gone out of them."

"It makes me gasp to even think of it all," said Stella. "But here we are solid enough this afternoon and we will try to enjoy ourselves. Mary and I thought that you might like to be present at one of our trance sittings before you leave, and this evening we shall be alone after the children are in bed, as Mrs. Ashford has been prevented coming, although we should have had the sitting just the same if she were here, as she is one of the few we occasionally admit. But still Mary and I enjoy our sittings *à deux* best of all. I should like to see if we can get a link established between yourself and Mr. Richmond, and so obtain news of you when you are on your travels. We have been told that he is present at all your lectures and is rejoiced at the way the good work is being carried on."

"I had been hoping you would propose something of the kind," Mr. Mason replied. "I have only seen your planchette writing, and trance speaking is to me much more satisfactory. I feel, too, as if I might hear something to do me good."

It was the easiest thing now for Mary to pass into the trance condition. Sometimes when they were not thinking about it, and Stella would turn to the piano and sing to Mary while she rested on the sofa after the work was done, Mrs. Richmond would be

surprised, on turning round, to find her with eyes closed and prepared to speak.

"The music made the conditions," Stella was told only the previous night, "and I wanted to tell you to be sure to ask Mr. Mason to sit with you to-morrow evening." Mary said when she came to herself that as Mrs. Richmond was singing she saw a shadowy form walk to the head of the sofa on which she was lying and then she remembered no more.

And this evening Stella had only to take Mary's hand after they had all three sat awhile and talked of Mr. Mason's plans for the future for Mary to be ready to speak. He was going to New Zealand almost immediately—had just received a telegram to say that a hall had been secured by prominent supporters for a long course of lectures, and it was soon evident that their communication was going to be entirely on the lecturer's work. He was described as constantly surrounded with a group of spirits who directed his movements, they being under the guidance of others of a more advanced grade, who could not communicate directly with him, as there were conditions in spirit life as definite as those that existed on earth.

To Mrs. Richmond's question "why these advanced spirits were only able to control the lecturer through others?" she was told that only those in the same spheres can hold direct communication. If in earth-life two individuals of different nationalities were seated together, say the one a Russian and the other an Englishman, neither knowing the other's language, it would be just as impossible for them to converse as for these higher grades of spirits to communicate directly with the less advanced. All great movements on the earth have thus received their initial direction from potent though unseen spiritual agencies, every religion owing

its origin to some great influx of light that came to its founders, however much the original thought may become degraded and alloyed by later interpreters or professors. Where love is there the spiritual light is strongest, and they were assured that there is often more of it where two or three are gathered together than in the most gorgeous cathedral.

The lecturer was always surrounded on the platform, they were told, with a galaxy of bright spirits, while one who was the leader of the rest stood above the speaker and directed his thoughts and speech.

"This has never been described to me before, but I can quite believe it," said Mr. Mason. "I seem to be taken possession of a few hours before the time of the lecture. I always spend the day alone, and during a long walk that I usually take in the morning the lecture 'comes,' as it were, and I am then satisfied that it will be all right, and I need give no more thought to it until I walk on to the platform."

"Will it be possible for you to tell us anything about the lecturer while he is on his travels?" Mrs. Richmond interjected; "not that Mary and I are lacking in faith or want a test, but to enable us to give proof to others."

"Proofs are of little use to average people who have made up their minds it is all delusion, but I will try," was the answer. "But the lecturer must take with him something belonging to you both. People think that because we have cast off our bodies and are in another state of existence that we at once become omniscient and omnipresent like the universal spirit. Just consider for a moment the countless millions of disembodied intelligences that are set free on this side, and remember that each of us must have a clue to find the particular one we seek. Without this the task would be as hopeless

and difficult as if a person were set to find some one in one of your large cities without knowing either his name or address."

"Let me have your portraits," was Mr. Mason's suggestion later on. "They will be delightful talismans to carry round with me, and will help to sustain my courage when difficulties and disappointments present themselves. This sitting has helped me enormously and explained much that was inexplicable before in the way I have been driven into lecturing. It was, of course, against the advice of all prudent people that I relinquished a good profession, and I should have been looked on as a hopeless lunatic if I had ventured on the explanation that I felt I was engaged on some important mission directed by invisible helpers."

"I look a poor scarecrow to be carried about," said Mrs. Richmond as she and Mary produced their pictures—cartes-de-visite of the prevailing fashion. "They were terribly shocked in England to see the sad condition of health I had been reduced to, as I was so strong and full of life and spirits when at home."

"It is better so," said Mr. Mason almost reverently. "You are having a wonderful experience and the meaning of it all is not yet fully disclosed."

"These pictures are just the right size for my pocket-book," the lecturer went on; "and will you be sure to let me know what you hear about me at your sittings?"

"We will both write in the course of a few weeks if there is anything to tell," said Mary. "Mother always takes down unusual or important items for me to read after I am out of the trance. It is quite new to me and most interesting, as I never know anything from the time I close my eyes. Some mediums, I believe, are partially conscious, but I might be miles away."

"Perhaps you are," said Mr. Mason, laughing,

“careering about on your own account. Clairvoyants say that at first it is difficult for them to distinguish between disembodied spirits and those that have only temporarily left their bodies either during sleep or in the trance condition.”

“You had better all come back to earth again,” said Elsie, who had entered the drawing-room at this moment.

“The supper tray has been ready some time, and you all look weird and uncanny. I don’t approve of this kind of thing at all. It is making mother quite ill and unfit for her work.”

CHAPTER XXXI

NO one approved of it. Although to Stella herself this spiritual awakening had been the chief event of her life, outsiders noticed the gradual loosening of the hold she had so rigidly kept during her residence in Sydney of the manifold duties that devolved on her. No working woman, her friends would say, had so little respite from daily drudgery or toiled through so many hours without intermission. Sundays, that are the relief and safety-valves of many an overstrained system, had been for her the hardest days of all. The fatigue of the musical services, the teaching in the Sunday-school, and the constant desire for her husband's ministry to be "successful," were too much strain after the exhaustive labour of the week. Sixteen hours a day of teaching, housekeeping and sewing combined were enough to sap the strongest constitution, and for many months before Mr. Richmond's death Stella always felt the least fitted for her work on Monday mornings. Her husband had noticed how exhausted she was after the Sunday-school, and for some time had insisted on her taking her only complete rest in the week when she came home on Sunday afternoons. So she lay down on the drawing-room sofa from four until the church bells announced the time for her to dress for evening service, Mr. Richmond bringing with his own hands her cup of tea and bread and butter, and sending the

children out to the servants with strict orders that "dear mother was not to be disturbed."

Stella was quite aware of the change in her mental attitude and strove vigorously against it. Sundays were entirely rest days now, and she would determine each week to start quite afresh on Monday morning and pump up some of her old energy. She would resolve to prepare a few of the more advanced pupils for University examinations and thus keep up the prestige that recent successes had given her. But this was not to be. Time upon time she would have to leave the schoolroom and go to find her chief counsellor, Elsie, and putting her arms about her neck deplore with bitter tears her inability to give a lesson. "I sit perfectly helpless, dear, at the head of my class or beside the piano, and can no longer whip and goad myself to do the work. I seem to have pushed myself to the extreme limit and can go no farther," she would sob out, and Elsie would try to encourage her, but recognized that some change would have to be made.

Mary reminded her how Madame Denver had told her in the trance that she would have to go to England, and how warmly she had asserted to the contrary.

"But if I don't intend to go, and have determined never to leave Australia now father and mother are dead and my old home broken up?" Stella had retorted.

"When the time comes you will have to go," had been Madame's quiet reply, and it seemed now as if nothing but a long sea voyage could restore Mrs. Richmond to bodily and mental vigour.

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The sittings went on as usual, but for some time when they questioned concerning the lecturer's movements they were told that he had not yet been visited.

One night, however, there was quite an interesting story to relate.

"We found him at the bedside of a sick man in a New Zealand city," they were informed by Mr. Richmond when Mary was in the trance, and were further told that Mr. Hammond, Mary's special guardian and instructor, was at the time Mr. Richmond's companion. "The man is dying and has the faculty of discerning spirits, and I think he saw us quite distinctly. The lecturer took your portraits out of his pocket and told him of the sittings, and the sick man said he had often heard of me, and had seen my free-thought paper, *More Light*.

Nothing more was said, and Stella, who had taken all this down verbatim, requesting Mr. Richmond to wait while she did so, was delighted to have this tangible news to give to Mary when she came to herself. By the next New Zealand mail they both wrote to Mr. Mason at the Auckland P. O., as his course of lectures there would be still running, and anxiously looked for the result.

They had not long to wait. The next week's mail brought letters from Mr. Mason to them both, written about the same time as their own, which had crossed his on the ocean. He told them of a most interesting visit he had paid to a sick man, a druggist in the city of Auckland, who was dying of consumption and now confined to his bed. "He has the most wonderfully developed psychic powers," Mr. Mason informed them, "and constantly sees spirits in his room, and seems partly in the other life already. He heard of my lectures and sent a message by a friend that he would like to see me, and I spent an hour with him a few nights ago. I showed him your pictures and told him of your sittings and about Mr. Richmond's work, of which he had, however, frequently heard. He then became rather

exhausted, and presently told me he had just seen two spirits standing at the foot of his bed, and described Mr. Richmond exactly as he was in life."

To Stella and Mary this was the most conclusive external proof they had yet had, and they especially congratulated themselves on their account having been sent off so promptly. The letters crossing on the way constituted a test that should satisfy the most incredulous. But they found that it only strengthened the faith of believers, and brought no conviction to persons immersed in worldly ideas.

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The idea of parting from her dear friends in Sydney was like death to Stella. Looking back on her life in England she realized how far she had travelled away in thought and aspiration from her old-world associates. It seemed as if she had been asleep in those early days, and that all those who surrounded her then had their heads buried in the present life so exclusively that never a thought was given to the beyond. There could not be a denser materialism than that of the average well-to-do English business man, and her young life had been steeped in it, although she saw that her desire to help less fortunate people was even then a blind groping towards the light. If her father and mother had been alive, she would have told them everything, and fancied how she would have sat between them holding their hands and telling them of the way her eyes had been opened and she had been led out of her dungeon, just as an angel came to open the prison doors for the Apostle Peter—one of the miracles her father used to scoff at. But if they knew the days of miracles were not confined to apostolic times, and that every nation on the earth had signs and wonders to relate, they would believe. One thing, wherever she

went she would be surrounded with the benign influences that had brightened her path, consciously or unconsciously, all her life and had eventually fully revealed themselves to her. It would be good, too, for the little children to see their aunts and cousins and know a different sort of life to the frugal one in which they had been reared. Yes! she must go and leave all her future in the hands of her invisible helpers.

The time for the last sitting with her faithful Mary arrived, for the last farewell to all whose love had brightened her sad days. And never had any one got through the turmoil of breaking up house and preparations for a journey more easily. Everything was left to the arrangement of her spirit friends. She was assured that even in the selection of the vessel no anxiety need be felt, as that and everything else was managed for her. Outsiders would, of course, have said that it was the universal sympathy felt for the widow, broken down in health and spirits, and the four fatherless children, that made her path so smooth and pleasant. Those who had seceded from the church in early days as well as later dissentients loaded her with gifts and necessaries for the voyage. Some wealthy supporters whom she had not seen for many years sent her cheques and letters of farewell, and it was with a full and overflowing heart that she embarked on the sailing vessel that had been selected as the most likely to secure her the needful rest and quiet.

It was desolate to think of going out into the world again from the shelter of the household that had always been a blessed retreat from external trouble. Mrs. Richmond had never known what it was to have a harsh word said to her in Mr. Richmond's lifetime, and Elsie and Mary had stood between her and all household worries since his death, and there never seemed to be

either a wry thought or word in the place—nothing but love and sympathy. The sittings with Mary she would miss most of all, but while she held the medium's hand for the last time she was told that these messages were not so important as she thought, that she was becoming each day more open to direct influence, and that the strong internal assurance was more to be sought after than either trance, speech or written communications, that the reality only comes when these are transcended by personal inspiration and direct illumination—this last being the greatest gift of all.

Stella was assured, too, that the best part of her life was yet to come, that work of an entirely different character awaited her for which her previous life had been a preparation, and that in due time the way would be opened out before her. "Always seek the guiding hand" was the last injunction.

Stella did not realize then the full import of this teaching, and how, later on, in following it, she would have to alienate the sympathy of many who now thought she could do no wrong. But the path, however difficult, led upwards, even though her friends contended that the well-beaten conventional track was the one she ought to pursue.

CHAPTER XXXII

“**N**O one could imagine the strange revulsion of feeling I experienced when the hour for landing in England arrived,” Stella wrote to her dearest friend in Sydney. “I should have felt more at home if I had been nearing Circular Quay than the London Docks, and sat trembling, with nerves all unstrung, in the saloon waiting for my friends. Presently they rushed in, Phyllis, my special pet when a child, first of all, now grown into a tall stately girl and most divinely fair, and my sisters and brother-in-law, the latter Margaret’s wealthy husband.

“They all took possession of the children, who looked splendidly well and bonnie, and were full of delight and eagerness to get out of the ship. Then came the rapid journey down to Laceborough in the late afternoon, through the country at its best in the bright June weather, with trees at their fullest verdure and fields like a green carpet besprinkled with flowers. I could hardly realize when we got to Margaret’s home that the beautifully furnished house and picturesque surroundings were almost the counterpart of those I had been brought up in. Soft carpet everywhere, lovely flowers, well-trained servants in spotless attire waiting to attend on us, and then the dainty meal exquisitely served, the table brilliant with silver and crystal and floral decorations. The children had never sat down to such a

banquet before, but they looked quite at home and so sweet and well behaved, just as if they had been used to it all their lives. The three elder ones went two days afterwards to the high schools with their cousins, Alice's children, and I find that in both the boys' and girls' divisions they are able to take the place of children their own age—are rather ahead of them I am informed by the teachers.

“ Soon I was besieged with callers, but, of course, I am out of the running. Every one seems, besides, to have just stuck in the groove I left so many years ago, and I realize that I have travelled miles away from them. It is interesting to try and recall my old feelings in respect to the social surroundings, but find my thoughts are not the thoughts of those around me, and I just have to keep to commonplace remarks excepting on rare occasions. One of these came with the visit of the minister of the Old Meeting—the Rev. Robert Alexander—a most able preacher, and editor besides of one of the high-class magazines. We talked and talked for hours. He knew Mr. Richmond, was at college with him, and I told him a little of my Sydney experiences and the wonderful light that had come into my life. ‘ This is the first time I have seen you look interested since you came back,’ Margaret said as she came into the drawing-room and found us still talking briskly. ‘ Mrs. Richmond has been giving me the most impressive account of her experiences in spiritualism,’ Mr. Alexander replied. ‘ For the first time, the subject has appealed to me,’ ‘ We made up our minds to keep it in the background while Stella was with us,’ her sister rejoined, ‘ as we very much disapprove of anything of the kind, and believe it is only this new craze she has got hold of that has sent her off the balance both bodily and mentally.’ ‘ Oh no!’ I replied, ‘ that is not quite correct. Before

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I knew anything about spiritualism, long before my husband's death, I was reduced to the most terrible state of health, and I see now it was sheer madness for me to have attempted to carry on the school without him. You would never understand, even if I described to you the martyrdom that each day of my life was to me. Any one must live through it, and be fashioned and trained in a luxurious home like this, besides being taught from childhood to consider non-success in a worldly sense a crime, to understand it. But I wouldn't have been without the experience for the world, and I wouldn't go back to the mental condition I was in when a girl for anything! All these beautiful surroundings are absolutely nothing to me now.'

"The next morning I got a lovely letter from Mr. Alexander, asking me to go to tea there that evening, as his wife was as keenly interested as himself in hearing the conclusion of my wonderful story. 'For the first time spiritualism appears absolutely beautiful instead of grotesque,' he said, and he sent me a charming book, the heroine of which was a fascinating woman who carried on her husband's work as a preacher after his death.

"When I got there he asked me if I had looked at the book, and said that he was most anxious that I should apply for the position of minister, then vacant, at one of the leading churches of the denomination. 'Your ideas would put life into some of our old doctrines,' he urged, 'and give the crowning touch to a noble faith.' You will see by this that Mr. Alexander is a warm advocate for women taking any position they are fit for. 'Intellect has no sex,' he maintains.

"I did nothing but laugh at his suggestion, and for the life me of could never enter a pulpit, although it seems as if my mission here is to privately address small groups

of inquirers. My grown-up nieces and a few others say I have brought fresh ideas into the family, and that I am like a messenger from the unseen.

"The old servants and the Sunday-school girls gave me the heartiest welcome back of all. Of course many of them are scattered, but the first Sunday I went to the Old Meeting there was one of my former scholars waiting at the church door when the service was over.

" 'The moment I opened my eyes this morning,' she said, 'I hoped that you might have arrived and be at the service.' And she stood a most pathetic figure, with tears in her eyes, with a little group of bairns around her. 'The Sundays we used to spend together have helped me through a lot of trouble,' she went on; 'and did you notice one of the hymns you copied out for us was sung this morning? It is in the new hymn-book with nearly all the others.'

" 'Oh yes!' I said, 'Adelaide Proctor's, "We ask Thy peace, O Lord." They have helped me too. I will bring my children to see you before long, and we will talk the old times over together.' This poor girl was strewn roses in my path after the wedding the last time I saw her, and it seemed as if they had sprung up round my feet again, as I walked home with the children and thought how the trifling kindness shown her had come back to me a hundredfold.

"It is strange how it is chiefly children and poor people who take much interest in me. When we go to spend a day with my favourite sister, Alice, we are met some streets away from her house by all the young ones of the family and escorted there in triumph. They had been counting the hours, they said, until we came, and then started to meet us halfway. The elders are outwardly kindness itself, but are evidently much concerned as to what I am to do for a living. So

engrossed are they in the life at Laceborough and money-making, that the only thing that would arouse any interest in Australia would be a prospective gold-mine that was to turn us into millionaires. At first I thought they would like to know something of the distinctive features of Australian life, and what the country is like—the fauna and flora and so on. But life in a manufacturing town appears to sap interest in everything but wealth-producing topics, and I find that I read books ten years ago in Sydney that Mr. Alexander says are just being heard of in Laceborough. In fact, two maiden ladies who were at school with me I found reading Edward Maitland's *The Pilgrim and the Shrine* as a new book. They were astounded when I said it had excited much interest in Sydney a decade ago, and they knew nothing about his later writings, and opened their eyes very wide when I told them that, although in *The Pilgrim and the Shrine* he condemned spiritualism, Mr. Maitland had become, like myself, a convert to its higher doctrines.

“ But the strangest thing in connexion with spiritualism happened when I went to spend a few days with a clergyman and his wife at a village in a neighbouring county. He is related to a friend of mine in Sydney, and on the Saturday night after my arrival he got me to tell them in his study all about my remarkable experiences. The next morning I went to church with the family, and the service struck me as the most dead-alive thing I had ever taken part in. I was told at dinner that the afternoon congregation was still heavier. They held the second service then instead of in the evening to suit the farmers, who wanted the serving men to attend to the cows later in the day. But I was assured that almost every one in the church slept through the sermon.

"It was the funniest sight as I looked round the building after the hymn which preceded the sermon had been sung. Most of the men were farm labourers dressed in clean smock-frocks, and had evidently been trying in vain to brush their rough shocks of hair into position, and sure enough by the time the text was given out they had all settled down preparatory to their usual snooze. I felt a bit sleepy myself that hot afternoon, but in a few minutes was aroused by the clergyman beginning a graphic account of all the wonders of spiritualism I had unfolded to him the previous evening. I don't remember his text or how he got round to this theme, which he began by saying, 'There are some people who declare they have actual knowledge of the future life and have messages from those who have gone before,' and then gave my personal experiences almost verbatim. As he went on it seemed as if a breath of life had passed over the sleepy congregation, and each one sat up to hear this novel discourse, remaining open-mouthed to the end. 'I woke them up a bit,' my friend said at tea-time, 'and some stopped behind to ask me when I could tell them more about it.'

"You see, dear friend, we have got hold of what they seem to have but a vague notion of in the churches, and this all shows how deeply rooted in human nature is the hope of immortality.

"One thing has pained me very much in my old home and shows the density of the atmosphere around my relatives. I should have so much liked to hear something about father's last illness and death, and to have felt that at least his memory was cherished by all of us as it deserved to be. But Margaret, at whose house I am staying, never mentions his name, and once when I asked a question, hoping it would lead to some conversa-

tion about him, she said, 'I never talk of dead people. What's the use, when they're buried and done for?' Alice, who has a much sweeter and more tender nature, does not think it worth while to bother about the future life or to speculate on the continued existence of those who have gone before. 'This life is quite enough for me to manage,' she says, although she told me a lot about father, and how he asked when he was dying to have Phyllis placed beside the bed 'just to look at her,' he whispered, and died almost immediately. This is my only letter this month, but it is to the whole group of friends in Sydney, and you will pardon its length."

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"I don't think I can possibly stay in England," Stella wrote a few months later in her Sydney letter. "I am pining for my old friends and their companionship more than I can say, and seem to only half live without them. Besides, I must earn a living somehow, and fear if I obtain a position here that I should find my teaching days are gone.

"Mr. Fortuna, Alice's brother-in-law and my father's oldest friend, is now a member of the Gladstone Government. He is always kind and helpful, and says he could get me a position in the High School here, if I think I am strong enough to take it. But I find I cannot give a lesson without turning quite faint and ghastly. 'Whatever is the matter with you?' said Alice the other day when I was staying with her. 'Oh, I have just been helping your girls and mine with their French lesson for to-morrow, and it seems as if a tender part of my brain is touched when I attempt any teaching.' 'It is madness for you to try to teach then,' she added; and another reason—something that occurred just now—has made me feel less inclined than ever to undertake

it, and also that more sympathetic companionship is a necessity to me.

"It appears that Mr. Fortuna had a position in view for me, but before going any further in the matter he wrote to me saying that he had heard I had imbibed some strange religious ideas and was inclined towards spiritualism. 'I shall need an assurance from you,' he wrote, 'that all this sort of thing will be kept in the background, so that I need have no scruples in sending in your nomination.'

"'That settles it!' I exclaimed indignantly. 'If I am fit for the position, I can surely be trusted, as I was in Sydney, not to obtrude what are simply personal opinions of my own into the lessons. I would not disgrace myself by writing any such assurance,' I said to Margaret, as I sat with herself and husband in solemn state at the breakfast table. 'What is it all about?' she replied, beginning to read Mr. Fortuna's letter which I had passed over to her. 'A very proper request, I consider,' she remarked in a highly superior manner, and I sat with a volcano burning in my breast, ready to overflow in fiery speech.

"However, I said nothing more, but felt that a dinner of herbs with those whose outlook is the same as my own would be preferable to all this soulless grandeur. I have not yet mentioned my determination to return to Australia, but I feel my heart is there. The children, too, talk of nothing but Sydney. They are having splendid times here, but they feel the restraint, I think, and they tell their cousins of picnics, and campings-out, and fishing, and oyster gathering, and paddling with bare feet on the shores of the harbour, until the cousins grow quite excited, and declare they shall never be happy till they see it all for themselves. I accidentally got to know the other day that my four bairns, are counting the days

until they get back to Sydney and their old free life there. They don't appear to think there is anything to wait for but a suitable ship.

"Have you heard any news of Mr. Mason?" the letter went on. "It seems as if everything that interests me is away at the Antipodes. I have had one letter from him, written in New Zealand, where his lectures seem to be highly appreciated. There is nothing to compare with them here. All the preachers I hear are in a set groove, which they must not overstep if they wish to retain their pulpits, and Charles Bradlaugh whom I heard debate with Mr. Alexander on 'The Reasonableness of a Belief in God,' is too strongly materialistic to satisfy me. It seemed, too, that Mr. Alexander's case for the other side was weak, his main contention being that there must be some reasonable ground for the universality of a belief in a Supreme Being and future life, and that our highest intuitions are to be implicitly trusted.

"As I sat there I felt I could give the audience something more tangible and soul-satisfying than that, remembering how the intuitional theory caused me nothing but discontent in my youthful days.

"I had to slip off, unobserved, as it were, to hear Bradlaugh, for whose character and ability I have the highest respect, and went with my eldest nephew as an escort. 'I attend all Bradlaugh's meetings myself,' he said, 'but they are considered rather "shady" places, and neither my mother nor auntie know that I go.'

"When I told Margaret that I should be away that evening hearing Bradlaugh, I expected an onslaught; but she made no remark, and my nephew and I started off gaily, as I was anxious to see the great secularist and also to hear Mr. Alexander in debate.

“ The gathering was in a long low room at the top of a warehouse, and when we got to the place we found a great stream of workmen entering the building, each of whom took a short pipe out of his mouth and put it in his pocket before ascending the narrow stairs. The room was packed to suffocation, but through our knowing Mr. Alexander we were piloted through the crowd to a seat near the platform, where I found I was almost the only woman present. Bradlaugh's tall, stalwart frame, splendid voice, and unflinching faith in his own opinions, strongly impressed me in his favour; but, as I said before, the almost fierce denial of any outlook beyond this world made his utterances appear as narrow and dogmatic as those of any other bigot, whether ecclesiastical or secular.

“ The next day at dinner Margaret asked me if the Bradlaugh I went to hear the previous evening was the one who was associated with that awful Mrs. Besant.

“ ‘ Yes ! ’ I replied, ‘ but I don't think you can know anything of her work or you could not speak of her like that. I consider her one of the bravest and noblest women in England, although my views and hers are quite dissimilar, as she is an avowed atheist and secularist.’

“ ‘ I know quite enough of her,’ Margaret retorted, ‘ to make me request that her name shall never be mentioned again in this house.’

“ I did not make any answer, as I do not very much care what Margaret thinks about anything; but it has made me feel all the more strongly that my old home is not an abiding place for me or where the children of a liberal-minded man like Mr. Richmond should be reared.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

“**H**OW delicious it is to be back again!” Mrs. Richmond remarked to Mrs. Ashford, as they took their place together at the theatre the first Sunday evening after her return from England. “Every stone in the streets and every leaf on the trees I love, and I feel that I can breathe freely once more. And here is the lecturer just the same as ever, with the flower in his button-hole, and looking as spick-and-span as if he had come out of a bandbox,” Stella went on, as Mr. Mason walked on the platform and was greeted with ringing cheers from the crowded house.

“And there are all the old churchpeople below, and the little tailor leading the applause as usual. There was nothing to equal this at home. I found out a meeting of the spiritualists in Laceborough one Sunday night, but it was the dreariest thing imaginable: a badly ventilated dirty room and a trance speaker mouthing out a lot of platitudes. I had seen nothing of the phenomena for so long that I felt drawn to the place, but it gave me a sickening, and I am more than ever convinced that it is degrading to run after anything of the kind.”

“*Séances* and trance-speaking have sprung up on all sides since you left Sydney,” Mrs. Ashford remarked, “and Mary has been much in request and sitting regularly with Mr. Mason and one or two others since his return.”

"I don't think I shall ever feel the same again about phenomena," Stella rejoined, "although I was never happier than the two years before I went to England, when I seemed to bask in the new light that had come into my life. But I think I shall have to wait for further developments, and have passed for good out of the primitive stage. I had to talk so much about it, and give all the reasons I could muster for my faith to so many unbelievers in England, that it seems to have lifted me out of mere sittings. In fact, I had to rely entirely on my inner assurance of the truth all the time I was away, and although I felt as people must do, I think, when swimming without corks for the first time, it enabled me to test the strength of my convictions, and I feel now that there is a great ocean of truth before me yet to explore."

"How lucky I am that the first lecture I hear is on spiritualism, the one I have been wanting Mr. Mason to give from the time I first knew him," said Stella, as the two friends settled themselves to listen to the opening sentences.

Many spiritualists who came there that evening expecting to hear of wonders and miracles would doubtless be disappointed. Mr. Mason had seen as many extraordinary manifestations as most people, but recognized that the mere seeking after phenomena had nothing to do with the development of the spiritual life; in fact, some of the most densely materialistic people he knew were among those who rushed the most frantically after every fresh medium. So, although the lecturer attested his belief in the genuineness of much of the phenomena and acknowledged that but for his own experience he should still be a rank materialist, he dwelt most on the philosophy of the higher teaching, and pointed out that modern spiritualism was

only a fresh awakening to the reality of the unseen presences about us, that as far back in the history of the race as we could go testimony to the potent influence of the spirit world could be found, and that we were just now escaping from the wave of unbelief and scepticism that had flooded the earlier part of the nineteenth century.

"How wonderfully the people listened to you to-night," said Stella to Mr. Mason as they strolled towards her home together after the lecture; "and I appreciated it much more myself than I should have done before I went to England."

"Yes, I gathered from what you said the first evening we met that you had got beyond the phenomena."

"And yet, at present, I have not got myself safely anchored elsewhere, and look back regretfully to the delightful evenings Mary and I spent together. I suppose I shall feel better altogether when I am settled and working again."

"What are you going to do, Mrs. Richmond?" Mr. Mason asked.

"Well, there is nothing just now but teaching, and although I look so much better, still I know I can never make my mark in that line again. It is now a weariness to me and it used to be an inspiration. But I hope eventually to write. All my life I have thought of a book I would translate when I had time, and it always was so restful to look forward to—even such humble literary work as translation. I can do a lot of writing and thinking without being tired; in fact, hours pass unconsciously when I am much interested in anything of the kind."

"But why not try to write something on your own account?"

"I have written a few short things, reviews of special

books and so on, that have always gone into the papers, and I have sometimes found them copied in the journals of other colonies. But literature seems a sort of sacred thing to me, and I feel quite uplifted when I sit down to write, but dreadfully nervous and afraid of not reaching my ideal. It is a positive joy to me to see the sentences evolve."

"How enthusiastic you are!" said Mr. Mason laughing. "Old press-men like myself have had all the bloom rubbed off our enthusiasm, our principal care being to know how much goes to a column and what we shall get for it."

"It was told me once by a man—a sort of seer—" said Mrs. Richmond, "that every one gets his heart's desire sooner or later, though it may be sometimes after death, he said; but I hope I shan't have to wait till the next life for mine."

"Oh no!" Mr. Mason replied quickly. "Occasionally I have a sort of prescience of coming events, and I believe all that you wish for will be yours in due time. But you haven't told me yet why you elected to return to Australia. To outsiders it seems that you would have had a much easier life among your own friends, and I wonder they allowed you to return, still unfitted as you are for much exertion."

"Oh, it was entirely my own doing, and I think they all felt as if they ought to have kept me in England, whatever I said to the contrary. They got the best doctors available for me soon after my arrival, as although I was bright enough occasionally, I collapsed so suddenly and entirely when I attempted anything extra in the way of visiting or even packing up for short journeys, when they would have to come to my assistance, that they became alarmed. The doctor, in whose diagnosis they had absolute confidence, said that in all

probability I should never be better, that I had had a severe bodily and mental strain at a part of my life in which the system gets permanently injured, and that constant exertion in the future would be an impossibility. Then there was a family conclave, but I felt it would be the hardest thing to be dependent on a rich brother-in-law who looks at everything from a strictly business point of view, and would feel he had a right to snub and coerce me. So to all their suggestions of even a little help and teaching half-time I could only say, 'No, thank you,' as I felt a crust of bread here and a cup of tea would suit my mental condition so much better. If anything could bring me round in this world it would be love and sympathy, and I mean to have a good try at getting well now I am back again. I hadn't a friend in England to equal Mrs. Macalister, Mrs. Andover, Mrs. Ashford, and others whom you do not know, to say nothing of Elsie and Mary. In England, too, they could not conceive the cause of my breakdown. They have never known what it is to be afraid of spending twopence on a 'bus ride for fear it should take away just what was wanted to make up the price of a new pair of shoes for a child that must be bought that day, or to have to toil on when mind and body were both exhausted, or to be working for a church which from the first was impossible to galvanize into real spiritual life, and all the while to be learning the hardest if most elevating lesson of all, that what is called success in the world's eyes may prove to be the most abject failure when the final summing-up comes."

"You are very brave and very good, Mrs. Richmond," the lecturer interjected, speaking with difficulty. "I wish I were half so unselfish."

"Oh, don't be under any misapprehension of that kind," Mrs. Richmond replied, laughing at the idea; "I

am neither. It is a strange thing that at crises in my life I always undertake these hard tasks, just like when I threw over the rich man for the poor one to come to Australia in the first instance. Ideals fascinate me, but I make a sorry figure while I am painfully toiling towards them. Elsie was always scolding me for not thinking enough of myself when I was at the most brilliant time in my teaching experiences, but afterwards I knew that if I had been self-satisfied enough to please her my spiritual development would have stopped. I never can give myself airs of superiority, and I just love that text, 'Whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant.' It is not one's personality that needs glorifying so much as the individual soul which cares nothing for praise or the adulation of stupid people. I am looking forward now to my 'Day of Enlightenment' when what I feel to be worth working for is achieved and I can shake off my fetters entirely."

"I expect they were sorry to lose you at home," was all the reply the lecturer gave to his friend's rhapsody.

"Oh yes! the children and the servant especially, and an old nurse I had known when a girl wept over me, and said 'it was a downright shame that my rich relatives should permit me to be transported again.' And my sisters were quite grieved at my decision, but they don't understand me a bit, and were rather disgusted sometimes at my want of appreciation of all the belongings of the affluent friends I went amongst. There was one place, for instance, at which I stayed near Manchester. The gentleman and his wife whom I visited there were friends of my father's when I was quite a child, and I remember the first time Mr. Addison came to our house that I rebelled at having to go to bed at eight as usual. I loved him as a girl, and he used to go to Crofton

with me, and said it was good to get away from business and go 'violeting.' But too much money has ruined both him and his wife. He is one of the Cotton Princes of Manchester, and has a great income both from his mill and investments. His equipages are magnificent, and his horses are thoroughbred, and have their names on their stalls in the splendid castellated stables. Mr. Addison had just bought a picture at the Royal Academy Exhibition for £1,000 when I went to stay with them, and I used to enjoy looking at that while I sat at dinner. But I horrified them all at home when I came back, after being made so much of by the Addisons, by saying, 'I wouldn't change places with them for the world,' and I meant it. I used to sit opposite them in their carriage during our long drives in the country, as they both wanted to talk to me, and we had grand times together; but they were really most unhappy and I saw it when their faces were in repose as they lolled back on their carriage cushions. Their only son had turned out a drunkard and was then at an Inebriate Home. He had always had too much money to fool round with, and used to belong to the fast set at Hurlingham, and the daughters were as hard and unsympathetic as King Lear's. And Mr. and Mrs. Addison did nothing but 'nag' at each other all the time. 'I call them poor,' I said to Margaret. 'A home without love is a dungeon,' Mr. Addison was such a swell, too, in the county, and went out shooting with Lord Stanley's parties—so, of course, it was almost blasphemy for me to talk flippantly of such a big man. Still, in spite of all my 'tomfoolery,' as dear father used to call my ways of going on, we never seriously disagreed, and I parted from all at home with sincere regret on both sides. They came to see us off and gave the children and myself a grand week in London. We stayed at the Hotel Metropole, and saw almost every-

thing that was worth seeing. I paid our passages on board ship there and back, and met all incidental expenses when at home myself. It was a comfort to be able to do this, as it made me feel quite independent."

"I often used to think of you when I was lecturing, and wondered if I should be so fortunate as to see you again," was Mr. Mason's sole rejoinder to Stella's account of her life in England. "But I knew that wherever you were your interest in my work would be unabated, and that you would not be led away by a little temporary glitter. When one feels that a friend is faithful under all circumstances it is hard to think of never meeting again. But the fates were kind in this instance and I realized the inspiration of your presence the whole time I was speaking to-night. People have to suffer as you have done to be entirely sympathetic with others and when you were the opposite side of the globe I am sure that any stray thought you sent out to me came straight to its destination. Many a sudden thrill of joy I would get, and then the thought of you would suffuse my whole being, and I prayed that you might come safely back again—not to me only, that would be a joy that can never be mine in this life. But it is something to know you are in the same hemisphere. The average successful person with whom the world goes easily cannot realize what it is to have a real comrade in the difficult path of life."

"Well, you can always have that in myself. Nothing can come between two people who are at one in thought and sentiment. We may see but little of each other, may never meet but in the company of others, but the mystic tie, the only reality in the universe, is always there, surviving calumny, separation and even death."

"But that is not enough for flesh and blood—for living human beings with hearts to love and souls to

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adore," Mr. Mason said bitterly. "Besides, I am totally unworthy of you. A career like that I have entered upon is fraught with all kinds of evil in a worldly sense, and before finally surrendering a fixed income, I made frantic efforts to start free from all pecuniary liability so as to let no one suffer for the step I was taking. All was futile, and I was driven out, as it were, with a load of debt from which I could not extricate myself. I hope that in some way or other, in this life or the next, I may be able to expiate it."

Nothing was so repugnant to Mrs. Richmond as debt. She could never wear a new dress with comfort until it was paid for—never felt it was her own but that she was masquerading in other people's goods and it struck a chill to her heart to think of Mr. Mason's position.

"But is there nothing that can be done? Cannot some means be devised to get rid of it gradually and to pay interest meanwhile?" she urged. "I cannot bear you to be owing anything. Perhaps I could help you and get others to join in."

"That would be only lifting the burden on to other shoulders. I have thought of this scheme and many others, but am now without hope of ever being able to retrieve myself. And maybe it is a thorn in my side that I am doomed to bear to keep myself humble. One of the conditions of such a life as mine is to be spoken ill of, and to be maligned and blamed for much that is unavoidable, and I must accept it all as cheerfully as I can and 'work the harder,' as Emerson says. Did you ever read this splendid passage out of 'Emerson at Concord'? I came across it the other day and copied it. Although Emerson's name is honoured now all the world over, he had to run the gauntlet of scurrilous abuse in his young days when he left the Unitarian

Church, as being too narrow for his budding transcendental philosophy."

"Let me take it with me, Mr. Mason, and I will read it to-night, for our long walk has come to an end, and now for supper with all the young people. They were to have it ready for us."

Later on Emerson's words gave Stella exceeding comfort. "I cannot bear him to have even the semblance of wrong-doing," she thought, as she opened the paper and read the piece of manuscript Mr. Mason had given her.

"To every reproach," Emerson wrote, "I know but one answer, namely, to go again to my own work. 'But you neglect your relations.' 'Yes, too true, then I will work the harder.' 'But you have no genius.' 'Yes, then I will work the harder.' 'But you have no virtues.' 'Yes, then I will work the harder.' 'But you have detached yourself and acquired the aversation of all decent people; you must regain some position and relation.' 'Yes, I will work the harder.'"

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"A man cannot force himself by any self-denying ordinances, nor by violent passivities, by refusing to swear, refusing to pay taxes, by going to jail or by taking another man's crop. . . . By none of these ways can he free himself, no, nor by paying his debts with money; only by obedience to his own genius, only by the freest activity in the way constitutional to him, does an angel seem to arise and lead him by the hand out of all wards of the prison."

"All the same, if I were rich I would pay off every shilling he owes, and no one should dare to say a word against him," Stella thought. "How long are we to wait for the millennial period, when every one born into this world will have a living assured, and there will be

no need to have money-making proclivities. Now the worst characteristics of human nature are the most desirable if you are to get the world's approval and go with the stream."

CHAPTER XXXIV

“ I AM going away, Mrs. Richmond,” was the lecturer’s announcement some months later. “ That fainting fit I had on the stage when I was lecturing should have been a sufficient warning, but I have given up at last, finding that all my attempts at gaining health and strength are futile. It has been the one joy of my life, this weary time, to have your sympathy and help ; but the world doesn’t permit people to be of service, even in times of sickness, without being censorious, and I have determined to leave for America without delay.”

“ But surely not for good ? ” Stella exclaimed “ and a visit to the States requires so much money.”

“ I must take my chance of that, Mrs. Richmond, and friends are coming forward in the most generous manner, to enable me to at least take a long rest until I am well enough to lecture or turn again to journalism. You see, I have always a useful profession at my finger ends, and there are good people everywhere should the worst come and I have to leave my bones over there.”

“ It will be grand to meet some of the people in America we hear about, and I quite envy you all the new experiences that a journey through the Great Republic will afford. But the other side of the picture

is not so charming, and I can see you poor and suffering and in want of a dollar. I quite shudder at the idea of a sick person going there without five hundred pounds at his back. You would be in a sorry plight without money."

"I shall miss my friends most of all. In fact, that is the one thing that hurts me. There cannot be any woman over there to match you, I know, and one thing I have to ask as a last favour: Will you, before I leave, take a spare afternoon and go with me for a farewell talk away from the madding crowd? We will take that volume of Walt Whitman with us, and view life from the standpoint of a shady nook beside the harbour, and find comfort in the grand old poet's philosophy."

"I should like nothing better. I never forget that it was when we were staying on the Blue Mountains with Mrs. Ashford that you first handed me a volume of Walt Whitman to read and it seemed as if his thoughts matched the glorious landscape we were looking at. I had only heard of his name until then, and I especially cherish that poem 'To You' in his 'Birds of Passage,' as it was the first I read, and he seemed to say in that what I had been waiting all my life to hear. And then whoever, besides Walt Whitman, would devote a section of his volume to 'Whispers of Heavenly Death,' to say nothing of the splendid assurance that runs through every poem that this life leads out to something so much grander and nobler. I never care for poetry whose meaning is so hidden that you have to search through a labyrinth of words to find what the author is driving at. But you don't have to do that in Shakespeare or Walt Whitman. Without any mincing of the matter old Walt says—

"'Do you suspect death? If I were to suspect death I should die now.

“Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well-suited towards annihilation?”

“And that thought of his about so-called great people came to me with a flash of recognition, it was so familiar. You remember how he says—

“Of persons arrived at high positions, ceremonies, wealth, scholarships, and the like:

“To me all that those persons have arrived at sinks away from them, except as it results to their bodies and souls.”

“Oh yes,” interjected Mr. Mason, “and a similar idea is in *Sartor Resartus*.

“For a long time now,” Mrs. Richmond went on, “nothing in the shape of external appearances or honours of any kind, political, civic, university, or the more vulgar ones appertaining to great wealth and display, has made the slightest impression on me. I only care to know what kind of souls the people have who possess these things, knowing that everything else is comparatively worthless and must fall away from them sooner or later. When I am talking to people I always forget whether they have large fortunes or not, and I never can meet people except on equal terms.”

“Well, of course, Walt suits you exactly then,” said Mr. Mason, laughing, “as he does me. And that is why we will take him with us down the harbour. You remember that line of his: ‘I think heroic deeds were all conceiv’d in the open air.’ He is quite right. It is only under the canopy of heaven that one can take a right decision on any subject. There is a great spiritual truth underlying those few simple words.”

“I will go this afternoon if you like,” said Mrs. Richmond. The weather is perfect, and if you leave by the next mail steamer there is little time for all the farewell visits you will have to pay. Let us take the boat to

Watson's Bay and walk towards the 'Gap.' I always fancy I can hear the roar of the storm there and the crash of the *Dunbar* on the rocks, mingling with the cries of those unfortunate people hurried to their doom. It is sad, but one gets face to face with realities in sad places."

Never did the harbour look more inviting than on that bright afternoon in the early spring, and as the two friends sat at the "Gap," with the broad expanse of ocean before them, and the noise and dust of the city away in the background, it seemed as if a great peace entered their souls, assuring them that they could safely trust the future whatever fate might be enshrined for them in its mysterious folds.

"Read me 'The Song of the Universal,'" said Stella at last, after they had sat silent for long, drinking in the melody of the lapping waters at the base of the rocks and watching the sea-gulls careering around. "Those glorious lines exactly harmonize with a scene like this," and when Mr. Mason came to the end Stella repeated softly to herself one of the concluding stanzas she had long known by heart—

Give me, O God, to sing that thought,
 Give me, give him or her I love this quenchless faith,
 In Thy ensemble, whatever else withheld, withhold not
 from us,
 Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space,
 Health, peace, salvation universal.

"We have no need to say anything about the future after that," said Stella. "What are all the plans of the world, our paltry hopes and fears when we can see

The guiding thread so fine
 Along the mighty labyrinth.

There is some deeper meaning I am sure than lies on the surface in our comradeship. I don't want to

know anything about your past any more than I do about our future. Everything is in so much wiser hands than our own, and even if I never see you again, if you do not come back to Australia—that is all right, and I shall finish my pilgrimage guided, as I have ever been, by both visible and invisible helpers. All we have to do is not to willingly wrong any one, and then submit our destiny to the arbitrament of events." And then Stella, shaking like an aspen, and with her voice full of tears, put her hand into that of her friend and looked out again over the ocean.

"I don't think ordinary mortals understand the sanctity of the tie that unites two souls that are at one in a spiritual sense," Mr. Mason affirmed. "Many people who have lived together all their lives never realize it, and yet whether we two meet again or not it is there strong as death, and will not be severed even if I never come back to you."

"I have gone through so much already that I can bear any personal suffering with positive equanimity," said Stella. "But it is always painful to me if friends whom I love and respect cannot see eye to eye with me in all I do. I know this is a weakness that I shall eventually outgrow for, occasionally, I have the strongest assurance—sometimes I even hear spoken words to the effect—that all my life is arranged, and that I must not be discouraged by any one round me, but rely solely on the purity of my intentions. My troubles have made me so receptive to these mysterious influences that I know I am travelling far ahead of those I now associate with, and must be more and more misunderstood. But every broken tie hurts. Even my coming down the harbour to-day will meet with stern disapproval, and it has been more like taking a last sacrament together than anything else. We must go now

and get the five o'clock boat, and then back to the city in the setting sun," said Stella, "or there will be an awful hullabaloo."

"But what do they make such a fuss about and why do you mind them?" Mr. Mason laughed out.

"Well, I suppose I am still in bondage, but all my nearest friends are those who stood so faithfully around Mr. Richmond when so many deserted him, and, without exception, they look on my friendship for you as disloyalty to his memory. It is of no use telling them that in spirit life this idea of personal possession is transcended by the law of attraction which no earthly ties can effect. They can't see it at all, and yet if their ideas were carried to their legitimate issue a widow ought to immolate herself on her husband's tomb like the Indian Suttee. I am getting into every one's black books, and yet I am learning more from you than I ever did in my life before. You have brushed away a lot of cobwebs from my brain and I am getting to see clearly."

"But you have taught me something still more valuable. I never knew until I met you that there were perfect women in the world, ministering angels with not a trace of selfishness in their natures. It has been a revelation to me.

"This afternoon will be a blessed remembrance even if I never meet you again," said Mr. Mason, as they watched the glorious evening sky while the steamer glided citywards along the harbour.

"Look over there at the City Beautiful in the sunset," said Stella. "Did you ever see anything so clear—the walls and buildings of burnished gold, and you can almost distinguish the flitting forms that people them."

"It is a picture of the home that awaits us by and by," said Mr. Mason, "or just as a city would look in my

eyes if you were always beside me. It is an awful thing," he added almost bitterly, "and the greatest satire on our present civilization, that the two people in all the world who ought to be together must set a great gulf between themselves at the dictates of a conventional morality."

"Oh, that is nothing," Stella laughingly interjected. "Poor old Walt would sit as calm as a sphinx under such conditions, knowing 'it was all provided for.'"

CHAPTER XXXV

STELLA felt as if the light had once more gone out of her life as she went home after seeing the last of the American mail-boat. "Such parting as ours is like 'the cleaving of a heart,' Stella moaned as she sat desolate in her room, "and one must bear a smiling exterior and never speak of the wound below the surface. But I am glad I can always say 'good-bye' to people with the greatest equanimity. No one on board ship would suppose I cared very much about Mr. Mason's going away. People were sobbing and hugging each other, and we two simply took each other's hands and clasped them a trifle longer than is considered proper, looked into each other's eyes and then joined the rest who had come to see him off. Our real parting took place weeks ago at the 'Gap,' and I had so thoroughly prepared myself for even the final wrench that I made no outward sign."

"What a good thing it is that Mr. Mason has gone away!" was the worldly view of the situation. "Any one can see with half a glance that he thinks there is no woman in the world like Mrs. Richmond, and she is far too good for him. He has brains enough for half a dozen average people and that is what attracts her so strongly, but apart from that it is degrading to think of, after that ideal union with the father of her children.

Her life has been so unsullied with anything, that it is positively dreadful to think of her name being linked with Mr. Mason's in any way, even that of mere comradeship."

Stella knew by instinct all that was being said, saw it in the faces of her friends, and heard the echo of it in the frank expressions of approval of those nearest to her at Mr. Mason's departure. But she was conscious of having done no wrong, and that it would have been a stifling of the best that was in her if she had acted as all her friends would have liked and kept the lecturer in the icy regions of distant acquaintanceship. She knew, moreover, that she was just the same in herself as all through the years of laborious baffling with poverty and her unstinted labours as a teacher. Every one had covered her with praise then ; her virtues were in every one's mouth who came within the scope of her influence. She had followed her highest then and she was doing the same now under much more painful circumstances, as she missed the cheering voices of her friends as she climbed the hill of "Difficulty." She realized distinctly that she was slowly toiling up another height—had descended from the one she had reached at her first spiritual awakening and was now striving after a goal where she would have more direct illumination. But now the surrounding dissonant voices hurt her overstrained senses, and, most of all, she resented any allusion to her children or a suggestion of any lack of thought for them.

"How dare any one insinuate such a thing," she said with flashing eyes to Mary, "when my whole life, from the time the first wee darling smiled upon me, I have toiled night and day for them. Mind, if any one tries to set my children against me or comes between me and them, I will never forgive them, for they would

not deserve either forgiveness or recognition from me again."

"Oh, mother dear! no one would," Mary sobbed, with her arms around Mrs. Richmond's neck, "and nothing in the world can ever come between you and me either."

But it was a terrible ordeal all the same. Mrs. Richmond wished afterwards that she had asserted herself more strongly to outsiders, but she was only half emancipated, was suffering too from an ever-present nervous debility that had clung to her from the time of her breakdown in health. It was very hard to drag through life at that time. She would brighten up when a friend came in and promise to go somewhere or undertake some work or other, and would be positively helpless when the time arrived to achieve what was expected of her.

"I should be so thankful," she would say to her faithful Mary, "if I could have a severe illness and get over this weakness with whatever suffering it brought. It would be so much better than this daily misery of being unfit almost to live."

People thought Mrs. Richmond was rapidly losing all the sweetness of her manner. And so she was, for life was a burden and she felt herself misunderstood, maligned, and criticized, and had not the strength to maintain the even temperament of former days.

"It is so easy to criticize," she thought bitterly to herself, "and criticism is so cheap; while the sympathy and love I am craving for from those around is sternly withheld." Afterwards she said she could count on the fingers of one hand those who had never swerved in their faithfulness to her, and they walked through all that sad time with her as angels in disguise, she thought, so precious to her was their companionship.

Soon letters began to arrive from Mr. Mason. He was rapidly gaining health in the States, had rested for some months and was now lecturing in a few of the principal cities.

"Everything in America delights me," he wrote to Mrs. Richmond, "and it is strange how all my ideas of Yankeeland are reversed by living over here. A more enterprising people I never met, and in every department of life the one idea of studying the needs and comfort of individual members of the community is never lost sight of. For instance, there is iced water for every one during this scorching weather, even the prisoners in the gaols, this being made possible by the great stores of natural ice secured in the winter. When you sit down in a restaurant, the first things that are put before you are a glass of iced water, the menu, and a fan, and the cooking, which seems to be a blend of all that is good of the various nationalities represented in the States, is superb. I am staying now with some friends I have made in Boston, and you should see the delicious breakfasts and dinners that are served. You will think I am turning into a gourmand, but I find that good food is a potent factor in restoring my health and am thankful for it.

"I am going again shortly to Salt Lake City. I was lecturing there a few months ago to large audiences of Gentiles, as those outside Mormonism are called, and, not having quite recovered, fell ill again at a second-rate hotel, the only one I could then afford to stay at. I was kindly fetched away from that, as soon as my condition was known, by one of the prominent merchants there who, with his brothers, owns the leading places in the city, and lives in a magnificent house in a sort of park-like enclosure. The family had left the Mormons years ago, and my friend was one of the most regular

attendants at my lectures. I was housed like a prince and treated like a brother, so you see there are good people everywhere, as I told you, and, on my way back to Australia, next year, I am to be this gentleman's guest again, while I deliver a course of lectures extending over several months.

"I have met most interesting people here, spent a day with Robert Ingersoll and his charming family at Long Beach, and also heard him lecture at one of the Chicago theatres a few months ago. I drove with him in his carriage to the lecture and had a special seat provided for me, as there was not a square inch of space vacant anywhere—an enormous audience all paying dollars and half-dollars to hear the great orator. He is the most delightful man, personally, and a delicious platform speaker, but I shall give you all details when we meet. Andrew Jackson Davis took the chair at my first lecture in New York, but the greatest treat of all was my visit to Walt Whitman at Camden City. I went six hundred miles out of my road to call upon him, and was accompanied and introduced by a personal friend of his. I had a most cordial greeting from the dear old man, and he was much interested in hearing about Australia, and that he has already in that distant continent some fervent admirers, select though they be and few. He is the rugged poet *par excellence*, exactly what you would imagine from his writings, which seem to be an efflux of his glorious soul, which is withal as simple as that of a little child.

"Although this is the land of millionaires it is also the land of most earnest workers for social reform I have ever met. When I was sick and in trouble of various kinds, friends, whose open-hearted sympathy I can never forget, sprang up on every side, so your fears of my being friendless and suffering among a lot of cold-hearted

people, intent only on money-making, were not realized. For many things I like the States better than any country I have yet visited. The people are so receptive, so free from the bondage of tradition. You see this in the most trifling details of domestic life.

“ I feel I have been living in the real sense of the term since I came here, and hope to bring more brightness into your life when I return. I always think of you as the woman, with sad earnest face and sympathetic eyes, who has done more than any other to redeem my life. At this distance all the paltry annoyances surrounding our comradeship seem to be of no import, but all the same it is cruel for a nature like yours to be harassed and troubled. The only remedy is to regard surroundings as merely temporary, and to wait for the justification which comes sooner or later to the pure in heart. All your prayers, dear Stella, will be answered, even though the response may come in a different guise to what you expect—even that of a more direct illumination, when these small trials will be seen in their true perspective.

“ America is a good place to visit to cure one of too constantly hankering after phenomenal spiritualism. The amount of twaddle I have heard under that misleading name since my arrival in the States is beyond credence. I see more clearly than ever that if you are not to lose your head over the phenomena and make a fool of yourself, a basis of strong rationalism and robust common sense is necessary. Of course, I have been rushed with invitations to attend peculiar little gatherings of all kinds under the heading of spiritualistic, and succumbed on one occasion to the entreaty of some of the promoters.

“ I sat as patiently as I could for half an hour or so, but when a trance speaker professed to be under the control of William Shakespeare and began to vent forth

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unutterable rot, I bolted incontinently and did not feel happy until I had put half a dozen streets between myself and that awful enunciator. To remain on the level of trance speaking, table turning, and lifting of furniture about, is like keeping a full-grown schoolboy at the alphabet.

"In private I have met, however, many believers in the potent influence of the spiritual world, and of the direct and personal control of our lives by unseen helpers, of an entirely different character. Two, especially, ladies of good social position who do not make a trade of their mediumistic powers, have in their drawing-rooms given me most wonderful tests, and brought to my mind friends of the long ago in Australia and associates of my juvenile days in England, that I only recognized after repeated sittings and attempts to make themselves known. One friend, who died over twenty years ago in Victoria, made his personality at last recognizable by the medium describing a splendid black and white Newfoundland dog which she saw by his side. He brought this noble animal in the flesh with him to Australia after a severe domestic bereavement, and he was his constant and almost sole companion until his death.

"While in the clairvoyant state one of these ladies also described you exactly, and said you were tending flowers and ferns when she saw you. But we do not need these external proofs of the reality of the tie that unites us. Wherever I go I seem to have a chain of communication with the soul of my friend over there in Australia, and my one prayer is that I may be taken safely back again to her."

CHAPTER XXXVI

MR. MASON'S final letter was written at Salt Lake City two or three weeks before taking the train for San Francisco, where he would embark in the mail steamer for Australia. "My life for the last two years has been like a romance," he wrote, "and if anything were wanting to convince me that our destinies are controlled by some wise and overruling power my visit to the States supplies a most convincing proof. I have had times of severe and almost hopeless difficulty, but I have been wonderfully helped both to better fortune and health, and now I am coming back a free man, with the one hope that you will share the rest of my life with me as my wife. You have so little conceit in your nature that I do not believe you half realize what that will mean to myself, or see the important part that good and able women will presently take in raising the status of political and domestic life. But I am convinced that the great social reforms of the future are going to come about mainly through women. Ibsen says that 'the next century will be that of women and workers,' and I can see that their enfranchisement will produce the greatest social revolution the world has ever seen.

"This is not much of a love-letter, but you are not like an ordinary woman, and look for true comradeship rather than adulation. I feel, too, as if you were already beside me and we were exchanging thoughts in our old

familiar way. I am coming home like a tired bird to its nest, and hope to be with you a month after this letter reaches your hand."

By the time of its arrival in Australia it was pretty generally known, through newspaper paragraphs and communications sent to other friends, that Mr. Mason was on his way back to Sydney, and the air in Mrs. Richmond's immediate circle was filled with electricity, premonitory of an approaching storm. In later years Stella realized how futile it is to try to drag people up to your own outlook, and that it is mere waste of breath to attempt to convince others of the beauty of the glorious view spreading out before you while they are in the valley below entreating you to come down and eat your supper. If her friends could see with her eyes, they would think with her that Mr. Mason would take her still farther along the road of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment that she had been travelling all her life. Wedlock in the ordinary sense had no charm for her. She had been a widow for the best part of a decade, and had never felt in the least attracted by any possible suitors who had come in her way. She realized now that from the time she had first met Mr. Mason she was conscious of some subtle attraction between them, and she believed that his was the hand she had been warned by the American clairvoyant would be offered to her later on, with the added injunction that no thought of former ties was to prejudice her against its acceptance.

But for the moment all thought of what her friends and the general public would say when her approaching marriage was announced was swallowed up in the joy of Mr. Mason's expected arrival. She would not think about the unpleasant side of the picture, would indeed have to see when she was face to face with her beloved friend if she

could make up her mind, unreservedly, to act in opposition to her prudent and faithful advisers and every one else who thought they had a right to interfere. So she lived in a dream-world of her own all that happy month. Then the steamer's arrival at Auckland was telegraphed, and a cable message to herself, immediately afterwards, announced that her friend was safe and well ; and still the days lagged until the steamer actually entered Sydney Heads. Her soul had entirely broken through the hard materialism with which her youthful training in England had encased her, and went forth full of hope and gladness to meet one who was destined to lead her still further on her pilgrimage towards the Light.

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"We must be married without delay," was Mr. Mason's final sentence after their first meeting and he had tried in vain to pooh-pooh all the objections raised against their union by almost every one that surrounded Mrs. Richmond.

"One could almost wish they were not so kind, and it would be easier then for me to treat this opposition lightly and as I know it really deserves," said Stella sadly. "But they have all been so good to me, and I know with many it is a final parting of the ways."

"Well, so much the better," was the smiling rejoinder, "and I will go now and inform every one who has any right to be told. But what does it all matter when we have each other?" Mr. Mason went on as he smoothed her brow and kissed her over and over again. "All these wrinkles are going to be wiped out, and each year you will grow younger when you are living, as you ought to do, away from teaching and turning your thoughts towards literature. I only wish you would think a little more of yourself. Not one of these people

who make all this fuss is worthy to untie your shoe strings."

From about half a dozen friends Stella immediately received most cordial congratulations. Mr. and Mrs. Williamson, whose high social position gave their approval a distinct value, sent a letter that Stella was glad to show her boys and girls, the eldest of whom were now in their teens. "There could not be two people more suited to each other," Mrs. Williamson wrote, "and we had hoped for long that the union would take place." Others replied that they would never wish Mrs. Richmond anything but good, and trusted the marriage would be as fortunate as she expected; but, reading between the lines, Stella knew she had gone down to zero in their estimation.

But could any woman remain thoroughly unhappy or be scared from a lover like this by all the talk of the world? Strange to say the mass of their acquaintances took opposite views of the much-discussed event. The majority of Mr. Richmond's old friends thought Stella was entirely forfeiting their respect by putting a successor in the place of her much-lamented husband, while the more brilliant coterie that surrounded Mr. Mason wondered whatever he could see to attract him in Mrs. Richmond. She was clever and good no doubt, but not the kind of woman you would expect one who had been a prominent society man for a quarter of a century to take pleasure in.

"It is strange," said Stella, "how we have met on the same plane of thought through different ways. No two people could be more at one in thought than we are, and yet our lives have been so dissimilar. I always wonder how you can put up with me. . . . Nothing could be sweeter than Mary and Elsie now it is all out," Mrs. Richmond went on. "They are making all

the necessary preparations for me and, thank goodness, there is nothing but love in my own household. I think all the more of their kindness because to Elsie, especially it is a grievous trial of her faith in me. I told her that I thought she would soon see that I was only fulfilling my destiny and that I am not disloyal to my husband's memory. He knows that I gave him all I had to bestow, as I promised, and had never a thought away from him while he lived. I can see that people are little to be blamed or praised for their various steps in life. I feel as if I had been a child of destiny from the time I can remember anything, and as if it were my fate to do exactly contrary to what is expected of me. Mr. Richmond came to lead me out of the terribly narrow conventional life at home, and you are here to lead me onwards I know not whither, excepting that it is to good. How grateful and confident I ought to be ! ”

“ I never have any messages now through Mary,” Stella went on. “ I was told a few years ago that I am to get more direct illuminations by and by, but I have had to grope my way in the dark for a long time. Now and again I get a flash of inspiration, as if to assure me I am not alone.”

“ Well, you won't be much longer,” was Mr. Mason's laughing response, “ for I come to-morrow to fetch you away, and then off to the mountains to feel that I have really got hold of you at last. I shall never believe it is a fact until we are right away from people and amid the silences of nature.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

I CAN never understand how I was allowed to have you all to myself," said Mr. Mason, as after a few years of happy married life he and his wife were seated in the study of a pretty house in a suburb of Melbourne intent on contributions for the daily press.

"It is a great thing for me that you have turned again to journalism," said Stella, "and as I came down in the steamer to join you when you had been offered this position as a leader writer, I had the happiest feeling imaginable. It seemed as if the sadness that had attended my life in Sydney was all clearing away like fog, and the sun shining through in unlooked-for directions. And now the children are all here it is just heavenly. I feel as if I had gravitated back to the sphere I was in as a girl. I have had enough for two lifetimes of people who regarded it as a condescension to act with kindness towards those who are supposed to be unorthodox. It doesn't matter what journalists' ideas on religion are, thank goodness, and there is no time to think about anything but subjects for articles and writing them."

"The next thing you will say is that the accident that prevented me writing for six weeks was a special providence, as you began then to write everything to my dictation."

"Oh, I am quite sure of that!" said Stella, laughing, "for you are too fidgety to have ever consented to dictate unless you were incapacitated. And now see

how my pen flies over the paper! As I get a column written in about two-thirds the time it takes you to crawl through it, I have the supreme pleasure of seeing how you evolve sentences, and helping you to think of the best word, the only word in fact that will do, and perhaps suggesting a thought or two as well. I suppose some people would imagine it drudgery, but it is the first time in my life that I have really lived. And then to see the words in print, next day, and the delight of hunting up subjects, and to know that my subject, although presumably yours, was accepted by the wise conclave at the office as proper and suitable. I would rather be a literary woman than anything in the world. A queen is nothing to it."

"I am beginning to wonder what limb of my body will be the next to be disabled in order to further your literary career," Mr. Mason interjected laughingly. "It is quite uncanny living with any one like you, who seem to have special agents about to knock a person down and dislocate his limbs. That is of course a mere trifle."

"But something better than that has happened," Stella went on. "I am going to write on my own account for another journal—a weekly. I have been dying to do something of the kind ever since I came down to Melbourne; but you always dashed cold water over any scheme I propounded, principally you said, because every unmarried literary woman would regard me as an enemy at once if I attempted to enter an arena which is already overcrowded. I know there is not much scope in the colonies for writers, and women are not over well paid, but I am going to do work that is peculiar to myself, in the first instance, and shall not encroach on any one's domain."

"Well, I only hope you did not send in an applica-

tion for it. You never know into whose hands letters fall, and I can't bear to think of you going among the ruck like that."

"No! I went personally to call on the editor, and found he was prepared for such a scheme as I had to lay before him. I am writing a few paragraphs and an interview this week just to show what I can do. But we are going to have articles about the great land boom and other things with figures in that you know I doat on. I am all there when you begin to cast averages and put a little arithmetic into your articles, and I am to commence at once interviewing people and searching files at the Free Library for data to work upon. This will all be done in the day-time, and I shall be able to write to your dictation just the same in the evenings, as that is merely child's play to me. A part of my brain that has hitherto been idle, I think, is just waking up and calling out loudly for exercise."

"Oh, well, do as you like. But I suppose you will work yourself to death over this twopenny-ha'penny thing, and get next to nothing for it. I shouldn't be surprised if you haven't volunteered, with your usual benevolence, to do it all for nothing."

"No fear! I am going to be paid all right. But honestly, it is having the writing to do that is the chief attraction. I shall work so hard and do my best, and then I shall get fairly launched on the literary career I am craving for. I am beginning to see that my long years of teaching were a necessary preparation for this. Even one of the literary lions of our day—Browning—I have read, went through the dictionary as soon as he had decided to be a poet or nothing, and I think I have been through mine two or three times when working with girls over English for the University examinations. We were afraid of passing over any unusual

word, as the examiner in English seemed to hunt up all the obsolete ones for his papers, and to be prepared to give the origin and derivation of these few kept us busy the whole year."

Although Stella enjoyed her new work of sifting figures, scanning balance sheets and drawing conclusions therefrom, it was extremely arduous, and she would return home each day with her pocket-book full of information, but quite exhausted. She had undertaken to furnish twelve readable articles in the form of a story of the startling rise in land values during the boom in Melbourne, and the awful collapse that followed the bursting of the bubble of bogus prosperity. Armed with letters of introduction from her husband, she penetrated the offices of gentlemen who had information to give, and at the end of six weeks she was ready with the first article. How she trembled as she took it to lay before the editor in his sanctum !

"Since the first week you wrote for me, Mrs. Mason," this gentleman said, "I have not treated you as an amateur, and everything you bring in is put straight on the file for the printer. There is never a superfluous word in what you write, and you always put your matter in the best possible way. But this is so important that I shall have to take it into serious consideration for fear of anything libellous creeping in. If it is very good I shall use it straight off, but it is quite possible I shall reserve this series until Christmas time."

Mrs. Mason's face fell. It was only September, and she could not bear the idea of her articles lying unused all that time. And she had put such good work, she thought, into this opening chapter. She had not shown it to any one, not even her husband, for he was always so intent on his own business that she did not care to bother him.

"I think you had better put your name or initials to these articles," the editor went on. "It will be better for you to be responsible."

"I would rather they went in without any signature," Mrs. Mason replied, "if you don't object. I want to be judged on my merits, and if a woman's name is mentioned in connexion with finance, all the men would be prejudiced at once, and think them not even worth glancing at."

"Well, just as you like," the editor smiled in reply. "I am a bit doubtful myself how you will manage the financial part. But I shall let you have a proof of the opening chapter by Tuesday if I am going to use it."

Mrs. Mason's enthusiasm seemed to have sunk into her boots as she wended her way home. It was such a blow after her hard work to think that these articles might be indefinitely pigeon-holed. She knew the first one by heart already, so often had she gone over it to be quite sure that the facts were as well brought out as possible, and she had been thinking of her readers all the while as well, and tried to make the matter as light and interesting as the subject would permit. She made up her mind, however, for the worst, and began to think of some book reviews she would propose to do while she was waiting.

Tuesday had almost passed without any proof appearing, and Mrs. Mason was feeling sad and gloomy, when the late post brought the article she had been putting her heart in for the last six weeks and that she felt to be like a part of her life.

"It has come!" she called out, and rushed into the study with two long strips in her hand. "So it is going in this week after all!"

"I knew the editor would put it in straight off," Mr.

Mason said with a knowing smile. "Enthusiasts on the press are rare birds," he added, "and I don't know a man anywhere who would have delved and struggled as you have for weeks after material for one set of articles. In fact, if you have to earn a living you can't do it, as everything has to be got through more mechanically."

"I never thought it would read so well in print," Mrs. Mason interjected as she rapidly glanced over the proofs. Charles Lamb was right when he said that you can't tell what a thing is like till it is set up—that it looks raw in manuscript, like piecrust before it has been in the oven. Would you like to look at it?" she added shyly, and went out of the room as soon as she had laid it on her husband's writing table.

"There is not such an austere critic in Australia," she thought, as she went to sit in her room and await the result. "It would be just impossible for me to remain quiet while he went through those proofs, and he looks so aggravatingly like a sphinx meanwhile, and won't let you know what he is thinking till he gets to the end. But knitting always makes me philosophical," Mrs. Mason soliloquized, as she opened her work-bag, and went on with her half-finished sock.

"This is really excellent," were the first words she heard as Mr. Mason entered the room looking quite excited. "Only it is too good for ordinary newspaper work. I cannot suggest the alteration of a single word, as you have so fully stated your subject and opened it out so well. What are you calling the articles? You should have one heading to accompany the series."

"'The Rise and Fall of the Land Boom,' I think, and now I will begin to polish up the second chapter and take it in. The editor wanted to have the twelve complete in his hands, but I pleaded successfully to take

them in as wanted, as each week I might have something to add or excise. When I assured him that you said there was enough material for twenty chapters in my possession he graciously gave in."

Mrs. Mason did not expect much beyond experience from her first plunge into literature. But by the end of the fifth chapter she found every one talking about the Land Boom articles. A friend, who was staying at a large boarding-house, came in to tell her that the only literary gentleman of the company said at the dinner table that nothing better had appeared on the present deplorable crisis in Melbourne than the articles in the weekly paper that was so strange a mixture of financial and society gossip. "He wondered who was the writer," her friend continued, "but I kicked my wife under the table to prevent her blabbing." Then she heard that a literary J.P. had called at the office for complete sets of the paper to date to send to friends in New Zealand, and declared that in the Magistrates' Room at one of the suburbs the articles were anxiously looked for each week and pronounced excellent.

"There is a lot in having a good subject," Stella thought, as she heard boys calling out the paper in the street "with all about the Land Boom," and she recognized the cleverness of the editor in seizing the psychological moment. The chief value to herself was in having done something entirely alone. She never consulted Mr. Mason about the remaining articles, as he could not give an opinion haphazard, but dived to the bottom of any subject put before him, and it was cruel to give him that extra work. So she contented herself with showing him the paper each week, and was growing so confident that she could now sit and watch him all through the reading.

But one day her husband called to look over a revise

for her at the office, as he said there was no reason for two people to face the roaring hot wind that was blowing. The editor and Mr. Mason were old friends, and as the latter rapidly went through the slips he was surprised to hear from the editorial chair—

“These are very good articles of Mrs. Mason’s, if they are hers.”

“If they are hers;” Mr. Mason exclaimed, looking up from his work; “why, I never see a line of them until they are in print, and have not given her even a suggestion. I have merely come to look over this revise as it is Mrs. Mason’s only rest day, and she is rather overstrained just now. You would not credit the amount of work she has put into these articles. It is quite a revelation to an old pressman like myself to see such enthusiasm over newspaper work.”

“Well, it is excusable if the articles are generally attributed to yourself,” the editor replied, “as you are a tower of strength behind your wife in literary experience, and I don’t know another woman on the press who could tackle figures like these, for instance,” turning to the revise.

“Ah! there Mrs. Mason is better than I am, and I tell you, honestly, I should take no pleasure in doing anything of this kind; in fact, I don’t think I could raise the necessary amount of patience.”

Stella was highly indignant when the conversation was repeated to her. “It all comes of being a woman,” she said. “Men never think you can do anything, and when you show them you can, they calmly say ‘it was the man at her elbow who really did the trick.’ Besides, I hate to be suspected of anything so mean as strutting in borrowed plumes.”

All the same it was not until Mr. Mason was suddenly called away to Sydney, and Stella had to do an article

almost under the editor's eyes, that she was assured that he gave her full credit for her work. On this occasion she had to interview a person on Saturday to have the article in at nine on Monday morning, and as it was simply impossible to have communication with Sydney meanwhile, the friendly editor was at last convinced.

"You never did anything better," Mr. Mason wrote to his wife after receiving the paper, "and I don't believe there is a man in Australia who could surpass you in your own particular line."

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"It is strange how completely I have got out of my old groove of thought," Mrs. Mason said to her husband, as they were talking over the success she had achieved when the last chapter had appeared. "It is a good thing too that the articles were not signed, as they would never have been read by members of the Government, judges and so on, as one of the Ministers told you the other day they had been. They never suspected a woman was the writer, and one gentleman remarked to a friend of mine, 'But all the figures were so accurate! Surely Mrs. Mason must have got some financial expert to assist her.'"

"People will learn in time that there is no sex in intellect," her husband rejoined, "and that while some men and women find their fittest occupation in menial duties, others can divide intellectual honours between them. And you are 'not a bit set up or proud,' as some one said to me the other day. What are you going to do next?"

"Oh, of course, I have any amount of work to do—am beginning twenty chapters on something else financial. But, between ourselves, I don't altogether revel in it. It is a singular thing that all those palmists I visited when I was preparing some articles on the occult side of life here, told me my hand was remarkable as showing

good business qualities allied with a strong strain of mysticism, and that I possessed divining gifts of my own."

"Mysticism and finance don't go together generally. It seems as if I am only just beginning to know what mysterious compound I have got hold of in the shape of a wife," Mr. Mason laughingly interjected.

"I am quite sure my best work will not have anything to do with figures," Mrs. Mason said seriously. "All this is merely external, and all the while I am being prepared for something far better. My restoration to health is mostly through spiritual agencies. The simple plan I adopted a year or two ago of always 'expecting to recover' has helped me wonderfully, and that book I read lately on *Metaphysical Healing* has given me a new outlook altogether. I can see that if you put yourself 'in focus,' as Oliver Wendell Holmes says, your whole being will be a reflection of God—that you can receive stores of health, inspiration, and every good thing from the reservoir of Universal Spirit which is open and waiting for us all to draw upon."

"That is one reason why I gave up lecturing without regret. I had begun to yearn for an interval of silence," Mr. Mason replied. "My ten years of platform speaking were among the happiest of my life, and I know I did a necessary and useful work. It is one of the pleasures of my present apparently prosaic existence to meet people, as I do almost every day, who thank me for opening their eyes, and putting them on the way to think for themselves. That is the most we can do for anybody. Each one must work out his own salvation, and the thought of the colony during the last quarter of a century has advanced so much in regard to creed and dogma that the backbone of servile faith in them is broken. If I ever speak again it will be on far different

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matters. The next revolution will be a social one, and it will cause even more bitter conflict than has been experienced in connexion with religion. And behind all this shifting panorama of thought lies the great reality that never changes, and without which we are as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. There were never grander words than those contained in the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians, and now the modern translators have substituted the word 'love' for 'charity,' which has come to mean simply almsgiving, it is perfect."

"I can understand now why I never like to hear reckless abuse of other people's opinions," Mrs. Mason said, as she walked across the room to take her husband's hand and sit beside him. "It is well to help people to get rid of the incubus of fear, but if you engender hatred and all uncharitableness while doing so, the spirit of love is not there, and without that everything is valueless. What is the use of anything if that be absent? I dare say people wonder that we are so happy and contented without the store of wealth that is considered necessary to that end. But no one can possibly enjoy themselves more than we do in our long days by the sea or our daily walks round the park, and as I do in my writing. There is not a rich person I know anywhere with whom I would change places if I had to give in exchange this wonderful light I have on my path. I am growing daily more receptive to this mysterious influence, and the words 'The Light has come' I heard distinctly the other morning. This is unintelligible to me at present, and I am so slow to move that I wonder I am dealt so patiently with. I only hope that, sooner or later, I shall be enabled to achieve all that is required of me. Hitherto every advance has come to me by following the straight and narrow path of daily duty, and I can

see that these financial articles have their use—that they are drilling me to write with fluency and accuracy.”

“People don’t seem to see that it is the attitude of mind that brings contentment or discontentment. What you possess has nothing to do with it, and if a man has five thousand a year and a grasping disposition, he will not be satisfied until he gets ten thousand, and after that still greedier ideas fill his mind,” was Mr. Mason’s rejoinder. “Poverty is certainly an evil, but it is not the greatest.”

“Oh! there is no poverty like that of a life unlit by any ideal,” said Mrs. Mason. “I have been through it. Now at the fashionable assemblies I have to attend, occasionally, it seems to me that people are all running after shadows, and that I am taking part in an entertainment of lunatics. At Government House functions, especially, the atmosphere is so dense and poisonous that it positively hurts me, and I have to take a morning with dear Walt Whitman to recover my peace of mind. It seems as if all the snobbery, toadyism and meanness of the community were gathered together in one place. . . . It will be grand when I shan’t have to bother about people at all, but just write and write and write exactly what I think of these things.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AND so the wonderful and happy years rolled on. Experience after experience in literary matters, amongst others magazine editing, came in Mrs. Mason's path, and each year new vistas of work opened out before her. Gradually, she was able to write more completely as she wished when, as editor, there was no eye but her own to run over her contributions. But there was always the limit of what was suitable for the magazine or paper, and, as a rule, the thoughts she considered her best were scrupulously kept out as being too peculiarly her own to expect to find favour with the proprietors of the periodical. That they would interest the general public she was assured, as on the rare occasions that mystic matters could be touched upon, notably in a series of articles on "Occultism in Australia," she found they were more largely read than any she had previously written. Some of these articles, in which the then celebrated "Julia" was mentioned, were sent by a friend to Mr. Stead of *Review of Reviews* and *Borderland* fame, and quickly elicited a letter from that gentleman to Mrs. Mason asking for a complete series. It was somewhat remarkable that Mr. Stead's "Julia," as she came to be familiarly termed, should have affected Mrs. Mason's life and become the means of opening for her still more widely the gates of the beyond.

When she was gathering material for articles on

"Occultism" there was no medium, palmist, or fortune-teller of repute in Melbourne that Mrs. Mason left unvisited. The experience was entirely new to her. She had only been to a fortune-teller once before in her life, when she and Margaret went by night in Laceborough to visit a woman who was possessed of a wonderful crystal, into which she gazed for the future of her clients. They were young girls then, and sat on thorns wondering what their father would say if he knew where they were, and all Stella could remember of her fortune was the prediction that she would marry and go across the water—that it would be good for her to do so, and she was not to hesitate when the time came for her to decide. As they left the house they saw the butcher who supplied their household sitting with some other men waiting for his turn with the soothsayer, and the girls fled in horror at being mixed up with such company and never ventured to a similar place again.

Although Mrs. Mason had for a long time ceased to take any interest or part in sittings for the production of spiritual phenomena, she always glanced at anything that was published concerning novel manifestations of spiritual power, and was reading at this time in the *Review of Reviews* Mr. Stead's remarkable experiences in automatic writing, especially that of communication with the spirits of friends still in the flesh who might be separated from him either by a few streets or hundreds of miles. In this way Mr. Stead received word from members of his family travelling on the Continent of their movements or welfare, written, as was explained, by their unconscious Ego through his hand, as well as from friends or others interested in his work. Many of these messages were given in detail with their subsequent corroboration, and it was evident that "Julia's" assertion, that it was just as easy to hold converse with

spirits still on earth as with those who had passed over, was probably correct.

This was all intensely interesting to Mrs. Mason, as it was the side of spiritualism that appealed to her reason, namely, the part it took in the development of the individual soul. This was, in her opinion, the only thing worth striving after, and Mr. Richmond's invariable explanation of this perplexing world, that it was a training place for souls, received hereby a fresh illustration.

This new development, as related by Mr. Stead, engrossed Mrs. Mason's thoughts so entirely that she sent a copy of the paper to her husband, then in Sydney, so that he should read it at once, and talked about it to every one she met who was known to be interested in these matters, making them all eager to get the paper and read for themselves. She was in this state of fervid enthusiasm when she met a gentleman who had frequently invited her to attend one of the weekly *séances* held at the house of a lady trance-speaker, who only admitted a select circle of inquirers, as she made no charge and sat simply to help any one who was searching for knowledge concerning the phenomena.

"You have often asked me to go with you some Wednesday afternoon to these trance-speakers," Mrs. Mason said to her friend, "and as I am getting all the information I can on occult subjects just now for some articles, I should be much indebted if the lady would kindly allow me to be present."

"We shall be only too delighted to welcome you," was the reply of her venerable friend, one of the bulwarks of the spiritualistic faith in Melbourne. And so, without introduction or previous notification, Mrs. Mason found herself at the door of the trance-medium's house a few days later, whither she had been piloted by her friend.

The room in which the *séance* was held was already well filled. It was a drawing-room of ordinary size, out of which all furniture but chairs had been removed, and some twenty or more individuals were seated round awaiting the entrance of the trance speaker, who would occupy an easy-chair placed ready for her on the hearthrug. Every one was strange to Mrs. Mason, and she asked her companion in a whisper to allow her to sit beside him. And so room was found for them both on the right hand of the medium's chair. Presently she entered, a sweet-looking middle-aged lady of quiet and refined appearance, and she had scarcely seated herself and greeted the assembled company when she went into the trance, similar to what Mrs. Mason had seen in her own house ten years before.

One lady sat holding the medium's hand all the while, acting as interlocutor, and, to begin with, the friends of several present spoke in turns through the medium, only a few minutes being allowed for each. Presently the medium gave a stronger shiver than usual, and began to speak in quite a different voice to what she had done before.

"I am a stranger here," she began, "and have been attracted by some one in this circle."

"Who are you?" from the interlocutor brought the answer in clear tones, "I do not think that any one but the lady I am seeking would recognize me. I am known as Mr. Stead's 'Julia,' and have come to this part of the world for the first time."

The mention of her name did not bring any recognition into the faces of those present, and Mrs. Mason, who had been merely a passive onlooker up to the present, asked if she might speak to the stranger.

"I think I am the only person here who has heard of you," Mrs. Mason said, "and I have thought so

much about you all the last week that perhaps this is the reason you have come."

"I think so," "Julia" said. "It is a very strong attraction that has brought me, and I think I may be able to help you a little later on. That is the reason I have come to see you."

"Perhaps it is to help me in my writing?"

"I do not know, but I will come to you now the link is established and do what I can. Good-bye. There is a great crowd of spirits waiting to speak to their friends here, and I must not keep the medium any longer."

After the *séance* Mrs. Mason inquired if any one had read the article that had so much interested her, but found that even the name of Mr. Stead's "Julia" was unknown to them.

"We have had a delightful afternoon," the lady who held the medium's hand remarked to Mrs. Mason. "It is seldom we have such a good sitting. I wish you could come occasionally, as you seemed to bring a great influx of spiritual power with you."

"Yes! all the mediums I have been to lately, and clairvoyants especially, tell me that I have quite a crowd of spirits round me, and that they are my constant attendants. It is the first time for many years that I have seen a trance-speaker, and it has been most interesting to me. But it is only on rare occasions, now, that I can take part in anything of the kind. I am either writing or collecting information for articles all day long."

But the incident gave excellent "copy," and Mrs. Mason never forgot that afternoon's experience, and was delighted to receive Mr. Stead's kindly letter concerning it. Mrs. Mason was quite sure that she was not a medium in the ordinary sense for supplying tests to unbelievers, but every access of light was wel-

came as a means of further development, although to what end was not yet clearly visible.

It was not until six months later, when her return to Sydney gave her a few weeks' leisure, that she had time to think much of "Julia," although she had been reading all she could find about her in the *Review of Reviews* and *Borderland*. But one evening, as she was sitting alone, the idea of seeing if her hand could be moved automatically, like Mr. Stead's, came very strongly into her mind, and she determined to try there and then. First of all she looked up the article that had primarily arrested her attention in the *Review of Reviews*, and read carefully Mr. Stead's description of how he held his hand perfectly free and untrammelled and not resting on the table. Then she placed herself, pencil in hand, according to directions, and presently there was written in a bold clear handwriting, but very slowly—

"Veuillez oter les yeux."

"*Mais pourquoi?*" Mrs. Mason replied, astounded at a message being written in French, as from the time she had given up teaching she had not even opened a French book, being too much absorbed in her literary work for outside reading.

"*Pour vous mieux diriger,*" was scrawled out next. Then—

"Je crois qu'une plume soit mieux qu'un crayon."

And when a pen had been procured and her eyes averted according to directions, the answer to Mrs. Mason's question, "Why do you write in French?" was written more freely—

"Pour vous convaincre de mon identité, Je ferai mieux bientôt. Soyez tranquille tout sera perfectionné."

"Je promets de vous assister de tout mon pouvoir."

—"JULIA."

For several weeks Mrs. Mason sat for a short time

each day. The messages came very slowly at first, and she had communications from her father, Mr. Richmond, and several old friends, who said they asked "Julia" if they might "try now" ("use the telephone this request reminded Mrs. Mason of), for at this time "Julia" appeared to superintend everything.

Julia's idea was that Mrs. Mason should write some articles and send to England for publication, but as messages began to come freely from Mr. Richmond, her father, and other friends, it became clear that this was not the intention of the rest. After the first sitting "Julia's" communications were always preceded by her name, and she wrote uniformly in French, her exhortations being sharply and strongly worded when Mrs. Richmond failed to begin the articles as she requested.

Some years afterwards, when reading Mr. Stead's collection of "Letters from Julia," Mrs. Mason recognized the same somewhat impatient impetuous spirit, when expostulating with Mr. Stead about his delay in establishing a Bureau of Communication with the other world, as with herself for not writing her experiences straight off.

Mr. Richmond was, however, quite as strong in the view that the time was not yet ripe for Mrs. Mason's literary work on the occult side of life to commence.

"I want to say once for all," Mr. Richmond wrote one day, "that 'Julia' is mistaken about your work. I think you have a future before you in literature for which everything else has been a preparation, but what Julia is urging you to do is not what you are being prepared for. That will come later on."

"*Faites le bien, Faites le bien,*" "Julia" instantly wrote in reply, a warm controversy on paper suddenly appearing before Mrs. Mason's astounded eyes. "*Je veux dire qu'il faut faire de forts efforts pour gagner le hout.*"

"Fly from foolish fancies," Mr. Richmond wrote in reply, "and keep to your proper path."

"*Je veux que vous travailliez à votre ouvrage,*" "Julia" retorted.

"*Faites de forts efforts et vous réussirez.*"

"So do I," was Mr. Richmond's response, "but it is different work."

"*Je désire qu'elle devienne riche, afin qu'elle ne craigne plus l'avenir de sa famille,*" Julia responded as with a lightning flash.

"So do I," Mr. Richmond replied, "but the way is different."

Fortunately perhaps for Mrs. Mason, who was grateful to both Mr. Richmond and Julia for their interest in her career, work was about this time offered to her in quite a different line, and she gladly accepted it, as she wished to gain as wide an experience as possible in current literature. It now became evident that much arduous labour and many pleasant experiences awaited Mrs. Mason before she would have an opportunity of turning to the subject that underlay and overshadowed for her all human interests. Occasionally, almost an imperative command "to write" would seize her, and when she took her pen in hand, it was generally some word to the effect that she would soon be at work on something far better than all the interviewing and business of a paper, which sadly interfered with her spiritual growth.

Once she was enjoined by her father to give the work up forthwith. "It is a perfect hell that surrounds the new proprietor of the magazine," he said, "and a daily degradation for you to associate with him."

The wisdom of this advice relative to Mrs. Mason's severance of her connexion with the magazine was clearly shown a few weeks later, and she gladly recog-

nized the watchfulness of those guarding her path, when the condition of affairs in connexion with its conductor became matter of public scandal, having a sequel in the criminal courts.

CHAPTER XXXIX

AS time went on every message Mrs. Mason got was indicative of an approaching change in her life and the commencement of the work she had so long been aware was forming in her mind. But journalism still held her pinioned to daily drudgery, which, however, never lost for her its peculiar charm.

"What makes you so lively this evening?" Mr. Mason would sometimes remark.

"Oh! a bag full of proofs, ten or a dozen of them. There is nothing in the world I love so much as going over proofs to see how the articles read in print, and then to give the finishing touches."

"I should have thought your enthusiasm would have oozed out of your finger ends long before this. But there is no accounting for tastes," her husband interjected with the humorous twinkle in his eye.

"I just live in my work, but I can imagine how delightful it must be to sit down and pour your heart out—to write exactly what you think. Now and then I rise up in rebellion against the interviewing. Some people are delightful to write about, and others are so commonplace. You don't feel they are worth the trouble, but I always manage to give everything I publish a trend in the right direction. It is a satisfaction to be told, as I often am, that the tone of anything I write is so good. That makes up for a lot of drawbacks."

By this time Mrs. Mason's hand would be occasionally seized, as it were, and a message written at post-haste speed, so completely amenable had she become to the control of the unseen presences. But there was little time to spare, and she always resisted the impulse as long as possible, and would sometimes go to bed with the mandate "to write" unattended to.

One evening, when Mrs. Mason was sitting correcting proofs at the drawing-room table, while her husband on the opposite side was chatting to her, glancing at the evening papers, and ever ready to give his opinion about a doubtful sentence, if called upon, she felt quite unable to drive from her mind the thought of her old friend, Mr. Fortuna, who had died a few weeks before in London. She had received some papers by the English mail with details of his funeral; of the sympathy of the Queen, who had sent a telegram of condolence to the family; of the personal call of inquiry of the Duchess of Teck and many leading members of the aristocracy; of the service in the church at Westminster, where the body was taken on its way for interment in Laceyborough—among the names of the mourners Mrs. Mason saw those of her two nephews, the eulogistic notices in the London press of a noble career finished, and the almost fulsome adulation of people in his native town and Laceyborough, where many years of his life had been spent. But she had received no direct word from him for nearly twenty years, and he had loomed so large of late in London aristocratic life that he seemed to have passed completely out of hers.

But to-night she could not escape from the thought of him—remembered how she loved and almost revered him when, a timid girl, she asked him "if he ever read Carlyle?" and thought how diverse their lives had been. He had attained more than the summit of

his ambition that he had set before her in those far-away days of girlhood, and had died in the odour of aristocratic sanctity ; while she was a humble literary woman with aims only half satisfied, and living an extremely happy life in a remote corner of the world.

Presently she had the strongest impulse she had ever felt to "write." But she was tired and took no heed and began to make preparations for bed. It was nearly midnight, and she had risen to leave the room, when she was absolutely forced to sit down and take pen in hand. Swiftly it flew over the paper—an astonishing message, the full meaning of which she could not grasp as it formed itself before her eyes.

"Whatever are you about?" Mr. Mason called out at last. "It is midnight, and here you are still at it. But what are you writing so hurriedly?"

"Oh! it is just finished," Mrs. Mason exclaimed, "a long message from Mr. Fortuna; he has just signed his name. It is most extraordinary. I don't know whether to read it to you to-night or not. It is entirely opposed to what I should have expected."

"Oh, read it at once, Stella. In fact I shan't go to bed till you have done so."

"I only wanted to go over it again to myself and think about it," she replied excitedly. "If ever there was a message from the unseen simply poured through a person unexpectedly and unconsciously, it is this one. You are mentioned in it, so I think I ought not to keep you waiting. Here it is. I can almost imagine how he looked when giving it to me. It is so strange, too, as I had no idea who was writing at first until he wrote his name two or three lines down. And then Mrs. Mason read aloud, lowly and carefully, the message that had forced itself through her hands.

"DEAR FRIEND," it began,—

"I am a long distance from home, and have come to your father, who is often with you, as he was for many years my friend. But I find he is far away from me in spiritual power and force. I am your old friend, Algernon James Fortuna, and a far poorer spirit than you ever imagined, full of pride and all that makes for fame, and far from the real goodness. Your father is a noble spirit, and so strong. He helps you all the time. Do not trouble about anything, your father guides and helps you, and, soon, will put you fairly on the way to the faithful work before you, of fashioning the minds of this depraved world. You have a great work to do, and I hope you do not hesitate to begin. It is first to write something of your own experience. So I am here as your dear friend of old times, and feel so full of grief that I did not see some of the beautiful emanations of the spirit that come to you. Oh, my friend, do everything that lies in your power to help and comfort those on earth. Show them the true way, and lift their thoughts above gold and fame and all the dross that passes for so much more than it is worth. I may be able to help you. I do not know how you are to begin, but your father says the time is at hand, and that you will soon be at work. So let me feel, dear friend, that you know I am here, and send me a few fair thoughts to gild my way. I have much to learn and unlearn, much to deplore, much to show to those who are left behind. I hope to be able to help them, but your father says it is the hardest thing to do. I do not see any of my old friends here, only father. Around you are crowds and crowds of spirits, all waiting and hoping to see you begin. I do not know any of them, but they are full of power and grace. I do not see your mother. She is away, I believe, doing some work that

will help her. I do not see your husband. I saw him only once in life at your wedding. I feel sure your father knows everything to do for you. I see crowds of spirits round your dear friend opposite. He has done a great work and will be received with joy, dear friend, when his faithful journey is ended. Father says he has helped your development greatly and fashioned you for the coming work. Do let me come sometimes and help to get strong in this light. I will come again to-morrow night. Please be ready.

“Your old friend,

“ALGERNON JAMES FORTUNA.”

“Was there ever anything so extraordinary and unlooked for?” Stella remarked, as she turned to her husband. To myself it is the most convincing proof that I have yet had of the deception of worldly appearances. I can see that the secret of all religions and of true piety is to distinguish between the apparent and the real in life—the transient and permanent. If any ordinary person had been asked two months ago—if I had been asked myself—as to which of our two lives was the successful one, I should not have presumed to even think that Mr. Fortuna, whose fame as an able statesman has spread through the Empire, whose name in all the relations of life was above reproach, was not far ahead of me. I wouldn't have changed places with him, but that was because I would not barter for any mere worldly honours the gift of spiritual insight that has been the crowning blessing of my life. And here he is asking to be allowed to come sometimes and “grow strong in this light.” I am living quite an enchanted existence just now and feel, as I am told, that I ought not to trouble about a single thing. It is marvellous, and I only hope I shall be able to do all that is expected

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of me. But I always feel so diffident. Even to-night, now I know that Mr. Fortuna is here, I feel as I do when strangers come to call—that my house is not smart enough for them, and that I am too insignificant to be worth the trouble. It is a great drop to Mr. Fortuna to come from queens and princesses and dukes and bishops—to say nothing of cabinet ministers and members of Parliament—to this humble place.” And Stella laughed as she glanced at her simple surroundings and looked across to her husband to hear what he had to say.

“ I expect there is more spiritual power here than in the average place of worship. The influx of divine light that brought the churches into existence has mostly departed from them, Stella, and the creeds that were formulated out of the lives and teachings of their founders positively block the way to further progress. Creeds are but the scaffolding, and you can only get near to God when you have got right away from them into the region of realities. To look on a creed as a finality is the ruin of religion in the true sense. It should be merely a temporary standing-place prior to a further advance.”

“ Mr. Fortuna never did much church-going, though, he was simply a thorough man of the world ; but I see more clearly than ever that we must become as little children if we are to know anything about religion.”

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Mrs. Mason lived in a sort of waking dream for the next few days. She sat for a few minutes the night after she received the message, according to promise, but was told that Mr. Fortuna had not come. “ He is trying to do what he can for his friends at home. He cannot influence them at all, and does not feel that he

can speak to you to-night. Father says he is full of grief and can't come yet, he feels so keenly his lost life."

A few weeks later the impulse to write came again to Mrs. Mason, but not so imperiously as before, and it was in a somewhat despondent strain that her old friend wrote.

"I am glad to be able to write a few words again. I have been to far distant places trying to influence for good those that are left behind. I am your old friend, Algernon J. Fortuna, but I am so cast down that I can't do all I wish to-night. It is dreadful to find friends quite opposite to what they ought to be. All are so blinded by pride that they cannot see far before them. All do just what they shouldn't do. All feel so proud of me, and I am only a poor spirit, not half so devoted or good as your father or many that I see here. There are crowds of spirits in this room to-night. I cannot tell you how full of joy you ought to be at your surroundings. It is far different to those I see generally. Your father does so much to help you, and acts as the agent of higher powers. I do wish I could describe to those in my old home what I see around you. So many grand spirits, so many glorious ones. I would ask you to let all care and trouble cease. You are fulfilling a great mission, and all you have to do is to realize that you are being guided. I feel sure that you will soon be at work and all your father's good desires accomplished. I do not know the form your book will take, but your father says all that is arranged, and you must just do what he impresses you to do. He does not desire to tell you all he is doing as it stops you working. You are surrounded by a great concourse of spirits, and all are fair and beautiful. You do not feel half full enough of joy. You never ought to be downcast for a single moment.

If you could but see your surroundings you would feel as if nothing on earth mattered. Oh, dear friend, let me exhort you to be of the best of cheer, and soon all your troubles will fly away. All you can do to help is to keep away from people who are hurtful to your development. Then you would begin to write, and be as far on the road as we could wish. I cannot feel happy away from here. All round my loved ones it is dense and dark, and you could not believe how I detest all the show, now I see through it. I was one of the wise and prudent people you were talking about just now to your dear friend. You are a babe in worldly knowledge and yet far before me. You can help me by even praying for me. So be happy, dear friend. We all send love and blessing.

“ A. J. FORTUNA.”

CHAPTER XL

ALTHOUGH communications conveying similar messages came from her father and other friends Mrs. Mason went on her way as before, applying herself still more diligently to the journalistic work she delighted in, and was loth to relinquish. But all the while intimations came thick and fast that it was not for long she was to be thus employed. "Far greater work awaits you in the future," was written one night by Mr. Fortuna, "and you will be called upon to show what is in you. You will have to follow your father's bidding, and you must be brave and strong, as you have to do a lot of daring work."

It was, however, an entirely new set of circumstances that decided Mrs. Mason to give up the position she took much pleasure in of editing a weekly paper. Her mind was still so intent on journalism that it was not until her services were required for many months as nurse and attendant during a serious illness that seized her husband, that she finally surrendered her connexion with the Press. This cleared the way, and a few weeks later she began writing something like a record of her own experience, with the sole desire of helping others in their search for light.

"Of course I shall expose myself to much ridicule and cynical criticism," Mrs. Mason remarked to her husband as she sat down to begin the first chapter,

“but that does not trouble me so long as I am doing what is required of me. I shall write it in the form of a story, with only as much incident as will supply the foundation on which to build my theory of life, and the destiny of the human race as deduced from facts that have come under my own observation. Indeed, the first chapter has been in my mind for many a year. The appearance of Mr. Richmond at my father's house was the turning-point in my life, and I can see how graciously I have been guided all through. Shelley tells us that poets “learn in suffering what they teach in song,” and, although not a poet, it will be my object to show that it is only through the gates of tribulation that souls can pass to the fields of eternal light. When you get an illumination from the beyond, how clearly you are able to distinguish between the real and the apparent, the true and false, the right and wrong, that seem so hopelessly jumbled in this world while you are in the midst of its struggles. It increases likewise your sympathy with the toiling masses and your assurance of their ultimate emancipation, for you can see that all the movements towards a more equitable distribution of the world's wealth are directed by unseen, powerful forces that are moulding and guiding the human race towards perfection.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Mason, “metaphysical teaching includes more than some of its teachers are aware of. Healing is only one part of the beneficial results that will accrue when it shall have become general. The idea of an anthropomorphic deity will vanish, and the creeds and dogmas that have been built upon this primitive conception of a big-man god will die out naturally. Even now the churches are honeycombed by the advancing tide of spiritual life, which is far more subtle and effective in its quiet, ceaseless aggression

than all the violent onslaughts of iconoclasts in the past. When it is recognized that the only tenable proposition concerning deity is that of a universal vivifying spirit permeating the visible worlds, of which spirit we are all more or less partakers according to our psychical capacity, the day of churches, as now constituted, and priests will have ended. The only true communion is that which operates between the individual soul and this pervading vivifying efflux. That saying of Paul's, 'The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are,' contains the secret of the religious life."

"It is marvellous," said Mrs. Mason, as she looked across to her husband "that this awakening should have brought us both back from the sphere of scepticism and denial to the essential religion of Christ. All the hideous superstitions that have been built upon that simple Gospel story have hidden the truth away. It is of no use for the churches to say that they hold the keys of eternal life, when you look around and see the result of eighteen hundred years of so-called Christianity. It would be impossible to conceive a lower range of morality than that which pervades the lives of the mass of church-goers. It is Lessing, I think, who says, "We have tried eighteen hundred years of the Christian religion. Let us see now what the religion of Christ will do.' The gospels and epistles are simply wells of spiritual life for all who can escape from the bondage of the letter. I can see that I have always been religious in the true sense," Mrs. Mason went on, "but it was the substitution of dogma in the place of love, and condemnation in lieu of sympathy, in professors of religion that revolted me."

"Among the little gifts I gave my girls in the Sunday-school when I left home to come to Australia," Mrs. Mason said, after a while, looking up at her husband,

“ was a Testament for each with their names written in, and below a favourite text of mine, ‘Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness.’ I did not realize that I was then entering on my own search for truth. And what a transfigured realm the world has now become to me! One gets quite intoxicated with the glory of things—the sea, the sky, the spreading landscape, the trees, the flowers, the stars at night! The response, too, that you get in nature is simply wonderful. There is everywhere a subtle influence that even gives you an answer from a distant star. Life has become ‘a perpetual benediction,’ and although I am poor, yet, as Paul says, ‘I seem to possess all things.’”

“ The Day of Enlightenment you have so long desired has at length dawned for you,” said her husband as he drew her towards him and kissed her. “ It is the real At-One-ment.”



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