THE WINEPRESS

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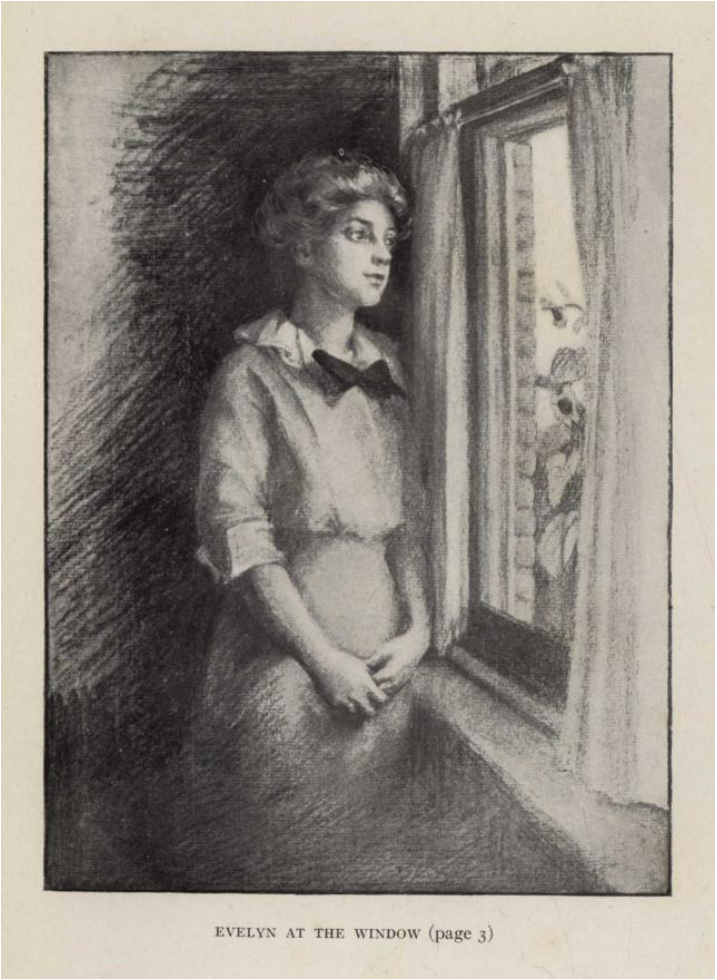
BY

CHRISTINE REALS



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TO MY LIFE-LONG FRIEND
J. S. C.

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THE WINEPRESS

CHAPTER I
THE CHURCH

The church was conspicuously situated on an elevation which had a dignity of its own; there was nothing steep nor abrupt about the incline, its long, smooth slopes extended smoothly and symmetrically. No fitter place could be found for a house of worship, and here those worshipfully inclined had builded this structure of architectural beauty with many embellishments, and dedicated it to their God. Here and there the long slopes were ornamented by neat dwellings and prosperous looking homes, while the town of Edgerly lay on the plain below. And the church, crowning the work of God, seemed a thing removed from the busy mart; a sentinel with a living, throbbing heart keeping watch, with eyes that slumbered not nor slept.

Was not this temple builded there, stone upon stone, to stand before the children of men, a living force to represent all that is best and most worthy, an aid to truth and purity, the earthly home of the spirit of the lowly One? And as its tireless eyes look upon the busy throng is it not the mission of this church of God to extend a helping hand to the fallen, to cheer the downcast and to bind up the broken-hearted? Are any of earth's children beyond its love and power?

The parsonage to which the pastor took his bride had about it an air of prosperity, a touch of exclusiveness that reflected creditably on this church on the summit. The grounds were well kept, the grass was velvet green, the flowers and shrubs and vines thrifty and vigorous in their springtime beauty.

The Rev. Maurice Thorpe and his wife established themselves in this modern, well-ordered home, and looked with fearless eyes into the future. A future that was to be devoted to their fellowmen, dedicated to the church of God.

The first love of the man's heart was given to his church; not even the fair and gracious woman whom he had wooed and wed came before this; and into its treasury he poured the first vigor and strength of his earnest manhood. There had been a time when he had inclined toward celibacy for the ministry. Although he had never doubted the aid and comfort the right sort of a wife could be to a pastor, there was in his heart a lurking horror of being yoked to a woman who was not in very truth, his second self, flesh of his flesh, soul of his soul, mind of his mind.

But no misgivings came to him as he watched the girlish figure of his wife at her varied duties, or as she pored over some volume in his study, or her honest eyes met his across the table at meal time. His sense of satisfaction grew from day to day, as he realized that his wife that he had won was not only good to look

upon, and a comfort in his home, but that she was capable of becoming an aid and assistant to him in his work.

Mrs. Thorpe found much to occupy her time and thoughts during these first days in her new home. The house was in perfect order, and a middle-aged woman was established in the kitchen; but her ideal of a home was one where the mistress has every detail of the work well in hand, and to this end she gave every branch of the work her personal supervision. There was the arranging of the rooms to suit her taste, and the placing of the articles that she had brought with her to her new home; all the vivifying touches that convert a house into a home, and mark it with the personality of its keeper.

On the side of the house facing the church a room had been fitted up for Mrs. Thorpe's special use. Here in a curtained alcove she hung her bookshelves and placed her books. There was a small library table, some easy chairs, and a desk where she would write her letters. From the window there was an excellent view of the church; there was the smooth incline that led up to the stately edifice, and the wooded hills and blue sky in the distance.

Mrs. Thorpe stood at her window at the close of one fair day, and drank in the beauty of earth and sky. The sun was sinking behind the distant hilltops, and it bathed the church in a mellow glow, and caused the narrow taper windows to radiate halos of golden light. Mrs. Thorpe's eyes lingered upon the scene until the light faded into shadow, then she slipped into a chair near the window. Her mind had a trick of eluding her vigilance at times, of slipping its leash when she least expected it, and carrying her into strange, disquieting realms of thought. Mysteries hung about her, and enveloped her as a mist-hung world envelopes a wanderer who has lost his way. The mystery of life–her life–what does it mean? For what purpose is it given? Happiness–what is it? Contentment and peace with God–to whom are these vouchsafed? Or by what virtues do mortals attain them? Is it not through service that these things are attained? Active, honest, energetic service, this was to be her magic wand, her Aaron's rod, by means of which she was to feed her soul, keep alive the fountains of her love, and consecrate and glorify her mortal life. And yet the vague, elusive mystery of it all–the motives that actuated her–the ceaseless longing. She drew her hand across her brow as though to change her mental vision, for well she knew the futility of this line of thought.

The evening wind swayed the curtain at the window and wafted the perfume from the garden to her. A bird trilled in a treetop near by, and a blush-rose nodded just outside the window. She leaned back in her cushioned chair and yielded to the quieting influences about her.

As a child she had been diffident and retiring, questioning much, but silently. All things that came into her small world were carefully weighed and

analyzed. Her surroundings and the conditions of her existence were sifted and searched in a manner that would have astonished her elders had they known of it; and the conclusions that she arrived at were final with her. She worked out problems of the gravest importance, accepted her own solutions, and lived according to her own convictions; which living was a sort of dream life. A favorite pastime was a conceit of her childish brain to look upon the life that she was living as a dream, an unreality, from which she eventually would awaken.

She reasoned in her small way with herself–always with herself alone, she never mentioned her conceits and fancies to others–that when troubled dreams came to her at night she could not know that she was dreaming. How, then, she questioned, was she to know at any time whether she was dreaming or awake?

Especially did she indulge in these fancies when things in her small world were not to her liking.

"Never mind," she would comfort herself, "this is only a dream; bye and bye I shall awaken, and then–ah, then!"

The gladness and ecstasy that awaited her were never clearly defined in her mind, but that it would be satisfying and all-sufficient her child mind never doubted.

Once when she was a small girl she was allowed to look upon the face of a playmate who had died. It was the first time that the question of death had confronted her; but she had been told that when good children die they go to live with God in Heaven. She looked at the face of the dead child, then, gently, without the least dread or fear, she laid her warm little hand on the cold hand of her late playmate. She said no word, and showed no agitation. The act was to ascertain whether the child was truly robbed of life and action. This point settled, she turned and walked away, and the firm conviction in her little heart was: "If I had been God, I would not have done it."

She spoke no word in regard to the dead child to anyone, but while the other children romped and played, and forgot the absent one, she was quiet and silent, and she pondered the question for many days. Every phase of it that her childish mind could grasp was weighed and considered, and finally the verdict came. A God who loves little children would not have taken her playmate away. There must be two Gods, a good one and a bad one. Then her imagination lived for days in a conflict between these two Gods. The conflict always ended in the restoration of the dead child to his mother and playmates.

As she grew toward womanhood there was the usual joyousness and vivacity of girlhood, but she was thoughtful and reticent, a dreamer still. When she was wooed and won by the pastor, Maurice Thorpe, she was an educated woman, gentle and thoughtful, but her real nature, and the traits in her character that were to shape her life, were as the unturned pages of a book.

Mr. Thorpe entered the room unnoticed and stood by his wife's side. He thought she appeared very frail and girlish in her attitude of abandonment.

"What does the future hold for her and for me?" he questioned. Would the hidden fountains of her life unite with his and flow in an even stream until Eternity should engulf them in her countless ages? He felt no fear, no premonition of evil to come, yet his heart was strangely stirred.

"My dear one," he whispered, "may truth, purity and peace be yours."

Yet in the years that came, this petition was granted in so different a manner from any in which he had desired it to be, that had it been in his power, he would not have hesitated to recall it.

Mrs. Thorpe, aroused by the intuition of her husband's presence, sat upright in her chair, and, catching a glimpse of her face in a mirror on the wall, she brushed the fluffy brown hair from her temples.

"I sank down here in this delightful easy chair," she said, "and its seductive restfulness, together with the twitter of the birds, the breath of the flowers, and the hum of insects conspired, I do believe, to beguile me into the land of dreams."

"I am glad to see you resting," he said. "You have been finding a great deal to keep you busy. I hope you are not overtaxing your strength."

"I am not tired," she said, but her face grew grave and the shadow of her troubled thoughts lay in her eyes. "I am anxious to get household affairs running smoothly, so that I may have leisure for other work."

And as though in answer to her restless questioning, rather than to her spoken thought, he replied: "We shall find our happiness in our work and our love." He laid his hand caressingly against her hair. "What a wonderful thing it is," he said, "this service in the Vineyard, and what a beautiful thing, Evelyn, that we two can live and love and work together."

The twilight deepened as they sat together, silent mostly, yet conscious of that understanding and sympathy that is dearer than words. The sweet summer night closed in about them and enfolded them as a perfume-laden garment; and the sea of life stretched before them, without a ripple visible on its tranquil surface.

Later in the evening, as Mrs. Thorpe made her customary round of the house before retiring, she found her serving woman still busy in the kitchen.

"Not through with your work yet, Mary?" she said.

The woman was bustling about with flushed face and somewhat unsettled manner.

"The work being new to me, comes a little awkward at first," she said. "But I think I shall get it in hand before long."

Mrs. Thorpe suspected that the woman had been out during the afternoon, or for some reason had neglected her work, else she would not be thus belated.

Before leaving the kitchen she said:

"I have been making some plans about the work, Mary; we will talk them over in the morning."

Mary signified her willingness, but her face took on an even deeper flush, and when her mistress had gone she sat down and covered her face with her hands.

But it was only for a few moments, then she arose and resolutely finished her work and went her way, carrying her own peculiar burdens.

Mrs. Thorpe, as she prepared for her night's repose, looked again toward the church, now dimly outlined in the night, and the thought came to her that something of the sacredness and power that pervaded it might perhaps in some way reflect upon her life and sanctify it, and lead her into green pastures, and beside still waters. She saw the church spire, tall and spectral in the moonlight.

"It is like a guardian angel," she thought, "watching through the day and through the night."

CHAPTER II
MARGARET

Mary McGowan, the serving woman, was a woman whose life was nearing its meridian. Her form, somewhat stooped, spoke of a life of labor; her hair, combed smoothly back from her face, was well sprinkled with gray.

When Mrs. Thorpe met her in the dining-room the next morning, there was something in the woman's face that for a moment appealed to her. A care-worn face it was, not beautiful, but stamped unmistakably with an expression of refinement. For a moment the mistress hesitated; should she meet her cordially, gain her confidence and make a friend of her? The girlish impulse lasted but a second, and Mrs. Thorpe had herself well in hand again, and she covered what she believed to be her weakness with a somewhat severer dignity than she had assumed before, and came at once to business.

After arriving at a satisfactory understanding in regard to the work, they came to the question of hours.

"You are to have one afternoon each week, and the service hour on Sunday; the rest of your time I shall expect you to spend here," Mrs. Thorpe announced.

A sudden flush spread over Mrs. McGowan's face. She did not reply, but

bowed her head in assent, and Mrs. Thorpe, satisfied with the interview, went at once to other duties.

In the kitchen a grim-faced woman went steadily about her work; but there was something in her countenance that made one believe the world not always kind to the children of men.

"Yet, after all," she thought, "what does it matter, if only Margaret gets through the school." And at the thought of her girl, her bonny Margaret, her heart grew warm within her.

The days passed by, and Mrs. Thorpe adhered with rigid precision to the rules and regulations she had established in her home, and devoted her leisure time in a systematic manner to the various societies and organizations conducted by the church.

Returning home one afternoon earlier than she had expected, she went to the kitchen on some small errand and found that Mary was not in. She waited for her return, and confronted her with unruffled mien.

"What excuse have you to offer for your absence this afternoon?" she asked.

"I have no excuse to offer."

"And is this the manner in which you keep your agreement?"

"Mrs. Thorpe, it is necessary for me to be away from the house at times, but I shall not fail in my duties here."

"You say that it is necessary for you to be away, yet you understood my terms and accepted them. Mary, this must not happen again."

"Then I must leave your employ, Mrs. Thorpe."

"Very well," replied the mistress, a red spot burning on either cheek; "I shall find someone else as soon as possible."

After supper Mrs. McGowan again left the parsonage and hurried along the street until she came to a small house a few blocks away.

"Why, mother mine, home so soon?" said a tall, dark-faced girl, as the mother entered the room. "What is it, mother? You look tired and worn. Is the work too hard for you?" The girl drew a stool to her mother's side and took a worn hand in hers. "I feel so badly to have you working so hard for me, mother, but when I finish school, oh, you shall be a lady then, mother! I shall take care of you and Jamie then."

The mother laid her tired head back against the chair and waited long before she replied. She felt faint and sick at heart. She had seen much in life that was hard to bear; widowhood and poverty had been hers for many years. Her only boy was a helpless cripple. Her one joy in life was Margaret, her blithesome girl. Her one great aim had been to keep her in school until she should obtain sufficient education to place her independently among the world's workers.

When she took her place at the parsonage, it was with the expectation that

Mr. Thorpe, who knew her circumstances and seemed interested in her family, would be willing for her to spend what time she could spare from her duties in her own home. But now she saw that this could not be, and there was nothing left but for Margaret to go into the factory. It was a bitter blow, but deeper and keener than her own pain, she felt what it would mean to the girl. Margaret, with her willful, passionate nature, had not learned to be patient, nor to bow to the inevitable, as she, the mother, had learned to do.

"What is it, mother?" persisted the girl. "What troubles you?"

"Lassie, I cannot work for Mrs. Thorpe any longer."

Margaret sprang to her feet and stood like a young deer, with head erect and dilated nostrils.

"Mother, what has happened? Tell me what has happened."

"It is nothing, lass, nothing at all, only Mrs. Thorpe must have someone who can spend all her time at the parsonage. She does not know how often I have been away, nor that I have spent the nights here with you and Jamie. She was displeased to-day when she found me gone."

Disappointment keen and sharp, anger wild and unreasoning, met in the girl's heart. Passionate, turbulent Margaret!

"Come, lassie, don't take it so hard; we can find some other way after a time, perhaps."

"Yes, mother, you can go to the pastor again with your trouble. You believed him to be so good a man. *Good!*–how I hate, *hate* and detest good people! They talk of helping the poor and needy–we have been poor, mother, poor and in need ever since I can remember–many times we have been hungry, and Jamie has never had the help that he should have had–else he might now be strong as other boys; and what have these good people of the church done for us? This man, your pious pastor, came here and offered you this place, and now his wife, the detestable hypocrite, has turned you off. Good people! Oh, I wish some great wave would sweep them from the face of the earth!"

"Margaret, Margaret, girl, this is terrible; you must not, Margaret!"

"Yes, mother, it is terrible; terrible for me to say what I think, but you know it is true. Those people have been good to your face; they have talked and sympathized, but what has anyone of them done for us? Not one of them would lift a finger or go one step out of his way to help us."

The girl's face was transformed with passion, and there was a glitter in her eyes that even the mother had never seen before.

"There is Amy Mayhew, the deacon's daughter," the girl continued, "who spends more for ribbons and rings and bracelets than my whole wardrobe costs. To-day at school she was showing a new ring; it cost only ten dollars, and while she was saying it her eyes were on my ragged shoes–oh, mother!" With a flood of

tears the girl buried her face in her mother's lap. Poor Margaret, she had not yet learned to look with unthinking, unheeding vision on the wrongs of humanity, her own included. Little more than a child, she had looked at life with a child's vision, and wrong, to her, had been wrong, and right was right. The distribution of property that gives one person more than enough and another less than sufficient, can never seem just to a mind unbiased by worldly wisdom. And when once the exact balance between right and wrong is disturbed, the equilibrium lost, a sort of moral chaos is likely to disturb all questions of righteousness and honor.

The mother laid her hand on the girl's crown of dark hair. She could not know–mercifully could not know–of the transformation taking place in the heart of her child. She well knew that many temptations lay in the girl's pathway; and Margaret had not always been tractable and easily controlled. Exuberant of spirit and naturally willful, a sort of restlessness seemed to possess her. But the mother believed that a few years more would tide her child over this trying time, and her one great desire was to get her away from the town, and engaged in some active, responsible work. And while the failure of her plans had bitterly disappointed the daughter, it had all but broken the mother's heart.

Had no thoughts come to Margaret other than those of the disappointment and uncongenial toil, she might still have retained her crown of womanhood unsullied–but alas, and alas! Beside the factory and the honest toil that her willful heart rebelled against, there arose in her mind forms and phantoms of many shapes and colors, tempting, taunting, alluring; and when her untutored mind endeavored to grasp their significance, they evaded her, and with seductive wiles eluded her. Poor girl! tempted by the sparkle of the foam on the cup. And while her heart was sore she sipped the first draught of the poison wine; and later she found, as all who taste must find, that the dregs were more bitter than anything that unsullied girlhood can conceive.

The next morning Mrs. McGowan was not able to leave her bed. A sleepless night, and the care and perplexities that multiplied ahead of her, left her nervous and exhausted. At her earnest request Margaret went to the parsonage and prepared the morning meal.

"Good morning, Margaret, I am glad to see you," said Mr. Thorpe, pleasantly. "I am sorry your mother is ill."

Mrs. Thorpe thought the girl's dark face very sullen and unattractive, and she wondered how even her husband could be kind and patient with people who seemed to care so little for his interest in them.

After Margaret had served the meal, and had left the room, Mr. Thorpe asked his wife what she knew about Mary's illness.

"Mary gave me warning yesterday that she must leave my service, but made

no mention of feeling indisposed," Mrs. Thorpe replied. "She gave me to understand that she could not give me all her time. I was not aware that she has a family."

"Then you do not know about the little cripple boy?"

"No; Mary has never mentioned any member of her family to me."

"I feel a special interest in this woman and her children, and I believed that after you learned her circumstances you could arrange to give her certain hours away from the house."

"But you never mentioned her circumstances to me, Maurice."

"No; I have thought several times of inquiring about her, but I have been very busy. I hope we may be able to find someone to take Mary's place soon, and perhaps after a time she will be able to come back."

"Perhaps the girl will remain. If I find her satisfactory, it will save me further trouble."

"Margaret is in the high school and ought not to miss a single day. You had better try to find someone else, and in the meantime it will be well to look in and see if there is anything the family needs."

"I will do so. I regret that I did not know about the family. And this girl is in the high school here?"

"Yes; one year after this one takes her through. Mrs. McGowan has great hopes for the future. A relative some place in the country has promised to secure Margaret a position as a teacher when she finishes the school here. For years Mary supported herself and her family by taking in sewing, but her eyesight began to fail, and she decided to try a change of work; so I offered her the position here. And Jamie, the cripple, consented to stay alone while Margaret was at school. I wish there was someone to take Margaret's place to-day."

An impulse came to Mrs. Thorpe to do the work herself that day and let Margaret go, but she remembered that she was a member of a church committee that was to meet that afternoon to transact some business for the church, and she felt that it would be hardly right for her to fail to meet with them.

So during the day Margaret swept and dusted and cooked and served, and no one knew of the disastrous thoughts that surged through her heart and brain.

Mrs. Thorpe called at the little house where Mary lived, but she found her reticent and little inclined to talk of family affairs.

"Margaret will go into the factory," she said. "There is no other way at present."

When Mrs. Thorpe told her husband of this he was surprised at the mother's decision; she had seemed so anxious about the school. But he thought that after all Margaret might have given up the school of her own accord. Perhaps he had overestimated the girl; some way she had not seemed so bright and

winsome that day as he had believed her to be.

It happened a few days later that Mr. Thorpe was called to see a poor parishioner who lived on the outskirts of the town. In order to reach this house he was obliged to pass through a neighborhood commonly known as the Flat. This was a disreputable district on the other side of the hill from Edgerly. When the town was in its infancy this Flat district was bought by a man named Bolton, who tried to throw the balance of power and interest on this side of the hill. To this end he erected a number of houses for tenants, built a saloon and hired the right sort of a man to run it. He also built a theatre. The Bolton stamp never left the Flat, and in time it came to be peopled by the lowest of the poor class. The saloon still did a flourishing business, and the theatre, known as the Flat theatre, answered for such plays and entertainments as more cultured and Christian Edgerly would not tolerate.

As Mr. Thorpe was returning from his call he saw a man and woman standing in the shadow of the theatre. The moon was full, and by its light he recognized the woman as Margaret. The man's face was turned from him, and he could not so readily make out his identity. But he knew it boded no good to Margaret to be there at that hour. He stopped, hesitated a moment, and caught the sound of voices. The girl spoke rapidly, and he thought she seemed in an ill-conditioned mood. The man's voice was more even and conciliatory. He drew the girl's arm through his and together they entered the theatre. The light from a lamp at the door fell upon them as they entered, and Mr. Thorpe recognized the man.

"Max! Max Morrison!" he exclaimed under his breath. He went on his way, thoughtful and troubled.

It must be true that he had overestimated Margaret, but he would speak to his wife, and see if her woman's tact could not devise some way to save the girl from the evil that threatened her.

CHAPTER III
UNDERCURRENTS

The seasons passed as seasons have a way of passing. The spring gave place to effulgent, luxurious summer; the summer slipped into autumn, and winter followed on, with bluster and storm. It was spring again at the parsonage. There was the song of birds, the hum of insects, and the rare perfume wafted from the

garden.

One sweet spring evening Mrs. Thorpe stood again at her open window. A hush seemed to have fallen over the earth, and the silent moon and stars looked benignly down. A rush of emotion, restful, worshipful, swept over her. If only she might escape the stress and turmoil of life, and become a part of the quiet and calm that belong to nature!

The year had been one of honest effort, faithful, loyal service. Twice every Sabbath, morning and evening, Mr. Thorpe had stood in the pulpit and expounded the truths of the Gospel as they had been revealed to him. Mrs. Thorpe, capable and willing, had been drawn into church, charitable and benevolent work, until her hands were full of work, and her life full of care; and her thoughts were vastly more troubled than they had ever been before. She realized that where once her thoughts had been vague, half-formed, that now, full-fledged and forceful, they were overmastering her. The mysteries that had once hung about her, dim and misty, now arose like walls of blackness, forbidding and awe-inspiring; and the things that she had once gazed upon with curious eyes now shocked and terrified her.

When she started in her life's work, her ideas of religion and the truths of life were but dream-like, shadowy conceptions; reflections, as it were, from the theories and dogmas of her elders and so-called spiritual leaders. There are many people who never get beyond these reflections, these traditions of religion, these second-hand conceptions. To some natures they are satisfying; they ease the mind, point a way to safety for the future, and afford a solace in time of trouble.

Mrs. Thorpe, however, was one who was destined to abide but a very short time in the consolation afforded by this kind of religion. Yet, when she attempted to step out from the creeds that cramped and dwarfed her soul, to thrust from her theories and premises that depressed and antagonized her, she found no other ground on which to place her feet, and felt herself naked and alone, without a garment of righteousness with which to clothe herself, and without compass or guiding star. She doubted, and in agony condemned herself for her doubts; later she rebelled, yet with her own hand she would have torn her rebellious heart from her bosom, had it been in her power to do so, and cast it from her as an unclean thing, an enemy to her peace, a treachery to her soul. She believed it treason to allow her mind to wander into fields of religious research other than those that had been carefully explored and marked as safe; and to her consciousness she pleaded guilty of the charge.

Before her, life stretched barren and desolate, and not even in her dreams could she find a light to guide her feet. She longed for peace, and believed the fault all hers that she had not found it; she lacked wisdom, and believed the power to attain it had been denied her.

And as she stood alone in the sweet spring night, her thoughts and emotions became complex, conflicting and tumultuous. Strange, alien thoughts flashed before her vision, and, like things alive, seemed to glow and quiver in the darkness. She covered her face with her hands. "God has hidden His face from me," she whispered, "I have never known Him."

Now before her in a fleeting vision she saw her Savior, but it was not the man Jesus as she had thought of him, with his crown of thorns and his nail-pierced hands beckoning to her, asking for her adoration and worship; but in this vision he came as a friend and teacher, one who has solved and proven all of life's problems, and stood ready to help her with all that troubled and perplexed her. He offered her not redemption through his death, but life through the understanding of God's love.

But so foreign was this vision of a Christ, to her orthodox conception of Him, that for a moment she was overwhelmed by it; then instantly she felt her strange thoughts to be intruders, vagaries of her brain, and her first impulse was to refuse them audience, to resist and destroy them. She had no intention of countenancing for a moment a thought that cast any shade of disapprobation on the work in which she and her husband were united, or which differed in any manner from the way in which they were working.

She turned and walked back and forth through the room. "This unrest always attacks me when I am tired and undone," she thought. "These troublesome thoughts will leave me when I am rested and myself again."

She went back to the window and breathed deep of the sweet night air. Something deeper than her consciousness, more potent than her faith, greater than her understanding, was striving for recognition within her. The heart of all things, the force and strength of the universe, the science of Life itself was unfolding before her; but she steeled her heart against it. Her mind had not yet burst its chrysalis; she was still a child of earth.

When Mrs. Thorpe found herself beset by the strife and unrest of her inner life, she turned instinctively to a strong, true friend that she had found. This was a Mrs. Mayhew, the wife of one of the deacons of the church. She was a woman older than Mrs. Thorpe and possessed of rare tact, and the sympathy that soothes and comforts without conscious effort.

This woman's life was a busy one; heart and hands were full. She had wealth at her disposal, and social duties made their demands upon her; church work appealed to her, and her family of children knew her as their counselor and best friend. If there were past chapters in this woman's life that caused her to be especially tender and sympathetic toward the young wife of her pastor, and yet gave her the wisdom to know that the trouble lay too deep for mortal hand to touch, she made no sign and spoke no word, but in the silence her heart spoke to

the troubled heart of her friend. And Mrs. Thorpe never named her trouble, or by the slightest word disclosed the doubts that came to her. Whatever help she received she imbibed from her friend's personality and gleaned from her quiet, well-balanced life.

Unable to rid herself of her troubled thoughts, the next day Mrs. Thorpe dropped in upon this friend. And during the call she discussed the church choir with Mrs. Mayhew's niece, Geraldine, who was the church organist.

"I think we should have some new music," Mrs. Thorpe said. "Since Max Morrison has consented to sing in the choir, with his strong tenor voice we can undertake some things which we could not before. I am glad that Max has promised to help us. So much depends on the choir. People will go where they can hear good music."

Geraldine made some suggestions regarding the new music, and Mrs. Mayhew readily agreed with Mrs. Thorpe that the choir has much to do with the success of the modern church.

At the service the next Sunday morning Mr. Thorpe gave a strong, scholarly address. But it was not the sermon, neither was it the strong tenor, nor the new music that caught Mrs. Thorpe's attention. She was coming to regard the service hour on Sunday as the hardest time of the week. For strive, struggle and pray as she would, she could not always bring herself into a proper frame of mind; could not keep the spirit of worship.

Sometimes a thought from her husband's sermon would flash out before her, confront her and torment her. At this stage of her life the thought, "I do not believe," never confronted her boldly and openly; but always there was the subtle insinuation, "Do you believe?" Sometimes her soul's agony was caused by the attitude of the people, lavishly dressed, ostentatiously worshipful. Then instead of worship in her own heart she would be possessed by scathing scorn. But this morning it was the songs that caused her undoing. Her husband took his place in the pulpit and the choir sang the opening hymn; and a line, a thought from the song attacked Mrs. Thorpe:

"Lord Jesus, look down from thy throne in the skies,
And help me to make a complete sacrifice."

Mrs. Thorpe felt herself without rudder or sail, her bark at the mercy of a stormy sea. Her mind was chaotic:

"The Lord Jesus Christ then was sitting comfortably, contentedly upon His throne in the skies! What wonder that His people are straying in many forbidden paths? What wonder that they are wandering, scattered and lost? Are they not

as sheep without a shepherd? If He is the Savior of men, why is He not among His people–oh, his people who so sorely need Him?"

The thought brought the tears to her eyes; but the next thought choked them abruptly:

"If He had taken Himself to His shining throne in Heaven, what right had she or this concourse of people to conjure Him to come down?"

Instead of the submissive attitude of one desiring to make a "complete sacrifice," a wild, unreasoning rebellion arose within her; but a stoical calm covered every emotion. But she was not yet to be let off the rack; the worst was to follow. The sermon was devoted to the work and needs of missions, and the pastor made a strong appeal for funds with which to carry on the Master's work. After the sermon the first lines of song rang out with a pleasing melody:

"I have read of a beautiful City,
Far away in the Kingdom of God:
I have read how its walls are of jasper,
How its streets are all golden and broad."

Mrs. Thorpe's sense of humor, which sometimes leaped suddenly into life and overmastered all her troubled thoughts and melancholy broodings, now came near finishing the tragedy of the service hour. Those "Streets all golden and broad–" If it was gold the world needed–and her husband had told them so emphatically that it was–why just a section of the street up there–only think what could be accomplished with a block–"all golden!"

But perhaps her humor was not of a healthy sort this morning; for her heart was cold as ice, and she feared that she might shriek aloud in fiendish glee.

During the weeks that followed she found her work difficult to perform; all her tasks were irksome. But with a desperate courage, and a resolution born of her will, she held herself to the minutest details of every task that came to her. As the weeks slipped by a peculiar strained look grew upon her face. Her husband noticed that the bloom was fading from her cheeks and an unattractive pallor taking its place, and the thought came to him that perhaps his wife was burdened with too many cares.

"Are you not so well as usual, Evelyn?" he asked her one day.

A nervous flush covered, for the time, the tired look on her face.

"Not so well, perhaps, just of late," she replied. She raised her eyes to his, and he noticed a strange expression in their depths.

But with a sort of supreme despair she clung to her work, and devoted herself to her various duties. Yet she found herself little by little obliged to give

up much that she had undertaken, for there were days when pain and physical weakness overcame her.

One evening after his usual hour of study, Mr. Thorpe laid aside his books and went in search of his wife. She was indisposed and had kept her room during the day. He found her noiselessly walking back and forth through the room, with her hands pressed close against her temples. She wore a loose gown, which fell in long folds about her, and revealed her tall and ghost-like in the dim light. Mr. Thorpe stood for a moment and regarded her in silence. Her face was haggard, and her eyes were set in dark circles. Her movements were slow and mechanical, as though her body was a thing apart from the spirit which impelled it. Her whole attitude and appearance suggested the embodiment of an overmastering pain.

Mr. Thorpe stepped to her side. "Evelyn, my dear," he said, "you are in great pain. Why did you not call me? You should have help; direct me and I will bring you some remedy."

"I have tried many remedies," she said. "I do not believe anything will relieve me. A headache has to have its own time."

She assured her husband that there was nothing that he could do to relieve her, and begged him to retire and leave her alone.

In the small hours of the night she crept to her bed, pale and worn, like some wounded thing that has been engaged in deadly combat with a foe. The pain had burned itself out, and the sleep of exhaustion came to her.

The severity of his wife's attacks alarmed Mr. Thorpe, and he begged her to lay down still more of the burden of her work. But she was not ready to do this, and continued her self-appointed tasks with all the strength at her command. Yet there was something in look and manner, something indescribable, unlike her real self, that caused Mr. Thorpe a vague feeling of apprehension for the future.

It was at this time that Mr. Thorpe's cousin, Pauline, came to make her home at the parsonage. She was a middle-aged woman, strong and vigorous and possessed of a goodly share of common sense and plain practicality. Having missed making a home for herself, she very sensibly made herself at home wherever she was.

"I love the Lord with all my heart," she was wont to say, "and I can work for him quite as well in one place as in another."

There was something in her strong and wholesome personality that caused one to trust her instinctively. And gradually, as Mrs. Thorpe was obliged to lay them down, she assumed the household cares; and cheerfully from day to day she took upon herself the burden of the work, and managed the girl in the kitchen with more tact and discretion than Mrs. Thorpe had ever been able to command.

"I do not believe that life holds any problems for Pauline," was Mrs. Thorpe's mental comment, "or that she has any doubts or fears with which to contend."

Now Mr. Thorpe pleaded with his wife and tried to induce her to lay aside all her cares in order that she might regain her health. But she insisted that she was not ill, and that she should not fail in her work; and she devoted herself with renewed zeal to her outside duties. Yet the days came closer together when she was obliged to keep her room, and not infrequently her bed for the day.

At such times Mr. Thorpe had fallen into the way of summoning the family physician, Dr. Eldrige.

The old doctor would shake his head and declare it to be a case of "nerves." And one day when Mrs. Thorpe's suffering was unusually severe, he said to Mr. Thorpe in his characteristically blunt, brusque manner:

"If you wish to keep that wife of yours out of the grave or the lunatic asylum, you will have to put a stop to this eternal gad and go she persists in."

Mr. Thorpe's face paled.

"I have tried to induce my wife to give up her work," he said, "but she clings to it persistently."

"Well, she will not cling to anything in this world much longer unless she changes her course," was his gruff rejoinder. He saw the pain in Mr. Thorpe's face, and noted the look of fear that leaped into his eyes; but it did not affect him. Other people's troubles never caused him a moment's concern. He often assured himself that a man who ministered to the ills of the human family needed a level head and a good hard heart to go with it.

Pauline, who overheard the conversation, made no mention of it to Mrs. Thorpe, but said:

"I cannot understand how Dr. Eldrige holds his popularity. He seems a rough, unfeeling man."

"He has the reputation of being the best physician in town," Mrs. Thorpe replied. "I always feel that I dare not be ill any longer after I have faced him. I have heard, too, that he treats his patients most skillfully when he is partially under the influence of liquor."

"I do not see how you and Maurice dare trust him, Evelyn. The human organism at the mercy of a half-drunken man! This, to me, seems like a terrible thing."

"You lose sight of the main facts, Pauline, and cavil at minor things. We of the human family must have a physician; with our sensitive bodies, our nerves so finely adjusted to feel the slightest discord, and to sting and quiver with pain, we must have a physician. Providence sends our ills, and it takes a skillful physician to correct them, and so if only he be skillful, there is nothing else that counts."

This was not the first time that Pauline had detected a strain of covert bitterness in Mrs. Thorpe's speech, and the tone in which she spoke more than the words alone troubled her now. In her philosophy all that which she could not understand was "Providence," and to yield to the iron Hand of it was the whole duty of a Christian. Yet there was a tone of pleading, rather than anything dictatorial, in her voice as she replied:

"We can trust the hand of Providence, Evelyn, whatever of pain and sickness comes to us."

There was a slight uneasiness in Mrs. Thorpe's manner and her breath fluttered in her throat:

"It is hard to be quiet under the rod, sometimes, Pauline."

"God knows what is best for us, dear. You do not believe that one moment's pain or suffering comes to you without His knowledge and consent."

At just this time Mrs. Thorpe's mental condition was such that every word of Pauline's was to her soul as red hot steel to the quivering flesh. Her breath fluttered and caught; there was a haze before her eyes. She felt herself possessed of two distinct personalities. She heard her answer to Pauline:

"Yes, I try to trust Him." But the second personality, forceful, insistent–what wildness, what frenzy was this?

"There is no God! There is no power in Heaven above, nor in Hell below, nor on this earth, that has a right to create a man and then by slow degrees to torture him to death! To rot the flesh from living bones, to crush and pollute and deform! It is not true! If this is God–cursed be God! If this is the Christ–"

With a strong effort, a quick, nervous movement, she recovered herself. She felt a wild impulse to fly from the room, from the house, but most of all from herself.

Pauline was by her side, with her cool hand on her forehead.

"What is it, Evelyn?" she asked. "Are you ill?"

"Only a spell of giddiness, I think, and my head feels badly. I will go to my room and lie down for a time."

CHAPTER IV

SHADOWS AT THE PARSONAGE

Mr. Thorpe was called to his old home by the death of his brother. This brother

had gone to California the year before for his health, had died there and was brought home for burial.

During their school days and college life, spent together, the boys had been very near to each other. There was a bond between them other than the bond of blood. A similarity of tastes and ambitions had brought about a congeniality and comradeship such as many times fails to develop between the offspring of the same parents. Both men had studied for the ministry and entered into the work at about the same time. But when George, the elder, was in the prime of his manhood a fatal malady had fixed itself upon him; a malady inherited, it was said, from his mother, who had laid down her burdens in the prime of her womanhood.

It was now nearly two years since Maurice Thorpe with his bride had left the home of his youth. It was a sad return. Among familiar scenes, old memories, well remembered faces, he bowed his head in grief and sorrow, and saw the clods close in upon the narrow earth-bed of this loved one, this gentle man of God, whose life had been dedicated to humanity. Something valued, something prized and loved was gone from life. Whatever the years might hold hereafter, this dear one was gone; his God had taken him. But there were no doubts or sacrilegious questionings in Mr. Thorpe's mind. His God was his sovereign, supreme of will, infallible in justice. Nor did the thought ever penetrate the well-kept fabric of his belief that there could be aught of ignorance in his conception of God; or that the Infinite in its length and breadth and depths was not wholly within the compass of his vision.

When he returned home, the marks of his grief were upon him, and Pauline believed that she detected a change in his health. His somewhat slender figure seemed more spare, his shoulders a trifle more stooped, and his chest contracted. Alarming symptoms, these. She had seen the first approach of the malady in his brother's case, and she could not mistake its advances. She took it upon herself to see that Maurice took proper care of himself. He was not allowed to sit in a draught, nor to go out unless properly protected from damp and cold. At the slightest alarm, a cough or failing appetite, she was ready with remedies and decoctions calculated to guard against and ward off all forms of the dread disease that was always pictured in her mind.

And now a great fear that had long lain dormant in Mrs. Thorpe's heart sprang into life. What reason had she to believe that her husband would be spared this fatality, this mysterious thing that had transmitted itself from one generation to another, and was free to lay its hand on its victims as it chose; sparing where its fickle fancy dictated, or clutching its death fingers into the heart, and refusing to relax its hold until the lifeless body lay before it, if so its ghoulish will desired? And no man could say it nay! Brooking no restraint, gaunt, mocking, stalking abroad at noonday, in the land which the Lord God had created!

The hot restlessness of heart which never wholly left her now flamed up and burned, and caused her to writhe as one in mortal pain. Questions of the gravest importance fraught with meanings she could not measure nor weigh confronted her wherever she turned. And the depth of her ignorance–humanity's ignorance–concerning the most vital things of life, seemed to her deplorable and reprehensible.

From sheer necessity she dropped the greater burden of her work. And always fond of reading, she now read incessantly and without discrimination whatever work she could find bearing on that one great problem, Life, and that other all-absorbing question, Religion. And over and over, and again and again, she pondered the meaning of it all. What does it mean–this life of man, with all of its pleasures and pain, its stress and strife, its joy and sorrow, its good and evil–for what is it given? She had been taught to believe that it is a preparatory state, a test or trial to ascertain how many are deserving of eternal bliss hereafter. And although she struggled against it and refused to look upon it, a picture persisted in painting itself upon her mental vision. This was the picture of a father who placed his children, the weak and the strong together, in an open field, and compelled them to till the soil and to dig and delve in the ground. And at times he sent punishment upon them, torment and torture and physical pain; while they, the children, toiled on in blind and stupid ignorance, never knowing what it was that had caused the father's wrath to descend upon them. And the father sat calmly at a safe distance and stoically observed their conduct. At the end of a certain period he intended to reward those who had been very good and patient, and very submissive to his will, with a beautiful home, while the others, those who had rebelled or complained, or fallen by the wayside, he would drive into another field and inflict punishment yet more dire upon them.

She never fully consented to look upon this picture, and she tried always to blot it from her vision, to erase and destroy it, and yet as often as she tried to do this she was horrified to find that by some strange machination of her mind she was condemning, repudiating the whole of creation, the scheme of the universe.

Her purpose in life was too honest, too sincere, her desires too pure to admit of her taking any halfway ground on these questions that confused and perplexed her. Her reading and research led her into many strange and unfrequented byways–hazardous, she thought them sometimes, black with peril–destruction, perhaps. And yet she had come to the place where she must know–she for herself must know the truth. And while with a trembling hand she shattered her old beliefs–graven images of doctrine–she found nothing to take their place. The sincerity of her life was crowding her off her old footing–but where? Over a precipice? She felt it to be so, and then–what then? There were days when her mind refused to act, when her mental faculties were in a state of paralysis.

Sometimes she fell into the old trick of her childhood, day dreaming.

At the close of one painful, troubled day she sat before her open fire, her head against a pillow at the back of her chair. Her eyes were upon the fire at her feet. The flames leaped fitfully from time to time, and again fluttered among the embers. Slowly the gulf of the centuries was bridged and she witnessed the creation of the first man–no great task it appeared, for the dust of the earth furnished sufficient material. In our human wisdom, finite though it is, we do not permit our children to use edged tools–her eyes were on the red embers at her feet, and she saw, glowing there, the thing which infinite wisdom gave to man; that which was at once his glory and his undoing, a two-edged sword, deadly keen–good and evil. It developed that this keen edged sword was hardly the thing with which to prune and keep in order the luxurious garden set apart for man on one corner of the footstool.

The unselfishness of Woman dates back to the Garden. No sooner had Eve broken open the luscious apple and tasted its flavor than she offered to divide it. And it was not within the nature of man to refuse so dainty a morsel from a fair hand.

Then man began to wander over the face of the earth, footsore and sin-stained, and in due course of time came the great Sacrifice–the spilling of blood–the Golgotha.

The smouldering fire shot into tiny tongues of flame and licked the stones on the hearth–and yet what has the great Sacrifice accomplished? Wherein is the efficacy? Hoping, fearing, faithless–ignorant, suffering, despairing–this is Life. Men and women parade before us and flaunt to the world that they are saved–saved from what? Or for what? The shame and moral degradation, the pain and the anguish date back to the Garden. Christ came to check it, but wherein are we better? The poison is in our blood and the canker in our hearts; the flesh rots from the bones and the soul reeks in iniquity; the senses long for the fleshpots of Egypt, and with one accord we gather about the board, at the feast of Belshazzer!

The flames died down, and the embers burned with a dull glow. Now a hush fell over the room and the stillness of the place folded itself about the woman motionless in her chair. The minutes slipped by and time flowed on without a break or ripple to mark its passing. The great calm stillness! Not only did it fill the room and lay like a garment about the dreamer, it filled her heart and entered her soul, and as a mother broods over her child and stills its restless wailing, it brooded over her and stilled all her tumultuous, unholy pain, and the spell of her turbulent, unwarrantable dream held her no longer.

Now the dull red coals turned to ashes and lay crumbling in the grate. And into the waiting stillness, into the majesty of the silence there breathed something divine. It radiated in the soft white light and filled the room with its presence; and

in sweet devotion before it knelt Humility and Meekness and Loving-kindness; and all power was in its hands of shining light, and all wisdom was in its star-pierced crown, and all truth in the stillness of its utterance. Into the soft white stillness, into the holy of holies, breathed this rarest gift of God–Love. The mystic glory of it hung about the dreamer, and quivered in the air, and throbbed and pulsed through the universe, and all things fell into place and became part of the endless plan of the Creator.

Every unholy thought and every vagary of false belief fell away. The iniquity of the ages, and all the crime and passion and suffering of men became a cloud of vapor, like the misty foam on the ocean waves; but beneath the foam-flecked waves lies the mighty volume of the sea, and above them the limitless reach of the heavens. Now the mortal dream of the Dust man and his short-lived Eden and subsequent suffering receded into a shadowy delusion, and the reality of Life, and the substance of eternal things unfolded and encompassed all creation.

Mrs. Thorpe stirred in her chair and felt the yielding of its cushioned depths and the pressure of the pillow at her head. She heard the door open and Pauline come into the room. She sat erect in her chair and drew her hand across her forehead.

"Have you been asleep, dear?" Pauline asked.

"Perhaps, asleep and dreaming–it was a dream–yes, a dream, it was all a dream." She brushed the hair from her temples, and again: "Was it all a dream?"

CHAPTER V

DR. ELDRIGE JR.

Dr. Eldrige Jr. was a very different man from Dr. Eldrige his father. What the elder man lacked in courtesy and kindness was abundantly present in the son. He had studied under his father, practiced and consulted with him; yet in the finer issues of life, its amenities and its culture, their lives might be likened to the branches of a stream: one followed a gorge of clay between banks of rocks and barren soil; the other flowed quietly between green banks, over white sand and shining pebbles.

The elder man had been known to remark that the rub and wear of life, actual life as he had seen it, would change the color of his son's views. If any man

could practice medicine as many years as he had practiced it, and not pronounce the whole human race a disgusting sham and a blasted humbug, he pitied that man, for there must be considerable of the fool in his make-up.

The son, however, was well content to go his way, seeing life as it appeared to him, and doing what lay in his power to make rough places smooth and ease the sufferings of humanity. He never undertook to modify his father's views, and on all occasions when it was possible for him to do so, he evaded crossing swords with him.

It was late one night when Dr. Eldrige Jr. left a poor home where he had been attending a patient. A wretched, ill-kept home it was, whose inmates seemed a thing apart from the divine creation. He stepped out into the night, bared his head and breathed deep of the fresh, sweet air. Above him was the tent of night, jeweled with stars, and at his feet the dew-wet grass, the dwelling place of tiny dumb creatures that cling to the earth's damp mold, and before him, like a blemish on Nature's canvas, the home built and fashioned and kept by man.

He was a reverent man, with no inclination to shift the responsibility of humanity's ignominious burden back upon the Maker. He had no solution to offer for the problem of human sin and woe, and he did not undertake to place the iniquity of existing conditions. His mission was to minister to those who needed his service, and this he did whether he found his patient in a palace or in a hovel.

Leaving the poor home where the sufferer lay, he came to the one pretentious street of the Flat. There had been some sort of a performance at the theatre, and the people were pouring out of the door. He was hurrying by, anxious to avoid the crowd, when his attention was attracted to a man and woman standing under the light of a lamp. The man was talking in a low, rapid manner, and the woman seemed but half inclined to agree to what he was saying. The doctor passed them directly under the lamplight; but neither of them noticed him or looked his way, he thought it very likely that they did not care to be seen by him. But as he went on his way a very tempest of rage burned within him.

"And that," he ejaculated to himself, "is Max Morrison, the man who is welcomed in the best homes in Edgerly! And Margaret, little Margaret, whom the children used to call 'Lassie'!" His mind went back to his boyhood days, when his father lived in a small village, and he and Margaret went to the same school. That was before Margaret's father died; he was the village blacksmith then, a hearty, whole-souled Scotchman. And what a laughing, rosy child the little Lassie was then. He remembered her temper, too, as did all who knew her at that time. He was a well-grown boy then and Margaret but a bit of a girl, but he had never forgotten her bright and winsome ways. Could this girl with the hard lines on her dark face ever have been the child that he recalled? He walked rapidly, his

anger and indignation burning within him. He climbed the long hill that led from the Flat up to the church, and descended on the other side; past the parsonage with its sleeping inmates, and on to his own home. Here he again bared his head and stood quietly beneath the stars. The events of the evening oppressed him. That Margaret had been beguiled from her home was, he knew, an open secret in Edgerly. His face set in grim, hard lines.

"No one who cared to know," he was sure, "could be ignorant of the character of the man who had led her to her downfall."

The next morning the doctor visited his poor patient again, and found his condition improved. The light of reason was again in his eyes, and it was evident that he clung to life with as much desire as the most favored prince of earth clings to it.

On his return he passed the Mayhew home. A party of young people, with Mrs. Mayhew as chaperon, were starting for a day's outing among the hills. A carriage stood at the curb; he bowed to Max Morrison, who was holding the spirited horses. Geraldine Vane, who was ready to enter the carriage, greeted him pleasantly. He lifted his hat to her, and she looked into his face.

"Is not this a beautiful morning for a drive?" she said.

"It is indeed a beautiful morning," he replied, but there was a coldness in his voice and his brows were contracted. Yet, as he went on his way he was sure that Geraldine's pure white face was the fairest that God's sun ever shone upon. He watched the carriage as it turned a corner into a street that led to a country road; and all the heart within him cried out against the vision of those two, Max and Geraldine, drinking in the beauty of fields and byways, earth and sky–those two together!

When he reached his office he found his father in a fit of ill-temper. This, however, was quite a chronic condition with the old doctor.

"You've been practicing among the Flat scrubs again," he said to his son. "Strange you cannot let the miserable curs die and the earth be rid of them."

The son paid little heed to his father's coarse bluster.

"They may be scrubs," he replied in his smooth, even tones, "and they may be curs, in fact, I think you are right, father, they are scrubs and curs over on the Flat, and perhaps the earth would be better off without them; nevertheless they are men, and my work lies among men." And this quiet argument silenced the old doctor, if it did not stay his wrath.

During the long, hot summer there was much sickness on the Flat, and Dr. Eldrige Jr. spent much of his time among the sufferers. The heat was intense, and the heavens withheld the rain, the earth became dry and parched, and the dust lay thick on the meagre foliage. The name of Dr. Eldrige Jr. became a magic word in that suffering district. Hard faces grew tender and harsh words died upon the

lips when his name was spoken. And day by day he went quietly about his work, relieving pain and caring tenderly for neglected old age, hardened criminals and suffering children. And hardened men and careworn women felt the stirring of new emotions within them and knew that the world is not all bad, nor life altogether bitter.

The summer days slipped by and the frost of autumn, Nature's tonic, came to aid the doctor in his efforts; and life, wretched at best, assumed its usual aspect on the Flat.

On his return from his round of visits one day the young doctor was met by his father, who was in a towering rage.

"Spending your time in the Flat filth," he growled. "Haven't you brains enough to keep out of the cursed mire? Here you are, able to minister to the puppets in high places, who, for want of better employment, spend their time nursing their aches and pains, and are proud of the size of their doctors' bills. You can dope them and dupe them quite as well as I can. Now here's a message from the Reverend Maurice Thorpe. It came an hour ago. Mrs. Thorpe has another attack of headache. Whatever that woman does to bring on those cursed spells is more than I know. If it were not for the holy fool her husband is, I should think she quarreled with him. But whatever the trouble is, all the reverends and the chosen of the Lord could go into fits and the earth be rid of them while you are to your ears in Flat mire. Now make yourself presentable and go and give Mrs. Thorpe a dose of morphine."

Dr. Eldrige Jr. hastened to do his father's bidding; not because of the old man's wrath and ire, but because he knew something of the severity of Mrs. Thorpe's attacks, and felt a very sincere sympathy for her. He found her walking to and fro in her room. She wore a crimson dressing gown, which fell loosely about her form. Her hair hung in disorder over her shoulders and rippled down her back; but she was all unconscious of her appearance. Her hands were clasped against her temples, and there was a frenzied look in her eyes, and dark blue marks lay beneath them. A white line, indicating intense pain, was drawn about her mouth.

She recognized Dr. Eldrige Jr. when he entered the room, but the fact that it was his father instead whom she had expected to see, caused her to suffer a nervous shock. She faltered in her walking and swayed uncertainly. Pauline, who was with her, sprang to her assistance.

Dr. Eldrige Jr. laid his hand on her shoulder and requested her to be seated. But she paid not the slightest attention to his request, and with eyes fixed on the floor, began again her restless walking.

"Perhaps she does not even hear you," said Pauline, "Sometimes when the pain is so intense we think she neither sees nor hears."

The doctor laid his hand on her arm and pushed the loose sleeve up to her shoulder, and in a voice that she obeyed without conscious volition, he commanded her to be quiet; then dexterously injected a dose of morphine into the flesh of her upper arm.

It was not long before her head drooped forward and her limbs seemed to grow weary, and then it was not difficult to place her comfortably upon a couch, where she soon fell into a troubled sleep. The doctor remained beside her for some time; then he prepared a powder to be given when she awoke, and took his departure.

When he returned to his office he said to his father: "I see nothing unusual about the nature of Mrs. Thorpe's headache; the pain seemed more intense than ordinary, yet it appears very like a common megrim."

"Megrim be blasted!" growled the doctor. "There's something more the matter with that woman than you or I know anything about. She's a brainy wench, and I have thought that perhaps she may be trying to find out the why and wherefore of some of the common-place things in this old world of ours. I tell you, my boy, when the Lord put Adam out of the Garden for fear he might take on too much knowledge, and set him working for his living, it showed mighty plain that there are a lot of things in this old world of ours that he never intended for man to find out. Mrs. Thorpe's mind is at the bottom of this trouble; she has let it get the upper hand of her. And I don't know but an over-dose of morphine would be the best thing for her now. It wouldn't sound bad to say that Mrs. Thorpe, wife of the Reverend Maurice Thorpe, died of heart failure during one of her nervous attacks."

CHAPTER VI
PHYSICIAN AND FRIEND

The next day a message came for Dr. Eldrige Jr. which took him past the parsonage. On his return he called on Mrs. Thorpe.

Pauline answered his ring. "Mrs. Thorpe will be pleased to see you," she said. "She is feeling better to-day."

Mrs. Thorpe received him cordially. "It is kind of you to call," she said. "I am quite myself again to-day. My headaches are usually of short duration. You doctors relieve me for the time; but I live in continual dread of the next attack. If

only I could know what it is that causes this trouble there is nothing I would not do to eradicate it; for I believe if this could be overcome I should have my health again."

Dr. Eldrige recalled what his father had said about the mental condition of this woman. Could he probe her inner life and ferret out the cause of her trouble? Under the circumstances would it be right for him to do so, if he could? With these questions in mind he engaged her in easy conventional conversation, and without a suspicion of the fact on her part, he studied her face and watched her movements with quiet intensity. He desired to do all that he could for his patient's physical welfare; and the heart and mind have so great an influence over the body, that just how far a physician has a right to seek and search becomes a finely balanced question. He resolved to give her an opportunity to be frank with him if she cared to do so, but if there was anything she desired to conceal he would not intrude upon her secrecy.

"The cause of your trouble, Mrs. Thorpe, may be beyond the reach of doctors' skill. There are many ills that a physician is able to alleviate, but there may be inducing causes that no physician is able to discover."

She waited some moments before she spoke, and the doctor's eyes were upon her expectantly.

"The fate of the whole human race lies with you physicians," she said. "There is scarcely one on this earth who is every whit whole. And those for whom you cannot prescribe–?" She stopped short, and her eyes flashed abruptly into his.

The doctor saw that she had missed the import of his words, and he believed that she attributed to them a meaning that could not fail to distress her, and he hastened to correct his mistake.

"I did not mean to intimate that your trouble is beyond a physician's reach, Mrs. Thorpe," he said. "Yours is what my father calls a 'case of nerves.'"

She put out her hands as though to entreat him to desist. Always in her intercourse with the old doctor she had felt a reticence that made it impossible for her to talk with him, except on strictly professional topics; but there was something in this man's face, a plain, clear-cut face it was, and in his manner, kind and sympathetic, that inspired her confidence.

"I know," she said, "that mine is a nervous trouble, but must we admit that there is pain in this world for which there is no remedy? Maladies for which there is no physician? Must we admit the situation to be true, and stand helpless before it, that certain forms of suffering, deadly in their nature, have been laid upon humanity, for which no antidote has been given? It cannot be–this cannot be true, else what is the inference?"

"You have misunderstood my meaning, Mrs. Thorpe. You should have

heard me out. I beg of you not to believe that I consider your trouble one for which there is no remedy. I meant only to call your attention to the fact that a great variety of causes may be responsible for nervous troubles. We look, naturally, for a physical cause, for a physical ailment; yet it is a mistake to believe that this must always be the case. It sometimes happens that the mind is largely responsible for the physical condition."

She waited again before she spoke. Her hands lay idly in her lap, but the doctor noticed that she was not in a state of relaxation, but that there was a restrained energy in attitude and manner.

"I think that you in your turn have misunderstood me, Dr. Eldrige," she said. "I deplore my own condition, certainly, but a menace to human happiness lies in the fact that the whole race is heir to the sufferings of the individual. Mine is not an isolated case. I am but one of the great world-wide family that is bound on the altar of human suffering."

Now the doctor saw that Mrs. Thorpe was discussing a subject broader than her own personal disability, and the first inkling of the truth came to him; and with it there came also an illumination of the woman's character. He saw her love for humanity and her compassion for its woes; and with keen perception he was able to understand something of her futile efforts toward an adjustment of existing conditions that might, to her own mind, seem fair and just. And great as was his concern for her physical condition, he now felt this to be of small importance compared to his desire to help her out of her mental dilemma. But the difficulty was as real to him as it was to her, yet there was this difference: it was a difficulty that he admitted, accepted, and dismissed from his thoughts, while with her he saw that it was rending the very fibre of her life and distorting her mental vision. But keenly as he realized the situation, he found no word of help to offer her, and so he said:

"I fear we shall find our task an arduous one, and unprofitable as well, if we undertake to account for humanity's burden."

"Whether we can account for it or not," she replied, "we, the children of a common Father, are sordidly indifferent to it. We go about our affairs during our waking hours with a sort of a pitiful gratitude toward the monster Disease, if by good fortune we have escaped him; we go to our rest at night, and if we are free from the fell hand, we sleep, while thousands and thousands of creatures, divinely made, are wrestling with mortal pain."

The doctor's eyes were upon her; not a movement, nor an expression of her face escaped him. He saw that the pupils of her eyes were dilated, and that a peculiar light burned within them; and he noticed that it was necessary for her to make a greater effort in order to control the nervous energy that possessed her. There was a ring of reckless protest in her voice as she continued:

"Is this a haphazard world, Dr. Eldrige, where men escape by chance, or are overwhelmed by circumstance? Is there no overruling power, no fixed law to which men may conform, and by which they may be governed and protected, even to the extent that our man-made laws govern and protect those who conform to them? I have been over this ground so many times; I have questioned and reasoned and studied, and yet I have learned–nothing at all."

Her hands fell to her sides with a nervous movement, but her face was averted now, as though she would not have him see its expression.

The doctor thought of what his father had said about the limitations the Lord has placed on human knowledge. He did not for a moment admit that there was a grain of truth in the theory, in fact he believed it to be one of his father's queer jests; yet the thought came to him that the woman before him seemed an actual demonstration of such a theory. But his answer was far from the thought and was intended to turn her mind to a more practical consideration of the subject.

"There are many laws of Nature that are intended to protect mankind. Our safety lies in obeying them; if we disobey, a penalty must be paid, and though the penalty may seem severe, or even, to us, unjust, this should but teach us to be the more obedient and circumspect."

"Do you believe that physical disability is always the result of a broken law of Nature?" The question was direct, incisive, and her eyes were upon him, demanding the truth.

He answered her truthfully, yet because of his own lack of knowledge, evasively:

"Not a direct result always, perhaps; some maladies are constitutional, inherited from some ancestor, it may be."

"Yes, it may be," she replied. She seemed quieter now, but there was an unmistakable accent of scorn in her voice.

"It may be. I have observed that where it comes to a question that concerns humanity high and low, the world over, it is very likely to be all guesswork with us."

There was a moment's silence, and her ever-varying mood changed again, and when she spoke her words came rapidly and there was a gleaming fire in her eyes.

"And if we do inherit our diseases, to whom are we indebted for this heritage? We may say to some ancestor, and if there is any uncertainty about it we make him as remote as possible. But where did he get it, where did he get this thing that has been fought and battled through all the years of its existence, yet has proven itself invulnerable? Give me the origin of disease. Who conceived it? Who created it? What is its mission–? this thing that is stronger than man–

stronger than his Maker–" Her voice had sunk almost to a whisper. "If there are two powers in this world, and this cruel, monstrous thing we call disease is the stronger of the two, what folly for man to struggle or resist. Oh, to know–to *know*–if only one could *know*!" Her voice fell and broke in a gasping sob, and she covered her face with her hands.

Dr. Eldrige did not betray by word or look that Mrs. Thorpe had disclosed to him the trouble that was preying on her mind, and he did not forget his professional duties. He had gained the knowledge that he desired to possess, yet the fact that this woman had allowed her mind to dwell on subjects of a religious nature until her health suffered and her reason was threatened was of no particular importance to him unless he could use his knowledge for her benefit; and now the question confronted him: had he the wisdom and tact to do this?

"Mrs. Thorpe," he said, "you have allowed your mind to dwell too long on this subject. As your physician I advise you to put this thing wholly from you."

But he saw her face grow white and her eyes dilate, and he thought best to change his tactics. He dropped his professional manner, or rather it seemed to slip from him. Before such need as this he felt that a mere physician must stand helpless and disarmed; but the man within him was ready to give in friendship's name all that could be given. Yet, the realization of his own lack of knowledge again arose before him and seemed almost to jeer and jest at his ignorance. But with scarcely a moment's hesitation, although fighting for the mastery of his own discordant thoughts, he decided to try once more to give this woman before him something practical and tangible for her mind to dwell upon.

"There are some things in this world that we cannot know," he said. "Perhaps it was intended that we should not know them. This we do know, that a pursuit of knowledge concerning them cannot benefit us, cannot fail to do us harm. And there is consolation, or at least exculpation, for us in the fact that this is God's world. He created it, he is responsible–we are not. We have only to take life as we find it, and make the best we can of it; we have no right to burden ourselves further."

In thus making it appear as though it is the Infinite One, and not finite man, who is responsible for the world's discords, Dr. Eldrige Jr. did not express a sincere conviction, but he felt that it would be a great indiscretion to enter into any argument or discussion with Mrs. Thorpe at this time, and he sincerely hoped that she might catch some suggestion from his words that would tend to quiet her troubled mind. Yet, despite his good intentions, he was conscious of a haunting thought that for a deadly malady he was giving a medicine whose only virtue lay in its being smooth to the taste.

Mrs. Thorpe saw the flaw in his logic, and to her distorted vision it seemed like a fault in the Infinite plan; but she said no more. She was already sick at

heart over what she considered her indiscretion. And she felt guilty of a sort of infidelity to her husband for having given voice to heresies that she knew would displease and offend him, and a thousand troubled thoughts surged through her brain. The glow had left her face and it now appeared pale and cold, and her eyes that had burned with so bright a light seemed dull as though covered with mist. Her voice, too, had lost its life and ring.

"You have been very kind to me, Dr. Eldrige," she said, "and I thank you."

The doctor arose to take his departure. "I have advised you both as a physician and a friend," he said, "to rid your mind of this unhappy train of thought, and I will add, find something to take up your time and attention; let it be amusing, entertaining, frivolous if you like, but give it your entire attention."

Mrs. Thorpe had arisen and stood confronting him. She now extended her hand to him, and her unfathomable eyes looked into his.

"You are my friend, Dr. Eldrige," she said. There was the conviction of a statement in the words, yet a catch in her voice and the intonation made it seem almost a question.

The doctor was quick of perception; instantly he understood her unworded request. He took her hand in his.

"I am your friend," he said, in a voice of utmost respect and sincerest sympathy. "And before God I will help you in any way that I can."

After the doctor left her, Mrs. Thorpe stood at her window and looked out at the somber autumn day. A gray mist hung in the air and red and yellow leaves lay in heaps in the corners of the yard. With her old habit still strong upon her, Mrs. Thorpe fell into reverie.

"Nature nursed the tiny leaves into life," she mused; "gave them form and color and permitted them to sport in happy freedom through all the days of summer, and now at the approach of winter she has bedecked them in gorgeous array."

And then the very subject that the doctor had so painstakingly warned her against presented itself to her in every form and shape that it was possible for it to assume.

"There is no pain nor suffering in this changing process," she thought; "even when disintegration sets in there is no reason to believe that a leaf or plant or flower feels the downward process to which it is subjected. This heritage of suffering, the realization of corruption and pollution, has been reserved for man–man, who of all the creatures of God's creation has been made the most susceptible to pain and woe. The vine flings its blood-colored leaves to the breeze, oblivious of time or change. The great trees reach their arms to the sky and stand secure in their native strength. How complete is the harmony between all growing things and Nature's laws that govern them."

When thinking deeply Mrs. Thorpe often experienced the strange phenomenon of having her thoughts suddenly, and without her conscious will, revert to some irrelevant circumstance or event apparently forgotten. Vividly before her now there flashed the vision of a little girl, who in her childish mind firmly believed that there were two Gods, a good one and a bad one. She gave a low shriek and covered her face with her hands.

"I have been worshiping the bad God!" she whispered.

Pauline, who was busy in an adjoining room, thought she heard a peculiar sound, and came into the room. She found Mrs. Thorpe reclining in an easy chair near the window.

"Are you feeling well, Evelyn?" she asked.

"As well as usual, I think," Mrs. Thorpe replied. Then she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. It was another bitter drop in her cup, the bitterest one of all, perhaps, that she could not prevent wild impulses and strange fancies from flitting through her brain. She might be obliged to yield her body to this unknown power that no man could explain or trace to its origin, but with all the force of her nature she fought against yielding her brain and will as well.

There was with her a continual sense of discord and irritation; small, trivial things upset her mental balance and rendered her trying and exacting with those about her. Secretly, she resented the close companionship of Pauline; she chaffed over the way many small tasks were performed, and often felt hurt and miserable, and all sorts of unhappy fancies dwelt in her mind.

Those were dark days at the parsonage. Daily the pastor knelt in prayer and implored the gracious Father to restore health and strength to the dear one suffering under His hand.

Mrs. Thorpe grew more frail and her health continued to decline during the winter. She would sometimes sit for hours thinking or dreaming, her hands folded idly in her lap, her eyes on the glowing fire. But no hint of the trend of her thoughts ever escaped her. Whatever problems presented themselves to her, she found their solution alone or not at all; from whatever premise she reasoned, she reasoned alone, without a hint or help to guide her, and her conclusions were always the deductions of her own brain, but flavored and colored, no doubt, by the writers, ancient and modern, sacred and secular, whose convictions and beliefs she had read, measured and weighed.

There were two reasons for her rigid silence. One of these was the natural proclivity from the days of her childhood to keep within her own heart the things that troubled and puzzled her. The other reason was much more complex, and added materially to the burden that she carried. Her husband, scholarly, thoughtful, gentle and reverent, was, she knew, flint and steel where the doctrines and dogmas of his church were concerned, and would, she believed, yield up his life

as readily as any martyr of old had ever done, rather than yield one principle of his faith or compromise one conviction.

Her domestic relations had been particularly happy; her husband's faith and confidence in her were complete. And dear to her as the breath to her nostrils was his love and approbation. And the more surely she felt the structure of her life, her aims and purposes, her hopes and aspirations falling in ruins about her, the more passionately she clung to this, the one thing that was left her, beautiful and unimpaired. What was all that she had suffered, or all that she could suffer while her husband's faith in her remained, compared to what must follow should he learn that she had withdrawn from him spiritually, forsaken the principles that were strong within him as the fibres of his life, repudiated the sacred tenets of his church? A sort of prayer had worded itself in her brain that she be not spared in bodily pain nor mental suffering, that no portion of the burden she bore be removed, if thereby, in life or death, her husband must know that she had proven faithless to the principles of his faith.

CHAPTER VII
MRS. THORPE'S MOUNTAINS

The ice king reigned. Ice bound, snow covered, the world lay white and still in the embrace of winter. Nature had closed her laboratory and turned the key; all the wonderful things in her store-rooms were waiting and resting. The tiny rootlets were deaf to the moaning wind; the stern and sturdy trees tossed their branches to the sky and defied the storms in their rage to tear from them the life force which they guarded; the ice-locked lakes and rivers joined in the great white stillness.

It was the time of year when the Star appeared in the East and wise men journeyed far to visit the Child; the time when the shepherds were aroused by the heavenly visitants, and angels proclaimed that the world's Redeemer was born and that the good tidings were for all men. Nevertheless, at this anniversary of the Redeemer's birth there were hearts in Edgerly in which rankled bitterness and envy, and where burned hatred and despair. Children, poorly clad, pale and thin, shivered along the streets of the city, and men and women faced the biting blast and dreamed of the return of the season that should warm and comfort them.

But these things were not in Maurice Thorpe's mind when he prepared his Christmas sermon. His purpose was to give to his people at this most blessed season something that would comfort them and bring peace, even the peace that had been proclaimed to their hearts.

The sweet hush of the Sabbath brooded over the church and lay like a benediction over the parsonage. The winter sunshine, warm and mellow, sifted through the windows and added to the warmth and glow of Mrs. Thorpe's apartment. In her clinging crimson gown, which brought into strong relief her white drawn face and luminous dark eyes, she appeared almost as though she might be a being from some other world.

"The morning is fine," said Mr. Thorpe, "and the air will do you good. It has been a long time since you attended church, Evelyn. Make yourself ready and go with me to-day."

Mrs. Thorpe avoided her husband's eyes. Could she trust herself to go? Dare she trust herself to refuse? Mr. Thorpe overruled her excuse of illness and insisted that going out would do her good.

Without further protest she yielded to his wishes and accompanied him. It was the Sunday before Christmas. The air was crisp and keen and brought a freshness and a bit of color to their faces as they climbed the incline to the church.

The solemn strains of the organ began in a hushed minor key and increased in volume and tone until they rang and vibrated through the farthest corner of the room. The melody was now pleading and plaintive, like a voice filled with passionate longing, and again solemn and grand as the longing glided into fulfillment, and at last triumphant, victorious–

"All is well with the world."

Geraldine Vane, a little lower than the angels, her blue eyes like stars and her yellow hair like a halo of light, put her own heart-pulse into the music. In the anthem that followed, Max Morrison's strong, clear voice rang out the joyful message:

"Peace on earth, good-will, good-will to men."

The congregation joined in singing a song and the words burned themselves into Mrs. Thorpe's brain and caused her heart to quiver and her soul to writhe–

"Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain,

Could give the guilty conscience peace, nor wash away the stain.
But Christ the heavenly lamb takes all our sins away.
A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.
My soul looks back to see the burden Thou didst bear
While hanging on the cursed tree, and knows his guilt was there."

The Reverend Maurice Thorpe then stepped forward and gave the waiting audience his text:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoso believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The pastor's voice was musical and cultured and the words of the text as he uttered them met with a magnetic response from the audience. This silent applause, this outpouring of the commendation of his hearers was as manifest to Mr. Thorpe as though it had been demonstrated by visible signs or audible words; as manifest and more satisfactory, for the sense of exultation which it gave him was perceived by no one save himself.

Sensitive and responsive, he always knew in what spirit his people received his text. He read their faces as an open book, and took his keynote from them. It was this intangible method of getting at the hearts of his people that made it possible for him to comfort and satisfy them, while preaching the most orthodox doctrine and restricted creed.

Mrs. Thorpe's battle began with the text. She kept her eyes withdrawn from the pastor's face and she endeavored to keep her mind from dwelling wholly on what he was saying. She thought of the long line of snow-capped homes that led up to the church; and about her heart there clutched a hardness cold and unyielding as the frost king's embrace of the earth. Each building and frost-hung shrub and white-branched tree reared itself into a mountain of ice and snow. And Mrs. Thorpe felt that just such a range of ice-bound mountains, relentless, forbidding, impassable, lay between her and the love of God.

The pastor, with nice discernment, was able to give his voice just the proper pitch and volume to cause it to fill the room; every word was carefully articulated, clear and distinct:

"From the beginning, man, the crowning work of God's hand, manifested a disposition to disobey, and this disobedience plunged the world into a chaos of sin and disorder. From the earliest record we see man demonstrating his evil nature, his tendency to sin and all unrighteousness.... The priests of old endeavored to cleanse and purify from sin. Moses was chosen the deliverer of the Lord's ancient people; David in his day was called to rule over them; Solomon was given wisdom with which to direct them; Jeremiah threatened them with destruction;

and Habakkuk exhorted them to a renewal of righteousness and prayed the Lord to be merciful to them. But the downward tendency was inherent within them and the record of man is one long record of sin and unfaithfulness....

"From time to time, owing to the wickedness of the people, it became necessary to visit punishment and destruction upon them. And many sacrifices were offered to God for the sins of the people. Lambs were slain and offered upon consecrated altars; goats and bullocks were sacrificed and altars ran red with the blood that was shed to wash away the still more crimson stain of men's sins. But there came a time when a long-suffering God could not thus be appeased; there came a time my friends, my brothers, *there came a time* when the blood of goats and bullocks was not sufficient to wash away the sins of man; was not sufficient to appease the wrath of Almighty God. When this time came, the only begotten Son was given into the hands of men to be crucified....

"A child, a little, helpless child, was cradled in a manger and ministered to by His Virgin mother. No man has trod nor can ever tread the pathway of pain and suffering that lay before this child, given to die for the sins of men. No man can drink the cup that He drank, or suffer the anguish that He suffered. He must die upon a cross, scorned and reviled by the world He came to save.... In the blood of His own beloved Son God wiped out the sins of the world, and so great is the corruption in which the children of men are steeped, that had one drop in the bitter cup, one sigh of anguish in the Garden, one nail that pierced the defenseless hand of the Christ been spared, the God of righteousness and justice would not have been appeased. This, then, this sacrifice sealed in blood, is the price of your salvation and mine, and there is no other way under heaven whereby men may be saved. Our pardon has been bought with the innocent blood of a crucified Savior."

Mrs. Thorpe felt her breath coming in short, quick gasps. Her cheeks were a scarlet flame and a white line was drawn about her mouth. How could men live and praise and exult under this carnage of blood! Where should she fly–how escape? Was there no way out of this–*this*–THIS! Was it inevitable, irrevocable, that she must reap the benefit of this awful carnage, this slaughter of a world's Redeemer? Who had at her birth, yea, before she was born, laid upon her sins for which another was called to suffer–who had dared to do this? If a blood sacrifice was required for her conscious sins, then her blood it should be–not another's–not innocent blood for culpable sin!

But the acme of her suffering lay in the thought that the God of the world had decreed this thing, in His own heart He had conceived it, from the beginning He had foreseen it–premeditated it. What wonder that chaos reigns in His world? What wonder that the children of His creation have from the beginning gone astray? What wonder that envy and hatred, strife, bitterness and despair live and

flourish? Can man rise above his conception of his Creator? Can he consistently worship a God who had planned and caused to be done a thing from which the compassionate human heart must shrink and human hand must stay? Is not the whole story of the Creation, the Fall, the Sacrifice, the Redemption, as we have heard it in all its harrowing details, absurd, deplorable, culpable? Can we in sincerity acknowledge ourselves guilty of a sin for which we are not responsible, and grateful to a Creator who, possessing absolute power, fashioned men free in will and action, and then forced upon them the blood of His own innocent Son to save them from the consequences of their freedom?

Yet, bewildered and entangled as Mrs. Thorpe felt herself to be, in this labyrinth of doubt and rebellion, she was aware that other thoughts than these were tapping at the door of her consciousness; tapping and pleading for admission. Deep in her heart soil a grain of truth was throwing out its penetrating rootlets and struggling toward the light. But so completely would these thoughts, if admitted and accepted, uproot every preconceived idea, so entirely would they cast out and destroy that which all her life she had been taught to believe, that their pleading for admittance but increased the confusion of her thoughts and rendered her mental state more chaotic.

When the service was over Mrs. Thorpe became aware that many eyes, curious and sympathetic, were upon her; yet few of her friends spoke to her, for there was an unwritten law that no one should go out of the way to speak to another and that little demonstration should be made inside the church. All was orderly and dignified and befitting the house of the Lord. Strangers came and went; newcomers felt the chill of propriety that pervaded the atmosphere, and the old members felt it, too, and gloried in it.

In her fertile brain Mrs. Thorpe beheld them all, the old members and the new, and the strangers among them, as in a vision, and all were trying to climb the mountains of ice, trying to reach Heaven over a pathway of cold indifference and fixed and rigid form.

Mr. Thorpe joined his wife near the church door and he put his arm protectingly about her as she descended the church steps. He felt that the Lord had been specially kind to give her strength to be present at this service.

Pauline preceded them and was already in the kitchen overseeing the dinner when they arrived. Mrs. Thorpe went directly to her room and, removing her wraps, sank down in her easy chair. Her eyes were dry and bright, but she covered her face with her hands and her shoulders quivered as if beneath a load.

"Never again," she moaned, "never again can I trust myself to hear his voice from the pulpit."

The admission wrung her heart and hurt her as hearts are wrung and hurt when some dear one passes from view of mortal sight.

Pauline tapped at the door and announced dinner. Mrs. Thorpe arose and stood for a moment before her fire.

"If there were a God," she whispered, "if there were a God, loving and strong and powerful–oh, a God who cares for His own, how passionately would I beseech Him to be with me now, to help and uphold me!" She walked over and opened her door. "There really should be such a God–Friend–Father," she continued in an undertone, "for we need Him so!"

Mr. Thorpe and Pauline were awaiting her in the dining-room. Mr. Thorpe, who was never lacking in the small courtesies of the home, seated her at the table and took his place opposite.

"I am glad to see that the exertion of the morning has not overtried your strength, my dear," he said. "Your face in the congregation is an inspiration to me. I hope you will be able to attend regularly hereafter."

Pauline, whose insight was keener than the pastor's, divined that all was not well with Mrs. Thorpe, and broached another subject.

"The church was well filled this morning," she remarked.

"Yes," said Mr. Thorpe. "There seems to be something about the Christmas season that touches all hearts. And I think the Savior's birth means more to the world every year."

"Is this because men's hearts are changing," asked Mrs. Thorpe, "or do we understand Christ's mission better?"

"I think the religious world realizes as it never has before the greatness of the sacrifice that has been made for humanity," replied Mr. Thorpe. "We may call it Christ's mission if we like, but I prefer the term sacrifice in connection with Him who was born to die that we might live."

The flow of talk continued, but as it often happened, Pauline and Mr. Thorpe kept up the conversation. Mrs. Thorpe did not venture another remark, and after the meal went directly to her room. Her husband followed her and seated himself before her open fire. Neither spoke for a few moments, and the pastor reached for a book that lay on a stand nearby. Mrs. Thorpe saw the movement and moved as though to intercept him; but the book was in his hand. It was a small volume bound in white and gold.

Mrs. Thorpe lay back in her chair and her face framed with her dark hair seemed drawn and white as it lay against the scarlet cushion.

"What have you here, my dear? What are you reading nowadays?" asked Mr. Thorpe in a full, smooth voice. And something in the tone caused Mrs. Thorpe's heart to vibrate as to a well-loved melody. How she loved this man; bowed to him, reverenced him. She did not answer him now, she did not stir nor turn her head.

Mr. Thorpe opened the little book at random and his eyes fell upon the

following: "God is a spirit and they who worship Him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

"It is difficult to understand how the idea of God as a personal being of power and wrath has taken so strong a hold upon men's minds. Not until this idea is eliminated, totally overcome and cast out, can we know our God as He is, and understand the divine mission that Christ came to perform....

"The Son of God became incarnate on the earth–not to die for men's sins–albeit a cruel and misguided people crucified Him–but by His life to teach the Truth of Life. Not to die the death of a martyr, not to offer a human sacrifice to a God of love, but to teach the children of God's creation to live."

Mr. Thorpe closed the book with his forefinger at the place. Mrs. Thorpe felt, rather than saw, his eyes upon her and she turned and looked into his face.

"Evelyn," he said, "what have you here? Where did you get this–this absurd book?"

Mrs. Thorpe did not answer him; instead she sank back into her chair and closed her eyes.

Mr. Thorpe regarded her for a moment, then he opened the book again and ran his eyes down the page. He halted at this paragraph:

"It may be true that the reluctance with which men change their conception of God, their propensity to cling to the creed and doctrines which have been handed down to them, serves to keep their hearts reverent and worshipful; nevertheless that which is false, all that is erroneous and misleading must die. The world to-day is demanding the truth about the deep hidden things of God.

"No matter how sacred a teaching or belief may have been to our forefathers, nor how efficacious it seemed to meet their needs, we must know that while the immortal Truth changes not, the ideas of men concerning it have changed with the process of the ages. Does anyone believe that while we are progressing in every line of industry, art and science, that to be Christian we must continue to stand in our religious convictions where our forefathers stood?"

Mr. Thorpe glanced at his wife. She had not changed her position, but he noticed a twitching of her eyelids and that the color had rushed into her face, burning her cheeks to a scarlet flame. He did not speak, but continued the next paragraph.

"Let us, then, with all reverence yet unafraid, seek the saving truth of God, strip it of creed and form, remove the tattered garment of prejudice and bigotry, lay low the orthodox beliefs which, while claiming to house and shelter this divine Truth, have hedged it about and endeavored to limit it to that which mortal hands have bound upon church altars."

Mr. Thorpe closed the book sharply, then opened it again and looked for the writer's name. It was a new name to him. He laid the book back on the stand

and stepped to his wife's side. He laid his hand gently on her hair.

"Evelyn," he said, "how came you by that book?"

She looked full into his face and answered directly: "I found it in a book-store, down town."

"And you bought it, Evelyn?"

"Yes."

Mr. Thorpe went back to the table, and he saw there another book, one that he had not noticed before. This one was bound in black leather and stamped in gilt. On the cover there was stamped a circle of gilt, and around the circle were these words: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." Inside the circle was a cross and a crown. Mr. Thorpe recognized this book, he knew it by sight. He did not touch it now, however, but pointing to it he addressed his wife: "And this book, is this one yours, too, Evelyn?"

"No," she replied, "that is one Mrs. Vane let me take."

Mr. Thorpe resumed his seat by the fire.

"If I believed it necessary to warn you against this sort of reading," he said, "or to caution you against these distortions of the Scripture, I hope I should not hesitate in doing my duty; but I feel that any such warning or caution would imply a lack of faith in your honor, and in your fidelity to your church vows. I have confidence in your judgment, Evelyn, and faith in your sincerity, but I request you to return Mrs. Vane's book at your earliest convenience."

"I had intended to do so," she said, "and shall attend to it to-morrow." Her voice was not quite steady.

She took the offending volumes and laid them on a shelf in the curtained alcove. She felt a sickening sensation creep over her, a sense of dishonor and of disloyalty to her husband.

CHAPTER VIII
STRANDED

Mrs. Thorpe sat in her room one morning, a piece of needlework in her hands. It was a beautiful piece of work and she held it from her and looked at it critically.

"You are my sedative," she said. "When a heart cries for God and cannot find Him; when a sacrilegious questioner tries to solve some of the problems of this life, or to learn the cause of this great world's woe–when one is so lacking in

judgment as to try to do this, serious trouble is likely to follow and then one must have something, really must have something to distract the mind for a time." She gave an odd little laugh and drew her work to her.

A phantasm of her imagination had caused her to discard her books. Whenever she opened a book and prepared to read, a phantom form, sable and somber, peered over her shoulder and read with her.

Then she resolved to read no more books and to think as little as possible about those she had read; and to this end she had taken up needlework. She knew what her condition was physically, and realized that it was only by the exertion of her will power that her mind, too, was not a wreck. She had a curious habit of looking at her mind and brain as something apart from herself, and as another personality she studied their condition.

When she discarded her books, the phantom disappeared for a time, and she believed that she had exorcised it. But after a time she saw that she was mistaken in this, for it returned at intervals, more grim and determined than before. It never made a sudden impression on her, and it never startled her; but always when she became aware of its presence she felt that it had been with her all the time–always, only she had not recognized it. Then silently it would jeer at her blindness and dullness of perception, and triumphantly assert that no one on whom it fixed its choice ever eluded it.

Mrs. Thorpe had begun sorting her silks for her work when her attention was attracted by a song that Pauline was singing:

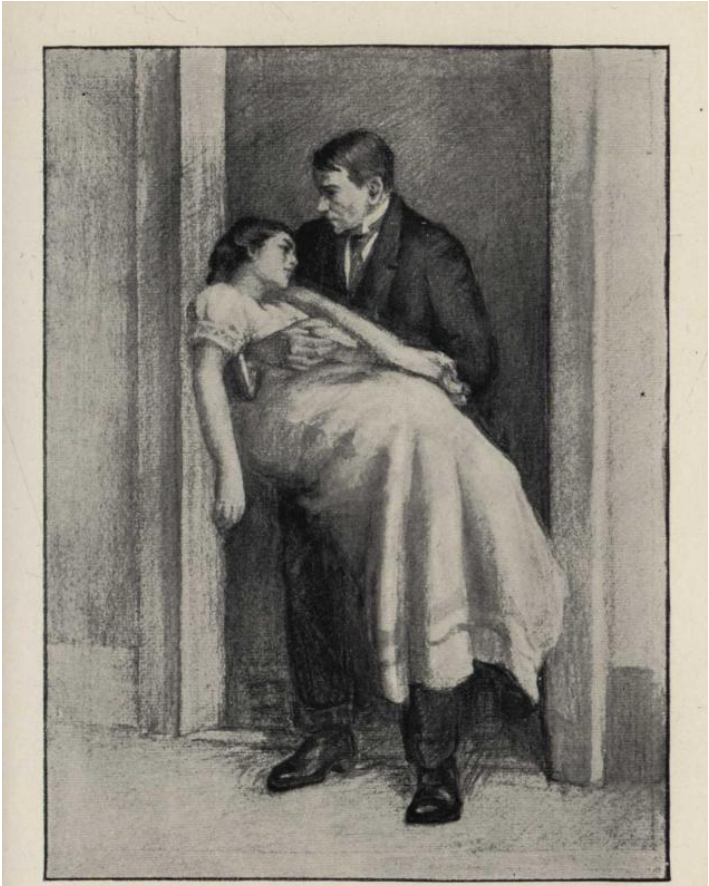
"Is not this the land of Beulah,
Blessed, blessed land of light
Where the flowers bloom forever
And the sun is always bright?"

The words of the song caused her unrest to burn within her.

"The land of Beulah–blessed land of light," Pauline could sing of this; while she–why had she failed? Had she not worked and watched and prayed–yet the blackness of darkness was about her.

"I am dwelling on the mountains
Where the golden sunlight gleams,
O'er a land whose wondrous beauty
Far exceeds my fondest dreams."

The low, sweet strain continued. Pauline often sang at her work, and the song



"HE TOOK HER IN HIS ARMS AS THOUGH SHE WERE A LITTLE CHILD" (page 97)

"HE TOOK HER IN HIS ARMS AS THOUGH SHE WERE A LITTLE CHILD" (page 97)

bubbled forth as though the full heart could not contain it.

"I am drinking at the fountain
Where I ever would abide,
For I've tasted life's pure river
And my soul is satisfied."

Mrs. Thorpe dropped her work and clasped her hands over her mouth, for she felt that she must shriek aloud.

"*Satisfied*! My soul is satisfied! Was it possible that this was vouchsafed to some, while every hope of hers was gone, every longing unfulfilled?"

When she took up her work again she placed stitch after stitch with careful deliberation.

"I must adhere to my resolutions," she thought. "I have no quarrel with the world. I am not responsible for its woes. I cannot fight its wrongs. I will live simply and contentedly, live for my husband and my home." But she refrained from looking over her shoulder, for the black wings of her phantom hovered there.

A few moments later Pauline came into the room. "Mrs. Mayhew is in the parlor and wishes to see you," she said.

Mrs. Thorpe greeted her friend cordially. "I am so glad to see you," she said; "I was feeling a bit down-hearted this morning and longing for a congenial friend."

"Then my plan is opportune," said Mrs. Mayhew. "I came in the carriage to take you home with me for the day. Mr. Thorpe will come to tea and spend the evening, I hope. My brother, Professor Vane, is spending a few days with us, and he and Mr. Thorpe are congenial spirits, you know."

"I am sure that Mr. Thorpe will be pleased to meet your brother again. I had a letter from Mrs. Vane a few days ago. She mentioned that the Professor meant to visit you before long."

"I am glad to know that your friendship with Mrs. Vane ripened into a correspondence."

"We do not correspond regularly. I had a book of hers, one which she let me take last summer. I returned it not long ago and received a letter from her saying that it had arrived safely."

Mrs. Thorpe accepted her friend's invitation for the day and as they drove through the bracing atmosphere her unhappy fancies seemed to fall away from her. There was something in Mrs. Mayhew's personality, wholesome and practical, yet winsome as well, that had a tendency to arouse Mrs. Thorpe out of her

troubled dreams and dispel the visions of her morbid imagination.

Yet when they were seated in Mrs. Mayhew's parlor, each with her bit of work, the first topic of conversation plunged her troubled mind again into a sea of doubt and despair.

Mrs. Mayhew drew her chair a little nearer to the grate, rested comfortably in its cushioned depths and let her work lay idle in her hands.

"They tell me," she said, "that there is a great deal of suffering among the poor people on the Flat this winter. The Ladies' Benevolent Society is doing what it can to help them, but cannot reach them all. Geraldine went over to the Flat with some of the ladies yesterday. She tells me that the condition of some of the homes they visited is dreadful to behold."

It is needless to say that Mrs. Mayhew did not know the effect that her words would have upon her friend. She knew that Mrs. Thorpe was often inclined to take other people's burdens sadly to heart, but she was far from knowing the state of mind that her words had wrought in her now.

She, too, was often troubled about the state of affairs on the Flat, but her outlook was very different from Mrs. Thorpe's. She saw in these miserable homes and destitute, unfortunate people, isolated cases of suffering, and their condition she looked upon as something that only the effort of the individual concerned could remedy. By his own effort and endeavor he must extricate himself from this class and advance to one higher. This always left those who remained the same privilege as that of the one who had escaped. Mrs. Mayhew believed this to be the way of the world, and she had learned never to analyze nor to question the world's ways.

Mrs. Thorpe did not interrogate the individual nor consider the class; her mind overreached these and went directly to the overruling Law–that which has created, and which does, or should, control. What greater folly than for man to endeavor to undo what the Lord has done? An overruling, unalterable, unrelenting Law lay over and made helpless and absolutely powerless the puny efforts of man.

She would share her porridge with a hungry neighbor, yes, go hungry herself to relieve a needy one; she would divide her garments to the last shred with those who had none. But while doing so, while trying to defeat the decree of the Ruler, would she prostrate herself before him, bow down and worship him?

"It is not only on Bolton Flat that people are suffering and miserable and destitute and without a God," she said. "The world is circled with woe; the cry of suffering echoes wherever the feet of men have trod. In the still watches of the night when all was quiet and peaceful about me I have heard the moaning of children. And on the street when all was bustle and confusion I have heard the agonized cry of lost souls; and I knew that those about me heard it, yet they paid

not the slightest attention, and I, too, went unheeding on my way. Yet men and women everywhere are talking of a Christ–proclaiming a message! Their voices are musical, even as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal; their phraseology–long prayers in the market place; the border of their garments and the broadness of their phylacteries proclaim their devotion!"

Her words ceased, but her thoughts, which she had long held in subjection, were now beyond her control. The fire of her spirit, that had leaped within her earlier in the day, now flamed up and consumed her. Throughout the length and breadth of the land God's men and women were going to a death more horrible than even her wildest hallucinations could picture–wailing and weeping and gnashing of teeth! Children were born into an environment that handicapped them at birth; women and young girls were obliged to sell their souls in order to keep the pitiful life in their bodies; men made a legal, licensed business of crazing their fellow men with drink. And those who professed to follow the world's Redeemer, comfortably housed, with rich garments and sumptuous fare, wrapped themselves in their righteousness and sang songs of praise in costly churches and gave thanks that they were not as other men.

The enormity of the thing was to her a blow straight from a powerful shoulder, a blow that staggered her and left her white with passion. And she felt that in all this world there was nothing so heartrending as the injustice of God. More to herself than to her friend, she said:

"If God is all powerful He is responsible for the conditions resulting from His creation; if He is not all powerful He is not God."

Her limitations were such that she could not know that these things which were so grievous to her were but a foul and tattered garment with which human kind has covered the great heart of God. Pride, vain-glory, uncharitableness, ostentation–from these she shrank in righteous revolt; and without the slightest realization that she had allowed them to become as a bandage about her eyes, blinding her to the overruling Love of the Creator and to the priceless thing in the hearts of her fellow men.

Something of this Mrs. Mayhew was able to understand. She felt that her friend's heresy was not so much a thing of the heart as a distortion of her too finely wrought sensibilities; and she wondered that a hand so exquisitely refined and sensitive should reach out into this bleeding world and touch and handle its ghastly sin-stained burdens.

"My dear friend," she said; "you say that if God is God He is responsible for these things, yet He may be working in a way that you and I know nothing about. It has always been a comforting thought to me that there may be a wideness and a mercy in His plans that our finite minds are not able to grasp. But be this as it may, you have thrown the responsibility back upon Him, then why do you not

let it rest there? Why do you fret and worry yourself about it? My dear, I am afraid you are allowing these things to weigh upon you and make you unhappy."

"Unhappy! Mrs. Mayhew I am wretched, tormented, ill, I fear I shall be–mad!"

"Mrs. Thorpe, what has happened to your life? What has brought about all this questioning and unrest?"

"Oh, my friend, if you knew the weary way that I have gone–alone–alone–I have no God!"

"But why have you cut yourself off from these things which the world has accepted? I cannot understand what has caused you to renounce your faith in God. Are you not afraid to stand thus alone?"

"There was a time when I was afraid, when I believed that I must believe that which I could not believe. It was a gruesome part of the way; yet there was no other part that I was so reluctant to leave. While living in fear I believed, most surely, that the first step out of it would be over a precipice; but this conception of what will follow is all that fear really is. Freed from this, my burden became lighter, but the darkness is none the less black."

"But why do you feel that you must go this troubled way alone? The world has accepted a religion. Why do you reject it?"

"The world has accepted a cleverly devised plan whereby men expect to be saved from their sins; they have woven into it the story of the Cross, the tale of the Christ. From the most beautiful life and tragic death that the world has ever known men have gleaned the harrowing, sordid details and fashioned them into form and creed and call it Religion. This thing I do reject. Could a completer foil be devised for mankind than that the nailing of a Christ to the Cross is to save them from the consequences of their iniquitous and selfish living?"

"I believe, have always believed, and my torment is that I must continue to believe that there is a God of justice some place–some how, some where–*He lives*! I have lain in my bed at night and heard the voice of the wind and it has whispered to me: 'There is a God;' I have seen the tender grass come forth in the spring and every tiny blade proclaimed Him; I have seen the rush of the storm, black, ominous, fearful, and behind it I have seen His face; and all the stars at night have broken into a song of praise to Him. And after this can I bow down to a conception, a mere idea of God? Can I worship simply because others have worshiped? Our Bible and our Christ tell us of a wonderful life; a great Heart touched with the feeling of our infirmities; One in whom the great, throbbing heart of the universe, the secret of all things, is embodied. Where is this great Master-Spirit, drawing all men to Him, healing their infirmities and cleansing them from sin? Have you seen Him in the hearts of those who attend our church, living in comfort and luxury–while over on the Flat–Mrs. Mayhew–over on the

Flat–can you bear to think of it? Have you seen aught of His healing power? How many can you count among the members of our church who are suffering from some infirmity? How many are every whit whole?

"I have longed for the touch, the presence, the realization of the *God that lives* as I have never longed for earthly possessions. I have prayed in my heart that I might be deprived of every earthly joy, every pleasure, every comfort, that I might be an outcast on the face of the earth, that I might know the anguish in the Garden, that I might feel the nails in my hands, if by this means I might have in my life and soul a realization of the Infinite, might feel and know the Divine presence."

Mrs. Thorpe's face was white and drawn and a red light was in her eyes. Mrs. Mayhew was by her side, her cool hand on her brow.

"Geraldine," she said as her niece passed the door, "bring me a glass of water, please, Mrs. Thorpe has become faint."

With the first return of consciousness Mrs. Thorpe thought of her husband. Had she not compromised his honor? Put to hazard his position, perhaps? She looked into Mrs. Mayhew's face:

"I have betrayed my weakness," she said; "I have shown you my unworthiness. It was not my intention to do this; over and over I have promised myself that no word that might cast dishonor on my husband's calling or cause him pain should ever pass my lips."

Mrs. Mayhew with quick intuition, understood all that her friend did not say, quite as well as that which she uttered. She read the story of repression and self-subjugation, and the heroism that hid her trouble and despair rather than cause another pain. And she also had a glimpse of the love this woman bore her husband, and of the fineness of her nature that even for the sake of this love, could not tamper with her soul's conception of truth. Her face was warm with sympathy:

"Dear troubled soul," she said, "I am your friend, not to distress and embarrass you, but if I can, to aid and comfort you."

During the remainder of the day Mrs. Mayhew endeavored to keep the conversation free from all topics that might distress her guest, and to limit the flow of talk to a circle of light and pleasant thought.

Mr. Thorpe came in time for dinner. Between him and Professor Vane there was much of common interest. Professor Vane was a teacher in a theological seminary; and the two men discussed the world of theology, the Church and its mission, the seminary and its work.

"I cannot account for the diversity of opinion I find among theological students," Professor Vane said. "There are scarcely two of them who see the questions of creed and doctrines in the same light. What the outcome of all of these

new lines of thought will be it is difficult to predict."

There was a spirit of resentment, righteous he believed it to be, in Mr. Thorpe's mind toward these new lines of religious thought. He believed that the Leviathan of doubt, and the subtle Serpent of false belief had threatened the sanctity of his own home. And he was strong in the belief that it was time for men of integrity and conviction to strike these monsters, to crush and destroy them.

"It is my opinion that these digressions and irregularities must prove disastrous," he said. "We must have a creed and a doctrine, and I do not hesitate to say, that men who cannot conform to them have no call to preach the Gospel."

Professor Vane did not answer at once, and Mrs. Thorpe who had listened in silence, waited anxiously for his reply.

Mrs. Mayhew believed she knew what was in her brother's mind. She recalled a frail little woman tortured with pain, whom her brother used to carry in his arms, and lift from one position to another. This woman, his wife had been restored to health and strength, and the joy of living, by a digression from accepted creeds and doctrines. A system of Christian healing had restored her.

"How far we have a right to judge another's conception of God is a mooted question," Professor Vane said thoughtfully. "If I err I hope it may be on the side of charity."

"On the side of charity, yes," said Mr. Thorpe; "but I can see little love or justice in allowing doubts and fallacies to intrench themselves in the consciousness of another." He could not quibble over this question, nor fail to express himself fearlessly, even though he should strike a blow nearer Professor Vane's heart then the students under his care. He was strong in the belief of his own just purpose.

Mrs. Mayhew with quick perception read his design. She knew that he had never reconciled Mrs. Vane's recovery with any grain of spiritual truth. But she saw the blood surge into Mrs. Thorpe's face, and she knew that his well aimed blow had struck where he had not meant that it should.

She laid her hand on Mrs. Thorpe's shoulder, "Let us leave the gentlemen to their theology," she said, "Come with me and watch the children go to bed; it will do you good to see them."

One by one the little garments came off and little white slips went on. Shoes were untied, and stockings removed, and little pink toes peeped out.

A visitor in the nursery at bedtime was an unusual occurrence, and unusually good order prevailed; yet Charley insisted on getting into his gown feet first, as he considered it unmanly to have it put over his head, and Mabel refused to be comforted because nurse unbuttoned Mattie's pinafore first. The three-year-old baby insisted on disrobing without assistance from anyone, and cried lustily because he could not untie his little red shoes.

But finally all troubles were overcome, the little hearts were comforted and all was quiet. Then by each little white bed a white-robed figure knelt with clasped hands and lisped a childish prayer.

Mrs. Thorpe kissed each child a happy good-night, and wished them sweet and pleasant dreams. But Mrs. Mayhew noticed that there was a strange expression on her face, and that the troubled look had not left her eyes since their talk in the morning.

When they returned to the parlor they found that Mr. Thorpe had taken his departure.

"A messenger came for him a few minutes after you left us," explained Professor Vane. "He was called to the bedside of a dying woman. He told me that he had been expecting the summons for many days."

"Mrs. Ritchie, I presume," said Mrs. Mayhew. "Poor soul! we cannot regret that the end has come for her at last. She has suffered a great deal."

Mrs. Mayhew sent Mrs. Thorpe home in the carriage, as Mr. Thorpe was not expected until late; he might be away all night.

Mrs. Thorpe explained his absence to Pauline, whom she found awaiting her.

"You are looking very tired, Evelyn; are you ill?" Pauline asked.

"No, Pauline, not ill; only very, very tired. I will go to my room at once."

"Very well; I will hear Maurice when he comes and let him in."

As Mrs. Thorpe arose to go to her room Pauline noticed that she shuddered as though a cold draught had struck her.

"What is it, Evelyn, are you cold?"

"I'm so tired, Pauline," she said, and sank down in her chair again. "And Maurice's being called away was something of a shock, you know."

Pauline went over to her. "Yes, I know," she said. "And I know you are tired; you look all worn out. Shall I go to your room with you?"

"Oh, no, thank you; that is not necessary. I shall be all right when I am rested again. Good-night, Pauline." And she started again for her room.

"Good-night, Evelyn. There is a light in your room. I hope you sleep well."

As Mrs. Thorpe entered her dimly lighted room a cold, dizzy sensation again came over her. She sank into her easy chair and the events of the day passed before her. Suddenly she sat upright and gazed with horror at the sight which greeted her. She tried to shriek, but her tongue was silent; she tried to fly, but her feet were motionless. She closed her eyes, but it was not with her natural vision that she saw the outline of phantom forms and ghoulish faces that filled the room.

"She is ours at last! She will never resist us again." It was not a voice that she heard; there was not a sound in the room; the silence was oppressive. Over

and over, around and about, circling, advancing, retreating, the forms filled every foot of space, and yet she was sure that the room was empty save the furnishings; the chairs, the bed, the table, these stood out clearly and distinctly. She felt the rush of bodies, the bustle and strife among the myriad forms as they jostled each other in their struggle to be near her; yet there was not a breath of air stirring in the room; all was motionless and quiet. Then a space above her cleared, the air seemed to open and the somber form and sable wings that she had seen so often descended upon her. She was conscious of wondering how it could be that she had met this phantom so many times and denounced and driven it from her. She felt so stupid now, so numb and powerless; yet the horror had never been one half so great. She felt the claw-like fingers clutch her shoulder and the blood gushed forth in a crimson stream, yet there was no sensation of pain, only the grim and awful horror of it. She felt herself borne away, the multitude of forms and faces following in her wake. What a ghastly burden she was! Blood oozed from every pore and left a crimson trail behind. Her phantom carrier went tirelessly on and on, through space and over distances until it reached an abyss, wide, deep and black. Over this, with fluttering wings, it paused. And could it be–broiling, seething, writhing below–oh, could it be–was it true? She must be wild–her vision blasted–her senses gone. She had heard the wail and moan of suffering children, the call of lost souls; she had seen the world circled with the maimed, the bruised and the broken hearted, but this–oh, this which she now saw and heard! How could it be that the abyss contained that which greeted her vision! The carrier, with poised wings, now let go its grasp upon her shoulder and slowly, yet with deadly certainty, she slid down into the abyss–to become one of them!

It was past midnight when Mr. Thorpe left the stricken home where he had been called. He had performed the last sacred rites for the dying woman; he had knelt at her bedside and committed her soul to the keeping of Him who gave it. It had been a painful scene and he was tired and depressed when he reached home. He entered his wife's room and found her in her easy chair in a dead faint. He hastily summoned Pauline and sent a message for Dr. Eldrige. Mrs. Thorpe was ill, very ill. Dr. Eldrige, fussing and fuming, declared that her nervous system was a complete wreck. There was little that he could do for her. Proper nourishment, careful nursing, and, above all, perfect quiet. These were the only remedies in a case of this kind.

To his son he said: "The thing I predicted has happened; the woman's mind is gone. She is mad as a March hare, and it is my opinion that much learning or effort toward learning has made her so."

Dr. Eldrige Jr. recalled his last interview with Mrs. Thorpe. Evidently she had not followed his advice. He was not surprised at this, for he had not really

expected that she would. He felt, too, that the advice that he had given her at that time was very much like giving to a patient in the full flush of fever remedies intended to prevent fevers generally in their incipient stages. He resolved, however, to satisfy himself whether there was anything that could be done for her now. The manner in which he obtained his father's consent to call upon her was typical of the method by which he managed to have his own way when he especially desired it, and yet get along smoothly with his irascible parent.

"If this woman has brought about her own destruction, as you believe," he said, "while doing what we can for her professionally, we can also study her condition for the benefit of science. I wouldn't mind calling on her myself."

"You are a likely limb, my boy. If you could get some of the foolishness out of your head you might make your mark in the world yet. To-morrow you can go and tell those pious people at the parsonage that your old dad is indisposed and sends you in his place."

When Dr. Eldrige entered the sick room the next day Mrs. Thorpe fixed her eyes intently upon him. Never in his experience had he felt the compassion, the depth of sympathy for a fellow being that her appearance kindled within him. Every expression of her face, every movement, every muscle was blended in physical pain and mental horror.

Love and compassion, as well as other emotions strong and deep, are not limited to the mind in which they have their inception; neither are they bound nor fettered, and they cannot fail to effect in some degree the being that has called them forth. Dr. Eldrige Jr. advanced to the bedside and quietly regarded the sufferer.

Mrs. Thorpe, who seemed to have taken no notice of anyone before, now raised herself to a sitting posture and, as a child reaches out its hands to a parent, she extended her hands to him.

"Take me out of this," she said, and there was fear and pleading, piteous and frenzied in her voice. Her eyes, in which no light of reason glimmered, wandered apprehensively about the room and back to the doctor's face. "Oh, do help me!" she gasped. "Take me out of this!"

The doctor's mind was working rapidly; with quick perception he detected that all reason was not gone, for it was evident that Mrs. Thorpe recognized him; yet he could not doubt that her mind was unbalanced to the extent that she believed herself in some place or condition the horror of which was unspeakable. If a condition, he must find some way to work upon what remained of her intellect, until, in her mind this condition was changed; but if it were a place or surroundings, his task might be less difficult, but it must be performed quickly. Without more than a moment's hesitation he extended his hands to her in return.

"Certainly," he said in a brisk, cheerful voice, "certainly I will take you out.

That is exactly what I came for." He bent over her and took her in his arms as though she were a little child. Then to the nurse he said:

"Show me the nearest bed outside this room."

The nurse opened the door, crossed the hall and swung open the door of the room opposite. It was Pauline's room, and as usual it was in perfect order and spotless. The doctor said no word to his patient, but laid her quietly upon the bed. She rested her head on the pillow with her hand under her cheek and her eyes wandered curiously about the room. Then her eyelids fluttered drowsily, fluttered and closed. The doctor held up his finger commanding quiet and the nurse remained motionless where she stood. A little clock on the mantel ticked off the minutes; there was no other sound in the room and the sufferer fell quietly asleep. It was the first sleep that had come to her since her illness, and her condition, which the older doctor had pronounced hopeless, at least so far as her reason was concerned, dated its improvement from this time.

CHAPTER IX
EASTERTIDE

The Reverend Maurice Thorpe had not been so successful in his work as he had hoped to be; not so successful as the beginning of his pastorate had promised. Of late he felt that his work was falling below par. The fine touch, the artistic setting, the convincing logic that had once been his were slipping from him. He could not feel that his ardor had cooled nor his interest waned, but his faculties seemed to have lost their keenness and his tongue its cunning. His health was not up to the desired standard and his wife's illness had been a severe strain upon him. There had been a time when he felt that there was nothing left in this world for him unless his wife regained her physical and mental powers. Now he felt that perhaps he had not been properly reconciled to the will of Providence, and he prayed for greater grace and threw himself heart and soul into his work and resolved to regain, if possible, that which he had lost.

At his request special preparations were made for an elaborate Easter service. He wished this to be a service that would arouse the people, something that would interest them and induce them to come again. The music has so much to do with the success of the modern church that the pastor planned always to keep in touch with his choir. The song service must be fitted to the sermon, either

to emphasize the beauty of the text, or else to soften and subdue the undressed truth which must sometimes be spoken.

Geraldine Vane was a capable and willing worker in the choir. The plans for the Easter service were arranged, the parts assigned and the practicing began.

In this work Geraldine and Max Morrison were thrown much together. There were some disreputable stories afloat about the man's character, but no one seemed to regard them very seriously; and his voice was so great an attraction that the choir was glad of his help.

When on his way to choir practice Max had fallen into the way of calling for Geraldine, and he often spent an evening in the Mayhew home. And as time passed he began to feel more than a casual interest in this girl with the shell-tinted face and golden hair. The Mayhew children, too, amused and interested him. He liked to talk to them, to ask them questions, and hear their naive answers and innocent speeches.

During the winter his acquaintance with Geraldine had ripened into a more intimate friendship. Their love for music and their proficiency in the art formed a bond between them. Geraldine, a veritable St. Cecelia, her figure swaying with the rhythm of the music as her fingers flew over the ivory keys, and Max with his bow calling forth the sweet, weird melody of the violin, would feel their pulses quicken as the blended melodies throbbed and sighed and quivered.

It was at this time that Dr. Eldrige Jr. condemned the woman he had loved from her girlhood and stepped aside and gave his rival possession of the field. Fine and true to the heart's core himself, he would not seek nor desire the love of a woman who demanded less than this in manhood. Nor was it in his nature to wage a warfare for a woman's love. This priceless, this sacred thing, must come, if at all, freely and naturally as the beauty and fragrance of nature comes to waiting earth.

During the preparation for the Easter service Max and Geraldine were thrown together even more man usual. And it was at this time that Mrs. Mayhew felt an indefinite fear, a vague alarm concerning their friendship. She went to her husband with her half-formed conjecture.

Mr. Mayhew was a practical man of affairs, shrewd and sagacious.

"I see no cause for alarm," he said. "We have known Max from his boyhood, and although his career has not been entirely exemplary nor his character spotless, for a young man of wealth to-day he is not a bad sort. And as to his fancying Geraldine, I see no reason to object if he should. There's many a girl gets a worse husband than Max will make. With a girl like Geraldine for a wife Max might settle down and make a model husband."

Mrs. Mayhew rarely opposed her husband. She believed that, owing to his position, his contact with men and his conflict with the world, his judgment

must be better than hers. She realized in a way that her judgment was a thing of the heart and lacking in that worldly wisdom that her husband possessed. She remembered many times when she had taken his advice against her own convictions and afterwards found that she had not been the loser thereby. Yet, being a fair-minded woman, she sometimes came to a place where another's judgment could not answer for her; where her impulse and desires prompted her to act from the dictates of her own heart.

Geraldine's father had died before the girl was born and her mother had yielded up her life at the birth of her child. Mrs. Mayhew had taken the little one and reared her as her own and loved her as her own. But aside from this love and watchful care there was a feeling of responsibility different from that which a mother feels for her own children; their welfare and happiness she is responsible for as for her own flesh and blood. She was responsible for Geraldine as a child of another birth and branch.

The girl had been loving and affectionate, willful and passionate at times, yet always ready to confess her faults. Mrs. Mayhew had seen her through the unsettled period of adolescence and knew that at the present time she was a true-hearted woman, looking into the future, trusting and unafraid. Had there ever been a time since she held her in her arms, an infant of a day, when she had needed a guiding hand and love and care more than at this present time?

Mrs. Mayhew resolved that, let the consequences be what they might, Geraldine should have some enlightenment as to Max Morrison's real character.

It was a few days before Easter. Outside there raged a storm of rain and sleet such as the Middle West often sees in the early spring. The snow had disappeared, except here and there a dark-hued bank by the roadside or in some well-filled corner. Out in the country the fields and meadows lay bare and brown, awaiting the magic touch of spring–Nature's resurrection.

But within the Mayhew home a warm radiance covered all. The interview took place in Geraldine's room. The room was typical of the girl. An air of purity and daintiness was lent by soft, white draperies; yet everywhere there was a suggestion of ease and restfulness. Conspicuous, but not prominent, a pair of cherubs were enfolded in a shimmering gauze of drapery. A picture of the Virgin with the Christ Child in her arms hung above the mantel and on the wall opposite, the tender, loving face of the Savior. And beneath the Christ face hung the picture of a sweet, calm-eyed woman and a manly, dark-browed man–the parents that the girl had never known.

Mrs. Mayhew was perfectly familiar with the room, but with her mission in mind she was aware that it impressed her in a different manner from its wont. A mind less pure than Geraldine's could not have planned and fashioned it. This

quality of mind and heart was apparent in all that the girl did. Suppose she were robbed of this chastity of thought and the evil things in the lives of others thrust upon her vision. Could she ever be just the same girl again? Mrs. Mayhew had eased her mind with like sophistry before, but now she felt that the hand of necessity was upon her.

Geraldine sat before her fire, a piece of needlework in her hands. Mrs. Mayhew drew her chair to the grate and produced her own bit of work. She cast about in her mind for some way to lead up to the subject upon which she wished to speak, but finding none, she broached it abruptly.

"Geraldine, do you know you are very unsophisticated for a girl of your age? That you know very little of the evil there is in the world?"

"Do you think I would be better if I knew more, Aunt Agnes?"

"It is not a question of your being better, Geraldine; I think the trouble is that you are too good already. Do you believe your friends to be as good as you are?"

"Why, Aunt Agnes! Am I any better than you are, or Mrs. Thorpe, or my girl friends? Why do you say such things to me?"

"Because I must say them, my dear; you must know more about your friends. You are not more virtuous, perhaps, than the ones whom you have mentioned; but you are as a creature of another world compared to Max Morrison, for instance."

The seashell color in Geraldine's face deepened to flame, but ignoring the display of feeling she had been too unguarded to suppress, she met her aunt's eyes full and true.

"Is there anything objectionable about Max that I should know?" she asked.

Mrs. Mayhew knew that there was no turning back now. She wished to be honest with the girl and at the same time as charitable as possible toward others. She must show Geraldine that, desirable and praise-worthy as purity and chastity are, and obligatory as they are in a woman, she should not expect to find these qualities in this man, nor hardly in the degree that a pure-hearted girl possesses them, in any man, and that it would not be wise nor just, perhaps, to condemn Max for a lack of them. She recalled her husband's attitude on the subject, and although it did not break her resolution to be frank with the girl, it tempered it appreciably; and a queer blending of her conscientiousness and her husband's practicality were the result. A distorted vision pictured itself impishly before her. Being a woman, she should cleave virtuously to the good, but be willing to fall on her knees at the marriage altar and accept the bad! She felt that the magnitude of the question was crushing her, and that its complexity would be her undoing. The longer she hesitated for the words in which to express her meaning, the more helplessly lost she became, and Geraldine was waiting for the answer to a direct

question.

"To allow you to believe that Max is virtuous as you understand virtue would not be justice to you, Geraldine," she said.

"Please be quite frank, Aunt Agnes. What is it you wish me to know?"

"None of us are perfect, my dear, and very few of us are good. It is a hard world to live in. Not many young men go through the trying period of early manhood unscathed, and it comes to us women sooner or later to know these things."

Geraldine did not speak, and silence fell between them. Mrs. Mayhew noticed the steady, even stroke of the girl's needle and her quiet composure.

Had her words failed to make an impression, or was Geraldine too strong and firm to show her feelings, or was it that she did not care?

But she found no answer to her questions and the silence continued. Mrs. Mayhew was relieved when the children came and tapped at the door. Geraldine bade them enter and they flocked in, frolicking and laughing, and filled the room with their chatter.

When they were all gone and Geraldine was alone she stood, a white figure among her white draperies, and looked out at the storm and listened to the sleet and rain against her window-pane. The color burned into her cheeks again and a shadow lay in her eyes. She was beginning to believe the world a rather difficult place in which to live, and life not so bright and joyous as she had thought it to be.

Easter morning dawned gray and cold, but the sun, seeming to repent its sullen mood, broke through the clouds and shed a warm radiance over the cold, soaked earth.

The great church with its arched ceiling and taper windows seemed impressed with its own solemnity and its silence was intense and worshipful. The banks of lilies, emblems of peace and purity, seemed to harmonize with the spirit of the place; for their fragrance and beauty were far removed from all that is plain and common and their golden hearts were untouched by humanity's woes. Above the bank of lilies and ferns hung a picture of the Christ with a halo about His head. The painter's art showed in pose and expression, in every line and detail. The eyes were pathetic and beseeching, as they must have been when those most heart-rending words the world has ever known–the prayer in the garden–were uttered. The brow was calm with the peace of Heaven and the mouth, so fine and true, was yet sensitive and pleading. If this Friend of man could speak, what would be His message to the worshipers gathered there? If those eyes could see the nodding plumage of the forests' songsters adorning the heads bowed in worship; if those ears could hear the rustle of costly garments–Easter outfits–while over on the Flat little children shivered, bare-footed and garbed in rags; if those

finely penciled nostrils could breathe the incense from the lilies' golden hearts, while from meagre, unkept homes vile odors arose–what, in truth, would be the message from the Christ this Easter day? If those hands were alive, those hands that carried healing, health and blessing in their touch, what would their mission be? Would not the crippled boy stand erect and walk? the tortured shoulders of the rheumatic straighten? the blind eyes of a parishioner's daughter open? and the deaf ears of the white-haired sexton hear, as they had not heard for twenty years, the Resurrection message?

But the eyes saw not, the ears heard not, the lips spoke no word and the hands bestowed neither health nor blessing. Was it then only a painted Christ that dwelt in the costly church? Only a painted Christ that confronted the Easter worshipers? Was there in their midst no heart touched by the feeling of their infirmities?

The song service was all that those that had planned and executed it had hoped for. The house was crowded; pews that had been dusted and cared for for months without occupancy were filled. The seats in the back of the church were filled also. Many of the poor came to feast their eyes on the lilies–conclusive evidence that, buried in their hearts, hidden from sight, perhaps, and struggling for existence, other lilies bloomed.

The song service was artistic, exquisite; not a flaw or discord marked the time or tone as the perfect blending of trained voices rose and fell with the pulse and throb of the music.

The pastor delivered his carefully prepared sermon with its rhetorical wording and euphonious flow, with more dignity and enthusiasm than had characterized him for many months past.

During the service Geraldine Vane, on her raised seat in the choir, turned and looked into the steel-gray eyes of Dr. Eldrige, Jr., who occupied a pew in front. It was but a flash, a passing glance, but the color deepened in her cheeks regardless of her endeavor to keep her attention on the pastor's words, and there came to her again something of the great difficulty of life's problems.

After the service Max Morrison joined her near the door and she stood beside him, bewitching in her Easter gown, and about her the sweet incense of the lilies she carried.

Then she became aware of another presence and looked again into the eyes of young Dr. Eldrige. But she read no friendly greeting there; the recognition was cold and formal and he passed on out of the church.

The warning that Mrs. Mayhew's words contained had assumed dimensions gigantic in Geraldine's mind, while their palliative qualities robbed her of all sense of proportion. A half-suspicion possessed her, a harrowing doubt assailed her; many questions besieged her and she found herself in a state far from

conducive to a peaceful state of mind or a tranquil spirit. But she walked down the street beside the tall figure of Max Morrison and she held her head proudly and endeavored to still the contending voices within her.

Mr. Thorpe felt a keen sense of satisfaction as he descended the church steps and took his way homeward. The service had been all that he could desire. No doubt there would be mention made of it in the papers during the week and it would give his church an enviable reputation. But this elation, gratifying as it was for the time, was doomed to be short-lived; before the day was done there was a reaction. The spirit of worship had waned and left a sense of chill and despondency. Mrs. Thorpe noticed the droop of her husband's shoulders, the worn look on his face, and her heart cried out against whatever it might be that gave him pain.

The Easter sun sank behind the tree-tops and its last rays lay warm and tender over the church and parsonage and over the meanest hovel on the Flat. Great Illuminator which seeks not the place of its shining and respects not one person above another–typical of the love of God.

CHAPTER X
THE DISCERNMENT OF TRUTH

Mrs. Thorpe was sitting one day in the familiar seat by the window, and her thoughts were centered on the conditions about her. Outside the vine was putting forth new buds and tender leaves; a bird on a swinging bough was singing his mating song; the grass was growing green on the incline that led up to the church. The winter had not destroyed the heart and life of that which it had blasted outwardly, and Nature was emerging into newness of life.

A world of growing things, abundant, forceful, alive, are springing from the brown, fructuous earth; spring is pregnant, alive with a power beyond human conception. Boundless, limitless, infinite Power!

Now questions that at first seemed to come to her timid, elusive, quivered before Mrs. Thorpe's mental vision and insinuated themselves into her consciousness. Was this material evidence before her eyes the substance and reality of that which she saw, or was there something hidden from her mortal vision, something in this scene before her which her senses could not recognize? Here before her was the seed-bed, the seed and the form of the fruitage; but were these

the reality, or were they but the fleeting forms of matter, and the divine Idea the only reality? Which is real, the plant and the flower, or the life of the plant and the flower? These questions that had come to her haltingly, falteringly, gradually assumed larger proportions until they included herself, the universe, and all that the universe contains. Time, place, conditions, and all material relations shifted and changed, and she saw God's world, and God's power controlling it; a just and majestic God asking only conformity to the perfect conditions he has created.

Now all of Mrs. Thorpe's preconceived knowledge vanished and melted away. Every structure that she had built had been founded on shifting, undulating sand, upon her belief of life in matter. The ideas and conceits of her childhood, the ardor and energy of her young womanhood, and all the strain of recent years all passed before her, and all were empty, vain, human and finite. She saw mortals bowed and broken, guided by finite wisdom and helped by finite power, trying to do God's work; struggling and agonizing, trying to aid Infinite strength, and to supplement Infinite wisdom.

She saw man–upright, holy, divine–yet dominated by his false beliefs and his conceptions of evil, believing himself the sinful, unclean thing that his distorted vision pictures him to be; ignorant, misguided, toiling in pain and sorrow. Christ, ah, Christ! Who would not be a Christ, a Savior of men; who would not sacrifice this stage of life, yea, die a thousand deaths, if by pain and sacrifice he might show this bruised and broken people the perfection of life, and the harmony of the condition in which Infinite love has placed them?

Every cord that held her to the moorings of her old belief gave way, and Mrs. Thorpe found herself alone on a shoreless, fathomless sea; no sail was in sight, no hand reached out to her. Adrift–alone–there was no measuring of time or space. But she was not afraid, for the science of Being had been revealed to her. Alone–yet he whose voice stilled the sea, he whose voice stills human passion, fear, pain and suffering was with her, and she walked upon the water with this Man of Galilee.

In their blindness and error men have produced that which is not beautiful, and which is not good, but there are no blemishes in God's world, and there are no iniquities. The God of love has put beauty, and grace, and joy, and gladness into everything that He has created.

Now Mrs. Thorpe saw before her all that has been, all that is, and all that is to be; and her eyes were not holden to the emblems and symbols through which the solution of God's world was hers. "Neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature," shall be able now to separate her from the love of God.

The peace that passeth understanding is like a calm on mighty waters, like

the strength of rugged forests, like the blending of many melodies. Mrs. Thorpe fell on her knees and buried her face in her hands. But this attitude was not taken to humble herself before the God that she had found; this Deity that was revealed to her was the great and perfect Whole, and herself she recognized as the spiritual image and likeness of God.

"There is a Spirit in man and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." "The inspiration of the Almighty;" there is no other source of supply, no other way to understand than to let the Spirit speak to the "Spirit in man." Mrs. Thorpe's mind was emptied of worldly wisdom; the tablets of her heart were renewed clean as an unwritten page. Freed from the thought of her material selfhood, and her intellectual beliefs, she was receptive, ready and waiting in the hands of the Master of men.

The preparation of the clay that is to be molded into a work of art is of first importance; and when this preparation is completed the artist begins his work of bringing beauty and grace out of a pliable, yielding mass ready to his hand. When a piece of ground is to bring forth a harvest of golden grain or succulent fruit the ground must first be prepared. There must be an upheaval; the weeds and tares must be uprooted; the plow-share and the harrow must do their work; the soil must be torn and broken and turned up to the mellowing sun, and then the seed is sown.

Upon her knees Mrs. Thorpe was not denied the knowledge that her years of suffering were years of preparation; that the anguish and pain wrought by her great desire had not been in vain. When she arose to her feet she knew that she had found the Kingdom of Heaven; it was within her.

A flood of sunshine lay over the room; each familiar object was in its place, yet all was changed. She stepped to the window and looked out, and the transfigured earth, and air, and sky greeted her; yet even in this first newness of her joy she knew that this change which glorified all things was in her own heart. And that which tongue has never named and pen has never described descended upon her and enfolded her like a garment; and henceforth and forever she was secure from harm; she had come into her own. She felt her heart overflowing and exulting; the vigor of the spring was in her veins, the unseen growth of the vine was expanding her soul, and the birds' song filled her with joy.

Then like a flash, like the cut of a knife, the sting of a lash, a black, evil thought darted into the radiance. The phantoms–where were they? The dark visage, the black wings, the hissing, shrieking voice–where were these? She looked fearfully about her with dilated eyes; but all was quiet, and there was neither form nor shape visible. The room lay bathed in sunshine, and there was a soft balminess in the air. Yet for one awful moment she felt that she was losing this wonderful thing that she had found, she was afraid–led into the wilderness

and tempted. Then with a supreme courage she put it to the test; she stood upright and looked over her shoulder. The space behind her was empty! Trembling, agonized, yet in ecstasy, she looked again–the space was empty! Not even in dimmest outline, half-hidden, elusive as her enemy sometimes appeared, did he now show his face; not the faintest flutter of wings was discernible; no whisper came to her. She turned and walked across the room and back again to the window. She could not yet be satisfied that she was free; the sickening horror, the awful dread had not left her, and she turned and looked again over her right shoulder, where her phantom most often appeared, then over her left shoulder, where it sometimes surprised her by lurking. The space was empty! Now she felt that if she longer held her peace the very furnishings of the room must cry out. "Father, Spirit, God of Truth," she cried, "Love has liberated me!"

Had a miracle been wrought for her deliverance? Mrs. Thorpe had always known that it was her imagination, her own distorted fancy against which she battled and fought. A phantom is not a reality, however real it may appear. The truth is always true, however distorted our view of it may be. When Mrs. Thorpe fixed her mind on the central Truth of creation, and spiritually discerned it, she realized that all the doubts and fears that had held her were but distortions of her material sense. All of her questionings and perplexities, vain fancies and evil imaginings were obliterated; her mental conception was changed, the hallucination dispelled, and she was free.

Free! Men have been freed from the dungeon and from chains; reprieves have come at a moment when prisoners were to meet at the hands of their fellow men a violent death; floods and flames have been faced and deliverance miraculously given. These are physical horrors, relieved by physical causes. Mrs. Thorpe's deliverance was from a mental foe, one who would destroy not only her physical frame, but who would twist and warp and dethrone her reason as well; her deliverer was the royal Truth of life. Now indeed she had burst her chrysalis, she was no longer a worm of earth, but clothed with the spirit of immortality, she saw God's creation, not as human weakness has interpreted it, but as a loving Father designed it.

Pauline, ever watchful and alert, was the first to notice a change in Mrs. Thorpe. She noted the returning vigor and observed the unusual buoyancy of spirit. There was also a consideration and thoughtful kindness in her manner that Pauline had never noticed before. A great deal of charity must be manifested toward one who is ill and in pain, unpleasant manners and disagreeable ways must be overlooked. Pauline had had the tact and patience to do this; she was not one to judge a sick woman unkindly. But now there was a winsomeness about this woman whom she had long looked upon as her charge, an optimism

that she found it difficult to adjust to Mrs. Thorpe's former attitude.

CHAPTER XI
A SUMMER'S VACATION

Mr. Thorpe noticed the change in his wife and rejoiced in her recovery. Her quiet manner and uniform cheerfulness brought to his mind the early days of their wedded life, and he felt that perhaps the many prayers that he had offered for her recovery had reached the throne of mercy.

But the pastor's own cares were pressing him sorely. All that he had gained by the Easter service he had lost, and more. His congregation grew smaller each succeeding Sabbath, and with bitterness and despair he admitted that he was not obliged to look outside of himself for the cause. He felt his strength slipping from him, and in some way that he could not analyze nor comprehend, and his mental capacity seemed dwarfed and contracted. Thoughts of beauty and grandeur flitted through his brain, but when he tried to fix them there, to put them into words or on paper they eluded him, mocked and evaded him.

When spring merged into summer a council of his church convened and voted him a vacation for the summer months. This was gratefully accepted; for he felt that a season's rest, a long vacation in which to recuperate and regain his lost powers would put him in condition again for his work in the autumn.

Mrs. Thorpe was to accompany him, and they planned to spend the summer with an uncle who lived in a small village in an adjoining state. This uncle was a retired minister, who for forty years had preached the Gospel. Now with his wife still beside him, he was spending what was left of his life in well-earned peace and quiet. He sent an earnest invitation to his nephew to come to him and spend his vacation in this quiet, restful village.

After the vacation was arranged, and the invitation accepted, Mr. Thorpe threw himself with all of his remaining strength and energy into the preparation of a farewell sermon. He desired this to be of high excellence, and especially adapted to the occasion; he wished to say something that would appeal to the hearts of his people, and cause them to remember him, and to be ready to welcome him back in the autumn. For days he worked on this sermon, comparing words and phrases, seeking just the shade of meaning he desired, harmonizing sentences, and striving for an agreeable rise and flow of language.

Mrs. Thorpe, who had attended church for several Sundays, accompanied her husband on this last Sunday morning. She walked beside him now with easy grace, and mingled with her friends and seemed not to notice their wondering looks and incredulous glances; she met them without self-consciousness, neither shrinking nor boasting.

When the pastor entered the pulpit, and the deep, sweet tones of the organ sounded, her soul glad and worshipful, left every care and material thought. Then she heard her husband's voice in prayer, praying for his people, and for the great world of humanity. But she did not follow the prayer closely; her new conception of God's creation enabled her to know that the Lord's blessing was already upon these people, that they needed only to realize and accept it. She saw toiling millions begging for a blessing that has been theirs forever, and that can never in any manner possibly cease to be theirs.

For his text the pastor had taken, "To him that overcometh," and he dwelt largely on the reward ready for those who are able to endure to the end.

As the sermon progressed, Mrs. Thorpe was reminded of her old troubled conception of the Father and His children in the field. She did not wonder that this idea had once possessed her; for was not this the very interpretation of life that her husband was presenting? But now before her vision she saw a kind and compassionate Father, and man in His spiritual likeness.

She had found that the propensity of mortal man to worship images of belief that he himself has created, rather than to hold as his own that which God has created for him, and has bestowed without limit or stint upon him, is the cause of man's woe, the cause of all his grief and pain. God has given man only good; He could give nothing else, for He has created or fashioned nothing else. She heard the sermon through, however, without inward questioning or discord. Since the deep, sweet Truth of life had become the bread and wine of her existence she was not troubled by another's conception of truth. All truth, however small, however great, is a part of the Truth, just as every drop of the ocean, or rippling wave, or mighty billow is a part of the sea.

Mrs. Thorpe knew something of the hard toil and effort this sermon had cost her husband; she knew that he had builded it word upon word, sentence upon sentence, and she understood the intensity of his purpose, the sincerity of his belief; but the thought came to her forcibly at this time that the laws of God are not influenced by man's conception of life and truth, but that, perfect and harmonious, they go undeviatingly on, regardless of what man believes or teaches.

After the service Mrs. Thorpe noticed that there was no change in the rigidity of the manner that marked the worshipers. All was orderly and formal; those nearest to her spoke in subdued tones, and expressed a cold pleasure at

seeing her again. This concourse of people, each heart carrying its own peculiar burden, had come to the service, listened to the music, heard the Scripture read and the sermon delivered; now each went again his own way without solace or comfort, his burden not one whit the lighter.

It was a dull, gray morning; lowering clouds hung threateningly about, and a fine, penetrating mist filled the air.

"This dampness and mist is as bad as a pouring rain," said Pauline, on the way from church. "You had better fasten your muffler close about your throat, Maurice, and turn up your coat collar; I fear this will bring on your cough again."

When they reached the parsonage Pauline saw that the fires were built and the rooms warmed and dried, although it was early summer. The dry, hacking cough that Mr. Thorpe was subject to was something to be fought and doctored continually. And in this instance Pauline's fears seemed to be well grounded; soon after dinner Mr. Thorpe was seized with a paroxysm of coughing, followed by a spell of weakness. By evening a low fever had developed and it was thought best to send for Dr. Eldrige.

The old doctor came, examined the patient and gave minute directions for his care; after this he came every day for a week. At the end of this time Mr. Thorpe's condition was greatly improved, and one day when alone with him Dr. Eldrige broached a subject that had been much in his mind since he began calling at the parsonage.

"Thorpe," he said, in his usual blunt manner, "what has brought about your wife's recovery? A few months ago she was a stricken invalid; now we see her in the full flush of health. Some great physician must have been consulted–or some occult power. It might be well for you to get around with your explanations if you value her reputation or your own."

Had Dr. Eldrige unsheathed a dagger and stabbed his patient, the blow could scarcely have been keener felt. For a time he repented his blunt words, for Mr. Thorpe's distress and agitation were alarming. The doctor mixed a stimulating draught and gave it to him, and at the same time, in a quiet, smooth manner, introduced another topic of conversation and soon after took his departure. He congratulated himself on being an adept at dealing crushing blows.

"I have, I think, given our pious pastor something to think about," he chuckled as he left the parsonage.

At the end of another week the delayed preparations for their departure were resumed, and a few days later the family separated, Pauline to spend the summer in the old home town with a relative and the pastor and his wife enroute for the little village among the mountains.

The old couple gave Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe a warm greeting and a hearty welcome to their simple, wholesome home. They acquainted them with the

resources of the place; gave them directions for reaching the mountain peaks; showed them the mountain stream where the speckled trout abounded; pointed out to them the woodland path that led to the lake and the glades and dells where the wild flowers grew, and then left them to make their own plans and find their own amusements.

To Mrs. Thorpe the place seemed like a fairy bower, a land of enchantment–one of her old daydreams come true. Here were the beauties of God's world, indescribable, luxurious, exquisite. Why had He made the hills and mountains so fair? Why were the skies so azure blue, the air so rare and sweet with the breath of flowers? Why do the waters of the rippling lake lay smiling in the sun? And why does the sun bathe woodland and field, mountain and lake in golden glory and flaming splendor? One of the books that she had read, the work of a popular scientist, told her that Nature's works are fixed and fashioned regardless of man; that in the plan of the universe no account was taken of his needs, and no cognizance of his desires. She recalled another book which told her that man is the central object of the universe and that all things are created to minister to his needs and desires. But deep in her own heart she believed the realities of life, all beauty, truth and harmony to be reflections of the one Life.

"It may be that mine was a case of too many books," she thought. "I depended too much on the knowledge that can be derived from the works of man, and considered too little the wisdom that comes from God, and can never come in any other way than by direct revelation–the heart of God speaking to the heart of man: 'Be still and know that I am God.'" And in this stillness, this sanctuary and solemn grandeur, there opened before her an unwritten book–the overreaching Law of Love, the compelling goodness of God.

That which has been spoken and that which has been written pertains to the material sense; but that which has been heard in the silence, and seen in "the light that no man can approach unto," and experienced in the grandeur of the limitless life–this is God–no tongue has told it, no pen has portrayed it, yet in letters of glory we all may read it. From the mountains and the hills, from the summer skies and the smiling water, the leaves of this unwritten book unfolded before Mrs. Thorpe and she read the deep hidden things of God.

The long golden days came and went like a radiant, glorified dream, each with its share of pleasure, some new joy, some added gladness. There were days when the summer rain beat upon the roof in mellow cadence; when the gray, leaden skies emphasized the cheer and comfort of the plain mountain home. Then, Mrs. Thorpe with some light work in hand, would listen while her hostess, the dear old aunt, related chapters from the past and told incidents and anecdotes from her long experience as a pastor's wife. There were days when the damp earth, warm beneath the sun, gave forth a blissful fragrance of growing things

and the green, swelling buds burst into showers of bloom; when the mountain brook, swelled by the rain, babbled in wild, sweet song and dashed its turbulent waters into the placid lake.

There were days when the pastor renewed his boyhood and spent long hours on the shaded banks of the mountain stream with his fishing tackle, baiting for speckled trout. Mrs. Thorpe always accompanied him and sought to divert his mind from every care; while he fished, or perhaps tramped through the woods and sought the homes of the feathered songsters, she would busy herself with some piece of needlework, and when he threw himself on the velvet grass beside her she would read to him from some book, bright, crisp and care-destroying. Sometimes the noonday lunch was carried in a basket and eaten at the foot of the towering, blue-hung mountain, and then together they scaled the mountain's height and from its summit viewed the valleys and woodlands below; saw the lake like a silver basin and the stream like a white thread; and all the world below seemed hushed and at rest, and their individual cares and perplexities seemed to shrink and fall away, and they breathed the life-giving ozone and felt that Life is so much greater thing than its material forms can ever demonstrate. These were days that long afterward lay in the memory like gems, rare, radiant, exquisite.

Mr. Thorpe spent a considerable time with his venerable kinsman, the old minister, and together they lived in the past, a past peopled with father and mother and the sadly lamented brother cut down in his prime, and other dear ones gone to the far, fair shore. When alone Mr. Thorpe's thoughts tended to carry him back to a time when no shadows clouded his life, when no fears regarding physical or spiritual strength assailed him. With the ready assurance which is a phase of the disease from which he was suffering, he felt that he was regaining his health, and believed that full bodily vigor would be restored to him. But where were the hopes and aspirations of his life, once so strong and indomitable? Where the joy and gladness he had once felt in his work?

A dull despair filled him now. Willingly, gladly, he had put his all in his work; and what had he received in return? He felt his heart "Smitten and withered like grass." And the people to whom he had ministered, to whom he had laid bare his heart and life, whom he had sought with all the passion and pleading of his soul, was there anything in their deeds or actions to indicate that their lives were marked with the impress of the Master? And always amid his introspection, there came the thought of his wife. The woman he loved had departed from the beliefs of his life, from the tenets of his faith, she had not followed him; her footsteps had taken a strange, new road, which must lead her ever farther and farther from him. Yet this, that she had not followed him, bitter as it was, was not the bitterest drop in his cup, was not the worst aspect of the trouble that weighed upon him. He had so cultivated the reverence in his nature for that which appealed

to him in religion, and so stimulated his devotion to that which he worshiped, that he did not know that any soul-saving righteousness could exist outside the orbit in which his mind revolved. Then it was not only that she had not followed him–when he had so loved her–but it must follow that she was a lost soul.

After long deliberation, Mr. Thorpe, feeling the burden and responsibility of his wife's departure too great to be borne alone, he laid the case before his venerable uncle.

The old man, thoughtful and considerate, heard him through without a word. Then in his gentle voice, slightly tremulous, he said:

"I think you made a mistake, Maurice, when you adopted a lenient attitude toward that which your judgment condemned. From your account, the book you found on your wife's table was rank heresy, openly opposed to established forms of religion. I have thought that perhaps this false conception of the works of Christ, this spurious growth that we know is gaining ground in the world to-day, is the very anti-Christ against which we have been so strenuously warned. It certainly is your duty to show your wife the falsity and error of these attacks on established creeds and doctrines. This blasphemy about spiritual healing is the most egregious error, the most harmful and misleading thing, the most damned and baneful thing that the enemies of pure religion have ever devised. I cannot understand how any honest person can adopt a neutral attitude toward it."

Mr. Thorpe was silent for a few moments, and when he spoke the life and spirit had gone out of his voice, and the shadow that had darkened his life brooded over him.

"There is nothing neutral nor conciliatory in my mind toward this 'wind of doctrine,'" he said. "In my opinion there is no greater sacrilege than for man to claim the power of Christ." He hesitated a moment and then continued as one who forces down the last drop of a bitter draught. "Evelyn was a Christian woman when I married her," he said, "orthodox as you or I; she has been very near to me in all my work, yet she has departed from me; she has not been able to feed and live on that which I could give. And if this woman, whom I have loved and trusted, has failed to find spiritual food under my teaching, how shall I judge my life's work?"

"This is a serious question, Maurice, and far-reaching; but your outlook is morbid and unfair to yourself. Have no scruples about your life's work; never doubt that the Lord has need of your service; let nothing turn you from this. If there is any condemnation upon you it is because you have allowed your heart to pervert your judgment."

There was silence again for a few moments, while a smile flickered across the old man's wrinkled face; a smile that spoke of many things; demons met and battles fought and every trace of human affection subservient to the creed that

rules his life. Nowhere in the history of paganism do we find such atrocities as have been committed in the name of Religion. The blood of the martyrs had within it the principle that would condemn another to martyrdom and at the same time, if put to the test, face, undaunted, an atrocious death. And the devotee to the creeds and doctrines of our orthodox church will, for his faith, flay alive the quivering soul of a loved one and yield his own soul to be flayed with equal readiness. The smile, or the trace of it, lingered on the old minister's face.

"I have a thought, Maurice," he said, "that it is the old story, old as the Garden of Eden, of man's yielding to the witchery of woman. The curse of Adam's weakness is in our veins, but there is no extenuation for us in yielding to it. Were I in your place I should either root this obnoxious thing from Evelyn's mind, or else deal with her exactly as I should with any other heretic in the church. Go and read Mark 9, from 43 to 49."

At the end of the summer when the first frost had touched the leaves and dressed them in red and yellow garb; when a blue haze hung over the landscape and the air was balmy with the summer's departing fragrance, the pastor and his wife bade an affectionate farewell to the friends who had been so kindly hospitable, and returned to Edgerly.

Pauline, capable, willing and always considerate, preceded them and had the parsonage aired and renovated when Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe arrived.

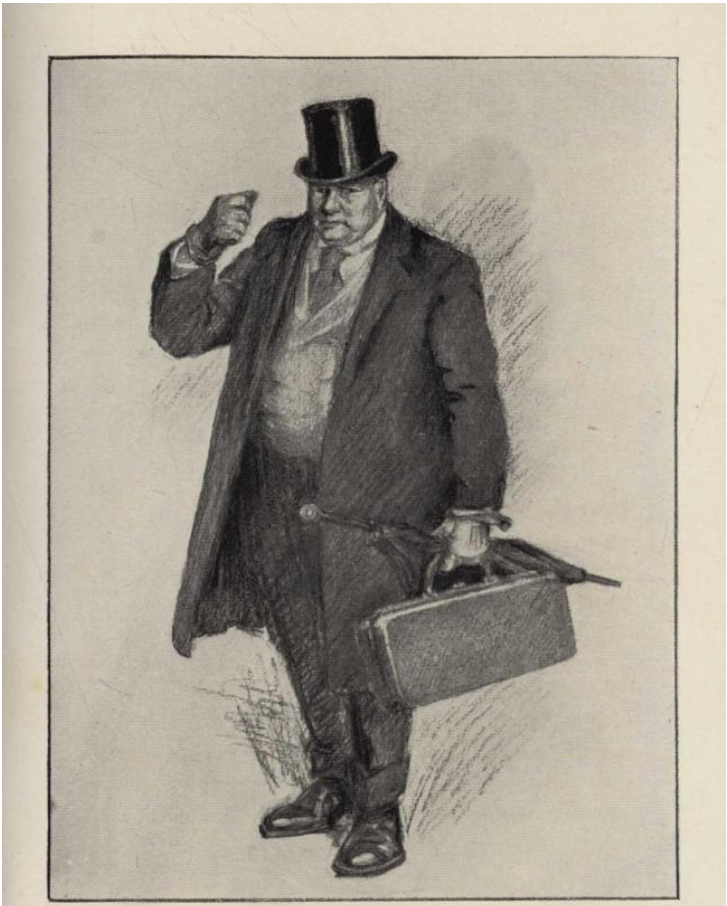
Mrs. Thorpe expostulated: "You should have waited and allowed me to help you," she said. "I can never repay you for all your kindness."

"The dust and close air would have been bad for Maurice," Pauline replied. "And, my dear," she said, "you have been with Maurice constantly and perhaps you cannot see as I can that the summer has not improved his health. To me he seems thinner and more broken than when he went away."

CHAPTER XII

THE MINISTER'S DECLINE

The family had not been home many days before Mr. Thorpe's cough again became alarming; weakness and fever followed, and Dr. Eldrige was again summoned. The old doctor prescribed and commanded. The patient must be kept quiet, but nothing to indicate his condition must be manifested by the family. He also advised that Mr. Thorpe resign his position as pastor.



"WHY, PERMIT ME TO ASK, DO YOU NOT TURN SOME OF YOUR WITCHCRAFT ON HIM?" (page 136)

"WHY, PERMIT ME TO ASK, DO YOU NOT TURN SOME OF YOUR WITCHCRAFT ON HIM?" (page 136)

"He cannot preach this winter," he said, "and it will be the death of him to try. Let him resign and have all care off his mind."

Mr. Thorpe objected to this and wished to obtain a substitute for a time; Mrs. Thorpe agreed with him that this would be the better way; and Pauline, although she said nothing, felt that his resignation would be a tacit admission that he would never regain his health.

Dr. Eldrige fumed and stormed, as he always did when he met with opposition. He told Mrs. Thorpe and Pauline to go on and have their way, but to remember his words when they heard the clods upon the coffin lid. And Mr. Thorpe's resignation was duly sent in.

As was his custom, Dr. Eldrige discussed his patient with his son. He made a pretense of scoffing at his son's methods and manners, yet he was always ready to lay his cases before him, and counted more upon the young doctor's opinions and depended more upon his judgment than he would under any circumstances admit.

"Our pious pastor is going to die," he said to his son. "Pious or devilish, we all come to the same place at last, and we all go through the same door and out into the same black hole."

Dr. Eldrige Jr. made no comment, but gave the consent of silence to his father's statements; he felt that they needed no corroboration.

After a few moments the elder doctor spoke again: "Perhaps, though, a man's better off dead than alive when he has a witch-wife," lie said.

"A witch-wife!" the young man ejaculated, and there was both incredulity and remonstrance in his voice; but he said no more; he knew better than to question his father outright, and he half regretted that he had allowed the exclamation to escape him.

"Yes," the old man stormed; "a witch-wife, a distracted, wild-eyed manes who has had seven devils–seventy for what I know–cast out of her and now blooms forth in pristine freshness. When witches inhabit the earth the doctors can seek another world in which to practice their vile profession of medicine; their services will not be required in this one. However, when our witch friend gets out among people she may find that she has fewer friends in her health than she had in her sickness. She may be able to ride over chimney tops on a broomstick and hobnob with black cats in the forest for a time–but it may be a short time."

Heretofore the young doctor had given little heed to his father's bluster about Mrs. Thorpe's recovery; but now he understood that his words contained a covert threat. In the course of their relations together the son had fallen into the way of arbiter between his father and his father's patients, and many times he was able to prevent his father's malevolent designs and to heal the wounds

that he inflicted. Now he looked up from the book that he was reading; he did not look full into his father's face, but scanned it surreptitiously, and he admitted to himself that his father's malady was working upon him again. The harsh grating of his voice and his evil, malicious words had portrayed it; and the fleeting glance at the old man's face had revealed the purplish tinge, the swollen veins, and the murderous gleam of his eyes.

Never could he forget the day that he had discovered his father's secret– the disease that was ravaging body and brain. He had come upon him suddenly, unexpectedly, and had turned hastily from him, partly in recoil at what he saw and also to shield his father from the knowledge that he had discovered his trouble. And from that time, as he valued his life, he had given no hint of what he knew, although there was a silent understanding regarding it between him and his father. And this understanding had enabled him to know his choleric parent as he had never known him before. He felt that the anger and malignity and rancor to which his father gave vent were but the outflow, the suppuration of the horror which held him in its grasp; and he dared not put the question to himself, whether it might not be that this thing of horror was but his father's evil moods materialized in the flesh. And now he read an expression of his father's virulence in his remarks concerning the pastor and his wife, and had he read no more than this he would have made no reply, but he feared that his father's words contained a menace to the peace of those to whom he was ministering, and he believed it was time for him to ascertain the state of affairs at the parsonage.

"If Mr. Thorpe's decline is, as you say, slow and gradual," he said, "so long as there are no complications, you may as well let me take the case." His manner was quiet, free from curiosity, and indicated that he was not interested in the matter of Mrs. Thorpe's recovery. "I have calls that will take me in that part of the town to-morrow," he continued, "and I will see Mr. Thorpe for you if you like."

Dr. Eldrige Jr. felt that he had scored a victory that was worth while. His father would get a new grievance bye and bye, and then, if he saw no more of the Thorpes, he would forget this one.

He called at the parsonage the next afternoon and found Mr. Thorpe resting comfortably. The cough was better and the other symptoms less pronounced. After this he continued his calls at different times for several days; then a call came that took him out of town for a few days and the old doctor made the call on Mr. Thorpe.

After the visit he said to Mrs. Thorpe, who had accompanied him to the hall: "The present treatment seems to be working so well that it will not be necessary for me to call again until Mr. Thorpe is taken worse; but be sure and let me know at the first return of the unfavorable symptoms." He spoke of this con-

tingency as though it were a foregone conclusion; that it was only a matter of time.

This was the first real intimation that Mrs. Thorpe had had that her husband's condition was serious. For the first moment she felt as if her heart had ceased to beat, or was it that she was blind that the daylight should be so black? Then she felt that a burden so heavy that she could not bear it had been suddenly and rudely thrust upon her. She felt that she staggered and was unsteady on her feet. But she faced the doctor and spoke as bravely as she could, although her voice sounded in her ears like a voice that she had never heard before. Yet in her consciousness there mingled with this deadly certainty that the doctor expressed something of her new-found faith in a higher power, and so she said:

"If he is taken worse we will let you know at once."

Dr. Eldrige lowered his head and looked at her over his glasses; he was in a villainous mood, and that little flame of faith that had shot out in her words had not escaped him.

"If," he roared; "indeed, Mrs. Thorpe, there is no 'if' about it; he will be taken worse." Then with the heart of one who knows he has maimed, but craves to kill, he said: "Don't you know that your husband is going to die?"

Mrs. Thorpe paled to the lips. She looked the man steadily in the face, but no words came to her.

He saw that she did not shriek nor cry aloud; she did not faint nor fall; and with all the malevolence in his nature he made another thrust.

"There was a time," he said, "when I believed that you would leave your husband free in the world, but the tables have turned. Why, permit me to ask, do you not turn some of your witchcraft on him? What is fair for one ought to be fair for another. You saved yourself by some devilish machination, but you are little inclined, it seems, to save your husband by the same process."

The horror and resentment of Mrs. Thorpe's outraged soul were depicted upon her face and gleamed from her dilated eyes. She had trained her mind to dwell on the divine attributes in man; but alas, how human, how very human, she felt this passion to be that possessed her now! Her blood was like fire in her veins, a strange noise was in her ears and hot, scathing words leaped to her lips.

"Dr. Eldrige," she said, and the words came keen and sharp; all her anguish and passionate anger were there, but she caught her breath sharply and stopped. Then again: "Dr. Eldrige–" Her voice wavered, fell and broke. She turned and walked to the window. The doctor began drawing on his gloves, his hand was on the door. Then she walked back to him. Her face was white, her eyes fathomless. "You are my husband's physician," she said. "I have no quarrel with you." Her voice was even, guardedly calm.

The doctor regarded her curiously. He had read her horror and resentment

and with the utmost exactness he read her passion and her anguish; now he as surely read her victory. His ill-will toward her did not soften. He stood with his cane and medicine case in his hand, ready to go, and without a word he turned and left her.

A lightning flash will sometimes cause objects and outlines to stand out with more distinctness than does the noonday sun. The keen flash of her bitter passion revealed to Mrs. Thorpe what the long summer days had not disclosed.

Why had she not been free and frank with her husband and confessed to him the change that had come into her life? Why had she shut her blessing in her own heart and uttered no word to those about her?

The consciousness that had come to her of the power of Truth over all evil and error never wavered nor failed. The actual demonstration of what she had experienced was manifested in her own life.

God's truth is not a complex thing, difficult to explain and hard to demonstrate; it is simple and natural. Health is the natural condition; sickness is abnormal. Righteousness is the simple state of man; sin is a distortion. But to live and demonstrate these truths in this many-sided, complex life requires all the wisdom that Christ came to earth to teach.

Mrs. Thorpe never doubted that could the saving power of Truth be revealed to her husband his infirmities would fall from him; yet with this message warm in her heart she had not broken the silence that lay between them. In this course that she had taken she had shielded herself behind the conviction that her husband would not accept this message; and she had put back with a quieting touch, hushed and kept asleep that which all the time had been to her so patent–that she was deceiving her husband–afraid to make known to him her new conception of the Christ-love and its transforming power.

Mr. Thorpe was in his study one morning, sorting and arranging his books. The disease from which he was suffering has been known to play with its victims as a cat delights to play with a mouse, and this was one of the times when Mr. Thorpe fully believed that he was to regain his health. He was finding great pleasure in his books this morning; he had been away from them so long that now as he handled them they seemed to him like dearest friends. Mrs. Thorpe tapped at the door of the study and he bade her enter.

"It seems good to find you here, Maurice," she said; "like old times again."

"Old times!" How the thought stirred his spirit–the time when there was no barrier between them. The sunshine streamed through the window and lay, a golden bar, on the floor; symbolic, he thought, of the barrier that had insinuated itself between him and this fair, smiling woman who stood before him; a barrier silent, far-reaching, heaven-high.

Mrs. Thorpe's eyes also were on the shaft of light.

"See how the sunshine lies like a bridge between us," she said; "a beautiful golden bridge. I hope I may be able to build as fair a one, Maurice, between your confidence and mine. I have been keeping something from you. I wish to talk to you about it–about the new belief–the light that has come to me."

Her heart was beating tumultuously. Her hand rested on a table beside her husband and he noticed the firm, white flesh of her arm, where once pitiful emaciation had marked it. He looked into her face and saw the signs of health and vigor there–evidence that she had cast her lot with some foreign power–some ungodly fetish!

"Evelyn," he said, "I have not questioned your belief nor demanded an explanation concerning this new, strange doctrine which you have embraced."

"No," she said, "you have not questioned nor demanded. I feel that you have trusted me, you have been kind–"

"No, Evelyn! Not that–I have been weak, culpable, a coward–fearing to ask lest from your own lips I get confirmation of the worst."

Mrs. Thorpe felt that her husband had thrust her suddenly outside the pale of his sympathy. The hope in her heart grew cold and all her glad words that she had been ready to speak deserted her; yet she answered bravely:

"This is no evil thing that has come into my life, you need not dread or fear it." Then, more eagerly: "Oh, Maurice, can you not see that it has restored my health, taken away my infirmities, blessed my life and made me whole?" The flood-gates were opened and the fullness of her soul poured forth. "It is the Truth that has made me free; there is no real power in the world save God's power. There is a better conception of life than that which admits sickness and disease to be real and powerful. Have not we to-day the same Savior who walked the Galilean shore healing all forms of sin and sickness? God is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. Is not our Christ just as tender, as compassionate, as able, now as then?" She stopped at the sight of her husband's face. The light had gone out of it; it was grim and set.

"That which I feared has come upon me," he said. "I had hoped that this folly of yours might pass; I have prayed daily that you might be delivered from this fallacy, and restored to the fold; but I see that you have gone from me–gone from me, from my church and my God."

Mrs. Thorpe had felt sure that her husband would not approve of her new belief, and in her darkest moments she had feared that by confessing to him the change that had come into her life, the perfect trust and confidence between them might be broken. But what was this that his words portended? Gone from his church–his God–*from him*! Was there anything–anything on earth or in Heaven that could compensate her for this? Yet with the question still passionate in her soul she realized that were it possible, for the sake of the mortal love her soul so

craved, for her to deny her conception of the Infinite, she could never retrace her steps. With her own free hand she had torn down the old relationship between herself and her husband. For the moment she felt that she had plucked from its stem the fairest flower that ever blossomed; now it must wither and die, no power on earth could prevent it.

The glistening sunlight radiated sparks of living fire, then reeled in darkness. Suddenly she found herself as one who departs on a strange, new road, and finds all other paths barred and blocked. A tremor shook her form and her breath came with a sob. Even though she find that the night awaits her in Gethsemane and Calvary looms on before, she must go on–but not alone–she has beside her One whose feet had passed that way before.

Her husband sat before her with bowed head.

"Maurice," she said gently, yet with the keenness of her heart's pain in her voice, "the sternest judge does not condemn without a hearing, much less should you who have always been kind and just condemn me before you have investigated the views I hold."

"I have no desire to investigate your views, Evelyn. This assertion that you have made, that a weak and sinful human being has power to overcome sickness and disease, is placing mortals on a level with the Son of God and is a defamation of the very character of God Himself. I would have given my life for you rather than that you should have embraced so heretical and blasphemous a doctrine. Yet even though this cup prove more bitter than I can bear; even though it blights my life and destroys my affection, I will not ask you to spare me now. I desire to know how far you have gone–I would like to know how far you are from me."

Mrs. Thorpe felt herself alone; her isolation closing in about her. Never before had her husband thrust her from him, never before had he been unsympathetic and unkind. Then the thought came to her that in all the years of her married life she had never before arrayed herself in open opposition to him; and she realized now, for the first time, that although she had loved this man she had also feared him with an awful, shrinking fear. Now she felt that he had not only thrust her from him, but that he had aimed deliberately to pain and wound her, and with this thought a new element sprang to life within her–a dauntless, unflinching courage.

"Maurice," she said, "you have thrown down the gauntlet which, were I to take up in like spirit, would result in wounding both our hearts even as you have wounded mine. Were I to reply to you as you have spoken to me, I think this power of Christ about which we disagree would prove singularly lacking in both our hearts. I came here to talk to you about the new belief that has come into my life; but can one talk of the heart's sacred joy, the deep, hidden things of God before a stern and unsympathetic judge? All I ask now is that you grant me the

freedom of religious thought that you demand as your inalienable right."

Now Mr. Thorpe was aware that a woman he had never known stood before him, and he also knew that in purity of thought and in her sense of justice, in Christ-likeness, she towered above him. Heretofore she had bent to his will so readily that he scarcely knew how thoroughly he dominated her. Now she stood before him asking and demanding freedom of thought, independence in her religious belief–even that for which their forefathers had fought. And this was Evelyn, his wife, not crushed by his scathing condemnation, but triumphant in her sweet humility, and mistress of the situation.

There was silence between them for a few moments, then Mrs. Thorpe laid her hand on her husband's shoulder. She knew that her thrust had gone straight to the mark and her heart ached with the pain she had inflicted.

"Maurice," she said, "I would not willingly incur your disfavor, much less cause you pain."

There was a tremor in her voice that threatened tears; but her husband remained motionless and irresponsive.

"Can our conceptions of God come between us, Maurice–alienate us—when we have been so much to each other?" Her voice choked and she felt that her heart was breaking.

"I cannot understand, Evelyn," Mr. Thorpe said, in a voice that had lost its harshness and was broken and unsteady, "how anything so visionary, so fallacious, so palpably false, can have taken so strong a hold upon you. What is it that has diverted your allegiance from the church–the church of Christ?"

"Maurice, there is no command given for the observance of God's laws but I most humbly reverence and endeavor to obey. All that to me seems good and true in church and creed I hold and keep, but this I will say, that the conception that I now have of spiritual things is deeper, stronger, mightier than the old, as the ocean is mightier than the rivulet. I do not condemn the church, but I must have more than it has ever given me. I believe that Christ loves sick and sinful humanity to-day as he loved it when he walked the earth healing all manner of evil and error."

"Evelyn, it is the heretical books that you have read that have blinded you and caused you to put a false interpretation on the works of Christ. Can you not see that when Christ came to earth and men were slow to acknowledge Him that it was necessary for Him to give to the world some evidence incontrovertible, irrefutable, that He was of divine origin? To establish this fact beyond all doubt and question He chose a most miraculous expedient: he healed the sick, cast out devils, raised the dead. And now, even in this wicked and degenerate age, these mortals whom He came to save claim the power to do these works that He did. To say nothing of the absurdity of the thing, I little believed you capable of accepting

so blasphemous a fallacy."

Mrs. Thorpe turned and walked to the window, and her eyes followed the incline that led up to the church.

"Christ takes the place in the spiritual life," she thought, "that the church takes in the world; something exalted, set aside, to be looked up to and worshiped, but never to aid and comfort. He came to glorify Himself; his mission was to prove His own superior origin, and, the church, following this conception of Him, holds itself superior to the human family it stands to bless." There flashed before her a vision of the dark-faced girl whose life had been robbed of its chastity and sent to its ruin, while the adherents of the stately church before her followed this conception of Christ. She thought of the sin and suffering she had seen on the Bolton Flat; the lives of anguish and crime that were lived there while the Savior of men, tender and compassionate, presided over the beautiful church and blessed and glorified it.

When she turned again to her husband her face was blanched and her eyes were glowing with a strange light.

"And all this great gift of Christ's life, His suffering and sacrifice–what was it for?" she asked. "If He healed the sick–not because He had compassion upon the multitude, not because He was touched with the feeling of their infirmities; if He cast out evil spirits–anger, jealousy, malice and all the vagaries of a sin-sick mortal mind–not because He wished the children of a loving Father to be pure in heart, clean of life; if He raised the dead–not because the great heart of God is merciful and tender–if these things would have been beneath His notice had they not served in gaining His end, indisputable evidence that He is the Great I AM, then He used them to fix the gulf, to measure the distance between Himself and humanity–used them, He the Christ, the Savior of men, for His own aggrandizement!"

Mr. Thorpe held out his hands with a gesture of horror. "Evelyn, desist!" he cried. "What profanation is this?"

"But answer me this, Maurice: Were Christ's miracles performed to prove Himself divine or were they works of mercy to prove His Saviorhood to humanity?"

"Your question is irreverent, and in the sense in which you ask it, sacrilegious and unchristian. Whatever it was that actuated Christ to do those mighty works it is wildness, mania, for one to claim that this power is in the world today."

"Yet for years, Maurice, you prayed that God would restore my health and strength, and now it is sacrilege to affirm that the God to whom you prayed has answered your prayer?"

"We will not prolong this discussion, Evelyn. Your feet have found a

strange, new road, while I, as I hope to see my God, must cleave to the old. I knew that the hand of God was hard and grievous upon you, but I could not believe that you would forsake the straight and narrow way. The bitterness of death sinks before this."

Mrs. Thorpe knelt beside her husband and buried her face in his hands. "God is our judge," she said; "let us leave our differences with Him."

"I have one promise to ask, one demand to make, Evelyn, and then this subject shall be dropped between us. My life is in God's hands; when He calls me I am ready to go. Whatever power you possess, or believe you possess, over the human organism, I ask, demand, that you forebear to exercise it in any manner where my welfare is concerned."

Mrs. Thorpe, still upon her knees, saw in the future pain, suffering, separation–evils which, should she give her promise, she dare not deny.

Mr. Thorpe put her from him and arose to his feet. She arose also and looked into his face; it was haggard and gray.

"Oh, Maurice!" she cried, "that I who love you should cause you to suffer so!" She extended her hands to him, but he ignored her advance.

"I have asked a promise, made a demand," he said, "and you have not answered me."

Again the living fire glittered in the sunshine; again the darkness reeled before her. "Oh, Christ," she sobbed, inaudibly, "you who suffered and died for the truth, help and keep me now!" Her face was drawn and gray as her husband's, and when she spoke her voice was sharp and keen with pain.

"I cannot–cannot deny my God," she said.

CHAPTER XIII
THE PURE IN HEART

The term, "A man of the world," is elastic enough to cover a multitude of sins, and it gives the impression that however far from exemplary the man may be to whom the term is applied, and however far from spotless his character, that having made no avowal of virtue, he is in some degree excusable for exercising the prerogatives of a villain.

Max Morrison was a man of the world. Men knew him as an all around good fellow; women knew him as a bright and shining light about which many a

pretty moth had singed its gilded wings, been scorched, maimed, wounded. But his popularity increased rather than diminished because of this, and Edgerly's best society welcomed him warmly.

But the best society and all that it offers, as well as the amusements that cannot bear the light of day, pall on a man in time and that which is fine within him, silent, yet alive, cries for expression. When the flush of youth is over, life begins to look more profound and sometimes a bit somber, and then the stirrings of a man's heart are for a home and fireside, wife, and the voice of children, and he begins to look about him for a queen to reign in his home. And here, in making a choice of a life companion, men generally show a superiority over women. A woman, governed by her emotions and her desires, and taking a superficial view of the future, will give her heart, her honor and her life to a man, no matter what his past has been nor what his present is, if only he makes her fair promises for the future. But a man, when he chooses a wife, must know beyond the shadow of a doubt that the woman he honors is of spotless character.

Let no woman breathe one word to break down this high standard that man has set for womankind; but rather, let women demand of men that which men require of them.

Max Morrison desired for his wife a woman pure as the angels in Heaven; and this is what he believed Geraldine Vane to be. And after a long and intimate friendship he decided to win her for his wife. He fully realized the importance of the step, and he also realized that when a man has a past and there are places in that past where the sun has never shone, that phantom hands are liable to rise out of these dark places and lay a blighting finger on the beautiful, blameless future. Many times when his thoughts sought matrimonial byways, a vision of a dark, eager face with full, voluptuous lips and passion-filled eyes arose before him. There were times when he denounced himself as a fool whose folly had ruined his life. There had been good material in Margaret, as well as the fatal traits that had ruined her. Suppose her circumstances had been different, or that someone had lent her a helping hand; defended and protected her. What a woman she would have made! What a force in the world! Was there one in the world who could equal what she might have been? The thought was torture to him and he banished the dark face from his vision; it had not been pleasant to look upon the last time he had seen it, and Geraldine was the woman to be considered now. He consoled himself as best he could with the thought that no doubt Geraldine, with her placid temper and quiet, acquiescent ways, would lead a man a more comfortable life than would a passionate, spirited woman such as Margaret would have made.

Max was not exactly a vain man, but he had known many women and been repulsed by none. He had no serious apprehension that he might not be

able to win the woman that he had decided to honor; but he desired to make his footing sure as possible, and he wished also to be honorable and irreproachable in his conduct toward this woman and her family. To this end he approached Mr. Mayhew on the subject.

"My friendship with your niece," he said to that gentleman, "is, as you know, of long standing. You have accorded me the greatest kindness and hospitality; now I ask your permission to pay my addresses to Geraldine as a suitor for her hand."

Mr. Mayhew's business instinct, always keen and shrewd, became at once active and alert. On general principles his policy was to conceal an advantage until he saw its consummation, and he saw no reason to depart from his usual course in this instance. And in his estimation a proposition would have to be questionable indeed if he could not from here and there bring in enough that was moral to make it tenable. However many dark places there might be in a course he wished to pursue, he never allowed himself to be too Puritanical to find some defensible ground on which to make a stand. He thought it very probable that Max did not know that Geraldine was a dowerless girl, absolutely dependent, and he had no compunctions that the fact had been well guarded. If Max wished to marry the girl, her fortunes ought to make no difference to him. And if Geraldine was willing to accept him for a husband, she could do as thousands of other women had done–overlook or ignore the past. Here, then, was the high tenable ground, and without any hesitation he took his stand. Yet in his heart he knew that if this fair girl beneath his roof had a fortune of her own he would see that she got a better man for a husband than this one to whom he now gave full and free consent to woo her.

Mr. Mayhew would like to have had the co-operation of his wife in influencing Geraldine to make her choice. He understood that Max expected him to use his influence to predispose the girl in his favor, and also that he desired him to palliate his past conduct, if there was need of palliation in Geraldine's mind. But Mr. Mayhew was too shrewd a man to see only one side of the question. His wife he believed to be one of the most satisfactory women in the world yet he realized that there were times when she was a power to be dealt with, and he believed it always better to circumvent a woman than to oppose her. He never attempted to lower her ideals of honor and morality; but he took it upon himself to see that they did not interfere with the practical advantages of life. Now he counted that all he could say in Max's favor would have less weight with Geraldine than that which his wife could say against him, if she cared to do so. And rather than risk having Geraldine consult with her aunt as to the suitability of Max as a husband, he decided to let her make the reply to the all-important question with as little premeditation as possible. And as though in response to his

unspoken preference, Max did not delay his purpose long.

It was a stormy night in early winter, Max called at the Mayhew home and was shown into the library, where he found Geraldine deep in a volume of old-time valorous deeds. She had read of knights and chivalry and maidens fair and true until her heart throbbed with the spirit of the olden time, and that which is brave and fine in human nature lay uppermost in her mind.

She greeted her caller with a mingling of the fervor of a Joan of Arc and the sweet dignity of a Lady Jane Grey. Her eyes were bright, there was an unusual glow on her cheeks, and no queen ever wore a crown of gems and jewels more becoming than was Geraldine's crown of golden hair. She drew a chair to the fire for her caller.

"You were brave to face the storm," she said.

Max settled himself comfortably in the grateful warmth and glow.

"One could well face a fiercer storm for a moment of lesser bliss," he said.

The firelight fell on his swarthy face and magnificent proportions. How like a veritable knight stepped out of the book of brave deeds he appeared!

The library door stood open, and Dr. Eldrige Jr., who had been called to see one of the Mayhew children slightly ailing, passed this door on his way to the nursery and saw the man and woman sitting in the firelight. His face grew hard, and involuntarily his fingernails cut into the flesh of his palms.

"There was a time," he thought, "a time centuries ago, when true men were knights and challenged to deadly conflict villains who dared to approach women of honor. There would be satisfaction in grappling with a man of Morrison's stamp; grappling until his cursed blood flows red–or give my life in the effort. But in these days, these better, Christian days, we have done away, if not with honor, with all aggressive vindication of it; we no longer call our enemy to halt and demand of him his aims and intentions; we get out of his way and give him full swing." The doctor came to a sudden halt; a new train of thought had flashed into his mind. "My God! I cannot tell what this man's intentions may be. He may intend to marry Geraldine!"

It was the first time this aspect of the affair had presented itself to him, and while it seemed a thing too hideous to contemplate, he felt sure that it was true. But although his indignation and despair broiled and seethed in his heart, he ministered to the child with a touch skilled and tender as a woman's; then he gave the nurse exact directions for the night and took his departure.

When he again passed the library the door had swung to and no sound came to him from behind the closed portal. He passed quickly, quietly out of the house and into the street, out into the dark, moaning night. Rain and sleet were falling; the wind buffeted him and strange sounds from the shivering trees and their bare, wailing branches came to him. All the black face of the night seemed

possessed of a wild and witch-like fierceness. Voices shrieked and hissed at him. The woman–the one woman in the world–the woman that he loved–what was life to him now and all that it contained? Was the future that stretched before him less black than this tempestuous night? Alone in the storm and the darkness he felt himself a part of the tumultuous elements about him.

In the library the firelight lay warm and red over the furnishings, and fantastic shadows lurked here and there about the room. The wind when it arose in its fury could be heard like the sobbing of some unhappy spirit.

Max stood before Geraldine, his soul in his eyes and a great tenderness in his musical, well-modulated voice.

"You must have known that I love you, Geraldine," he said; "love and adore you." He extended his hands to her, pleading, passionate. "Geraldine!"

But Geraldine, sitting there wrapped in the red firelight, did not stir nor move. The color had gone from her face, her eyes were bright and her eyelids burned hot and dry. She saw the dark, dominating figure beside her, she heard the pleading and she understood; yet she remained silent and motionless before him.

He bent over and took her hand in his. "Geraldine," he whispered, close to her white face, "come to me."

Then the blood beat into her face and flushed it crimson red. Her tense muscles relaxed and she arose and stood before him. The warm firelight enfolded them, and the wind came to them in wailing sobs; but silence lay between them, and Geraldine was alone–alone as it comes to us all to be sometimes–many times, perhaps. No word of her aunt's warning came to her now; no thought of her uncle's unspoken wish was with her; the world, with its perplexities, was forgotten; life that had already grieved and distressed her was lost in oblivion and she was in the silence, the vastness, the grandeur of self–alone–and her pure heart, her woman's heart knew its own. There are voices that come to us sometimes, other than those that come over the vibrations of air waves. The deep, still voice of truth needs no material means through which to speak. A wordless message came to Geraldine, as she stood silent and alone; it called to the depth of her soul, and smote upon the sweet, vibrant chords of her womanhood.

"Max," she said, "I cannot–cannot–"

"Geraldine–oh, Geraldine!"

"I cannot, Max–I do not love you."

He looked at her then as one looks at a rare and beautiful gem, and a desire to possess her such as he had not felt before arose within him; and even the dark-faced girl that at one time he had fancied stood unseen beside him in the firelight was forgotten.

"Geraldine, it cannot be–you do not understand." He seized her hands and

his eyes burned upon her compellingly, as he sought by the superior force of his will to dominate and control her. "My love, be kind; you would not cast me off, ruin my life–"

"I cannot, Max," she said. Her voice faltered and her eyes looked compassionately into his. "I do not love you."

How many women he had loved, or professed to love, and not one of them had answered him as he was answered now. What sort of woman, then, was this one, whom persuasion could not influence and passion could not sway? By what standard had her life been fashioned? What was its center and controlling power? With all that he had seen of life, could it be that he had failed in his judgment of womankind? Was there something in the nature of a woman, a good woman, that he had never known?

His thoughts had found a new channel and he was at their mercy. Was there something in human nature, in life, deeper, truer, stronger than he had ever known? He turned from the firelight and the trembling girl on the hearth and walked across the room. The bare branches of a sweet-brier outside tapped against the window-pane. The blinds were drawn, but he could hear the tapping, and in fancy see the bare, brown branches at the mercy of the wind. He sat down by the window and bowed his head and covered his eyes with his hand.

Had he all this time been dealing with the outer sham of life, deluded in the belief that he was living in the very heart of it? Had he been surfeiting himself with the husks, believing that he was feasting on the rare, sweet-flavored kernel?

For a time Geraldine remained by the hearth, then she crossed the room and stood beside him and laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Max," she said, "we have been friends, good friends–in our friendship we have been true to each other, we must be true to each other still, and true to ourselves–to the best that is in us. I cannot give you what you ask. Shall I be false and give you less? You desire a woman's heart, her life and love–shall I defraud you of this? Some day, perhaps, you will be glad that I have been true to myself–and to you, Max."

When Max stepped out into the night the wind had grown less boisterous; now and then a fitful gust went by like a wanderer in the night. The cold had become keener; overhead the clouds had rifted and a few stars kept watch with the night.

Geraldine lay awake long after she had sought her rest. The low moaning of the wind came to her in her upper room, and from her window she could see the rifted clouds and scattered stars. From a child she had looked from this same window at the face of the night, and the feeling had grown up with her that the great enfolding darkness was guarding and protecting her. Her trust and her simple faith had been as natural as her breathing or her existence. All her life

before Faith and Trust had pillowed her head at night, and gently touched her eyelids, and whispered sweet dreams to her; but to-night dark, foreboding Doubt became her companion, and she tossed restlessly on her bed and looked down the long vista of years and saw herself alone, forgotten and unloved. With maidenly reserve and a woman's pride she had endeavored to shut out and debar from her thoughts one whom she believed had ceased to care for her, even as a friend; but when she had stood alone in the presence of her conscious self, the pleading of the man beside her had not seemed so real, so vital to her as did the vibrations of the wordless, evanescent message that came to her above the sobbing wind and the spirit of the tumultuous night.

Mrs. Mayhew noticed her heavy eyes and swelled lids the next morning, and Geraldine told her of Max's proposal and her rejection of him. Mrs. Mayhew had felt sure that Geraldine was to face this question, and in her heart she was glad of the girl's decision; yet her happiness came first, and it was evident that she was not happy, and she felt sure that there was something that Geraldine had not disclosed; yet she understood the fineness of the girl's nature too well to desire to force her confidence. And Geraldine could not speak of that about which she felt no woman has a right to speak. And so a barrier, subtle, thin as gauze, yet impenetrable, hung like a curtain between them. And Mrs. Mayhew, with rare wisdom, realizing that her girl had grown into a woman, was content to let her alone with her woman's secrets.

When Mr. Mayhew came home from his office that day his mood was not exactly a happy one. He had seen Max and knew the outcome of his proposal. He was both surprised and displeased; but he concealed the fact from Max and hinted that a woman's "no" often means "yes," and he determined to see Geraldine and speak plainly to her. When Max first spoke to him about Geraldine he had begun to look upon her as he might upon a commodity that had lain for years almost forgotten, but which had suddenly become of great value. Now, with her own hand she had shattered his plans for her, and refused one of the best fortunes in Edgerly.

After dinner he asked Geraldine to come to him in the library. He was seated near the fire reading when she entered the room. She did not disturb him, but went over and stood by the window and watched the sweet-brier as it tapped gently now against the window-pane.

Mr. Mayhew lowered his paper and looked at her, and his mind became reminiscent. He was impressed anew with Geraldine's likeness to her father; and this man seemed to come out of the shadowy past and confront him. Noble he had been, high-minded, conscientious and–poor. A musician, his artist's soul pure as the divine strains of his melodies, he seemed like one whom chance had placed in a wrong world, or a wrong age. Then his mind ran over the different

members of the Vane family; scholars, musicians, professional men, high-minded and noble, but could anything excuse their poverty?

Geraldine turned and met his gaze. He arose and placed a chair for her.

"I wished to speak to you," he said direct, "I wish to speak about Max."

"Yes," she said, and her manner was gentle and womanly.

He was conscious of thinking that she had good blood in her veins; her voice and manner proclaimed it; and all she lacked was a fortune such as Max could give her.

"You understand, Geraldine, that Max has all the comforts of life to give the woman he marries."

"Yes, I know."

"The truth sometimes sounds harsh when spoken plainly, Geraldine; but you are aware, that however loved and welcome you have been beneath my roof, that you are a dowerless girl. It was my desire that you be given every advantage that a girl of wealth receives, and your aunt has seen that my wishes were carried out. Now you are offered a home and fortune that will give you the comforts and luxuries of life to which you have been accustomed. Can you afford to lose this opportunity?"

"I cannot marry Max Morrison."

He met her eyes; they had been dark and sweet like pansies; now they were wide and blue. He felt the hopelessness of argument. He knew the Vanes; they appeared yielding and docile, but he knew them to be flint and steel where a principle was concerned. He arose, impatient to be away.

A few days later it was known that Max Morrison had enlisted with a company of volunteers, and was going to the Philippines.

CHAPTER XIV
A FRIEND IN NEED

Mr. Thorpe went to Colorado for his health. A cousin of his, a brother of Pauline's, lived there, and Mr. Thorpe had a standing invitation to come and try the effect of the climate on his health. Pauline accompanied him; she had become so used to caring for him and watching over him as a mother watches over an ailing child, that she could not bring herself to part with him now, when she believed his condition to be more critical than it had ever been before. Then,

too, she knew that all was not well between him and his wife, and, knowing this, she had no desire to remain with Mrs. Thorpe.

The pastor who was called in Mr. Thorpe's place was an unmarried man, and had no use for the parsonage, and Mr. Thorpe, by courtesy of the church committee, had been permitted to retain the use of it. But now, left alone, Mrs. Thorpe felt the necessity of finding a home for herself.

Some years previous she had, by the death of an uncle, come into possession of a small legacy. This her husband had insisted that she keep intact against a day of need.

On the Flat side of the church-crowned incline there was a small cottage set in a bit of ground, somewhat back from the rambling street. On either side of it were smaller houses, with ill-kept yards in which neglected children played and where untidy women talked across broken down fences and quarreled over petty grievances. Mrs. Thorpe had often noticed this cottage on her way to and from the Flat. The fact that it stood a little back from the street had given her the impression that the builder of it had desired more privacy, was more retiring, perhaps, than were those who had built their houses against the street; and she had planned in her mind how flowers and shrubs might be grown in the yard and vines trained over the windows and the place made to take on a homelike appearance, if the owner desired it. Now, confronted with the problem of finding a home for herself, her thoughts went directly to this cottage.

Alone in the world, broken-hearted, strong in spirit, yet all at sea as to the future, the thought of a cottage on the Flat was not distasteful to her. Perhaps her work lay there; she meant to work, and it made little difference to her what the work should be or where it took her. She knew that the place was for sale, and when she found that the price was within the limit of her possessions she hesitated no longer, and the cottage became hers. Deep within her heart she knew that she was influenced by the fact that from its location she could see the church–might almost feel that she lived within the shadow of it–the church that her husband had loved. In the morning she would see it, as she had so often seen it from the parsonage, with the sun rising over the hills and mantling it with roseate splendor; and in the evening she could see the long shadow of the church spire; and on the Sabbath she could hear the bell as it called the worshipers to its altars. Full well she knew that she loved the church, knew that she must always love it and reverence that for which it stands. The fact that it is profaned by the hollow-hearted and ungodly does not change its sacred character nor destroy its spiritual significance, any more than the making "my Father's house a place of merchandise" destroyed the spiritual significance of the Temple.

Sometimes in her ever-vivid imagination she saw the whole Christianity-professing world as an Edgerly, and the poor, the ignorant and the unfortunate

in the world as this great Edgerly's Flat; and always the church-crowned prominence with its prosperous, complacent money-changers between. And always she was glad that henceforth her home was to be on the Flat side, with those who needed her. Had her Master ever chosen to walk in the high places with the great ones of earth?

It was a day in early winter when Mrs. Thorpe had her possessions moved from the parsonage to the cottage on the Flat. She engaged the services of a strong woman to assist her with her work and in putting her new home in order. When this was done she paid the woman her hire and allowed her to go; her income would not warrant her keeping a servant nor a companion; she would live alone, and frugally.

When sorrow, or pain, or disappointment knocks at our door we struggle and strive, sometimes we faint and fail, yet always the knowledge comes to us that we may be strong if we will. There is no time nor place nor circumstance in life stronger than the central force within us.

Since her husband's departure Mrs. Thorpe's time had been taken up with work that pressed upon her; many cares and real labor claimed her time and strength. But now all was done, her house was in order and she was alone, sitting with empty hands–alone–beside her silent hearth. The wind blustered noisily outside, foretelling the ravages of winter, and sleet and rain came spasmodically against her window-panes. And here in the solitude of her new home old memories crowded round her and ghosts of her former self trooped through the silent rooms. She recalled how she had tried in the early days of her married life to penetrate the future, the sealed and silent future. Merciful love of the Infinite One, who turns the pages of life's book one at a time!

A sudden gust of wind came furiously against her window. She arose and walked about the room and pressed her face against the window-pane and looked out into the darkness. A white, transparent face it was, with eyes too large and dark for their setting. Then she came back and stood before her fire, a slender, girlish figure with clasped hands and bowed head. A sigh arose to her lips and ended in a quivering sob. She sank upon her knees beside her chair and buried her face in her hands.

"Maurice!" she cried, "Maurice–it is all false and untrue–this trouble that parts us. There is no evil, no pain, no sickness in God's world–Maurice–God's power is absolute; there is no other. God is supreme–love will conquer."

It was not the heart of the mortal woman, loyal and loving though it was with human affection; but the soul of her diviner self that was crying in the silence for its own. And never yet has the soul called in vain. Yet, is it not true that the Mount of Calvary is the mount of answered prayer? It was here that the great love-born prayer for humanity was consummated; a consummation

attained by the adorable surrender of the finite to the Infinite.

Mrs. Thorpe had prayed; back in those haunted, troubled days she had dared to pray that all forms of suffering might be heaped upon her, that she might become an outcast in the world, if by this means she might know God. Now she felt the living presence of the Infinite enfolding her, and her life merged into the great Life. Had she not been all the way to Calvary?

When she arose from her knees she sat quietly, bravely before her open fire, and listened to the wind and rain without. After a time she experienced a feeling, vague, indefinite at first, that something was required of her, someone needed her. She could not tell who it was, nor where, but the feeling grew upon her that she was needed by someone in trouble. After a time this unvoiced conviction become so persistent that she arose and took her hood and rain-coat from the closet.

"It may be Mrs. Boyd," she thought. "Her baby is sick; I will call over and see."

At the door the wind caught her and the rain dashed into her face; but she pulled her garments more firmly about her and faced the storm. At her gate she paused for a moment in the face of the gale. "What is it," she questioned, "that is drawing me out into the night and the tempest?"

No one had sent for her, she had spoken no word to anyone, yet the feeling was so strong within her that she persisted, and made her way to her neighbor's door.

Mrs. Boyd met her garrulously: "And are you out in the storm, Mrs. Thorpe? Lonesome? Well, no doubt, no doubt; it's hard living alone for a woman, and a bad night to keep one's own company."

"I came to inquire about the baby," Mrs. Thorpe said. "How is he to-night?"

"The baby's better, thank you, Mrs. Thorpe. He's sleepin' natural to-night."

"I am glad to know it," Mrs. Thorpe replied. "I had a feeling of uneasiness about the little fellow; but if I am not needed I will go back at once, for I think the storm increases."

Again out in the dark, windy night, she questioned her purpose. What was it that had impelled her to go out into the night and the storm?

The part of the street that lay between this house and her cottage was scarcely more than a foot-path, and she was following it somewhat uncertainly when she stopped short and drew back in sudden fright.

There was something directly in front of her, flapping in the wind, like the dark wing of some great bird or evil spirit. For a moment she wavered, trembling and irresolute, then her unflinching spirit asserted itself and she approached the object. Now she could discern that it was a garment that was flying in the wind, and as she drew near to the object it moved, partly arose, and fell back again.

"Who is this?" asked Mrs. Thorpe, now close to the prostrate form. "Are

you hurt or ill?" She stooped and laid her hand upon the object. "Are you ill?" she repeated. "Can I assist you? Why are you here?" She was down beside the creature now, and a moan and a bitter cry greeted her.

"Why am I here–why–why am I here–" It was a woman's voice.

Mrs. Thorpe took hold of her.

"Do what you can to help yourself," she said, "and I will assist you." But she soon saw that the burden was too great for her strength, and the unfortunate creature was down on the ground again. She was about to go back and ask Mrs. Boyd to assist her when she saw the figure of a man approaching. As he drew near she spoke to him.

"Would you be so kind as to lend me your assistance?" she said. "I found this unfortunate creature here in the street. I fear she is ill."

The man stood close beside her in the darkness.

"Mrs. Thorpe!" he said, "Mrs. Thorpe, what are you doing here in the night and the storm?"

With a glad cry she held out her hands to him.

"Dr. Eldrige! How fortunate that you happened this way. I found this poor creature here; she must be ill, I think. Help me now and we will take her into my house."

The doctor took the woman in his arms and helped her, half carrying her to the cottage door. Mrs. Thorpe turned the key in the lock, pushed open the door, and the light from the room streamed out and fell upon the woman's face. And then Mrs. Thorpe's questions were answered. She knew why old memories had crowded upon her; she knew why she had gone to the source of Power for strength, and why she had gone out into the wild night storm. The face was the dark, passion-stamped face of Margaret McGowan.

The doctor crossed the room and laid his burden on the couch as Mrs. Thorpe directed him. Then he straightened himself and looked into Mrs. Thorpe's face.

Never in her life had she seen a face so haggard, so deadly white and set. The time may come to a human heart when sympathy is as keenly craved as is food and drink to a man stranded in the desert. For one long minute the doctor held Mrs. Thorpe's eyes with his, and she read in their awful depths the tragedy of his life. Ah, these heart tragedies! Faith, hope, love–faithless, hopeless, forsaken! Not a word was spoken; the man turned to be alone, and the vibrating silence lay between them. But who can know what message may have gone out from the man's tortured soul? Dr. Eldrige's thought held to the wronged woman suffering and cold on the cot, but the soul of his manhood went out to that other woman shielded in the warm firelight. What, after all, are our material concepts of life where the realities of being are concerned? Who places our limitations upon us

and makes our communication with a loved one dependent on time and space?

Both the doctor and Mrs. Thorpe turned to the prostrate form on the couch. "We must attend to her without delay," the doctor said; and they drew off her rain-soaked shoes, and warmed her aching feet, and removed her wet garments, and wrapped her in warm flannels. And Mrs. Thorpe brewed her a steaming cup of tea; and after the girl had drank this they assisted her to a bed and made her as comfortable as possible for the night. Then the doctor prepared to take his departure.

"I will send you someone to stay with you through the night, if you like," he said to Mrs. Thorpe.

"Not unless you think it necessary," she replied. "I am not afraid; believe me, I am not afraid." And so he left her alone with her patient.

The girl fell into an uneasy sleep and Mrs. Thorpe drew a chair to her bedside and sat beside her. And watching by this erring girl who had been so often in her thoughts, Mrs. Thorpe realized how small had been the measure of her faith; for she had not dared to believe that the opportunity to repay Margaret for the wrong she had done her would ever come to her.

After a time Margaret fell into a deep slumber, and Mrs. Thorpe left her and sought her rest. The next morning she found her tossing restlessly on her pillows. Her eyes, wide open now, were staring and bloodshot; the blood was leaping wildly through her veins and fever burned in her face. She laid her hand on the girl's forehead.

"Margaret," she said, "my poor Margaret."

A wild laugh greeted her, then a moan and a cry of pain. Mrs. Thorpe talked to her and soothed her as best she could, and when she grew quieter she prepared a plate of tempting food for her and brewed a cup of coffee to a deep, rich brown and flavored it with the cream she had reserved for her own morning beverage.

During the day Dr. Eldrige called in and inquired about her.

"You are doing all there is to be done for her," he said to Mrs. Thorpe. "Stimulating food and good care are all that she needs. If you could keep her with you–if she could be kept away from her temptations–there is good in the girl, Mrs. Thorpe, or at least there once was good in her."

Mrs. Thorpe looked at him with her eyes misty, unfathomable.

"No one understands the truth of what you say better than I do, Dr. Eldrige; I shall keep her with me–always, perhaps."

As the day wore away and evening came on, Margaret began to realize her condition and she recognized Mrs. Thorpe.

"I thought it was a dream," she said, "all a dream, and I dreaded to awake; and now I do not understand. Where am I? And why are you here, Mrs. Thorpe?

How came we beneath the same roof–you who are good–and I who–thank God–if there is a God–I who am bad?"

Mrs. Thorpe looked into the girl's face. What should she say to her? What could she tell her? How could she win her?

"You have been ill for a time, Margaret, and I have been caring for you," she said.

"Where am I? Who brought me here, and why have you been caring for me?"

"This is my home. I found you in need and brought you here. I am very glad to have you, Margaret; and you were ill, you know." But Mrs. Thorpe noticed that there was a hard and sullen look on the girl's face. She did not speak for some time, and then she said:

"I do not know why you brought me here, Mrs. Thorpe. Perhaps you expect me to thank you for what you have done for me. You have saved my life, no doubt. There was a time when I was worth saving–and you could have saved me–but now I had rather have died in the street than to have taken one favor from your hand."

Mrs. Thorpe stepped to the girl's side and slipped an arm about her.

"Margaret," she said, "you have an old grievance against me, and justly, too. But girl, girl, do you think that I, too, have not suffered for that day's ignorance and folly? Do you think that the condemnation that the past has brought is more bitter upon you than it is upon me? Do you think that the stain of your sin is upon you alone? Margaret, Margaret, hear me. As we stand before God, I do believe I am the guiltier woman of the two." Mrs. Thorpe's voice choked with sobs and her face was wet with tears. "I sent you, passionate and misguided, to your sin; you but did the thing I drove you to. In the sight of our fellow men the condemnation is upon you; but how blind and ignorant is the judgment of men! Yet this I will say: I never meant to harm you, Margaret. I had no slightest thought of what it meant to you and your mother. I was ignorant, and oh, I, too, was passionate and misguided! But now that I have found you again, now that I have you here in my home while you need me and I need you–and I do need you, Margaret–stay with me, stay here with me."

"Stay with you? Stay here with you? Little you know what it is you ask, Mrs. Thorpe–little you know! I must get back–yes, back."

"I will not let you go, Margaret. I will never let you go."

The girl's anger and passion flamed into her face.

"You don't know what it is you ask," she said. "I tell you, you don't know–I'm not a woman that you want here."

"Margaret, I do want you. I want you to feel that this is your home; and oh, my child, I want you to know that I am your friend–always and always your

friend."

The girl's eyes were furious, yet piteous, like the eyes of an animal at bay; her passion had burned almost to frenzy.

"Know, then," she hissed, close to Mrs. Thorpe's face, "know, then, what it is that I must have! I tell you, I am a ruined woman–I must have–"

But Mrs. Thorpe put out her hand.

"Hush, Margaret," she said. "Do you think that I do not know? I do know, and, believe me, I know what you suffer! But oh, my child! How many, many who were dire distressed pressed close to the Healer's side–and never one was turned away."

Margaret scanned Mrs. Thorpe's face with a look that was terrible–keen as a lightning flash. For a moment the transfiguration of hope, desire, faith, lay in the dark depth of her eyes. Her face relaxed; the frenzy and passion died out of it and left it quivering with a new-born anguish. She threw herself prostrate on a couch and burst into a paroxysm of tears.

A woman's tears–a fallen woman's tears! The sacred pages that are so few, yet hold the record of all that guides the human family from the beginning to the end, had space for this, a fallen woman's tears. The sins, blood-red, that have been made like wool; as scarlet, that have become white as snow, washed in the fountain of penitent tears! And beating in divine cadence, sounding forever through the centuries, are the words of the great Forgiver of men:

"Go thy way and sin no more."

CHAPTER XV

NEITHER DO I CONDEMN THEE

Mrs. Thorpe beguiled Margaret into leading a quiet life. She prevailed upon her to go out but little, and never allowed her to go alone. There were days when the old rebellion arose within the girl and her abnormal craving grew all but intolerable, when bodily pain and mental anguish rendered her less woman than monster.

But into the work of helping to readjust this unfortunate girl's life Mrs. Thorpe brought her dauntless courage, her understanding of the Truth and her

faith in the supreme Power. There were no halfway places in this woman's character; there were no doubts in her creed, no cringing fears in her belief. The power of God is a power to save once, every time and forever. To doubt once, to admit one fear, to let go for one instant the everlasting principle of Truth, is to hurl oneself from the mountain peak, to cast oneself from the pinnacle of the Temple.

The winter was a severe one. The great banks of snow piled higher and higher during the short winter days; and when the days began to lengthen the cold grew more keen and cutting. There was suffering on the Flat as there had been winters before. Mrs. Thorpe went among the people with words of cheer, and such material aid as she could render. The ladies of the church and the Edgerly Benevolent Society soon found her out, and her little home became a distributing point between Christian Edgerly and the suffering Flat. The Society soon learned that Mrs. Thorpe knew where the need was greatest, and what the needs of the individual were; she knew which shivering child the little scarlet coat that some mother's darling had outgrown would fit; she knew where the shoes that had become too shabby for a child of fortune to wear would be most welcome, and which pair of cold, pinched hands should have the half-worn, fur-topped mittens; she knew where there was sickness and where the larder was empty; she knew also where the needy ones could be trusted with funds and where they could not.

And the Benevolent Society, finding that she knew all these things, found it a great relief to leave their offerings with her. It saved the painful harrowing of their feelings that personal contact with these people brought, and also gave them a comfortable sense of the works being well done. And in simple truth, was not this, to gain the feeling of conscious comfort that comes from the doing of a good deed, the primary object of their charity?

Mrs. Thorpe willingly took this work upon herself. It was a joy to her that she was able in any degree to lighten the burdens of these people, and her zest and interest in the work grew from day to day; yet from the depths of her heart she grieved over it.

"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children." Were these Christian women of Edgerly the daughters and the children of the daughters that the prophetic vision saw down the stretch of the centuries?

Margaret became interested in the work of distribution. It may be that it was the interest and spirit with which she entered into this work that saved her. Mrs. Thorpe saw that little by little the girl's thoughts were turning from self, away from the dark record with its paralyzing effect, to another's need, another's suffering, another's pleasure. Sometimes among the garments that were sent

to them there would be one that must be altered in some way, or buttons be replaced, or stitches taken. With forethought and tact Mrs. Thorpe kept Margaret employed; kept her hands at works of kindness and her mind filled with thoughts of others.

Among the members of the Benevolent Society there was one who took an active interest in the relief work, one who cared to go among the people and know them. This was Geraldine Vane, who had become a frequent visitor in Mrs. Thorpe's home. The trouble that had come to Geraldine had turned her thoughts from her own favored life and made her more thoughtful of others, and in Mrs. Thorpe she had found a friend such as many a girl craves, a woman older and more mature than herself.

And there was something in Margaret, this passionate girl with her turbulent, troubled past, that appealed to the favored child of chastity and gave her a broader, more sympathetic outlook; gave her that peculiar knowledge the lack of which Mrs. Mayhew had once deplored. The two girls were of about the same age; they had grown to womanhood in the same town, but circumstances had forced their paths far apart. Now the threads of their lives, so different in form and color, were weaving together the pattern of a unique friendship.

Together these two visited a poor home one day, where death had entered. A little child lay dead, and they performed the last services for the little sleeper and prepared her for her rest. Together they stood by the poor little grave and heard the minister's words and saw the earth heaped above the little form. Mrs. Thorpe remained in the home, where another child lay ill. When they returned from the grave they found Dr. Eldrige Jr. ministering to the sick child. Mrs. Thorpe saw the doctor's face grow cold and grave as he greeted Geraldine, and she noted the reserve that the girl drew about herself. Yet, after the greeting was over she saw in the man's eyes a look such as a thirsty traveler might direct toward a stream of water which was beyond his reach. And on Geraldine's face there was a shadow which she had noticed there before, the shadow of a long endurance.

Some days later Mrs. Thorpe met the doctor again. He had finished his round of calls and was on his homeward way when he overtook her near her gate.

"Come in with me and rest a bit before the long climb up the hill," she said.

"Always a long, hard climb to the top of the hill," he replied. And Mrs. Thorpe, seeing that he hesitated to accept her invitation, said:

"Margaret and Geraldine have gone across the Flat to see a sick child; they will not be back for some time, I think."

Then, without further words, he opened the gate for her and accompanied her to the house. She gave him a chair by the fire and stirred up the coals in

the grate, then she removed her wraps and seated herself by the fire. There was no uncertainty in her mind as to why she had asked him to come in; she knew exactly what it was she wished to say to him; but she felt that kind Providence must aid her in finding a way to say it. Since that night, when in the tragic silence a bond of sympathy had sprung up between them, she had learned a fact which she was desirous of communicating to him.

She had a personal liking for this man, and a great admiration for the manner in which he was devoting his time and skill to the relief of the unfortunate. Then, too, she had not forgotten that he had been her friend in the days of her sorest perplexity; and she knew as well as did he that his judgment and prompt action had once saved her reason. And then, when all her skies were black, at that time in her affairs when she knew not whether in all this world she had more than one thing left her, when of all she had believed she had, she was sure of just this one thing–the love of God–at this time she knew that Dr. Eldrige had by his actions, rather than by words or arguments, defended her against the malevolence of his father, and with his quiet scorn had removed the venom from the wild, improbable reports that the older man had circulated, and had maintained before her friends and acquaintances that these unreasonable tales were a disgrace, not to the one lone woman, but to the community which countenanced and repeated them.

When her friends came back to her and life began to flow again on the old level, a word dropped by one or another, a statement or a half confession from friend or casual acquaintance, revealed to Mrs. Thorpe the sincerity of this man's quiet, unostentatious friendship. Now the knowledge came to her that his life had been robbed of its happiness and all its sweetest harmonies had given place to discord. And she longed to tell him that which she knew to be a fact, that it was his own unskilled touch that was producing the discords.

"You are finding plenty of work here this winter, Mrs. Thorpe," he said. "The good you are doing is inestimable."

"An appreciation which might easily be returned, Dr. Eldrige. I know whose name is a household word over all this Flat."

"Yet the lives of these people are hard," he said; "hard and pitiable, for all your efforts and mine."

"But not so hard as they might otherwise be; and as for that, many lives are hard–every life that lives and labors under false impressions is hard."

He glanced at her as though to catch the import of her words, and then he knew that there was something in her thought more than her words signified; but he waited for her to continue.

"A mistaken idea is quite as capable of causing unhappiness as the sternest reality," she said.

"There is something you wish to say to me, Mrs. Thorpe. Why do you disguise your meaning? Can we not be frank with each other?"

"Thank you, Dr. Eldrige; I hope that our friendship is not so poor a thing that it cannot stand a straightforward word. This, then, is what I wish to say: I believe your standards to be excellent and your sense of justice fine and true, yet in your estimate of another you have allowed yourself to be influenced by outside appearances; and while I can see your point of view, yet I know you are condemning as good and true a woman as ever lived, for something she did not know existed."

Mrs. Thorpe saw the man's face harden, his brows contract, and pain, keen and sharp, flash in his eyes; and when he spoke there was severity in his voice.

"She knew the man's character," he said.

Mrs. Thorpe's eyes, level, unflinching, met his.

"What is your authority for your statement?" she asked.

The doctor arose and came over to Mrs. Thorpe's side.

"Mrs. Thorpe," he said, "can it be–can it be possible that she did not know?"

"She did not know, Dr. Eldrige; she has told me that she did not know."

"She has told you–Geraldine has told you?"

"Geraldine has told me that she did not know the man's character; that she never dreamed of the thing that you and I know. Mrs. Mayhew has told me that at one time she tried to enlighten the girl, but she confesses that she did not handle the subject fearlessly as she should. I, myself, told Geraldine the truth as I know it; but it was not until after Max had gone."

The doctor resumed his seat; he rested his elbow on the arm of his chair and covered his face with his hand.

Mrs. Thorpe arose and left the fireside and went over to the window; her eyes wandered far across the frost-covered Flat, but her heart was with the man sitting in silence before her fire–her whole heart was with him–his happiness–his future–his life. Had she made possible for him that condition of life which she knew to be so perfect, so near to Heaven?–knew because it had once been hers. Then she felt his presence near her and turned and faced him. He took her hands in his.

"You are the best friend I have ever known," he said; "a better friend than I deserve. Your loving kindness has made you dear to me–dear as friend can be to friend."

She looked into his face, strong, steadfast beneath the flush of happiness that illumined it.

"If I have been able to help you to your happiness this will make me glad all my life," she said. Then a gleam of humor lighted up her face. "I do not know whether you can ever make your peace with Geraldine or not," she said, "but I

thought it right that you should know the truth."

He flushed with the confusion of a schoolboy.

"But to know the truth," he said; "just to know what you have told me, this has changed the face of all the earth for me. I can never thank you."

"We are even, then," she said, "for I have never tried to thank you for your many kindnesses to me."

Dr. Eldrige left the house as Margaret and Geraldine were seen coming up the street. He lifted his hat to Margaret as he passed her at the gate, and spoke to Geraldine, who was passing on.

"Miss Vane, permit me to join you," he said, and together they ascended the long hill. The setting sun blazed redly upon the church and its lingering rays shed a glory over the man and woman toiling up the long incline. When the summit was reached they paused for a few moments before the glorified church; then they passed on and down on the other side. When they parted at the door of Geraldine's home Dr. Eldrige had received permission to call later in the evening.

When he called again he found Geraldine in the library beside the fire, very much as he had seen her that other night, and his heart smote him for the injustice he had done her. She arose to meet him; he came over to her, and the love of his life, so long held in subjection, now ruled supreme. He held out his arms to her and she came straight into them.

"Geraldine, I have wanted you so–longed so for you."

"And I have loved you always, Allen Eldrige," she said.

The walk home in the winter sunshine brought a glow to Margaret's cheeks, but there was a look of pathos in her dark eyes; the slumbering fire of her spirit was burning there. She assisted Mrs. Thorpe with the evening meal, and in the fruitful silence that often means more than words, they sat together over their biscuit and tea. After supper Margaret drew her chair before the fire and remained silent with her thoughts. Mrs. Thorpe busied herself with her ever-ready work, but she spoke no word to intrude upon the girl's thoughts. When Margaret spoke at last, her voice was quiet and even.

"Mrs. Thorpe," she said, "I cannot allow this to go on. This restful life has meant much to me; it is hard for me to leave it, but I have been idle too long. I must get to work again."

Mrs. Thorpe understood the import of the words, and more; for there was more in tone and manner, in pause and silence, than the words conveyed.

There was little doubt that Margaret was done with the old life. The fierce, consuming struggle was over. The battle against her seeming foes, ever alive, alert, ever ready for open attack or covert sting, had been fought. There is much

that one person can do for another in the struggle toward righteousness; there is the handclasp of comradeship, the countenance of faith, and, more potent than these, there is the force of thought held supreme and infallible. Yet when the test comes, when the enemy, grown strong, or snarling and impatient of delay, or crawling, insidious, in the dim shadows, makes a stand and demands its victim, then forever anew, and always alone, the old battle with the Serpent must be fought. Then the kingdoms of the world and all that they contain must be perceived, measured, weighed, balanced and judged for exactly what they are. The delusions of mortal sense have not lost their subtle deception since the days of the talking snake; and with undeviating certainty comes the time, even as it came to the first man and woman, when choose we must. Yet saving power of the Infinite, though we have lost our Eden, even as our first parents lost theirs, the Kingdom of Heaven is neither visionary nor transitory, but forever remains.

Margaret's Eden was gone; she had stepped out of her purity into darkness and evil, and the Angel with the flaming sword stood forbidding on one hand, and on the other the Beasts that had sought to destroy her. But into her life had come the understanding that there is but one real power–the Power of Eternal Good.

"What is it you have in mind to do, Margaret?" asked Mrs. Thorpe.

"I have not decided upon anything, but I must work; I cannot remain idle."

"You have not been idle, Margaret; and there is work, quantities of it, not remunerative but humane, for both of us here on the Flat."

The firelight rose and fell and fitful shadows lingered about the room, and again there was silence. Margaret was again the first to speak.

"I am not fit for the work here, Mrs. Thorpe, even if I were at liberty to devote myself to it. My past stands between me and the Master's work."

It was the first mention that had been made of the past since that day, months before, when the anguish of her remorse had swept over her like the devouring billows of the sea; when her tears had flowed sufficient, if tears have efficacy, to wash away every crimson stain.

"If he who is without sin casts the first stone, Margaret, you need have no fear of the condemnation of men. Tune up the fine, invisible instrument of your better nature and let the words of the Divine Man ever sound there: 'Neither do I condemn thee.'"

Margaret slipped from her chair, and on her knees buried her face in Mrs. Thorpe's lap; and her form shook and quivered with the passion of her sobs.

"Mrs. Thorpe," she said, "I want my mother–my poor, broken-hearted, forsaken mother–mother–mother–and little, suffering Jamie!"

Mrs. Thorpe laid her hand caressingly on the girl's dark hair, and her own face was wet with tears.

”Tell me about your mother, Margaret. Where is she now, and what is she doing?”

”I have not seen her for over a year. I knew then that she never wished to see my face again–oh, poor mother! But a longing to hear from her came over me, and I asked Geraldine to-day if she had seen her. She told me that mother has given up sewing again, and that she goes out to service wherever she can get a day’s work, and be with Jamie at night.”

”We will go and see her, Margaret, you and I. It will gladden her heart to see her Lassie again, and it will do you good, too. We will go to-morrow, and I am sure we shall find some way to assist her.”

”Now go to your rest, my child, and never doubt that all good belongs to you and yours.”

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. THORPE’S WORK

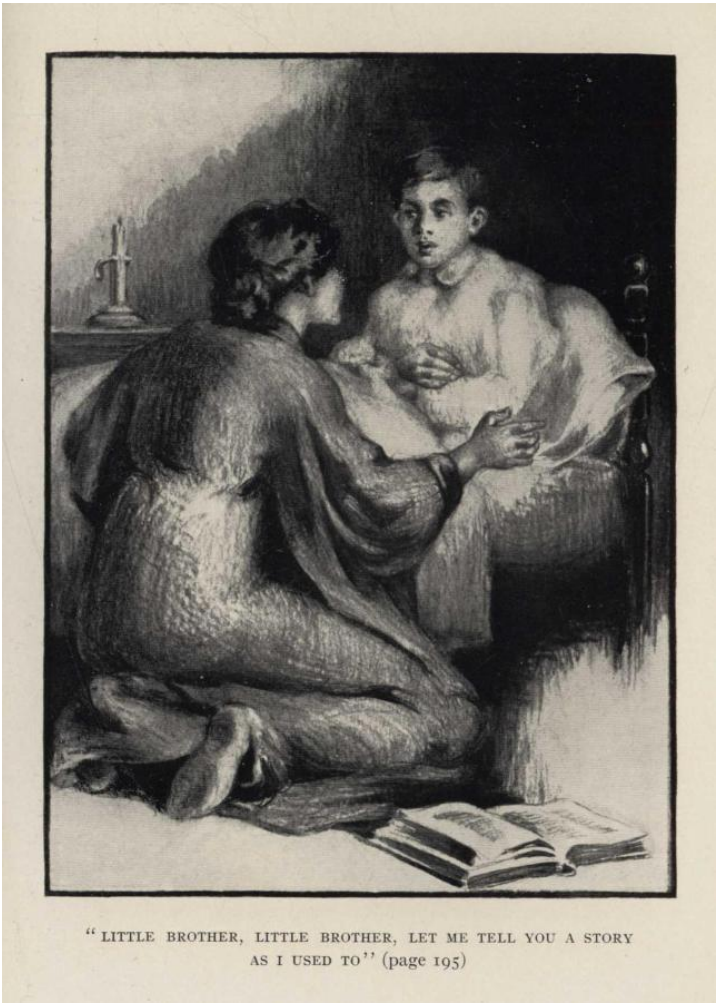
”The work of men–and what is that? Well we may, any of us, know very quickly, on the condition of being wholly ready to do it.

”But many of us are for the most part thinking, not of what we are to do, but of what we are to get; and the best of us are sunk into the sin of Ananias, and it is a mortal one–we want to keep back part of the price; and we continually talk of taking up our cross, as if the only harm in a cross were the weight of it–as if it were only a thing to be carried instead of to be crucified upon.

”’They that are His have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.’

”Does that mean, think you, that in times of national distress, of religious trial, of crises for every interest and hope of humanity–none of you will cease jesting, none will cease idling, none put themselves to any wholesome work, none take so much as a tag of lace off their footmen’s coats to save the world? Or does it rather mean that they are ready to leave houses and lands and kindred–yes, and life if need be? Life! Some of us are ready enough to throw that away, joyless as we have made it. But station in life–how many are ready to quit that? Is it not always the great objection when there is a question of finding something useful to do–we cannot leave our stations in life?”–(John Ruskin.)

Margaret found her mother ill. She had been working beyond her strength, and the exposure and hardship of the work had worn her out; and her eyes, tried



"LITTLE BROTHER, LITTLE BROTHER, LET ME TELL YOU A STORY AS I USED TO" (page 195)

"LITTLE BROTHER, LITTLE BROTHER, LET ME TELL YOU A STORY AS I USED TO" (Page 195)

beyond their strength, had almost failed her. Dr. Eldrige Jr. had told her that the only hope of saving them lay in rest and quiet. But how impossible was this; she had no means, for years she had worked beyond her strength to keep herself from beggary. Jamie, the cripple, was not able to leave his couch without help. Day after day, while his mother worked for the pittance that kept them alive, he lay on his little cot, alone; often in pain, always lonely, counting the hours until his mother's return.

"We will take your mother and Jamie home with us, Margaret," Mrs. Thorpe said. "We can all live together until your mother is well again, and Jamie need not be alone."

Margaret consented to the plan. She understood the power that ruled Mrs. Thorpe's life and prompted her actions. She had looked into her face and found it warm with kindness, and with keener vision she had looked into her heart and found it touched with the feeling of another's infirmities. She knew that this thing that she proposed to do was not an act of charity prompted by the desire to save the harrowing of her own feelings, but because of her loving kindness she desired to do it.

Mrs. McGowan was too much overcome by the restoration of her girl to protest, and Jamie was radiant at the prospect. Mrs. Thorpe called on Mrs. Mayhew and left Margaret alone with her mother for a time. And afterwards Mrs. Mayhew sent her carriage to take Mrs. McGowan and Jamie to Mrs. Thorpe's cottage. Before parting, Mrs. Mayhew pressed a banknote into Mrs. Thorpe's hand.

"You shall not have all the merit there is in the case, you loving soul, you good Samaritan," she said. "Let me share your good deed with you."

The day passed quietly at the cottage. It was mild and clear and the first indications of spring were visible. The great banks of snow were beginning to show reefs along their sides and the atmosphere contained a suggestion of the change of seasons.

Margaret was more like the winsome lass of former years than she had been for many months, and her mother's eyes followed her lovingly. Faith and Hope, immortal sisters, what magic in the tones they cause to vibrate upon the human heart-strings! All the world and all the glory of it is ours when Faith and Hope sing for us their seraphic song.

Margaret took Jamie to her room at bedtime.

"You shall have a little cot near me, my boy," she said. "I am going to be your nurse, and whatever your wants may be it shall be my pleasure to supply them."

The boy smiled happily.

"It is a good world, after all, Margy," he said, when they were alone for the

night. "I have always tried to make mother believe it is a good world. Mother's eyes will get better now, wont they, sister?"

"There is a great Physician who heals all kinds of infirmities, Jamie. He used always to be especially kind to the blind."

"Did He pity them more because it is so very bad not to see?"

"Perhaps that was the reason. He was always very, very kind."

"Have you seen Him, this great man, Margy?"

"I have felt His healing power, little brother."

"Do you suppose–sister–could He make me walk like other boys, and run–oh, Margy, do you suppose I ever can run?"

"There is nothing the great Physician cannot do, Jamie."

Margaret reached for her Bible, one that Mrs. Thorpe had given her. She turned the leaves until she found the place that she desired.

"I am going to read you something that I have read many times, Jamie, and always with thoughts of you in mind:

"'And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.

"'Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms.

"'And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said: "Look on us."

"'And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

"'Then Peter said: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give to thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received their strength.

"'And he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.'"

When the boy saw his sister take up a familiar-looking black book and begin turning the pages, his heart fell within him. He listened while she read of the compassionate act of love, then he covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

"Oh, Margy, I didn't think you would–that's the Bible, Margy, the book mother used to read out of–the one Mr. Thorpe used to preach from–only the Bible, and I thought you meant it really, about the great doctor!"

"Only the Bible!" Margaret looked at the child and saw the disappointment in his face; and through him she seemed to see a great world of suffering people. This frail child, crippled, distorted, disappointed and faithless, seemed to her a symbol of the great suffering overwhelming the world, and his piteous cry an echo of the voice of the world: "Only the Bible!"

The whole world calling for power and turning dully from the great

fountain-head of Power; crying for strength and ignoring that which constitutes all strength; desiring health and clasping close in their embrace the image of disease; pleading for light and joy and peace and turning their eyes resolutely away from the waiting angels standing ready to minister to them. "Only the Bible!"

Margaret knelt by the child's couch and put her arms about him.

"Little brother," she said, "little brother, let me tell you a story, as I used to do, Jamie.

"Once there was a great mine of gold, beautiful, shining gold, layer upon layer of it; and many men mined for it, and some dug in the ground, and a great many people worked day after day, some in one way and some in another, to find it. And many of the people disagreed about the best way to get at it. Some dug about the outer edges of the mine, and when they found a very few grains of gold they went away and told all the people that they had found all the gold there was; that they had explored the whole mine and knew all about it. Others did not dig deep enough to find the great golden layers, but they found a few glittering nuggets of the precious gold, and they went away and told all the people that they had gone to the bottom of the mine and had found all the gold there was there.

"Thousands and thousands of people went to the mine. Some found gold enough to satisfy them, others found only a few shining grains, and many went away disappointed. But the strange part of it was that all those who found any gold at all, even if it was only a tiny spark, believed they had found all there was.

"There were so many different opinions about it, and so many theories and beliefs, that after a time the people began to wonder whether there was really any gold in the mine at all. Some doubted and disbelieved, and a great many walked all about over the mine and had not faith enough to dig beneath the surface.

"Yet the gold was there, Jamie–it is there–a great mine of beautiful, shining gold. There is enough for everyone; yet few have obtained a supply sufficient for their own needs."

The story was finished and there was silence in the room. Then the thin little hand crept into Margaret's.

"Is that the way you think about the Bible, Margy?"

"Yes, Jamie. The Bible is a great mine of Truth; few, if any, have found the whole of it, and many, many have not found sufficient for their needs."

The boy's eyes were grave and serious; a grain of truth had been sown in fertile soil. Then after a time the blue-veined lids fluttered and closed and the boy fell asleep.

The spring opened early; the great drifts of snow yielded beneath the sun's warm rays and miniature rivulets and rills rushed and babbled down the hillside. Bare brown patches of earth showed here and there over the Flat, and unsightly

piles of rubbish and debris were again laid bare; the mantle that had covered them melted and slipped away as though glad to be free.

The children of the Flat, long housed in close, cramped quarters, were hilarious at sight of the brown Mother Earth; and this great-hearted Mother to whom they turned instinctively never fails and never disappoints, but remains always heart to heart with the best in human nature. Poor waifs of children they were, unkept and ill-clad in spite of the efforts that had been made in their behalf.

There was no school on the Flat; the children who went to school climbed the long hill and went over into Edgerly and entered the ranks with the Edgerly fledglings. But many of these children never climbed the long hill, never saw the Christian city and never entered a schoolhouse.

Mrs. Thorpe had long felt that these children should be gathered together and instructed; now the conviction came to her that it must be done.

The fathers of these children wasted their substance in gambling houses and dens of vice, and their mothers eked out a wretched existence as best they could. Young men and women were walking in the footsteps of those who were lost in this wilderness, and the children were following on. Their scrawny limbs must reach out and grow to adult stature and their minds, already befogged by the uncleanliness that had been their portion from birth, were twining about the mean, demoralizing things that lead to destruction.

On the outskirts of the Flat where the Flat proper began to rise in undulations and low hills, from which could be seen stretches of field and upland, there stood an old, weather-beaten house. It was large and square and porches had once run the length of its sides. This old building had once been a summer hotel, or resort, as it was called. Vines that had been planted about it in those days now clambered about the partly fallen columns and endeavored, as Nature often endeavors, to hide from view unsightly blots and blemishes. There may be people who would cavil at using this building because of the various uses to which it had been put since the days of its freshness and popularity.

When the balance of interest became established on the Edgerly side, and the Resort fell off in the patronage of the better class of people, an unsavory fame came to attach itself to the place. We sometimes hear old tales of disembodied spirits who walk through halls and corridors and flit about apartments that they were wont to inhabit in the days of their flesh. But if the crime and suffering, the shame and woe that had existed beneath the roof of this crumbling old Resort had massed itself in one monster shape and walked the streets of the city over the hill, men and women would have cried out for a place to hide themselves, as did the Canaanites when the walls of Jericho fell down.

When gruesome stories regarding the place began to float about, when the scurry of rats and the rattling of blinds and the whistling of the wind through

the crevices came to be known as the wailing and moaning of lost spirits, the place was deserted; and so it had stood for years, ruined and forsaken. But whoever might cavil at the building because of its infamous notoriety of the past, Mrs. Thorpe had no compunctions and no fears. She saw in the deserted rooms beneath the crumbling roof a place for the children, the neglected, untaught children of the Flat. Bit by bit a plan formed in her mind and grew from day to day until, full-fledged, but lacking yet in detail, she laid it before Margaret. And as though while she had been pondering the main plan, Margaret had been arranging the minor parts; now all the way seemed open before them.

The first step was to see the owner of the building and get his consent to use it for a school and kindergarten. The greater part of the Flat district was owned by a descendant of the first Bolton. This man in his younger days had cherished the old hope that the Flat would yet make a prosperous town. There is more money to be made from ownership of a prosperous, respectable town than from a disreputable Flat; but if he could not own a respectable town and make his money in a creditable manner there was but one thing left for him to do, and he put his foot squarely on his honor and did it. He saw that saloons and places of vice were erected to lure the sort of population that must people a wretched Flat.

Mrs. Thorpe called on this man at his business office in Edgerly. He regarded her keenly as she explained to him the use she wished to make of the old Resort.

"So you wish to open a school on the Flat?" he said. The expression on his face was inscrutable and his small eyes were so far sunk into the folds of flesh which surrounded them that it was difficult to know just where his gaze was directed.

"It is a long walk to the Edgerly school for the little children," she said, "and if they do not go when they are small it is difficult to get them started later."

"Exactly. I think I understand, Mrs. Thorpe." The small eyes, sunken in their folds of flesh, were looking for the future recruits for the saloons and places of vice, and the man's mind was busy with a fine calculation as to where they were coming from if these children were to be so taught as to make self-respecting citizens of them.

Sometimes we feel the atmosphere about us to be keen and rare, sometimes fragrant with the breath of flowers and the incense of morning dew; again we are aware that it is charged with a coming storm, or dark with impurities, or heavy with moisture. There are those who are as keenly sensitive to the mental atmosphere about them. Mrs. Thorpe felt strongly that unless her faith in the integrity of her purpose sustained her, her undertaking must fail before it had drawn the first full breath of life. She had stated her purpose and asked the favor

and she felt little inclined to beg or plead for its fulfillment. Yet a battle was fought, keen and sharp. There was no flashing of swords nor pomp nor parade, neither were there words nor argument. It was the play of mind upon mind; penetrating, forceful. It was thought pitted against thought; right demanding its own. The small eyes shifted about uneasily and the man moved ponderously in his chair. When he spoke again his voice expressed his irritability.

"It is not my policy to let my buildings free of charge, Mrs. Thorpe. What consideration can you offer me for the use of this building?"

Mrs. Thorpe realized that she had not fallen into the hands of a philanthropist; she was fully aware that the man was not in sympathy with her plans. Without a moment's hesitation or a word of protest she drew from her purse the banknote that Mrs. Mayhew had pressed upon her, and handed it to him.

"How long may I have the use of the place for that amount?" she asked.

He held the money in his fingers as though testing its quality, and his eyes were fixed upon it, but the struggling soul within him was making him very uncomfortable. How merciless are the voices that contend in the soul of a man! These children of the Flat–was he in any way responsible for them? They were no better than so many rats in their holes–the houses that he provided were miserable holes–the wretched children–but why should he charge this woman rent for an old, deserted building set in a thicket of briars and brambles?

"You may have the building for the summer, if you like," he said aloud.

Mrs. Thorpe's eyes were upon him curiously. She could not tell how it happened, nor when, nor why, but she became aware that this pompous man of wealth had lost his air of condescension and self-conscious superiority.

"And now as I am paying you rent for this property," she said, "you will, I hope, make some needed repairs on the building and perhaps put the ground in a little better shape?"

The small eyes seemed to stand out from the enfolding flesh to look her full in the face. And that which they saw there aroused a smouldering spark of manhood. He turned to his desk and wrote rapidly for a few minutes. He handed her the paper. It was an order for whatever improvements she wished for both building and grounds.

"Present this to my business manager," he said, "and your bills will be paid."

Mrs. Thorpe arose at once and thanked him very sincerely.

"You are very kind," she said, "and I believe that you will never regret this

day's work, liberal though it has been."

CHAPTER XVII
EVERY WHIT WHOLE

Poverty, poverty, the curse of the Flat–the curse of all on whom its blighting influence falls! We have been told that the love of money is the root of all evil. The misuse of money is the most atrocious thing in our civilization; but poverty is a devastating monster that crushes out the better nature of men as relentlessly as any monster of the jungle crushes its victim between its giant jaws.

Nature is prolific, lavish, luxurious; there is neither limit nor measure to her bounty and generosity. The ever-faithful Friend of man withered the fig tree because it failed to bring forth fruit. Everywhere over the wide earth we see provision made for the needs of men. Food, shelter and clothing the world does not lack. Nature's storehouses circle the globe, and they are never empty. Vast, measureless seedbeds, watered and warmed from Heaven, impelled by an unseen Power, are growing and producing the seasons through. Forests of fruit trees yielding their succulent, sweet-flavored fruit; oceans of grain fields, whose length and breadth the eye cannot measure–to feed the human race. Cotton, wool and hemp and the patient spinning of the silk-worm–to clothe the children of men; quarries of stone and forests of wood to provide shelter from sun and storm. Let us never, even in our weakest, most irreverent moments, voice a protest against the great and generous Giver of this boundless, countless wealth because of the disposition men have made of it.

Some day, that bright, blessed day that even now is dawning, men will not keep and hoard that for which they have no need, and for the lack of which a fellow man perishes and dies. When this day dawns no man will desire more of this world's goods than he can use and enjoy. Men will not seat themselves at a feast and stuff and feed until their bodies distend and their eyes start from their sockets while the wail of hungry children echoes in the land.

The monster, cruel, relentless, immovable, that Mrs. Thorpe found everywhere on the Flat was Poverty. This monster may spring from a gentle mother, more sinned against than sinning, but it is sired by Ignorance and the stamp upon its forehead is Vice.

Mrs. Thorpe visited in these poor, barren homes; she became acquainted

with the people and was a friend to all, and with tact and patience she presented to them the desirability of the school that she was about to open.

The boys, profane, reared in immorality, knew her and in their boyish hearts admired her. When she called upon them and solicited their aid they responded readily, and devastating war was waged upon the briers and brambles that cumbered the soil around the old Resort. And while the ground that she planned for flower beds and vegetable gardens yielded up its unprofitable growth and was made ready for the plowman's steel the boys were receiving Nature's best discipline, the tug and sweat of honest work.

A workman skilled with tools, but who had abandoned his trade for the gambler's fortunes, was called upon and pressed into service to mend the broken roof and place again the crumbling columns. And when this work was finished the man, feeling again the spirit of manhood revived by honest work, went over into Edgerly and obtained steady employment; and his wife and children awoke to a new appreciation of life. The wife took a lot of the ground that lay back of the old Resort and vied with her neighbors in raising her beds of vegetables–tender lettuce, green peas and cucumbers.

As the summer wore on, the old Resort, robbed of its superstitions and the evil hold its uncanny tales had had upon the minds of the people, stood forth erect in the midst of cultivated grounds. The babble and chatter of children's voices echoed through it and exorcised the last remaining trace of evil that may have lingered there.

It had been somewhat difficult to induce the women whose children attended the school to plant and care for the garden lots, and their somewhat reluctant consent to do this was given more as a favor to Mrs. Thorpe than from any interest in the work. But he who cultivates Nature becomes interested in spite of himself. And as the brown seeds quickened and sent forth their little flame of life and developed into vigorous plants, each after its kind, the flame of Truth and Immortality in the hearts of the workers revived and grew and expanded.

The goddess Ceres vied with the Bacchus of the Flat and in a measure was the winner. In the cool of the summer evenings, when the day was slipping away and the earth prepared her bath of cooling dew, men, vicious-faced and with bloodshot eyes and unkept hair and beards, had been wont to take themselves to the dens of vice and quaff the cup in which the hissing serpent lurks; but now there was another attraction on the Flat. The owners of the garden lots would gather around the old Resort in the evenings to dig and weed and hoe, and the men fell into the way of strolling over to view the work of their wives' hands, and before the summer was over there was not a place on the Flat more popular than this. And sometimes a man whose heart was not all bad would take the rake and hoe and assist in the work. And then there were some whose memories took

them back to boyhood days on the old farm, before the Evil One came with his false promises of pleasure.

Sometimes Mrs. Thorpe would induce the parents to come into the schoolroom and she would show them the work that their children were doing; and sometimes she would talk to the mothers about the care and management of their children and of their homes, and other subjects of interest; and then sometimes in passing their houses she would see that a window had been cleaned and a curtain, or perhaps a clean newspaper answering the place of a curtain, had been put up; or perhaps she would observe that some rubbish pile had been removed, or that a walk had been cleaned, and as she noticed these small improvements she felt that she had received her reward, and went on her way with strengthened purpose.

Mrs. McGowan so far recovered her health and her eyesight that she was able to take the greater share of the household cares upon herself, thus leaving Mrs. Thorpe and Margaret free to devote their time to the school. A strange school it was; there were no hard and fast rules; no one was compelled or commanded, but he who denies that love has power to rule denies because he has not love in his heart and is a stranger to its transfiguring power. It was, perhaps, more of a community of interest than a well-regulated school, but its influence was unmistakable.

Little children were amused and instructed and taught to be kind to each other. There were classes at regular hours that were given instruction from the standard text-books. Boys and girls who had never been to school and who were ashamed to go to Edgerly now, came here to learn to read and write. Girls brought their sewing and were given instruction in the art of cutting and making garments. Housewives were encouraged to come in and learn to cook. Daily it was impressed upon Mrs. Thorpe's mind that the harvest was ripe but the laborers were few. She did each day all that the limit of her strength allowed, but she carried no burdens and permitted herself no load of care. The work was hers, her heart and soul were in it; it strengthened her and put heart and zest into her life.

In the evening after her day's work was done she often spent an hour with Jamie, teaching and amusing him. She felt strangely drawn to the unfortunate child, and often talked to him about her work and related to him any pleasing incident that occurred during the day.

The boy had never attempted to walk, had never stood upon his feet. Dr. Eldrige Jr. had taken a special interest in him and had done much toward removing his physical deformity and freeing him from pain. He still had hopes that continued treatment would enable him to walk, but all his efforts to get him on his feet had so far proved futile.

Mrs. Thorpe was sitting in the gloaming one evening talking to the boy. He sat in his invalid's chair facing a flaming, fire-like cloud, the trailing garment of the setting sun.

"Please sing for me to-night, Mrs. Thorpe," he said. "I love to hear you sing while I sit here and watch the glory cloud fade out of the sky."

Mrs. Thorpe went to the piano that had been hers from the days of her girlhood and let her hands wander over the keys, recalling snatches of song and old, half-forgotten melodies.

Mrs. McGowan came into the room and seated herself in the easy chair that had been set apart for her. She leaned her head back against the cushion and closed her eyes, and a sense of peace and blessing welled up in her heart. She had seen many hard places in life and their influence had lingered with her. But to-night she had a peculiar feeling as of all her cares rolling from her and only that which was glad and good remained, and her spirit seemed light and free as in the days of her young womanhood, before care and trouble called her.

Mrs. Thorpe ceased the desultory snatches of song and melody and, turning the leaves of her song-book, she came to a song especially dear to her. Her voice was sweet and low, and when she sang her soul poured forth the joy of her spirit, and all that stood between her and her heart's happiness seemed to recede and slip away from her.

The low, sweet strains of the instrument rose and fell in pleasing cadence, and the tender, pleading voice floated out on the soft evening air.

Still, still with Thee, when purple morning breaketh,
When the tired waketh, and the shadows flee,
Fairer than morning, lovelier than the daylight,
Dawns the sweet consciousness, I am with Thee.

The words came to Mrs. McGowan like a confirmation of that which her heart had felt, and she seemed to feel the ever presence of infinite Love. An intensity of feeling swept over her, an ecstasy of peace and joy that seemed almost pain, so sure and keen it was. She did not move nor stir; she felt that she scarcely breathed.

Margaret, looking at her mother, saw the glory of the sunset reflected on her quiet face. How peaceful and quiet it was; how strangely still, as though it was the glory divine that rested there.

With an indescribable feeling in her heart, half worship, half wonder, she turned instinctively to Jamie and saw that his eyes had left the flaming west and were fixed upon Mrs. Thorpe's face. His lips were parted, his eyes aglow, his

thin, white face eager with unspoken desire, and–was it the sunset that touched his yellow curls, transforming them into a crown of light?

Alone with Thee, amid the seeming shadows,
The solemn hush of being newly born,
Alone with Thee, in breathless adoration,
In the calm dew and freshness of the morn.

Margaret, watching the boy, felt her awe and wonder growing upon her. His slight body inclined forward as though in waiting expectation. A warm glow had come to his cheeks and there was a strange light in his eyes.

And still the low, sweet words flowed on.

So shall it ever be in that bright morning,
When Divine sense bids ev'ry shadow flee,
And in that hour fairer than daylight dawning,
Remains the glorious thought I am with Thee.

Quietly, without seeming effort, the boy slid from his chair and, steadily, erect, he crossed the room and stood by Mrs. Thorpe's side. The red glory encircled him and the pleading melody seemed to fold him about, hold and sustain him.

Margaret, as though fearful that she was looking upon something too sacred for mortal vision, covered her face with her hands and a quivering sob fell from her lips.

Mrs. McGowan sat erect, and instantly her eyes sought the boy's chair; she arose in consternation. Then in the waning red light she saw him standing by Mrs. Thorpe's side. A great trembling seized her; but amid her confusion of thought, before words came to her, she was conscious that a prescience of this thing that had happened had been with her since she first came into the room.

"Jamie!" she cried, "oh, Jamie, Jamie!" She was by his side, her arms about him. "My child, my child! That I have lived to see the goodness of the Lord! That I have lived to see this blessed day!"

The song had ended, and with a quivering note the music ceased. Mrs. Thorpe turned and confronted the mother and child and at once comprehended the meaning of what she saw.

"Christ is the Healer Divine!" she cried, and she kissed the boy's white brow and clustering curls.

Margaret knelt beside them, and her tears flowed unrestrained. "Little

brother, little brother!" she said, "cured by the great Physician!"

The boy threw his arms about her neck. "I can walk, Margy, I can walk! But why do you cry, Margy?–mother, Mrs. Thorpe–you are not surprised–you believed–the Lord has promised–don't you know? And I believed–I truly did believe!"

CHAPTER XVIII
THE HEART'S DESIRE

At the approach of cold weather Mrs. Thorpe was obliged to close the school, but she and Margaret worked among the people during the winter and were rewarded by the fact that there was less suffering and sickness than there had been the year before.

Some of the older boys and girls came to Mrs. Thorpe's cottage for instruction, and prepared to enter the Edgerly school in the spring. The classes in sewing and cooking were also continued, although necessarily on a reduced scale.

In the spring when the school was again opened there was no difficulty in arousing interest and enthusiasm. The garden lots were in great demand, and the children begged for a corner for flowers. The vines that had been cared for and trained the year before now climbed about the posts and columns and transformed the old Resort into a mass of greenery and rioting bloom.

The sweet summer days drew on with golden sunshine and lavish promise, and the Flat received something of Nature's benediction. Throughout the summer Mrs. Thorpe and Margaret continued their work. Day by day they bound the sheaves; day by day they saw dear smiles break on childish faces and light dawn where darkness had reigned before.

Yet there were times when the magnitude of the work arose before Mrs. Thorpe and appeared to her like a Red sea in her path. The ignorance and immorality, the poverty and the want, the small, poorly built homes and lack of order and law massed themselves into a rolling sea which she could see no way around and no way through unless the Lord of Hosts should cleave the waters for her. But with characteristic faith she resolved that should the command ever come to her "To lift up thy rod and stretch out thine hand over the sea and divide it," she would be ready to obey. And for her there was consolation in the thought

that her work had come to her with no uncertain appeal; she had sought it and it had found her. She loved it with her heart and soul, this work of hers, and stripped of its gruesome exterior, beneath the sackcloth of poverty and misfortune, the loving, throbbing heart of it responded to her.

The long summer days slipped by and the frost of autumn was again in the air. Red and yellow leaves fluttered down from the trees, sported with the winds, and lay in garlands along the streets and pathways. Mrs. Thorpe and Margaret left the school together at the close of one blue, balmy day; but at the gate they parted.

"I shall not go directly home," Margaret said. "I am going for a walk, over to Cedar Brook, perhaps; I shall be back before dark."

"Very well, my dear," Mrs. Thorpe replied. "The walk will do you good, no doubt." She stood for a minute at the gate and watched the retreating figure. Many times of late she had seen the fire of the girl's spirit leap into the dark eyes; and all that day her heart had ached at the sight of the restless pain in the thin, dark face. Was the turbulent nature warring again?–the restlessness of her spirit not yet subdued?

"Keep my girl, dear God, keep my girl," she murmured, as she turned in at the gate. "Keep my dear, dear girl."

A man, gaunt and worn, with signs of recent illness upon his face, stepped out of one of the prosperous-looking, well-kept homes of Edgerly. His step was not so elastic as it once had been, but the face had lost none of its alertness, nor the eyes their keenness. He passed the Mayhew house; how familiar it looked. Not a tree or shrub seemed changed; he noticed the sweet-brier by the library window, and in fancy he could hear it tapping against the window-pane. Farther out he passed the home of Dr. Eldrige and saw the old doctor in an invalid's chair on the porch. He had heard the harrowing story of the old man's affliction, also some gruesome reports concerning it. That blood and froth oozed from his nostrils and mouth during his attacks, which contained a virus that poisoned all flesh that came in contact with it was supposed to be a fact; but that this poison exuded continually from his body was believed by most people to be an exaggeration of the case.

The next house was the home of Dr. Eldrige Jr. This was a cottage less pretentious than the house where the old doctor lived; but there were shrubs and flowers in the yard; the grass was well kept and vines grew over the door. A woman, partly screened by the greenery, was sitting on the porch rocking back and forth in a wicker chair, a woman with golden hair coiled about her head and soft, clustering curls about her face. And tenderly in her arms she was cradling a wee bit of a rosy child. Perhaps she was crooning a lullaby; the little one put out

his hand, a little roseleaf hand, and the mother bent her head and laid her lips upon it.

The man, in passing, saw the mother and child, and his face lighted with a smile. During his absence his friends had kept him informed about the happenings at home. He knew that the woman with the crown of golden hair was married; his sister had written him about it at the time, and he remembered now that the news had brought him no sadness and no regret, but that in his heart he had been glad that it was so. And as he went on his way his thoughts went back to that far-away foreign land, to an island of the sea where he had been when this letter of his sister's reached him. For weeks he, with his regiment, had been in the deep heart of a forest and sometimes there were marshes to cross and streams to ford and their beds at night was the damp, black ground. In fancy it all came back to him now: the dusky natives with their scant raiment; the towering forests with their weird majesty, and the call and cry of the wild creatures that inhabited them; the smell of the reeking mould, where year after year the decaying mass of vegetation had not been disturbed; the reedy marshes where all through the lonesome nights the wind sighed and moaned in the long marsh grass.

And there in that sun-kissed, tropical land, where the stars came out at night, calm and familiar as in his native land, as he stretched his weary limbs on his blanket for his night's repose, sometimes a cool hand would be laid on his brow and a sense of peace and rest would steal over him, and then, sometimes, in the mist and clinging darkness a face would appear before his vision, and it was not the fair face of the woman with the shining golden hair, but a dark, slender face with great, dark eyes burning into his soul; pain and pleading and the anguish of a woman's heart were written there. And once on a misty night, when the darkness was thick and heavy with moisture and all the moaning forest was dripping wet, a white circle was outlined in the blackness and a slight, supple form glided close to him and knelt beside him in the mist and dripping rain; the thin fingers that he remembered so well were clasped in anguish and the face was wet as the dripping foliage about him–wet with a woman's tears. All the heart within him rose in anguish to meet her, and he would have given his life and soul to take her in his arms and soothe the remorse and despair from her anguished face; but when he put out his hand to touch her, a great fear came over her and she recoiled from him and shrank and shuddered in the darkness and was gone.

"Margaret!" he cried, and his heart broke within him–"Margaret!" The cry sounded dully through the heavy silence and a comrade partly awoke and asked him why he was moaning and calling in the night.

The man, with his thoughts still partly in the past and partly on the familiar objects about him, passed on through the streets of Edgerly and slowly, as

one who toils, he climbed the incline up to the church. He seated himself on the church steps to rest for a time, and then perhaps he would go back–or perhaps–but his thoughts again became reminiscent; the spirit of the past was with him. His mind went over the long weeks spent in the hospital, where the doctors had pronounced his case hopeless and the nurses believed that he must die. Long, weary days he had lain on his bed of pain, and in his heart waged open rebellion against the power that held him there; then for many, many days he lay, too weak to struggle, too helpless to care. Down into the dark valley where the air was damp and dank, where gruesome things, weird and fantastic, glided noiselessly among the shadows–shadows ever growing deeper, darker, closer–down in the dark valley he left the last remnant of his vaunted power and felt himself a child–just a child–with the Everlasting Arms, the abiding, sustaining force of the universe, about him. And like a gnarled and cankered plant that the gardener cuts to the root that it may put forth a more vigorous and healthful growth, little by little he came again into the sunshine, and a new heaven and a new earth opened before him.

The great purpose of God is absolute in the universe; it reaches out, covers and enfolds the purposes of man as the shades of night cover and enfold the earth at eventide. All the struggling, sin-tossed creatures of earth are folded tenderly close to the great heart of God; yet our vain imaginings and foolish desires often take us a long and weary way, over mountains and vale and sea, before we lift up our eyes and know that God is love. When passion has burned itself out, when lust is dead, when the human is crucified and laid in the grave to rise again divine; when all the mocking demons of false belief and evil thought are rebuked and sent cowering from before our consciousness, then the soul comes into its own and the Kingdom of Heaven is ours.

Margaret was seated on a ledge of rock by the brook. Her eyes were strained far off to the dim blue hills in the distance; her heart was torn with restless pain, and her life's hunger was in her face, but her soul was anchored safe and secure.

"Expiation!" she murmured. "Dear God, only keep me from day to day–keep me–keep your child." Softly over her memory floated a fragment of the words that Mrs. Thorpe had read that morning: "He that keeps thee will not slumber."

The brook babbled at her feet and the curious droning voices of the woodland came to her. Every sense was alive; the wild seclusion of the place appealed to the turbulent passion within her, its peace and beauty enthralled her.

"Give unto me the strength of the towering forest pines," she whispered, "the humility of the woodland flowers, the steadfastness of the mist-hung hills."

A squirrel, intent upon his winter's store, was making little journeys from an acorn-filled treetop to his home at the tree's gnarled root; from the woods came the muffled drumming of a partridge. The call of a bird-note, faint in the distance, the nearby chirp of a cricket and the whispering of the wind in the treetops mingled with the low, vague sounds of the forest and blended into a symphony soft and sweet, then weird and haunting, as the falling of a leaf or the snapping of a twig broke the harmony.

The girl, with her eyes on the far-away hills, was bound by the spell of it all; yet to her finer sense there was wafted from the soft, thrilling melody and the fluttering breath of the forest a knowledge, vague, evanescent, yet so quickening and compelling that the past, the future, the present–life itself–trembled before it. A shower of leaves scattered by the provident squirrel fell at her feet; a twig snapped sharply and there was a rustling sound in the path beside her. But she did not move nor stir, and her eyes did not leave the hilltops–but she knew–she could not fail to know his presence, and when he came to her side, and stood close beside her, she shrank and shuddered, and yet her heart cried out with the exquisite pain of it.

"Margaret," he said, "Margaret, I have come over land and across seas. Have you no welcome for me? No word nor look?"

He had left the church and passed through the crooked, unkept street of the Flat and on past the old Resort out to Cedar Brook. Exhausted with his long walk, he seated himself on the ledge of rock. Margaret sank down on the soft, clinging moss beside the rock and buried her face in her hands.

"Have you no word for me, Margaret? After all this time, not one word for me?" But he did not touch her; he dared not lay his hand on her. And she made no reply nor raised her face to his until she had gained complete control of herself; then she arose and stood before him.

He had heard of her reformation; he expected to find her changed, but he was not prepared for that which had had its birth and growth since he last saw her; and in this first moment of their meeting no other characteristic seemed so patent to him. He regarded her in silence. Here was the girl that he had known, the passionate, turbulent Margaret, but blended with her, permeating her personality, guarding and protecting her, was this other self–the ideal enshrined in his heart. Whence had she obtained this unnamable quality which, unvoiced and without conscious effort, aroused the reverence in his manhood? Always before he had controlled her, dominated her, often against her will by his superior force; now her personality, her selfhood stood out before him, silent yet indomitable, subtle, intangible, yet absolute. Reverently he extended his hand to her, and his voice was deep with pleading.

"Margaret, speak to me, all unworthy though I am to hear your voice–trust

me, though I did so abuse your girlish trust–forgive me, forgive me and let me prove myself to you."

She took his proffered hand and looked unfalteringly into his eyes.

"You should not take all the blame," she said. "I, too, need to be forgiven."

He held her hand between his palms, then raised it to his lips.

"Margaret," he said, "you are the only woman I have ever loved."

"Max!" The word fell from her lips like a sob. "Max!"

He drew her to him and kissed the dark hair where it lay smooth against her forehead.

"Will you be my wife, Margaret, my loved and honored wife?"

Her eyes scanned his face; not a line of pain, not a mark of suffering escaped her. All his struggles, his rebellion, his victories, and all the soul within him lay bare before her deep-seeing eyes. She laid her hand on his face, that dear face so intense and strong, and wondered keenly in how many ages, how many worlds, how many lives, she had known him.

The squirrel, disturbed by their presence, stopped midway on the tree trunk and chattered noisily; again the drumming of the partridge and the woodland voices blended, now rich and full in a glad song of triumph, praise, victory.

CHAPTER XIX

"WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?"

Max and Margaret were quietly married in Mrs. Thorpe's little parlor. They made their home in a comfortable, roomy cottage which Max erected on the outskirts of the Flat not far from the old Resort.

Now, as never before, Max devoted himself to his business affairs and took stock of the amount of his wealth. He was part owner of a manufacturing plant in Edgerly, and before the year was out he had sold his interest and announced his intention of building a factory on the Flat. From the man Bolton he obtained possession of the Flat district. To tear down the old, decaying buildings, to clear the ground of rubbish and lay off straight, square lots and build comfortable cottages was no small task; but all this was accomplished while the new factory was building. In planning and executing this great amount of work Max found Mrs. Thorpe's counsel and advice invaluable. There were many interests to be considered and some obstacles to be overcome, and her knowledge of the work and

acquaintance with the people helped him to plan wisely and to use judgment and discretion in his work.

He called at the school for Margaret one evening at the close of her day's work, and lingered for a talk with Mrs. Thorpe.

"I think we shall be able to have a regular school here another year," he said.

"I am sure all good things will come to the people here in time," she said. "What a world ours would be if every such place as this Flat had such a friend as you, Max."

"The work is yours, Mrs. Thorpe; you must know that it is all yours," he replied; and then after a moment's silence he continued: "There are emotions that words seem to degrade, this is why I have never attempted to put into words my admiration for what you have done for the people on this Flat, nor my gratitude for what you have done for me. But, after all, it is not protestations, desires nor words, but the way he lives his life that proves a man. My work among these people, my life devoted to the alleviation of needy humanity, these must be my spokesmen, to you first, Mrs. Thorpe, and to my fellow men; these must testify to the transformation of the man, and stand as a monument to his faith, a thank-offering to his God."

Mrs. Thorpe checked the sudden tears that sprang to her eyes. Years before she had believed that it was service that was demanded of her, and she had besought the Lord that she might see the fruit of her endeavor, the harvest of her labor; that a visible sign might be given her. Dare she doubt that her prayer was answered, or hesitate to recognize the answer? Dare she turn her eyes from this Infinite love, or escape this deluge of blessing, even though it overwhelmed and overpowered her? She thought of the children of Israel, how they had besought Moses to veil his face after he had talked with God. Was she, too, unable to bear the brightness of the light? Must she beseech the Lord to again draw the veil between her and His kingdom that the ecstasy of answered prayer might not become too great for her soul to bear?

Margaret, who had been assisting a girl who had lingered over her task, now crossed the room and joined them.

"Come with us to tea, Mrs. Thorpe," she urged. "We love to have you with us. Mother and Jamie will expect you to-night, I am sure."

"Yes, come with us, sister," added Max. "We are always wishing for your presence in our home."

"Very well," Mrs. Thorpe replied, "your hospitality is sweet to me."

After the evening meal was over they sat out on the broad cottage porch and discussed various aspects of their work. From adjoining cottages could be heard the chatter and laughter of children's voices. The air was sweet with the scent of flowers; the sun was nearing the horizon and its radiance lay over the

Flat, no longer the unlovely Flat, but a collection of comfortable homes whose inmates, sure of employment and, more than this, sure of justice and equity, had in a measure fallen into harmony with the forces that make for righteousness.

The air of peace and quiet that had fallen over the little group on the porch was broken by the arrival of a carriage at the gate. Dr. Eldrige assisted his wife to alight, and Margaret and Max went down the walk to meet them. There was cordial frankness in their greeting, sincere and whole-hearted. As they neared the steps Mrs. Thorpe came forward, and after greeting Geraldine, stooped and put her arms about the child; he put his chubby arms close about her neck and laid his soft, pink cheek against her face. How dear to her heart was the love of this child!

The two men walked leisurely up to the house; Geraldine, in a simple white gown that caused her face with the golden hair above it to appear like the petals of some rare-tinted flower, stood against the dark outline of vines that screened the porch. All that her girlhood promised had blossomed into womanhood; maternity had developed all that was best and noblest in her.

From a nearby cottage a ripple of childish laughter floated out on the evening air. Geraldine turned to her companions.

"Does earth contain sweeter music than the laugh of a child?" she said. "I often think that the transformation of this Flat is more wonderful than any of the fairy tales that enchanted our childhood."

"It is a demonstration of the brotherhood of man, almost beyond belief," Dr. Eldrige replied.

"To do what lies before us, just that which comes to our hand to do, to be true to the best within us, is not so remarkable a thing to do," Max replied, and his eyes met Geraldine's honestly. "It is in the results that the wonder lies."

After a time the two men fell into a discussion of ways and means concerning both the health and morals of the laborers on the Flat, and Margaret took Geraldine to see her garden. Mrs. Thorpe accompanied them, and Mrs. McGowan and Jamie joined them. The child, with Jamie for an escort, played about the garden paths and filled his hands with flowers, and Margaret and her companions made themselves comfortable on a rustic garden seat.

Margaret had a gift of understanding that made it possible for her to read her husband's wishes and to know his needs; now she knew that he would join them, unless for some reason he wished to be alone with his friend. The loyal friendship of Dr. Eldrige Jr., freely given, had, she knew, been meat and drink to Max, and had been invaluable to him in his work.

After the matter concerning the work on the Flat was disposed of, the two men continued their talk.

"Old Edgerly is still in throes of incredulity over your operations on this

side of the hill, Max," the doctor said.

"Yes, I have heard her groanings from afar; queer why the old town should suffer so!"

"Yes, it is strange; father has been roaring like a lion, but he has taken to silence, absolute silence!"

Max smiled at thought of the stormy old man reduced to silence.

"I had not supposed it was so bad as that," he said.

There was the best of comradeship between the two men, although little had been said concerning the past. Events had run their course in such a manner that Dr. Eldrige Jr. felt that he had no grievance to cherish; and however slow one might be to accept the reformation in Max Morrison's character, the transformation in his life and work was patent to all.

Max leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands back of his head.

"It's a queer world we live in, doctor," he said, "a queer old world."

Dr. Eldrige Jr. regarded him in silence; he was not quite sure of Max's attitude toward conditions, as he had found them since his return to his native land, and he had no desire to probe an old wound nor to inflict a new one. And, at best, Dr. Eldrige was a man of few words.

"I used to live over in Edgerly," Max continued, ignoring the doctor's silence, "over in Christian Edgerly. I had, I think, the heart of a man in me, yet I was a villain–you know what I was–I ought to have been shot, shot like a cur–yet Edgerly favored me, sought and pampered me. But now that I have put my hand to an honest work–to help the needy, to feed and clothe the poor–the good old town has at least every other day a new motive, each more sinister than the other, to impute to my actions." He sprang to his feet and walked the length of the porch and back. "Eldrige," he said, "I had thought never to impose on your friendship by bringing up the past; but I feel to-night as though I may break my good resolutions."

"Do not be afraid of imposing on my friendship, Max; speak of the past as freely as you like. You know me–we know each other."

"You know my temperament, Eldrige; I have always been a devil of a fellow when aroused; and the attitude of those good people over there beyond the hill arouses me a bit. There is a little woman here on the Flat that chides me for this attitude, and tells me that I am wasting good strength fighting windmills. But I have not arrived at a place where I can view other people's unaccountable conduct and shortcomings in the calm, unruffled manner in which Mrs. Thorpe views them."

"I find no difficulty in seeing Mrs. Thorpe's viewpoint, Max. She proves by her daily life and work that she is a follower of the one perfect Man; she heals the sick and reforms the sinner through her understanding of the Divine Law. This,

to me, seems simple and natural, and she allows nothing to fret or trouble her. But I am going to be perfectly frank with you, and tell you that I cannot so readily understand your attitude. I think I have never deluded myself into believing that I understand you, Max; a man who has it in him to do the work that you are doing here on this Flat, aroused by adverse criticism–why man–"

"There, Eldrige, stop, please! I thought you understood me better than that. Why, man, criticism tones me up–puts me in good working order; antagonism exhilarates me, persecution inspires me. But what of those who criticise, antagonize and persecute? There's the rub–that's what arouses me. Why should professing Christian people hold up their hands and shout themselves hoarse because some fellow does an act of kindness to his fellow men? It's not criticism that I care for, but it does arouse the very devil in me to see Christian people stand in wide-eyed, open-mouthed astonishment before a Christian deed. You see, I have not the religion that Mrs. Thorpe has; in fact, I am not at all sure that I have any religion whatever. I think it possible, and I may say that I really hope it possible that I may some day come into the scientific understanding of life that Mrs. Thorpe has attained; but at present I am trying only to do the square thing by my fellow men."

The doctor looked him over deliberately.

"If ever I am able to understand the man you are, Max, I think it will be when I am a better man myself than I am now. You may not call yourself a religious man, but there is a force back of your life, a force of some kind that I did not know that the universe contained; there is some secret here that I have not been able to find out."

"I don't agree with you there, Eldrige; there's no secret about it, there's nothing hidden nor concealed; all is open and clear as the sun in mid-heaven. The trouble is our eyes are holden, we are blind and dumb and dead–I wish I could make you see things from my viewpoint–there are a thousand things I would tell you if I could."

Max was not looking at the doctor now; his eyes were far away upon the distant horizon. "I would tell you something of the influence of my early bringing up," he said, "a pampered child of wealth; something of the force of Christianity, as it was taught and lived in my home; something of the time when I passed from boyhood to manhood, idle, with more money than I could spend–honestly; something of the day when I first looked into the eyes of the woman I love–innocent, beseeching–"

He arose again and walked back and forth across the porch.

"I can't do it, Eldrige–I've no words to make you understand," he said, "you who have lived a clean life, you who have always worked–" He drew his chair up near to the doctor and sat down again. "I really think," he said, in a quieter tone,

"that during that period of my life I was not so much bad as blind and dead–the man in me had never been born; I was a clod, a lump of clay, with the instincts of the beast. Our civilization! Our Christianity!–Damn!–I'll try not to be profane, doctor. But this is why I say I am not a religious man; I tell you I had as soon trust the chances of the brownest skinned, dumb beast of a man that I knew on those far islands of the sea as the chances of the son of the average wealthy Christian parents in this Christian land.

"I am not going to be profane, not if I can help it, and I am not going to allow myself to become unduly excited, but the rashest language that our vocabulary contains could not portray the fires of hell that burned within me when I left my native land, beaten and broken. I was furious–furious because I had missed the heart and center of life–why should I have missed it? I desired the beautiful, satisfying things of life; I had the base and unclean; and I was furious with myself, my family, society–the whole world."

There was silence for a few moments. The doctor said nothing; then Max spoke again: "I know, Eldrige, and you know, that the truth and purity in your wife's heart was the whip and scourge that drove me to my manhood."

The doctor extended his hand, and met Max's hand in a firm, keen clasp.

"When I found that truth and purity, uprightness and a clean soul are the real gems of life, the beautiful things, the lasting and abiding and satisfying things, I wanted them for myself," Max continued, "and no fires of hell can ever burn and sear as did the belief that I had lost them irrevocably; that through the conduct that my family had ignored and society had condoned I had with my own hand shut myself off from them forever. I think my indignation was directed not so much at myself as at the civilized world, the society, church, and family that had offered no resistance and put no check on my journey to perdition. But when I came back to my native land I had had some experiences that made another man of me. When a man goes down into the valley and stands on the border he sees things with a clearer vision. I had no desire then to shift the responsibility of my misspent life upon either people or institutions. I think I saw more clearly, perhaps, than I had before the faults and weaknesses in our institutions, and the lack of moral stamina in those who take upon themselves the training of the young; but these were not the things that counted with me then, not the things I cared about. No, I tell you I was face to face with my own soul then, and nothing else counted! The inexorability of it! There was no way to escape, no way to shift or turn, no excuses, no deceits, no subterfuges. Absolute, immovable Justice is the most grim-faced thing that a man can meet. It was not until after I had met this grim fellow, and laid my black life bare before him, asking nothing, deserving nothing, that any peace came to me. But after this I knew–I cannot tell you how I knew–but the knowledge came to me that over this

sinning and suffering life there lies the great Life, tender, compassionate Love.

"When I came back to this Flat and found Margaret, and looked into her face, and saw the transformation there, then I knew that there is a God, and to know this, that there is a God, is to know that the whole duty, pleasure and profit of man is to serve Him by serving his fellow men, and this, without any meeting-house religion whatever, is what I have been trying to do.

"My mother and sister go every Sunday and worship in the beautiful church yonder on the hill. They have never recognized my wife, although my mother knows, as God knows, that the guilt was mine more than it was Margaret's. My mother is a Christian woman, according to accepted standards, and far be it from me to reproach or judge her, but the son that she reared had a long way to go and a hard battle to fight before he could see and know the purity of an honest love, the dignity of a human soul, whether it be in a high place or a lowly one. I have come to the conclusion that what we call the Christian world has in its social code and accepted standards of respectability a law of its own, the spirit of which never sprang from inspiration; a law that binds and holds absolutely, as the letter of the old Jewish law held the priests and scribes who cried 'Crucify, crucify the Truth unless it comes in the style and manner that we have marked out for its coming.' The simple, undressed truth is ignored, put aside and kept in the background; the so-called church of Christ keeps it there.

"You know, Eldrige, and I know, and every man in the world to-day knows, that there is something wrong, radically wrong, deep-seated and to the heart's core, with our church, society and home training when a man and woman, reared you might say, in the very shadow of the church, and having its precepts hurled at them from their infancy, yet can mistake passion, immorality and shame for the joy and pleasure of life; when to their young lives the hell-brewed poison of destruction appears like the rich, red wine of satisfaction.

"For what does the church over there on the hill stand? What is its mission? its object? its meaning? If there is anything in the power of the Son of Man there is everything–everything or nothing; and this attitude of people who call themselves Christians, standing between suffering, sin-sick mortals and the sinner's God is enough to make the angels weep–and mortals howl!"

"Well, well, Max, I believe you are aroused a bit; but I am afraid, my man, that you are probing to the heart and center of conditions that will never be righted in this world. Eternity alone, I think, will reveal the why and wherefore of some of the things that are troubling you."

"No, Eldrige, it will not require the revelations of eternity to convince me why the Church is cankered, worm-eaten and corrupt. I verily believe I can give you the reason this minute: it is because its advocates are *hearers* of the Truth, but not followers of it. Over there in Christian Edgerly men and women profess

to follow Christ, and in their hearts they know that they stop with the professing. Not one man in ten will read the words of Christ and admit that they can be taken as a rule of life and conduct.

"'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you do ye even so to them.'

"Where is the man who does this? The poor, the needy, the suffering, the down-trodden, the unfortunate, they circle the globe, they are in every land, every clime, every city, town and hamlet; the voice of their cries by day and their groanings by night is never still; naked, they are not clothed; hungry, they are not fed; thirsty, they are not given drink; and these are 'the others.' Where is the man who does unto them as he would be done by? Do you? Do I?

"And where is the man who loves his neighbor as himself? Where would be the stress and strife of life, the wear and tear, the wrangle and scramble, the heartache and crime, the murder and suicide, if this precept were followed? Where would be all this agitation about labor and capital, the piling up of wealth on one hand and biting poverty on the other, if men–Christian men–loved their neighbors as themselves? Wise men of our generation are trying to devise ways and formulate plans to regulate the differences and disagreements among men; but even the reformers disagree among themselves and dissensions grow greater from year to year. Do men think that they are wiser than God? Do they think that if there is a better way Christ would have failed to tell us about it? Yet we are deaf to the simple words of the divine Teacher, the grandest precept ever given, the one and only panacea for the world's discord, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.'"

"If only the world had such a religion as that, Max, Christianity would be Christian."

"And Christianity never will be Christian until men believe what they profess to believe. I am not much of a Bible scholar, I was brought up to reverence the Bible, not to read it, but I know that we are told that faith without works is dead. There is faith enough in the world, if it were alive, to save the world–but it is dead, dead and buried, and the devil is dancing to his hornpipes over its burial place–the opaque hearts of men. A general may fight a battle with an army of men, if they are alive–but if they are dead, dead in the trenches, they will not put up much of a fight. Yet the absurdity of fighting a battle with dead men is not greater than the inconsistency of a religion with a dead faith.

"I have not yet learned to understand the scientific principle back of the kind of religion that has been at work on this Flat; but I know that the faith of a grain of mustard seed would remove mountains of sin and crime and unholy desire from our land. A grain of mustard seed is alive, pregnant; given favorable conditions it will expand and increase, and flower and produce again, demonstrating the power of the Invisible. This work here on this Flat started from a grain of mustard seed; a grain sown and tended and watered and tilled by a

woman's hand. And the Christian city and the stately church marvel that God has given the increase. You and I have special cause to honor this woman and her work, Eldrige, and we both owe her an endless debt of gratitude."

Again their hands met in silent companionship. Then Max arose. "I am afraid we have forgotten the ladies," he said. "Let us go and join them in the garden."

The doctor followed his friend, and he no longer felt that he failed to understand him; he was just an honest man, nothing more–nothing less.

CHAPTER XX
THE REVELATION

In a small village at the foot of a Colorado mountain, the Reverend Maurice Thorpe pitched his tent–literally pitched his tent–for he resolved to try the open air treatment for his malady.

He had tried the remedies that men have compounded and the devices that their skill have fashioned until the last one was tested and tried and found wanting; and when his faith in these was gone he resorted to the Nature cure–he resolved to let Nature have her way with him. So he set up his tent, lived in the open, bathed in the sunshine, breathed the mountain air; and he felt his strength returning. If there was something beside these things that helped his recovery he did not know of it at the time.

The good Book tells us that "The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up," and there are yet some people in God's world who believe it.

The tent was pitched near the bank of a mountain stream. From far up the mountains it came, at times a turbulent, rushing stream and again narrowing to a silver rill. Part way down its course it came to a rocky formation which obstructed its flow and forced it into two different channels. During the summer months the larger of these two streams diminished in size and the other became dry. Following the dry course over stones and sand one was led through a region of wild and rugged grandeur. The circuitous course led through deep gorges and past great ledges of rock, and here and there huge stones stood out alone, like silent sentinels.

Mr. Thorpe, in his long walks over the mountains, often followed this

course until he reached the chasm, or cave-like opening, where it ended. The rocks were dry and bleached now, except for here and there a patch of moss or bit of grass which grew among the crevices. Some birds had chosen the cave for their nesting place, and their cries echoed shrilly among the rocks. This wild, isolated spot was far removed from the usual haunts of men, but it held a peculiar charm for Mr. Thorpe, and he fell into the way of taking his books and reading there. Some goat-skins spread on the rocks served for a couch and a ledge of rock answered for a table; and here, one by one, his favorite books and magazines found a place. Here, alone with his silent friends, he became a recluse. The world that had so bitterly disappointed him, the life that had so grieved and vexed him, the love that had bowed and broken him, all were left behind.

The brook babbled noisily by the tent one rare morning in June; the birds called shrilly from the rocky ledges, and the sky was azure above the mountains. Mr. Thorpe looked over his letters and papers and laid aside those that he cared to take with him for the day. The canvas bag in which he carried his luncheon was packed and his water-bottle filled. He picked up his selection of papers, and as he did so his eyes fell on one that he had not noticed before. He examined it and saw that it was a copy of the Edgerly Times. Some headlines at the top of the page caught his eye: "The Transformation of the Flat. Once a Place of Vice and Want, Now a Thriving Factory Settlement." He glanced down the page and caught sentences that contained familiar names: "Mrs. Thorpe, former pastor's wife–Max Morrison, returned soldier–Dr. Eldrige Jr. and his young wife–"

Mr. Thorpe's face set in grim lines and the blue veins stood out prominently on his forehead. He folded the paper and thrust it in his pocket, picked up the canvas bag and water-bottle and made his way down the rocky course to the rock-walled cavern. His attitude was that of a man bowed, broken, vanquished.

When he reached the cavern he threw himself upon his goat-skins, drew the paper from his pocket and read the article carefully through to the finish. It dwelt at length on the factors that had brought about the change on the Flat.

When he finished the article he folded the paper slowly, methodically, as one whose mind is far away. His eyes were upon the stones at his feet, and slowly the doors of memory swung open, and before him were the hopes and aspirations of his life, its trials and disappointments–the questioning anguish of failure.

He had been so sure of his standards, so certain of the infallibility of his ideals. He felt that if the voice of the Lord had spoken to him, as it spoke to Moses from the burning bush it could not have brought to him more conviction than the ideals of his early manhood had afforded him–yet he had failed, his life was a wreck, a derelict stranded on the shore of time.

His mind had been so filled with the convictions that had come to him with the stamp and seal of his forefathers upon them that he had not grasped the

possibilities, nor realized the demands of the vital, ever-present and progressive forces about him. And as one who starts upon a race bound and handicapped from the start, the inevitable had come upon him. But these underlying causes that had made shipwreck of his hopes and a tragedy of his existence had been to him as an unwritten book, unseen and unknown. And always when his mind had gone back over the past he had seen only the strewn and broken wreckage of his hopes, and the future was black with a dumb agony that he had no heart to face.

But one of the facts of this creation of ours and of the eternal verities that govern it is that sincerity never seeks in vain; when the sincerity of the soul asks, divine Love does not, could not, fail to respond. We must understand that there are many phases of mortal thought that parade under the mantle of sincerity which have little or no relation to that which is truly sincere. Sometimes we, as untutored children, ask for that which we would instantly cast from us were our requests granted; many times we beg and plead for that from which our very souls would shrink and cower; and very many times our motives are so obscure and our desires so warped and misshapen that we have no logical conception of that for which we ask. But the eternal fact remains: Man never yet asked for bread and was given a stone, never yet asked for an egg and was given a scorpion.

Now the man's life, bare to the quivering quick, stripped of every hypothesis, analysis and subterfuge of philosophy, was asking, sincerely asking, why he had failed. His self-righteousness slipped from him and lay like a cast-off garment at his feet; prejudice, which had held him in so firm a grip, retreated and slunk back into the dim, illusory creation where its multiform delusions have their inception; pride, humbled and forsaken, trailed its glittering pageant out of the range of his vision.

The branches of a tree outside the cave swayed in the wind and brushed against the rocks with a soft, rustling sound, and the birds called across the cavern and circled about the man's motionless figure. But outward conditions, location, surroundings and lapse of time were for the time no part of Mr. Thorpe's experience. The sun crept up in the heavens until it reached the meridian. The dog, the man's only companion in his rambles, came to his side and thrust his nose against the canvas bag, but receiving no attention, stretched himself again patiently beside his master.

When Mr. Thorpe raised his eyes from the stones at his feet he was not surprised at that which he saw. That which he beheld was exactly that which he raised his eyes expecting to see. On one side of the cavern there stood a grim, relentless form, heavy-browed and strongly built. There were iron bands about the waist and thighs and iron circles on the ankles, arms and wrists. One hand held an iron sword, the other an iron pen. And branded deep into the forehead

in letters of red-hot iron was the word INTOLERANCE. On the opposite side of the cavern stood a figure of less massive proportions, of easy grace and supple bearing, clothed in a simple, clinging garment of white. In one outstretched hand was held a burning torch, and in the other a pen of light, tipped with a diamond point. Glittering gems upon the forehead fashioned the word FREEDOM. From out of the past they came, years, centuries, ages were upon them.

Now on the stones of the cavern walls each figure began to write, carefully, silently, remorselessly, until slab after slab stretching away into the dim recesses of the cave was filled with the history of the past. Every word that the iron pen recorded stood out clearly and distinctly, and there was no choice but to read. The silent spectator felt his senses shrink and quiver and his heart grow sick as the record passed before him, but he was not spared. His body grew rigid and every sense was in revolt, but the iron-bound hand did not waver nor relent. So vivid was the record that all the awful carnage and bloodshed, torture and persecution were as though actually transpiring before his tortured gaze, and the air was filled with the shrieks of the dying and groans and invectives of the tortured and tormented. But the physical horror of it did not compare with the agony of noble minds and fearless souls whose mental anguish the iron-bound hand did not hesitate to record.

The silent man, alone with these strange creations of his brain, fell to tracing the work of this iron-bound monster back to its birth or beginning. And as he pondered and questioned, it came to him with a distinct shock that the first intolerance was that which opposed itself to God's creation in the Garden of Eden. Its first form was that of a sinuous serpent; its voice that of the subtle testimony of the senses! He found also that this monster had assumed a form, and found a voice in every age in which mortal man had lived. And it came to him straight as an arrow and as keen to his highly-wrought senses that the relentless iron pen was writing, along with the other records, the history of the Church, the Church which had seemed to him to be infallible, which had come to him fraught with the faith of his ancestors, steeped in the blood of martyrs, and which held within its sacred teachings the only possible redemption for mankind, the Church for which he had labored. But he was not yet spared; remorse and contrition were having their way with him, and the sweat of agony was on his brow. For the first time in his life he entertained a doubt as to a literal hell; for what could a quenchless fire do to the physical body, compared to this which the bigotry and intolerance of his life were uncovering before him?

It was a relief to turn from this mental gloom, this verge of madness, from all this record of pain and woe, the history of the world's wrongs, to turn and behold the supple figure in white, writing with the diamond's flashing point. Here was a record of God's creation, untouched by mortal sense; a story of man

untempted and woman unbeguiled; all things the image and reflection of the one God. Only that which is good and true and pure, that which is noble and righteous, was recorded by the flashing pen; the freedom which God gives to man can write no other record.

The events of the ages passed as a panorama before the solitary observer. From the bookshelves of the world were selected volumes written by a master hand, books that had stood the test of time and lived through the years. And the fact stood out with distinctness that the souls of the men who wrote them were not shackled, they were not slaves to another's will, nor bound by another's power, but that the minds that conceived them stood in absolute freedom before God. He was made to feel the throb and pulse of freedom, unbound and unfettered, that surged through the life of the artists that have painted the world's famous pictures and fashioned its works of art. He saw man expanding beneath the touch of the Infinite, answerable to the Infinite only.

Then the world's greatest singers stood before him, those to whom had been given the gracious gift of melody. And he knew that the possessor of this gift had arisen over difficulties, through trials and endeavor, until he reached the height where for him there sounded the supreme harmonies of the universe, and that he stood alone, exultant in the freedom of his power.

The flashing pen went back over the past and noted the world's reformers, men of staunch and steadfast character, who have stood for righteousness, for purity and truth, men who resisted despotism, put down superstition, stamped out ignorance and made possible the progress of science, even though their footsteps were stained with blood and led to the dungeon and the guillotine.

And this record of light, traced with the diamond's point, made it clear beyond question that in the small things as well as the great, only that which has been done in the freedom of the soul has made the world better. It is soul-freedom that has uplifted, transformed and glorified life. Every act of charity, of love, of Christian kindness, the cup of water given in the Master's name, the garment to the naked, the bread to the hungry, the visit to the prison if of any worth, of any efficacy or power, have been done in the freedom of the soul, prompted by the heart-spirit, the desire of the individual unhampered by another's will.

Now before the smitten man there rolled the long years, uncompromising and relentless as he believed the Judgment-day to be, the years in which he had held a fair, frail woman, soul and body in subjection to his wishes, dominated and controlled her by the superior force of his will. He had held to the belief that he had chosen to live apart from this woman that he loved because of her infidelity to the Church; now he was face to face with the conviction that he had deserted her because she had not subscribed unconditionally to scholastic theology.

Mr. Thorpe was aroused from his trance-like condition by the whimpering

of his dog. The animal thrust his nose against the canvas bag and looked pleadingly into his master's face. Mr. Thorpe put out his hand and patted the dog's head; he gave him a biscuit from the bag and poured some water from the bottle for him to drink. Then he arose, stretched his stiffened limbs and walked to the entrance of the cave. The sun was nearing the horizon; the day had passed. He gathered his papers together, took up the untasted food and made his way back to the tent.

Pauline, who lived with her brother, and who still exercised a watchful care over her cousin, had been watching for him, and saw him when he came into sight. She was surprised at his appearance; his shoulders were squared to meet the bracing wind, and he swung along with the stride of a strong man, physically and mentally vigorous.

CHAPTER XXI
THE LAW OF LIFE

June was drawing to a close. The sun rode high in the heaven, and at evening seemed loath to leave the verdant earth in darkness. From the rows of neat cottages on the Flat came the scent of perfume-laden flowers. The garden beds, bathed in the glowing sun and watered from heaven, grew and throve; and the vines and shrubs lately planted vied with each other in growth and beauty.

Mrs. Thorpe had spent the day as usual in the school. All day she labored among the children, and at evening sent them glad and happy to their homes. There was something about her patience and loving kindness that touched the hearts of those about her; her presence was an inspiration, as well as a help and comfort.

At the close of school this June day Margaret asked Mrs. Thorpe to go with her to tea.

"You refused last night and the night before," she said.

"And I think it better for me not to go to-night, dear. I have some exercises to look over and some work to prepare for to-morrow. Another time, perhaps, but not to-night." And so Margaret left her and went her way alone.

The work that required her attention was examined and preparations for the morrow completed, and still Mrs. Thorpe lingered in the empty room. She walked back and forth through the room where all was silent save the sound of

her footsteps; but she was not lonely; she loved the quiet of the deserted room and the memories that lingered about it. She loved the children among whom she worked, and she was hopeful and ambitious for them. She longed to see them in the way of honor and virtue, in the way of self-respect and independence; and she believed that this way lay before them. Her life was full of hopes and plans for their future, and she worked willingly, gladly, whole-heartedly, for the fulfillment of these plans.

Yet this woman had never tried to deceive herself. She knew that there was a room in her heart silent and empty, where memories, sad and silent, lingered among the shadows. She was not unhappy because of this; her happiness lay in accepting it and fashioning her life superior to it.

There had been a time when she believed that, like the chords of a harp, the sweetest strains of her life had been broken. She recognized the generally accepted view that if the union between a man and a woman be broken, the lives affected by the dissolution must necessarily be crippled and their usefulness impaired. But this view of life had gradually changed as she came into a larger, more scientific view of life. Now she believed that nothing but a violation of the life Principle could mar a life or rob it of its legitimate rights. She had come to understand that there is a Law back of Life, a Law to which all the children of creation must conform, and that nothing but an infringement of God's law can hurt or destroy in all His holy mountain. And the natural deduction followed that all relationships between individuals must be honest, sincere and pure. And that any law, written or unwritten, that fosters or favors the domination or control of one person over another is a mortal law, and invariably an immoral one. Man in the image and likeness of God is governed by righteousness and not by his fellow men.

Mrs. Thorpe was no longer a frail woman; her physical development had come about gradually and naturally. Her form that had remained slender and girlish long after her girlhood days had passed, was now rounded out into full contour of womanhood. Her eyes that had been too large and bright for her colorless face, now blended harmoniously with her soft, warm color. No stimulants nor artificial means had been employed to bring about this change; it had come naturally with her changed attitude toward life, her scientific understanding of life harmonious, as the reflection of the Infinite. Where once she had been irrational, ignorant and ill, now she was sensible, wise and well; the one following the other in natural sequence in the physical as well as in the mental condition.

Yet she was always frank with herself; she missed the love and companionship that had once been hers. She walked over to one of the windows and seated herself on the window-seat. The wind came in softly and touched the tendrils of brown hair about her face. She looked far off to the distant blue hills. "Maurice,"

she called, softly; "Maurice." Deep in her heart she knew that the old relationship could never exist between them again. They were both children of the one God, answerable to Him only. It was a violation of this law of life, a conception derived from tradition, and tainted with paganism that had brought about their downfall. "But oh, Maurice," she whispered, "I love you, love you!"

The flowers outside the window nodded and swayed in the gentle wind, and a bird whose happy secret lay concealed within reach of her hand, twittered, unafraid, on a swaying bough; and the twilight settled down about her.

When Mrs. Thorpe arose she shook herself free from the memories that had clung about her, and walked out into the semi-darkness. Wholesome and whole-souled, she was little given to retrospection or introspection, but chose to live her life in the fruitful present.

As she neared her home she saw that a light was burning inside.

"It is Jamie," she thought. Dear little Jamie; how many times he had remembered her, and lighted her home and laid her fire.

With a light heart she ascended the steps and entered the house. She glanced through the rooms to the little kitchen, where she expected to see the boy fixing the fire, or laying the table, perhaps.

"Jamie," she called, gently. "Jamie."

There was no response from the room beyond, but from a seat near her a man arose and confronted her–a man bronzed and bearded, who showed the impress of mountain life and contact with nature.

The light in the room was dim, but the recognition was instantaneous.

"Evelyn! Evelyn, my wife!" His arms were about her, and she lifted her face to his, as she had done on their bridal morn.

"Evelyn," he whispered, "can you forgive–forgive the wrong–the cruel years?"

She put out her hand and laid it against his face.

"There is nothing to forgive, Maurice–nothing to forgive–love is everything."

"And I have loved you, Evelyn; you have been near me, with me always."

"Always, Maurice."

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