

BROTHER OWEN'S STORY of THE PARSON'S SCRUPLE.

CHAPTER I.

IF you had been in the far West of England about thirteen years since, and if you had happened to take up one of the Cornish newspapers on a certain day of the month, which need not be specially mentioned, you would have seen this notice of a marriage at the top of a column:

On the third instant, at the parish church, the Reverend Alfred Carling, Rector of Penliddy, to Emily Harriet, relict of the late Fergus Duncan, Esq., of Glendarn, N. B.

The rector's marriage did not produce a very favorable impression in the town, solely in consequence of the unaccountable private and unpretending manner in which the ceremony had been performed. The middle-aged bride and bridegroom had walked quietly to church one morning, had been married by the curate before any one was aware of it, and had embarked immediately afterward in the steamer for Tenby, where they proposed to pass their honeymoon. The bride being a stranger at Penliddy, all inquiries about her previous history were fruitless, and the townspeople had no alternative but to trust to their own investigations for enlightenment when the rector and his wife came home to settle among their friends.

After six weeks' absence Mr. and Mrs. Carling returned, and the simple story of the rector's courtship and marriage was gathered together in fragments, by inquisitive friends, from his own lips and from the lips of his wife.

Mr. Carling and Mrs. Duncan had met at Torquay. The rector, who had exchanged houses and duties for the season with a brother clergyman settled at Torquay, had called on Mrs. Duncan in his clerical capacity, and had come away from the interview deeply impressed and interested by the widow's manners and conversation. The visits were repeated; the acquaintance grew into friendship, and the friendship into love--ardent, devoted love on both sides.

Middle-aged man though he was, this was Mr. Carling's first attachment,

and it was met by the same freshness of feeling on the lady's part. Her life with her first husband had not been a happy one. She had made the fatal mistake of marrying to please her parents rather than herself, and had repented it ever afterward. On her husband's death his family had not behaved well to her, and she had passed her widowhood, with her only child, a daughter, in the retirement of a small Scotch town many miles away from the home of her married life. After a time the little girl's health had begun to fail, and, by the doctor's advice, she had migrated southward to the mild climate of Torquay. The change had proved to be of no avail; and, rather more than a year since, the child had died. The place where her darling was buried was a sacred place to her and she remained a resident at Torquay. Her position in the world was now a lonely one. She was herself an only child; her father and mother were both dead; and, excepting cousins, her one near relation left alive was a maternal uncle living in London.

These particulars were all related simply and unaffectedly before Mr. Carling ventured on the confession of his attachment. When he made his proposal of marriage, Mrs. Duncan received it with an excess of agitation which astonished and almost alarmed the inexperienced clergyman. As soon as she could speak, she begged with extraordinary earnestness and anxiety for a week to consider her answer, and requested Mr. Carling not to visit her on any account until the week had expired.

The next morning she and her maid departed for London. They did not return until the week for consideration had expired. On the eighth day Mr. Carling called again and was accepted.

The proposal to make the marriage as private as possible came from the lady. She had been to London to consult her uncle (whose health, she regretted to say, would not allow him to travel to Cornwall to give his niece away at the altar), and he agreed with Mrs. Duncan that the wedding could not be too private and unpretending. If it was made public, the family of her first husband would expect cards to be sent to them, and a renewal of intercourse, which would be painful on both sides, might be the consequence. Other friends in Scotland, again, would resent her marrying a second time at her age, and would distress her and annoy her future husband in many ways. She was anxious to break altogether with her past existence, and to begin a new and happier life untrammelled by any connection with former times and troubles. She urged these points, as she had received the offer of marriage, with an agitation which was almost painful to see. This peculiarity in her conduct, however, which might have irritated some men, and rendered others distrustful, had no unfavorable effect on Mr. Carling. He set it down to an excess of sensitiveness and

delicacy which charmed him. He was himself--though he never would confess it--a shy, nervous man by nature. Ostentation of any sort was something which he shrank from instinctively, even in the simplest affairs of daily life; and his future wife's proposal to avoid all the usual ceremony and publicity of a wedding was therefore more than agreeable to him--it was a positive relief.

The courtship was kept secret at Torquay, and the marriage was celebrated privately at Penliddy. It found its way into the local newspapers as a matter of course, but it was not, as usual in such cases, also advertised in the Times. Both husband and wife were equally happy in the enjoyment of their new life, and equally unsocial in taking no measures whatever to publish it to others.

Such was the story of the rector's marriage. Socially, Mr. Carling's position was but little affected either way by the change in his life. As a bachelor, his circle of friends had been a small one, and when he married he made no attempt to enlarge it. He had never been popular with the inhabitants of his parish generally. Essentially a weak man, he was, like other weak men, only capable of asserting himself positively in serious matters by running into extremes. As a consequence of this moral defect, he presented some singular anomalies in character. In the ordinary affairs of life he was the gentlest and most yielding of men, but in all that related to strictness of religious principle he was the sternest and the most aggressive of fanatics. In the pulpit he was a preacher of merciless sermons--an interpreter of the Bible by the letter rather than by the spirit, as pitiless and gloomy as one of the Puritans of old; while, on the other hand, by his own fireside he was considerate, forbearing, and humble almost to a fault. As a necessary result of this singular inconsistency of character, he was feared, and sometimes even disliked, by the members of his congregation who only knew him as their pastor, and he was prized and loved by the small circle of friends who also knew him as a man.

Those friends gathered round him more closely and more affectionately than ever after his marriage, not on his own account only, but influenced also by the attractions that they found in the society of his wife. Her refinement and gentleness of manner; her extraordinary accomplishments as a musician; her unvarying sweetness of temper, and her quick, winning, womanly intelligence in conversation, charmed every one who approached her. She was quoted as a model wife and woman by all her husband's friends, and she amply deserved the character that they gave her. Although no children came to cheer it, a happier and a more admirable married life has seldom been witnessed in this world than the life which was once to be seen in the

rectory house at Penliddy.

With these necessary explanations, that preliminary part of my narrative of which the events may be massed together generally, for brevity's sake, comes to a close. What I have next to tell is of a deeper and a more serious interest, and must be carefully related in detail.

The rector and his wife had lived together without, as I honestly believe, a harsh word or an unkind look once passing between them for upward of two years, when Mr. Carling took his first step toward the fatal future that was awaiting him by devoting his leisure hours to the apparently simple and harmless occupation of writing a pamphlet.

He had been connected for many years with one of our great Missionary Societies, and had taken as active a part as a country clergyman could in the management of its affairs. At the period of which I speak, certain influential members of the society had proposed a plan for greatly extending the sphere of its operations, trusting to a proportionate increase in the annual subscriptions to defray the additional expenses of the new movement. The question was not now brought forward for the first time. It had been agitated eight years previously, and the settlement of it had been at that time deferred to a future opportunity. The revival of the project, as usual in such cases, split the working members of the society into two parties; one party cautiously objecting to run any risks, the other hopefully declaring that the venture was a safe one, and that success was sure to attend it. Mr. Carling sided enthusiastically with the members who espoused this latter side of the question, and the object of his pamphlet was to address the subscribers to the society on the subject, and so to interest them in it as to win their charitable support, on a larger scale than usual, to the new project.

He had worked hard at his pamphlet, and had got more than half way through it, when he found himself brought to a stand-still for want of certain facts which had been produced on the discussion of the question eight years since, and which were necessary to the full and fair statement of his case.

At first he thought of writing to the secretary of the society for information; but, remembering that he had not held his office more than two years, he had thought it little likely that this gentleman would be able to help him, and looked back to his own Diary of the period to see if he had made any notes in it relating to the original discussion of the affair. He found a note referring in general terms only to the matter in hand, but alluding at the end

to a report in the Times of the proceedings of a deputation from the society which had waited on a member of the government of that day, and to certain letters to the editor which had followed the publication of the report. The note described these letters as "very important," and Mr. Carling felt, as he put his Diary away again, that the successful conclusion of his pamphlet now depended on his being able to get access to the back numbers of the Times of eight years since.

It was winter time when he was thus stopped in his work, and the prospect of a journey to London (the only place he knew of at which files of the paper were to be found) did not present many attractions; and yet he could see no other and easier means of effecting his object. After considering for a little while and arriving at no positive conclusion, he left the study, and went into the drawing-room to consult his wife.

He found her working industriously by the blazing fire. She looked so happy and comfortable--so gentle and charming in her pretty little lace cap, and her warm brown morning-dress, with its bright cherry-colored ribbons, and its delicate swan's down trimming circling round her neck and nestling over her bosom, that he stooped and kissed her with the tenderness of his bridegroom days before he spoke. When he told her of the cause that had suspended his literary occupation, she listened, with the sensation of the kiss still lingering in her downcast eyes and her smiling lips, until he came to the subject of his Diary and its reference to the newspaper.

As he mentioned the name of the Times she altered and looked him straight in the face gravely.

"Can you suggest any plan, love," he went on, "which may save me the necessity of a journey to London at this bleak time of the year? I must positively have this information, and, so far as I can see, London is the only place at which I can hope to meet with a file of the Times."

"A file of the Times?" she repeated.

"Yes--of eight years since," he said.

The instant the words passed his lips he saw her face overspread by a ghastly paleness; her eyes fixed on him with a strange mixture of rigidity and vacancy in their look; her hands, with her work held tight in them, dropped slowly on her lap, and a shiver ran through her from head to foot.

He sprang to his feet, and snatched the smelling-salts from her work-table,

thinking she was going to faint. She put the bottle from her, when he offered it, with a hand that thrilled him with the deadly coldness of its touch, and said, in a whisper:

"A sudden chill, dear--let me go upstairs and lie down."

He took her to her room. As he laid her down on the bed, she caught his hand, and said, entreatingly:

"You won't go to London, darling, and leave me here ill?"

He promised that nothing should separate him from her until she was well again, and then ran downstairs to send for the doctor. The doctor came, and pronounced that Mrs. Carling was only suffering from a nervous attack; that there was not the least reason to be alarmed; and that, with proper care, she would be well again in a few days.

Both husband and wife had a dinner engagement in the town for that evening. Mr. Carling proposed to write an apology and to remain with his wife. But she would not hear of his abandoning the party on her account. The doctor also recommended that his patient should be left to her maid's care, to fall asleep under the influence of the quieting medicine which he meant to give her. Yielding to this advice, Mr. Carling did his best to suppress his own anxieties, and went to the dinner-party.

CHAPTER II.

AMONG the guests whom the rector met was a gentleman named Rambert, a single man of large fortune, well known in the neighborhood of Penliddy as the owner of a noble country-seat and the possessor of a magnificent library.

Mr. Rambert (with whom Mr. Carling was well acquainted) greeted him at the dinner-party with friendly expressions of regret at the time that had elapsed since they had last seen each other, and mentioned that he had recently been adding to his collection of books some rare old volumes of theology, which he thought the rector might find it useful to look over. Mr. Carling, with the necessity of finishing his pamphlet uppermost in his mind, replied, jestingly, that the species of literature which he was just then most interested in examining happened to be precisely of the sort which (excepting novels, perhaps) had least affinity to theological writing. The necessary explanation followed this avowal as a matter of course, and, to Mr. Carling's great delight, his friend turned on him gayly with the most surprising and satisfactory of answers:

"You don't know half the resources of my miles of bookshelves," he said, "or you would never have thought of going to London for what you can get from me. A whole side of one of my rooms upstairs is devoted to periodical literature. I have reviews, magazines, and three weekly newspapers, bound, in each case, from the first number; and, what is just now more to your purpose, I have the Times for the last fifteen years in huge half-yearly volumes. Give me the date to-night, and you shall have the volume you want by two o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

The necessary information was given at once, and, with a great sense of relief, so far as his literary anxieties were concerned, Mr. Carling went home early to see what the quieting medicine had done for his wife.

She had dozed a little, but had not slept. However, she was evidently better, for she was able to take an interest in the sayings and doings at the dinner-party, and questioned her husband about the guests and the conversation with all a woman's curiosity about the minutest matters. She lay with her face turned toward him and her eyes meeting his, until the course of her inquiries drew an answer from him, which informed her of his fortunate discovery in relation to Mr. Rambert's library, and of the prospect it afforded of his resuming his labors the next day.

When he mentioned this circumstance, she suddenly turned her head on the pillow so that her face was hidden from him, and he could see through the counterpane that the shivering, which he had observed when her illness had seized her in the morning, had returned again.

"I am only cold," she said, in a hurried way, with her face under the clothes.

He rang for the maid, and had a fresh covering placed on the bed. Observing that she seemed unwilling to be disturbed, he did not remove the clothes from her face when he wished her goodnight, but pressed his lips on her head, and patted it gently with his hand. She shrank at the touch as if it hurt her, light as it was, and he went downstairs, resolved to send for the doctor again if she did not get to rest on being left quiet. In less than half an hour afterward the maid came down and relieved his anxiety by reporting that her mistress was asleep.

The next morning he found her in better spirits. Her eyes, she said, felt too weak to bear the light, so she kept the bedroom darkened. But in other respects she had little to complain of.

After answering her husband's first inquiries, she questioned him about his plans for the day. He had letters to write which would occupy him until twelve o'clock. At two o'clock he expected the volume of the Times to arrive, and he should then devote the rest of the afternoon to his work. After hearing what his plans were, Mrs. Carling suggested that he should ride out after he had done his letters, so as to get some exercise at the fine part of the day; and she then reminded him that a longer time than usual had elapsed since he had been to see a certain old pensioner of his, who had nursed him as a child, and who was now bedridden, in a village at some distance, called Tringweighton. Although the rector saw no immediate necessity for making this charitable visit, the more especially as the ride to the village and back, and the intermediate time devoted to gossip, would occupy at least two hours and a half, he assented to his wife's proposal, perceiving that she urged it with unusual earnestness, and being unwilling to thwart her, even in a trifle, at a time when she was ill.

Accordingly, his horse was at the door at twelve precisely. Impatient to get back to the precious volume of the Times, he rode so much faster than usual, and so shortened his visit to the old woman, that he was home again by a quarter past two. Ascertaining from the servant who opened the door that the volume had been left by Mr. Rambert's messenger punctually at two, he ran up to his wife's room to tell her about his visit before he secluded himself for the rest of the afternoon over his work. On entering the

bedroom he found it still darkened, and he was struck by a smell of burned paper in it.

His wife (who was now dressed in her wrapper and lying on the sofa) accounted for the smell by telling him that she had fancied the room felt close, and that she had burned some paper--being afraid of the cold air if she opened the window--to fumigate it. Her eyes were evidently still weak, for she kept her hand over them while she spoke. After remaining with her long enough to relate the few trivial events of his ride, Mr. Carling descended to his study to occupy himself at last with the volume of the Times.

It lay on his table in the shape of a large flat brown paper package. On proceeding to undo the covering, he observed that it had been very carelessly tied up. The strings were crooked and loosely knotted, and the direction bearing his name and address, instead of being in the middle of the paper, was awkwardly folded over at the edge of the volume. However, his business was with the inside of the parcel; so he tossed away the covering and the string, and began at once to hunt through the volume for the particular number of the paper which he wished first to consult.

He soon found it, with the report of the speeches delivered by the members of the deputation, and the answer returned by the minister. After reading through the report, and putting a mark in the place where it occurred, he turned to the next day's number of the paper, to see what further hints on the subject the letters addressed to the editor might happen to contain.

To his inexpressible vexation and amazement, he found that one number of the paper was missing.

He bent the two sides of the volume back, looked closely between the leaves, and saw immediately that the missing number had been cut out.

A vague sense of something like alarm began to mingle with his first feeling of disappointment. He wrote at once to Mr. Rambert, mentioning the discovery he had just made, and sent the note off by his groom, with orders to the man to wait for an answer.

The reply with which the servant returned was almost insolent in the shortness and coolness of its tone. Mr. Rambert had no books in his library which were not in perfect condition. The volume of the Times had left his house perfect, and whatever blame might attach to the mutilation of it rested therefore on other shoulders than those of the owner.

Like many other weak men, Mr. Carling was secretly touchy on the subject of his dignity. After reading the note and questioning his servants, who were certain that the volume had not been touched till he had opened it, he resolved that the missing number of the Times should be procured at any expense and inserted in its place; that the volume should be sent back instantly without a word of comment; and that no more books from Mr. Rambert's library should enter his house.

He walked up and down the study considering what first step he should take to effect the purpose in view. Under the quickening influence of his irritation, an idea occurred to him, which, if it had only entered his mind the day before, might probably have proved the means of saving him from placing himself under an obligation to Mr. Rambert. He resolved to write immediately to his bookseller and publisher in London (who knew him well as an old and excellent customer), mentioning the date of the back number of the Times that was required, and authorizing the publisher to offer any reward he judged necessary to any person who might have the means of procuring it at the office of the paper or elsewhere. This letter he wrote and dispatched in good time for the London post, and then went upstairs to see his wife and to tell her what had happened. Her room was still darkened and she was still on the sofa. On the subject of the missing number she said nothing, but of Mr. Rambert and his note she spoke with the most sovereign contempt. Of course the pompous old fool was mistaken, and the proper thing to do was to send back the volume instantly and take no more notice of him.

"It shall be sent back," said Mr. Carling, "but not till the missing number is replaced." And he then told her what he had done.

The effect of that simple piece of information on Mrs. Carling was so extraordinary and so unaccountable that her husband fairly stood aghast. For the first time since their marriage he saw her temper suddenly in a flame. She started up from the sofa and walked about the room as if she had lost her senses, upbraiding him for making the weakest of concessions to Mr. Rambert's insolent assumption that the rector was to blame. If she could only have laid hands on that letter, she would have consulted her husband's dignity and independence by putting it in the fire! She hoped and prayed the number of the paper might not be found! In fact, it was certain that the number, after all these years, could not possibly be hunted up. The idea of his acknowledging himself to be in the wrong in that way, when he knew himself to be in the right! It was almost ridiculous--no, it was quite ridiculous! And she threw herself back on the sofa, and suddenly burst out laughing.

At the first word of remonstrance which fell from her husband's lips her mood changed again in an instant. She sprang up once more, kissed him passionately, with the tears streaming from her eyes, and implored him to leave her alone to recover herself. He quitted the room so seriously alarmed about her that he resolved to go to the doctor privately and question him on the spot. There was an unspeakable dread in his mind that the nervous attack from which she had been pronounced to be suffering might be a mere phrase intended to prepare him for the future disclosure of something infinitely and indescribably worse.

The doctor, on hearing Mr. Carling's report, exhibited no surprise and held to his opinion. Her nervous system was out of order, and her husband had been needlessly frightened by a hysterical paroxysm. If she did not get better in a week, change of scene might then be tried. In the meantime, there was not the least cause for alarm.

On the next day she was quieter, but she hardly spoke at all. At night she slept well, and Mr. Carling's faith in the medical man revived again.

The morning after was the morning which would bring the answer from the publisher in London. The rector's study was on the ground floor, and when he heard the postman's knock, being especially anxious that morning about his correspondence, he went out into the hall to receive his letters the moment they were put on the table.

It was not the footman who had answered the door, as usual, but Mrs. Carling's maid. She had taken the letters from the postman, and she was going away with them upstairs.

He stopped her, and asked her why she did not put the letters on the hall table as usual. The maid, looking very much confused, said that her mistress had desired that whatever the postman had brought that morning should be carried up to her room. He took the letters abruptly from the girl, without asking any more questions, and went back into his study.

Up to this time no shadow of a suspicion had fallen on his mind. Hitherto there had been a simple obvious explanation for every unusual event that had occurred during the last three or four days; but this last circumstance in connection with the letters was not to be accounted for. Nevertheless, even now, it was not distrust of his wife that was busy at his mind--he was too fond of her and too proud of her to feel it--the sensation was more like uneasy surprise. He longed to go and question her, and get a satisfactory

answer, and have done with it. But there was a voice speaking within him that had never made itself heard before--a voice with a persistent warning in it, that said, Wait; and look at your letters first.

He spread them out on the table with hands that trembled he knew not why. Among them was the back number of the Times for which he had written to London, with a letter from the publisher explaining the means by which the copy had been procured.

He opened the newspaper with a vague feeling of alarm at finding that those letters to the editor which he had been so eager to read, and that perfecting of the mutilated volume which he had been so anxious to accomplish, had become objects of secondary importance in his mind. An inexplicable curiosity about the general contents of the paper was now the one moving influence which asserted itself within him, he spread open the broad sheet on the table.

The first page on which his eye fell was the page on the right-hand side. It contained those very letters--three in number--which he had once been so anxious to see. He tried to read them, but no effort could fix his wandering attention. He looked aside to the opposite page, on the left hand. It was the page that contained the leading articles.

They were three in number. The first was on foreign politics; the second was a sarcastic commentary on a recent division in the House of Lords; the third was one of those articles on social subjects which have greatly and honorably helped to raise the reputation of the Times above all contest and all rivalry.

The lines of this third article which first caught his eye comprised the opening sentence of the second paragraph, and contained these words:

It appears, from the narrative which will be found in another part of our columns, that this unfortunate woman married, in the spring of the year 18---, one Mr. Fergus Duncan, of Glendarn, in the Highlands of Scotland...

The letters swam and mingled together under his eyes before he could go on to the next sentence. His wife exhibited as an object for public compassion in the Times newspaper! On the brink of the dreadful discovery that was advancing on him, his mind reeled back, and a deadly faintness came over him. There was water on a side-table--he drank a deep draught of it--roused himself--seized on the newspaper with both hands, as if it had been a living thing that could feel the desperate resolution of his grasp, and read the

article through, sentence by sentence, word by word.

The subject was the Law of Divorce, and the example quoted was the example of his wife.

At that time England stood disgracefully alone as the one civilized country in the world having a divorce law for the husband which was not also a divorce law for the wife. The writer in the Times boldly and eloquently exposed this discreditable anomaly in the administration of justice; hinted delicately at the unutterable wrongs suffered by Mrs. Duncan; and plainly showed that she was indebted to the accident of having been married in Scotland, and to her consequent right of appeal to the Scotch tribunals, for a full and final release from the tie that bound her to the vilest of husbands, which the English law of that day would have mercilessly refused.

He read that. Other men might have gone on to the narrative extracted from the Scotch newspaper. But at the last word of the article he stopped.

The newspaper, and the unread details which it contained, lost all hold on his attention in an instant, and in their stead, living and burning on his mind, like the Letters of Doom on the walls of Belshazzar, there rose up in judgment against him the last words of a verse in the Gospel of Saint Luke--

"Whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, commiteth adultery."

He had preached from these words, he had warned his hearers, with the whole strength of the fanatical sincerity that was in him, to beware of prevaricating with the prohibition which that verse contained, and to accept it as literally, unreservedly, finally forbidding the marriage of a divorced woman. He had insisted on that plain interpretation of plain words in terms which had made his congregation tremble. And now he stood alone in the secrecy of his own chamber self-convicted of the deadly sin which he had denounced--he stood, as he had told the wicked among his hearers that they would stand at the Last Day, before the Judgment Seat.

He was unconscious of the lapse of time; he never knew whether it was many minutes or few before the door of his room was suddenly and softly opened. It did open, and his wife came in.

In her white dress, with a white shawl thrown over her shoulders; her dark hair, so neat and glossy at other times, hanging tangled about her colorless cheeks, and heightening the glassy brightness of terror in her eyes--so he

saw her; the woman put away from her husband--the woman whose love had made his life happy and had stained his soul with a deadly sin.

She came on to within a few paces of him without a word or a tear, or a shadow of change passing over the dreadful rigidity of her face. She looked at him with a strange look; she pointed to the newspaper crumpled in his hand with a strange gesture; she spoke to him in a strange voice.

"You know it!" she said.

His eyes met hers--she shrank from them--turned--and laid her arms and her head heavily against the wall.

"Oh, Alfred," she said, "I was so lonely in the world, and I was so fond of you!"

The woman's delicacy, the woman's trembling tenderness welled up from her heart, and touched her voice with a tone of its old sweetness as she murmured those simple words.

She said no more. Her confession of her fault, her appeal to their past love for pardon, were both poured forth in that one sentence. She left it to his own heart to tell him the rest. How anxiously her vigilant love had followed his every word and treasured up his every opinion in the days when they first met; how weakly and falsely, and yet with how true an affection for him, she had shrunk from the disclosure which she knew but too well would have separated them even at the church door; how desperately she had fought against the coming discovery which threatened to tear her from the bosom she clung to, and to cast her out into the world with the shadow of her own shame to darken her life to the end--all this she left him to feel; for the moment which might part them forever was the moment when she knew best how truly, how passionately he had loved her.

His lips trembled as he stood looking at her in silence, and the slow, burning tears dropped heavily, one by one, down his cheeks. The natural human remembrance of the golden days of their companionship, of the nights and nights when that dear head--turned away from him now in unutterable misery and shame--had nestled itself so fondly and so happily on his breast, fought hard to silence his conscience, to root out his dreadful sense of guilt, to tear the words of Judgment from their ruthless hold on his mind, to claim him in the sweet names of Pity and of Love. If she had turned and looked at him at that moment, their next words would have been spoken in each other's arms. But the oppression of her despair under his

silence was too heavy for her, and she never moved.

He forced himself to look away from her; he struggled hard to break the silence between them.

"God forgive you, Emily!" he said.

As her name passed his lips, his voice failed him, and the torture at his heart burst its way out in sobs. He hurried to the door to spare her the terrible reproof of the grief that had now mastered him. When he passed her she turned toward him with a faint cry.

He caught her as she sank forward, and saved her from dropping on the floor. For the last time his arms closed round her. For the last time his lips touched hers--cold and insensible to him now. He laid her on the sofa and went out.

One of the female servants was crossing the hall. The girl started as she met him, and turned pale at the sight of his face. He could not speak to her, but he pointed to the study door. He saw her go into the room, and then left the house.

He never entered it more, and he and his wife never met again.

Later on that last day, a sister of Mr. Carling's--a married woman living in the town--came to the rectory. She brought an open note with her, addressed to the unhappy mistress of the house. It contained these few lines, blotted and stained with tears:

May God grant us both the time for repentance! If I had loved you less, I might have trusted myself to see you again. Forgive me, and pity me, and remember me in your prayers, as I shall forgive, and pity, and remember you.

He had tried to write more, but the pen had dropped from his hand. His sister's entreaties had not moved him. After giving her the note to deliver, he had solemnly charged her to be gentle in communicating the tidings that she bore, and had departed alone for London. He heard all remonstrances with patience. He did not deny that the deception of which his wife had been guilty was the most pardonable of all concealments of the truth, because it sprang from her love for him; but he had the same hopeless answer for every one who tried to plead with him--the verse from the Gospel of Saint Luke.

His purpose in traveling to London was to make the necessary arrangements for his wife's future existence, and then to get employment which would separate him from his home and from all its associations. A missionary expedition to one of the Pacific Islands accepted him as a volunteer. Broken in body and spirit, his last look of England from the deck of the ship was his last look at land. A fortnight afterward, his brethren read the burial-service over him on a calm, cloudless evening at sea. Before he was committed to the deep, his little pocket Bible, which had been a present from his wife, was, in accordance with his dying wishes, placed open on his breast, so that the inscription, "To my dear Husband," might rest over his heart.

His unhappy wife still lives. When the farewell lines of her husband's writing reached her she was incapable of comprehending them. The mental prostration which had followed the parting scene was soon complicated by physical suffering--by fever on the brain. To the surprise of all who attended her, she lived through the shock, recovering with the complete loss of one faculty, which, in her situation, poor thing, was a mercy and a gain to her--the faculty of memory. From that time to this she has never had the slightest gleam of recollection of anything that happened before her illness. In her happy oblivion, the veriest trifles are as new and as interesting to her as if she was beginning her existence again. Under the tender care of the friends who now protect her, she lives contentedly the life of a child. When her last hour comes, may she die with nothing on her memory but the recollection of their kindness!

THE EIGHTH DAY.

THE wind that I saw in the sky yesterday has come. It sweeps down our little valley in angry howling gusts, and drives the heavy showers before it in great sheets of spray.

There are some people who find a strangely exciting effect produced on their spirits by the noise, and rush, and tumult of the elements on a stormy day. It has never been so with me, and it is less so than ever now. I can hardly bear to think of my son at sea in such a tempest as this. While I can still get no news of his ship, morbid fancies beset me which I vainly try to shake off. I see the trees through my window bending before the wind. Are the masts of the good ship bending like them at this moment? I hear the wash of the driving rain. Is he hearing the thunder of the raging waves? If he had only come back last night!--it is vain to dwell on it, but the thought will haunt me--if he had only come back last night!

I tried to speak cautiously about him again to Jessie, as Owen had advised

me; but I am so old and feeble now that this ill-omened storm has upset me, and I could not feel sure enough of my own self-control to venture on matching myself to-day against a light-hearted, lively girl, with all her wits about her. It is so important that I should not betray George--it would be so inexcusable on my part if his interests suffered, even accidentally, in my hands.

This was a trying day for our guest. Her few trifling indoor resources had, as I could see, begun to lose their attractions for her at last. If we were not now getting to the end of the stories, and to the end, therefore, of the Ten Days also, our chance of keeping her much longer at the Glen Tower would be a very poor one.

It was, I think, a great relief for us all to be summoned together this evening for a definite purpose. The wind had fallen a little as it got on toward dusk. To hear it growing gradually fainter and fainter in the valley below added immeasurably to the comforting influence of the blazing fire and the cheerful lights when the shutters were closed for the night.

The number drawn happened to be the last of the series--Ten--and the last also of the stories which I had written. There were now but two numbers left in the bowl. Owen and Morgan had each one reading more to accomplish before our guest's stay came to an end, and the manuscripts in the Purple Volume were all exhausted.

"This new story of mine," I said, "is not, like the story I last read, a narrative of adventure happening to myself, but of adventures that happened to a lady of my acquaintance. I was brought into contact, in the first instance, with one of her male relatives, and, in the second instance, with the lady herself, by certain professional circumstances which I need not particularly describe. They involved a dry question of wills and title-deeds in no way connected with this story, but sufficiently important to interest me as a lawyer. The case came to trial at the Assizes on my circuit, and I won it in the face of some very strong points, very well put, on the other side. I was in poor health at the time, and my exertions so completely knocked me up that I was confined to bed in my lodgings for a week or more--"

"And the grateful lady came and nursed you, I suppose," said the Queen of Hearts, in her smart, off-h and way.

"The grateful lady did something much more natural in her position, and much more useful in mine," I answered--"she sent her servant to attend on me. He was an elderly man, who had been in her service since the time of

her first marriage, and he was also one of the most sensible and well-informed persons whom I have ever met with in his station of life. From hints which he dropped while he was at my bedside, I discovered for the first time that his mistress had been unfortunate in her second marriage, and that the troubles of that period of her life had ended in one of the most singular events which had happened in that part of England for many a long day past. It is hardly necessary to say that, before I allowed the man to enter into any particulars, I stipulated that he should obtain his mistress's leave to communicate what he knew. Having gained this, and having further surprised me by mentioning that he had been himself connected with all the circumstances, he told me the whole story in the fullest detail. I have now tried to reproduce it as nearly as I could in his own language. Imagine, therefore, that I am just languidly recovering in bed, and that a respectable elderly man, in quiet black costume, is sitting at my pillow and speaking to me in these terms--"

Thus ending my little preface, I opened the manuscript and began my last story.