LETTERS IN CONCLUSION.

LETTER I.

FROM WILLIAM PENHALE, MINER, AT BARTALLOCK, IN CORNWALL, TO HIS WIFE IN LONDON.

MY DEAR MARY,

I received your letter yesterday, and was more glad than I can say, at hearing that our darling girl Susan has got such a good place in London, and likes her new mistress so well. My kind respects to your sister and her husband, and say I don't grumble about the money that's been spent in sending you with Susan to take care of her. She was too young, poor child, to be trusted to make the journey alone; and, as I was obliged to stop at home and work to keep the other children, and pay back what we borrowed for the trip, of course you were the proper person, after me, to go with Susan--whose welfare is a more precious possession to us than any money, I am sure. Besides, when I married you, and took you away to Cornwall, I always promised you a trip to London to see your friends again; and now that promise is performed. So, once again, don't fret about the money that's been spent: I shall soon pay it back.

I've got some very strange news for you, Mary. You know how bad work was getting at the mine, before you went away--so bad, that I thought to myself after you had gone, "Hadn't I better try what I can do in the fishing at Treen?" And I went there; and, thank God, have got on well by it. I can turn my hand to most things; and the fishing has been very good this year. So I have stuck to my work. And now I come to my news.

The landlady at the inn here, is, as you know, a sort of relation of mine. Well, the third afternoon after you had gone, I was stopping to say a word to her at her own door, on my way to the beach, when we saw a young gentleman, quite a stranger, coming up to us. He looked very pale and wild-like, I thought, when he asked for a bed; and then got faint all of a sudden--so faint and ill, that I was obliged to lend a hand in getting him upstairs. The next morning I heard he was worse: and it was just the same story the

morning after. He quite frightened the landlady, he was so restless, and talked to himself in such a strange way; specially at night. He wouldn't say what was the matter with him, or who he was: we could only find out that he had been stopping among the fishing people further west: and that they had not behaved very well to him at last--more shame for them! I'm sure they could take no hurt from the poor young fellow, let him be whom he may. Well, the end of it was that I went and fetched the doctor for him myself, and when we got into his room, we found him all pale and trembling, and looking at us, poor soul, as if he thought we meant to murder him. The doctor gave his complaint some hard names which I don't know how to write down; but it seems there's more the matter with his mind than his body, and that he must have had some great fright which has shaken his nerves all to pieces. The only way to do him good, as the doctor said, was to have him carefully nursed by his relations, and kept quiet among people he knew; strange faces about him being likely to make him worse. The doctor asked where his friends lived; but he wouldn't say, and, lately, he's got so much worse that he can't speak clearly to us at all.

Yesterday evening, he gave us all a fright. The doctor hearing me below, asking after him, said I was to come up stairs and help to move him to have his bed made. As soon as I raised him up (though I'm sure I touched him as gently as I could), he fainted dead away. While he was being brought to, a little piece of something that looked like card-board, prettily embroidered with beads and silk, came away from a string that held it round his neck, and dropped off the bedside. I picked it up; for I remembered the time, Mary, when you and I were courting, and how precious the least thing was to me that belonged to you. So I took care of it for him, thinking it might be a keepsake from his sweetheart. And sure enough, when he came to, he put up his thin white hands to his neck, and looked so thankful at me when I tied the little thing again to the string! Just as I had done that, the doctor beckons me to the other end of the room.

"This won't do," says he to me in a whisper. "If he goes on like this, he'll lose his reason, if not his life. I must search his papers, to find out what friends he has; and you must be my witness."

So the doctor opens his little bag, and takes out a square sealed packet first; then two or three letters tied together; the poor soul looking all the while as if he longed to prevent us from touching them. Well, the doctor said there was no occasion to open the packet, for the direction was the same on all the letters, and the name corresponded with his initials marked on his linen.

"I'm next to certain this is where he lives, or did live; so this is where I'll write," says the doctor.

"Shall my wife take the letter, Sir?" says I. "She's in London with our girl, Susan; and, if his friends should be gone away from where you are writing to, she may be able to trace them."

"Quite right, Penhale!" says he; "we'll do that. Write to your wife, and put my letter inside yours."

I did as he told me, at once; and his letter is inside this, with the direction of the house and the street.

Now, Mary, dear, go at once, and see what you can find out. The direction on the doctor's letter may be his home; and if it isn't, there may be people there who can tell you where it is. So go at once, and let us know directly what luck you have had, for there is no time to be lost; and if you saw the young gentleman, you would pity him as much as we do.

This has got to be such a long letter, that I have no room left to write any more. God bless you, Mary, and God bless my darling Susan! Give her a kiss for father's sake, and believe me, Your loving husband,

WILLIAM PENHALE.

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LETTER II.

FROM MARY PENHALE TO HER HUSBAND

DEAREST WILLIAM,

Susan sends a hundred kisses, and best loves to you and her brothers and sisters. She's getting on nicely; and her mistress is as kind and fond of her as can be. Best respects, too, from my sister Martha, and her husband. And now I've done giving you all my messages, I'll tell you some good news for the poor young gentleman who is so bad at Treen.

As soon as I had seen Susan, and read your letter to her, I went to the place where the doctor's letter directed me. Such a grand house, William! I was really afraid to knock at the door. So I plucked up courage, and gave a pull at the bell; and a very fat, big man, with his head all plastered over with powder, opened the door, almost before I had done ringing. "If you please, Sir," says I, showing him the name on the doctor's letter, "do any friends of this gentleman live here?" "To be sure they do," says he; "his father and sister live here: but what do you want to know for?" "I want them to read this letter," says I. "It's to tell them that the young gentleman is very bad in health down in our country." "You can't see my master," says he, "for he's confined to his bed by illness: and Miss Clara is very poorly too--you had better leave the letter with me." Just as he said this, an elderly lady crossed the hall (I found out she was the housekeeper, afterwards), and asked what I wanted. When I told her, she looked quite startled. "Step this way, ma'am," says she; "you will do Miss Clara more good than all the doctors put together. But you must break the news to her carefully, before she sees the letter. Please to make it out better news than it is, for the young lady is in very delicate health." We went upstairs--such stair-carpets! I was almost frightened to step on them, after walking through the dirty streets. The housekeeper opened a door, and said a few words inside, which I could not hear, and then let me in where the young lady was.

Oh, William! she had the sweetest, kindest face I ever saw in my life. But it was so pale, and there was such a sad look in her eyes when she asked me to sit down, that it went to my heart, when I thought of the news I had to tell her. I couldn't speak just at first; and I suppose she thought I was in some trouble--for she begged me not to tell her what I wanted, till I was better. She said it with such a voice and such a look, that, like a great fool, I burst out crying, instead of answering as I ought. But it did me good, though, and

made me able to tell her about her brother (breaking it as gently as I could) before I gave her the doctor's letter. She never opened it; but stood up before me as if she was turned to stone--not able to cry, or speak, or move. It frightened me so, to see her in such a dreadful state, that I forgot all about the grand house, and the difference there was between us; and took her in my arms, making her sit down on the sofa by me--just as I should do, if I was consoling our own Susan under some great trouble. Well! I soon made her look more like herself, comforting her in every way I could think of: and she laid her poor head on my shoulder, and I took and kissed her, (not remembering a bit about its being a born lady and a stranger that I was kissing); and the tears came at last, and did her good. As soon as she could speak, she thanked God her brother was found, and had fallen into kind hands. She hadn't courage to read the doctor's letter herself, and asked me to do it. Though he gave a very bad account of the young gentleman, he said that care and nursing, and getting him away from a strange place to his own home and among his friends, might do wonders for him yet. When I came to this part of the letter, she started up, and asked me to give it to her. Then she inquired when I was going back to Cornwall; and I said, "as soon as possible," (for indeed, it's time I was home, William). "Wait; pray wait till I have shown this letter to my father!" says she. And she ran out of the room with it in her hand.

After some time, she came back with her face all of a flush, like; looking quite different to what she did before, and saying that I had done more to make the family happy by coming with that letter, than she could ever thank me for as she ought. A gentleman followed her in, who was her eldest brother (she said); the pleasantest, liveliest gentleman I ever saw. He shook hands as if he had known me all his life; and told me I was the first person he had ever met with who had done good in a family by bringing them bad news. Then he asked me whether I was ready to go to Cornwall the next morning with him, and the young lady, and a friend of his who was a doctor. I had thought already of getting the parting over with poor Susan, that very day: so I said, "Yes." After that, they wouldn't let me go away till I had had something to eat and drink; and the dear, kind young lady asked me all about Susan, and where she was living, and about you and the children, just as if she had known us like neighbours. Poor thing! she was so flurried, and so anxious for the next morning, that it was all the gentleman could do to keep her quiet, and prevent her falling into a sort of laughing and crying fit, which it seems she had been liable to lately. At last they let me go away: and I went and stayed with Susan as long as I could before I bid her good-bye. She bore the parting bravely--poor, dear child! God in heaven bless her; and I'm sure he will; for a better daughter no mother ever had.

My dear husband, I am afraid this letter is very badly written; but the tears are in my eyes, thinking of Susan; and I feel so wearied and flurried after what has happened. We are to go off very early to-morrow morning in a carriage, which is to be put on the railway. Only think of my riding home in a fine carriage, with gentlefolks!--how surprised Willie, and Nancy, and the other children will be! I shall get to Treen almost as soon as my letter; but I thought I would write, so that you might have the good news, the first moment it could get to you, to tell the poor young gentleman. I'm sure it must make him better, only to hear that his brother and sister are coming to fetch him home.

I can't write any more, dear William, I'm so very tired; except that I long to see you and the little ones again; and that I am,

Your loving and dutiful wife,

MARY PENHALE.

LETTER III.

TO MR. JOHN BERNARD, FROM THE WRITER OF THE FORE-GOING AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

[This letter is nearly nine years later in date than the letters which precede it.]

Lanreath Cottage, Breconshire.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I find, by your last letter, that you doubt whether I still remember the circumstances under which I made a certain promise to you, more than eight years ago. You are mistaken: not one of those circumstances has escaped my memory. To satisfy you of this, I will now recapitulate them. You will own, I think, that I have forgotten nothing.

After my removal from Cornwall (shall I ever forget the first sight of Clara and Ralph at my bedside!), when the nervous malady from which I suffered so long, had yielded to the affectionate devotion of my family--aided by the untiring exercise of your skill--one of my first anxieties was to show that I could gratefully appreciate your exertions for my good, by reposing the same confidence in you, which I should place in my nearest and dearest relatives. From the time when we first met at the hospital, your services were devoted to me, through much misery of mind and body, with the delicacy and the self-denial of a true friend. I felt that it was only your due that you should know by what trials I had been reduced to the situation in which you found me, when you accompanied my brother and sister to Cornwall--I felt this; and placed in your hands, for your own private perusal, the narrative which I had written of my error and of its terrible consequences. To tell you all that had happened to me, with my own lips, was more than I could do then--and even after this lapse of years, would be more than I could do now.

After you had read the narrative, you urged me, on returning it into my possession, to permit its publication during my lifetime. I granted the justness of the reasons which led you to counsel me thus; but I told you, at the same time, that an obstacle, which I was bound to respect, would prevent me from following your advice. While my father lived, I could not

suffer a manuscript in which he was represented (no matter under what excess of provocation) as separating himself in the bitterest hostility from his own son, to be made public property. I could not suffer events of which we never afterwards spoke ourselves, to be given to others in the form of a printed narrative which might perhaps fall under his own eye. You acknowledged, I remember, the justice of these considerations and promised, in case I died before him, to keep back my manuscript from publication as long as my father lived. In binding yourself to that engagement, however, you stipulated, and I agreed, that I should reconsider your arguments in case I outlived him. This was my promise, and these were the circumstances under which it was made. You will allow, I think, that my memory is more accurate than you had imagined it to be.

And now, you write to remind me of my part of our agreement--forbearing, with your accustomed delicacy, to introduce the subject, until more than six months have elapsed since my father's death. You have done well. I have had time to feel all the consolation afforded to me by the remembrance that, for years past, my life was of some use in sweetening my father's; that his death has occurred in the ordinary course of Nature; and that I never, to my own knowledge, gave him any cause to repent the full and loving reconciliation which took place between us, as soon as we could speak together freely after my return to home.

Still I am not answering your question:--Am I now willing to permit the publication of my narrative, provided all names and places mentioned in it remained concealed, and I am known to no one but yourself, Ralph, and Clara, as the writer of my own story? I reply that I am willing. In a few days, you will receive the manuscript by a safe hand. Neither my brother nor my sister object to its being made public on the terms I have mentioned; and I feel no hesitation in accepting the permission thus accorded to me. I have not glossed over the flightiness of Ralph's character; but the brotherly kindness and manly generosity which lie beneath it, are as apparent, I hope, in my narrative as they are in fact. And Clara, dear Clara!--all that I have said of her is only to be regretted as unworthy of the noblest subject that my pen, or any other pen, can have to write on.

One difficulty, however, still remains:--How are the pages which I am about to send you to be concluded? In the novel-reading sense of the word, my story has no real conclusion. The repose that comes to all of us after trouble--to me, a repose in life: to others, how often a repose only in the grave!--is the end which must close this autobiography: an end, calm, natural, and uneventful; yet not, perhaps, devoid of all lesson and value. Is it fit that I should set myself, for the sake of effect, to make a conclusion,

and terminate by fiction what has begun, and thus far, has proceeded in truth? In the interests of Art, as well as in the interests of Reality, surely not!

Whatever remains to be related after the last entry in my journal, will be found expressed in the simplest, and therefore, the best form, by the letters from William and Mary Penhale, which I send you with this. When I revisited Cornwall, to see the good miner and his wife, I found, in the course of the inquiries which I made as to the past, that they still preserved the letters they had written about me, while I lay ill at Treen. I asked permission to take copies of these two documents, as containing materials, which I could but ill supply from my own resources, for filling up a gap in my story. They at once consented; telling me that they had always kept each other's letters after marriage, as carefully as they kept them before, in token that their first affection remained to the last unchanged. At the same time they entreated me, with the most earnest simplicity, to polish their own homely expressions; and turn them, as they phrased, it, into proper reading. You may easily imagine that I knew better than to do this; and you will, I am sure, agree with me that both the letters I send should be printed as literally as they were copied by my hand.

Having now provided for the continuation of my story to the period of my return home, I have a word or two to say on the subject of preparing the autobiography for press. Failing in the resolution, even now, to look over my manuscript again, I leave the corrections it requires to others--but on one condition. Let none of the passages in which I have related events, or described characters, be either softened or suppressed. I am well aware of the tendency, in some readers, to denounce truth itself as improbable, unless their own personal experience has borne witness to it; and it is on this very account that I am firm in my determination to allow of no cringing beforehand to anticipated incredulities. What I have written is Truth; and it shall go into the world as Truth should--entirely uncompromised. Let my style be corrected as completely as you will; but leave characters and events which are taken from realities, real as they are.

In regard to the surviving persons with whom this narrative associates me, I have little to say which it can concern the reader to know. The man whom I have presented in the preceding pages under the name of Sherwin is, I believe, still alive, and still residing in France--whither he retreated soon after the date of the last events mentioned in my autobiography. A new system had been introduced into his business by his assistant, which, when left to his own unaided resources, he failed to carry out. His affairs became involved; a commercial crisis occurred, which he was wholly unable to meet;

and he was made a bankrupt, having first dishonestly secured to himself a subsistence for life, out of the wreck of his property. I accidentally heard of him, a few years since, as maintaining among the English residents of the town he then inhabited, the character of a man who had undeservedly suffered from severe family misfortunes, and who bore his afflictions with the most exemplary piety and resignation.

To those once connected with him, who are now no more, I need not and cannot refer again. That part of the dreary Past with which they are associated, is the part which I still shrink in terror from thinking on. There are two names which my lips have not uttered for years; which, in this life, I shall never pronounce again. The night of Death is over them: a night to look away from for evermore.

To look away from--but, towards what object? The Future? That way, I see but dimly even yet. It is on the Present that my thoughts are fixed, in the contentment which desires no change.

For the last five months I have lived here with Clara--here, on the little estate which was once her mother's, which is now hers. Long before my father's death we often talked, in the great country house, of future days which we might pass together, as we pass them now, in this place. Though we may often leave it for a time, we shall always look back to Lanreath Cottage as to our home. The years of retirement which I spent at the Hall, after my recovery, have not awakened in me a single longing to return to the busy world. Ralph--now the head of our family; now aroused by his new duties to a sense of his new position--Ralph, already emancipated from many of the habits which once enthralled and degraded him, has written, bidding me employ to the utmost the resources which his position enables him to offer me, if I decide on entering into public life. But I have no such purpose; I am still resolved to live on in obscurity, in retirement, in peace. I have suffered too much; I have been wounded too sadly, to range myself with the heroes of Ambition, and fight my way upward from the ranks. The glory and the glitter which I once longed to look on as my own, would dazzle and destroy me, now. Such shocks as I have endured, leave that behind them which changes the character and the purpose of a life. The mountain-path of Action is no longer a path for me; my future hope pauses with my present happiness in the shadowed valley of Repose.

Not a repose which owns no duty, and is good for no use; not a repose which Thought cannot ennoble, and Affection cannot sanctify. To serve the cause of the poor and the ignorant, in the little sphere which now surrounds me; to smooth the way for pleasure and plenty, where pain and want have made

it rugged too long; to live more and more worthy, with every day, of the sisterly love which, never tiring, never changing, watches over me in this last retreat, this dearest home--these are the purposes, the only purposes left, which I may still cherish. Let me but live to fulfil them, and life will have given to me all that I can ask!

I may now close my letter. I have communicated to you all the materials I can supply for the conclusion of my autobiography, and have furnished you with the only directions I wish to give in reference to its publication. Present it to the reader in any form, and at any time, that you think fit. On its reception by the public I have no wish to speculate. It is enough for me to know that, with all its faults, it has been written in sincerity and in truth. I shall not feel false shame at its failure, or false pride at its success.

If there be any further information which you think it necessary to possess, and which I have forgotten to communicate, write to me on the subject--or, far better, come here yourself, and ask of me with your own lips all that you desire to know. Come, and judge of the life I am now leading, by seeing it as it really is. Though it be only for a few days, pause long enough in your career of activity and usefulness, of fame and honour, to find leisure time for a visit to the cottage where we live. This is as much Clara's invitation as mine. She will never forget (even if I could!) all that I have owed to your friendship--will never weary (even if I should tire!) of showing you that we are capable of deserving it. Come, then, and see her as well as me--see her, once more, my sister of old times! I remember what you said of Clara, when we last met, and last talked of her; and I believe you will be almost as happy to see her again in her old character as I am.

Till then, farewell! Do not judge hastily of my motives for persisting in the life of retirement which I have led for so many years past. Do not think that calamity has chilled my heart, or enervated my mind. Past suffering may have changed, but it has not deteriorated me. It has fortified my spirit with an abiding strength; it has told me plainly, much that was but dimly revealed to me before; it has shown me uses to which I may put my existence, that have their sanction from other voices than the voices of fame; it has taught me to feel that bravest ambition which is vigorous enough to overleap the little life here! Is there no aspiration in the purposes for which I would now live?--Bernard! whatever we can do of good, in this world, with our affections or our faculties, rises to the Eternal World above us, as a song of praise from Humanity to God. Amid the thousand, thousand tones ever joining to swell the music of that song, are those which sound loudest and grandest here, the tones which travel sweetest and purest to the Imperishable Throne; which mingle in the perfectest harmony with the

anthem of the angel-choir! Ask your own heart that question--and then say, may not the obscurest life--even a life like mine--be dignified by a lasting aspiration, and dedicated to a noble aim?

I have done. The calm summer evening has stolen on me while I have been writing to you; and Clara's voice--now the happy voice of the happy old times--calls to me from our garden seat to come out and look at the sunset over the distant sea. Once more--farewell!

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