

BOOK VIII.

THE SECOND INTERVIEW AT THE FARM-HOUSE, AND THE SECOND PART OF
THE STORY

OF ISABEL. THEIR IMMEDIATE IMPULSIVE EFFECT UPON PIERRE.

I.

His second interview with Isabel was more satisfying, but none the less affecting and mystical than the first, though in the beginning, to his no small surprise, it was far more strange and embarrassing.

As before, Isabel herself admitted him into the farm-house, and spoke no word to him till they were both seated in the room of the double casement, and himself had first addressed her. If Pierre had any way predetermined how to deport himself at the moment, it was to manifest by some outward token the utmost affection for his sister; but her rapt silence and that atmosphere of unearthliness which invested her, now froze him to his seat; his arms refused to open, his lips refused to meet in the fraternal kiss; while all the while his heart was overflowing with the deepest love, and he knew full well, that his presence was inexpressibly grateful to the girl. Never did love and reverence so intimately react and blend; never did pity so join with wonder in casting a spell upon the movements of his body, and impeding him in its command.

After a few embarrassed words from Pierre, and a brief reply, a pause ensued, during which not only was the slow, soft stepping overhead quite audible, as at intervals on the night before, but also some slight domestic sounds were heard from the adjoining room; and noticing the unconsciously interrogating expression of Pierre's face, Isabel thus spoke to him:

"I feel, my brother, that thou dost appreciate the peculiarity and the mystery of my life, and of myself, and therefore I am at rest concerning the possibility of thy misconstruing any of my actions. It is only when people refuse to admit the uncommonness of some persons and the circumstances surrounding them, that erroneous conceits are nourished, and their feelings pained. My brother, if ever I shall seem reserved and unembracing to thee, still thou must ever trust the heart of Isabel, and permit no doubt to cross thee there. My brother, the sounds thou hast just overheard in yonder room, have suggested to thee interesting questions connected with myself. Do not speak; I fervently understand thee. I will tell thee upon what terms I have been living here; and how it is that I, a hired person, am enabled to receive thee in this seemly privacy; for as thou mayest very readily imagine, this room is not my own. And this reminds me also that I have yet some few further trifling things to tell thee respecting the circumstances which have ended in bestowing upon me so angelical a brother."

"I can not retain that word"--said Pierre, with earnest lowness, and

drawing a little nearer to her--"of right, it only pertains to thee."

"My brother, I will now go on, and tell thee all that I think thou couldst wish to know, in addition to what was so dimly rehearsed last night. Some three months ago, the people of the distant farm-house, where I was then staying, broke up their household and departed for some Western country. No place immediately presented itself where my services were wanted, but I was hospitably received at an old neighbor's hearth, and most kindly invited to tarry there, till some employ should offer. But I did not wait for chance to help me; my inquiries resulted in ascertaining the sad story of Delly Ulver, and that through the fate which had overtaken her, her aged parents were not only plunged into the most poignant grief, but were deprived of the domestic help of an only daughter, a circumstance whose deep discomfort can not be easily realized by persons who have always been ministered to by servants. Though indeed my natural mood--if I may call it so, for want of a better term--was strangely touched by thinking that the misery of Delly should be the source of benefit to me; yet this had no practically operative effect upon me,--my most inmost and truest thoughts seldom have;--and so I came hither, and my hands will testify that I did not come entirely for naught. Now, my brother, since thou didst leave me yesterday, I have felt no small surprise, that thou didst not then seek from me, how and when I came to learn the name of Glendinning as so closely associated with myself; and how I came to know Saddle Meadows to be the family seat, and how I at last resolved upon addressing thee, Pierre, and none other; and to what may be attributed that very memorable scene in the

sewing-circle at the Miss Pennies."

"I have myself been wondering at myself that these things should hitherto have so entirely absented themselves from my mind," responded Pierre;--"but truly, Isabel, thy all-abounding hair falls upon me with some spell which dismisses all ordinary considerations from me, and leaves me only sensible to the Nubian power in thine eyes. But go on, and tell me every thing and any thing. I desire to know all, Isabel, and yet, nothing which thou wilt not voluntarily disclose. I feel that already I know the pith of all; that already I feel toward thee to the very limit of all; and that, whatever remains for thee to tell me, can but corroborate and confirm. So go on, my dearest,--ay, my only sister."

Isabel fixed her wonderful eyes upon him with a gaze of long impassionment; then rose suddenly to her feet, and advanced swiftly toward him; but more suddenly paused, and reseated herself in silence, and continued so for a time, with her head averted from him, and mutely resting on her hand, gazing out of the open casement upon the soft heat-lightning, occasionally revealed there.

She resumed anon.

II.

"My brother, thou wilt remember that certain part of my story which in

reference to my more childish years spent remote from here, introduced the gentleman--my--yes, our father, Pierre. I can not describe to thee, for indeed, I do not myself comprehend how it was, that though at the time I sometimes called him my father, and the people of the house also called him so, sometimes when speaking of him to me; yet--partly, I suppose, because of the extraordinary secludedness of my previous life--I did not then join in my mind with the word father, all those peculiar associations which the term ordinarily inspires in children. The word father only seemed a word of general love and endearment to me--little or nothing more; it did not seem to involve any claims of any sort, one way or the other. I did not ask the name of my father; for I could have had no motive to hear him named, except to individualize the person who was so peculiarly kind to me; and individualized in that way he already was, since he was generally called by us the gentleman, and sometimes my father. As I have no reason to suppose that had I then or afterward, questioned the people of the house as to what more particular name my father went by in the world, they would have at all disclosed it to me; and, indeed, since, for certain singular reasons, I now feel convinced that on that point they were pledged to secrecy; I do not know that I ever would have come to learn my father's name,--and by consequence, ever have learned the least shade or shadow of knowledge as to you, Pierre, or any of your kin--had it not been for the merest little accident, which early revealed it to me, though at the moment I did not know the value of that knowledge. The last time my father visited the house, he chanced to leave his handkerchief behind him. It was the farmer's wife who first discovered it. She picked it up, and

fumbling at it a moment, as if rapidly examining the corners, tossed it to me, saying, 'Here, Isabel, here is the good gentleman's handkerchief; keep it for him now, till he comes to see little Bell again.' Gladly I caught the handkerchief, and put it into my bosom. It was a white one; and upon closely scanning it, I found a small line of fine faded yellowish writing in the middle of it. At that time I could not read either print or writing, so I was none the wiser then; but still, some secret instinct told me, that the woman would not so freely have given me the handkerchief, had she known there was any writing on it. I forbore questioning her on the subject; I waited till my father should return, to secretly question him. The handkerchief had become dusty by lying on the uncarpeted floor. I took it to the brook and washed it, and laid it out on the grass where none would chance to pass; and I ironed it under my little apron, so that none would be attracted to it, to look at it again. But my father never returned; so, in my grief, the handkerchief became the more and the more endeared to me; it absorbed many of the secret tears I wept in memory of my dear departed friend, whom, in my child-like ignorance, I then equally called my father and the gentleman. But when the impression of his death became a fixed thing to me, then again I washed and dried and ironed the precious memorial of him, and put it away where none should find it but myself, and resolved never more to soil it with my tears; and I folded it in such a manner, that the name was invisibly buried in the heart of it, and it was like opening a book and turning over many blank leaves before I came to the mysterious writing, which I knew should be one day read by me, without direct help from any one. Now I resolved to learn my

letters, and learn to read, in order that of myself I might learn the meaning of those faded characters. No other purpose but that only one, did I have in learning then to read. I easily induced the woman to give me my little teachings, and being uncommonly quick, and moreover, most eager to learn, I soon mastered the alphabet, and went on to spelling, and by-and-by to reading, and at last to the complete deciphering of the talismanic word--Glendinning. I was yet very ignorant. Glendinning, thought I, what is that? It sounds something like gentleman;--Glen-din-ning;--just as many syllables as gentleman; and--G--it begins with the same letter; yes, it must mean my father. I will think of him by that word now;--I will not think of the gentleman, but of Glendinning. When at last I removed from that house and went to another, and still another, and as I still grew up and thought more to myself, that word was ever humming in my head, I saw it would only prove the key to more. But I repressed all undue curiosity, if any such has ever filled my breast. I would not ask of any one, who it was that had been Glendinning; where he had lived; whether, ever any other girl or boy had called him father as I had done. I resolved to hold myself in perfect patience, as somehow mystically certain, that Fate would at last disclose to me, of itself, and at the suitable time, whatever Fate thought it best for me to know. But now, my brother, I must go aside a little for a moment.--Hand me the guitar."

Surprised and rejoiced thus far at the unanticipated newness, and the sweet lucidness and simplicity of Isabel's narrating, as compared with the obscure and marvelous revelations of the night before, and all eager

for her to continue her story in the same limpid manner, but remembering into what a wholly tumultuous and unearthly frame of mind the melodies of her guitar had formerly thrown him; Pierre now, in handing the instrument to Isabel, could not entirely restrain something like a look of half-regret, accompanied rather strangely with a half-smile of gentle humor. It did not pass unnoticed by his sister, who receiving the guitar, looked up into his face with an expression which would almost have been arch and playful, were it not for the ever-abiding shadows cast from her infinite hair into her unfathomed eyes, and redoubledly shot back again from them.

"Do not be alarmed, my brother; and do not smile at me; I am not going to play the Mystery of Isabel to thee to-night. Draw nearer to me now. Hold the light near to me."

So saying she loosened some ivory screws of the guitar, so as to open a peep lengthwise through its interior.

"Now hold it thus, my brother; thus; and see what thou wilt see; but wait one instant till I hold the lamp." So saying, as Pierre held the instrument before him as directed, Isabel held the lamp so as to cast its light through the round sounding-hole into the heart of the guitar.

"Now, Pierre, now."

Eagerly Pierre did as he was bid; but somehow felt disappointed, and yet

surprised at what he saw. He saw the word Isabel, quite legibly but still fadedly gilded upon a part of one side of the interior, where it made a projecting curve.

"A very curious place thou hast chosen, Isabel, wherein to have the ownership of the guitar engraved. How did ever any person get in there to do it, I should like to know?"

The girl looked surprisedly at him a moment; then took the instrument from him, and looked into it herself. She put it down, and continued.

"I see, my brother, thou dost not comprehend. When one knows every thing about any object, one is too apt to suppose that the slightest hint will suffice to throw it quite as open to any other person. I did not have the name gilded there, my brother."

"How?" cried Pierre.

"The name was gilded there when I first got the guitar, though then I did not know it. The guitar must have been expressly made for some one by the name of Isabel; because the lettering could only have been put there before the guitar was put together."

"Go on--hurry," said Pierre.

"Yes, one day, after I had owned it a long time, a strange whim came

into me. Thou know'st that it is not at all uncommon for children to break their dearest playthings in order to gratify a half-crazy curiosity to find out what is in the hidden heart of them. So it is with children, sometimes. And, Pierre, I have always been, and feel that I must always continue to be a child, though I should grow to three score years and ten. Seized with this sudden whim, I unscrewed the part I showed thee, and peeped in, and saw 'Isabel.' Now I have not yet told thee, that from as early a time as I can remember, I have nearly always gone by the name of Bell. And at the particular time I now speak of, my knowledge of general and trivial matters was sufficiently advanced to make it quite a familiar thing to me, that Bell was often a diminutive for Isabella, or Isabel. It was therefore no very strange affair, that considering my age, and other connected circumstances at the time, I should have instinctively associated the word Isabel, found in the guitar, with my own abbreviated name, and so be led into all sorts of fancyings. They return upon me now. Do not speak to me."

She leaned away from him, toward the occasionally illuminated casement, in the same manner as on the previous night, and for a few moments seemed struggling with some wild bewilderment. But now she suddenly turned, and fully confronted Pierre with all the wonderfulness of her most surprising face.

"I am called woman, and thou, man, Pierre; but there is neither man nor woman about it. Why should I not speak out to thee? There is no sex in

our immaculateness. Pierre, the secret name in the guitar even now thrills me through and through. Pierre, think! think! Oh, canst thou not comprehend? see it?--what I mean, Pierre? The secret name in the guitar thrills me, thrills me, whirls me, whirls me; so secret, wholly hidden, yet constantly carried about in it; unseen, unsuspected, always vibrating to the hidden heart-strings--broken heart-strings; oh, my mother, my mother, my mother!"

As the wild plaints of Isabel pierced into his bosom's core, they carried with them the first inkling of the extraordinary conceit, so vaguely and shrinkingly hinted at in her till now entirely unintelligible words.

She lifted her dry burning eyes of long-fringed fire to him.

"Pierre--I have no slightest proof--but the guitar was hers, I know, I feel it was. Say, did I not last night tell thee, how it first sung to me upon the bed, and answered me, without my once touching it? and how it always sung to me and answered me, and soothed and loved me,--Hark now; thou shalt hear my mother's spirit."

She carefully scanned the strings, and tuned them carefully; then placed the guitar in the casement-bench, and knelt before it; and in low, sweet, and changefully modulated notes, so barely audible, that Pierre bent over to catch them; breathed the word mother, mother, mother! There was profound silence for a time; when suddenly, to the lowest and

least audible note of all, the magical untouched guitar responded with a quick spark of melody, which in the following hush, long vibrated and subsidingly tingled through the room; while to his augmented wonder, he now espied, quivering along the metallic strings of the guitar, some minute scintillations, seemingly caught from the instrument's close proximity to the occasionally irradiated window.

The girl still kept kneeling; but an altogether unwonted expression suddenly overcast her whole countenance. She darted one swift glance at Pierre; and then with a single toss of her hand tumbled her unrestrained locks all over her, so that they tent-wise invested her whole kneeling form close to the floor, and yet swept the floor with their wild redundancy. Never Saya of Limeean girl, at dim mass in St. Dominic's cathedral, so completely muffled the human figure. To Pierre, the deep oaken recess of the double-casement, before which Isabel was kneeling, seemed now the immediate vestibule of some awful shrine, mystically revealed through the obscurely open window, which ever and anon was still softly illumined by the mild heat-lightnings and ground-lightnings, that wove their wonderfulness without, in the unsearchable air of that ebony warm and most noiseless summer night.

Some unsubduable word was on Pierre's lip, but a sudden voice from out the veil bade him be silent.

"Mother--mother--mother!"

Again, after a preluding silence, the guitar as magically responded as before; the sparks quivered along its strings; and again Pierre felt as in the immediate presence of the spirit.

"Shall I, mother?--Art thou ready? Wilt thou tell me?--Now? Now?"

These words were lowly and sweetly murmured in the same way with the word mother, being changefully varied in their modulations, till at the last now, the magical guitar again responded; and the girl swiftly drew it to her beneath her dark tent of hair. In this act, as the long curls swept over the strings of the guitar, the strange sparks--still quivering there--caught at those attractive curls; the entire casement was suddenly and wovenly illumined; then waned again; while now, in the succeeding dimness, every downward undulating wave and billow of Isabel's tossed tresses gleamed here and there like a tract of phosphorescent midnight sea; and, simultaneously, all the four winds of the world of melody broke loose, and again as on the previous night, only in a still more subtle, and wholly inexplicable way, Pierre felt himself surrounded by ten thousand sprites and gnomes, and his whole soul was swayed and tossed by supernatural tides; and again he heard the wondrous, rebounding, chanted words:

"Mystery! Mystery!

Mystery of Isabel!

Mystery! Mystery!

Isabel and Mystery!

Mystery!"

III.

Almost deprived of consciousness by the spell flung over him by the marvelous girl, Pierre unknowingly gazed away from her, as on vacancy; and when at last stillness had once more fallen upon the room--all except the stepping--and he recovered his self-possession, and turned to look where he might now be, he was surprised to see Isabel composedly, though avertedly, seated on the bench; the longer and fuller tresses of her now ungleaming hair flung back, and the guitar quietly leaning in the corner.

He was about to put some unconsidered question to her, but she half-anticipated it by bidding him, in a low, but nevertheless almost authoritative tone, not to make any allusion to the scene he had just beheld.

He paused, profoundly thinking to himself, and now felt certain that the entire scene, from the first musical invocation of the guitar, must have unpremeditatedly proceeded from a sudden impulse in the girl, inspired by the peculiar mood into which the preceding conversation, and especially the handling of the guitar under such circumstances, had irresistibly thrown her.

But that certain something of the preternatural in the scene, of which he could not rid his mind:--the, so to speak, voluntary and all but intelligent responsiveness of the guitar--its strangely scintillating strings--the so suddenly glorified head of Isabel; altogether, these things seemed not at the time entirely produced by customary or natural causes. To Pierre's dilated senses Isabel seemed to swim in an electric fluid; the vivid buckler of her brow seemed as a magnetic plate. Now first this night was Pierre made aware of what, in the superstitiousness of his rapt enthusiasm, he could not help believing was an extraordinary physical magnetism in Isabel. And--as it were derived from this marvelous quality thus imputed to her--he now first became vaguely sensible of a certain still more marvelous power in the girl over himself and his most interior thoughts and motions;--a power so hovering upon the confines of the invisible world, that it seemed more inclined that way than this;--a power which not only seemed irresistibly to draw him toward Isabel, but to draw him away from another quarter--wantonly as it were, and yet quite ignorantly and unintendingly; and, besides, without respect apparently to any thing ulterior, and yet again, only under cover of drawing him to her. For over all these things, and interfusing itself with the sparkling electricity in which she seemed to swim, was an ever-creeping and condensing haze of ambiguities. Often, in after-times with her, did he recall this first magnetic night, and would seem to see that she then had bound him to her by an extraordinary atmospheric spell--both physical and spiritual--which henceforth it had become impossible for him to break, but whose full potency he never recognized till long after he had become habituated to its sway. This

spell seemed one with that Pantheistic master-spell, which eternally locks in mystery and in muteness the universal subject world, and the physical electricalness of Isabel seemed reciprocal with the heat-lightnings and the ground-lightnings nigh to which it had first become revealed to Pierre. She seemed molded from fire and air, and vivified at some Voltaic pile of August thunder-clouds heaped against the sunset.

The occasional sweet simplicity, and innocence, and humbleness of her story; her often serene and open aspect; her deep-seated, but mostly quiet, unobtrusive sadness, and that touchingness of her less unwonted tone and air;--these only the more signalized and contrastingly emphasized the profounder, subtler, and more mystic part of her. Especially did Pierre feel this, when after another silent interval, she now proceeded with her story in a manner so gently confiding, so entirely artless, so almost peasant-like in its simplicity, and dealing in some details so little sublimated in themselves, that it seemed well nigh impossible that this unassuming maid should be the same dark, regal being who had but just now bade Pierre be silent in so imperious a tone, and around whose wondrous temples the strange electric glory had been playing. Yet not very long did she now thus innocently proceed, ere, at times, some fainter flashes of her electricalness came from her, but only to be followed by such melting, human, and most feminine traits as brought all his soft, enthusiast tears into the sympathetic but still unshedding eyes of Pierre.

IV.

"Thou rememberest, my brother, my telling thee last night, how the--the--thou knowest what I mean--that, there"--avertedly pointing to the guitar; "thou rememberest how it came into my possession. But perhaps I did not tell thee, that the pedler said he had got it in barter from the servants of a great house some distance from the place where I was then residing."

Pierre signed his acquiescence, and Isabel proceeded:

"Now, at long though stated intervals, that man passed the farm-house in his trading route between the small towns and villages. When I discovered the gilding in the guitar, I kept watch for him; for though I truly felt persuaded that Fate had the dispensing of her own secrets in her own good time; yet I also felt persuaded that in some cases Fate drops us one little hint, leaving our own minds to follow it up, so that we of ourselves may come to the grand secret in reserve. So I kept diligent watch for him; and the next time he stopped, without permitting him at all to guess my motives, I contrived to steal out of him what great house it was from which the guitar had come. And, my brother, it was the mansion of Saddle Meadows."

Pierre started, and the girl went on:

"Yes, my brother, Saddle Meadows; 'old General Glendinning's place,' he said; 'but the old hero's long dead and gone now; and--the more's the pity--so is the young General, his son, dead and gone; but then there is a still younger grandson General left; that family always keep the title and the name a-going; yes, even to the surname,--Pierre. Pierre Glendinning was the white-haired old General's name, who fought in the old French and Indian wars; and Pierre Glendinning is his young great-grandson's name.' Thou may'st well look at me so, my brother;--yes, he meant thee, thee, my brother."

"But the guitar--the guitar!"--cried Pierre--"how came the guitar openly at Saddle Meadows, and how came it to be bartered away by servants? Tell me that, Isabel!"

"Do not put such impetuous questions to me, Pierre; else thou mayst recall the old--may be, it is the evil spell upon me. I can not precisely and knowingly answer thee. I could surmise; but what are surmises worth? Oh, Pierre, better, a million times, and far sweeter are mysteries than surmises: though the mystery be unfathomable, it is still the unfathomableness of fullness; but the surmise, that is but shallow and unmeaning emptiness."

"But this is the most inexplicable point of all. Tell me, Isabel; surely thou must have thought something about this thing."

"Much, Pierre, very much; but only about the mystery of it--nothing

more. Could I, I would not now be fully told, how the guitar came to be at Saddle Meadows, and came to be bartered away by the servants of Saddle Meadows. Enough, that it found me out, and came to me, and spoke and sung to me, and soothed me, and has been every thing to me."

She paused a moment; while vaguely to his secret self Pierre revolved these strange revealings; but now he was all attention again as Isabel resumed.

"I now held in my mind's hand the clew, my brother. But I did not immediately follow it further up. Sufficient to me in my loneliness was the knowledge, that I now knew where my father's family was to be found. As yet not the slightest intention of ever disclosing myself to them, had entered my mind. And assured as I was, that for obvious reasons, none of his surviving relatives could possibly know me, even if they saw me, for what I really was, I felt entire security in the event of encountering any of them by chance. But my unavoidable displacements and migrations from one house to another, at last brought me within twelve miles of Saddle Meadows. I began to feel an increasing longing in me; but side by side with it, a new-born and competing pride,--yes, pride, Pierre. Do my eyes flash? They belie me, if they do not. But it is no common pride, Pierre; for what has Isabel to be proud of in this world? It is the pride of--of--a too, too longing, loving heart, Pierre--the pride of lasting suffering and grief, my brother! Yes, I conquered the great longing with the still more powerful pride, Pierre; and so I would not now be here, in this room,--nor wouldst thou ever have received any

line from me; nor, in all worldly probability, ever so much as heard of her who is called Isabel Banford, had it not been for my hearing that at Walter Ulver's, only three miles from the mansion of Saddle Meadows, poor Bell would find people kind enough to give her wages for her work. Feel my hand, my brother."

"Dear divine girl, my own exalted Isabel!" cried Pierre, catching the offered hand with ungovernable emotion, "how most unbeseeming, that this strange hardness, and this still stranger littleness should be united in any human hand. But hard and small, it by an opposite analogy hints of the soft capacious heart that made the hand so hard with heavenly submission to thy most undeserved and martyred lot. Would, Isabel, that these my kisses on the hand, were on the heart itself, and dropt the seeds of eternal joy and comfort there."

He leaped to his feet, and stood before her with such warm, god-like majesty of love and tenderness, that the girl gazed up at him as though he were the one benignant star in all her general night.

"Isabel," cried Pierre, "I stand the sweet penance in my father's stead, thou, in thy mother's. By our earthly acts we shall redeemingly bless both their eternal lots; we will love with the pure and perfect love of angel to an angel. If ever I fall from thee, dear Isabel, may Pierre fall from himself; fall back forever into vacant nothingness and night!"

"My brother, my brother, speak not so to me; it is too much; unused to

any love ere now, thine, so heavenly and immense, falls crushing on me!
Such love is almost hard to bear as hate. Be still; do not speak to me."

They were both silent for a time; when she went on.

"Yes, my brother, Fate had now brought me within three miles of thee;
and--but shall I go straight on, and tell thee all, Pierre? all? every
thing? art thou of such divineness, that I may speak straight on, in all
my thoughts, heedless whither they may flow, or what things they may
float to me?"

"Straight on, and fearlessly," said Pierre.

"By chance I saw thy mother, Pierre, and under such circumstances that I
knew her to be thy mother; and--but shall I go on?"

"Straight on, my Isabel; thou didst see my mother--well?"

"And when I saw her, though I spake not to her, nor she to me, yet
straightway my heart knew that she would love me not."

"Thy heart spake true," muttered Pierre to himself; "go on."

"I re-swore an oath never to reveal myself to thy mother."

"Oath well sworn," again he muttered; "go on."

"But I saw thee, Pierre; and, more than ever filled my mother toward thy father, Pierre, then upheaved in me. Straightway I knew that if ever I should come to be made known to thee, then thy own generous love would open itself to me."

"Again thy heart spake true," he murmured; "go on--and didst thou re-swear again?"

"No, Pierre; but yes, I did. I swore that thou wert my brother; with love and pride I swore, that young and noble Pierre Glendinning was my brother!"

"And only that?"

"Nothing more, Pierre; not to thee even, did I ever think to reveal myself."

"How then? thou art revealed to me."

"Yes; but the great God did it, Pierre--not poor Bell. Listen.

"I felt very dreary here; poor, dear Delly--thou must have heard something of her story--a most sorrowful house, Pierre. Hark! that is her seldom-pausing pacing thou hearest from the floor above. So she keeps ever pacing, pacing, pacing; in her track, all thread-bare,

Pierre, is her chamber-rug. Her father will not look upon her; her mother, she hath cursed her to her face. Out of yon chamber, Pierre, Delly hath not slept, for now four weeks and more; nor ever hath she once laid upon her bed; it was last made up five weeks ago; but paces, paces, paces, all through the night, till after twelve; and then sits vacant in her chair. Often I would go to her to comfort her; but she says, 'Nay, nay, nay,' to me through the door; says 'Nay, nay, nay,' and only nay to me, through the bolted door; bolted three weeks ago--when I by cunning arts stole her dead baby from her, and with these fingers, alone, by night, scooped out a hollow, and, seconding heaven's own charitable stroke, buried that sweet, wee symbol of her not unpardonable shame far from the ruthless foot of man--yes, bolted three weeks ago, not once unbolted since; her food I must thrust through the little window in her closet. Pierre, hardly these two handfuls has she eaten in a week."

"Curses, wasp-like, cohere on that villain, Ned, and sting him to his death!" cried Pierre, smit by this most piteous tale. "What can be done for her, sweet Isabel; can Pierre do aught?"

"If thou or I do not, then the ever-hospitable grave will prove her quick refuge, Pierre. Father and mother both, are worse than dead and gone to her. They would have turned her forth, I think, but for my own poor petitionings, unceasing in her behalf!"

Pierre's deep concern now gave place to a momentary look of benevolent

intelligence.

"Isabel, a thought of benefit to Delly has just entered me; but I am still uncertain how best it may be acted on. Resolved I am though to succor her. Do thou still hold her here yet awhile, by thy sweet petitionings, till my further plans are more matured. Now run on with thy story, and so divert me from the pacing;--her every step steps in my soul."

"Thy noble heart hath many chambers, Pierre; the records of thy wealth, I see, are not bound up in the one poor book of Isabel, my brother. Thou art a visible token, Pierre, of the invisible angel-hoods, which in our darker hours we do sometimes distrust. The gospel of thy acts goes very far, my brother. Were all men like to thee, then were there no men at all,--mankind extinct in seraphim!"

"Praises are for the base, my sister, cunningly to entice them to fair Virtue by our ignorings of the ill in them, and our imputings of the good not theirs. So make not my head to hang, sweet Isabel. Praise me not. Go on now with thy tale."

"I have said to thee, my brother, how most dreary I found it here, and from the first. Wonted all my life to sadness--if it be such--still, this house hath such acuteness in its general grief, such hopelessness and despair of any slightest remedy--that even poor Bell could scarce abide it always, without some little going forth into contrasting

scenes. So I went forth into the places of delight, only that I might return more braced to minister in the haunts of woe. For continual unchanging residence therein, doth but bring on woe's stupor, and make us as dead. So I went forth betimes; visiting the neighboring cottages; where there were chattering children, and no one place vacant at the cheerful board. Thus at last I chanced to hear of the Sewing Circle to be held at the Miss Pennies'; and how that they were anxious to press into their kind charity all the maidens of the country round. In various cottages, I was besought to join; and they at length persuaded me; not that I was naturally loth to it, and needed such entreaties; but at first I felt great fear, lest at such a scene I might closely encounter some of the Glendinnings; and that thought was then namelessly repulsive to me. But by stealthy inquiries I learned, that the lady of the manorial-house would not be present;--it proved deceptive information;--but I went; and all the rest thou knowest."

"I do, sweet Isabel, but thou must tell it over to me; and all thy emotions there."

V.

"Though but one day hath passed, my brother, since we first met in life, yet thou hast that heavenly magnet in thee, which draws all my soul's interior to thee. I will go on.--Having to wait for a neighbor's wagon, I arrived but late at the Sewing Circle. When I entered, the two joined

rooms were very full. With the farmer's girls, our neighbors, I passed along to the further corner, where thou didst see me; and as I went, some heads were turned, and some whisperings I heard, of--'She's the new help at poor Walter Ulver's--the strange girl they've got--she thinks herself 'mazing pretty, I'll be bound;--but nobody knows her--Oh, how demure!--but not over-good, I guess;--I wouldn't be her, not I--mayhap she's some other ruined Delly, run away;--minx!' It was the first time poor Bell had ever mixed in such a general crowded company; and knowing little or nothing of such things, I had thought, that the meeting being for charity's sweet sake, uncharity could find no harbor there; but no doubt it was mere thoughtlessness, not malice in them. Still, it made my heart ache in me sadly; for then I very keenly felt the dread suspiciousness, in which a strange and lonely grief invests itself to common eyes; as if grief itself were not enough, nor innocence any armor to us, but despite must also come, and icy infamy! Miserable returnings then I had--even in the midst of bright-budding girls and full-blown women--miserable returnings then I had of the feeling, the bewildering feeling of the inhumanities I spoke of in my earlier story. But Pierre, blessed Pierre, do not look so sadly and half-reproachfully upon me. Lone and lost though I have been, I love my kind; and charitably and intelligently pity them, who uncharitably and unintelligently do me despite. And thou, thou, blessed brother, hath glorified many somber places in my soul, and taught me once for all to know, that my kind are capable of things which would be glorious in angels. So look away from me, dear Pierre, till thou hast taught thine eyes more wanted glances."

"They are vile falsifying telegraphs of me, then, sweet Isabel. What my look was I can not tell, but my heart was only dark with ill-restrained upbraidings against heaven that could unrelentingly see such innocence as thine so suffer. Go on with thy too-touching tale."

"Quietly I sat there sewing, not brave enough to look up at all, and thanking my good star, that had led me to so concealed a nook behind the rest: quietly I sat there, sewing on a flannel shirt, and with each stitch praying God, that whatever heart it might be folded over, the flannel might hold it truly warm; and keep out the wide-world-coldness which I felt myself; and which no flannel, or thickest fur, or any fire then could keep off from me; quietly I sat there sewing, when I heard the announcing words--oh, how deep and ineffaceably engraved they are!--'Ah, dames, dames, Madame Glendinning,--Master Pierre Glendinning.' Instantly, my sharp needle went through my side and stitched my heart; the flannel dropt from my hand; thou heard'st my shriek. But the good people bore me still nearer to the casement close at hand, and threw it open wide; and God's own breath breathed on me; and I rallied; and said it was some merest passing fit--'twas quite over now--I was used to it--they had my heart's best thanks--but would they now only leave me to myself, it were best for me;--I would go on and sew. And thus it came and passed away; and again I sat sewing on the flannel, hoping either that the unanticipated persons would soon depart, or else that some spirit would catch me away from there; I sat sewing on--till, Pierre! Pierre!--without looking up--for that I dared not do at any time that evening--only once--without looking up, or knowing

aught but the flannel on my knee, and the needle in my heart, I felt,--Pierre, felt--a glance of magnetic meaning on me. Long, I, shrinking, sideways turned to meet it, but could not; till some helping spirit seized me, and all my soul looked up at thee in my full-fronting face. It was enough. Fate was in that moment. All the loneliness of my life, all the choked longings of my soul, now poured over me. I could not away from them. Then first I felt the complete deplorableness of my state; that while thou, my brother, had a mother, and troops of aunts and cousins, and plentiful friends in city and in country--I, I, Isabel, thy own father's daughter, was thrust out of all hearts' gates, and shivered in the winter way. But this was but the least. Not poor Bell can tell thee all the feelings of poor Bell, or what feelings she felt first. It was all one whirl of old and new bewilderings, mixed and slanted with a driving madness. But it was most the sweet, inquisitive, kindly interested aspect of thy face,--so strangely like thy father's, too--the one only being that I first did love--it was that which most stirred the distracting storm in me; most charged me with the immense longings for some one of my blood to know me, and to own me, though but once, and then away. Oh, my dear brother--Pierre! Pierre!--could'st thou take out my heart, and look at it in thy hand, then thou would'st find it all over written, this way and that, and crossed again, and yet again, with continual lines of longings, that found no end but in suddenly calling thee. Call him! Call him! He will come!--so cried my heart to me; so cried the leaves and stars to me, as I that night went home. But pride rose up--the very pride in my own longings,--and as one arm pulled, the other held. So I stood still, and called thee not. But

Fate will be Fate, and it was fated. Once having met thy fixed regardful glance; once having seen the full angelicalness in thee, my whole soul was undone by thee; my whole pride was cut off at the root, and soon showed a blighting in the bud; which spread deep into my whole being, till I knew, that utterly decay and die away I must, unless pride let me go, and I, with the one little trumpet of a pen, blew my heart's shrillest blast, and called dear Pierre to me. My soul was full; and as my beseeching ink went tracing o'er the page, my tears contributed their mite, and made a strange alloy. How blest I felt that my so bitterly tear-mingled ink--that last depth of my anguish--would never be visibly known to thee, but the tears would dry upon the page, and all be fair again, ere the so submerged-freighted letter should meet thine eye.

"Ah, there thou wast deceived, poor Isabel," cried Pierre impulsively; "thy tears dried not fair, but dried red, almost like blood; and nothing so much moved my inmost soul as that tragic sight."

"How? how? Pierre, my brother? Dried they red? Oh, horrible! enchantment! most undreamed of!"

"Nay, the ink--the ink! something chemic in it changed thy real tears to seeming blood;--only that, my sister."

"Oh Pierre! thus wonderfully is it--seems to me--that our own hearts do not ever know the extremity of their own sufferings; sometimes we bleed blood, when we think it only water. Of our sufferings, as of our

talents, others sometimes are the better judges. But stop me! force me backward to my story! Yet methinks that now thou knowest all;--no, not entirely all. Thou dost not know what planned and winnowed motive I did have in writing thee; nor does poor Bell know that; for poor Bell was too delirious to have planned and winnowed motives then. The impulse in me called thee, not poor Bell. God called thee, Pierre, not poor Bell. Even now, when I have passed one night after seeing thee, and hearkening to all thy full love and graciousness; even now, I stand as one amazed, and feel not what may be coming to me, or what will now befall me, from having so rashly claimed thee for mine. Pierre, now, now, this instant a vague anguish fills me. Tell me, by loving me, by owning me, publicly or secretly,--tell me, doth it involve any vital hurt to thee? Speak without reserve; speak honestly; as I do to thee! Speak now, Pierre, and tell me all!"

"Is Love a harm? Can Truth betray to pain? Sweet Isabel, how can hurt come in the path to God? Now, when I know thee all, now did I forget thee, fail to acknowledge thee, and love thee before the wide world's whole brazen width--could I do that; then might'st thou ask thy question reasonably and say--Tell me, Pierre, does not the suffocating in thee of poor Bell's holy claims, does not that involve for thee unending misery? And my truthful soul would echo--Unending misery! Nay, nay, nay. Thou art my sister and I am thy brother; and that part of the world which knows me, shall acknowledge thee; or by heaven I will crush the disdainful world down on its knees to thee, my sweet Isabel!"

"The menacings in thy eyes are dear delights to me; I grow up with thy own glorious stature; and in thee, my brother, I see God's indignant ambassador to me, saying--Up, up, Isabel, and take no terms from the common world, but do thou make terms to it, and grind thy fierce rights out of it! Thy catching nobleness unsexes me, my brother; and now I know that in her most exalted moment, then woman no more feels the twin-born softness of her breasts, but feels chain-armor palpitating there!"

Her changed attitude of beautiful audacity; her long scornful hair, that trailed out a disheveled banner; her wonderful transfigured eyes, in which some meteors seemed playing up; all this now seemed to Pierre the work of an invisible enchanter. Transformed she stood before him; and Pierre, bowing low over to her, owned that irrelative, darting majesty of humanity, which can be majestic and menacing in woman as in man.

But her gentler sex returned to Isabel at last; and she sat silent in the casement's niche, looking out upon the soft ground-lightnings of the electric summer night.

VI.

Sadly smiling, Pierre broke the pause.

"My sister, thou art so rich, that thou must do me alms; I am very hungry; I have forgotten to eat since breakfast;--and now thou shalt

bring me bread and a cup of water, Isabel, ere I go forth from thee.
Last night I went rummaging in a pantry, like a bake-house burglar; but to-night thou and I must sup together, Isabel; for as we may henceforth live together, let us begin forthwith to eat in company."

Isabel looked up at him, with sudden and deep emotion, then all acquiescing sweetness, and silently left the room.

As she returned, Pierre, casting his eyes toward the ceiling, said--"She is quiet now, the pacing hath entirely ceased."

"Not the beating, tho'; her foot hath paused, not her unceasing heart. My brother, she is not quiet now; quiet for her hath gone; so that the pivoted stillness of this night is yet a noisy madness to her."

"Give me pen or pencil, and some paper, Isabel."

She laid down her loaf, and plate, and knife, and brought him pen, and ink, and paper.

Pierre took the pen.

"Was this the one, dear Isabel?"

"It is the one, my brother; none other is in this poor cot."

He gazed at it intensely. Then turning to the table, steadily wrote the following note:

"For Delly Ulver: with the deep and true regard and sympathy of Pierre Glendinning.

"Thy sad story--partly known before--hath now more fully come to me, from one who sincerely feels for thee, and who hath imparted her own sincerity to me. Thou desirest to quit this neighborhood, and be somewhere at peace, and find some secluded employ fitted to thy sex and age. With this, I now willingly charge myself, and insure it to thee, so far as my utmost ability can go.

Therefore--if consolation be not wholly spurned by thy great grief, which too often happens, though it be but grief's great folly so to feel--therefore, two true friends of thine do here beseech thee to take some little heart to thee, and bethink thee, that all thy life is not yet lived; that Time hath surest healing in his continuous balm. Be patient yet a little while, till thy future lot be disposed for thee, through our best help; and so, know me and Isabel thy earnest friends and true-hearted lovers."

He handed the note to Isabel. She read it silently, and put it down, and spread her two hands over him, and with one motion lifted her eyes toward Delly and toward God.

"Thou think'st it will not pain her to receive the note, Isabel? Thou

know'st best. I thought, that ere our help do really reach her, some promise of it now might prove slight comfort. But keep it, and do as thou think'st best."

"Then straightway will I give it her, my brother," said Isabel, quitting him.

An infixing stillness, now thrust a long rivet through the night, and fast nailed it to that side of the world. And alone again in such an hour, Pierre could not but listen. He heard Isabel's step on the stair; then it approached him from above; then he heard a gentle knock, and thought he heard a rustling, as of paper slid over a threshold underneath a door. Then another advancing and opposite step tremblingly met Isabel's; and then both steps stepped from each other, and soon Isabel came back to him.

"Thou did'st knock, and slide it underneath the door?"

"Yes, and she hath it now. Hark! a sobbing! Thank God, long arid grief hath found a tear at last. Pity, sympathy hath done this.--Pierre, for thy dear deed thou art already sainted, ere thou be dead."

"Do saints hunger, Isabel?" said Pierre, striving to call her away from this. "Come, give me the loaf; but no, thou shalt help me, my sister.--Thank thee;--this is twice over the bread of sweetness.--Is this of thine own making, Isabel?"

"My own making, my brother."

"Give me the cup; hand it me with thine own hand. So:--Isabel, my heart and soul are now full of deepest reverence; yet I do dare to call this the real sacrament of the supper.--Eat with me."

They eat together without a single word; and without a single word, Pierre rose, and kissed her pure and spotless brow, and without a single word departed from the place.

VII.

We know not Pierre Glendinning's thoughts as he gained the village and passed on beneath its often shrouding trees, and saw no light from man, and heard no sound from man, but only, by intervals, saw at his feet the soft ground-lightnings, snake-like, playing in and out among the blades of grass; and between the trees, caught the far dim light from heaven, and heard the far wide general hum of the sleeping but still breathing earth.

He paused before a detached and pleasant house, with much shrubbery about it. He mounted the portico and knocked distinctly there, just as the village clock struck one. He knocked, but no answer came. He knocked again, and soon he heard a sash thrown up in the second story, and an

astonished voice inquired who was there?

"It is Pierre Glendinning, and he desires an instant interview with the Reverend Mr. Falsgrave."

"Do I hear right?--in heaven's name, what is the matter, young gentleman?"

"Every thing is the matter; the whole world is the matter. Will you admit me, sir?"

"Certainly--but I beseech thee--nay, stay, I will admit thee."

In quicker time than could have been anticipated, the door was opened to Pierre by Mr. Falsgrave in person, holding a candle, and invested in his very becoming student's wrapper of Scotch plaid.

"For heaven's sake, what is the matter, Mr. Glendinning?"

"Heaven and earth is the matter, sir! shall we go up to the study?"

"Certainly, but--but--"

"Well, let us proceed, then."

They went up-stairs, and soon found themselves in the clergyman's

retreat, and both sat down; the amazed host still holding the candle in his hand, and intently eying Pierre, with an apprehensive aspect.

"Thou art a man of God, sir, I believe."

"I? I? I? upon my word, Mr. Glendinning!"

"Yes, sir, the world calls thee a man of God. Now, what hast thou, the man of God, decided, with my mother, concerning Delly Ulver?"

"Delly Ulver! why, why--what can this madness mean?"

"It means, sir, what have thou and my mother decided concerning Delly Ulver."

"She?--Delly Ulver? She is to depart the neighborhood; why, her own parents want her not."

"How is she to depart? Who is to take her? Art thou to take her? Where is she to go? Who has food for her? What is to keep her from the pollution to which such as she are every day driven to contribute, by the detestable uncharitableness and heartlessness of the world?"

"Mr. Glendinning," said the clergyman, now somewhat calmly putting down the candle, and folding himself with dignity in his gown; "Mr.

Glendinning, I will not now make any mention of my natural astonishment

at this most unusual call, and the most extraordinary time of it. Thou hast sought information upon a certain point, and I have given it to thee, to the best of my knowledge. All thy after and incidental questions, I choose to have no answer for. I will be most happy to see thee at any other time, but for the present thou must excuse my presence. Good-night, sir."

But Pierre sat entirely still, and the clergyman could not but remain standing still.

"I perfectly comprehend the whole, sir. Delly Ulver, then, is to be driven out to starve or rot; and this, too, by the acquiescence of a man of God. Mr. Falsgrave, the subject of Delly, deeply interesting as it is to me, is only the preface to another, still more interesting to me, and concerning which I once cherished some slight hope that thou wouldst have been able, in thy Christian character, to sincerely and honestly counsel me. But a hint from heaven assures me now, that thou hast no earnest and world-disdaining counsel for me. I must seek it direct from God himself, whom, I now know, never delegates his holiest admonishings. But I do not blame thee; I think I begin to see how thy profession is unavoidably entangled by all fleshly alliances, and can not move with godly freedom in a world of benefices. I am more sorry than indignant. Pardon me for my most uncivil call, and know me as not thy enemy. Good-night, sir."