Gathered In: A Novel

Spence, Catherine Helen (1825-1910)

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Gathered In

A Novel

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Gathered In
Chapter 1 Sorrow

“You've come owre late to see Isabel in life, Mr. McDiarmid,” said old Marion Oswald; “It's of no avail to seek to see the dead.”

“I have lost no time — I started immediately on receiving the news of her dangerous state. I did not even know of her illness till yesterday,” said Norman McDiarmid, a tall distinguished-looking man, in the very prime of life, who seemed strongly agitated, and spoke with difficulty.

“There's been little passing between you and her in the way of letters, and now it is all at an end. Isabel passed away at midnight.”

“Was there any message for me beyond this?” and he held in his hand a letter.

“She died at peace wi' a' men, an' nae doubt wi' you, and I hope and trust at peace wi' her God.”

“But was there no particular message for me, Mrs. Oswald?”

“What for should there be? She forgave you, as she forgave a' that had dune her ill, as free as she hoped to be forgi'en hersel' for all that lay on her conscience.”

“There was no trouble, there, Mrs. Oswald? Kenneth saw no trouble?”

“Only about leavin' him; and that was sair. But, no; she ne'er said word to him that I could come at that her soul was in deep waters. The minister saw her as often as three times in the week, and he was satisfied; aye, on the whole he was satisfied. She had a vision of the glory that was to follow, and rested on her Redeemer with full trust for hersel'; but her soul was grieving about the laddie. God is the father of the fatherless, the minister kept saying, but woe me! she said she kent that weel, but how was he to be mother to the motherless?”

“The boy was much with her, I hope?”

“All but schule time; he was maistly at the bedside, and I maun say, very handy for a laddie. A' that the minister dooted about Isabel's frame of mind in the face o' the great change, was that she had na faith to leave the bairn in God's hands, and that she had na just the full sense of sin that such worms o' the dust as we are suld have, especially with the reproach on her that she had.”

“Then her mind was at peace in itself;” said Mr. McDiarmid.

“She said she was sure her sins were forgiven, and lost in the ocean o' Divine Love, and said she could na just be troubled with bringing up old stories, and wi' the laddie hanging owre her, little could be said. Isabel was never the lass to put blame off hersel' on to ony other body, or she might have made her case clearer to the minister and to me; but Kenneth will
never be told by me, good or bad, on the matter."

“I must see Isabel, Mrs. Oswald.”

“What's the good? What's the use? Ten years have never looked near her living, and now you would fain lay a balm to your conscience by looking on her face, which is now as the face of an angel in heaven, and you will think that she hadna sae muckle to dree or she wan there. It will be harder for you, I'm thinking.”

“You speak truly, Mrs. Oswald, but Isabel wrote to me that, living or dead, I was to see her, and alone. It is the last wish of one very dear to you. You must respect it.”

The old woman reluctantly rose from the chair, where, with her open Bible beside her, and her knitting in her hands, she had kept her place during the stranger's visit. There was no trace of tears on the resolute face; all the emotion had been repressed, but the feelings were probably the deeper for that. She opened a door which led out of the living-room of the cottage, so low that Norman McDiarmid had to stoop to enter, admitted him, and closed the door again softly, and sat down to her knitting, taking every stitch as if it caught at her heart.

It was a poor little room in a poor cottage, but beautifully clean; and there on the bed lay in her graveclothes a dead woman, apparently about thirty, with a face so heavenly in its expression of perfect repose that no one could imagine that a breath of slander or a glance of scorn could ever have come near her. For a few moments he gazed on the still face and motionless form, to which not even his sudden appearance could give the faintest impulse, in reverent awe, and then laying his lips to the cold lips of the dead, he shook and trembled with passionate, uncontrollable anguish and regret. Even the dull ears of the mother could hear the sobs of the strong man, who thus met after many years the object of so much young love. Tender memories, bitter regrets, and equally futile wishes chased each other through his mind, while he stood for a period that appeared to the mother interminable. “And this is all I can do. I cannot lay her dear head in the grave, and see the last of my poor Isabel. Only I must see the boy.”

He opened the door, and Marion Oswald suddenly laid down her knitting.

“Well, are you satisfied?” she asked.

“I am very grateful to you for your kindness in letting me see her.”

“Not her,” said the mother; “She's far enough off from you now.”

“Did she suffer much, bodily I mean; was she ill long?”

“Off and on, about six months; but no sair stressed till the last month or thereby.”
“Could nothing further have been done? No better advice? Why did not you write to me? Could we have not saved her for the boy?”

“Only for the boy,” said Marion Oswald bitterly. “Do you no think that it's an empty house now for her father and me. Whatever else she did or did not do, she was a good and dutiful bairn to us; and the laddie will get owre it lang or we will. But there was nae saving her life for ane or for the ither — she behoved to die — the heart would do its work nae langer.”

“Do not suppose I do not feel for your heavy share in the bereavement. It may be that you will feel the loss more than the boy, but he really loses more. Just ten the 15th day of March. I must see him. Where is Kenneth?”

“Oh! the laddie's out bye, but ye canna see him.”

“But she says I must see him; she cared more for that than that I should see herself.”

“Some other time; no now. Now that she is taken, it's hard for me to see you enter the house you have never darkened before wi' your bodily presence, though you have darkened it sairly otherways. But wi' the tears in your eyes, and the sob in your voice, I canna let you see Kenneth. He'll guess what has been kept frae him. He belongs noo to his grandfather and to me. He is an orphan, and I'd fain have him ken no other than that. And since you were owre hard to do Isabel the justice she should have had, and she was owre soft to make you, I'd have you and Kenneth kept apart for good and a'.”

“But here is Isabel's letter. There is no question that her last wish was that I should see the boy.”

“Aye,” said the mother, taking a little time to read the few lines of the letter. “Isabel had little notion of what was really best for Kenneth. But as she would have it so, she maun be obeyed, I doot.”

“And you will still receive from me what I have sent you hitherto,” said Mr. McDiarmid eagerly.

“Aye, aye. I doot I maun take it, for the guidman gets mair feeble; though I'm a thocht aulder than him, I'm stouter every way. My son George, in Australia, sends us help nows and thens, God bless him, but it's no to be depended on to the day, like what you see fit to try to make some amends with.”

“It would please you better to refuse me that poor satisfaction.”

“Deed, it would, I'll tell you nae lee about it; and it would please me better that you should not cross eyes with Kenneth, so that you might be strangers to each other; but we're forced to put up with muckle in this world that we dinna like. You'll find the laddie down by the burn. He is there with his dog. Be careful of what you say.”

Norman McDiarmid walked slowly from the cottage towards the burn,
which wimpled and flashed as merrily in the sunlight as if there was no sorrow or perplexity in the world, and then he saw a dark-eyed, lithe-limbed, sunburnt boy on the bank, trying, not without success, to extract some companionship and sympathy from a little collie dog.

“So you are Kenneth Oswald,” said the stranger, extending a shapely hand to the boy, and commanding his voice to something like indifference.

“And you are Mr. McDiarmid, and you've come ower late,” and the dark eyes filled with tears. “Have you been there? have you seen?” and he looked towards the cottage.

“Yes, my boy,” and the tone and expression showed such deep feeling that the boy's natural shyness was dispelled, and he opened his heart a little.

“Would you have kenned her, Sir?”

“Yes; anywhere.”

“It's her, and it's no her.”

“Transfigured!” said Mr. McDiarmid.

“Ready, all but the wings, for Heaven, but nothing now for me,” and the boy turned to the collie, and hid his face in his shaggy coat.

“You addressed this letter to me,” said Mr. McDiarmid after a pause.

“Aye, mother said her hand shook, and she couldn't write it plain enough. And she told me forbye, to be sure to give you some letters and a wee box into your ain hand, and to naebody else — rather to burn them than let any other creature have them, but she was sure you would come, and so you have, as fast as the train could fetch you.” And Kenneth drew from his pocket a small packet of letters wrapped up in paper, tied round with twine, and sealed up, and a small jeweller's box, also tied and sealed.

“She said there was your sister's hair in the box, and that you should have it in memory of her; but you'll mind about it, Sir.”

Mr. McDiarmid took the letters and the little box, and held them in his hand for a few minutes without speaking, while the boy looked on wonderingly at first, and then turned to his dog.

“And what are you going to be, Kenneth?” he said, commanding his voice with a strong effort.

“Granny wants me to be a minister, but I'd rather learn a trade.”

“And you are doing well at school?”

“Mother thought so — but I canna just say I've been doing so well when she was needing me. The master says I should go into Latin next quarter. Granny's keen for the Latin.”

“But are you keen for it yourself, Kenneth?” asked the stranger.

“Sandy Tamson and Robbie Marr and Jamie Dalglish are going in, and I'd no like to be left ahint them; that's mair than being keen for the Latin
itsell, I'm thinking, Sir.”

“Well, Kenneth, whatever is the motive, whatever you want to learn you shall learn, and whatever books you need you must get. Your mother” — and here he made a pause — “was a most faithful and tender nurse to my dear sister during her illness until her death, and I was glad to hear from your grandmother that your kindness and attention to — to — her that is gone was somewhat like hers. The least I can do for you, for her sake, is to give you every facility for getting on in life.”

Kenneth looked up at the strange gentleman with astonishment and grateful eyes.

“I have no doubt you will do your best to deserve all I can do for you,” continued this new friend.

Kenneth hung his head a little for a moment, and then looked up.

“I'll try, Sir.”

“And you will write to me from time to time to this address — care of Wm. Shiel, Esq., W.S., Edinburgh — if you need anything, or if anything happens of importance. Your grandparents are old. Was there no member of the family near?”

“No, only — only my mother to bide with them. There's Uncle George, he's been in Australia seventeen years; there's Uncle Sandy, he's been in America more than twenty years; there was Uncle James, he was drowned at sea; and Uncle Patrick died in Russia; and some that died young. So there was only Mother left, and now there's naebody.”

“Only you, Kenneth.”

“Oh, I'm naebody. What good is a laddie in a house?”

“Great good, Kenneth. Surely you were a great comfort to your mother, she says so in this letter.”

“Aye, to mother, for it was nae matter what I cared about, she cared about it too. Collie and me will miss her. But I can do nane o' the things she did for the old folks.”

“But your well-doing will be their pride and their pleasure; your coming in and your going out will interest them. A good boy can be an unspeakable comfort.”

“But — but —” and the boy's eyes turned entreatingly to the strange gentleman, with whom he felt more confidential than he could have been with any older acquaintance, partly because he was quite detached from every petty circumstance of his life, and associated merely with the one great sorrow which overpowered him; but mainly because the sympathy which his voice and manner expressed, seemed deep and genuine, and he spoke to Kenneth, not as if he were a mere child to be coaxed, but as if he were a thoughtful earnest boy to be supported and strengthened, “but —
who is to comfort me? If you kenned my mother weel, if you saw her wi' somebody that you cared about — you maun be sure that — that it's no sae easy for me to think on what I'm to do for them that they should na miss her. I want her mysel' far mair nor they can.”

The stranger took the boy's brown hand in both of his, and drew the curly head close to him. There were tears in his eyes as they tried to meet the pleading look, and it was some time before he found words to answer.

“My dear boy, you will find the greatest comfort of all in doing what God has given you to do — in so far as you can, filling her place with her good parents — in growing to be a good, useful, and brave man, doing honest and honourable work in this world, and so making yourself more fit for the better world to which she has gone before.”

“But it's so far off, and so long to wait. It's easier for granny and grandfather; they canna live lang afte r her. But will I see you whiles, Sir. I'd find it easier if I could get speech of you now and then.”

“I hope so, Kenneth.”

“For mother said you were a friend, a dear friend, and she had na many friends. And if I want to be an engineer, or a wright, and not a minister, will you help me, for granny's hard to turn when she is set on a thing.”

“Nobody shall make a minister of you against your will if I can have any voice in the matter. That's a calling that needs the heart to go with it.”

“So I'm thinking, Sir.”

“Is that your grandfather I see in the distance?” asked Mr. McDiarmid, after they slowly walked towards the cottage.

“Yes, he has just been walking up and down ever since, for all he has the pains in his legs; but granny she sits still, and reads her Bible, and knits her stockings.”

“He does walk lame,” said Mr. McDiarmid.

“It's no so bad just now, but whiles the rheumatics is very bad. He gets along with his stick though.”

“He will lean on you, Kenneth, when you get taller.”

“If I dinna gang off to Australia or America like my uncles, and that's likely eneuch. Is that your horse, Sir? He's a bonny beast.” And Kenneth seemed to take in the good points of the horse.

“Can you ride him to the water, while I talk for a few minutes to your grandfather? You can ride I hope,” said Mr. McDiarmid.

“I'll take him to the burn, and you'll see if I canna ride.” And Kenneth jumped onto the horse's back, and followed by the exultant collie, went to the burn, where he saw the animal satisfied, and then rode slowly round the plantation so as not to disturb his grandfather's conversation with the stranger.
John Oswald's attitude towards Mr. McDiarmid was not so defiant and mistrustful as that of his wife. He saw the deep and genuine grief which Norman McDiarmid felt and he respected it. He saw also the desire on his part to make things as easy for the old people and as good for the boy as possible, and he was willing to accept the assistance.

While Kenneth still kept on the horse's back, Mr. McDiarmid went to say farewell to Mrs. Oswald. She had evidently given up her knitting, and appeared more discomposed than before. She had been in the chamber of death and might have given way to her feelings there, but her farewell to the man whom she looked on as her enemy was even more discourteous than her greeting. She wanted to say something, but failed in voice or in courage. She saw him ride away after a goodbye to Kenneth, which she thought imprudently affectionate, and saw the boy follow with eager eyes the dazzling apparition of his mother's friend, who had, as it were, won his heart by a few fair words. An unwonted harshness was in her voice and her manner as she hastily called to her husband and grandson to “come in oot o' the cauld.”

She had spent the interval of Mr. McDiarmid's absence in looking carefully through the wooden box or chest which had contained all Isabel's earthly possessions from the time when she first left her father's house at sixteen years old. In the shuttle of this chest had lain the ribbons, the bits of lace, the choice treasures, and all the letters which she had received in her life, and Kenneth had taken from it by his mother's desire the packet which he had just delivered into the hands of Mr. McDiarmid. There were some letters left, a few from her parents when she had been absent in Edinburgh, two or three of old date from a brother in Australia, a packet with little snips of Kenneth's hair at different stages of darkness, and specimens of his handwriting cut out of his copybooks; but what the old woman wanted was not to be found.

“You havena been meddling wi' your mother's kist, Kenneth, sin' she was taken?” she asked sharply.

“No, granny, ye ken ye have had the key yoursel’.”

“Deed have I, but it passes me to find out what has come o' rhae letters an' the little brooch. Your mother burnt naething that day ye were sae lang thegether by yoursels that ye ken o'.”

“Na, she burnt naething; we had nae fire.”

“Weel, I'm sure it's past my comprehension, I ken she aye keepit them safe.”

“But, granny,” said the boy, “though you dinna ask me, it's only fair to tell you that she bade me give them to the gentleman that was here the day, and he's got them away wi' him.”
“You’ve gi’en them to the gentleman; gi’en them to Mr. McDiarmid. Had she lost her wits a’thegether? And you too, there was a bonny pair o’ ye,” said the grandmother indignantly.

“And you’ve just thrown away what was of the most consequence to yoursel’, and a’ for nought.”

“Na, for he’ll be a guid friend to me all my days if I deserve it,” said Kenneth. “Will he no, grandfather?”

“He speaks very kind and very fair, guid wife,” said John Oswald. Oh, aye, very fair promising, nae doot. He got what he wanted and and what he came for. I ne’er thought o’ that trick being played on me,” said Mrs. Oswald.

“But my mother said I was to do it,” said Kenneth. “It was the last thing she asked o’ me.”

“Mair last things! Nae end o’last things! And every a’ne more bitter to swallow than the last. What’s dune canna be undone I doot, but if ye had had the wit to have tell’d me about it I’d hae had my say in the matter.”

“But grannie,” said the boy, coaxingly, “there were mair last things she said. That I was to be a guid laddie to grandfather and to you. And I’ll may be have more chance through this friend o’ hers.”

“Aye, aye,” said the grandmother a little mollified. “They’re a’ for doing great things when they’re young — but when they grow up off they go, hither and thither, to find their own fortunes. A woman wi’ mony sons is like a hen wi’ a clecking o’ dewkes, they a’ tak to the water someway in spite o’ her flapping and fluttering. And the mair ye do for them, the mair eager they are to gang off. The guid man an’ me stinted an’ spared to gie our bairns a better chance nor oursels, and here we are, high and dry, wi’ but a bairn like you to stand by us. And you’ll do the same when your time comes. I’m no saying anything against George, for he minds us through it a’, but it’s hard that there’s only you John, and the laddie to lay Isabel’s head in the grave, and a’ the goodly lads we brought into the world are dead or out o’ reach. What wi’ many births an’ many deaths, and other trouble, we’ve been sair hauden down, and latterly we’ve had mair comfort in Isabel than in ony o’ them and then she’s ta’en, just as we’d grown mair content to put up wi’ what had come and gane. But we’ve been far ower muckle for this world, Kenneth, my man, and it would pleasure me mair to see you wag your head in a poopit in this precious land o’ gospel, licht an’ liberty, than engineering in America or Australia, or among the Russians, like your uncle Patie that perished in the swan, and us never seeing and scarce hearing tell o’ ye. Oh! my bonny man, and when death has just put his fit into the house, and laid hands on the bonniest and maybe the best, it behoves both young an’ auld to mind upon their latter end, that when their
times comes they may be found ready.”

“I hope I may, grannie, whether I put my head in a poopit or a stoker's engine,” said Kenneth. “If I doo the stoking better nor the preaching, there will be a better chance.”

“Oh! laddie, wi' sic a gift o' the gab as you've got, it wad be a clean throwin' awa' o' you to mak you a smutty engineer.”

“There's nae fear o' Kenneth,” said John Oswald, “he'll fa' on his feet, I'll warrant. An' noo, my laddie, gang and fetch in the coo for your granny to milk, while she reds up here and puts back the bits o' things into the kist.”

Kenneth obeyed at once, and Marion Oswald followed him out with her eyes with curious feelings of pride and humiliation. In the set of his head and the turn of his limbs, he excelled greatly any of her own goodly sons. He had the gait and bearing of a gentleman's son, and it was very questionable if Norman McDiarmid had at home any boy to be compared with this unowned and nameless firstborn. Her search had been in vain, she felt baffled by the abstraction of letters which she was convinced were of the greatest importance. While her daughter lived it had been impossible to claim any rights for Kenneth upon his father but through her, and Isabel had resolutely refused to move in the matter. What these letters, which had been so carefully guarded during life, and now delivered up to the very person against whom they might have been used, might have contained, Mrs. Oswald could only guess. She knew the facility of the Scottish marriage law, by which any written admission or verbal acknowledgement of being married, is as binding in law as a solemn religious ceremony, and she also thought too well of her daughter to believe that she could have lived for a year with Norman McDiarmid without believing that some such bond subsisted between them.

In her heart Marion Oswald believed that Kenneth was the rightful heir to one of the oldest families in Scotland, and that the old property and fine castle in the North where his father now lived, ought to come to him at his death. The very name which had been given to him — that of his grandfather, and the favourite family name for generations back — showed that some such idea had been in his father's mind at his birth. Although Norman McDiarmid's grandfather had interfered, had driven Isabel home to her parents, and induced his heir to marry the daughter of a prosperous Edinburgh merchant, and had broken off all apparent ties between Kenneth's parents, the older woman felt certain that there were good grounds for her conviction of Isabel's legal rights.

Whatever might have been claimed, however, it was now out of the grandmother's power to move a step in the matter. The betrayer had received from his son's innocent hands the evidence that might have
disturbed his tranquillity, and he could henceforth feel at ease at his own luxurious fireside, and rest assured that his little Norman's rights were unassailable. He might have suffered a little; she hoped that he had suffered a good deal, at the sight of the dead Isabel and of the living Kenneth, whose dark eyes and mobile mouth were all his mother's, whatever of the general build was derived from the McDiarmids; but on the whole he had had the best of it. He had come out the winner, as wealth and position always do when pitted against poverty and obscurity, and as the old woman resolutely knitted that long evening, visions of Kenneth, as the most powerful preacher in Scotland, holding forth in a great city church to a crowded congregation, amongst which would be Mr. McDiarmid, of Castle Diarmid, with his wife and family, attracted by his renown; and expounding with unconscious eloquence and insight of genius such a text as “Thou art the man!” from still higher than that of wealth or aristocracy, seemed to her the only thing that could satisfy her cravings for justice, and for the reversal of the hard fate pressed upon her.
Chapter 2 Old and Young Notions of Theology

Although Kenneth Oswald's position at school was somewhat improved by the added interest of the master in him, and by his beginning Latin, and liking it better for its own sake than he had expected, nothing out of doors or at school could make up in any measure for the loss of his mother at home. His grandmother's long-cherished hopes had been finally disappointed, and the boy was less interesting to her than he had been, and he missed his mother's quick sympathy with his words, and her loving insights into his thoughts and visions. His grandfather was somewhat deaf, and sat somewhat isolated in the chimney corner, and though the old woman kept her faculties wonderfully bright, her interest in his learning was for the end of Kenneth becoming a minister; it was only a step in the ladder to reach this result — nothing of any value in itself. Isabel Oswald, though she would not have been called clever, had a wonderful knack of smoothing a difficulty, or carrying Kenneth over it, and however busy she might be, everything was laid aside if he needed her. Whatever was her press of work, and at times she was very busy, she always left her Saturday afternoons at leisure to spend them with him. In the summer they had long walks together, up the neighbouring hill, where there was a view over three countries, where she could point out the special beauties, not like an art critic, but like a nature-lover; or they would track the burn up to its source in a little fairy-like glen, where the hazel-nuts grew, and he would get up the trees and gather them when they were ripe; or go to the “scaurs” where the brambles (Anglice, blackberries) grew, or they would more rarely go to the nearest town, where she would do her little marketings, and get Kenneth's help in carrying them home. As they walked or while they rested, and latterly there had been a good deal of resting, they talked openly, freely, affectionately, of all kinds of subjects. At home, Isabel was often checked for spoiling and over-indulging her boy; here, there was no one to remark upon, or chide her single-minded absorption in the life of another. Sometimes Nelly Lindores, the daughter of a neighbour, accompanied them, if the walk was not too far or fatiguing, and even with this restriction Isabel often carried the little girl for a bit, and Kenneth, who was nearly two years older, would take her in his arms when the little feet were tired. Nelly was no check in the familiar intercourse. She listened wonderingly to what she could not understand; and to her Kenneth and his mother were like superior beings, who deigned to take notice of her. Her stepmother objected to these Saturday rambles, “wearing out the lassie's shoon, and
making her so tired she was only fit for her bed when she came back,” and contrived so often to disappoint the child, but if her father could circumvent her plans, Nelly had her walk. In winter there were some days in which they could not go out, but Isabel managed something else nearly as pleasant. She would get some little useful work that they could do for her, while she read or told them stories. Her voice was sweet, and she knew what would interest her hearers. On those walks, and especially on the days when they could not walk, she would encourage the little ones to repeat to her all the nursery rhymes, ballads, hymns, and paraphrases they knew; and sometimes she would read simple poetry to them. The very last such Saturday afternoon she had begun the “Lady of the Lake,” which Kenneth had finished reading to her when she was confined to her bed. He could follow it very well, although it was too advanced for Nelly.

Now, how dreary and blank was the Saturday afternoon — so looked forward to in old times! How uninteresting even the Latin lesson which he could not bring to her! How tasteless was getting up dux in the class, or being commended, when he had not his mother to tell it to! How especially stony the Shorter Catechism, which had always been Kenneth's great stumblingblock, for verbal memory was not his strong point, and the most literal accuracy was required by the master at the point of the “tawse” (or leathern strap). Although Isabel Oswald had always said humbly that she could not understand it all herself, and indeed was doubtful if anyone in the parish, except the minister and the master himself, had the complete comprehension of it, she could simplify and explain it so that it could be learned.

On the Sunday after his mother's funeral, when, according to use and wont, he went over with his grandmother that part of the Catechism learned during the past week, and she asked him —

“What is Adoption?” he gave the correct answer.

“Adoption is the act of God's free grace, whereby we are admitted into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God,” and then stopped a minute.

“Granny, if Mr. McDiarmid helps wi' my schooling, and gets me my books, and writes to me and befriends me, will that no be a kind of adoption? And, ye see, it's like the adoption in the ‘Questions,’ it's no for my ain sake, no for onything I have done or can do, but for the sake of my mother, and her goodness to his sister that is dead lang syne”.

“There's naething to be compared to the wonders o' redeeming grace,” said the grandmother sternly. “As far as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts, and my ways than your ways.”
“To be sure, I ken that, but it's something like, and I can keep mind of the question better, and that's a gude thing, is it not, Granny?” said Kenneth.

“Oh, ay,” said the grandmother, sighing. “And now, ‘What is Sanctification?’

“Sanctification is an act,” began Kenneth.

“No, Kenneth, a work,” was the correction.

“Oh, I mind noo. Mother telled me that was a slow thing; that folk did na grow holy in a day, but in a lifetime; that it was na like the others, justification and adoption, done for us, wi' a flash (as it were) o' the loving ee o' God; but went on and went on all through the days and months and long years till ye died.

“Does it go on after that, Granny? Do folk grow better and better after they are dead? Mother said she dinna ken when I asked her. She kens now,” said the boy solemnly.

“They are changed in a moment — in the twinkling of an ee, Kenneth, and are made perfect at once. The Questions tell ye that.”

“Then they canna be ony better than perfect?” said Kenneth, doubtfully.

“I dinna see how they can be better nor that,” said the grandmother; and to this proposition, when appealed to, John Oswald also assented.

“I'd like to be aye getting on,” said Kenneth. “If Heaven is to be a' standing still, Heaven canna be so very good after all. But, Granny, James Hepburn says he's learning naething at the schule now, he's learnt a' thing the maister can learn him.”

“He'll gang to college next session, and he'll behove to learn mair there,” said the Grandmother.

“An' after he's learnt a' at college, will he stan' still then?”

“Na; he'll have some business to learn, if he does na gang into the kirk, and if that, he'll hae to study.”

“An' after his business is learnt?” insisted Kenneth.

“He's gotten to practeese it, laddie. I'm thinking that a' the years o' his life he'll find something to do an' something to learn, for a' he's sae upsetting as to say he can learn naething frae the maister.”

“But supposing I was to dee the night, as whiles I wish I would, will there be ony school or college to gang till in Heaven, or ony trade to learn?”

“Na, laddie; Heaven is a' thegither different; there's nae comparison. Young and auld, gentle and semple, learned and unlearned, a' are equal in Heaven.”

“Then I'd like to live lang, lang — if it werena that mother is there waiting and wearying — but I want to learn a' I can, I'd be awful sorry to dee, and lose the chance of being an engineer. Dear, dear there'll be nae
trains in heaven, and nae steamers, and nae telegraphs.”

“What need o' trains, laddie, when every blessed spirit has wings to fly swiftly by, swift as thought — what need of steamships when there shall be no more sea — what need of telegraphs when soul is laid open to soul, and all rest peacefully in the Redeemer. Oh! laddie, the world has great hauld of you. And ye want to do wi' me as ye did wi' your mother, ae question out o' the buik, and ten out o' your ain head. What is Sanctification?”

“But, granny, just wait a minute. When mother said, ye mind, ‘I'm ready to go now, Lord Jesus,’ did she mean that she kent she was sanctified enough to get to Heaven?”

“Maybe, laddie, maybe, but folk are fit for Heaven when they are only justified, for the merits of the Saviour are sanctification eneuch for them.”

“Then maybe it would be best, I mean it would be safest, for folk to dee at once after they are justified, for then there would be nae fear o' their falling back.”

“I think they canna fall back,” said the old woman thoughtfully, “at least no to be lost.”

“But some gude folk fall into sin, granny.”

“Aye! more's the pity, but they repent ere they dee, ye may be sure o' that,” said the grandmother.

“But some dinna repent, they dee suddenly,” said Kenneth.

“Then they couldna hae had the root o' the matter in them. God will never lose his ain, or suffer them to be lost. We hae his covenanted promise for that.”

“Aye, but maybe I'm nane o' his, though mother said she was sure of it.”

“You're young yet, Kenneth, but you're the bairn of mony prayers, and He is a Hearer of prayer.”

“Aye granny, and mother'll be praying for me now nearer hand than ever afore.”

“Whisht, laddie, whisht. There's nae prayers frae the dead.”

“Then she's no in Heaven — she's no in life anywhere,” said Kenneth, with a sudden burst of tears, “and I'll never see her or hear her mair.”

“Dinna gang on in sic a daft-like fashion, Kenneth. I humbly trust, through Christ's mercy, that your mother is now in bliss.”

“In bliss, and no praying for me in some way; na, na, granny, ye'll never make me trow that.”

“Dinna be wise or presumptuous beyond what is written in God's Word, Kenneth. We ken by Holy Writ that where the tree falls there it lies, and that there is nae repentance in the grave, and that the Papistical notion of the intercession o' saunts is a monstrous delusion got up for the sake o' filthy lucre by thae priests o' Baal. Na, na, laddie, ye had your mother for
ten years, keep mind o' all the good advice she gied you, and gang to the Great Fountain-head yoursel' as she gaed, but trust nae mair to her prayers, for now it is only a hymn of praise to God and to the Lamb that she is singing round the throne, at least we trust that she is," said the old woman with a sigh. “And now, again, what is Sanctification?”

Kenneth said the answer, not exactly perfectly; he was checked three times for rectification; but when he had finished his task he sat looking into the fire, with his mother's Bible in his hand. There was no part of it that interested him so much as the fly leaf. The inscription there was —

Isabel Oswald, 1 January, 18 —
From her father, John Oswald.

And below that, in the troubled hand that had just penned the summons to Mr. McDiarmid —

To my dear son, Kenneth,
With his mother's dying blessing.

His mother's dying blessing! Yes, as long as she was in this world her soul had poured itself out in prayers for him, for his being good and happy. What a strange, heartless transformation it must be to that loving mother to cross the black river of death, and then to be absorbed in such a flood of glory as to forget the tearful face her dying eyes were fixed on to the last. Not only to cease to watch over, to help, and to comfort the son of her love, but to cease to pray for him, or to ask God or Jesus to comfort his grief. No doubt Granny knew — she spoke with authority, his mother always took her opinions on such matters as conclusive — and when Kenneth strove to recall the last words his mother uttered, there was nothing that expressed any confidence on her part that she could hereafter be near to him at any time, or aid him in any way. That was the very bitterness of death to Isabel Oswald. She could only urge him to be good, to fear God, and put his trust in Christ; and she hoped and believed they should meet in glory.

Yes, in glory! After the long years of pilgrimage were over. He had just wished for a long life, that he might learn all that could be learned before the sudden transformation should crystallise him into perfection; but now he shuddered at the idea of a long life, with its temptations, its sorrows, and its dangers, vaguely apprehended by his childish mind, but yet felt too much for him to go through without his protecting counsellor and guide. He longed for the wings of a dove that he might fly at once to the safe and
glorious haven of rest; for whatever might be said by Granny about the perfect happiness of Heaven, he was sure his mother would lose something of bliss if she, being among the sheep in the fold of the Good Shepherd, could see him afar aff among the goats.

More solitary than he had felt before, more conscious of the tremendous gap between him and the dead, he crept to his bed. No mother now to bend over him, as he said his evening prayer — not even the shadowy mother who had ever since her death hovered near. She was so far away in glory that she did not hear or heed the sobs that shook the boy's frame. The song of praise in which she joined would be too loud to let her hear the desolate cry of her only child. Somehow his thoughts reverted to his mother's friend, and he fancied that if he could only talk to him he might comfort him a little.
Chapter 3 Living Prayers

The look of those grave, tender eyes, the touch of that soft, beautiful hand, the half embrace in which he had been folded in his sorrow, dwelt in his grateful memory, all the more on account of his grandmother's attitude of antagonism.

On the following morning Kenneth was just strapping on his satchel preparatory to making a start for school, when he heard a well-known voice, and saw John Lindores, the wright, with Nelly in his hand, standing at the cottage door.

“Kenneth, my man, it's mair than time Nelly went regular to school now; she's turned eight this sax months. She's little for her age, an' timorsome; but I dootna she'll mak a braw scholer. Your poor mother said aye she was gleg at the uptak; and, thanks to her, she can read a bit, and when I can get her to mysel' she's the best o' company. But she's maistly throng wi' the little ones, and doesna get as muckle attention as she should hae; so I've put my foot down, and she's gang to schule. So as the bairn's timorsome, as I said before, I'll be muckle beholden to you if you'd see her safe to and from the schule — at any rate till she's used to the gait.”

“I'll do that for her an' welcome,” said Kenneth; “but ye ken I canna dae muckle for her in the schule, for I'll no be near her, and couldna keep the tawse off of her if I was.”

“It's no the tawse Nelly dreads; it's the rough lads an lasses. She's been keepit sae muckle at hame minding the bairns that she's no acquent wi' only of them but yoursel'. But it's no doing Nelly justice to make a mere bairn-keeper o' her, and to lose her lair through being sae handy. Well, Nelly, good day to you; and you'll tell me at night how you fared at the schule. I'm aff to a day's work at the Place; they're having an addition to the servants' part o' the hoose. If it were othwerwhere, they'd hae some ane frae Embro. Your mother aye had a kind word for my Nelly, so I can trust her wi' you. Dinna delay Kenneth, my lass; let's see how your feet can gang owre the lea;” and the father hastened off to his work when he had seen the youngsters set off on their way.

“But what will your mother do wanting you, Nelly?” said Kenneth, when they had fairly started.

“I dinna ken,” said Nelly.

“Are you keen to gang to the schule, Nelly?”

“I dinna ken.”

“An' it's no just the quarter either.”

“Will the maister no take me then?” asked Nelly, doubtful if that would
be a benefit or not.

“Ah! I daresay he'll no mind for that. The second-class are no sae far on but that ye'll catch up to them soon enough, and dinna mind aboot the tawse, the maister's never so hard on the lasses.”

“Oh! I dinna mind about them. We've tawse at hame.”

“And you're acquent with them, I se tawse.”

“Whiles — gey often, for if the bairn greets, mother thinks it is a' my wyte for no minding him right; and when she's throng wi' her work, hae's maist times greeting for her, and I canna soother him ony way. I used to think that if my father had only married your mother — as Auntie Jess says he wanted to — she would have been gude to me; but now you see she would hae been dead, and it would be all to do owre again. Only then ye would hae been a sort o' brether to me, and that would be good.”

“Maybe aye, and maybe no. Laddies never care about their sisters, I think; but I aye liket you, Nelly, and I'll tell you what I've been thinking. Now that baith our mothers have been put away sae far frae us, and they canna gie us a word or even a look, we might help ane another, maybe.”

“Oh, Kenneth, what could I do for you?” said Nelly eagerly.

“I think if ye mind upon me in your prayers it would do me good. Ye see, it's no sae easy to win to Heaven, even for auld folk like granny; and my mother, that never forgot to pray for me, has been taken away just like yours, and I see nothing clear but that I maun have living prayers forbye my ain and granny's, so if I mind upon you and say nicht and morning ‘God keep Nelly Lindores safe and good and on the right road to Heaven,’ ye'll do the same by me.” And Kenneth felt he had put the case as plainly and strongly as its importance demanded.

“But would I have to say your very name like that?” said Nelly, to whom this familiar address to the Deity seemed a little profane.

“Oh, if you think the name it will do. He'll ken who you mean, as He kens a' thing; but what for would ye no mention Kenneth Oswald's name. I was christened Kenneth, and He forgets naething.”

“Naebody puts names into prayers, Kenneth.”

“But they do. There's Queen Victoria.”

“Oh, but that is no a common name like yours and mine, Kenneth.”

“No just,” said Kenneth doubtfully, “and the other Sunday when that strange man preached that came from Dumfries, and he was praying for our minister, he didna say Mr. Lang, as you and me would do, but called him his dear brother, and I'm sure he's nae friend and no a drap's bluid o' connection to him. To my mind it would have been mair wiselike if he had called him Mr. Lang, and no evened himself to be brother to a gentleman that is auld enough to be his father.”
“That's a' ye ken about it, Kenneth; but a minister maun ken better than you, and I'll just pray for you as you wish it, and call you my dear brother, and if she hears, she'll think it is Jamie — but as you say, God will ken. Oh! Kenneth, Jamie is a weary bairn — he's sae weighty and sae cross.”

“But should na ye pray for Jamie too,” said Kenneth musingly, “and may be he would na be sae cross.”

“I'm sure it wad mak nae odds on him till he had gotten a' his teeth, whatever it might do afterhand,” said Nelly, with great simplicity. Kenneth pondered over this want of faith in the efficacy of prayer till they got close to the school. He bravely held the hand of the little girl till he had introduced her to the master, and seen her placed in the class of strangers, where she looked smaller than ever.

Fathers in John Lindores' class did not always take their children to school, and his wife had her hands too full of small ones of her own to care to go with her stepchild Nelly. Kenneth underwent a little rustic banter about taking up with a lassie, and also some cross-questioning as to who or what she was.

He only knew she was the daughter of their neighbour, the wright, by his first wife, and that her mother had died when she was a fortnight old. But the neighbours generally knew that the widower had first wished to fill up the vacant place in his heart and home by marrying Kenneth's own mother, who, John Lindores believed, would tend his neglected child with love, and who, feeling his own disadvantageous position, would probably be only too glad of a respectable marriage. But Isabel Oswald had steadily declined the offer, and thereby confirmed her mother's cherished idea that she considered herself the wife of Norman McDiarmid.

At first John Lindores thought that he had every right to a favourable answer, and that his promise never to reproach her with Kenneth's birth if she would be good to Nelly, ought to have pleaded for him; but his wishes strengthened by opposition, and Isabel's reiterated refusal made him fancy she was really above him in spite of all. The more he saw of her nice gentle ways, the scrupulous cleanliness and order in which she kept the cottage, her care and her ambition for her boy, her separation from the neighbours, first because they had looked down on her, but afterwards as that wore away, because she preferred keeping to herself, — the more desirable it seemed to him to secure such a mother for Nelly. Her skill in the finer kinds of needlework was rare in the village in which she lived, and she got pretty regular employment; it was believed that Kenneth was maintained by his father or his father's relatives, so that he could be no burden, and Nelly was so fond of his mother even as an infant, that there was everything in favour of the marriage, except Isabel's consent.
Mrs. Oswald pressed her daughter more sorely about this marriage than her desire to part with her could have warranted, for that she did not really wish; but she thought by this means she might extort some confession, some evidence as to her marriage with one much higher in the social scale. But Isabel said “no, it could not be,” and would give no other answer.

“But, Isabel,” urged her mother, “it would be a straightening of what has been crooked.”

“That would never straighten it, mother; it would only make it worse.”

“But, Isabel, when you was a young lass, and John Lindores was a strapping fellow, you would have been pleased and proud enough to have been evened to him.”

“Aye, mother, true enough.”

“And now you are owre proud to be evened to him, when it would lift off all the disgrace that has lain so heavy on us all.”

“Mother, don't tempt me. With God's help, I'll bear my share of the disgrace. Oh! if I could only bear yours and Kenneth's too, but I cannot — I cannot.”

“You cannot let John make an honest woman of you?”

“Not as John's wife, mother. I can make an honest woman of myself even in your eyes in time. God's eyes I have no fear of.”

“Say you so, Isabel?” said her mother eagerly. “Then he was a black-hearted scoundrel, as I aye believed.”

“Whisht, mother! I'm no blaming him, and ye needna. What I meant is this, that if a man or woman just repents, and turns from sin, and has got pardon, God looks as if it had never been. It takes long ere men or women do the same, but I must be patient, it will come in time.”

“It wad come a' the sooner if ye were a gude wife to John Lindores, and a kind mother to his bit bairn, poor thing.”

“Yes; if I were a good wife and mother — but I could not love John as he deserves to be loved; and if my heart is so full of my Kenneth that there is no room for another bairn in it, even if it were a bairn of my own, would I be really a right mother to Nelly, poor thing?”

“I'm sure you're muckle ta'en up wi' her as it is,” said her mother.

“Kenneth is so fond of her, and it is good for him to think on some one less and weaker than himself.”

“And what ails you at giving Kenneth the good o't, if good it is, for a permanence.”

“I just cannot do it, mother. It's just there that my conscience pinches me. I cannot wrong John Lindores with half-hearted unwilling duty instead of love.”

“Oh! Isabel, there you are, still craving and pining after a man that
wronged you for his ain pleasure, and then whistled you down the wind. Did he keep mind o' you that you should set your heart dead against honest love and troth? What for should he no have done the same for your sake?"

"It was different with him, mother. His mother, his grandfather, their family affairs all pressed it on him, and you cannot judge how hard it was for him."

"But your mother, your friends, and your family affairs, too, as you ca' them, a' press it on you."

"Are you weary of me, mother? said Isabel affectionately. "Am I not more help and comfort to you and my father now just as I am than I could be as the wife of John Lindores, or of any man on the earth, even his, my Kenneth's father's? Let me abide with you; let me work for you; tend you in sickness and in health, and if I am taken away I can leave you Kenneth to be all your own, to have no one coming between you and him, not even your own friend John Lindores."

What Isabel said was true enough, as even Mrs. Oswald was forced to acknowledge. In no way could the daughter have been of more service and a greater comfort to her parents than she was, and if only the bitter drop could be taken out of the cup, which flavoured it in the midst of all to the mother's taste, she would have rejoiced in the undivided, unremitting devotion of Isabel. If the latter herself tasted the same, she made no wry faces over it, but pursued her own way quietly, and that way was not in the direction of John Lindores. Wearied out and provoked by her repeated refusals, John turned his eyes on a good-looking lass, who had never been at service, but at what is called the “outwork” in the fields. Jeanie Maunders was not so hard to win — or at all unwilling to be set down as the wife of the village wright or carpenter, which was promotion to a distinctly higher grade in life. There was no doubt a child in the way, but only one. She had no more hard rough work, and she came into possession of a cow, which had been the pride of Nelly's mother's heart, and which Mrs. Oswald or Isabel had milked for the widower from the time of her death. She did not mean to be unkind to little Nelly — indeed, she was rather proud of her, until claimants of her own came thick and fast to fill her hands and heart.

There was one person however, to whom she had a great dislike, and that was Isabel Oswald. Every one knew that John courted her, and that she had refused him time after time. Although Jeanie had reaped all the benefits of this refusal, she never could forgive the “upsettingness” of a creature like that turning up her nose at “her man”. And she was full, not only of petty spite, but was apt to indulge in serious backbiting.

The excessive reticence of all the Oswalds as to their own private affairs
— at least as to that part of them which the world most wished to know — was provoking to a woman of Jeanie's turn of mind. No one knew who Kenneth's father was, not even John Lindores, who had been at one time very anxious to find out. Isabel was too meek, and her father and mother too much aggrieved to reveal anything. It had all taken place at a distance — there was no visitor ever came to see Isabel, no suspicious-looking letters coming through the village Post-Office that Jeanie could find out, and she could only surmise that things must be worse than only an ordinary “misfortune” when all was kept so dark. Poor Nelly's love of going to the Oswald's cottage as soon as she could toddle to play with Kenneth, or to ask for a “piece” or a drink of milk, was altogether insufferable to her stepmother, and indeed her first acquaintance with the leathern strap, familiarly called the tawse, arose from this inveterate habit; but even the tawse could not prevent the little feet from finding their way in when there was any possibility.

The Saturday afternoon's excursions were a grievance, but John Lindores, who felt for the little girl's life of drudgery, had interposed his authority to sanction them — first, if she had been a good girl, and latterly whether she was reported good or not; and Nelly had grieved over the sickness and death of Kenneth's mother as if she had been her very own. Mrs. Lindores' heart was softened by the death of her rival, whose ways John could no longer compare with hers, and she yielded with better grace than her wont to the proposal that Nelly should go to the school under Kenneth's charge. John thought he was doing the best he could for the lassie; he was scarcely aware how much he was doing for the boy. Nothing could have comforted the desolate heart like the companionship of one younger and feebler than himself, whose brightest memories were associated with the mother he had lost. As they walked together to and from school, every flower and bush and bud gave them subjects for talk about her, and what she had said about them all. When Nelly found her lessons puzzle her she came to Kenneth to “hearken her,” as she called it, and looked on his explanations and ideas concerning them as the very words of wisdom. To her Kenneth was almost a man, and quite a hero. She rejoiced in being put under his care and in being admitted into his confidence. On her return from school on that eventful first day her stepmother's grumbling about being deprived of her services was unheeded in the thought of that prayer that must be said at night — that no one would know the meaning of but herself and Kenneth and the far-away Father of all.

Her father was late home that night. She would have liked to have got him his supper and sat beside him, but there was that weary Jamie to walk
about till he went to sleep in the other room; but her father found her out there.

“And how did my lassie get on at the schule?” he asked.

“Oh, middlin’, said Nelly. “I think I'll like it fine when I get used to it, but I hae lots to learn ere I win up to Kenneth.”

“And he was gude till ye, Nelly,” said the father in a low voice.

“Oh! father, he was real gude. He faced the maister for me, and we had such a bonnie time going to the schule, and comin' back too.”

“Poor laddie,” said John Lindores, “you behove to be gude till him, Nelly; it's a sair loss he's had.”

“What can I do,” said Nelly; “a wee thing like me.”

John thought a minute. “Deed! no very muckle, Nelly; but ye can mind him in your prayers — naebody kens what powers for gude may be in them.”

Nelly was so delighted she nearly dropped Jamie in her joy. Her father, too, thought her prayers might help Kenneth — her dear father — who knew mostly everything.
Chapter 4 Old Wounds

As Norman McDiarmid made his way homeward with the unopened packet of letters in his breastpocket which he kept for the quiet and seclusion of his study at home, he had more bitter grief in his heart than Marion Oswald could have believed in. He looked in at his father-in-law's house in Edinburgh to enquire how all were there, he called on Mr. Shiel to give instructions to continue his payments to John Oswald for Kenneth's behoof, and to forward any letters which Kenneth might address to his care, and then took the train for his northern castle with a mixture of listlessness and impatience to be at the end of it all. When his wife and his sons and daughters greeted him affectionately after his temporary absence, did he see in his mind's eye that low cottage, and his firstborn holding his horse for him to mount, while a still white form lay hushed and unresponsive to even the touch of his lips? When Norman rushed into his father's arms and asked what he had brought him from Edinburgh, was there an additional caress, or the contrary, on account of those which he was not permitted to bestow on that dark-eyed sunburnt boy?

When Mrs. McDiarmid asked about his father and mother and enquired particularly about the health of the former, did the vision of John Oswald leaning on his stick, and Marion knitting over her open Bible, trouble his recollections of the details she wished for? And when little Malcolm said Mama must not go to Edinburgh to see grandpapa, for he could not do without her, did not the thought of the boy by the burn side hiding his tears on collie's neck bring back a painful tightness in the throat and oppression on the breast?

The subject of his sorrow had never been spoken of to his wife. She knew nothing at all about it, and now there was no need to open it up. But she was a woman of good sense and kind feeling — she saw that her husband was depressed. If he volunteered his confidence, well and good; but she would not force it. When the children went to bed, she sat quietly sewing for a while, and then, saying she felt sleepy, she left the room. She had scarcely gone when Mr. McDiarmid went into his own sanctum, and, carefully shutting the door, took out his packet. First came the little box containing the brooch, with his only sister Flora's hair at the back of it. How well he recollected ordering it to be made as a memento of one whom Isabel had watched over and tended for so many months. How well he recollected giving it to her and asking leave to fix with it the ribbon she wore. In his mind's eye he saw again the slender throat, the exquisite round of the cheek, the parted lips, the surprised pleasure in the eyes, and the first
kiss of love, broken in upon by an indignant and harsh-judging mistress; the dismissal with undeserved reproach, and his own eager offers of service and protection, alas! how futile and how injurious. Slowly he replaced the little relic in the box, and proceeded to untie the packet of letters. There were a few of his own, written in the first glow of love; two, the only two, after they had finally parted. There were several letters in a hand which he did not at first recognize, but which appeared of no consequence to him until he had read the long farewell epistle which Isabel had penned by little snatches as her strength and time had served her, in the conviction that she would never see him alive. She had thought it best not to see him at all, but when the end drew very near, the craving to see his face once more became irresistible, as well as the wish that Kenneth should be seen by his father, and she had written the summons which had so much disconcerted her mother.

It was with feelings of the most mixed emotions — shame, grief, gratitude, admiration, even awe — that he read the words she had meant to be her last. He saw there the origin of the other letters, and felt how loyal and unselfish had been the mother of the bright honest boy whom he would have liked so much to claim as his own.

The letter read as follows:—

My Dearest Norman —

I must call you by that name now for the last time, for I must write to you, and send to your ownself all the letters I ever got from you, and some that I got from your unfriend Hugh Carmichael, because it may come to pass that what he says he can do, may be the thing you would like to see done. He could not get me to make a stir in the matter, for what has been done cannot be undone, and I had just to bear the blame and the scorn as I best could, and as maybe, I deserved. But it was not so hard to bear as it would have been if I had thought you the scoundrel he wanted to make you out to be, and it would never lighten my load to bring misery and shame on others more blameless than me. I knew your heart better than he could do, and the position, such as it was, was of my own choosing. But, maybe, if your boy, that he says is sickly, and your only one, was taken, you might be glad if you could prove my Kenneth your heir, as there's no one to heir the estate but a far-away cousin, so I send you all Carmichael's letters, and there you can see that he has another witness still in life, Phemie Sinclair, to bear out his words, whatever they may be worth. I never thought what your angry words to him that day might be made to prove — and you were married, and I hoped were happy, with a good woman of your own station, long ere I heard what mischief he was brewing for you out of them. But without my consent, Carmichael was powerless, and though he wrote again
and again, he never could get me to feel that I had any rights as against your wife and children. He spoke of acknowledgement before witnesses as a binding marriage by the Scottish law; but whatever he might say, or the law might prove, if I had myself believed those words made a binding marriage, your mother and grandfather could never have parted us, and I never could have let any other woman be called your wife. I knew in my soul that I was only yours for life; but I never thought but that you might leave me at any time if you saw fit.

I was glad that Carmichael only wrote to me, and did not disturb my mother or my father with his wild tales, for my mother especially would go through fire and water to have me put straight as she calls it. She would fain have had me married to a decent man of my own station, but that I could not do even to please her.

It might have been better for Kenneth in some ways; but I held fast to the thought that in God's eyes I was your wife. It was the only thing I could comfort myself with when I felt that you had slipped out of my life when every thing was too strong against us. I was not worthy of you, I aye knew that. I had not the schooling or the upbringing to make me a mate for such as you, though when I was beside your sister, our Flora, (as we used to call her that year among the Highland hills,) and she depended on me for everything, and you looked to me for sympathy, you forgot all about the drawing-room ladies you were used to, and fancied that I might do for your turn, obey your behests, and follow wheresoever you would lead; but it would have been different if we had had to face the world together. Everyway I would have hurt you — it was far better to slip away, and let another sort of happiness come with some one else. But if you should ever think of claiming Kenneth, as Carmichael says you can, at least I have not harmed his chances by making any other vows than those I made to you in my inmost soul.

It is hard to say good-bye for ever, and that only by the pen, that is so slow and so clumsy, but I could not trust myself to see you, I could not trust myself that I would not be overheard by my mother, or worse still, by my son. You must not think that I have been altogether unhappy, as I hope you have not grieved over-much about me. With such a bairn as Kenneth, how could I be without much comfort and much hope? The disgrace was hard to bear, but I think it made him only the dearer, and it has worn out in great measure, and folks judge me by what I am now, and not by what is long past. The bitterness of the home-coming you can guess — to see my father's altered face — to hear my mother's changed voice — and to feel that I had taken Kenneth for ever away from his father's love to such a cold welcome. I had committed the unpardonable sin in all good women's eyes,
and I myself despised them who thought lightly of it. But I found peace with God by my prayers and tears of repentance, and as my boy won on his grandparents and on the other folk, I was comforted. I've helped my father and mother, and I'm sorely grieved to part with them; but to leave Kenneth is hardest of all. The worst of it is that he must go one way in the world and you must go another. There is no help for it. You can, and I doubt not will, send him money, and see that he does not want for schooling and such like; but you cannot give him care, you cannot give him love. And he'll miss it, and as he grows older, he'll feel more the wrong we did him. He never felt it so long as he had me. And though I had not the privilege of a widow to speak about you to your son, I could tell him the things that you had told to me, read him the books you liked, try to build him up in some ways as you would have done had things been different. But that is over now, and I must not grieve you by speaking of what cannot be helped.

If he had been ugly, or stubborn, or coldhearted, I might have thought God had not forgiven us, but every loving word and every kindly act he said or did makes me feel that the past is wiped out, and that this sinner who loved much had been pardoned and accepted.

When I made the great wrench of parting with you for ever, for what I thought was your good, I did all I could to show my repentance. For, Oh! it was love that made me leave you, love as great, aye, even greater, than what brought us together.

If I could only trust Kenneth to God's care on earth with as much faith as I can trust my own soul to my Saviour — but my faith sorely fails me when I see what I leave.

And now, my only love, you can whiles think upon me now, as I have for ever thought of you. There can be no wrong to your wife if you now and then go back to that time in the Highland hills when you and me first looked on Kenneth's face together. And, Oh! pray God with me that he may grow up so good and so noble that we may acknowledge him for our own in that better place where there is no marrying or giving in marriage; but where all are as the angels in heaven.

There, I'm thinking I'll be waiting long, long, ere you and Kenneth come. What can the Almighty give me to do to keep me from wearying till you meet me face to face? So many years — ten years, and never a sight of you. Mind, I count on meeting you in heaven. The world is not to spoil you, nor its cares to cark you. In the flesh or in the spirit, I am, always, Your own Isabel.

It showed what deep and tender memories were awakened by the perusal of this letter that Norman McDiarmid sat long brooding over it, and read it again and again, before he thought of opening those of Hugh Carmichael
referred to in it. Nay, it was not so much the boy that he thought of at this
time. It was Isabel herself who returned to his memory, who filled all his
heart and mind to the exclusion of all other considerations, now as she had
done in those glorified months in the midst of the Highland hills.

At last with a mighty effort he roused himself, and opened the letters of
his old College toady, Hugh Carmichael. And here sure enough was
evidence that would have overturned his formal marriage, and make his
son and heir, and the rest of his children illegitimate, if Isabel had been
inclined to press it. The fatal facilities given by the Scottish law, combined
with Isabel's enduring conviction that she was bound by the love-troth she
had exchanged, and that in God's eyes she was Norman McDiarmid's wife,
might have enabled Carmichael to trade upon her ambition for herself and
for her son, if she had been less firm; and now that she was dead, he had no
doubt that he would enlist the parents in an endeavour to prove the
marriage. Where was Carmichael now? These letters were dated years
back, and had evidently been repulsed bravely by his staunch Isabel. It
could be gathered from his rejoinders that she had explained away her own
words and his, and had utterly refused to yield to his suggestions in the
smallest degree; that his pleadings for Kenneth's rights had been scouted,
and that she had carefully kept his overtures from her parents. With regard
to young Norman's sickly health, on which Carmichael dwelt much, that
was a thing of the past, and he was now as likely to live as Kenneth
himself. And besides there was another boy born since the date of these
letters. No — Norman McDiarmid smiled bitterly as he thought how very
remote was the chance that he should ever have any desire to prove Isabel's
son his heir. But still more bitterly, he thought of the loss the boy had had,
and how infinitesimally little was all he could do to make up for it.

But again he thought — where was Carmichael? He would, no doubt, if
he heard of the death of such an obscure individual as Isabel Oswald, apply
to her parents, who would have no scruples about disturbing his peace, and
who would only be too delighted to make a stand for what he would
represent as Kenneth's rights. One of the greatest evils of the Scottish
marriage law is the curious moral obliquity which makes people think it
right to move heaven and earth to prove an old irregular bond, which will
snap through new and more sacred relations.

"More sacred!!" he paused as he thought of it. He took up again Isabel's
letter, and kissed it with passionate remorseful tears. He placed it with
Carmichael's letters and his own in a secret drawer, of which no one but
himself knew the trick, and which already contained a ribbon, some letters,
one lock of dark and a tuft of fair hair, the counterpart of the earliest of
Isabel's treasured locks; and then he sat down to think of the best course to
pursue. Carmichael might be dead. He was a man who had lived hard and fast, and had no regular means of support. He had been brought up to the Established Church, but was altogether too lax in doctrine and in life for such a career. He had been a private tutor to Edinburgh students when Mr. McDiarmid knew him. His letters to Isabel were dated simply “Edinburgh”, but the answers were to be addressed to a lodging-house in a poor neighbourhood. He might be dead, or he might have left the country. Isabel's death might never reach his ears, and in that case there need be no dread of his disturbing Kenneth or his grandparents, and making them think more meanly of him than they did.

Still the thought of Marion Oswald's face, as she might confront him with Kenneth in her hand, and with Hugh Carmichael to back her, was not agreeable, and his disturbed slumbers were haunted with all sorts of contradictory and alarming threats and visions. When he took up the *Scotsman* at the breakfast table, he was surprised how often his eyes were arrested by the not uncommon name of Carmichael. One John Carmichael had money to lend on heritable bonds; another Andrew Carmichael was inducted into a Church; another Robert Carmichael advertised the newest things in fancy goods — but no mention of Hugh Carmichael, not even in the obituary notices, where, to tell the truth, the greatest relief would have been found.

Mrs. McDiarmid was full of little household cares, and she liked to talk over such matters at the breakfast table, but she could not command her husband's usual attention. He was quite absorbed in the newspaper that morning. Even when he had apparently finished reading the newspaper, he did not give his wife the undivided interest she expected. He had got out the Edinburgh Directory, and could not find the name of the man he wanted, but in one of five years back he did find it. He planned his operations carefully, and during the next few days he gathered that Hugh Carmichael had disappeared from Edinburgh shortly after the date of his last letter to Isabel Oswald, that no one knew whether he was dead or alive. He had been very hard up for years, and after his disappearance not a syllable had been heard about him in his old haunts. Norman McDiarmid felt relieved; he breathed more freely, and appeared to his wife and children more like himself than he had been since his journey to the South.
Chapter 5 Uncle George Oswald's Liberality

More than a year had elapsed since the death of Isabel Oswald, and Kenneth kept growing fast, and making good progress at school. His master took a pride in him, he himself was eager to please Mr. McDiarmid, to whom he was allowed to write twice a year and who answered his letters very kindly, and on two occasions Kenneth had the great treat of going up to Edinburgh to meet this generous friend, who took him to a fine hotel, and had him dine with his own self, and made him order what he liked best. More than this, he was asked to choose which of the sights of Edinburgh he would prefer to see, and height of bliss, Mr. McDiarmid accompanied him to the theatre, and the circus, and once took him for a walk round Arthur's Seat. He encouraged the boy to talk, and tell him all the thoughts, serious or idle, that were in his heart, and sent him home full of pleasant memories and pleasanter anticipations of a repetition of the delights.

But when Kenneth attained his twelfth year a great change came over the family arrangements. The uncle in Australia, George Oswald, who had written to his parents but seldom and irregularly, though always kindly, astonished them and all the village in which he and they had lived by announcing that he had had such strokes of good luck lately that he meant to keep his father and mother in comfort for the rest of their lives, and that as he had heard they had a fine nephew of his own at home, he wished that he should be educated as a gentleman, in first class style, and sent out to him when his education was finished. He, George Oswald, had never taken a right grip of the world till he had sworn off drink, so he would like his nephew to begin on the square, and drink nothing stronger than tea. He was married and had one son two or three years younger than Kenneth as he thought; the mother spoiled him a bit, but the little chap was as like his father as two peas. But there was only the one, and he thought Jim would be the better for a companion by-and-by. There was plenty for them both at Tingalpa, which was the name of his head station, and as for the old folks, they were never to need to work another stroke.

The letter was accompanied by a remittance so handsome that the old couple were amazed, and there was a promise of a similar sum to be sent every half year. He said he would prefer his nephew to be educated in England, or at any rate in Edinburgh, and that he should be sent where there were real upper crusts, and not to any poor widow woman who let lodgings to starving divinity students. Above all things he was to be sure to have plenty to eat, if it was to be got for money; for George Oswald's ideas...
This bewildering letter was discussed by John and Marion Oswald first in private conference. To leave their home and their neighbours to go either to Edinburgh or to England was altogether out of the question; to part with Kenneth was nearly as hard, but then if he was to be associated with gentlefolks henceforward, he must be parted with.

“I'd better advise with the minister, John,” said the old woman.

“Nobody could advise us better than Kenneth's ain father, Marion. Will I write to him on the matter, think ye?”

“Never!” said his wife; “never. Thank the Lord and our George that we need never to be beholden to him for a penny o'siller or a scrape of a pen henceforth! Oh, my heart is greatly relieved! George is as rich as any McDiarmid o' them a', or I'm greatly mista'en, and now, as he says, he is sworn off the drink, he'll haul up his head wi' the best in the lan'. And as for Kenneth, he'll gang forth the kingdom, and nae man in Australia can lay a finger or the spot that a' body here is so keen to see.”

“But what will we do wanting the laddie?” said John Oswald. “And naething to do ourselves aither.”

“It's time we twa sat by the fireside noo, John,” said his wife kindly. “As for me, I can knit my stocking yet as I have done sae lang, and you, John, can have your dambrod (draughtboard) and drafts and your pipe and the papers, an' I daresay the neighbours will be blithe to come an' hae a crack wi' ye aboot the news.”

“Aye, but we'll miss Kenneth, there's naebody reads oot like him, though I could aye hear Isabel, though her voice was no' that loud — it was sae clear. But there's naebody else that makes me hear sae well.”

“We'll miss the laddie nae doot, but we've had aye to send the young anes oot o' the nest wi' less certainty of their prosperity too. Wad Geordie hae come to sic a kingdom in the three Lothians, think ye, if he had stopped here like John Lindores? Na, na,” and she played with the Bank draft she held in her hand and listened to the crisp rustling of the paper, as sweet to her Scottish ears as the chink of gold to those of an Englishwoman. “This is a bonnie little bit o' paper to be worth sae muckle.”

“But we maun let the laddie's father ken,” said John Oswald.

“'I'll do that myself,” said Marion, “though I'm nae great hand wi' the pen, I can manage that muckle,” and before Kenneth had come from school, she had penned with many slips, omissions, and mistakes what Mr. McDiarmid made out thus —

Sir — My son George in Austraulia havin maid his fortin wants to have Kenneth scooled and maid a gentlemon of, all at his own koast. So as we ne'er wanted favour from you but only justiss, which ye neer wad see, there
needs be nae mair beholden to you from this time, and nae mair trockin wi' the laddie at Embro.

   Your servant to command
   Marion Oswald.

Kenneth was stunned, less by the good fortune coming to the family and to himself than by the announcement that there was to be now no need of Mr. McDiarmid's charity, and that his grandmother had written and posted a letter to put a stop to all communication, and forbade him to write to say anything to explain matters, as she had done everything that was necessary. No expostulation had any effect on the peremptory old woman, and even the grandfather bowed to her wishes and could not be brought to side with Kenneth. Nobody sympathized with him but the powerless Nelly Lindores, who thought it a shame and a sin that the wonderfully kind gentleman who was like a fairy Prince to her imagination, should be treated so rudely, and make Kenneth appear so ungrateful. Mrs. Oswald was scarcely prepared for Mr. McDiarmid writing to Kenneth under cover to the schoolmaster, congratulating him on his unexpected change of fortune and hoping that he would make the best of all the opportunities given to him. He acquiesced in a general way in the grandmother's opinion, that now his own assistance would be unnecessary, but if ever circumstances changed, if ever Kenneth needed advice or help, he should be glad if he would address a letter to him at Mr. Shiel's, and he might be sure of an answer if he (Norman McDiarmid) was alive.

   This precious letter Kenneth read and reread, and answered it forthwith.
   Honoured Sir — I have not words to thank you in, only I'll mind your offer and ask your help if ever I need it. Grandmother is set against it, but I like your help better than my uncle's. If I go to Edinburgh, will I have any chance of seeing you; just a sight now and then would do me good and cheer my heart a bit. I remain,

   Your obliged servant,
   Kenneth Oswald.

In a very short time from the date of this letter Kenneth was placed, by the advice of the minister, Mr. Lang, in a large academy in Edinburgh, not as a boarder — that was scarcely considered what would have satisfied his uncle George's ambition — but as a day scholar. He was boarded with a Mrs. Wishart, whom Mr. Shiel (the Writer to the Signet, who was in Mr. McDiarmid's confidence) recommended to apply for the boy. She was the widow of a young advocate who had bid fair to rise to the highest walks in the profession, but who had died, leaving her with two young children to provide for. She had a good house in a good situation, and took boarders from the country who were either at school or College, and had an
especially good connection among the legal profession. This recommended itself to Mr. Lang, as preferable to a boarding school, for Kenneth would benefit by living in the daily society of a gentlewoman, and acquire better manners among such students as she attracted to her house than he could do at any school. Mrs. Wishart had never had so young a boy as Kenneth, and at first was disposed to feel aggrieved at Mr. Shiel when she saw how countrified he looked and how broad his accent was. But Kenneth won upon her by his kindness to her little children, and he soon caught the sharper, quicker mode of speech in use in the capital of Scotland, and he was so obliging and easily pleased that he soon became her favourite inmate, so that his youth, which promised a longer stay than usual, was all in his favour. He had good abilities and steady application, and did fairly well at school — more than fairly, in Mrs. Wishart's opinion, because he was such a good all-round boy — a lover of play, a lover of exercise, and a lover of literature — a boy who made friends and never let his lessons prevent him from doing a kind thing, or going out of his way a good deal to serve a friend. When at the age of sixteen, he was entered at “the College” as the ancient and famous University of Edinburgh is called in common parlance, he took and kept a very respectable place. But it was not his great special talents, or his turn for languages or for the exact sciences, that were his distinguishing characteristic. Nobody recollected Kenneth Oswald as a sap or a crammer until the last year of his course, when he seemed to have some motive for extra exertion. He was just the pleasantest fellow who attended that three years' course, ready for any fun and interested in everybody's affairs. To none of her other young friends, as she called them, could Mrs. Wishart confide her little anxieties about money matters, and about the future of Willie and Robina. There was no student there whom the old Janitor so delighted to button-hole, and tell old stories about his exploits in the Crimean War; no one whom the Professors so relied on to help to keep order or discipline in case of any snowballing or other College row, or who had an equally good footing among his seniors and juniors. Mrs. Wishart confessed that her country lad grew into the best-looking and most gentlemanly-looking fellow of those who accompanied her to church, and the grandparents and Nelly at each visit during the holidays congratulated themselves on his height and his strength, and his handsome appearance, and above all on the fact that he would do credit to Uncle George's expenditure on him; for he looked no more like the lads who had gone with him to the village school than if he had been brought up a gentleman all his life.

Kenneth's feelings with regard to his future career were not altogether in consonance with his uncle's plans and wishes. There was such a vagueness
in Mr. George Oswald's letters; there seemed to be no special directions to be given to his studies. He had written to know if his uncle would like him to study or to take special note of sheep or cattle or agriculture, if these would be of any service, but his uncle had said that if that was needed he'd learn better under him in Australia, for everything has to be learned afresh in a new country; but what he wanted was the education and the manners of a gentleman; a “Good hand of write, which he saw his nephew was cultivating, and some more counting” than he, George Oswald, had got. He was to learn all that was going at the school and the College — but not to be a book-worm — that was neither for use nor for ornament. If he could keep on outside of a horse, and hold the ribbons for a pair of spirited beasts, so much the better. His cousin Jim could do that first rate, and might not respect him as he should do if Kenneth was deficient there — there were horses and traps enough at Tingalpa.
Chapter 6 Recognition and Severance

The liberality with which George Oswald had begun towards Kenneth and the old people never flagged; indeed it increased, for he said he had prospered more ever since he made up his mind to do the right thing by them all. Gradually the Oswalds got into a better home with better furniture, and secured more help and attendance. The greatest stroke of business for their comfort Kenneth thought he had executed just on the expiration of his first year at College, when he contrived that Nelly Lindores should leave the crowded, noisy, home where she was a slave to her stepmother and her half-brothers and sisters, and live altogether with his grandparents. This was effected by promising not only current wages for the girl's services, but also hiring a stranger to perform Nelly's multifarious duties at home. Nelly, however, did not take the position of a servant, for she had a girl under her. She was like a dutiful granddaughter or niece, to be cheerful company to the aged couple, to watch over their health and obey their pleasures. The little, deft, quick-eyed maiden waited on the folks cleverly, and brightened up the house. She wrote to Kenneth for them once a week to tell how all went on; she read out so loud and clear that John Oswald said she was nigh hand as good as Kenneth for that. She found now some leisure to make herself a little smart, and to read the books Kenneth loved, and to try and understand the things he and his College friends were interested in. John Lindores saw the improvement in his lassie's look after her change, and, but that Kenneth was bound for a life in Australia, he would not have known what to think might be the upshot.

When any of the neighbours ventured to hint to Mrs. Oswald that when Kenneth went to Melbourne, he would be for taking Nelly with him, her indignation knew no bounds. Nothing of the sort certainly! When Kenneth was in Australia at his uncle's grand place at Tinglepa, where there were horses and carriages out of number, it would be some great Australian lady, some sister or daughter of the Governor, or the Members of Parliament, or the Judges of the land, that he would be taking up with, and not a country wright's daughter, that was glad of an up-putting with such as her and the good man. The old lady's idea as to her son George's position rose with the receipt of every letter and every remittance. The family was a rising family everywhere, for the American son had taken to writing more regularly, and described a state of prosperity far beyond what he could have attained to in Scotland, but he had a very large family and needed all he had; in that different from George, who was as liberal as the day.
Nelly heard many long narratives about these two boys, and others, who had died in their early youth, and felt moderately interested in them, but she could never get the old lady to enter into particulars about her only daughter Isabel, except here and there in connection with Kenneth. Nelly naturally felt the strongest interest in Isabel; she had always felt cheated in getting her present stepmother instead of the one she would have liked so much. And Kenneth used still to take the opportunity in his holiday visits of talking to Nelly as of old about his lost mother. His grandmother was as reticent to him as to Nelly. In her mind now Kenneth and her eldest son George were constantly connected, she barely acknowledged the fact that the uncle had a son, to whom he was far more dearly bound than to the unseen, unknown, nameless, nephew; indeed the Australian grandson was very much ignored in all her visions of Kenneth's brilliant future. Somehow Mr. Oswald's letters seemed to accept Kenneth as his brother's son, and there never was the least mention of Isabel in connection with him, and when the old folks moved, shortly after Nelly's establishment with them, to a pretty village so near Edinburgh that Kenneth could occasionally walk out on Saturday to spend Sunday with them, he found that everywhere his position was accepted as that of the orphan son of that James Oswald who was lost at sea.

Kenneth had had a good many gibes and jeers to undergo in the village school in early days, and he liked the Edinburgh home because he was quite free from them. If his mother had lived he would have got the truth from her, and all his full sympathy might have partly indemnified her for years of solitary endurance; but, as he grew up to manhood, he puzzled himself long and vainly as to the subject on which his grandparents were so close and so sensitive. No idea of Mr. McDiarmid as his father entered his head until the second year at College had expired. He was so far above him, so far above anything that Isabel Oswald could have dreamt of. His kindly interest in Kenneth was sufficiently accounted for by the care and devotion which Isabel had lavished on his only sister, and the very perfection which Kenneth attributed to his patron, excluded the idea that he could have been a betrayer and a deserter of humble innocence.

Once or twice Kenneth met casually with his friend whom his grandmother had such ungenerous ideas about. How handsome, how distinguished-looking he was, how kind were his looks and bearing. Mrs. Wishart knew something about him, and when she heard that Kenneth was interested in him she would speak of what an old family it was, and how he had rather married beneath him in point of position in allying himself to Miss Syme, who was said to be an heiress, but at any rate was a very nice girl, and her father and mother were very proud to talk about their daughter
at Castle Diarmid.

The day on which Kenneth's eyes were opened was a great day at Edinburgh University. A new Rector was just installed, and he had been giving an inaugural address, and Kenneth saw on the platform near the person of the lecturer, to whom all eyes were turned, the face and form of his honoured patron. Just as he looked from behind his fellow-students by whom he was partly concealed, he suddenly caught Mr. McDiarmid's eye resting upon him with an interest and affection altogether beyond anything that goodwill towards himself, or gratitude for his mother's services towards a dead sister could have called forth. The eyes met, and Mr. McDiarmid the finished, collected gentleman, flushed visably at the questioning yearning glance of the tall lad, whose mother seemed to look out of his eyes and quiver in his lips. Kenneth too flushed, and then turned as pale as death, and leaned against the corner of the Hall to support himself. Close behind Mr. McDiarmid stood a fair stripling, undoubtedly his son and heir. It was not the heirship, but the nearness, the countenance, the thousand memories and hopes and expectations that twined these two together, that Kenneth envied. It was not what his father might do to further his own fortunes or position that he longed for, it was what he might have done for his father that was forbidden under these cruel circumstances that wrung his heart. "When he is old that is the arm he will lean on; when he is troubled, that is the company that will cheer him. In his joy, that lad will rejoice; in his sorrow, he has a right to grieve. He will stand by him through life, and on his death-bed he will close his eyes, and there is nothing for me to do; no place where I can stand to help or console." Thus in the bitterness of his heart Kenneth communed with his own soul, and his friend, Henry Stalker, who stood near, wondered what had come over him. How long the subsequent proceedings appeared! When all was over, he was hurrying out to take a long solitary walk before he could face either Stalker or Mrs. Wishart, when he met Mr. McDiarmid's eye again. It was a glance of command, and it arrested him. He observed that he committed the fair stripling to the care of a white-haired gentleman, probably his grandfather, and went straight towards the darker older lad.

A kind hand was laid on his shoulder, a kind voice fell on his ear. The sense of isolation and of severance from parental love and filial duty vanished at that magic touch, but the heart was too full for words.

"Kenneth, my boy, you are not well. Come with me." And he led the way to the familiar hotel where they had dined together years ago, and from which they had sallied on that never-to-be-forgotten walk. No word was spoken until they got into a private room, and Mr. McDiarmid shut the door. He took the lad's hands in his own, and with an expression of
tenderness such as Kenneth had never seen on human face since he had lost his mother, watched the vain efforts to swallow back the gathering tears and choking sobs which shook his whole frame.

“It was a crowd. It was very hot — there is really nothing the matter with me,” said Kenneth, speaking with short pauses as he found voice, endeavouring to regain his self command.

In the large mirror over the mantleshelf both faces were reflected: Kenneth's was aged by emotion, Mr. McDiarmid's made perhaps more youthful by sympathy; and the likeness between them even in countenance, which was not noticeable at other times, came out startling to both.

“How can I help vexing myself. How can I but feel your grief. How can I help feeling humble in your eyes and my own. Only try to forgive me. Kenneth, my son, my son. Your mother did.”

At this allusion to his mother, the tears could no longer be repressed.

“What have I to forgive, Sir. Only, only, I cannot help being doubly sorry that I have lost her, and cannot get you,” and he raised his father's hand to his lips. “And I can never get you, because it would only hurt you if such as I took it upon me to serve you. But don't grieve about it. I'll get over it. I got over her dying, and that was worst of all. And I am going to Australia in a year, and it will be all the same. Why need you grieve for me?”

“Don't be too cruel to me, Kenneth. Give me the right to grieve in your grief.” And in the affecting words of Scripture, Norman McDiarmid fell on his son's neck and kissed him, and they wept sore. When he had thus given vent to long-repressed affection and emotion, he tried to resume the conversation in a calmer tone.

“And you are doing well, I hear. Mr. Shiel gives a good account of you.”

“Nothing out of the way, Sir. If I could take a degree, or anything like that, would it make any difference?”

“If it is nothing out of the way. I hear that your progress and your conduct have both been very satisfactory, and that you will do credit to your Uncle George.”

“Oh! to Uncle George, I dare say; but if mother had only lived I think I might have done more; or if it could have brought me just a little nearer to you;” and the beseeching eyes pleaded hard.

Mr. McDiarmid winced. “But the studies are good in themselves, are they not? I hear that mental and moral philosophy is your favourite study, though you do well all through.”

“Yes, that interests me most, because I think it might throw some light on the best way of living; and that has always seemed to me of more service than things to be learned and known. You must not think that I do not like the College, or that I am ungrateful to Uncle George for what he is doing
for me; but just this day it seemed like apples of Sodom.”

“When do you go to Australia, Kenneth?” said his father after a pause.

“Next year I reckon on starting for an unknown life. But do not be angry with me if I ask a question. Was not that your son that was standing alongside of you who went out with the old gentleman?”

“Yes, Kenneth, my son; that was your brother, Norman.”

“And you've no need of me, I should be glad; but, oh! it feels hard to come all on me at once. But, thank God, you have called me your son.”

“My son, my first born.”

“And I may love you as much as — —”

“As much as you can Kenneth”.

“And that is much; but — —”

“But you regret the severance; you cannot regret the severance more than I do. But my dearest boy, your position in Australia as your uncle's helper and honoured kinsman is far better for yourself than any recognition I could give you; and any notice I might take of you could only injure you with those who deserve your love and rightfully claim your services. It is hard to say it, but it must be said — You must go your way in the world, and leave me to mine; only do it as kindly towards me as possible. You are young and impressionable; I pray God you may never be placed in circumstances of such temptation as your mother and I were in. They say that the punishment of such sin is very unequal. To the world's eyes it is. What my Isabel had to bear I can guess. She made no complaint to me, but she wrote to me with her dying hand that she had not been unhappy through it all, for she felt God had forgiven her when he sent her so good a son as you; when she could do everything for you, and was all the world to you. How could you have served me better than by being such a son to her? How can I be grateful enough to you for this? And can I be called prosperous and unpunished when I am not able to do anything for you; when I cannot claim your duty; cannot take pride in your progress; when even the poor money help I entreated to be allowed to give had been rejected; and your mother's despised kin are educating my unowned son as I could educate the heir to my name and estates, and keeping that son apart from me as if my touch were poison? Your mother made every sacrifice she could for me. I apparently can make none. Kenneth, do you feel a little for me? Can you forgive me, my son?”

The young man knelt reverently at his father's feet — “As heartily as I hope to be forgiven myself. Only bless me, me also! Oh! my father.”

“May our Heavenly Father bless my dear son, and guide him, in life and death,” said Norman McDiarmid solemnly.

This explanation seemed to tranquillize both father and son. The father
could not go back to his earliest memories of his boy, but he led Kenneth
to go back to his first memories of his mother, and his life with her. Seen
through the haze of years it seemed a lovely pastoral idyll, the life of those
two so wrapped up in each other. Kenneth knew of no scorn or reproach
which his mother encountered, and Norman McDiarmid felt her words
corroborated by the description of the happy life he had led, the walks and
talks and books and plans. Information he had been thirsting to obtain for
eighteen years as to how that severed life had flowed apart from him came
naturally from Kenneth.

Painful as the interview and explanation had been for both, both felt very
glad it had taken place. The father felt indescribably relieved as to the past,
and hopeful for the future career of his son; and Kenneth was so
overpowered, oppressed, and yet strangely proud. “Surely,” he thought to
himself, “in the many years of life probably in store for both of us, I may
do something for him, something to show that I am worthy to be called his
son.”
Chapter 7 Harry Stalker

Kenneth regretted the close of his studies in the good old City of Edinburgh, because he really advanced more in the last year of his course than he had done in the preceding years. The conversation with his father had acted as a spur to him. If he had had it before he would have worked hard, and obtained a degree; but he was young, and though his advisers made him go in he was not successful. It was not a discreditable attempt — it only need another year's study; but George Oswald was unwilling to let him remain any longer over books. Harry Stalker, who was the only divinity student resident at Mrs. Wishart's, and Kenneth's dearest and most appreciating friend, always said Oswald ought to have pulled through, but at the same time congratulated him on his failure as boding for greater ultimate success in life than a brilliant University opening. Besides, of what value would an University degree be in the eyes of the patriarchal George Oswald, steeped in the local conceit of successful and ignorant colonists? “You can please him better by going in for easy honours at their Melbourne affair, and have your name printed in the newspapers that he reads. And you will have less to regret in leaving ‘Auld Reekie’.”

“It is very good-natured of you to say so,” said Kenneth, who was naturally mortified at his being unsuccessful; “you would have felt it mortifying if you had failed.”

“So I should, but it would have been the best thing for me. The hopes of paterfamilias and of that venerable uncle who is waiting for my aid in his Highland parish would not have been so inflated. I might have dropped into business and made a fortune. Don't laugh, Kenneth; I should have liked it above all things, but for that unlucky degree. Whereas I am to be a pillar of the Kirk — a second Norman Macleod! Save the mark!”

“But what you could do could not I have done, with the motives I felt spurring me on?”

“No, not exactly. In the first place, I am years older than you, and that tells. It was a wild hope to get an Edinburgh degree at nineteen with a year's spurt. In the second place, I am a good deal cleverer, so that though I am deficient in concentrativeness as well as you, I can do certain things with less effort. In the third place, it was for my disadvantage to pass, and the demon of perversity, which arranges most mundane affairs, cursed me with success. I don't exactly see what good the degree would do you, Kenneth. In fact, I have been arguing to the contrary but at the back of that argument I am quite sure that it would be of the greatest advantage for you to get it, and also that it is most important that you should spend another
year in my society to try again. This is to say, for me. I am not so sure of your being marked out for ill-luck as I am in my own case.”

“I do not see your ill-luck, Harry, but it is just the paradoxical nature of your mind that makes you take exceptions to all received notions.”

“Your grandmother told me the other day, when we were at your place, that her ambition was to see you in a pulpit. Now, Uncle George, with his contempt for starving divinity students, came in like a providence to protect you from that; and you will go in for pastoral pursuits of another kind. Do you think you could preach as well as I could?”

“Certainly not.”

“You would never preach so well as I can do at times, but you would never fall so low as I am sure to do when it comes to be routine work. But the question is not how to preach, but what to preach, and there it is that I'll fail.”

“You always assert no man can succeed who does not fail, so that so far I have the advantage of you.”

“Ay, Kenneth, so far, and a great deal further. Consider the probable effects of making a minister of me, with all my unsettled opinions, all my Bohemian tastes, and my strong sense of youth and rebellious self-will. And yet I can preach. I feel that if I get wound up I could give sermons that would do everybody good but myself. You see, Kenneth, I have such strong sympathy with what is evil and disreputable in man that I could touch chords among the vicious classes that a middle-aged, respectable minister knows nothing of, and in some irregular way I might open the kingdom of heaven to people who are the despair of the Churches.”

“While you yourself?” enquired Kenneth.

“Would stop outside, gathering the sour plums of experience, and scratching myself with the thorns of the flesh. But such a career has its charms; to touch natures no other can move, to enter into feelings which to my worthy father and uncle (ripe and learned divines) are absolutely unknown, should make me think life was given me for something.”

“You always maintain that there is a great deal of good in the vicious and criminal classes,” said Kenneth.

“Not only a great deal, but potentially if not actually more than among the respectable classes. You see energy counts for so much as a factor in life. You know I hate the respectable classes. They are indescribably tiresome and I believe that if they had the opportunity they would be more wicked than those whom they command to stand off.”

“Let us be glad the opportunity is not afforded them,” said Kenneth.

“Oh! but many of them make a great deal of the limited opportunities they have got,” said his friend. “When you see a middle-aged citizen sitting
at the foot of his table, with an ugly wife at the other end and half a dozen children at the sides, who can tell the whole history of that man's youth or even of his maturer age?"

“You are more disposed to trust the respectable classes than the others, Henry, in the same way as you really like the moral books, while you protest there is more truth and profit in the immoral. It is mere love of contradiction that makes you advance so many outrageous statements.”

“Not at all, Kenneth, it is the sacred love of truth.”

“Truth which you elicit from your opponents?”

“Truth which my opponents elicit from me. I trust the respectable classes in those many cases where their interests coincide with their duty; but I would not trust my life, my purse, or my character with any one whose interests did not protect me, even though he or she sat in the chief seats in the tabernacle, and received testimonials from admiring fellow-citizens for integrity and disinterestedness. And as for the books, more harm is done by the mawkish morality, which exaggerates every little failing into a heinous sin, than by that which treats heinous sins as little failings. I want to have my conscience work naturally, if possible. It will have a hard life of it with me at the best; but if I get oversensitive, I'm done for.”

“There I cannot sympathize with you, Harry.”

“As for you, Kenneth, I envy your organization. A fine physique, a splendid digestion, and a well-balanced conscience, it will be hard for you to go to the bad; though I warn you, you have some trouble before you when you get out to Australia. This uncle, with his boast and his blow, and his ignorance, and his feeling that you owe everything to him, will be just the sort of man I should like to kick and say good-bye to; but you will do your spiriting more gently, and will have a great deal to put up with before you settle into your rightful place. And if Jim your cousin is a lad of ordinary spirit he will be jealous of all your advantages. It is clear to me at present that no degree is best.”

“I wish I could think so,” said Kenneth, who had wished his father to see his success.

“And it is also clear that you cannot have another trial here. I'll miss you, Kenneth.”

“We must all miss him more or less,” said Mrs. Wishart, who now entered the room and joined in the conversation, “and I am sure Kenneth will be sorry to leave his native land and his old friends.”

“There must be some natural pangs at parting with both,” said Kenneth, “though it is what most Scotchmen take kindly to. I should feel it less than ordinary emigrants, as I am going to a home and relatives.”

“And that is the very reason why you feel so dubious,” said Stalker. “If
the world were really all before you, you might exult in the boundless prospect held out; but you have been trained here in one way, and there you are expected to fill a groove that is made for you, and of which you know no more than a child. And there will be expectations formed about you that are grounded on equal ignorance on the other side. I prophesy that you will be a distinguished failure.”

“It is something to be distinguished, at any rate,” said Mrs. Wishart.

“Of course it is,” said Stalker. “It will be no vulgar success, exactly fitting the place his uncle destines for him, but so deplorably unfitting that he will disappoint himself and everybody else.”

“Why should he disappoint any one? I see no necessity for that,” said Mrs. Wishart.

“My dear Madam, he must, or he will never satisfy his Maker or himself. Do you think God in making Kenneth Oswald intended him for such a square hole as George Oswald has cut out for him at Tingalpa, or whatever the outlandish name of the place may be. Kenneth is rounded to a perfect sphere, and the corners will slip out of his cognizance altogether. I have not made up my mind as to what he will be driven — to poetry, to politics, to lunacy, or to transcendentalism, which may include all these. But I would stake all I have on earth, even my books, that there are hard lines for him across the water, and that until he gets clear of all his entanglements with relations he will never get to his own proper work.”

“Is it not absurd in you to dogmatize about what you know nothing about, Henry?” said Kenneth, who was really discomposed by his friend's confident assertions, which awoke answering echoes in his own heart.

“You may tell us how you are to distinguish yourself when you fail in what your friends expect of you,” said Mrs. Wishart, who was disposed to turn the tables on Kenneth's disconcerting friend.

“No doubt about the last part of your surmises, but grave doubts as to the first. I could not tell you at present what will ever make up to the world or to myself for being a ‘sticket minister’.”

“You can never be that, with your wonderful command of language,” said Mrs. Wishart.

“There are other ways of sticking besides want of words. When the thoughts are confused, and the life inconsistent; when the conscience pulls one way and the interests another; when truth, or what to me appears to be truth, holds up a flaming sword to bar me from any paradise here or hereafter, I think I am very likely to stick somewhere. But of course I'll try it. I cannot go through life without my failure. Let us hope one will suffice.”

“You are in a dismal humour, Harry,” said Kenneth.
“How can I help it, when you are going to put half the world between us on such an uncertain venture, to try to follow out old people’s plans. These disappointments are hard on the old folks, however. They forget their own youth and their own failures, and they think we will stand up exactly where they set us, and do exactly as they anticipated, and all the while the living soul within us has its own salvation to work out somehow, not with hope and certainty, but with fear and trembling. Strange that they have no misgiving about the human and fallible nature of the materials they fancy they can command.”

“I think you may be partly right about yourself, though even there you take too strong views,” said Mrs. Wishart. “You know your own friends' expectations, and your own capabilities or incapabilities; but as for Kenneth, he is far more considerate and yielding than you, and has his faculties better in hand so to speak. I cannot agree to your notion that he will not take kindly to whatever Providence sets him to do.”

“Providence being George Oswald, you think?” said Stalker.

“He has been a good Providence to me,” said Kenneth, warmly. “He has done for me well and liberally in every way.”

“How much love has there been in his liberal doings?” asked Harry Stalker.

The question was like a sting to Kenneth, for this uncle, by his munificent gifts, had closed the avenue through which his father had sought to help him. Kenneth changed colour; but could not trust himself to speak. Harry Stalker saw that he had given pain.

“I am always doing this sort of thing, Kenneth, I'm sorry. Of course he cannot be expected to gush over a boy whom he never saw in his life, and, as Mrs. Wishart says, you are so different from me that you will get on well enough with the great, what d'ye call him? Squatter is it? At least it will not be your fault if you do not, because that rounding off I spoke of takes away all the sharp aggressive corners, and you are not ready either to give offence or to take it. Whereas I — I am an awful example of human perversity. Just because I am at heart sad and sorry to lose my best friend, perhaps for ever, I say things to vex him, and he will go to the antipodes with less heart for his difficult duties, because I had neither good taste, good temper, nor good feeling.”
Chapter 8 Departure

Kenneth accepted the apology so humbly offered; but the words sank into his mind notwithstanding. Mr. McDiarmid came from the North to see his boy before he left Edinburgh for his departure to unknown lands; he comforted him for his failure about the degree, and took far more cheerful views as to Mr. George Oswald of Tingalpa, than his College friend or than Kenneth himself could take from the letters. He was not only Isabel's brother but her favourite brother. His very sensitiveness about Kenneth's birth, and the ignoring of her in his letters which had hurt the son so much, made Norman McDiarmid see more love in his doings than any one else. As the days hurried on, and the session closed, and there was only to be the short farewell visit to his grandparents and Nelly, he felt daily more reluctance to go to discover what was expected from him in Victoria. Henry Stalker accompanied his friend in this visit. He had before made himself a favourite in the household; his regard for Kenneth was genuine, he was so much plainer in appearance that they were never afraid of his eclipsing their own particular hero, and all Kenneth's praises of his friend's greater abilities and higher standing at the University, backed by his marvellous flow of talk and legend and anecdote and quotation, could not shake Mrs. Oswald's idea that if only Kenneth had taken to the Kirk, he could have outshone the elder student. Whereas he had gone in for being a gentleman by his uncle's orders, and young Stalker was not fit to hold the candle to him in that respect.

Mrs. Oswald interested Stalker much more than her husband did, and he loved to draw her out, and to elicit by question and rejoinder that curious mixture of Calvinistic theology and worldly wisdom, which is so essentially a national characteristic of the bygone generation.

In the village in which the Oswalds lived, they had gone up at least two degrees in the social scale, and were visited by people several degrees higher than that. A rich and liberal son in Australia and a clever grandson at College, on whom no expense was spared, were passports for respectability. The amount of education which the Scottish peasants receive fits them better for a rise in life than would be the case with a similar class in England. The Scotch, too, is a language, and not a dialect, and never seems vulgar in old people; and the old man read the papers and played draughts and backgammon, while his wife in her black gown and snow-white cap knitted stockings, much as people in much higher rank do when life's active work is done.

Their pride and pleasure in Kenneth's appearance, manners, and
attainments, were wonderfully little disturbed by the approaching separation. It was to be; it was for this that George had behaved so handsomely; his absence in Edinburgh for his education had accustomed them to it. The laddie would write every month, and send the papers which George had not done, and Nelly would write for them regularly, and would look after them till they were taken in their good time, not far apart from each other, as both fondly hoped. Harry Stalker, whose mind was full of regrets and misgivings about his friend, could not help being amused at the complacency with which these old people looked upon all the arrangements.

Kenneth and his friend had looked into the parish school one day in passing, and the schoolmaster, delighted with the interest taken by two clever Edinburgh students in the children and their studies, and, hoping to rouse the ambition of some of his bigger boys for higher education, made them go through a long examination on various branches of knowledge, and, among other things, took the Shorter Catechism in hand, and the readiness, the precision, and the triumphant certainty of the answers given by the youngest children, awoke an old vein of questioning doubt in the minds of both young men.

“These atoms have no doubts,” said Harry, as he and his friend took their way to the Linleath woods, where Nelly had promised to meet them in the afternoon, “any more than your grandfather and grandmother. Curious, is it not, that at the beginning and the ending of life all seems so clear, and in the middle, when you want the faith to live by, it is so perplexing. Shall you and I ever reach a serene atmosphere as theirs, when we shall see whatever is is right, and that this is the best of all possible worlds? Is it the age we live in that is so disturbing, or is this earthquake what every human soul must experience in its passage from youth to age? Probably both; at least the disturbance must arise, but the character of the upheaval is determined by that of the times we are passing through. The more various the currents in which we are caught, the more uncertain will it be to predicate the nature of the ‘Sturm und Drang’ through which the soul must pass.”

“I think a much larger proportion of people escaped this crisis in former times,” said Kenneth, “at least there is little trace of such throes in the literature of the past compared to that of the present.”

“Literature misleads us in this as in many things, Kenneth. In the first place, modern literature is ten times more abundant; secondly, it is much more daring in expression; and, thirdly, if you look closer into the old literature, you will find hints that the difficulties arose, though they are not dwelt on.”
“The difficulties were different in most instances,” said Kenneth.
“Aye, you are right there, Kenneth. Modern difficulties are really something grand. It is worth living in this nineteenth century for the sake of the grand problems which we face in their depth and height and vastness,” said Harry, his plain face lighting up to something like beauty.
“But with regard to your grandparents you notice their comfortable, unshaken, and unshakable conviction about themselves, about yourself, and about everybody; the settledness they see in every arrangement, the unwillingness to weigh or balance probabilities. Even if a thing is merely proposed or surmised, they take it up as settled and to be carried out at once, and are astonished afterwards to hear it has not been acted on at all.”
“If I were to get a letter from Australia tomorrow saying that my uncle had changed all his plans, and wanted me to go to business in Scotland, or to take to the Church, how do you think they would take this uprooting of all the plans they have formed on my behalf?” asked Kenneth.
“Much better than you would do, who can anticipate such a possibility. In a day or less, they would see that it is better that you should remain, and that it was not to be expected that your Uncle George, with a son of his own, should just make a son of you. Your grandmother would take either to business or to the Kirk, with joy, and your grandfather would acquiesce in her ideas, while you would be full of surmises and hesitations, wondering at your uncle's motives, and finding it hard to change the current of your ideas.”
“I don't know but what it would be somewhat of a relief,” said Kenneth with a sigh. He thought of how little chance there was of his seeing the good old folks again or Nelly, but above all, that he would never possibly see his father's face or hear his voice in that far-off land; and if George Oswald had voluntarily banished himself for so many years, what chance was there of his own return?
“But with regard to your grandparents,” said Harry Stalker, “it would be too hard if along with the failing pleasures of age, they continued to feel the keen anxieties of youth. It is a great compensation to them for the loss of much, that they do not feel grief so sharp or apprehension so terrible as we younger men.”
“You yourself have the most curious streak of age in your youth that I ever saw in any one,” said Kenneth. “Where have you lived in some pre-existent state to acquire all the cynicism, the dogmatism, the insight that sometimes looks like experience, only that in your twenty-two years you cannot have really seen so much. You are not one of the happy men who learn by the experience of others.”
“No, unfortunately, I don't learn wisdom, however much I may seem to
know. That pre-existence theory is fascinating. When shall the individual have advanced so far as to recollect distinctly what he did, thought, and felt, in the last even of his transmigrations. Is there to be for ever a River of Lethe in which the soul must plunge, and begin anew with only unconscious memories in the shape of tendencies? There is a period in every one's life, pre-natal and post-natal, which is as completely forgotten as if it never had been, and yet it is probably the most important part of his life. So it may be that until we reach a certain advancement we cannot retain individually and definitely the traditional memories of the race. But to return to your old people, who would be shocked beyond measure at such speculations, I am amused to hear how they reckon on Nelly's services so long as they want them, the idea of her marrying and leaving them never enters their head. And I dare say they will imagine when she does give them notice of this kind that they can easily supply her place, but we know they cannot. She's simply perfect in her management.”

Kenneth looked up a little sharply at his friend, but he betrayed no emotion. He was only talking of things in the abstract, as was his wont.

“No! of course, she promises everything in or out of reason that she thinks would please you or me or any one else. What is a young woman made for but to be agreeable to everybody, especially to the nobler sex? It is the whole duty of women. Let me see! an actuary would value the lives of that couple, the survivor of them I mean, at ten years. They are hale, temperate, and free from all anxiety, and with abundant means. It might stretch out easily to fifteen or sixteen. And Nelly will stick to them till she is thirty-two because she promised, and it would be very handsome to keep her to her promise.”

“You are a very uncomfortable counsellor, Harry. And here the subject of our dispute comes with a letter in her hand; the Australian mail is sooner than we expected. This is the last letter I shall receive. Is it to countermand orders or to confirm them?”

“To confirm certainly. The disturbance will come after you get to your uncle's.”

There was no alteration in the plans. Kenneth read in his uncle's careless
scrawl his renewed injunctions to sail from the port of Liverpool in the
good clipper ship “Kent”; and that he should probably be met in
Melbourne, but if not he was to telegraph his arrival and proceed forthwith
to Tingalpa by train to Castlehurst, where he would find some one with a
buggy and pair to take him home.

The duplicate bills of exchange for his passage-money and outfit were
sent in due form; and his appearance was to be much as should do him
credit both on board ship and on his landing. There was a little depression
among the three young folks in the Linleath woods at this final marching
order for Kenneth. Nelly and her friend planned an excursion for the
morrow to her own old home, where Kenneth could say good-bye to John
Lindores, and to the minister, Mr. Lang, and would visit his mother's grave.
In this excursion Mr. Stalker was not a party, he had another visit to pay
for the day, but with this exception he did not leave his friend till he saw
him on board the “Kent”. The farewells were said; Marion Oswald saw her
daughter's nameless child depart as she thought to fortune and honours and
happiness. John Oswald felt less exultant, and poor Nelly thought the
house very sad and dull without the two friends who always had so much
to say to her.
Chapter 9 Across the Ocean

The good ship "Kent" was a regular trader and a favourite passenger ship. Bets rising from a new hat to a £5 note were made as to her making the passage in seventy-five days on each outward voyage, and Kenneth was surprised to find what an Australian atmosphere pervaded the vessel. There were some new people like Kenneth going out for the first time, but they were completely overpowered by the superior position and the superior knowledge of returning colonists. The bulk of these were from Melbourne, but there were two or three Tasmanian people and two Adelaide families. It would appear by the prevailing talk that Melbourne was the "hub" of the Australian universe, and, although Kenneth had been told that the gold was the largest interest, both as an article of export and as employing most labour, it was the wool and the pastoral interests that enormously preponderated in the talk at the cuddy table. He could have had no better introduction to lead him to appreciate his uncle's peculiar walk in life than this voyage in the "Kent". Many of the passengers had taken the Suez route home, but preferred the long stretch of sailing for their return, and the extraordinary differences of opinion and of power of observation between people who had led the same lives and seen the same things and places interested the young Scotchman, whose travels had been hitherto very limited. It was pretty clear to him that if people did not take anything with them in the shape of ideas or information, they brought wonderfully little away from the sight of the most interesting places and the hearing of the most eloquent speeches. Some few, who had greatly enjoyed the excitement and the change of foreign travel, went back reluctantly as to a place of dullness and quasi-banishment; but most of the returning passengers seemed glad to have a prospect of taking up their work again, and mixing with their compeers on a platform where they occupied a place more or less conspicuous. A gold-broker and a manager of a Quartz-crushing Company represented the diggings interest, at least the capitalist side of it. Among the second-class passengers there were some small storekeepers and even artisans who had gone home for a holiday, but the bulk of such passengers were on their first outward voyage. The captain and officials were as familiar with Melbourne streets and Melbourne politics and general affairs as with those of their native land, and Kenneth thought he imbibed the atmosphere around him very fairly. He saw the tone of his uncle's letters reproduced in various gradations, and with more or less pronouncement on all sides. England owed much more to her colonies, especially to her Australian Colonies, and most especially to the
premier colony of Victoria, than she acknowledged, or than she was at all aware of.

Among such a number of Victorians, Kenneth hoped to hear some particulars about his Uncle George, but there were none who knew him personally. By name, George Oswald was well known as a successful squatter of the old type, shrewd, hardworking, and prompt to seize opportunities as they offered, and habitually close-fisted, though liberal in spots. He had been originally an overseer — had managed for the Brothers Dirom till they got disgusted with the colony at the outbreak of the gold-diggings, and were anxious to go home. Their overseer had bought them out, and it had turned out a splendid bargain for the purchaser. Tingalpa was so near the large mining township of Castlehurst that the market for stock had been of incalculable value, even better than for Mr. William Gray's station at Wilta, who was another squatting magnate even wealthier, and, by what Kenneth could gather, of much higher social rank than his uncle. But George Oswald was spoken of with respect, his wool fetched splendid prices in the London market, and he was extending his operations, as yet undisturbed to any extent by the free selectors, whom the squattocracy are wont to stigmatize as the curse of the country — depriving men of means of their runs, and doing no good for themselves or the colony by their acquisitions. The liberal land laws were looked on by these sufferers, either in esse or in posse, with most extreme disgust, and in their eyes Victorian politics generally appeared framed for the destruction of capital and the ruin of capitalists.

Kenneth was a favourite on board; his desire for information made him popular with the prosers, who were eager to give it; his readiness to be obliging was agreeable to a few very limp ladies on board, who appeared to have no power to help themselves; his interest in navigation recommended him to the officers, and his love of fun to the children. There were some pleasant girls on board, with frank manners and a great readiness in conversation; and he did not escape the inevitable flirtation which at nineteen, in the enforced idleness of a voyage, has so many attractions; but he discovered before they reached Melbourne Heads that Miss Dunne was only passing the time with him, and that she was engaged to a middle-aged man on the New South Wales side. Kenneth's vanity was wounded, and his heart a little too; he thought of Harry Stalker's assertions that in most things there must be one failure, and it would be well if there were no more than one; and burned the verses he had written, and the little tokens he had treasured as marks of affection which did not exist. Emily Dunne had enjoyed the flirtation while it lasted, and was perhaps as sorry to find it brought to a close by one incautious speech of her mother's as
Kenneth was, but she was not so much hurt or humiliated, and her conscience being of a very robust kind, never reproached her. She considered that she had helped in forming the young man, and done him no end of good. She as well as others had been somewhat surprised at the handsome, well educated, gentlemanly young man, who was going out to join his plebeian uncle, and predicted that he would be disappointed with the society he would meet with at the sheep station of Tingalpa.

Kenneth had fancied that going on board as a stranger he would be left much to himself, and had taken books with him for a little serious study. In the seventy-five days of leisure he hoped to take stock of all that he knew, and fix old acquisitions by building on them new ones; but he found he was dragged into the vortex of society, and chat, and amusement. Books of light reading were abundant, and they furnished subjects for talk which his serious ones could not have done. He thought he frittered away his time sadly with novels and Emily Dunne and her compeers, and regretted his instability of purpose. But often we are mistaken in our estimate of what is best for us. It was a weaning from the keen intellectual life — a throwing-off of the spirit of mental competition, and mixing with the world, invaluable to him. Nay, the common courtesies which were to be observed towards the stupid and the boorish were good preparations for the new life in the new home.

When Mrs. Honey, who, though the wife of a very rich squatter, and the mother of three stylish daughters, talked of her Continental tour with the vagueness of utter ignorance, and was occasionally sharply brought to book by those young ladies when she fell into any blunder more egregious than usual, Kenneth kept his countenance better than any young fellow on board. She had hoped to get her daughters' portraits painted by the old masters when they were at home, at any rate, as they were said to be the best; and if it was expensive, Mr. Honey could afford it; but she had found that was not so easily accomplished, as these old masters had been dead and buried for centuries. Her only idea of the places she had visited was by the purchases she had made; and at the mention of Rome, she flatly denied she had ever been there. In vain did Miss Honey speak of St. Peter's and the Colosseum, of the Catacombs and the Tiber. She could not recall anything about the place till Miss Tilly, the youngest, reminded her that in the Corso there she had bought some tasselled and three-buttoned gloves, which had split at the first wearing. At this evidence Mrs. Honey gave in, and Emily Dunne, wondered at Kenneth's good breeding, for he neither laughed nor smiled, and turned the conversation in another direction.

The Honeys were the richest of the passengers, but by no means the highest in social position; and though the girls were fearfully and
wonderfully fashionable in their attire, they had been too wilful to profit by the education their father had paid so much for, and too ignorant to pick up anything but the merest shreds of information in their travels.

The hats and £5 notes were won easily by all those who betted on the good sailing capabilities of the “Kent”. She was in port six days before the usual time, and captain and officers were jubilant. Even the losers of the bets reckoned that six days gained was full compensation, without taking into account the pleasantness of a rapid favourable passage. Owing to his being before his time there was no one to meet Kenneth at his landing, but he went straight to the hotel recommended by his uncle, telegraphed his arrival, and his intention to start on the following morning; and walked through Melbourne streets all day and part of the night with another new chum — the passenger he had liked best, and with whom he had most in common, but who was unfortunately bound for Adelaide. They acknowledged that their passengers had some cause for their pride in the extent, the handsomeness, and the life of the southern metropolis.

In the afternoon Kenneth and his friend Evans met the three Misses Honey “doing the block”, as they called it, in Collins Street. The young ladies fastened on their fellow-passengers as an available escort, and as they walked up and down for an hour and a half, they were accosted by numerous friends and acquaintances, not with the wonder or the questioning which would greet an English family after an absence of eighteen months at the Antipodes, but more like that of the same family after their autumn tour.

“Ah! you're back. It seems like yesterday that you went home. Came in the “Kent” I suppose. Papa told me it was sighted this morning.”

“You're all well, I hope”.

“Quite well, thanks. Nora's married; of course you know.”

“Oh! yes; heard that ages ago. Got the letters at Paris.”

“Paris is divine; is it not?”

“Yes; heavenly.”

“How did you get on with the languages?”

“Oh, first-rate. Everybody speaks English.”

“Sorry to get back?”

“Ain't we, just? but the pater got rusty, and we had to turn back.”

“Any balls on?”

“Lots. Going out to-night and Friday.”

“Could you get us invitations?”

“Don't think so; rather crowded with girls. Anything new to wear?”

“Lots; and so scrumptious. You look a little old-fashioned.”

“Ah, you mistake, Tilly, my love. We get the fashions in advance.”
“So your Melbourne dressmakers say; but we know better,” said Miss Honey. “Ma has brought out the very most recent things for herself and us — cost no end of money. Things are really dearer, you know, at West-End shops in season than here.”

“Cannot you introduce me?” in an audible whisper. “English friends, I suppose.”

“Only fellow-passengers,” said Miss Honey, coolly, and walked on to other friends, with whom the same course of conversation went on with very slight variation.

Kenneth thought his young lady friends were ashamed of him and of young Evans, but he was quickly undeceived. “A likely thing, indeed, to introduce you to them, who would not go out of their way to get us a invitation when we wanted it. Overdone with girls, forsooth! that's always the cry. We shall introduce you to our favourites, not to mere acquaintances like them.”

The Misses Honey did not happen to meet with any favourite in this afternoon's walk in Collins Street, and they enjoyed the curiosity they raised as to their companions. They compared the dresses they saw with their own, and with those they had in their mamma's packing-cases with general complacency and satisfaction, and parted with Oswald and Evans in the conviction that they had impressed them powerfully with their good position as well as their fashionable easy manners in their old accustomed haunts. Kenneth and his companion drew a different conclusion, but of that the fair ladies were happily ignorant.
Chapter 10 Tingalpa

The old-accustomed passengers by railway to Castlehurst were a little amused at Kenneth's active curiosity as to the country he was travelling through; at his interest in the great gum trees and the various wattles with their different flowers; the townships they stopped at for passengers; the lay of the country; and the character of the buildings. Castlehurst, though not so busy a place as it used to be, was a much larger town than he could have supposed could exist out of Melbourne. In the town itself, there was little sign of digging, but out of it in all directions there were holds and quartz-crushing establishments, and in the town a Stock Exchange of a character peculiar to California or Australia, where claims and reefs and Quartz Companies occupied the foreground, and anything in the way of Bank stock, or Railway shares, or Joint-stock Companies of miscellaneous kinds was modestly kept in the background. As he heard the talk and the jabber, and noted the eager faces of buyers and sellers, he thought surely his fellow-passengers were mistaken about the pre-eminent importance of wool.

Kenneth felt somewhat disappointed that there had been no one sent to meet him, and leaving a message at the station that he had gone on the Exchange with a Castlehurst railway passenger, Kenneth took the opportunity of looking about a little.

This gentleman, Mr. Dean, knew his uncle, and said he was sure to be sent for in the course of the day. As they walked together to and fro Kenneth felt just a little anxious about his welcome; but when he was accosted cordially by a smart Irish groom as “Mr. Kenneth sure, by his photograph in the master's album,” with profuse apologies for his being late, “for he could not be well spared before, and there was no one that the master could trust wid the pair of bays saving himself,” his uneasiness gave way.

“An' savin' your presence, Mr. Kenneth, but I must request ye to make all the haste ye can, for the mistress wants you, an' the master wants me.”

“The old story, Mick?” said Mr. Dean.

“Just a taste o' that same,” said Mick O'Hearn. “The horses are having a bite ov chaffed hay, and will clear the ground once we've started. I've got your baggage, leastways all that's at the station, in the buggy, except the big box — that will go wid the dray. So you must say good-bye to Mr. Dean, and be off.”

“The master scarce expected you so soon, Mr. Kenneth,” said the groom, when they were fairly started on the road. “The ‘Kent’ has come double
quick this trip. He'd have been after mating you himself in Melbourne, if you'd not been so mighty quick. Thim old ships knows the short cuts nowadays.”

“I hoped he would have met me here,” said Kenneth.

“It happens he's not just able to come on this day.”

“Too busy, I suppose, with the shearing.”

“The shearing is over this week back and more, and as for his being busy, its myself would like a small partnership in that business, and all the better for him poor gentleman; but he's the whole firm there, Co and all.”

“And Mr. James, my cousin, I hear he is a good driver."

“None so safe, though bould as brass. Mr. Jim has been at Castlehurst nigh a week — he likes to git out o' the way, and the missis has no hould on him to keep him at home.”

“Perhaps it is inconvenient my coming here. I might have stayed in Melbourne till it suited my uncle better.”

“Not the least in life inconvenient, saving that I want to get back to the master, for he must have a burster now and then, and nobody manages him like your humble servant. He thought it ud be all over by the “Kent” arrived, and then he'd have met you sure enough, and shown you the Milburn sights too its like, but ye've stole a march on him this wanst, and caught him napping.”

Kenneth now formed some notion of what was the matte r, but he did not care to ask any further information from Mick O’Hearn. He felt depressed, however, and the kind-hearted Irishman saw it.

“It's no account raly, Mr. Kenneth. Sure the master can afford a bit of a jollification now and again that hurts nobody but himself, and he's as straight as the Bank between times. He's swore off it, but it's mighty aisy that same swaring, but the divil and all to hould by it. And when the fit comes on powerful he caves in handsomely.”

There was no mistake about the extent and the value of George Oswald's property. The vast shearing shed which Mick pointed out with pride, with yards for sheep round it, the bought land penned off into convenient paddocks through which they passed, the wells that were sunk, the tanks which were constructed, the thousands of sheep and hundreds of cattle and horses of which the groom spoke, showed substantial and increasing wealth. When they drove up a poorly grown avenue of bluegums to a large substantial stone house with a verandah all round, and a flower garden indifferently laid out in front, Mick called to a stable boy to put up the horses without delay, for he wanted to see the master, and Kenneth alighted at the hospitably open door.

In a hall ornamented with some stuffed birds, snakes, and native
marsupials, and one immense ram's head incrusted with salt from one of the inland lagoons, stood a very stout, very showily dressed, middle-aged lady, who introduced herself as his aunt Oswald, and eyed him from head to foot with satisfaction. She then led the way into a good-sized drawing-room, crowded with useless and incongruous furniture, tasteless nicknacks, and the wildest of fancy work, where the most ordinary engravings and the most worthless chromo-lithographs hung on the walls alongside of one or two tolerable paintings.

“My dear nephew,” said this lady, after she thought he had had sufficient time to get over his astonishment at the general elegance and grandeur of her best rooms, “you are very welcome to Tingalpa. Your uncle ain't very well at the present, and not just fit to talk to you for a day or two, so in the meantime you must put up with me.”

“I am very sorry indeed that my uncle is ill, but you are very kind to supply his place,” said Kenneth.

“No kindness at all — at least I mean its nothing to do for my own nephew, or Mr. Oswald's, which is all the same — but its really a great disappointment to us all, for he was set on going to Melbourne to meet you, and I had my plans for going too, for I wanted summer things, and there's no getting people to execute orders properly if you only write. It is never so satisfactory as when you see and handle the things yourself. And there's such new styles coming out. What do you think of the Melbourne fashions? Do they dress as well as they do in London?”

“I was never in London in my life, I am sorry to say.”

“Oh I always forget, you were brought up in that town in Scotland where of course you could see nothing of the kind,” said the lady.

“Edinburgh, do you mean? Have they no pretension to fashion there, Mrs. Oswald?”

“Oh! of course, that is a poor place compared to Melbourne; but call me Aunt, it seems more homely.”

“Well, Aunt, the Edinburgh people would not like being treated so contemptuously. It is a larger city than Melbourne.”

“Is it really?”

“More ancient, of course.”

“Why, perhaps it may be that.”

“And full of traditions and historical associations that every Scotchman ought to cherish,” said the young Scotchman.

“Yes, it may be all that, but I was speaking of fashions — do the ladies there dress as well as the Melbourne ladies?”

“That depends on what is considered good dressing, and, besides, I spent seven years in Edinburgh, and only seven hours in Melbourne, so I cannot
be a judge.”

“I mean as to expense, and that sort of thing?”

“Well, I fancy that ladies everywhere dress as expensively as they can afford to do, and perhaps a little beyond that, and I dare say there are wealthier people in Melbourne than in Edinburgh — the richest people are attracted to London.”

“Then I'm right in my view of the case,” said Mrs. Oswald, complacently.

“I fear you will be much disappointed in me, for I seldom notice what ladies wear.”

“Don't you? that is a pity, for I thought I could get some ideas from you. All new comers should help to keep us up to the mark in that way.”

“I am sorry my cousin James is not at home,” said Kenneth.

“So am I, but to tell you the truth, James made himself scarce when his father took to his smoking-room. It's what Mr. Oswald is used to, and Mick manages him nicely, so there's no call to be uneasy, but he don't want either me or Jim hanging about him; and so Jim set off for Castlehurst the first day, and I suppose he is at the Crown and Sceptre at the billiard table. He is passionately fond of billiards. I hope you can play or he will think very small beer of you, Kenneth; is not that your name?”

“I can play a little, but unfortunately my uncle's letters were short, and he neither recommended me to practise billiards nor to study the fashions. If you or my cousin had been so good as to write, I might have turned out more satisfactory.”

“I dare say you are not too old to learn,” said Mrs Oswald patronizingly. “You do not look more than twenty. Jim is seventeen. It's a pity though that there is only me to keep you company.”

“Oh! don't speak of that, Mrs. Oswald, and as you say my uncle can spare you, I need not feel I am taking up too much of your attention.”

“He cannot bear the sight of me till he has had his bout out, and then he's as kind a husband as there is in all Castlehurst district. I think it should be over in two or three days — but Mick says there is no slackening yet.”

She spoke with so much unconcern that Kenneth was amazed. Could she really be as indifferent as she appeared?

“I thought my uncle had given it up altogether,” he suggested timidly.

“So he had between times, only he must have his fling now and then, or I think he'd go melancholy mad. I see it coming on, and then I hand him over to Mick, and let him have his own way. He shuts himself up in his smoking-room, orders pen, ink and papers to be kept out of sight, for fear he should do anything foolish in his drink, and then goes in heavy. But at other times he takes nothing stronger than tea, with cocoa for a change, and
it is well for him and all belonging to him. He'll come out as fresh as paint in a few days, and he ain't any the poorer for it, except the price of the brandy. I'm glad you like the place.”

Now Kenneth had not said that he liked the place, but Mrs. Oswald had glanced at her own brilliant attire and tasteless drawing-room with that complete satisfaction which includes that of all other people. “I do so like to see pretty things about me, and Mr. Oswald has been most liberal to me.”

“He has been most liberal to me. I am sure I cannot be sufficiently grateful for his kindness.”

This was a point on which Mrs. Oswald had long desired information. Her husband had not sufficient confidence in her judgment to tell her of his business affairs, and he had thought that Kenneth would be more appreciated if he was silent to his wife and son about his remittances for his behoof.

“So I always thought, though he would deny it,” said Mrs. Oswald. “I felt sure that the price of some of his bales of wool went to the making of you. Not that I begrudge it, I am sure; but Jim may take it ill.”

“I am sorry if my uncle's generosity should make my cousin feel that I have done him any harm,” said Kenneth, a little hurt.

“Oh! of course it's no fault of yours, but what I mean is that Jim would not learn here from any tutor we could get, and we went to great expense in that way; and at the Scotch College in Melbourne they were too hard on him, and he ran away, and would never go back for all his father could say, and his father threatened that he would put him under you, and you were to make a scholar of him, as you had been at the University and all that — and he'll think that you've both been planning and plotting this against him for years, and it's likely to set Jim's back up. He's quick enough and clever enough, but he won't settle to his books. His father gets into a passion with him, and is downright unreasonable, so I cannot but take Jim's part. He ain't to say backward but not just so forward as his father would wish.”

“Then, he has no taste for books at all?”

“Not the least. He'll not even read the papers that Mr. Oswald is so fond of. You see there's the *Argus* unopened for this week back and more. Only the *Australasian* he's took the envelope off to read the racing news, and the odds, and the matches. As for me, the magazines are enough for me. I have not patience for politics, and markets, and all that Mr. Oswald cares about. His sight ain't so good as it was, and I dare say he'll be glad of your young eyes to read the bulk of the papers out to him; that's what he reckons on your doing for him, Kenneth. I suppose you are a great reader.”

“It has been my principal work for so many years. I have necessarily got
through a great many books.”

“We are going to have the breakfast parlour fitted up as a library, and Mr. Oswald hoped your books would help to fill it.”

“One can read a great deal without possessing many books,” said Kenneth.

“Oh! yes, circulating library books, of course, but we are out of the way of that, and I find no time for reading, except, as I say, the magazines; but I'd like it if you could coax Jim to take to books a little. But dear me! I forgot, I must show you your room. Mick would set Biddy to put your portmanteau and things into it. And, by the time you have had a wash and a brush tea will be ready in the dining-room, to the right hand of this room.”

Kenneth was glad to have an opportunity of washing off the dust of his long journey, and a quiet half-hour to face the situation before him. For what an atmosphere of material prosperity and of intellectual poverty had his careful education been the preparation? His uncle shut up with the spirit decanters; his young cousin playing billiards for a week together with the habitués of a Castlehurst hotel, and his aunt complacently enjoying her possessions, and apparently indifferent as to what should become of either of them. And he, Kenneth, expected to fit into every one's humour and tastes, and bound to do it by honour and gratitude. How true Harry Stalker's prophecy as to his difficulties appeared, and how probable his presage of utter failure in his attempts to fill his square hole satisfactorily. Not that he wished to know less, or to ignore the many real advantages which his course of study had won for him, but it seemed all but hopeless for him with such equipment to go into the mêlée with the least chance of victory.
It is not easy to describe Mrs. Oswald's appearance, except as to her bulk and her clothes; her face was so characterless, and was more remarkable for its want of expression than for anything else; her hair was of a neutral tint; her complexion of a uniform greyish paleness; her eyes small, pale and slow to apprehend even striking objects; her height less remarkable than her breadth. In speech she had a drawl, and her h's were, though not absent, very uncertain. Kenneth had his experience with Mrs. Honey to fall back upon, but she had been kept up better to the mark by her daughters, who had snubbed their mother's florid taste in dress, and would reconstruct her furniture remorselessly, so that in both these points she had been snubbed into better ways. But the general vapidness was similar in the two ladies. Perhaps on the whole Mrs. Oswald's natural nonentity was the more complete, and it was well that she should be distinguished by her clothes, which were changed with changing fashion and doubtful taste, forming a striking contrast to the fat lymphatic colourless countenance which retained in all circumstances its expression of uninterested acquiescence with things as they were. She could not make a joke to save her life. She could not even see one — although when she saw other people laughing around her she would insist on having the whole story minutely explained to her to the utter loss of its point, and her calm, “Oh, yes; I see it now!” without relaxation of the mouth or intelligent glance of the eye, had the effect of making the interpreter of the wit, or the humour, or the grotesque exaggeration, feel he must have performed his task very badly. Unfortunately she was not a Scotchwoman, to whom some national affinities might have appealed, and she could not understand the racy Doric of her husband and his friends. She was an Englishwoman by extraction, but had been born in New South Wales, and had found her way to Melbourne, and had by some inexplicable fascination induced George Oswald to marry her. She certainly at that time was a good cook and not a bad listener. She never differed from any one, and had no opinions of her own, and that to a somewhat overbearing man like George Oswald might have its charm.

This temper, as well as his love of strong liquors, had stood in the way of Kenneth's uncle in his beginning of life. In his first overseership he had been so hard on the men under him, exacting so much and granting so little, that his master thought he had lost more by that than he gained by his undoubted vigilance and practical knowledge. However, when he undertook the management for the brothers Dirom, Oswald had learned by
experience, and steered his course much more wisely. At the outbreak of
the diggings he did wonders under the greatest difficulties, doing the work
of half-a-dozen men himself, and liberal enough to get hands when others
were destitute. The Diroms were young men of good family, who had
started with what in old days would have been called a considerable
capital, and at first they had intended to work themselves. But Oswald
managed so well that they took to Melbourne life, and enjoyed it, and they
were paralysed by the aspect of things which only aroused their overseer's
energy and called out all his resources and ingenuity.

Melbourne as a residence had become enormously expensive, and the
society unendurable, when, as the old colonists expressed it, the sweepings
of the world were attracted to it. The brothers offered their manager a half-
interest in the station, which he accepted, and carried on the station on
those terms for several years, but chafed a little at the position, at the time
he was grappling with countless difficulties, and he thought that he would
conquer better if the gains were all for himself. He therefore offered to buy
them out altogether by long-dated bills, which the Diroms took with fear
and trembling, and which George Oswald himself lay awake many nights
thinking of. But it was a good bargain at the first for the overseer, and as
things turned out it was a splendid investment. Castlehurst market was at
hand, the value of all stock doubled and trebled, wool kept up its price, and
indeed rose in value steadily, owing to the general rise in prices consequent
on the gold discoveries. George Oswald added flock to flock, and run to
run, whereas with the enhanced prices of everything in England and on the
Continent, his old masters found themselves every year growing poorer.

The marvellous advance of the colony of Victoria in wealth and
population raised the value of all his property, especially of his land; and
though in matters of detail George Oswald was what was called a “nipper”,
he had some excellent ideas about the judicious application of capital, and
did not starve his stations for want of hands or use them shabbily.

The better class of squatters thought he had driven a hard bargain with
the Diroms by taking advantage of their panic and disgust, and Mrs.
Oswald was more objectionable to their wives than he himself was to them,
and the only son Jim had got such a rooted taste for low company that he
neither desired the society of his betters nor tried to fit himself for it, so
that with all this outward prosperity there was a bitter drop in the cup at
Tingalpa.

Mr. Oswald was always ashamed of not assisting his parents
substantially and regularly before he did, but he had bitterly resented the
disgrace which Isabel had brought on the family, which though very briefly
and imperfectly revealed in his mother's letters, had struck him in the
tenderest point. He recollected her as a lovely girl of thirteen, and her mother wrote of her growing beauty, her cleverness at her books and with her needle, and his first present of five pounds had gone to teach her dressmaking.

He had just made up his mind to write home for her to share his prosperity and keep his house. If she had objected to leave her parents, it might have been managed that they should come out too. He had thought Isabel's society might do more to wean him from his besetting sin than anything else, and when the humiliating news reached him he gave way to it more than before. Shortly after that he married, and had one son, on whom his hopes were centred; and though he wrote, not unkindly, to his parents, he never again addressed a letter to his sister.

On hearing of her death and some particulars hitherto unknown, he softened a little and sent more money, but on concluding his bargain with the Diroms by paying off the last of his bills, he thought, as a sort of thank-offering for such prosperity, he might act a father's part by Isabel's worse than orphan boy, and then the idea of making a gentleman of him charmed his imagination.

The boy's letters were well written, and expressed good feeling; the photographs that were sent from time to time showed a very promising young fellow who would hold his own with the stuck-up neighbours. As years advanced, and as his over-indulged, self-willed boy refused to learn from tutor or schoolmaster, Mr. Oswald's thoughts turned constantly to the clever nephew, who would come out fresh from college, well-dressed, good-looking, and chock-full of the needful knowledge. Everything that was wrong Kenneth would put right; he would be only too glad to do service to the uncle who had taken him up and made a gentleman and a scholar of him, and Jim could not slip out of his hands as he had out of those of the shabby tutors who had been engaged before. And thus through his kindness and liberty to his nephew his own son would have a chance to be made a gentleman and a scholar of too.

Mrs. Oswald's ordinary mood of acquiescence had been slightly ruffled by these plans of her husband; for the idea of the subordination of her boy to his cousin had been so actively resented by the former that her maternal sympathies, which were the strongest feelings in her nature, were aroused in opposition. But she took refuge in the thought that Jim had never submitted to any one in his life; and that though of course he would learn a great deal from this cousin — for that was only reasonable — still, as he was the son of the house, he would always be the master and take the lead everywhere. Nobody could suppose that the heir of such a property was to be tied down to hours and tasks like a poor child at a common school. And
Jim, though he was younger than his cousin and not so book-learned, knew
the world as well or better, and would not go in leading-strings.

As Mrs. Oswald presided over the well-spread tea-table, and pressed her
nephew with languid hospitality to do justice to such a meal as she felt sure
he had never seen in Scotland, which she looked on as a land of starvation,
for all her husband's memories of his native land had been of hard work
and poor living, and he often shocked her notions of gentility and propriety
by bringing up these subjects, she felt a shade of disappointment at his
silence and abstraction. No doubt, he was rather awed by the
handsomeness of everything about him, from the silverplate and massive
dining-room furniture to her own rich silk, costly lace, and overpowering
cap, freshly donned while he made his own toilet, and that was certainly
gratifying; but if he could not talk and hold his own in society he would be
of little use in helping them up the social ladder, which was their one
desideratum; and if he was really grumpy and sulky, Jim would hate him
outright and learn nothing from him.

However, in the course of the meal, a subject was started that was more
successful than Kenneth's preoccupied anxious mind could have supposed
possible under the circumstances — the fellow-passengers per Melbourne
clipper ship "Kent". To Mrs. Oswald's delight she found that her nephew
had spent seventy days in the society of a tip-top Melbourne merchant and
his family. She knew the Dunnes and the Honeys to be large squatters,
though unfortunately in a distant district. There were many ladies on board,
fresh from Continental and English sight-seeing. How they looked, how
they talked, and, above all, how they dressed, gave Mrs. Oswald abundant
cause for questioning, and the account of the various costumes improvised
for some private theatricals on board was of much more thrilling interest
than the sketch of the piece adapted from the French by Kenneth, La
Maitresse au Logis, which to himself was much more interesting. How he
could have got so quickly out of one suit of clothes into another, so as to
represent two quite different characters, was a greater stroke of cleverness
than changing his voice, air, and manner completely to carry out the
illusion. And the different dresses of the young widow for reception and
for her wedding attire were also gone into minutely, and Kenneth's interest
in the actress, who was Miss Emily Dunne, made him recollect very
creditably what she had on.
Chapter 12 George Oswald in Retirement

In the midst of this talk Mick put in his head. “Av you plaze, Ma'am, the master has heard of Mr. Kenneth's being aither taking his tay alongside of yer, and nothing will put him past the notion that he must see him at wanst.”

“Why did you tell him, Mick? You know it's much better he should not be disturbed. It's his own orders before he goes in for such bouts that he should see no strangers.”

“True for ye, Ma'am, but ye see he don't count his nephy as a stranger.”

“And he cannot bear the sight of me or of Mr. Jim, either.”

“When he comes acquainted with Mr. Kenneth, it's like enough he'll serve him with the same sauce, but in the meantime he's raging like a wild bull for the sight of him.”

“And how was he to know he was here if he had not been told?”

“He was after blowing me up sky-high for laving him for my own divarsion, and I let out that it was to Castlehurst I had to go, and he put two and two together, and swore that I had brought home his nephy, and was after hiding him as if we was ashamed of him. So to pacificate his mind, I said I'd step in and fetch him at wanst.”

“I'm very sorry, Kenneth, that Mick has been so foolish as to disobey Mr. Oswald's orders. He'll suffer for it himself by-and-by.”

“Then you think I should not go,” said Kenneth, turning to his aunt.

“Faith, Mr. Kenneth, you must go, or he'll come out himself and fetch you, and that'ud be worse.”

Mrs. Oswald only shook her head helplessly, and allowed her nephew to follow Mick along the passage to a room which opened from the verandah.

“I'm bound to after laving you, Mr. Kenneth, for the master can only stand one at one time, and often not as much as that;” so he opened the door of the room softly, and Kenneth entered. There in an easy chair sat his uncle, with his feet in slippers, a smoking-cap set on one side of his head. An old flowered dressing-gown buttoned very much awry enveloped his person; neither shirt nor gown was buttoned at the wrist, and he was with shaking hand filling himself out a fresh tumbler of brandy and water. A box of cigars lay at his left hand, and on the right was the brandy bottle and a large monkey (or porous stone jar) of cold water. His' face was swollen, his eyes were bloodshot, his mouth hung loosely, so that it was difficult for him to command his voice to greet his nephew in the manner he evidently wished to do. The room was in general use as a smoking-room, but on occasions such as this it was fitted up as the master's bedroom, with a
stretcher for Mick at the far corner. He knew Mr. Oswald's ways, and humoured him with discretion, and could tell the exact moment when the bout was over, and when the “matarials”, as he called them, might be removed with safety.

Kenneth advanced to the place where his uncle sat, and stretched forth his hand. George Oswald made the very poorest attempt at rising from his chair, and sank down again, but shook hands with such pertinacity that it seemed as if it would never be over.

“Glad to see you, Kenneth, my boy. Welcome to Tingalpa. Have a glass of something? Where's Mick? Bid the rascal bring a clean tumbler, here — quick.”

“No, thank you, uncle. I've just had tea.”

“Tea,” said George Oswald with a voice of scorn; “poor stuff, only fit for heathen Chinese, especially as Mrs. Oswald makes it. Na, ye *maun* hae a glass of brandy.”

“You know you laid me under an interdict about drinking, and I have obeyed it,” said Kenneth.

“Glad to hear it! Glad to hear ye mind what I say. I maun drink your health on the strength of it. Here's t'ye. Have you seen Jim?”

“He is not at home, Mrs. Oswald says.”

“That's a pity. He aye slopes off when I'm out of gear. His mother has nae control to keep him at home. *She's* little gude, little ill, like a spale (chip) amang parritch. But you maun get acquant wi' Jim. He's a sly dog, Jim. Mair in Jim than you'd think to look at him.”

Kenneth could not help thinking there must be more in his uncle than present appearances promised. A man to have been so successful — to carry on such large operations — must in ordinary conditions be very different from this poor, trembling, inarticulate George Oswald, who had sat there nearly day and night for more than a week with a single tumbler and successive bottles of brandy before him.

“Ye were owre quick in the passage, Kenneth. You caught me napping, as I may say, though it's just the reverse, for I canna get a wink o' sleep. There's something on my mind that starts up to drive sleep away. Kenneth” — and his voice lowered to a confidential whisper — “get me pen, ink, and paper. That villain Mick, will not give them to me. I want to write a letter; only to write a letter. Hard that a man in his own house cannot get leave to write a letter to a friend. You think because my hand shakes that I canna write, but I'll let you see different. It would steady my hand to write that letter.”

“Could not I write for you, Sir? Tell me what you want said.”

“No, it maun be done by my very self,” said his uncle. “It's to the Diroms
I want to write. Get the paper, and the pen, and the ink, and dinna forget an envelope — some of your ain; that Mick need never hear tell of it.”

It seemed to Kenneth very hard that a man who wanted to write should be prevented; the letter need not be dispatched after it was written, if it was a foolish one. So he went softly to his own room, and brought his writing case.

The shaking hand applied itself to the paper, but it did not appear to be a letter that Mr. Oswald penned. It was evidently a promissory-note that was drawn out, and that for an enormous sum; but it appeared to be correctly done.

“An envelope quick, man, an envelope or Mick will be in here, and burn it. He deserves the sack, that chap, and he'll get it this time. Now put it into the post without delay, for it maun gang. Oh! Kenneth, now I see I have got a real friend. Here's t'ye again,” and he took another great draught of brandy and water.

“And ye'll no taste, just to our better acquaintance. You look like a gentleman, Kenneth, and all my making. Maybe ye'll keep that look longer if ye keep clear o' the drink, and it's likely ye have na the head to stand it. That's what I aye say to Jim, but he'll take no telling. D'ye ken how muckle I can put past, and as ye see, as clear as a clock when all's done? Look at the dead men there!” and he pointed to an array of empty bottles. “All brandy, ten degrees over proof; good spirits though, or it might have upset me. I give the best price, and I can depend of the best article. And as ye see, I'm as right as the Bank. Oh! Lord, I'm rich, I'm rich. Where's my cheque-book — Mick has it hid somewhere, but you'll find it. Ye'll need siller. Tell me out of hand how muckle you want.”

“I need nothing, uncle. I have quite as much as I want.”

“Never knew a man who had as muckle as that in all the course of my experience. Na, Kenneth, ye maun hae siller, you need not spare it. Oh! Lord, I'm rich — seventy thoosand sheep, a thoosand head o' beasts, three hundred and fifty horses, twenty thoosand acres of land, and mair to be had — and John and Robert Dirom — but that'll be put right, and you'll see if William Gray will turn up his nose at me then. There's mair to be made of Tingalpa than of Wilta itself, and thae sons of his, that he is so proud of, are scattering. I've got a son, too, and a nephew, my brother Jamie's son, mind that's what you are, and a gentleman — not a word about your mother, though ye are like her, laddie — that's what my money was invested in; how muckle per cent. will it pay, think ye? On the one side o' the ledger a thoosand pounds — mair — thoosands o' pounds; on the other side, a gentleman! How do you think the spekilation will answer?”

“I cannot tell,” said Kenneth sadly.
“Can't ye — well I can; every spekilation I went into paid me, and this will be the best I ever tried. Now, any other man would have been as drunk as a fiddler with all thae dead men that he had made an end of; but I am not drunk; not mad, most noble Festus; but speak the words of truth and soberness. Ye see I can quote Scripture. Your granny wanted you brought up for the Kirk, but we know of something better than that, Kenneth. What do you think of this head station of Tingalpa; the house and the grounds, and the furniture and the plate? Is that not better than any manse you ever saw, whether Established, Free, or U.P.? A beggarly lot they are. I could buy up the whole lot of them. Oh! Lord, seventy thousand sheep, and every mother's son of them seven pounds of greasy. Oh! Lord! I'm rich. And the beasts, and the horses, and the land, Kenneth, the land, if we could be sure of the selectors keeping off, damn them! They may pick out William Gray's een an welcome, but I canna hae Tingalpa meddled with. But you maun hae a cheque for a hundred pounds, just to show that you have got a good man at your back. And if I drew a cheque for ten thousand the Bank would make it good. Oh! Lord, seventy thousand sheep! Do have a glass. My throat's as dry as a whistle, for all I can do to slocken my drouth. But I have an excuse to drink for two when you're ben; let's have two bottles of brandy, I'll ring for Mick.”

The handbell was touched, and Mick appeared. He scowled at the writing materials.

“Another bottle of brandy, Mick. Don't you see there's another gentleman.”

“It's time you knocked off. You're two bottles ahead already of what you say you should stop at, Sir.”

“You count double, you rascal; you're drunk; you're very drunk.”

“It's like enough, Sir; for it's you that has been setting me a mighty bad example.”

‘But you've no head to stand it, Mick; you'll be breaking heads and getting into trouble. That's what I say to Master Jim, and what I say to Master Kenneth. There's few heads like mine — clear as a clock yet, and fit for another week of it.”

“If you're clear as a clock you should be minding that it's time of night to be after going to bed, and not for another bottle of brandy. And there's Mr. Kenneth dying for his bed after his long journey this day.”

“But I canna sleep, and you know it, you villain. I can drink, drink, drink, but the sleep is the devil.”

“I'd advise you to try, Sir. You've no patience. Now, you'll just let me ondress you, and tuck you in, and you'd be amazed how comfortable you'll feel after this joyful meeting with your nephy, who's the pleasant young
gentleman to get alongside of in a buggy, and who'll be after admiring all the improvements when you show them to him. I'll stop in the room with you, and you'll get a beauty sleep and get up in the morning as fresh as a daisy, and Mr. Kenneth, too, and then you'll go round the place, the two of you, and find out it there's a screw loose anywhere. We must turn you out, Mr. Kenneth, the missis is after wanting you for the cards.”

Kenneth said good night. Quick as thought Mike followed him to the door. “Whatever he has written, you must burn, or he'd never forgive you when he's in his sober senses. He gives me extra pay for never minding his orders at such saysons as this. But when he's wild for pen and ink, I know he's got to the worst, and I can hould him in.”
Chapter 13 Cowarrel

“You've been much longer with Mr. Oswald than there was the least occasion for,” said the mistress of the house. “Nobody manages him so well as Mick, and the less he's interfered with the better. I never look near him myself. I suppose the smoking-room is in a horrid mess. All the rest of the house has got a thorough turn up, and been cleaned from top to bottom. With both Mr. Oswald and Jim out of the way, it is a good opportunity to get the girls set to work, instead of their idling their time and carrying on and flirting with the men about; and I think you will find it hard to see a speck of dust out of Mr. Oswald's den. All gentlemen hate to see cleaning, but they growl if it ain't done. I hope you are fond of bezique, for it is the only amusement I can offer you.”

This was one thing Mrs. Oswald could do, and was fond of; not that she was by any means a good player, but she liked to take a hand, and was less languid over it than anything else. The magazines she spoke of as her only reading were simply fashion journals, where she studied the costumes and the fancywork, and ordered imitations from Melbourne, but she did not read even the serial tales or short stories which were continued with those interesting matters. She did not sew, she did not knit. She had servants enough to do all the household work, and she liked to come out upon them to see that things were not slighted, and that they gave her all their time. She occasionally went into the kitchen to cook special dishes, when she required a great deal of waiting on, and called attention to their excellence when they came to table. And she thoroughly enjoyed her meals, of which she had five every day, unmoved by the increasing stoutness which made her more trying to fit, and was a great grievance to her dressmaker. When the substantial tea was followed by an equally substantial supper only with wine and beer substituted for the milder beverage, she did as great justice to it, and after expressing surprise that Kenneth could not follow her example, she had another game at bezique, took her candle, said good-night, and went to bed for her customary sleep of ten hours.

Mick O'Hearn, who had some sharpness and some sympathy, had perceived that the new comer felt his first evening at Tingalpa a very trying one. He brought Kenneth a cigar, one of his master's very best, and when it was declined with thanks — as he did not smoke, Mick looked on him a little puzzled as to how he could be worked upon.

“Try it, Sir; there's nothing that quietens one like tobacco. The master's been blowing me up and blackguarding me because I think it's time he pulled up, and after such bullyragging, I felt like to fly out in the kitchen at
every mother's son and daughter of them, till Biddy, she put the pipe in my mouth with a smile, after she had just touched it with her rosy lips, and faith the first whiff was like magic. The master will be all right in two or three days, but the horrors is to come, and my hands 'ill be full trying to get him square without a fall back, which is worse than the first plunge; and if so be as you would take a run to the outstation at Cowarrel and stop a few days with the Manager, then I think I'd get him straight faster, for he'll be asking for you, and the fewer he sees the better.”

“But what would Mrs. Oswald say?” asked Kenneth.

“Oh! she takes everything mighty asy, leastways what does not touch her own skin or her own stomach, as Biddy says,” answered Mick.

“And what would the Manager say?”

“He'd be as pleased as Punch to see you, and if you're agreeable, I'll send the lad with you and the pair of greys. I'd not trust him or you wid the bays till I know how you handle the ribbons; but the greys will do.”

Kenneth felt very grateful for Mick's suggestion. To get away even for two or three days to people to whom he was not bound, about whose conduct he might be indifferent, to have a little breathing-space in which to plan his future work, was a boon too precious to be rejected.

“And you must not judge of the master by what you saw to-night. There's no better head in the Castlehurst district than his, barring the brandy, and the heart is in the right place. It's a pity your arriving was so contrairy. He'll be vexed when he comes to himself; but say as little as you can. Let's hope he'll disremember it.”

Mick had planned a very early start for Mr. Kenneth, but the latter thought he must explain things to Mrs. Oswald first. She would have preferred his company, for she felt a little dull, but it was not to be supposed that a lady who took advantage of her husband's deep, solitary carouse and her son's absence with questionable company, to give her house a thorough cleaning, would feel the departure of her strange nephew very keenly. She merely hoped that on his return he would find Jim at home, and Mr. Oswald himself, and in the meantime she had found a recipe for making curry, Indian fashion, in the cookery column of her latest fashion journal, which she would try to carry out, and would have it perfect by the time she collected her family round her. Mr. Oswald always liked something hot and relishing when he took to eating after ten days of drinking.

“The master's taken the turn,” said Mick as he saw the new arrival into the buggy. “You'll find him quite compos when ye come back, and ready to tell you all his plans. Faith, and he'll find you a comfort to him, and may be you'll be the salvation of Mr. Jim, for he's getting himself mixed up wid the
dirty lot at that Castlehurst.”

Kenneth found his uncle a very different man when he returned from Cowarrel, and he himself had gathered some strength to face his difficulties. The primary object which his uncle had in view, the teaching or reclaiming of his son, appeared to the young man likely to be as great a failure as Harry Stalker would have predicted, but surely it was possible for him to make himself useful in other ways than that chalked out for him by his uncle and aunt.

His training and tastes had been towards languages, literature and metaphysics; but of what use was the culture he had received and the thinking he had done, if they could not make him stronger in all directions? He must school himself now differently, learn from his uncle and his employés all about sheep and cattle and horses, study the meteorological tables, and turn his ingenuity towards increasing or saving the water supply with as little outlay as possible. The narrative of the intelligent overseer at Cowarrel of the heavy losses during the last drought interested him greatly, and he listened attentively to his suggestions for better preparations for the next bad season, so as to reduce the losses to a minimum. If he did no other good, he delighted Robert Horne by the respectful attention he paid to all he said, and as he had known something of rural affairs as a boy, and had kept up his interest in them in his holidays, he took up the points of a bullock or a sheep, or the feeding qualities of grass and salt bush, in a very creditable manner for a new chum, especially for a new chum fresh from the College.

“Mr. Oswald is a keen man, no doubt,” said the overseer, “and can drive a hard bargain; but he's not a bad sort. He sticks to his word when he's once given it. And he knows a good servant when he has got him. He never interferes with my management. If I dismiss a hand, he need never carry tales to the master. If I say a man's worth having, he'd never doubt my judgement, even though the man was as surly to himself as a bear with a sore head. Now Mr. Jim is the very opposite; he'll never fill his father's shoes, and if he was much at Cowarrel, I'd lose every man on the place. It's all his father can do to keep the Tingalpa hands together. For ever on his high horse, for ever on the find-fault, taking men from their regular work to run after him and his whimsies. But he's far keener to go and spend his time and money at Castlehurst than to trouble us at the out-station.”

“It is a pity that he's an only son,” said Kenneth.

“That's true; and of course he has money to spend and little wit to guide him. I wonder the master did not have you out sooner.”

“He wished me to complete my education first.”

“You'll find Mr. Jim both very backward and very unwilling to push on.
He may be able to read, that I cannot speak for, but as for writing, it's just awful.”

“Oh, writing is easily learned,” said Kenneth, “and nobody thinks that of so much consequence as other matters.”

Robert Horne prided himself on his calligraphy, and attached great importance to what his master called “a good hand of write”. He saw too that this Edinburgh student, who was taking down notes of various matters, wrote a clear bold hand, and made capital figures, and reckoned up in his head quickly and accurately, and he thought it was mere modesty on his part to depreciate these good gifts. He tried Kenneth on horseback, and found that he kept his seat, except with a buck-jumper, which was scarcely to be expected of a new comer. They went over the run together, and he showed the tyro the marks of inferiority in shape or vigour, or evenness or fineness of wool which condemn the animal to be culled out and sold, and not bred from, so that the high character of the flocks and of the staple should be kept up and improved. He made Kenneth acquainted with the men, with the horses, and the dogs, and pointed out the distinguishing characteristics of each with the delight of laying down the law to a perfectly fresh and appreciating listener.

“You'll do, Mr. Kenneth, I see you'll do. Beast or body, you see the way to manage them, and get the best out of them, whereas that poor lad, Mr. James, if he takes even a horse or a dog in hand he spoils them, sure as fate. He has a great down on me, I know, and you'll hear him full of complaints about my management. He'd like to see me turned off, and a smoother-tongued man put in my place; but Mr. Oswald, he's satisfied, and that is enough for me.”
Chapter 14 George Oswald in a Different Aspect

When Kenneth returned to the head station the master of Tingalpa was sitting clothed and in his right mind, not in the smoking-room, which was undergoing a purification, but in the room meant to be the library. The room was fitted up with shelves which were mostly empty, but some had newspapers on them, while on others were laid guns, pistols, seeds, specimens from quartz reefs, of wool in great variety, and a few stuffed birds and reptiles.

Mr. Oswald had not altogether recovered from the effects of his debauch; his eyes were still dull, and his face of an unhealthy pallor, and his hands scarcely so steady as they were at his best; but there was so very great an improvement that Kenneth's hopes rose. He was a little above the middle height and strongly made; his face lighted up at the sight of his nephew, and he threw down the back numbers of the *Argus* which had been unopened during his seclusion, and shook hands heartily with Kenneth, altogether ignoring the fact of his having seen him before. Jim was standing with his back to his cousin, taking out a gun from one of the shelves, which he wanted to get Mick to clean for him, and looking for supplies of powder and shot for a day's sport. Mrs. Oswald was sitting doing nothing, only occasionally looking out of the window at the tame magpie which was anxious to get in.

“I'm very glad to see you, Kenneth — a pleasant voyage I hope — and as usual the “Kent” up to her time. Jim gained a hat on it. Here he is, not so tall as you, and not so bookish, but keen with his gun as you see. Shake hands with your cousin, Jim,” said George Oswald, in much better English than he had spoken under the influence of brandy.

Jim reluctantly turned round and gave his hand.

“So you, too, made a bet on the “Kent”; there were a dozen bets on board as to her keeping her time,” said Kenneth.

“I wanted something to make up to me for its coming to interfere with my sport, as my father says it will. But I'm off for to-day anyhow.”

“No, Jim, stop here. I've something to say to you both, and the sooner it is done the better. And what do you think of Cowarrel and Robert Horne, Kenneth?”

“I have liked my visit very much. I hope I have learned something from your overseer. I certainly felt very greatly interested in what he told me.”

“He is a fellow to jaw,” said Jim. “And for conceit there is not his match. All jaw and no work. I'd give him the sack if I were father.”

“Luckily you are not,” said Mr. Oswald drily.
“He looks after his own interest anyhow,” said Jim.

“He never neglects mine,” said his father emphatically, “and I am glad you like him Kenneth. And now, I must tell you what I want you to do for James, and I want you, Mrs. Oswald, to hear it too, that there need be no mistake or misapprehension about it for the future. You, Kenneth, are nearly three years older than Jim, and have had the best education money could buy. You are to take him in hand and make him mind you for his own good. Order what books you want from Melbourne, settle the hours he's to give to learning, and these hours he must abide by. But that is not all, it's a companion he needs even more than a teacher. Where he goes, you, Kenneth, must go with him, what he does, take note of — if it is right, keep him up to it, if it is wrong tell him the truth about it — I want no toadeating flatterer beside my son, who will take my money for leading him to destruction, as that scoundrel Johnson did. I want a cheery young fellow who has pluck and strength and sense to hold his own. Keep Jim from the dice-box, the brandy bottle, and other evils, and make a man and a gentleman of him. Don't gloom that way, Jim. You promised when you ran away from the Scotch College, that you would learn at home from your cousin, and no doubt he'll have a pleasanter way of teaching than the masters there.”

James Oswald looked with a determined scowl on his face at the young cousin thus invested with supreme authority; not merely a tutor, though that was bad enough, but an eavesdropper and a spy to dog his steps and report his conduct. He had got the better of his other tutors by fair means or by foul, but this near relative, who was so much bigger than himself, would be harder to manage, especially as the governor's back was up, as Jim had never seen it before.

Mrs. Oswald stared in blank amazement at the announcement of the subordinate position Jim was to hold — but behind her surprise, there was the feeling that, however his father might order, Jim had always contrived to wriggle out somehow and have his own way. Kenneth felt he must support his uncle, and assert his dignity, though he had but slender confidence in his success.

“In two years' time,” said Mr. Oswald deliberately, “he should be fit to go to the University as they call it here, and there's no saying but he may set the Yarra on fire yet. It is no want of wit, it's the will that's been wanting. He's young yet, and you've been well trained to the work; promise me to undertake it.”

The idea of preparing a youth of this description for Melbourne University in two years was somewhat appalling, especially in the face of such reluctance on his part. Kenneth between the gravity of the charge and
the despair of success, fell into the worst possible blunder he could have made with all three of his Australian relatives.

“I shall do all that I can, but I fear you expect far too much from one who has had no experience in teaching. I shall do all I can, and if my cousin will also do all that he can we may do a great deal, but not what you calculate on. What is two years when there has been no previous study, and no habits of attention and application formed?”

“You could do a great deal in two years yourself,” said Mr. Oswald.

“But I have scarcely been absent a day from school since I was six years old,” said Kenneth.

“Well, it is only to make Jim fit to begin at nineteen what you went in for at sixteen, and he has a good headpiece, only there was never a tutor here worth his salt to make him stick to the books. I expected more goodwill from you, Kenneth.”

“Goodwill certainly, and if my cousin will only add his goodwill to mine, we may do wonders. But the cleverest engineer in the world cannot make water run uphill; the matter is infinitely more in my cousin's power than mine.”

“Then you run counter to me,” said Mr. Oswald in a tone of the deepest disappointment.

“Not at all. I'll do my very best. I'll try to follow every instruction you give me, and I hope that you, James, will help me, for it will be so much pleasanter for both of us.”

“Well,” said Mr. Oswald, “this is the room that you can be the King of for the future; this is the day and the hour that you can make a beginning. James, lay down that gun, and bring Kenneth the books you had at the Scotch College, and let him see what you can do, and what ye canna. I've put my foot down this day; and you may gloom as you like, but I'll hold you to your bargain, and not a single sixpence you shall have, or a debt at Castlehurst paid, if you do not mind your books. Your whole allowance depends on your conduct. It will do you good to have to earn what you spend, though it is an easier way than your father before you had to do it. I'll stop here till you get out the books, but no longer.”

James slowly went for the books; his father kept his eyes on the door till he returned with them, and then leading his astonished wife out of the room, he left the young tutor master of the field.
Chapter 15 Uphill Work

That James Oswald's ignorance was well-nigh absolute, was no surprise to his cousin. What could he possibly have learned? He never opened a book or even read the current news in the newspapers, and had no society which would improve him. How he could make out the racing news and the odds which his mother said interested him so much, was a puzzle to Kenneth, for he could not read aloud a sentence of English, without serious blunders, and of the ordinary rules of arithmetic he appeared to know nothing. His writing was as inelegant as his spelling was incorrect, and of ordinary matters, which are familiar to the schoolboy of ten, this lad of seventeen was perfectly ignorant. Was there any way of awakening curiosity, of arousing ambition, of breathing some soul into this clod? Had he any affection for either of his parents, or for any one?

Kenneth tried to get his cousin to talk, but for that Jim had no inclination. He was not going to speak to a spy and a tell-tale! Kenneth next tried to talk to him, but the pleasantness which had made him so popular in Edinburgh and on board the "Kent" seemed altogether at fault here. No topic could interest him at all. His Scottish grandparents and their interest in Tingalpa and its inmates; what did he care for old fogies whom he had never seen and never wished to see? Edinburgh and its sights — perfectly stolid. The voyage — equally uninterested. The theatricals, with which he had amused Jim's mother, were pooh-poohed as mere amateurs' performance that no one used to Castlehurst or Melbourne professionals would care sixpence to see. The landing at Melbourne — one little spark of interest was elicited here.

"And what did you think of Melbourne," said Jim.

"A wonderful city for its age. Handsome, busy, and with beautiful suburbs. To me, however, it looked painfully new."

A coarse laugh was the first sign given that Jim cared for what his cousin had been saying.

"That is the best of Melbourne," said he. "None of your old mouldy buildings with no end of lying stories about them, but all spick and span new. If a house gets shabby it is pulled down and another put up in its place. In time it will lick all the cities of England into a cocked hat. There's some life in Melbourne. If I'd only lost my bet as I wanted to we'd have had a run down to meet you, but the governor reckoned on his spree first, and was out in his calculation for once. Rum notion of enjoyment the governor has. I take my pleasure different to him. And now he'll not move to Melbourne, for months he says. He's chalked out some sickening work
for me, and you and him will be sick enough of it before you're done with it. I wish you and the "Kent" had gone to the bottom. The fishes might have had the benefit of your cram and welcome.”

“There go two words to that bargain, my good fellow. I prefer dryer quarters, even Cowarrel in a bad season,” said Kenneth.

“With Bob Horne's driest speeches for amusement. But I tell you once for all, that I'm not going to slave and work like a nigger, because the governor thinks it will make a gentleman of me. It's the rhino that makes the gentleman nowadays, and there's plenty of that. Now just hear reason; let us settle how little I am to do, just for appearance sake. And as for your poking your nose into my business, I tell you plainly I'll have none of it. It's all very very well for the old cock, who takes his grog wholesale, and makes a beast of himself two or three times a year, to say I'm to keep clear of the brandy bottle; and for him that has had the game of making a fortune to tell you to watch that I don't handle the dice-box, it was on his tongue's end to say the billiard table too, but he thought that was rather too strong, but a man must have some way of risking money to win or lose, or life would be as flat as ditchwater. I tell you I've been used to have my own way and I'm going to have it. You look like a milksop, and I hear you are a teetotaller, and I've no doubt you are a hypocrite. What's your figure?”

“Nothing that you could offer,” said Kenneth, “would make me disregard your father's wishes.”

“And you will find I'll make the place pretty hot for you.”

“I don't care in the least for what you threaten.”

“And you mean to follow me about?”

“I shall try to carry out your father's wishes.”

“And report to him?”

“Whatsoever he asks I shall answer to the best of my knowledge.”

“I wish you joy of your post. You'll wish you were back in ‘Auld Reekie’, as my father calls it, ten times in the half-hour.”

“That's likely enough. I wish it now, but that makes not the slightest difference to my duty.”

“Duty!” said Jim, in a tone of the deepest disgust. “Well, I suppose you are not twenty, and you speak about duty as if I believed you cared a hang about it. Well, I'll learn as little as I can. It will save you trouble to know it at the first.”

“You will find it the wiser course, and certainly the more profitable course, to try to please your father. You will find learning more interesting if you would give it a fair trial.”

“That's all according to taste. I believe you spoke a true word about water running up hill, though I had a mind to thrash you for your damned conceit
Poor Jim with his slight figure, his puny limbs, and his general want of vigour, caused by precocious drinking, smoking, and late hours, was much more able to talk of such thrashing than likely to attempt it.

“Pray, what the better are you now for all the years you've been at this sickening work?” resumed he with a glance of disgust at the schoolbooks which, though they had not been used, had been abused with splashes of ink and gashes of knives so that they looked to have seen some service.

“I hope I am a great deal the better, and I am sure I am very much the happier for what I know.”

“Well, and you bring all this rot out here when I've seen the best scholars — men with a degree — (which you could not get, for all you tried, as the governor let out one day) knockabout hands on stations, or loafing at Castlehurst, glad to get their grub and a glass of brandy from men that did not know their A.B.C. No;” said James with the profound conceit of ignorance, “I could buy a score of them with a keg of brandy and a pound of tobacco. And the governor knows that as well as I do, for all he preaches to me before you, and be hanged to you.”

Kenneth had certainly uphill work enough to discourage a more experienced instructor and an older man. A stupid unwilling boy in a school learns unconsciously something from his companions and the teacher has the bright boys to push on and encourage his labours; but the hammering at a single, dull, refractory spoiled lad, is the very lowest depth to which a conscientious man could be condemned.

But with incredible pains and trouble, and George Oswald's own firm keeping to his word about money, he effected something. Jim did learn to read better, to write legibly, to spell imperfectly, and to cast accounts somewhat better than the other branches, for he really wanted to understand the odds, and to bet with more precise information than he had done heretofore.

Kenneth did not keep him long at work, the poor head could not stand any continued attention even to elementary learning, but the main thing that he wished to effect, was to give him some taste for innocent amusement, and some interest in books or pictures or gardening or the working of the station. All Jim's ideas of recreation or fun were connected with public houses, theatres, and general spending of money among low company, and when his cousin tried to interest him in books of the lightest description, Jim only experienced varieties of weariness.

He tried him with a sporting novel, but, except for the tit-bits about races and matches, the rest was all “rot.” The love passages and the description were “not business.” He tried him with a schoolboy book, but it was
babyish; with a cleverly illustrated child's book, it was twaddle; with ballad poetry, which is the earliest of literature, but it was stuff; with the drama, but that was no use read; the theatre, with the dresses and the scenery and the stars and the bar and smoking-room, was more like the thing. Yes, he liked the Melbourne theatre and the Castlehurst theatre, when there was anything good on. He laughed very heartily at a modern comic song with a good chorus sung in a Music Hall or in the Shades, especially if it was sung in character with a good get up, but as for seeing any fun in the finest jokes printed in a book, that was beyond him.

Would not he like to act, to take a part in some private theatricals? Too much trouble, far better to pay other people to act for him; but yet this suggestion received more attention than any other that Kenneth had made, and Mrs. Oswald took up the idea and interested herself in the costumes, and proposed to invite their neighbours the Deanes and the Robert's's. It was of no use thinking of inviting the Grays of Wilta. Miss Deane and her brother were glad to take parts, Mick and Biddy were easily drilled for the two Irish servants in the little farce which was selected, Kenneth took a heavy part and doubled another, and Jim, in the handsomest clothes of the party, did the walking gentleman. With much coaching from his cousin and several rehearsals, Jim got his part and his cues fairly, and the piece went off pleasantly enough. It was not much towards the matriculation, but it might be something towards education to get him to do such things, but after the performance, Jim rested on his laurels. He could do theatricals as well as any one — indeed his mother thought he far surpassed his cousin, whose two parts were taken in shabby clothes; but it was too much to go through to effect so little. He liked to "blow" about his acting, and how many speeches he had to learn, and how pat he had them, but there was no further result.

The enforced companionship of the two cousins was to both a painful restraint, but there is no doubt that it kept Jim for the times out of much mischief. If he had his living to earn, there might have been some hope for the lad, but as the only son of George Oswald, he saw not the slightest cause for exertion or the least motive for ambition. His father was devoured with the wish to rise in the social scale, and to mix with his betters in birth and breeding, but Jim liked the society of his inferiors, where he was the king of the company, and where he could feel that he or his father (which was the same thing) could buy them all up. As, in spite of his pride of purse, he never was conscious that his cousin looked up to him one whit, he felt the constant association with him a galling chain, and lost no opportunity of saying so to him.

In one respect Kenneth's visit was not disappointing to his uncle and
aunt; they were visited by some of the neighbours who had held aloof before, but with none of them could Kenneth himself find the companionship he longed for. Neither the Deanes nor the Roberts's had any intelligent tastes. He was suffering so keenly from intellectual isolation, as well as from a phase of religious difficulty, that his inner life was almost unendurable. Fifty times in a week was he tempted to go to his uncle and request to be allowed to go as an usher in a school or as a clerk in a Bank or a warehouse, or as a shepherd on a station, anything rather than continue in this miserable position of bear-warder without the effective command of the bear. But his uncle thought he was really doing Jim good, and hated the idea of parting with him. Kenneth, too, got attached to Mr. Oswald, and gradually found out methods of serving him which, though far less important, were more satisfactorily carried out. And he knew that as his uncle grew older, there would be more for a young active willing helper to do in various ways. Although Mrs. Oswald's jealousy was sometimes aroused at the praises bestowed by her husband on his nephew, and at the invitations he received and the preference shown to him over Jim by the neighbours, she found him very obliging and helpful in many ways, and made no active effort to oust him.

Slowly and drearily the days, months, and years passed by, varied by occasional visits to Melbourne, where the desire for liberty became almost maddening, and several hard drinking bouts on the part of Mr. Oswald, which even Kenneth thought a much less evil than the constant glasses of beer, wine, and spirits, from which all his efforts failed to keep the son.

It was Kenneth's birthday, he was of age, and he was more than usually gloomy. No one knew or cared about it, he had no inheritance to look for, no mother now to take pride in her handsome boy. And his father — their fates were apart, apart for ever. If the Australian life had been as happy as his father had hoped it would be, he would have written; but it was so much harder than he could have feared, that he thought it better to let Mr. McDiarmid think all was well, and that he accepted the severance as the best and wisest course. But in this loveless house, how his heart yearned for the love he could not claim. Hard thoughts came into his heart, such a wish that he had never been born, such an impatience of the interminable hours that led to nothing — of the efforts renewed every day without any good results — such a weariness of his thankless task, such an eager desire to shuffle off this mortal coil altogether, if he could do it without sin. Who would miss him? The grandparents were just as well and comfortable without him. His uncle would cease to expect impossibilities and to entertain hopes from his influence over Jim which could never be realized, his aunt and cousin would be better pleased if he went out of their sphere
altogether, into the grave or anywhere else.

Here was Nelly's letter just received, cheerful about the old folks, chatty about the kind neighbours, and effusive about a recent visit from Mr. Stalker, who had gone with her to the Linleath woods in memory of the old times, who had lent her some books and had executed Kenneth's commission about her birthday present so beautifully. It was so good of him to mind her. She had been at the old home lately, and thought much of the old days when Kenneth had taken her to school, and of the still older times when the three of them had those lovely walks on the Saturday afternoons.

"Nelly would miss my letters, and Harry too," thought Kenneth, "but except for the monthly communication, I am completely taken out of their lives. They could not miss me much. And there's Harry trying to delay the evil day, and complaining of his hard fate. He had shrunk from the appointment as assistant and successor to his great uncle, and gone on teaching and writing in Edinburgh, but the old man's health was failing and he must make up his mind soon. And he is not satisfied with the prospect of an assured livelihood in a rural parish, where everyone will look up to him, where he can preach thoughtful and eloquent sermons, and do a little work for the Press; not at all satisfied. He is too speculative to be satisfied with set creeds and crystallized opinions; too honest with himself to think himself a guide for young and old; and filled with a wild desire to have his fling out before he settles down, and that fling forbidden by the restraints of his profession. The provision made by his many friends for his future comfort appears to be as cruel kindness as in my case, but he is not starved intellectually and morally as I am. He has many friends with whom to change ideas; he reads, he writes, he thinks; I seem to forget that I ever had any intellectual power or ambition at all."

On that birthday he sat down and wrote a long letter to his father, in which he gave vent to all his feelings, and described the colourless life, the difficult duties, the religious despondency, the intellectual stagnation. He poured out all the affection which he had felt for his dead mother to this father, whom he could have loved so warmly and obeyed so loyally if it had been allowed, but from whom he was severed so completely, and in the act of writing he felt he was gaining some sympathy, and would go on henceforward with more courage. After he had finished the letter, he set fire to it and reduced it to ashes. As he watched the last red sparks wander and expire, the futility of all such make-believes, either to his father on earth or in heaven, fell heavy on him, and leaning his face in his hands in his solitary room, he groaned in the bitterness of his soul.

"If he knew it, what could he do for me? He cannot step out of his own
sphere to lend a friendly hand to pluck me out of this slough of despond. No, let him serenely move in his own orbit, and, if he casts a glance towards me, let him continue to think that I have been caught up in an inferior system more suited to me — perhaps really better for me — than his own. Why should I undeceive him? And it is the same with prayer. I may relieve my own feelings for a moment, but I can call down no efficient help. ‘On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind,’ that is all we can hope for from the Higher powers. I must make out the two years, however, that were thought to fit Jim for matriculation. After that I must have liberty. There is no need for me to attempt to make bricks without straw any longer than that.”
Chapter 16 A Mission and a Missionary

Kenneth, however, did not leave Tingalpa at the time he had fixed in his own mind. He became somewhat more reconciled to his position by the growing attachment of his uncle, and there always seemed to be something he must do for him before he could go, and afterwards circumstances brought about such a change in his thoughts and interests that no persuasion could have induced him to desert his post. Life took a new colour; if it was not easier it was infinitely more interesting; with the change of many of his surroundings the natural love of activity and desire for success came into play, and George Oswald found him daily more helpful and more cheerful.

By many hints and many signs Kenneth learned that at the bottom of his uncle's heart there was a defiant attitude towards Mr. Gray, of Wilta, and a watchful jealousy of all his social and material advantages. Although his expression about the selectors being free to pick out Mr. Gray's eyes was not really so savage as it sounded — only referring to what are called “the eyes of the run,” the watering-places and choice blocks, it was bad enough; and even George Oswald sober was but little better than George Oswald drunk, in his want of sympathy with the good and bad fortunes of his prosperous and respectable neighbour. Mr. Gray was a Scotchman. As the Victorian people have it, “Scotland is a fine country to come from,” it is surprising what a large proportion of the squatting magnates and leading merchants of that colony hail from the northern portion of Great Britain. He was a man of much more education than Mr. Oswald, he had begun with some capital, he had gone on steadily adding to his possessions, and with regard to a bargain he was as keen a man as George Oswald was on the strength of tea. In a small bargain with regard to land George Oswald had got the better of Mr. Gray, but in one large transaction in cattle some superior information on the part of the buyer as to the extent of the losses, and the probable permanence of high prices after the great drought, made Mr. Gray obtain an enormous advantage over his plebeian neighbour. This rankled in his mind. But the point on which Mr. Gray had the greatest pull on him was in his family. Instead of having only one son, who was weak, wasteful, and utterly without head for business, Mr. Gray had four sons as clear-headed and as far-sighted as himself, who worked to further all his plans, and who could each have made fortunes for themselves if they had begun the world without a penny. The eldest had gone to Queensland, where he had married and was doing well; and two had recently started for New Zealand, where they had taken out large runs with splendid prospects;
and the second son Walter Gray, the keenest of the family, remained at Wilta, his father's right hand and trusted counsellor. There was only one daughter, the youngest of the family. Mr. Oswald heard a great deal of her good looks and her good management and general amiability; but as she held herself above Mrs. Oswald, as her mother had done in her lifetime, and as he felt it was war to the knife between him and William Gray on account of these cattle, there could be no intercourse. There was some communication between them, but not of a pleasant kind; mutual fences were to be kept up, stray cattle, sheep and horses could be impounded, messages and notes were sent, which were never well received, and both the squatting magnates had to make constant complaints of disagreeable neighbours.

The Grays indeed held their heads very high; they did not associate much with any of the settlers in the district or with the Castlehurst people. They had visitors from Sydney, from Adelaide, and from Melbourne — English and Scottish newcomers or travellers, to whom they did the honours with true bush hospitality, and for such people they got up parties and picnics. They visited much among the leading Melbourne merchants and professional men, especially among those of old standing. George Oswald in his cups magnified his own possessions, and depreciated those of his neighbour; but in his sober senses he acknowledged with bitterness that in every way Mr. Gray had the advantage. And as the owner of Wilta bought out all the smaller holders round him, and accumulated flocks and herds and land, he was casting a covetous eye on the outlying bits of Tingalpa; and he was convinced that once the reins dropped from his own strong hands, Jim would let the whole property go piece by piece to his resolute, wealthy, and as he believed crafty neighbour, and this apprehension for the future added to his grudge at him for the past injury and for present annoyances.

As Kenneth got to know his uncle better he entered into many of his hopes and fears. Something of the compensation which makes up for sacrifices, and which recompenses honest and kindly effort, rewarded him when he found he could really follow his uncle's carelessly kept accounts, and check those of his managers. He learned the difference between one animal and another, and how much could be done to keep up the fine quality of wool and carcases, and he had always such a pleasant manner with the men that his uncle learned to make him the go-between in many matters; but with regard to buying and selling he had no experience, until on the arrival of an emergency where Mr. Oswald could not act himself.

Mr. Gray had for sale a choice lot of breeding ewes. His neighbour knew the value of them to a penny, and was willing to give it, but was not willing
to come into contact with the seller. He did not like to send an overseer, and he was suspicious of all stock and station salesmen. They were all, as he said, in with Mr. Gray, who employed them much more than he did, and he felt sure they would not do their best for his interest.

When Kenneth saw his uncle's dilemma he asked him frankly if he could not be trusted to go over to Wilta, and try what he could do in the way of making a bargain, trusting entirely to Mr. Oswald's valuation.

The latter hesitated a little, for though Kenneth was intelligent and zealous, he had no faith in him at a bargain with such an old hand as William Gray or his son Walter. But on reflection he determined to send him. If he could make the purchase on reasonable terms, if indeed he gave more than the sheep were worth, he would at least show to those proud upsetting neighbours that his nephew was as good a gentleman as any Gray of them all. Kenneth must go by himself — Jim was more closely identified with the wrongs felt on account of those cattle, and besides Jim could do no good and might do mischief. They were a stiff lot, the Grays, very stand-offish, and would most likely never ask him in; but that was neither here nor there to Kenneth. He was to take the handsomest buggy and the best pair of horses in the place — as good a turnout as possible — to represent Tingalpa worthily.

When Kenneth started on this expedition, his handsome person set off by as well-made suit of tweeds as ever came out of Collins Street, with the newest American buggy, as light as a feather and as strong as a rock, to use Mick's similes, and the pair of bays which he could now be trusted to drive, George Oswald watched his departure with no little pride. The whole turnout was most creditable to the establishment. If only he could make the bargain, and not get taken in, it would score something to the right side of the account, something to set against “those beasts.”

As he drove along Kenneth felt a little exhilarated at the novelty of the undertaking — by the fine day and the rapid motion, as well as by the freedom from the company of his uncongenial cousin Jim, who had taken himself off to Castlehurst in equal joy over his freedom. Before the bays had taken him halfway to Wilta he overtook a rather elderly man, who was walking at a leisurely pace and carrying a small portmanteau. To offer him a seat beside him was only an act of common civility, which the stranger accepted cordially. As he acknowledged the courtesy in well chosen words, but with a north country accent, he was singularly attracted to him. He had a face that made you desire to know his history and his thoughts. The forehead was very broad, the smile gravely sweet, and the eyes had a power of inward vision which gave them an intensity and a depth of expression in which speculation lost itself; at least Kenneth was quite at a
loss to read their meaning.

“I am going as far as Mr. Gray's, at Wilta,” said Kenneth, “and will be very glad to take you so far on your way if that is your direction.”

“I thought of staying there for the night,” said the stranger, “and going further north on the morrow. I must get a hundred miles travelled before Sunday.”

“You are not looking for work; at least you have not the appearance of it,” said Kenneth.

“Not in the sense in which you mean, but of course, like every man that's worth his salt in this world, I am always looking out for work. I've no doubt you are doing the same. In broadcloth or moleskin, in smart buggies or on shank's naigie, we're all on that lookout. And blessed are we when the Lord finds it for us, and we rest satisfied to do it.” This was said with quiet assurance, as if it was the natural expression of the man's habitual feeling.

Kenneth looked at him again; there was nothing in the stranger's dress or demeanour that was at all clerical. Lay preachers, however, are not particular in their attire, and have other avocations to season their talk, but this man did not look like a dissenting lay preacher or an Anglican lay reader. He was more like a philosopher or a savant, but such men are not nowadays so satisfied that their work is done under Divine direction.

“I see what you are thinking of,” said the stranger. “You are wondering if I am a minister. A man cannot say what is in his heart concerning divine things on a Tuesday, but he is supposed to make a business of it on the Sunday. But I'm no preacher. I'm only a wandering sort of bush missionary or evangelist, you might call me, only that no one has sent me but my Master. I have received no ordination at the hands of man.”

“Then you go from station to station, holding service, but yet not preaching,” said Kenneth.

“Not holding service, endeavouring to lead worship; you do not see the difference, few folk do. Service is a term derived from the old Temple ritual, with its regularity, its pomp, its sacrifice — something, in fact, done to the glory of God. Worship, as I take it, is just the uplook of the human soul to the Highest. No service to Him; He needs none.”

“What benefit to us? He bestows none,” said Kenneth, the bitterness of his heart coming out to this stranger, who plunged into the heart of things at once.

“Ah! great benefit to us,” said the stranger. “Not to be measured by mechanical laws — so much food or comfort for so many prayers — so much advance in spiritual life for so many aspirations; but just this: that into the open up-looking soul the Infinite God flows, and life is made
divine in its joys and its sorrows, in its successes and its disappointments. I
don't pretend to explain it. I only know it.”

Kenneth paused for a minute before he ventured on another question.

“But tell me what is this worship without preaching, and I suppose
without book, for I do not suppose you use the Church liturgy,”

“No; no printed words for me. Some folks get good by that old form, but
I suppose they were brought up to it. I am sorry I cannot preach. I am only
a sort of seer, if I may presume to claim the title.”

“A seer was a prophet, greater far than a preacher,” said Kenneth.

“Rarer, my young friend, but not greater. No; the power to persuade, to
convince, to exhort, to instruct, is not mine; to sway the heart of the
multitude, with my voice, and to give out the wonderful message from God
to man with the Spirit and with power. But I think I see more in the Bible,
in the world, and in human life than most folks do, and if I can make a
handful here and there, in these neglected heathenish bush stations, see
some of the wondrous things in the Gospel, the beautiful things in this
world, and the possible things in the threescore years and ten which we
have here, and the endless eternity that is to follow, David Henderson will
have done his Master's work, so far at least as it has lain in his power.”

“And you hope to have such a hearing at that place a hundred miles off
on Sunday,” said Kenneth.

“I hope to have a hearing at Wilta to-night first, and at each station on my
journey.”

“Do they care to have service on weekdays? Is there time? Are they not
too tired after their supper and smoke?”

“They can stand an hour of it at least, instead of the cards they take to,
poor souls, as their only amusement. Think how little difference can be
made in station life between Sunday and other days, before you put
weekevening worship aside as a weariness.”

“I spoke thoughtlessly,” said Kenneth, who saw at once that such living
faith as this man's would make its way Sunday or Saturday with most
people.

The missionary resumed:—

“To those poor station hands, ‘Behold God hath given you the Sabbath,’
has scarcely ever been said. Mark the word given, not a day taken out of
our week, but a day given to us; to how many a weariness and a snare
because of so much Jewish superstition and so many Puritanical notions
being mixed up with it, but really a priceless boon for toiling humanity.
But whenever I can find people to listen, that is the day and the hour that
God has given to me.”

Kenneth felt this man's simple confidence, his zeal and delight in his self-
imposed (what he felt to be his God-imposed) work, the most cheering thing that he had met with for many a day. Somehow his own difficulties seemed lightened by contact with such a man.

“May I ask you where is your home?”

“I have no home now. I sit loose to the world. Wife and children are all dead. I seemed to have nothing to do for myself, and was glad when it was borne upon my soul that I might work for others.”

“Had you ever difficult duties; were you ever haunted by the spirit of unrest; of doubt, of disbelief?” asked Kenneth.

“Unrest, ay; till I settled to this. Doubt, ay; when the desire of my life was removed at a stroke. Disbelief, ay; when — but I cannot speak of that. You're some way troubled, I see. But all the advice I can give is do the nearest duty — shirk nothing because of perplexities.”

“But if your nearest duty appeared to be as hopeless as trying to break down a stone wall by speaking to it of its being in the way, what then?”

“If it is as hopeless as that, it is not your nearest duty. No, in the eyes of men, I doubt not only that other things than this work of mine would appear to be nearer to my duty — but I feel it otherwise. If a man is in the midst of friends and relatives who do not need him, and who do not benefit by him, his work may be to leave them for those who do need him. And it grieves me to see the station hands and the shearers, the men by whose weary drudgery wealth and comfort are produced for their masters and prosperity for the colony, making their money like machines, and spending it like idiots or madmen. I've forced myself to sit and watch those poor souls ‘Knocking down their cheques,’ as they call it, and I have tried hard to get inside of their hearts; tried to comprehend their motive, to get some notion of the pleasure they must somehow take in it. It wants a seer's power to get into that.”

“It is indeed a mystery,” said Kenneth.

“You must look back, as well as at the present moment, to get any idea of the possession that seizes on them; at the repression, at the monotony, at the subordination of the fifty weeks, before you can comprehend in any way the orgies of the concluding fortnight.”

“You are a master?” said Mr. Henderson.

“Scarcely so; I work under my uncle, Mr. Oswald, of Tingalpa, and he is, of course, my master, though a kind and liberal one.”

“But you look at matters from the master's point of view, and rightly too, or you could not be of much value to your uncle.”

“Not altogether. I think my life has had some hard experience that makes me sympathize with all classes.”

“Have you ever heard Mr. Oswald, or any of his fellow-employers, say
that if it were not for these drunken fellows, who cannot keep their wages, there would be no shepherds or station hands to be got?"

"I have heard it said, and have been sorry to hear it, and very unwilling to believe in its truth," said Kenneth.

"And its being so much for their advantage, they do not care to discourage the sinful waste and beastly drunkenness."

"I do not think any master would put the case so point-blank to himself as that," said Kenneth. "He may think that the poor foolish fellows are at least safe for fifty weeks of the year, and certainly useful to their employer, and to the country at large."

"But should any line of life be so uncomfortable, or so ill-paid, or so dreary, that only those poor ne'er-do-wells will engage in it? Do you think the employers would encourage anything better?"

"I think so — I hope so, at least. At least I can speak for my uncle."

"You are his nephew, not his son. I have heard of you both at Castlehurst."

"He is as kind to me as to his son."

"And you have neither father nor mother?"

"Neither," said Kenneth, "grandparents at home who brought me up."

"Ay," said David Henderson; there's where we of the human race have such advantages; there's more than the father and mother to go to the building up of the generations, and if the immediate parents are removed there are the grandfathers and grandmothers, and the uncles and aunts, ready to spend and be spent for them. And where they fail, then they must be counted as 'the children of the State.' We are coming, I think, through various ways most unlooked for by Christian theologians to produce such results, to some comprehension of the solidarity of mankind, which seems to me to be the root idea of the Primitive Church."

"The French people are far further advanced in that idea than the English," said Kenneth, "and you must confess that they are little influenced by the source you speak of."

"Yes, far less from direct Christian precept and example, but the spirit of the Master is in the air, though unacknowledged. I have not been long in these colonies, but it seems to me that the spirit of 'every man for himself, and God for nobody,' seem too prevalent here. The working man is better off here, no doubt, but he is no fonder of his employer than where his pay was worse, and the master seems to have very little personal regard for him. So far as I have yet seen, there seems to be a sort of wall between them, which the leaders of both political parties in Victoria are inclined to make higher and stronger; but I don't think the wall so strong as it is in appearance, and we might break down a piece big enough to let daylight
through. I fancy it is more talk than feeling."

"Why did you not come to my uncle's place at Tingalpa last night? We should have been very glad to have your company, and his heart would have warmed to the Lowland tongue."

"I came the other way by Roberts's station, and besides you are too near to Castlehurst to need the services of a poor bush missionary."

"You do not address the miners, then?" said Kenneth.

"They are mostly within reach of church and chapel, and would not care for what I have to say. If I meet in with a party of prospectors or an isolated camp of diggers they fall into the same line as the station hands, and I ask their leave to worship with them."

"We have scarcely the same class of diggers here as in the California diggings, in whom Bret Harte gives us so much interest," said Kenneth. "Not the wild desperado with lawless cravings after impossible feats and persistent practice of the most grotesque and grim blasphemy. Our typical digger has not been developed from the wild western prairie hunter; he has been attracted from old civilized countries."

"The bulk of the Californian gold-diggers no doubt are as stupid and as uninteresting as the bulk of yours in Victoria, but there are more exceptions, and those more striking, so that they open up a new field for storytelling, but perhaps a less gifted writer than Bret Harte might find difficulty in finding anything but what was both prosaic and repulsive in the desperado," said David Henderson.

"The reckless disregard of all law and the holding of their lives in their own hands has something of the charm of romance even for the law-abiding, of course only where the dangerous element is turned away from themselves," said Kenneth.

"I have been enquiring into the subject," said David Henderson, "and I believe that Victoria was saved from a great deal of the disorganization, rowdyism, and lynch-law of the early days in California by the imposition of a considerable licence-fee on diggers. It was originally 30s. a month, and violently abused and even fought against; but it saved them from the heavy gambling, bloodshed, and murder that seems to have distinguished California. To collect the licence-fee required a large body of police at all the different goldfields, who could not possibly have been paid or kept up but for the large sums thus raised by Government. By means of that police force a rigorous despotism was exercised, intoxicating liquors forbidden to be brought on the gold-fields, and shanties where they sold grog burnt to the ground and the liquors confiscated."

"So at the most critical period," said Kenneth, "law and order were kept up by the strong hand, and the Victorian digger was not allowed to
blossom into the picturesque daredevil with the soft heart for women and children, but the violent hand against most men, who makes such a figure in diggings' stories. The Castlehurst alluvial diggers seem rather deficient in enterprise.”

“That may be, but the stupid people are all interesting to me, only as I say Castlehurst is full of places of worship, and it is no field for me,” said Mr. Henderson.
Chapter 17 Edith Gray and her Friend

With all their talk, the companions found time to admire the scenery and the appearance of well-being on all sides as they drew near Wilta — well-grassed land, sometimes open, but with occasional belts of timber; here splendid gums, with straight white stems, rising fifty or sixty feet before forking out into well-leaved widespread branches, with the inevitable marks of fire on the side of the prevailing hot winds at their base; and there again a belt of sheoaks, looking diminutive by contrast, with their sombre but graceful pinelike foliage; the never-failing creek, traceable in the distance by the gum-trees which bordered it all along, which flowed from the Wilta Hills beyond the house, bridged over by Mr. Gray, and road made at his own expense for miles through his run; the station buildings on a larger scale than those of Tingalpa, and the avenue planted a dozen of years before George Oswald had thought of such a thing.

As they crossed the creek and drove up the avenue they came to the large commodious house, built on one floor, with a broad verandah on all sides but the south. It was in the midst of well laid out grounds, where both skill and taste were visible, and at the door of a conservatory, in front of the house, stood two young ladies, whose appearance would have done credit to any old English country seat. Edith Gray, the daughter of the house, was the older, the larger, and the more commanding of the two. Brown-eyes and dark-haired, her complexion was of that rich creamy kind, with a warmer glow mantling the cheeks. Her mouth was somewhat large, but singularly gracious in expression, closing firmly when silent, but with a wonderful play both of fun and feeling in it with every change of mood, her head finely set on a throat not slender, but grand, with a figure easy and graceful, though on a large scale, she was a contrast in all ways to the blue-eyed, fair-haired, ethereal girl beside her, who, although considerably younger, was a married woman. What was it that attracted Kenneth so powerfully to them both at first sight? Was it that he had been so shut out from refined female society at Tingalpa that the first sight of such loveliness and grace overpowered him, as they say Orientals are mastered by the sudden lifting of a veil which discloses the whole face and expression?

Miss Gray's beauty and grand air made her to him the more admirable of the two, but something that was not admiration — something inexplicable to himself — attracted Kenneth to her companion.

Miss Gray advanced to greet the stranger. Kenneth announced his business. “Unluckily,” said she, “my father and brother are both out
driving with Mr. Ellerton, and we do not expect them till towards nightfall. Would Mr. Oswald be good enough to come in, with his friend, and await their return?"

Kenneth could not think of intruding on the ladies, and Mr. Henderson explained his errand, asking permission to have worship that evening in the men's dining-room. Miss Gray said the largest room in the house would be given up for the purpose, and that the men would be all called on to come if they chose, and meantime cordially invited the missionary to come in with Mr. Oswald and have some rest and refreshment.

David Henderson declined with thanks. "I'm very much obliged to you all the same, but I'd rather go to their own place, eat with them, smoke with them, and after that speak to them. It's not like a sermon that I can give, only a little laying open of a book that to so many of them seems sealed, and prayer for light and strength and comfort which we all need, and they'll take it better and kinder if there is no fuss made. But if you'd like to come in and join us," and he looked seriously into the young lady's brown eyes, "or your friend, or Mr. Gray, or any of his guests, I'll ask the men's leave to invite you; and I doubt not they will make room for you and your house-servants. And I think you'll not forget to thank them for the invitation."

"But you will both come in now?" said Miss Gray.

"Are there any sick men or women on the station?" asked Mr. Henderson.

"There's one poor woman, the blacksmith's wife, dying, I fear," said Miss Gray. "I saw her this morning. And there's a young fellow laid up with a broken leg from a fall last week — a boundary rider."

"That is my first business, then, Miss Gray, thank you, if you will show me where these people are, I'd like to visit them; but Mr. Oswald may do as he pleases."

Kenneth was a little embarrassed, and so was the young lady, for neither of them was quite sure as to the footing on which Mr. Gray would receive Mr. Oswald's nephew and deputy.

"Perhaps you would like to look at the sheep. They are some distance off; but I can send a man with you, and he may explain the matters."

Kenneth thanked Miss Gray, and her plan was carried out. "We meet in the men's dining-room, then," said he to David Henderson.

"I fear that will not suit my father's ideas of what is fitting, or your uncle's either," said Miss Gray. "There is Bachelor's Hall (if you will not trust yourself to Mrs. Ellerton and myself), where you will fare better than with the men."

"Where Mr. Henderson goes I must go," said Kenneth; "for I may not meet him again for six months, or perhaps longer, and must make the most
of the lucky chance that favoured us today.”

“Then you are strangers to each other?”

“This morning we were, but never mean to be so again,” said Mr. Henderson.

So with thanks the two strangers went each on his business, leaving Miss Gray and her friend Sybil to return to the plants in the greenhouse, which they had left to speak to the new arrivals.

“It is a pity papa has such a dislike to old Mr. Oswald and his still more objectionable son, for I hear everywhere that this nephew is of a very different stamp,” she said to Mrs. Ellerton.

“He looks wonderfully like a gentleman, certainly, Edith, and the tales I have heard your brother and Mr. Gray tell about Mr. Oswald and his wife and his son Jim make me think they must be the most uncouth beings on the face of the earth.”

“To you, Sybil, I know some of our subtle distinctions as to the social position of Victorian settlers must appear very far-fetched; descended as you are from a long line of Highland chiefs, who can trace your genealogy almost to the Flood, you cannot appreciate my pride in my father, the son of a clever country surgeon, who was your great grandfather's family practitioner, and he himself the son of the minister of the parish, who got the presentation of the church from a previous generation. To have been descended from three or four generations of tolerably well-educated people is quite distinguished ancestry hereabouts. The blue blood of Australia flows through my veins.”

“It is not bad ancestry anywhere,” said Mrs. Ellerton. “I suppose your father could buy up our Highland estate many times over.”

“But he could not buy the ancestry, Sybil. If old Mr. Oswald, for instance, bought it, and entailed it on that odious son of his, how many generations would it take before the plebeian blood would work out.”

“It would depend greatly on the distaff side of the house,” said Mrs. Ellerton.

“Heaven help the lady who sought to ameliorate the race by an alliance with James Oswald,” said Miss Gray. “The nephew certainly looks more hopeful. There the distaff has come in, no doubt. His mother must have been as much superior to her husband as old Mr. Oswald is to his wife. Something might have been made of the old man if she had been even equal to him; I like his face very much. I mean young Mr. Oswald's. As for the bush missionary, his countenance is wonderful.”

“I saw nothing so surprising in it,” said Mrs. Ellerton.

“I tell you I could sit and watch it for hours. Did you ever see such eyes, such a far-away light in them, and the smile when he said he was sure I
would thank the men for their invitation. Ah! I know he knows I respect those whom my father employs, and would be more careful of their feelings than of those, like you, who can afford to look down on me as a blunderer of a bear. But how did he know?"

“You make a great deal out of a little, Edith.”

“You will come with me to hear him to-night. I want to know how he speaks to the men.”

“He may be a ranter, Edith, though he does not look like it; only how can he take hold of your shepherds and hutkeepers without something that is sure to offend your fastidious taste?”

“Even suppose (which I do not allow) that he is what you would call a ranter,” said Miss Gray, “I want to know what it is that impresses the masses, for it is clear enough to me that our scholarly and gentlemanly clergyman never got near them. I like that idea of his, that he will live with those ignorant rough men, share their fare and their talk, and not be eager for attention and hospitality from us. Just think of the difference between this procedure of his and that of the clergyman we had here holding service, as he called it, three weeks ago; helping me with my trumpery pot-plants, going out driving and shooting with Walter and Mr. Ellerton, and playing billiards with your husband when he was not hanging over your singing in the drawing-room. And on Sunday he calls all the hands in, that are not out on necessary business, all washed and trimmed, to hear him read prayers out of a printed book and then he hurried through a short sermon, which, whether he wrote it or not, he certainly read as if he rather disbelieved it than otherwise, and dismissed then with an unctuous blessing delivered in ex-cathedra style. He never looked near them before nor afterwards, but said to me what a pleasant place. Wilta was, and how much gratified he would be to do duty there again.”

“You are rather hard upon the poor man. He wanted to make himself agreeable to you, Edith.”

“He was very much out in his reckoning, then. Now, this man's face is so sagacious, so kindly, so earnest. I shall go whether you do or not. I feel as if his religion was real, not mere cloth, or gown, or surplice. Do you not hate to hear that profession which ought to be the most sacred of all called "the cloth?”

“I shall go with you, Edith. I'd like to see where the men live.”

“Papa is sure to go; he does everything I ask him.”

“So he does,” said Mrs. Ellerton with a sigh.

“I am the only girl he ever had, and the youngest, and of course a spoiled child, especially after my dear mother's death. You were the eldest girl of a family of many sons and daughters.”
“Yes; but I suppose I was spoiled too. Nobody had such a father as mine was and is. You must wonder how I could leave him to go halfway round the world.”

“Yes, I sometimes do, though you must recollect that the most of our people have done that. It does not strike me as so inexplicable.”

“I am glad you are not shocked at me.”

“You were very young, Sybil, and that is some excuse.”

“If Mr. Ellerton could get into any settled way of life, I should feel that it would be easier for papa. Herbert, you know, was disappointed in his expectations from his own friends and from mine, and he suddenly made up his mind to come to Australia, where he thought he had influence. You know you are the best friends we have ever had, and even Mr. Gray, who is kindness itself, does not see any opening.”

“Do not be so impatient. In the meantime, it is perfectly delightful to have you here for an indefinite period, and the opening will be all the more welcome to you when it does come. Personally, I shall be very sorry indeed to lose you — even for your own good.”

“And I to lose you, but somehow I feel as if I should never lose you altogether. Wilta is that hospitable home where those who have once been admitted seem to have a prescriptive right to return, and I may yet have a home to welcome you to, who knows? And when you go on your European tour which is talked of, and go to see my people, I wish — I wish — but it is of no use wishing ——”

“It is a great use wishing, Sybil; whatever I wish for I always get, either from papa, or Walter, or it may be sent from Charlie, or Robert, or Harold.”

“Oh, yes, that sort of wish, for a horse, or a carriage, or a set of ornaments; but my wishes are not quite so feasible.”

When Mr. Gray and his son accompanied by Mr. Ellerton, returned from their drive in time for dinner, they heard of Kenneth Oswald's errand with regard to the ewes, and of Mr. Henderson's mission to speak to the men. The invitation for the family came in due form. Mr. Ellerton laughed at the idea of going to hear some howler hold forth in the men's kitchen in an atmosphere redolent of a mixed odour of supper, tobacco smoke of the rankest flavour, and dogs, not to speak of the men, and that not on a Sunday when things might be better; and he challenged Walter Gray to a game of billiards, which was accepted. Mr. Gray himself said he would accompany the ladies and the house-servants, who made a considerable addition to the small congregation.
Chapter 18 Supper and Talk in the Men's Dining-Room

Kenneth knew well what sort of quarters his new friend had chosen, when he declined for himself, not only the timidly-proffered hospitality of Miss Gray, but the hearty and reiterated invitation of the overseer to join him and a few travellers of the better sort in the dining-room of the Bachelor's Hall, where the fare would be better, and the accommodation superior. But his desire to see how David Henderson would make his way with the rough station hands, and his reluctance to lose any of his conversation, made him cling to him as closely as possible. And he was not disappointed. Instead of addressing his talk to the educated man sitting beside him, he joined in all that was said by the most illiterate, and encouraged the most sulky and shy to speak, by the evident interest he took in what they had to say. As, however, many of our readers may not be so familiar with a bush kitchen as Kenneth Oswald was, it may be well to give some description of this at Wilta.

It was somewhat larger and better than that of Tingalpa, but differed little in style or comfort. It was a long low room, the walls made of pine slabs stuck upright, and the crevices filled up with clay held together by wattles about six inches apart, with a shingled roof, unceiled, and a clay-floor well beaten down by the tread of many feet. There was a vast chimney at one end where the meals were cooked, and with cooking utensils for ornaments at the end of the room, and rows of nails from which tin pannicans had been taken, which were now laid on the table for the evening meal. At the further end the walls were hung with woodcuts taken from illustrated papers, renewed occasionally as something special took the men's fancy, or as the smoke and flies made the old ones somewhat dim.

All down the centre of this room extended a long table of four boards, which was supported on ten legs of sawn timber with the bark on, at equal intervals. Round the table were strong benches without any backs, supported in the same way on numerous short stumpy legs of sawn saplings. There was, of course, no tablecloth and the knives were merely wiped but never scoured.

The table was meant to accommodate about seventy men, and at shearing time it was too small for the requirements of that busy season. At the present time it was little more than half-filled, although shepherds, boundary riders, stock keepers, knockabout hands, and two Cornish well-sinkers were mustered for the evening meal, as well as two or three travellers, besides Kenneth and the missionary.
There was not a coat upon any back but those of our two friends; most of the men wore waistcoats, but several were satisfied with the guernsey or the crimean shirt and trousers, which were worn without braces, but kept up by a belt round the waist. Hats of every description and of every degree of shabbiness and dirt were thrown off anywhere as they entered the room, the true cabbage-tree, however grimy, as being the dearest and the most serviceable being thought the best, and each man took his accustomed seat as the best way to prevent unpleasantness.

The room was lit up by the real old-fashioned bush candelabra. Neither oil nor kerosine had as yet disturbed the reign of the three old-established fat-lamps, which, suspended from the rafters by a twist of fencing wire, shed a soft, if somewhat dim, light on the table. The lamps were constructed of the upper half of clear glass bottles, broken off quite smooth, and corked firmly as if to hold in good liquor, half-filled up with water and then filled to the top with melted tallow, in which a thin piece of cork bored and covered with tin floated, and through that was drawn a cotton wick or any old rag that would conduct the fat, which the heat kept melted all round the cork to feed the flame. The twisted fencing wire clasped the neck of the bottle, which was turned upside down, and was kept firm by its shoulder.

At the long table, at which between thirty and forty people were assembled for the most leisurely and satisfactory meal of the day, there was no lack of substantial food. There was mutton roasted, or rather baked, and mutton boiled, both salted and fresh. There was one large pie made of meat. There were no condiments but salt and pepper, and nothing to drink but tea without milk. There was good bread in abundance, because the old days of universal damper have given place on all well-managed stations to a regime of well-raised bread, baked in a huge brick oven where also the mutton and pies were cooked. And as Wilta boasted of a splendid garden, it was one of the few stations where there were green vegetables on the men's table nearly all the year round, and potatoes without fail. This made Wilta a favourite place, both with station hands and swagmen, the latter of whom were indeed a great tax upon Mr. Gray's hospitality. But he never wanted for hands, either permanent or occasional. Men liked to be engaged at a place where the pay was as good as anywhere, and the “tucker” better than anywhere else. The tea was not the sweepings of the tea shops, the sugar was bright and clear, though not absolutely white. The flour was sound, the mutton killed for the station was Mr. Gray's own average quality and not something inferior considered good enough for the men, and above all, Mr. Gray and his daughter saw that the cook did not spoil good food by neglect. And it was the boast at Wilta station that there was no functionary
of the kind in Victoria better qualified or better paid than Tom Coppers, of whom they spoke in a more subdued tone of respect than of Mr. Gray himself, or of his sons or any of his managers.

It would have been equal to a social revolution if the Grays had floored or ceiled the dining-room or sleeping-room for the men's use, and no one expected better quarters than they got at Wilta. In one respect Mr. Ellerton had exaggerated the amount of discomfort in the men's dining-room for more refined beings. There was undoubtedly the smell of food and of tobacco smoke, and the men had only their everyday clothes, but there were no dogs under the table gnawing bones or eating scraps from their master's plates. These were all fed elsewhere, and after their supper would be found to have taken up their quarters for the night in the sleeping-room, and were often tied to their own master's bed. The dormitory where David Henderson also purposed to sleep, was not at this season of the year crowded any more than the dining-room. Of the two tiers of beds erected there ship fashion, only one tier was occupied; the rough berths, made of the most easily worked native wood by a bush carpenter, had each a mattress and a bolster and a pair of blankets. Sheets were an unheard-of luxury in these quarters. The boundary riders kept their saddles in the sleeping-room, and each man had his kit of clothes close to his own bed, a very slender wardrobe at the best of times; but this religious service of Mr. Henderson's was so improvised, that there was neither time nor opportunity for the station hands to dress for it, and they were a little taken aback when they were asked to invite Mr. Gray and his family to join them. They, however, could not make any decent objection, and a very civil message was sent. Probably they thought it would not be acceded to, as it must be known that they were not dressed.

With the bush missionary himself, they all felt perfectly at ease. From the poor boundary rider with the broken leg, who had been carefully carried in by Mr. Henderson and Kenneth, and laid on a colonial sofa, to the latest comer, Donald McTavish, all felt no necessity for restraining their speech before him. He ate with them off their tin plates, and drank out of their tin pannicans, and praised the cook, who was somehow so identified with the men, that each took part of the credit to himself. He did not insist on asking a blessing, or returning thanks, though Kenneth observed a short pause in which he must have been mentally engaged on such acknowledgment to the Giver of all good. He knew that hungry men are generally impatient of grace, whether short or long. When an oath slipped out, which was too often the case, he did not raise his eyebrows or look horrified. The Cornish wellsinkers, who were Primitive Methodists, thought he was a queer missionary, but the bulk of the company thought him the right sort, and
when after supper was ended, they all went in for the still more keenly relished enjoyment of smoke and talk, he smoked his pipe in the midst of them with a quiet, genial good-fellowship that made one and all eager to talk to him.

Kenneth had long ere this learned the value of tobacco as a sedative, and it had helped him through some of his heaviest hours, but he never seemed to have seen so well into the thoughts and wishes of the men on stations as in this evening in the men's kitchen at Wilta.

The talk ran much on horses and dogs, especially on dogs. Every man had a dog, or had had a dog, or had known of a dog that was remarkable for something, and even Donald, the most Highland and perhaps the most ignorant of the shepherds on the place, had something to say about a “doag of his own” which he was just beginning when Mr. Gray entered with the young ladies and the servants. There was a little disturbance to make room for them opposite the missionary and Kenneth, but Miss Gray had caught the begun narrative, and Mrs. Ellerton's ears were delighted with the familiar accent, and they entreated Donald to finish his story or rather to begin it again, and thus encouraged, he struck out afresh.

“You wass wanting to know about my doag, Miss Gray, that I was telling this gentleman that will be delivering himself with preaching, and Mr. Kenneth, which is a very goot Highland name whatever, and when the master's daughter and a lady from the North asks me to go on wuss it, I must be telling you about it though it keeps back the preaching.

“But you'll know, that I was keepin' the Isles for the master, and he wass sending the English gentlemen over ebery year to shoot the paitricks (partridges) on the Isles, wuss his gun, you'll know. And wan day there comes a fine young Engliss gentleman that thought to pass for a Highlander, wuss his kilt and his trews, but he was no Highlander, nor no gentlemen neither whatefer.

“So he calls out loud to me to get out the poat you'll know, wuss the lads, for him to get over to the Isles to shoot the paitricks. And the Engliss gentleman, when I wass gitting out the poats, and my doag — it was a big Foundland new doag — wuss a tail as long as that,” and here Donald extended his arm, and touched it above the elbow, “as long as all that, ebery bit; and when the Engliss gentleman wass gitting into the poat, wuss his gun, you'll know, he strampit on my doag's tail, and then my doag, he wass not pleased, you'll know, and he bit the Engliss gentleman on the leg, and he roared out with pain. ‘Tonald,’ says he. ‘Sir’, says I. ‘Tonald,” says he; ‘I'll frequent your master wuss thus.’ ‘I don't care that’, says I, and I snapped my finger in the Engliss gentleman's face, ‘if you frequent my master wuss it or no.’ And for a fortnight, that Engliss gentleman wass on
the Isles, and shooting the paitricks, and he would have my doag shut up all the time whatefer, and when there wass whaskey all the day in his bag that he made me carry for him, he never wance said to Tonald, ‘Tonald, have you a mouth?’ never wance whatefer.

“And when the maister his nain sell came to the isles and he wass coming wuss me and the lads in the poat, says he to me, ‘Tonald,’ says he. ‘Sir,’ says I. ‘It's a fine morning, Tonald,’ says he. ‘It's a fine large morning, Sir,’ says I. ‘What's this I hear Tonald?’ says he. ‘Wat's is it you'll be hearing, Sir?’ says I. ‘What for Tonald,’ says he; ‘will you keep a doag that will be after biting the gentleman's leg that I send to the Isles,’ says he, ‘to shoot the paitricks’ says he. ‘It's very bad manners whatefer,’ says he. ‘Sir,’ says I, ‘de you see that plack snail that is lying upon the ground,’ says I. It wass a large plack snail. ‘Yes, Tonald,’ says he, ‘I see the snail upon the ground,’ says he. ‘Well, Sir,’ says I, ‘if you wass to be stramping on that snail, it will be putting in its horns, and if the Engliss gentleman will be after stramping on my doag's tail, he will be putting in his teeth,’ And the maister says, ‘Well spoke up Tonald,’ says he to me, and he gave the orders that my doag would be let out, and that the Engliss gentleman should not never stramp upon his tail no more whatefer.”

“And what became of the dog?” asked David Henderson.

“Oh! he died, they said it was old age, but he was not so fery old neither. And then I was talked ofer to go to Milburn, and here I'm up the country, where there's no shooting and no fushing and no lads wuss the poats. Ohone; but I'll not delay the preaching, whatefer,” and setting himself down next to Kenneth, he fixed his eyes on David Henderson with an interest no one had seen in the face of the little dark, wiry, Highlander before.
Chapter 19 Worship in the Men's Dining-Room

The Seer stood up to pray, and as each and all rose with him there was impressed on them the irresistible conviction that he was addressing One in whose existence, in whose immediate presence, in whose controlling power he intensely believed. It was no vague phraseology of adoration and petition, according to established form or routine, but a real laying of the present wants, aspirations, and repentances of the little knot of worshippers before the God who was waiting to hear, to help, to accept, to comfort them. From Donald up to his master and to Kenneth, from the housemaid to Miss Gray and Mrs. Ellerton, he seemed to touch some chord to which they responded. It was common prayer in the rarest sense, not because the words were so general that they must apply vaguely to all, but because he touched each soul with an intense motion, awoke in each a desire, more or less evanescent, after a union with the Divine, rose from the transitory to the eternal, from the duties of every day to the longings for higher powers and worthier service in the long day that was to follow, from the tenderness of our human loves and human memories to the infinite tenderness of the Divine compassion. Unwonted love warmed the heart, hope grew out of the love, hope blossomed into faith, and the unrealized world appeared for the time to be the most real thing in existence.

David Henderson's voice, though solemn, sweet, and penetrating, was not powerful enough to fill a large building, and therefore he could not have affected in a similar way a large congregation. But he gathered into sympathy with him such assemblies as this in a manner impossible to an ordinary preacher. He occasionally allowed his voice to sink to an impressive whisper which nevertheless was quite audible to such a handful of interested hearers.

When he had finished the prayer and the little band of worshippers had sat down, he began his exposition.

“Now, my friends, let us look together into a part of the message which is contained in this book,” taking out his pocket Bible. “In your mind's eye will you go back with me more than eighteen hundred years, and try to read this wonderful story, not like mere printed words in a book, but taking in the life and death of our Lord as a life that you see lived, and a death that you look upon from the foot of the cross.

“It is the night of betrayal. The Lord is going to eat the last Supper with his twelve Apostles. He has sent his orders, and the master of the house is very friendly and proud no doubt of the honour done him by one he believed to be the Messiah.
“If you look with me, you will see the Supper spread in an upper room, the Master and the Apostles go up the stair, take off their wooden sandals, and sit down after their day's work and long walks, not on chairs, but on low cushions round the table. Then you see the Lord and the twelve around him, all poor working men. The chief of them all had been only a carpenter working in Joseph's shed with working men's tools, weary with the day's work, and pleased if he had done it well. Of all the relics that some of our Christian brethren in the Catholic Church (here the Irish housemaid and stable boy and two or three others looked up eagerly) find to kindle their devotion I have had most desire that something could have been preserved for us to look on that the Lord Jesus had made with his own hands, had put honest loving work in it, and so to show by his example to the toiling generation who come after how Divine a thing labour is. In that carpenter's workshop I like to picture to myself the holy family that painters and poets have looked on with different eyes. And those twelve Apostles, all poor unlearned men, with hands hard with hauling fishers' nets, and managing their poor boats, the richest of them, Matthew, the most despised, because he had been a tax-collector for the hated Roman Government. I dare say the priests and the Scribes and the Pharisees had many a good laugh over the thirteen men who were going to overturn the world, and thought the number was a unlucky one for their hopes.

“You see the youngest of them all sits beside the Lord, and leans upon his breast in the Eastern fashion. But now they are eating the Passover, and see they eat all standing with their sandals on, the staff in the hand, and their long garments gathered up in their girdles, as if ready to start on their journey. They eat with their fingers, you see, the lamb is roasted whole, and there is nothing to accompany it but bitter herbs and the unleavened bread, which was typical of the haste with which their forefathers had left Egypt at the time of the great deliverance.

“But who is this who is watching at the door? shaded from the light of the full moon of the Passover under a projecting archway. Is he a friend or an enemy? Surely he must be a friend, who looks up and down the street with eager eyes, and listens intently for every word which may be heard in the stillness from that upper chamber. It is some one who has felt that there is trouble in the air of Jerusalem, whose quick ears may have heard mutterings or threats from people in high places, and who takes his watch to-night, in order to call friends round his Lord in case of any attempt to seize him. Some one whom the Lord has served or cured — yes, surely ye know him again, he is one of the two blind men who sat by the wayside begging, and whose heart was full of love and gratitude, and vague fear for the safety of the Master and his band.
“He scarcely stirs from his post by a hairsbreadth, because his ears, made quicker by a lifetime of blindness, catch great portions of that wonderful discourse which Our Lord poured forth to comfort and to strengthen his weary and dispirited disciples. He hears the preparation for washing the Apostles' feet, and Peter's vehement protestations that he could not have his Master demean himself so far, and his equally vehement entreaties to have his hands and head also washed by those Divine hands. But the voices sink to a whisper, he cannot hear the enquiries about Judas, and the reply, for that was only given to the beloved disciples. But the Lord's command, given aloud to Judas in the hearing of all, 'What thou doest, do quickly,' he fully apprehends, and he hears the steps, and recognises the face of Judas Iscariot, known to all, to even the humblest disciples as the treasurer of the slender funds of the first Christian Church who received and laid out the gifts of the faithful.

“Judas starts to see the watcher there. Had he been forestalled in his treachery? Was there any other whom the chief priests were tampering with? ‘Who are you?’ he asks sharply. ‘A friend,’ said the humble watcher. ‘One whom the Lord gave sight to,’ and with eager hand he offers to Judas a silver coin as his first gift to the good cause. Formerly he begged by the wayside, now thanks to the Lord he could work, not skilled or well-paid work, but still he could carry burdens or go errands for small sums, and now when Judas was going on his Master's business, he rejoices to pay in his mite — Judas puts the coin into the bag, and with a muttered acknowledgment goes his way. His dark eyes are cast moodily down, his cap is pulled over his head, his hand tightened over the bag, his step quick, impatient, and defiant.

“What thoughts are passing through that troubled soul? Can he really foresee that his action will bring his Master, whom he had followed as long as any of the others, whose works he had witnessed, whose discourses he had listened to with pleasure, nay, he is sure with profit — to a terrible and shameful death. No, he feels that he can get the thirty pieces of silver from the chief priests, but they will not attain their end. The thousands of the people who hailed him as the Son of David a few days ago will rally him, and drive off his enemies, or he will exert for himself that superhuman power he had so often exerted for others, and would strike his foes with terror and shame, and be all the greater for the betrayal, which was really needed to make him declare himself fully.

“He argues within himself that if he had not agreed to do it, there were others who knew the Master's haunts as well as he, who might have been glad of the offer. Peter with his boasting, might have been talked over as he had been — he does not see why the Lord should think so much of Peter
and John and James. In what way were they any better than himself? If they had had the bag they would have muddled it finely. Why, that old blind beggar at the door might have done for the chief priests what he Judas had not yet quite made up his mind to do. The thirty pieces of silver was a mere spoiling of the Egyptians; as well Judas got them as another.

“Our simple-minded watcher, however, knows none of those thoughts which that dark-browed man is trying to quiet his conscience with, for at the back of all his hollow excuses, he knows that he is guilty, and that his besetting sin of greed has got hold of him. With the coin in his bag and the blessing of the old beggar on his head, he moves out of sight, to do the deceit that damn's him to everlasting fame with all the generations who come after, and again the listening ear is intent on the sounds that proceed from the upper chamber. What is this he hears? the first celebration of the Supper, which after eighteen centuries of change, and making and destroying of peoples and governments, is still the most sacred religious observance among countless millions of human beings, in realms where the Roman eagle never flew, undreamed of by Roman, Jew, or Greek. He hears nearly all of that Divine address of consolation which we have recorded here,” and the seer holds up the Bible open at the 14th Chapter of John's Gospel, “the quietness of the ignorant and doubting disciples, and the Lord's patient and encouraging replies. Surely for him may be prepared a humble place in those many mansions of which the Master speaks. To him would He be the Way, the Truth and the Life. He who would gladly do whatever the Lord commanded, would be numbered not among his servants, but his friends. Surely he too had his share in the prayer which the Lord offers for His disciples, then and elsewhere, then and hereafter, which he offers for you and for me, my friends, as well as for the twelve who heard it, not that we should be taken out of the world till our time is accomplished, and our earthly work is done, but that His Father and our Father should keep us from the evil that is in the world, and that we should be sanctified, not by forms or words or ceremonies, but by God's truth.

“As last the prayer is ended, and the watcher hears the descent of the Messiah and his followers, and creeps into the darkest shadow that he may unobserved see the object of so much grateful devotion. First comes the Saviour himself, with the rapt look on his face left by that wide-spreading and prevailing prayer, and with the expectation of Judas' treachery, and his disciples' weakness filling his mind. To the plots of his powerful enemies, Sadducee and Pharisee, priest and Levite, whom His boldness had alarmed and irritated, He had nothing to oppose but that half-hearted populace who had hailed Him as the Messiah yesterday, but who, at the first sign of submission on His part, will swell the chorus of ‘Crucify Him, crucify
Him,’ for this is not the Messiah they look for, who gives His cheek to the smiter, and is led like a lamb to the slaughter.

“Close beside Him walks Peter, speaking with the old confidence so soon to be shaken; on the other side John, silent, with his eyes fixed on the beloved Master, and in his thoughts recalling every word spoken on that memorable night. James, afterwards leader of the church, behind them speaking to Thomas, about the question and answer concerning the way. All the others in a compact band (so soon to be scattered before real danger), recalling the glory and the honours heaped on them so lately, and sure that in spite of some threats from a few mighty ones, that the great heart of Israel was true to this Greater Son of David and would rise to defend Him at any time of need.

“They do not look for what to devout Jews seemed too horrible to conceive, that their national and religious leaders would apply to the hated Roman power to crush the reformer whose rousing preaching had started them in their strongholds of decent forms and hollow hypocrisy. They have some fears that the priests, who were mostly Sadducees, may oppose one who said, ‘Mercy was better than sacrifice,’ or that the Pharisees may stir up the rigorous sticklers for the law against one who said that love was the fulfilling of the law, and that Herod and Pilate may take alarm at the crowds who had wanted to take Jesus by force and make him a King; but such an alliance of three parties who hated and opposed each other, for the purpose of crushing their Master and stifling the new spirit which had been breathed into the world, they cannot dream of.

“Our watcher does not take in the full peril of the situation. The traitor has passed him unsuspected, the faithful disciples appear to him like a strong bodyguard. The Saviour himself calm and collected, resolute to do and to bear whatever was laid upon Him by his Father, inspires His humble followers with courage and hope. He feels how blessed he is that he can see with his bodily eyes the Messiah long promised to the fathers. He believes they are safe out of this house, which may have been marked and known, but he follows them, creeping along the shaded side of the narrow crooked streets of Jerusalem, while they walk forth in the glorious moonlight. The windows are open, and all along they hear the evening hymn floating in the air, the Passover hymn taken from the 118th Psalm ending with —

God is the Lord, who unto us
Hath made light to arise;
Bind ye unto the altar's horns
With cords the sacrifice.

“The disciples and the Saviour and even the watcher on the other side catch up the triumphant strain and join in the final verse, commemorating that the Hebrews had light in their dwellings while the Egyptians were in thick darkness, and the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb, which typified the sacrifice so nearly ready to be offered. But see, they pass to one of the gates of the walled city of Jerusalem and take their way to the Mount of Olives, and the Garden of Gethsemane, towards which our Lord steadfastly turns His eyes. While feeling that for this night at least they are safe, our watcher can keep silence no longer, and the pent-up feelings find vent in the ejaculation ‘Oh! my Lord, may God bless thee,’ and with the blessing of one that had been ready to perish on his head, the Saviour of the world marches forth to betrayal, to death and to victory, while the watcher seeks his humble couch and sleeps with the peace of heaven in his heart.

“And how many blessings since then have risen to God through this wonderful life and death of Jesus Christ. How much of heaven has He brought down to us! Oh! my dear friends, what I want you to see as I see it is not merely that you need a heaven hereafter, or that you must escape from the threatening terrors of hell. It was not only to reveal such things that the Saviour walked this sinful earth for thirty years and more. Self-righteous Pharisee and formal priest could speak of that. It was to lead us to the heaven of doing God's will on earth, a heaven that if you once entered, you would find all other pleasures worthless in comparison. If God's will is only done on earth as it is in heaven, then heaven is begun for you, and for me, and for all men. And when I see what poor lives most of us make of it, work day after day without heart and soul put into it, that makes heavenly work of the meanest honest employment — pleasure that God and man forbid, wasteful and foolish, selfish, sensual or devilish, on which we so often spend the wages of this joyless work, I feel as if I wanted a hundred tongues of fire to kindle some sort of Divine life in you, to speak everywhere and to every man of how noble, how helpful, and how blessed this life of ours could be made, if we only worked in God's way, and rested in His love. But I can only pass from place to place, and feebly drop here and there the earnest words that burn into my very soul — here a little and there a little, but all as it were a mere nothing in the great wilderness of the world. Only if each of us does the little that he or she can, some with money, some with speech, some with writing, some with influence, and every one among us with one soul to bring into union with God and His Christ, we shall do something to add to the goodness and the happiness that He lived and died to purchase, and to take away from the
evils and the miseries of life — and so be fellow-workers with the Creator Himself.

“May we all, masters and servants, learned and unlearned, young and old, be gathered into that fold, that mighty mixed multitude whom no man can number, not merely in another world hereafter, but in this here, and now, as the children of God, and joint heirs with Christ, who in this Divine book reveals us our great inheritance. Amen.”

Just a whispered question to Miss Gray, and an affirmative answer, and David Henderson read out distinctly, twice over, a verse of a familiar hymn to Scottish ears —

'Twas on the night when doomed to know
The eager rage of every foe,
That night in which he was betrayed,
The Saviour of the world took bread.

Mrs. Ellerton led the service of song in a clear soprano of extraordinary power, and Miss Gray fell in with a second. It was wonderful how many of those rough bush shepherds and working men recollected the words so impressively read, and joined with more or less musical skill, but with evident heartfelt enthusiasm. Verse by verse was read out in the same manner till the paraphrase was finished, and then with a prayer still more impressive than the first, for he had got the whole audience completely en rapport with him, David Henderson closed the religious service, which to him and to those he led was emphatically “worship.”
Chapter 20 Impression Made on High and Low

Whatever thoughts the company had taken with them they had laid aside in an unprecedented manner. Mr. Gray forgot the probable bargain with Kenneth. Kenneth left off wondering what it was in Mrs. Ellerton's face that was familiar to him, and what was the wonderful charm of Miss Gray's, but could not help mentally indulging in one wish that his friend Harry Stalker could have been with them in this primitive conventicle. Edith Gray forgot her speculations about Kenneth, and the missionary himself, and watched with him at the door of the house when the revolutionizers of the world took their last meal together in that upper chamber. At the close of the service there were no cards brought out as usual; the men proposed to turn-in at once, and with a gruff, though civil good-night to Mr. Gray, and to the ladies, after Edith had thanked them heartily for their invitation and begged that they would repeat it when Mr. David Henderson returned again, as she hoped he would before long.

“Certainly, certainly, I shall take Wilta in my rounds until you are tired of me,” said he.

“You must come to the house with us,” said Mr. Gray warmly. “I must introduce you to my son Walter, who I am sorry did not join us. We can give you better quarters than the men's dormitory or even Bachelor's Hall. I wish you could suggest something better to be done for the men, and if money is needed or any influence that I can exercise, pray apply to me. And, Mr. Oswald, I was sorry to be out when you came, and so gave you the trouble of waiting, but I have no doubt you think it a privilege to be present at such a religious service as this. I will take no refusal from either of you, you must come.”

“I'll be back with all of you at breakfast,” said David Henderson. “Good-night to you. God bless you all my friends.”

“Good-night to you, Mr. Henderson, and Mr. Kenneth, too, good-night,” said Donald, who lingered the last. “I did not think when I came in late for supper that I wass to be hearing such fine preaching, and such singing of fery good words that cannot be much behind what the angels can be doing. But about Judas, I was always thinking that he was a little man wuss bowit legs and an awful skelly and hair like carrots, but you'll be seeing far better nor me whatefer. And he wass, maybe, no worse nor many a wan of ourselves, who will be taking money for some dirty trick, and will be thinking all the time that the man will never get no good of it. But, maybe, the Lord will not be so fery angert at him after all because you'll see, it had to be done or the defil would be keeping the upper hand for efer and efer,
and the poor man Judas, never got no good whatever of the thirty half-a-
crowns, and he hangit himself, because he was so sorry, and maybe thocht
shame to be lifing on this world when the Master was dead and buried. He
wass not knowing that he will be rising from the grave. He wass not
knowing that it wass all for the best, no, he wass not knowing that, but
after he wass dead he would surely be knowing. And if he wass sorry, he
will maybe be taken into the good place not far ben, but just at the back of
the door. If he wass fery sorry, and wass wishing that he hadn't never done
the dirty trick, for the money that these rogues will be tempting him wuss,
if he wass fery sorry, it would not be just fair to put him into the bad place
where the defils will not be sorry for nothing, only for their ain skin when
it will be fery hot. Iss it not so, Mr. Henderson? You'll see so much in the
good book that Tonald nefer will be seeing, you will surely be seeing
that?"

"Indeed, I hope so, Donald."

"And I will be seeing you in the morning. I will not be going out fery
early whatever."

"I'll be sure to see you."

"Good night. And Tonald is much beholden to you, and to the ladies that
made the place look like heafen for one night."

Walter Gray had said jestingly to his sister that her friend Mrs. Ellerton
made her look plain, and she herself had an idea that the well-born,
carefully-educated, accomplished daughter of a Highland chief, would
make her bush acquirements and accomplishments look very small, but she
rejoiced in her friend's beauty notwithstanding, and was enraptured with
her singing, so that she was required to occupy a secondary place. With
regard to beauty, the styles were so different that it was a matter of taste,
but in regard to intellectual powers and intellectual training, the girl who
had spent her life at a station was very much in advance of the girl who had
been educated at an Edinburgh Institution under competent masters. In the
first place, she was several years older; in the second place, she had been
the companion of her father and her brothers, and of their friends. There
was leisure at Wilta for reading, there was money to buy the best books,
and encouragement for Edith to read what interested intelligent men. She
did not fritter away her existence in morning visits to indifferent people
when there is no getting below the merest surface of gossip, or spend
valuable hours in "doing the block" like the Misses Honey, who found
their father's station unendurable, and gave him no peace till he gave up the
life he loved, for a Melbourne residence, where he suffered from the most
desolating ennui. Edith was the particular friend of the brother next to her
in age, who had recently gone to New Zealand, and whose letters were but
a poor compensation for the loss of his society. Miss Gray was fairly accomplished, but nothing out of the way. Her judgment was good, her principles high, she had a very wide acquaintance with the best of English literature, and she was full of that unspoken poetry which a girl whose heart has been as yet untouched by love, but who is affectionate and imaginative, throws round her family affections, her friendships and her tastes.

Active by temperament, and encouraged in her efforts by her father, she had a strong desire to make every one round her happy. Of course, they were to be happy in her own way, but somehow that personal feeling enters into all the best projects of all young reformers. And the world has been moved most, and that in the right direction, by those who not only saw that good was to be done, but had distinct opinions as to what kind of good they could do. Her interests now were greatly absorbed by Sybil Ellerton, who had left a happy home and an affectionate family, and had married at seventeen a man whose only recommendation appeared to be a handsome person and (when he pleased) a gentlemanly manner; but his looks Edith could not see, and his manners were odious to her, and she wondered if the young wife was not disillusioned after six months of matrimony, or if this was really the man who won the heart of the schoolgirl.

What had attracted him to her was less difficult to guess. Not only was she strikingly beautiful, with a voice of rare quality, but at the time when she was in Edinburgh at school she was living with her grandfather, and reported to be his favourite, and this grandfather was considered one of the wealthiest merchants in the city. Immediately after the marriage, in a commercial crisis, the mercantile house had gone down, and Sybil was only the slenderly dowered daughter of an old Highland family; and Mr. Ellerton, who had run through his own small patrimony, found that there was no opening for him in the old country, and struck out for the colony of Victoria. Sybil had made but little objection, which Edith thought unnatural, unless she had found out her mistake and wished her dearest ones to be kept in ignorance of it. Of several letters which the young couple got to colonial people that to Mr. Gray was the most valuable to them. A home was offered at Wilta for as long as they pleased, and Mr. Gray and his son tried various ways of serving them by getting some opening for Mr. Ellerton. But he was not a business man, and had no look of a business man. In the meantime they lived at Wilta free of expense, and even Ellerton could not help owning to himself that they had “struck oil” there.

The Grays, father and son, treated Mrs. Ellerton with the marked deference due to her position as the daughter of the race of the local
magnates in their old home, as well as with the attentions readily accorded to a young and lovely woman. And whatever may be the faults and shortcomings incident to our social condition, when wealth gets accumulated in strange hands it cannot be said that rich Australians really despise or offensively patronize people poorer than themselves. Watch the society which new comers and outside critics pull to pieces so unmercifully, and you will see that every parvenu rich family delights in and even courts the countenance of people who have not risen, who have even fallen behind in the race, if these people have good characters and some culture, even though the unsuccessful colonists know every step of their own rise from humble beginnings. Much delicate and unsuspected kindness is shown by the prosperous to the less fortunate, which does not find its way into subscription lists or into knowledge of the recipients themselves.

Mr. Gray was a man so liberal in expenditure, and so generous in all ways, even from his early start in life, that some people wondered how he had accumulated so much property. But his outlay in the matter of investments was always most carefully entered into, and prudence in that direction will allow much latitude in current expenses. He never let himself be taken advantage of in a bargain which was to be either kept for income or sold at a profit. He knew the present and prospective value of every description of property by a sort of rapid weighing of probabilities that looked to slower men like intuition. He always had money at command — he could always buy anything that he thought cheap or likely to rise. He was liberal in outlay which promised fair returns, especially in the improvement of his stock, but very cautious about risky speculations under other people's management, and with such simple inexpensive personal habits that superficial observers of another class called him wanting in enterprise, and as close-fisted as his neighbour George Oswald.

Mr. Gray's sons saw that their father's plans prospered, that he gradually bought up smaller holders, that his fair treatment and kind manner to his men secured the pick of the market, and they were satisfied to follow in his footsteps. As they grew up he extended his operations, and they had done some good pioneer work in Victoria before the second son went off to Queensland, and the two younger ones to New Zealand.

He had kept his sons as busy as possible, and endeavoured to give them an interest in all his affairs. The long spells of idleness which are the curse of station life when the improvements are all made, and things have settled down to clockwork regularity in competent hands, had been hitherto undergone by the Gray family without any bad results, partly from this extension of operations before spoken of, and partly because they were
fond of books and of society, and generally contrived to have visitors staying with them to share their leisure, who thought bush life the very perfection of existence. A snatched holiday from the bustle and dust of Melbourne, and the routine of office work, to the freedom and hospitality of Wilta was enjoyed keenly by all friends of the older or younger Grays. A large convenient house, horses and vehicles at command, a good library, a fine piano, a billiard-room, a good cellar, a good cook and magnificent cigars, and a young, handsome, and intelligent hostess, made Wilta something of an earthly paradise to such visitors.

This society, however, consisted more of gentlemen than ladies. Edith Gray's education had been conducted by a governess at home, and she had made no school acquaintances, and somehow, although abstractly, she had the highest ideas about woman's powers and woman's field of action, gentlemen were to her more interesting companions than the society-girls she met with in their visits to Melbourne. But though a popular girl with gentlemen, she had had few lovers, partly because she was considered too clever, and partly because she had none of the coquetries in her manner which encourage hopes. Her position at home was such a good one that a man must have thought highly of himself to try to tempt her from it. She called herself a spoiled girl by father and brothers, but as she yielded to their wishes in almost everything, and laid out all her plans in life for their comfort and happiness, she could not have been seriously spoiled. She had never been captivated by any stranger as she had been by Sybil Ellerton, who stimulated her curiosity as to that unknown power called love, which had invested a man so commonplace where he was not odious, with such a halo that home and country, position and independence, had been sacrificed to follow his fortunes.
Chapter 21 David Henderson's Scheme

When Kenneth Oswald, with his new-found friend, entered the drawing-room with Mr. Gray and the ladies, he found a very different sort of evidence of wealth from what had struck his astonished sight in his aunt's glaring room. Everything was soft and harmonious in colouring; there was enough of furniture, but still enough of room to move about, or group together in conversation; and when the two elegant young women, dressed in perfect taste, took their seats at a little work table, under the softened light of a shaded lamp, the whole apartment seemed such a suitable framing for their grace and beauty, that he could fix on no particular point for admiration, the whole was so eminently satisfactory. The room was one that was lived in; there were books on each table, and traces of women's work to be seen. Mr. Gray's newspaper, and the magazine he had been cutting the leaves of lay close to his particular easy chair, and the open piano awaited Mrs. Ellerton's fingers, to go on again where she had left off to attend worship in the men's dining-room.

Mr. Ellerton and Walter Gray came out of the billiard-room when they heard the return of the party. They had been rather eager to ask about the service, but when they heard the voice and saw the face of David Henderson, they recognized the principal performer, and only ventured on the customary greetings of civility to him and to Kenneth.

“You should have been all with us,” said Edith; “you would have been surprised at the effect which Mr. Henderson had over us all. I do not merely speak for myself or Sybil. The most ignorant men there were carried away by what he said to us and for us.”

“Singular that people on such different levels should have been similarly impressed,” said Mr. Ellerton, with an almost imperceptible sneer.

“Not similarly, by no means similarly,” said David Henderson, “but if we could go back to a simpler looking at the facts of history and of life, I think every one would find them somewhat vivifying to himself, or herself, as the case might be. This young lady would put what she heard from me into a very different framework from what Donald the Highland shepherd could do, and if she tried to reproduce it, it would be much more accurately and vividly told; but Donald has got something too. One never knows what good you may do when you do your best.”

“You took a sort of liberty with the sacred text in introducing the solitary watcher at the door,” said Mr. Gray.

“I think I see your reason,” said Edith. “You wished to put each of us into the attitude of that solitary loving watcher; you wanted us to be
watching every sound, to be listening for every footfall, to feel the impending danger, to appreciate the combination of circumstances which the Saviour understood but rose superior to.”

“And perhaps,” said Kenneth, “you wished us to value more the divine discourses which the watcher was straining his ears to catch, and to feel our share in their promises and their encouragements.”

“Not only these reasons, which you are right in saying actuated me,” said David Henderson, “but I always want to know the future history of those obscure and unnamed men and women who were witnesses of that divine life and death. Those who ‘marvelled and went their way;’ those ‘devout women, not a few, who ministered to our Lord of their substance,’ even the nine thankless lepers who were cleansed. Would not gratitude come into their hearts by-and-by? I've often noticed a man accept a kindness with a gruff manner that made you think it an offence, and yet he was not altogether as he appeared.”

“Well, if you took some little liberties with the text, especially in the matter of Judas — which to me is open to doubt — the beliefs of sixty years or more are not overturned so easily; you interested us all, and after all that is the main point,” said Mr. Gray.

“But,” said Edith, “I want to know, and I am sure my father wants to know, what special object you have at heart, which it would be open to us to further, either by money, by influence, or personal effort, or by all three.”

Mr. Ellerton exchanged a glance with the younger Gray. “Always subscriptions, no escape for the rich squatter,” thought he.

“It may not do so much as I would fain hope, but it would certainly do something. I should like to see a Bushman's Club established in Melbourne like what they have got at work in Adelaide, where station hands and shearers could get comfortable board and lodging, and the pleasure of each other's society, and a little innocent amusement, at reasonable prices, free from the curse of drink, and the other dangers of low life in town.”

“There has been some talk about such a Club,” said Mr. Gray, “but it came to nothing.”

“It came to something in Adelaide,” said David Henderson.

“It was started there by an enthusiast, who put his whole soul into it, and got the station hands as well as their masters to co-operate in the attempt, and not merely collected the subscriptions, but himself organized and carried out the thing,” said Mr. Gray.

“Yes,” said Edith, “in order to succeed in any new or difficult undertaking, first catch your enthusiast! And here we have him! Is not this the work you feel called to do, Mr. Henderson?”
“To urge its being done, to give all the powers I possess to stir up others to action, but not to carry it out as ‘William’ has done in Adelaide.”

“He too was a bush missionary,” said Edith, “and won his way to the hearts of all classes preparatory to this work.”

“And now rests in it, which I could not do. Nobody could manage such an establishment worse than I could do. I don't care what I eat or drink, or how I sleep, and might neglect the comfort of my inmates. I am a tool about money matters, and would not keep correct accounts. I believe everybody, and would be cheated by my tradespeople. I need no amusement, care for no excitement, and find it hard to enter into the feelings of fellows who have been leading a monotonous life for a year, and want something vivid and startling for a change. I am just the sort of man who would bring discredit on the best scheme that could be adopted by my faulty administration. And besides, woe is me if I preach not the gospel! Let others serve tables — I have found my work.”

Edith, though first a little disappointed at the rejection of her brilliant proposal, felt that it would be a misplacing of the missionary to set him at the head of even a perfectly organized Bushman's Home.

“But, Mr. Henderson,” said Walter Gray, “a Bushman's Club in Melbourne would not really meet the want. It is only the best of our men who get so far to spend their money. The bulk of those you want to rescue go to the nearest public-house, or to the nearest township. Castlehurst is one fatal stopping-place — there our poor fellows lodge their cheque in the hands of the landlord, telling him to let them know when it is melted down, and return, sick, and sorry, and penniless, after their carouse.”

“There should be another such place at Castlehurst, and at all towns where bushmen, sailors, or miners go for their spell from work,” said David Henderson, “but if we have not one, we can never have a second, I have no objection to making a beginning at Castlehurst.”

“They will never go to such a Club if you insist on their being teetotallers,” said Walter Gray.

“I should not insist on that, but they must get nothing to drink at our Club,” said the missionary.

“Let them lodge their money in the Savings Bank or in the Superintendent's hands as in Adelaide, and have to ask him for spending money. A wise kind word may often check them in their career, and a friendly unprejudiced welcome may bring them back. If they come back after a carouse, it is something that on their waking they have neither the smell nor the sight of drink about the place to tempt them to a relapse. Let it be like a home to the homeless, where books, games, music, tobacco, and, above all, new faces to look at, and new people to talk to, may give
the fillip to the dull, jaded mind which they seek in alcoholic stimulants.”

“I always think,” said Edith Gray, “that all institutions and reading-rooms for working men should contain two or three talking-rooms; it is the talk that refreshes one after mechanical work. I judge by a little experience in the Melbourne Public Library. The ghostly silence, the impossibility of looking up from a book, as I do here to read out a passage to papa or Walter, or as I used to do to Charlie, and ask what they think of it, makes reading there unsatisfactory to me, who have the character of being really fond of books. And I know the way the men talk over the newspaper in the evenings in the midst of the card-playing, and the occasional concertina music is more of an amusement to them than silent reading in a splendid reading room could be.”

Kenneth thought of the solitary reading he had done at Tingalpa, and the woeful lack of sympathy and his almost maddening craving for some living soul to communicate ideas with.

“Yes,” said David Henderson, “it is variety and liberty that they want, and that they fancy they can only get at a public-house. And what comfort do the publicans who fatten on these poor fellows give them in exchange for their hard-earned money? Not decent lodging or well-cooked food, only alcoholic poison made more poisonous often by adulteration and hocussing. What protection do they give them from theft and violence?”

“They seem to care nothing about food and lodging,” said Walter Gray, “when they are on the loose after shearing time.”

“They ought to care,” said David Henderson, “and if it was offered them they would learn to prefer decency to discomfort and dirt. What they want is something like a home, and they can afford to pay for it, if the start were made. It ought to be self-supporting when fairly in working order, only that in the slack season the managers cannot reduce expenses as private individuals can. It must always be open and always comfortable, for half a dozen as for half a hundred. For building and the purchase of the necessary furniture and fittings, richer colonists must be applied to in the first place. In Adelaide that has been done with great success, to the bettering, as I believe, of the feelings subsisting between employers and employed.”

Mr. Gray was rising for his cheque-book.

“I am not collecting subscriptions,” said Mr. Henderson. “I hope to incite one of both classes to make a start. One from the huts and one from the house.”

“With what religious body are you connected?” asked Walter Gray.

“With none specially. I scarcely think I could subscribe to the articles or confession of faith of any religious body which I know of at present.”

“Then you are a universal dissenter,” said Mr. Ellerton.
“Or a universal believer; that would be a truer definition. I can work on any ground with any body, but I am accredited by no defined religious denomination.”

“Like Harry Wynd, you fight for your own hand,” said Edith, “and a good fight you seem to make of it. But where is your head quarters — your home? Excuse my asking such questions, but you have awakened such interest in me. I want to know all I can about your doings.”

“No excuse needed, Miss Gray. I have no settled home and no one belonging to me now. I travel about the country, walking generally, but occasionally I get a lift as I did from my young friend, Mr. Kenneth Oswald, to-day, and good talk besides, which was better. I have not been long in the colony, but I suppose I will end my days here. It seems as if there was good work to be done that I can do, and, while I have sufficient health and strength, I pray God will allow me to do it. It may not be long.”

There was a light in those far-seeing eyes that seemed to look beyond the work to the rest and the reward.

“I suppose,” said Mr. Ellerton, “that you look upon billiards as wicked because they are played in public-houses.”

“No; by no means; no,” said Mr. Henderson eagerly. “The misfortune is that every amusement which a poor man can get by paying for, innocent enough in itself, is surrounded by temptation. What can be more innocent then bagatelle, billiards, or the theatre, well conducted; but what poor man can enjoy them without the alloy of their surroundings?”

“I suppose we should take a lesson from Salt Lake City about the theatre,” said Mr. Ellerton.

“Take a lesson, if it is a good one, from any place or any people,” said David Henderson. “But with regard to billiards, I should like to see, for the first time in my life, a private gentleman's billiard-room, where there is neither betting nor drinking nor swearing; and see gentlemen playing what is really a beautiful game of skill. We should have a billiard-table at our Club if we can afford it.”

“Come in with us, then,” said Edith, “and see how we manage it here.”

* The enthusiast who has worked so long and so successfully in Adelaide, South Australia, under the simple name of “William” has at last revealed his name and family of which most men would have been too proud for concealment. His real name is William M. Hugo, and he is related, not distantly, to the great French poet, novelist, and enthusiastic philanthropist, Victor Hugo.
Chapter 22 A Surprise

Miss Gray led the way into the great resource for idleness in a country house, the billiard-room, where a first-rate Melbourne-made table had elicited the praises of even Mr. Ellerton, who had tried many of the best private and public tables in England.

“Can you play, Mr. Henderson?” asked Edith.

“Not at all, but I have often watched the game. I suppose you do?”

“Just fairly well for a lady, but my brothers all play well, and Mr. Ellerton is a splendid player. Do pray, Mr. Ellerton, just show this gentleman your extraordinary strokes. When I see you I make up my mind for hard practice in private, but something always come in the way. You play, of course, Mr. Kenneth Oswald.”

“A little; my cousin James is very fond of billiards, but my uncle will not build him a billiard-room.”

“That is a mistake,” said Mr. Gray. “I had four sons, and I made early provision for a smoking-room and a billiard-room. Mr. Oswald, with only one son, perhaps did not see the necessity for the latter.”

The party stood all round the “Alcock's” table, and David Henderson had a sight of billiards in private life with two handsome gentlewomen and five gentlemen round it — no — were there five? was Mr. Ellerton, however skilful at billiards, really a gentleman in the true sense of the word? His dress was faultless, his movements easy, his features handsome, his figure well proportioned, but there was that indescribable look about him which the bush missionary had seen among different surroundings; at the card table, when the play was high, and the fair dealing questionable; and again on the betting ring, giving the odds; and again at the billiard table, keeping his head clear when he saw others excited or muddled, and only indulging in excess when no bets were on, or when it was his game to play badly; and taking a hand with the marker to keep up his practice when there was no one available as a profitable antagonist. And this was the husband of this young girl, who had all the air of a high-bred gentlewoman. People are often made and unmade by circumstances, and Mr. Ellerton might be saved by being placed above temptation. With a good wife and easy circumstances, that man might not sink so low as the possibilities suggested to the seer by his eyes, mouth, and expression.

Kenneth too was impressed by the contrast between husband and wife, and curiously fascinated by some haunting recollection connected with Mrs. Ellerton.

“You must be from the Highlands, Mr. Oswald,” said the subject of his
thoughts.

“No, from the Lowlands, from the Lothians,” answered Kenneth.

“Then how did you come by your name. It is a favourite name in our family, but strange enough, papa has such a prejudice against it that none of us is called Kenneth. We all wanted the youngest boy to have the name, but he was as fixed as Ben Nevis, and the little fellow was called Charlie instead.”

“And a very pretty name too,” said Edith, “the name I like best in the world. The brother, who is in New Zealand, who writes to me such long letters, is my Charlie.”

“But there is nothing in the name characteristic of an old Highland family,” said Sybil.

“You would have them all Dugalds and Fergusses and Rodericks,” said Mr. Ellerton, “I agree with Miss Gray that Charlie is much more euphonious.”

“And ‘Charlie is my darling,’ and ‘Bonnie Prince Charlie,’ and ‘Wae's me for Prince Charlie,’ should make the name dear to you,” said Edith.

“It cost us rather dear in old times,” said Sybil.

“Mrs. Ellerton sings those Scottish ballads exquisitely,” said Edith Gray, “and as both Mr. Henderson and Mr. Oswald are from the North Countrie, they ought to hear them.”

“If I can judge of Mrs. Ellerton's ballad-singing from her leading the rude psalmody in the men's dining-room, it must be something remarkable,” said Mr. Henderson.

“Did you really lead the chorus of shepherds and stock keepers, Sybil? It must have been a treat,” said Mr. Ellerton.

“But we must have those ballads if Mrs. Ellerton will be so kind,” said Mr. Henderson, and they returned to the drawing-room.

Mrs. Ellerton sat down to the piano, followed by Kenneth and the others, and she asked the younger stranger to hand her a green book of songs out of the music-stand. He did so, and he was about to open it to lay on the piano when the name in gold letters on the outside, “Sybil McDiarmid,” struck his eye. He nearly dropped the book in his awkwardness. Walter Gray stepped forward to his rescue, and, finding the songs he wished to hear, turned over the leaves as he had been often used to do.

This then was the haunting likeness, not so much to his father as to the fair stripling whose face he had studied on that day when the secret of his birth had been revealed. This was his father's daughter, so near and yet so far removed from him. The name of Kenneth had been already appropriated by himself, and was held sacred by their father; there was a sort of sweetness in that. As Sybil sang song after song, he was just
conscious that it was very beautiful, his lips moved mechanically to say “thank you” at the close of each, leaving the bush missionary to make remarks on the author or the composer, and to express his delight at the spirit and expression she threw into the national ballads. Kenneth’s interest in the visitors of the Wilta family now overpowered his interest in David Henderson and the Grays themselves, though five minutes ago these had been paramount. This glimpse of a life and a society so different from that of his uncle’s house had hitherto been all pleasant, but now the desire to enter it again for its own sake was intensified by the eager wish to see more of his sister, to discover if she was happy, to further her wishes, to serve her in any way. She was far away from her father and her home, apparently united to one inferior to herself, and it might be in his power to do something for her.

Mr. Henderson declined all offers of refreshment, said he was tired and went to bed. Kenneth felt he ought to follow his example, but was detained by Miss Gray, who wanted to ask him how he met with the bush missionary, what they talked of, and how he was impressed with his earnestness and sincerity. All the family spoke so cordially to Kenneth that he had no reason to complain of his reception. When the gentlemen proposed to adjourn to the smoking-room, Kenneth was invited to join them, and as he was anxious to see more of Mr. Ellerton, he accepted the offer.

“The idea of a billiard-table for a parcel of cads of shepherds and shearmen is a splendid absurdity for a crack-brained enthusiast to broach,” said Mr. Ellerton as he was saying good-night to Miss Gray.

“But,” said Edith, “does it not seem hard that we should get all the good things of life, and they get none of them?”

“We get nothing that we do not pay for,” said Mr. Ellerton.

“Papa pays for me,” said Edith looking affectionately at her father. “Supposing that he did not, and that I had nothing but what I worked for, how should I like the limitations of that position?”

“Oh! you have been used to better things all your life — it would be harder for you.”

“I am not so sure of that,” said Edith. “I have had the good things for part of my life, perhaps for that part when I could most thoroughly enjoy them, and I could live partly on the money of the past, whereas the bulk of those people never had them at all.”

“And would not know what to do with refined pleasures if they had them. Did you ever see such a ridiculous figure as your Victorian parvenu and his wife out in society, with no end of money, but absolutely ignorant of how to get the pleasure and the credit out of it? Let people be poor and keep
their place, rather than so absurdly glaring in their wealth.”

Miss Gray could not help thinking that if her father's family had remained in the position in which they had been born, they could not have given so comfortable a home to Mr. and Mrs. Ellerton when they needed it, but she did not say so. She contented herself with the customary — “Good-night Mr. Ellerton, we shall never agree on such matters. Good-night, Mr. Oswald,” and Miss Gray and Sybil left the room.

“I am very glad your uncle sent you to make our acquaintance,” said Mr. Gray to Kenneth, when they were seated together with a cigar in the smoking-room. “I have seen you occasionally with your cousin at Castlehurst, but that young fellow keeps aloof from the settlers' families too much. Mr. Oswald has done well in getting you out from Scotland as a companion for his son, and I hear that you are constantly together. An only son in a house like Tingalpa has many disadvantages, and if you can be like an elder brother to James Oswald you may save his father many a heartache.” Then after a pause Mr. Gray resumed. “I think Mr. Oswald misunderstood something that happened many years ago; a cattle transaction — you may have heard of it. Will you tell him from me that I am particularly pleased that he sent you here on his business, which I have no doubt will be transacted satisfactorily. I hope you may find your way to Wilta for your own pleasure if you have no other errand.”

This invitation was what Kenneth could have wished above all things, but yet it could not be accepted without much hesitation. It would be most offensive to uncle, aunt, and cousin, for him to be received as a favoured guest where Jim was not admitted.

“I rarely go out, and never without my cousin. This is a remarkable exception, as I have come on business.”

“Bring him with you at any time. We shall all be glad to see him, and as there are dogs, horses, guns, and billiards here, he may find it pleasant. Old colonists should be neighbourly.”

This set the invitation on a very different footing, and Kenneth could only hope that Mr. Oswald would put his old grudge in his pocket, and avail himself of what might do more for Jim than all Kenneth's own hard work.

Sleep was impossible to Kenneth after the exciting events of this day. He tossed restlessly about till daylight came in when he dropped to sleep. He was too late for the men's breakfast, which he had purposed to share with his friend David Henderson. He only came in time to hear Donald bidding the missionary an affectionate farewell, presenting him at the same time with two sticks of tobacco.

“The fery best, just to be shmoking when you will be seeing all the fine
sights out of the good book, and to mind Tonald by. It will be put to a better purpose than that piece of silver in the poach of that Scarriot, which wass all wasted, when it might haf peen the pipe of tobacco, and the glass of whiskey for the poor man hisself, after watching all the nicht in the cold, when all of them wass hafing their supper and he hadn't nefer no supper. And then it went into that poach, and wass no good to nobody whathever. But you'll be saying when you will be shmoking this tobacco, ‘Tonald knows not fine words, but he knows good tobacco whathever.’ ”

Mr. Gray's goodwill towards David Henderson's scheme did not evaporate in words; he determined to speak to the other squatters in the neighbourhood, and to look out for another enthusiast with different gifts but the same aims as the bush missionary. Although the latter would accept of no subscription, he asked that Wilta should be the headquarters for receipts for a Castlehurst Bushman's Club.

Kenneth parted from his new-found friend with reluctance, and expressed his hopes of seeing him again from time to time, for though his rounds were extensive, they must work round periodically. Kenneth himself took breakfast with the family, and was placed at table between Miss Gray and Mrs. Ellerton. The meal was made pleasant by intelligent conversation, in which he tried to take his part, and during which Edith could not help observing that he, like all recent visitors at Wilta, seemed so much engrossed by her friend that she scarcely got her fair and reasonable share of attention as the mistress of the house; and the looks he directed to Mr. Ellerton, who was no more prepossessing by daylight than on the preceding evening, amused the young lady a good deal.

Kenneth knew that the Grays, father and son, were pleasant in manner, but he had been warned that they were hard to deal with in business, and he was a little nervous when Walter Gray, said to be the keener hand of the two, proposed to go with him to look at the lot of splendid long-woolled ewes with their lambs that were for sale. He had admired them very much on the previous day, he knew his uncle's limit, but feared it was not high enough; and he knew how strong was the desire to possess them, or George Oswald would not have taken the hazardous step of trusting the transaction to him. He was, therefore, most agreeably surprised when Walter Gray asked as his first price five per cent. under what his uncle was eager to give.

It was necessary to hesitate a little; his uncle had told him that it was essential to every bargain, however advantageous the terms might be that were offered. So he paused to think over it, to consider whether the animals were worth that long price. He looked over the ewes again, to see as to their soundness and perfect condition, but no flaw was to be discovered.
Still his hesitation had some effect on the settler, he offered a considerable abatement, and Kenneth, to his surprise, found that he had closed his first transaction with unlooked-for success.

“You had better come yourself and take delivery when it suits Mr. Oswald, and bring your cousin with you if he would like to come. And if you are not hurried, I'd like to show you some half-breeds that are not for sale, but that are very well worth looking at.” And Walter Gray took Kenneth round the place, where he saw a great deal of splendid stock of all kinds — sheep, cattle, and horses, till it was time for luncheon, when they returned to the house. After luncheon Kenneth took a friendly leave, got into his buggy, and drove home, with food for thought in many directions quite unexpected when he left Tingalpa.
Chapter 23 A Father's Plans

Nothing could exceed Mr. Oswald's delight at the result of his nephew Kenneth's mission to Wilta. The purchase was satisfactory in the first place — more than satisfactory. Kenneth must have a longer head at a bargain than he got credit for to get the better of such a keen hand as Walter Gray. There seemed no chance of a fall in the value of such high-class stock as this in question; the quotations in Castlehurst and in Melbourne markets were quite up to the figures set down by Mr. Oswald as his limit. Kenneth disclaimed any special merit in the transaction, but his uncle was determined to see great acuteness in the way he had out-generalled the seller. He had not given the first price asked, even though it was below his employer's estimate — he had beaten down Walter Gray!

But the reception of Kenneth by the family was even more a subject of congratulation on Mr. George Oswald's part. He had indeed begun to get paid for the money he had laid out on Kenneth's education. Jim, by dint of the inexorable regulation with regard to spending money, had learned to read, to write, and to cast accounts, and his cousin's company had kept him out of no end of mischief. And now this invitation (in which Jim was included) to Wilta, where no one but tip-top squatters and Melbourne lawyers and merchants were ever invited, was bewildering to the old man. What did it mean? What could it mean? It would be the very salvation of Jim to give him a taste for real good society that he could look up to, and when he saw how his cousin got on all through his learning and his love of books, it might lead Jim to take to such things, and keep him out of Castlehurst.

“Oh, Kenneth, I did a good stroke of business when I gave you that errand. And what do you think of the daughter, Miss Gray — Edith I think they call her?”

“Very highly indeed,” said Kenneth, who had really admired her beauty and brilliancy more than his sister's style, but of course was most interested in the latter.

“Is she bonny, Kenneth?”

“Handsome is perhaps the better word.”

“Oh! a fine figure of a woman?”

“Yes; but a very fine face too, with wonderful variety in it.”

“I've heard she is real bonny, and quick and clever with her tongue.”

“Yes, it is her brightness and her earnestness, and the constant changes of expression, that give her her greatest charm.”

“Plenty to say and quick with it? Oh! that's good, Kenneth.”
“She was much interested, as we all were, with that wonderful bush missionary whom I gave a lift to, who held service, or worship as he would call it, in the men's dining-room.”

“We'll have him here when he comes this way. And she can speak to such as him, and to such as you, and to such as me, with a different kind of speech for every one of us. Aye, that's good. And she's no such great catch after all. There's four brothers of them, and they behove to have a bigger share of the property than her. And they were civil, you say?”

“More than civil. They were exceedingly kind.”

“And pressing for Jim to come to see them? Oh! I see. William Gray knows well on what side his bread is buttered. My Jim is my only son, and will come into all I have, and what for should'n a he and the lassie Gray make a match of it?”

“Jim?” said Kenneth in open-eyed astonishment.

“And what for no?” said his uncle vehemently. “The runs lie unto one another, and as I say, he is my only son and heir, and William Gray knows what I am worth nighhand as well as I do myself. Do you think he or his son Walter would hae let me have their five hundred choice yowes at seven and a half per cent. below their worth in Castlehurst market if he had not seen some advantage to himself in it? I can see through a mill-stone as far as my neighbours.”

“But I think Miss Gray herself would have to be consulted.”

“Bless my soul! what could the lassie look for? Ninety thousand sheep, fifteen hundred head of cattle — and would have been double that if it had not been for William Gray, but we must let bygones be bygones — four hundred horses, twenty thousand acres of bought land,” for in his elation of spirits George Oswald was nearly as boastful as when he was drunk. “What in the name of wonder could the lassie want more than that?”

“I am sure she is older than Jim by several years.”

“All the better, Kenneth, all the better, she'll steady him. Did you never hear your grandmother, honest woman, say that she was a thocht aulder than the guidman, and that made the bien (comfortable) house. Oh! Kenneth, man, she's just the woman for Jim.”

“You did not follow my grandfather's example, however. Mrs. Oswald is much younger than you.”

“No, I cannot say I did, but I cannot say that it would not have been better otherwise. But what I'm convinced of is this, Kenneth, that if this lassie Gray had not a penny she'd be a better wife for my Jim than Maria Deane or Tottie Roberts, or any lass he might pick up at Castlehurst, with fifty thousand pounds tacked to her gown-tail. Why, Kenneth, she'd make a man of him. If he took to her and she to him, she'd do more for him than I
can do with all my siller, or you with all your scholarship. You'll no deny that."

"Two very important 'ifs,'" said Kenneth.

"Two grand 'ifs' that I'd give thousands to make realities," said Mr. Oswald. "And you maun help, Kenneth. I look to you to help me."

His uncle's eagerness seemed to the young man strangely misplaced.

"How do you mean to carry on the campaign? Do you mean to recommend Jim to fall in love with Miss Gray as the first move?" he asked.

"No such fool as that; no, that would drive him the clean contrary way. But you'll take him with you for the delivery."

"Of course I shall, if he will go."

"Oh! he'll go; there's a billiard-table at Wilta, and a man that is a crack-player, I've heard of him at Castlehurst. Oh! he'll go to Wilta, you'll take him with you."

"Certainly," assented Kenneth; "I shall be only too happy."

"And if you could just make him think that you had a notion of the lassie yourself, that would be the way to make Jim turn his mind that way. You see he's no to be driven, or even very easy to be led, but he can be worked, Kenneth — he can be worked by a lad with brains like yourself, and the learning you got all through me."

"But I thought you disliked all the Grays, and would strongly object to such a connection," said the puzzled Kenneth.

"And what for did I no like the Grays? Because they are for ever stealing marches on me, buying up here, arranging there, working out smaller men."

"Too like yourself, Uncle, to be altogether agreeable," said Kenneth smiling.

"Just so, Kenneth; and if I am taken, as no man knows his appointed time, how long do you think that Jim would hold his own with such neighbours? Always ready to buy even before he wanted to sell; always tempting with exchange in which Jim would have the worst of it; and Jim would spend and never spare, and he'd be eaten up with smooth-tongue flatterers, bookmakers, and boon companions; ay, and Jezebels of the other sex, with painted cheeks and greedy hands, and ye would see the bonny property, that I've scraped and saved to get, scattered to the four winds of heaven. It seems a lot to spend, but it can be done, and there's no entails in these parts, or I'd tie up the land (at least) so tight that he could not make ducks and drakes of that. But if he was married on a Gray, the whole lot of them would have an interest in keeping him straight and keeping up the property and no hankering after it. And a clever wife like that lassie ye speak of, that doesna aye look the same, but has a new face for every new
turn, and a fresh word and a good laugh whatever happens, has more power for good with the sons of men than the bonniest or the richest woman that can be picked up. So, as I say, if she was nighhand ugly and had not a penny, I'd have that lassie Gray for a wife to my Jim sooner than any other woman alive. And If William Gray does not mean to try it on, he is deeper than I thought, even of him.”

Kenneth was somewhat overpowered by his uncle's eagerness and strong convictions as to the advantages to Jim, but he could not believe in there being the slightest desire on the part of the Grays for such a connection. His cousin's character and abilities were too well known everywhere, and there was to everyone but Jim's own father an enormous intellectual, social, and moral disparity between the thoughtful, pure, generous woman of twenty-two and the lad of nineteen, precocious only in wrong directions. The evident love of the older and younger Gray for their daughter and sister, who was the light of their home, all said “no” to such a supposition as that they could scheme any such marriage for her. He had heard that even to rich men such an estate as that of Tingalpa had charms as great as to the most struggling and impecunious of the rank and file, but surely these gentlemen were capable of seeing that money may be bought too dear.

Still, the unprecedentedly favourable sale of the stock under its value to a tyro like Kenneth was a hard nut for him to crack, and George Oswald himself only looked on it as a piece of deep policy. Whether Walter Gray, by his father's advice, let the young man who was likely to be the go-between in future transactions have a decided advantage in his first bargain — whether it was as a preliminary to an exchange of some land, which was ultimately carried out satisfactorily — or whether, as Kenneth afterwards surmised, the consciousness that the old cattle transaction rankled in his neighbour's mind, induced Mr. Gray to deal handsomely about the ewes — none of these considerations presented themselves to the minds of uncle or nephew at the time, and the bargain long remained an unanswered riddle.

But as for the slightest idea of their darling Edith being connected in any way with any of the Oswalds, it never once entered the brain of the elder or younger man. They had no desire to part with her to any one, least of all to one inferior in every point of view to herself, and they had always congratulated themselves on her being unimpressionable and so far free from love entanglements.

When the young men started to take delivery of the sheep, George Oswald looked after them with still more eager eyes than he had directed to Kenneth on his departure. The turn-out was the same as before, only that there were two fine young men instead of one, and that Jim, who was a
showy if not a particularly safe driver, held the reins.

The cousins were equally well-dressed, equally good-looking in the father's eyes. Though Jim was the lesser, in height and breadth, he was well enough made, and had wonderfully improved in manner and bearing lately — and then he was the heir, and Kenneth nobody, and less than nobody, but for his uncle's generosity.
Chapter 24 A Son's Perverseness

Both young men were received at Wilta cordially. Jim was never quite at his ease in the company of those whom he was obliged to acknowledge as his betters, but the good-breeding of his host did much to prevent his appearing very awkward. In the business matter of the delivery of the sheep, which Kenneth had to conclude for his uncle, Jim had a good deal to say, but he left his cousin to check the numbers, and to commit them into the care of the Tingalpa men who had come up for them, while he took a game at billiards with Mr. Ellerton, and was deeply impressed with his magnificent play.

Instead, however, of taking a fancy to Miss Gray, he neither thought her handsome nor agreeable. She was too sharp altogether for him, and her eager talk about David Henderson and his scheme met with no other response than that the governor was ready to put down pound for pound with Mr. Gray, which his father had commissioned Jim himself to do; leaving to Kenneth to explain the real sympathy which Mr. Oswald felt in the object.

But with Mrs. Ellerton Jim was captivated at first sight. Not only had he the usual shallow fear of a purse-proud youth that he was a great catch, and therefore there was safety in flirting with a married woman; not only was there the additional spice of its being somewhat wrong to covet another man's wife, but the style of Sybil's beauty, her face, her figure, her manner, and her extraordinarily fine voice, all filled him with the greatest admiration. He had been accustomed to scoff at drawing-room music, and to say he liked things always tip-top, and that could be best had by paying for them; but when Sybil sang ballads or operatic music with her clear, strong, highly-cultivated voice, without the adventitious aids of dress or scenery, and simply to give him pleasure, because he asked for the songs, the poor fellow was raised to the seventh heaven of delight.

Mr. Ellerton took the measure of this bush cub at a glance. He was infinitely amused at the impression which Sybil's beauty and voice made on this Victorian specimen of the wealthy lower orders. There was no danger to be apprehended to his domestic peace from anything that such a Lothario could say or do, but there might be great pecuniary advantage if he could hold in hand the only son of a wealthy and ignorant Victorian squatter. And Jim was so transparent in his selfishness and his wilfulness, that he would be easily held in hand by an astute man of the world, without heart and without scruple, like Herbert Ellerton.

The latter spoke of establishing himself at Castlehurst shortly. He and his
wife had already trespassed too long on the kind hospitality of their friends at Wilta. Did not Mr. Oswald think he might do something in the share-broking and commission line, where a man of good address as well as of business capacities was desirable? He was an excellent judge of horse flesh, he had seen all the racehorses of any account in England, and knew their pedigrees and their powers, and he was delighted to see such zeal for the good old English sport of the turf in Victoria. Did not Mr. Oswald think he might go in for buying and selling horses? Now that he had been several months in Australia, and knew his ground a little, did not Mr. Oswald think he might be a match for some of the sharp colonial hands? Only he would be the better of sailing directions from some one who knew who was who, and what was what; from somebody who was intimately acquainted with the ins and outs of station and turf life. The Grays had been exceedingly kind, and had expressed themselves as willing to help and advise in any way, but they were all such steady-going people, they were not up to all the things on which he needed information. Jim's heart swelled at this flattering application to him, as to a young man who had seen life; he was pleased, too, at the marked preference which Mr. Ellerton showed to him over Kenneth, whereas the Grays gave precedence to the elder cousin. Jim had invited Mr. Ellerton to go over to Castlehurst on the following day to play billiards with him, and to be introduced to some horsey people, and also offered to help to choose a horse and to look out for a house, and came home so elated that his father hoped that the turning-point of his life was reached, and that he had fallen in love with Edith Gray.

The little stimulus of jealousy which the old man had suggested to Kenneth's mind to direct Jim's affections towards the desirable party, had somehow been made available in a wrong direction, for Kenneth's natural interest in his sister, his curiosity as to all about her from her husband to her ornaments, and his surprise at the extraordinary influence she was exerting over his cousin, made Jim think that Kenneth's admiration was also directed towards this perfect specimen of English or Scottish loveliness.

Jim, however, kept his own council; he was not naturally frank or open, and his only idea of cleverness was that it was a mark of talent to mislead everybody as to his real wishes and feelings, and if possible to keep them in the dark about his actions too. With this view, he depreciated Mrs. Ellerton, and praised Miss Gray (who would make two of the other), so as to lead his father to think all was well. Jim would not confide in Kenneth of all men, but it was not so easy for him to hoodwink a looker-on as to the true state of the case so deeply interested as Sybil's brother was. Visits to Wilta, with or without pretext, were repeated so long as the Ellertons were
there, and when they left the Grays, and established themselves in a house in Castlehurst, the Wilta visits were all but dropped, and the road to Castlehurst was taken almost daily at Jim's instigation. Kenneth's conviction deepened that his cousin had really been inspired with what was for him a grand passion, which was shown by increased awkwardness, and somewhat more like shyness before the object of it than he had ever manifested before to any one.

Nay more, though it was not virtuous love by any means, though his hopes and aims were bent on seducing this beautiful and innocent woman from her husband, to whom he showed much outward friendship, the desire to please Sybil Ellerton restrained his speech, checked his over-bearing selfishness, humbled his pride of purse, and awoke some ambition in his sluggish soul.

The loud debate grew low,
What was unseemly chastened, and the fear
Of beauty waking her moralities.
Sent through the adjusted limits the long forgot
Ambition to be fair.

He had never before shown himself so docile to Kenneth's instructions or to Kenneth's hints. If Mrs. Ellerton wanted to know anything about which he felt ignorant or uncertain, he would turn to his cousin with a mute entreaty that he would satisfy her curiosity. He enjoyed what she said to Kenneth only less than what she said to himself, and as he considered himself a far better judge of singing and of music than his cousin, because he had heard far more public performers, he thought he could take the wind out of Kenneth's sails there at any rate.

He tried to improve his writing and his spelling, because he might have occasion to write to her — he tried even to read the books she praised, and he felt that he fully appreciated all the songs she sang. When she pointed out a lovely view in their frequent walks or drives, he saw something in it never before seen. He behaved more politely to Kenneth in her presence, because then she would see he was a gentleman, and knew how to behave as such to a poor dependent, even though he had his suspicions about the Argus-eyed watch which his cousin kept on all his words and looks. He improved so remarkably in his general manners even at home, that both father and mother observed the difference. He drank less than he had done since he was fifteen, he kept out of the low company in which his soul delighted, and although for a long time Mr. Oswald wondered at the rarity of his visits to Wilta, it took some weeks to undeceive him as to the motive
of his frequent drives to Castlehurst; for it might have been that he expected to see Miss Gray at her friend's house.

He ransacked the music-shops in Castlehurst, and wrote to Melbourne that he might bestow on Mrs. Ellerton every song and piece of music, which was either new or that she was likely to think good amongst the old. He paid for his pleasure in Mrs. Ellerton's society by heavy losses in every sort of game of chance or skill with her husband, who somehow did not get into business on the Stock Exchange.

The ugliest and most vulgar looking broker, Christian or Jewish, seemed to inspire more confidence in buyers and sellers than this smooth, handsome, gentlemanly man of good English family. Nor did he succeed in horsedealing much better, but his billiard playing was an income to him with such lads as Jim Oswald. The governor, as Jim called him, delighted at the improvement in his son's manners and morals, relaxed his purse-strings freely, and as Kenneth went with him everywhere and there was no open rebellion against such companionship, he thought all was going on well.

Kenneth at last determined to open the eyes of his uncle and aunt to the real state of matters, and got them to yield to Jim's repeated solicitation that the Ellerton should spend a week at Tingalpa. James Oswald knew that Ellerton could not keep away from Castlehurst where business or pleasure, or that sort of play, which for him combined both, engrossed him so much, and he would have Mrs. Ellerton more to himself than at Castlehurst. At Tingalpa too, Kenneth had employments which would relieve Jim of the constant espionage he found so irksome. But his secret was discovered there; the old man was shrewd enough to see where his son's affections were really placed, and he did so to his infinite disappointment and apprehension. In every way it was a fatal attachment for Jim; hopeless for good, fruitful for evil. The husband would pick his pockets on the strength of it, and if ever the wife gave him any encouragement (and it is not to be supposed that the lad's father could see how unlikely that was) Ellerton was just the sort of man to blow out Jim's brains for his presumption.

If Jim drank less than usual, he spent far more, and the old man was not sure if he was paying all his losses out of his liberal allowance. He questioned Kenneth closely, and found that he shared in these suspicions. He impatiently reproached his nephew for being indifferent to Jim's real interests and to his own entreaties. Kenneth could only answer bitterly that no one could possibly feel the misplaced attachment more keenly than he did; that all he could do was to watch that no deadly mischief came of it, that he followed to the letter his uncle's commands to go with Jim wherever he went, and that he could do no more, for Jim was neither to be driven, to
be led, nor to be worked.

Mrs. Oswald had received Jim's friends with her usual languid hospitality. She could not quite understand why Mrs. Ellerton's black alpaca and simple hat, which were such cheap affairs, looked so well on her, but she supposed it was because she was so recently from the old country. Mr. Ellerton was very civil to the old people for purposes of his own, which deceived Mrs. Oswald, but could not have any effect upon her husband, who saw in this smooth-tongued gentlemanly rascal the type of the men who would combine to scatter his hard-won earnings to the winds.

Mr. Ellerton's confidence in his wife's prudence and honour made him feel perfectly at ease with regard to James Oswald. Occasionally a suspicion darted through his mind that Kenneth too was spooning in the same direction, and that might be worse, for he was better looking, and infinitely more intelligent. But it was the talk at Castlehurst that Jim never stirred without his cousin, and though it might have suited Ellerton in some ways to have got rid of him, he felt that the two were a sufficient check on each other when they visited Sybil in his absence. Edith Gray was more uneasy for her friend. She had seen the agitation Kenneth showed in the first instance, and had observed many tokens of watchful affection, nay, to her mind, of passionate preoccupation on Kenneth's part. And to any young susceptible generous man, as she believed him to be, the habitual sight of a woman so lovely, so amiable, so fascinating, and so woefully mismated, was most dangerous.

Now that Mr. Ellerton had fallen into the atmosphere of the Castlehurst billiard tables and the Castlehurst racecourse, he had sunk far lower in the opinion of Mr. Gray and his son Walter than before. Edith did not think that she could think more meantly of him now whatever he might do; but she did not force her friend's confidence as to her happiness. She put a constraint on herself to speak of Mr. Ellerton with respect, and she never heard a murmur or a complaint. Not even the way in which he played off his fascinations on Jim Oswald, which grew to be the talk of Castlehurst — not even the weariness she must feel in the constant visitations of that youth, caused Sybil to utter a word against the husband she had chosen to the friend who would have sympathized with her, and might have helped to shield her. Was Kenneth's society than a sufficient compensation to her for the infliction and the humiliation which her husband submitted to and encouraged? This was a strange surmise to make, but it was nevertheless not improbable.

It had indeed been a painful disenchantment to Sybil Ellerton to find that there was now no tie but duty and appearances to bind her to the husband who had inspired the brief madness of a first love. Every shred of the glory
with which she had invested him had been stripped off, and she now saw the crookedness and meanness of his selfish nature. She privately appealed to him to protect her from the false imputations which James Oswald's devotion might cast on her. But he said it did not suit him to quarrel or break with the young fellow, that the absurd passion he felt amused him, and did not hurt either Sybil or himself. He was not the jealous husband who could not trust his wife entirely.

In these circumstances she appreciated Kenneth's watchful care for her honour and her comfort. She rested on him to an extent that she was scarcely aware of herself. And how did Kenneth feel when brought into such frequent contact with his father's daughter, whom he saw thus repressed, misunderstood, and, but for his guardianship, insulted? Every feeling of family affection, hitherto so starved in his nature, seemed to centre in her. Her situation, so full of pains and of perils, called for his help and counsel either actual or potential, and he soon arrived at the conclusion that if things came to the worst, she would apply to him rather than even to Edith Gray. She was pained at the thought — that Edith should suspect the humiliation of her position, but Kenneth was the daily witness of her husband's carelessness and of his cousin's devotion. Edith's kindness was unfailing and delicate, no doubt; she eagerly pressed her to pay visits of a week at Wilta where she had grown like a part of their own family circle, but Sybil had often to decline because there Jim would follow her, and her friend would see what she had to endure. Still some such visits were paid, and Kenneth could not be too grateful for the break it gave to his sister's hard life, and grew to admire and to love Miss Gray for her thoughtful, intelligent, and affectionate friendship to one so sorely in need of it. It was no small addition to the difficulties of Kenneth's position that all his anxieties and efforts on his sister's behalf were misinterpreted by the woman he was really in love with. Hopeless as his passion might have been under the most favourable circumstances, what prospect could there be for him when Miss Gray had such good cause to think him little better than his cousin? He felt that if he watched Jim, Edith Gray watched himself as keenly and as closely.

If Kenneth could have ventured to tell Sybil of the claims she had on his special affection, it might have been well for both, but when he heard how she worshipped her father, the best man, the noblest, the truest being she had ever seen, known, or dreamed of, when she spoke of her dear mother, of Norman the eldest, the heir to the long line, of her many brothers and sisters, each of whose names he treasured in his memory — and how she was sick with waiting for the monthly letters, and rejoiced over them when they came — he could not bear, even for the sake of sanctioning his deep
interest in her welfare, to cast a cloud over that clear, bright picture on which her heart and soul rested. Any slur cast on her father would give her unspeakable pain.

Her husband never could bear to hear her speak of her Scottish home or her Scottish relations, but Jim could sit listening to whatever she chose to open her mouth about, and during Ellerton's frequent absence Kenneth would encourage her to turn to those topics so interesting to himself. When she showed to Kenneth the photographs of the beloved ones at Castle Diarmid, and of views taken in the neighbourhood, which were not displayed to vulgar eyes, he showed so much interest in each member of the family and in the scenes that, as she said, he deserved his Highland name.
Chapter 25 Two Treasures

One day Kenneth happened to be with Jim in Mrs. Ellerton's little drawing-room at Castlehurst when the mail was delivered. The thick family letter directed in his father's hand was actually put into his own to pass to Sybil. It was more than a double letter; it contained photographs.

"I never saw any one get such lots of letters and likenesses from one house as you get from yours, Sybil," said Ellerton. "You have duplicates and triplicates of every one at Castle Diarmid, I'm sure. You should make a bonfire of the old, they make such an accumulation of rubbish."

Kenneth looked up with a wistful glance. "I'd be glad of some of Mrs. Ellerton's rubbish to fill my album. I have so few friends to send me likenesses."

"And this is a duplicate of my father's and mother's last, taken a short time since," said Sybil. "They seem to forget that Flora sent me them by last mail, along with the children's birthday book, with all their names, ages, and locks of hair tacked in."

"As if you forget their birthdays, Sybil!" said her husband. "When I see you thoughtful or grumpy I may be sure it is a birthday or is near a birthday; and as the family is numerous these occasions are frequent. And so these photos are duplicates. Chuck them in the fire or give them to Mr. Kenneth here. He may pass them off for family portraits."

The offer was good, though the manner was offensive enough. Ellerton went on.

"Did you ever hear the story of Sybil's ring that she wanted repaired in Melbourne? one of the small diamonds had come out of it. You have seen it, it was an old engagement ring of one of her ancestresses with some unpronounceable name, and has a small heart in rare blue enamel, set round with diamonds of some value, and the legend 'Faithfulle unto deathe' engraved inside. I don't know how many generations it has been in the family as an heirloom. Well, the jeweller somehow seemed to fancy she might be hard up, for she was a stranger, and looked like a lady, and he asked her if she was at all disposed to sell the ring, and she said 'no, certainly not,' but as I was with her and had an eye to business, I thought I might as well ask him the value of it. He said the art of making this particular kind of enamel was completely lost, and that the value of the ring intrinsically was about £50, but that he was sure he could get more than double that sum from any Melbourne parvenu, who wanted to pass it off as an old possession of his family. So, if we are ever very hard up, I'm going to put it up to the highest bidder and may realize £150 for it, with
keen competition among that particular class; and the whole story of the ring, which Sybil knows, may be thrown into the bargain, to be retailed as a family tradition."

The story was rather offensive in its application under the best of circumstances, and the angry flush which rose to Kenneth's face on having his timid request misunderstood or misrepresented was not to be wondered at. Mrs. Ellerton felt that she would like to make him some apology.

"If you would really like these duplicates I should much prefer giving them to you to destroying them. As works of art I think them very good, and as you have been a very kind friend to me, and have taken such a warm interest in my people at home, I do not feel that it is giving what I prize to a stranger," and she handed the pair of photographs to Kenneth to the visible annoyance of her husband and Jim Oswald.

"He must be further gone than I could have thought to look with such rapture on likenesses of people he never saw," thought Ellerton, "all because she holds forth about them from morning to night."

"Why did she not give them to me?" thought Jim. "I'm sure I listen to every word she says about them, and I've given her no end of music. It's all Ken's cheek; he is so fond of putting himself forward. To go and ask for her father's and mother's photos!"

"I always feel *de trop* when the English mail comes in," said Ellerton aloud. "One's wife is not one's own when her mind is full of people and places half way over the globe. I like to give her twelve hours to settle down. Will you fellows come with me to Wilta? They are never so upset there by the arrival of the mail; and after all that Wilta billiard-table is better than any one at Castlehurst, and I'll give you your revenge then, Mr. Oswald."

Jim was always unwilling to leave Mrs. Ellerton, whose face looked lovelier than ever as it was bent over her letter. Kenneth was hungry to hear some scrap of information about his father, in addition to the precious photograph, which he scarcely could believe was really his own; but when Ellerton insisted upon any movement, both cousins had to yield, and they started for Wilta without delay.

Jim did not like the Wilta people, though he confessed that the billiard-table was first-class. They always made him play second fiddle to Kenneth there. Any business they did with Mr. Oswald was transacted through the elder cousin, and although there was never such another brilliant negotiation made as that about the long-woolled ewes, George Oswald thought Kenneth's bargains were sufficiently advantageous, and found it a good thing to buy and sell with his long-estranged neighbours. The Grays never thought of consulting Jim about any purchase or sale on his father's
account, and in any transactions which he entered into for himself about horses and dogs, Jim was sure he always got the worst of it, at least Ellerton told him so, and fanned his sense of injury.

Mr. Ellerton always put James Oswald before his cousin, and paid him the kind of deference dear to the soul of a purse-proud lad, who wants to be valued on account of his father's money, but who at the same time holds himself above the hard work and the wise economy which has acquired it. Any deprecatory remark levelled at Kenneth, either in his presence or his absence, which was thrown out by Ellerton, went to the heart of his cousin; and when he pointed out the absurd way in which the Grays behaved to the obscurer young man, he helped to prejudice Jim against an influence that might have done him good.

Edith Gray's mind and heart had been, as it were, “to let” when the beloved brother Charlie left her for New Zealand. Her father did not know that this departure made his daughter much more susceptible to strong interests, and even to the passion of love, than it had been before, and the direction which her active imagination and her affectionate heart had taken was to try to understand Sybil Ellerton's relations with her husband, and with her two devoted adorers. Why Ellerton had never manifested jealousy of Kenneth's attention to his wife was inexplicable. He did not rook Kenneth at any game, Kenneth never betted, never played but for the most nominal stakes and he was a check on James Oswald's high play — continual and vexatious. His colour changed when she ventured on the least allusion to his regard for Sybil. Edith believed that he valued her merely as a friend and a helper of Mrs. Ellerton, but, singular to say, though Miss Gray had had the very strongest and most rigid views as to virtuous love, and the sinfulness of falling in love with married women, and was indignant at the questionable morality of so much of our modern fiction, where people are always tossed about by criminal passion, and hover over the verge of sin, if they do not actually fall into the gulf, she could not hate or despise Kenneth Oswald for his fluttering around what might be destruction.

She could not help being pleased at the visit of the three gentlemen when she thought that Sybil might cry over her letters in peace, and perhaps, begin her answers undisturbed, with the impression fresh and vivid on her mind of a very different home from her present one. Besides, in Mrs. Ellerton's absence, Edith thought she might discover how the land lay from chance talk. She asked the visitors to stay all night, as her father and brother would not be home till somewhat late in the evening, and they accepted the invitation at once.

Ellerton joked a little bitterly about his wife giving her photos to a
stranger, and Kenneth had to display his acquisition.

“She might have given them to me instead,” said Edith Gray. “My father of course recollects Mr. McDiarmid as a boy, and we should all have been pleased to have them. I seem to know them all so well; Sybil talks so much about them.”

“I am sure you have far more right to such a gift than our friend Kenneth,” said Ellerton.

“All you have to do now, Ken, is to deliver up,” said Jim. “Such a lady's man as you are, ought to consider such a speech as Miss Gray's a command.”

“Not to give away a gift made to me by another lady. Miss Gray would never think that right,” said Kenneth.

“Of course, I never would think so, but at the same time I envy you your good luck. I shall beg for some others of Sybil's duplicates, but these are the finest I have seen. It is this one I covet most,” and she took up for another look the father's likeness. “The mother is good-looking enough, and a good woman too, I am sure, but this of Mr. McDiarmid's is such an interesting, such a haunting face, and if what Sybil says is to be relied on, he is perfect in every relation of life. Such a husband, such a father, such a landlord, such a friend. If I get to the old country, as papa promises, I mean to make a friend of him. Oh! we have no such people out here!” And Edith looked at the man whom this gentleman's daughter had chosen for her life long companion with a sad, ill-concealed disdain.

“‘Les absents ont toujours tort,’ the French proverb has it,” said Ellerton, “but at the antipodes, at least in this region of Australia, the adage seems reversed; it is the absent who are always brought up to cast in the teeth of the present, and the further absent they are, the better for that purpose. Perhaps you and I might put ourselves in a better position, Mr. Oswald, if we moved into the billiard-room, and Miss Gray might hold us up as shining examples to Kenneth, who has been having it too much his own way lately, I think.”

Jim moved off willingly to the most attractive part of the Wilta mansion when Mrs. Ellerton was not in it, and left Miss Gray and his cousin together. Ellerton had some idea that Kenneth knew in what direction his interests lay, and fancied that he might have sufficient assurance to make up to Miss Gray of Wilta, even though he did hang about Sybil in his cousin's company. Although he thought it would be a somewhat bitter pill for Mr. Gray to swallow to see his daughter carried off by George Oswald's penniless nephew, it was on the cards if no better parti turned up.

“And you really care about these photographs, Mr. Kenneth,” said Edith. “Don't think I would deprive you of them for the world. It was very
thoughtless of me to say what I did about them."

"No, it was quite natural, what right have I? . . . Only as Mrs. Ellerton was kind enough to give them to me when she saw that I was pained by some remarks of her husband's, I should very much like to keep them."

Kenneth stammered a little and blushed. Miss Gray, pre-occupied by her own surmises and conclusions, very naturally misunderstood the agitation he showed. She looked keenly at him; he grew more agitated. He feared that she had seen the likeness to his father's photograph in his face or figure, and that she might put some awkward question to him about the interest he felt in her model gentleman. Edith Gray felt herself years older than the young man, although she was really his senior by only a month. She felt she might take the liberty of dropping a word of caution.

"Do be careful," she said, "for every one's sake be careful what you say and do — for her sake above all."

"I shall try not to hurt her in any way."

"She is so charming, and as we all see, she is most unhappy, though she has never confessed as much to me. She is as true as steel, but no one can see them together as I have done for months, and as you have done too, without knowing them to be the most mis-matched pair that ever blundered into marriage. Low in intellect, low in morals, what could a gentlewoman see in him? But, Mr. Kenneth, you must not make her more unhappy still, and you might ——"

'You misunderstand me altogether. Miss Gray. My regard for Sybil — for Mrs. Ellerton — is strong, but quite different from what you imagine."

"It makes you blush and tremble at the mention of her name. Take care, my poor boy, that you do not misunderstand yourself. If I did not love her so much, and even in spite of this, respect you so much, I should not speak. How long is this to go on without arousing the most dangerous jealousy on Mr. Ellerton's part? I am quite sure he is alive to all your advantages over your poor infatuated cousin, and her life is bitter enough without any additional sorrow. You had better go somewhere else out of temptation. There is no courage like running away in such cases."

"I cannot," said Kenneth, "you mean very kindly, but I cannot."

"There is the world before you," said Edith, "the world of action, of effort, and of success. I never felt so much sympathy with any man's position as I have felt for yours since I came to know you. Everybody seems to expect impossibilities from you. Shake yourself free of this place; go to Melbourne or anywhere; begin the world on an independent footing for yourself, and by and by, when you have conquered it, come to me and tell me that the advice was good."

The ring in her voice and the flash in her eye were such as in other
circumstances might have led Kenneth to mount the deadliest breach; but if she had only known the real truth she would have urged as warmly that he should stand to the post he occupied now. He could only urge reasons which to her seemed incomplete.

“But my uncle trusts to me to be a check on his son. I have learned to help him in his business, his health is failing. It would be cowardly and recreant in me to leave my position now, however full of difficulties it really is.”

“You cannot tear yourself away from Mrs. Ellerton,” said Edith, with the deepest compassion in her eyes and voice.

“No; she needs me, and may need me more.”

“Cannot you trust her to me?” said Edith. “I shall see that she comes to no harm. If the lurking devil of jealousy that I see in that man's eye to-day breaks forth, life will be infinitely worse for Sybil than it ever has been. He is such a base hound that everything will be made to press on her. She is in his power — night and day, no escape. Only now she is alone with her betters, thank God. But though you love her, which I suppose I ought to call wrong, I trust it is somewhat nobly. You would go through fire and water to do her good. Then go through what to such a generous nature is still harder, and that is doing nothing and leaving her. Do not think that I do not feel for you.” The brown eyes were full of tears, the sensitive mouth quivered in sympathy with the pain she was giving. Her hand fell lightly and kindly on Kenneth's own.

He touched the hand with his lips by some irresistible impulse.

“Perhaps you may be right; let me think — let me weigh matters. I had meant to leave my uncle after two years’ service; but by that time he had come to cling to me, and to trust to me, and he has not much comfort in his family, poor man. You are right, Miss Gray, from your point of view, no doubt; and I cannot explain; I cannot make you see what I see myself; but whether I take your advice or not, I am deeply grateful to you for it. . . . How hard it is to do right.”

“It is not my conscience that you have to satisfy,” said Edith. “I only judge from what I see and hear. If you with greater knowledge decide differently, I cannot blame you. But you are very young and impressionable. Perhaps you do not take that into account as much as I do. I have felt the fascination of Sybil's face, voice, and manner, so much that if I had been a young man instead of a young woman, I should have fancied myself over head and ears in love with her. Mr. Ellerton did me the honour of being jealous of my love for, and my influence with his wife. He was glad to take her away from Wilta, in spite of his appreciation of the comfortable quarters, because he saw we both grieved at the separation.”
“I feel quite sure that you are right in that surmise.”
“And now tell me if what I hear is true, that Mr. Ellerton makes a great part of his living out of your cousin?”
“So I believe.”
“And encourages his visits?”
“Certainly he does.”
“And would discourage yours.”
“So I think; but that is because I am some check on Jim's high play.”
“Not altogether; I am sure there are other reasons,” said Edith.
“I think — I hope you are mistaken.”
“Now, don't you think that Sybil ought to separate from such a man and go and live at home with that good father and mother.”
“Certainly, I think so; but she never complains.”
“Oh! she is proud! she thinks she has made her bed, and must lie on it. Do you think he does nothing that the law may take hold of? My father and brother have broken loose from him very much, they cannot bear the way of life and the companions he has got amongst at Castlehurst, but you see him often, too often. Tell me if you think he plays fair.”
“It is part of my business to watch him, and I cannot say I have discovered any dishonest play. He had wonderful skill in all games; keeps his head clear when other people are muddled, excites to foolish bets, takes curious odds; but I have seen nothing that is not considered legitimate play among the class of people he mixes with.”
“It would not be considered so amongst gentlemen,” said Edith eagerly.
“No, it would not be permissible amongst gentlemen,” said Kenneth, glad to see she considered that he knew what sort of conduct was becoming to gentlemen. “It would no doubt be terrible at the time for her, if he got within reach of the law, but don't think me wicked — it seems the only way to set her free. I believe he is at heart a worse man than three-fourths of the convicts at Pentridge, and she must live with him. I did not think I could hate and despise any man alive as I do Herbert Ellerton.”
“And he is of good family they say.”
“Yes, and he came to Edinburgh under the wing of some respectable well-meaning aunt, who thought he was thoroughly reformed, and that a good and pretty young wife with a handsome fortune would be the salvation of him.”
“And Englishmen have such a prestige in Edinburgh society,” said Kenneth. “The accent and the address are looked on as something superior, and I dare say the idea of the fortune Miss McDiarmid was likely to have made him very assiduous.”
“And that fortune was delusive,” said Edith. “If they had only delayed
the marriage, the ardour of the lover would have cooled when the crash came, and poor Sybil would have felt it very hard; but it would have been happiness compared to this.”

“But Mr. Ellerton must have been somewhat different when he came to Wilta first,” said Kenneth.

“Yes, he was on his good behaviour, so far, but it was evident that he was cruelly disappointed by the misfortunes of Mr. Syme's house of business depriving him of his wife's expectations from that quarter. I never could like him, but papa tolerated him better. I wonder when our bush missionary will return to put a little of heaven into my heart. There has been too much of something else in it lately.”

“He is uncertain in his movements,” said Kenneth, “but we should see him soon now.”

“He did me good that day,” said Edith, “and it lasted some time, but my soul cleaves to the dust now, and I need some reviving,” said Edith. “And you told me that you felt the same benefit. It was the first day on which I saw you. You recollect driving to the door, and poor Sybil and I standing by the conservatory. Poor, poor Sybil.”

Edith turned away abruptly, and left the room on some slight pretext, but she wanted to wash her face, and her eyes, and to shake off all traces of her recent emotion. She half questioned the wisdom of her interfering with advice, but decided that she could not help it; and if she had not done it she would have felt it was still to be done. It was surely well to put that poor young fellow on his guard, and though he had insisted on it that she misunderstood his feelings, she thought she understood them all too well. That he loved her friend, she had no doubt, but that he was without the hope, even the wish to awake a reciprocal passion — that he was content to give everything and to receive nothing — to wait her call, to do her bidding, to shield her from harm, to see nothing that she did not wish him to see, to submit to her husband's insolence, to bear with his cousin's ignorant presumption, and all for the chance of serving her. This was “one way of love,” and Edith Gray's heart swelled at the thought that to excite such love was worth going through a good deal of misery for.

What lover would her own youth, and beauty, and fortune, and intelligence bring to her feet as this schoolgirl had brought Kenneth Oswald to hers? She might have prudent suitors, sensible of the advantages of the position, making commonplace proposals with “limited liability,” but it would be “another way of love,” not worth leaving Wilta and a good father for. Her more mature age and shrewdness would prevent her from being so grievously deceived as Sybil McDiarmid. There would never be the misery of being Ellerton's wife, or the humiliation of being Jim
Oswald's object of pursuit, but then that ineffable bliss of being worshipped without hope and without reward by a brave, generous man like Kenneth would never be hers.

He in the mean time was revolving her looks and words — “Young and impressible,” the very words her father had used with reference to temptation — but the temptation lay in another direction from what Miss Gray had pointed to. He had long felt the power of Edith's beauty, grace, and mind; if his birth and prospects had been in any way equal to hers, he would have set the winning of her heart as his object in life, for which every effort was to be made. Her desire that he should make a career for himself, free from all ties to uncongenial relatives, was like a trumpet call for him to descend into the lists and conquer crowns for her — her courage, her earnestness, her wisdom — for from her point of view the danger was great, all made him feel that here was a woman to live and die for.

Not that she understood the involuntary homage he had offered, or could guess that she had his heart in her keeping. The frankness of her speech, the way in which she stood upon her age, her experience, her position, all made him sensible that she placed him on a very different level from herself. But her interest in him, her sympathy with his difficult position, so much harder than she knew of, her confidence in his powers, her belief in his generosity, were more to Kenneth than professions of love would have been from another woman. A flower had fallen from her bosom as she hurriedly turned to leave the room, he picked it up, kissed it, and put it beside his father's portrait as the two most precious things which he possessed on earth.
Chapter 26 George Oswald's Will

Mr. Oswald had no overweening sense of the magnitude and permanence of his resources when he was sober, and he took increasing alarm at the extravagance of his only son under the fascinations of Mrs. Ellerton, and the baleful influence of her husband. Although money makes money, even in indifferent hands, it must be when these hands delegate their work to others more capable of administration. And in the prejudice which Jim had always taken against those whom his father trusted most, in the insulting speeches and suspicious innuendoes which were cast at old and valuable servants, and the preference which he showed for the worthless and time-serving toad-eaters who hung about the skirts of the rich man's son, George Oswald saw the gravest dangers in the future, when the power had slipped out of his grasp, and Jim began his headlong career of enjoyment and profusion.

“Kenneth,” said his uncle to him one morning, when Jim was sleeping off the effects of a night at Castlehurst, and the two men were going their accustomed round, looking at the horses and giving general orders. “Kenneth, there's a lot on my mind that behoves to come out to you, for I have not another soul to put trust in. You'll give me your best advice, and not your advice only, but your willing help, I hope, for I need it all.”

The brow was clouded, the face was anxious, the bent frame showed that years and cares had told upon it. Kenneth promised that so far as it was possible, he would do what his uncle wished, but everybody seemed to ask hard things from him, and he doubted his ability to satisfy either himself or his trusting relative.

“You see, Kenneth, there's a fine property here, and it would seem to you that I need have no anxiety about worldly matters. Only one son, and what most folk would call a kingdom to leave to him. But as I've often and often said to you, Jim has no grip of the world, and if he's no held back, and that with a powerful hand, the substance that looks so solid now will melt away like ‘snaw off a dyke,’ and he'll be left with nothing, and maybe the mother too would be in want in her old age. There's no entail here, and it would vex me in my grave to think that somebody no kin to me had Tingalpa and the other stations, and Jim, poor fellow, maybe without a sixpence when he's as old as me, and he would take ill with poverty; far worse than you or me, Ken, that had to clamber up the brae, and began the world on porridge and kail.”

Kenneth in his heart doubted that Jim would reach his uncle's present age, but he saw the dangers to the property quite as strongly as George
Oswald did.

“I think you've tried to do the best you could for Jim, but he's wilful and he's weak,” continued the old man. “He takes after the mother, he's so much for himself, and he cannot be brought to see what is really best for himself. The first thing he'll do when I'm laid under the mould will be to turn you adrift, the next will be to dismiss the managers one after another, and any man that is worth his salt. There'll be a big billiard-room built, and Mr. and Mrs. Ellerton invited to live at Tingalpa at rack and manager, and a dozen of greedy blacklegs from Castlehurst and Melbourne, and then it will be spend, travel, build, bet, keep racehorses, hounds, and every mortal thing that folk can spend siller on, and what station can stand that? If you had been my son, Kenneth, I might have looked forward with some comfort to things being kept 'under thack and rape', as they say in Scotland. But this last six months Jim has spent more than ever.”

“He has drunk far less.”

“He had had enough last night, I think — but the bitterness you speak of was just because he is running after that Jezebel of a married woman, whose husband rooks him at every sort iniquitous game. No, it's no real bitterness, d—n it.”

“In many ways you thought him improved,” said Kenneth.

“That's because I thought he had sense, and was after William Gray's daughter, that he might have had maybe for the asking, whereas this woman”—

“Is as far above his reach as the stars in heaven,” said Kenneth. “And a man's none the worse for looking up to the stars.”

“That depends on how he looks, Kenneth. If he falls into the mire by taking no tent to his steps, if he refuses the good things he might have because he is looking for what he cannot get, he is very much the worse, as I take it. Ay, if it had been a Gray!”

“But Jim is really, honestly, a good deal softened, and made less overbearing by this influence.”

“Say ye so, Kenneth, say ye so? But I hear you're just like the rest, carried away by a bonny face, and I'll no deny she's real bonny, though no to hold the candle to the lassie Gray — for I went to Castlehurst yesterday to see that Ellerton woman with my own eyes in her own house, and there was Edith, as she called her, with a face and a look and a voice and a way with her that makes her worth twenty milk-and-water boarding school misses, that are only fit to sit at a piano, and skirl out songs in foreign tongues. I'm no denying that I like the Scotch songs the other one sings, but that's neither here nor there. William Gray's daughter has been at the head of his table and managed his house since she was sixteen. She keeps house
books as I am told that's a pleasure to look at. She read out something from the papers that she thought I'd like to hear; it was about ‘Backblocks,’ and the way she read it, and the laugh she had over it when it was done, were enough to set a man up for the day. She's learned in the best school, and that's by trying to make up to her father for the wife he lost when she was sixteen years old, how to find her way to the old man's heart. Ay, if it had been only Edith Gray.”

And George Oswald leaned more heavily on his stick, and paused in his walk with his nephew.

“But that's no what's heaviest on my mind just at present. It's my will, Kenneth, it's my will! They say, and I've found it in my experience, that the handling of much money makes a man keen to keep hold of it; but you've shown such regard to my interests, sought so little for yourself, cared so little to spend, with no taste for drink or for play, or for women, that d—n it Kenneth, I'll trust you; I'll leave you everything I possess, every mortal thing!”

“Under certain conditions, of course, in trust for Jim and Mrs. Oswald,” said Kenneth with an internal groan at the promised responsibility.

“Ay, under certain conditions; only he's no to know that you're bound in honour to allow him yearly revenue out of it, but I must put it out of his power to exchange, to mortgage, or to sell.”

“But the trust-deed would define strictly what I have to do.”

“I'll make no trust-deed,” said George Oswald. “My life was made bitter to me with a confounded trustee-ship that I had worrying me for ten years, and I was to do this, and I was no to that, and I wanted the money myself at the time, and would have given twelve per cent. for it, but it was to be invested in mortgage on approved security, as if George Oswald's word was not security enough. No, Kenneth, I think ye know my mind better than any lawyer in Melbourne or Castlehurst, and with a few hints by word of mouth, and some memos I'll leave in hand of write, I'll be more satisfied than if you are tied down hand and foot with a trust-deed that Jim may raise money on.”

“Then you mean to trust entirely to my honour?” said Kenneth, in the most utter amazement at the proposition.

“I do, Kenneth,” said the old man with a great gulp, “and I think ye may take it as a compliment. My man of business in Melbourne is very doubtful of everybody, and he does not know either how much you are beholden to me or how whole your heart is in my interest, so I have to fight a hard battle for you with him. But we must go by the law. Only mind, Kenneth, you cannot heir anything, and nobody can heir you but the State, and that I could not tell Lawyer Thomson. So when I am laid at rest, your first
business is to make a will in case of your own death, so as to leave Jim in
careful hands. But your life is a good one, a far better one than Jim's —
poor fellow. Thomson will put me off this if he can, and persuade me to
make just an ordinary will, but I am convinced that it must be a bye-
ordinary will, for neither Jim nor his mother have half a notion of business
between them. I leave you the money, the stock, the land, all for yourself to
buy, sell, exchange, or do what you please. You've a head for business.
Even Walter Gray cannot get the better of you.”

“But surely you could constitute me guardian, or executor, or trustee,”
said Kenneth, “this confidence seems altogether too rash for yourself and
woefully burdensome to me.”

“No, Kenneth, my way's the best, and your very hesitation makes me
sure of it. Guardianship? Jim will soon be twenty-one, and out of all such
control; executors and trustees, as I say, are hampered and tied down, they
cannot make the property as a man who has a head on his shoulders, and
money at command can do, and I'll no have the property starved. There's
Tingalpa and Cowarrell and Willanirie, and I am going in for a station in
the Riverina district. You'll do justice to them when I'm at rest. And it's no
to be for nothing, Kenneth. I'll make a memo for your own satisfaction of
what you are to keep for your own services. Say eight hundred a year, and
the house and the garden, and the horses and the traps, all for your own
use, and the rest you'll account for to Jim and his mother. £800 a year!
Your grandmother was keen for your going into the Kirk, it would have
been long ere you would have gotten such a living out of that, or a manse
like Tingalpa head station, or such a turnout as the pair of bays, let alone
the others.”

“But my grandparents, what about their allowance.”

“You'll keep that up, or add to it; but it must come from you, I trust that
to you, but there's another thing that is on my mind. I'll leave you a memo
about the Diroms, that I could not put in a will, but you'll see to it. And
mind Mick's to have $50 a year for his life. He's been a good fellow to me
to stand all my tantrums when I'm on my splores, and it will help him and
Biddy along, and won't be enough to spoil them. That's about all I think,”
and George Oswald drew a long breath and then remained silent expecting
an answer.

Kenneth was thunderstruck at this proposal made seriously as if it had
been the result of months of thought, as indeed it had been.

“You may live years yet, my dear uncle, there is no hurry about making
so unprecedented a will. I feel sure that Mr. Thomson will strongly advise
you against it, and I have the greatest objection to it myself.”

“And what for?” said the old man in an injured tone. He had with so
much difficulty schooled himself to repose this enormous trust in his
nephew, that he thought Kenneth should measure the compliment by the
effort it had cost him. “Is not £800 a year enough?”

“It is not that, my dear uncle, but my objection is that however honestly I
deal with Mrs. Oswald and James, they will never believe that I am not
taking advantage of them.”

“But they can take no action in the matter, when the money is left to you
without reserve, and that's just why I do it so.”

“But they will hate me as a supplanter, they will take no advice or good
office from me.”

“They will take a certain income from you,” said George Oswald, grimly,
“and I shall die assured that they will not come to want, and that Tingalpa
is still a head station with others round it. Oh! Kenneth, man, I could never
rest in my grave if I thought William Gray or his sons made an out-station
of this bonny place, that I've made all myself, and that all the
improvements were thrown in for an old song. And I leave you the
property unconditionally, because I would make it easier for you.”

“But it would really be harder, for I should know that it was not really
mine. I should have all the trouble, the annoyance, and the responsibilities
of wealth without feeling free to do as I pleased.”

“Yes; free to do what you pleased for the good of the property, aye, free
to do that, and Jim could not say you nay.”

“My dear uncle, it would really be truer kindness to allow me to follow
my own bent, and earn my own living in some other way. Do you think life
has been so pleasant to me since I came here, doing you such doubtful
service, that I should wish it to be made perpetual? For God's sake, don't
burden me with such a trust as this.”

“Say you so Kenneth? Then I have not a friend in the world. I thought I
could have reckoned on you.” And the old man turned away in deep
offence. Kenneth felt his heart moved both by the confidence and the
disappointment. He qualified his refusal so much that Mr. Oswald went
forthwith to Melbourne alone, and consulted his lawyer, whose scruples
and objections he beat down, and carried his point triumphantly. Kenneth
had great hopes that Mr. Thomson would refuse to carry out his uncle's
wishes, but his aspect on his return, the extra satisfaction he took in the
beauty and the progress of the place, the astute glance that he cast at Jim
when he proposed any alterations, or talked in his confident blustering
manner about money or the station property, or grumbled at any of the old
servants, convinced Kenneth that the will had been executed, although his
uncle never told him so in so many words.
Chapter 27 Taking Counsel

On the occasion of his visit to Mrs. Ellerton, at Castlehurst, it had indeed been tantalizing to Mr. Oswald to see how very superior in every way Miss Gray was to her friend. He took stock of her from head to foot, and found her up to the mark on all points. As he listened to the talk of the young women, and occasionally joined in it, he came to the conclusion that William Gray's daughter was the handsomer, the cleverer, as well as the richer of the two, and yet that perverse son of his was infatuated with the inferior article, and had thrust his neck into the noose of hopeless or sinful love; whereas the other girl might be had without sin or shame, and with infinite honour and advantage.

They were both polite to him, but Edith was more than polite. She felt for the old man so cruelly disappointed in his son, so poorly accompanied by his wife, with only his grateful and generous nephew to give him loyal service.

“They say it takes three generations to make a gentleman, Sybil,” said she when their visitor had departed. “In this case the third generation will have a great deal to do for parvenu fils is infinitely more vulgar and odious than parvenu père. Don't you think so, Sybil?”

“The old man has something in him; he understand his business, and attends to it, whereas the young man holds himself above anything of the kind. There must be great good in Mr. Oswald from the kind way in which his nephew speaks of him always. I wish Mr. Ellerton would quarrel with that foolish young man parvenu fils, or that we could leave Castlehurst altogether to get quit of him, although it would separate me from you, Edith.” She looked pale and worn.

“Cannot you offend him in any way?” asked Edith, pleased at this first revelation of any trouble on Sybil's part.

“No, he will take no offence from me, and Mr. Ellerton likes his society so much that he would bring him back even if I were to be absolutely rude.”

“It is a strange infatuation on the lad's part.”

“Do you see it, too?” said Sybil with a deep blush. “He does not say much.”

“But he is always here.”

“Ah, he is so fond of billiards, and all sorts of games, and those things Mr. Ellerton is so skilful in. I believe he would come quite as much about the place if I were not here.” Sybil blushed more deeply, for her friend's quick glance reminded her that when she was on a visit to Wilta Jim
followed her there, though Ellerton was at some races at Geelong. “But his cousin is always with him,” she said apologetically. “Mr. Kenneth is a great relief to me in every way. He is so different. He has been very, very good to me. He never lets me be alone with his cousin.”

“And how does Mr. Ellerton like this self-constituted guardian?” asked Edith.

“I cannot tell. I think there is no cause for uneasiness. Mr. Ellerton is not sensitive on such matters.”

“I should feel uneasy if I were you,” said Edith.

“I hope it will lead the poor fellow into no harm, but I feel I can trust him entirely.”

“He is certainly a very good and generous young man, but is it right or fair to make use of him in the way you do? Is it not very dangerous for him, and a little dangerous for yourself?”

“Not for him, thank God, not for him. Believe me, Edith, he is no lover of mine, I am sure. Never a word or a look of that kind. I know the difference. He is only very good, very kind. Nobody else can help me as he does. Not even you could serve me as Kenneth Oswald does.”

How brave he must be! How reticent to keep back his inmost feelings, to beware lest a look might betray him, thought Edith to herself — for she had no doubt of the reality of his love. Where could Kenneth Oswald, peasant-born and almost peasant-bred, have acquired that delicacy of feeling, that chivalrous fidelity, worthy of knight-servant of old?

“Mr. Ellerton thinks,” said Sybil hesitatingly, “don’t be angry, Edith — but he has an idea that the elder cousin's affections are placed elsewhere — most ambitiously placed — and that prevents him from thinking as you fear he may.”

That was all Mr. Ellerton knew about the matter then! It was but a poor subterfuge certainly, but if it shielded Kenneth from jealous suspicions, and enabled him to serve the real object of his affections, it was a useful delusion.

“You speak confidently about him, but yet you would be sorry if you got him into trouble, and that idea of Mr. Ellerton's is absolutely without foundation. You heard old Mr. Oswald say just now that he would like his son to travel through the colonies with his cousin. Could you not recommend it to Mr. James as the necessary finishing touch to his education? A hint from you would have great weight. And you know ‘out of sight out of mind,’ especially with young men like him. He may see a new face in his travels, and come back a married man to our infinite relief.”

“I shall try,” said Mrs. Ellerton doubtfully, “but you would be surprised
at how little I can really do.”

After Mr. Oswald's mind had been relieved by his Melbourne visit he looked younger and brighter, and when David Henderson after a long round came again to the Castlehurst district, and made Tingalpa his first stopping-place, he received a hearty welcome from uncle and nephew, as well as from the station hands who had heard of his fame, and none of them were disappointed with the evening's prayer and exposition.

When the religious worship was over Kenneth got his friend into his own room, the library or study, which Jim now never entered, and where his uncle only sat sometimes in the mornings.

“And what has been your success in your round?” asked Kenneth. “I mean specially with your Bushman's Home scheme?”

“Not very great, but I can try the ground again on my second visitation. I've opened the subject at least, and some others may take it up.”

“And with regard to other matters no less important?” asked Kenneth.

“Ahh! there I think I have done some good. I somehow feel as if the souls I have come into contact with have obtained some light. And yet you would say what is a stray word in season once in six months to counteract daily evil and deadening influences. May be if I was with the same people for constancy I would be less sanguine. But you see, I come fresh to each of my hearers. A steady congregation would soon get to the end of my tether.”

“Influence is so subtle a thing that neither the giver nor the receiver of help can rightly trace out all its bearings,” said Kenneth.

“That is true,” said Mr. Henderson, “and I spoke without sufficient judgment when I said that my occasional word had to fight alone against all the evil and deadening influences of the half-year. I forgot for the moment the powerful help I have from within; old resolutions, old repentances, and the ever-living spirit of God within every human soul. We are too apt to overlook ‘that power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness,’ which aids all our efforts, as if to make our own poor doings appear more wonderful. And now, my friend, how is it with your own soul?”

“Better, certainly better. I date more hope and more courage from the day I met with you first.”

“God be praised for it. Then is life easier for you?”

“No, it is more difficult.”

“And yet you feel better.”

“Yes, for I have more heart for the work I have to do.”

“It is by no flowery paths that God leads His own to those serene heights where duty is not only the command of the conscience but the delight of
the heart. You have to go through the Slough of Despond, climb up the Hill Difficulty, toil in fear and in darkness through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, through the dungeons of Giant Despair, through the Enchanted Land, and through other snares besides, ere you reach the Land of Beulah.”

“Yes,” said Kenneth, “Doubting Castle still stands, but its bolts and bars are no longer to be shot back by the key Promise. Giant Despair no longer picks up stray pilgrims who trespass on his grounds, and shuts them in filthy dungeons, and beats them grievously with his crab-tree cudgel, but broods like a thick dark cloud, impersonal and unconcerned, over heaven and earth, so that the blessed sunlight cannot pierce through.”

“Yes” said the bush missionary. “The nature of the difficulty seems changed.”

“The doubt and the despair in those old times,” said Kenneth, “was as to one's own personal salvation, for the idea of God was like that of a man, with parts and passions, with preferences and rejections; and a gracious word undubitably believed to have come from Him, once apprehended and taken possession of by the individual soul, the whole nature seemed to fall into harmony with the Divine government at once. Now the difficulty is to believe that in so vast a universe as science discloses to us, there is care and love in the Infinite Creator for his creatures, beyond the ordering of laws working on the whole for the best. We do not question our individual claims on the love of our Heavenly Father, but we are stunned by the sense of infinite space and time, and law and forces, working with solemn and rhythmic precision unaffected by our words or efforts. No text will settle that doubt — no key of promise will open that lock.”

“You touch the key note of our modern scepticism,” said the missionary.

“You who so prize the written Word, and can see so much in it,” continued Kenneth, “must regret that its authority can no longer be called in effectually to support the troubled soul.”

“Nay, my friend,” said David Henderson; “though to me the Word is precious, it is only as an introduction to the deeper voices that speak out of the infinite silence. I cannot mourn the exchange of anxiety about the salvation of our own souls for that longing which falls on our modern captives in Doubting Castle, for the assurance of God's love and care for all his creatures, rational and irrational. It is a change for the better and not for the worse.”

“Then you are not alarmed at the extent and the boldness of the sceptical spirit,” said Kenneth.

“No,” said the seer, speaking slowly and with short pauses as if for thought and prayer, “if it is not of God it will be brought to naught, but in trying to stifle it as churches in old days have done, and as churches in
present times would fain do, I think you must see a danger that haply we might be fighting against God . . . Religion and Christianity have outlived attacks as deadly and less reverent than assail it now, and for my part, I look with less dismay at the open batteries of the enemy who may be a truth-seeker than at the false defences and hollow zeal of those who consider themselves as the defenders of the faith . . . If the attacks would call out new life in the churches, though with a great change of front, the churches would be stronger. God is able to take care of Himself — our puny efforts cannot aid or impede the march of omnipotence. We do not need to be careful for His honours in the eyes of others by opposing what is merely a flimsy pretence in the eyes of God. It is far better that people should see us shivering by the ashes of the fire that once warmed us than that we should stretch out our hands before it and say loudly ‘Aha, Aha, we are warm, we have seen the fire.’ See how warm we are, and come and find like comfort from like action.”

“Then,” said Kenneth, “you see a happy issue out of all this strife and debate, this distaste of the modern mind for sacred things and Divine contemplations, this eager secularism, this questioning of all things hitherto believed to be above all human speculation.”

“No,” said the missionary, “I cannot say I see it. I trust it will be well because I trust in God. But I do not believe that God's people ever see altogether clearly the solution of their doubts, whatever they may be. An element of uncertainty always clings to the most assured hope of personal salvation so long as life lasts. The just must live by faith. Here and now the issues are vaster and wider, and just because the race has lost the selfish hope and fear which were only fit for the childhood of humanity, I feel hopeful that greater results are within our reach, and that higher and nobler aspirations are leading us ever nearer to a fairer and vaster celestial city than John Bunyan ever dreamed of in his day. Very probably it is not such as I look for, but I know that my soul shall be satisfied when I awake after death that God has done all things well. Yes; if John Bunyan were writing his Pilgrim's Progress now, he might add a few chapters to it. New days, new difficulties. But in his time, as in ours, onward is the watchword.”

“But,” said Kenneth, “the way now does not seem so straight and so narrow, that one cannot depart from it, even with the most sincere and the most intense desire to keep on the right path. There is where Bunyan and his school fail in another way to interpret for us the spiritual life of the nineteenth century.”

“You are right there, my young friend, as I have had experience, and you so much younger, so much more influenced by the new literature and new views of morality, are likely to feel it much more strongly. It is often
extremely difficult to see the best course to pursue; but somehow if you try
to do your best, without selfish or greedy aims, even a turning to the right
or to the left does not seem to hinder your onward course. Even our
mistakes, even our sins if they are not habitual and delighted in, but
repented of and abandoned, help us on. You oftentimes see that the storm
of passion has been fertilizing, and that the future life is wiser and purer
and grander after the hurricane out of which the man or woman appears to
emerge shattered or maimed.”

“People would call that a dangerous doctrine to preach to the young,”
said Kenneth, who thought of his mother and of his father too.

“Truth can never be dangerous. If God can command the wrath of man to
praise Him, cannot He work our progress through our apparent fallings
back. Indeed that puzzles me about the progress there should be in heaven,
I would give up much of its perfection for the sake of advance.”

Again the memories of the beloved mother and the orthodox ideas of his
grandparents, which chilled his heart, were recalled to Kenneth.

“But this progress through error is more in youth than in age such as
mine,” said David Henderson. “But for you, you are less minded to break
off with the station life, than you were when we parted.”

“I cannot leave now, I am more needed than ever.”

“And your cousin, is he more tow ardly? I was glad to see him at worship
with us.”

“He had heard so much of you that he could not but come.”

“He is somehow improved however?”

“In some respects he is, but in others I fear he is quite the contrary.”

“Is it true what I hear that he is infatuated about that beautiful young
creature with the wonderful voice and the worthless husband?”

“So it appears, though he does not confide in me.”

“Well, it’s hopeless love, so it will do no harm, and it may do the young
fellow good. I myself thought more of the brown-eyed girl, Miss Gray, but
either of the two of them might put some spirit into as dull clay as your
cousin is made of. And how does the husband like it?”

“I wish I could believe he was blind; but no, he sees it all, and I’d like to
have it out with him for his disregard of his wife’s reputation and feelings,”
said Kenneth warmly.

“Her reputation is safe enough, for nobody could look on her face, and
ever lower her to an unholy thought, especially towards such as your
cousin. Her feelings — that is different; does she complain to you?”

“No; she is too proud to complain, and besides what right have I to claim
her confidence? But part of my hard duty is to see what I cannot mend, and
to hear what gives me constant pain. Still, as I said, I would not shirk it for
the world."

“And your uncle, I see, trusts to you as if you were really his son. That is something to have gained.”

“Not so much to take pleasure in if you knew all,” said Kenneth sadly. “He trusts me far too much, but yet I am not going to run away from my responsibilities. If I were to draw up a balance-sheet on some such principle as my uncle talks of sometimes, of the advantage and disadvantages of my position here, I dare say it would look worse than it did when I gave you the lift to Wilta, but somehow I am in for it, and will go through to the bitter end.”

“I hope you go a good deal to Mr. Gray's. You are evidently a favourite there,” said David Henderson.

“It is a most hospitable house, and they are all very pleasant people. But my cousin does not care for them, and I cannot say that they court his society, so I cannot see so much of them as I should like. No, I see a great deal more of Castlehurst than I care for, and of only one phase of Castlehurst life. But if Mr. Ellerton will not watch over his wife, I feel bound to do so.”

David Henderson looked at the young man with his dreamy eyes, for once concentrated in enquiry as to what was to be read in a countenance naturally open and sincere, but at present a little puzzling. There was embarrassment but no trace of shame. “Is it the old story,” he asked of himself, “always hankering after forbidden fruit, when there's the Garden of Eden to choose from; but I've no doubt he'll come all right yet. There are some men I believe in, and this is one. But he shall have my prayers. And if I am not greatly mistaken that brown-eyed girl has him on her mind too.”
Chapter 28 George Oswald's Compunctions

When Mrs. Ellerton, following Miss Gray's suggestion, made the recommendation to Mr. James Oswald that he should travel and see the world along with his cousin, that young gentleman appeared to see no savour in it. Although such a colonial tour under any circumstances had been the desire of his heart before he met with Sybil, he could not think of leaving her. But gradually things worked round to make him consent to go. In the first place, Mr. Ellerton said he wanted much to take such a round. He was tired of Castlehurst, and thought there was much better opening for a man of his talents in any of the colonial capitals, than in a gone-down, dead-alive place like the diggings-township. In the second place, Mr. Oswald, whose mind seemed to be much relieved now that his will was signed, sealed, and delivered, thought that he could not spare Kenneth, for he wanted him to go and take possession and set things going in the new station in the Riverina district. Although certainly, Ellerton was not the best of companions, he would at least see that no one took advantage of the rich squatter's son but himself, and as it might detach Jim from Mrs. Ellerton, Mr. Oswald was willing to allow him both time and money for an extended tour.

Mr. Ellerton proposed to give up Castlehurst House which he had never liked much, and to store the furniture, and his wife might pay a visit to her friends at Wilta during his absence. He liked the idea of having no cares whatever, and travelling “en garçon.”

The time was fixed for the departure, three months were allowed for the visit, and Sybil busied herself with preparations for her husband's comfort abroad, for giving up housekeeping at home, and for taking up her quarters at Wilta, with a tremulous eagerness, and with haunting fears lest anything should come between her and her haven of refuge, which showed proofs of the tension under which she had been suffering for months before.

There were to be races in Adelaide, they would go there first after a week or two in Melbourne, which Ellerton said he had not half seen, and where Jim Oswald thought he would introduce him to a little life; then they would do Melbourne again en route to Tasmania, which was a slow place; but still it was “the thing” to do Tasmania, which was a sort of cool summer garden made expressly for the recreation and refreshment of burnt-up Victorians. Then they might go to Sydney, and do New South Wales and then go to Brisbane. Jim thought he would like to see all the Australian colonies before he came of age, when he would have a flare up at home, or, better still, in Melbourne, and Mr. Ellerton had no objection to take this
trip at Jim's expense, which directly or indirectly he was sure to do. Mr. Oswald shook his head a great deal over the company he went in, but yet, as Kenneth had said forcibly to him, it was impossible to keep James Oswald in leading strings any longer, and he must learn experience for himself; and away from Mrs. Ellerton he was much more likely to quarrel with her husband as well as to forget her, than when he visited both so frequently under their own roof. Indeed, even now, Kenneth saw signs of great hollowness in the friendship, and impatience on Jim's part of the ascendancy of the clever scoundrel in whose society he had so long apparently delighted. His love for Sybil, and his antagonism to Kenneth prevented Jim from acknowledging or acting upon any such distaste, but away from these two counteracting influences, George Oswald reasonably hoped that Ellerton's great luck at play and his careless imperiousness of manner might produce their natural effect, and that there would soon be an open rupture between the two companions.

Something more like ease of mind and happiness than he had felt for many a long day, took possession of Kenneth when all the arrangements were completed, the house abandoned, the travellers started, and Sybil was committed to the loving care of her friend Edith, in a house where she had consideration, comfort and peace. He turned to his uncle's affairs with undivided attention, consulted with him about the stock necessary for the new Riverina station, suggested some plans and approved of others, and made his start with a light heart. His uncle wrung his hands on parting with more emotion than he generally showed; his aunt said it would be dull without the two young men coming in and going out bringing the news, but her regret was a much more languid feeling than her husband's.

To be relieved from the incubus of his cousin's company was happiness in itself, to be serviceable to his uncle was pleasant, and to be a pioneer in a new country had its charms, although that new country, flat, dry, and sombre, covered with nothing but monotonous saltbush, which, however, sheep can live and thrive on, was not nearly so agreeable to look on as the undulating wooded grassy country round Tingalpa and Wilta. Kenneth had recommended his uncle to try John Mayne, an active, intelligent fellow on the station, as resident overseer; and as they travelled up together, he saw every reason to be satisfied with the arrangement. He was quick and observant, and an experienced bushman, and he knew this particular country well. Kenneth put himself into his hands for ordinary sailing directions; they went through a few hardships together, camped at night side by side, talked of matters pastoral, social, political, and even religious—for David Henderson's recent visit had awakened some interest in such things as Tingalpa, and altogether had a pleasant time of it.
The new run was ridden over, the watering places noted, and the place for the erection of the house and outbuildings fixed on, before the drays with building timber with the stores necessary for six months' consumption, and the flocks and the shepherds arrived. With his own hands Kenneth worked at the Ballywallock House, and was astonished to see how rapidly it took shape; and he felt free to return to his uncle with a satisfactory report of the new settlement.

“I've missed you, Kenneth; I've missed you,” said his uncle as he went to the door on Mick's announcement that “Sure it's Mr. Kenneth coming up the avenue.” He was looking very ill, and Mick was in close attendance, so the young man formed a shrewd guess at what had been the matter.

“I've had a burster on the head of it,” said Mr. Oswald, as he took his easy chair in the library, “and I'm just out of it, and as dull as ditchwater. God forgive me for an old reprobate, but the house was so miserable without you and Jim, and the wife no better than nobody to speak to, and other things troubling me, that I've gone in heavier and deeper than ever. But all's well I hope at the new place, Ballywallock. I've lots to tell you when my mind's easy about that.”

“All as right as possible. How beautiful Tingalpa and all the country down from Cowarrel looks after the saltbush country.”

“Aye, ye cannot get Tingalpa nowadays for the picking up, but this station will pay, and that is the main thing, Kenneth.”

“Oh! no doubt it will pay. The stock in the neighbourhood look in capital condition.”

“And there's no d—d selectors there, and that's the dread here, as you well know. And you are sure John Mayne will do?”

“He is taking to his work like a good one. We were shoulder to shoulder at the housebuilding, and he beats me hollow, though I really did my best.”

“I think I may be certain you would do that. And the men were all there up to time—no skulkers, and did not overtravel the sheep either.”

“I think you would have been as satisfied as I was with the way they were travelled. And there is plenty of water for the season. John Mayne has a wonderful eye for finding water. Travelling with him as I did, I could see what stuff he was made of.”

“That's good, Kenneth, very good.”

“But our travellers, Jim and Mr. Ellerton, what of them?”

“No signs of their coming back yet,” said the old man moodily.

“They did not mean to return before three months.”

“One would have thought they would have hastened their steps homeward with the news they got.”

“What news, uncle? I have heard nothing.”
“Ill news, ill news—that poor thing Mrs. Ellerton has been lying between life and death at Wilta for weeks past. What's the matter with the laddie? Surely you're no so far gone as Jim! God forgive her, but she has much to answer for, first wrecking her own life with a scoundrel like Ellerton, and then spoiling other folks' lives because they cannot get her. She's out of danger now—that's what the doctor says—there was a bairn, before its time, of course; it never breathed the air of this world, but she fell into a low nervous fever, and was out of her mind for days and weeks. But, Kenneth, she's better now. Have a glass of something to put you right?”

“But her husband—but Jim?”

“You may well say that, Kenneth. Though I hated the notion of Jim fancying her, and I would have given hundreds, aye thousands of pounds to make him forget her; to think that he could be away taking his pleasure with that reprobate of a husband of hers, and neither the one nor the other would leave their amusements though she might be dying. I've been so mad with the fellow, that as I said I have gone in extra heavy. I'm no just myself yet. But my heart misgave me because I minded that I had often wished the woman dead, before she had cast such a glamour over my Jim, and when I went to Wilta, where I had said I would never set my foot after the way William Gray choused me with thae beasts, but I could not be content with messages through Mick; and I went there, and that lassie Gray came with her set face as white as death, and said she thought her poor friend would soon be set free from her troubles, I just grat like a bairn, Kenneth. My son had been one of her sore troubles, and in my care for him I had wished the poor thing out of life. And he—what's a sick dying woman to him. She might not be so bonny as when she was well, and she could not amuse him with her foreign songs that he set such store by, and she might be a trouble. When William Gray came in and took me by the hand, I believe I forgave him from the bottom of my heart about that old bargain, for he had done everything in his power—everything that money and kindness could do to win the poor young creature back to life. A nurse from Castlehurst and Miss Gray herself took turns to watch her night and day; the doctor constant, and one telegraphed for from Melbourne when the case was urgent. Miss Gray herself could not have had more done for her. She brought me a glass of sherry and soda, for she saw that I was altogether knocked down as you are yourself, Kenneth. Fill yourself out a bumper, my hand is shaky yet.”

Kenneth obeyed his uncle's orders, and then tried to listen calmly to what further he had to relate.

“Well, when I asked what Ellerton had replied to the telegrams and the letters, it was only that he could do no good; that his dear wife—dear wife
indeed! he's been the dear husband to her!—was in the best of hands; that he felt it a bitter disappointment about the baby; but that as the doctor said, it was purely a nervous fever, the less agitation and the fewer people she had near her the better. Maybe it's true enough—but it was not just the thing for him to say it. He would trust to hearing by every opportunity, and hoped they would telegraph him when there was a change. He had no house at Castlehurst, and he could not think of adding to their already heavy charge at Wilta . . . There was one thing I was glad of, and that was that it was not me that had the writing back to him. I suppose folk like the Grays can be civil, even though they despise the man at their heart's core, but for me, if I took up the pen my words would be few, but they would be plain enough.”

Long as was Mr. Oswald's speech, Kenneth needed it all, and the bumper of sherry too, to enable him to recover his self possession.

“Has anyone written to her relatives in Scotland?”

“Oh! no doubt, they have; they are sure to do what is right, but it is a long way off, ‘a far cry to Lochow’, as the saying is, and these two men could have come back within a week if they had been needed too. Oh! Jim, Jim, I knew that you were fond of your pleasure and your amusement, but I did not think you were so heartless.”

“Perhaps he is cured of his foolish passion. Perhaps, as he wished and hoped, he has seen someone else who takes his fancy.”

“If he was cured ever so much, he might have written something, if he could not come.”

“It is very awkward for Jim to write about anything his feelings are concerned in. He has not words to put such things into.”

“In such words as you have, Kenneth, and no such feelings to put them in,” said Mr. Oswald, with a groan. “But it is a comfort to see you, and a strength. You must help to keep me square—Mick says I never was so outrageous, or so long over it. And now I feel as weak as water. I feel as if I must have a pick-me-up. Just the least nip of Brandy.”

“No uncle, you know that a relapse is worse than the original disease. And Mrs. Ellerton is really better—out of danger.”

“So Miss Gray writes to me, such a bonny clear hand the lassie writes, as clear as print,” and here the old man pulled out of his pocket the dainty little note. “She saw I was sorely troubled that day at Wilta, and wrote the very first day they had good news, and indeed until today I was scarce fit to receive it.”

Kenneth read the note eagerly; it was decidedly cheerful, but showed what cruel and prolonged anxiety they had all endured. Mr. Gray had written to the same effect to Mr. Ellerton to his address in Sydney, where
he and Jim were staying at a first class hotel.

“Whether is dying or living the worst after all?” he thought to himself moodily. “Sybil might have slipped quietly out of the world, and been released from all her sorrows and her difficulties. Now she must face her position, and none could look gloomier.”

“She must stay at Wilta for some time longer,” he said aloud. “Until the doctor orders her away for a change she must continue to be the guest of the Grays. Will Castlehurst be sufficient change?”

“They have no house at Castlehurst. No, it will be the seaside most likely they’ll recommend.”

“I wish Ellerton would never return at all, then she might go back to her father.”

“Not a pleasant homecoming, Kenneth. It is a very sore thing to go back to a father’s house even if one is a widow, but there are other circumstances harder to bear, and that is one of them.”

“Anything would be better and safer for her than the life she has led with Ellerton. And such a child she must have been when she married him.”

“What for did she no get her licks, and be sent to bed supperless like a bad bairn, rather than be let marry such a piece of goods as that Ellerton. Oh! Kenneth, man, I must have a dram, I maun hae a dram. You can have no conception of the drowth that is inside of me. No in my mouth only—though that is as dry as a whistle—but all through me.”

“Come and have some soda water.”

“That does not do it; the bit nip of brandy with it gives the world just another look.”

“Only for a time, uncle. For my sake, do hold out. Life has not been pleasant for me while I have been here. I have wished, oh! how earnestly, I have wished that you would leave me free to follow my own bent, and to work out my own fortune—but you said you needed me, and I have stayed. Do you think it has been easy for me to go through all I have with Jim and Ellerton and that poor patient victim, who I dare say is sorry that she has been nursed back to life. But I watched for your sake, and for hers, that no harm should come to her. Do bear up, uncle, or I shall be dead beat myself. I'll take the good advice that a good friend gave me, and go off to carve my own fortunes.”

“Kenneth,” said his uncle piteously, “you know how much I've done for you; you must not leave me.”

“I know it only too well, you never let me forget it, but I would rather have had less help and more consideration.”

“Who could consider you more than I do. You know how much I trust you, you know I have left you every penny I possess.”
“You trust me a great deal too much. It is the cruellest thing you have done yet. You tie a man hand and foot by the strongest sense of honour, and then you overwhelm him with pecuniary benefits. I could forgive you anything but that.”

George Oswald cried like a child. He was not out of the depression caused by his recent debauch. He wanted to be coaxed, humoured, and amused, and this, in Kenneth's state of mind, was impossible.

“I thought you were my friend, my only friend, but you are turning against me. My wife is no good to turn to; she is no help to a man in perplexity, no cheer to him in trouble. My son Jim, he only looks on me as the pursekeeper to satisfy his wants and to pay the bills and drafts; but you, Kenneth, if you turn against me now, I tell you I will blow my brains out, and then I can have no time to alter my will that you have such a spite at. And if it goes against you so sorely I'll try to think on some other way to do it. I know you're wanting to go to Wilta to enquire more particulars about Mrs. Ellerton, but I cannot want you at home. You must stand by me. And let me have the soda water for God's sake, if that's all I am to get.”

It was clear his uncle could not be left at the present time. He was not out of the wood yet, and a relapse would be a serious thing after such a deep carouse as he had had. So Kenneth got the soda water, and gave orders for some food that might tempt his uncle, and sat down and tried to eat it with him, and read the newspaper aloud, and tried to keep his own mind from wondering too much to that sick room at Wilta, where his sister was fighting for her life, with Edith Gray watching over her.
Chapter 29 A Squatter's Princely Liberality

Kenneth had read the stock and station reports and markets, which were always the most interesting portions of the newspaper to his uncle, when the latter interrupted him with:—

“Kenneth, heard ye ever much about the Diroms?”

“Not much, except at times from yourself—they were the original settlers here.”

“Yes, but it was not the Tingalpa you see it now—a bare, poor place compared to what I have made it.”

“And you were originally their manager or overseer, as Horne and Mayne are yours now.”

“I had always more charge than any man has had under me—but of course it is true, I was only their manager; but they liked Melbourne and were there a great deal, even before the diggings broke out.”

“And they took fright at the overturn of everything then,” said Kenneth, helping his uncle on with his narrative.

“Yes, and they were disgusted with Melbourne, and proposed to go home and let me manage on halves, and it was as good a bargain for them as for me, and nobody can deny that—for labour was scarcely to be had, and I worked like a nigger myself, and they took it easy. But after a while I proposed to them to give them a fixed sum by the year, because, you see, things were turning out well, and I could not just trust myself to give them the fair half, so I made the offer and they thought it a good one, and they closed with it. And after that, I thought I could work with more heart if the whole of the profits were mine, and I offered to buy the whole affair, and a long price it seemed for me to give.”

“And they accepted it, I suppose.”

“They haggled a little, but they referred it to a Melbourne friend, who advised them to close with it, and they took my bills for it at 6, 12, 18 and 24 months, and when I cleared them off, I wrote for you to be brought up like a gentleman, and ever since that I have added flock to flock, and field to field—but the Diroms, they are not over well off, I hear, and that's why I'd have Jim get so much by the year, for a sum of money gets less and produces less if there's no wise handling of it—and so the Diroms,” and George Oswald paused.

“You would like to do something for them further,” said Kenneth, who well remembered his uncle's strange procedure about his old masters in their memorable first interview.

“Aye, that's what I whiles think of, but how to do it. You see if I sent
them siller, it would seem to them as if it was conscience money, and that I thought I had cheated them, and it's no the case. I just made my offer all the three times, and they closed with it. They consulted their friends, and they consulted their lawyer ere they decided, and their advice was that the offer was fair. They were satisfied with it, and so was I. After a while it might turn out that I was a thocht mair than satisfied, and they were, may be, a thocht less, but no man shall say to me that at the time I drove a harder bargain than William Gray would have done—nor so hard. How did he buy out the Evanses just near about the same time, and when I think on thae beasts he had of me, I lose mind that I shook hands with him before I went on that splore that I wish had not come to an end yet, for my drowth is just intolerable. But I know that William Gray aye holds out the Diroms were taken advantage of. They were as sober as you are, and so was I, when we bargained by word of mouth, and surely when it comes to the pen, they were likely to handle it better than the like of me. Kenneth, you must believe my solemn word, they were perfectly fair bargains all the three. Every new station I've bought, as I've done this of Ballywallock, I've thought to myself—Would the Diroms, even with my management, have got so far ahead as me? and the answer has always been No. They were soft and liked to spend, and though I might have managed honestly by them, nobody manages just as well for another man as for his own work. See how the Grays lay hold of their business themselves. Very different men they are from John and Robert Dirom. If they had not sold to me they would have sold to some one else who would have driven a harder bargain, or they might have done foolish things, as my Jim is likely to do if ever he gets the handling of big transactions. Don't tell me that they would or could have made Tingalpa what it is."

“I don't think it at all likely that they would have done a quarter so well as you. I think your management is wonderful, superior in some respects to Mr. Gray, and he was backed up in the worst times by his sons, while you worked single-handed, and from all that I have heard of the brothers Dirom, I am sure they would have sold out sooner or later. Of course if they had waited till the rise in value of all station property they would have had more money, but few people at that time had any idea of the ultimate benefits the gold-fields and the increased population would bring to the squatter.”

“I had not much notion of it myself, but still I was not downhearted like the Diroms.” Here George Oswald paused as if he wanted Kenneth to make some suggestion. “Can't you speak, man, can't you say something? What's the use of your schooling and your colleging and your books, if you cannot help a man to some way of satisfying himself without putting himself in
the wrong. I hate secret gifts (anonymous, they call them). If I sent them money that way it would be traced to me, and they would say my conscience smote me, and I had to disgorge illgotten spoils; and my conscience is not smiting me a bit, any more than William Gray's is about thae beasts. Oh! Kenneth, man, just a nip, just the least nip with the soda. If you will not give me counsel, you might at least give me a drink.”

Kenneth held out about the nip, but it was not so easy to give advice. He knew his uncle was universally believed to have driven hard bargains with the Diroms, to have kept back facts, to have counted everything in the most advantageous way for himself, and although the amount of blame was certain to have been exaggerated, he thought it likely that there was some, especially in his uncle's ingenuous confession that he wanted to buy the whole affair because it was so hard to be honest on shares.

“And one reason why I wanted to leave the whole boiling of the property (stock and crop, as they say in Scotland), in your hands, Kenneth, my man, was that I could trust you, and that you might act as you saw fit, and could deal handsomely by the Diroms, and I would rest quieter in my grave to think that it would be done. I had made a memo, for you in black and white.”

“But, my dear uncle, only think of resting quietly out of your grave, for that is the chief point to be considered now. It would not satisfy you to postpone what you wish for till you were dead, and when perhaps those old masters of yours did not need it or did not care about it.”

“Faith, I'll be caution, they'll never be past the need of ten thousand pounds, or past the caring for it. Did you ever see the man alive that would not find it convenient to accept of such a sum of ready money? Ask William Gray himself his opinion of that matter?”

“But they might die before you,” urged Kenneth.

“No, no, small chance of that, Kenneth, my life's a bad one. I'd better tell you now. I'm not long for this world. Every bout I take is so many nails in my coffin. And it's that that drove me wild to think of Jim running through everything, and the Diroms none the better; but you'll mind what I say about them.”

“This is only the depression after such a hard week as you have been having,” said Kenneth.

“Say a fortnight, for I doubt it was that long; I've no count of time when I'm in for these bursters, but there was an awful file of papers to open. But it's no just the horrors that are on me. It's God's truth; but I tell you, only you're no to open your mouth about it to living man or woman. What would they care for me if they thought I might go out like a flash of a candle any day? So about the Diroms—£10,000 is what I think would be
handsome.”

“But, my dear uncle, believe me it would be infinitely better for you to
do this generous action yourself. You would be relieved at once.”

“It's a lot of money, Kenneth. I could not just lay my hands on it, and
then I scarce bear to part with it if I could. Whereas you—it would be
nothing to you—you had never had the siller, and would never feel you
were parting with it. It would be easier for you to do it than if I had left it
as I might have left it to Jim. But £800 a year is owre little for yourself;
make it £1,000, make it £1,000—and with the house and the perquisites
and the pickings that most managers get, that I'll no debar you from, you
may lead the life of a gentleman at Tingalpa, and do well for the property
and get a wife and bairns about you.”

“But if Jim should marry and have a family, what then?”

“He'll be better able to keep them with the gear in your hands than in his
own. His son may take after me, and of the saving kind, and be deserving
of the placing. And think, Kenneth, a thousand pounds by the year, and the
worth of maybe five hundred more, where would your headpiece get you
that elsewhere?”

“But I might change, uncle. The handling of so much money might be a
snare to me, and my cousin, distrustful and disappointed, might irritate me
into not carrying out your intentions.”

“Kenneth, I'm between the de'il and the deep sea. I'd sooner trust you that
you'll keep to be the honest man you are now, than that Jim will change
from a prodigal to be careful and prudent. And your very scruples show me
that you mean to do your best by the property, by Jim, and by me. Only,
what do you think? We had better have it settled, what s hould be for Mrs.
Oswald so long as she lives and what for Jim. She must have her meat and
her drink and her duds just all as good and as plenty when I'm under the
ground as when I'm to the fore. No man shall say that George Oswald
would see his wife scrimpit.”

“Settle by will one thousand, two thousand, or whatever you think fit on
Mrs. Oswald.”

“No, Kenneth. I'm no going to sw allow the cow and worry on the tail of
it. If I provide for her and no for Jim, it may make ill-blood between
mother and son; and if he does not coax her out of it, he'll sulk and maybe
never look near her, and that would be hard on her, poor woman. No, I put
all my eggs in one basket, it's a big venture, but I can trust you with it, and
with the d—d Dirom business too. For every £6 Jim gets out of the estate,
let her get £1 while she lives, and when she is gone, Jim may have it all.
But mind, dinna starve the property. Let everything be kept up as good as I
leave it and made better if it can be done. And this ten thousand to the
“If you would only write yourself to them, telling them the story exactly as you have told it to me, honestly and straightforwardly,” said Kenneth, “that you do not think, looking back on the transactions after this lapse of time, that you took any advantage of them in making very speculative arrangements for yourself; but that as things turned out, you gained more than you had expected, and that it would be a pleasure and a satisfaction to you to give them a share in your prosperity.”

“Not a share, Kenneth. I said a lump sum, no partnership — it's just an entanglement when one man is here and another man on the other side of the world. Oh! it's a sore temptation to the flesh, and flesh is weak. Only, Kenneth, you look so like your mother that would rather be wronged herself than wrong anybody, that I feel as if I could trust you when I'm gone.”

“Well, trust me here and now, and write this letter; send the money when you are alive, and can feel it something to give up, something taken out of the goods you have laid up for many years, like the rich man in the parable. And believe me, my dear uncle, your soul will be more at ease for the remainder of your life, be it longer or shorter, for having done so.”

“And that night God required his soul of him, Kenneth. It may be as you say. I made a memo for you, and it did me good to do that; I've spoken to you about it, fully and clearly, this day, and it has done me good to do that; but as you say it will maybe do me most good of all to take the bull by the horns myself, and get an overdraft or something of the kind. Though Kenneth, we've stretched our credit for stocking at Ballywallock pretty close. Maybe next year we'll be easier. Jim's drawing lots of money, too, with all this travelling with this blackleg. Next year, Kenneth.”

“Let it be done now, Uncle George. You ask my advice, and you must take it. You want relief now, and there should be no delay.”

George Oswald's opinion of his nephew rose at his firmness and promptitude, even though he had some natural pangs at such a large overdraft, which would not be recouped substantially. He wrote the letter to his old employers, and a very good sensible letter it turned out, and in two days the first of exchanges for ten thousand pounds were remitted, via Brindisi, to John and Robert Dirom.

We may anticipate a little the course of events, and say here that the astonishment of his old employers at this unlooked-for liberality was unbounded. They had previously indulged in many reproaches against their old overseer, who had built a splendid fortune on their foundations, and had left them to live on a beggarly pittance. But the candour of the letter, and the handsome way in which this large sum was given, made a
complete revolution in their feelings, and when the news spread among all
the Australians travelling or resident in England, who are a very clannish
set of people, and through them back again to Victoria, George Oswald's
character rose so high, every newspaper had such a paragraph about his
liberality, he was so congratulated, so shaken hands with by people who
had been shy of him heretofore, especially by Mr. Gray — that he felt as if
several nails had been taken out of his coffin, and that he really could
forgive William Gray altogether about “thae beasts.” From the moment the
thing was done, he had felt relieved, and a few financial pinches that had to
be undergone, reminded him every now and then that he had done a grand
thing; but when he got the full credit for his liberality, he was grateful to
Kenneth who had worked like a good one all the time, and who had taken
an added interest in markets, in financing, and in turning everything to the
best account, in order to make this large disbursement the less felt.

And now that Kenneth was relieved from the care of Jim, he could be
much more serviceable to his uncle, and the days passed busily and
cheerfully, the evenings peacefully. Although the father and mother
regretted the absence of their son, it was impossible for the cousin to feel it
otherwise than as a relief. And the prolongation of the absence and his
apparent absorption in new plans seemed to all conclusive proof that he no
longer cared for Mrs. Ellerton, and as that was the main object of his
travels, George Oswald felt somewhat more reconciled to his delay, and
honoured his heavy drafts with a moderate amount of growling.
Chapter 30 Sympathy

To return to the memorable day of Kenneth's return to Tingalpa after his pioneer expedition, he took the earliest opportunity after his uncle was quieted and he seemed safe from relapse, to ride to Wilta to make enquiries after Sybil; and his anxious face, and his ill-concealed agitation confirmed Edith Gray in her belief that this was the object of his deep and hopeless love. It was no doubt wrong to fall in love with one bound by sacred vows to another; but when this love asked nothing and gave everything, it seemed to Edith only one of these ironies of fate that so often make or mar the noblest nature. How could he help loving the sweetest woman he had ever seen — the most unhappy, the most in need of a strong helping hand? And to be loved so seemed to a girl whose heart had never been touched by passion, or even by that sentiment which passes for passion with so many women, the most precious thing that could be had in this lower world. The secrecy and the repression of such love contrasted with the open and frank affection which Edith herself had from fond father and loving brothers. She sometimes took herself to task for his interest, her sympathy with what severe morality ought to stigmatise as sinful, especially as she could not help wishing that Ellerton might be put out of the way somehow, for then Sybil might have a chance of happiness even with Mr. Oswald's nephew.

How far was this love returned? Sybil's pale face flushed a little when she received Mr. Kenneth Oswald's kind enquiries as to her health.

"Tell him I am better for the present at least. Might I see him, Edith. I should so like to see him."

"It will not excite you Sybil?" asked her friend.

"No, it will quiet me, I think. But —"

"But you want to know is it proper? You have seen papa and Walter occasionally for a few minutes, and I think there is no impropriety in seeing this good friend, who knew nothing about your illness till yesterday."

"I have no faith in getting well — that's why I want to say good-bye to him while I'm able," said Sybil.

"Don't be so gloomy, Sybil, does not the doctor say you are on the right way for recovery now? But I'll bring Mr. Kenneth in. Don't upset him by your forebodings. He cannot stand it just now."

Did she care how she looked? Not a bit. Edith just smoothed the hair, and administered the little refreshment she needed before she summoned Kenneth. She felt as if it would be treason to look at the meeting, and was turning her head aside when Sybil sought her hand, and drew her head
close to her. In answer to Kenneth's broken, agitated, hesitating greeting —  
“I thought I should never have seen you again,” said Sybil, “and I wanted  
to thank you for all your goodness, and to give you my poor good wishes  
for your happiness. At present they say I am to live, but I do not feel as if I  
should, so I just want to say good-bye, in case I am right. That's all.”  
Kenneth still held the thin transparent hand she offered to him. Although  
practised eyes could see that the crisis was past, she looked to him more  
like dying than living. “When you go to Scotland, as no doubt you will,  
find out papa and the rest of them, and tell them you were a friend, a dear  
friend of mine.”  
“What can I do for you,” said he; “there seems nothing for me to do now.”  
“Not much here; you were very kind at Castlehurst. But if you would  
persuade dear Edith to go out for a ride with you, it would please me. She  
looks quite worn out, and I cannot get her to leave me. Now the nurse is  
quite enough for me. A canter over the Wilta hills may bring some colour  
to her cheeks, and you can have the sort of talk you like.”  
“I refused to go with Walter this morning, and he went off without me,”  
said Edith.  
“But you won't refuse me this time. I'm tired now. Go and have your  
ride,” insisted Sybil.  
Edith yielded to her friend's wish, and Kenneth was only too happy to be  
her companion. Two Wilta horses were brought out, and Edith in her  
riding-habit and hat with the least possible delay — and the two were in  
the open air together.  
“She is going to live, Mr. Kenneth, whatever she may say — going to  
live. I suppose we should be glad, and yet, though this is what we have  
fought hard for, I feel it is a doubtful blessing,” said Edith, when they had  
got clear of the place, and were taking the way to the wooded hills which  
Sybil could have a peep at from her window.  
“A very doubtful blessing indeed,” said Kenneth. “Surely when people  
are so miserably mated, there should be some facilities for divorce.”  
“I suppose the aggregate of happiness is secured by making marriage a  
contract not to be lightly broken,” said she doubtfully. “You see it cuts  
both ways. Woman being the weaker, would come by the worst of it if she  
could be lightly cast aside. Men being the lawmakers would naturally carry  
out what suited them best, if they made alterations in the laws of marriage  
and divorce.”  
“That is severe, Miss Gray,” said Kenneth.  
“No, it is simply the truth, I think. If we were the lawmakers, we should  
look out for our own advantage. But even though there is an especial
hardship in poor Sybil's case, there could be no chance of a rupture of the
tie unless one or both of the parties earnestly desire it.”

“Do you not think she would if she could see a chance of relief?” asked
Kenneth.

“Scarcely, for she is proud, and could not bear any one to know of her
unhappiness, least of all her friends at home.”

“And he — do you think he cares about her?”

“In a certain way he does. He was very disappointed about the money,
but he is proud of her beauty and her accomplishments, and I believe he
thinks that he could make money by her voice. From things that she
dropped in her wanderings, I feel sure he would like her to go on the
operatic stage.”

“That she must not do,” said Kenneth emphatically. “Her father must be
written to, Miss Gray. If no one else will do it, I shall do it myself. That
would be a desecration indeed.”

“So I think, but of course delirious wanderings are not certainties, they
want confirmation. Papa and I are writing the doctor's opinion, and are
passing as lightly over Mr. Ellerton's neglect as possible. I knew nothing
would offend Sybil more than for any one to tell the dear ones at home that
she is miserable. Oh! could I ever be brought to such a pass that I could
keep such things from papa?”

Edith felt for her handkerchief in the pocket of her saddle, slackened the
pace of her horse, and went off for the first time in her life, to her own
astonishment, into a fit of hysterical crying, every now and then laughing
at herself, but in such an absurd uncontrollable way that it was much worse
than the tears.

“You have been overdone, as Mrs. Ellerton says,” said Kenneth.

“Anxiety, fatigue, and no fresh air. It was time she ordered you out.”

“But to give way now, when she is really better; it is too absurd.”

“Not at all,” said Kenneth. “It is when the strain is off that one gives way.
It all came on me, illness, danger, and favourable crisis, yesterday. And my
poor uncle upset with it, and in other ways, in a most unprecedented
manner, needed my presence and help, or I should have been here
yesterday; but I am not worn out with watching.”

“And would not cry if you were. It is so womanish, so babyish of me”,
said Edith.

“How do you know that I could not cry. It would take very little to make
me cry now,” said Kenneth, and his face showed the truth of the admission.

“No, I don't mean to try. I'm going to make you laugh. We've had news
from New Zealand.”

“Where your brothers are. Good news, I hope, especially of your
favourite, Charlie.”

“Oh, yes! the best of news; he is going to be married. Should not I be pleased?” said Miss Gray, biting her lip.

“Yes, if you knew about it, and were prepared for it, and if you think she will make your brother happy.”

“I think she will,” said Edith slowly. “I hope she will; but as you say, I was not prepared for it, and it was a little hard to be put second with Charlie just at one stroke. My Queensland brother is married, and has four dear children, though I have never seen them; he writes and Jane writes, and the eldest tries to write, too, such dear little letters, and I seem to know all about them. But Charlie did not like to write till he was sure that this Helen Murray would accept him. I did not know his hopes and fears, his doubts and encouragements. If I had I should have rejoiced over the news I had yesterday, as sincerely as disinterestedly as you yourself could do; but when it was put point blank as a fait accompli, to be made public at once, and a photograph sent, and congratulations desired, I could not but feel a little selfish,” and Edith Gray cried again, but more quietly than before.

Kenneth's heart swelled within him with sympathy for her very natural feeling, and with pride at her confidence in him, and her praises of his sincerity and disinterestedness. “I do not wonder in the least at its striking you in this way. Was there no alteration in his letters lately to prepare you for this?”

“Perhaps there were more poetical quotations, and more metaphysics than usual, but I never suspected that he would fall in love without confiding in me.”

“Do you judge of him by yourself? Would you confide the rise and growth of an attachment to him?” asked Kenneth.

“Ah! with a woman it is so different,” said Edith. “If she is so unfortunate as to fall in love first, it is only foolish, not adventurous, or bold. If she receives an offer about which she hesitates, she has scarcely a right to betray confidence, so her lips are closed until there is a definite engagement, and it is the fashion to be very prompt in publishing that, in order to cut off all hopes on both sides. It will come all right about Charlie when I get Helen's promised letter, and another one from himself; but what with the suddenness of it, and with being in the depressing atmosphere of a sick room at the time, even Sybil noticed my being more than usually upset. And when Walter asked me to ride with him this morning, I knew he was only going to talk about this, and they are all so pleased.”

“The young lady, is satisfactory in every way, suited to your family expectations.”

“No money, if that is what you mean; but of a very good family, indeed;
highly educated, and by the photo, with a most interesting face, though not handsome. Papa is always glad to see his boys settled young. Walter is, I fear, going to disappoint him; but the others are all sure to marry. Now I feel somewhat like myself again. I have got it out with you, as I could not with Papa or Walter.”

“I am very glad to have been of any service to you, though, perhaps, if you had come here by yourself, and told your feelings to the hills and the trees it might have done you as much good.”

“No, Mr. Kenneth, no. As our friend, Mr. Henderson would say, human sympathy is better than the mute sympathy of nature.”

“I spoke without believing what I said,” said Kenneth. “I really feel as you do. That fine poem of our Australian poet, Henry Kendall, ‘Fainting by the Way,’ which you pointed out to me lately, rung in my ears all the journey I took with the new manager my uncle had sent up to Riverina, and I could not help feeling that fine as was the description of our desert wastelands, there was a sort of allegory conveyed equally powerful, of the help, the strength, and the cheer of human companionship and sympathy,” said Kenneth.

“You felt the full force of the first verse, I'm sure,” said Edith.

Swarthy wastelands, wide and woodless, glittering miles and miles away,
Where the south wind seldom wanders, and the winters will not stay —
Lurid wastelands, pent in silence, thick with hot and thirsty sighs,
Where the scanty thorn-leaves twinkle, with their haggard, hopeless eyes.
Furnaced wastelands, huncht with hillocks, like to strong billows rolled,
Where the naked flats lie swirling, like a sea of darkened gold.
Burning wastelands, glancing upward, with a weird and vacant stare,
Where the languid heavens quiver, o'er vast depths of stirless air.

“I did feel the fidelity of the picture,” rejoined Kenneth; “but you recollect the despair of the one traveller, and his weariness, and his desire to be left to perish; his want of faith in God or man to help in this scene of arid desolation, and that entreaties and the arguments and the encouragements were scouted.”

Leave me, brother, all is fruidess, barren, measureless, and dry;
And my God will never help me, though I faint and fall and die.

“And the bolder, stranger, and more hopeful traveller, will not leave him; he speaks all the more confidently —
Rise, and lean thy weight upon me; life is fair and God is just,
And He yet will show us fountains, if we only strive and trust.
Oh, I know it, and He leads us to the glens of stream and shade,
Where the low sweet waters gurgle round the banks that will not fade.
Thus he spake, my friend and brother, and he took me by the hand
And I think we walk'd the desert till the night was on the land,
Then we came to flowery hollows, when we heard a far-off stream
Singing in the moony twilight, like the rivers of my dream;
And the balmy winds came tripping softly through the pleasant trees,
And I thought they bore a murmur like a voice from sleeping seas —
So we travelled, so we reached it; and I never more shall part
With the peace, as calm as sunset, folded round my weary heart.

“I felt at a time when life was very hard for me that our friend, Mr. Henderson, took me by the hand.”

“What a strong love you have for poetry,” said Edith after a pause.
“Since Charlie went I have rather missed my most appreciating listener. I suppose you and Mr. Stalker had great sympathies then, or was your taste of earlier date,” said Edith, who had a great curiosity about Kenneth's youth.

“It was my mother who first gave me the love for ballads and for poetry of every kind,” said Kenneth.

“And she died when you were quite young — ten years old, I have heard you say. I kept my dear mother till I was sixteen, and then I suppose it was all the harder to lose her.”

Kenneth felt how much harder the loss had been for him than for her. “I lost far more, however,” said he unconsciously, repeating his father's words to his grandmother.

“I have always felt a strong interest in your mother, who clung so closely to her dead husband's father and mother. Another and a better Ruth, for Ruth shook off her cares by making an advantageous marriage, while your mother, in the words of Sybil's ring was ‘faithful unto death.’ And she loved poetry and nature, and had a motherly heart to the pretty girl you told me about who lives with your grandparents, and writes to you for them every month — so that she won a successor for her duties.”

How Edith had pieced out his mother's character from his chance hints.

“And she died so young,” continued Edith. “I cannot recollect my mother as other than middle-aged, for I was the last of the family. You must recollect yours differently. Have you not got her likeness in that locket you wear?”

“Yes, hers and Nelly's,” said Kenneth. “Would you like to see them,” and he unfastened the locket from his watchchain and handed it to Edith, who opened it, and was at first a little puzzled to tell which was the mother's, for
they both looked so girlish. But a second glance showed the strong likeness to Kenneth.

“It is a lovely face,” said she, as she returned it. “I thank you very much for the sight of it. Ah! I think you needed some one to take you by the hand in the desert, when you had no longer that dear mother, those College friends, and those intellectual pursuits. Tingalpa must have been ‘fruitless, barren, measureless, and dry’ for you.”

“I hear Mr. Henderson has been in the neighbourhood,” said Kenneth.

“Yes, you missed him in his round last week. He had taken a shorter beat. I think he heard of Mrs. Ellerton's illness somehow, and came to ask for her. He prayed with us for her in such a way that the whole of the people in the men's dining-room were in tears, and he gave me some good counsel about bearing up, that it appears did not did not stay with me long.”

“And my uncle would miss him too, that's a pity.”

“Oh! he was at Tingalpa,” said Edith.

“But my poor uncle was not fit to receive him. He took Jim's indifference very hardly to heart.”

“I was only too glad of it. That trouble is over at least,” said Edith.

“So it appears, but his father was hurt at his cold-heartedness.”

“I like your uncle so much more than I could have thought I would do. He showed so much feeling about poor Sybil — and such righteous indignation at her husband's conduct that he won my heart. I was sorry to hear he had given way — but he must have missed you. It must be a great satisfaction to you to feel you can supply in so many ways the place of his disappointing son.”

All this talk was very pleasant to Kenneth, although he knew well that there would have been less confidence, less approval if she had not believed that his affections were engaged by her friend, his unsuspected sister.

As Sybil slowly gathered strength, and began to be convinced that she was really to take up the burden of life again, Kenneth's visits to Wilta were pretty frequent. He made them sometimes fit in with his business, and sometimes took them as independent errands.

He was always admitted to see Mrs. Ellerton in her room for a short interview — as it was sometime before she could be moved into the drawing-room. Sometimes he brought a bunch of rare heaths or flowers from his long rides, sometimes birds he had shot to tempt her appetite, sometimes a book he thought would interest her, and always the little flush of pleasure rose to her cheek at his messages and gifts.

She looked very glad to see him on the day when she first sat up in her
invalid-chair, set close to the open drawing-room window, so that she could look at and smell the flowers, and feel the freshness of the air. Edith was determined not to look on at this meeting. She pretended to be arranging some flowers on a stand at a little distance, but she could not help catching a few words. There was emotion on both sides, plainly perceptible to her ears, so after a few low-toned questions and replies she thought she might join in, partly to check any undue agitation. Sybil looked on her friend's face with loving grateful eyes, in which, however, there was unutterable sadness.

“You have called me back to life with all your care, and it seems thankless in me to care about it so little.”

“Not so much as your friends do for you, or as much as you will do for yourself when you get stronger. This life has such limitations that it can scarcely be called living,” said Edith.

“Some blessed limitations,” said Sybil, “you see I need to do nothing — and care about nothing.”

“And that is the hardest part of it to me. All my happiness springs from what I can do and care about. Don't you feel the same, Mr. Kenneth?” said Edith.

“That is the happiness of health and youth, and activity,” answered Kenneth, “which you and I ought to feel. The happiness of convalescence and of peaceful old age is different.”

“I should be so impatient if I were chained to that chair, and far worse if I had to stay for weeks in bed. I have not been tried by any illness that I can recollect of. I have most vulgar and uninteresting good health.”

“There is one limitation that I do chafe at, however,” said Sybil — “my letters. When may I be allowed to write? They kept all my letters from me till three days ago, and then I got them by instalments, and that martinet of a doctor said I was the worse for reading them.”

“I thought you would have been still worse if they had been kept from you longer, but it delayed your being in the drawing-room two days, he said,” observed Edith.

“Edith has been so good as to write by each mail to mamma; and Mr. Gray and the doctor to papa.”

“And very painful it was to do it,” said Edith.

“But I want to write to papa myself — and after I have read the letters I feel the more anxious.”

“No bad news?” asked Kenneth anxiously.

“No, except that he had lost an old friend, his family lawyer, Mr. Shiel, you may have heard me mention him — and my father felt it a great loss, though he is quite an old man, and it was to be expected. But grandpapa
seems breaking up a good deal after his misfortune, and mamma had been much with him in Edinburgh, and papa was dull, and fretting about my being so far away, and he would get such bad news about me.”

“This illness of yours must have been a great trial to them,” said Kenneth.

“Only a trouble — here or there, only a trouble. I thought I was going to rid you all of me, but here I am. You are all too good.”

“Could not I write for you,” said Edith, “to your dictation.” She used the words Kenneth would have been so glad to say.

“No, I must write myself, if it is only a short letter. He will never believe that I am really better if I do not write with my own hand.”

“But you will allow me to supple ment your letter by telling what an angel you have been, and how dear you are to all of us. I shall enjoy writing to Mr. McDiammid, to a gentleman whom I have never seen and may never see. It is a great deal more charming to my fancy than writing to a lady.”

“Don't say whom you may never see. Of course you are going home soon, and if they do not rejoice over you at Castle Diarmid, if papa does not fall in love with you at first sight, and perhaps some one else, it will be strange — only I shall not be there to see.”

“Why not, Sybil? Stranger things have happened. There is nothing apparently so easy as moving to and from Australia nowadays.”

“No home-going for me,” said Sybil; and she crumpled in her hand the last letter she had received from her husband, announcing that “as she had now turned the corner, but was likely to be some time before she was strong enough to up home again, his friend Jim Oswald and he had determined on extending their trip and going via New Zealand to San Francisco. This would make young Oswald's tour complete in one direction, and he would only need a journey home per mail streamer via Suez to make him a thoroughly travelled monkey who had seen the world,” Mr. Ellerton said in his epistle. “I look forward to your going, Edith — and you too, Mr. Kenneth, I feel sure you will learn to know and to prize my father even more than his photograph.”

“There is not much chance of my getting such a holiday for many years to come, if ever,” said Kenneth. “I have not been long in the colony, and if my uncle did not see the good of it for himself, it is not at all likely that he will think of my needing or deserving such a treat — and business will never call me to England.”

“You would like to see the grandparents who brought you up,” said Edith, kindly, “and your clever fellow students, especially the young clergyman you speak of, and Mr. Oswald will give you a holiday for the
purpose, and then you will see this phoenix of a Mr. McDiarmid. But do you know that the way in which Mrs. Ellerton talks of her father sometimes puts me a little out of humour. There's my own father, the very best and kindest of men; but he is not such absolute perfection as this Highland chieftain. He says a hasty word now and then. People say he is a keen hand at a bargain; he is a little regardless of appearance, not that I like him any the less, not a bit; but there is no weak spot in Sybil's father.”

“Perhaps it is because you do not see him so closely as you see your father,” said Kenneth.

“Well, it may be so, but really Mr. McDiarmid seems too good to be spoken of except on Sundays, to use the words applied to his father by a poor ne'er-do-well who was sent out here to see if anything could be made of him, and nothing could.” And the girl sighed.

“What leverage can we apply to such people as you speak of,” Kenneth said, “and yet there must be a power of recovery in every human soul. But no one but God can know how and where to strike the apparently dead conscience and to strengthen the wavering will. We are so blind, so possessed with our own conceits about our fellows that we strike falsely and drive them often in the wrong direction.”

“You are thinking about your cousin,” said Sybil, softly. Kenneth, in fact, was thinking of Jim, but also of Mr. Ellerton, who seemed to him to be a still greater failure, and as he had had originally much more mental power, he was a more mischievous member of society — and to this worthless fellow's lot that poor, struggling life had linked itself.

“Yes,” he answered, “I was thinking about him a good deal — but this is too much talk for an invalid.”

“I am not strong yet, it will take so long, as Herbert says. I have been so nervous and irritable, that often I could not bear even to be read to, though Edith reads so beautifully. But I must gain strength for my letters on Tuesday. If I go on as I am doing, I shall get leave to write; if not, I suppose I must get a friend's help.”

She did not particularize Edith, and Kenneth liked to think that if Edith had not been at hand he might have been trusted in preference to Mr. Gray or his son, and Miss Gray read the expression of his face.
Chapter 31 The Blot on the Scutcheon

Edith saw that her friend was comfortably settled, and withdrew with Kenneth into the adjoining room, which was the library, or as she preferred to call it, the book-room.

“Don't you think some one should write definitely to her friends about how she is situated with her husband, and tell them how hopeless a scoundrel he is,” said Edith. “I am more and more convinced that he intends her to go on the stage, and thinks there is no use in his returning till her strength and her voice have come back. And in this tour they are taking, you may be sure he is visiting the theatres and getting acquainted with managers and directors of opera companies, and preparing them for her début. He went provided with photographs. You recollect the very fine one he had taken and coloured before he left, that your cousin got surreptitiously copied for himself. She would succeed, I do not doubt, if she gets back her voice, and he would live in idleness and vice on her earnings.”

“Mrs. Ellerton has not told you of any such intention?” said Kenneth.

“No, but what between her words when she could not keep a bridle on her lips, and many other trifling signs in corroboration, I am as convinced of it as if she had distinctly stated it. The look on her face when she is about to open his letters is even more pathetic than after she has read them. It seems as if she expected even worse that she receives. Her father surely could not be such a good man as she represents him to be to allow her to marry that man at seventeen; only think of it, at seventeen to choose such a fate.”

“And to be bound by that choice,” said Kenneth, “the pity of it, oh! the pity of it. But you are right, Miss Gray, her father ought to be informed, and he will no doubt urge her to return to a safe and happy home. There is no living child, thank God, to complicate matters.”

“If I write for her, I must only write what she says, and though I have spoken of the matter to papa, he does not like to inform Mr. McDiarmid without Mrs. Ellerton's sanction, and that he cannot ask until she is stronger. If he writes for her to join him, I shall, however. So long as she is at Wilta, I think we can shield her from a good deal. She looks upon you and me as her best friends, I know.”

“Does she? I am proud to be joined with you thus. How proud you cannot even imagine!” said Kenneth.

“This is the sort of feeling I am sure you and I have about her,” and Edith took down a volume of Robert Browning's plays and dramatic lyrics, and
read aloud Gwendolen's speech to Mildred —

GWENDOLEN Here, Mildred, we two friends of yours will wait
Your bidding, be you silent, sleep or muse?
Only when you shall want your bidding done,
How shall we do it if we are not by?
Here's Austin, waiting patiently your will —
One spirit to command, and one to love
And to believe in it, and do its best
Poor as that is, to help it: why, the world
Has been won many a time, its length and breadth
By just such a beginning.
MILDRED I believe
If once I threw my arms about your neck,
And sunk my head upon your breast, that I
Should weep again.

“But how can we do her bidding if she will not tell us what to do. If she
would just throw her arms about my neck and weep out her sorrows, I
should feel encouraged to advise her to part for ever from that worthless
man.”

Edith Gray read with feeling. Kenneth took the book from her hands. The
Blot on the Scutcheon was the name of the play she had quoted from. He
started, coloured but could not help trying to see what was the subject of
the drama which had a title so wounding to his sensibilities.

“Don't you know this play of Browning's? It seems new to you. I think it
is so pathetic. I never can read it even to myself without tears. I think it
would be inexpressibly touching if it were well acted. I believe it was acted
shortly after it was written, and good judges pronounced it very successful.
But I fear it would not be popular with ordinary audiences.”

“They say there is too much condensed thought and too much analysis in
Browning's dramas for the stage,” said Kenneth, “but he can conceive most
powerful situations. I like In a Balcony extremely.”

“I like this still better. Oh! here is another passage which relates to the
subject we talked of when we had our ride together.” “Who knows but the
world may end to-night,” murmured Kenneth, quoting from Browning's
lyric of that name.

“That's not what I mean, and you know it very well,” said Edith laughing,
“but about Charlie and his incomparable Helen, only in reading this you
must reverse the sexes and make brother stand for sister and vice versa,
and I think it will be still more true.”
TRESHAM *Amor vincit omnia* — Mildred, here's a line

(Don't lean on me) I'll English it for you —

“Love conquers all things.” What love conquers them?
What love should you esteem best love?

MILDRED Best love!

TRESHAM I mean and should have said, whose love is best
Of all that love, or that profess to love?

MILDRED The list's so long — there's father's, mother's, husband's —

TRESHAM Mildred, I do believe a brother's love
For one sole sister should exceed them all;
For see, now, only see! there's no alloy
Of earth that creeps into the perfect'st gold
Of other lovers — no gratitude to claim;
You never gave her life — no, not even aught
That keeps life — never tended her, instructed,
Enriched her — so your love can claim no right
O'er hers, save love's pure claim; that's what I call
Freedom from earthiness. You'll never hope
To be such friends, for instance, she and you
As when you hunted cowslips in the woods,
Or played together in the meadow hay.
Oh, yes! — with age, respect comes, and your worth
Is felt, there's growing sympathy of tastes,
There's ripened friendship, there's confirmed esteem.
Much head these make against the new-comer —
The starting apparition — the strange youth
Whom one half-hour's conversing with, or say
There gazing at, shall change (beyond all change
This Ovid ever sang about!) your soul,
Her soul, that is — the sister's soul. With her
'Twas winter yesterday; now all in warmth,
The green leaf's springing and the turtle's voice,
“Arise and come away!” Come whither? — far
Enough from the esteem, respect, and all
The brother's somewhat insignificant
Array of rights! All which he knows before —
Has calculated on so long ago!
I think such love (apart from yours and mine)
Contented with its little term of life,
Intending to retire betime, aware
How soon the background must be place for it;
I think — am sure — a brother's love exceeds
All the world's love in its unworldliness.

“And you have come to feel like this,” said Kenneth, “about your brother.”

“I think so, only I feel mortified that I did not accept the situation more
magnanimously at first. I know I must be second evermore. But a man's
love for his wife is one thing, his love for his sister must be quite another,
in some things better and bigger. Don't you think so? There are the early
associations of which Browning speaks, which never can enter into the
happiest married life, unless it has been a childish courtship, which is very
rare.”

Kenneth's love for his sister was of course entirely detached from
youthful associations, and Edith's words brought back to his memory the
figure of the little Nellie Lindores hunting cowslips in the woods, and
playing with him in the meadow hay.

“You had neither brother nor sister, so it is of little use asking your
opinion; it is like girls asking my views about love, as Miss Roberts did the
other day. Only I think I feel quite satisfied that I shall always be very dear
to Charlie. He is going to bring Helen over after they are married, and if we
do not get on together it will not be my fault. His letters and hers are as
satisfactory as possible. But if you would like the book, take it home with
you. I am always glad to lend Browning to an appreciating reader. Tell me
if you can read dry-eyed, for now that you have confessed to a little
womanish weakness in the tear-line, I should like to know what moves
you. My father and Walter laugh at me because my voice fails and I
become inarticulate when I read to them anything pathetic, so I have never
ventured on this to them. It is one of my favourite individual studies, and
Charlie liked it greatly, too. But in the play Mildred's lover is killed, and
she dies, and the brother, too, so mistaken, so carried away by his wrong
apprehension of circumstances, hurries out of life. I pity him, I think, most
of all.”

“Our poor friend, Mrs. Ellerton, has got to live,” said Kenneth, “and what
can we do to make life tolerable for her.”

“For the present much,” said Edith. “San Francisco is a good way off, let
us hope he may never return; but after all that is a wild hope. What could
keep him in California when he is the possessor of such a valuable property
as Sybil's voice?”

“Did she betray much of her unhappiness or her husband's unkindness in
her wanderings?” asked Kenneth timidly, “if it is fair to ask?”

“No, very little indeed, except about the stage; she seemed to ignore him
a great deal. She went back to Castle Diarmid and the home of her
childhood, and all her people, but especially her father. You know the
McDiarmid, or as he is now called, Norman McDiarmid Esq. is a Highland
proprietor, not very rich, but better than rich. 'No blot on that scutcheon,'
unless this scoundrel brings disgrace on the family.”

“Not by any means so rich I suppose,” said Kenneth after a pause, “as a
Victorian squatter of the first-class; but I suppose many of them would exchange.”

“Papa, I am sure looks up to the family with a great deal of the old clannish reverence, though of course we Grays have not the honour of belonging to the race; but there are old associations close and kindly which bind him to them. I know papa would do far more than he has done for Sybil on her own account now that we have come to know her, but the first thing that drew him to her was that she was a McDiarmid.”

“You have been the truest and kindest of friends. I never can be too grateful, sensible I mean — at least Mr. McDiarmid must feel any old family obligations repaid tenfold,” said Kenneth blunderingly.

“For my part, I am not like your aunt, Mrs. Oswald, who rejoices in the newness of her possessions, and envies the people who go home and sell off everything in their houses and furnish afresh. I found out that when I called the other day,” said Edith.

“So much to my uncle's delight,” said Kenneth, “but I unfortunately was at Cowarral.”

“Now, I am rather ashamed of the newness of everything at Wilta, though it is not glaring, I hope, and we do our best to keep everything in everyday wear. I would rather have that old ring which Sybil has as an heirloom, than the set of ornaments papa got for me last birthday, which are really in excellent modern taste. The dear old gentleman showed great judgement in the choice he made, and he is ordering a facsimile for Charlie's Helen as his wedding gift. She is dark like me, and what suits one will suit the other, and I think Charlie will be pleased that the two women he loves best in the world should wear the same things.”

“But to return to our subject, Miss Gray. I never told you before — but I have a slight knowledge of Mr. McDiarmid, and if neither you nor Mr. Gray can make up your minds to acquaint the family with her true position, I think I ought to pluck up courage and do it myself.”

“Will you,” said Edith with sparkling eyes, “how good of you — but it is only what might be expected from you. Only, don't misunderstand me about what I said of the degradation of Sybil's going on the stage. I honour the artist who feels that she can interpret the divinest thoughts of the masters either of music or poetry; but to be forced reluctantly on the stage to gratify the selfish wishes of her husband is what no friend of Sybil's could bear to see.”

“Your idea is corroborated by some chance talk I have heard from Ellerton about his wife, and often half in jest and half in earnest to her with regard to the money value of her voice. He used to make my cousin Jim wild by saying that with a little special training his wife could be the
reigning prima donna and might realize a fortune,” said Kenneth.

“And your cousin did not like it. I scarcely thought he had so much good feeling,” said Edith.

“It was perhaps his dislike to Ellerton's claiming any property or mastery over her, or perhaps his fear that once brought before the public, other men might step in with more words than he had to express their admiration in, that irritated him so much — but I could only guess at poor Jim's feelings, he never confided them to me, though some of them were only too patent to all eyes.”

“If your letter produces the effect you expect, we shall all lose Sybil for altogether,” said Edith.

“Yes,” said Kenneth, “but it will be for her comfort, safety, and happiness, if happiness she can regain after such sorrows, and what friend who loves Sybil Ellerton would not lose the pleasure of her society for such a good to her. And you have the chance, almost the certainty, of seeing her again. As for me, it is of no consequence.”

“Of course it is best for you,” said Edith, “that she should go; but do not think I under-value the effort it costs you, or your generosity in bringing it about.”

Kenneth bit his lip. This delicious praise, this eager sympathy, his open confidence, was all given under so great a misapprehension. Was he pained or pleased by it? Could he strike any sort of balance? On the whole he was he thought most pleased. When Sybil was gone, she might see differently; but then the “blot on his scutcheon,” which he must disclose before he ventured to ask her to marry him. What was in this book she loved so much? What light would it throw on her sentiments? He was turning to say farewell, when she stopped him and asked somewhat abruptly:

“But you know Mr. McDiarmid, and you never told.”

“Very slightly you would say, and on so much lower a level.”

“Of course we would all feel that. But what I want to know is, does he strike you as such a paragon? Does what you saw of him, much or little, bear out Sybil's extravagant praise?”

“I don't think I am quite a fair judge; my opportunities were limited,” said Kenneth more and more embarrassed.

“Now, Mr. Kenneth, I know what the English of all this is. You think, Sybil absurdly infatuated about her father, and you fancy it would be ungracious to say so. I do not need you to say anything more.”

“You mistake me, Miss Gray, you are always mistaking me. I only wanted to put into words my impressions of Mr. McDiarmid in such a way as that you would not think me as absurd in the same direction.”

“Then you endorse her opinion so far as you can judge,” said Edith
eagerly.

Kenneth bowed acquiescence.

“Why do you not tell Sybil of this acquaintance?”

“You recollect the Frenchman who said the King had spoken to him, when he had merely told him to get out of his way. That might be the extent of our acquaintance, but yet he may have said it so kindly and graciously that I may thrust myself in his way again, if it would do Mrs. Ellerton any good. I had rather you did not tell her or any one else, only I thought you would be glad to know I had some excuse for writing beyond the desire to meddle in other people's affairs.”

“That is what I am constantly accused of, so you must excuse my, perhaps, impertinent curiosity with regard to yours. Forgive me if I have offended you.”

“You could never offend me, Miss Gray, never,” said Kenneth, with a voice that trembled, and then with the borrowed book in his hand, he went into the drawing-room to have another precious half-hour with the sister he meant to do his best to send out of his sight and hearing for life.

When he got home his first business was to read the drama over which Edith Gray had so often wept, and he could not read it without tears. It did not sting him so much as he expected, the circumstances were so different, and as Edith said, all the principal actors died, their difficulties were ended with one tragic crash; whereas in the real case in which he was implicated, they all lived for years, dislocated, separated from each other, and were as strangers henceforth. Edith's love of the book and the author, gave it an interest of another kind, and he could not help feeling that the girl who had wept over Mildred's fate, “who was so young, God left her, and she fell,” would not judge hardly the mother who had redeemed her error by ten years of angelic goodness and filial and maternal devotion.

If Mr. Shiel had still lived, Kenneth would have written to his father under cover to him, but the news of his death made it necessary to address direct to Castle Diarmid. As in case of illness, death, or absence, the letter might be opened by other hands, as all news from Australia might relate to the beloved Sybil, Kenneth was careful to claim nothing more from his father than a slight acquaintance with himself in Scotland, and his near neighbourhood and intimate knowledge of Mrs. Ellerton in Australia might warrant. He thought it right to let them know what the Grays, from motives of delicacy to their guest, might object to doing, that Mr. Ellerton's character was worthless, and that his careless neglect of his wife in this long illness was only less to be blamed than his probable intentions towards her when she had recovered.

It was hard for him not to expand in expressions of sympathy and
affection towards Sybil herself. It was still harder to write as an indifferent stranger to the father whose affection he longed after so sorely; but after careful writing and re-writing, he satisfied himself that no uninstructed eye could suspect any connection, and hoped that if his father did not see words of love, he might be able to read between the lines, and know that the affection was in his heart.
Chapter 32 James Oswald's Object in Life

If Mrs. Oswald had any warm or dominant feeling at all, it was, as we have before said, the maternal, and when her son James kept away month after month with the Ellertons, she first felt a little surprised, then a little annoyed, and lastly a little uneasy. She did not miss his kindly offices, for Jim performed none, and Kenneth was her messenger to Castlehurst to discharge her commissions, her amanuensis when she wanted a letter or note written, and her counsellor in those matters of daily routine in which she liked to go through the form of asking advice. But she missed the sight of her own boy, and her talk about the things he had done, the things he could do, and the things he did not think it worth his while to do.

At first she was glad to think that Mrs. Ellerton's influence must have waned, because he did not return when he thought she was dying, and still more positive proof was afforded by his not hastening back when he heard she was recovering. Jim might do far better than hanging by a married woman's apron-string, and might easily get a rich wife, either in the other colonies or in Victoria itself, but when the absence was prolonged, when the New Zealand and San Francisco trip was suddenly decided on, and no opportunity given of countermanding it even by telegram, she grew, not so restlessly uneasy as her husband, but for her, decidedly discomposed.

Her ignorance was certainly great, but visions of cannibals in New Zealand, and of revolvers and bowie-knives in California threatening the life of her darling son slowly travelled over the hazy field of her imagination. His letters were shorter and shorter as her anxiety became greater, his drafts continued heavy, and it appeared as if his twenty-first birthday, to which she had looked forward so long, would be spent, not at Tingalpa or at Melbourne, in her company, but at Sydney on his return voyage home. For even from Sydney he seemed to object to hurry home.

When the acknowledgment of her husband's liberality to the brothers Dirom covered him with glory in the eyes of all his neighbours, and found its way into the newspapers, she did not at all sympathize with the popular feeling, or with the generous impulses that had prompted it. It was just so much taken from Jim and from her. She had never realized how much her husband possessed, and how hardly he had worked for it. She spent freely, but without any comprehension of the aggregate amount, though she delighted to tell to everyone, lady or gentleman, whom she happened to meet, the price of every article of dress she wore, and of every piece of furniture she crowded her house with. The figures were somewhat hazy and variable, and she could not have added up half-a-dozen items to save
her life, so that it was impossible for her to be consulted by her husband on any business transaction, even if she had felt interested in his affairs.

Ten thousand pounds! It was a fortune in itself. How could Mr. Oswald dream of giving away such an enormous sum? And she recollected that for the first time for many years her husband had refused her something she wanted very particularly (such people always want everything so very particularly) on the ground that money was tight, and the outlay on the Ballywallock run had made him very short of cash — and there he was throwing away £10,000 on those ungrateful Diroms, who had never so much as given her a silk gown when she was manager's wife, or sent her a brooch or pair of earrings as the Robertsons had done to the wife of the man who took their runs on shares, and who had spoken ill of himself into the bargain, as she had heard.

And Jim needed all the money his father would be able to leave him — he was free and very generous (i.e. lavish), and fond of travelling about. He wrote when he wanted fresh supplies, and his father had grumbled at his extravagance, when he himself was chucking away such a fortune at one sweep. She ventured to remonstrate, and to prophesy that he would bring her and Jim to beggary.

"Houts, woman, you know nothing at all about it. Never you meddle with what you cannot understand," was all the reply one got, and she naturally felt very much aggrieved.

She applied to Kenneth, who was bound to give her a more civil answer, but he fully sympathized with the proceeding which he had indeed so strongly urged. She only got out of him that Mr. Oswald could very well afford the sum, and that he had prolonged his life by doing what he thought handsome. Kenneth endeavoured to distract her attention from the expenditure of money which she counted as her own and Jim's, and to awaken some different feelings in her narrow soul by pointing out the honour and glory which she derived from it along with her husband — but the sense of injury had taken possession of her, and was hard to dislodge — and when she perceived that her husband and Kenneth had taken counsel together on the matter, she felt that the latter came in for a great part of the odium.

So she sat down to write to her son Jim herself — the rarest of things — to say that his father and Kenneth between them (and she thought that his cousin had been the prime mover in the matter) had sent the Diroms no less a sum than ten thousand pounds; and very fine indeed in him to give away other people's money, after all he had cost his uncle first and last; seven years of the most expensive education that was to be had in England, and his passage and all his expenses paid — and he always dressed as well as
Jim himself, and riding and driving about as if the place belonged to him; that he should have got Mr. Oswald to give away that mint of money, and they had all had their pinches in consequence. Many a thing she had wished for lately that his father said she must do without, and put her off by saying it was the Riverina station that swallowed up all, and there was this at the back of it all. And his father begrudged Jim's own travelling expenses too; and now everybody, the very papers were saying what a fine thing it was for Mr. Oswald to do, and he was so uplifted about it that he might be giving other sums in the same way. Mrs. Oswald waxed diffuse when she had once fairly started, and she said to herself “if this does not bring Jim back from wandering about with that fellow Ellerton, I do not know what will.”

But neither she nor any one else knew what was Jim's real secret motive in this prolonged companionship with this man, who was living on him, and whom he did not like, after the first novelty was off of getting intimate with a nob who had seen life, and who could put him, James Oswald, up to a thing or two.

Jim had not a large mind or a large heart, but he had a singularly large appreciation of the importance and the desirability and the possibility of getting what he wanted. And at the present time this desirable object was Sybil Ellerton. To get her from her husband, to induce her to leave a poor beggar without sixpence to bless himself with, except as he won it from greenhorns, and who behaved so badly to herself, appeared to him in his first hot impatience to be a feasible plan. He saw, however, on further acquaintance, that it would be exceedingly hard, nay, quite impossible to win her in this way. No, he must have it in his power to offer her lawful marriage, before she could be brought to listen to his solicitations, and with his prospects, and his personal advantage (for he believed himself the best made and the best looking fellow about Castlehurst) he had no doubt of his success then. She knew the value of Tingalpa, and how much his father was worth; the old fellow could not last for ever, and the heir apparent would enter into his kingdom, and she, and she only, should share his throne.

And so with this intense concentration of a selfish and very narrow mind, he elected to be Herbert Ellerton's companion by night and by day, at sea and on land, in crowds and alone, in hopes that some chance might present itself by which he could rid Mrs. Ellerton of a very worthless husband without running himself into any risks of after trouble about it. This caution proceeded both from his natural cowardice, and the consciousness that if Sybil suspected his designs, it would injure him fatally with her.

James Oswald was too profitable a companion for Mr. Ellerton to desire
to shake off, and although the latter sometimes wondered that the young fellow did not think he had had enough of plucking and snubbing and being made a convenience of, he simply set him down as a greater fool and himself as a cleverer fellow than he had believed previous to this experience. Every allusion to the stage as a fitting field for Sybil's voice — every visit to the theatre where Ellerton proposed she should appear — every conversation which he overheard with managers and theatrical people in which he either spoke of his wife's voice or showed her likeness, stirred up fresh wrath in Jim's soul, and a stronger desire to cut short Ellerton's career.

James Oswald had been strangely transformed by the strong possession of this over-mastering idea. He never forgot Sybil as his father reproached him with doing. He would have liked to watch over her when she was ill, and to have taken the part Kenneth was taking (for which he hated him) in her convalescence. He could not trust himself to write to her, and he could not send messages through the detested Ellerton's careless letters. The first thing to be done was to get rid of him, and wherever these two inseparables went, there was thinly disguised contempt on the one side, and the deepest but most carefully concealed hatred on the other.

James Oswald had always delighted in low company, but his present eager wish for seeing the very dregs of society, and calling it “life”, sprang from his hope that Ellerton's insolent airs of superiority, and his questionable play, and the excitement of drinking and gambling might awaken angry feelings among those reckless characters, and that a hasty stroke or a random shot or a general scuffle might rid the world and himself of the man whom he hated, feared, and envied. In every considerable colonial town there are places where such men congregate. Jim had introduced his friend to some choice lots of Melbourne roughs before he sailed, then to the Adelaide rowdies, next to the Hobart queer customers, and then tried the temper of the dangerous classes in Sydney, which he thought the most hopeful of all, as there must be hereditary tendencies from the old convict element which would flourish well in an old large city like Sydney. But out of all these low dens Ellerton emerged unhurt. On his part he thought it a waste of time to take amusement among people not worth powder and shot, and openly sneered at Jim's vulgar and profitless proclivities in a way which did not soothe the young man's animosity.

It seemed like an inspiration to Jim to suggest New Zealand and San Francisco, and Ellerton consented to it for two reasons. First, he thought a long voyage would do him good; and second, he wanted to see the ‘Frisco theatre and theatrical people. He looked on himself as making a sort of
agent's tour, for which Jim paid the expenses, though he loathed the business. Visions of the revolvers and bowie-knives, and the wild devilry of Californian desperadoes, were much more vivid in Jim's mind than in Mrs. Oswald's, but all these things were levelled in his imagination at Ellerton, and by no means at himself.

In a wild stormy night close to the coast of New Zealand, when the steamer strained and cracked and even the old hands saw some danger, Ellerton went up on deck, and close behind him crept Jim. It was dark as pitch, save for the partial light of the lamp at the helm. Ellerton was holding on by the bulwarks when a sudden sea swept him off his feet, and a triumphant feeling rose almost to Jim's mouth that now it was accomplished; but lithe and quick his enemy caught by a rope and saved himself.

“That was a close shave Jim,” said he. “Look out for yourself. We are safer below.”

“Are you out of breath,” Jim said as he stumbled on the top of him.

“Not unless you mean to choke me. What the devil do you mean by sitting on a man's throat like that?”

“I can't see my hand before me,” said Jim, and he got up reluctantly as one of the officers came forward and ordered them down at once.

Then Jim lay and thought, would they be shipwrecked, and then might not Ellerton be drowned and himself saved. But daylight brought calmer weather, and they pursued their voyage in safety.

There were no large towns in New Zealand that Jim thought of any account for his purposes; and he was disappointed with San Francisco — at least he found it impossible to make his companion go to the places to which he himself wildly desired to take him. No, Mr. Ellerton had found the hotel good enough, and populous enough to answer his ends of amusement and of getting information. There were no bowie-knives or revolvers in the theatre bars and saloons which he frequented — and Jim Oswald felt that the money his father had so much grudged had been completely wasted, worse than wasted; for the two voyages to San Francisco and back had done Ellerton's health so much good that a life assurance agent would have predicted ten years longer life to him, and taken him at a lower premium, if he had ever gone in for so prudent a thing for the sake of his wife.

Baffled and thirsting for some indirect means of taking the life of his comrade, they returned to Sydney, which both of them liked. Ellerton, because it was not new or so bounceable as Melbourne; and Jim, because it was a large city, where he was not known, and where he still thought something might be done.
Chapter 33 Hugh Carmichael

In a billiard-room in a somewhat shady neighbourhood, a middle-aged, shabby-looking man started at the name of Oswald, carelessly uttered by his companion, and watched the pair keenly. Hugh Carmichael, for it was he who had drifted into a low stratum of society in New South Wales, wondered if this could be the son of that Isabel Oswald whose just rights he had endeavoured to obtain without success. He asked casually where the young man hailed from, and was informed that he was the son of a rich squatter in Victoria now, and somewhat famous all over Australia — so he subsided into comparative indifference — this could not be his Oswald.

The room was filled with the habitués of the place, all evidently of much lower position than the strangers, but all full of the idea that they could easily win money from them, which in the case of Ellerton at least was all but impossible. It may seem a very chimerical idea for poor Jim Oswald to imagine that he could get the better in any way of a man so astute and so unscrupulous as his companion, and he was a weak man to hope to influence others to work for him, but still the idea had taken such hold on his mind that the longer success was delayed the more vehemently he desired it.

Ellerton, of course, knew that there was no real love between himself and his victim, but from many words and actions of Oswald's he came to the conclusion that his insane passion for Sybil was completely worn out, and that it was only as a knowing hand who had seen and associated with upper crust fellows in the old country that he had hung on him, very much to Mr. Ellerton's pecuniary advantage. Heavy as were the young man's drafts on old George Oswald, they did not represent all his losses, for he had given IOU's without any apparent concern. Jim's life was therefore too valuable to Ellerton to be risked foolishly — and on the appearance of a brawl in which the lad felt strangely interested, he wanted to hurry out before the quarrel came to a head. Hugh Carmichael noted the dupe and the victim, and wished that he had only the dress, the appearance, and the (as he called it) cheek that would enable him to hold in hand so profitable a charge. There was some difficulty in getting out, the stair and passages were crowded with some newcomers attracted by the noise, who wanted to know what was the matter.

“It was easier getting in,” said Ellerton.

“Facilis descensus Averni,” said the stranger.

Jim exchanged a glance with his companion; a Latin quotation from the shabbiest man in the company always amused him. “That's what I always
used to say to Kenneth when he talked big about Latin and Greek and stuff,” he said half-aloud to Ellerton. “Much good it does. And there, hang it, he's got the governor's ear and a pull at the governor's purse, as I hear from my mother, confound him. I suppose it is time we moved homeward, unless you care to take root in Sydney.”

“I should not mind doing it, for they have more appreciation of the best style of music in Sydney than in most places, but I must go home for my wife before I can settle anywhere. I don't suppose the Wilta people would let her come here to join me.”

Although the stranger did not hear all the words spoken by the two strangers, he caught the name Kenneth, and he moved towards the speaker.

“I think your friend called you Mr. Oswald,” said he. “May I ask if your family is originally from the Lothians in Scotland?”

“You may ask and welcome; but as to an answer, that is a horse of another colour,” said Jim rudely. He liked to be rude to a seedy man who made Latin quotations.

“The colonial aristocracy are not generally very much interested in their British antecedents,” said Ellerton, with the sneer that Jim always hated him for.

“We are not so ticklish in Victoria as they are hereabouts,” said Jim. “At any rate, there are not such serious reasons why we should be. I'm not ashamed of anything either in Australia or out of it that my people have done, but I don't want any cad that loaf's about Sydney to be asking questions and perhaps claiming acquaintance with some mouldy old uncle or grandfather in the old country about whom I don't care a hang.”

“I meant nothing offensive,” said the stranger, “quite the contrary. This is my card.” And he astonished Jim by presenting a somewhat dirty card with Mr. Hugh Carmichael, B.A., on it. “If a man has had ill-luck, and is a little down in the world, it does not prevent him from being a gentleman all the same, and when I heard a familiar name, I thought I should not be misunderstood if I asked a simple question, and on second thoughts I think you will acknowledge as much yourself, Mr. Oswald. I do not ask the question again if it is still objectionable.”

“It's the governor you should get hold of, or Kenneth, if you know the old folks, but how can I take an interest in people I have never seen and don't care to see; but you are right in you guess, that the governor is from the Lothians,” said Jim, relenting under Carmichael's respectful apology.

“Are his father and mother still alive?”

“Yes, so far as I know; but I've been on my travels for the best part of a year,” said Jim Oswald.

“And still living in the old place?”
“Yes, I think so — no, by-the-bye, I think I have heard Kenneth say they moved to some place nearer Edinburgh.”

“And your aunt, your father's sister, is she still alive?” pursued Carmichael still more earnestly.

“I think she is dead, I'm pretty sure she is dead, at least Kenneth never speaks about an aunt, and I am sure he jaws enough about the old birds.”

“Never speaks of her at all, you say?” said the stranger with a peculiar smile. “He is your cousin, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes! a son of my uncle James, who was drowned at sea, at least I think it was either James or Patrick, but these stories go in at one ear and out at the other.”

“I did not know that either of those brothers had been married. Are you sure this is not a son of the uncle who went to America?”

“Oh, no; he's living — I know that. I hear he's doing well, and I wanted to hunt him up in the Western States, but this fellow would not stir from San Francisco, and after all perhaps it was too much trouble. But the governor would have liked it.”

“And your cousin Kenneth is certainly not his son,” said the stranger musingly.

“His father has been dead for ages, and his mother too, and the governor took him up, and sent him to school and to College and had him out to be the plague of my life, and to make his own game at my expense, hang him!”

“Is he not older than you, Mr. Oswald?” asked the stranger.

“Yes, more's the pity, for he crows over me with his superior age, and yet it is not three years after all.”

“And he is considerable handsomer, which is also a pity,” said Ellerton. “You'll be cut off with a shilling, my fine fellow, and your cousin will step into your shoes if you don't mend your manners.”

“No fear of that,” said Jim, who nevertheless had often had some misgivings when he thought on the steadily increasing favour in which his cousin was held, and who hated Ellerton the more for reminding him of them. “What does the old fellow care for good looks, at least such good looks as that great hulking fellow Kenneth has got, when there's no likeness to himself. Now I am as like the governor as two peas.”

“On a smaller scale and with a little different complexion, the sort of likeness of a Prussian blue to a marrow-fat,” said Ellerton.

“You are like the family,” said the stranger, “and you seem to have got the family spirit. They are all bold and adventurous, all men to make their mark. And your aunt is dead! And you never heard anything about her, about your Aunt Isabel?”
“I suppose you were spoons upon her in the old days,” said Jim Oswald, laughing vociferously. “That was a very sentimental tone of enquiry. No, I never heard about her at all, so I cannot satisfy your tender curiosity. But old stories are dry work, what will you have to drink? Let's get out of this low hole, and get something at a better tap. I can't think why we came here at all.”

“I am very glad you did, because it has allowed me the pleasure of making your acquaintance and that of your friend,” said Hugh Carmichael.

Ellerton turned on the seedy scholar such a glance of contempt that he felt ten times more desirous of ousting him from his lucrative position and taking the young Victorian in hand than he had done at first sight.

“I shall got to the theatre, I promised to look in tonight, and leave you to your new-found friend,” said Ellerton, with as much scorn in his voice as in his eyes. Hugh Carmichael caught a flash of young Oswald's eye as Ellerton went out. He was off his guard, and the hatred he felt was clearly manifested to this watchful and interested spectator.

“No great difficulty here,” he thought; “there is a screw loose somewhere”.

Ellerton had ceased to flatter and study and consider Jim Oswald as he had done in the earlier days of their acquaintance. He saw, that in spite of his change of feeling with regard to Sybil, of which he now felt assured, the young man still followed him, did as he wished, lost money at games, expended it in travelling, without more than the customary growl, which was inevitable. Use and want, and the young fellow's intense stupidity, bound his victim to him.
Chapter 34 An Unexpected Coadjutor

When Hugh Carmichael used the old address which had been so successful with a preceding generation, he thought that under the circumstances he could scarcely fail of success. He forgot, however, that in these days he had been young and full of animal spirits, ready for any adventure, and able for any fatigue, and that he had not caught the style or manner of speech and of thought which is so strangely fascinating to the young of each generation in their entrance into life.

His exceedingly shabby appearance was also much against him; but on the other hand he had the vantage ground of knowing the secret grudge felt by James Oswald against his supposed friend Ellerton. He adroitly spoke of the latter with qualified praise, and led Jim to make admissions that he was apt to carry things with too high a hand. Then he sympathized with him, flattered him, drank with him, and drew out of him all he knew about his father's possessions, his father's weak points, his cousin's underhand ways, and the recent grievance about the ten thousand pounds. Mr. Carmichael had seen the photograph which had been copied in the Sydney papers about the princely liberality of Mr. Oswald of Tingalpa, and he saw how sore the heir to the estate felt about his folly, and appeared to acquiesce in his opinion that no doubt his father had been got over when he was drunk by this beggarly cousin, who was always putting his fingers into other people's affairs.

Ellerton had not liked the gift, which was so much taken out of what he considered a sort of bank of his own, but he had been openly amused at Jim's indignation, whereas this new man sympathized with it. As they drank pretty deeply, the younger man got muddled, but Carmichael, who was an old seasoned toper, kept his head clear, and did not leave him till they had made an appointment to meet on the morrow.

Ellerton was very contemptuous about the friend whom Jim had made on the strength of a Latin quotation, and of old family ties, and said that he had better cut him if he did not want to be cut by himself. James Oswald wished to do neither. It entered his mind that this poor seedy clever man might help his great project, and might suggest some plan for ridding him of the man he hated, and who stood in his way—only he had a wholesome fear of committing himself in expressing his wishes.

When he spoke of returning to Victoria to look after Kenneth's proceedings, Ellerton said he wished to return also. His wife was now completely recovered, and it was time he took her from Wilta, where she had stayed so long. There appeared to be a good opening for a brilliant
operatic career for her, and he heard that her voice was as fine, if not finer than ever. Of course there must be a little special instruction, and she must go in person to Melbourne in the first place to let the managers and musical critics have a taste of her quality; but that would not take long, and she would astonish the general public very soon. Jim had always hated the notion of this desecration of his idol, and he knew how repugnant to her own feelings any such public appearance must be, so that Ellerton's quiet way of saying his plans would be carried out was gall and wormwood to him.

There was an added cloud on his brow when he kept his appointment with Mr. Carmichael, and the key having been given to his character by the look and the talk of the previous evening, that worthy had no difficulty in finding out that something fresh had irritated him against Mr. Ellerton.

He was sitting reading the newspaper account of a trial for murder on circumstantial evidence in which some stupid oversight had led to detection and conviction.

“How blunderingly these people set about their work,” said Carmichael; “I am sure there are many cases of murder which are never found out at all. Some by violence are supposed to be accidents, and some of poisoning that are put down to natural causes. If people only had the prudence to play their cards well, there need be no discovery or suspicion.”

“Do you think so,” said Jim, with flashing eyes.

“I have not the slightest doubt of it,” said Carmichael, deliberately.

“Did you ever know of such a case?” asked Jim.

“I know of two or three, in which I feel quite certain there was foul play.”

“And you did not think of denouncing the people who were concerned in them?”

“No, not I,” said Carmichael carelessly. “My suspicions were only my own suspicions, judging from some circumstances which I knew of—not sufficient to prove anything, though if I had set the right machinery to work, the thing might have been proved. But it was not my business, and besides there are some men and women that it is a good deed to hurry a little out of the world—out of the way of doing mischief, just as one would kill a venomous snake or a scorpion.”

“And that was the case in those things you spoke about,” said Jim, with suppressed interest.

“Oh! yes; a good riddance, I thought. Hang it, if a man has got a drunken wife, or a woman has got a brutal tyrant of a husband, or an old miserly hunks of a father or uncle keeps his heir out at elbows, where is the harm of hurrying nature a little. They must all die some day. It comes to all the
same a hundred years hence, as Mrs. Squeers used to say to the boys when they got an extra flogging.”

James Oswald sat silent a few minutes, ordered a pick-me-up in the shape of a glass of bitters for himself and Mr. Carmichael, while the latter returned to the report of the trial.

“This is so clumsily done,” said he, “and the motives were too transparent. No amount of false swearing can get people off if they show their cards like that. A poor man who wanted money—an injured man who wanted revenge. Suspicion, of course, falls at once on him.”

Jim thought over it after a pull at the bitters. He was not a poor man who wanted money. No one, as he thought, knew his hatred to Ellerton, and no one could suppose he was actuated by revenge. As for his love for Mrs. Ellerton, he had never thought he showed that at all, and after keeping away from her, and not writing to her or about her all these long months, no one would believe but that he was quite indifferent to her. Whatever happened to Ellerton, if he was not immediately and personally concerned, no suspicion could fall on him.

“If I hated a man I would always consider it safest to be extra civil to him,” said Carmichael, watching the effect of his words; “because if anything happened to him—and nobody knows what may happen—things are all the better for all parties.”

“Supposing that I hated a man,” said Jim, lowering his voice, “and wanted to get rid of him”—and he paused—

“I'd watch my opportunity,” said Carmichael.

“So I have, but it has never come,” said Jim.

“It may come by-and-by.”

“I've lost my best chance, I fear.”

“I'd get some other man whom I could trust to watch him.”

“That's better,” said Jim, “but can you trust another man—there's the hitch.”

“That depends,” said Carmichael.

“Depends on what?”

“On his hating the man as much, or it may be more than you do.”

“Aye, that might be; that's what I've aimed at, but I fear such a man is not to be found,” said Jim slowly, “and if he is not?”

“And if it seemed worth his while?”

“He'd plan something.”

“Safe, swift, and certain,” said Jim, speaking with unwonted precision. All these months of concentrated thought on one subject had made him thoroughly understand it.

“Just so,” said Carmichael.
“And the first man asks no questions; knows nothing at all about it,” said Jim, in the same low eager voice, wiping the perspiration off his face.

“He knows nothing at all about the matter,” said Carmichael.

“And what would be about the figure?” said Jim.

“That depends on the circumstances, on the risk, on the trouble, on the expenses that must be incurred,” said the new-found counsellor.

“But I don't want to hear about the circumstances; I tell you, I am to know nothing whatever about it; these were your own words,” said Jim impatiently.

“That makes it much more costly,” said Carmichael deliberately.

“Can't be helped. I may not be able to pay you all at once, but I'm good for £500.”

“Five hundred pounds,” said Carmichael. “It is not much, but I'll take it as an instalment. Were you never tempted to do it yourself? You've been together so long you must have had opportunity enough,” he said.

“None of any good to me. Once I thought he was washed overboard in a terrific storm, and I was inclined to give the wave a helping hand, when he hollowed out, and people came round and spoiled the game. And once when we were driving together on the face of a precipice I had a mind to make the horse take a false step and turn it all over. If I had been quite sure that I could have sprung out myself at the right moment I would have done it; but I have not the nerves for that sort of business.”

“You owe him money, do you not?”

“Not much,” said Jim.

“You should pay him off or give him bills as are negotiable for all of it before I take a step.”

“I have not got the money, and besides you want some.”

“Are you not of age?” asked Carmichael.

“Yes, I came of age last month, and here I am in this beastly hole with him, and I meant to have such a flare-up at home or in Melbourne when I was twenty-one.”

“Well, you can draw bills on your father for the amount you owe him, and you must give me something in hand, for one cannot move without that in such delicate matters. When do you make your start for Melbourne?”

“Next Monday we propose to sail.”

“Well, we must see that he does not start with you. He will not be well enough. Let him go to the wharf by himself if he is able to.”

“I don't want to hear anything about it,” said Jim.

“Well, I don't mean to tell you, only this, that you must be civil; that is your game with the party at present,” said Carmichael.
Fear and hope, expectation and suspense, struggled together in James Oswald's poor little soul after this conversation. All that he took in very distinctly was that he must give the bills to Mr. Ellerton, and get £50 in hard cash for Mr. Carmichael to begin with, and give bills for the remainder of the £500, and that he was to be especially civil to the man against whom he was plotting. He surprised Ellerton, who had noticed a little ill-humour lately, by his liberal dealings and his extra patience. Indeed, he set that gentleman to wondering what could be his motive, but he could see none, and so merely supposed that he had covered his natural ascendancy over the inferior intellect.

There were no signs of illness on Ellerton's part, which Jim half expected.

The preparations for departure were made, the cab was called, and both gentlemen were stepping into it when Jim recollected that he had forgotten something. He had to go to the Bank, but would not be long. Ellerton had better go and take possession of their berths, and put their luggage on board, and he would get his business done and join him.

He went to the Bank for the passage-money, which he had purposely forgotten, and looked a little shaky, as if he had had a night of it (the teller remarked to his fellow-officers) as he was a good deal in the habit of doing.

When he took a cab from the Bank to the wharf he saw a crowd round a broken down vehicle, and an injured man in the arms of some person unknown. It was the cab and Mr. Ellerton. Was he killed or wounded?"

"Here comes his friend; he'll tell us what to do," said one.

"There's been a precious smash here," said another.

"A little larrikin of a boy driving a cart went right at the trap, and it's smashed. He's crying, and saying he didn't go for to do it, and he says he was not up to driving in such crowds, but he's done the mischief all the same."

"Is the gentleman killed?" said James Oswald, with real emotion in his voice.

"No, I think not," said the man who held him up. "Here comes the doctor; he'll tell how much is wrong. He's fainted, anyhow."

A surgeon walked forward hastily, and pronounced the injury to be merely a broken leg and some bad bruises, but he was fortunate to have escaped so easily, because the fall had been among a lot of iron rails laid upon the side of the wharf, and he might quite as easily have broken his neck or had fatal concussion of the brain. The boy was brought up before the Police Court for reckless driving, but he pleaded his youth and inexperience, and looked such a foolish fellow, that with a caution not to
attempt to drive a horse and cart in a crowd till he was five years older, and
had more sense, he was fined and discharged.

James Oswald gave orders that his injured friend should be taken to the
nearest tolerably comfortable hotel, and accompanied him thither with the
bitterest feelings of disappointment. It had been so nearly done, and so
cleverly done, that it seemed no other opportunity could again offer half so
good.

“What sort of constitution has your friend?” asked the surgeon, after he
had done all he could for his patient.

“Oh, good enough,” said Jim.

“I should think he has lived fast.”

“No mistake about that.”

“Quite young, though; I should say thirty-two.”

“Not more than twenty-eight, I believe,” said Jim.

“He is old in constitution for his years. If he is not careful he may find
this accident somewhat critical.”

“Indeed,” said Jim, brightening up.

“He'll find it hard to be perfectly abstemious, but that is absolutely
necessary. Inflammation may set in, and the consequences may be
serious.”

“You don't mean to say that a man may die of a broken leg,” said Jim.

“A man may die of a scratch in the finger. When the blood is in a vitiated
state, as is the case with hard drinkers, there is no saying what results may
arise from the most trifling abrasion of the skin. If you had met with the
same accident, as you might have done but for your delay at the Bank, you
would have been just as ticklish a case. I've set the leg and prescribed a
lotion for the bruises, and ordered cooling medicine; but the most
important prescription is that he should have no stimulants whatever.”

Here was hope for James Oswald. Ellerton could not live without brandy.
He saw his friend comfortably laid in bed, and went to the place where he
had met Mr. Carmichael on the day when this project was first broached.
There he found him reading the newspaper with an appearance of
unconcern.

“It's a failure so far,” said James Oswald in a whisper. “Only his leg
broken, and some bruises; but if he's not careful the doctor says it may be
serious.”

“A pity it is only half done; but leave the matter to me,” said Carmichael.

“May I go off to Melbourne and leave him?” said Jim.

“You'd better. And as it appears the steamer is delayed a few hours, you
can save your passage yet. If he had been really done for you must have
stopped for the Coroner's inquest; but as it is, I suppose you have him
comfortable in a hotel, and what more can you do for him? You had better get home as soon as you can.”

This advice was so palatable that Jim hurried to the hotel and told Ellerton, who was conscious, but suffering a great deal of pain and in the greatest ill-humour, that as a broken leg was only a matter of time, and as he could not be of any earthly use in a sick-room, he thought he had better save his own passage and go home. The surgeon was in attendance, and the landlord said there was a man he could get to wait on him as much as he needed; and though it was a pity to leave him laid up by the leg like that he was sure he would do no good, and he had telegraphed that he was to be home in time for Castlehurst Races. He had made a book for these races so he must go.

“Telegraph for my wife,” said Ellerton savagely; “she must come and nurse me.”

It was on the end of Jim's tongue to say that he had been such a careful nurse to her that the least she could do now was to come at once at his summons, but prudence restrained him. He was to be civil. He telegraphed according to instructions, but added on his own account that there was nothing bad in the case—that it was merely a matter of time. He felt sure that the Grays would not let her go, and he did not believe she had any money to pay her expenses with. He did not think that she could wish to go, because Ellerton had been such a neglectful, cruel husband, and was now plotting how to make money of her voice. She must be glad to have a peaceful life away from him.

The first step in the matter was taken, but how would Hugh Carmichael carry out the complete fulfilment of his promise? Poison, which first suggested itself to James Oswald's mind, would be impossible with a surgeon in daily attendance, and even administering mischievous stimulants might be checked by the probably repeated warnings and commands of the professional man.

Still it was something to have got rid of the man he had hated so long, and to picture him lying on a sick bed wishing for his wife, and her not coming. He spent no more hours even in Melbourne than were necessary to get the first train, and got to Tingalpa in apparently good health and spirits, having telegraphed to Wilta from Melbourne that there was really no need for Mrs. Ellerton to go to Sydney, for the case was a very simple one.
Chapter 35 Mrs. Oswald's Discovery

Jim Oswald was received without much reproach at home; his mother was overjoyed, Kenneth cordial, and George Oswald was really glad that he had come back without Ellerton, though it was all of a piece with his dislike to everything that was disagreeable that Jim had left the friend whom he appeared unable to live apart from, when that friend was in pain and in solitude. As there might be later telegrams at Wilta about the patient, Jim had a mission to go there to enquire as soon as possible. Kenneth had business in another direction, so for the first time in his life his cousin went to Mr. Gray's by himself.

And now when he was to see Mrs. Ellerton again without her husband and without Kenneth, how would she receive him after leaving his friend in this shabby way. “She ought to be glad to get rid of him a little longer,” he said to himself. “He never deserved such a woman; he never behaved to her decently; he wanted to drive her on to the stage.” But then, again, if Sybil knew what he had plotted with Carmichael, how he had paid for the accident to happen, and would pay more if it was followed by more serious consequences, she was sure to turn from him for ever. But she should never know.

His reception at Wilta was by no means warm, either by the Grays or by Sybil herself. The family to whom she owed so much had so set their faces against her going to Sydney to nurse her husband, which she thought was her duty, that she had returned an answer in the negative, but the telegrams were gloomy. The leg was not doing well, and the bruises looked very bad indeed.

“If he drinks freely,” thought Jim; “and he is sure to want to do that, especially as he seems dull and miserable, inflammation will set in, and then it is all up with him.”

Mr. Gray, however, had telegraphed direct to the surgeon, and his answer was not unfavourable, only that Mr. Ellerton was impatient of pain and of restraint. This Jim heard, and tried to think who was in the right. There was not much sympathy expressed by the Grays for Ellerton's sufferings. Indeed, Walter Gray openly said to his late companion that it was a thousand pities it was not his neck that was broken; and although neither Edith nor her father said so, they could not help being a good deal of Walter's opinion.

Sybil herself was much discomposéd, and her conscience pricked her about leaving her husband to be cared for by mere strangers. Only she dreaded being reproached about the expense of the trip and the additional
cost of hotel living, after she had made the sacrifice to go to him, and she also shrunk from having the charge of an irritable and tyrannical invalid after so many months of love and peace. No one at Wilta had expected Jim Oswald to take any trouble about his friend, and so no one was disappointed at his going off so suddenly. A sick-room and Jim were, indeed, very discordant ideas.

But his jealousy of his cousin Kenneth was increased by everything he saw and heard both at home and at the Grays. The latter had visitors from Melbourne—tip-top people—and yet it was clear that they thought as much of Kenneth as of any of them. He was always lending and borrowing books; he had suggested some alterations in the conservatory; he was to be of a picnic party in the hills the following day, to which Jim himself received no invitation, and the Melbourne visitors thought they would gratify him by saying what a fine fellow his cousin was, and how pleased they were to make his acquaintance.

When he returned from this unsatisfactory visit Kenneth had also returned from Castlehurst. He had his father's passbook and his bills and vouchers in his keeping; he was closeted with Mr. Oswald for a while over business matters, and he (Jim) was twenty-one years old, and made of no more account than if he was a baby. His father did not seem able to turn without consulting this interloping cousin. Altogether Jim's spirits were very much ruffled, and he took refuge with his mother.

And she was full of another grievance besides the £10,000, although she dwelt with some prolixity on that as a wronging of both her son and herself. On George Oswald's last outbreak, which was a short one, for Kenneth had come in the midst of it from Cowarral and aided Mick vigorously, she had, contrary to her usual custom, gone into his den. It had been a “burster” on the head of the great éclat and glorification which had come to the old squatter of Tingalpa on account of his princely liberality, in which he had been led to taste the forbidden stimulant in extra large quantity at first, and then had gone on till he was especially bragging and communicative.

The reason why she had always kept so carefully away on such occasions was that, though an easy and indulgent, though a somewhat contemptuous husband at other times, in his drunken fits he used to say the most outrageous things, and to use the most violent threats to her. The mere sight of her irritated him, and nothing that she could say or do had the slightest effect in mollifying his temper. But she hoped that when the brandy was in that the truth might come out, and she fancied that she might thus get at the bottom of this £10,000, and learn how great a share Kenneth had in this robbery and spoliation. When he was sober, and she asked
questions on this subject, her husband simply told her to hold her tongue, and not speak “havers,” that she did not understand business, and he did; so she need not fash her thoomb on the matter.

Her entrance into the room was the signal for Mick to withdraw, with the resolution not to leave her long there.

“And so you're here, you old cat. Just when I'm enjoying myself you put in your tallow face to spoil my pleasure. It's enough to poison the brandy. Do you ken what for I like this room now and then? Just because you keep out o't. But if you begin to follow me here, something must be done, and that forthwith. Here's to a speedy riddance of you!”

“You surely would not have me dead, George?” said his wife pathetically.

“Dead and buried—not dead without being buried; that would not do, but dead and buried; what for no?”

“And you'd marry again, George?” still more pathetically.

“And what for no? I'd do better next time, I'se warrant.”

“After the wife I've been to you all these years!” she sobbed hysterically.

“ Plenty of them, owre many of them; time I had a bit of a change.”

“And when I'm gone you'd get a new mistress for Tingalpa, to get all my things, and have all my furniture that I take such pride in, and maybe turn poor Jim out of the house — your only son, Jim”.

“He might not be my only son then,” said George Oswald slyly, with a poor attempt at a wink. “I may have another son — ten sons, that would not cost me as much money and heartache as your precious Jim has done.”

“Oh! you cruel, cruel man. I'd never have thought it of you to turn away our Jim.”

“He turns himself away, you jade. There's how many months — three, six, nine months after date pay to bearer; yes, he aye minds to draw the bills, but he does not come back when he is due himself. No, it's pleasure — spending money — racketing about, but he does not honour the bills, nor his father, nor his mother that bore him — and a great bore you are yourself, Mrs. Oswald.”

“How can you speak so, Mr. Oswald? I wonder at you,” said the aggrieved wife and mother.

“Faith, I've wondered at myself this twenty-two years that I ever took up with the like of you, good wife. But I may get shot of you, and have a goodwife of another kind. I have got one in my eye.”

“And who are you thinking of, you cruel wretch?” said Mrs. Oswald.

“What do you think of Miss Edith Gray?” said George Oswald, with another wink. “That's the right sort to make a mistress of Tingalpa of.”

“You old idiot,” said Mrs. Oswald, thoroughly exasperated at this
outrageous proposition. “If you want Edith Gray, you'd better turn away your fine nephew Kenneth, for he's on the lookout for her — like his impudence.”

“Turn away Kenneth, no; he's worth ten of Jim; ten of you — ten thousand pounds; that's the sum. Kenneth put me up to it, and now it is done. Lord! it was a good stroke of business that; William Gray could never have done the like. When will he give me such a luck-penny for those beasts he had of me in 1867? I've got the upper hand of William Gray now, and well he kens it; for he grippit me by the hand, and says he to me, 'I envy you, Mr. Oswald; I envy you your feelings.' And well he may — I'm glorious as a king — a king of good fellows. Let's have a glass on the head of it. Take a glass yourself to put a little colour into your pasty face.”

“And you gave ten thousand pounds to please your beggarly brother's son, that you've done everything for?” said Mrs. Oswald.

“No my brother's son; you're a leeing jade to say so. He's my sister Isabel's son, and she was the bonniest lass that ever trod the heather.”

“Your sister's son, nonsense; you're not yourself, Mr. Oswald; you don't know a sister from a brother.”

“Don't know dour Jamie from my bonny Isabel! There was an odds there. I'm as clear as a clock, woman, and ken what's what as well as if I was sitting drinking tea with you, and no this prime brandy. Here's to your better understanding, Mrs. Oswald,” said her husband with mock gravity.

“If he's your sister's son, then who was his father?” asked Mrs. Oswald, whose curiosity was strongly roused by this remarkable communication.

“That was her secret, and buried with her, and no business of yours, you inquisitive — you impertinent woman.”

“And that's the nephew you set over my Jim, your own son Jim?” said the indignant wife and mother. “A base-born brat that you might be ashamed of. School and college, keep and clothes for years before you paid his passage out, and now to come and lord it over us all, and make you throw away half your fortune.”

“Half my fortune! its little ye ken about it. Lord! I'm rich. Twenty-five thousand acres of bought land, a hundred and fifty thousand sheep, ten thousand head o' beasts ——”

“Ten thousand fiddlesticks, you have not five,” interrupted Mrs. Oswald, “and even if you had all you say there's no reason you should throw away ten thousand pounds on these ungrateful Diroms, who looked as if they would not touch me with a pair of tongs, just because your sister's bastard asked you.”

“Do you want me to throw this brandy bottle at your head and spill the good drink, and send the monkey of water after it in case it was owre
strong for your nerves? I'll kill you on the spot if you say such things again. Isabel was ill-guided, but I'll take my Gospel oath that she was married, only the scoundrel made away with her marriage lines, and so she could prove nothing against him.”

This Mrs. Oswald thought was a mere pretext, and was quite certain that her husband had let the cat out of the bag. She left the room, for she dared not stay to question him further for fear of her life, but she was satisfied that she had got valuable information, and said to herself she would not tell Jim, for it would make him wild. However, when the mother and son had their confidential talk the temptation to tell him was irresistible. Jim recollected the particular questions about his father's sister Isabel, and the manner in which Hugh Carmichael received the news that no one ever spoke of her. It was as clear as day to him that he had a strong pull on his over-rated cousin now; and he took the earliest opportunity of alluding to the subject as one spoken of by a man he met in Sydney, for he was discreet enough not to betray his mother's share in the revelation. Kenneth's change of colour and agitation showed that this shaft had struck home.
Chapter 36 Jim Oswald's Two Shots

How to let the Wilta household know his cousin's disgraceful birth without making himself odious was Jim's next concern. His father's anger he was prepared to risk, but his father's bitter annoyance was as nothing to him compared with damaging his cousin with Mrs. Ellerton. If Ellerton himself, who hated Kenneth so thoroughly, had been at hand, a word dropped to him would have been sufficient; the news would have been conveyed to Sybil with certainty and dispatch, and with all the vinegar and gall possible mixed with it. But Ellerton was far away, and slowly recovering; more was the pity, in Jim's opinion. He might drop the disparaging fact to Mr. Gray or to Walter, but they kept him at arms' length; and, besides, they could not be trusted to tell either their sister or their guest such a piece of scandal. He had a notion that such gentlemen do not communicate these things to the ladies of their family. Jim knew no woman except his mother who might be made the go-between, and Mrs. Oswald was too much afraid of her husband's anger to betray his secret.

Opportunity, however, as he thought, favoured him. Kenneth's letter, so carefully written, had arrived at Castle Diarmid when his father was on a fishing excursion in Norway, whither his wife had urged him to go to recruit when the cruel anxiety about Sybil was ended, and she had taken the turn for the better. Mr. McDiarmid was out of the reach of the post, and this letter, sent via Brindisi, might need answering at once, and all Australian letters were too interesting to brook delay; so she looked at the signature, which inspired confidence. For in Sybil's own letters just received she had said that in case she never got back, or anything happened, the dear people at home must remember that she owed the deepest gratitude to the whole of the Gray family, especially to Edith and to Mr. Kenneth Oswald, the nephew of a rich squatter near Wilta, who had shown her the most generous and thoughtful kindness. Young and old at Castle Diarmid got Kenneth Oswald's name by heart, and Norman and Flora speculated on a probable union of Sybil's two friends, and their visiting Castle Diarmid on their wedding tour.

Mrs. McDiarmid therefore had no hesitation in opening the letter, but she saw enough to alarm and distress her in it without the additional pang, which might have cut her to the heart if Kenneth had been less careful. He wrote as a slight acquaintance of Mr. McDiarmid in years past, and as one who had seen much of Mrs. Ellerton, and was deeply interested in her happiness; and his account of the misery, the degradation, and the danger which Sybil had brought upon herself by her most unfortunate marriage
was both startling and distressing. Sybil had never written a word of complaint. No one could have supposed that her husband was unkind or neglectful or untrustworthy from her own letters; and although Mr. Gray and Edith had found it necessary to mention the unaccountable and prolonged absence in the other colonies and California, they had not dwelt on it as a grievance, and it was evident that she was under the most loving care at Wilta.

This letter from a stranger, from whom Sybil had written that she had received so much kindness, was all too convincing to the anxious mother. She wrote to Kenneth a most grateful and courteous answer, explaining why she, and not the person to whom it was addressed, had opened his letter, and then sat down to write to Sybil the most affectionate, the most distressing, the most peremptory entreaties and commands to leave for ever the unworthy husband whom she had fancied she had once loved, and to return to the old home with father, mother, brothers, and sister.

This letter reached Sybil at an unfortunate time. She had had a more affectionate and more miserable letter from her husband by the last Sydney steamer than he had ever written before. He missed her so very much; he had not a soul to speak to, except a cad called Carmichael, who sometimes looked in. Jim Oswald had behaved like a scoundrel; and could she be happy with every comfort and pleasant society at Wilta when he was as hard up as possible? Hotel bills, doctor's bills, were running up, and he would not have enough to bring him back to his dear wife, far less to bring her to him, as he had wished when he longed so for her. There was only one thing she could do for him, and he hesitated much about asking it. Could she borrow £50 from Mr. Gray, or could she make up her mind to sell her ring — the only article of value she possessed — to enable him to get home. He was ashamed to ask it of her, for he knew how she prized it; but really this was a very costly business being laid up in a Sydney hotel. He confessed to having been apparently neglectful; but he had known that the Grays disliked him, and that it would be really better for her if he stayed away — and latterly he had lived upon her letters.

Altogether it was a most moving epistle, and upon that to hear that the dear ones at home had heard such shameful stories of him, and had been told that she should desert him — now that he needed her so much — roused Sybil's strong indignation. First she suspected the Grays, but both father, son, and daughter denied having written anything but what she authorized them to say. Edith, of course, knew who had done it, and was only too pleased that the revelation had been made; but she would give her no clue. Sybil did not think Kenneth could do such a thing; but it flashed across her that old Mr. Oswald might have taken up the pen to try to
separate her from her husband, and get her safe out of his son's path in her old Highland home, for now it was evident that all these long months of absence had made no difference on Jim's feelings — only that he could not haunt Wilta as much as he had haunted the house at Castlehurst.

While Sybil was chafing at the unpardonable liberty which someone had taken, and wondering who it could be, Jim Oswald came to pay a visit, ostensibly to hear what news there was from Sydney about Ellerton, and he found the object of his devotion for once in her life decidedly out of temper. Edith of course mounted guard over her friend at Wilta — she could do for Sybil then what Kenneth had done so steadfastly at Castlehurst.

The Sydney news was not good. Mr. Ellerton was very dull, and getting on very slowly. Jim ventured to ask about the English mail letter — he knew that his cousin had received a letter with a Far North postmark, like what Mrs. Ellerton's letters had, and this had excited his curiosity, especially as he saw that his father was kept in ignorance about it as well as himself. Mrs. Ellerton seemed even more agitated about her Scottish letters than about her Sydney one.

“Bad news, I hear?” said he.

“Yes, very bad news — some one has been writing, alarming my people most unnecessarily and most unwarrantably.”

“Oh, that's it,” said Jim; “I see — I see now.”

“What do you see?” said Sybil abruptly, almost fiercely.

“This has been my cousin Ken's doing.”

“Your cousin Kenneth, surely not,” said Sybil. “He's too much of a gentleman to take such an unpardonable liberty.”

“I'll bet a ten pound note that it is him that's done it. It is just like his impudence. You don't know the amount of cheek he has.”

“I could not have expected such conduct from him. I looked on him as a friend; I looked on him as a gentleman,” said Sybil vehemently.

“Much more of a gentleman than me. He has the smooth tongue and the underhand way with him,” said Jim, who rejoiced in this altered tone on Sybil's part.

“I'll tell him what I think of him when I see him. I'll never forgive him — to grieve them all so much. How can I ever undo the mischief he has done? How can I make him write to retract every word he has written and say he is ashamed of himself? If he could act thus, there can be no hold on him.”

“Not the least. You'll find he just glories in what he has done,” said Jim, revelling in the indignation so freely expressed by Sybil towards his cousin.

Edith Gray heard them until now in silence. She knew what Kenneth had
done; he had urged the family to take Sybil completely out of his reach —
where he would never see that dear face or hear that sweet voice more.
How hard it must have been for him to do; and then to be misunderstood
by the object of so much unselfish devotion!

“Do not be too eager to blame your friend,” she at last managed to say.
“All we have seen of Mr. Kenneth Oswald, all that we know of him, we
respect. What we do not quite understand, I think we may trust that it will
be equally above reproach.”

“Even his birth?” said Jim Oswald.

“We should reproach no one for the accident of birth. You see, Mrs.
Ellerton does not look down on me, though we are of such different
ancestry.”

“But I look down on Kenneth's,” said Jim.

“His father and mother were born poor and died poor,” said Edith Gray
calmly. “Your father and mother were born poor and are likely to die rich.
I see no difference there.”

“Oh! the poverty is not the thing I care about. At least I know who my
father and mother are, and that would puzzle Kenneth, I think.”

Edith recollected the change of countenance when Kenneth first caught
the title “The Blot on the Scutcheon,” and two or three other signs that
convinced her that this ungrateful and ungracious Jim in this cruel thrust
was speaking the truth. Poor fellow! how hard it was for him, with his
sensitive nature, with his love of all that was noble, with his desire for
perfect openness and sincerity, to have this ugly secret gnawing at his
heart. Well, the birth was low enough! not even honestly born! Old George
Oswald, his most respectable connection, and he himself felt to be a
disgrace to such a cub as Jim himself.

Mrs. Ellerton coloured a little as her friend got agitated. The spitefulness
of Jim's revelations restored Kenneth to a little of his former favour.

“I must hear what he has got to say for himself before I judge him too
harshly, and perhaps it was not he who wrote this cruel letter after all.”

Jim thought he had rather missed fire with his second shot with Mrs.
Ellerton, but he had certainly impressed Edith Gray.

If there was anything that she prized unreasonably it was birth, and
especially honest birth. In spite of her tears over Mildred in her favourite
drama, she had a rooted prejudice against the bar sinister, even across
royal arms. It brought a stigma which no extraneous titles could efface.
Every ducal house which claimed through Charles II she held lower than
the family which could count their pedigree from honest men and virtuous
women as far back as it could be traced. The strong interest she felt in
Kenneth was now mixed with infinite pity.
Chapter 37 Sybil's Ring

When Jim departed, and relieved the two friends of his presence, Sybil leaned her face in her hands for a while and then burst out with —

“This accounts for the difference in the cousins. Kenneth's father was a gentleman, at any rate. The plebeian mother (for of course she was Mr. Oswald's sister) has given him that strain of vulgarity which comes out in this unpardonable action, which I resent so bitterly.”

Edith Gray thought very differently about Kenneth's hereditary tendencies. That lovely mother, of whom he spoke so affectionately and so reverently, must have been a wronged or deceived woman, and from her he derived the best and highest qualities of his nature. If there was any baser alloy (and as yet she had perceived none), that must be derived from the gentleman father. In this case Sybil was most unjust. She herself had full complicity in the offence which Kenneth had given, and therefore she wished to share the odium.

“Sybil,” said her friend; “if I had had the courage I should have done what Kenneth Oswald has done. I should have shown myself as much of a plebeian as he has. If you hate him for it you must hate me too.”

“Edith, I cannot hate you,” said Sybil, with an effort, speaking slowly, and with short pauses. “I cannot hide from you, who have seen so much of me, and heard probably somethings when I had no control over myself, that my marriage has been a disappointing one. I expected too much, I fancy. I had been spoiled by everybody. But I was so wilful, so positive, so infatuated, and he appeared so absolutely in my power to mould for good. Oh! how papa pleaded with me, and I was so unreasonable, and then he said he himself had been thwarted in his earliest attachment, and that, though mamma was everything that was good and kind, he recollected what he had suffered, and he gave in. Oh! so kindly. How can I bear to let him think that his goodness has only done harm? How can I bear to remind him that if he had only been firm, and held out against Herbert and me, he might have saved me from much suffering? Only three months, and then grandpapa's affairs would have been known, and I think he would have left me — but perhaps he would not — for he was fond of me, very fond of me, and a little of it is coming back now.” Another long pause and she resumed.

“But I'd rather be killed by inches by my own remorse and by other people's unkindness than that my father should reproach himself with having been too weak with me. You do not know, you cannot conceive, how I love my father, loving good daughter as you are, Edith. Oh! when I
see you with Mr. Gray I just marvel at myself for leaving such a home so young.”

Now came the flood of passionate tears which Edith had wished her friend to shed on her bosom — tears which called forth the deepest sympathy and respect. Yes, they were both the most unselfish and generous creatures in the world, this Highland chieftain's daughter and George Oswald's nameless nephew; and now at variance as they seemed to be, with the disparity of birth still more enormous, Sybil appeared more worthy of the chivalrous love she had inspired than ever before.

“Papa did not know when they wrote to me,” said Sybil. “Happy for him to be away in Norway. I had such a dear bright letter from him about the country. Perhaps he will not be so credulous as mamma and Norman. He ought to believe me rather than any stranger who chooses to meddle with my affairs,” said Sybil, when she had recovered a little.

“And you would prefer to lead the life you have done to returning to your loving, happy home?” asked Edith.

“I took him for better or for worse.”

“A great deal for the worse,” thought her friend.

“And he may be improved by this illness, this endurance of pain, and absence of the excitement he has been in the habit of living in. He writes most affectionately. He longs for me. We must have another trial, and I must school myself to be doubly patient and forbearing with him. Poor fellow, he was very badly brought up, and had not the blessed family influences around him to which we owe so much. What says our Lord? we must forgive our offending brother until seventy times seven, and shall I not do as much for the husband whom I have loved so much? . . . But I must see Kenneth Oswald, and find out what he has really done, and try to make him undo it. We can never be the same to each other after this — never.”

Jim could not resist telling his cousin that he had split upon him (as he called it) in two ways, and that he thought he need never show his face at Wilta again. Kenneth knew that Edith Gray at least would approve of the action which had so much offended Sybil, but the anguish he endured at her being told by his ungrateful cousin of the “blot on his scutcheon” was intolerable. He was tempted to go to his sister to tell her the truth, and throw himself on her sympathy; but to go when she was offended, when she was estranged, to tell her what would cause her such bitter pain, would be cruelty of which he was not capable. No, he must only bear a little more himself — he was used to that. Jim did not dare to let his father know the knowledge he possessed, or the mischief he had done; he had some fear of his father's righteous indignation. George Oswald, however, noticed
something was wrong with Kenneth — he did not eat, he did not seem to
sleep. The old man did not so completely forget things said and done in his
cups as he wished to make people believe, and Kenneth's added sadness
and depression recalled to him the interview his wife had forced upon him,
and his imprudent revelation. Thank God, he had let nothing out about his
will, but this was bad enough. It was evident that Jim knew, and had
taunted his cousin with his birth, and perhaps threatened exposure. He took
an opportunity of speaking to Jim, and learned that he did not mean to tell
anyone else about it, but he could not help letting it out to Mrs. Ellerton
and Miss Gray to serve out Kenneth for his cheek. Smitten to the heart with
sorrow and remorse, George Oswald looked on his nephew with a
solicitude and a kindliness that somehow reminded the young man of his
mother, and as he leaned more and more on him in every way poor
Kenneth felt there was something to live and struggle for yet.

A few days passed, and he received a note from Sybil, desiring to see
him without delay. It was a cold, stiff note, but he could not disobey the
summons. His real right to take an interest in her affairs being unknown, he
felt he had taken an unpardonable liberty. And unless his father wrote to
him to permit him to tell the bond between them, he made up his mind not
to divulge it.

So he did not attempt to justify himself; he simply heard her reproaches,
and allowed her to defend her husband, and explain away every instance of
neglect or unkindness that she thought he knew of. He could not tell her
that his mode of life was disgraceful and dishonest; that any money he
provided for the household, which was not much, was won at play and not
in lawful business; for every commission and agency business he had been
supposed to do had been a mere farce as to bringing in an income. She did
not know the depths into which he had sunk.

Sybil wished him to write a retraction and apology for what he had sent
to Castle Diarmid, but that Kenneth could not and would not do. All she
could obtain from him was a letter, in which he expressed concern for Mr.
Ellerton's accident and his sufferings, and hopes that he might be softened
and improved by the experience he had gone through, and his conviction
that Sybil had still that faith and confidence in him which ought to lead
him to a wise and better life. To herself, personally, he expressed the
greatest regret for having grieved or offended her, and as in the course of
her talk he learned that Edith had generously shared the odium of the
communication he had made to her friends, he hoped that, as she appeared
to have forgiven her, she could not be permanently irritated against
himself.

After Sybil had relieved her mind by saying all she could about his
conduct, and had found that even her anger did not make her friend less
true or less steadfast, she felt disposed to take him into favour again. She
had something on her mind still, and he offered his services. Yes; Mr.
Ellerton was very short of money, and he wanted her either to borrow
money from Mr. Gray, which she could not do, or to sell her ring. Kenneth
protested against the selling of such an heirloom, and timidly offered
himself to lend what she needed. She shook her head impatiently — he was
not restored so far as that. “Why not sell the furniture at Castlehurst
rather?” he suggested. It was of no great value, for the piano had been
hired, and other things would fetch very little, and besides they might need
it at once for a new home, for Mr. Ellerton could not come again to live at
Wilton. No, she must give up the ring. Herbert thought she valued it too
much, and had an unreasonable estimate of family associations; it would
show that she prized him beyond everything if she could sacrifice this to
his urgent need. Would Mr. Kenneth think it too much to take it to the
Melbourne jeweller who had been so struck by its unique style and
workmanship, and get the hundred pounds he had said it was worth, buy a
draft for £50 to send to Mr. Ellerton, and bring the balance to her to be
something to begin the world with again?

Kenneth promised he would obey her instructions to the letter.
“I had intended to have given it to Edith Gray as a slight mark of my
undying gratitude, but I cannot have that pleasure. I must be content to be
immeasurably in debt to her and to all of you. Edith may see it on other
fingers some day.”

Kenneth determined that the sale of the ring should not be final. He was
not paid any regular salary for his services to his uncle, though he was
fairly supplied with money, and Mr. Oswald never refused him what he
wanted. So he said he was in need of a hundred pounds, and the old man
after looking at him kindly and shrewdly gave him that and a little more.
He then took the journey to Melbourne, got the jeweller's receipt for the
ring, which he afterwards bought himself, allowing the man his profit,
bought the draft and dispatched it with a little grudge at the idea of so
much being sent to Ellerton out of the proceeds. He gave Sybil the
jeweller's formal receipt and the £50, and something of the old light came
into her eyes when she thanked him and said he had managed the business
very satisfactorily for her.
Chapter 38 The Tables Turned on Jim Oswald

When Ellerton's recovery, retarded by his own impatience and imprudence, was going on, he was glad to see anybody, even the seedy Hugh Carmichael. There was no real advantage in gambling with him for two excellent reasons; he had no money, and he was as clever and as unscrupulous as Ellerton himself. If the latter knew a few modern tricks, Carmichael played a very deep old game, and somehow, although the visits were originally made with the view of earning the balance of £500 frustrated by the incompleteness of the accident, the pair rather took to each other on further acquaintance.

As Jim Oswald was absent, his advance spent, and great difficulties in the way of earning more from him appeared in the surveillance of the surgeon — especially as Ellerton himself began to see how necessary it was to be circumspect, Carmichael set himself to discover the causes of the hatred which was unsuspected by its object. When Ellerton expatiated — as he did freely on Carmichael's first visit — on the shabbiness of young Oswald's conduct in going off for his own pleasure, and leaving him writhing in pain among strangers, he did not hint at any deeper motive than Jim's general indifference to everyone but himself. But when he got more familiar, and spoke of his wife's wonderful voice, and the hopes he had of her great success as a public singer, and showed the beautifully finished coloured photograph, which he carried about with him everywhere, Mr. Carmichael discovered the motive for the commission, which he had undertaken to execute, to put the husband out of the way.

From Ellerton, too, he learned the position which Kenneth Oswald held with his uncle, and that there was no idea entertained but that the nephew was his brother's son, and no whispers of illegitimacy.

Even if Ellerton was dead, Carmichael was shrewd enough to think there was little chance for James Oswald, even with his expectations, with a woman like Mrs. Ellerton. His interest in the whole matter deepened when he learned that this beautiful woman was a McDiarmid by birth, and half-sister to the Kenneth Oswald who was after all the strongest card in his hand. Whether by betraying the illegitimate birth, or by inducing the uncle to extort his nephew's rights from his father, Hugh Carmichael saw some harvest for himself from a parvenu squatter, probably ambitious of social consideration, who had recently been brought prominently forward for his "princely" liberality. Newspaper writers appear to be able to find no other word than princely for such liberality, whereas princes nowadays are not distinguished by the quality, as both Ellerton and Carmichael agreed when
they discussed the subject together.

The question in Carmichael's mind now was how to derive the greatest advantage from the present state of the game, which looked more promising than any hand he had held for many years. And he determined to change front altogether. Instead, therefore, of making away with Ellerton to please James Oswald, it would be much the better game to irritate Ellerton against him. He was a violent and unscrupulous man when his blood was up, and though there was a good deal of discount to be taken off his narratives of things he had done in his wild youth, he might be roused now by the sense of wrong, to do as much for James Oswald as that worthy had contemplated with regard to him. This would clear the way for Kenneth, who was even now very much valued by his uncle, and make him much more profitable to Hugh Carmichael. He therefore redoubled his attention to the worthless son-in-law of Norman McDiarmid, and as there was apparently no interested motive to induce him to come to the sick-room, Ellerton was satisfied as to his sincerity, and in default of better company, wearied for him, and was glad to see him.

When he at last felt sufficiently recovered to make a start, he was not surprised or displeased when Carmichael proposed to accompany him on the plea that he wanted to see his friends the Oswalds.

"I wonder how long it will take that young fellow, Jim Oswald, to run through that property when the old boy hops the twig," said Carmichael. "He'll cut up well, though; and of course, as Jim is the only son, he'll get the bulk, though I dare say the old man will leave the nephew something."

"It's a fine property," said Ellerton; "I would not mind if it was mine. Such an estate would make a miser of me, I believe, but it won't make a miser of Jim Oswald. What with his taste for the brandy bottle, the dice-box, and the betting ring, and a fancy for women too, which will get more expensive as he grows older — and his absolute ignorance about business, he can get through the whole of Tingalpa and the other places — land and stock — in a wonderfully short time — with good help from friends."

Carmichael laughed softly. This last was a touch of nature on Ellerton's part that went to his heart.

"I went through a pretty little fortune in three years," resumed Ellerton. "But you acquired experience in the process, but I don't think James Oswald is picking up any of that commodity."

"I took a good deal of pains with the fellow."

"Very generous and disinterested of you when you saw his designs on your domestic happiness," said Carmichael, for latterly Ellerton had alluded to the absurd way in which Jim had spooned about his wife.

"My domestic happiness was quite safe from an unlicked cub like Jim
“Do you know, however, that you ought to be on your guard with him? I speak seriously.”

“On my guard with regard to my wife. She is true as steel — and with Jim? The thing is ridiculous.”

“I do not mean with your wife. I daresay she is safe enough; but I mean with regard to your life.”

“My life, indeed! That is a good joke! A coward like Jim Oswald to put me in bodily fear?”

“I am in serious earnest. If James Oswald could see any way of getting rid of you without endangering himself, your life is not worth an hour's purchase,” said Carmichael.

“And for what motive?” asked Ellerton.

“Is not your wife sufficient motive?” asked Carmichael.

“He had quite lost the insane fancy for my wife,” said Ellerton, eagerly. “He ran after other sorts of women wherever we went; never wrote to her; never sent any messages to her when she appeared to be dying. Your supposition is too absurd.”

“That was all a blind,” said Carmichael. “I never saw such hatred on any man's face as I once saw in his to you. He'd kill you if he dared.”

“The devil!” said Ellerton.

“It is the naked truth. And do you think that accident was not a put-up thing?”

Ellerton started up, opened his eyes wide, and uttered a tremendous oath.

“It was meant to be your neck, but it failed, and only broke your leg.”

“How do you know?”

“Never you mind, I know well enough — at least I can put two and two together, and after catching that look, I would never be surprised at anything that happened.”

“Hang it — but he paid me what he owed me first. If he had meant to get me out of the way he'd not have done that,” said Ellerton, incapable of taking in the idea at once of Jim having had any such deep designs against him.

“It was not for money, you see — it was quite another motive, which of course I did not guess at the time. But recollect — he delayed his Bank business in order to separate himself from you; he declined your company to the Bank, which you tell me you offered; he came up to see you half dead, got you to this hotel, and sailed off, leaving you sink or swim.”

“And, by God! he tried to kill me on board the steamer going to San Francisco, too — he dragged me into every sort of low haunt, and revelled in the prospect of a brawl or a quarrel. It is as clear as day.”
“And he kept you in the dark all this time?” said Carmichael, with a sympathizing expression that was most irritating to his friend.

“That's the worst of it. Jim Oswald hoodwinked me! — me that led him about, and thought I had him under my thumb. What did you think he hated me for?”

“Oh, I suppose you had won money from him, made use of him, and perhaps made fun of him; but now I feel sure it is your wife he wants.”

“But if Mrs. Ellerton was a widow to-morrow, do you think she would ever look at such as him?”

“How is he to know that? Every young fellow fancies he would be irresistible to any woman if he could offer his hand and heart, and a full purse into the bargain. So you were in his way, and he wanted you out of the way — that is the long and the short of it.”

“Jim Oswald, so deep a card as that,” said Ellerton, still more enraged at the young fellow's powers of concealment the more he thought of it. “Well, when I get over to the Victoria side I'll pay him out for this leg, and for these weeks of captivity. I'll always walk lame, I owe him one for that. I might have died. I was not very prudent, and I was impatient of the tight scrapping; but by the Lord, if I had known all this was Mr. Jim's doing, I'd have obeyed every order, and I'd have been at him before now.”

“He'll not do to be rooked any longer,” said Carmichael, “he hinted to me that he did not think you played on the square.”

“Square enough for an idiot like him! And he said that to you on the slightest acquaintance! And he paid me, or at least gave me bills on his father, which I've melted and spent, more's the pity, and never hinted a word of this. If I don't serve him out for this?”

“I'd keep clear of him, if I were you, he is dangerous,” said Carmichael.

“Am I not able to outwit a low idiot like James Oswald? particularly with your hints. I'll be wide awake enough.”

“A wilful man must have his way,” said Hugh Carmichael; “but forewarned is forearmed, is as good a proverb in my country as the other.”

Ellerton sat long silent, moodily turning things over in his mind. He had despised young Oswald too much to fear him. He had often spoken to him and of him with undisguised contempt, thinking he was too obtuse to observe, and too weak to resent. But it had been his love for Sybil that had made him so tolerant, and now that Carmichael had given him the key, he did recollect some words and some looks which corroborated his statements. And that dark night in the storm, when Jim's whole weight was on his throat, so that he might not have been able to cry for help, came back to his memory, and made certain to him that the recent accident was a piece of underhand plotting. Where was the boy; did Carmichael know?
Carmichael knew, but did not tell. He said he had tried to get at the truth at the time, but the boy had left the colony, no doubt with the money James Oswald had paid him for his half-done work.

There was no fear about Sybil, at any rate. She had written to him most affectionately; she had sold for his sake her cherished ring, and the Bank draft had been sent direct from Melbourne (so as to save time) for the £50. Ellerton paid off his doctor and his hotel bill, swearing internally that he should get that, by fair means or foul, out of the scoundrel who had made him incur such expenses, and in a rare fit of liberality offered to pay Carmichael's passage for him to Melbourne, as that gentleman said he was very hard up. He had, however, got some new clothes recently, and now looked a more creditable acquaintance than when they first met.

They played cards all the way on the steamer, but Ellerton had not his usual success. He was not so cool as usual, and he got among some hands as knowing as himself. He actually lost money instead of gaining any. Carmichael was more fortunate, but still nothing like what he expected. They got into Melbourne in the afternoon. Ellerton took his friend to the theatre. His thoughts were now turned still more exclusively to his wife's probable earnings, when Jim Oswald was no longer a Bank on which he might be able to draw.

Ellerton took the railway next day to Castlehurst, and looked in for refreshment at the Railway Hotel. People looked coldly on him. Every one had heard of his staying away all these months, and not coming back when his wife seemed to be dying at Wilta.

Mr. Deane and Mr. Roberts, neighbouring squatters, who were in town at Castlehurst market, saw Ellerton; but they looked another way, and did not recognize him. He was actually cut in the streets of Castlehurst! The hotel-keeper looked shy, and when he went to the livery-stable to get a horse to take him to Wilta he had cold looks and a demand for immediate payment. He looked in the stable to see if there were any of the Wilta people in town, for this was the place where they, as well as the Oswalds, put up, and he saw horses belonging to Kenneth; and his curiosity to know the cause of the strange reception he was meeting made him ask after the Tingalpa people.

“Oh!” said the livery-stable-keeper, “Jim Oswald's been at Castlehurst for days, going on just as his father sometimes does. Something had crossed him, and he sat and drank; but instead of getting the merrier, it was the more drink the more gloom, and he has been most outrageous to everybody, blackguarding his cousin, so that it has been the town talk, and saying everybody cheats and robs him. He's scarce fit to go off now; he set
off about a quarter of an hour ago for home, but he said it would not take much to make him blow out his brains. You're not bound for Tingalpa?"

“No; I go straight to Wilta. Mrs. Ellerton is there, and expecting me, for I telegraphed, and I thought some one would have been to meet me.”

The stable-keeper gave a look which irritated Ellerton still more.

“I suppose Jim Oswald was speaking about me too. What did he say?”

“He was drunk, Sir; very drunk. I pay no attention to what a gentleman may say when he's not himself.”

“I'll find out,” thought Ellerton, but he said nothing further, and paid for his horse, which left him with only a little silver in his purse, and rode off at a brisk pace, which he hastened when out of sight. He thought that by riding rapidly he could soon make up to any man in the two miles of road before the Wilta and Tingalpa roads divided; but he got to that point without catching sight of Jim. He could not be far off, however; he would just go on, and find out what the blackguard had been saying. He would confront Jim Oswald with all the advantages of a sober and injured man over a drunken offender. He, too, must have ridden very quickly, but recklessly, for he had been thrown from his horse, and he was seen a little off the road, sitting quite close to a deserted digger's hole, at a place about seven miles from Castlehurst, and five miles from Tingalpa. It was a place most unlikely for gold, but a Spaniard had dreamed on three consecutive nights that the Virgin Mary had appeared to him and had shown him that on this very spot he would find such quantities of the precious metal as made him faint away in his vision when she displayed it before him. Contrary to the advice of every experienced miner on the gold-fields, who said it was no use sinking for gold on a granite bottom, the Spaniard began his operations, and was joined by several other men — some Catholics, and even one shrewd Orkneyman, also carried away by his strong conviction, and they made the hole wide and large, though not very deep, before it was abandoned as a “shycer.” It was now filled with water, and horses and cattle made a practice of drinking there. Perhaps Jim's horse had wanted a drink, and thus went off the road, but he had rid himself somehow of his master, and after drinking at the hole he was taking a bite of grass before he made his start for his home at Tingalpa. Jim was shaken and bruised by his fall. His coat and trousers had been torn on some stones or stumps by the side of the shaft. He looked as stupid and helpless as possible till he caught sight of Ellerton, then the look of unmistakable hatred came on to his face.

“So you have got your turn now,” said Ellerton. “I hope you have at least broken your leg, to serve you out for your murderous plot against me in Sydney.” Jim Oswald said nothing to deny the accusation or to justify
himself in any way. He only looked, or rather glared, at his enemy.

“It's not me you should bully or attack,” said he after a pause. “It is Kenneth who is your wife's fancy. It's time you were back to look after her. He's written to her friends complaining of your conduct. She gave him a secret piece of business to do for her in Melbourne, and I believe he forked out the money she sent to bring you back. She is hand and glove with him — damn him. If she said I was not fit to tie my cousin's shoes, what would she say of you? I don't think you're fit to tie mine.”

“I can trust my wife,” said Ellerton, “with any Oswald of you all. But what have you been saying about me in Castlehurst?”

Now Jim had been too careful hitherto of consequences to say anything against Ellerton in Castlehurst. He had taken Carmichael's advice on that point to heart. Although the livery-stable-keeper had tacitly admitted that something had been said that he paid no attention to, it was his own distrust and dislike that had really made him shy of Mr. Ellerton. Now, however, that Ellerton was back alive Jim experienced a sensation of relief in getting out his real opinion of his quondam friend, so he replied —

“Just that you are the biggest blackleg in Victoria unhung; and what is more, everybody believes it. You've swindled me out of hundreds and thousands, and I saw it, but I put up with it. But your game is up with me.”

Jim was in that reckless frame of mind that his usual cowardly fears had no weight with him. He did not care what he said or how he said it.

“And you, you unlicked cub, dare to speak thus to me,” said Ellerton, “after your behaviour to me for which I could have you shut up for life — and I will too.”

“What did I do? Made eyes at your wife. And that you winked at as long as there was money in it; but now that I am not to be swindled any longer you are both mighty particular. You'd like to show her off on the stage, and win as much out of half-a-dozen spooneys at once. That game's over with me.”

Ellerton's blood was up at this insulting speech, which was just so far true as to make it the more stinging. He struck Jim on the temple with his heavy loaded riding-whip, and was astonished to see him fall as if dead with the blow. He had not exactly meant to kill his enemy, though he would have been glad to be rid of him; but this was alarming. If he recovered, he could speak for himself; if he died, suspicion might fall on him (Ellerton) that would not easily be combated. Sudden as thought, he lifted the prostrate form of his enemy, and carried him with difficulty, for his leg was still weak, on the slippery track of trodden soft earth by which the horses and cattle went to drink. He used all his strength to throw in the body, but slipped his foot a little just at the end. He waited till the body sank. He
fancied that he saw the look of returning consciousness on the face, and the glare of hatred pass over the eyes as they opened at the feeling of coldness in the water. He dared not weight the body in any way, for it must be supposed to be an accident; the horse had gone down to drink, and his rider had an unsteady seat and had fallen in. Nobody would know; nobody could suspect that there had been any foul play. He looked all around. There was no one near; there could be no evidence against him. How long it appeared to him before the clothes got saturated and helped to sink that poor body before the danger of detection was over; and yet how very few minutes had sufficed for the extinction of life, and for the laying of this strange new burden on the conscience of a hitherto careless, unscrupulous man.

He saw Jim's riding-whip at a little distance. He need not leave it there; it would lead to instant discovery. He carried it to the shaft, and very nearly threw his own in instead, which was also in his hand. That would have been a fatal oversight; but he recollected himself in time. He looked again round the place. There was not a vestige of the accident visible; nothing that could call any attention to the place.

Ellerton then mounted his horse, took a cross road, which he knew would save a mile or two, and rode full speed till he came quite near to Wilta, when he slackened his pace to only that moderate rapidity suitable to a husband returning after so long an absence to a beautiful young wife. He was in a strangely troubled state of mind. What would be his reception by the Grays when he had been treated so badly at Castlehurst? If Jim Oswald had complained loudly of his conduct, would they not have heard of it? How would he induce Sybil to consent to the stage project, which she had hitherto shrunk from? How would they manage about ways and means? He shut out from his view that miner's hole, and the body at the bottom of it. He had other more pressing matters to think of; but he looked tired and jaded when he presented himself at the open hall door.
Chapter 39 Discovery and Misdirected Suspicion

Sybil had hurried to welcome her husband — still so young, still lovely, still attractive enough for the stage; the serious illness had not cost her a single charm. Even her fair hair, which had been cut out, was now long enough for the most bewitching crop of curls, and gave a more piquant setting to her face than before.

“You are looking perfectly lovely,” said he, as he embraced her with real delight. “I am so glad to be back to you.”

“It has been a long, long time,” said Sybil, when she could find voice to speak. “If they had not been so very good I might have tired out our kind friends long ere this. We must make a humble home for ourselves soon. I am half ashamed of the kindness I have received and the trouble I have cost; we can never repay it in any way. And how is the poor leg, Herbert? I see you are a little lame, and you have got yourself a little muddy. I think you had better have a wash and a change of clothes. I have some of yours here; of course you could not bring any on horseback. You cannot appear at dinner in your state. I shall help you to dress, and Richards will take your horse.”

Ellerton found his way to his wife's room, leaving her to call the groom. The state of his clothes need be seen by no one but Sybil. Richards said when he took the horse that Mr. Ellerton had ridden faster than usual, for the animal was a good deal blown. Sybil smiled at the thought that her husband was really eager to join her, and that they might be happier after this long separation.

She helped him with his toilet, and tried to make him look his best.

“And how are the Grays?” he asked.

“All very well. Edith said she would let us get over our meeting before she appeared on the scene. Mr. Walter has got two friends from Melbourne staying here — such capital fellows. One of them is a rising barrister, and he is evidently quite smitten with Edith. I suppose it would be a good connection for him, and not a bad one for her.”

“And she is propitious; or is our old friend Kenneth's star still in the ascendant there?”

“Oh, I do not think poor Kenneth has much of a chance now.”

Ellerton looked up sharply. Was Jim's drunken assertion really true that Kenneth and his wife were hand and glove, and that he needed looking after? And how far had things gone?

“I do not think Edith really cares about this Melbourne man, and as they now talk confidently of their European tour, and will go to Castle Diarmid,
I may get my long-cherished wish, and she may be won by my brother Norman."

"Norman the younger, of Castle Diarmid. And really the younger. Edith Gray is four-and-twenty, I'll bet."

"Edith will never grow old. She is so fresh and bright and varying."

"Not a bad idea for the heir of a poor northern laird, who has a lot of brothers and sisters to be provided for, to marry a sort of heiress from the wild Australian bush; the little disparity in age need not signify."

"I had set my heart on her marrying my brother and being my sister," said Mrs. Ellerton.

"As, unluckily, you cannot marry one of hers till I am out of the way; but I had a near shave of it, I can tell you. It was the merest chance my neck was not broken."

"Mr. James Oswald made very light of the accident, though I always felt sure there was much more in it than he chose to say."

"And what is the news from Castle Diarmid," said Ellerton in a tone of unusual interest. Any subject for talk was better at this particular period of Ellerton's life than Mr. James Oswald.

"Oh! they are all well but my father, who has returned from Norway, not any the better for his trip."

"You'll read me the letters, will you?"

"You know you never like to hear family letters, Herbert; they bore you so, you say," said Sybil, who did not feel that they would be altogether agreeable even to a repentant husband.

"I have been bored long enough with having nothing to do or to hear that I think the dryest family letters would be interesting. Do you not think your father could help us a little? As you say, we cannot in any conscience trespass any longer on the Grays, and to set up again, even in the quietest way, requires money."

"And it must be in the very quietest way."

"Not at Castlehurst; I see much better chances in Melbourne or Sydney. I think a horse bazaar ought to answer if I had only a little capital. You could help me in a large city, too; your voice is worth a little fortune. If you would only make use of that we need not draw upon your father much, but to start with we must have money."

"I have only twenty pounds. A Castlehurst bill that I thought you had paid was sent here, and the man threatened legal proceedings, and I paid thirty pounds."

"How foolish, what is twenty pounds? I have not got twenty shillings in the world."

"Well, twenty pounds and our furniture is always something. This has
not been a good school at Wilta in which to learn rigid economy, but I shall try hard. We have both been very ill — at the very gates of death, I may say, since we parted, and I hope we have learned something. And I must say to you now, even on the first day of meeting, that I cannot endure the life we used to lead at Castlehurst, the high play, the questionable company, and all the rest of it.”

“Well, I think I shall start on a better tack in Melbourne. Only as I said, we need money.”

“I cannot bear applying to papa. He gave me all he could afford.”

“Settled tightly on yourself.”

“Yes; but you get the interest.”

“Miserable 4 per cent, and money here worth more than double on mortgage, and three or four times as much in the hands of a business man. Ask Mr. Gray, or Mr. Oswald, or the Taylors what they think of 4 per cent?”

“Of course it is low interest; but then it is safe.”

“We must get out of this as soon as we can, at any rate,” said Ellerton.

“But, dear Herbert, do be polite and grateful to our kind friends here. I should have died if it had not been for them.”

“Well, and as I have no desire to lose my beautiful Sybil in the flower of her youth, I do feel considerable grateful, and will be as gracious as it is my nature to be.”

When Herbert Ellerton joined the family circle, looking somewhat pale and interesting, and with his manner subdued to a gentleness and modesty long foreign to him, the Grays thought him much improved. He expressed his gratitude to them in very appropriate language, hung over his wife like a lover, praised everything she wore, from the curls on her head to the tiny slippers which Edith had given to her, and seemed to rejoice in finding this haven after all his wanderings.

The Melbourne men were pleasant. Ellerton was glad of the society, the good dinner, wine, cigars, and billiards; but at the back of all were the questions which would come in his mind — when would the body be found? and what surmises would be made about it? He felt quite sure, now that it was done, that it had been a very hasty, foolish thing, because from the way in which the Grays received him, and the politeness of these Melbourne men, it was evident that whatever James Oswald had said against him the best settlers had not believed him; but if it were not found out against him — and he did not see how it could be — he was glad he had put him out of the way, and thus had some revenge on him for his two attempts at murder.

Mr. Ellerton was not prepared for the intelligence which startled the
household on the following morning that James Oswald had been found
drowned in the Spaniard's Shaft, and that Kenneth had been arrested on
grave suspicion of having committed murder.

There was a blow on the head which looked as if it could not have been
an accident, and it was known there had been ill-blood between the cousins
for the past month and more, and Jim had taunted Kenneth publicly that
very day with not knowing who his father was, and that Kenneth had
followed him, and had got home a little after Jim's own riderless horse, and
that Jim's watch had stopped at the very time when Kenneth would have
come up to the place on his homeward journey.

Kenneth had declared his innocence, but suspicious were too strong
against him, and he was in gaol and bail refused.

Every one pitied the parents, but especially George Oswald, whose only
son was thus cut off in a sudden, violent, and mysterious way when so
unprepared, and his trusted nephew in such a dangerous position.

“He will clear himself easily,” said Edith Gray. “Who would dream of
suspecting him?”

“No one who knows him,” said Sybil.

“And every one in Castlehurst knows Kenneth to be the last man in the
world to commit such a treacherous crime,” said Mr. Gray.

“The circumstances, however, are very awkward for the poor fellow,
innocent or not,” said Mr. Talbot, the Melbourne barrister, who was
supposed to be an aspirant for Miss Gray's good graces. “A rich uncle, a
most provoking cousin, deadly insult, and a curious combination of time
and place.”

“He had probably followed his cousin home,” said Mr. Gray, “knowing
he was not very fit to be left to himself, and as he could not see a drowned
man in a waterhole, he is to be suspected of throwing him in. Depend upon
it, it was a mere accident. The horse threw his drunken rider; but the public
appetite for horrors would not be satisfied with the explanation. The insults
levelled at Kenneth, which, they say, he bore like a hero or a Christian
when in public, he is to revenge in secret by a cowardly murder. Kenneth is
the soul of honour. I shall never believe that he laid an unfriendly hand on
his cousin.”

“He cannot prove an alibi unluckily,” said Mr. Talbot.

“The whole course of his conduct to that poor fellow, Jim Oswald, whom
I suppose we ought to forgive, now he is dead, was long-suffering to a
most extraordinary degree,” said Walter Gray.

“But if the uncle favoured him and trusted him it was natural that the
cousin should be jealous,” said Mr. Talbot.

“I must go to Castlehurst at once,” said Mr. Gray, “and attend the
Coroner's inquest, and see what case can be made out against him.”

“And I shall go too,” said Mr. Talbot. “I should like to watch the proceedings ——”

“Poor old Oswald will be there, no doubt. I feel more for him than for Kenneth himself, for Kenneth knows he is innocent, and cannot regret his cousin as the father must do,” said Mr. Gray.

Ellerton wanted to make a remark. It looked so awkward for him to sit and say nothing when they spoke of the lad, who had been his inseparable companion for so long; but what to say? He had not anticipated these suspicions; but for the scene at Castlehurst in the morning, and Kenneth following so closely, and the circumstance of the watch stopping, he felt quite sure that the blow on the temple would have been attributed to striking his head on the bottom with the violence of his fall; but there was a much stronger case against Kenneth than against himself. There had been so much haste made by him in returning that he believed he could prove an alibi, and every one at Castlehurst thought Jim Oswald was worth an income to him; so there was no motive for putting him out of the way. No one in the world but Hugh Carmichael knew of any cause of offence.

It was unlucky that the idea of murder had been mooted at all, but no doubt it would be put aside when all the circumstances were considered, and the verdict would be “Accidental death.”

Ellerton looked grave, however, and at last made a remark that this was a very unexpected termination to poor Jim Oswald's career; but of course there could be no real ground for suspecting Kenneth, who though somewhat of a prig, was really an honourable man. But it was like that poor blundering Jim to bring discredit on his own family, in order to vex and spite his cousin in his lifetime, and now even in the very manner of his death.

“The old man will take this very hard,” said Mr. Gray. “People have been thinking so much of him lately about that splendid gift of his, so unostentatiously done. Well, I'll do what I can for the old man and the young.”

Edith saw her father, brother, and Mr. Talbot go off in the buggy, and she would have given a great deal to be able to go with them. She could not rest. She left Sybil and Ellerton to themselves, and went out and paced up and down the garden walks. Kenneth in trouble, Kenneth in danger, and the woman he had loved so generously could sit and talk to that insufferable husband — could sing to him, as if nothing had happened. The other Melbourne man, Mr. Hardy, did not go to the inquest, but as people were dropping in, each with some fresh story about the murder, he took out to Miss Gray the latest rumour as it arrived.
And yet Sybil was little less moved than her friend — she felt keenly the death of her persecutor, and recalled with some regret the bitter words she had used to him on their last interview, and the manner in which she compared him with his cousin; she acknowledged to herself the difficulty there might be in proving Kenneth's innocence — but she was a wife, and schooled by long and hard experience in her husband's dangerous moods. She felt that any apparent preoccupation on her part as to the fate of Kenneth would excite suspicion and jealousy, and so she forced herself to talk apart from the subject which was agitating Ellerton's mind as strongly as her own, because he had been trusting to no suspicion having been aroused at all, and all Kenneth's friends would move heaven and earth to clear him.

If Kenneth Oswald had only come three-quarters of an hour sooner he might have seen the completion of the deed. A cold sweat rose on Ellerton's brow when he thought of the possibility. If he had not followed at all, it was sure to have been attributed to accident, or to suicide consequent on the depression of spirits after days of continuous drinking. If enquiry was searching, would there be any clue by which to trace the deed to him? Had he left anything belonging to him at the side of the Spaniard's hole? Not that he could recollect of. The best thing for him to do was to get away with Sybil from the neighbourhood as soon as they decently could, and so the only way in which he could relieve his mind at all was in speaking of plans and preparations for their new home. Both husband and wife kept off the burning subject as much as possible.

When Edith came in for the pretence of luncheon, she found Sybil playing and singing to her lord and master, a little tremulously, but still going through her repertoire as if nothing had occurred. Her voice soothed Ellerton's agitated mind more than anything else. It was the one great resource by which they might get an income far away from this cursed Castlehurst.

Mr. Hardy was not to be supposed to take such a deep interest in Kenneth's case, but yet he spoke feelingly on the subject, and expressed great impatience to hear what the news would be which the gentlemen would bring from Castlehurst. Still he ate a good luncheon. Sybil ate as little as Edith herself, and Ellerton, who expressed no concern or uneasiness, but felt his food like to choke him, swallowed glass after glass of wine to enable him to force down enough to prevent remarks being made.
Chapter 40 Intolerable Pros and Cons

When Mr. Gray returned with his son Walter and Mr. Talbot he brought the news that Kenneth Oswald was fully committed for trial in spite of his uncle's confident belief in his innocence, for there were so many strong points against him. Mrs. Oswald, on the other hand, believed her son had been murdered by his cousin.

At Wilta it was an open question with all who discussed it whether it was not rather accident or suicide. The livery-stable-keeper's remark to Ellerton was repeated at the inquest, that Jim seemed very much out of spirits and out of temper, and said that it would not take much to make him blow out his brains. Mr. Walter Gray recollected that it was after an interview with Mrs. Ellerton in the garden that Jim Oswald had gone straight to Castlehurst, and sat drinking steadily till he started for home.

Mr. Talbot, who had watched the proceedings at the inquest narrowly on behalf of the suspected man, was eagerly questioned by Edith as to the weight of evidence in favour of murder. The mark of a blow on the temple had been particularly noted, and it did not appear as if the fall from the horse could have caused that and the other bruises which were on the other side of the body. He was not robbed; his watch and chain was found on him, a valuable ring was on his finger, and also his pocket-book, which did not contain much money, but still was worth a thief’s taking. It was either a very curious accident indeed, or murder by an enemy, and there was evidence that Kenneth had very much resented his cousin’s open assertion as to his birth on that very day.

Kenneth had left Castlehurst an hour after his cousin, and arrived at Tingalpa almost immediately after the riderless horse. He had been sent back with Mick O'Hearn to look for him, and had not passed by the waterhole, which was as we have said, a little off the road, but on returning with two police officers they had suggested dragging it, and the body had been found and carried to Castlehurst for an inquest to be held on it there.

“Appearances are all against Mr. Kenneth Oswald except his excellent character,” said Mr. Talbot, “but even that is sometimes slippery ground. There are times in every man's life in which he would be a criminal under strong temptation. I have offered to undertake the case, notwithstanding. I believe in that young fellow's face, and there are few cases I cannot see daylight through. I felt for him very much though when they searched his pockets, took out his pocket-book and letters, for evidence against him. There was one letter in especial that he seemed to cling to desperately, and as it was from a friend in Scotland and could have no bearing whatever on
the case, I stepped in to defend his rights there. There was a curious old-fashioned ring found in his possession that he objected to say anything about, and as it had never been James Oswald's, I protested again on his behalf. Public curiosity had got so excited about him on all accounts, that the most uncalled for questions were asked. If he does not see his way to anything better, I believe he is to retain me. I get a final answer to-morrow. His uncle evidently thinks me too young.”

Edith and Sybil listened to this speech with silent gratitude. A quick glance from Ellerton at the mention of the ring confused his wife. Edith, on the other hand, did not know of the sale of her friend's heirloom until now, when she guessed something like the truth.

And of all people in the world, as if by one of those coincidences which we take note of a few times in our lives, who should arrive about sundown but the bush-missionary, David Henderson? He had heard reports of mischief, and that Mr. Gray had been at the inquest, so instead of going to the men's quarters as usual, he went straight to the house for the most authentic information.

Edith heard his voice in the hall and hastened to meet him — welcome at all times, thrice welcome now. She always associated him with the friend who had driven him to Wilta, and she felt that if he had the gift of seeing more than other men, now was his opportunity for showing his power. She had intended to let Mr. Gray and Mr. Talbot tell their story without comment and without interruption to the visitor, but when David Henderson held her hand in his, and his questioning eyes met hers, she could not help saying —

“Kenneth Oswald is innocent, I am quite sure. It was a poor life and a useless one, but he never would repay his uncle's trust by this treachery, never take a weaker man at a disadvantage, and hide his body in a waterhole, and hope peacefully to step into his inheritance. I'd as soon believe that you, Mr. Henderson, would go from your mission work to kill a man you had prayed with and for, as that our friend would go home from the faithful service he did for his uncle to take the life of that uncle's only son.”

“My dear Miss Gray, I am as sure as you can be that there is no real ground on which to charge our young friend, but I must know every apparent ground seriatim, and as I hear Mr. Gray knows all, I have come for particulars.”

“Mr. Talbot undertakes his defence, he will be able to tell you,” said Edith, as she led in her honoured guest and set him at her right hand at dinner, while Mr. Talbot sat at her left. Ellerton was beside his wife. He would rather not have heard the whole sickening story over again, but he
must sit and listen, and besides he knew it was better for him to hear all the pros and cons of a case which had so strong a personal interest for himself.

“In the first place,” said David Henderson, “it might have been accident pure and simple. He was intoxicated, poor lad.”

“Yes, if it could only be proved to be accident and nobody to blame that would be the pleasantest solution,” said Mr. Talbot, “except for the bruises, the torn clothes, and the blow on the temple, which do not altogether agree.”

“He might have been thrown from his horse in the first place, and violently bruised and his clothes torn, and then rolled over into the waterhole, and struck his temple on a snag.”

“There are no snags there — it has a granite bottom,” said Talbot.

“Could not he have struck his temple on this bottom?”

“Most unlikely I fear, but still possible,” said Talbot.

“The next supposition is suicide,” said Mr. Henderson.

“I should think James Oswald was the most unlikely man in the world to put an end to his own life,” said Walter Gray. “Should not you, Ellerton? He seemed to me to be such a coward.”

“Well, I don't know,” said Ellerton, thus appealed to. “He was in the horrors and that makes the most unlikely person careless of life often.”

“And he was heard to express himself in a most gloomy way on leaving Castlehurst, you say,” said Mr. Henderson, again addressing Ellerton.

“You yourself heard what Lyons said about him.”

“Yes, he was heard to say that it would not take much to make him blow out his brains; but people say these things often when they have not the slightest notion of carrying them out,” said Mr. Gray, for Ellerton did not respond to Mr. Henderson's enquiry.

“True, but there are times when people do carry them out,” said David Henderson. “As Mr. Ellerton says,” and he fixed his eyes on the newly returned wanderer, “the horrors after heavy drinking often change the character completely, and I think suicide a very probable solution.”

“If he had meant suicide he could not have been so bruised or struck himself on the temple,” said Mr. Hardy.

“No, probably not, but in throwing himself in he may have struck against something he did not expect,” said David Henderson.

“The suicide theory is scarcely tenable,” said Mr. Talbot. “I wish it were.”

“Then, in the third case, which the Jury at the inquest seemed to think the most probable solution, that it was the work of an enemy, who wished to give his crime the colour of an accident, was there no one who had a grudge or a cause of offence against the poor lad except this Kenneth
Oswald, who seems to have behaved all through to his cousin with almost superhuman forbearance?” Mr. Henderson glanced round the room for sympathy with this supposition, and Mr. Ellerton fancied he fixed his eyes on him.

“Nobody was known to have had such a great grievance against him, and nobody was on the spot to do the deed. The circumstances of place and time are all against the cousin,” said Talbot, “but yet, as I say, I believe him innocent, and will leave no stone unturned to find out some other probable culprit.”

“With regard to the motive, there was not merely revenge which weighed with the Jury at the inquest; there was the inheritance, which, failing Jim, was sure to be Kenneth's,” said Walter Gray.

“Money matters might weight with him as with other people, I suppose,” said Mr. Hardy, and Ellerton thanked him for the suggestion.

Mr. Gray was about to speak, but checked himself.

“Let us put money matters out of the question for the present,” said the missionary. “Was it not possible that on Castlehurst market-day there might not have been some one travelling on the same road, on horseback or on foot, whom James Oswald might have insulted or offended formerly, or whom he might, at the very time of meeting, have ruffled with his very unscrupulous tongue? They say 'speak no evil of the dead', but in the interests of the living, it is only fair to suppose that such a thing might have happened. What travellers were likely to take that road from Castlehurst? Because Kenneth Oswald rode on the road openly, and went home straight, was he to be the only man at that time on the way? Are there no tramps seeking work at this season, no disappointed gold-diggers that might have sat down to rest near the Spaniard's Shaft? And the young fellow was in a very queer frame of mind, and if thrown from his horse, as seems probable, would be still more out of humour. He might have asked the stranger to catch his horse and got a surly reply; words might have led to a scuffle, a hasty blow, and as hasty a concealment of the unpremeditated crime in the waterhole. A man in poor Oswald's frame of mind does not know what devil he may arouse, and some of our population are free enough with their hands on such provocation as he was always ready to give. Don't you, Mr. Ellerton, who have travelled so much with him, agree with me about this?”

“I never saw Jim Oswald so drunk as he must have been on this occasion,” said Mr. Ellerton, who could not refuse to answer the question. “He used to be continually muddled, but never violent or outrageous.”

“I do not speak of his violence, but of the character of his talk. It was one especially irritating to dependents and men poorer than himself.”

“Well, perhaps it was,” said Ellerton.
“We have a very narrow ring to fight in,” said Talbot. “The time appears fixed by the stopping of the watch, and it looks as if Kenneth Oswald must either have done it or seen it done.”

“Jim Oswald was drunk for days,” said Mr. Henderson. “He was sure to forget to wind up his watch, and the time could not be depended on which is indicated.”

“A very happy thought,” said Mr. Talbot. “You should have gone in for the Law, instead of the Gospel, Mr. Henderson. If we could get that awkward hitch about the exact time tided over, we might do wonders, but in spite of everything to the contrary we will pull him through over that and all. The good thing is that his uncle so thoroughly believes in him.”

“How did poor Mr. Oswald look, father?” said Edith.

“He is staggered and stunned. He knows how sorely Kenneth took to heart his cousin's taunts, and it grieves him that almost the last words of his son, reported to him, were so injurious to the family honour,” said Mr. Gray.

“You had a long talk with him,” said Edith.

“I had,” replied his father, “a most interesting talk. He says that with regard to Kenneth it is unfortunately true that he is a natural son of some gentleman in a much better position than the Oswalds, and of his dear and only sister. In his heart the old man believes his sister was deceived by a private and irregular marriage, though it could never be proved, and that if documents had not been lost or destroyed, he should be the heir of an old family.”

Edith Gray felt that this must be true. Her colour rose — her heart beat fast. It was the gentleman father who had been altogether to blame, and not the beautiful peasant mother. She said nothing, however; but Mr. Talbot said, “Here is another romantic element entering into this very interesting case.”

“But with regard to money matters,” continued Mr. Gray, “George Oswald told me what should make any Jury hesitate about convicting Kenneth; and that is that his will, now lying in the hands of Thomson and Scott in Melbourne, is made, and that by it he leaves everything he possesses to his sister's son, known by the name of Kenneth Oswald, and that the young fellow knows it, and looks upon it as a very great hardship to himself somehow. So that no deed of violence to his cousin could make his pecuniary prospects any better, and it might make them worse.”

“A most unpreceedented will,” said Mr. Talbot. “Then Jim was disinherited.”

“Apparently so,” said Mr. Gray.

“And Mrs. Oswald left nothing either?” asked the lawyer.
“So George Oswald says,” said Mr. Gray.

“Then if Jim got any inkling of this, there was every motive for Jim to put Kenneth out of the way,” said Mr. Ellerton who saw some light on this dark subject. “A scuffle ensued, and Kenneth being the strong man and perfectly sober, got the better of his cousin. It seems now as clear as day.”

“But there was no sign of any scuffle. Why should Jim's clothes be torn, and his body bruised, and this great blow on his temple, and his cousin without a spot on his clothes or a mark on his body ride quietly to Tingalpa? There is nothing on Jim's clothes or person like the marks of a hand-to-hand struggle. He was not capable of a violent attack; he could scarcely sit on his horse when he left Castlehurst,” said Mr. Talbot.

“And, besides, in his violent tirades against Kenneth when he accused him of robbing him of £10,000, which was the sum the old man at Kenneth's instigation sent to his old masters, the brothers Diroms, during his life and not after his death, as he originally proposed, and in which he taunted him with his illegitimate birth, he made no mention of what would have been the greatest grievance if he had known it. No, Mr. Oswald is quite certain that Jim had no idea of the contents of his will. And as to the struggle, which alone could justify a blow in self-defence, Jim might have received one, but he gave none to Kenneth Oswald,” said Mr. Gray.

“And that is a way of behaving which is impossible to our young friend. But I am not so sure about Jim being really disinherited,” said David Henderson. “There were conditions annexed to the will?”

“No, the old man says he left the whole property unconditionally to Kenneth.”

“A most unparalleled will,” said the young barrister.

“If not expressed in the will, there was some secret trust or honourable understanding,” said David Henderson.

“Did he tell you so?” asked Edith eagerly.

“No, he did not tell me so — but I have talked both to him and to his uncle, and I have come to the conclusion that in order to keep his possessions together he left them under certain conditions to our dear young friend, but it was very hard measure for the poor fellow. I recollect his saying that his uncle trusted him far too much.”

“This will makes his case much stronger,” said Talbot, with flashing eyes. “It was a providential move on George Oswald's part, and I hope among so many staunch friends as we have here, we will pull the poor young fellow through, to enjoy the inheritance free from vexatious restrictions.”

Sybil Ellerton's large eyes had been full of tears many times during this talk, but she said nothing. Edith, on the contrary, was full of eager
suggestions, and looked on Mr. Ellerton, or Mr. Talbot, or her father when they brought out any favourable feature with such unconcealed approval that her interest was visible to every one, especially to Ellerton, who said to himself — “If that fellow gets off she will marry a nameless man, and take up house at Tingalpa with those vulgar old people.”
Chapter 41 Mr. Henderson's Suspicions

David Henderson saw that both of these beautiful young women were interested in an extraordinary manner in his young friend, though they showed it so differently. He thought of the infatuation of the poor dead Jim for Mrs. Ellerton, of his suspicions that Kenneth, too, was impressed deeply by her beauty and her sorrows, and of the husband's long careless absence from her. He looked at Ellerton, who seemed to have lost his old easy assurance, and his old habit of interrupting conversation by remarks beside the subject; he saw that he had a deep though restrained interest in the discussion as to the probabilities of the case, and that the remarks he made had not the old natural careless tone. The bush missionary also took note of his observation that he had been kept so long on low diet that he could not do as much justice as he used to do to the Wilta cook's excellent menu.

With all Ellerton's avowed contempt for such a man, he felt the power of his eyes, and of his acute and telling suggestions as to the points in favour of Kenneth, and he tried to turn his face so that it could not be seen by him, away from his wife, and towards Mr. Hardy, who was the least interested person in the company.

David Henderson thought he had developed the latent rascality of his character more rapidly than with such a wife, and such education and surroundings, he should have expected when he saw him first at the Wilta billiard-table. Was Ellerton in that direction on that day? Had he any deep grudge at Jim Oswald for his persistent admiration of his wife, not thrown off by nine months of absence, but resumed as strongly as before on his return? Ellerton has been universally despised and blamed for taking Jim's passion so easily, and besides Jim had been esteemed to be as good as a Bank to him, and it was proverbial what a tool he was in the older and more crafty man's hands, but the present emergency called out some contradictory surmises in Mr. Henderson's mind.

"Are you too much excited by this sad affair to conduct worship in the men's quarters to-night?" asked Mr. Gray of the missionary.

"No; never too much disturbed to interfere with that," was the reply.

"We have collected a little money for your Bushman's Home," said Mr. Gray, "but not so much as I could wish. I must say that I think you make a great mistake in not collecting yourself; you would get twice as much as I can do?"

"It is not my line," said Mr. Henderson calmly. "Are you ladies and gentlemen too much disturbed to join us? I must go to smoke with the men
now, preparatory to this.”

“And I forgot, you had no tea with your dinner which you are accustomed to,” said Edith, “I'll get you a cup now.”

“If you will let me have it on the verandah, so as not to appear to be a rebuke to those gentlemen over their wine, I shall be glad of it. I shall think on my subject for to-night's exposition there.”

Edith ordered the tea, and took it with her own hands to her friend, and sat beside him on the verandah lounge. It was a great comfort to her that this good strong steadfast man was here again, ready to take poor Kenneth by the hand, when he was in such sore trouble.

“Was Mr. Ellerton jealous of our young friend, Miss Gray, or of this poor lad that is gone?” asked Mr. Henderson.

“Yes, and no,” said Edith. “He had a careless trust in his wife, and seemed never to disquiet himself about the younger cousin, but I have often wondered that he did not resent the regard and the confidence which she felt in Kenneth or take alarm at his watchful devotion.”

“You have seen so much of both of them,” said Mr. Henderson, “don't mind telling me what you think. From what he said to me, I came to the opinion that Kenneth Oswald loved that woman more than his own comfort or his own life.”

“I quite believe it,” said Edith. “Unhappily for his own peace he has formed such an attachment. Only don't blame him too much for it, for it was most unselfish love.”

“I do not blame him. A woman mismated as that poor young woman has been is so much to be pitied that a man dragged into her society as Kenneth Oswald was would slide into a warmer feeling without being conscious of it. Now I must ask a more delicate question. Do you think Mrs. Ellerton returns our friend's affection?”

“If you had asked me six weeks ago I should have said yes; not in any wrong way you must understand; but that I think he stood first with her, that she liked to please him above all others — above my brother Walter for example. Nay I am not sure even now that her hot quarrel with him for writing to her friends about her husband's conduct, was not a sign of how much she thought of him, and how cruelly she took any such interference on his part. I am so unpractised in love affairs that I may mistake some of the signs. But be that as it may, she dares not show the agitation she feels, the interest that is devouring her, for fear of awakening her husband's jealousy. I blamed her for indifference, and chafed at the way she has been playing and singing to that man all the day, while I, so much less concerned, have not been able to sit still — but the haggard look she gave me, the expression of weariness and of fear on her face when I went to
hurry her for dinner, showed me what she had endured."

“Her expression struck me much in the same way. I never saw fear, repressed fear, so apparent on any face. Is the fear for Kenneth or for some one else? I am puzzled about her husband. He came here that day — yesterday — it seems so much longer.”

“He came straight to Wilta from the Railway Station — there was no possible motive to take him five miles out of his way for the purpose of murdering Jim Oswald, against whom we know of no quarrel — in fact, his interests lay in keeping the young fellow alive,” said Edith.

“If he had got to the place,” said Mr. Henderson, “he was a most likely man to do it. Whatever his interests might be or not be, it was possible for Jim Oswald to insult him so as to lead to violence and murder.”

“There was not time,” said Edith — “there could not have been time. A lame man hurrying back to his wife, whom I must say he appeared very glad to see again, would never think of going the Tingalpa-road for the chance of picking a quarrel with James Oswald. You are most ingenious, Mr. Henderson, but I fear this will not hold. Only try every supposition. Poor Kenneth told me what comfort and strength you had given him when he was troubled and perplexed. You will go to see him in prison. I am going to get my father to take me. All his friends must rally round the man so cruelly accused.”

“Now,” said Mr. Henderson, laying down his empty cup. “I must go to ‘smoke O’, and in half an hour or thereabouts we will expect you in the dining-room.”

Mr. Ellerton was most unwilling to go to religious services of any kind anywhere and at any time, but Mr. Gray said, very gravely — that as he had a very narrow escape with his life, and his wife a still more close struggle with death, and as they were, one and all of the household, concerned for the sudden death of his long-chosen companion, and in deep anxiety as to their friend the accused man—he thought Ellerton least of all men should refuse to join in prayer to Him in whose hands are the issues of life and death. Mr. Gray led the way himself, with Edith clinging to him, and Ellerton could not for shame decline to accompany his wife, whose arm trembled on his so violently that he feared people might think it was his own that shook.

It was far more eager talk that they interrupted in the dining-room than that on the former occasion about the dogs. It was murder, self-murder, or extraordinary accident, every man laying down the law, but every man arriving by different reasoning at the conclusion that, however James Oswald came by his death, his cousin was not the man to murder him. Something like a lull fell on the conversation on the entrance of Mr. Gray
and the family and the servants, but a few words were spoken by the master himself — as it were officially — that in spite of every circumstance to his disadvantage, his own confidence in the absolute innocence of Kenneth Oswald was not in the least shaken, and were received with hearty cheers.

And David Henderson stood up to pray — to pray for light, to pray for faith, to pray for charity. He did not need any time to bring his audience in perfect sympathy with him; for once there was one subject occupying every mind. Every one there was strongly interested in the truth or falsehood of the accusation brought against one who had eaten and drunk with them, and one who had worshipped with them there under that very roof. He prayed for the parents of the young man thus suddenly cut off. Indeed, he prayed for the lad himself, who was now removed as it were into another room of God's vast house, and who would now see much that he could not have had a glimpse of through the gross veil of flesh and blood and bones.

The Cornish well-sinkers started at this prayer for the dead, but Donald nodded his head in approval, and even the man who had murdered him, who stood there among the rest, trying to look like other people, felt that he would like the fellow to have another chance, and to turn out better elsewhere than he had done here. Through the relenting of human nature, David Henderson appealed to the long-suffering Divine compassion that is ever waiting to be gracious. The most hardened murderer never wants to kill body and soul, and the very feeling that a man has had foul play makes us instinctively believe that things will go easier with him at the great account.

The chapter he chose for exposition was the 139th Psalm, and the bush evangelist dwelt upon the omniscience and omnipresence of God with a living faith that he communicated to every one of his little congregation. Even Ellerton reluctantly yielded to the power of that intense conviction. Before his eyes rose the waterhole and the prostrate form; the taunting words rang in his ears, the sudden blow, the hasty plunge, the awful ten minutes by the brink, all came back to him as under the scrutiny of the Eye which slumbers not — which in darkness or in light watched him still, which he could not turn from — that looked at him through David Henderson's solemn eyes, through Talbot's gleaming spectacles, through Edith Gray's questioning glances. Vain as it was, he felt he would fain take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea. This place, this Wilta house, was unendurable to him when the subject was discussed, and would be discussed ad nauseam. He must leave the colony altogether; things were too risky for him to stay in a scene where he had
committed the most foolish and the most useless of crimes. Why regard Jim Oswald's drunken tempers or foolish threats? Why resent the revenge his attempts on his own life by violence, instead of holding out threats of legal proceedings, so much more safe and profitable? It might be all very well for David Henderson to rejoice, as he seemed to do, that if they made their bed in hell or in the grave (no matter about the translation) God was there. At present he would rather be somewhere where God was not.

As he took a rapid survey of the situation an additional element of danger threatened him. The only man who knew what a deadly cause of offence existed between them and the dead man was Hugh Carmichael, who called himself a friend of the Oswalds, and who would see his interests lie in getting Kenneth, now, by Ellerton's own act, the undoubted heir to a great property, clear off, and leaving him, the poverty-stricken Ellerton, to take his chance. How he cursed his folly in paying the passage-money to bring this witness to the spot. The cold sweat stood on his forehead as he thought of the newspaper reports, and Carmichael's seeing the whole proceedings at the Coroner's inquest, detailed in the next day's papers.

After the interminable exposition was over, the men begged the missionary to stay another hour before they turned in to rest. They had not had their full allowance of talk. Ellerton said he was tired, and his wife went with him to retire for the night, but all the rest of the family and visitors waited up for David Henderson's return.

“Mr. Ellerton did not see his old friend and companion at all that day at Castlehurst?” asked the missionary when he joined them.

“No,” answered Mr. Gray, “he enquired about him at the stables, where he engaged a horse; but was told that James Oswald had gone home. Mr. Ellerton left Castlehurst before Kenneth did, but of course he came straight here.”

“The Spaniard's Shaft, where the body was found, is quite off the Wilta road, I suppose,” said Mr. Talbot.

“Oh, five miles out of the way,” said Mr. Gray.

“I suppose we need not subpoena him, then; but I am afraid we must subpoena Mrs. Ellerton.”

“Why,” asked Mr. Gray. “It will be exceedingly painful for her; could you not spare her that, poor thing?”

“If we want to prove low spirits and depression, so as to lead to suicide, the immediate cause of this is believed to be a conversation he had with her here, from which he went to Castlehurst in extreme ill-humour, and went in for the heaviest bout of drinking he ever indulged in during the whole course of his life. Of course it will be very unpleasant for her, because there is no doubt he was most presumptuous, and she had given him a
thorough setting down.”

“Not at all pleasant evidence for a lady like Mrs. Ellerton to have to give,” said Mr. Gray, “but I suppose it must be done, and she will do it as well as it can be done. She is not bound to answer every question that is asked.”

“The whole affair is unpleasant,” said Walter Gray, “but the most astonishing point of it to me is the story of the will. Who would have thought that our commonplace neighbours — the Oswalds — could have given us such romantic subjects for speculation? First, George Oswald's princely liberality; next, the murder of his son in this mysterious manner, and his nephew's arrest on grave suspicion of the crime. Kenneth, of course, is going to turn out something great; those missing documents will be found, and he will be proved the heir to an ancient family, and will buttress it up with our Australian wool-bags, if he only gets clear; and, to crown all, George Oswald has told him beforehand of his extraordinary will, to help him to prove his innocence. The only member of the family not as yet invested with a halo of romance is Mrs. Oswald, but there is no saying what she may blossom into.”

“Mrs. Oswald is the only one at Tingalpa who believes in Kenneth's guilt,” said Mr. Gray.

“Why should she think so?” said Talbot and David Henderson in the same breath. “It could not be money, when this will was known to Kenneth.”

“It would have been the old man he would have attacked if he wanted money and power,” said Mr. Hardy.

“No,” said Mr. Gray; “it was some quarrel the cousins had. Kenneth had greatly resented something — I fancy it was about his birth — that Jim had said at Wilta to Mrs. Ellerton, and told him that he never could feel the same to him again; and she says she feels sure he meant to have his revenge. Poor woman! she cannot bear to think of his committing suicide; and as you, Mr. Henderson, pointed out to us to-night, we feel that if we have had an injury from our fellows, that the good and just God will make it up to us in some way; and I believe it is a positive relief to her to think that her son had foul play, both because she can blame someone for the sad event, and because she instinctively feels that if he was hurried to his account by violence, that account will not be so strict. And with all her love for Jim, her grief for his death is made bitterer by the consciousness that he was not very fit to die.”

“Just as fit to die as to live,” said David Henderson solemnly. “Let us hope that in the next stage of his existence he is learning to live a better life, although the lesson may not be without pain.”
Chapter 42 Kenneth's Arrest

To go back a little in our narrative, after hearing from his cousin's own lips of the revelations which he had made at Wilta, Kenneth kept away as much as he could. He had given Sybil the money and the jeweller's receipt, and told her to summon him again if she needed him. The gulf between himself and Edith Gray, which he had known of all along, was now fully known to her, and she made no advances to him to give him any hope that she made light of the misfortune of his birth.

If he could have dared to tell the whole truth to Sybil, it might have been a comfort to her to know that he had a right to interest himself in her welfare, to work for her, to lend her money, to redeem for her her heirloom, and that she might rely in his absolutely brotherly regard. But no, not until her need was sorer, he would not betray the relationship. He must wait besides till her father should reply to the letter opened in his absence. The next mail brought the letter, and to Kenneth it was the greatest comfort and support.

My dear Kenneth, my beloved son —

I cannot tell you the mingled feelings with which I received your letter, opened, as you might have thought possible, by other hands, which have already acknowledged and thanked you for it. All letters that were likely to affect or relate to our Sybil are considered family property.

It is an unspeakable comfort to me to think that in that far land you have been watching over your sister, helping her when she needed it, and brave enough to risk her displeasure by disclosing your conviction that she is miserable. I have long feared that the man she so blindly set her heart on was unworthy of her, but I never could have thought him so cruel or so base, if you had not written your candid letter. The rare delicacy of Mr. Gray and his family, to whom I never can be sufficiently grateful, has veiled his conduct, had made light of our deep obligations to them for their loving care of our tender blossom whom he deserted, has put the best construction on every suspicious circumstance, and Sybil herself has never written a line to say that she has been neglected or unhappy. But we cannot allow her to continue to lead the miserable life of a gambler's wife, even though she does not complain of unkindness. At least, I follow up her mother's letter by the strongest remonstrance on my own part, and make business arrangements for her to draw upon me for all the necessary expenses, including her medical attendance, which I fear must have fallen upon the Grays. She never even wrote about poverty to us. I feel, however, that I can absolutely rely upon your information, which even carried
conviction to my wife, when in ignorance of your real claims upon our
regard. I therefore write by this mail to Sybil, urging her to leave Ellerton
at once, if he has returned to her by the time she receives this, and return to
the old home where all things are as they were, and where every heart is
open to love and cherish her. I also wrote to her that from personal
knowledge of you, and from enquiries I have made elsewhere, I am quite
satisfied that your statements are correct, and that she need not think of
concealing her real lot from us for the future; and also that though I shall
bitterly repent all my life of having yielded to her wilfulness, I shall repent
of it still more bitterly if she continues to bear her misery alone and apart
from us.

With us she can have love and peace, even more than she had in her
husband's absence with her good friends Mr. and Miss Gray, of which you
write so touchingly. I hope that with her mother and brothers and sisters
and me she may learn to forget the brief madness which linked her with a
scoundrel. For my own justification, however, I must tell you that I was
deceived as to his character. He had been a little wild, his aunt said, but he
was thoroughly reformed. He seemed most passionately attached to Sybil,
and she thought she could do everything with him. I did not think that the
poor daughter of a Highland laird could have tempted a fortune-hunter, but
I believe now that he counted on substantial additions to her dowry from
her grandfather whose favourite she was. But his circumstances were
delusive, and when the crash came, Mr. Ellerton seemed to be without
resource, and hurried Sybil off to Australia — where probably she thought
she could hide her disappointment from us all.

I held out against Sybil's entreaties for a while. I had not been free from
sin myself, so I could not be too hard on Ellerton. I had suffered from the
thwarting of my first deep strong attachment, and I could not bear to see
Sybil pine and fret — so I gave in. But still I always distrusted him, and
with good reason, as it is now proved.

But in my anxieties and remorse about Sybil, am I to say nothing of my
pride and satisfaction in you? Am I to make use of you thus without
acknowledging you? Am I to speak of you and hear you spoken of in my
house as a kindly stranger, and not as my honoured son? Bear with me
Kenneth, forgive me if I cannot do all that I would with regard to you.
Think of all the young children I have about me, and think how difficult it
is to say to them:— ‘You have an elder brother. That Kenneth Oswald who
has earned Sybil's undying gratitude is my son unaided, unowned, found
out by chance in the wilds of Australia.’

I have told my wife, who pardons me the long silence as to the one great
sorrow of my youth, and who has wept over your mother's fate and your
severance from me with tears which comforted me in my humiliation, and
she now loves and honours you as you deserve, but further than this I
cannot go. And that is more in your interest than out of regard to my own
feelings. I might, and I believe I ought to bring myself to say to my
children, ‘you have an illegitimate brother,’ but that would be to injure
you. As you uncle's trusted nephew, your position is infinitely better than
any I could give you. No one would resent more bitterly than he would do
any left-handed claim on your duty on my part. You need nothing else
from me but the power of serving me, and that you have done. Twice I
have been infinitely indebted to you. Once when your love and duty
sweetened the bitter cup which your mother drank to the dregs, and now a
second time when you act a brother's part without a brother's name or
privileges. In both cases not a single effort, but a long continuous work,
and in the last instance with unavoidable pain to yourself.

As to my affection, you must never doubt it. I have always loved you
since the day when I saw you first in your mother's arms. You have my
love, and shall have it till I die. Write to me without fear and without
reserve; lay open all that is in your heart. If things go very hard with Sybil,
and you need to have more hold on her, tell her you are her father's son,
armed with his delegated authority, and show her this letter. She has seen
something of the world since she left her home, and will not look on my
sin with as much horror as the younger girls would do. But for the sake of
your own position, you will not tell her this if you can help it. God bless
you, my dear Kenneth, and believe me,

Always your affectionate father,
Norman McDiarmid.

It was a compensation for much that had been hard in his life to feel his
father's love and trust so freely bestowed on him, to be encouraged and
commanded to write fully and unreservedly to him; Kenneth however,
could not help wondering how Sybil would meet him after her father's
peremptory entreaties for her to return to Scotland at once; but though he
wished much to know, he was not very eager for the interview. She did not
summon him, as he had expected, but he went to Wilta to see her.

Sybil was then expecting her husband home very soon, and she told
Kenneth that as he had modified his opinion of him in the letter sent last
mail to Mr. McDiarmid, and as she had also written in the strongest terms
about how much mistaken their informant had been, she could not pay any
attention to what her father had written to her after his return from Norway.

Of course she was not going to act upon what her father had been led —
or rather misled — to write.

“Only he says he knows you personally and by report. Why did you not
tell me that before, Mr. Kenneth?"

"Because my acquaintance was in such a humble capacity that I did not
like to claim it," said Kenneth blushing.

"Oh! you do not know papa. High or low, gentle or simple, he is good to
everybody. But he thinks very highly of you, and so did I till —"

"Well, forgive me now, if you can. Only trust me. If you find you change
your determination, and wish to go home, let me know."

Sybil shook her head with her old wilfulness.

Kenneth, however, did not believe in Ellerton's reformation, and he
trusted to Edith Gray and himself that if they settled in the neighbourhood
they could soon discover if there was any hopeful improvement.

Jim Oswald on his return had certainly said many queer things about
Ellerton's goings on in Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart Town, Sydney, and
San Francisco, and strangely enough Jim did not seem to miss Ellerton, or
regret his delay in Sydney, or long for his company in the least. He took up
some old companions who had been deserted when Ellerton's star was in
the ascent, and spent his time with them. It was a busy time of the year, and
George Oswald was ailing a little, and glad that his nephew could buy and
sell, and look after everything for him. There was some surplus stock to
sell, and Kenneth had gone to Castlehurst Market on the morning of
Ellerton's return, to dispose of them to the best advantage. His uncle had
been very much dismayed to hear that Jim had gone in for an unexampled
debauch at the Crown and Sceptre, where he had been for many days. Mick
had seen him, and tried to get him away on the preceding evening, but
without effect.

"He cannot stand it, Kenneth; he cannot stand it. These colonial born lads
have not the stamina that we bring out with us from Scotland, and he has
not had the hard fare and abstinence from whisky and tobacco that I had till
I was two-and-twenty. He'll kill himself in twelve months if he goes in as
heavy as I do at times, and keeps always at in between times."

Kenneth acknowledged that there was great danger in his cousin's
imitating his father at his worst, and not at his best.

"So, Kenneth, just look on him as you go to market, and bring him home
with you in the buggy, and leave his horse at Castlehurst — he'll be safer
with you driving, and the mother will coddle him up a bit. Don't mind the
market if you can get him, go at once. Give the man your instructions
about the wethers."

"But if he will not come then?"

"Then look in for him as you return. If I was well enough I'd go myself;
but it is time he was tired. Mick, who is an experienced old hand, thinks he
will leave off today. And if he is only safe with you my mind may be
easy.”

When Kenneth went to the parlour of the Crown and Sceptre where several of Jim's friends were sitting with him, he was saluted with a volley of abuse. Jim absolutely refused to go home at his bidding, and swearing furiously, said he would sit here till the day of judgment, if he so pleased. He had been robbed by Kenneth, who was a bastard, who did not know who his father was, of ten thousand pounds, which his own father would have left to him, and he was not going to stand it.

Kenneth changed colour at this open insult, rushed on Jim, and shook him till he howled for mercy again. There were hopes amongst the boon companions that there was going to be a row; and though Jim was likely to have the worst of it, he had been so ill-tempered, so irritable, so insulting to one and all of them, that the good liquor they were having at his expense would not prevent them from being very glad to see him put down. The very feebleness of his foe brought Kenneth to a calmer frame of mind. He let go his hold. “You will speak differently when you are yourself, Jim. Your father is far from well, and wants you at home, and so does your mother. You will find the horses and buggy at the stable, and Lyons will send a man to drive you home when you wish to go. I can ride Prince Charlie home. I am going to market,” he said, and turned away.

“Going to market — of course — every mortal thing he puts his nose in. It should be me that my father should send to market; but he has no confidence in me. Nobody cares a straw about me. It's Kenneth here and Kenneth there. I'm not fit to tie Kenneth's shoes, am I? Is that your opinion, lady fair? If somebody knew that, I'd not like to be in Kenneth's shoes. I'd rather tie them — hang him! But I am a poor miserable wretch, without a friend in the world,” and Jim Oswald began to cry as he had never done since childhood.

After a violent fit of sickness brought on by this unwonted indulgence in tears, he fell asleep for some hours, and then he thought he would go home before Kenneth came to hunt him up again. He would not be driven by that rascal, or by any one of Lyons' men, he would ride his own horse, Prince Charlie, which was his favourite, for Sybil had often tried it, and praised it. Ellerton was expected back alive after all. That £50 was completely thrown away, and he at last had become convinced that even if he had succeeded in getting the husband out of the way, there was no hope for him. That supplanter, Kenneth, even in spite of the tales he had told to Mrs. Ellerton against him, was the favourite. “Not fit to tie his cousin's shoes! He would like Ellerton to hear it,” he muttered to himself as he mounted Prince Charlie, and the animal started at full speed towards his home, of which he was fonder than his master was.
Kenneth, unspeakably irritated by the public insults he had endured, which he knew George Oswald would resent as keenly as he himself, went to market, and transacted the business on which he came. He was observed to be very depressed, a little short in his answers, and unusually shy of social intercourse. It spread over the town how Jim Oswald had insulted him, and most people were of opinion that he should have thrashed his cousin within an inch of his life.

Sad and dispirited, he went to the stable. “Mr. Jim has given you the slip, Mr. Kenneth,” said Lyons; “he's off on Prince Charlie; you had better keep a bright look out there is no accident, for he was not very fit to ride. It is a good thing the horse knows the road, and has no vice. A good horse is a providence to his master.”

The Spaniard's Shaft was off the road; but even if Kenneth had gone on to the spot Ellerton had done his work clean and left no scrap of evidence behind; but on driving up to the gate of Tingalpa he saw Prince Charlie, who had found his way to the stable without his rider, and George Oswald looking anxiously at him.

“Have you seen Jim,” said the old man. “Here's his horse all right enough, but he can tell no tales.”

“I have seen no trace of him on the road,” said Kenneth, “though I looked about me. I know he started an hour or more before me.”

“The horse ain't hurt or cut, anyway,” said Mick. “Depend on it, Mr. Jim has been having a parting glass at Castlehurst somewhere in the skirts of the town, and hasn't half fastened Prince Charlie to the post, and so he got loose and found his way home like a sinsible baste as he is.”

“That’s like enough,” said the anxious father, “but go back and make sure, for my mind's troubled about him.”

“Don't be after making yourself onaisy about Mr. Jim. He's as right as ninepence, no fear,” said Mick. “Will you go back wid me, Mr. Kenneth?”

“Certainly,” said the young man, and he returned and again passed the neighbourhood of the waterhole without suspicion. After enquiry at probable places in the outskirts of Castlehurst without any success, they returned with the reinforcement of two police-men, who recommended that this waterhole should be dragged, for the horse might have wanted to drink there, and Jim then might have slipped off his back from his unsteady seat.

It was now dark, and the body was dragged out and carried back to Castlehurst. Mr. Oswald was summoned, the body was identified, the livery-stableman and the companions Jim Oswald had been drinking with questioned, and the medical man who looked at the body gave it as his opinion that the death had not been accidental. Kenneth had passed pretty closely on the tracks of his cousin; the scene in the parlour of the Crown
and Sceptre was in every one's mouth, and had lost nothing in the telling; the idea that if Jim was once out of the way, the favourite nephew would step in to the inheritance weighed with the magistrate, and it was not at all an improbable thing that a quarrel had resulted in the death of the weaker party.

Kenneth therefore was committed to gaol on suspicious which even he was forced to confess not altogether unreasonable.

He was pleased to see his uncle's unshaken confidence in him, and the kind faces of Mr. Gray and his son cheered him too. Mr. Talbot's eager interest in the case on his behalf would have been more agreeable, if he had not known that he was an admirer, if not a lover of Miss Gray's, and that he was supposed to have very good chances of success. Still, he could not help being grateful to the young barrister for the intelligent manner in which he looked after the interest of the accused and protected him from irrelevant questioning, and restored him his treasured letter unopened.

When Mr. Gray urged both him and his uncle to entrust the case to Mr. Talbot's management, as he had the highest opinion of his ability and knowledge of law, neither of the Oswalds could suggest any one better fitted, and gave a provisional consent.

It would be a creditable case for the young man if he could carry the prisoner through.
Chapter 43 Uncle and Nephew

On the day after the inquest George Oswald went to see his nephew in Castlehurst Gaol, and again repeated his assurance that however poor Jim had come by his death, his cousin had neither art nor part in it.

“I did not let it out at the inquest, for there was no question asked that pointed that way, but I told William Gray, of Wilta, privately, and I will give evidence at the trial, that I had made my will absolutely in your favour, Kenneth, and that you knew it. William Gray says that will carry the greatest weight with the Jury to prove you guiltless.”

“But you must also tell under what peculiar circumstances the will was made,” said Kenneth.

“What for should I? the will is indefeasible, and there it lies in Thomson and Scott's hands in Melbourne to prove my words. What for should I relate the private conversation we had together when you took my intentions so sore to heart?”

“To vindicate yourself, uncle, and me, too, in a certain way; for you had no right to leave your wife and son penniless or dependent on me. You thought you would rather trust to my honour than give Jim legal rights that he might borrow money on and through which he might hamper and annoy me in my management of the property; but you know I always felt it the only really unkind thing you ever did to me, to burden me with a responsibility in which I could never hope to please either Mrs. Oswald or poor Jim himself.”

“But it behoved to be left to you absolutely, Kenneth, for whatever my poor lad had in his own power, he would scatter to the winds. Would it not show the Judge and the Jury how much I trusted you?” pleaded the uncle.

“Yes, but it might not make other people trust me the more or believe in my innocence now, because you had then and still have such a blind faith in me. But anyhow it must come out at the trial, that though you did leave me the property, I was bound in honour to account for it all to Jim, to Mrs. Oswald, to my grandparents, and to Mick O'Hearn, all but a sum of £1,000 a year which I was to receive as Manager, with liberty to retain money for any outlay which might be necessary to keep up or improve the property itself.”

“Well, that was an understanding that made my mind easy and showed my trust.”

“True, but it was an understanding that made my mind uneasy and that I might be tempted to do anything to get quit of.”

“And how will that sound to the Jury?” said Mr. Oswald, alarmed. “Oh!
Kenneth man, tell me how you think that will sound to them? Will they, who do not know you as I do, fancy that when you could not put me off leaving you the property like that, as you tried hard to do over and over again, that you misdoubted having dealings with Jim and his mother that could be only gall and wormwood to them and to yourself no profit? Will they believe that you were all the more angered by what he said of you at the Crown and Sceptre because you knew of this disposition of mine, and that all your intercourse after my death would be a constant blister for ever open to both of you? Eh! Kenneth, do you think that would be the way they would look at it — that a blow and a plunge would set you free for ever from the intolerable burden and allow you to be my heir without the draw-back?"

“I cannot say how they may look on it, but I know that you must tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, if the subject of the will is brought up at all.”

“And it must be, for I told it to William Gray, and the man's face lighted up as if it was just salvation for you. Well, as you say, I must tell the truth and shame the devil, and surely if there's a God above, he'll not let the devil have it his own way here. No, Kenneth, if I thought ye had done the deed, I'd never see your face again; but now I have lost my Jim, my poor laddie that I was so proud of and so hopeful for, and had so many a sore heart over, I cannot abide the thought of losing you, Kenneth. Oh! man, you look like your mother this day. It is the hardest thing on me that Jim ever did to cast up among some of the lowest lot in Castlehurst, as if it were not a shame to all of us — to me, and to him as well as to you. But he was so set upon that woman, Ellerton, and so jealous of you, that his only aim was to bring you down in her estimation, and it was to her he said it first, as you know full well. But I never thought that he had any cause to be jealous of you, for you had the sense to think Miss Edith Gray worth ten of her.”

“What makes you think that, uncle?”

“Because you've got een in your head and a sense of what's fitting. But I must not speak of such things now, though if you got clear, I'm no saying what may not happen; but there's my poor Jim lying unburied, and you shut up in prison, and the mother, she's neither to hold nor to bind, but she must have your life; and when I wanted her to hear reason, and told her about the will, she said we were just a pair of plotters, as bad as Guy Fawkes and, Lord forgive her! she would have it that I wanted to put my son out of the way, because I would not believe that you did it.”

“Has not Mr. Ellerton returned?” asked Kenneth. “I think I heard so at the inquest, but there was so much talk and noise, I cannot be quite sure.”
“Oh! yes, he is at Wilta again, and he's likely to stop, for he likes good quarters, cheap. I am sure it was a black day for us all when he first put his nose into William Gray's house. But I was pleased to see my old enemy so staunch on your side, and he is to be at the funeral, and he is gone this day to Mrs. Oswald, and he will try to soothe her down. It's hard to bear for the both of us any way you take it.”

Kenneth wrung his uncle's hand in speechless sympathy.

“Our poor Jim,” said George Oswald, “that we thought so much of and had such plans for. And he was such a knowing little chap and asked such questions, and never was to be daunted by beast or body. Oh, Kenneth, man, it is hard! And now to think that I misdoubted him about the property, that is no concern of his now, and had angrier words with him this last month of his short life about your poor mother and her trouble than I ever had before, and now my heart is just like torn in two, how I am to clear you without putting too much blame on him. Oh! Kenneth, man, be not over hard on my poor Jim!”

“How can I be in the face of death, sudden and perhaps violent?” said Kenneth, solemnly. “How can I bring up my little grievances? It was very hard on Jim to see you making me take, as he thought, his rightful place — to fancy me preferred by the woman he loved — to believe me his watcher, his spy, for he did not understand that it was your love and care for him that made you give me such a charge. I ought to feel nothing but grief and compassion for his mistakes and his weaknesses.”

“And Kenneth,” said the old man slowly, “if you feel like that — you that had so much to put up with from him that's gone to his account, will not the Almighty, that made him what he was, and put him where he was with temptations in his way, look somehow in the same way at him? He had no time maybe for prayer, but it was a big price that was paid down for the sins of the sons of men on Mount Calvary long syne. And if he was hurried out of this life, surely, Kenneth, God would deal some easier with him for that.”

“He has all eternity to work in,’ said Kenneth. “And He who has put such tenderness into human hearts, will act more tenderly and far more wisely than we can.”

“They say there's no repentance in the grave, though,” said Mr. Oswald, doubtfully.

“Not in the grave but out of it — wherever the soul has gone — surely there must be repentance and acceptance, wherever and whenever there is need of it, or God would not be the God of everlasting compassion.”

“These are new notions, Kenneth. I was brought up in the old way. And many a time have I thought that if I was cut off in any of my splores, as
indeed I might, and the doctor tells me it is the likeliest thing in the world — whether I'd be judged by the six month's hard fight with my besetting sin, or by the six days of giving into it — but God help me, what makes me think of myself when my poor Jim is past doing anything for."

“Not perhaps by us, but by One stronger, wiser, and better than any of us can be. Take comfort, and try to comfort Mrs. Oswald.”

“I hear that your friend, David Henderson, is about the district,” said Mr. Oswald, “I must get him to go to Tingalpa to speak a word in season to her. I never saw a man that had such a quiet way of being sure that everything was for the best. It's no just the words he says — any one can say the words glib enough out of the Bible or good books, but his words come from the heart and go to it straight.”

“Oh! I'm glad to hear he is near us,” said Kenneth.

“Would you not like to see him yourself, Kenneth?”

“Very much indeed, but if he is on his regular rounds, he may not be able to come just at once; don't hurry him off his duty.”

“Surely he would look on it as his duty to visit the prisoner. He has good warrant for that in the Bible he is so well acquainted with. About worldly matters — about your defender, Kenneth? Do you think that Melbourne birkie, Talbot, will serve your turn. They say he is very clever, and I liked the way he turned his spectacles on the witnesses yesterday at the inquest. He'd cross-examine well, I think.”

“Well, I suppose he will do as well as any other.”

“They say he's after that lassie at Wilta. But let him only get you clear, and I'll no give him for his chance. Only a young lawyer that has his way to make for himself — and there's Tingalpa, and Cowarrel, and the other runs. But about siller, Kenneth, you must have siller. You had a hundred pounds from me not far gone.”

“That is spent. You know I got it for a purpose.”

“And would not tell me then, but went off to Melbourne instanter?” said George Oswald, who had the weakness (if it may be so called) of strong curiosity about all money matters, characteristic of the successful business man.

“And I am not going to tell you now, uncle, but I hope I may be able to tell it by-and-by. It was not my own secret, or you would have been told at once.”

“Well,” said the old man, a little disappointed, “and so it is spent, and a gaol is a bad place to earn money in, and you must have some to gie your lawyer and to pay your way. You'll make a better bargain with Talbot than I could do. So, Kenneth, my man, here's £50, and when you want more ask me. And I hope you get your food right and see and have something to
keep you up — ale, wine, brandy, whatever suits you best. You are so careful, there's no fear of your taking too much.”

“And you, uncle,” said Kenneth, affectionately, “don't let yourself be driven to false consolation in this terrible time. Remember I trust to you — you are my strong rock of defence.”

“And I must keep clear to be ready for whatever may turn up. Waes me on the drink! for when I was out of myself I let out to Mrs. Oswald that you were my sister's son, and Jim when drink had the better of him, let it out before the riff-raff of Castlehurst. No — not a drop shall touch my lips till you're clear. So good-bye to you, Kenneth, and I'll see about David Henderson for the wife and for yourself.” And George Oswald left the prisoner to his own thoughts.
Chapter 44 Sybil's Appeal

David Henderson had no intention of leaving the neighbourhood without seeing his young friend, in spite of any plans he might have proposed for himself for his rounds, but he first went through all Jim's haunts at Castlehurst, and on visiting Mrs. Oswald, which he did in the afternoon of the day after the inquest, he enquired at Tingalpa if there was any one likely to have any grudge against James Oswald, who could have been about the Spaniard's Shaft on the market-day.

Although Jim Oswald had not appeared to miss Ellerton or to weary for his return, he had had too strong a sense of his own interests, in case Carmichael carried out the plans he was so confident about when they parted, to betray that they had been other than the best of friends during all the voyages and land travelling they had together. Until Ellerton returned safe and sound, and up to the last moment there was always a chance that Carmichael might earn his £500 out and out, there must be no suspicion that he had any interest in getting Ellerton out of the way.

Even in the last foolish visit to Wilta, when he saw Mrs. Ellerton alone, and heard from her own lips the most indignant rejection of his professions of love, and the most bitter complaints of his persecution, he did not loosen his tongue about Ellerton, because she did not intrench herself in her love for her husband, only in her duty to him. Jim had in his wild love-talk reminded her too powerfully of the encouragement which had been given to his visits by her careless husband, and of the pecuniary advantages which had accrued to him through her attractions for her to bring forward wifely love. But her honour was insulted, her blood was up, and when he taunted her with preferring his cousin, who had offended her by his interference in her private concerns and who had the cunning underhand ways which were suited to his birth, she said that whatever might be her feelings as to these things, he, James Oswald, was not fit to tie his cousin's shoes.

So David Henderson could get no information to lead him to suspect Ellerton, and his enquiries at the Crown and Sceptre resulted in disappointment.

However, there was a poor half-witted fellow named Patrick Donovan wandering about the shaft, and who was often found near the scene of the great disappointment, to whom Jim Oswald was obnoxious, because he had laughed at him and taunted him with the extravagant expectations so completely frustrated. The poor fellow had dreamed dreams like the poor Spaniard, and had stood the disappointment still worse. The man was not
violent and was allowed to roam about. Occasionally he would work for a week or two with a mate at the alluvial, but not with more than one, for it reminded him of his old trouble. So working a little and begging a little, and living upon very little, he was well-known to everybody.

If he had seen Jim Oswald near his own hole, and the young fellow in his ill-humours had repeated his old taunts and jeers, this Pat Donovan might very readily have over-powered him, and sent him into the shaft. Jim's riding whip, with which the deed, too, might have done, was found in the hole after a second search, and the poor miner was looked for in his old haunts, that he might be arrested on suspicion.

This was all that could be done in one day. Mr. Henderson and Mr. Talbot had a long talk on the following morning and compared notes and planned operations. Mr. Henderson said he must now go to see the prisoner. Edith Gray sent a kind message with a trembling voice. Mr. Ellerton was out of the way. Mrs. Ellerton said nothing, but as the bush missionary was mounting the horse lent to him by Mr. Gray, one of the maid servants came out with a note in her hand. “Give this to Mr. Kenneth Oswald quietly,” she said.

It was addressed in a lady's hand. He wondered if it was from Sybil or his friend, but he thought that Miss Gray would have given such a letter herself, and not trust it to another hand to convey to Kenneth.

It need not be said that Kenneth was glad to see his friend, and to hear from him that his uncle and aunt seemed a little comforted by what the missionary had said to them, and that Mrs. Oswald was not now so sure that her poor boy had been killed by his cousin. They then went on to the probabilities of the case, in which Kenneth saw with grateful surprise that his friend showed as much insight and sagacity as he did on those divine things with which he was more especially conversant. They then talked about George Oswald's grief, and about the apparently useless if not mischievous life which had been so mysteriously closed, and so many similar lives, when human eyes cannot see the reason for their being brought into being at all.

This led to Ellerton, in whom David Henderson saw some change, whether for the better or for the worse he was not prepared to say.

“If it had not been that he came straight home to Wilta in the time he did, and that all his interests were in favour of keeping the poor lad alive, my suspicions would attach to him far more than to Patrick Donovan. Mr. Talbot and I talked the matter over this morning, and he can see no grounds at present. Ellerton naturally rode straight home to his wife.”

“Could he have known, could he have heard in Castlehurst about Jim's interview with his wife?”
“We have thought of that, but he spoke to nobody in Castlehurst but the stable-keeper and the barman at the Railway Hotel, and they swear that they said nothing of the kind. Talbot made enquiries as to whether Mrs. Ellerton had telegraphed to him at Melbourne, but there was no telegram sent to Ellerton at all. No, at present I see no reason for suspecting Ellerton except his character and his manner. Our sheet anchor at present is poor Pat Donovan.”

Kenneth could scarcely think that his cousin could have offended the poor half-witted fellow to such an extent as to lead to such violence. Although Jim was of an imperious and inconsiderate temper, he had never insulted any one at any time as much as he had done himself, and it was the high words and the half struggle that had taken place at Castlehurst that weighed most with the Coroner's Jury. In fact, these things made them so readily agree to the doctor's opinion that it was neither accident nor suicide.

As David Henderson took leave he put into the hands of his friend the note committed to his care, but Kenneth did not open it till the door had closed on the missionary. It was from Sybil.

Dear Sir — My father wrote to me when I was in any great straits or difficulty, I was to consult with you in preference to my friends here. I am now in such a position. I must see you, and that alone. I shall be in Castlehurst to-morrow at the Royal Hotel about noon. I have a little business to do there, but my main business is to see you. Write to that address and tell me at what hour I may ask for admittance. I grieve to come with my troubles when you are overwhelmed with your own. I have already done you great injustice, and if I am too hard on you now, it will be only in keeping with the rest. Yours, S.E.

“He wants to drive her to the stage, and he finds it difficult. Backed by her father, she will not yield to his wishes, and he resents it. This is the reason of the change David Henderson observes. Well, it is little a poor prisoner can do. I can only refer her back to Mr. Gray and Edith, but I may advise and help her a little. Thank God, she is coming to see me before she goes home.”

He wrote the note, setting 1 o'clock as the hour of meeting, and tried to fix his attention on a book. His uncle had brought him some books to while away the time, but it was of no use attempting to fix his mind on them. His own affairs were altogether too perplexing, and those of other people dear to him seemed also critical. A light book had no interest or meaning, a serious book seemed only a conglomeration of words.

He took pen and ink, and indulged himself in one of those long confidential letters to his father that he had sometimes written and destroyed, but which now might be sent if he thought it wise. He got a little
gleam of comfort from the thought that Sybil retracted her unjust suspicions, and that their father would be pleased that she could come to him in her trouble even though it were to add to his own. He tore up his own letter which was too gloomy to be sent, and placed Sybil's note with his other treasures.

He had an interview with Talbot on the following morning, and explained to him under what peculiar circumstances his uncle had made his will in his favour. He was quite candid in telling how he had chafed at it. He said also that he was perfectly sure Jim Oswald knew nothing about the will. Although Mr. Oswald had betrayed the other delicate secret to his wife in his recent drinking bout, he had given no hint of that.

Talbot touched on the subject of Ellerton but even more lightly than David Henderson had done.

“Your uncle's unshaken faith in your innocence is your strongest point at present. I think we may pull you through on the ground of the high character you have always maintained, though of course if we can discover the right party the ends of justice will be better satisfied, and the work would be easier for me.”

“But not quite so creditable for yourself,” said Kenneth smiling.

“Yes, I'd score a good deal more in point of legal acumen if satisfactory evidence did not turn up. But I must say that your friend Henderson astonishes me with his extraordinary scent for a telling point. He has taken up this Pat Donovan idea now, and when we get hold of him I hope things will look better for you.”
Chapter 45 Faithfulle Unto Deathe

About 12 o'clock Kenneth received a telegram from Hugh Carmichael.

BLUE DRAGON, BOURKE STREET, MELBOURNE.

TO KENNETH OSWALD, CASTLEHURST GAOL.

CAN HELP YOU — HARD UP, OR WOULD GO CASTLEHURST. REPLY.

He recollected that Carmichael had been with Jim Oswald and Mr. Ellerton in Sydney. His first idea was to send the man money at once, and obtain his assistance, but Sybil's letter came to his recollection, and he thought he should at least delay until he had seen her, and learn what she needed from him. He waited impatiently till she arrived.

She had on a large cloak in spite of the warm season of the year, and a thick veil. The warder said “a lady to see Mr. Oswald,” introduced her and left the cell — Kenneth took her hand, but neither of the two could speak just at once.

“I have no time to waste,” said she, “no time. . . . I throw myself on your generosity. . . . I have come to ask much more than I could dare to ask from any one alive . . . but it happens that the very man whom my father desires me to consult is the only man who can serve me.”

“I am a prisoner, bound hand and foot, unable to do anything,” said Kenneth sadly.

“It is just because you are a prisoner,” said Sybil.

“Yes, an innocent one — I know — who knows better? You did not kill James Oswald. But I suspect, I cannot say I know, who did it, and God forgive me, I want to let him escape. If he does not get away soon Mr. Talbot and your friend Mr. Henderson have their eyes open, and piece by piece they will bring out the evidence against him. He is utterly unnerved, he is so strangely changed. And he had terrible provocation, I know, if he did do it. There must have been high words between them if it is as I think, to lead to what I suspect. I know how Jim Oswald would speak. And when he came home he did not say anything against James Oswald for leaving him in Sydney with his broken leg — nor when I said how light he had made of the accident, was there a syllable said about his heartlessness and selfishness.”

“But the time? Had he time to go as far as the Spaniard's Shaft?”

“God forgive me for telling you, but the horse was sorely pushed, and Herbert himself muddy. He left me to call the groom, and went to change his clothes before any one else saw him. And all this talk about the murder
is making him ill. He does not sleep, he cannot force food down his throat. And if Mr. Talbot or Mr. Henderson get hold of a thread, they will never let it go. He does not say so to me in so many words, but I feel quite sure that he would like to get out of the colony, and he came in with me to-day to see about selling our furniture which is at Castlehurst. If he could get right away do you not think that would help to clear you without having him arrested and tried? I do not mean, Mr. Kenneth, that I would have you, innocent, to suffer instead of him, guilty; but if you would help to divert suspicion from him till he gets away, I think your high character and other circumstances, particularly that about the will, which weighs so much with our good friend Mr. Gray, would have all the more weight if Herbert has made his escape. And unless he picks up more nerve he cannot stand the daily scrutiny of our Wilta friends and their visitors. They lay something to the account of his Sydney accident, and nobody but myself knows the appearance of his clothes, and the groom has said nothing about the horse. God forgive me for telling you my suspicions of my own husband.”

“To me of all men,” said Kenneth, “I have the best right to know.”

“Yes, true, but you have the best right to take advantage of the knowledge. You have only to put Mr. Talbot and Mr. Henderson on the scent, and Herbert is hunted down. Only you have been so good, so good — and my father tells me to trust you.”

“And you may, Sybil,” said Kenneth tenderly. “If you read this letter, you will see that I am your father's son — your brother.”

“My brother, my father's son,” said Sybil bewildered. “How? when did you know? What made you guess that I was your sister?”

“On the very day I saw you first at Wilta. I saw your name on a music-book, and I knew you were the daughter of my father, Norman McDiarmid.”

“My father,” said Sybil, recollecting all the full meaning of Jim Oswald's resolution. “Oh! this is too hard! There was nobody like my father. He could not have wronged your mother, wronged you! Oh! my God, Herbert says all men are alike, if we only knew. Oh! Kenneth, how can I be glad even to know that you have a right to the strong regard I have always felt for you, when it makes me think less reverently of my father?”

“Do not fancy I am wronged, do not blame him much, my dearest Sybil. My mother forgave him from her heart, and so did I when he told me, Oh! so kindly.”

“And my father to need forgiveness! Oh! Kenneth, you do not know how hard it is for me to hear that.”

“Did I say forgive, Sybil? I mean love, bless, pray for. This letter which he sent me is my greatest comfort. Don't think I feel wronged, only
honoured that he trusts me. Trust me, too, Sybil. Tell me how I can help you. Let me serve you as long as I live. Let me feel that I may make myself worthy of being our father's son.”

Sybil was too much astonished and shocked to weep — tears might come afterwards but she knelt down and laid her head on her brother's knee, and for a few seconds was lost in thought. Time pressed, and she felt she could not delay necessary business even to recover herself from this bewildering intelligence.

“I do not know what to say — what to think. It seems so base altogether. If I was unreasonable enough to ask a generous stranger to run additional risk by letting the real culprit escape, how can I ask my own brother to do so?”

“Surely now with ten times more right. Lay me aside altogether. I shall get clear, I believe. All my friends remain staunch to their faith in me. All the Wilta people are so.”

“Yes, every one. Edith is more restless than I have dared to show myself. I know she thinks me indifferent and ungrateful.”

“Does she think well of my advocate, Sybil?”

“As an advocate, yes, Kenneth; but I believe she thinks more of the client by a great deal.”

“Mr. Talbot says that though it would be a much stronger case if we could find out that Donovan or some other man was as likely or more likely to have committed the crime, he trusts to success even without it. So do I, Sybil. Lay me entirely aside, and let us get your husband off. But in the mean time, look at this telegram which I received yesterday.”

“Hugh Carmichael!” exclaimed Sybil, “with both of them in Sydney — the only visitor whom Herbert had when he was laid up there — who came across with him in the steamer. This is the most alarming thing yet. Have you answered it?”

“No, and will not, now I hear what you have got to say.”

“What will he do next, dearest Kenneth?”

“He is a scamp, I fear; it is difficult to say what he will do; failing me he will probably try my uncle, who is known to be anxious to prove me innocent.”

“And Mr. Oswald will have no scruples as to replying and sending the money needed,” said Sybil.

“Not the least, he will send the money at once.”

“Then there is no time to be lost, Kenneth. Herbert must go at once. In what direction?”

“To Europe or America, but I should say to America, and get lost in Californian States. And what about money, Sybil?”
“I cannot raise money upon my father in such a hurry, have you any? I have not much in hand left of the price of that unlucky ring,” said Sybil.

“A small sum will not do, I fear; he must disguise himself, he may have to conceal himself for some time before he can get a ship from Melbourne to California, or go to Sydney and take the mail steamer. I rather ran myself short by the purchase of your family heirloom for you.” And taking out his pocket-book he showed her the ring in the old-fashioned box which had been its home for a hundred and fifty years. Kenneth put it on her finger as he had seen it in old times, and kissed the little hand as he did it, and felt his sister throw herself into his arms with passionate tenderness, and kiss him over and over again, with a warmth, a pity, and gratitude, that even in that moment of conflicting emotion made amends for some of his hardest trials.

“Faithfullé unto deathe! ah that is your motto,” she said when she could speak.

“Oh! my brother, my darling Kenneth, dearer even than Norman of whom I was so proud! How ungrateful, how ungracious of me to feel pained by such a gift as you have given to me — the right to your counsel, your sympathy, your love. And you have borne to be misunderstood and suspected, and never would tell what you feared would pain me to shield yourself, only now you tell when it only hurts you. But things have gone rather hard with me, and even my love is cruel, for I exact from you to the uttermost farthing, and I cannot claim you, I cannot defend you, until Herbert is somehow safe out of reach.”

Kenneth showed his pocket-book with the five ten-pound notes which his uncle had given him on the preceding day, and looked at the money doubtfully.

“You have some money, only you need it for yourself, my dear brother, and if it is to do Herbert any good, he must have it at once.”

“I got these notes from my uncle, because I had spent all I had on this,” and he again kissed the ringed hand; “but it seems hard to take my uncle's money to help his son's murderer to escape.”

“It shall be repaid, if I were to beg from door to door for it. I can draw upon my father to repay that, but with this telegram threatening us, Herbert must lose no time.”

“Will you tell him how you came by the money?” said Kenneth, taking the notes out of his pocket-book. “Will you tell your husband that I have some rights to take care of you?”

“No,” said Sybil passionately, “no. Not till we have our father's leave to make the relationship public would I tell any one, and above all, I would not tell Herbert. Do you think I could bear to give him any excuse to sneer
at my father. No; I feel as if I would rather die than let him do that. He may be jealous when I tell him that I got this money from you, but if I show him this telegram he is sure to be only too eager to go. I cannot make up my mind to tell him that I risked my brother's life to save his.”

“It might not be death in either case — Pentridge and so many years of penal servitude may be the award when both parties suspected had very great provocation.”

“But how about the money, Kenneth?”

“Here it is, Sybil, and I hope I am not doing wrong.”

“It goes against your feelings, I see. It must go cruelly against your feelings. But then you are not sure, I am not sure; it might have been an accident after all. Oh! God help me, but is hard to be ar. I cannot ask the Grays for money, I cannot ask any one but you, my dearest brother. Only he must make what I have already do. Put that pocket-book up, Kenneth, don't tempt me with the sight of it.”

“No;” said Kenneth quietly, “the thing must be complete, no half measures will do. Get Ellerton off by the earliest opportunity, let him shave off his beard in Melbourne or Sydney. Then I think California the best place to go to, but he may do as he pleases. I shall keep suspicion off him as long as I can, and trust to me to betray nothing of what I may suspect. And now, Sybil, you have no time to lose. Where is your husband?”

“At the Royal Hotel. He ordered a private room, and I feel sure he is thankful to be there by himself, where no one is speaking about Jim Oswald and the murder. I went out ostensibly to see that the furniture was all right, and he thinks I have a few visits to pay. I knew he was not likely to come near the gaol, so I believed I was safe.”

“Then he is ready to take the afternoon train to Melbourne, or stay, better let him take the 3.27 train to Sandyhill first. He may make a pretext of looking out for a new opening for some business — houses or commission agency, and disguise himself there where he is not known. Do not compromise yourself by making any arrangements for him, let him see to his own affairs. Good-bye Sybil, darling, here is the money.”

Sybil took off the ring and replaced it in its box in her brother's pocket-book. “For your wife, Kenneth, for your wife! Right that the heirloom of the McDiarmids should be in your possession. If you do not inherit our father's name or his lands, you inherit his spirit. I have asked more from you than I could have asked from Norman himself, and you have done more for me that I could have thought possible for any one.”

Sybil was held for a minute in her brother's close embrace. It was so new a thing for him to feel those clinging arms, to meet those render, truthful, tearful eyes, to have her lips pressed again and again to his own. Never
since his mother's death had there been a woman's caresses for Kenneth, and all the pent-up family affection, the protective instinct, which had been kept in the background from the first day of meeting his sister, overflowed from his heart. Tears, bitter, yet withal strangely sweet, relieved both brother and sister, and she turned from the noble brother to seek and save if possible her unworthy husband, with a sense that she had found something inestimably precious that no circumstances could rob her of.

As Sybil Ellerton was going out of the gaol through the long corridor, she was surprised to meet Mr. Gray and Edith.

“I did not know you were here,” said Edith, “you said nothing about visiting the gaol when you left. Where is Mr. Ellerton? Was he not here with you?”

“I left him at the hotel. I had some shopping to do in this direction, and thought I might look in.” Sybil had her veil closely drawn, and spoke with difficulty.

“Poor fellow, how does he look,” said Mr. Gray.

“Wonderfully well, though I, as usual, came to trouble him. My father,” and here Sybil paused, “told me to consult him when I was in perplexity, and this stage scheme which Mr. Ellerton has taken into his head troubles me so much. I think I must go home.”

“And you were glad to go and apologize to poor Kenneth for your unreasonableness when he was at such low-water himself;” said Edith.

Sybil bowed acquiescence. She could scarcely trust herself to speak.

“The business arrangements were communicated to him as well as to you, otherwise I should have thought you would have come to me about money,” said Mr. Gray. “Whatever Kenneth cannot do for you owing to this awkward suspicion, you must ask me or Walter to carry out.”

“Thank you, Mr. Gray, you are so generous, I fear to speak to you about money. But I have a good deal to do, and must go at once.” And Sybil hurried away to expedite her husband's movements, while Mr. Gray and his daughter went on to the prisoner's cell.

Kenneth was sitting thoughtful, his face buried in his hands, and his open pocket-book on his knees, and when he suddenly looked up to greet his friends, his whole appearance was so characterized by his recent stormy agitation that Edith was more puzzled than ever.

Mr. Gray was not so observant. He spoke cheerily and without effort.

“This looks but an empty pocket-book Kenneth. If you find your uncle draws the pursestrings rather tight, apply to me. I'd cheerfully give a hundred pounds out of my own pocket to get this case worked up as it ought to be, and though Talbot is a very good fellow, of course he must be paid. There's some talk now of a man, Oliver a hot-tempered fellow, who
had some spite at your cousin, who was at Castlehurst on the day, and might have gone home that way. And they are on the track of Pat Donovan too. You knew Oliver?"

“Yes; he was very peppery, and thought poor Jim had got him turned off from Tingalpa. It was contrary to my uncle's usual custom, but he saw the man was a poor worker and insubordinate to the overseer.”

“Talbot has been here to-day, I believe,” said Mr. Gray.

“Yes, we had a long talk this morning. He is hopeful, and so am I. You see my quarters are not so bad. The food is good and the gaoler civil. I have books and leisure to read them, and that is more than I always have had since I came to Australia. I have a clear conscience. And my friends come to see me, which shows what good friends they are.”

“We met Mrs. Ellerton in the corridor,” said Mr. Gray. “I am glad she is making up her mind to part from her husband.”

Kenneth started just a little; but Edith saw it.

“This stage scheme is hateful to her. She says it will drive her home,” said Mr. Gray.

“I am glad it has driven her to acknowledge her unreasonableness to you,” said Edith.

“Will you accept a loan from me, for I can see you need it,” said Mr. Gray. And Kenneth did so cheerfully, for he could not apply to his uncle for a while.

“The Talbot girls are coming out to Wilta for a week or two,” said Mr. Gray. “They are great enthusiasts about Mrs. Ellerton's singing. And really the way that man keeps the poor thing playing and singing till she is ready to drop with fatigue, saying ‘that will do,’ or ‘that will scarcely pass,’ is most provoking. She appeared glad to see him when he arrived, but he is wearing her out with his selfishness.”

“Then I suppose she wants to go soon,” said Edith, “but she is subpoenaed as a witness, and must wait for the trial.”

“That is unfortunate,” said Kenneth. “I half thought this would be our last meeting, for if she has made up her mind, the sooner she joins her own family the better.”

“I believe Talbot wants her evidence,” said Mr. Gray, “though I don't think it is very important, as I do not believe Jim Oswald committed suicide, but, of course, Talbot ought to know best. I am glad you like him. He is an old friend's son, and I am glad to see how he is making his way. They say that ere long he may lead the Melbourne Bar.”

Kenneth looked at Edith when her father praised the rising barrister. She was a little conscious, for she blushed slightly. In any way he would be thought more suitable than himself, but when he tied up his pocket-book
after accepting Mr. Gray's loan, and felt the ring there that was to be for his wife, he knew Sybil had meant it to be for her friend. If he could only get clear without bringing poor Sybil into more trouble, and she got back to her safe and happy home, he would try his utmost to win the dearest and most generous woman in the world, even though he was handicapped by the drawback of having no name and no recognized position.
Chapter 46 Hugh Carmichael to the Rescue

When Hugh Carmichael saw the newspaper reports of Jim Oswald's death, and the arrest of his cousin Kenneth on suspicion, he felt that this was matter of grave concern to himself. Kenneth Oswald was the best card in his pack, and was all the more valuable now that Jim was cleared out of the way, by fair means or by foul. He meant to do nothing in a hurry, but to watch the current of the evidence, and see how his knowledge of Kenneth's own antecedents, of Jim Oswald's designs and of Ellerton's rage at his discovery of them could be turned to the best advantage to Hugh Carmichael.

The report of the proceedings at the inquest gave great prominence to the insults offered to Kenneth at the Crown and Sceptre by his cousin, and there Carmichael felt that one of his cards had lost its value. He could not threaten to reveal the family disgrace, if it had been made public before, so that nothing whatever could be made of that. It did not suit his game to suppose Kenneth the murderer; for Kenneth either hanged or shut up at Pentridge, could not make it worth his while to bring up a doubtful story to prove his rights as the heir to Mr. McDiarmid; but Kenneth acquitted, his uncle's heir, smarting under the sense of injury from his cousin's drunken revelations, might pay him very handsomely for putting him up to his rights. Carmichael watched the report, and the rumours that were afloat. Strange that no suspicion had ever fallen on Ellerton, who had gone that very day to the neighbourhood, and who had every cause for hating the weak and vicious young man, as Hugh Carmichael well knew.

He did not give Jim Oswald credit for pluck enough to commit suicide; why should it not have been an accident? It was merely the vulgar appetite for horrors combined with the knowledge that James Oswald had been so insolent to his cousin that made Doctor and Jury believe it was murder; but as later rumours reached Melbourne, and as he turned over the probabilities in his mind, he came to the conclusion that if there was any chance of Ellerton having been at the spot at the time, he and no one else must have done the deed.

He did not want to show his hand; he did not yet know how to get into communication with Kenneth, and he needed money before he could travel or make the appearance he wished to do. So he dispatched the telegram, the sight of which had so greatly alarmed Mrs. Ellerton. He expected first a reply by telegram, and then a letter containing a remittance, but neither arrived. Still the reports showed no suspicion of Ellerton. It was thrown first on Pat Donovan, and then on Oliver, an old Tingalpa hand who had
been turned off, but the most deeply injured man seemed to be walking about in safety.

Ellerton had promised to write to Carmichael. He did not do so, but that was not much either way, for the older blackguard had little reliance on his promptitude in the matter. When, however, he had waited nearly two days for Kenneth's reply — for, thinking he might have wanted to consult with his counsel before taking action, he gave him a little latitude — Carmichael thought he must delay no longer, and telegraphed to George Oswald himself. There was no hesitation on the part of the old man, he telegraphed at once for Hugh Carmichael to draw on his banker for five pounds, and come up to Castlehurst, where he would be met at the station.

Carmichael got the money, bought some needed addition to his wardrobe, and took the first train to Castlehurst. Mick O'Hearn met him at the station, and in the course of the drive the stranger heard all the surmises and the gossip of the place. He asked for Ellerton and heard not much to his surprise, indeed to his great satisfaction, that he had gone to Sandyhill, about some horse-bazaar business, leaving his wife at Wilta.

It would suit Carmichael's views much better for Ellerton to go altogether out of sight than to have him brought to trail to confront him with the stories he had told about Jim, which would damage him with the father, and perhaps lead to awkward enquiries. One reason of his delay was to allow Ellerton to clear out, which if he was guilty and if he had any common sense, he would be sure to do.

If Ellerton could get into any sort of business in that town Mick “hoped he would not make his wife turn play-actress, as poor Mr. Jim had wanst said he meant to do. He was a black sheep that Ellerton, and had led the master's son into no end of trouble first and last.”

Carmichael looked up sharp, but there seemed to be no suspicion in Mick O'Hearn's mind about this “last”.

When they reached the Spaniard's Shaft Carmichael alighted, and heard Mick describe exactly where and how they dragged the hole, first for the body and the following day for the riding-whip. He looked well at the sides, and asked after the depth and the bottom. “Granite,” said Mick, “nothing but granite, and every body knew it, but that poor distracted foreigner was so sure that there was gold in it on account of the Blessed Virgin appearing to him in a dhrame. And Pat Donovan was just as bad, for says he ‘Why should not the mother of God put gold into granite as well as into quartz.’ No doubt she could, but she somehow didn't do it.”

“Has Pat Donovan been caught then?” asked Carmichael.

“Yes! but he's proved what they call an alibi, and so has the man Oliver — and it's what we cannot prove for Mr. Kenneth for he drove right past
the place wasn't his himself and the second time wid your humble servant, and the third time wid those black-gyars of policemen, who said it was most like he had made way wid his cousin, who stud in his way, and had been after rousing bad blood in the morning, but nobody will believe that same excepting the mistress — who is a wake woman, a mighty wake woman.”

George Oswald was on the look-out for his unknown guest, who introduced himself as a friend and well-wisher. He did not half like the looks of the stranger, but yet any one who might help Kenneth out of his trouble should be made welcome at Tingalpa.

“Now, Mrs. Oswald see to get me some cocoa, and this gentleman whatever he would like,” for he could see at a glance that something different would be most acceptable to Carmichael. “Brandy-hot, you say, brandy-hot be it, and we'll go into the smoking-room, and have a talk about matters in general. I must keep my head clear in this awful tanglement, Mr. Carmichael, so you will excuse me allowing you to drink by yourself.”

When Carmichael pointed to Ellerton as the most probable culprit, Mr. Oswald eagerly took it up. His son had had no worse friend in life then Ellerton, and all the old grudges against him as a bad counsellor to Jim, and a careless and cruel husband to his young wife, would have been satisfied by making out that he had brought himself into the power of the law, and ridding society of a scoundrel, as well as satisfying the cry for righteous vengeance for his own son's murder.

But George Oswald could not but see the three difficulties in the way or proving it — first the character of the man, which was selfish and crafty, but not violent; next the profitable connection with James Oswald, which no one at Castlehurst knew was at an end; and to conclude, the impossibility that he could have done the deed in the time and have got to Wilta apparently straight from the livery stable at Castlehurst.

When Carmichael, however, told him that he knew that Ellerton had growled and sworn constantly at Jim's leaving him so helpless, without money and without friends in Sydney — that he suspected he wanted him put out of the way in order to have more chance with his wife — that he had said he believed Jim had tried to kill him on the steamer on the road to San Francisco, and suspected the accident which broke his leg was premeditated, though none of these things Carmichael himself believed; but Ellerton had made up his mind that a man who could leave him in that way must be capable of anything, and that he had said to Carmichael in Sydney that he thought he never could regain his old ascendancy with his profitable fellow-traveller, Mr. Oswald thought there was every reason for suspicion and fair grounds for arrest. He stopped his new friend's narration
to order a fresh pair of horses to be harnessed immediately, regretted bitterly that he had not himself met Carmichael at the station — made him gulp down the remainder of his second glass of brandy-hot — and start off for Castlehurst to lodge information and take out a warrant.

“If he has really gone to Sandyhill on business, we shall catch him sure enough but if it is only a blind, he'll have left that place for some other, and he will be harder to get then.”

“By the Lord! and I hope he'll forgive me for swearing,” said George Oswald, “I hope not. It would be the greatest satisfaction to me to string him up.”

“But his flight will clear your nephew, at any rate.”

“It may, man, but to let the villain escape would be a clean defeat of all the ends of justice, and an awful discredit to me. Oh! what for did Kenneth no answer your telegram or tell me to do it? I could see that it must be attended to whenever I got your message; but I was a fool, too. I should have gone to meet you myself.”

They lost no time in taking out the warrant and in telegraphing a minute description of Ellerton to Sandyhill.

Of course the police were set on his track, and it was with hopes that something would be still discovered that Mr. Oswald visited his nephew in prison, along with his friend Carmichael, after taking out the warrant. Kenneth found his uncle's reproaches very hard to bear about his neglect of the offer of assistance from any quarter, and as he could not fortify himself with the opinion of his counsel, which of course he had not taken in the matter, he had simply to hear in silence his uncle's opinion that he had not such a long head as he had got the credit of; or, at any rate, that he had not used it in his own interests as he had done often in his, George Oswald's.

“And though I'm concerned, deeply concerned, Kenneth in getting justice on the villain, it's your neck that's in jeopardy, and surely that's of some consequence to yourself. But with the help of God, I trust we'll clear you, though you're so easy about it.”

Carmichael glanced furtively at Kenneth while his uncle taunted him thus, and suspected that Mrs. Ellerton had worked on him some way or other to keep silent and inactive on the information received. He thought with some scornful bitterness that the character of the McDiarmid family and connection must be saved at any rate, whatever came of the life of the reputation of the obscure Oswalds.

Mr. Oswald relieved his mind by giving it a little to Kenneth, and returned to Tingalpa in hopes that with the telegraph and the police, Ellerton might be apprehended and brought to trial.

Carmichael resumed his attentions to the brandy-hot, which business had
interrupted, and Mr. Oswald his less exciting beverage.

“Although this has been awfully, I may say sinfully bungled, I think we'll do the villain yet, and save your nephew,” said Carmichael. “You have had a great deal of comfort in him.”

“Aye, Kenneth is a good lad, a very good lad.”

“Bookish, I hear,” said Carmichael.

“Oh! very fair for that, for I sent him to Edinburgh College.”

“My own Alma Mater. It wasn't much good to me in the colonies, however,” said Carmichael. “Education is thrown away here,” and he took a pull at the brandy-hot.

“But for all that, he can judge of sheep and of beasts, and can make a bargain. The first he made was at Wilta, and faith, he got the better of Walter Gray. Since then he has done fair, very fair, and the best of him is he knows when a man serves me well and what a man is fit for. No, the books have not spoiled Kenneth.”

“He owes a great deal to you — everything, in fact.”

“And Kenneth's no the lad to forget it, and that makes it the harder to think folk should even him to putting end to my poor Jim. It will be a melancholy satisfaction to me to have the real murderer brought to justice, and I am sure it will be a satisfaction to Mrs. Oswald. You must tell the wife just all you have told me.”

“Of course we are not absolutely certain, Mr. Oswald.”

“I am absolutely certain, just as sure as I am that I'm sitting here drinking cocoa, when I would fain have the neighbour of that glass of brandy-hot that you are rejoicing in; but Mrs. Oswald must be told.”

He brought his wife into his smoking-room, which she seldom entered even in ordinary times on account of the smell of it, and made Mr. Carmichael go over again all the reasons which led him to suspect Mr. Ellerton of the murder. These did not weigh so much with her as with her husband, but still it was a comfort to be able to blame any one for poor Jim's death, and without exonerating Kenneth, she combined Mr. Ellerton, who had been such an evil counsellor to her boy, in the reproaches she gave vent to.

“Stop, good wife, hooly!” said Mr. Oswald. “If Ellerton did the deed, Kenneth stands clear, there were not two about the black job. If Kenneth did it, Ellerton is wronged by our thoughts, but you must not put them in one basket.”

“You're of course clear that Kenneth had no hand in it,” said Mrs. Oswald. “You always set him above your own lawful son. But when the case is tried you will find out that I'm right, and that somehow they are both mixed up in the murder.”
Suspicion was strengthened against Ellerton by his disappearance, especially as he was not to be found at Sandyhill, and as no man answering to the description of his appearance had ever been seen there at all. Ellerton had disguised himself so successfully that his appearance was changed; he had only remained at Sandyhill long enough to take the next train for Melbourne, found a steamer bound for Sydney in which he took a second-class passage, and caught the mail steamer from that port to San Francisco about to start. He again took a second-class passage, and unrecognized and undisturbed found a fitting arena for his talents in that western metropolis.

The groom at Wilta recollected how very hot the horse had been; he could not speak as to Ellerton's appearance, for Mrs. Ellerton alone had been witness of that. Mrs. Ellerton said she did not know where her husband had gone; he had liked to move about all his life, as was proved by his recent long absence in the other colonies when no business called him away. She could not be called on to give evidence to criminate her husband, and her friends at Wilta did not press her with questions.

She spoke of returning to her friends in Scotland, but as she was bound to give evidence on the trial she could make no move until this was over.
Chapter 47 A Blunder

Mr. Talbot made an effort to get Kenneth Oswald out on bail on the strength of the suspicions against Ellerton, but he failed.

Two or three days after the police had been set on the tracks of Ellerton, Kenneth received a visit from Walter Gray, who had from the first day of their meeting always behaved to him in the kindest and friendliest manner. He liked all Edith's people whom he knew, and often wondered if he would find her particular favourite Charlie superior to this quiet acute gentlemanly brother, whose character of being hard in business he had never realized in his experience, and who was a man who could do and did most liberal things. He had penetration with regard to character and the same accurate judgement as to the value of property which his father had, so it was difficult for either rogues or flatterers to take him in. Nothing succeeds like success. The Grays did not need to be hard to make their fortune larger. They did not spend half their income, and were always adding to their capital in judicious ways, and so long as the colony went ahead they could not fail to go ahead with it.

After the customary greetings were over, those of the season (for it was Christmas time) included, Kenneth asked particularly after the health of the family. They were all well — had visitors staying with them, Mr. Talbot's two sisters as well as himself. Mrs. Ellerton was not so well; all this came hard on her.

“It is rather a sad Christmas for us,” said Walter Gray, “and especially so for her. There is no news of Mr. Ellerton, and I think it is evident that she expects none. Every circumstance that tells in favour of you, in whom we are all so interested, necessarily tells against Ellerton, and Mr. Talbot, who is working up your case when he is supposed to be enjoying his holiday in the country, cannot help showing his exultation at the strong suspicions which now attach to that well-connected scamp.”

“It is cruel in him to do so before her,” said Kenneth, “I should have thought him more of a gentleman.”

“He knows she does not want you convicted either, or he certainly ought to be more reticent. The character of this new witness, Carmichael whose evidence is of great importance against Ellerton, is very indifferent, but combined with Ellerton's own flight, it ought to have weight; only there is one very awkward circumstance which has come out, which singularly enough tells as much against you as against him.”

“What can that be?” said Kenneth. “I thought we were distinctly separated in all suspicions, except in poor Mrs. Oswald's mind; she thinks
we must both have had a hand in it.”

“A ten-pound note which Ellerton changed in an obscure shop in Castlehurst, where he bought a large travelling cloak, is traced to be one which your uncle gave you on the day after the arrest. The number had been taken at the Bank, and it was identified at once.”

Kenneth's heart sank. How could he face his uncle after this disclosure? What blunder or mischief had induced Ellerton to pay away in Castlehurst one of the last notes so grudgingly given to Sybil to secure his getting off safe, instead of one of the older notes, which she had had weeks in her possession, which she had given to her husband at the same time.

“What does my uncle say to this,” said Kenneth.

“He says much less than might have been expected. Talbot was really amazed at his forbearance, but the circumstance is exceedingly awkward.”

“Does Mrs. Ellerton herself know of this discovery?”

“Yes. Mr. Talbot thought to get some confession out of her, and came out with it suddenly when they were alone together. She did not say a word, but left the room, and has not faced your advocate since. She says she is not well, and I quite believe it is the case.”

Kenneth sat silent for a while. Walter Gray spoke without temper but not without feeling.

“Of course, guilty or not, Ellerton wanted to leave this place, where he had not made a single friend, and where, I believe, there is no one but his unfortunate wife who would not have been glad if the recent accident in Sydney had cost him his life. I, for one, expressed my opinion to that effect at the time. It was, however, somewhat weak in you to furnish the money to bring him here from Sydney, as I believe you did, and again to help him away, which, of course, you also did. And like the perverse creature he is, he must needs damage you as much as he possibly can in the very act of taking advantage of your leniency, or your Quixotism, or whatever was your motive.”

“Is Mr. Talbot very much annoyed?” asked Kenneth. “I expected him to-day to come to see me, but it is perhaps on account of this discovery that he has not come.”

“He is a good deal ruffled — for him. In general, he has the equanimity proper to his profession. But he has gone out with his sisters and Edith for a long ride, and perhaps he will recover his spirits. Mrs. Ellerton insisted on Edith going. I think she could not bear her looks, for Edith's eyes are full of reproaches since the affair of the ten-pound note came to her ears. You have seen the Talbot girls at Wilta before,” said Walter Gray, seeking to change the subject to one less painful to the prisoner.

“Yes, they are very pleasant, especially the younger.”
"The very best class of Melbourne girls I know. It is rather a treat in
general to have a visit from them, for there are so few girls in the
neighbourhood to associate with who take any interest in the subjects Edith
cares for. Their house is a sort of centre for the best literary and scientific
society in Victoria. Edward, your advocate, has not yet left the parental
roof, and his father, Dr. Talbot, is the head of the medical profession in the
colony, so they naturally attract people who are worth knowing. If you
judge of our colonial girls by the Misses Honey and their associates, or
even by the Misses Roberts, you will judge it most unfairly. These Talbots
are of another stamp altogether. In fact, I think them superior to their
brother — clever lawyer as he is. There is a want of breadth, and perhaps a
want of depth in him to come up to my ideas of a complete man. Very
presumptuous in a slow-coach like me to criticize a man of undoubted
talents, and of wonderful fluency and readiness in address."

Kenneth heard this criticism with pleasure. He fancied Walter Gray was
considering whether the rising barrister was worthy of his sister, and
thought he was not.

"Still this will make him none the worse advocate — probably it will
make him a better. Only he is not able to sound the mystery of the ten-
pound note, as well as a much duller man (myself for instance) can do. If
the worst comes to the worst, you must allow Mrs. Ellerton herself to
explain the matter at the trial. It will be better for her, I am sure, to clear
you. I see you hesitate, but I feel sure that she trusted that his flight would
thoroughly exonerate you if this ten-pound note had not turned up to
implicate you in the defeat of justice, if Ellerton is guilty, and perhaps in
some complicity if not actual commission of the crime. Carmichael's
evidence is, of course, damaged by his indifferent character, and by his
apparently strong desire to get into your uncle's favour."

"You think Mrs. Ellerton will do this," said Kenneth, who felt that this
grave quiet man was a wonderfully safe counsellor.

"I have that confidence in her sense of right and of justice that I am sure
she will be glad to do it. But we will not hurry it till the trial. By that time
let us hope her husband will be past pursuit and tracking out," said Walter
Gray.

"What does Miss Gray say about this latest discovery?" asked Kenneth.

"Edith does not say much, but I do not think she would have left her
friend ill at home to go out with her Melbourne friends if she had not felt
somewhat offended at her. To sacrifice a good man for the sake of a bad
one is not according to Edith's notions of what is right; and if I thought
Mrs. Ellerton could deliberately do it, I should feel somehow the same, but,
as I said before, he sent this last Parthian shaft to wound you, which could
not have been anticipated by his wife.”

“It is very kind of you to come to tell me all this.”

“I thought it well to prepare you for your uncle's indignation; for, of course, he will show more of that to you than he did to Mr. Talbot, whose strong views on the matter made the sturdy old fellow stand up for you. Your uncle comes out even more grandly now than he did with his princely gift to the Diroms. They are keeping the thing as quiet as possible, so as to prevent its being town talk.”

For this Kenneth was unspeakably thankful.

“It, of course, will be brought forward by the prosecution at the trial, but then, as I say, Mrs. Ellerton ought to explain as much as will exonerate you.”

“Do the Talbots make a long stay?” asked Kenneth.

“Only the Christmas week. It is a little inopportune, but the visit was long promised, and they liked to pay it when their brother was here at any rate. He was Charlie's particular friend, you know, they were schoolfellows. By-the-bye, we had news yesterday about that interesting young man.”

“Indeed? About the marriage.”

“Yes; the day is fixed, and the young folks will leave New Zealand by the first steamer after the knot is tied, and spend three months at Wilta, much to Edith's delight. She unfortunately never had a sister of her own, and she has never seen Robert's wife yet, and, of course, Charlie's is still more interesting.”

“And when do you expect them?”

“In about two months.”

“Assize time,” said Kenneth.

“Yes; and Talbot says he hopes Charlie will be here to see him in full force conducting a difficult case. He has made his way these years Charlie has been in New Zealand. You will like to know these young people, I am sure.”

“Well, if I get off, I shall have much pleasure in making the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Gray.”

“You must get off, there are no two ways about it.”

“And you declined accompanying that pleasant party in their ride, that you might come to me,” said Kenneth, with real gratitude.

“Oh! I had some business in Castlhurst besides,” said Walter Gray, “which I had better see about,” and he took his leave, having made the prisoner aware of the blunder Ellerton had made in the kindest possible manner.

Kenneth was indeed afraid of his uncle's righteous indignation and horror
at the discovery that his own money had assisted his son's murderer to escape; but contrary to Walter Gray's anticipation, the old man dealt far more tenderly with him than he had expected, and he felt it all the kinder because to George Oswald it was an exceedingly bitter disappointment that Ellerton had been allowed to get two good days' start of the police.
Chapter 48 Sybil's Letter to Kenneth

Kenneth did not see Sybil alone after the first agitating interview. She paid him two visits, however, during the term of his imprisonment, once with Mr. Gray and Edith, and once with Edith and her brother Walter. There was pleasure to both in the meeting, but there was considerable constraint. However, he received a letter from his sister which contained some information which he wanted, and felt comparatively easy as to himself and hopeful as to his ultimate success with Edith, in spite of the prevalent opinion that Mr. Talbot worked as much to please her as to serve his client, and that he was making great way with her.

Sybil's letter ran thus:—

My dearest Kenneth,—I cannot tell you how grieved I am at the blunder which took place about the notes, and that your crowning act of self-sacrifice, the only one you did grudgingly for me, has been one so likely to be misconstrued both by Mr. Oswald and by the general public. Otherwise all went well, and everything that I exacted from you for me and mine has been received.

Edith looks on me so reproachfully for my taking advantage of you so meanly. I feel her sad eyes follow me about everywhere, but I cannot tell her yet. She would so indignantly overbear all my weak subterfuges; she would insist on my clearing up my relations with you, and strengthening your case by so doing that I could not stand out against her. She tries hard to busy herself with the preparations for the visit of her brother and his wife. She talks a good deal about them, but I know that her mind is always turning to you in prison, and to me robbing you to save H. But I forgive her and her hard thoughts of me, because it is all on your behalf. She believes it to be only friendly and sisterly interest that actuates her, because she has this wrong idea in her head as to the state of your affections, but when the veil is lifted off, as it will be on your acquittal, she will find out that you have established yourself firmly in her heart, and that she cannot dispossess you.

Mr. Walter Gray, however, had a quiet talk with me the other day, and put it so clearly before me that I can at the trial say sufficient to exonerate you, that I feel I can partly make amends for this cruel mistake — which on your uncle's account I feel so bitterly — Mr. Walter was so good; he did not press too hard on H. And yet he seemed to take it for granted that I could not let you suffer.

At night when I lie awake for hours, and think of all the trouble I have had since I left my beloved ones at home, the thought of the brother I have
found, of the son whom I shall give to my father and my mother, comforts me unspeakably. It comes over me with delicious tears that have no bitterness in them. I have read over and over my father's letter to you which you gave to me, and which I now return to your keeping. How could you bear my reproaches, my indignation, and not act on his request to disclose your relationship if necessary? But now as poor J.O. made public what your uncle would so fain have hidden, it cannot injure your position for my father to claim you as his own best son. As for any scruple with regard to how the children will take it, that is a mere trifle, not worth a moment's consideration.

And you are to be acquitted — I know it, your friend, Mr. Henderson, yesterday before he took leave of the district till the trial of the Assizes, when he will be here again — took me aside and told me that he believed an alibi could be proved so that there was no need to press hard on Mr. Ellerton. They do not want the prosecution to know this, so they keep it as quiet as possible, but I could see that Mr. Talbot also was in excellent spirits, much better than he has been since the identification of your uncle's £10-note, and went off to Melbourne this morning as if the case looked hopeful.

So I am wonderfully calm; I am surprised at myself for being so calm when I know I am the subject of so much public discussion and private scrutiny, and feel conscious that I have borne very hard upon you, but your heart is so large, so true, and so noble that I rest upon it with perfect confidence, and a sister's truthful love.

S.E.

Edith Gray was indeed strangely exercised in her mind about her friends. She was sure Ellerton was the murderer, she was convinced that Kenneth had connived at his escape, but how was he to be rewarded or was he to be rewarded at all? Was he simply to be made use of to screen a bad man from punishment, and to defeat justice, and then allowed to sink or swim as chance or providence might direct, and was Sybil to return home to her beloved family, and satisfied with having saved its honour, leave her generous deliverer exposed to the just anger of his uncle, and with perhaps a lifelong suspicion on the part of the public, even if he was pronounced “not guilty”.

A few months ago Edith Gray felt herself to be years older than Kenneth Oswald. She had addressed him as “My poor boy,” she warned him of his danger from Sybil's charms and Ellerton's jealousy, but he had been growing rapidly older in her eyes, and now when he was in prison under unjust suspicion and in some danger of an unjust sentence, she felt herself younger and more inexperienced than he was. Life is not measured by days
and years alone, but by events, by emotions, and by opportunities. Even the misfortune of his birth enclosed to her a romantic history. She never looked on it as anything that lowered him after she had heard from her father the suspicion of George Oswald that his mother had been robbed of her marriage certificate. He was in every way the equal of Sybil Ellerton, and why should not his faithful disinterested love have its reward? Ellerton had gone out of sight, but her fertile imagination planned various ways in which he might rid the world of his presence and his wife of her claims, and set her free to make a better man happy. Only now she felt as if the well-born daughter of the McDiarmids was scarcely worthy of the love she awoke in Kenneth Owald's heart when she could stoop to make use of his love for the advantage of her unworthy husband, and thus to increase his own danger. The days of suspense were longer to Edith than even to Sybil; it was well she could sometimes put her impatience on to the coming guests instead of to the impending trial.

Edith Gray was during this suspense a little irritable, a little unreasonable. Her father said he feared Charlie would think her changed, and she made an effort to recover her old cheerful serenity. Charlie and Helen had a greater share of her talk than of her thoughts, but she busied her hands when she could with a piece of work, which was to be her personal gift to her new sister. The needle was often held in suspense, however, and she was ashamed of the slow progress she made, while Sybil, with so much on her mind and so much on her conscience, made more headway with her piece of work devoted to the same purpose.
Chapter 49 The Trial

The trial of Kenneth Oswald, charged with the willful murder of his cousin, James Oswald, was the most exciting case that had been brought before a Castlehurst Jury for many years. The Court was crowded. Mr. Sandford, Q.C., for the prosecution, and Mr. Talbot for the defence, were considered a very equal match, and both looked as if they thought the case clear enough.

The first witnesses called were James Pike and Daniel Flaherty, members of the police force, whom Kenneth and Mick had taken with them on their return from the search in all probable places for the unfortunate young man.

They deposed to finding the body of James Oswald at the bottom of the Spaniard's Shaft at half-past 9 o'clock on the evening of Tuesday, the 17th December, quite dead, without appearance of being robbed, for his gold watch and chain were on him, the watch had stopped at twenty-five minutes past 5, his purse and pocket-book were apparently untouched, and he had a valuable ring on his finger. They had conveyed the body to Castlehurst to the Black Bull Inn, where the inquest was held. Prisoner had appeared surprised and concerned, but not any way afraid, and had submitted to be taken in charge on suspicion very patiently.

Henry Halcomb, qualified medical practitioner, deposed — Examined the body, which he identified as that of James Oswald. There were several bruises and several small rents in the coat and trousers on the left side, and one mark of a heavy blow on the left temple. The skin was not broken on the temple though there was an abrasion on the left thigh, where the largest rent was in the trousers. If the horse had thrown his rider with such violence that the body had been driven to the very bottom of the waterhole, and touched the granite which was irregular from having been picked at by the Spaniard and his party, the skin would have been broken on the temple. If he had slipped in after a fall from his horse on the brink which would cause the bruises on the left side, he would have fallen more softly, and was less likely to strike anything with so much force. Was not of opinion that it had been suicide, because there would have been no bruises and no rents in addition to the blow on the temple. It was within the bounds of possibility that it might have been a succession of accidents. Death had occurred after submersion and not before it, whatever might have been the force of the blow given. A violent blow from the butt end of a riding-whip might produce the discolouration of the temple, without abrasion of the cuticle. Not such a blow from deceased's own whip, which was a roughly chased
silver. Prisoner's driving whip, which was produced, was perfectly smooth at the butt end, and would be likely to produce a mark of that character.

Cross-examined for the defence — The third whip produced, which was that given by John Lyons to Mr. Ellerton, might have inflicted such a blow, as it also was perfectly smooth.

Next came the evidence of John Lyons, livery-stable-keeper the last man known to have seen the unfortunate young man alive — He deposed that at about twenty minutes past three in the afternoon deceased had come for his horse. He was much the worse for liquor, but not so drunk that he could not stand and walk a little. Deceased had asked for his horse. Witness had asked if he had not better wait for prisoner, who had the buggy and pair in the stable, and who would be returning in about an hour to Tingalpa. Deceased had sworn at prisoner, and said he would rather walk than go home in his company. Asked deceased if he should not send a man to drive him home, as witness thought him scarcely fit to ride. Deceased was altogether in a bad humour, and swore at witness for not making more haste, and said he had been robbed of £10,000 by prisoner, who dogged him like a spy, and tried to make mischief between him and his father. Deceased swore he was the most miserable dog alive. Every friend he had was false, prisoner was in with everybody. Deceased said it would not take much to make him send a pistol shot through his head. Deceased had no pistol, so witness did not think much about it. Deceased then asked for a nobbler to steady his hand, paid for it, and when he had drunk it, looked at his watch, and said it was half-past three o'clock, and that he would get through to Tingalpa before that sneak by a good hour and a quarter, if Prince Charlie went at his old pace. He rode off, and witness never saw him afterwards. Prisoner came to the stables about an hour after deceased, and left for Tingalpa, as near as witness could recollect, at 4.40. Prisoner asked if deceased had gone, and told him he was sitting his horse fairly well, and Prince Charlie knew the road, and was free from vice. Got ready prisoner's horses very quickly, for he seemed put out. Witness had heard of the row at the Crown and Sceptre, but did not allude to it. Prisoner said nothing good or bad about the deceased, but got into his buggy, and drove straight to Tingalpa.

Cross-examined for the defence — Deceased did not mention Mr. Ellerton's name. Mr. Ellerton came up from the station, having arrived from Melbourne by the train that arrived at 3.23, and he got to the stable less than ten minutes after the deceased had gone. Mr. Ellerton asked for a horse to ride to Wilta, and looked to see if there were any Wilta horses in the stable, and seemed annoyed at not being sent for. Ellerton recognized prisoner's buggy horses, and asked after him and deceased. Told Ellerton
he must have payment in advance. Witness told Ellerton deceased had been on the spree for three days at the Crown and Sceptre, and had just gone off a quarter of an hour before he, Ellerton, could start. Told him deceased was in the worst possible humour, and that he said it would not take much to make him blow out his brains. Ellerton asked what he had said about him. Replied that nobody cared for what deceased said, for he was far from sober, and did not know what he was saying. Ellerton said nothing, but rode away, as witness thought, straight to Wilta. Witness gave him a good horse — nothing less would do for Ellerton. The chestnut could have gone to the Spaniard's Shaft, and then to Wilta by half-past six if he had been much pushed. Ellerton was a very good rider, and never took more out of his horse than was absolutely necessary. Ellerton did not set off at an extraordinary pace. The whip produced is the one witness gave to Ellerton.

James Owen, landlord of the Crown and Sceptre, deposed — Deceased had come to his house from Wilta on the Saturday preceding his death in the most extreme ill-humour, had quarrelled with everybody, and would have quarrelled with his own shadow; had drunk steadily till Thursday morning without producing the slightest effect on his spirits. Mr. Oswald's man, Mick, had come on the Monday afternoon, and tried to get him home, but deceased had been very outrageous to him, and said his father must send a better man than that to get him out of the Crown and Sceptre. On Tuesday morning, about eleven o'clock, prisoner came for deceased, saying his father was far from well, and wanted him home. Deceased asked if he considered himself a better man than Mick O'Hearn, for he, deceased, did not, and called prisoner a sneak, a spy, a hypocrite, a thief, and a bastard, and swore furiously at him. Deceased said prisoner did not know who his father was, and that he had robbed his, deceased's, father of £10,000, which ought to have come to deceased by rights, and said he would not stand it. Prisoner turned very red and then white, seemed very much put out, stepped forward and took him by the shoulder and shook him. He could easily enough have knocked him down or horsewhipped him, but he drew back, and said deceased would speak differently when he was himself. Prisoner then said the horses and buggy were in John Lyon's stables, and that he could get a man there to drive him home when he pleased, and he prisoner could ride home Prince Charlie, and in the meantime he was going to the market. Deceased complained that prisoner was in with everybody. It was Kenneth here and Kenneth there, and nobody cared a straw for him, deceased. It was him that his father should send to market, but though he was twenty-one he was never trusted with anything. No, he was not fit to tie Kenneth's shoes! Deceased asked if that was everybody's opinion, and then threatened to tell somebody that somebody had said so. Witness
supposed he alluded to Mrs. Ellerton. Deceased then cried a great deal, was very sick, had a sleep for some hours, and then went to the stables, and witness never saw him afterwards.

William Johnston, Henry Sprait, and Robert Matters corroborated James Owen's testimony as to the insulting language of the deceased to prisoner, the evident resentment of the latter, kept in check by forbearance or prudence, and the condition of deceased when he left the Crown and Sceptre. Deceased had never before, to their knowledge, said anything about prisoner's birth, but the £10,000 was a grievance which he had dwelt on ever since his return from his intercolonial tour. None of them would have blamed prisoner if he had knocked down deceased there and then. Nobody believed much of what deceased said about the prisoner, and James Oswald was then much more drunk than he had ever been in his life.

Isaac Raphael deposed — That Mr. Ellerton had come into his shop on the afternoon of Saturday, the 21st December, and had bought from him a large travelling cloak and a cap, the price of both was 38s., and he had tendered in payment a £10 note on the Bank of Victoria, which was the note produced.

James Hudson, teller at the Bank of Victoria, deposed — That he had paid this particular ten-pound note, along with several others, to Mr. George Oswald, of Tingalpa, on the morning of the day after the inquest, the 19th December, and that he identified it by its number.

William Stubbs, barman at the Crown and Sceptre, deposed — That deceased tried to wind up his watch on the night before his death, but complained that he could not find the keyhole of the new watch the old lady had given him. He was one of those gentleman who are awfully particular about the time, and who would never forget to wind up his watch. Deceased asked him, witness, to wind the watch up for him, and did so at his request. Took note that the time was correct, as the town clock was striking twelve at the very moment.

This closed the case for the prosecution.

For the defence Mr. Talbot called first, George Oswald, who deposed — The prisoner was his nephew, his sister's son. Had him educated at witness' expense in Edinburgh; brought him out in 187—; put his son under prisoner's care; he was two years and a half older than his cousin. Trusted prisoner — trust him still. Prisoner had no motive to put his cousin out of the way. Witness had made his will more than a year ago in prisoner's favour; will drawn up by Messrs Thomson and Scott; will produced in Court is the document signed at their offices. Prisoner knew that witness had made will in his favour.

Cross-examined for the prosecution — Prisoner was not pleased at
witness making such a will, and asked him repeatedly to change it. Had a private understanding with prisoner that he was to allow himself £1,000 a year for his services, and to take money for keeping up and improving the property to the best of his judgment, and pay some annuities, but after that all the rest was to go to deceased and Mrs. Oswald in certain definite proportions. Prisoner said it was a hard will. Made it because he thought prisoner would do better for the property than either deceased or Mrs. Oswald. Prisoner said at the time witness first spoke about it, and several times afterwards, that however he might act on the square about the property and by them, that deceased and his mother would never believe it. Know he would have preferred another kind of will. Have not made another will, and don't mean to. The note produced was one which he had given to prisoner after his committal — along with four others.

Sybil Ellerton, married woman, deposed — That she knew both deceased and prisoner well. Prisoner was her brother, her father's son, not her mother's son, several years older than herself — did not know of the relationship till after prisoner's arrest. Prisoner told her of it in gaol. Prisoner had known she was his sister from the first day he had seen her at Wilta, and had been most kind to her in every way. Knew deceased well. Prisoner was invariably forbearing with him. Deceased had come to Wilta on the morning of Friday, the 13th of December. Found her in the garden. He came ostensibly to ask after Mr. Ellerton, whom she said she expected home on Tuesday, the 17th. Deceased seemed a little ashamed of having left Mr. Ellerton laid up in Sydney with a broken leg. Deceased seemed annoyed that her husband was coming back. Would rather not tell what he said to her. If she must give evidence, she owned that deceased had made violent love to her — knew that deceased had long felt as she did not like, but had never been alone with him before. Witness was very angry. Deceased seemed jealous of prisoner, who he said came before him with everybody, and in every way, and reminded her of the way in which he had written to her father about her, which, of course, he had a perfect right to do as she now knew, but which she had resented very much at the time. Witness then told deceased that in spite of that he was not fit to tie prisoner's shoes. Deceased then went away in a great rage, and witness never saw him again alive or dead. Refused to answer any questions about her husband's appearance when he came to Wilta on Tuesday the 17th December. Refused to say anything that would criminate her husband. The ring found in prisoner's possession had been hers. Prisoner had sold it for her, and had brought her the balance of the price after sending £50 to Mr. Ellerton. Did not know that he had bought it for himself. Wanted the money to bring Mr. Ellerton back from Sydney. Prisoner had given her
money on Saturday, the 21st, when she said she was in need of it. Did not know one £10 note from another — that might have been one of the notes prisoner gave to her. Would not answer any question as to Mr. Ellerton's reasons for leaving Castlehurst, or as to how this bank-note came into his possession. Did not know where her husband was.

Hugh Carmichael deposed — Knew the deceased a little in Sydney, introduced himself to him in the billiard-room of the Royal Oak there. Deceased was in company with Mr. Ellerton. Knew about the family of Oswald in Scotland. Did not know prisoner till he saw him in Castlehurst Gaol on Tuesday, the 24th December. Believed Ellerton was the guilty man. Deceased and Ellerton were not such good friends as they appeared. Deceased told him that Ellerton had got the better of him unfairly at gambling. Ellerton thought and said that the accident which broke his leg in Sydney was a put-up thing, and told witness that he believed deceased meant to break his neck. Ellerton also said he was sure deceased had tried to kill him on the passage to San Francisco in a great storm, when it might be supposed to be an accident. Witness did not believe these stories, but was sure that Ellerton did. Ellerton was full of complaints all the weeks he was laid up in Sydney, and was quite prepared to take advantage of deceased if he had an opportunity. Ellerton had told witness that he would serve deceased out for that leg and on other scores. Ellerton was not jealous of deceased; he had too high an opinion of his wife for that, but he resented his impudence in setting his heart on her.

Cross-examined for prosecution — Had no steady means of living, had an Edinburgh degree — had knocked about a good deal — could teach, but had got no connection — did not come up to Castlehurst at once, because hard up — thought at first that deceased's death might have been an accident — did not telegraph to prisoner till the Saturday — then telegraphed that he could help him, but needed money — prisoner neither replied by telegram nor by letter. Telegraphed on Tuesday to Mr. Oswald, who answered by telegram, and witness came up at once that day. Found Ellerton had gone on Saturday — prisoner gave no reason for not replying on the Saturday — Mr. Oswald was very angry at prisoner about the delay, which allowed Ellerton to make his escape.

Henry Richards, groom at Wilta, deposed — Took the horse from Mrs. Ellerton on the afternoon of Tuesday, the 17th, at half-past 6 o'clock. Did not see Mr. Ellerton. He had gone in to change his clothes. The chestnut was very warm, much warmer than witness should have thought from the journey of eighteen miles, as Mr. Ellerton did not take much out of his horse in general, being a good rider — but thought perhaps he rode harder through being lame, and that perhaps he had stayed a while at Castlehurst,
talking and drinking, and wanted Mrs. Ellerton to think he had come as fast as he could back to her, so made no remarks on it. The road by the Spaniard's Shaft is twenty-five miles even by the cross-road which is rough though shorter. The horse could have done it though at a push. Did not see the whip at the time. Mr. Ellerton took it into the house with him.

Mr. Gray was next called — Mr. Ellerton looked disturbed about the murder case, but said little about it and took no active part in the search or the enquiries. He neither expressed anger at deceased on the day the murder was committed for leaving him in the lurch at Sydney, nor concern for his violent death after it was discovered. He never said good-bye to any one. He told no one his intentions about Sandyhill. He left Wilta in the small buggy alone with Mrs. Ellerton on Saturday morning, and never returned. Mrs. Ellerton still lives at Wilta till she can arrange for her return to Scotland. The prisoner to the certain knowledge of witness, was invariably most forbearing with deceased.

John Denton, watchmaker, deposed — Sold the gold hunting watch produced to deceased on the eighteenth of November last, taking an old watch with which he was not quite satisfied as part of the price. It was a present from Mrs. Oswald — for Mr. Oswald, though he had promised deceased the best watch to be got in Melbourne when he was twenty-one, was so displeased at his long absence that he said he would not give him any, and that he must make the old one do. Mrs. Oswald said she would pay for it by degrees out of the housekeeping money, for she did not like deceased to be disappointed, and they both came to the shop to choose the watch. Deceased was one of those young men who are awfully particular about their watches keeping the most exact time. He was not likely to forget to wind up his watch. Was sure the murder could not have been done for money, for the watch and ring were both of value and could have been easily sold in Melbourne. About a fortnight after the murder, Mr. David Henderson came into witness' shop and asked if he was in the habit of selling gold hunting watches with patent levers and all the latest improvements, that would let the water into them the minute they were plunged into water, and this set him thinking. Mr. Henderson and Mr. Talbot gave witness the watch of the deceased, and had it cleaned, and put in the same good order that it was at the time of the death, and then Mr. Talbot and Mr. Henderson, accompanied by Mr. Everett, a Justice of the Peace, and the Mayor of Castlehurst, who are both respectable and disinterested gentlemen, and witness, watched the experiment of how long it took before the water penetrated through the closed case so as to stop the works, and this is the certified report of the result which can be repeated now.
We the undersigned having reason to doubt the probability of water finding immediate entrance into a new hunting watch, have subjected that of the late Mr. James Oswald to the test of immersion in a waist-coat fob in a large vessel of water, and find that the time required was exactly forty-three minutes twelve seconds. The probabilities are that the body might have kept afloat for a short time before the watch was subjected to as much water as in the experiment we have tried.

W.H. RAINES, Mayor of Castlehurst.
JAS. EVERETT, J.P.
DAVID HENDERSON.
HENRY TALBOT.
JOHN DENTON.

In this case the plunging of the body in the water must have taken place five or ten minutes after the time when the prisoner was leaving the livery-stable seven miles off from the Spaniard's Shaft.

The Court was filled with applause, which the Judge endeavoured to suppress, and then proposed to adjourn for refreshments while the experiment was carried on under the eyes of the authorities. A second time it succeeded, with only the variation of two minutes, and Mr. Talbot and Mr. Henderson felt the case was gained.

The counsel for the prosecution made the most he could of the few points he had left, especially the curious manner in which Kenneth Oswald had lent himself to the escape of Mr. Ellerton, but the acknowledgment of his relationship to Mrs. Ellerton weakened that, and the evidence about the watch was too much for him to get over, and the alibi could not be refused.

Mr. Talbot felt that the ground was cut from under his feet by the very excellence of his work. He could not make so good a speech as if his case had been less clear. But the audience as well as the Jury had patience with him when he placed in the strongest light the high character of his client as contrasted with that of Herbert Ellerton. The improbability that he should commit a crime for money, when the testamentary disposition of his uncle was so well known to him, and how impossible it was for any one who felt the bonds of honour so strong as to chafe at the heavy responsibility laid on him by his uncle's unlimited trust to commit a crime to escape from the most difficult position. That even supposing that his blood had been roused by his cousin's languages so as to make him strike a hasty blow, it would have been much more natural for him to have done so in the morning, when public opinion would have supported him in resenting public insults, than for him to have fallen on his cousin when he was alone, feeble, and bruised from an accident, and to have first struck and then drowned his trusting relative's only son, and then ride home gaily as if nothing had
happened. When to all these moral reasons why he should be proved innocent was added the conclusive proof furnished by the time taken in stopping the works of the watch of the unfortunate young man, he, Mr. Talbot, thought there could not be the slightest doubt left in the minds of the Jury that his highly esteemed client was not guilty of the wilful murder of James Oswald.

The Judge summed up briefly but conclusively in favour of the prisoner.

The Jury without retiring found the verdict Mr. Talbot reckoned on, and one glad shout rent the air. The Jury also appended a rider to the effect that the strongest suspicions attached to Herbert Ellerton, who must be sought for and brought to trial as soon as found.
Chapter 50 What Edith Thought of It

Edith Gray had been in Castlernurst all day. Her brother Charlie and his wife had arrived on the previous day, but even that could not keep the sister at home. She went ostensibly with Mrs. Ellerton, who had her evidence to give, but the truth was she would not remain at Wilta with the two persons who ought to have been to her most interesting in the world, and talk to them on subjects foreign to that which engrossed all her thoughts. She nevertheless did not go to the trial. A strange contradictory whirl of emotions worked within her. Charlie had suggested that she should see Talbot win his laurels — and that was an unpleasant suggestion — and Helen had said that she could not conceive how any one who could stay away could go to such a place as a Court of justice, and that too was disagreeable. So she sat at the Royal Hotel expecting that as soon as Sybil was relieved she would hurry to the privacy of the rooms which the Grays had taken for the day, and she had charged her brother Walter to see that she left the Court at once. But Sybil could not go after she had given her evidence. She wanted to know if the case was made clear enough without her needing to say anything more. Her announcement that she was the prisoner's sister had created the greatest sensation in the Court. The three persons not astonished at it were Hugh Carmichael, George Oswald, and Walter Gray. Kenneth saw by his uncle's face the reason of his forbearance with regard to the traced note, and breathed more freely. And it was probable that Sybil had confided in Edith's brother, when he had explained to her how much it was necessary for her to admit.

Had she told Edith herself? That would have been more difficult. There are some things more easily said to a cool man than to an impetuous enthusiastic woman.

As the points were made out in Kenneth's favour, and the fact of the supposed criminal's wife being his sister was taken into account in the matter of the money help (which, besides, he was not bound to know was to be used in this way), Sybil saw that nothing more was needed from her, and felt that she could now meet the eyes of the world somewhat more calmly. When the trial was over, and Kenneth stood absolutely acquitted by the Jury to the satisfaction of all present, Sybil was eager to join her friend in her solitary watch at the hotel. It had been a more trying day for Edith, she thought, than for herself. Though not half so clever as her friend, in this matter she understood Edith a great deal better than Edith understood her, or even understood herself.

It was a great delight to her to be almost the first to congratulate Kenneth
on his acquittal. His uncle had a little the start of her, and indeed he had a
good right to the privilege. She was afraid to meet George Oswald's eyes.
“You may be glad you did not do more mischief,” said he. “He is free,
however, and I dare say you are as glad as I am of that.”
“Far gladder, Mr. Oswald. I was prepared to do far more if things had
gone wrong.”
“You were not prepared to let justice take its course, Mrs. Ellerton,” said
Mr. Oswald. “No, not just prepared for that. But we'll maybe get justice
yet,” said the old man in an undertone.
“You look wonderfully well, dear Kenneth,” said Sybil. “I don't think
any one would have believed you guilty if there had been any amount of
evidence.”
“Now,” said Mr. Oswald, “that you are a free man, we must all go to the
Royal Hotel, where Miss Gray has been by herself all day, for it seems
neither Mr. nor Mrs. Charles were with her.”
“They only arrived yesterday,” said Sybil, “and thought they would like a
quiet day at Wilta rather than a journey to Castlehurst.”
“Mr. Talbot was mistaken about his friend coming to hear his successful
advocacy of Kenneth,” said Walter Gray.
“And Miss Gray has been absolutely alone,” said Kenneth. “I suppose
there is nothing more to detain us — let us make our way to the Royal
Hotel.”
“Don't tell Edith, any of you,” said Sybil. “I want to tell her quietly about
our relationship.”
Some rumours of acquittal preceded them, and Edith felt that Kenneth
was safe even before the noise of the hurrying feet, and the confusion of
tongues of the party who came in.
“And here he is,” said George Oswald to Edith, when she met the joyful
group, “a free man once more, and no doubt of him anywhere. Shake hands
and wish him joy of his grand clearing up of his innocence.”
Edith extended her hand at once, and felt overpowered for a moment by
the expression of Kenneth's face; the eyes, the mouth, the whole
countenance were full of peculiar, of personal, of intense regard. Could she
have been mistaken after all? Was it not Sybil Ellerton to whom he had
given his whole heart? Could it be possible that it was to Edith herself that
Kenneth was passionately attached? He was at least dumb enough for a
lover. Not like the glib parson who so enjoyed doing duty at Wilta, or the
fluent Talbot, who made such ready, such neat, such epigrammatic
speeches to her apropos of everything and of nothing. Kenneth said not a
word; he only wrung her hand, and looked at her as she had never been
looked at before in her life. Her own ready tongue for once failed her. She
could only say she was glad, and then she could say no more.

Mr. Oswald and Mr. Gray began to explain the *alibi*, and to give Mr. Henderson, who stood in the background, the credit for his ingenuity and thoughtfulness, and Edith could get out words to him, and thank him for all he had done for the acquittal of their friend.

“Mrs. Ellerton's testimony had nearly as much weight. I think it might have carried him through without the *alibi*,” said Mr. Henderson. “She surprised us all very much.”

“Edith,” said Sybil, “come with Kenneth and me into the room upstairs that you have been in all the morning. I have something to say to you that I want quiet for. These gentlemen will excuse us for a short time — I am sure. There has been a great deal of misunderstanding on your part for a long time, that I hope to put an end to for ever.”

They went to the room where Edith had been so anxious all day.

“Don't think I would have sacrificed Kenneth, Edith. I would have told every thing that I knew — everything that I suspected in Court, whether they received my evidence or not, rather than any harm should come to him.”

This was plain enough speaking at any rate.

“But, thank God, there was no need — and I believe Herbert is beyond pursuit — though I really know not where he is.”

“But now, my dearest Edith,” continued Sybil, in a rapturous tone, absolutely bewildering to her friend, “you have grieved me, rejoice with me now — rejoice with me. I have lost a great deal in Australia, but I have found a faithful friend in you, and I have found the most generous brother in Kenneth Oswald.”

Brother! yes that was all of a piece with the rest. Very virtuous no doubt, to give for passionate devoted self-sacrificing love the regard of a sister, and he seemed satisfied with it too. Edith said nothing, but looked coldly at her enthusiastic friend.

“I mean my real brother,” said Sybil, “you do not understand.”

“Kenneth Oswald, your brother?” said Edith, absolutely dumbfounded.

“My father's son, my dearest brother,” said Sybil, kissing the hand she held, the hand of the brother she could now claim and be proud of.

“Your father's son,” said Edith slowly, gravely, and sadly. She had decided in her own heart that Kenneth's mother had been deeply wronged and deceived, either by a false marriage or by a real one concealed. That lovely face spoke of innocence and purity — all she knew of the mother had been calculated to make her feel she was worthy of her son's deep regard and affection, and when the revelation was made that Kenneth had no legal right to a father's name, she felt in her heart that he had a moral
one. But all she had heard about Norman McDiarmid had been to the effect that he was almost insufferably perfect.

“I know how you feel, Edith — I was ungrateful — I was ungracious to Kenneth when he told me — because of the same reason.”

“When did he tell you?” again slowly said Edith.

“On the day when I went in my despair to see him in prison.”

“Never before? It would only have pained you then.”

“Never before; he bore to be misunderstood, to be suspected, to be unjustly blamed for interfering with my affairs, and never said ‘Sybil, I have a right to your confidence. Sybil I have a right to your love’. Oh, Kenneth, when I think of how I treated you, I wonder you have patience with me.”

“And when did you know of this relationship?” said Edith gravely, turning her eyes full on Kenneth.

“Since the first day at Wilta when I saw her name on the music-book, and heard from her own lips that I had got the favourite family name.”

“And you have borne all this,” said Edith, “rather than wound Sybil by making her think less highly of her father. Filial reverence could not go farther, nor brotherly love endure more. Browning is right — this is surely ‘Best Love’.”

“You surely ought to know what a brother's love is,” said Sybil, “you who are just rejoicing in your favourite Charles's return.”

“I never had anything in the least like this,” said Edith, “and never shall have it in my life. I did not think to have ever cause to envy you, Sybil, but I do.”

“We did not wish to make the relationship public yet, not just yet. I wanted my father's consent. I should say we wanted our father's consent before we tell every one; his feelings must be consulted above all. But your brother, Edith who has been so kind to me lately, when you seemed estranged on account of my abominable conduct to Kenneth, put it to me so strongly to avow the real nature of the bond between us in Court to-day, that I brought it out, and then people saw that it could not have been his guilt that made him apparently screen the guilty. I still feel much ashamed of the part I have acted, but I am so proud of my brother. I must now go and try if I can win any favour in Mr. Oswald's eyes, for I do so want an invitation to Tingalpa.” And Sybil, wishing to allow Kenneth an opportunity of a little private conversation with her friend, turned downstairs, leaving them together.

Edith covered her face with her hands, and leaned on the table. Kenneth hung over her till she was willing to speak, waiting her pleasure. “I have to ask your pardon humbly, my friend,” she said, “I interfered with warnings
and advice which were all mistaken and unneeded. You bore with my blunders, and with what must have appeared impertinence. Forgive me now that I know the extent to which I must have pained you.”

“How can I have anything to forgive when it was all your love for Sybil and your regard for me that prompted your advice. How can you doubt that I preferred your kindly blunders to the very words of wisdom from any one else?”

“How I have wounded you time after time,” said Edith, flushing scarlet; “not even that poor blundering Jim could have hurt you more. If you forgive him, you will forgive me.”

Kenneth took the offered hand, raised it to his lips as he had once before, but this time the kiss was different. Edith could not mistake its meaning.

“Sybil thinks of nothing but her father, how he will take it, how his feelings are to be spared,” said Edith in an impatient tone.

“He is my father, too, Miss Gray,” said Kenneth. “We both owe him that consideration.”

“And nobody,” said Edith with quivering lips, “thinks of your mother. My sympathies are all with her.”

The hand was again raised to the lips, a tear fell from Kenneth's eyes, and a more passionate kiss pressed upon it.

“You had her till you were ten years old. Did she die of a broken heart?” asked Edith.

“No, I hope not. I believe not. She died of heart disease, but she was not so miserable as you may be led to suppose. All my recollections of her are of cheerfulness and kindly interest in all that I cared about. She was the best of daughters, the tenderest of mothers. I never saw my father till after her death.”

“Never till then,” said Edith, in the same slow impressive tone, “and very little after then — you were told very kindly to keep out of the way; you told me so yourself. You had to beg for your father's portrait; you had to write to him so that no one could suspect the claims you had on him; you had to pick up scraps of news about him and his doings thrown out in your sister's careless talk. I have seen you hanging on her words, and mistook, as I have always mistaken you. Your mother was a deeply injured woman, one whose generosity you have inherited to your own wrong. She was the lawful wife, and the common-place woman who is called by your father's name, usurps her rights. But I suppose it cannot be proved. If documents are destroyed, or suppressed, the weakest goes to the wall.”

“My dear Miss Gray,” said Kenneth, “you continue to mistake me. If he told me kindly to keep out of his way, it was more in my interests than in his own, and I believe it cost him as much as it cost me.”
“Could your mother have been so cheerful with such a weight on her conscience? Oh! my friend, all you say only strengthens my conviction.”

“My dear Miss Gray,” said Kenneth, who still retained her hand, “would it make things better to believe my father was a villain? It is more the fault of my people than his that we were thus severed. My grandparents, my uncle Oswald, insisted on his keeping aloof.”

“And why should they do so,” said Edith with impetuosity, “if they did not think him baser than he appeared to be? I have often felt inclined to resent, as you know, Sybil's extravagant praises of her father, and now, when I see you siding with him against your wronged mother, I think there must be some strange glamour about The McDiarmid.”

“I believe I am feeling and acting as she would approve. She made no complaint, and I shall make none. She is in heaven now, if ever human being reached that happy home, and he, my father, will meet her there in God's good time.”

Edith could not answer Kenneth, but at heart she was unconvinced. They went down-stairs together, and listened to the confused and triumphant talk between Mr. Henderson, Mr. Talbot, Mr. Gray, and his son Walter; but they took little or no part in it.

“Do you think it would be a piece of extravagance to telegraph to papa?” asked Sybil of her brother. “It will relieve his mind.”

“Not at all,” said Kenneth eagerly. “I shall do it at once, before I leave Castlehurst.” And he went out to carry out this intention.

“Now, I can make my arrangements for going, but somehow,” said Sybil, turning to Edith, “I cannot bear to go now when Kenneth is at liberty, and we have so much that we want to say to each other. It seems that it would be a poor repayment for his services to run away from him now. Could you give me quarters at Wilta for a month or two, and he can come and go. I shall try hard for an invitation to Tingalpa, for I want to see him at home. I want to be able to tell papa everything about his life. Will you keep me?”

“How can you ask it,” said Edith, who was pleased with Sybil's pride and affection for her brother, though she resented what was done especially for The McDiarmid.

“You will be much engaged with Mr. and Mrs. Charles, but you have plenty of room at Wilta, and I shall try not to be in the way. He has gone to telegraph to papa that he is acquitted, and that the other has not been found. It will save him two months of anxiety, for the mail does not go for a fortnight.”

“He does nothing to save himself,” said Edith. “He is more careful of other people's feelings than other people are of his. When I think of how that wretched lad Jim on purpose, and poor blundering I, by mistake, laid
open every sore place in his heart, and the insults offered at the Crown and Sceptre, which, of course, were publicly repeated to-day, I feel as if there was no justice in the world.”

“These things will be all forgotten, Edith,” said her friend eagerly. “As Mr. Oswald's nephew and heir, his position in Australia is an excellent one. And the old man has come out somewhat grand in this trouble.”

“Yes,” said Edith emphatically. “I scarcely think that Kenneth has any cause to be ashamed of the Oswald connection.”

“And that is the only one that is of any consequence here,” said Sybil. “Now, I suppose, we must go homewards. Our friend, Mr. Henderson, goes with us for a thanksgiving service.”

“That ought to be at Tingalpa,” said Edith, still jealous for the Oswalds. “No. Mr. Oswald wants a quiet evening at home with his nephew first. I dare say there is business to be attended to. We must say good-bye to him.”

George Oswald had the strongest wish to kiss Miss Edith Gray that day in his exultation, but thought she might take it amiss. He took both her hands and looked hard in her face. She said “good-bye, Mr. Oswald, I am very glad in your joy. Would you mind if I kissed you, just to show my sympathy.” And the lips of the finest woman in Victoria touched the rough cheek of the old man.
Chapter 51 Kenneth's Second Trial

When Kenneth, after dispatching the telegram to Castle Diarmid, returned with his uncle to Tingalpa, they were accompanied by Hugh Carmichael, who had apparently taken up his quarters there. The discharged prisoner was a little doubtful of his reception by his aunt, who had never thoroughly exonerated him in her mind, although she had also all along thirsted for vengeance on Ellerton.

But when Mr. Oswald told of his honourable acquittal by the Jury, and the universal satisfaction which the verdict had given; that not only had there been the strongest evidence to show that Ellerton both could and would have committed the crime; but that there has been an alibi proved which was incontestable, Mrs. Oswald gave way. The circumstance that the alibi had been proved entirely through the watch she had given to poor Jim in spite of Mr. Oswald's refusal, redounded greatly to her credit. Mr. Oswald was tempted to say that if Jim had worn his old watch which was loose in the case, the water would have got in at once, and the alibi could have been proved at the Coroner's inquest, and two months of imprisonment and anxiety spared. But he wisely refrained, and allowed Mrs. Oswald to believe that she had been largely instrumental in his nephew's acquittal.

So she welcomed him to his accustomed seat, and was glad to see him discharge his accustomed offices at her right hand.

There were little things that had been neglected during his imprisonment; the gardener had not done the flower borders rightly, and would not understand what she wanted, and Mr. Oswald had no turn and no time for that sort of thing, so Kenneth must see to it on the morrow.

As she was dressed now in deep mourning, which suited her very much better than her usual profusion of incongruous colours, she looked better than ever she had done in Kenneth's eyes, and her face had an expression of sadness and regret for the loss of her only son, which redeemed it from its usual blank mediocrity. Life at Tingalpa was going to be more tolerable than heretofore, unless this man Carmichael made mischief, and Kenneth certainly did not like his looks or his talk.

“Well, it's a poor heart that never rejoices,” said Mr. Oswald when the three gentlemen adjourned to the smoking-room. “It is a comfort to have you back again, Kenneth, and I must have one glass or maybe two on the head of it. And you'll stop me when I've had enough. I'll mind you, just hold up your hand, Kenneth, and I'll knock off. But after these months of anxiety I feel as if I could not hold off any longer. I've been on the square
all the time you've been in chokey, and Carmichael there drinking my best brand of cognac as if he liked it. Lord! it has been hard, but I thought if there was anything to be done or said, or money wanted for anything, I must keep my head clear to do it.”

Kenneth yielded to his uncle's entreaty, and allowed him to go in for this dangerous indulgence. Poor Kenneth was a little tired of being always wise.

“Fill yourself a bumper of something,” said his uncle, “sherry or claret or whatever you like, and drink a toast with me.” Kenneth acquiesced.

“Miss Edith Gray,” said his uncle, “and may she be the mistress of Tingalpa in God's good time. You'll no refuse that toast, Kenneth. Oh! man, you did not see the kiss she gave me — and she offered it too. Your time is coming though, but you'll have to ask.”

“Miss Edith Gray,” said Kenneth, “whether she is the mistress of Tingalpa or not.”

“And now, Kenneth, there's something that I've half heard from Mr. Carmichael here, that he's promised to tell right out when you are here to take it in. You may be thankful that I heard some of it, and that I knew it was your sister that got the better of you about letting that villain escape — or I'd have been down harder on you for the £10 note than for neglecting to answer the telegram. You've saved the honour of your father's family somewhat at my expense — but I suppose she grat, poor thing, and it's hard for a man to stand a woman's tears, and you knew she was your father's daughter. It was very hard for me.”

“It was very hard for me, uncle, every way it was hard; but for the watch, it would have told against me strongly to-day.”

“Aye, the watch, Mrs. Oswald's watch!” said the old man with a chuckle, “that did it. But when Mr. Carmichael told me that your father was The McDiarmid, it was all clear to me how you had hung about that ill-used wife, and been so troubled when she was like to die, and so watchful over poor Jim, when that blackguard encouraged his fancy that he might pick his pocket. But Carmichael has something to say, which he says is of great importance, and so now you are free, he need be kept in the dark no longer.”

“Did you know Mr. Carmichael in Scotland, uncle?”

“No, but he knows about the family; he knew your mother.”

“Yes, and your father too,” said Carmichael, turning to Kenneth, “and what I mean to say is this, that if you will go heartily in with me in the matter, I think I could prove that Isabel Oswald was Norman McDiarmid's wife, and therefore that you are the rightful heir to the old name, and the estates, and the castle in the north of Scotland.”
Strange that this worthless man should start up to corroborate the opinion so confidently expressed that very day to Kenneth by the best, and dearest, and most generous woman in the world. But Kenneth's pleasures was alloyed by many considerations. Not so his uncle's.

"Say ye so man? say ye so?" said George Oswald, eagerly. "Faith, man, I knew it or you said it. I knew my Isabel was sorely wronged. We'll have her name cleared, and that burning scandal that my poor lad let out at Castlehurst, and that was blazoned forth again this day in the full Court, clean wiped out. Ken shall be put in to his rights if I should sell half the stock on Tingalpa to compass it. Kenneth, my man, if I had only known this before, oh! if I had not let Isabel's troubles out to my wife when I was not myself, and the poor woman told Jim and he let it out too, all through that cursed drink," and George Oswald took the half-empty tumbler, which was standing before him, and dashed it to pieces on the floor of the room.

"But you've got off clear. If I had not split the stuff I would drink your health. The health of Kenneth McDiarmid, Esq. of Castle Diarmid. Lord, how things come about. And Isabel no living to see it, and my Jim, what would he have said? I'll have to tell the wife."

"Not so fast, uncle," said Kenneth. "I do not see — I cannot see — how such a thing is to be proved, and even if it could, I must hesitate before I involve innocent people — my father's wife and children, in trouble and disgrace for my sake."

"For your own sake?" said George Oswald impetuously. "It is your mother's name that you have to think of; it is her good fame that you have got to establish; it is to take the sting out of the taunts that were passed on you at Wilta and Castlehurst. It is to make you hold up your head, and to make me hold up mine — to make you better than any mushroom squatter or merchant in all Australia; able to ask the finest woman in Victoria, and that is Miss Edith Gray, to be your wife. I'm keen of money, no doubt, but oh! Kenneth, man, money seems as nothing to me in the face of this. You risked your neck to let off that scoundrel, and to save your sister's notion of the family honour. You must think of your own family honour now. The Oswalds have to be considered as well as any proud Highland family that ever lived. But I'm so carried away, I'm no letting you speak, Mr. Carmichael. What do you think you can prove?"

"An irregular marriage, but one binding by Scottish law."

"How came it about? I was in Victoria for years before it happened, and then I only heard that Isabel had gone to learn the dress-making and was very clever at it, and then that she had gone to some ladies' school as a sort of lady's maid to look after the girls' clothes and take a charge, and that she had gone off and stopped a year in some quiet country place with a
gentleman that was someway connected with one of the school lasses, and then that she came back with a young son, and no marriage-lines. I was that mad when I heard of it, for I had meant to have her out to keep my house. When she died my mother wrote that she believed there was a marriage, but that the father had got away all the papers that would prove it, and I cursed him in my soul. I ken that a written promise of marriage exchanged between two people, and a child born after, makes a good marriage in law. I ken, too, that any letter signed ‘husband’ can be made to prove it, as well as acknowledgment before witnesses — the papers are gone — but if this gentleman is the witness it may be made out yet. Now, Carmichael, out with the story, all you know — the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, as we had to swear to this day.”

Kenneth leaned his head in his hands on the table; he must hear this narrative, but he could not bear to see the man who told it — who was telling it, he knew, for his own profit — who was laying bare the old story that Edith Gray was sure to be told.
Chapter 52 An Old Story

“Well,” began Carmichael, “so far as I can recollect after this lapse of
time (for our young friend here has a beard on his face, and must be four-
and-twenty now), I'll tell you the whole story. Norman McDiarmid was a
student at Edinburgh College when I was there as a private tutor. I had got
my degree, but had not gone in for the Kirk, and I was glad to do anything
I could get. He was the heir to an old Highland property, and the family as
proud as you like, but not over rich for their pretensions. However, he was
just twenty-one, and had come into a sum of about fifteen hundred pounds
that was left to him by a maiden aunt. His father was dead, and his mother
lived with her father-in-law, who was The McDiarmid at the time. Norman
was very handsome, and very much liked, and I think the grandfather
wanted him to pick up a rich wife, and did not object to his spending his
money freely, and visiting a good deal while he had his college course.

“He was very free-handed, and I'll not say that he did not do me a good
turn now and then, for I always was hard up, and we had a good deal of fun
and frolic, as young men will have when they are together. But he had an
only sister, Flora her name was, at a boarding-school in Edinburgh, and he
was much taken up with her, and would break through any sort of
engagement if she wanted him. Well, the sister took scarlet fever at the
school, and she was put in a room by herself, and kept quite separate, and
Isabel Oswald, who was in a place of trust in the school, who had had the
fever, and whom this Flora McDiarmid was very fond of, was appointed to
nurse her. Norman had had it too, and as he was particularly fond of his
sister, as I have told you, and as she was very ill, he could not be kept
away, and so he saw a great deal of Isabel Oswald. Now, though Isabel was
dressed suitable to her station, th at did not hinder her from being the
prettiest girl in Edinburgh, at least I am sure Norman thought so, and I dare
say the great care she took of his sister made her look all the better in his
eyes.

“When she got over the fever, she was not strong enough to go to her
home in the Highlands, and her mother came down and took her to the
seaside to Portobello, and as this Flora McDiarmid craved for Isabel to be
with her, they got the mistress of the boarding-school to spare her for a
while. Instead, however, of getting better, the girl got worse and worse; the
fever had left such dregs behind it that she fell into a sort of decline. Her
mother was not strong, and Isabel did mostly everything for her. Norman
was constantly at Portobello taking flowers or fruit to his sister, taking her
out in an invalid chair, reading to her, and somehow the mother's eyes were
so full of her dying girl that she never cast a thought on the living one, who was over-worked, got too little sleep, and had need of being spared instead of being constantly called on for some service.

“And nobody but Norman thought of sparing her. He would often send her to bed and watch himself. He would often settle her in a chair, put a stool at her feet, and a pillow at her back when she would not be induced to leave her patient altogether. He would coax her to eat, and bring delicacies from Edinburgh to tempt her as well as his sister. And she listened to his readings and his talk, and, I dare say, gave her opinion and said her say. Nobody will tell me that your sister, Mr. Oswald, and your mother, Mr. McDiarmid (Kenneth started at the new name given to him, but again subsided with his hands tightly pressed over his eyes to brace himself to listen) was not equal in ability and taste and good sense to any Highlander of them all. In that sick room they were all on one level, till the poor girl died almost in Isabel's arms, with her mother and brother hanging over her.

“Now, of course, they did not need her any longer, and she would fain have gone back to the boarding school, but her place was filled up, and she looked out for another. It happened that some friend of Mrs. McDiarmid wanted such a girl, and it was better wages than she had had, and lighter work, so it was thought to be a very good place for Isabel. But they were very hard people to serve, and the girls of the house were jealous of her good looks, and her extraordinary fine manners; for they had an eye to Norman themselves, and he often came to the house, and if he could get a chance he would speak to Isabel. He could see for himself that she was not happy, and that she was hardly used. I don't know how it came about, but somehow one day the spark caught the tinder,” and Carmichael gave a little laugh that Kenneth would have liked to knock him down for, “but the next thing I heard of Norman McDiarmid was that he had taken Isabel Oswald away from the highly respectable place where his mother had left her, and that his grandfather and his mother were in the greatest trouble about it, for fear that he should have married her in his hot haste.

“He had money, and he was of age, and as you say, Mr. Oswald, it is the easiest thing in the world to get married in Scotland. And from all I ever heard of Isabel Oswald, I don't think she would have gone away with him if she had not thought she was his wife.

“Well, some months after this I was staying at Glenrea, in the Highlands, with a young friend who had taken some shooting, and when I was by myself out one day, who should I see standing at the front of a very pretty cottage but Norman McDiarmid and Isabel. I had never seen her before, though I had heard enough of her, and I tell you she was just as lovely a woman as I ever crossed eyes with. He had his gun and his dogs, and she
was saying good-bye to him for the day. Her dress was very simple but
pretty, and she would have looked as well at Castle Diarmid as any lady
that ever sat there.

“Went up to Norman and asked him how he was. He introduced me as a
College friend and tutor to ______”

“To his wife?” said George Oswald, triumphantly.

“No, to Isabel.”

“That won't do,” said the old man, “that won't do, Carmichael, my man.”

“Norman asked me to accompany him for the day,” resumed Hugh
Carmichael, “and as I was rather tired of my companion, I had no objection
to change, especially as I wanted to discover if possible what were the real
relations between the two. They had both the settled look of married
people, they made plans for the future, they spoke about old times as if this
was the legitimate outcome of it. She moved about quietly in the house,
waited upon him and on me when I was there, with the assistance of a
rough country girl, sang Scotch ballads sweetly, took up her sewing in the
evening; and during his absence she read the newspapers and the books he
liked so as to be able to talk to him on the subjects he cared about. I never
saw any woman with a finer eye for nature or a greater love for poetry; and
somehow I suppose what between curiosity to find out what she really was
to Norman, and what between sheer admiration on my part, or whether it
was a temptation of the devil pure and simple, she looked so bewitching
one evening when Norman was out seeing to the dogs, and we were sitting
alone, that I could not help trying to kiss her.”

Again poor Kenneth gave a start, and went up to Carmichael, but his
uncle pushed him back, saying “Waid a wee, Kenneth, let's have the story
first and then you can have your quarrel afterwards.” Carmichael resumed.

“How she flew at me, how she dared me take such a liberty. If I did not
consider her Norman McDiarmid's wife she considered herself so. And in
the midst of it Norman himself came in, and he was outrageous at the insult
offered to his wife. The Highland girl, Phemie Sinclair, came in at the
moment, and she as well as me, heard Norman's words. I had to take my
leave, although I offered every apology that occurred to me, that I was not
aware of the circumstances, that I was very sorry, and all the rest of it. But
I was not likely to forget the words he used, and if Phemie Sinclair is still
alive, she will recollect them to. I kept the facts in my mind in order to
prove an irregular Scotch marriage against him in case he wanted to get out
of it.”

“I returned to Edinburgh and had a good appointment offered me to go to
Canada, and sailed for Montreal about three months after I left the young
people in the Highlands. I stayed in Canada three years, the appointment
was not so good as it promised to be, at least it wanted steadier work than I
cared about, and after that I returned to ‘Auld Reekie’. Then I found that
Norman had married a Miss Grace Syme, the daughter of a leading
Edinburgh merchant supposed to be very rich (though I heard that the
house had gone smash lately, from our friend Ellerton), but this was a good
catch for the heir of an encumbered Highland property. His grandfather
had made the match and had sent Isabel Oswald home to her parents with a
young son, who had got the family name of Kenneth. The McDiarmids
allowed her a small pension for the boy, and she made no complaint as to
the treatment she had received. I wrote to her saying I could prove her to
be Norman McDiarmid's wife, and her son the heir, but she refused to take
any action in the matter. I wrote to her more than once or twice, but she
never would give in to my wishes on his behalf. I knew it was only because
she would not disturb him in his quiet comfortable home, and not because
she did not believe she had a case. I tried to work on her through Kenneth,
but she wrote that God would provide for him, as he has wonderfully;” and
Carmichael took a pull at George Oswald's cognac and looked round as if
he thought Kenneth had been landed in comfortable quarters.

“As Isabel Oswald,” he resumed, “would not admit that she has been
wronged or take a step to right herself, I could make nothing of her. I went
out to Australia shortly after, and have been a rolling stone gathering little
or no moss. But when I met with Mr. James Oswald in Sydney, I found out
that the boy in whom I was so much interested had not been left to the
tender mercies of his proud father, but had been taken by the hand by his
mother's brother — yourself, Mr. Oswald.

“You, Mr. McDiarmid, have been strangely enough mixed up with your
sister's affairs, but there is a limit to self-sacrifice, and for your mother's
sake you ought to claim the name, if not the estate.”
Chapter 53 Kenneth's Decision

“I don't care about the estate; I could buy up the estate twice over,” said George Oswald; “but Kenneth, let us have you owned.”

Kenneth had followed this narrative with the most conflicting feelings. Taken in conjunction with Edith Gray's words and looks on the day, when she first discovered the real state of his affections, the temptation to bring forward Hugh Carmichael's testimony was very strong.

“Let me think, let me consider, let me sleep upon it,’ said he, “don't press me too hard. I thought to have a quiet night instead of this new agitation — a harder trial than that before the Castlehurst Jury this day.”

“Well, it is hard on you after all, Kenneth,” said his uncle with real feeling. “You seem never to have any rest for the sole of your foot. I suppose you think this is as bad as my will that you took so hard.”

Carmichael could not help smiling at the idea of a will of that kind being a burden to any man. It was, indeed, difficult for Mr. Oswald, but it as absolutely impossible for Hugh Carmichael to enter into Kenneth's feelings either about money or about birth. All the deep love which he had felt for his mother, all the compassion and tenderness he had felt for his father, flowed in upon him; and to stigmatize his father as a bigamist and his children as illegitimate, in order to better his own position, even with Edith Gray, appeared to him utterly base and selfish. How far had his mother been wronged? How far could such a movement right her? He felt sure that there had been no religious ceremony; at best, it was an irregular marriage, censurable by the Church, not satisfactory to his mother's conscience, even if by such evidence as Carmichael could bring forward it was binding in law. And as she herself had steadfastly refused to hurt his father's position by claiming any rights through Carmichael's testimony, even when she was bearing reproach and goaded by her mother's strong feelings on the subject, which Kenneth now fully comprehended, surely he, Kenneth, could but carry out his mother's wishes by refraining also. He would ask to be acknowledged; he would add his own entreaties to those of Sybil that he might have the right to go to his father's house, and to be brotherly to his father's children, to have the privilege of performing the duties of a son openly and naturally; but he would make no claim that might cause his father a heart-ache.

“I do not need the night to think of it,” he said aloud after rapidly reviewing his position in all its bearings. “I take my stand where my mother took hers. I shall do nothing that will grieve or injure my father.”

“But you must, or I'll do it for you,” said Mr. Oswald. “I'll bring forward
your claim, and if money will do it, you shall have justice. If you do not care about your mother I care about my sister and the honour of the Oswalds. I may not have such superfine feelings as you have, but, by the Lord, when I have a good case in hand, I cannot drop it like a hot potato.”

“I feel convinced that there was a written promise of marriage exchanged between them, and that Norman had promised to carry it out when his grandfather either died or consented. Subsequent marriage always legitimizes the children in Scotland, and this written promise was as good for your mother as the marriage lines themselves, if she had had the common sense to act on it,” said Hugh Carmichael.

“But whatever documents she had or had not,” said Kenneth, “her dying request to me was that I should give them to Mr. McDiarmid, who would come for them and this I did on the day after her death. I never saw him before to my knowledge.”

“And that was what your grandmother meant by the paper having been made away with. That was an awful blunder, Kenneth,” said George Oswald.

“No, they were hers. I had only to follow out her commands. It was the last action of love she could do for him, and I am glad that I carried it out for her. I loved my father from that day, though I knew not that he was my father. I have loved him since, and I love him now.”

“Then he told you, I suppose.”

“No, not till years after, when I was at college. I was eighteen at the time. I caught him looking at me, and I could not mistake the expression of his eyes. He took me with him to a quiet place, and then he told me. He said my mother had forgiven him, and asked me to do the same, and spoke so sadly, so kindly. You are mistaken if you think he has not suffered. And here is this letter I had from him before I was arrested that I did not want seen at the inquest.”

“Don't you look at it,” said Kenneth, fiercely, to Carmichael, “but do you read it, uncle — the latter part of it — and judge if I can hurt a hair of his head.”

Mr. Oswald put on his spectacles, held the letter to the light, and read the portion relating to Kenneth himself. He was touched, the spectacles got dim; he had to wipe them, and his eyes too, once or twice before he handed the letter back to his nephew.

“Well, there is one circumstance that is greatly changed, and that is that all the disgrace of your birth has come out without his interfering. Only it appears to me that he would not be so very penitent if he had not wronged Isabel more than he likes to let on; and if he shields himself under your love, that is no reason I shall spare him. Your mother would make no
second marriage because she thought herself your father's wife. No, Kenneth, you must not thwart me in this; this is what would rejoice the old hearts of your grandfather and grandmother, and make up to me for the sorest bit of my heart about my poor Jim, who was really put out of the way for a McDiarmid's sake, and whose murderer you helped away with my money because of Sybil McDiarmid's entreaties and tears. I've suffered too much through them altogether to care to spare them now."

“Well, uncle, you are consistent all through,” said Kenneth bitterly. “You wanted to leave me money, a very desirable thing in itself, on such conditions that it was a positive affliction, and now you want me to claim an honoured name through what I feel to be dishonourable means. If I cannot hinder you from prosecuting this claim, I really wish the Jury to-day had found me guilty, and that they had sentenced me to death. I cannot stand this any longer,” and the young man went to his own room, locked the door, and flung himself on the bed in a whirl of anger, love, and wounded feelings.

His uncle and Mr. Carmichael sat looking at each other.

“The young one has got a pretty stiff back, I see — like his father for that,” said Carmichael, who thought baffled, enjoyed the fight.

“My back can be as stiff as his,” said George Oswald.

“I suppose he won't come again to-night,” said Carmichael, filling himself another glass of brandy-hot. “Let us make a night of it, Mr. Oswald.” But George Oswald did not respond; he sat with knit brows for a few minutes, and then went to his nephew's room and knocked at the door.

“Leave me alone,” said Kenneth. “Am I to have no rest?”

“Let me in, Ken; let me in. I cannot part from you this night in dispeace, of all nights in the year.”

Kenneth rose and opened the door. “What for could not I have waited till you had had your sleep and your rest before I brought this perplexity on you; but I thought that you would have twice the chance with Miss Edith Gray if you were Kenneth McDiarmid than if you had only your poor mother's name. Otherwise I'd been content that it should be Oswald of Tingalpa. It's true enough that I could not have stirred, or, at least, would have been very hard to stir, if poor Jim had held his tongue, but would Edith Gray marry Oswald of Tingalpa?”

“If she marries me at all it must be as I am. She knows about it — that is, that I am Sybil's brother and, God bless her! all her sympathies are for my mother.”

“That's because she thinks her wronged, and would fain see her righted; but I'll no say another word this night.” He took his nephew's two hands, and the tears stood in his eyes, rough old fellow as he was. “You're all I
have now, Kenneth.”

“You wish me well, I know, but it is hard for you to see what I think well for myself. I have difficulties with Miss Gray, I know, but I shall never get over them by anything like what you suggest.”

“And I suppose I may not tell Mrs. Oswald.”

“You must tell nobody. Even Mr. Carmichael would advise perfect silence at this stage of the proceedings. Confound him,” said Kenneth, “I'd give something to punch his head. I very nearly did it, only you struck in.”

“It does me good to see you angry, but we must not punch his head till we have got all we can out of it, and it's a large one, though maybe not just so well balanced altogether as it might be; and now go to your bed and sleep, for it has been a troubled day to you.”
Chapter 54 One Way of Love

Edith Gray had thought it strange that her brother Charlie did not show any wish to go with the family to Castlehurst to attend the trial which to herself was so deeply interesting, while her brother on the other hand was surprised that she should care to go to Castlehurst at all on that day. If Helen had expressed a wish to go, of course her young husband would have gone with her and heard Edward Talbot plead, but it was very far from her ideas, and she enjoyed the freedom of Wilta after the constraint and publicity of having spent the first week of her married life on board a passenger steamer. Although Charlie thought Edith herself might have stayed at home with them on the first day after their arrival, still Mrs. Ellerton might need Edith's support and countenance, and he therefore excused her. The young pair had a very happy day together, strolling the garden, seeing the animals, going through their house. Everything in and about the old beloved home was dear to Charlie, and through him dear to his bride.

Charles Gray had once paid his sister the highest compliment she considered she had ever received; that his only regret in having her for a sister was that it would be impossible for him to make her his wife. She had thought that in choosing a partner he would look out both for personal and mental resemblance to herself; but although both young girls were dark, there the resemblance ended. Helen was both short and exceedingly slight in figure, her face pleasing and gentle, her manner extremely quiet, and altogether eminently a restful little woman. Charlie said she was the most receptive and reasonable woman in the world, and she had the most worshipful appreciation of her husband's intellectual and universal superiority to all men in the world.

She was prepared to love and admire her sister-in-law, of whom she had heard so much, whose letters were so brilliant and affectionate; and she was somewhat surprised and dazzled by her beauty and her apparent force of character when they met. Charlie saw his sister had grown handsomer in some way; there was a new light in her eyes, a strange power in her face, and in those quick movements and alternations, which he never remembered to have been so effective before. Both bridegroom and bride had been greatly fussed over at home by Helen's friends; their own love story was to themselves deeply interesting, and Charlie had looked forward to satisfying his sister's reasonable curiosity, and expected little but eager questioning and reply, in which Helen and himself would play the foremost part.
Of course the trial was rather engrossing; but when the party returned from Castlehurst with the joyful news of young Oswald's honourable acquittal, and that Mrs. Ellerton's husband, though strongly suspected, was out of reach, they expected the family to settle down to something like its normal state.

Talbot was triumphant, brilliant, and most attentive to Edith; the newly-married pair saw the current of the talk, and surmised that there was this additional element of interest in the trial. The party was unexceptionable, and Helen thought he must be quite clever enough even for Charles's wonderful sister. But Edith turned from him often to the homely bush missionary, and felt more comfort in his face and his talk than in anything else. With what different feelings did she look on all the past now that the truth was revealed. And she knew that she had been and was now the object of Kenneth Oswald's love.

Worship in the men's dining-room that night was a solemn thanksgiving, in which Edith joined from her heart, but she did not know that at the very moment when they gave thanks for his escape from the legal trial before Judge and Jury, Kenneth Oswald was undergoing a greater and harder trial which her own words and looks had made harder still. Would it have been any comfort to him when he lay wakeful till early morning, thinking of how impossible it could be for him to act on his uncle's suggestion, if he had known that Edith never closed her eyes, as she turned over in her mind how Norman McDiarmid was to be worked upon to do tardy justice to the woman he had so wronged, and to the son whom she loved — yes, whom she loved. Her heart had not been interested so deeply in all his thoughts and doings so long without a friendship of the closest and the tenderest description having been aroused — that sort of friendship which can be kindled at once into love at a sudden revelation of love from the other party. And this revelation had been made at the very moment when her interest in him had reached its culminating point.

There are some women who miss love altogether, and who throw into their friendships somewhat of the passionate devotion that has not been called out in the normal way — as we see maiden aunts devote their maternal cares to nieces and nephews. Even if Edith's idea had been correct, and Kenneth's heart was altogether for Mrs. Ellerton, still she never could have been quite the same after this long engrossing preoccupation with Kenneth's affairs and feelings; but now there was no question in his own mind as to what she felt. This was love — what she had dreamed of as possible, but whom no man whom she had ever seen had ever risked enough to arouse — this tumultuous, this exquisitely, almost painfully delicious sensation. Had Helen felt like this for Charlie?
Did Kenneth feel like this for her? The last was true. She was utterly and entirely loved. He had not said it in words, but she had read his devotion in his eyes — she knew he had put his whole heart into his kisses. She got up and looked out of the window in the direction of Tingalpa, the moonlight bathed the landscape in its silver light. The moon faced his window. She knew the lay of the house well. She sent a blessing by it, and fancied it would steal more softly on his slumbers. She caressed and kissed over and over again the hand to which he had given the first love-kiss.

It was another world to which she rose on the morrow. She had to say good-bye to Mr. Henderson for months, for he was going on a long round, beginning at Tingalpa. “Any message for our young friend?” said he. Mrs. Ellerton was writing a note, would he wait for it? “Certainly,” was his reply.

“Any message from you, Miss Gray.”

“Only that I think the same as I did yesterday on the subject we spoke of,” said Edith, who thought she could send a kindly message by so dear a friend. “And of course, kindest regards to him and all of them.”

“I suppose I should be off to Melbourne again,” said Mr. Talbot, who just then came in, “after I look in at Tingalpa, and see the Oswalds once more. It has been an interesting case, and I don't know when I enjoyed anything so much. It has been a pretext for a good many pleasant days at Wilta. Where are those vagrant young people, Miss Gray?”

“Oh, I don't know, they slipped out together. They are in the garden, I suppose.”

“Very excusable under the circumstances I'm sure,” said Mr. Talbot. “Suppose we go and hunt them up. I want to say good-bye. Let us see if my scent for such discoveries is equal to that for legal points. I dare say you will be sharper than I in the quest. Let me take down your garden hat from the peg, Miss Gray.”

Instead, however, of taking any trouble to find the young people, Mr. Talbot took care to keep out of their way. He had a proposal to make, and he made it with his usual felicitious and choice mode of expression. He admired Miss Gray's beauty, her talents, her right way of thinking on all subjects. A great part of the interest he had taken in the recent case was because it was one of great interest to Miss Gray. It had been a sufficient reward for all the trouble that it had cost him, that it had brought him more into contact with her, and deepened the very favourable impression which she had long ago made on his heart. His family, character, and circumstances he hoped would be considered unimpeachable; his habits were domestic, and he believed his principles were to be relied on. He flattered himself he had a good temper, which goes for so much in
domestic happiness. His father and family would be delighted to welcome her into their midst as the brightest ornament of their circle, and he thought that now when she saw domestic happiness in so fair a light in the persons of her favourite brother and his charming bride, that Miss Gray would be disposed to give a favourable answer to his ardent aspirations, and permit him to speak to her father before leaving Wilta.

Edith had never let any man go so far before; she had stopped any aspirants to her good graces on the verge of their proposals, or at least at the end of the first sentence, but this young barrister seemed to have so much pleasure in saying all that he had to say, turned his sentences so neatly, and seemed so sure of a favourable reply, that she did not see where she could strike in without disappointing his full intentions of being both explicit and exhaustive on this very interesting subject. She was carrying on a double process in her mind at the time, and contrasting Kenneth's overpowering look and his broken sentences, and his passionate kisses of the hand he held, with this man's confident though, as he thought, persuasive manner and fluent speech. It was one of those cases of "limited liability" — what she knew she might expect. There was no putting his whole fortunes to the touch to win or lose all. If she loved Mr. Talbot perhaps he might get very fond of her, but at present he risked no deep feeling, and would feel no great disappointment. The desire to be referred to her father roused her to action. In language as choice as his own she expressed her gratitude for his good opinion, but regretted that it was not returned, and that she believed it impossible it could ever be returned in the way in which Mr. Talbot wished; and requested that he would not speak to her father at all.

Mr. Talbot was astonished — more than astonished. He had felt that he must lose no time in making his proposal, for now that Mrs. Ellerton had acknowledged herself to be Kenneth Oswald's sister it was necessary to put in his claims before the client he had worked so hard for could come into the field. He had never thought of him before, though he was undoubtedly handsome, and would be rich, for he had been so convinced of his devotion to Mrs. Ellerton — which he had proved to an extent very damaging to his own cause — that he believed young Oswald was no suitor for Miss Gray's good graces. Still, even in this altered state of things, there were drawbacks — very great draw-backs, to a union with Kenneth Oswald; the illegitimate birth, the vulgar relations, the want of congenial society, and his being such a mere boy compared to Miss Gray. There ought to be at least five years difference in age, which there was in his case. He trusted to time. He must try again, but he did not say so. Edith Gray was the most suitable wife for him of all his acquaintance. Not only was she likely to be
richly dowered with regard to money; he felt certain that, however high he might rise in his profession — and the young barrister was ambitious — she would worthily fill the position of his wife. His house, with her at its head, would be a centre for the keen intellectual life of the best Melbourne society — a sort of literary coterie, in which her beauty and her brilliancy would find a fitting field of action.

He seriously admired and respected her, and even loved her, as far as he could love without the certainty of its being returned; and all his experience in life led him to believe that, unless in the case of a preoccupied heart, any man might win any woman if he set himself resolutely to do it. He must allow a little time for this excitement to subside, and for Edith to observe Charlie and Helen's happiness in each other; and Charlie was an old friend, who would help him on in his suit.

So the young barrister went to Tingalpa with David Henderson, to have a farewell interview with his obliged client. Young Oswald read Mrs. Ellerton's note and received Miss Gray's message, and to Talbot's surprise looked more worn and haggard than he had done in the very worst days of suspense, or of the trial itself. Mrs. Ellerton's note then was agitating; he had not heard David Henderson's message.

Edith had sent it with one view; Kenneth took it up in another. She meant to let him know that as she believed his mother was married she did not look on his birth as illegitimate, and therefore they stood on the same level in her eyes. He, racked all night by the feeling that she would have him prove that mother Mrs. McDiarmid's wife, conscious at the same time that the sort of marriage which Carmichael proposed to establish was not the marriage that Edith believed in, and absolutely convinced that he should not press doubtful claims on the testimony of an enemy and a scoundrel, took the message altogether wrong, and considered that he would have a long hard battle to fight to induce the woman he loved to marry a nameless man, and to live with him at Tingalpa, for while his uncle lived he must remain there. For Edith Gray, the most refined, the most honoured woman in the whole country round to leave her place in her father's house, associate chiefly with Mr. and Mrs. Oswald would be indeed a condescension. But there was regard to begin with — there was a strong friendship on her part — nay, he felt sure that there was more — and on his — his soul seemed lost in the ocean of love he felt for her.

So he visited a great deal at Wilta, of course primarily to see his sister, but still he kept himself in Edith's sight. He never forgot himself as he had done on the day of his acquittal; the consciousness that on one important subject they were at variance made him timid and hesitating, and pained her with the thought that she had perhaps misunderstood the real nature of
his feelings. Sybil praised her brother now as much as her father, and met with very unequal sympathy from Edith.

Charlie Gray wrote about young Oswald's constant visits to Talbot, who saw a great deal more against his hand than he had supposed, but still took into account many other points in his favour, especially the society to which his wife would be introduced. The interest which Edith took in her brother was not so strong as it had been; his influence in favour of his friend was not so powerful as it would have been before he left for New Zealand, but so far as it went it was given for his old friend and against young Oswald.

Edith was puzzled with herself; she had thought her attachments and her friendships were constant and steady before this, and felt nevertheless that Charlie no longer occupied the highest place in her heart, not even putting Kenneth out of the field. It was not jealousy of his wife, who was really a dear little thing, and who was so different that there could be no rivalry between them; but in the few years of absence, Walter, who knew every incident that had happened lately, who had sympathized in the anxious watch over Sybil, who had joined in her indignant scorn and hate of Ellerton, who had gone heart and soul in the efforts made to prove Kenneth innocent, and who infinitely preferred young Oswald to Talbot, had grown dearer to her. Somehow in this troubled time, when she could not make out why Kenneth did not follow up his advantages with her, she felt more comfort in the grave elder brother than in the old favourite — whose wife as well as himself was always sounding the praises of the rising barrister in her ears.
Chapter 55 Another Way of Love

Hugh Carmichael stayed at Tingalpa till Kenneth was fairly sick of him, and as he wished to ask his sister to spend a week or two quietly there, he was very anxious that his uncle should give him his congé. No persuasion would induce Kenneth to proceed in any way against his father, and even his uncle had ceased to press it before Carmichael took his departure.

It was a very peaceful visit that Sybil paid. Mr. Oswald tried to look severe at her because of her old influence with his son, and her present influence over his nephew, which strengthened his resistance to the voice of justice and of reason, but the girl won her way to his heart by her gentleness, by her devotion to Kenneth, by her exquisite singing, and by the little touches she gave to the house to take off its rawness and newness. It was sad to see the young thing, barely twenty, worse than a widow, going back to her father's house bankrupt in happiness, and with Kenneth's brotherly love for her only compensation. And to risk putting bitterness between them for the sake of the honour of the Oswalds seemed even to the old man now somewhat cruel. In Hugh Carmichael's absence, Mr. Oswald's kindly nature reasserted itself.

One morning when Kenneth was out, and she was putting some little loving stitches into his clothes, which hitherto had been done by servants, Sybil received a note from Wilta, and joyfully told Mr. Oswald of her expectation that Mr. Gray and Edith would accompany her to Britain, as Charlie Gray could be kept at home to help Walter if he was needed, and the old gentleman would be quite easy in his mind to leave Wilta. George Oswald at once said, "If William Gray goes, so do I! It's just as fair I had a holiday as him. What do you say, Mrs. Oswald? Will you come with me, or will you prefer stopping at home?"

"Of course I'll prefer going with you. After all I've gone through, there is nothing that will set me up like a complete change, and as you leave Kenneth to manage you can be spared," said Mrs. Oswald.

"But I'll not leave Kenneth; he goes too. He needs a change, poor lad, as well as you or me," said her husband decisively.

"Oh! Mr. Oswald," said Sybil, "how good you are. I shall then have his company all the voyage. I'll take him to papa. Oh! he'll be rejoiced over by one and all at Castle Diarmid."

"More than the prodigal son even," said Mrs. Oswald.

"Ten times more, and with no grudge from any one. Oh! Norman, Malcolm, Charlie, Flora, Lydia, and Maggie, will all see who can do the most for him. What can I say to you, Mr. Oswald, to thank you for your
goodness?” and she positively hugged him in her joy.

“But how can the stations be managed without Kenneth,” said Mrs. Oswald. “You say he does so much.”

“The overseers, woman, will do fairly well, and I will make it worth while either for Walter or Charlie Gray to look to things a bit. I'm getting an old man, guid-wife, and there's my father and my mother still in life, and will be blithe to see me, and all the blither if Ken is with us. And if I have not worked for a holiday, I'd like to see the man in Victoria that has.”

“When do you count on going, Mrs. Ellerton?”

“By the next mail steamer, next month; is that too soon for you?”

“I'll make what suits you suit me, I reckon.”

“And then you will take the Suez trip, too. Mr. Gray talks of going via Brindisi, and taking it leisurely through Italy and France, and my father will probably meet us somewhere on the Continent, and I can go home. I hope it will be convenient for you, because, of course, I want as much of Kenneth's society as I can possibly get ——”

“What William Gray can afford, surely I can, either of time or money,” said George Oswald.

“And I suppose you will sell off the furniture and buy new like other people when they go home,” said Mrs. Oswald.

“No, guid-wife; you may buy, but there's to be no selling. There's no new fangled easy chairs that will fit me like this; and I'm not going to turn everything out of the house that our poor Jim handled and looked at, for any kick-shaws you may pick up on your travels. But there's one thing you must keep mind of, guid-wife. Buy something at every place you stop at, and get Ken to label it in a good big hand, and keep it for a reminder, for you're no to disgrace us like the lady on the “Kent”, that threeped she had never seen Rome till she was brought to book about a pair of gloves that split up.”

Kenneth was surprised and delighted at the resolution his uncle had taken to accompany the Grays and Sybil, and overjoyed to hear that he was to be the companion of their travels.

He would be with Edith all the way — he would keep his claims, such as they were, before her, and when she once saw his father and the happy home which was opened for poor Sybil after all her wanderings, she would surely see differently the point on which they had disagreed.

There was to be a large family picnic at the top of the Wilta hills the following week, and Kenneth was invited to join the Grays. Edith was gathering everlastings, white, golden, and purple, and twining them into little wreaths. “There are some graves on the Continent, where I should like to lay Australian flowers. I suppose it would be out of place in
Scotland, Mr. Kenneth.”

“I think it would surprise Scotch people,” said Kenneth.

“The heaths will not stand, but this beauty I feel disposed to twine in,” said Edith. “Indeed, I have a feeling that the perishable should be mixed with the immortelles, as a type of human life and human hopes. Some things must die, but the best things must live. To me the strongest argument of all for immortality is the strength of the affections. It seems to me as if love must endure for ever and ever. And if our love is indestructible, necessarily God's love must thus endure, and He must keep the personal object of His love alive to enjoy it.”

Edith twisted the heath she admired, and received from Kenneth's hand a spray of blue and another of white flowers.

“And yet the most beautiful are the perishable,” said he. “Is it not because we know we hold our dear ones uncertainly, that we prize them most, and that the contingency of death separating us gives its tenderness and its intensity to our deepest affections.”

“That is as we are now,” said Edith, “not as we shall be.”

“There are other things besides death to separate people,” said Water Gray, who was sitting beside Mrs. Ellerton, “distance, estrangement, circumstances.”

“Amor vincit omnia,” said Kenneth, “all things but death. It is vain to say love conquers death. It survives it — but it is beaten by it.”

“To Charlie and Helen, how terrible death must appear at striking at one of them,” said Edith, “every other trouble they would think nothing, their love would conquer it; but as you say, Kenneth, death is terrible when one loves.”

Mrs. Ellerton thought the conversation sounded promising; there had evidently been more difficulty between her brother and Edith than she could have anticipated, and the nature of this difficulty neither of them could reveal to her. Of course housekeeping at Tingalpa near the old Oswalds had its drawbacks; but if Edith loved Kenneth as he deserved, love would conquer even that. Sybil moved away and Walter Gray followed her, and the pair suspected by both to be lovers were left to follow up the train of thought, of which a good deal might be made. But Sybil was by no means prepared for the first result of this step. When they had walked on to a beautiful glen where the ferns grew, and the Wilta creek bickered in the shade of the magnificent white gums which grew on its banks, Walter Gray suggested that she should sit down and rest, and standing over her with his serious handsome face somewhat troubled, he said slowly; ——

“Love conquers all things but death. So long as you live, you are the
object of my hopes ——"

“But you forget — I am a married woman.”

“No true marriage. It deserves to be broken for the very sufficient reasons of cruelty, neglect, desertion, and serious crime. You have no right to be bound by vows made in childish ignorance to a man who trampled on every feeling you had. You do not love him now?”

“No,” said Sybil; “but if he repented.”

“If he repented, he would have to give up his life or his liberty. The only sign of repentance worth having would be his surrender to justice; and he will never do that.”

“Even that does not sunder the marriage-tie in the eyes of the law,” said Sybil.

“No, not unless he were to pay the penalty of his life, and that our Juries are too merciful to enforce. They shut up a murderer in Pentridge for seven or fourteen years and then he comes out to claim his wife and her wifely duty. The law is altogether wrong.”

“But it is the law.”

“Yes, Mrs. Ellerton, unfortunately it is the law, and as your husband is disguised and under a false name, you can never discover whether he is dead or alive. I believe there is some presumption that he is dead after a certain number of years. I can wait. You think if very shocking, but perhaps in time you may think differently.”

“My husband is sure to write to me to keep up some hold on me.”

“I think it very unlikely that he will run the risk of any one discovering his address. He is a murderer skulking for justice, he dares not write. No, Sybil McDiarmid, I consider that in the eyes of God you are divorced from that man. You cannot possibly live with him any more, he dares not claim you. If the world saw things rightly you are again a perfectly free woman; but, as you say, the law is against you, and I would not ask any woman, least of all you, whom I love as I never thought I could love any one, to put yourself at a disadvantage for my sake. As I said, I shall do my utmost for the alteration of the marriage law, so as to shorten the time until you have your perfect liberty, then I shall ask you to marry me; till then I shall wait.”

“Why waste your life on such a remote and visionary hope,” said Sybil.

“I choose to waste it, as you call it. If at the end of the time, short or long, which the law allows, you see fit to choose another I shall regret it. Only you understand what I mean. You are so dear to me that I care more for your happiness than my own, and though I am sorry that you prevailed on your brother to let your husband escape at the risk of his own life, I believe I should have done the same if you had asked me. I thought you preferred Kenneth, and I like other people believed he worshipped you, but now that
we know what he is to you, I put forward my distant claims to your regard.”

“But I am going home, Mr. Walter, you must not sacrifice your whole life and your hopes of happiness to such a remote contingency.”

“It is no matter to me whether you are at Wilta or at Castle Diarmid. It is just as impossible for me to love another woman while you are alive. My father has been sorry that I did not see any one to win my affections, and I know Edith looks on me as confirmed in single life. I am not young, I am not brilliant, but I love you — that is the long and the short of it.”

This was a different sort of love from what had been offered at seventeen by Herbert Ellerton — the love that was impatient, exacting, and passionate — that could not live without her, that had no hold for good apart from her, that defied parental rights, and overbore her yielding nature, so as to make it as headstrong, as wilful, and unreasonable as his own.

No, this was a steadfast man whom even if she rejected, she could not destroy — who would wait and hope, and go on doing his duty by his father and his family — who would love her absent, as he loved her present — who did not attempt to kiss her or to take her hand, but only stood over her with the respect due to a queen.

“I do not ask you now because you are not free, only I wish you to know how I feel. I shall not tell Edith, and I suppose you would rather not. I shall rejoice in your happy meeting with your dear ones at home. If you allow me to write to you, trust me that I shall not press you until I may, but whether you permit that or not you need not doubt the genuineness of my feelings. I think you would rather I left you now; would you return to our friends, or shall I leave you and return?” Sybil could scarcely articulate that she would prefer to return; she was more afraid of solitary thought than of society.

Walter Gray, the clever keen man of business, to throw himself thus at her feet. She looked into her own heart. There was none of the old love left in it — no it was empty, and swept, and garnished so far as the old wifely feeling was concerned. She had filled it with Kenneth, and thought there was no void; she kept her family and her friends in their old warm places, and the sensation of relief from the pain the wounded trampled love had suffered, had made her think herself happy.

But — but — this was bewildering — only it needed no answer, it pressed for no consideration now. She returned to her brother and Edith, and Walter Gray looked as calm and collected as if there had been no such extra-ordinary declaration on his part. And Kenneth had apparently made but little use of the opportunity so rashly given. There was pain on his face,
and something like displeasure on Edith's.

Charles Gray and his Helen, who thought they had run through the whole gamut of love in their recent experience, had touched no such notes as those which were now vibrating in the heart of the grave Walter or the apparently indifferent Edith. Their love had been so natural, so prosperous, so fostered by everybody and every circumstance; and the proverb that the course of true love never does run smooth, only proves the universal consciousness that it is when love is thwarted that it most powerfully proves itself true.
Chapter 56 George Oswald's Move

George Oswald and the family at Wilta made ready for their sudden move towards the old country with a rapidity that would strike old English folks with astonishment. Kenneth's uncle kept his word. Wherever William Gray went he would go; whatever sights the Grays went to see the Oswalds would not be left behind; whether the places were interesting to himself or not he would stay as long in them, and not stir till they did. If the Grays left the bulk of the Australian passengers at Galle and spent some days at Ceylon and then went to Bombay, Bombay had irresistible attractions to the Oswalds. If a party was made to visit the caves of Elephanta the old enemies of Wilta and Tingalpa went together. If Miss Gray determined on a leisurely survey of Italy and persuaded her father to go from town to town, and to explore more minutely than the average English traveller (let alone the Australian) those ancient cities, so widely different in appearance and associations from the brand newness of Melbourne, against which she had always protested, their movements regulated those of the Oswalds.

By letters received at Brindisi, Sybil learnt that her father did not wish to deprive her of so much pleasure as she should have in thus travelling about with her brother and her friends. He would meet her in Paris or at any other place she appointed; meet her and his dear Kenneth, to whom he wrote with the warmest affection. The party calculated their movements as well as they could, and gave the times when they were likely to be in the Italian cities and in Paris, and it was decided that Mr. McDiarmid should join the party at Florence and take Sybil home.

Our Australians greatly enjoyed Italy — the climate so like their own in warmth, though bathed by the rains of the Mediterranean so much more profusely; and the manners, the cultivation, the buildings, the associations, so very different. Naples and its surroundings, Vesuvius and Pompeii. Rome with the new life breathed into it as the capital of a restored nationality was rich in other things besides gloves to all but Mrs. Oswald, and even she seemed to take in some ideas by the eye, and went through churches and picture galleries as if she enjoyed them. Mr. Gray took an intelligent interest in all he saw, though he did not go into such raptures as his daughter, who seemed to tread on air. Sybil loved the music she heard in the churches and at the opera, even more than the paintings; and Kenneth, true to his old character of being an all-round boy, enjoyed this travelling about under all different lights.

Mr. Oswald knew it was the thing to do, and whatever it was needful for William Gray's daughter to see and hear, it was incumbent on his nephew
and heir to see and hear it too. Some of Mrs. Oswald's maternal affection had been transferred to Kenneth, who after his acquittal by means of the watch she had chosen for poor Jim, had been particularly kind and thoughtful to her. He would sit by her at Tingalpa and on board ship for an hour at a time, and hear her talk about her poor boy when he was a little fellow, and how hard it was for them to lose him just when he had got old enough to be a comfort to her. Anything that he could say in Jim's favour Kenneth said, and he listened with kind attention.

Kenneth often winced when his uncle made a blunder in etiquette or otherwise before Edith Gray, and he felt it still more when his aunt fastened upon her to give vent to her tiresome platitudes. On the whole, however, Mrs. Oswald enjoyed the voyage, and the changes from place to place; and in her handsome black silk and crepe she looked as "well put on," to use her husband's words, as anybody on board. But it was Edith Gray whom the old man's eyes followed, and her admirers whom he watched in Kenneth's interests. The young fellow was too bashful; he let other men, not fit to hold the candle to him, step in before him, and sit beside Miss Gray at meals, while he sat persistently next to his sister all the voyage. When concerts were given on board Mrs. Ellerton was the leading lady, and even the partial George Oswald himself could not allow that Miss Gray's tolerable contralto voice was to compare with the wonderful soprano on which that blackguard Ellerton wanted to make a living. But Edith's speaking voice was to Mr. Oswald the pleasantest thing in the world, and he got to be great friends, as he called it, with her. Kenneth took part in all the entertainments — musical and dramatic — that were got up to relieve the tedium of the voyage, and his uncle was proud of his talents and of that pleasantness which had won him friends from childhood upwards. He was proud of the nephew he had made a gentleman of, and proud to see that he always treated himself and Mrs. Oswald with deference. Where could Edith Gray see any one better in any way than Kenneth? What made the stupid fellow so backward? Now that they were making their voyage in the mail steamer, and doing the Continent thoroughly in company with the Grays, he felt that they had taken the concluding step up the social ladder to raise the Oswalds to the same level. It was well laid out money. He would never think to grudge it.

It was not till they got to Florence that it dawned upon the old man that he could substantially serve his nephew by confiding to Edith's private ear his conviction that documents proving a binding marriage had been given by Isabel's dying order to Mr. McDiarmid by Kenneth's own hands, and that Carmichael could have proved the same if he could have got Kenneth to take up the idea.
This, he thought, would satisfy her that there was no real stain on his sister's name, but that Kenneth had been too much taken up with his father and his sister to act upon it; for, as he said, it was hard to distress so many living for the sake of the dead, and what his mother had seen fit to bear, he would bear too, for his father's sake.

Edith had regained in a great measure her old easy manner with Kenneth on shipboard, and especially now in Italy, where they had so many subjects of common interest, and where they were much more thrown together. She thought she must have somehow misunderstood his words and looks on the memorable day of his trial. The excitement of his acquittal, and of the acknowledgment of his relationship to Sybil, had been such a relief to him that he had scarcely know what he said or did. Her own feelings she could not mistake. She wanted to win his heart if she had not already done it, and she delighted in his companionship.

When, however, old Mr. Oswald told his story she understood clearly the cause of the comparative estrangement that had so pained and humiliated her, and why Kenneth had taken no steps to strengthen the favourable impression he must have known he had made on her heart. He knew that he could do what she so earnestly wished him to do, and he did not choose to do it. There was one triumphant and delicious feeling in her heart that she had not mistaken — that he loved her; and then came the mortifying thought that his love was not "best love", that it could not conquer all things.

With George Eliot's *Romola* in their hands as a sort of a guide-book, and old volumes of Robert or Elizabeth Browning to supplement it, our Australian travellers had gone through Florence the Beautiful with the greatest enjoyment on the part of the younger members. They lingered at the Casa Guidi windows, from which the married poets had witnessed the first struggles for Italian liberty; they pictured to themselves “their young Florentine” on his mother's knees, looking out with vague pleased wonder on what the parents understood, sympathized with, and hoped such great results from. On this, the day after George Oswald's betrayal of confidence, Edith whose mind was full of the troubled thoughts suggested to her, and who was wondering how she could let Kenneth know what she thought of his scruples, took her way, as had been arranged the preceding day, to the English Cemetery, with Sybil and her brother. Mr. Oswald and Mr. Gray went to see some irrigation works near the city, and Mrs. Oswald elected to go with them. She did not care much about irrigation works, but she liked cemeteries still less, and she could not bear to be left alone at the hotel, so a message was left for Mr. McDiarmid that the young people, in whom he was so much interested, were at the cemetery, and directions given for him
to follow in case he arrived during their absence. The beautiful quiet burial-ground in the midst of the grand medieval city, with all the hum of life stilled as if the heart had suddenly stopped, where so many of England's brightest and best have found a final resting place, had particular charms for our trio. They saw a party of Americans leaving the cemetery who had just laid a wreath of immortelles on Theodore Parker's grave, and Edith took note that it was the ordinary wreath bought in Florence.

“This of mine is unique, I hope,” said she, as she moved towards the plain white marble sarcophagus, with the initials E.B.B., and the date 1861. “These are the Australian immortelles, we gathered that day in the Wilta Hills, and here, Mr. Kenneth, are those withered sprays of blue and white twined amongst them. The immortelles are the most beautiful now, but I think with you that the mixture is appropriate.”

“Surely,” said Kenneth, “genius is the strongest link to bind the world together. From the Australian wilds to the busy centre of old civilization this poor wreath of faded flowers and vigorous immortelles has been brought by the attraction of reverent and loving gratitude and admiration.”

“There is nothing for which we should be so grateful to the old country as for its literature. I hope it may weld the English-speaking peoples together firmly by-and-by,” said Edith, and she sat down on the grass by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's grave, and reverently placed her Australian wreath on the spot where the poetess's head was laid. On all matters of literature and art, Kenneth and Miss Gray had perfect sympathies, and she felt this a safe subject for conversation. He, too, liked it, for this mental sympathy might lead her to overlook the great drawback to the position which he had to offer.

“We are nearer to England for all practical purposes,” said Kenneth, “in Melbourne than the American colonies ever were, and I feel sure that its literature takes a very strong hold on the colonial mind. Perhaps we may be longer in developing any distinctive literature of our own. We see,” and he looked towards the volume he held in his hand, which was *Romola*, “that the literature of Greece and Rome, which was unburied after the darkness of the middle ages, made the men of the Renaissance feel nearer to the old republics than to their modern monarchies. The true modern spirit had to be formed afterwards, when the modern intellect had evolved from the fusion of old and new what was more suited to the needs of the time.”

“Yet, I suppose the masterpieces of the past can never be equalled,” said Edith; “that as works of art they stand unapproachable.”

“The only art which has incontestably advanced is music,” said Sybil. “That is creation, not imitation; and to my mind the highest of all.”

“There is a singleness of aim in ancient poetry and in ancient art,” said
Kenneth, “that can scarcely be equalled in our complex civilization.”

“Still,” said Edith, “the modern literature — with its variety, with its impressibleness, with its colours more shifting, its forms less rigid — touches my human sympathies more. The characters are less grand and statuesque, but worked on by so many different influences — influences which I feel have power over myself, so that I can feel with them and live in them more fully. Our Brownings, for example, touch me far more than Greek tragedy. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* never could speak to the heart of any century as it does to that of this nineteenth. One misses something in the very best of the oldest writers in the power of touching the chords that thrill us now. Shakespeare is, perhaps, an exception; but Shakespeare is like the Bible — people take a great deal to Shakespeare that they take out again.”

“Well, I suppose the limitations of ancient art gave power and intensity,” said Kenneth, “whereas the freedom of modern expression of art gives variety and completeness. No man or woman can be drawn by one or two strong outlines, though they may strike a superficial observer as correct. The essence of caricature is to exaggerate these few lines, and the world says how clever! how striking! But” — and he again looked on the volume of *Romola* — “a Tito Malema is not struck off by two or three rapid strokes.”

“Portraiture,” said Edith, “ought to catch the subtler lines and fainter shadows as well as the outlines; to embody a characteristic thought, fleeting expression — nay, to embody several expressions in one whole.”

“That is the weakness of photography,” said Sybil. “I have several likenesses of my father, and, though they are all like him, they are scarcely like each other. Kenneth is the same — he is even harder to take than his father; and you, Edith, are the most disappointing of all. I wish we could get the ‘old masters’ to take you and make you a really beautiful portrait. It is the mobility of both your faces that gives them their charm. Whereas I look always the same in half a dozen different photographs.”

“Your face has a steady sweetness in it, and your features are regular, whereas mine do not stand taking to pieces at all,” said Edith. “But to return to our first subject. There were a large proportion of our fellow-passengers who never had heard of the Brownings at all. Your aunt, for instance.”

“Poor aunt,” said Kenneth, “she finds the magazines enough for her. There is a great gap between her and my uncle, who reads the newspapers, and at least is up in the local news and the ‘Talk on Change,’ and relishes it much when he can lay his finger on the man who is the hero of a good story. But even a novel is too tedious for him to read, though if he is ill
he'll stand a good one being read to him; and he does no care about verse unless it is a song, or a skit at someone. Then, there is Mr. Gray, with an intelligent interest in political news, both in Victoria and England, who keeps up with the new books very fairly, and has a thorough knowledge of the old classics, which I regret much I have never had time to keep up; but the gap between him and Uncle George is very great.

“I am very fond of your Uncle George,” said Edith.

“You ought to be, for he worships you, Miss Gray.”
Chapter 57 Edith Gray's Ultimatum

Sybil saw some one in the distance whom she thought she recognized. She moved away and left her brother and friend alone. There was an awkward pause for a minute.

“And you think this a fitting tribute,” said Kenneth, and he touched lightly the wreath on the tomb.

“Yes, I do. I have one at home that I wove the same day with you looking on, but that was for some one else, and perhaps I may not be at the place.”

“Was it for any great poet or poetess,” asked Kenneth.

“No, it was for your mother's grave, if I could ever get to see it, for my heart was full of her, and Sybil was constantly turning her thoughts to her father, while mine turned towards your mother. I thought as I twisted the flowers together under your eyes, that I should like to lay it on her grave as a type of my faith in her.”

“Miss Gray,” said Kenneth, “you know my heart, you cannot but know that I have loved you long and much — but for the ‘blot on my scutcheon’ I should have told you long ago.”

“There is no real blot, Kenneth,” said Edith, steadily.

“Then you return my love. You will at least let me hope to win your heart,” and Kenneth waited breathless for her answer.

“Right your mother's fame. Extort from your father the tardy justice he owes her, and I will love you with my whole heart and soul; love you as I believe no woman ever loved yet.”

“Is that the condition? Edith Gray, it is a hard one.”

“Men think so lightly of putting us aside for their own pleasure. Gentlemen care so little for plebeian women who sacrifice every thing for them,” said Miss Gray. “I feel sure that your mother was so generous that she could not disturb your father's tranquillity. Your uncle says she was married, and I believe it. He also says you can prove it, and you will not. You are as generous as your mother. I believe you would rather lose me than hurt or grieve Mr. McDiarmid. And you say you love me, say it again,

“Say over again, and yet over, over again
That thou dost love me,”

said Edith, quoting from the love sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett to Robert Browning, which one wonders that she ever published, though they are thinly veiled as translations from the Portuguese.
“I love you, love you, love you — minding, dear. 
To love you also in silence with my soul,”

said Kenneth, taking up the sonnet further on. “I have loved you from the first day I saw you, I have borne to be misunderstood, and warned and advised as to a love to another, advice, however misplaced, that was delicious because it came from you, and made me come nearer to you than you would have allowed if you had suspected my true feelings. I loved you long without hope, but I love you now with hope, for you love me again.”

“I love, oh! how I love the Kenneth McDiarmid who will do the right thing when I ask him,” and she turned her face full on her lover with the most enchanting, the most bewildering light in those brown eyes, which looked larger and deeper than ever before.

“You must love the Kenneth Oswald who does what he himself thinks right,” said Kenneth, trembling all over with passionate emotion, “and you shall love him. It is my conscience which I have to satisfy and not yours, as you once said to me on one of the hard days you and I have had together. And my own conscience I must not disobey for any man or woman alive, although that woman is Edith Gray.”

The stood up beautiful, defiant, opposite to each other, and they suddenly became aware of two persons approaching; Sybil Ellerton on her father's arm hurrying forward in the greatest excitement and agitation.

“He has come, he has come. I saw him in the distance. Oh! thank God, here he is. Papa, this is Kenneth and Edith Gray.”

“Do I not know my son,” said Mr. McDiarmid, with an embrace as close, but not so bitter as that which had taken place between them on the day when Kenneth knew his secret. “Do I not know my Kenneth?” He looked him all over admiringly; how handsome, how strong, how manly he had grown. He was so full of his delight in him, that he scarcely noticed the handsome young woman who stood a little apart, with her imperfect sympathy with the whole scene. She was deeply prejudiced against the father, and irritated against the son. He had said she should love him as he was, he had asserted his power to make her yield; she would assert her power to do without him if he did not comply with her wishes. She had wearied of Sybil's excessive praise of and constant talk about her father, and how grateful he was to Kenneth, and that he would introduce him everywhere as his son whatever people might or might not say.

Ruffled by this iteration, and at present stimulated by George Oswald's assertions and Kenneth's obstinacy, she was in no mood to receive with her usual kindly courtesy Mr. McDiarmid's tardy greeting. She answered him
coldly, and said she thought she had better go to the hotel by herself, and leave the family party to have their talk out.

“But I consider you one of the family party,” said Sybil. “No sister could have been kinder, no sister can be dearer to me. Papa, don't let Edith go. Kenneth, bring her back, or let us follow her. Do you feel it sad meeting thus in a cemetery, papa?”

“It is where we must all meet at last,” said Mr. McDiarmid, who was thinking of that quiet churchyard in Scotland where Isabel Oswald lay, and wondering if she could see or witness in any way this happy meeting between father and son.

“Everything has been out of place between you and me, Kenneth,” said his father sadly. “You have given everything, I have been able to give nothing. But, thank God, that you have been permitted to help and comfort your sister in her many sore trials. We must go after Miss Gray, she must not be allowed to go home alone. She must think me ungrateful, I really could see nobody but Kenneth.”

They hastened their steps, and soon overtook the young lady, though she was walking rapidly. Norman McDiarmid tried to get her to talk, and was surprised that he made so little way with her, for he had heard from Sybil so much about Edith's cleverness and goodness. The attitude in which they had surprised the young people was peculiar. There must be some misunderstanding somewhere, for she was constrained with Kenneth as well as with himself.

When they returned to the hotel, the seniors were not there. Sybil was full of questions about her mother, her brothers, her sisters, the garden, the animals, the neighbours, everything great and small, about the old home. She said she was quite ready to leave Florence and go straight to Scotland as soon as her father wished, but he said he wished to get acquainted with Mr. Gray and Mr. Oswald, and would remain, if permitted, in their company for a week.

“To tell the truth, Sybil, my great desire is to see more of Kenneth, but I have no right to control his movements. He is, of course, at his uncle's disposal.”

“And his uncle's disposition is that he should never lose sight of Edith,” whispered Sybil. And she drew her father into an embrazoned window, of which there were many in the hotel, which, like most hotels in Italian cities, was an old palace. “Not only do the properties join, but the old man positively idolizes her, and if Kenneth is remiss in his devotion, his uncle never slackens. But I believe my brother has asked her, and she has refused him this very day.”

“Surely he is rich enough and handsome enough, and God knows, good
enough, for the best woman in the world.”

“So I thought, I fancied he had only to speak, and wondered both at his reserve about it with me, and at his diffidence with her, but there is something wrong evidently.”

“It must be the birth — my poor boy — to be punished for my sin. Can I do anything to help the affair,” asked Mr. McDiarmid.

“We shall see,” said Sybil. “It puzzles me, it perplexes me beyond measure. And you told mamma all about it?”

“I told her the whole sad story when I came from Norway, and saw poor Kenneth’s careful letter.”

“Which I was so cruel to him about. And what did mamma say?”

“Your mamma was an angel — better than an angel, perhaps — a good true woman. She knew there was something before we were married. My mother told her, but that it was completely at an end, and advised her never to allude to the subject as her wisest course. I wish I had had courage to tell her before.”

“And the children — is not it strange to them?”

“Well, Sybil, your mother undertook to break it to them, and I must say they seemed to do nothing but rejoice. To the young ones it seemed such a natural thing to think that the rich Australian uncle had adopted him, and given him his own name. The older ones, of course, understand, but in spite of my humiliation I feel indescribably happy.”

“And so do I, dear papa. I am going to be happy now?”

“It is but a wrecked life, darling, but it will be a peaceful one, and that your troubles have won me my son and you your brother, may console you a little. You have won friends in Australia, too, worth making and keeping.” Sybil thought of that quiet steadfast man at Wilta who could wait. She paused a little before she said:—

“I don't deserve half as much love as I receive from you and from everybody. And I am keeping you from Kenneth, and he is not getting on just as I could wish with Edith. Let us have no more secrets.” And she moved out of the recess with her father.

Mr. Gray and Mr. Oswald came in soon after from their drive. Many years had elapsed since William Gray had left the Highland village where his father was the country surgeon, when Norman McDiarmid was a mere boy, but they recognized each other at once, and greeted each other most cordially. George Oswald hung back a little and held back his wife, who was somewhat inclined to press forward to see the distinguished-looking man, who was Kenneth Oswald's father.

“Mr. McDiarmid — Mrs. Oswald, Mr. Oswald,” said Mr. Gray. Edith who stood a little apart, watched with suspicious eyes the greeting between
the aristocratic father and the homely uncle of her obstinately inflexible lover.

“I have more to thank you all for than I have words to put it in,” said Mr. McDiarmid, speaking with difficulty, with many pauses and much trembling of the voice. “What you, Mr Oswald, have done for my Kenneth, lays me under the deepest obligation. . . . What you Mr. and Miss Gray have done for Sybil through the whole time of her Australian life, in her sickness and her sorrow, in her terror and in her humiliation has been like the tenderest care of the nearest relative, rather than what might have been expected from our being neighbours in our younger days. . . . My debts to Australian friends make me feel absolutely bankrupt in thanks.”

Edith could not but own that this was well said. The stress laid upon my Kenneth was marked — the greeting to Mr. Oswald was as graceful as possible — Kenneth was certainly owned, but not sufficiently owned.

George Oswald turned to his special favourite, Edith Gray, and looked questionably at her. “Would that do?” was the question on his face. She did not let him in to all her feelings. She thought she had carried matters a little further than even Uncle George would approve of.

“It's all like the last page of a story-book,” said she. “Everybody is so pleased, everybody has only to be happy ever after. Only I always want to turn the leaf and find an epilogue — something further about the dramatis personae.”

“But until death comes,” said Mr. Oswald, “there is really no stopping-place. Who would have thought a year back that you and me would be travelling together in foreign parts without my poor Jim, and meeting Kenneth's father too, speaking so fair, and I must say taking him by the hand, nigh-hand as he should do. Who can tell where we will be a year hence? Back in Victoria I hope, but there's no saying.”

“The old folks will be wearying to see you and your nephew,” said Edith. “My father has no parents left alive, no relatives nearer than cousins in the old country. But there are plenty of Victorians, particularly in and about London, whom we know well and mean to visit. But of course I don't feel pulled home as you and your nephew do. I could linger in Italy for months yet — if papa does not weary, which I fear he will do.”

“I'll not weary before him,” said Mr. Oswald, “nor Kenneth neither, nor the wife, she likes to see all that's to be seen like the best of them.”

“I'm sure Mr. McDiarmid wants to take his — I mean Mr. Kenneth home with him,” said Edith.

“Well let him. The more they are together the better he'll see the rightful claims Kenneth has upon him.”

During the time which our travellers spent in the Italian cities and in
Paris, Norman McDiarmid while he rejoiced in his recovered daughter and his discovered son, and while he made his way even with George Oswald and his wife, found Miss Gray the most disappointing person of the party. She was coldly civil to him, she would not let herself expand before him; she was abrupt to Kenneth, she was unreasonable even with her friend Sybil. And yet she was not at ease. In her heart she felt her lover's words, “You shall love me as Kenneth Oswald.” She knew they had come true, that she loved him in spite of his obstinacy, nay partly because of it. Everybody at home, from the grave Walter and the sprightly Charlie to her father himself had yielded to her every wish, and here was a man who would not, though he might lose her for it. But he suffered, she rejoiced to think that he suffered. When he was sitting or walking with his father and his face showed unmistakably the pleasure and pride they had in each other, one glance at her indifferent unsympathizing countenance would make him look blank, and repel the pleasant rejoinder he had meant to make to some observation from the other.

She could read his face now like a book, and flattered herself that he could not read her so well.

Now, however, they turned their steps homeward, really to the North Countrie. Mr. Oswald said that his party must first go to see the old folks, and after that they would accept the invitation to Castle Diarmid. Sybil hoped that when Kenneth was absent Edith might miss him and would come to her senses. She herself was eager to go home, and entreated Mr. Gray and his daughter to accompany them to the North. But Mr. Gray pleaded business in London, and Edith her strong desire to see some London sights, so the party which had been for months inseparable dispersed for a time.

Kenneth felt Edith's reception of his offered love very hard, but still he had strong hopes. She loved him, and love conquers all things. He was pained at her conduct to his father, and sorry to see that she made so unfavourable an impression on him, but he could wait. She must learn to be as generous for him as she could be for herself — for he knew that if the claim she wished him to urge had been presented to Edith as a personal matter of her own, that she would have as indignantly refused to better her own position at the expense of innocent people as he could do. There was no mistake about the words she used. Only the particular difficulty which was to be got over was one which he could not divulge to his father or to Sybil, and he felt that his father expected full confidence, and was disappointed because it was not given.
Chapter 58 The Old Folks at Home

Whatever ideas old John and Marion Oswald had formed as to the grandeur of their son George and their grandson Kenneth were fully realized when they came to see them, and took apartments at the nearest hotel, but spent the days entirely with them.

Kenneth had grown so manly that he looked more than his age; still he was quite recognizable after about five years' absence, but George who had been in Victoria for thirty years and more, and had aged a great deal with his family troubles, was much harder to make out. As he sat beside his old father, there did not seem so much between them—the placid years that had latterly rolled over the old folk had been undisturbed to any great extent by what had made George Oswald's hair silvery-white, and bent his once vigorous frame, and which had added years to Kenneth's own apparent age.

“And here's Nelly,” said the grandmother, “grown older too.”

“And bonnier than ever,” said Kenneth.

“Like to be married soon,” said the old woman, “at least so I fancy.”

“No,” said Nelly, blushing, “I am not going to marry William Cuthbert.”

“I ken better, Nelly, he's been courting you long.”

“That does not always answer, though it generally does. But who is this William Cuthbert, grandmother?” asked Kenneth.

“A very decent lad, a watchmaker to his trade, he lives in the town, and is muckle respectit.”

“But you're not wearying to get quit of me, auntie,” said Nelly.

“Deed no,” said Mrs. Oswald, “but when an honest man spiers for a lass in an honest way, I would no stan' in his gait. What ails ye at William Cuthbert?”

“Nothing ails me, auntie,” for that was the title she gave to the old woman, “but just that I think one needs a lot of love to begin with to stand the tear and wear of life with all its cares and troubles, and I don't think William Cuthbert cares as much about me as would make it safe. I'm better as I am.”

“You may sit out your market, Nelly, lass, and have to take the crooked stick at last,” said the old woman.

“No fear of that for some years to come,” said Kenneth, pleasantly.

“We're not going to follow the French fashion and choose for you, for fear you should choose foolishly for yourself. I must see this William Cuthbert, and make his acquaintance, and find out if he deserves our Nelly, who wrote to me so regularly and took such loving care of you and
grandfather,” and he put his arm kindly on the old woman's shoulder, which was the nearest approach to a caress that she admitted of. Mrs. Oswald looked a little dissatisfied at his view of Nelly's case, but the girl took an early opportunity of telling Kenneth that she was known to have saved money, and to receive constant gifts from Australia, and she thought William Cuthbert was a little eager about that, and not really so much taken up about herself.

Kenneth was rather shocked at the languid amount of sympathy which the old folks showed about poor Jim's death. Indeed, the grandmother thought it only put Kenneth into his proper place, the place she had always looked forward to for him from the receipt of the first letter about the boy; and though she said a few commonplaces about the awful dispensation, and the suddenness and horribleness of the thing, she evidently felt that there was balm in Gilead.

She was astonished to hear that Kenneth's father had met them in Italy, had owned him as his son, and seemed more taken up with him than even with the daughter they took home with them, and that they, the Oswalds, were to visit the family in their northern Castle soon. Of course George with his riches, and his wife with her “silk gowns that could stand their lane,” were fit company for any lord or lady in the land, but she had never thought that they would ever cross the door-stane of Castle Diarmid.

In a private interview with his parents he got his mother to go over the old grievance of the abstraction of papers under the most suspicious circumstances. There had been some step that Isabel would not take that might have righted her.

“And which Kenneth will not take either, confound his scruples,” said the uncle. “It's not for his sake but for the credit of our house, that is as honest a house as the McDiarmids'. But I cannot say but the man was civil and grateful, and as proud of Kenneth as if he was his heir, instead of being mine, that's worth a hantle mair siller, at any rate.”

“Well, he may be proud of Kenneth,” said the grandmother. “He's as like poor Isabel as he can be.”

“That's a bonnie lass you've got minding you, mother,” said George Oswald.

“Oh aye she's a weel eneuch,” was the rejoinder.

“What do you say, George. I'm a wee dull o' hearing,” said the old man.

“I was telling my mother that that's an uncommon bonny lass you've got taking care of you, Nelly Lindores, I think Kenneth calls her, and a good one to write she's been—never missed a month, and he never missed her. In prison or out of it, Nelly was never cheated out of her letter.”

“It was only on our account the writing gaed on. I'm no ready wi' the pen,
nor is the good man,” said Marian Oswald.

“Aye, George,” said John Oswald, “she's a by ordinar thoughtful lass. The mother there is some set on her being marriet on a chield called Cuthbert, a watchmaker to his trade, that is courting her like, but I'm in no such hurry to pairt wi' Nelly.”

“Kenneth is going to get acquaint with William Cuthbert, and I dare say Nelly will be guided some by what he says,” said Mrs. Oswald.

“He was aye minding upon Nelly, and sending her bits of things and whiles money in her letters,” said the old man. “They were neebour's bairns, George, as ye ken, and went to the schule thegither. I fancy her father thinks Kenneth might draw up wi' her now.”

“Kenneth,” said his uncle with dignity. “If you only saw the lass he's got his eyes on now, you'd never even him to the like of Nelly Lindores, bonny lass as no doubt she is. Just tip top every way—money, connection, education, and accomplishments, and common sense into the bargain. Only they have had a sort of cast out—just this wee while back. I'll be bound it will all come right though.”

“Money, did you say?” said the old woman, pricking up her ears; “an only daughter, like.”

“No, there's five of them, and they'll each have their share, but an Australian fortune will stand dividing. There's Wilta, and Paralla, and Bulpena in Victoria, and Buragulla in Queensland, and the new place, Otihika, in New Zealand, all stations stocked and in working order. There's lots for all.”

The old woman's eyes watered at the recital of all this unknown wealth in apparently unknown languages. It had as soothing a sound to her as the Scripture names of Cappadocia and Mesopotamia.

“And a fine lass ye say, George,” said the old man.

“I don't see as much as you do in Miss Gray,” said Mrs. George Oswald, who came in from changing her dress, by which she impressed the old folks greatly, for she merely exchanged one rich black silk for another.

“Of course you don't, good wife,” said her husband. “Did ever woman alive see the good points in another woman as a man can do?”

“And as for her dress, she is always months behind the fashion!”

“We cannot all be as far forrit there as you, Mrs. Oswald. I never said she would do to stick in a fashion-book. Her face is never two minutes the same, her eyes have new light in them every time you look at them. Her waist is not to be spanned with two hands, not even such big one as mine. There's room there for a good big heart beating true to her friends, and room for Kenneth when she'll just open the door she's holding a thought too close shut for her own comfort. Aye and room for a good pair of lungs
to give her breath to climb the Wilta and Tingalpa hills, and she has feet big enough to walk a dozen miles on. I had set my heart on her for Jim, poor fellow, but that was not to be, and so I fall back on your laddie, mother.”

The old lady felt relieved that her grandson's affections were so worthily and so prudently engaged, and distressed herself no more about William Cuthbert's excellent offer—nor did Kenneth see any necessity for forming the young man's acquaintance when he saw that neither Nelly's heart nor fancy was in the least engaged by him.

On the following day arrived Harry Stalker, by appointment, to pay a visit to his friend and to be introduced to his friend's uncle and aunt. Nelly Lindores' pretty face lighted up at the old flashes of talk; though she did not say much, not a point was lost on her of Harry's vagrant humour or Kenneth's pleasant repartees. George Oswald was greatly taken with the young minister, who was to preach on the Sabbath ensuing for the parish incumbent. He would be sure to give them something fresh and racy. Last time he had been round Mr. McDrone, who was an orthodox proser of the old school, had been rather scandalized to see that old Tibbie Mathieson, who used peacefully to go to sleep every Sunday over his short sermons, kept awake all the time that this young man held forth, though he was not particularly brief. On his next pastoral visit to the worthy old woman in her cottage, he said pleasantly enough:

“Well, Tibbie, I've just a little observation to make to you. I notice that just after I've given out my text you lay back your head and go off to sleep, and I'm not denying that the Sabbath is given for us to rest, and if you do not get enough of that in your bed you're welcome to take it out in the kirk. But I also remark that when the like of Mr. Stalker, or any young chap from Edinburgh comes to give us a turn, you're as gleg and as wakeful as the youngest in the kirk. How do you account for that, Tibbie?”

“Weel, Sir, ye see, it's just this. Ye're a kenned hand, and we can lippen (trust) to you, and when ye've gi'en out the text I ken fu'weel what ye'll make o't. It'll be all soond Gospel doctrine. But when the like o' young Stalker or thae birkies frae Edinbro' comes down, my certy, they need watchin'. There's nae kennin' frae the text what they're like to mak o't.”
Chapter 59 Harry Stalker's Failure

To Harry in private confidential conversation, Kenneth poured out, not the personal talk which his friend expected, and which he longed to hear, but all sorts of things only ideally connected with the circumstances in which he had been placed. He began to discuss science, philosophy, literature, art, criticism; he recalled for Harry's edification, the talk with Edith which had been arrested by the stormy scene at Mrs. Browning's grave, and he brought up some questions of casuistry arising out of the circumstances in which he had been placed without detailing or defining these circumstances.

"I am no Doctor Dubitantium," Harry interrupted him with, "put no conscience questions to me. I need enlightenment sorely myself. After fighting with my difficulties so long I fear I must cave in at last. You seem to have come pretty straight out of the troubles which I saw before you, and out of other troubles which I could not see. But then, as I always said, you were the round man, and no squareness of your hole could affect you as my round hole presses on all the angles of my nature. You were always such a pleasant fellow, Kenneth, and ready with another thing if one failed, and you went up to your difficulties differently from what I could do. I never could have won on that uncultivated uncle or that idiotic aunt of yours, as you have done, or had the patience with the son and heir, or thrown aside my books and taken to sheep with the goodwill you have shown. I know it was an awful pull once, and how did you get over it?"

"I think it was mainly because my uncle needed me and depended on me—and other things helped to keep me up," said Kenneth.

"Well my uncle needs me and says he depends on me, but somehow whatever I do to please him does not please myself, and what I would fain do to please myself would mortally offend him. There he is placed in a remote Highland parish, where three-fourths of the inhabitants belong to the Free Church, and the bulk of both sects are Calvinists of the Calvinists. It is a pretty church, a fair living, and an excellent manse—the patron is glad of some intelligent society, and my uncle and I are asked to the great house three times a week during the season; and other times we suffer from stagnation. My uncle is too old to preach himself, and I might as well preach to stone walls as to the little congregation, unless when the great folks and their guests are there. I see no fruit of any of my work, and if I had not some writing to do—anonymous writing, where I can speak my mind, I think I should go mad."

"Why not leave this parish, and get a city charge. They want such young
men as you in prominent places in the Church. There is a great dearth of talent and zeal.”

“I may have the talent, Kenneth, but I have not got the zeal. If I could only get a spark of that divine faith which your friend the bush missionary has to guide him, life to me would have a meaning. I should seek my work and do it, but it is not so.”

“You would like to give up the Church altogether, Harry, and take to something else.”

“I cannot ever make up my mind to that. What am I really fit for? If I have any gift at all, it is rather in speaking than in writing. I have felt oftentimes, when addressing a cultivated congregation or at a public meeting, where there was a proportion of cultivated people to leaven the lump, something of the triumph and joy of the orator; and singularly enough, though with my own faith so unfixed and so useless to myself, I can present what I hope is the truth, or as much of the truth as I can lay hold of with wonderful vividness and power. But every thoughtful preacher in our Presbyterian Churches works in fetters—not only with the risk of being arraigned for heresy before the Church Courts, but with the certain conviction that in seeking the truth and, so far as he sees it, expounding it, he is paltering with his own vows and subscriptions. And the worst of it is, I have not the martyr spirit. I need more certainty that I am right to risk prosecution and trial. I need more courage to shake myself free from it all, to leave my uncle, who is very much attached to me, and has been very kind to me, in his old age, to go (as he would think) to certain destruction. And with all my objections to its dogmas, I have a strong traditional attachment to the Kirk of my forefathers, where four generations of Stalkers have preached in parish pulpits and done parish pastoral work.”

“And you find the last part of the duty even harder than the preaching,” said Kenneth. “I wish you could take a lesson from my bush missionary.”

“Ah! Kenneth, but then he was among men and women ignorant of theology, to whom he tried to ingratiate himself, and open their souls to receive divine things by taking a natural interest in the things they cared about, but all the men and women in my Highland parish are perfect in the fine points of Calvinism, and can lay down the law to me, who they think am puffed up with carnal knowledge. Not instruction, but destruction, is what I feel called on to do. I often feel like a denouncing prophet. They do not need instructing—it is the destroying of their set notions that is the desideratum. You recollect what we said about the certainty that people had when very old and very young, and the uncertainty that is in the faith when we need it to live by. Now these Highland people I am amongst have none of the “Sturm und Drang” we spoke of, not even in the impetuosity of
youth or the anxieties of middle age. When I hear them expounding not only their faith in the absolute decrees of God, in which I acquiesce willingly; for there is no getting out of the doctrines of necessity; but their own absolute certainty as to their reading of these decrees to the dishonour both of God and man, along with my protest against their presumption, I half envy them their perfect accord with the system they have framed, their complete losing of themselves in their faith in God. For, Kenneth, there is no system of theology that was ever framed by another or that I could frame for myself that can at all satisfy me; the universe is too vast, too complex, too bewildering for me to find any key to its mysteries.”

“We can trust when we do not see. Much of the work of our daily life is necessarily done on trust, and I think it does not need absolute certainty as a guide of life. In fact, the certainty would take away from its beauty and grace.”

“I am not of the trusting kind, Kenneth.”

“You could make your way in any walk in life, Harry, with your talents; you need not fear taking to the Press or the lecture-room, for a field of action as well as an assured livelihood.”

“You know my strength, or you think you do, but you do not know my weakness. The world is full of men who can write as well as I can do on the subjects that take such hold of me as to make them worthy to be life work. You have no idea of the keen competition of those who have nearly enough to live on, to make it quite enough, in that particular walk of life. Between rich men and enthusiasts, who work for nothing, and the limited public which such writers address, the payment for thoughtful or speculative writing, which takes time and pains, is not an assured livelihood.”

“Fiction then?” said Kenneth.

“That is falling into the hands of women, now. I suppose it, too, is done cheaper on that account—one prize to a hundred blanks, and I don't think I could construct a plot. No, I see there is only one way by which I could earn a steady living by my pen, and that is on the staff of a newspaper. Now, is there no lowering of the moral tone there, too, as well as in the Church? Did you ever see a man who had gone in harness on the staff of a daily or weekly political paper for years, who was not dwarfed by it? They may begin with the glow of patriotism, and the eager desire for reforming the world, but sooner or later, and often woefully soon, they think of the practical and expedient rather than of the true and the right.”

“But is not all reform really the effect of compromise,” said Kenneth.

“Some men's idea of it, but not mine. No, if I cannot stand compromise in the Kirk, I am not going headlong into it in the Press. All political life
tends nowadays to delude into party-organization; all political writing such as a man can make a living of, sinks to the level of pot-boilers in art.”

“The lecture-room—the platform, I think, would suit you best of all,” said Kenneth. “Your natural eloquence would have its free scope, and you would not be restrained as to subject, and as to treatment, as you are in the pulpit.”

“God forbid that I should ever become a popular lecturer, though that to myself holds out the greatest temptation. It is clap-trap and bunkum, and what they call humour, that fill the halls, and I may descend to that level in time. I love to have my audience en rapport with me, and if nothing else would do it, I might try the popular method.”

“But you have natural humour as well as natural pathos. Why should you undervalue your good gifts, because you might be tempted to make unworthy use of them?”

“It is the nature of the creature; I believe it is because I feel I have been so richly endowed that I am so dissatisfied. With half my gifts I should have been content to use them, and probably the result would have been greater.”

“Then, so far as I can make out this difficult question,” said Kenneth, “you would like to be in such circumstances that you need only speak or write when you please and what you please.”

“Just so, and in that case may natural laziness would make me speak and write very little. I should go in for enjoyment, leisure, society, and that would be very bad for me. Such a man as I needs the definite routine, the regular hours, the appointed task, to make him work at all, only all such work is curbed by such cruel and false limitations that I feel between the de'il and the deep sea; the de'il of insincerity, and the deep sea of chaotic doubt and unused faculties. For I have talent—I even believe I have genius.”

Kenneth never was more convinced of this being true than when his friend thus appeared to reject every mode of life which could exercise such talent or genius.
Chapter 60 Harry Stalker Cuts the Gordian Knot

Harry paused in his speech and strode two or three times across the room, and then resumed — “People go on like inspired idiots about the Gospel being a perfect law of life, and our Saviour a complete example of every human virtue. Look at the difficult questions arising out of our complex commercial system, and money and business matters generally. How are you to make the Sermon on the Mount agree with the certain doctrines of Political Economy? Look at your keen business men! They make bargains differently, they maintain their rights differently from the Christian spirit that commands to give the cloak to the spoiler of the coat; and yet who shall say that they do not do far more good in the world than the philanthropists who give to him that asks, and lend expecting not again. How can they have to give if they have not first spared?”

Kenneth thought of his uncle, of Mr. Gray, and of Walter — supposed to be the keenest men of business about Castlehurst — and he recollected very many kind things and generous things done by all of them. Just before he had left Tingalpa, a circumstance had come to his knowledge of the most delicate, the most liberal conduct by Walter, to a man who had asserted most falsely that he had been over-reached and cheated by Mr. Gray's wideawake son, and who had fallen into discredit and into bad health, with a wife and family dependent on him. The thing was done so secretly that it was only by the merest accident that Kenneth discovered it.

“Look at the still harder questions arising out of the relations of the sexes, the mighty problem of modern life. It is not touched at the vital point. Our Saviour, or Model Man, who was said to have been in all points tempted like as we are, is never recorded to have been stirred by the pulses of youth, or to have been tempted by the sight or by the touch of a woman's loveliness. Whether he was angelic or austere, we know not — and how those devout women not a few, who ministered to him of their substance, how those who followed him near or far off, felt to him, there is no hint given to us. As a guide to us in the thorny paths in the outset of life His example to us is of no value.”

After another pause Harry resumed — “And the law He lays down as to divorce is untenable. Is there only one offence, and that only on one side, that should dissolve a contract necessarily made in partial ignorance always — and often in absolute ignorance of character, temper, and physical constitution. Is a man or woman to be bound to a mad mate for life, or to a criminal one, because Christ has said there is only one cause to give release? The whole thing is faulty and incomplete, but stands in the
way of real reform, for if you touch the marriage question they come down on you with the Bible. Look at the case of that poor sister of yours — what warrant of release can the law or the Gospel give her; and is there to be no natural desire on her part for the love she deserves from a good man, because a villain promised to her what he never performed, and she vowed duties to him which he has put it out of her power to discharge? If the laws of chastity are too rigid, there is either rebellion or great and unnecessary suffering,” said Harry Stalker in conclusion.

Such speculations as those of his friend always sent Kenneth back to his father and mother, and to the protest he always entered against the severity of the religious and social punishment for the most venial of all the sins connected with the relations of the sexes.

Whether from the rigid lines laid down by the Gospel, or the disabilities imposed by human law, his kindly uncle and his generous Edith felt the stain on his mother's reputation and the stigma on his own birth so heavy thus they would try to make him do things worse in his own estimation than the original sin — to wipe them out.

“Chastity absolute and unconditional was the rule in the early Church,” continued his friend, “and it was enforced with a vengeance. But we want some holding ground; something more than mere platitudes which young men disregard, and young women, who are borne upon by the mighty force of public opinion and hedged in by family care, respect and acquiesce in, but which they too overleap from passion or from generosity when not so restrained. It is hard to be a young minister, and one who cannot afford to marry — unless a woman with a fortune.”

“But that you could get easily enough,” and Kenneth looked at his friend, whom his grandmother had once characterized in this question — “What makes Mr. Stalker so good-looking, and him so ill-faured (favoured)?” There was a charm in his countenance, independent of feature, and his manner when he chose to please was captivating to all women.

“Yes, I could, if I were such a sneak as to ask her to share my uncertain fates,” said Harry.

“But she might make the fates much more certain and a good woman is surely not the worse for happening to have money,” said Kenneth, thinking of his own love.

“Not if she was a very good woman indeed; but somehow I do not think any woman of the kind that I could win would submit to my vagaries, and her friends would not submit to them for her, and they might be right. If I had the means of being independent through her fortune only, would it be honest to her to throw up the very position and career she marries me for? No, Kenneth, I cannot do it; and yet when I am in her company she is so
sympathizing and acquiescent, and when I know that by speaking a word I could secure for myself the safety and the sanctity of a home — flesh and blood are sorely tempted to say that word.”

“Then if you love her, and if she loves you, yielding may be easy for either or for both of you.”

“Would it though?” said Harry Stalker fiercely, and he got up and walked to and fro for a few minutes. Kenneth recollected that with all his love for Edith, he could not yield in the matter she made so strong a stand for, and that though she loved him with all the intensity of a strong nature, she was as obstinate as he.

“No, it will never be easy for me to yield,” resumed Harry, “and I do not think it would be fair to make her yield, if she threw such a burden on me as a fortune, far beyond my deserts and reasonable expectations.”

“You are somewhat farseeing for a lover, Harry. The question is really do you love her?”

“Yes — and no. A man can, after a fashion, love any woman, and I have seen a great deal of her, and she is good-looking enough, and I should do well for myself if I won her; but no — it is not the sort of love that waits and worships, that transfigures all nature, that haunts you sleeping and walking, that speaks to you through the book you are reading, that takes up the burden of the song you hum, that strikes through your every vagrant thought. I don't think whatever I hear or read or see, how she would like this, what she would think of that? I don't hang breathless to hear her opinion of anything, and I am not always interested in it when I do hear it. No, Kenneth, I feel far more like a lover to Nelly Lindores, with her sweet beseeching face and her receptive mind and her deep quiet soul, that I do to this woman who could make me independent.”

Kenneth had followed his friend's description of what was and was not love with eager sympathy. This was the love he felt for Edith Gray that thrilled through every fibre of his being. But when he concluded by his assertion about Nelly he looked questioningly at him, as if to try to discover if he felt all those wonderful things about her.

“Not altogether,” said Stalker, answering the look; “but I believe it only wants a word to make her feel thus about me; and I know that for myself there is far more promise in that direction with Nelly than with any other woman I know, so that I do feel tempted to ask her if she will begin the world with me from the very lowest rung of the ladder. Let me be free in the first place, and then the thought of having to provide for her and for our children, if we have any, will give the necessary spur to my industry. All my people would, of course, call it a low marriage, but I believe it is the only chance I have of rising, as I account rising. What is foolishness with
man is wisdom with God. And she would yield to me, she would believe in me, she would never check my wild talk, so that I could have perfect freedom in my humble home. She is not the stereotyped, commonplace, conventional woman whom my uncle has marked out for me to keep me steady; but the flexible, poetic, affectionate girl who would be satisfied with what I can give her. I will not be a model husband; I know that; but I believe I shall be faithful to her, and will love and respect her, and she will not exact more.”

“And how does she feel, do you think?” said Kenneth, recollecting Nelly's shrinking from the excellent marriage chalked out for her by his grandmother.

“Oh! I feel some sure of her feeling, as your grandmother would say,” said Harry.

“And it was that that made you think of her first?” asked Kenneth, whose own experience had been different.

“I must have showed some regard first. I could not help it. I am always putting my foot in it with young girls. I cannot help trying to please them. And Nelly is extremely pretty; there is no question of that; and the way she listens to me just leads me on. And I had to come from time to time to see your people when I was in Edinburgh on a holiday or on business with publishers; and she was always turning up, and — and — çà va sans dire. I dare say you know something about it.”

“Well,” said Kenneth thoughtfully, “if you cannot make up your mind to the plunge you speak of, you should be very careful. Poor Nelly must not be trifled with. My grandmother says she has got an offer from a young man in the village, to whom she wishes me to introduce myself.”

“She has not accepted him, has she?” said Stalker eagerly.

“No; she does not think he likes her well enough. She does not find any particular fault with him, however.”

“She may have fifty faults to find with me, but if she likes me well enough, and I like her well enough, she'll take me, faults and all. Who or what is he?”

“A young watchmaker of the name of Cuthbert; but if she does not like him there's an end; no one will put any constraint on her.”

“No one need; I'd like to see any one dare;” and he subsided into, for him, unusual silence — for a while, and then came an indignant outburst, addressed to his friend —

“Can't you speak, Kenneth? Have you not a word to throw at me, who have been laying open my whole heart to you, and you so close with your own? Come, tell me about this father of yours, who at last comes forward to own you; about this sister, who is in the position I spoke of just now —
neither wife nor widow; tell me about your cousin who was killed, and the trial you stood, and the man you helped to get away. Your letters were not minute enough, and the newspapers did not let me behind the scenes. Come, tell me the whole story, instead of putting suppositions cases to me without clothing them in flesh and bones. Then I may be able to criticize the past, and advise for the future.” And Harry Salker settled himself in an easy chair so as to be able to give the most comfortable consideration to his friend's chequered narrative.

And Kenneth told the whole story, including the genesis of his love on the very day on which he discovered his sister, and on which he met his good friend, Mr. Henderson; Edith's mistaken idea as to its object and friendliness induced, the advice given, the will, the murder, the sister's appeal, the trial, the acquittal, the meeting with his father, the perfect acknowledgment of his claims on his father's love, the expected return to his father's home, his proposal to Miss Gray, and her refusal. He did not tell why, for the pressure laid upon him to prove his mother's marriage was his father's secret.

He spoke of his love to his friend with more openness than to any one else but Edith herself. He said that he believed this love was returned, but that it was difficult for Miss Gray to get over the slur of his birth.

“Now here is where your commonplace, stereotyped woman is at fault. The conventionalities have got hold of her. She sees a good man of God's making, who has behaved like a hero and a gentleman in the most difficult positions, and who loves her with his whole heart, and she hesitates to love him in return because no priest muttered a blessing over his father and mother's young love.”

“She is neither commonplace nor conventional,” said Kenneth, who thought his friend was very much out in his characterization of Edith Gray. “She is original, she is generous; but she is a little mistaken.”

“Not a little mistaken,” said Harry Stalker. “I should despise her if I was you, but of course you don't. My dear Kenneth, it is the love that sanctifies the marriage, more than the marriage can sanctify the love. When the love has gone, the marriage is really broken. It had been no common love your mother felt for your father. And it lasted all her life, I know. I feel sure it was no light love your father felt for her. In many ways your mother had the advantage, for she gave up all, and he seemed to give up nothing. Aye, you are not so happy in the thought that you are owned and loved, as he is in the consciousness that he has been allowed to own you. Now, if this Miss Edith Gray would just look at the matter as God looks on it, she would see that the man who is at her feet is the sort of man to whom the oldest families look back as their founder — the man who makes
honourable the name he transmits to her descendants. And for the sake of public morals, I'd rather have you openly acknowledged at your father's house as his natural son, than have you proved to be his heir, if that was possible. People think too much of inheritance. It is the law of inheritance which, indirectly working through public opinion, casts an unnecessary stigma on illegitimacy. The shuffling, makeshift way in which people provide for their natural children, in order to prevent scandal, is one of the hollow shams that I could lift up my voice, like one in the wilderness, to expose. In your case, it was your mother's kin who felt so sore on the matter that your poor father could do for you far less than he would, and that you have reconciled your bragging Australian uncle to your aristocratic father is a triumph to be proud of. Cheer up, Kenneth; if the girl you love is worth anything she will see the matter as I see it. Come and let us get Nelly to go with us to the Linleath woods. You will give me a chance to speak to her while you muse on your adorable Edith, and I shall learn my fate before the day is over.”

The fate was propitious; Nelly was surprised, delighted, proud. She could not see what Mr. Stalker could fancy in her, but there was no hesitation in her mind about his loving herself enough, and that they had a sufficient stock of love between them to stand the tear and wear of life. It was to be soon. He would resign his charge, and take lodgings in Edinburgh to begin with, till they could see their way to a small house. She did not object to lodgings. No, where Mr. Stalker was was home good enough for her.

Old John Oswald was delighted with the match, and said he had had a notion that it would come about some day. As for the old lady, she was astounded, but very soon acquiesced in the idea that Nelly's sister, Jenny, would do as well for them. She did not, but still she was not very disappointing.
Chapter 61 Relentings

Mr. Gray had never found his daughter so wayward and whimsical as now that they had left their fellow-travellers, and they were supposed to be taking their pleasure together. She wanted to go everywhere, as it were, at once; she seemed to be always expecting pleasure which she did not receive, and her only idea during each sight or amusement or party was where should they go next, what was to come that would be more exciting or more satisfactory than the present. He had expected that his daughter would shine in the Anglo-Australian society which he himself so much enjoyed, but to old friends and to new friends she was not the radiant winning woman she had been at Wilta, or even during the voyage, but a somewhat capricious and exacting person.

It was evident to Mr. Gray that until Edith came to some understanding with Kenneth Oswald she would not be herself again; but she refused to move towards Scotland, in spite of her friend Sybil's repeated invitations, and her descriptions of how beautiful the Highlands were looking. After taking her about to some of his pleasantest friends without any improvement in his daughter's spirits, Mr. Gray thought that a visit to the silliest people of his acquaintance might have the desired effect.

Among the acquaintances of Mr. Gray's, resident in a good neighbourhood in London, were our old friends the Honeys, who had left Melbourne altogether, and were living in excellent style. The eldest girl was engaged to a man of good family, but very slender means, and still more slender abilities. Mr. Honey was immensely wealthy, and had only three daughters, so that there were advantages on both sides. Mr. Gray had business with the retired squatter, as he wished to purchase a station property from him; and he said that it was necessary for Edith to be civil to the family, and to accept an invitation for a visit. She had never had her own insignificance so painfully impressed upon her as in this Belgravian mansion, where the engagement, the enormous trousseau, the costly wedding presents, were matters of the deepest moment. The young gentleman was assiduous, and the fiancée was the most interesting being in the world to the circle which they gathered round them, the settling of the arrangements for the church and the breakfast, the choice of wedding dress, travelling dresses, morning dresses, visiting dresses, the absolute necessity that every dress should be worn with its proper ornaments, and that from the hat to the boots and shoes, all should match, seemed such vital questions, that the fate of the world hung on them. In the midst of the most critical talk about a certain silver grey suit, Tilly Honey suddenly asked —
“Did not you come home with young Oswald, who was our fellow-passenger on board the “Kent”, Miss Gray?”

“Yes, we were neighbours in the country,” replied Edith.

“How shocking to be tried for murder!” said Tilly; “I could not get the thing out of my mind when I heard it; to think that we were such friends on the “Kent” with a man who might have been a murderer.”

“He was acquitted most honourably,” said Edith emphatically.

“Oh! yes. I suppose he was, but these sort of things stick a little,” said Tilly.

“And,” said Miss Honey, “to think of his being a natural son, and all that coming out. It was so shocking altogether. I, of course, think so much of family, and all that. As dear Algernon says, ‘I have not much to bestow on you else, but I have a name that is historic.’”

“And his uncle at Hurst House, Sir Richard Mandeville, is such a gentleman — none of your colonial knights, but a real baronet. There is not much between Louisa and the title,” said Miss Maria — “I scarcely think the boots a perfect match.”

“It is Algernon's manners that are so different from those of the colonial young men; there is a je ne sais quoi about them that you never see in Melbourne — a perfect ease combined with aristocratic hauteur”, said Louisa, the bride-elect. “Papa is going to telegraph the marriage that it may be in the Argus on the Friday morning after we are married on the Wednesday.”

“It will be such a long announcement,” said Tilly.

“Rather expensive, I should say,” said Edith Gray.

“Oh! pa does not care about that,” said Louisa. “He thinks he can afford that, whatever it costs.”

“But about young Oswald,” said Maria. “We really liked him on board the “Kent”, and he spooned a great deal on Emily Dunne, and they acted together. Now he came home via Brindisi, I suppose. I wonder pa took us in the “Kent”. I so prefer the mail route; the officers are so gentlemanly, and the Indians, too, are delightful. I quite enjoy the constant racket and change.”

“He's old Oswald's heir, is he not?” asked Miss Tilly.

“This will do, Tilly, I think,” said the fair bride. “This shade is a perfect match; don't you think so, Miss Gray, I really want your candid opinion. It is so very important that it should be so. You will stay over the wedding, Miss Gray, of course,” said Miss Honey, as if she was offering the greatest treat in the world. “I'd ask you to be a bridesmaid, but I have my six, and I think we cannot add to the number.”

“Thank you,” said Edith, “I was never a bridesmaid in my life, and I have
no particular wish to be one."

"Wish to need one first?" said Miss Honey. "Oh! we heard all about that. Mary Palmer wrote about the young barrister, Mr. Talbot, who was always at Wilta about the murder case, and that it was a settled thing."

"Miss Palmer was greatly mistaken," said Miss Gray. She had never been exposed before to thoughtless gossip.

"Oh, it is all very well to deny it," said Tilly Honey, "but Mary Palmer was confident, and she is very seldom out in her news. You did wisely to have your English tour first. If Mr. Talbot had only been here," said the bride-elect, "I should have liked to invite him. I never heard any one make a better speech at a wedding breakfast. You recollect when we were at Emily Dunne's — how he kept us all in fits of laughter, returning thanks for the bridesmaids, and really, for a colonial, I think he is the most gentlemanly man I know."

"I think this is as near as we can get satin to match silk," said Maria Honey.

"Well, I really don't know what I should say if I met young Oswald now and it is quite possible," said the bride-elect, recurring to their old fellow-passenger. "I shall ask Algernon what he thinks of it after we are married."

Other Victorian residents had heard about the trial and taken some interest in it, and had a more intelligent understanding of the bearings of the case, but they generally dismissed the subject by saying that young Oswald was a fine fellow, but that it was a pity that these trials always bring out awkward family secrets.

"Father," said Edith on the afternoon of the day when there had been this discussion mixed up with the silver-grey suit, "I am getting tired of this noise and racket. Scotland must be looking lovely just now, and I have just had a letter from Sybil, pressing me to go up when I am tired of excitement. Are you ready to accompany me?"

"Not just yet, I have one or two other matters to attend to first. Will you wait, or shall I go by myself?"

"I shall not wait for this marriage. I must escape from this house before I am dragged into it. Sybil's home will be more like dear old Wilta."

"You will not be spoiled for Wilta, I hope; people tell me you will," said her father tenderly.

"Not at all, you need not fear that. It appears as if Wilta had spoiled me for London. Well, I shall write to Sybil that I shall go to-morrow."

"Are the Oswalds at Castle Diarmid?"

"No, I believe Mr. Oswald is visiting the Brothers Dirom, and Mrs. Oswald is with him."

"And Kenneth, is he at Castle Diarmid?"
“No, he is with a friend of his in Ross-shire, the old fellow-student, Mr. Stalker, whom he used to talk so much about.”

“But he has been there?”

“Oh, yes, he stayed there for a fortnight, says Sybil.”

“So that difficult business is over. It was as well we were not there then.”

“So as he is away in that Ross-shire manse with his friend, I should like to go up now.”

“Edith, are you sure you know your own mind,” said her father gravely.

“Yes, papa; at least I think so.”

“If you can return Kenneth Oswald's love I shall make no objection. I shall be perfectly satisfied. This Honey marriage is a caution to any one disposed to overestimate family connection. To alter a little sentence in the first Latin book I read, ‘I'd rather give you to a man without a name, than to a name without a man.’”

“But he does not love me enough.”

“God bless me, what would you have the man do more than he has done to show his love? Any one might see that he loves you as truly and as deeply as it is in his nature to love; and his nature is a rare one. If on a punctilio of birth you trifle with his happiness and your own, you deserve to suffer for it.”

“I am not trifling; don't think so, papa.”

“I believe you are not trifling, for you are not easy in your mind. My darling girl” — and he took her in his arms and kissed her — “I am very sorry to see you so unhappy, so unlike yourself. I can do nothing to soothe you; but I think if you go to the North, out of this awful Babel of dressmakers, and milliners, and jewellers, and lawyers, you will feel better. There was nothing of the kind in my time.”

“I'm sorry to leave you here, papa.”

“I'll get away to-morrow, and take a run to Brighton to see Hardy's father, and come back to finish my London business. I'll join you in the North within a week, you may depend on it, and see the dear native village, where you must explore a little, and see if you can make some discoveries.”

Edith did not mind travelling alone—she rather preferred it; she could think all these hours without her father's watchful eyes on her. There need be no effort to appear not to be thinking of unpleasant subjects. And the more she thought of it, the more she felt that in punishing Kenneth for his obstinacy she was punishing herself still more. He had been rejoiced over; everyone had, as it were, bowed down to him in his father's house, and evidently he did not care how she felt; he had not written to her, and she had been utterly miserable. How she had been accustomed to admire and
idealize his love for Sybil! How she had envied her the possession of such unselfish attachment! His love for herself must be a more manageable affair than she had dreamed of in the case of Sybil. He could hold it well in hand, and only do what he pleased. He might have known that she did not want the estate, or to rob his father's family of anything, only to right the great wrong done so many years ago. And he would not yield—not a hair's-breadth. And now she acknowledged to herself that she only lived in him, and for him; that she was dying to see him; that she hated London and London society, because nobody spoke about him there as he deserved to be spoken of. She felt every minute bringing her nearer to the place where every mouth would be full of his praises; she hungered to hear what they thought of her Kenneth—her own dear Kenneth. “I shall have to write to him or something. I cannot allow him to slip out of my life,” she said to herself. “Papa is right; I must not trifle with either his happiness or my own.”

Mr. McDiarmid and Sybil were at the station to meet her, and she felt kindly to him when he said he was sorry that Kenneth was not at home to come with them.

“But he is coming, Edith, he is coming to-morrow,” said Sybil eagerly. “Do you think we were going to let him spend a whole week in Ross-shire when we want him here every day he can spare us; so he brings his friend, who—you will not guess, but it is such a romantic story. He is engaged to Nelly Lindores, who has taken such good care of the grandparents. He gives up the Church, and goes in as a freelance into the field of literature. And as much time as he can spare from his wooing he is to give to Kenneth here. And oh! Edith, it is so delightful to see him at home, where he should be.”

How different was the scenery and the life in this remote part of the Highlands from anything Edith had seen at Wilta or all over Victoria. Norman McDiarmid had had harder work than any Australian squatter, and if he had not achieved any great material success, he had won a greater moral triumph. He entered into his ancestral estate at the age of twenty-five, and found that it was a poor, encumbered property, suffering from the evil effects of generations of neglect and decadence. His wife's fortune, which was not as much as his grandfather had expected it to be, relieved him from immediate pressure, and he set himself to work vigorously to improve the property; but, above all, to improve the shiftless, indolent habits of the people. There were far too many living on the estate, but they were old clansmen and kinsmen. And he could not go in for wholesale eviction, as larger proprietors have done without scruple. His love and his respect for the peasant's daughter, who had so generously moved out of his
way, made him tender of the feelings of the poor, and eager to prove that her sacrifice had not been made for nought. Some of the McDiarmids he encouraged and assisted to emigrate, but the risk there was that the energetic and prudent would go and leave the lazy and improvident. He set himself, therefore, to some daring projects for reclaiming waste lands, for planting largely, for improving the patches already cultivated. He threw himself into the work with energy; he learned how things were to be done, and showed with his own hands his ignorant clansmen the best way of making their land more productive, and thus enforced the dignity of manual labour by the example of the Laird—the chief of old times.

As they passed through the village, Mr. McDiarmid made Edith alight at the square, stone, two-storey house where her father had been born. He asked admittance for her from the present tenant, who was the family surgeon; and she went through the house and garden, which was fairly kept. An old woman—Elspeth McDiarmid—came out of a cottage near, who had been a servant in the house when Mr. Gray was a boy, and rejoiced in the sight of Willie's daughter; and there was the burn her father had played by, and the very hills he had climbed up so many years ago. All this was much more tranquillizing than London.

Norman McDiarmid looked younger than when Edith saw him first. His eyes rested on her with a sort of pleading in them that brought tears to hers. As they entered the old-fashioned, massive gates, drove up the ancient avenue, and entered by a curious low door, the Castle which had stood there for hundreds of years, Edith felt for a moment the rebellious feeling that this ought to be for Kenneth; but when she was introduced to the peaceful and kindly family, and was clasped in the arms of the motherly lady who welcomed with the warmest affection and gratitude her daughter's friend in trying times; saw the handsome Norman, fair, blue-eyed, but spirited and intelligent, and all the others down to little Charlie, of five-years-old, her heart smote her when she thought that she had wished to cast a fire-brand in the midst of this happy circle.

To brand the heads of the household as not lawfully married, and all their children as illegitimate, appeared now a much more serious thing to Edith than ever before; and she began to think that in her regard to the claims of the dead woman, she had forgotten the claims of the living one, who had married without knowledge of any bar in the way. When she looked on Mr. McDiarmid himself with reasonable eyes, it was difficult for her to think him the willing party to such a deception as she had before fancied had taken place.

When little Charlie clung to her side, and asked to hear about Tingalpa, where brother Kenneth had such beautiful horses, and Wilta, where brother
Kenneth took the birds he had shot to poor Sybil; when Norman called him a brick and a trump, and said he had gone over the estate with his father, and talked about sheep and cattle and horses like an oracle; when Malcolm said that if Mr. Oswald had no objection he wanted to go to Tingalpa and learn sheep-farming under Kenneth; when Mrs. McDiarmid took her aside and told her that her sad griefs about Sybil had been in some degree compensated for by the dear friends her darling girl had made in Australia, and especially by their bringing them all to know their beloved Kenneth, and healing an old deep wound in his father's heart, she felt ashamed of herself for her imperviousness and her obstinacy. Had not he really taken that supreme position which she had insisted on his claiming by waiving his rights, and by laying the family under greater obligations than they ever knew of. What did it matter what other people thought. She knew what he could do, and refrained from doing. Yes; Kenneth was all right, and she was all wrong; that was the only conclusion she could come to.

“And what news from Wilta?” said Sybil, “how are Mr. and Mrs. Charles getting on?”

“Ah! very well indeed; but the most interesting news is about Walter. I did not write it, for I want you to guess.”

Sybil blushed. “Not a marriage?”

“No, no; nothing of the kind, Walter is a determined old bachelor; and besides who is for him to see at Wilta? but perhaps if he succeeds in this object, he may be brought into more society. Mr. Terry has retired, and actually Walter is venturing into the troubled sea of Victorian politics. I am delighted, because I think it is right for a man to do his duty by his country, and Walter is wonderfully thoughtful, though quiet. He will not perhaps shine as a speaker, but as a working member I have great hopes of him.”

“Do you think he will get in, Edith?” asked Sybil.

“He wrote as if he thought he would, and he is not apt to be sanguine without good cause.”

“Charlie is your favourite brother,” said Sybil with a little tone of disapproval in her voice.

“Well he used to be my favourite, but he is married, and, of course, I am second there, and Walter has been very good indeed to me, when he was the only one. It was because Charlie was nearest to my own age that I cling to him most. Now I feel older in more ways than Charlie, and seem to draw closer to Walter.”

“I have never seen Harold or the other brother in Queensland,” said Sybil. “I thought that in Australia parents could keep their children together, but your family is an exception.”

“Papa thinks our boys have a turn for pioneering; but this is a new field
for Walter. I wonder what ground he will strike out. He has a wonderfully clear head, Sybil.”

Edith felt more like herself than she had done since that day in Florence; she was again bright, cheerful, hopeful. She had made up her mind for surrender, and felt that there was peace in the thought. Mr. McDiarmid saw the charm in her countenance and manner which he had missed before; he caught her wistful brown eyes sometimes turned to him. She wished for a little explanation with him before she saw Kenneth, just to give him the most distant hint of how heroic her lover had been.
Chapter 62 Explanations

Mr. McDiarmid was as desirous of an explanation with Edith as she could be; so on the following morning, when, after a restless night, she rose early, and met the master of the house about to take his morning walk before breakfast, he stopped and said to her, “will you speak to me for a little, Miss Gray?” She was willing to follow where he led.

He led her into his study—his sanctum—which was a curiously shaped room with a narrow window with deep embrasures. An old castle is picturesque, but Castle Diarmid was not by any means so convenient as Wilta after all.

“I think, my dear Miss Gray,” said he, “that there has been some misunderstanding between you and Kenneth, which is costing him much suffering. Although he is as frank as possible on all other subjects to me, on this he is absolutely silent. I fear that it is somehow connected with me, and with the wrong I did him, which I never can sufficiently repair. It is inexpressibly bitter to me to think that I, who have never been able to do him any service, should in any way injure him with the women he loves so truly. Speak to me perfectly openly, my dear Miss Gray—you will serve Kenneth best by telling me all.”

“I want to beg your pardon,” said Edith, very humbly, “for hard thoughts of you, Mr. McDiarmid.”

“It was only too natural, too well deserved, Miss Gray.”

“So, I thought, but Kenneth did not; he seemed to me to care only for you, and to forget his mother.”

“He never forgets his mother, never, nor can I forget her.”

“But,” said Edith, with some embarrassment, “what I mean is this, that when Mr. Carmichael, who, you know, was an important witness on the trial, and Mr. Oswald, and I too, urged him to prove the marriage, and right his mother's memory, he would not take a single step to do it. Not that I wish him to do so now. I believe he was right, as he always is.”

“But, my dear young lady, there was no marriage.”

“But there must have been a Scotch marriage. Mr. Oswald told me there was proof, if only Kenneth would consent to prove it, but he would not; and I should like you to know it, for I am sure he would never tell you.”

“My own boy! my good son! generous as ever—always willing to spare me, and others more innocent than me, from every pang he could. But, my dear girl, no testimony that any man or woman could bring forward could shake this, which I received from Kenneth's hands by his mother's dying request on the day after her death. Acknowledgment before witnesses can
only make a binding marriage if one or both of the parties wish to enforce it.” And he touched the spring of a secret drawer and drew out of the packet Isabel's farewell letter to himself and read these words:—“Whatever Carmichael may say or the law may prove, if I had myself believed these words made a binding marriage, your mother and grandfather could never have parted us, and I never could have let any other woman be called your wife. I knew in my own soul that I was only yours for life, but I never thought but that you might leave me at any time you saw fit.”

“No casual words,” continued Mr. McDiarmid, “reported after this lapse of time by half a dozen witnesses could stand against this.”

Edith was dumb. Isabel Oswald was not Norman McDiarmid's wife. Kenneth was really illegitimate. She could not say he had a right to the foremost place, and ceded it magnanimously. And when she looked at the troubled face of the father, she could not find it in her heart to reproach him for having seen fit to leave Isabel Oswald and her son.

“You do not know—and never can know—all the circumstances,” said Mr. McDiarmid.

“I do not wish to know,” said Edith meekly.

“We had exchanged a written promise of marriage, which in case of my death would have put Isabel legally right, but neither of us felt that this was marriage. In our happiest moments there was an uneasy consciousness of wrongdoing—and the more Isabel developed mentally and intellectually, the more she felt, and the more I felt for her, the false position which our precipitancy had plunged her in. My written promise she destroyed before she returned to her parents; Isabel's I destroyed before I married. Now I feel that I ought to have been more courageous, and not to have allowed myself to have been outdone in generosity; but at the time the case looked hopeless.”

Edith felt alternations of pride and humiliation while she listened; the first, because there had been the legal claim to waive, the second because at the best it would have been only righting a previous wrong.

“There was the strongest pressure put upon us both—and especially on Isabel one day in my absence. My grandfather had, on my coming of age, made me promise not to marry without his consent. I was young and sanguine and inexperienced, and I thought I could get him to agree to my marriage with Isabel, as he was very fond of me, and I believed that if he only came to know her he must have loved her. But I did not know that the hereditary property had been diminished and encumbered, first in the old times from political troubles, then from a protracted lawsuit, and afterwards by my grandfather's mismanagement and my father's extravagance. Instead of coming into a fine estate, I was likely to be a poor
hampered man, unless I married well, and on the appearance I could make on a legacy from an aunt my mother and grandfather thought I could make a brilliant marriage. Trusting to my promise, my grandfather did not disquiet himself for some time, though I had written to him repeatedly that I wished his consent, but when I wrote still more urgently that I had a son whom I called Kenneth, after my father, and that I felt it imperative on me to do Isabel justice and to legitimize my heir, he absolutely refused, and told me his reasons. He referred me to Mr. Shiel, who was the family lawyer, to corroborate his statements. I went at once to Edinburgh to consult this old friend, for whatever my promise to my grandfather might have been, I felt Isabel's claims were overpowering. In my absence, my mother and grandfather went to Glenrea, and explained to her both the money difficulty which was great, and the social difficulty which was greater. They told her she never could be received or acknowledged by the family, that her son's birth would be always under a stigma, and that I should have to choose between her and all the objects of my life. She yielded to their representations, and left Glenrea with Kenneth at once, and when I returned, discouraged but not convinced by Mr. Shiel's opinion, I found the house empty, and only a letter bidding me farewell for ever. Oh! Miss Gray, how much love was in that parting.”

Edith's eyes were overflowing. She held Mr. McDiarmid's hand, and felt that he too deserved pity and consideration.

“I wrote to Isabel,” continued Kenneth's father, “protesting vehemently against her determination, and saying that she was worthy of every sacrifice, and that I was prepared to make her my wife at once; but she was inflexible; she would not injure me so far as to keep by me to hurt me.”

There was a pause. “But why,” said Edith softly, “did you never see her again alive, or look near the boy?”

“If we had loved each other less, I might have done so, but she herself forbade it. I could not trust myself; and she could not trust herself to meet under the altered circumstances. After her death, I should have seen him often; I should have been too happy to do the little that I could for my dear boy, but for Kenneth's own relatives, who never could forgive me. You who know and love Kenneth so well must confess that I was punished enough in being severed so completely from him.”

Could Edith have believed that her own heart could have been so completely softened towards Kenneth's father?

“She, my Isabel, bore her burden alone, but do not think mine was lighter,” continued Mr. McDiarmid. “You are young—you have had no temptation, shielded as you have always been by family love and care. I want you to make up to my Kenneth for much that he has suffered, for
much that he has missed—and you cannot do that if you do not accept the fact that both his father and mother were weak, but not wicked—that circumstances led them astray, but that both found, one in heaven and one in earth, pardon and peace. She wrote to me with her dying hand that she felt God had forgiven her when he sent her a boy so loving and so truthful. May I not hope that God has forgiven me when he has permitted me to gather in my first born, my loyal, my generous, my noble son, into my own family. His sister's comforter and helper at the risk of his own character and life—his father's preserver from an enemy's blow, of the force of which he himself was ignorant, and his uncle's faithful counsellor and friend. There is only one thing that I have had to wish for, and I think that too is granted—I think I may regard my Kenneth now as your accepted lover!"

Edith was utterly subdued. Her idea of justice to Kenneth's mother, even if it could have been carried out, had last night appeared to be cruel, but this morning it seemed almost ignoble. No honours on earth (even if not purchased at the cost of pain and shame to him for whom she had sacrificed herself), could exhaust that angelic spirit which had loved so well, which had repented so sincerely, which had been, as it were, bathed in the purifying waters of self-renunciation, and had probably shown herself a better daughter and more tender mother than if no such whirl of passion had passed over her. And what honours from an ancestral line could equal Kenneth's claim to be the son of his own deeds, which had won him acknowledgment without bitterness, had pushed no one from his place, but had made the best place of all in his father's house for him. Was she ignorant and presumptuous, to judge of the father's sin or the father's repentance? God had forgiven him, and she felt that she did. She threw herself at Mr. McDiarmid's feet, and asked for forgiveness. He folded her in his arms, kissed and blessed her.
Chapter 63 — And Last Unconditional Surrender

“Edith is here,” said Sybil, as her brother arrived with Harry Stalker in the afternoon of this day. “You will find her in the garden, or more likely in the silver-fir avenue. I think she wants to see you.”

Kenneth was dashing off in the direction indicated, when his father stopped him. “Miss Gray knows I have something important to say to you first. Come with me, Kenneth,” and he led his son to his study.

“My dearest boy,” said his father, “I have just been made acquainted with the fact that Mr. Carmichael has tried through your uncle, and he again through Miss Gray, to persuade you to prove yourself my rightful heir, and that you steadfastly resisted to yield to their wishes, like the loyal generous son you are both to father and mother. You recollect well giving me a packet of papers on the day after your mother's death—here they are all, as you gave them to me. No doubt your uncle thinks, and probably you think too, that they could prove a marriage, but they prove quite the contrary, and whatever Mr. Carmichael may say of his interview with us at Glenrea, it has no weight at all against this letter of your mother's, when she distinctly disclaims any belief on her part that she was my wife in the eyes of the law. You and only you have a right to read this letter,” and he put into his son's hands what he had received from the boy fourteen years before.

Norman McDiarmid stood with averted eyes and head. It is one of the most trying experiences to wait while some one reads an agitating letter, the contents of which are fully known to one self. Kenneth felt that it was his very mother who spoke to him from the grave; but could not bear that his father should keep apart while he read it. He looked pleadingly at him, which had the effect of bringing Mr. McDiarmid towards him, and then held his hand in his own while he read the last words of love to both of her dearest ones. The he kissed the beloved name, and returned the letter to its owner.

“It is as I thought, better than I thought, my dearest father, because my uncle cannot now reproach me; but Edith—Miss Gray—she will feel it hard.”

“We have had an explanation this morning, and a most satisfactory one it was. You can have yours now, Kenneth. Sybil told you were she is waiting for you. God bless you, my son.”

It was a different Edith from the one from whom he had parted defiantly at Florence, from the Edith who had watched him mistrustfully during the last week of their companionship. It was not the Wilta Edith either. In all
her varying moods there had been none like this.

“Kenneth,” said she, “my Kenneth; forgive me, say you love me still.”

“Love you, dearest, with all my heart, utterly, absolutely,” said he, as he clasped her to his heart.

“And I love Kenneth Oswald far more than I could love any Kenneth McDiarmid. And I am glad that you are not the heir, and if people think you unfortunate in your birth, I shall be only all the more proud of you.”

This was a most unlooked for transformation. Kenneth could scarcely believe his ears.

“And will Mr. Gray be satisfied, my dearest Edith?” he asked.

“He says he will; he sent me here for the express purpose of bringing me to my senses. I have been nearly as unreasonable with him as I was with you, and so he had to take me to task.”

“What a dear, good father yours is, Edith. I must try to show my sense of all his goodness.”

“And Kenneth, I had a conversation this morning with your father and he says I am to make up to you for old griefs. I hope I may be able to do so; at all events I shall try. And as for your father, I love him dearly; I think I understand now how you feel to him, and how your very fidelity to your mother's memory makes you so tender and loyal to him.”

“Are you satisfied now that my love for you is ‘Best Love?’ You could not doubt that it was strong love. Even in my refusal to yield to you at Florence you must have seen what it cost me.”

“Your words have rung in my ears ever since, though I tried hard to shake them off and to feel that you did not love me enough to justify my obstinacy. I really believe you love me as much as I used to fancy you loved Sybil when I wove such romances about you. Ah! I fancied then no one could ever feel so to me. And now I know

‘How much God's gifts put men's best dreams to shame.”

“As for my uncle,” said Kenneth. “He has done so much of the wooing he will take a great deal of the credit. But, dearest, there is one drawback that I fear you have not taken into account. Can you make up your mind to live at Tingalpa?”

“Where else could I be so near dear Wilta and papa?”

“But we must live very near my uncle and aunt. They will be much with us, and we must necessarily be much with them. So long as my uncle lives, he will depend on me not only for help but for company, and I know that poor Mrs. Oswald will be very trying to you.”

“Is that all, Kenneth? I think Love may conquer that. But for your uncle, I never should have known you. I owe too much to Mr. Oswald to grudge him some dutiful and loving service, and for his sake and yours, I think I
may bear with poor Mrs. Oswald's dreariness.”

“I have thought you very tolerant to her hitherto,” said Kennith.

“And if your brother Malcolm comes out,” said Edith, “he will be pleasant company for us both. But I almost wish there were more drawbacks. I feel almost afraid at the prospect before me that it is really too much happiness for this lower world.”

“And when will you marry me?” said Kenneth. “I should have wished that my dear old friend, Harry, should tie the knot, but he wants to be married as a layman, and that soon, so he has already taken the preliminary step for resigning the Church—and I do not wish to hurry you. It is enough to know that you mean to be mine.”

“I would marry you to-morrow if I could, and if you wished it,” said Edith.

Did he not wish it? There was no question about that.

“But papa is coming up here within a week, and I hear they expect your uncle and Mrs. Oswald too, by that time.”

“And you will marry me then?” said Kenneth.

“If you will take me?”

“And what about trousseau, and wedding presents, and settlements?” said Kenneth, who had heard from Sybil of the atmosphere which Edith Gray had been in at the Honey mansion.

“I hate trousseaux. I despise wedding presents, I disapprove of marriage settlements—I love you," said Edith.

“Your father, however, will insist on settlements, and I dare say my uncle will too, and they have both a right to be consulted on the matter,” said Kenneth; “but as they desire our happiness, and have perfect confidence in us, I believe the lawyers can do the work within a week. It will astonish them however.”

“It will probably astonish everybody, but I have tormented you both wittingly and unwittingly so long, that I feel as if I could never do enough for you; that whatever you wished, whether you asked it or not, I should be willing to give.”

Kenneth took from his neck the old ring, which ever since Sybil's interview with him in prison he had worn as a sort of amulet, and put it on Edith's finger. “This is what has been meant for you for many a day. Now you are fairly engaged. This will stand for a week, and we shall have another token of submission put on this somewhat strong hand—a very different character of hand from poor Sybil's.”

In somewhat calmer words the lovers expressed their mutual confidence, and discussed their immediate plans. Edith explained to him her changed feelings with regard to the subject of difference at Florence, and owned
that the very fact which he feared would be the hardest for her to get over, had somehow made him only the dearer to her.

They were too late for dinner, but there was great allowance made for them.

“My dear father,” said Kenneth, as he led Edith to him—“Welcome your new daughter,” and the welcome was most affectionately given by the elders, and most vociferously by the younger members of the family. Sybil looked with complacency and delight on the prophetic ring, which had found its fitting place at last. Mr. and Mrs. McDiarmid embraced Edith as if she had been their very own.

“Harry,” said Kenneth, “allow me to introduce you to the common-place stereotyped woman of whom you spoke to me lately, on whom the conventionalities have taken fast hold.”

Harry Stalker felt the flood of light from those brown eyes, and confessed his terms had been singularly inappropriate.

“I am going to be married to Nelly in a month,” said he, with a little pride at the promptitude of his proceedings.

“We are going to be married in a week,” said Kenneth, “and you must be here to perform the ceremony. As you have not yet sent in your demission, you must delay it until you discharge one part of the sacred office satisfactorily for a concluding stroke.”

“In a week!” said Flora McDiarmid. “Why, what about wedding-clothes?”

“My Edith hates wedding-clothes,” said Kenneth.

“And my Nelly,” said Harry Stalker, “is at this moment working her sewing machine, or putting in dainty stitches in her modest trousseau, thinking that ‘he will like this,’ or ‘I fancy this is just his taste;’ and she has my last letter, received this morning, in her pocket, or it may be nearer her heart, and she sings the songs I like as her needle flies or her machine turns. Oh! trousseaux may be very interesting things, Miss Gray.”

“Yes, when love goes to the making of them,” said Edith; “but to buy piles or clothes ready made at warehouses—to lay in dozens upon dozens of all sorts of things as if you were never to have any money henceforth—to be made a lay-figure for months for dressmakers and milliners, to have your whole mind and heart filled with jewellery and rubbish of that sort, to lay yourself out for wedding presents, and to compare their relative value, seems to me a very bad preparation for that life-long partnership with unlimited liability into which a bride is entering. I shall get no new clothes, and I hope no one else will. I want to marry Kenneth as soon as he wants me, and as soon as we can get our people together, because I feel I have behaved very badly to him, and because I want to make myself happy as
well as him. It is best to be honest.”

“I must put a postscript to my letter to Mr. Henderson,” said Kenneth, “which like a lady's postscript, will altogether eclipse the body of the epistle in interest. He will be delighted.”

“And will not Mr. Walter Gray be pleased?” said Sybil.

“Our present plans, my dear father,” said Kenneth, “are that we should be married here by our good friend Harry, and he may use his own latitude about the word ‘obey’.”

“I never put it in,” said Harry. “If a man wants his wife to obey he will be sure to make her do so if he is able; if not, no vows will secure it.”

“Then,” said Kenneth, taking his father aside, and still with Edith on his arm, “we mean to go to Glenrea, and spend a week there, next we go south, and visit my mother's grave and ramble over the places which were familiar to my early childhood, the hills and glens and woods I walked over with her, and the burn where I first saw you. Then we go to my grandfather and grandmother, and make Nelly's acquaintance, to let them see the wonderful good fortune that has fallen on me. We want to see all the people and all the scenes associated with my mother first. We mean of course to be present at Nelly's marriage to this dear old friend of mine, and after that we are coming back here to stay as long as you will keep us. By-and-by, when we want to go sightseeing, perhaps Edith may see more in London than she appears to have been able to do this last month.”

“Perhaps you, Mr. McDiarmid, would not object to a run up to London with us,” said Edith. “I want as much of Kenneth's visit to the old country (which I fear his uncle will be inclined to shorten when the main object he had at heart has been carried out) to be spent in your company as possible. And so we shall stay away as short a time as we can, and come back here. And if we are very absurd—as I dare say we shall be—you can send us out of doors, or order us into some quiet nook of this old castle. I want you to have the comfort of Kenneth's society; and as I have found out that I am perfectly miserable without him, you must be cumbered with me; but I'll try to be as good as I can, and if I am not, bear with me for Kenneth's sake.”

Edith carried out her intentions. She was married within a week, and she did not have a stitch of new clothes. The only new dresses worn on the occasion were those of old Elspeth McDiarmid, who got from Mr. Gray a beautiful warm dress and new cap to sit in the Castle Diarmid drawing-room, and see Willie's daughter married; and of Mrs. Oswald, who could not possibly appear in black at a marriage, or wear anything so antiquated, as what had been made before poor Jim's death, and enlisted and Edinburgh dressmaker to construct her a very imposing and quite
fashionable lavender silk that took the shine out of all the dresses there, and really looked wonderful for such a place as Edinburgh to turn out. She also thought she was bound to make a present, and bestowed on Kenneth the watch that had, in her opinion, saved his life.

George Oswald was in great feather at the wedding; he had the desire of his heart. The future mistress of Tinglepa would be Edith Gray, and he still maintained that she had the additional strong recommendation, “she was a thocht older than her guid man.” He, George Oswald, was not to be beaten in the matter of telegrams by any squatter in Victoria—not even by the millionaire, James Honey. His nephew's marriage should appear in the Melbourne papers on the same day as that of Miss Honey.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Gray were on a visit to Melbourne, which they greatly enjoyed. They were staying with the Talbots, where that young barrister still had his home with his father and mother.

On the Friday morning Miss Talbot had the Melbourne Argus in her hand, when her brother and his friends entered the breakfast-room—

“Here is news,” said she, ‘that will interest you all; only think—”

(By Telegram)

AT ST. JAMES'S PICCADILLY, ON THE 2ND AUGUST, BY THE REV. THE DEAN OF BARCHESTER, ASSISTED BY THE REV. ALOYSIUS MANDEVILLE, ALGERNON MARMADUKE, ELDEST SON OF THE LATE EVERARD MANDEVILLE, ESQ., OF THE WILLOWS, SURREY, AND NEPHEW OF SIR RICHARD MANDEVILLE, BART., OF HURST HOUSE, HEREFORDSHIRE, TO LOUISA CHARLOTTE, ELDEST DAUGHTER OF JAMES HONEY, ESQ., OF 371, WESTBOURNE GROVE, AND OF BUMBEROWIE, VICTORIA.

“This is very satisfactory indeed,” said Talbot, “Louey Honey has attained her heart's desire.”

“But there is another,” said the sister, “and on the same day too, and you will be far more interested in it—”

AT CASTLE DIARMID, SCOTLAND, ON THE 2ND AUGUST, BY HARRY STALKER, M.A., KENNETH OSWALD, NEPHEW OF GEORGE OSWALD, ESQ., OF TINGLEPA, TO EDITH, ONLY DAUGHTER OF WILLIAM GRAY, ESQ., OF WILTA.