BIENTOT.

Let it be soon! Life was not made to long
For distant hours of dim futurity.
Thy presence soothes me like some far-off song.
Oh! where my heart has rested let it lie;
Hope is the morning; love the afternoon.
Let it be soon!

Let it be soon! The treasured daylight dies,
And changes sadly to the chill of night,
But summer reigns forever in thine eyes,
And at thy touch grief stealeth out of sight.
After sad years of longing love must swoon.
Let it be soon!

CLEMENT SCOTT.

LAD'S LOVE.

No fairer scene could be shown to appreciative eyes, this hot summer day, than that presented by a red-roofed, many-gabled house standing well back from the river; to whose banks runs a long old-fashioned garden full of all old-fashioned flowers—marigolds, and London pride, and dainty sweetbriar with its pale miniature roses, a garden wherein bees find delicious pasturage, and where, just now, big burly moths are beginning to whirr about among the geraniums, which, with the lobelias and delicate yellow roses and their homelier neighbors, look like fine ladies among a gathering of country folk.

Near the water's edge grow great alder trees, with gnarled stems, and here and there a branch dropping low, seemed to touch the ripples of the river as it flowed, for very love of their bright beauty. The old house itself watched the river and the flowers through deep mullioned windows, framed in sweet tangles of jasmine, clematis, and ivy; and about one of its gables a Banksia rose had spread a net woven of green leaves, and starred with golden buttons.

Let us enter the room which looks out upon the garden and the river, and whose curtains are drawn fully aside to let in the welcome coolness that evening is bringing to refresh a world which has panted through this real hot summer day in the month of July.

It is low-roofed, or would seem so now to our more modern ideas, and would be square but for certain charming recesses branching out in unexpected places, one of which is large enough to have a tall narrow window all to itself, a couple of chairs with spindle legs, and some carved oak shelves rich in bits of rare old china.

The window that stands open is so wide it seems almost to fill the entire end of the room, and all round it runs a window-seat luxuriously cushioned. It just now looks like a frame made of tendrils and blossom-laden branches, and framing daintily a river-landscape in exquisite olive-green and gray, where the shimmer of gently stirring water is seen as it steals through rustling flags, and bathes the feet of a meadow-sweet or two, whose sunny plumes mingle with the green of the sedges and the russet of the bullrushes.

How fair the world looks thus sleeping in the welcome eventide! The red sail of a tiny pleasure-boat passing across the disc of the picture seems the sail of a fairy barge, for the after-glow of a gorgeous sunset catches it and turns it to gold. There are two people in this room whence such fair sights are seen. A man and a woman.

The woman, seated in the angle of the low wide window-seat, holds a square of muslin, fine as a spider's web, in her hand; an open basket full of tiny bobbins stands beside her, and on the dainty canvas is a spray of wheat-ears and poppies, embroidered all in white.

The little bobbins are of sandal-wood, and their faint pungent perfume mingles with the scent of the flowers that twine about the window.

She has all her tools at hand, but the square of muslin as often rests upon her lap as not, while with dreamy eyes she watches the framed picture of the river, or turns with quiet steadfast gaze to her companion.

This woman was not young; that her female friends and acquaintances felt small difficulty in deciding. How old seemed a question involving much uncertainty of opinion.

At all events, hitherto, time had but given new depth and earnestness of expression to the beauty of her face, new grace to the lines of her pliant form, as the finger of early autumn lends to the Virginian creeper delicious tints and tender shades of crimson and gold.

Still, some people said, in a sort of confidential way, that Millicent Warner was 'getting on,' whatever that might mean, and—when the speakers were of the gentler sex—said it with cunning inflections of voice which sought to claim the pity of the listener for the progress in question.

But in the eyes of her old uncle, Sir Geoffrey Warner, 'Milly' was still a child. As an orphan she had been left early to his care; and that care had been such as to merit full well her devotion through the years of maidenhood and womanhood; a devotion that had grown to him as the very air he breathed, and as the atmosphere in which he lived and moved and had his being.

They were very happy, those two, in the many gabled red-roofed house down by the river, for each understood the other, each mind was cultured and companionable, and each year's routine was varied by long autumn wanderings in foreign lands.

In Milly's life, years back now, there had been once a dream—a happy blissful dream while it lasted, and after the dream had come the waking. In the first impulsive freshness of her girlhood she had loved, trusted, believed—and found love and trust, and credence things given but to the semblance of what she had rested her hopes upon ungrudgingly. She had suffered, yet been brave in her suffering, and so the shadow passed from the fair surface of her life as the shadow of a storm-cloud from a summer sea.

Yet the suffering left its mark, in quickened possibilities of sympathy for others in added tenderness to every sorrowful creature who came across her path. Hers was one of those clear-cut, high featured faces that even in extreme old age will retain a certain beauty; the eyes dark gray, black lashed; the hair black as a raven's wing, with a crimple ruffling it here and there; the nose slightly aquiline, with sensitive, almost transparent nostrils; the mouth a little sad, but most ineffably sweet at times, also at times a little stern; the chin firm and finely moulded.

Such was Millicent Warner to look at. To listen to she was delightful, so sympathetic was every inflection of her soft low voice; but she was a woman who was often silent, and often spoke by look or smile as much to the purpose as another by many words.

'My dear, she's thirty-five if she's a day,' said the wife of the village rector, first to this person, then to that.

And maybe the lady was as near right as ill-nature was likely to be, adding a year or two, to make up for the many who were ready to rate Miss Warner at several years less than her actual age.

That she was over thirty may be allowed. You seldom see such perfect repose and grace of manner as Sir Geoffrey Warner's niece possessed in any woman under it. That the touch of light on the edge of those pretty ripples in her hair meant the glisten of a silver thread or two might also be taken as proven.

That she was an influence, pure and true, in the lives of those with whom she came in contact, might also be taken for granted.

No one could look into her eyes and doubt that fact.

'It makes me very glad and happy to hear all these things.'

She looked across at her companion as she spoke, a sweet content shining in her eyes.

'I knew it would,' he answered blithely. 'All the way here I was thinking what welcome news I carried.'

This was the way with Millicent Warner. No one ever doubted her truth and reality. If she showed a person that she liked them, that person knew that her liking was a thing to be relied upon—solid ground on which their feet might rest securely—not the shaky bog land of passing caprice or affected sympathy.

And she was very glad to hear the news just told to her by Ruthven Dyott, for it concerned his own welfare, and what can well be dearer to any of us than the welfare of the friend we love?

He deserved to have friends, too—this young fellow with the clear-cut face and dark candid eyes. He was none of the drones of earth, but one who scorned no honest drudgery that might lead to name and fame. Indeed, he belonged to a profession in which no man who scorns real hard drudgery can hope to get on, for Ruthven Dyott was a civil engineer.

Already he seemed marked out for a successful career, for, though hardly three-and-twenty years had passed over his head, his name was associated with a clever discovery in electrical engineering, and among his earthly possessions he reckoned letters patent for this discovery.

So much for the moil and toil of life, as Ruthven Dyott had met and wrestled with it. As for all life's poetry, that had consisted in the friendship borne to him by Millicent Warner.

For the last year or so his week's work was brightened, any disappointment that met him in those six days of toil and thought was softened, by the reflection that on the seventh he could, if he chose, make his way to the red-roofed, many gabled house down by the river, enter the pretty room that looked into the garden full of sweet old-fashioned flowers, and there meet a gentle, kindly greeting—the clasp of a cordial hand, the light of welcome in a woman's soft grave eyes.

Not only so, but he could talk of his plans, his work, his hopes, his fears, to a listener whose sympathy was so assured a thing that he almost ceased to be grateful for it. Later on, Millicent would sing or play—songs that old Sir Geoffrey knew by heart, and to whose melody he loved to let the hand on his armchair rise and fall—compositions by those old masters of music whose gentle sprightliness is pervaded by a haunting under current of pathos.

Truly these Sunday evenings at the Hermitage were pleasant things to look forward to in the midst of the hurry, and bustle, and smoke of London town, and week by week, and month by month, they grew dearer and sweeter—sweeter than Ruthven could say, dearer to his boyish heart than he himself knew.

Millicent Warner had grown to be the music of his life, and it was grand and holy music too—music which lifted his bright young nature into a clearer, purer atmosphere than that of mere earth; music that kept his life clean and his hands honest, and fed the lamp of ambition in his soul as oil feeds the flame that burns before a shrine.

And now, on this glowing summer's day, Ruthven had come out from the busy hive of the town to this peaceful country home, with a heart full of pride and joy, and yet with an aching pain deep down in it, for he had only told Millicent Warner the half of his news yet.

He had said that the Government of a far-off land was willing to utilize his discovery. What he had not said was that the terms upon which they would agree to do so were that the inventor should accept office under them, and superintend the working of his own scheme.

He was conscious, indeed, of a strange reluctance to communicate this last piece of intelligence just yet.

He was a bit of a mental epicure, and wanted to enjoy the full flavor of this sweet woman's pride in his success without alloy.

It had seemed a terrible thing to him all along—the idea of a parting between himself and Millicent Warner. He had said to himself that the loss of her would make him feel the same sense of a sudden empty silence, as had more than once come over him when her cunning fingers dropped from the ivory keys, and the melody they had been weaving in an exquisite weft of sound, ceased. It had seemed to him like this, thinking of it.

Now, watching her by the soft shimmering light, listening to the tones of her soft low voice—a voice that was capable of conveying an intensity of gladness, though never raised into outward show of passion, to Ruthven Dyott the thought of this possible severance from all part or lot in her life brought with it an overpowering sense of pain—a shuddering foreboding of lonely days, and months, and years to come.

When they had talked over the good fortune that had befallen him, when they had, as it were, set it in their midst and looked at it from every possible point of view, it suddenly struck Miss Warner that for a man who had had 'greatness thrust upon him' by the hand of fate, her companion was somewhat distrait, not to say moody.

'You are not half as glad as I thought you would be, not half as glad as you ought to be!' she said, shaking her head, chiding, yet smiling too.

'Glad!' he echoed, passing his hand across his eyes, as if the sunshine from the burning world without had suddenly streamed in and dazzled him. 'How can I be glad, Millicent, of what must take me away from you?'

'Take you away?' she said, and then stopped.

She did not choose to question him. She was conscious of a certain slight irritation of mind. He had been keeping something back. It was strange: it was not like Ruthven Dyott; at all events not like him in his dealings with her.

'Yes,' he said, rising from his seat, and taking his stand close by her side, 'take me away from you. How, then, can I be glad?'

'Do they want you to go out there and set the thing going; and, if they do, are you likely to forget the friends you leave behind, or do you fancy we shall forget you, that you put on such a tragic air, Ruthven?'

'It is not a case of going away, it is a case of staying away.'

If he had been standing somewhat behind her, she might have noticed how pale he grew, as he uttered the last two words—words that meant so much. As it was, she only noted a thrill of pain in his voice. She bent closely over an ear of barley to which her needle was adding delicate finishing touches.

'They want you then to settle down there—to take the management of the affair entirely into your own hands?'

'Yes.'

The ear of barley was now daintily completed, fringed with a feathery beard; she looked at it with complacency, her head a little on one side in the prettiest pose imaginable.

'I think the idea an excellent one,' she said, speaking slowly, and as if full of intent thought; 'most excellent in every way.'

'Even to leaving you?'

'There is always some little drawback to everything, isn't there?' she answered lightly.

'Do you call it a little drawback to lose all that is sweetest in life, to lack all that has grown most dear?' he said passionately, his young face pale and wistful, his dark eyes full of pain.

She turned slowly round in her chair, and looked up at him.

'Ruthven,' she said, 'have you been devoting yourself of late to the reading of romances, you foolish boy?'

'No,' he answered, and she felt the trembling of the hand that rested on the back of her chair. 'I have been living one.'

There was a moment's silence, and Millicent once more bent over her work.

That her eyes saw what they rested on may be doubted; that they were dim and misty, as though she had stood in the glare of the sun where no shadow was, is more likely.

This headstrong boy seemed determined to rush upon his own destruction. She had striven to curb the impulse of passion that was drifting him into dangerous waters; but her will felt feeble, her hand nerveless—what should she do?

How blind she had been, how besottedly foolish not to have foreseen toward what bitter end things were hurrying!

She had given all her sympathy, all her friendship, to Ruthven Dyott, since that day in a spring that seemed a lifetime away, that day when every bough on every tree was bright with thick-set blossoms—white or red—when the air was sweet with the faint perfume of the lilac flowers, and Millicent Warner, wandering homeward by the river, met her uncle and a stranger, a slight, dark-eyed boy, with a smile as bright as the spring sunshine, and a manner at once candid and gentle.

Sir Geoffrey introduced this companion of his to his niece as the son of an old friend, come to London to work hard at an arduous profession; he spoke of him and to him as one who was henceforth to be looked upon as an intimate friend, to be welcomed warmly whenever business would allow of an expedition up river, and, more especially, to be looked for on a Sunday, 'to get a breath or two of fresh air to help you through a week of smoke, my lad,' he said, when that night Ruthven Dyott took his leave.

It seemed a long, long while ago, all this, and now the end was drawing nigh.

How often had these two, the woman who had given her friendship and her high ennobling influence so ungrudgingly, and the man whose life had been brightened and sustained by the calm steady radiance of her sympathy, listened to the rustling of the water as it whispered in and out among the sedges, to the robin singing sadly on the big thorn tree by the window, to the clear piping of the yellow-billed blackbird riotously jubilant over the coming of spring! And now they would listen to these sounds never again together.

What is so sweet to any man as to garner up in the sanctuary of his innermost heart, in the midst of the hurry and bustle of life in a busy city, the thought of a shadowy room, perfumed with flowers, and made sacred by the presence of a true, pure woman, a friend who cannot fail him, a room where, enter when he may, a kindly greeting waits him, a kindly hand meets and clasps his?

All these things had Ruthven Dyott found at the red house by the river.

What wonder that his heart was heavy within him as he said:

'This means not only going away, but staying away.'

Realizing all that Millicent Warner had been in his life hitherto, he felt the very thought of life without her to be unbearable. And yet there was something in her quiet self-contained manner, in her matter-of-fact comments upon the views of his prospects, that galled him inexpressibly, and made him bite back the hot passionate words that rose to his boyish lips.

'She is gentle, and true, and kind,' he thought to himself bitterly, 'but she is cold, passionless, more statue than woman after all.'

But after one long look at the sweet face bending over the embroidery, his heart got the better of his brain: wise reflection, calm resolution fled, and with all a lover's imperiousness he had taken her work from her hands, imprisoned those soft white hands in his, and was lifting to hers a troubled, wistful face, dark eyes full of pleading, lips that trembled like a girl's.

Truly no lack of words was his.

All the story of what the past had been, of what the future might be—in his opinion—was poured forth with love-given eloquence. Kisses fell thick upon the hands he held so closely.

And Millicent listened in unbroken calmness for a while, then to his passionate protest of, 'I love you, and I cannot live without you, Millicent—Millicent,' she made answer, 'At all events you think so, Ruthven, and at your age it comes to the same thing.'

The words were gently spoken, softened too by the touch of her hand upon his thick dark locks, but they pierced like darts.

He sprang to his feet, and found he had to strangle something very like a sob before he could speak again.

She gave him no time to recover his eloquence.

'See,' she said, 'you have upset my bobbin basket, careless boy.'

At that moment the door of the room slowly opened, and in came Sir Geoffrey, happily unconscious of having a bandana handkerchief across his shoulders, and the bow of his black satin tie under his left ear. The old gentleman had been having a doze in the library chair, and these disorders were the results.

'Why, Ruthven, my boy,' he said with the most cordial of welcomes shining out of his eyeglasses, 'who expected to see you here?'

Then, without waiting for a reply, those same glasses glanced from one to the other of the two people whose tete-a-tete he had interrupted.

'Eh day, eh day! have you two been quarrelling?'

'Ruthven has upset my bobbin-basket,' said Milly, rising and wheeling a low chair round to the window for her uncle.

So there was nothing for it but for Ruthven to go down on his knees and hunt those refractory sandal-wood bobbins into the various corners and recesses into which they had seen fit to roll; and it is to be feared he inwardly anathematized the whole tribe, basket and all, during the process. When the last straggler was captured, and Milly declared their number complete, Ruthven's two items of news—the accepted patent and the offered appointment—were duly imparted to Sir Geoffrey, who made merry, and mentally killed a whole herd of fatted calves over his young friend's good fortune.

Later on they all strolled down to the river, for Ruthven's road lay that way, and he might as well go by the garden and through the field-path as not.

How lovely, how calm, how still it was. Scarcely a sound broke the quiet save the crickets singing in the grass, and the low measured splash of oars, somewhere far up the river. Silence seemed to suit the time and the hour better than words, and Ruthven's eyes, darkly sad, full of repressed longing, of bitter regret, ever sought those of the woman by his side.

Sought, yet seldom met, for Milly seemed absorbed by the beauty of the scene around them.

Idly plucking this leaf or that, at last Ruthven culled a tiny spray of green which gave out a faint and pungent scent, as he ruffled it in his hand.

'What do you call this?' he said. 'It is a very old-fashioned plant, I am sure, for it recalls to my mind going to afternoon service with my nurse when I was so small that I had to be hoisted on to the seat of our family pew, and was always on the point of slipping off again. My nurse carried a clean handkerchief, folded and laid upon her prayer-book, and in its folds one or two sprays of this sweet-smelling green thing, whatever it may be.'

'You're right, my boy,' said Sir Geoffrey, 'it is an old-fashioned kind of plant, and country folk call it "Lad's Love."'

Ruthven, with one quick flashing glance at Milly, the while a hot flush rose to his cheeks, dropped the little spray of blue-green leaves as if it had suddenly grown red-hot.

'Lad's love,' he thought bitterly walking in silence by her side. 'Yes, that is what she deems the love I offer her. She takes me for a mere boy who does not know his own mind, whose vanity is flattered by a clever woman's notice.'

But Milly did not let him go without a word. Just at the last, when Sir Geoffrey had said good-night and turned homeward, she lingered.

'Do not think me ungrateful, Ruthven,' she said, 'for all you have told me to-night. You would wrong me cruelly if you did. I will write to you and tell you all I could not say before. Be sure I can never forget—no woman can forget—a man who has once loved her.'

For a moment he thought a strange stir and quiver passed across her face; but when he looked again it was gone, and Milly, calm as any St. Cecilia listening to the strains of her own evoking and looking heavenward the while, stood before him with a smile upon her lips and grave sweet eyes meeting his unfalteringly.

Then she left him. And he, standing there bare-headed in the shadowy light, watched her go, noting the grace of her gait and the sweeping flow of her gown.

All at once she turned, and waved her hand a moment in adieu. Then the turn of the path hid her from his sight.

'She is gentle, pure and true; the most womanly woman I have ever known,' pondered Ruthven as he went on his way; 'but she is cold and passionless. She does not know, perhaps has never known, what love is.'

Meanwhile, Milly too went on her way.

Half-way up the garden she stooped an instant to raise something from the ground, thrust it into her bosom, and went into the house, where for the rest of the evening she read aloud to old Sir Geoffrey or chatted to him of such things as he loved best to hear.

Just as the moon was rising and spanning the river with a pathway of silver beams, Millicent Warner retired to her chamber, locked the door behind her, and found herself face to face with her own heart.

Oh, poor little drooping spray of greenery! If tears and kisses could have given you back your freshness, then had you never faded.

When the first faint gray touches of morning woke the river from its sleep beneath the kisses of the moon that shone no more, the woman who was 'cold and passionless,' who 'did not know what love was,' still sat by the open window.

She seemed to have grown old in a night. Her face looked gray in the gray light; there were dark shadows beneath her eyes, and sad lines about her mouth.

As Jacob wrestled with the angel, so had Milly wrestled with that hot rebellious heart of hers, that now, crushed and bleeding, seemed to her dim eyes to take the semblance of a vanquished foe.

She had won a hard-fought victory. She would stretch forth her hand to reap no harvest of sweet content, no dear and passionate delight, whose aftermath should be to herself bitterness and self-reproach; and to Ruthven Dyott—

Ah, she dared not think of that! This was no sorrow to be dwelt upon, but one in which the only hope of strength lay in avoidance.

Wan, worn, pallid, Millicent was nevertheless a victor.

Yet the birds beneath her window, singing sweet greeting to the new day, seemed singing the coronach of a life's buried joy.

II.

Five-and-twenty years is a long gap in a man's lifetime. The path he is destined to travel along has plenty of time, in such a lapse, to run through valleys of humiliation, and up hills of difficulty; the sun has plenty of time to shine upon him; and the stinging biting rain, driven against him by the bitter wind of adversity to blind him, and make him stagger as he goes. Flowers of life are culled, thorns pierce, in such a breadth of years. The character, thoughts and feelings are so changed, so carved by the chisel of time, that the man of five-and-forty would scarcely recognize himself in the lad of twenty who used to look at him from his mirror every morning, and whistle for very light-heartedness as he brushed the thick curly locks which are now so sparse and streaked with silver lines.

All these varieties of experience, all these changes had come upon Ruthven Dyott, since that summer's night, five-and-twenty long years ago, when we saw him stand bare-headed in the mellow light to watch a woman moving swiftly through the meadow-grass, which rustled under the touch of her trailing robe as she passed.

Passed—where?

Out of his ken—out of his life—though he knew it not.

For two days later he received Millicent's promised letter—the letter for which his very soul within him had seemed to wait—and when the thing so longed-for came, its kindly friendliness and calm sisterly interest half maddened him.

Quite maddened him, he came to think in a time to come, as he looked back upon the hasty impulsive actions that followed. No answer was sent to Milly, and Ruthven Dyott hurried up north to spend a month or six weeks with his own relatives, without attempting to visit the red house by the river—determined, in fact, to try and banish from his memory the very existence of its inmates.

'Send me one line to say that you forgive me for any pain I may have caused you; and believe me, dear Ruthven, the time will come when you will look back upon all this as a passing fancy that it was well indeed should pass, and leave your young life still free.'

Thus had run that fateful letter. But the 'one line' was never sent.

'I have loved a statue, not a woman. I have been a fool, but now I am wise. I have been blind, but now I see.'

Thus ran Ruthven's thoughts during that long journey north. But with time, and the near approach of his departure from England, came softer feelings.

Yes, he would go and say farewell to the woman who had been to him so good and true a friend; he would once more watch the river stealing along beneath the alder-trees; once more wander in the garden where all old-fashioned flowers grew and flourished exceedingly.

Autumn's hand had changed the aspect of the garden and river since last he had seen them. The leaves of the Virginian creeper, red, and gold, and russet-brown, were strewn upon the grass, a carpet daintily tinted; the roses were all dead; the alder-trees had shed their best leaves.

Strangest change of all, not a window was uncurtained, and when Ruthven rang at the porch-door, the first sound that greeted him was the grating of locks and bolts.

'Are Sir Geoffrey and Miss Warner from home?' he asked of a withered old crone who blinked at him from under shaggy white tufted brows, and evidently bore him bitter grudge for having disturbed her from her lair, wherever that might be.

'Sir Geoffrey's dead and buried. I don't know where the lady's gone.'

That was all.

Then came the grating of keys and bolts once more, and Ruthven was left out there in the dark autumn day, with the fallen leaves under his feet, and dead and dying blossoms all around him. So that kindly genial old man was gone! Death must have come suddenly, too; and Milly—how she must have suffered! To hurry home, to write, not the 'one line' she had asked for, but many lines, urgent, sympathetic, tender, was Ruthven's next proceeding. He knew of no address whither he might send, except the old home now so desolate. He could but trust to the faint hope that 'To be forwarded,' strongly underlined, might appeal to any conscience the crone with the bushy brows possessed; he could but wait and watch for some word of greeting during the few days that remained to him before he must start on his long journey.

He watched and waited in vain. The silence remained unbroken; and he bore that silence with him to the new land and new life in which his lot now lay—a burden heavy to be borne.

Yet time did its inevitable work of healing. New scenes, new stirring aspects of work and life, drifted thought into new channels. Ruthven never forgot Millicent Warner, nor yet the red house by the river, and the pleasant hours passed in the room with the wide low window that looked across the grass and flowers to where the alder branches bent to kiss the ripples as they passed. He did not forget; but the picture grew dimmer; and in time—what changes may not be wrought by that silent resistless influence men call time!—Ruthven Dyott, recalling the words of Milly's letter, 'This is but a fancy that will pass,' looked wise, and owned to his own heart that those words were true. They had seemed cruel in a day that was past; but then he saw 'as in a glass darkly;' now he stood face to face with the certainty that Millicent had been cruel only to be kind.

'It was no rare thing,' he thought to himself, smiling at the folly of a day that was dead, 'for the object of a lad's first love to be a woman some years his elder.' The romance died away and no harm was done. A good and pure influence this woman whose experience of life had chastened and refined her character, had kept his life free from all evil; there was much reverence mingled with the tenderness that he in his youthful ignorance had taken for a passion.

Yes; the story was neither rare nor new; and now, two years after that parting in the gloaming by the river, the real romance of a passionate love came to Ruthven Dyott.

Millicent had swayed him, now he learned the sweetness of swaying another. Millicent had been his guide, now he was the guide of one who found all her sunshine in his smile.

Millicent's dark eyes had been wont to watch him with helpful interest, but not always approvingly. Alice, his girlish blue-eyed wife, would not know how to begin to chide him, much less to go on.

She studied his comfort as the one thing worth striving for; counted herself blessed among women in that he had chosen her from all the world to be forever by his side; read the books he loved, so that she might be able to speak of them with him; made, in a word, a perfect wife. But by her very perfection and the utter unselfishness of her devotion, she cherished, rather than helped him to fight against, a certain wilful headstrong impulsiveness, that Milly, poor faithful Milly, whose honest tongue would smooth over no truth, however disagreeable, had ofttimes called his 'rock ahead.'

Never were happier people than Ruthven Dyott and his wife—for a time.

But at last sore and bitter trouble came to them; and in this wise.

A year after their marriage a child had been born to them; a boy with Ruthven's dark eyes, clear-cut features and sunny smile. When the lad could stagger three steps across the floor and then fall into his mother's outstretched arms, Alice thought her cup of joy could brim no higher; when his baby-lips began to try and lisp her name, she thought that there was yet another note added to the exquisite music of life.

And so the years passed on.

The child became the boy, the boy the youth; and then to Ruthven Dyott and his wife Alice, it was given to learn by bitter experience the truth of poor old Lear's exceeding bitter cry that sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankless child.

Cuthbert, this only son of theirs, was worse than thankless. Is there such a thing as too much love, as well as too much harshness, in the rearing and tending of a child?

The mother of this young fellow would never have allowed such to be the case. In her eyes all the wrong her boy did, all the shame and sorrow he brought upon his father and herself, was the fault of somebody else—first of this false friend, then of that bad companion; never of himself. He was 'too easily led,' she said, 'and wicked people took advantage of his gentle disposition.'

Her husband said little or nothing, and, for her dear sake, was generous and forgiving to the young sinner. But he grew to look older than his years; his upright form began to stoop. He would walk along silent and preoccupied, his eyes on the ground, the brows above them puckered in thought. More than once, when Cuthbert, flushed of face, disorderly in dress, unsteady of gait, loud-voiced, defiant, or desponding, according to the stage of drunkenness at which he had arrived, found himself in his father's presence, that father did but turn upon his heel, lock himself in his private room where none—not even Alice—dare follow, and there 'dree his weird,' in solitary, brooding misery.

He had been wilful, impulsive, ofttimes lacking in patience and self-control, but he had kept his life clean and clear; he had never degraded the manhood within him; he had toiled hard at his profession; name, fame, wealth, success were his; and now, of what value did they seem in his haggard eyes? What was to become of this ghastly 'fetch' of his, this lad so like in outward seeming to the boy who had gone to London nearly thirty years ago to try to push his fortunes, the boy to whom Millicent Warner had been so good and true a friend? Yes; strangely enough in these the days of his bitter sorrow, Ruthven Dyott bethought him of the past, remembered the woman who had brightened and sweetened his life and then passed out of it like a shadow that is gone—remembered her with a new spring of gratitude rising in his arid heart toward her memory like a sparkling rill of water in a desert.

He set himself to wonder that had become of her.

Was she married long ago, or had her chastened spirit fled from earth to heaven, and left only her memory to shine in the hearts of those who had known and loved her.

How he should like to have one of the old long chats with her, tell her all about this unhappy boy of his, and of Alice, his darling, his wife who had been so tender and loving a companion to him all these years! Alice weighed upon his mind almost as heavily as Cuthbert. For a strange change had come upon Mrs. Dyott. She, so guileless, so confiding, had grown silent and reserved. No one ever saw her weep, but her eyes were always weary, misty, and with a weird far-off look in their blue depths, as if they were forever looking for something they had lost—always wistful, pleading, pathetic. Were they seeking for the boy she had lost—the little lad she remembered staggering to her arms with merry, ringing laughter—the boy whose new clothes for his first going to school she could hardly see to mark legibly, for the tears that rose so fast, and had to be dashed away between every dip of the pen? Who can read aught of the sublime mystery of a mother's heart mourning over the backsliding of the child she brought into the world? Ruthven grew almost to fear his wife. Her dim eyes meeting his would send a chill through every nerve in his body.

He had never been a man of much religious profession; but now in these terrible days he was driven to God's feet by the scourge of pain; he learnt to pray, more with the heart than with the lips, perhaps, yet none the less fervently for that; to pray, not for himself but for Alice, his wife, that Heaven would have pity on her suffering soul, and lift the cloud that was darkening all her life.

About this time an old friend came to visit Alice Dyott, one of those friends whom it is given to some women to make, ofttimes truer, tender and more faithful than those to whom the ties of kindred bind us ever so closely.

'Let your boy come home with me for a while,' said this good friend to Ruthven when her stay under his roof drew to a close; 'your wife is breaking her heart over him.'

'I know it,' said Ruthven, his head sinking on his breast; 'who better? And yet I am helpless, I can do nothing.'

'Oh yes, you can,' said his companion. 'You can let Cuthbert come to us. He is my godson, you know; so I have some claim to a part and lot in him.'

'What will your husband say?'

'What, James? He'll say I'm the most sensible little woman in the world; he always does, you know.'

'With cause, too,' answered Ruthven with a smile.

So Mrs. James Coveney had her way, and Cuthbert left home for a time, an arrangement in which, after a long talk with her friend (an interview from which Mrs. Coveney came forth with no eyes to speak of, but in which Alice shed no single tear), his mother quietly acquiesced.

The Dyotts at this period of their lives were living in London. Mr. and Mrs. Coveney dwelt far north, in a lovely nest of a place among the English lakes; so Cuthbert found little similarity between the life he went into and the life he had left; and for a time at all events, the excitement of change must—so his father thought—tend to keep bad habits in abeyance.

Mrs. Coveney wrote at intervals, but beyond a general cheeriness of tone, nothing very definite could be gathered from her letters.

At last Ruthven Dyott, going into his study one evening just when the daylight was dying and the gloaming dropping earthward like a gray veil, saw the gleam of a white patch upon his desk.

It was a letter, and in Cuthbert's hand.

Now the boy seldom wrote when away from home. What indeed was there for him to say? Was it any good to make promises that were but 'written in sand,' doomed to be washed away and leave no trace once the tide of temptation should arise?

Silence was better than meaningless words, as both father and son had by this time learned.

Hence this letter took to Ruthven's eyes the guise of a possible evil. Had the boy got into some fresh trouble—yielded to some new temptation—made the friends who had nobly stretched out a hand to him bitterly repentant of their generosity? Was it that old story, a demand for money to pay debts of so called honor, as the only way in which public exposure might be averted?

Ruthven Dyott was no coward, yet he shrank from opening his son's letter. Renewed hopes had lifted themselves in his heart, like tiny shafts of green piercing an arid soil. He had begun to fancy that Heaven had heard and was about to answer the prayers offered through sleepless nights and weary, anxious days. Now, might it not be that his hopes were to be slain at a breath, as the tender springing herb by one night of biting frost? With quickened pulse and breath he broke the seal of Cuthbert's letter.

What were the words he read?

'Since I have been here, it has seemed, dear father, as though scales have fallen from my eyes. Is it too late, I wonder, for me to win your love and trust once more, to try and make some reparation for the past? I have a friend beside me as I write who tells me that it is never too late to mend. It is this friend who has led me to strive after better things; who has shown me the possibility of retracing all the past. The whole thing has been so strange, so wonderful, I hardly know how to tell you of it, or to explain it, even to myself. I first went with Mrs. Coveney to see this new friend of mine. Then I went alone. Then I could not bear to be a single day without going. There seemed some strange kind of influence that drew us the one to the other—this dear, sweet woman and me. She is quite old, her hair is white, and turned back over a high cushion, like an old picture. Her face is perfectly beautiful, and has no color in it except the darkness of her eyes. They are eyes which seem to look you through and through. The first time I saw her, it was wonderful; you would almost have thought she had known me all my life. She held my hand in hers, and as she looked at me, I saw two bright tears gather in her eyes. I cannot tell you how the friendship between us grew: it started into life at once, I think, like Jonah's gourd that grew all in a night. I have told her all the past. I have kept nothing back; not even things that it hurt dreadfully to tell. There never was anyone in the world so easy to tell things to; and, as she talks to you she makes you feel that you would rather do anything in all the world than give her cause to be sorry ever again. I see I have not told you her name. It is Mannering—Miss Mannering, for she is what I supose would be called an "old maid." She is very rich, and all the poor people round about here look upon her as their best friend. Mrs. Coveney says she has given, at different times, large sums of money to help the poor in our crowded cities. Isn't it like a beautiful story? But I must not forget the sad side of it. This dear lady is almost always suffering. She cannot walk about like other people, but lies all day long upon a couch near the window of her room, where she can see the lake. She says she loves to watch the changing shadows that pass across its surface, and hardly knows whether she loves it best on a sunny day or a cloudy one. I heard a lady say to Mrs. Coveney the other day that "poor Miss Mannering's life hung upon a thread." So this is the sad side of my story, you see; but I am glad with all my heart that I have seen and known her before that slender thread has snapped in two. I want you and my dearest mother to try and believe in me just a little. It will help me more than anything else in the struggle which must come, to see that you do, however little it may be. It must be a hard thing for you to forget and forgive the past and to put some faith in the future; but, dear father—try do all these things for me!"

We can most of us bear a great sorrow once we brace ourselves to meet it; but the touch of an unlooked-for joy is sometimes more than the full heart can endure.

When he had read thus far in his boy's letter, Ruthven Dyott crossed the room sharply, sat down beside his desk, hid his face upon his arms, and broke out crying like a child.

Sometimes in a black and stormy sky a tiny rift appears, through which a struggling sunbeam 'strikes the world.'

The bitter home-sorrow which had come upon Ruthven Dyott and his wife Alice had ofttimes made them feel like weary travellers beneath a sunless sky.

Now came the rift overhead, and the sunray of hope. Ruthven saw his wife's sad face soften to a smile; noted a new buoyancy in her step; a lifting of the misty dimness that had stolen the light from her eyes.

She was none of those jealous mothers who grudge to see the working of any influence save their own in the lives of their children. Only let her be sure that influence was for good and she could thank Heaven for it as for a welcome boon. She set in her prayers the name of this new friend whom Cuthbert had grown to love; she knew that the hand which should lead him back to the lost pathway of rectitude must lead him back to her—his mother.

She felt as if her boy, innocent and loving, was about to be given back to her.

When the Sunday came round it so chanced that the Lesson for the day contained the parable of the prodigal son, and as Alice listened to the exultant cry: 'For this my son was dead and is alive again; was lost, and is found,' her husband saw the big tears gather and fall, and knew that they were tears of joy.

For Cuthbert's father and mother believed in the sincerity of his repentance, believed in the reality of his determination for the future; and Alice had written to him a letter that no one else, not even her husband, ever saw—a letter in which she had poured forth all her heart, speaking of the past as blotted out, of the future as radiant with hope and firm resolve.

They began to look for Cuthbert's return home, and were full of plans for his welfare. Hitherto he had cast aside all opportunities of making a career for himself in life; now things would be different. He would work with them, not pull against them.

But instead of the expected arrival came a summons.

'Dearest father,' wrote the boy, 'will you come up here as quickly as you can? An old friend wants to see you. If you do not come at once you will come too late. Miss Mannering was once Millicent Warner. She had to change her name to take possession of some property; but she says you will remember the name she bore in days long past. Father, she has been so much to me, will you not do as she asks, and come and see her before she dies? She is so feeble one can hardly hear her speak. Yesterday we thought she would not live till night.'

'Oh, Ruthven!' cried his wife, 'do not lose an hour—go and tell her how Cuthbert's mother blesses her name; go and see your old friend, dear husband!'

So Ruthven Dyott took a hurried journey north, to take a last farewell of the woman he had loved long years ago, and to whom he now owed a debt of gratitude which never could be paid; for death was stepping in to claim the future.

She lay in a darkened room. Her worn and attenuated frame was draped in a snowy wrapper whose folds were scarcely whiter than the face of the dying woman, or the still luxuriant hair that was put back from her brow. The small, high-featured, clear-cut face that he remembered so well looked up at him. The sensitive, delicately-chiselled nostrils had grown transparent; the mouth was deeply lined; the lips pallid; but the old sweetness lurked in the smile that greeted him. It was not a meeting of many words at first; hearts were too full for lips to be eloquent.

'Ruthven, old friend,' said Milly, and then, with her hand in his, kept silence.

'You have been so good—' began Ruthven presently.

'I have done my best,' she put in quickly; 'and that is what I wanted so much to see you for; your boy has done you and his mother great wrong, but I believe in him. Ruthven, do you have faith in him too. I feel that the turning point in his young life has come, and that he will take the straight road now. Surely, dear friend, the old impulsive ways that I used to scold you for long ago, have hung about you still, for sometimes, so it seems to me, you have been hasty with the lad, and met his expressions of sorrow with a hot word or two that would better have been left unsaid. As to your wife—ah, Ruthven, I should like to have seen your wife—you will see that in the time to come her boy will make up to her for the pain he has cost her in the past, and she will not grudge the tears she has shed. Mothers never do, I think.'

'She is the dearest, tenderest, best—' said Ruthven.

'I am sure of that. Tell her that she does not seem like a stranger to me, but like some one I have known and loved and suffered with. I have thought so much about her since I knew her boy, that she has seemed to grow quite near me.'

Millicent lay there like a waxen image, so white, so still, with closed eyes and lips gently moving.

And Ruthven watching her, felt old memories rise and surge in his heart like the waves of a troubled sea.

All at once she looked up at him, eagerly, intently.

'I knew Cuthbert for your son the moment I saw him, and I took him straight into my heart.'

'You put me away from your heart in the old days, Millicent.'

A slight spasm crossed her marble features.

'Did I? Well, I have made up for it now. I have kept you in my memory all these years.'

'Why did you never answer my last letter?'

'I always was one to do things thoroughly, you know; even my enemies allowed that; and so I sent you away thoroughly.'

He thought the hand that still lay in his was growing strangely cold, and had half a mind to call for some attendant. But, as if divining his intention, Milly gently shook her head.

'What a careless boy you were, upsetting all my cotton bobbins!' she said presently, with a faint smile.

'But I was very sorry, and picked them all up again; you counted them, you know,' he answered, humoring her mood.

She muttered some words he could not catch. Surely, surely, the hand in his was growing colder still.

Her mind was wandering back to the old home. Once more she saw the river stealing on, whispering through the sedges, gliding beneath the alder-boughs; and Ruthven, not the life-worn man who stood beside her now, but a slender, dark-eyed boy with a smile like sunshine.

Hearing her breath come short and fast, Ruthven would fain have sought some aid, but the feeble fingers held him fast.

'Do not go,' she said, seeming to battle for a moment's fresh strength; 'there is something else I want to say; put your head closer down to me. I am not strong, you see, and—my voice fails me.'

He fell upon his knees beside the couch, crushing his lips against her hands.

'Ruthven,' she said softly, 'you say I put you from my heart, and it is true, dear, but—I loved you all the while.'

Silence; no sound but the ticking of a clock hard by. A life's secret has been told, and the answer to its telling is the sound of a man's weeping.

'I knew it was best so, for you and for me—and I was right, you see, wasn't I? It was a passing fancy, that love of yours. It was 'lad's love,' dear and nothing more. Such as it was, you gave it to me in all truth, and, Ruthven, it has lasted me all my life.'

She drew one hand from the clasp of his, and for a moment gently touched the bowed head which almost rested on her breast.

Ruthven's hair was thickly lined with gray, worn from the temples; almost white just above the brow.

But the eyes of the dying woman were dim. She noted none of these things.

To her that bowed head was dark with clustering locks as in the olden time; the dear dead time whose last knell was now quivering through that silent, shadowy room.

How long Ruthven knelt there he never knew. When at last he raised his head, the face of the woman he had once loved so well was still—the hands he clasped were cold—in death.—[All the Year Round.

THE TRUTH ABOUT BUNTHORNE.

From a Letter to The Pall Mall Gazette.

The truth is that the social phenomena which those objectionable words, "æsthetes" and "æstheticism," denote were confined to an extremely narrow circle until Mr. Du Maurier, who happened to be familiar with that circle, began to caricature them into notoriety. At that juncture an ingenious young gentleman from Ireland came upon the scene, and, falling into the humor of the thing, amused himself by posing as the typical "æsthete." He made it his business to supply postures and catchwords to the caricaturist. The bait took, and the catchwords were taken up not by one comic gentleman but by fifty, and with most avidity by those who knew least of the persons and the ideas of which they believed themselves to be making game. In consequence of their efforts, Bunthorne soon found himself becoming famous. Presently came the "Colonel" and "Patience," and his fortune was made at once. The persons who fondly supposed they were laughing him down were in reality playing his game, and have very successfully laughed him up. He is now the hero of the hour.

He goes starring it in America, and cannot open his lips but his sayings are telegraphed all over the world, and celebrated in prose and verse in the columns of the gravest journals. Even your own poet must needs add his tribute. While as for our old friend *Punch*, he has fairly got æsthetics on the brain. He has been going through a course of Ruskin, and solemnly came forward the other day in the new character of an arbiter between "true æstheticism" and "false æstheticism," evidently with the true griffin and the false griffin in his mind. What next, I wonder, and when will the comic gentlemen realize the true humor of the situation which they have created? As soon as they do so, I shall be surprised if they do not feel that it is time to leave æsthetes and æstheticism alone.

DEATH IN THE FOREST.

From The Visions of England.

Where the greenwood is greenest
At gloaming of day,
Where the twelve-antler'd stag
Faces boldest at bay;
Where the solitude deepens,
Till almost you hear
The blood-beat of the heart
As the quarry slips near;
His comrades outridden
With scorn in the race,
The Red King is hallooing
His hounds to the chase.

What though the Wild Hunt,
Like a whirlwind of hell,
Yestereve ran the forest,
With baying and yell;—
In his cups the Red heathen
Mocks God to the face,
"In the Devil's name, shoot,
Tyrrell, ho! to the chase!"—
—Now, with worms for his courtiers,
He lies in the narrow,
Cold couch of the chancel!
But whence was the arrow?

. . . .

His sin goes before him.
The lust and the pride:
And the curses of England
Breathe hot at his side,
And the Evil-wood walls,
That in ashes were laid,
For his jest and his pleasure,
Frown black o'er the glade;—
—Now, with worms for his courtiers,
He lies in the narrow,
Cold couch of the chancel!
But whence was the arrow?

Then a shudder of death
Flickered fast through the wood;
And they found the Red King
Red-gilt in his blood.
What wells up in his throat?
Is it cursing or prayer?
Was it Henry or Tyrrell,
Or demon, who there
Has dyed the fell tyrant
Twice crimson in gore,
While the soul, disembodied,
Hunts on to hell-door?

Ah! friendless in death!
Rude forest hands fling
On the charcoaler's wain
What but now was the King!
And through the long Minster
The carcass they bear,
And huddle it down,
Without priest, without prayer:—
Now, with worms for his courtiers,
He lies in the narrow,
Cold couch of the chancel!
But whence was the arrow?

—[F. T. PALGRAVE.

TITLES OF BOOKS.

From The Spectator.

Few outside the circle of authors and publishers have any idea of the trouble involved in choosing titles for new books. The factors that combine to make up a good title are many, and some of them, perhaps, more far-fetched and complicated than may at first sight appear. To begin with, titles are copyrighted, and, therefore, woe be to the unwary publisher who employs a title belonging to a litigious rival! for it is the publisher, and not the author, who is responsible. Even a colorable imitation of a previously used title would most assuredly bring down the wrath of the Courts, in the form of substantial damages.

Before the proposed title is finally passed for press all the available book catalogues for about the last forty years must be diligently searched, to see that it has not been previously adopted. Apart from the dread of legal phantoms, it is not advantageous to the publisher of either that two books should be in the market under the same or even mistakably similar titles. Booksellers in the country, when ordering from their wholesale agents in town, are liable, under these circumstances, to have the books they do not want sent them; and extra expense of carriage and time, besides a great deal of correspondence and confusion, follows as a matter of course. Such unpleasantnesses do not react to the benefit of the sale of either of the two publications. Speaking generally, there are many well marked variations of the species Title. Publishers and old hands at writing are therefore accustomed to speak of "selling," "catchy," "misleading" and "weak" titles. Under the first of these groups would be included those titles which catch the eye at once, are harmonious to the ear, and convey instantly to the mind either a clear conception of the scope and intention of the book, or raise in the imagination a desire to know more concerning its contents. Among recently published books, "The Land of the Midnight Sun" may be instanced as a good title of this class. Those who know or have read about Scandinavia at once perceive its appropriateness and applicability; and those who are unaware that the sun can ever be seen at midnight naturally have their curiosity aroused by the very fancifulness of the title, and desire to know more about the work. This title is also one likely to linger long in the memory.

Biographies are about the easiest class of books for which to select titles, the name of the subject of the memoir being generally sufficient. Novels are certainly the most difficult books to name suitably. Though in other classes of books misleading titles often turn out to be good selling titles, amongst novels they are a great mistake. Not a few worthy farmers of the South Downs and Wolds must have ordered Ruskin's work on sheepfolds, and we wonder how many unsuspicious and simple-minded persons have taken "Adam and Eve" to be a book treating of the cradle-time of our race; and have not many enthusiastic students procured Kingsley's "Yeast," thinking that they were getting a work upon *torula* and kindred organisms? It was not so very long ago that a young lady asked at a library for Ouida's "Moths," to enable her to pursue further her entomological studies. At any rate, a novel should show clearly from its title that it is a work of fiction. For this reason, the use of Biblical quotations as titles—a practice unfortunately in vogue just now, with certain writers—is to be deprecated.

There is one novelist whose books bear simply the names of flowers, and though a voluminous writer, it is not likely that this class of titles will be exhausted, and the plan has the merit of distinctness. A growing custom, and one in keeping with the so-called æstheticism of the present time, is to call novels by a few well-known words from some old English song or carol. This method may only be a passing fancy, but it is unconventional, and, for the class of books to which it is applied, is an agreeable change from the stiff titles to which we have been accustomed, and it is particularly appropriate to the stories of certain living writers. The press, nowadays, pours out such an overwhelming quantity of works of fiction, that the ultimate fate of any particular novel depends somewhat upon its name. The title should be inseparably connected with the main incidents of the book, so that the recollection of the plot will at once recall the title, and the mention or sight of the title be sufficient to vividly bring to mind the plot. Among titles which seem to fulfil these conditions may be mentioned "Oliver Twist," "Bleak House," "Felix Holt, the Radical," "Vanity Fair," "Love or Marriage," "Citoyenne Jacqueline," "The Wreck of the Grosvenor," "A Confidential Agent," "Lady Audley's Secret," "The Talisman," "Westward Ho!" Titles which linger longest in the memory are generally short, or "catchy," as they may be called, and such usually consist of one or two words only. If possible, a title should be either euphonious, as "Robinson Crusoe," "Nicholas Nickleby," "Barnaby Rudge," "Ready-Money Mortiboy," "Dorothy Fox"; or else distinctly difficult of pronunciation, as "Theophrastus Such," "Mr. Pisistratus Brown, M. P.," "Rose Turquand," "Among the Gibjigs," "Fritters, Tatters and the Councillor," "Kicklebury's on the Rhine," "Contarini Fleming." Titles falling under the former category are likely to prove the more advantageous. The trick of alliteration, combined with some of the qualities already mentioned, is not without its advantages; "Pickwick Papers," "Summer Snow," "Fallen Fortunes," "Cripps, the Carrier," "Lost for Love," "The Chronicles of Carlingford," "Peregrine Pickle," "Roderick Random," "Rob Roy," "White Wings," are instanced which occur at once to the mind.

As a rule, those titles are weak which commence with an article. Cataloguers ruthlessly discard all such affixes, and index the books by the initials of the second words. Long flabby titles, consisting of a number of short words, are seldom successful.

It wasn't till they had fought ten minutes and the other fellow was on top of him, jamming his head into the mud, that the sheriff exclaimed: "I am an officer. I have authority to arrest you!" And then the other fellow shouted: "Well, old hoss, your authority doesn't seem to be worth a cuss!"