

one end, and I bowled "round" at the other. We bowled all we knew, and our field worked like tigers. What mischief we meant the telegraph soon showed—"7 wickets down and 21 runs!"

Just then, at a slight pause in the game when I went up to Southey he pointed away to a tent on the far side of the ground, and there, peering round the corner of the canvas, was our tall grey colonel, *dressed in plain clothes*. He had not relished the crowd of spectators when the day was going against us; but although, while confident of our success, he did not care who saw him or talked to him; he could not bear to be seen or spoken to while we were losing; yet he could not resist seeing out the match, and had taken up his position by the tent, stealthily, alone, and in plain clothes. Southey and I didn't bowl any the worse when we knew who was looking at us from behind the tent.

It fell out that the swell Town eleven, who in their first innings had kept us hard at it for four hours, were now disposed of in three-quarters of an hour, and for 30 runs! The excitement was now intense, the fire of the match was worked up to its utmost heat. We had 96 runs to get to win, and it was just on the cards that we might do it. Still, chances and betting were against us; for the ground was not what it was when we began: it was much cut up between wickets; the hot sun and the play had dried it, and made it lumpy and untrue. Southey and I sloped over to the colonel. We felt that he had more interest in the game, than even we had ourselves. He scarcely spoke: all he said was, "You couldn't have done more in the bowling than you did: the match isn't lost yet." Sergeant-Major McJug, of the Sappers, one of our best bats, went to the wicket first with Winterburn, a lieutenant in H.M. Foot. McJug was bowled out the first ball. It was painful to see the colonel's expression as the sergeant's wicket fell. "Jim," said old Southey, who was captain of our team, "go in; cut over the slow bowling; when Winterburn's out, I'll join you, and if you die first, I'll follow." I went in. The first ball they bowled me was slow, overpitched, and to leg. I got hold of it, and sent it a good way towards the sea. We ran 4. The telegraph soon showed "10" towards the "96." Winterburn "mopped up" two or three more, was bowled out, and then Southey joined me. Presently the telegraph showed 20, when the other side took off their slow bowler and made a set to separate us; for they guessed we meant mischief. Every ball came straight on the wicket, and their fielding was first-rate. I think I see old Southey now: he has a peculiar way of stopping a good ball, thundering down on it as if he meant to batter it into little bits. They tried every dodge on the slate, and puzzled us considerably; they put on bowler after bowler, till I think every man in the eleven had his shy at us; but they could not get us out. At last "60," our old number, showed itself, and told us that the neck of our work was broken. Southey and I were happy then. We were "well in:" we had collared the bowl-

ing: we were strong, and cared for no ball they could bowl. "Even if we fall," we said, "surely the fellows to follow, can make the runs now."

It was about this time, in changing ends for a quiet single, that Southey called over to me in an Irish whisper, "Look at the colonel!" There he was, *in his staff uniform*, in the thickest of the line of lookers-on, a head taller than most of them, chatting gaily to everybody who came in his way. He had been home and had put on his gayest uniform, now that he saw we were sure to win.

The rest is easily told. The loose balls we hit for fours and fives; the good ones we put away for singles. 70, 80, and 90, followed on the telegraph in quick succession, and Southey at length made the winning hit for "96," and the day was ours. We had made our 80 runs in less than two hours, and carried out our bats; so you may guess that H.M. Rifles were at a premium that day. After the match was over the colonel walked up to the wicket where we had fought all day, and looked it over as cricketers will look. He was as perfectly happy as a man may wish to be: his face literally shone with delight and pride; and I am sure he would have given a hundred pounds rather than we had lost the match. Of course Southey and I were with him, and it did our hearts good to hear him thank us for "winning the match for *him*."

### THREE NIGHTS BY ASH-POOL.

#### I.

"MARY's late i' coming home, mother."

"So she is, Alice; just put thy apron over thy head and run down t' garden to look if she's i' sight: she suld ha' been home long afore this. T' clock's upo' t' stroke o' ten."

When Alice opened the house-door her mother heard the low moaning of the midsummer wind in the full trees, and, dropping her sewing, followed into the porch. It was a deep, shady porch, garlanded about with roses and honeysuckle as a rustic porch should be, and with a narrow path edged with golden St. John's wort straight down to the gate. There was no open prospect on either hand, for the hedges were high and the shrubs thick, but once at the gate, you could look far over the upland fields, and trace for nearly a mile across them the footpath leading to Heckerdyke. The Wards' was a lone house amongst the fields, with a dense planted hill rising close behind, and the corn lands and pasture lands stretching in front. They could not watch the curl of a neighbour's smoke for company at any time without mounting up through the wood, but thence they could see Heckerdyke in the hollow two miles distant, and the haze of other smaller villages in the valley further away. It was now a moonlight night, very clear, soft, warm, and beautiful, and the melancholy whusking in the leaves only seemed to deepen the stillness. When Alice had stood for some minutes peering steadfastly at the white road, she said, "I can't make her

out, mother; let us walk a bit o' t' way to meet her."

"I don't mind if we do, only let me put on my bonnet."

Alice passed through the gate, and stood leaning against the post until her mother joined her, when they went straight forward along the path without there being much talk between them. Not meeting Mary, perhaps they walked further than they intended, for, coming to an inconvenient stile beside a great pond called in the country-side Ash-pool, from the trees that overhung it, Mrs. Ward stopped, and said she did not see the use of proceeding. "She can't be long now, so we might as well wait here. Sit thee down, Alice; I'm well-nigh tired myself." So they rested on the plank put through the bars by way of steps, Alice above her mother, and both with their faces set towards Heckerdyke. Ash-pool laved the long meadow grass almost close to their feet, and when the swaying of the boughs permitted it, the broken moonlight shone through on the water with silvery brightness. It was a lovely spot. The moonlight and the ripple, the quivering leaves and the dipping reeds fired Alice's half-sleepy eyes, and she stared at them until she fancied she saw something white moving out of the black shade on the further bank.

"La, mother, I'm glad I didn't come by myself—there's something not right about the pool to-night!" cried she, shuddering all through as I have heard old-fashioned folks say we do when anybody is walking over the place where we are to be buried.

Mrs. Ward was looking straight along the path to Heckerdyke, but at this exclamation she turned her face towards the water, and replied, "I remember hearing tell when I was a lass how that it was ha'nted, but I've passed it myself at all hours, an' i' all weathers, an' I never saw or heard anything. There's nought i' this world worse than ourselves, an' you've no call to be afeard, Alice."

Notwithstanding this encouragement, Alice's gaze lingered on the water with a kind of fascination. The ash-boughs swayed apart under a stronger gust, and showed her the blackest and deepest of the pool, where the trees arched over like a cavern roof, and the bank was steep and jagged as if desperate hands had clutched and broken it in a struggling fall.

"Ay, mother, but it's a dismal, dreary place! Let's get on a bit further, or else go back!" cried she, springing suddenly from her seat. "It gives me such a feel you can't tell."

"I didn't know I'd such a fond lass to take flights an' fancies for she doesn't know what," responded her mother; "but come thy ways; if Mary was over-persuaded to stay supper at thy aunt's, there's no telling but she may stop all night, or if she doesn't Jack'll come with her part o' her road."

Alice set off down the path at a pace which soon left her mother behind; at the next stile, however, she waited until she overtook her, when Mrs. Ward said, rather testily, "What

ails thee to-night, Alice? One would think thee was daft."

Alice only laughed, and said she was all right again now she had left Ash-pool.

"Such stuff! *thee* talking o' being feared on it. It's none so long sin' thee would paddle in after marsh-mallows, wetting thy skirts and catching cold i' thy feet! Don't run, bairn; who does thee think's after thee?"

Alice at this remonstrance moderated her pace, and they regained their home side by side. Mrs. Ward struck a light in the house-place quickly, and as Alice turned off the garment which she had worn over her head during the walk, she stood before her mother's eyes the prettiest girl in Rivisdale. Mrs. Ward was very fond of her two children, and very proud of them. They had been well brought up, and were esteemed as well conducted as girls could be. Alice was twenty-one, and was engaged soon to be married to Farmer Goodhugh, of Rookwood End; but Mary was only seventeen, and had no avowed suitor. Alice had a healthy pale face, dark hair, and a figure that was almost perfect in its build and development, as her firm, agile walk and graceful movements showed. Cultivation could not have improved her much; nature had given her the form and proportions of an antique model, and also some of the strong passions that moved antique women. Living all her life in that lone house, amongst the woods and fields, taught by her mother, and having no companion but her young sister, she had grown up pure, reserved, and good by habit as well as instinct. Reading her Bible, the Pilgrim's Progress from this world to a better, and a few old-fashioned volumes of spiritual instruction besides, was the highest of her mental efforts; but she was a clever dairy-woman on her mother's little farm, and had quaint stores of practical knowledge about herbs, roots, bees, and flowers; she was weather-wise, too, and could tell by the signs in the sky whether it would be fair or foul in Rivisdale day by day. Her sister Mary was learning the dressmaking with Miss Timble, at Heckerdyke, but Alice had always stayed at home to help her mother, the liveliest of her holiday excursions being a monthly visit to the village schoolroom where the young women of the parish met to make clothes for the poor, under the superintendence of that excellent Dorcas the rector's wife, and after which, for three years past, Mark Goodhugh had always contrived to join her and little Mary and set them home. Mrs. Ward considered Alice very happy in her prospect of a good husband and a good home, and between the young people there was an attachment warm, strong, and true. Alice was a woman of very deep feeling; her affection for her mother, and especially for little Mary, partook of the passionateness of her temperament.

"I think it is a craze I've got to-night, mother," said she, looking dreamily at the candle standing on the table between them; "for now I am away from Ash-pool I want to go back."

"I'll hear none of that, at all events," re-

plied Mrs. Ward; and she locked the house-door and put the key in her pocket resolutely. "Mary'll not come home to-night; she's stayed at her aunt's, or Miss Timble's got a press o' work an' has kept her."

Alice did not seem satisfied. "It's very queer, mother, the longing I have to go back and seek her; she's stayed away many's the night before, an' I never felt like this."

"What's come ower thee, bairn! longings an' feelings, such a fash! What can ail thee?"

"That's just what I don't know, mother."

"Nor nobody else either. Get thee to bed, and thee'll soon forget all about it."

Alice felt herself very foolish, but very uncomfortable, as she obeyed her mother's mandate, and went up the narrow cottage stairs to the room which she and Mary were accustomed to occupy together. The little lattice had not been closed, and, looking out, there were the fields and the white road stretching away to Ash-pool. She stood gazing on them without any design, until her mother's movements in the adjoining room ceased, and then putting a plaid shawl over her head she crept down stairs, unlocked the back door, and was away across the first field before the aimlessness of this new journey struck her. Then she laughed to herself, and said, "It is fond; what has Ash-pool to do with Mary, or Mary to do with Ash-pool? But as I have got out I'll go on." And reasoning with herself thus, she quickened her pace, and in a quarter of an hour had reached the stile where she and her mother rested before.

All was just as still, just as beautiful, just as softly mysterious as when she left it; the water dimpling in the moonlight, and the great ash-boughs swaying slowly to and fro. She stood looking across it, and blaming herself for her folly, and hoping her mother would not discover her absence for ever so long. Indeed, she made no attempt to go home, but presently sat down, exactly as if she had come out in the deliberate intention of waiting for somebody. And as she sat there flowed irresistibly over her mind vivid recollections of certain things she had read in her few books, especially of Christian towing to the shores of the waters of Death, and then taking leave of wife and children before going over the flood alone; but suddenly she was startled from her dreams by the sight of a figure rushing across the field where there was no pathway, straight towards Ash-pool. In an instant she knew that it was little Mary, and, springing forward, caught her in her arms. Then a struggle ensued; the younger sister was slight and weak in comparison with Alice, but she had the frenzied strength of the despair that is covetous of death.

"Let me go—let me go, Alice," she panted, and twisted herself, and struck with all her little might; but Alice had clasped her firmly round the body, and trailed her by main force along the hedge-side, out of sight of the water; then she purposely dropped to the ground herself, pulling Mary with her, and there held her with a more gentle restraint.

Mary's efforts to escape ceased gradually, and she fell into a quivering, moaning, sobbing agony, with her head resting on her sister's knees, and her pretty long yellow hair all loose about her face and neck. Alice put it away, and, bending down, kissed her soft cheek, and then lifted her up, and made her rest against her breast with the fondest tenderness.

"You have got into trouble, Mary darling; but all's not over yet," said she. "I've been sent here to save you from doing a great sin."

"Who sent you?"

"It was God himself, Mary. I've had it borne in upon my mind all night to come and seek you by Ash-pool."

Mary said nothing for several minutes, but at last, in a gush of tears, she broke out: "Oh, Alice! what shall I do—what shall I do? You'd better have let me go. I'd have been lying like a stone at the bottom now!"

"Nay, Mary; your poor body would, but *you* would ha' been standing afore the throne o' God's justice."

"I don't think he'd be as hard as Miss Timble, Alice, if I was."

Alice was silent for a little while, and then thinking Mary somewhat quietened, she began to say, "You'll go home now, Mary?"

"No, no; I daren't, Alice—I daren't!" And then the circumstances, or the consequences, of her calamity overpowered her reason again, and, with vehement cries, she renewed her efforts to escape. Alice was so excited that she did not see her mother until she was close upon them. The old woman had heard her stealthy departure, had dressed herself, and followed her out into the fields. Some way off she had heard Mary's agonised voice. Now she loved Alice, but little Mary was the idol and darling of her mother's heart; and when she saw the strange, unnatural strife, she stood for a moment paralysed; but Mary had seen her, and was still.

"We will take her home, mother," said Alice, quietly.

"Ay, yes, we'll take her home, to be sure—take her home. Come, Mary dear, come now an' be good." And Mrs. Ward put her arm round her waist and lifted her up.

"Oh, mother, mother! I'm not worth it—I'm not worth it," sobbed Mary, drawing herself away.

"We are none on us worth much, but thou art our Mary, an' thee must come wi' thy mother an' thy sister, let what will ha' happened thee. I say nought, only thee must come home."

"Oh, mother, that it should be me to break thy heart and shame Alice afore everybody! I wish I were dead—I wish I were dead."

"Hearts take a deal o' breaking, Mary, that has their help i' the Lord Almighty," was Mrs. Ward's answer; and then she said to Alice, with an involuntary sigh, "Take hold of her, and let us get her home."

It was a miserable walk. Mary cried hysterically, and twice again made her insane efforts to get back to Ash-pool. It was something, indeed, to thank God for aloud, as Mrs. Ward did, when

they had her safe in the house-place and the door locked. They put her into the great chair that had been her father's, and Alice kindled the fire, while her mother sat still and soothed the unhappy girl as well as she might. But Mary was not in a condition to listen or profit much. She was sensible that they whom she had most dreaded to see had taken her to their hearts and had not reproached her; but she was sensible also that she was a wicked girl, who had brought shame and sorrow upon all belonging to her, and that her own troubles were but just begun. Miss Timble had made her understand that too distinctly ever to be effaced from her memory. Neither Mrs. Ward nor Alice asked a single question, though what had happened came upon them like a thunder-clap; for the present they were only intent on getting Mary quietened and put to rest. This was not easy of accomplishment: she rejected food, and declared she would starve herself to death—she would not live to be a disgrace to everybody who loved her—if she were in her grave they would forgive and forget her by-and-by.

"Hush! Mary darling, don't talk like that," said Alice; "if God forgives thee, surely thy mother an' thy sister can."

"Miss Timble said you couldn't, and that the best thing I could do would be to die out of the way."

"Miss Timble has not had the same temptations fro' the flesh an' the devil as thee, Mary, or she'd know better than to speak like that. If thee sins no more thy mother's heart will never turn again thee; we maun't try to be more just than God, Alice. Thee has been very wrong, but thee belongs to us, Mary, if thee had been ten times as wrong; I ha' no right an' no desire to cut thee off. Alice, a sup o' hot tea would do all o' us good. Mary'll drink out o' my cup."

And when the tea was made, Mary was prevailed on to put her trembling lips to it and drink, and then she let herself be taken up-stairs, undressed, and laid on the bed without any resistance, only now and then she looked wonderingly in her mother's face, as if what was passing bewildered her, and every few minutes a convulsive fit of sobs and tears shook her slight frame from head to foot.

Alice busied herself in folding up her sister's clothes, and when that was done she stood by the bed foot, looking pityingly at Mary, until her mother spoke. "Go thee to my bed, Alice; I'll sleep with thy sister to-night, for the less she gets talking the better." So Alice went away and shut the door.

But Mary could not sleep, and before the morning she had confessed herself to her mother—her love and her weakness, her misery and her despair. It was not without some entreaty that Mary would tell the name of him who had deceived her; but at last, having exacted a promise of silence from her mother, she did so. Nothing was likely to astonish Mrs. Ward after the lamentable discovery of her darling's frailty, and when she heard the name of the rector's son,

she only sighed and said, "Who could have thought it!"

Good people are often awfully severe; the next day Mrs. Ward had this severity to suffer. She was alone in the house-place, about noon, Alice and Mary being together up-stairs, when she saw the erect, solemn figure of the rector coming over the fields. She did not meet him reverentially at the gate, as her custom was, but let him knock at the door, and then silently admitted him. The rector was not an unkind man at heart, but he was rather magisterial in his office; he was more priest than pastor, and he was neither by nature nor habit, used to tender dealing with the bruised sinners of his flock. Mrs. Ward coloured painfully as he metaphorically put her into the witness-box.

"Mrs. Ward, is this true that I hear about Mary—her misconduct?" said he, as if he were pressured of his answer.

"I am not one to defend wrong-doing, Mr. Lascelles, as you very well know, but Mary's my child, and I will say this for her—she's more to be pitied than blamed, and him that deceived her is the greater sinner o' the two," replied Mrs. Ward, firmly. "He had better knowledge o' what's good an' what's bad than she had, an' it was a very poor thing o' him to ruin her that loved him. My girl's not vain or mean-minded like some, an' her undoing would never ha' come about had she not been ower-persuaded through the tenderness o' her poor heart."

"Really, Mrs. Ward, you make a confusion between right and wrong that surprises me! I thought that *you* of all people would have kept your daughter better!" said the rector. Mrs. Ward might have asked him why he had not kept *his* son better, but she refrained herself, and held her peace. "For a girl so young, and who had every attention from my wife at the school, she must have a very depraved disposition indeed to have done as she has."

"No, Mr. Lascelles, Mary's *not* depraved," returned Mrs. Ward, indignantly; "she has been led away, and there's no telling what she might become if we flung her out from among us like a bad weed. But God made me her mother, and let who will cast stones an' hard words at her or me, I shall stand up for her an' shield her as long as I live."

"Would it not be well to remove her from the neighbourhood, at least for a time?" suggested the rector; "such a bad example to the other young women of the parish—"

"No, sir, I will not send my Mary away from her mother an' sister," was the resolute answer; "as for her being a bad example, it seems to me she'll be a sad warning rather to her old lake-fellows. The poor thing will be punished enough by the cold looks o' one an' another, an' the sorrow o' bringing into the world a babe without any o' the love an' pride that helps us women through, without Alice an' me turning our backs on her. She'll stay wi' me, sir, and we shall do what we can to comfort her."

"I am sorry to find you of this way of think-

ing, Mrs. Ward; if such early wickedness is not to be discouraged, I don't know what we shall come to by-and-by!"

"Mary'll have enough to bear, sir, never fear; nobody need come near us that would rather stay away."

The rector rose with an air of displeasure: "And who is the other delinquent?" asked he, coldly.

"Mary'll not tell——"

"Worse and worse! Does she mean to carry on her intrigue?"

"He's far enough away by this, sir——"

"Humph—very bad case altogether, *very* bad. Mary will come to no more of my wife's Dorcas meetings, and perhaps Alice would prefer to stay away just at present. I must show the young people that vice is to be discouraged, Mrs. Ward. Mary has only herself to blame that she is an outcast. I trust it may be put into her heart to repent of her wickedness and to amend her ways." He said nothing of the sinner being taken back with welcome and rejoicing—outcast she must be from human society for ever—only the All-Pure meets returning sinners. And so he went away, leaving poor Mrs. Ward somewhat mystified between his Sunday preaching and his week-day practice.

## II.

ALICE WARD'S marriage with Farmer Goodhugh was deferred by this sad trouble which had befallen Mary, and there was even some talk of its going off altogether; but though evil tongues spoke, the young people, being truly attached to each other, fulfilled their engagement the next spring, and Alice removed to Rookwood End. Mary was then left alone with her mother and a bright-eyed, four-months old baby, which she worshipped as fondly, and mothered-up as delightfully, as if the blessing of God had been upon it at its coming. Old friends were shy of the house, but Mrs. Lascelles had been to see her; and though she came primed with stern good counsel, as she thought befitted a clergyman's wife, somehow she did not find the occasion to utter it. Mary showed her baby with a perfect motherly tenderness, and the sedate modesty of her young face forbade all imputation of lightness, and would have made rebuke seem very inappropriate. Her child had comforted her, and though Mary was now and then sorrowful, she was not miserable; she looked upon her little one exactly as she would have done had she been a happily wedded wife, and this her crowning joy. Mrs. Lascelles had not the heart to scold her; and when she went away she even kissed the child as it lay in its mother's arms, and touched its dimples with a playful caress. The tears flashed into Mary's eyes—she had been so longing to ask a question, and this emboldened her, though her heart beat very heavily all the time.

"Are you likely to lose Master Frank, ma'am? Will he be going away to this war they talk of?"

"I am afraid he will, Mary. I am sorely

afraid he will," replied Mrs. Lascelles, sighing. Mary's face drooped; she said no more, and her visitor went away without any more words.

Farmer Goodhugh took in a weekly newspaper, and every Sunday evening Mary used to meet her sister at the stile by Ash-pool to receive it, and look for the intelligence of the removals of regiments—of Frank Lascelles's regiment, that is. Mary had never been to church since her calamity. She used to go and sit through the long Sunday afternoons on the hill-top with her baby alone and offer her prayers there—the coldness of old friends had made her feel herself unworthy to join the Christian congregation in Heckerdyke church. After tea Mrs. Ward walked with her to the stile, and when Alice and her husband appeared she would join them, and leave Mary to con her paper with the baby in her lap until they returned. This was done, as usual, one beautiful pure Sunday evening, and Mary had read, through blinding tears, that Frank was immediately going abroad. Nobody but herself knew why she was always so anxious for the paper; no matter what she *ought* to have done, she had not ceased loving him—she thought she never should cease to love him. When she had seen the fatal words, she let the paper drop to the ground and laid her lips to the baby's cheek—sobbing and crying. But Ash-pool dimpled its dark waters in vain—she had that now worth loving and living for, and the shame was not greater than she could bear.

She had sat thus with her eyes hidden for some time, when a hand was laid on her shoulder, and a well-remembered voice said, in the pleasant old accents, "Mary, Mary!" She sprang up: she never reproached him; all was forgotten in the greeting of the woman who loved. For a moment only—they had been guilty together—both very young, passionate, happy, heedless of consequences—but the heavy sense of sin was between them and its living evidence in Mary's arms. After the first impulse both were silent. Frank was the first to speak:

"They were all in church—I felt that I must see you once more, Mary—just once before I go. You got my letters?"

"Yes—I can't bid you send no more, but my mother does not like it. She would be grieved to know you were here now. Oh! Frank, Frank, it would have been better for me if we had never met!"

"I will marry you before I leave England, if you will, Mary——"

"It's too late, Frank—it's too late; you shall not waste your life for me. I know it would be *your* ruin to marry me, and it could not help *us*. We shall stay with my mother—so give us one kiss, and then go——"

"But when I come home again, Mary——"

"You must not see me any more." Her voice trembled, and her face drooped as she said so, and Frank declared that he should not obey her. "It oughtn't to please me, Frank, to see you're fond of me as ever, but it does—I'm

afraid I've a bad heart," said Mary, looking up at him, tearfully. "But what I said first was right—we mustn't see one another any more."

"Perhaps we never shall—who knows whether I may live to come back?"

"Oh, Frank, Frank!" And then the sad tears came.

These two had had no method or design in their fall—young and beautiful, they had loved "not wisely but too well." Of course the penalty would be paid by both in one shape or another—nay, perhaps the bitterness of that hour almost expiated their sin. Frank offered to marry Mary, but *she* knew, and *he* knew, that it could never be, and that the moment that witnessed their parting witnessed it as for ever. We need not try to portion out the relative shares of blame—both passionate, both weak, we know on which descends the heavier punishment.

They had not met till now since her disgrace became public, but neither made any allusion to it; Mary said nothing of the hard words which had frenzied and driven her to the verge of self-destruction—of that terrible hour she never thought without fear and trembling. But Frank guessed much. At home he had heard his mother speak with a severe compassion of Mary, and mention it as commendable that she kept herself in seclusion, not appearing even at church. And he had brought this upon her! She and her mother and sister had kept his share of her secret faithfully, and she had borne all the contumely in her own person when the mere mention of his name would with many have gone far to mitigate the blackness of her sin. He could not thank her for this—any *words* seemed poor and cold, and she would none of his caresses. They stood side by side looking over to the sunset and the gilded trees, and speaking little; but there was the aching pang of remorse in both their hearts. The after-taste of guilt is very bitter.

Presently there was a sound of distant children's voices, and Mary knew that the people were coming out of church.

"Now, Frank dear," said she, turning her sorrowful pale face up to his.

"Must I go, Mary?"

There were a few tears mingled, scalding tears, such as may your eyes and mine never have to shed! Heart-drops that could not heal the heart-ache, lave out the sin, lessen the remorse.

The little one was asleep in Mary's arms all the time, close pressed to her bosom. Frank kissed the rosy, dimpled face, and kissed its mother. "Mary, I was very cruel to you—very selfish," he said.

"Never mind, love, that is all over. I will like to remember, when—when I don't see you any more, that you loved me. Oh, Frank, Frank!"

And thus they parted: and Mary ran home crying, crying. You pity the good and true lovers on whom sorrow falls; have a little pity, too, for those whose passion lies under the ban

of shame and separation. For all grief there is perfect healing, save for that guilt which society immaculate never condones. Scourge the sin as savagely as you will, but remember the sinners' humanity, and lay the lash on them lightly: perhaps, as Mrs. Ward said to her erring daughter, you have had less temptation from the flesh and the devil than your weak brothers and sisters around you.

### III.

ONE night, rather more than two years after this parting, Mary Ward again took her way up to the stile by Ash-pool. Her little lad was now old enough to toddle beside her, clinging to her gown, to run on before and then scamper back, laughing and crowing, to hide his face against her knees. He was a very beautiful child, with great dark-blue eyes, and brown hair curling in rings all over his head, and every day, to Mary's mingled joy and dread, he grew more like his father, who was far away with the army in the East.

All the long morning there had been the ringing of Heckerdyke church bells for a great victory. Mary had heard the sound over the hills, and had paused in her work often to listen, and think where was Frank all the time that the sun was shining and the bells were ringing through bonny Rivisdale? Was he lying dead, face upwards, on the crimson battle-field, or was he writhing, in wounded misery, in an hospital tent, or was he one amongst the happy saved and victorious? She was in feverish haste, for Alice was to meet her at the stile, with any news she could get from the rectory, whither *she* could never go, and once or twice she would have carried the boy, that they might get on the faster; but he was full of spirits and mischief, and would use his own little legs to run in amongst the wheat, to gather the poppies and gay blue corn-flowers, and kept her waiting again and again. But when she reached the stile, she was all too soon—no Alice was there, nor in sight upon the path; so she went further and further, until she came to the brow of the hill, which looked down full upon the village. A little way off was the church, with the rectory and rectory gardens, and, leaning over the last stile, with the boy playing at her feet, she tried to school herself to watch and wait. At first it did not strike her that, though the sun had gone round from the south side of the house, all the blinds were down and the lower shutters half closed. But there was a strange silence and hush about the place; the door into the flowery porch was shut, and Mr. Lascelles was not taking his evening stroll of inspection amongst his roses. The joy-bells had ceased five hours ago, and though the day's work was done, there was no noise of cricket-players on the village-green, or of quoit-players at the alehouse.

She knew that Alice would go to the back-door at the rectory, and she kept her eyes on that, distinguishing curiously the green ivy leaves, with the sunshine slanting round a cor-

ner at the west. So intent was she, that she did not notice a young woman who was coming from a little dairy-farm that she had passed a few hundred yards behind, until she had twice asked her to make way for her to cross the stile. She had a jug of milk in her hand, and, with mechanical civility, Mary held it for her until she had got over, and then she recognised an old school companion who had gone into service at the rectory.

"I can't stop, Mary, but I'm glad to see you looking so well. And is that your little boy?" said she. "There's trouble at home—you've heard, perhaps. They stopped the bells directly."

"I have heard nothing."

"Poor Master Frank's dead—yes, he's dead—and missis is nearly distracted. I've just been for t' milk for our teas. I knew you'd be sorry—he was a very fine young man. Ay, true it is, t' best allus goes t' first!"

Mary never spoke, but just turned round, and, taking up her child, now tired enough to be quiet, tottered back to Ash-pool. Afterwards she told Alice, that when her old companion said, "Master Frank's dead—yes, he's dead," something struck her heart like a death-blow. Her sister found her sitting there by the water, still as a statue, dumb and tearless, and white as a corpse.

"You have heard, Mary?" she said, kneeling beside her. "They got the news this noon. It's very sad. They say he was riding into the battle, and cheering his men to come on, with his sword waving over his head, when a shot struck him in the breast, and he died. Oh, love, love! I wish you had a right to be sorry for him; but it is like a judgment on him for his wickedness to you."

"Then it's a judgment on both of us, for I was as much to blame as he," replied Mary, still clear enough to defend her lover.

"I never said so before, but I have hated him, Mary—oh! I have hated him! I believe I was glad when I heard he was killed."

"Don't, Alice, don't!" And poor Mary shuddered with a blind, blank look of misery in her pretty eyes.

They were in no haste to go home either of them, and they stayed by the pool as the sun went down. The child fell fast asleep in Mary's arms, but her anguish only seemed to deepen in watching the innocent, unconscious little face. Alice wished she would give way and cry, but of any such outlet for her feelings she was at present incapable. Her heart swelled, and her throat ached, but the tears would not come. And while these two women sat silently grieving, the bereaved father was coming slowly towards them, his head bent down, his spirit within him weak as water. He had lost his only son—his only child. There was little sign in his subdued presence of the magisterial priest

who had condemned Mary and rebuked her mother—the flood of sorrow had come over him and swept him down to the level of suffering humanity. He had come to the fields by Ash-pool to be alone with God in his anguish, for Frank had been the joy and pride of his heart, and that he had died as became a brave soldier but little mitigated it. And so it happened that he saw Mary for the first time since she was an innocent merry girl, resting so still, broken-hearted, with *his* child upon her lap. Self-absorbed as he was, he could not but read aright the utter sense of prostration that her attitude and countenance betrayed, and with the frightened glance she cast at him as she moved to let him pass, a sudden suspicion came into his mind.

"Mary, you know what trouble has come to us. You are in great sorrow again. Are our griefs akin?" said he, sharply.

"Oh! sir, sir!" That piteous exclamation confessed all, and with a quick gesture she uncovered the child's face, and held it towards him.

The rector could not speak—than all anger, than all disgust, than all righteous reprobation, love is stronger. Mary's love for the son he had lost overcame his indignation. By-and-by he recovered his voice, and said, with a gesture towards the home where the bereaved mother was weeping, "I think, Mary, it would comfort *her* to see him, and to know——"

My sketch is done. While there is death in the world, and sorrow and parting, and sin, let love, and Christian charity, and forgiveness triumph as they triumphed here. Mary Ward's life was short—she died within two months of the night by Ash-pool, where she heard the tidings of her lover's death. The child was taken to the rectory, and is being brought up by the rector and his wife—all the world knows now that Mary Ward's son was also the son of Frank Lascelles. There is a grey slab in an out-of-the-way corner of Heckerdyke church with this inscription: "Francis Lascelles, aged 23. Mary Ward, aged 19. Who art thou that condemneth? Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone." Which monument has been spoken of as in bad taste. I think it is in as good taste as the lying glorifications which are so much commoner on church walls.

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