The Old Rocking-Chair.

My grandmother sat in the old rocking-chair
(But she was not my grandmother then),
And her pert little face was bewitchingly fair
As she laughed a defiance to men!
Her sunbonnet fluttered like bird on its string,
Her hair wandered free on the breeze;
And gayly I ween did my grandmother sing
Underneath those old gnarl'd apple trees.

My grandfather rode through the white orchard gate,
And tethered his roan to a tree;
He'd a well-powder'd wig on his silly young pate,
And high tassel'd boots to his knee!
From the pink apple blossoms that over him hung,
He brush'd off the dew with his hat;
Till he came to the place where the rocking-chair swung
And my merry young grandmother sat.

The kingcup and daisy bloomed round in their pride,
And bees of their sweetness did sip;
But my grandfather blush'd and my grandfather sigh'd,
As he flick'd off their heads with his whip;
My granny she hummed her a cunning old song—
"Faint Heart Never Won Ladye Fair!"
So he wooed and he prayed, and before very long
There sat two in that old rocking-chair

—*J. G. Brennan in Temple Bar.*

ESTELLE'S INFATUATION:

A NOVEL.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHIPWRECK.

Gone! Gone like a stone in the water, like the path of a bird in the air. Gone, and no trace left by which to track her, no clew by which to find her. Had the earth opened and swallowed her up, or had a fiery chariot taken her to heaven, she could not have disappeared more wholly from the world, nor completely have effaced her path. She had gone, and no one could say when, nor where, nor how, nor whether she had been taken by force or had gone of her own free-will—whether she had been companioned or alone.

When Anthony came home rather late from his magisteral duties at that distant town, he found his household in consternation. Mrs. Harford, they said, had gone for a walk before luncheon and had not returned. No one had seen her save the nurse, who, as she passed the window, called into the inner room by the cry of the awaking child, caught a glimpse of her young mistress standing on the upper terrace, as if looking at the view beyond. When she repassed with the child Mrs. Harford was not there. Save for this rapid glimpse, which told nothing, no one else knew of her movements. The gardeners and work-people were at dinner; none of the servants were about; for the moment the place was deserted, and witness there was none. She had disappeared as if she had sunk into the central fire, or had evaporated like a dew-drop into space.

No search, however careful, which Anthony instituted, came on the footprints of his lost love.

He knew nothing of the return of Charlie Osborne to England, nor that he had suddenly left Kingshouse; still less that he had come to Thorbergh—called by mysterious summons which left the door open for all possibilities of intrigue and romance—nor that Mrs. Latimer's nephew had dropped down from the clouds on a visit to his old aunt. Who was to tell him all this? He had no casual correspondents at Kingshouse, and Mrs. Clanricarde had been as careful not to mention the fact of Charlie's return in her letters to Estelle as she was now to ignore it in her answering telegrams to Anthony. And even if he had known of his return, he would not have connected it with Estelle's strange disappearance. He would not have suspected her of flight with her old lover. That she could have deserted him, her child, her place, her honorable name of wife, her fair fame among women, for a girlish fancy that could never have justified itself by a serious union, and the very existence of which he had almost forgotten—no; he would have needed overwhelming proof before he could have believed her capable of this disgrace—she whose faults were surely not those of unbridled passion or carelessness of her duties and contempt of moral decencies.

He thought—and feared—that she might have killed herself in some fit of insanity following on the duller depression of her days. However much he tried to fight against it, deep down in his heart he knew she was not happy. His marriage was not a success. He had made heroic attempts to blind himself to the truth, and force himself to believe a lie. He had not succeeded. He had staked his all, and lost. And she had not deserted him for another. There was some explanation to this deadly mystery which would leave her as spotless as his love would have her—as nature had made her.

By degrees he ceased to think that she had died. She had gone, and gone of her own free-will. But some day she would come back. The mother's instinct would bring her, and the wife's love would reawaken. Some day she would stand before him, drooping, pentient, sweet and humble in her beauty. He would welcome her as the wintered earth welcomes the young spring, and love her the more for the pain she had made him undergo.

And thinking this, one day he opened her desk for love to touch what she had touched, and there he came upon a hoard of girlish treasures—of withered leaves and faded flowers; a lock of hair; a ring; a photograph; some letters—all religiously kept as sacred relics emblamed in perfumed paper—with dates and scraps of poetry; and everywhere the initials "C O.," or the full name "Charlie," "Charles Osborne," or "my beloved," or "my darling."

Then Anthony Harford took his revolver from the drawer where he always kept it, looked to the loading, and thrust it into his pocket. She should not suffer; but she should die. Her beauty should be undefaced, but she should no longer live to work ruin on men. He knew where to find her heart; and his own after. His revolver was trustworthy, and had been already baptized.

Meanwhile Estelle lived closely hidden behind the curtains at Mrs Latimer's. To outsiders, the house had changed in nothing, save that a young man, known to be Mrs. Latimer's nephew, was occasionally seen going out and coming in.

Estelle was grateful for the asylum that Mary and her mistress gave her. She resolutely forgot all that was not Charlie. Her husband, her child, her parents, her whole existence of those past bitter years, and all tha was outside him, she put away from her as we put away the memory of our fever dreams. She knew nothing of repentance, nothing of regret; and remorse would have been an infidelity of which she was incapable. Charlie was hers by the prescriptive right of love and time; and she had but gone back to her own and left the unlawful circumstances of the interval. Of all those circumstances her child was the only sacred spot, the only holy tie. And when the sound of its tender voice suddenly broke in on the ears we cannot stop, and its little hands seemed to wander over her face, and its clear and wondering eyes to look into hers, she would fling herself round Charlie's neck, and drown the remembrance of that thing which had been part of her very life in floods of caressing words which he rolled back on her in sweet and full replies. For husband she had no pity, no thought of even moderate regret. She looked on him as the executioner who had first deceived and then tortured her. It was only the child whose memory haunted her; and when that haunting reproachful little spectre rose as from a murdered bed before her eyes, she did what she could to harden her heart by remembering that her child was also his—and that part which was his deserved no love from her.

So the time passed till the summer had gone and the winter was at hand; then Charlie's health broke as once before, and the only chance of saving his life was by taking him to some warmer climate where he might live in the sun and forget the cold winds of the north.

Meanwhile they had had one or two scares, as once, when Anthony Harford came suddenly to the house, and Estelle had just time to rush up the stairs, carrying her work with her. He heard the "frou frou" of her dress as it swept the stairs, but he was not enlightened. No mystery of subtle sympathy told him who it was. It was the swish of a woman's gown and the hurrying patter of a woman's feet—in all probability the servant's—fleeing as for dear life itself for a clean apron or a smarter cap. He was not a man to naturally note much of the ways or doings of servant-maids; but this rapid flight of the gaunt woman who served his tenant struck him as odd; and why did he think of it so much? It was strange how those sounds vexed his imagination, oppressed though he was with that load of unspoken sorrow and unrealized suspicion!

He paid Mrs. Latimer a long visit this day, and it seemed to her, acting her part—to Mary, vigilant and anxious, the sentinel under arms, the pilot never taking his eyes from the horizon—to Estelle, upstairs in her bedroom, with the door ajar to hear the quicker and keener—to Charlie by her side unarmed, but feeling that for her he would either slay or be slain—it seemed to them all as if he would never go. And, truth to say, to Anthony himself there was a strange and nameless power of attraction which kept him in that darkened, stifling room talking to a half-imbecile old invalid, he did not know why, but could not withstand. At last, however, he went. And when he left the house he stopped and stood in the middle of the street looking at it curiously, and for a moment seemed about to re-enter. Another time a policeman came, looking at the scared inmates as if bristling with warrants for their apprehension. He was only charged with a message from the sanitary board relative to traps and overflows, and his visit passed as innocuously as Anthony's.

All these scares and fears were now at an end. Secretly, as they had come, unobserved of all, so secretly they withdrew—the fugitive wife and her childhood's lover; and no one knew the time, manner, or direction, nor who they were who took the midnight train to London and thence to the Continent, so cleverly were all things managed and all traces obliterated. They were sufficiently furnished with money from what Charlie had saved and what Estelle had received from him. The old lady, too, pressed on them a substantial gift, and altogether they made up a purse more than enough for their immediate wants. And then they passed away into space; and Anthony, who had brushed by their hiding-place unawares, had no warning to tell him of the distance now between Estelle and himself, as he had had none to tell him of her close neighborhood. Change of name; unbroken reticence on all their affairs, their relations, their home status their original roots; living to themselves wholly and mixing up with no one; by these means the two escaped all chance of detection and gave no cause for suspicion. They were simply like any other people—a beautiful young married couple to be met with on the sunny days in the lonely places of the Riviera—known to the post-office and their landlady as M. and Madame Charles—pitied as well as admired by all who saw them—for he looked as if he were what people call "struck for death," and she had a strange expression in her face as of one who was doomed and fated.

Only Mrs. Clanricarde had her suspicions, and only Mary and Mrs. Latimer knew the truth. But neither mother nor maid hinted a word of what the one thought and the other knew to Anthony Harford, eating out his heart in lonely anguish at Thrift.

At Kingshouse it gradually got to be known that Mr. Charles Osborne had gone to Thorbergh and young Mrs. Harford had left her husband simultaneously. The news went round in a whisper, that soon deepened into an audible voice enough, but Anthony at Thrift heard no echo, and knew nothing of what was common property to many. He had by now given up the search for his lost love.

BOOK THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

BY THE SEA-SHORE.

Two young people were sitting on a bench facing the sea and under the shadow of the ilex-trees. They were sitting hand in hand close together, radiant with the glossy happiness proper to a bride and bridegroom satisfied with each other and themselves. He was gallant, tender, caressing and she was a little shy, a little silly, and, as it might be, surprised, abashed, and fluttered by her own sensations.

The two on the bench, in their turn, were sitting close together hand in hand.

Said the good-looking young bridegroom on the heap of stones, with his clean-shaven face save for the delicate mustache, which he caressed lovingly, "And you really think this better than Kingshouse, Annette? You do not regret your fatal step?"

"You silly boy!" answered his companion, with an embarrassed little laugh. It would be unpolite to call it a giggle.

"But tell me, do you? I begin to think you do. Tell me, my pretty birdie, do you regret it."

"How can you be so silly! Yes, then, I do. There, now!" was the reply.

"Now you must do penance," returned the young man; and after some scuffling among the dry twigs and loosening stones, a few curiously stifled "don'ts," and as curiously checkered laughter, the penance was duly performed, and peace was re-established between the contending parties.

"I wish mother was here to keep you in order," said the girl as she settled her hat, which had got a little awry during the passge at arms.

"Do you?" was the answer. "I cannot say that I do, much as I love the old lady."

"Old! Meddy!" said Annette, in a tone of reproach. "Why, she is not fifty yet. That is one of the funny things at Kingshouse—none of the dowagers are old. Even the countess is not what you might call old, and she is the most ancient of them all."

"No; I grant you they are a fine set of matrons," said Meddy. "Upon my word, the last time I saw your special love, Mrs. Clanricarde, she looked about thirty. She is a wonderful get-up, I must say."

"Oh! but she paints and dyes, and does all that," said the bride, who four days ago was Anne Aspline, and now was Mrs Medlicott. "So no wonder she looks young, made up as she is. I wonder what has become of that dreadful Mrs. Harford?" she added, after a pause. "Fancy any well-brought-up girl leaving her husband and little baby for another man, and such a man as that dawdling, affected, good-for-nothing Mr. Osborne! It is really too dreadful! Such an awful shame!"

"But it is not quite sure that she left. You know it was thought she was killed," said the former curate of Kingshouse, now a full rector on his own account. A gentle kind of deprecation was in his voice. "You see, no trace of her has ever been found, and all that we can say is but surmise."

"They both disappeared at the same time, and of course they went away together," returned Anne, a little doggedly. The Clanricardes were the reddest of all the red rags in her mental store-closet. Good-natured to every one else, to them she was implacable. "We all know how madly in love with each other they were, and how Estelle hated her marriage with that awful bear—I don't blame her for that!—and how Mrs. Clanricarde manœuvred the whole thing, and put that advertisement in the paper, and all that. So how could it end but as it has?"

"Assuredly logic and sequential reasoning do not make part of my wife's mental furniture," thought Mr. Medlicott, while he caressed his mustache with one hand and held hers with the other. "Tell me, Annette, he said, suddenly; "did that Harford man ever make love to you."

"I don't know about making love," said Anne, with a girlish laugh. "He wanted to marry me, if that's what you call making love!"

"The scoundred! how dare he!" cried the bridegroom, with affected indignation. "I shall have to break his head for that!"

"If you intend to break the heads of all who liked me you will have enough to do, sir," said Anne, bridling.

"Confess, little wretch—'excellent wretch!'" said Mr. Medlicott. "How many? Who? Tell me, that I may make a note of them all, and punish them as their presumption deserves. Begin the roll-call Lord Eustace?"

"Well, yes; Lord Eustace liked me very much," said Anne, bravely. "I was always exceedingly careful, though, not to give him any encouragement, for I did not care about him personally, and I had no fancy to be the wife of an earl who had not enough money to keep up his title with. So I always cold-shouldered him, poor fellow! And so I did Mr. Osborne, who at one time was very sweet on me. I could have got him from Estelle Clanricarde, if I liked. But I always despised him, and would never have anything to say to him."

"Perhaps that monster of the money-bags, that gnome of the mines, Mr. Stagg, looked at you with those calf's eyes of his, and presumed to think you fascinating and delightful—as you are?" continued the gallant bridegroom, going on with his interrogatory.

"He!" said Anne, with something like a scream. "No, indeed! I would have made him remember it to the last day of his life, if he had! No. Lady Elizabeth may take him, now that Estelle Clanricarde cannot have him. He is rich enough to buy even Lady Elizabeth if he likes."

"I suppose now that old Stagg is dead, he has an enormous income—" said Mr. Medlicott.

"Enormous!" continued his wife. "I don't know how many thousands a year! What a shame that such a creature should be so rich, and others so far his superiors so poor!

"But I fancy the poor monster is not a bad monster at heart," said the apologetic bridegroom. "He is queer, but is a good fellow when you get at him."

On which the two went off into the lovers' paradise of babble, silliness, and mutual flattery; and the listeners on the bench facing the sea got up and slowly walked back on the narrow mountain-path by which they had come.

They walked on in silence, as they had sat, hearing all that had been poured forth by the former somewhat over-disdained antagonist. Estelle's pale cheeks were paler still; Charlie's had yet a deeper flush. They were so entirely all in all to each other—so shut out from the world and society—they had, as it were, forgotten the existence of those who knew their story. Love, which had united them, had also been their high-priest; and to neither her nor him was it as if they were living in or defying the laws. The sin had been her marriage, not now in their love, and her husband had no righteous cause of grief against her in that she had left him. She alone had the right to complain in that he had ever taken her. This was their normal state of feeling—the child lying as a secret, unnamed kind of terror between them—but when they heard the talk of Anne and her husband they realized to the full the position in which they stood as the world saw it and judged of it. Never separated, ever loving, they too were miserable in the hell which they would have said, when living, love would make a heaven. And these two young people, who also had lost all that makes life honorable among men for the love that been denied them, and the faith of which they had been cheated, were no more happy than were Francesca and Paolo, when Dante fell as fall the dead for pity of their story. The Nemesis we cannot escape, flee as fast as we will, was creeping up to them daily nearer and nearer. They had Love as their high-priest, truly, but Death was to be the avenger; and now they both, at least fer the moment, realized the dishonor which surrounded them as things were, and which would close still more closly around Estelle when he had gone.

"I have been a brute. I have been awfully selfish," said Charlie, suddenly breaking the silence which had been so eloquent between them. "I was carried away by the passion, the despair of the moment; but I should have had more self-control; I should have resisted you and myself too."

"Hush!" said Estelle, called back to herself as his only, and not as any other's to hold disdain. "I cannot bear you to say that, Charlie. I would rather be with you than be the queen of the world. Do you think I care for what such a silly, weak-minded girl as Anne Aspline says? Do you think the blame of such a creature as that touches my love for you?"

"Your devotion does not make me less a selfish brute," said Charlie, tears in his eyes and voice.

She shook his hand and carried it to her lips.

"When I complain then blame yourself," she answered, with infinite grace and tenderness.

"But when I am dead, Estelle, who will you have then to love and care for you, to protect you, to make your life tolerable to you? Then you will find out to your sorrow all that you have lost for me, my poor unselfish darling; and I shall know it in heaven, and be unhappy in vain."

"I shall want no one," she said. "If you die, Charlie, I shall die too. So that need not trouble you here or in heaven. There is no one I should care to live for—no one whose love I would value if I had not you. No one!"

She slightly shivered as she said this. The image of the child she had left abandoned to the care of a hired nurse whose temper and heart she scarcely could guess, and certainly did not know, seemed to form itself before her from the crossing threads of the radiant atmosphere—like a cloudy shape just there within her grasp. But she shut her eyes and put the thing resolutely away, and felt as if she had killed something tender and beautiful, as she always did when this thought possessed her, this image appeared, and she would not receive it. Her tenderness was in vain, at least for the moment. Charlie would not be comforted. His conscience was aroused, and not all her assurances could lull it to sleep. Death was upon him, and he knew it.

After this unintentional eavesdropping, a certain nameless something came over both Estelle and Charlie. It was not that they loved each other less, but they were even more unhappy than before—and unhappy in a different way. Something besides sorrow of that all too certain separation was on them—something that stung him, and that made her as it were timid and in one sense reserved. They had lived in the fool's paradise of love, and had forgotten the world without. Now Anne Aspline's words had brought them back to the consciousness of the life that was beyond and without their own, and to the laws they had broken.

CHAPTER II.

THE FINGER OF SCORN.

The last three days had been sultry and oppressive. Horses were either restive or sullen, and when they did not plunge and kick, they jibbed and refused to go. Those who knew these signs looked anxious, as men foreseeing a catastrophe. All nature seemed distressed.

On the third day all these signs had increased in intensity. And then came the moment. Strange noises were heard in the earth like underground thunderings, or the muffled roar of an imprisoned creature in wrath and pain. The solid earth quivered and rocked. Houses fell into heaps of ruins as if pounded into dust. Here and there the earth opened and engulphed fields and farms and orchards where it was riven asunder; while over all the tumult arose the voice of human agony, going up to the pitiless heaven in one great cry of fear and pain that was half a reproach to the Force which hurt and half a prayer to the Power which could save. It was a time of universal wailing, and there was not a family which had not lost in love or in gear—and almost all had lost in both.

Down on the seaboard, where the strangers from far-off lands congregated, things were bad, but not so bad as higher up the hills. Here there was, on the whole, more fear than damage. Hotels shook and cracked, but did not fall; and the invalids who had come here for the sunshine of the sweet South suffered more from terror and exposure than from actual bodily hurt.

Among these were "two young lovers lately wed"—Anne Aspline and her husband, Mr. Medliott.

Sitting there in the garden, Anne and her husband together. Mr. Medlicott soon gathered around him a small audience of those who attended the English church regularly on the Sundays, and went as regularly to Monte Carlo all the other days of the week. It was quite a triumph for the handsome young clergyman with his military air. His discourse betokened so many valuable qualities—presence of mind, physcial courage, sublime faith, scientific knowledge, and that intimate acquaintance with the Divine Will which endues man with ambassadorial functions; all these were manifest in the young clergyman's harangue, and made their mark accordingly. Spiritual assurance and pratical experience together worked a miracle of mental healing on these distracted folk. Men began to laugh and pretty women to giggle, while a few of the more courageous kind stole back into the hotel to adorn themselves as usual, and to make sure of their valuables, left open to pilferers in the haste of the moment. And while they were all dispersed in this wise there came two more shocks as voilent as the first had been, and the whole scene of terror and distraction was enacted anew.

These recurrent shocks finished the ruin of the upper villages to the plains and seaboard. A little later Anneand her husband were sitting in the same place as before, in the garden facing the sea, surrounded by the same admiring audience.

He was at one of the most moving passages of his extra-official thanksgiving when a hired carriage drove through the gate and up to the house door. It contained a young man and woman with a very slender amount of luggage, and as small a stock of health. He, indeed, was dying; she, as evidently fragile and broken-hearted, had yet a strangely resolute look in her gentle face, giving the impression of one keeping up by force of will for a special reason and a definite term—and then? They were among those whose habitation had been wrecked by the earthquake, and they had been the whole day foodless, helpless, strained, unable to find a conveyance to take them down to the hotels on the sea-shore, and with but little left of their modest possessions. They had scarce enough, indeed, for currents needs; and what money they had was buried in the ruins. Still they must live—and there was always that old friend and her rather mysterious mistress to fall back on. The landlord of the hotel, who had lost fully have of his guests, was glad enough to see this new arrival, unpromising as it looked. He took in the situation at a glance; but these English milords have inexhaustible supplies in their own country, and a day's accident is not a life's disaster. He was welcoming the young people with his best manner when the group in the garden broke np. It was to come in to dress for *table d'hote*.

Last of all the streaming little crowds, as it were, filtering through the door, came Mr. and Mrs. Medlicott. As they passed through the doorway into the hall they stood face to face with the new arrivals. Charlie, pale and half fainting, was sitting on the hall settee, coughing in the intervals of returning consciousness. Estelle was beside him, holding his head against her breast. The clean and well-regulated soul of Anne revolted at this rampant impropriety. Her whole being cried out shame and repudiation. She felt it to be impossible to stop under the same roof with these hardened sinners—these unmarried lovers who bore their iniquity so unblushingly. All the pride that she had herself had in her lawful wedded state seemed to sink into mire, to fall to the base level of this illegal union.

No sense of pity stirred the white soul of the once pure maiden, and now no less pure, because the unlawful wife. She, Anne Aspline, usually so quiet, so unobtrusive, so undemonstrative, left her husband's side, and with the air and manner of an indignant pythoness, pointing to the two sitting there in their misery, said o the landlord, in a loud voice, "If you take these two unmarried people into your house, I and my husband will leave it."

Had a thunder-bolt fallen, or another earthquake shaken the house, the consternation of all assembled would not have been greater.

"They are not married," she repeated, "and that woman has left her husband and child."

A murmur of reproach ran through the English. The native servants, however, looked at one another with a shrug that said: "What of that? Monsieur is dying, and madame is beautiful!"

Only one English person ventured on compassion. This was a woman no longer young in years, but still young in heart, and she went up to Charlie and Estelle. and ignoring what had been said by Mrs. Medlicott, asked them with infinite kindness if she could be of any use to them; and what they would do? where would they go? For the hotel-keeper, driven to the necessity of choice, had, wisely for himself, determined too keep the two who already had done his house some good, and whose departure would probably draw others too away, and had told these poor young newcomers, without too great expenditure of courtesy, that they must leave now on the instant—he would not give them rooms.

"There are other hotels," said Estelle, with all her old quiet dignity.

She neither failed nor blenched. This small spite of the former cook's daughter fell from her as something utterlly unimportant. Side by side with her darling's state, what mattered it, or aught else? She was only sorry that she had to go forth to find another place. He was too fatigued already. But even that must be borne, and bravely.

"Your poor gentleman looks too ill for much exertion," said the lady.

"I would not stay here with that woman if I could," said Charlie, with a sick man's petulance. "Come, Estelle, let us get out of this place. It is pestilential, with that creature here!"

He spoke too feebly to be heard beyond those immediately beside him; and both Anne and her husband lost the words which, had they been heard, would have added fuel to the already raging flames. Kindly helped by the porters, to whom the master made a sign, and accompanied by the lady who had spoken to them, a certain Miss Ellistone, the two poor banished and outraged exiles—these descendants of the peccant pair who ate the forbidden fruit—went slowly out into the chill dusk of the dying day to seek for an asylum where there was no Anne Aspline to denounce them, and where their certificate of marriage was not asked for. All through that weary night there sounded in Estelle's ears the murmur of virtuous abhorrence and the rustling as of the drawing away of skirts which had greeted the damning announcement that she was no wife—a faithless wife and an unnatural mother—and that the man she loved and lived with was not her husband, but a fraud and a disgrace from whom, as from her, all honest women and honorable men did well to shrink.

(To be Continued).

A London surgeon, in a daring flight of imagination, says that business men who occupy offices above the third story get flighty after a few years, and in default of a change become mildly insane.

A North Carolina man visiting in Brooklyn last Sunday went to Plymouth Church "just to hear Beecher and judge for himself." He may have judged for himself, but it is doubtful if he heard Beecher.

Madisonville, Ky., is the seat of a great reform. An ordinance there forbids brass bands from meeting "for the purpose of learning new pieces of music within 300 feet of a dwelling-house."