MOTHER AND STEP-MOTHER.

CHAPTER. X.

In spite of his resolution to keep his uneasiness to himself, Edward was too much irritated by the ill success of his interference to conceal from Catherine all his disquiet; and he told her enough to add weight to her former conviction, and to increase the burden of her sorrow. Loving her the better from the consciousness of the effort he had made to defend her, and dreading his mother's displeasure, he remained at the Parsonage until late in the evening; and, having spent a few minutes in the drawing-room, where Lady Irwin's manner gave him little encouragement to remain, he went off to his own room. There he wrote the following letter to his brother, which he carried to the post next morning himself.

Dear Brother,—I came home last Tuesday week. I dare say you know that I didn't do so badly at the examination, after all. I brouht home a prize which pleased mother and delighted dear old Birkby. Father did not say much, but he looked as if he liked it, and made me bring it out to show Lord Allason when he called. I found all well at home: going on much as usual; father deep in some stratum or other at the bottom of the Dead Sea—I shouldn't much wonder, if he were off to Palestine next week. I wish to Heaven he would, and take mother with him! A pilgrimage would do her a tremendous deal of good just now. I wish with all my heart you and Kitty were married! What is the reason, it would puzzle a much wiser head than mine to discover; but of this I'm sure: she—mother, I mean—has taken a positive dislike to Kitty. The worst of it is, that Kitty knows it; and you may believe that she looks none the better for it. Of course, it's bad enough for her to have you so long away, and if any one sees her look sad, she puts it upon that; but mother has more to do with it. Aunt Fanny is here with Clem and Ada, all flounces and finery as usual. If it wasn't for father, no one would take any notice of dear Kitty, but he's as true as steel, and mother dares not say a word against her to him. I'm sure he has a notion that there's something wrong, for he pets Kitty like a child—much more than he pets me, which does not please mother. If you had only taken my advice, all the trouble would have been over by this time; you may take my word for it, that if you don't do something yourself, and before long, mother will find some means to break it off yet. You have no idea what a timid, nervous creature, Kitty is become in her presence.

I dare say you find it extremely jolly at Rome, it must be nice to have lots of money and nothing to do. I suppose I'm not likely to have much experience of either of these pleasures. Father asked me, the other day, if I should like to be a parson. I suppose he was in joke; I took it so, for I only made a wry face. Fancy mother sitting demurely to hear her son deal out divinity! Don't forget dear Kitty, and when you write, don't say a word of what I have told you. Mother always likes to read my letters, and it won't do to make her angry. Do you get any skating? The ice is four inches thick on the pond. Tomlins, a first-rate fellow, who works in my room, is coming down next week, if the frost only holds on, we shall have glorious fun. Good night, old fellow, I'm so sleepy, I can hardly see. I wish you'd send me something about some of the temples—the ruins, I mean. Finch dotes on ruins.

Your affectionate brother,

Edward Irwin.

When this letter reached Frank, he was recovering from an attack of fever, brought on by the climate, and perhaps by anxiety. He was consequently labouring under severe depression of spirits. His fears had already been excited by a coldness and constraint in the letters he received from his mother, and by the plaintive tenderness which struggled in the assumed cheerfulness of Catherine's. He had promised his father to travel. He was to visit Greece and parts of Asia, perhaps to penetrate even to the land of joy and desolation—the glorious and wasted Palestine. He had been as yet only three quarters of a year absent, and this was his second illness. It was evident, that the climate of Italy did not agree with him. The image of her he loved pining for him, and crushed by the dislike of his stepmother, rose vividly before him. He saw her paler and thinner, watching with tearful eyes the embers as they fell, and thinking of him so far away, with a heart growing daily fainter, and wearying for the comfort of his cheering voice. He read those parts of his brother's letter, which related to her, again and again. To be so clear to the eyes of the boy, it must be bad indeed. He himself, too, was lonely and sorrowful. The sweet communion of thought and feeling to which he had become habituated, was checked, and the deepest emotions of his soul lay, unexpressed, a heavy burden on his spirit. One bold stroke, and she was his own for ever. He knew his father's indulgence, and that his mother's influence, though great, was not unlimited.

The yearning to England once indulged, became irresistible. Arguments readily presented themselves, not only excusing, but justifying, the apparent disobedience; and the next morning saw him already on his return. Once started, his impatience knew no bounds. No railway, no steamboat, was sufficiently expeditious for him; almost before an answer could have been received to his brother's letter, he arrived in person at his father's door.

Amazement was the first emotion produced by his unlooked-for appearance—amazement, quickly succeeded by pleasurable sensations in the breast of his father, by angry consternation in that of Lady Irwin, while Edward could hardly restrain his admiration and satisfaction at a promptitude so much in harmony with his wishes.

The tumult of feeling with which he beheld his son, travel-worn and haggard from recent illness, prevented Sir Edward from remarking the uncontrollable emotion of Lady Irwin. But Frank, whose perception was sharpened by anxiety, read her unspoken anger. His quivering lips hardly touched the cheek she mechanically presented to him; and she felt that if not before, now, at least, he knew the purpose lying in her heart. As by mutual consent, they shrunk from each other's gaze; for each felt the need of concealment. But Lady Irwin was stung almost to madness by the unrestrained joy with which his brother's return was welcomed by the child for whose aggrandisement she was prepared to jeopardise soul and body.

"Helen, you look pale, love," said Sir Edward, when the first excitement was over, and he had leisure to think of his wife. "This mad freak of Frank's has startled the blood from your cheeks. No wonder, either,—the silly fellow to come back, without a single word of warning. Bringing such haggard looks, too. Your mother was growing anxious about you, Frank, and had just persuaded me, that it would be pleasant to go and have a look at the old places again, when you must needs come blundering back. I am heartily glad to see you, nevertheless; and Kate, I've a shrewd guess, will not be sorry. She is not quite so rosy as she was, poor little girl, but your absence has told more on yourself than on her."

"She'll be all right now," exclaimed Edward, unable to keep silence longer. "I'll be up betimes in the morning, and run over and give her a hint. She is not a colossus of strength; and there's no telling what might happen, if she saw you all at once and unexpectedly. She might take you for a *pallida imago* instead of a true flesh and blood lover."

"I have not heard Catherine complain of illness," said Lady Irwin, "you should not frighten your brother without reason, Edward."

"Yes, yes; Kitty will be well enough now." said Sir Edward, "never fear, Frank. Love tortures, but he seldom kills, if the poor victims only continue of one mind."

"I acknowledge that I was drawn home in great measure, by anxiety for Catherine," said Frank, cheered by his father's cordial kindness. "Not that I doubted your indulgence to one so very dear to me, or that I should have ventured to return without your permission, if I had been in health to use my time either profitably or agreeably."

"Well, we should have liked a little notice, if it were only to have the opportunity of welcoming you with proper honour; but who has a greater right to be here, than you? I thought a littte travelling would be of use to you. Besides, I had a fancy to test the quality of your love, which your mother thought might possibly have no more stuff in it than first attachments often have. But since it was strong enough to render Italy, with all its charms of climate and association, distasteful, we are quite satisfied, are we not, Helen?"

"I assert no authority over Frank," said Lady Irwin, "however my interest in his welfare may have induced me to offer him unpalatable advice."

* * * * * * *

"So the young signor is returned," said Agnese," as she combed her lady's hair, "without warning, and unexpected!"

"He knows that he can insult me with impunity," returned Lady Irwin, "and that my influence over his father is gone."

"His love for the Cure's daughter has made him mad," said Agnese.

"Yes; and not him alone. She has won my husband from me. My very child she would not leave to me."

"He knows not what he does. She has won him with her false smiles, and he is entangled in her meshes; but fear not, Madonna; we are not yet overcome."

"The joy of life is gone," returned Lady Irwin, with fierce depression, "it were well for me to die."

"Be not troubled, Madonna, or let your purpose be shaken by the pride of this self-willed boy. Rouse your great heart. Let it never be said, that you have been wronged with impunity."

"Do not tempt me, Agnese. Leave the dark thoughts in my soul, and do not make them more familiar by clothing them in words. I am sick and weary. I am alone—my very child arrays himself with my enemies."

"O! he knows not the interests at stake; he is still a child. No blood of mine flows in his veins; yet for your sake, Madonna, and for the memory of the long days and nights when he lay cradled in my arms, I would count life little to serve him."

"Senseless as you are!" cried Lady Irwin, with an impatience not unlike that of an untamed horse excited beyond endurance by the application of the spur, "do you talk of what *you* would do, you who have never borne a child—who have only rocked to rest the child of others? Is he not mine—mine in mind and body? The hair that clusters on his brow he had from me; and in which of the tame Irwins would you see the flash of such an eye as his? He is the one thing on earth that is mine; and do you think, there is anything I would not do for his sake? But were he nothing, I have still sufficient motives. They have treated me with scorn—almost with open defiance. They have turned from me the affections of my husband! But if I must be miserable, they at least shall not rejoice."

"There the signora spoke worthily of herself,', cried Agnese, her dark eyes flashing; "but strong deeds are the language that she must learn to use to her enemies. The blood of the south is hot as its sun; that of the north cold as it its winter streams."

"Agnese," replied Lady Irwin, rising and fixing a look upon her that made her quail, so stern—so cruel—it was, "there is blood flowing in my veins hot and impetuous as in those of the fiercest barbarian of the south. There are tales told of the clansmen of my house which would make even your Italian heart stand still. The snows of ten thousand winters will never cool the blood of the fiery Celt. The days of strong deeds are past, and this puny generation drags the chain its fathers burst. Nevertheless, fear not. I am no unworthy daughter of the Macdonalds."

ROBBERS IN CHURCH.

People who live by appropriating other people's property, generally have little to do with the house of God. But there are other robbers besides highwaymen. Most of our churches are visited by robbers, and they are quite constant too, in their attendance. They have no organization, and do not act under any leader; but each one robs on his own hook. Take them altogether, they do a large work in the way of despoiling, in the course of the year.

1. All late comers to church are robbers. They rob a large number of people at once. They filch away the preacher's comfort and that of all the rest of the congregation, except those who are as late as themselves. And what ought to interest them, though we fear it seldom does, they commit quite as harmful a robbery upon themselves as they do on others. They lose so much of divine worship, as had transpired before their arrival. And they rob themselves of what ought to be to them more precious than rubies—a good name.

2. All drowsy and sleepy hearers are robbers. Every nap they get in the sanctuary is a downright theft. But can people steal, while they are fast asleep? Be sure they can. Don't they rob the preacher of a hearer for the whole time that they are nodding? Who can deny this? And people about them, that see them nodding, and fear least a fall should break their bones—are they not robbed of their comfort? And if they snore, as well as nod, then they trouble ears as well as eyes, and the robbery is all the greater. One of these church sleepers robbed Paul of quite a slice of all sermon, for he had to stop and cure the young robber, who was near losing his life by a fall from an upper window—whose case offers some eye-salve for modern church-sleepers, whereby they can see their own danger.

3. And we call all robbers, who are powerful, at church, in the matter of sneezing and coughing. Both these operations, as respects the power of the explosion, may take any place in the whole octavo, chosen by the operator. He can so suffocate either of them, with a little care, that a quiet sleeper by his side shall not be disquieted. Or, he can let all go, and the explosion shall wake all the drowsy into consternation, and shake the very pillars of the temple. Now, sure it is, that all the last described are robbers. Do they not rob other people of their rest? Do they not rob attentive hearers of so much of the sermon as was overwhelmed by their explosions? Do they not rob the preacher of his peace? Do they not rob themselves of at least a feather or two of their own honor?

4. All busy-bodies about other matters, than the progressing church service, are robbess. Some are busy with a fan, some with a hymn book, some with other peeple's feathers and ribbons, some with the robbers first mentioned in this article, viz: late comers to church—in a word, they are busy about anything rather than the passing services of divine worship. Robbers they are and no mistake; robbing themselves of all the benefits they lose by inattention, and robbing others of peace and comfort, destroyed by such bad examples.

If these things are so, then are robbers, not a few, in all our churches. We do not call for the civil arm to interfere. We have caught a few in this article and hung them up as specimens, in the hope that others, seeing the figure their associates cut, shall by reform, save us from hanging them up in the same fashion.—*N. Y. Evangelist.*

NEWS BY LAST ENGLISH MAIL.

THE BALTIC FLEET.

On the 9th inst. the Merlin and Firefly, having on board the French Admiral, all the Captains and several of the Commanders in the fleet, left the anchorage, and accompanied by the Dragon and the French steam-corvette D'Assas, went up to reconnoitre the fortifications on the north side of Cronstadt. After passing Tolboukin Lighthouse, they had proceeded to within about 2500 yards of Fort Risbank, when suddenly two of those long talked-of and much-dreaded infernal machines exploded right under the bows of the Merlin, and a third burst, almost at the same moment, under the Firefly. The two steamers, although, of course, severly shaken, were, however, strange to say, but very slightly damaged by the explosion.

A telegraphic despatch from Kiel, dated the 16th inst., announces the arrival at that port of Admiral Baynes's squadron, *en route* to the Baltic.

We have letters from Helsingfors up to the 5th, and from Abo to the 6th inst. The inhabitants were in great dread of the allied fleets, and all the families in affluent circumstances had retired into the interior of the country, taking with them their valuables. The Emperor had sent a gold medal to a native merchant at Helsingfors as a reward for his patriotic services in making, at his private expense, an electric telegraph to Hango Head, by which immediate notice of the enemy's movements may be received

WINTER QUARTERS IN THE BALTIC.

Negociations have been opened with the Swedish Government for ceding the island of Gothland to England and France, in order to form a winter station for the fleets, which would then be able to anchor in the safe and commodious harbour of Faro-Sound, and not be obliged to return home at the end of the campaign. The advantages to be derived from this plan are obvious. From that advanced position, the ships could keep a better check on the movements of the enemy, nor need they retire from the coast, till actually obliged to do so by the setting in of the frost, whilst Gothland offers a favourable situation for the permanent establishment of large depots of coals, provisions, ammunition, and stores for the fleets, as well as hospitals for the sick and wounded, and barracks for the land troops, during the winter. The allied forces would, moreover, be enabled to exercise a better control over the movements of neutral vessels, and prevent the recurrences of such a shameful act as that lately performed by the United States merchant ship Sammy Appleton, in landing 50,000 rifles and 12,000 revolvers at Baltic Port. It is a question for the investigation of her Majesty's Government, what was the British Consul at Boston about, to permit the shipment to take place under his very eyes, or, at all events, not to give the Government intelligence of the fact, that proper measures might have been taken in time to stop the vessel in question at Elsineur, where she lay for several days, waiting till the state of the ice allowed her to proceed to Port Baltic?

RUSSIAN PREPARATIONS IN THE BALTIC.

This year the so-called "bare spit" on the north coast of the bay of Cronstadt has been fortified, and also the north side of the island of Kotlin, which was considered not strong enough, in case of an attempt at a landing. The extensive manufactory of steam machinery in Cronstadt is approaching completion. The intention of this establishment is to render superfluous the importation of the machines necessary for the steam fleet, and is the object of the Grand Duke Constantine's particular care and anxiety. He has already succeeded in procuring that all the rigging and cordage necessary for sailing ships should be obtained solely from Russian manufactures. The organization of a corps of enginemen and stokers has just been completed; it forms the last link in the chain of operations, by means of which it is intended to convert the Russian slow-going sailing vessels into fast-going steamers. It is now the fashion to hold the view, that a long continued blockade, though it increases the price of colonial produce, by no means injures the productiveness and manufacturing industry of Russia; on the contrary, the blockade is only carrying out Russia's own system of exclusion, and the allied fleets, by undertaking the duty of a Russian preventive service, are further enabling Russia to enrol in her armies a numerous body of disciplined soldiers hitherto engaged as a coast-guard in the Baltic and Black Seas. This is mere bravado. It is, true, however, that the officials of the Custom-house, as well as the coast-guard at Odessa and other