

Aaron The Jew

Vol.II

By
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***Free*editorial** 

AARON THE JEW VOL.II

CHAPTER XVIII UNTO THEM A CHILD IS BORN

Three weeks of great anxiety followed. Despite the courage with which Rachel had borne the sudden visitation of blindness, her physical strength did not hold out, and, by the doctor's orders, she kept her bed.

During these weeks Aaron had enough to do to put his affairs in order, and he had the additional trouble that matters turned out worse than he had anticipated. For security's sake, and to set the borrowers at ease, he transferred all the pledges that had been saved to another pawnbroker; those which were destroyed he considered himself bound in honour and common honesty to make good. He made no demur to the claims that were brought against him, but settled them promptly, and settled, also, all his trade debts. What with all this harassing business and his domestic sorrows, he was occupied day and night; but he was careful that Rachel should not suspect how bad things were with him.

The doctor came daily, and Rachel's time was very near. At every visit Aaron watched his face for hopeful news of Rachel's condition; but the doctor volunteered no information, and only gave instructions to do this or that. This reticence was torture to Aaron, and one day he begged the doctor to conceal nothing from him.

"There is nothing to conceal," said the doctor. "Her state is critical; but what else could be expected? Consider what she has passed through."

"I think of nothing else, of nothing else!" said Aaron, his fingers working convulsively, for a question was trembling on his lips which he felt he must ask, but to which he could scarcely give utterance.

At length he found courage.

"Doctor, will she live?"

The doctor bit his lip as he gazed upon Aaron's misery.

"Whatever lies in my power shall be done, but human skill and science have their limitations. We are all in God's hands."

And with these words, and a look of compassion, he departed.

Aaron stood motionless awhile. We are all in God's hands! How often has that been said, and how terrible is its import! Human science and skill have done all it is in their power to do, the rest is with God. Aaron reasoned the true meaning away.

"Yes, we are all in God's hands," he murmured; "old and young, rich and poor, the strong and the feeble alike. It is so with one and all. I thank God he did not tell me to prepare for the worst!"

He drew comfort, not from what was said, but from what was not said. He continued to commune with himself.

"How can she be otherwise than weak? And doctors sometimes think it their duty not to look on the brightest side. My Rachel will be spared to me. God will not take her away."

He went up to her. A nurse he had engaged was in the room; she could come for only a week, her services at the end of that time being required elsewhere.

She put her fingers to her lips as he entered.

"Is she asleep?" he asked, in a whisper.

She nodded in reply; but when he approached the bed, Rachel held out her hand to him.

"Nurse thought you were asleep, dear," he said, bending down to her.

"I may have been," she answered. "I fall off into a doze a dozen times an hour, it seems, but I always know when you are near me."

She put her hand to her head.

"Are you in pain, my life?"

"Oh no. I am rather weak, but I shall get strong soon. Whenever I doze I see our dear one, the blessing God is sending us. Aaron, dear love, do not be anxious for me. I shall hold our darling in my arms."

The nurse gave him a warning look not to encourage her to talk, and, understanding the silent monition, he kissed Rachel tenderly, and went down to muse and pray.

The settlement of all his debts had left him almost a beggar. He owed not a shilling, except to the doctor, who had said nothing about his account; the week's money for the nurse was carefully put away: he could not have afforded to engage her for a longer term, for all the money he had left in the world amounted to barely two pounds. What was he to do when that was spent? Commence business again upon borrowed capital? That seemed to be the only course open to him. But who would lend it to him? It was no small sum that would be required, and all his friends, with the exception of Mr. Moss, were poor. Mr. Moss was comparatively a new friend, and he could not expect him to render such substantial assistance without security. And what security could he offer but his own bare word? There were money-lenders; the newspapers teemed with their advertisements. It would be folly to apply to any one of them for so large a loan as fifty pounds, which sum, he calculated, was the least he could begin business again with; he would be sure to be met with a refusal. But what was he to do?

He thrust these worldly contemplations aside, and indeed it was impossible for him to dwell upon them with a heavier sorrow at his door, and with a dread crisis so very near. He trusted in God--yes; but he knew that a man must work for his livelihood. Well, he would work; he was willing and ready for any honest occupation; but he must wait--for what? He became confused. The pressing worldly necessity, with its exacting and imperative demands, and the overwhelming human sorrow were contending for supremacy. He stepped into the passage, and softly ascending the stairs, listened at Rachel's door. As he stood there the nurse came out.

"Go for the doctor," she whispered.

He flew. There was no conflict now in his mind between the two extremities; his worldly trouble was forgotten; he thought only of his beloved wife and their unborn child. The doctor was not in, but was expected in a quarter of an hour, and would be sure to come round at once. Leaving an urgent entreaty not to delay a moment, Aaron hastened back to his house, and on the road found himself intercepted by Prissy, who had grown taller but no stouter since the night upon which she introduced herself to him. By reason of her increased height she looked thinner and scaggier than ever; as usual, Victoria Regina, who had grown plumper and rounder, was in the girl's arms.

"Mr. Cohen, Mr. Cohen!" cried Prissy.

"I can't stop now," he replied, passing her quickly.

But Prissy's long legs were as active as his, and though Victoria Regina was a heavy weight to carry, she kept pace with him.

"D'yer know wot some people's saying about yer, Mr. Cohen?"

"Never mind, never mind, my good girl; I have no time to listen."

"They're saying, everybody is," persisted Prissy, "that yer as good as ruined, and that yer 'aven't got a shilling left to pay yer way with."

"What does it matter what some people say, Prissy? There are good and bad, just and unjust. Never listen to tittle-tattle."

"Ow's it to be 'elped, Mr. Cohen, when it's dinged in yer ears? Mr. Whimpole, he ses he sor wot was coming all along, and when I ups and gives 'im a bit o' my mind he slaps my face he does, and pushes me into the gutter. I don't mind that, but no one's going to speak agin yer when I'm by. It ain't likely after all yer've done for me."

"You are a good girl, but take no notice of what Mr. Whimpole says. There are many here who still have a good word for me."

"Plenty, sir, and that's wot makes Mr. Whimpole mad; he can't make everybody think as he wants 'em to. There's plenty as speaks up for yer. You look ill, Mr. Cohen. I 'ope missis is no wus, I do."

"She is still weak and ill, Prissy; but she will get well soon--eh, Prissy?--she will get well soon?"

He cast a swift anxious look upon her; even from the lips of this poor girl he sought the comfort of a consoling word.

"Yes, sir, she's sure to. Don't you worry yerself, Mr. Cohen. Gawd won't let nothink wrong 'appen to 'er. He knows what He's up to, Gawd does. Wot did Mrs. Cohen say 'erself to me more nor once? 'Be a good gal,' she ses, 'and tell the truth, and be as kind as yer can to everybody, and Gawd'll look after yer.' And ain't she good, sir, and does she ever say anythink but the truth, and ain't she as kind as kind can be to everybody about 'er? Why, it's in everybody's mouth, 'xcept Mr. Whimpole's! Nobody 'xcept 'im's got a word to say agin 'er. She's sure to get well, Mr. Cohen, and then yer'll let me see 'er, sir, won't yer?"

"Yes, Prissy, yes," said Aaron, laying his hand for a moment on Prissy's tangled hair. He had reached his house, and was unlocking the door. "She will get well, please God, and you shall see her. Thank you, thank you, my good girl; and now run away."

"I'm off, Mr. Cohen," said Prissy; "this is going to bring yer luck, it is." And slipping a large paper parcel into his hand, she scuttled away.

He did not know what it was he held until he reached his room, and then he examined it. When he removed the paper he saw a horseshoe and two penny pieces which had been rubbed bright with sand, so that they shone like gold. Something shone in Aaron's eyes as he gazed at the humble offering. He smiled wistfully, and muttering, "It is an omen of good fortune; God bless you, little Prissy!" put the shoe and the pennies carefully aside. Then he stepped softly up the stairs, and gently tapped at the bedroom door.

"How is she, nurse?"

"Bearing up wonderfully, sir."

"Thank God! The doctor will be here presently. I will wait for him at the street door."

He had not long to wait; in a very short time he saw the welcome form turning the corner, and the doctor, with a friendly, smiling nod, passed into the house.

Aaron paced to and fro in the room below, and waited for the word that was to bring joy or despair to his soul. He had put his slippers on, in order that his footsteps should not be heard. In such times of tribulation his thoughts were invariably directed to the Divine footstool; as with all devout Jews, prayer was part of his life, and never, since the day of his birth, had he prayed so earnestly and fervently as now. Every few moments he paused in the supplications he was sending forth, and went into the passage and listened. He heard no sound, not a sob, not a cry; and after remaining in the passage several minutes, he returned to his room and resumed his prayers. His heart was with Rachel, and he knew that she was thinking of him. In the light of the perfect love that existed between them, in the anxious expectancy of these lagging minutes, what mattered poverty or riches, what mattered mere worldly misfortune? A stout spirit, a strong shoulder to the wheel, and all would be well; thus much could a right-minded man do with a cheerful spirit. But here and now he was helpless, impotent; here and now was impending a graver issue, which he was powerless to influence. A life--the life of his beloved--was hanging in the balance; and all he could do was to wait, and hope, and pray.

Hush! What was that? An infant's wail--the cry of a new-born child! With his heart in his ears he stood in the passage, then sank upon the stairs, with his face in his hands. His child lived--but Rachel! how was it with her? "Lord of the universe," he prayed, inwardly, "spare my beloved! With Thee is the fountain of life; by Thy light only do we see light. Let Thy light shine upon me and upon her!"

The bedroom door opened and closed, and the doctor came down. The passage was dark, for it was now evening, and Aaron could not see the doctor's face. Taking Aaron's arm, which shook in his grasp like a leaf in a strong wind, the doctor led him into the sitting-room, and lit the gas.

"Doctor!" implored Aaron, with clasped hands.

"You have a little girl."

"And Rachel--my wife!"

"Be comforted. She is in no immediate danger. She is a brave and noble woman. I will return in a couple of hours. The nurse will tell you when you can go up and see her."

Aaron laid his head upon the table and wept.

CHAPTER XIX.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

"Aaron!"

"My beloved!"

"Is our darling beautiful?"

"Very beautiful--like you."

"You spoil me, dear; you think too much of me."

"It is not possible, Rachel. Without you my life would not be perfect; without you I should be a broken man."

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she said, clasping his hand tight. "It is out of my power to repay you for all your goodness to me."

"You repay me every moment of your life. Not for a throne would I exchange my place by your side; not for a palace would I exchange my humble home, with you to hallow it." Their lips met, and there was silence in the room awhile.

"Dear husband, you are not disappointed that our child is a girl?"

"I am rejoiced that we have with us a daughter in Israel. What greater happiness could I desire? When you are strong, when I hear your footsteps about the house again, all will be well."

A holy joy dwelt in her face. "My darling, my darling!" she murmured, as she held the sleeping babe to her breast. "I had a fear, but it is gone, a fear that our precious one would be deprived of sight. What happiness entered my heart when the doctor told me that her eyes were bright and beautiful, and that she could see! I was fearful that my affliction might be visited upon her. It would have broken my heart. But I am blessed--I am happy; our child can see the light, the green fields, the flowers. If only the gracious Lord will not take her, if only He will spare her to live to an honoured old age!"

"He will, He will, my beloved! We must not talk any more. Sleep and grow strong."

He sat by her bedside in silence, gazing upon her face, which was as the face of an angel, and then he stole softly downstairs. He had much to occupy his thoughts; Rachel's danger happily passed, as he hoped, he could turn his attention to his worldly affairs, which, indeed, being at a desperate pass, would have forced themselves to the front under any circumstances. By the doctor's orders he had been compelled to make certain purchases which had not only emptied his purse, but had driven him to the necessity of parting with two or three articles of jewellery which he and Rachel possessed. These proceeds gone he was an absolute beggar.

Never in his life had he been placed in so serious a position. Difficulties had been encountered and confronted with courage and success, times of embarrassment had been tided over, losses had been made good, and he had fought his way cheerfully; but now his heart sank within him at the prospect that was opening out. Rachel needed not only care and unremitting attention, but delicacies in the shape of food, to keep up her strength. Nourishing soups, a glass of port wine, a chicken--these were no trifles to a man in Aaron's position; and, unable to afford the regular services of a servant, he had to look after these matters himself, to perform domestic work, to cook, and to keep the whole house in order. The nurse's attention was devoted solely to the sick-room, and he could not therefore look to assistance from her. Prissy made her appearance daily, but Aaron dismissed her quickly, feeling the injustice of accepting services for which he could not pay. It was no easy matter to get rid of Prissy, who was not only willing but anxious to remain, and she feebly protested against being turned away so unceremoniously. Her protests would have been more vigorous had she not entertained a certain awe of Aaron's strength of character, before which she, as it were, was compelled to prostrate herself. Thus Aaron, from force of circumstance and from his inherent sense of justice, was thrown entirely upon his own resources.

Counting the money in his purse he calculated that it was sufficient to last for nine or ten days. In four days the nurse would take her departure, and then he and Rachel and their babe would be left alone in the house. At the expiration of less than a week after that he must be prepared to face the most serious difficulties. He had friends in London, to whom he had already written, and had received replies of regret that they were unable to assist him. Mr. Moss had been so good a friend that he hardly dared appeal again to him, and he resolved to leave it to the last moment. With a troubled heart, and hardly having the strength to hope against hope, he went about the house and attended to his duties. The four days passed, the nurse, having taken her leave of Rachel, came down to Aaron to receive her wages, and bid him good-bye. He paid her with a sad smile, and thanked her for her services. The "good-day" exchanged, she lingered a moment. With quick apprehension he divined why she delayed.

"You have something to say to me, nurse, about my wife."

"Yes, Mr. Cohen, I have," she replied; "and I am glad you have mentioned it, as I did not know how to bring it out." She paused again.

"Well, nurse?"

"I think you ought to know, Mr. Cohen, that your wife is not so well as you suppose."

"Nurse!"

"She keeps it from you, sir, and has begged me not to alarm you, but it is my duty. I should never forgive myself if I went away without speaking. No, sir, she is far from well, and is not getting on as she ought. She grows weaker and weaker--and baby, too, is not thriving. It is that which keeps Mrs. Cohen back."

"What can be done, nurse?" asked Aaron, the agony of his feelings depicted on his countenance. "Tell me--only tell me!"

"It isn't for me to say, Mr. Cohen. If I were you I would ask the doctor to speak plainly."

"I will, I will. Nurse, does she suffer?"

"She's just the one to suffer, sir, and to say nothing. It would be a dreadful thing for you, sir, if----" But here the woman stopped suddenly and bit her lip. She had said more than she intended. "Good-day, sir, and I hope we may all be wrong."

He caught her arm. "No, no, nurse. I will beg the doctor to speak plainly to me; but he will not be here till to-morrow, and I cannot go to him and leave my wife and child alone in the house. Finish what you were about to say. 'It would be a dreadful thing if----'"

"Well, sir, it is best to face the truth. If your poor lady was to die."

"Great God! There is danger, then?"

"I am afraid there is, sir. Don't take on so, sir, don't! I am sorry I spoke."

"You have done what is right," Aaron groaned.

"We must all of us be prepared, sir; trouble comes to all of us."

"Alas, it is a human heritage! But you do not know what this means to me--you do not know what it means to me."

"Perhaps I have made things out worse than they are; I hope so, I am sure. But you ask the doctor, sir, and don't give way. I shall think of your lady a good deal when I'm gone."

With that, and with a sympathetic look at him, the woman departed.

At length, at length, the truth had been spoken; at length, at length, he knew the worst. It was as if a sentence of death had been pronounced. His Rachel, his beloved wife, the tenderest, the truest that man had ever been blessed with, was to be taken from him. His child, also, perhaps; but that was a lesser grief, upon which he had no heart to brood. His one overwhelming anxiety was for Rachel, who, as it now seemed to him, was lying at death's door in the room above.

He had some soup ready, and he took a basin up to her.

"Can you drink this, dear?"

"I will try."

He assisted her to rise, and put a pillow at her back. As he fed her he watched her face, and he saw that it had grown wan and thin. It was well for both of them that she could not see him; the sight of his agony would have deepened her sufferings and added to his own. With wonderful control he spoke to her with some semblance of cheerfulness, and his voice and words brought a smile to her lips. So through the day he ministered to her, and every time he left her room his fears grew stronger. He did not expect the doctor till the following day, and he was startled and alarmed when he made his appearance at nightfall.

"I happened to be passing," he said to Aaron, "and I thought I would drop in to see how we are getting along."

When they came down from the sick-room Aaron observed a graver expression on his face.

"It is unfortunate that you have no nurse, Mr. Cohen," he said; "your wife needs constant care and watchfulness."

"She will have it, doctor. Is she any better, sir? How is she progressing?"

"She is still the same, still the same, no better and no worse."

"It is not in her favour, doctor, that she remains the same?"

"No, I cannot conscientiously say it is. At this stage a little additional strength would be of great assistance to her. Nature's forces require rallying; but we will hope for the best, Mr. Cohen."

"We will, doctor, but will hope avail?"

His sad voice struck significantly upon the doctor's ears. "Perhaps not, but it is a consolation."

"There are griefs, sir, for which there is no consolation. I cannot wrest my thoughts from the selfish view. There are sorrows that come so close home as to take complete possession of us."

"It is human, Mr. Cohen, it is natural; but we must not shut out resignation, fortitude, submission."

"Doctor, I implore you to conceal nothing from me. It will be merciful."

"What is it you wish to know?"

"Tell me exactly how my wife and child are, so that I may be prepared"--his voice faltered--"for the worst."

"You do not know, then?"

"I fear--but I do not know."

"We doctors have frequently hard duties to perform, Mr. Cohen, duties which to others appear cruel. I will speak plainly; it will be best. It is due to your wife's gentle and loving nature that I have not done so before, and I yielded to her imploring solicitations, deeming it likely that you would discover the state of the case from your own powers of observation. Mr. Cohen, I have rarely had so sad and affecting an experience as I find here. It would be wrong for me to say that your wife is not in danger; she has been in danger for some days past, and it is only an inward moral strength that has supported her through the crisis. Physically she is very weak, spiritually she is very strong. She has still a vital power which, under certain conditions, will be of immense assistance to her, which will enable her--so far as it is in human power to judge--to pull through. You will

gather from my words that her safety, nay, her life, depends not so much upon herself as upon others; upon you to some extent, but to a much greater extent upon her babe. It is her deep love for you both that has sustained her, that still sustains her. Were anything to happen to either of you I should fear the gravest results. It would react upon her, and in her delicate state there would be no hope."

"I am strong and well bodily, doctor; nothing is likely to happen to me. Her danger, then, lies in our child?"

"You have clearly expressed it. Her life hangs upon the life of her child. So fine and delicate are her susceptibilities, so profound is her love for those who are dear to her, that I, a doctor, who is supposed to be nothing if he is not scientific, am compelled to confess that here my learned theories are at fault. I will no longer disguise from you that her life hangs upon the balance."

"And our child, doctor, how is it with her?"

"I can answer you with less certainty. Something of the delicate susceptibilities of the mother has in the course of nature entered her child's being. The baby is not strong, but she may grow into strength; it is as yet a problem to be solved, and a physician's skill is almost powerless to help to a happy issue. Hope, Mr. Cohen, hope; and in bidding you hope, and in explaining matters to you, I have not said all that it is necessary for me to say. There remains something more."

"One question first, doctor," said Aaron, in a hushed voice; "if our child lives, there is hope that my wife will live?"

"A strong hope; I speak with confidence."

"And if our child dies?"

"The mother will die. Forgive me for my cruel frankness."

"It is the best kindness you can show me. You have something more to tell me."

"Something almost as cruel, but it must be spoken. Mr. Cohen, your wife has been severely tried; the shock of the fire, the shock of her sudden blindness, both coming so close upon her expected confinement, have left their effects upon her. If things take a favourable turn with her it will be imperative, in the course of the next three or four weeks--earlier if possible, and if she can be removed with safety--that you take her to a milder climate, where she can be nursed into permanent' strength. We are going to have

a severe winter, and I will not answer for its effects upon her. From three or four weeks hence till the spring in a warmer atmosphere, where there are no fogs or east winds, will be of invaluable service to her, will set her up probably for many years to come. You must recognise this yourself, and if by any possibility or sacrifice you can manage it, you must do so."

"Is it vitally necessary, doctor?"

"You have used the right word--it is vitally necessary. And now, good-night, Mr. Cohen. I leave my best wishes behind me."

CHAPTER XX.

A MOMENTOUS NIGHT.

Each day, each hour, Aaron became more anxious and troubled. In the doctor's plain speaking there was no reading between the lines, and no possible mistaking of his meaning. The stern truth had been revealed, and there was no arguing it away. Aaron saw clearly what was before him, but he could not see a way out of his difficulties, nor to doing what he was warned it was imperative upon him that he should do, in the happy event of Rachel's coming safely through her present crisis. There was no apparent change in her; she lay weak and powerless in her bed, receiving Aaron always with sweet and patient words, and nursing her child as well as her feeble state would allow her. The condition of the babe pained and troubled him. He observed no indication of suffering, no querulousness in the child; it was simply that she lay supine, as though life were flowing quietly out of her. Every time Aaron crept up to the bedside and found the babe asleep, he leant anxiously over her to catch the sound of her breathing; and so faint and low was her respiration that again and again he was smitten with a fear that she had passed away. Acutely sensitive and sensible now of every sign in his wife, it became with him an absolute conviction that the doctor was not mistaken when he declared that her life and the life of her babe were inseparable, that if one lived the other would live, that if one died the other would die. During this torturing time strange thoughts oppressed him, and oppressed him more powerfully because he scarcely understood them. The tenor of these thoughts resolved itself into the one passionate desire to do something--he knew not what--to keep his wife with him even if she should lose her babe, and towards the accomplishment of which he felt that a power outside the sphere of human influence was necessary. Normally he was a man of sound understanding, not given to mysticism nor to a belief in the effects of supernatural power upon mundane affairs; but during these agitating days there was a danger of his healthy mind becoming unbalanced. Human resource had failed him; he must seek elsewhere for aid; if he were to be successful in steering his beloved to a haven of peace and health it must be through outside influences which had not yet made themselves visible to him. "Show me the way, O gracious Lord, show me the way!" This was his constant prayer, and although in less agitated times he would have blamed himself for praying for a seeming impossibility, he encouraged himself in it now, in the dim and despairing hope that some miracle would occur to further his agonising desire.

Meanwhile his funds had run completely out, and he saw with terror the wolf approaching the door. He had not the means to pay for the necessities of the next twenty-four hours. Then it was that he resolved to make an urgent appeal to Mr. Moss. He would tell him everything, he would reveal his hapless position in the plainest terms,

and he would beg for an immediate temporary loan of money, which he would promise to faithfully repay when the cloud was lifted from his house.

It was a cold and bitter evening. The snow had been falling heavily; a fierce wind was raging. He thought of poor people he had seen in such inclement weather as this walking along with sad faces, homeless and hungry; he recalled the picture of a young good-looking woman whom he had seen years ago in a London park during a heavy snow-storm; she was thinly clad, want was in her face, she pressed a babe to her bosom. Shivering with cold she walked slowly onward, and looked around with despairing eyes for succour. He slipped a shilling into her hand, and as he hurried away, he heard, with a feeling of remonstrant shame, her gratitude expressed in the words "God Almighty bless you, sir!" as though he had performed an act of extraordinary generosity. Between this wretched woman and his beloved Rachel there seemed to be an affinity, and his heart was torn with woe. He was the breadwinner; to him she looked for food, for warmth, for shelter; he was her shield. Could he not keep desolation and despair from her? could he not keep death from her? He did not know that the angel was already in his house.

The doctor had paid a visit early in the morning, and had spoken even more gravely of Rachel.

"Much depends," he said, "upon the next day or two. For some days past she has been silently suffering, and I have succeeded in piercing the veil of sorrow which hangs upon her soul. She fears that her child will not live, and if unhappily her fears are confirmed--" He did not finish the sentence; there was no need for further words to convey his meaning. "This harrowing thought," he continued, "keeps her from rest, prevents her sleeping. There are periods of sickness when sleep means life. I will send round a sleeping draught, which you will give her at eight o'clock to-night; it will ensure her oblivion for a good twelve hours, and if when she wakes all is well with the child, all will be well with her."

"Can you tell me, doctor, why this fear has grown stronger within these last few days?"

"The babe lies quietly in her arms; she does not hear its voice, and only by its soft breathing can she convince herself that it lives. Tender accents from the child she has brought into the world would fall as a blessing upon her sorrowing heart. At any moment the child may find its voice; let us hope that it will very soon."

The sleeping draught was sent to Aaron, and it was now on the table. The hour was six-- in a couple of hours he would give it to her; and while he waited he sat down to write his letter to Mr. Moss. It was a long letter, for he had much to say, and he was but half way through when a postman's knock summoned him to the street door. He hurried there

quickly, so that the knock should not be repeated, and to his surprise received a telegram. It was from Mr. Moss, and it informed him that that gentleman was coming to see him upon a very important matter, and that he was to be sure not to leave home that night. Aaron wondered what this important matter could be, and there was a joyful feeling in his heart that the telegram might be the presage of good fortune. He knew enough of Mr. Moss's kindly nature to be convinced that he would not be the herald of bad news. "There is a rift in the clouds," he murmured, as he pondered over the message; "I see the light, I see the light!" Would Mr. Moss's errand open up a means of giving Rachel the benefit of soft air and sunshine in a more genial clime? He prayed that it might, and he had never prayed more fervently. But the night was inclement, and Mr. Moss might not be able in consequence to pay the promised visit. Time pressed; the necessity was imminent, and would brook no delay; therefore he determined to finish his letter and to post it this night, in the event of Mr. Moss not making his appearance.

It wanted a few minutes to eight when his task was completed. He read the letter over, and addressed an envelope, but did not stamp it; he had but one stamp, and every penny was of importance. He looked at the clock; eight o'clock. With gentle steps he went up to Rachel.

"It is time for the draught, my love," he said.

"I will take it, dear."

He poured it into a glass, and she drank it reclining in his arms.

"If our dear one lives, Aaron," said Rachel, "we will call her Ruth, after your mother."

"It shall be so, love," answered Aaron, laying her head upon the pillow. "God will vouchsafe the mercy to us. She will live, Rachel, she will live!" Desirous that she should not talk now that she had taken the sleeping draught, he kissed her tenderly and would have left her, but she held him by the hand.

"Has the doctor told you that I am in sorrow, Aaron?"

"You have the gift of divinity, love. Yes, he has told me, and he said that to-morrow, perhaps, please God, you will hear our darling's voice."

"Did he say so? Heaven bless him! She is sleeping?"

"Yes, beloved."

"I pray that the good doctor may be right. I shall dream of it. To-morrow--perhaps to-morrow! Ah, what happiness! It needs but that, dear husband, it needs but that! How tired you must be with all that you are doing for me! Kiss me again. God guard you!"

And so she fell asleep.

The small fire in the room required attention, and Aaron arranged each piece of coal and cinder with scrupulous care; never had there been so much need for thrift as now. In all his movements there was not the least sound; so softly did he step that his feet might have been shod with velvet pile. One of Rachel's arms was lying exposed on the counterpane; he gently shifted it beneath the warm coverings; then he quitted the apartment and closed the door upon his wife and child, and upon the Angel of Death, who was standing by the bedside to receive a departing soul.

Aaron did not return to his room below; he stood by the open street door, looking anxiously up and down for Mr. Moss, and thinking with sadness that if that gentleman delayed his visit he would be compelled in the morning to part with his silver-mounted pipe, which was the only article of any value that was left to him. Of all his personal belongings he cherished this pipe the most; so often had she filled it for him that he regarded it almost as part of herself. It was not between his lips at the present moment; he had no heart to smoke. For nearly an hour he stood upon the watch, interrupting it only for the purpose of creeping upstairs to see if Rachel were still sleeping. At nine o'clock Mr. Moss made his welcome appearance in the street; even as he turned the corner at a distance of many yards Aaron recognised him. He was enveloped in his great fur coat, which was pulled up close to his ears; he was puffing at one of his large cigars, and between the puffs was humming a celebrated air from the latest operatic success--

"Toreador attento,
Toreador, Toreador,
Non obliarche un occhio tutt' ardor
Adammirarti è intento,
E che t' aspett' amor,
Toreador t' aspett' aspetta amor."

He scorned the English tongue in operas, and though by no means a well-educated man, never sang but in Italian. The last flourish brought him close to Aaron.

"Why, Cohen" he said, in a hearty tone, "what are you standing at the door for on such a cold night?"

"I have been expecting you," Aaron answered, "and I did not wish you to knock. Rachel has taken a sleeping draught, and must not be disturbed."

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Mr. Moss, accompanying his friend into the house. "How is she?"

"Not well, not at all well, I am grieved to say. Mr. Moss, my heart is almost broken." He turned aside with a sob.

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Mr. Moss. "That will never do, Cohen. You mustn't give way--a strong, clever man like you. Look on the best side. Things will right themselves; they will, mark my words. I am here to set them right."

"To set them right!" exclaimed Aaron, all his pulses throbbing.

"Yes, to set them right. What is this?--an envelope addressed to me?"

"I was writing you a letter when your telegram arrived."

"And then you did not stop to finish it?"

"I did finish it, Mr. Moss, in case you did not come."

"May I read it?"

"Yes; it will explain matters; you will learn from it what it would pain me to tell you in any other way."

"Smoke a cigar while I read."

Aaron took the cigar, and laid it aside, and then Mr. Moss, who had taken off his thick coat, sat down and perused the letter.

"I have come in the nick of time, Cohen," he said. "There is a silver lining to every cloud; I have brought it with me."

"I felt," said Aaron, his hopes rising, "that you could not be the bearer of bad news."

"Not likely, friend Cohen. I am the bearer of good news, of the best of news. Don't be led away; it isn't a legacy--no, no, it isn't a legacy, but something almost as good, and I hope you will not throw away the chance."

"If it is anything that will relieve me from my terrible embarrassments it is not likely that I shall throw it away."

"It will do that for a certainty, and there is money attaching to it which I have in my pocket, and which I can pay over to you this very night."

"How can I thank you? how can I thank you?"

"Don't try to, and don't be surprised at what you hear. It is a strange piece of business, and I should have refused to undertake it if I had not said to myself, 'This will suit my friend Cohen; it will lift him out of his trouble.' But upon my word, now that I'm here I don't know how to commence. I never met with anything like it in all my life, and if you were well off you would be the last man in the world I should have dreamt of coming to. But you are not well off, Cohen; you have lost everything; Rachel is ill, and the doctor says she must be taken out of this cold and dismal climate to a place where she can see the sun, and where the air is mild and warm. I dare say you're thinking, 'Moss is speaking in a strange way,' and so I am; but it's nothing to what I've got to tell you. Cohen, what will happen if you can't afford to do as the doctor advises you?"

"Do not ask me," groaned Aaron. "I dare not think of it--I dare not, I dare not!"

"I don't say it unkindly, Cohen, but it seems to me to be a matter of life and death." Aaron clasped his forehead. "Very well, then; and don't forget that it is in your own hands. Before I commence I must say a word about myself. I can't do all you ask me in this letter; as I'm a living man I should be glad to assist you, but I have entered into a large speculation which has taken all my spare cash, and all I could afford would be eight or ten pounds. How long would that last you? In two or three weeks it would be gone, and you would be no better off than you were before; and as to taking Rachel to the South of France, that would be quite out of the question."

"But you held out hope to me," said the trembling Aaron, "you said you were the bearer of good news!"

"I said what is true, Cohen, but it is not my money that I have to deal with. I have brought fifty pounds with me; another man's money, entrusted to me for a special purpose, and which you can have at once if you will undertake a certain task and accept a certain responsibility. It is only out of my friendship for you, it is only because I know you to be so badly off that you hardly know which way to turn, it is only because Rachel is ill and requires what you can't afford to pay for, that it entered my mind to offer you the chance."

"Fifty pounds would be the saving of me, Mr. Moss," said Aaron, in an agony of suspense. "It would restore my Rachel to health, it would bring happiness into my life. Surely Heaven has directed you to come to my assistance!"

"You shall judge for yourself. Listen patiently to what I am going to tell you; it will startle you, but don't decide hastily or rashly. And bear in mind that what passes between us is not to be disclosed to another person on earth."

CHAPTER XXI.

OVER A BRIGHT CLOUD A BLACK SHADOW FALLS.

Mr. Moss then proceeded to unfold the nature of the mission he had undertaken for Mr. Gordon, with the particulars of which the reader has been made acquainted in the earlier chapters of this story. Aaron listened with attention and astonishment: with attention because of his anxiety to ascertain whether the proposal was likely to extricate him from his cruel position, with astonishment because the wildest stretch of his imagination would not have enabled him to guess the purport of the singular disclosure. When Mr. Moss ceased speaking the afflicted man rose and paced the room in distress and disappointment.

"I told you I should startle you," said Mr. Moss, with a shrewd observance of his friend's demeanour, and, for the good of that friend, preparing for a battle. "What do you say to it?"

"It is impossible--impossible!" muttered Aaron. "I told you also," continued Mr. Moss, calmly, "not to decide hastily or rashly. In the way of ordinary business I should not, as I have said, have dreamt of coming to you, and I should not have undertaken the mission. But the position in which you are placed is not ordinary, and you are bound to consider the matter not upon its merits alone, but in relation to your circumstances. I need not say I shall make nothing out of it myself."

"Indeed you need not," said Aaron, pressing Mr. Moss's hand. "Pure friendship has brought you here, I know, I know; but surely you must see that it is impossible for me to assume the responsibility."

"I see nothing of the kind. Honestly and truly, Cohen, I look upon it as a windfall, and if you turn your back upon it you will repent it all your life. What is it I urge you to do? A crime?"

"No, no, I do not say that. Heaven forbid!"

"You are naturally startled and agitated. Cohen, you are a man of intelligence and discernment. My wife has often said, 'If Mr. Cohen were a rich man he would be one of the heads of our people.' She is right; she always is. But there are times when a man cannot exercise his judgment, when he is so upset that his mind gets off its balance. It has happened to me, and I have said afterwards, 'Moss, you are a fool': it happens to all

of us. Let me put the matter clearly before you. Have you ever been in such trouble as you are in now?"

"Never in my life."

"Misfortune after misfortune has fallen upon you. All your money is gone; everything is gone; you can't get through this week without assistance. You have tried all your friends, and they cannot help you; you have tried me, and I can only offer you what will meet the necessities of the next few days. It is known that you are badly off, and you cannot get credit; if you could it would cut you to the soul, because you know you would be owing money that there was no expectation of your being able to pay. You would be ashamed to look people in the face; you would lose your sense of self-respect, and every fresh step you take would be a step down instead of up. Poor Rachel is lying sick almost to death; she has a stronger claim than ever upon your love, upon your wisdom. The doctor has told you what she requires, and of the possible consequences if you are unable to carry out his directions. Cohen, not one of these things must be lost sight of in the answer you give to what I propose."

Great beads of perspiration were on Aaron's forehead as he murmured, "I do not lose sight of them. They are like daggers in my heart."

"Strangely and unexpectedly," pursued Mr. Moss, "a chance offers itself that will extricate you out of all your difficulties. You will not only receive immediately a large sum of money, but you will be in receipt of a hundred a year, sufficient to keep your family in a modest way. What are you asked to do in return for this good fortune? To take care of an innocent child, who has no one to look after her, who will never be claimed, and about whom you will never be troubled. You can engage a servant to attend to her, and when you explain everything to Rachel she will approve of what you have done. Before I came to you, Cohen, I consulted a gentleman--Dr. Spenlove--who has a kind heart and correct principles, and he agreed with me that the transaction was perfectly honourable. I have no doubt of it myself, or I should not be here. Be persuaded, Cohen; it will be a benevolent, as well as a wise, act, and all your difficulties will be at an end. What is it Shakespeare says? 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood,----' you know the rest. Why, there are thousands who would jump at the opportunity. Come, now, for Rachel's sake!" Mr. Moss was genuinely sincere in his advice, and he spoke with earnestness and feeling.

"The child is a girl, Mr. Moss?"

"A dear little girl, of the same age as your own."

"Hush! You forget. This little stranger is born of Christian parents."

"That is no crime, Cohen."

"Do I say it is? But we are Jews. The stipulation is that she should be brought up as one of our family; and, indeed, it could scarcely be otherwise. She would live her life in a Jewish household. It is that I am thinking of Mr. Moss, I am at war with my conscience."

"She will be none the worse off for living with you and Rachel. Your character is well known, and Rachel is the soul of kindness. You would be committing no sin, Cohen."

"I am not so sure."

"Then who is to know? You and Rachel are alone, and when she is able to be moved you will take her for a time to another place. You need not return here. Rachel's health restored, you should go to London, or Liverpool, or Manchester, where your talents would have a larger field. I always thought it wrong for you to bury yourself in so small a town as this. There is no scope for you in it; you would never make your fortune here."

"If I go from this place I shall not return to it. You ask who is to know. Mr. Moss, God would know; Rachel and I would know. How can I reconcile it with my conscience to bring up a child in a faith in which she is not born? It would weigh heavily upon me."

"That is because your views are so strict. I do not see why it should weigh heavily upon you. If it were a boy I should not press it upon you; but girls are different. There is very little for them to learn. To pray--there is only one God. To be good and virtuous--there is only one code of morality. You know that well enough."

"I do know it, but still I cannot reconcile it with my conscience."

"In your position," continued Mr. Moss, perceiving that Aaron was wavering, "I should not hesitate; I should thank God that such a chance fell in my way. Even as it is, if I did not have eleven children, and expecting the twelfth, I would take this lamb into my fold--I would indeed, Cohen. But my hands are full. Cohen, let me imagine a case. It is a cold and bitter night, and the world is filled with poor struggling creatures, with little children who are being brought up the wrong way. Rachel is asleep upstairs. You are here alone. Suddenly you fancy you hear a cry in the street, the cry of a babe. You go to the door, and upon the step you see an infant lying, unsheltered, without a protector. What would you do?"

"I should bring it into my house."

"With pity in your heart, Cohen."

"I hope so. With pity in my heart."

"Poor as you are, you would share what you have with the deserted babe; you would nourish it, you would cherish it. You would say to Rachel, 'I heard a cry outside the house on this bitter night, and upon the doorstep I discovered this poor babe; I brought it in, and gave it shelter.' What would Rachel answer?"

"She is a tender-hearted woman; she would answer that I did what was right."

"Look upon it in that light, and I will continue the case. In the child's clothes you find a fifty-pound note, and a letter unsigned, to the effect that the little one has no protector, is alone in the world, and beseeching you to take charge of it and save it from destitution and degradation. No scruples as to the child being a Christian would disturb you then; you would act as humanity dictated. In the case I have imagined you would not be at war with your conscience; why should you be at war with it now?"

"Still I must reflect; and I have a question or two to ask. The name of the mother?"

"Not to be divulged."

"The name of the father?"

"The same answer. Indeed, I do not know it myself."

"Where is the child?"

"At the Salutation Hotel, in the charge of a woman I brought with me."

"My decision must be made to-night?"

"To-night."

"Supposing it to be in the affirmative, what position do you occupy in the matter in the future?"

"None whatever. The task I undertook executed, I retire, and have nothing further to do with it. Anything you chose to communicate to me would be entirely at your discretion. Voluntarily I should never make reference to it."

"What has passed between us, you informed me, is not to be disclosed to any other person?"

"To no other person whatever."

"Am I to understand that it has been disclosed to no other?"

"You are. Only Dr. Spenlove and the gentleman who entrusted me with the commission have any knowledge of it."

"How about the woman who is now taking care of the child at the Salutation Hotel?"

"She is in entire ignorance of the whole proceeding."

"Is she not aware that you have come to my house?"

"She is not. In the event of your deciding to undertake the charge I myself will bring the child here."

"Is the mother to be made acquainted with my name?"

"It is an express stipulation that she is to be kept in ignorance of it."

"And to this she consented willingly?"

"Willingly, for her child's good and her own."

"Is Dr. Spenlove to be made acquainted with it?"

"He is not."

"And the gentleman whose commission you are executing?"

"Neither is he to know. It is his own wish."

"The liberal allowance for the rearing of the child, by whom will it be paid?"

"By a firm of respectable London lawyers, whose name and address I will give you, and to whom I shall communicate by telegram to-night. All the future business will be solely between you and them, without interference from any living being."

"Mr. Moss, I thank you; you have performed the office of a friend."

"It was my desire, Cohen. Then you consent?"

"No. I must have time for reflection. In an hour from now you shall have my answer."

"Don't throw away the chance," said Mr. Moss, very earnestly. "Remember it is for Rachel's sake."

"I will remember it; but I must commune with myself. If before one hour has passed you do not see me at the Salutation Hotel, you will understand that I refuse."

"What will you do then, Cohen? How will you manage?"

"God knows. Perhaps He will direct me."

Mr. Moss considered a moment, then took ten five-pound banknotes from his pocket, and laid them on the table.

"I will leave this money with you," he said.

"No, no!" cried Aaron.

"Why not? It will do no harm. You are to be trusted, Cohen. In case you refuse I will take it back. If you do not come for me, I will come for you, so I will not wish you good-night. Don't trouble to come to the door; I can find my way out."

Aaron was alone, fully conscious that this hour was, perhaps, the most momentous in his life. The money was before him, and he could not keep his eyes from it. It meant so much. It seemed to speak to him, to say, "Life or death to your beloved wife. Reject me, and you know what will follow." All his efforts to bring himself to a calm reflection of the position were unavailing. He could not reason, he could not argue with himself. The question to be answered was not whether it would be right to take a child born of Christian parents into his house, to bring her up as one of a Jewish family, but whether his dear wife was to live or die; and he was the judge, and if he bade his friend take the money back, he would be the executioner. Of what value then would life be to him? Devout and full of faith as he was, he still, in this dread crisis, was of the earth earthy. His heart was torn with love's agony.

The means of redemption were within his reach: why should he not avail himself of them?

Rachel enjoyed life for the pleasure it gave her. Stricken with blindness as she was, he knew that she would still enjoy it, and that she would shed comfort and happiness upon all who came in contact with her. Was it for him to snap the cord, to say, "You shall no longer enjoy, you shall no longer bestow happiness upon others; you shall no longer live to lighten the trouble of many suffering mortals, to shed light and sweetness in many homes"? Was this the way to prove his love for her? No, he would not shut the door of earthly salvation which had been so providentially opened to him, he would not pronounce a sentence of death against the dear woman he had sworn to love and cherish.

Aaron was not aware that in the view he was taking he was calling to his aid only those personal and sympathetic affections which bound him and Rachel together, and that, out of a common human selfishness, he was thrusting from the scale the purely moral and religious obligations which usually played so large a part in his conduct of life. In this dark hour love was supreme, and held him in its thrall; in this dark hour he was intensely and completely human; in this dark hour the soft breathing of a feeble woman was more potent than the sound of angels' trumpets from the Throne of Grace, the sight of a white, worn face more powerful than that of a flaming sword of justice in the skies.

He had arrived at a decision; he would receive the child of strangers into his home.

Before going to the Salutation Hotel to make the announcement to Mr. Moss he would see that his wife was sleeping, and not likely to awake during his brief absence from the house. The doctor had assured him that she would sleep for twelve hours, and he had full confidence in the assurance; but he must look upon her face once more before he left her even for a few minutes.

He stood at her bedside. She was sleeping peacefully and soundly; her countenance was now calm and untroubled, and Aaron believed that he saw in it an indication of returning health. Certainly the rest she was enjoying was doing her good. He stooped and kissed her, and she did not stir; her sweet breath fanned his cheeks. Then he turned his eyes upon his child; and as he gazed upon the infant, in its white dress, a terror for which there is no name stole into his heart. Why was the babe so still and white? Like a marble statue she lay, bereft of life and motion. He put his ear to her lips--not a breath escaped them; he laid his hand upon her heart--not the faintest flutter of a pulse was there. With feverish haste he lifted the little hand, the head, the body, and for all the response he received he might have been handling an image of stone. Gradually the truth forced itself upon him. The young soul had gone to its Maker. His child was dead!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

"If our child lives, there is hope that my wife will live?"

"A strong hope. I speak with confidence."

"And if our child dies?"

"The mother will die."

No voice was speaking in the chamber of death, but Aaron heard again these words, which had passed between the doctor and himself. If the child lived, the mother would live; if the child died, the mother would die.

A black darkness fell upon his soul. His mind, his soul, every principle of his being, was engulfed in the one despairing thought that Rachel was doomed, that, although she was sleeping peacefully before his eyes, death would be her portion when she awoke to the fact that her babe had been taken from her.

"If, when she wakes, all is well with the child, all will be well with her."

The spiritual echo of the doctor's words uttered but a few hours ago. He heard them as clearly as he had heard the others.

How to avert the threatened doom? How to save his Rachel's life? Prayer would not avail, or he would have flown to it instinctively. It was not that he asked himself the question, or that in his agony he doubted or believed in the efficacy of prayer. It may be, indeed, that he evaded it, for already a strange and terrible temptation was invading the fortress of his soul. To save the life of his beloved was he ready to commit a sin? What was the true interpretation of sin? A perpetrated act which would benefit one human being to the injury of another. Then, if an act were perpetrated which would ensure the happiness and well-doing not of one human creature, but of three, and would inflict injury upon no living soul, that act was not a sin--unmistakably not a sin. But if this were really so, wherefore the necessity for impressing it upon himself? The conviction that he was acting justly in an hour of woe, that the contemplated act was not open to doubt in a moral or religious sense, was in itself sufficient. Wherefore, then, the iteration that it was not a sin?

He could not think the matter out in the presence of Rachel and of his dead child. He stole down to his room, and gave himself up to reflection. He turned down the gas almost to vanishing point, and stood in the dark, now thinking in silence, now uttering his thoughts aloud.

A friend had come to him and begged him to receive into his household a babe, a girl, of the same age as his own babe lying dead in the room above. She was deserted, friendless, alone. All natural claims had been abandoned, and the infant was thrown upon the world, without parents, without kith or kin. Even while he believed his own child to be alive he had decided to accept the trust. Why should he hesitate now that his child was dead? It was almost like a miraculous interposition, or so he chose to present it to himself.

"Even as we spoke together," he said aloud, "my child had passed away. Even as I hesitated the messenger was urging me to accept the trust. It was as if an angel had presented himself, and said, 'The life of your beloved hangs upon the life of a babe, and the Eternal has called her child to Him. Here is another to take her place. The mother will not know; she is blind, and has never seen the face of her babe, has scarcely heard its voice. To-morrow she lives or dies--it is the critical day in her existence--and whether she lives or dies rests with you, and with you alone. Science is powerless to help her in her hour of trial; love alone will lift her into life, into joy, into happiness; and upon you lies the responsibility. It is for you to pronounce the sentence--life or death for your beloved, life or death for a good woman who, if you do not harden your heart, will shed peace and blessings upon all around her. Embrace the gift that God has offered you. Allow no small scruples to drive you from the duty of love.' Yes," cried Aaron in a louder tone, "it was as if an angel spoke. Rachel shall live!"

If there was sophistry in this reasoning he did not see it; but the still small voice whispered,--

"It is a deception, you are about to practise. You are about to place in your wife's arms a child that is not of her blood or yours. You are about to take a Christian babe to your heart, to rear and instruct her as if she were born in the old and sacred faith that has survived long centuries of suffering and oppression. Can you justify it?"

"Love justifies it," he answered. "The good that will spring from it justifies it. A sweet and ennobling life will be saved. My own life will be made the better for it, for without my beloved I should be lost, I should be lost!"

Again the voice: "It is of yourself you are thinking."

"And if I am," he answered, "if our lives are so interwoven that one would be useless and broken without the other, where is the sin?"

Again the voice: "Ah, the sin! You have pronounced the word. Remember, it is a sin of commission."

"I know it," he said, "and I can justify it--and can I not atone for it in the future? I will atone for it, if the power is given me, by charity, by good deeds. In atonement, yes, in atonement. If I can relieve some human misery, if I can lift a weight from suffering hearts, surely that will be reckoned to my account. I record here a solemn vow to make this a purpose of my life. And the child!--she will be reared in a virtuous home, she will have a good woman for a mother. With such an example before her she cannot fail to grow into a bright and useful womanhood. That will be a good work done. I pluck her from the doubtful possibilities which might otherwise attend her; no word of reproach will ever reach her ears; she will live in ignorance of the sad circumstances of her birth. Is all this nothing? Will it not weigh in the balance?"

Again the voice: "It is much, and the child is fortunate to fall into the hands of such protectors. But I repeat, in using these arguments you are not thinking of the child; you think only of yourself."

"It is not so," he said; "not alone of myself am I thinking. I am the arbiter of my wife's earthly destiny. Having the opportunity of rescuing her from death, what would my future life be if I stand idly by and see her die before my eyes? Do you ask of me that I shall be her executioner? The heart of the Eternal is filled with love; He bestows upon us the gift of love as our divinest consolation. He has bestowed it upon me in its sublimest form. Shall I lightly throw away the gift, and do a double wrong--to the child that needs a home, to the woman whose fate is in my hands? Afflict me no longer; I am resolved, and am doing what I believe to be right in the sight of the Most High."

The voice was silent, and spake no more.

Aaron turned up the gas, took the money which Mr. Moss had left upon the table, and quietly left the house. As he approached the Salutation Hotel, which was situated at but a short distance, he saw the light of Mr. Moss's cigar in the street. That gentleman was walking to and fro, anxiously awaiting the arrival of his friend.

"You are here, Cohen," he cried, "and the hour has barely passed. That is a good omen. How pale you are, and you are out of breath. In order that absolute secrecy should be preserved I thought it best to wait outside for you. You have decided?"

"I have decided," said Aaron, in a husky voice. "I will receive the child."

"Good, good, good," said Mr. Moss, his eyes beaming with satisfaction. "You are acting like a sensible man, and you have lifted yourself out of your difficulties. I cannot tell you how glad you make me, for I take a real interest in you, a real interest. Remain here; I will bring the babe, and we will go together to your house. It is well wrapped up, and we will walk quickly to protect it from the night air. I shall not be a minute."

He darted into the hotel, and soon returned, with the babe in his arms. Upon Aaron's offering to take the child from him, he said, gaily, "No, no, Cohen'; I am more used to carrying babies than you. When you have a dozen of them, like me, I will admit that we are equal; but not till then, not till then."

Although his joyous tones jarred upon Aaron he made no remark, and they proceeded to Aaron's house, Mr. Moss being the loquacious one on the road.

"The woman I brought with me does not know, does not suspect, where the child is going to, so we are safe. She goes back to Portsmouth to-night; I shall remain till the morning. The baby is fast asleep. What would the world be without children? Did you ever think of that, Cohen? It would not be worth living in. A home without children--I cannot imagine it. When I see a childless woman I pity her from my heart. They try to make up for it with a cat or a dog, but it's a poor substitute, a poor substitute. If I had no children I would adopt one or two--yes, indeed. There is a happy future before this child; if she but knew, if she could speak, her voice would ring out a song of praise."

When they arrived at the house Aaron left Mr. Moss in the room below, and ran up to ascertain if Rachel had been disturbed. She had not moved since he last quitted the room, and an expression of profound peace was settling on her face. His own child lay white and still. A heavy sigh escaped him as he gazed upon the inanimate tiny form. He closed the door softly, and rejoined his friend.

"I will not stay with you, Cohen," said Mr. Moss; "you will have enough to do. To-morrow you must get a woman to assist in the house. You have the fifty pounds safe?" Aaron nodded. "I have some more money to give you, twenty-five pounds, three months' payment in advance of the allowance to be made to you for the rearing of the child. Here it is, and here, also, is the address of the London lawyers, who will remit to you regularly at the commencement of every quarter. You have only to give them your address, and they will send the money to you. I shall not leave Gosport till eleven in the morning, and if you have anything to say to me I shall be at the Salutation till that hour. Good-night, Cohen; I wish you happiness and good fortune."

Alone with the babe, who lay on the sofa, which had been drawn up to the fire, Aaron stood face to face with the solemn responsibility he had taken upon himself, and with the still more solemn deception to which he was pledged. For awhile he hardly dared to uncover the face of the sleeping child, but time was precious, and he nerved himself to the necessity. He sat on the sofa, and gently removed the wrappings which had protected the child from the cold night, but had not impeded its powers of respiration.

A feeling of awe stole upon him; the child he was gazing on might have been his own dead child, so strong was the resemblance between them. There was a little hair upon the pretty head, as there was upon the head of his dead babe; it was dark, as hers was; there was a singular resemblance in the features of the children; the limbs, the feet, the little baby hands, the pouting mouth, might have been cast in the same mould. The subtle instinct of a mother's love would have enabled her to know instinctively which of the two was her own babe, but it would be necessary for that mother to be blessed with sight before she could arrive at her unerring conclusion. A father could be easily deceived, and the tender age of the children would have been an important--perhaps the chief--factor in the unconscious error. "Surely," Aaron thought, as he contemplated the sleeping babe, "this is a sign that I am acting rightly." Men less devout than he might have regarded it as a Divine interposition. But though he strove still to justify his act, doubt followed every argument he used in his defence.

The next hour was occupied in necessary details which had not hitherto occurred to him. The clothing of the children had to be exchanged. It was done; the dead was arrayed as the living, the living as the dead. Mere words are powerless to express Aaron's feelings as he performed this task, and when he placed the living, breathing babe in the bed in which Rachel lay, and took his own dead child to an adjoining room, and laid it in his own bed, scalding tears ran down his cheeks. "God forgive me, God forgive me!" he murmured, again and again. He knelt by Rachel's bed, and buried his face in his hands. He had committed himself to the deception; there was no retreat now. For weal or woe, the deed was done.

And there was so much yet to do, so much that he had not thought of! Each false step he was taking was leading to another as false as that which had preceded it. But if the end justified the means--if he did not betray himself--if Rachel, awaking, suspected nothing, and heard the voice of the babe by her side, without suspecting that it was not her own, why, then, all would be well. And all through his life, to his last hour, he would endeavour to make atonement for his sin. He inwardly acknowledged it now, without attempting to gloss it over. It was a sin; though good would spring from it, though a blessing might attend it, the act was sinful.

His painful musings were arrested by a knock at the street door. With a guilty start he rose to his feet, and gazed around with fear in his eyes. What did the knock portend? Was it in some dread way connected with his doings? The thought was harrowing. But presently he straightened himself, set his lips firmly, and went downstairs to attend to the summons.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PLUCKED FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH.

Mr. Moss stood at the street door, bearing in his arms the little iron casket which Dr. Spenlove, at the intercession of the mother who had consented to part with her child, had entrusted to him.

"In my excitement, Cohen," he commenced, before Aaron could speak, "something slipped my memory when we were talking together. I rapped softly at first, fearing to disturb Rachel, but no one answering, I had to use the knocker. I hope I have not disturbed her."

"She is sleeping peacefully," replied Aaron, "and is taking a turn for the better, I am thankful to say. To-morrow, I trust, all danger will be over. Come in."

He closed the door gently, and they entered the parlour.

"I have come back about this little box," said Mr. Moss, depositing it on the table; "it belongs to the task I undertook. The mother of the babe made it a stipulation that whoever had the care of the child should receive the box, and hold it in trust for her until she claimed it."

"But I understood," said Aaron, in apprehension, "that the mother had no intention of claiming her child."

"In a certain sense that is true. Don't look worried; there is no fear of any trouble in the future; only she made it a condition that the box should go with the child, and that, when the girl was twenty-one years of age, it should be given to her, in case the mother did not make her appearance and claim the property. It stands this way, Cohen. The mother took into consideration the chance that the gentleman she is marrying may die before her, in which event she stipulated that she should be free to seek her daughter. That is reasonable, is it not?"

"Quite reasonable."

"And natural?"

"Quite natural. But I should have been informed of it."

"It escaped me, it really escaped me, Cohen; and what difference can it make? It is only a mother's fancy."

"Yes, only a mother's fancy."

"I'll lay a thousand to one you never hear anything more about it. Put the box away, and don't give it another thought."

Aaron lifted it from the table. "It is heavy, Mr. Moss."

"Yes, it is heavy."

"Do you know what it contains?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"It must be something that the mother sets store on--jewels, perhaps."

"Nothing more unlikely. The poor woman didn't have a shilling to bless herself with. I shouldn't trouble about it if I were you."

"I have gone too far," said Aaron, sighing; "I cannot retreat."

"It would be madness to dream of such a thing. Remember what depends upon it. Cohen, in case anything occurs, I think I ought to tell you what has been passing in my mind."

"In case anything occurs!" repeated Aaron, in a hollow tone, and with a startled look. "What can occur?"

"The poor child," continued Mr. Moss, "has had a hard time of it. We almost dug her out of the snow last night; the exposure was enough to kill an infant of tender years, and there's no saying what effect it may have upon her. If it had been a child of my own I should be alarmed for the consequences, and I should scarcely expect her to live through it." Aaron gasped. "The idea distresses you, but we must always take the human view. Should she not survive no one can be blamed for it. How is your own dear little girl?"

"She is well," replied Aaron, mechanically. He passed his hand across his eyes despairingly. The duplicity he was compelled to practise was hateful to him, and he despised himself for it.

"Good-night again," said Mr. Moss. "I have sent my telegram to the London lawyers. Don't forget that I shall be at the Salutation till eleven in the morning. I should like to hear how Mrs. Cohen is before I leave."

It was not only the incident of the iron safe that Mr. Moss, in the first instance, had omitted to impart to Aaron. In the agreement formulated by Mr. Gordon there was an undertaking that in the event of the child's death, or of her marriage if she grew to womanhood, the lawyers were to pay the sum of five hundred pounds to the person into whose home the child was received. Mr. Moss had not mentioned this, and Aaron was in consequence ignorant of the fact. Had he been aware of it, is it likely that he would have shrunk from carrying out the scheme inspired by his agony? It is hard to say. During these pregnant and eventful hours he was dominated by the one overpowering, passionate desire to save the life of his beloved; during these hours all that was highest and noblest in his nature was deadened by human love.

There was no rest for him on this night; he did not dare to undress and seek repose. The moments were too precious; some action had to be taken, and to be taken soon, and, his mind torn with agony and remorse, he devoted himself to the consideration of it. In the course of this mental debate he was plunged at times into the lowest depths of self-abasement; but the strength of his character and the serious issues at stake lifted him out of these depths. Ever and anon he crept into Rachel's room and derived consolation from the calm sleep she was enjoying. The doctor's prognostications of returning health seemed to be on the point of realisation; when she awoke in the morning and clasped her child to her bosom, and heard its sweet voice, all would be well with her. What need, then, for further justification?

But his further action must be decided upon and carried out before Rachel awoke. And it was imperative that she should be kept in ignorance of what had taken place. On no account must it be revealed to her that he had taken a strange child into the house, and that it had died there within a few hours. In her delicate state the news might be fatal.

Gradually all that it was necessary for him to do unfolded itself, and was mentally arranged in consecutive order. He waited till three o'clock, and then he went from his house to the Salutation Hotel. The night porter, half asleep, was in attendance, and after some demur he conducted Aaron to Mr. Moss's sleeping apartment.

"Who is there?" cried Mr. Moss, aroused by the knocking at his door.

"It is I," replied Aaron; "I must speak to you at once."

Mr. Moss jumped from bed.

"Is it all right, sir?" asked the night porter.

"Of course it is all right," said Mr. Moss, opening the door, and admitting his visitor.

The night porter returned to his duties, and fell into a doze.

"What brings you here at this time of night?" exclaimed Mr. Moss; and then, seeing the distress in Aaron's face, "Good God! It is not about Rachel?"

"No, it is not about Rachel; it is bad enough, but not so bad as that. How shall I tell you--how shall I tell you?"

"Stop a moment," said Mr. Moss. "I ordered half a bottle of port before I went, and there is a glass or two left. Drink this."

The wine gave Aaron courage to proceed with his task.

"I have dreadful news to tell you," he said, putting down the glass.

"I guess it," interrupted Mr. Moss. "The child!"

"Yes," answered Aaron, with averted eyes, "the child."

"Is she very ill?"

"Mr. Moss, the child is dead."

"Heavens!" cried Mr. Moss, slipping into his clothes as fast as he could. "What a calamity! But at the same time, Cohen, what a release! Tell me all about it. Does Rachel know?"

"Rachel does not know. She is still sleeping, and she must not know. It would kill her--it would kill her!"

"I see the necessity, Cohen; it must be kept from her, and I think I see how it can be managed. It is a fortunate thing that the woman who accompanied me here with the poor child has not returned to Portsmouth, as I bade her. She met with some friends in Gosport who persuaded her to stop the night, and she was going back with me in the morning. I promised to call for her, but she will have to remain here now till the child is buried. She will not mind, because it will be something in her pocket. A sad ending,

Cohen, a sad ending, but I feared it. Did I not prophesy it? What else was to be expected after last night's adventure? A child of such a tender age!' The wonder is it did not die in my arms. But you have not told me how it occurred."

"It is very simple," said Aaron, in a low tone. "I laid the babe in my own bed, intending to call in a woman as soon after daylight as possible to attend it till Rachel was well and able to get about. She seemed to be asleep, and was in no pain. I determined not to go to bed, but to keep up all night, to attend to the little one, and to Rachel and my own child--- Bear with me, Mr. Moss, I am unstrung."

"No wonder. Take time, Aaron, take time."

"Now and again I went up to look at the babe, and observed nothing to alarm me. An hour ago I closed my eyes, and must have slept; I was tired out. When I awoke I went upstairs, and was startled by a strange stillness in the child. I lifted her in my arms. Mr. Moss, she was dead. I came to you at once, to advise me what to do. You must help me, Mr. Moss; my dear Rachel's life hangs upon it. You know how sensitive she is; and the doctor has warned me that a sudden shock might be fatal."

"I will help you, Cohen, of course I will help you; it is my duty, because it is I who have brought this trouble upon you. But I did it with the best intentions. I see a way out of the difficulty. The woman I employed--how fortunate, how fortunate that she is still here!--is a god-send to us. She is a kind-hearted creature, and she will be sorry to hear of the child's death, but at the same time she is poor, and will be glad to earn a sovereign. A doctor must see the child, to testify that she died a natural death. She must have passed away in her sleep."

"She did. Is it necessary that the doctor should visit my house in order to see the child?"

"Not at all. I have everything planned in my mind. Now I am ready to go out. First to the telegraph office--it is open all night here--to despatch a telegram to the London lawyers to send a representative down immediately, who, when he comes, will take the affair out of our hands, I expect. Afterwards to the house of the woman's friends; she must accompany us to your house, and we will take the child away before daylight. Then we will call in a doctor, and nothing need reach Rachel's ears. Don't take it to heart, Cohen; you have troubles enough of your own. The news you give me of Rachel is the best of news. Joy and sorrow, Cohen--how close they are together!"

In the telegraph office Mr. Moss wrote a long message to Mr. Gordon's lawyers, impressing upon them the necessity of sending a representative without delay to take charge of the body, and to attend to the funeral arrangements.

"Between ourselves, Cohen," he said, as they walked to the house of the woman's friends, "the lawyers will be rather glad of the news than otherwise; and so will Mr. Gordon, when it reaches him. I am not sure whether I made the matter clear to you, but there is no doubt whatever that, so far as Mr. Gordon is concerned, the child was an encumbrance--to say nothing of the expense, which perhaps he would not have minded, being almost a millionaire. But still, as it has turned out, he has got rid of a difficulty, and he will not be sorry when he hears of it."

"And the mother," said Aaron, "how will she take it?"

"I will not pretend to say. We know, Cohen, what we think of our own children, but there are people in the world with different ideas from ours. The mother of this little one will feel grieved at first, no doubt, but I dare say she will soon get over it. Then, perhaps her husband will not tell her. Here we are at the woman's house."

They halted before a small cottage, inhabited by people in humble circumstances. Before he aroused the inmates, Mr. Moss said,--

"I shall keep your name out of the affair, Cohen; but to a certain extent the woman must be taken into our confidence. Secrecy will be imposed upon her, and she will be paid for it. Remain in the background; I will speak to her alone."

The woman herself came to the door, and when she was dressed Mr. Moss had a conversation with her, the result of which was that she and the two men walked to Aaron's house, where she took charge of the dead child, and carried it to the cottage. Then she went for a doctor--to Aaron's relief not the doctor who attended his wife--and as there was no doubt that the child had died a natural death, a certificate to that effect was given. At six in the morning Aaron returned to Rachel, and sitting by her bedside, waited for her awakening. The potion she had taken was to ensure sleep for twelve hours; in two hours he would hear her voice; in two hours she would be caressing a babe to which she had not given birth.

It seemed to Aaron as though months had passed since Mr. Moss had presented himself at his house last night, and for a while it almost seemed as though, in that brief time, it was not himself who had played the principal part in this strange human drama, but another being who had acted for him, and who had made him responsible for an act which was to colour all his future life. But he did not permit himself to indulge long in this view of what had transpired; he knew and felt that he, and he alone, was responsible, and that to his dying day he would be accountable for it. Well, he would bear the burden, and would, every by means within his power, endeavour to atone for it.

He would keep strict watch over himself; he would never give way to temptation; he would act justly and honourably; he would check the hasty word; he would make no enemies; he would be kind and considerate to all around him. He did not lay the flattering unction to his soul that in thus sketching his future rule of life he was merely committing himself to that which he had always followed in the past. This one act seemed to cast a shadow over all that had gone before; he had to commence anew.

A strange and agonising fancy haunted him. The child of his blood, Rachel's child, was lying dead in the house of a stranger. The customary observances of his religion could not be held over it; Christians had charge of the lifeless clay. With his mind's eye he saw his dead child lying in the distant chamber, alone and unattended, with no sympathising heart near to shed tears over it, with no mourner near to offer up a prayer in its behalf. The child opened its eyes and gazed reproachfully upon its father; then it rose from the couch, and in its white dress went out of the house and walked through the snow to its father's dwelling. The little bare feet left traces of blood in the snow, and at the door of its father's house it paused and stood there crying, "Mother, mother!" So strong was this fancy that Aaron went to the street door, and, opening it, gazed up and down the street. The snow was still falling; no signs of life were visible, and no movement except the light flakes fluttering down. A mantle of spotless white was spread over roads and roofs, and there was silence all around. But in Aaron's eyes there was a vision, and in his heart a dead voice calling. His babe was there before him, and its voice was crying, "Mother, mother! Why am I deserted? why am I banished from my father's house?" When he drew back into the passage he hardly dared shut the street door upon the piteous figure his conscience had conjured up.

At eight o'clock in the morning Rachel stirred; she raised her arm and put her hand to her eyes, blind to all the world, blind to her husband's sin, blind to everything but love. Then instinctively she drew the babe nearer to her. A faint cooing issued from the infant's lips, and an expression of joy overspread the mother's features. This joy found its reflex in Aaron's heart, but the torturing anxiety under which he laboured was not yet dispelled. It was an awful moment. Was there some subtle instinct in a mother's love which would convey to Rachel's sense the agonising truth that the child she held in her arms was not her own?

There was no indication of it. She fondled the child, she suckled it, the light of Heaven shone in her face.

"Aaron!"

"My beloved!"

"Do you hear our child, our dear one? Ah, what happiness!"

"Thank God!" said Aaron, inly. "Oh, God be thanked!"

"Is it early or late, dear love?" asked Rachel. "It is morning, I know, for I see the light; I feel it here"--with her hand pressing the infant's head to her heart.

"It is eight o'clock, beloved," said Aaron.

"I have had a long and beautiful sleep. I do not think I have dreamt, but I have been so happy, so happy! My strength seems to be returning; I have not felt so well since the night of the fire. Our darling seems stronger, too; it is because I am so much better. I must think of that; it is a mother's duty to keep well, for her child's sake--and, dear husband, for your sake also. I do not love you less because I love our child so dearly."

"I am sure of that. Should I be jealous of our child? That would be as foolish as it would be unwise."

"You speak more cheerfully, Aaron. Is that because of me?"

"It is because of you, beloved. We both draw life and happiness from you. Therefore, get strong soon."

"I shall; I feel I shall. My mind is clear, there is no weight on my heart. Before many days have passed I shall be out of bed, learning my new duties. Aaron, our child will live."

"She will live to bless and comfort us, beloved."

She passed her hand over his face. "You are crying, Aaron."

"They are tears of joy, Rachel, at seeing you so much better. A terrible fear has weighed me down; it is removed, thanks be to the Eternal. The world was dark till now; I dared not think of the future; now all is well."

"Am I, indeed, so much to you, dear husband?"

"You are my life. As the sun is to the earth, so are you to me."

The wife, the husband, and the child lay in each other's embrace.

"God is good," murmured Rachel. "I did so want to live for you and for our child! But I feared, I feared; strength seemed to be departing from me. What will they do, I thought, when I am gone? But God has laid His hand upon us and blessed us. Praised be His name for ever and ever!"

"Amen, amen! I have not yet said my morning prayers. It is time."

She sank back in bed, and he put on his taleth and phylacteries, and prayed fervently. He did not confine himself to his usual morning devotions, but sought his book for propitiatory supplications for forgiveness for transgressions. "Forgive us, oh, our Father! for we have sinned; pardon us, oh, our King! for we have transgressed; for Thou art ever ready to pardon and forgive. Blessed art Thou, the Eternal, who is gracious and doth abundantly pardon." And while he supplicated forgiveness, Rachel lay and sang a song of love.

His prayers ended, Aaron folded his taleth and wound up his phylacteries, and resumed his seat by Rachel's bed.

"While you slept last night, dear love," he said, "a piece of good fortune fell to my share, through our friend Mr. Moss. I shall be able to take a servant in the house."

"How glad I am!" she answered. "It distressed me greatly to know that you had everything to attend to yourself. A woman, or a girl, is so necessary!"

"There is altogether a brighter outlook for us, Rachel. Do you think Prissy would do?"

"She is very handy, and very willing. If you could manage till I can get up I could soon teach her."

"I will go, then, and see if she is able to come. You must not mind being alone a little while."

"I shall not be alone, dear," said Rachel, with a bright smile at the child.

He prepared breakfast for her before he left, and she partook of it with a keen appetite. Then he went on his mission, and met Mr. Moss coming to the house.

"I have received a telegram," said that gentleman, "in reply to mine. A gentleman will arrive from London this afternoon to attend to matters. You look brighter."

"Rachel is much better," said Aaron.

"You are in luck all round, Cohen. There are men who always fall on their feet. I'm one of them; you're another. This time yesterday you were in despair; now you're in clover. Upon my word, I am as glad as if it had happened to myself. You know one of our sayings--'Next to me, my wife; next to my wife, my child; next to my child, my friend.' My good old father told me it was one of the wise sayings of Rabbi ben--I forget who he was the son of. A friend of ours who used to come to our house said to my father that there was no wisdom and no goodness in the saying, because the Rabbi put himself first, as being of more consequence than wife, and child, and friend. My father answered, 'You are wrong; there is wisdom, there is goodness, there is sense in it. Self is the greatest of earthly kings. Put yourself in one scale, and pile up all the world in the other, and you will weigh it down.' He was right. What comes so close home to us as our own troubles and sorrows?"

"Nothing," said Aaron, rather sadly; "they outweigh all the rest. We are human, and being human, fallible. Can you imagine an instance, Mr. Moss, where love may lead to crime?"

"I can, and what is more, I would undertake to justify it. Who is this little girl?"

The diversion in the conversation was caused by Prissy, who had run to Aaron, and was plucking at his coat.

"A good girl who attends to our Sabbath lights."

"Ow's missis, please, sir?" inquired Prissy, anxiously.

"Much better this morning, thank you."

"And the babby, sir?"

"Also better and stronger, Prissy." Prissy jumped up and down in delight. "I was coming to see you. Do you think your aunt would let you come to us as a regular servant, to live, and eat, and sleep in the house?"

This vision of happiness almost took Prissy's breath away; but she managed to reply, "If yer'd make it worth 'er while, she would, Mr. Cohen. She's allus telling me I'm taking the bread out of 'er mouth, and ain't worth my salt. Oh, Mr. Cohen, will yer take me, will yer? I don't care where I sleep, I don't care wot yer give me to eat, I'll work for yer day and night, I will! Aunty makes my life a misery, she does, and I've lost Wictoria Rejiner,

sir. She's got another nuss, and I ain't got nobody to care for now. Aunty sed this morning I was a reg'lar pest, and she wished she could sell me at so much a pound."

"You don't weigh a great deal," said Aaron, gazing at Prissy in pity; and then, with a sad touch of his old humour, "How much a pound do you think she would take?"

"Come and arks 'er, Mr. Cohen, come and arks er," cried Prissy, running before Aaron, and looking back imploringly at him.

He and Mr. Moss followed the girl into the presence of Prissy's aunt, and, although he did not buy Prissy by the pound weight, he made a bargain with the woman, and by the outlay of five shillings secured the girl's permanent services, it being understood that she was not to take her niece away without Prissy's consent. As they walked back to Aaron's house he spoke to Prissy about wages; but the girl, who felt as if heaven's gates had opened for her to enter, interrupted him by saying,--

"Don't talk about wages, sir, please don't. I don't want no wages. Give me a frock and a bone, and I'll work the skin off my fingers for yer, I will!"

Extravagant as were her professions, never was a poor girl more in earnest than Prissy. Blithe and happy she set to work, and never did valiant soldier polish up his arms with keener zest than did Prissy her pots and pans. The kitchen was her battleground, and she surveyed it with the air of a conqueror. There was joy in Rachel's heart in the room above, there was joy in Prissy's heart in the room below.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CURTAIN FALLS AWHILE.

Mr. Moss and Aaron spent the greater part of the day together, awaiting the arrival of Mr. Gordon's legal representative. The doctor who attended Rachel called only once, and gave a good report of her condition.

"The crisis is over," he said to Aaron. "Your wife and child will live. In a few days Mrs. Cohen will be strong enough to be removed, and I advise you to take her without delay to the South of France, where before spring her health will be completely re-established."

It was not until the doctor had departed that the question presented itself to Aaron whether he had any right to the fifty pounds he had received from Mr. Moss. He was clear as to the second sum of twenty-five pounds--that must be returned. He wished Mr. Moss to take it back; but that gentleman would have nothing to do with it, and as to Aaron's right to retain the fifty pounds he entertained no doubt.

"It is undisputably yours," he said. "It was handed to me by Mr. Gordon himself for a specific purpose, and I look upon it as a retaining fee. No lawyer returns such a fee when the case breaks down--trust them for that. Understand, please, Cohen, that I am no longer acting in the affair: it rests now between you and the lawyers."

Late in the afternoon Mr. Moss went to the railway station to meet the lawyer, and the two proceeded together to the house where the dead child lay. Arrangements for the funeral were made, and then Mr. Moss conducted the lawyer, whose name was Chesterman, to Aaron's house.

"Mr. Chesterman has something to say to you, Cohen," he said. "I will leave you together." He took Aaron aside. "It is something of great importance--a wonderful stroke of fortune. Don't throw it away; it will be the making of you; and remember Rachel."

"Mr. Moss," commenced Mr. Chesterman, when he and Aaron were alone, "has related to me all that has occurred. In a general sense the death of the child is to be regretted, as would be the death of any person, old or young; but there are peculiar circumstances in this case which render this visitation of God a relief to certain parties. It removes all difficulties from the future, and there is now no likelihood of our client's plans being hampered or interfered with. You are aware that he is a gentleman of fortune?"

"I have been so informed."

"You may not be aware, however, that he is a gentleman of very decided views, and that he is not to be turned from any resolution he may have formed. We lawyers have to deal with clients of different temperaments, and when a case is submitted to us by a strong-minded gentleman, we may advise, but, if we find our client determined, we do not waste time in arguing. I understand from Mr. Moss that you have some scruples with respect to the money you have received from him."

"I wish to know whether I may consider the first sum of fifty pounds mine; I have my doubts about it. As to the second sum of twenty-five pounds, paid in advance for the rearing of the child, I have no doubts whatever."

"We have nothing to do with either of those sums; they did not come from us, but from our client to Mr. Moss, and from Mr. Moss to you. Without being consulted professionally, I agree with Mr. Moss that the fifty pounds is yours. I offer no opinion upon the second sum."

"If you will give me your client's address, I will communicate with him."

"We cannot disclose it to you. It is confided to us professionally, and our instructions are to keep it secret."

"You can give him my name and address?"

"No. His stipulation is that it is not to be made known to him. If at any time he asks us voluntarily for it, that is another matter, and I will make a note of it. The special purpose of my visit is to complete and carry out to the last letter our client's instructions. The conditions to which he bound himself were very liberal. With a generous desire for the child's welfare, in the event of her living and marrying, he placed in our hands the sum of five hundred pounds as a marriage dowry, to be paid over to her on her wedding-day."

"A noble-minded gentleman," said Aaron.

Mr. Chesterman smiled, and continued,--

"In the event of the child's death this five hundred pounds was to be paid over to the party or parties who undertook the charge of her. The child is dead; the five hundred pounds is to be paid over to you."

"But, sir," said Aaron, in astonishment, "do you not understand that I cannot accept this money?"

"It is not for us to consider any scruples you may have; it is for us to carry out our instructions. It does not come within our province to argue with you. I have brought the cheque with me, and all I have to do is to hand it over to you, and to take your receipt for it. Mr. Moss hinted to me that you might raise objections; my reply was, 'Nonsense.' The money belongs to you by legal and moral right, and I decline to listen to objections. If it is any satisfaction to you, I may tell you that our client can well afford to pay it, and that by its early payment he is a considerable gainer, for he is no longer under the obligation to pay a hundred a year for the child's maintenance. Here is the receipt, legally drawn out; oblige me by signing it."

It was in vain for Aaron to protest; the lawyer insisted, and at length, fearing the consequences of a decided refusal, Aaron put his name to the paper.

"Our business being concluded," said Mr. Chesterman, rising, "I have the pleasure of wishing you good-day. Should in the future any necessity for the statement arise, I shall not hesitate to declare that the child was placed in the care of an honourable gentleman, who would have faithfully performed his duty towards her."

"God forgive me," said Aaron, when his visitor was gone, "for the sin I have committed! God help me to atone for it!"

But he would have been less than human had he not felt grateful that the means were placed in his hands to restore his beloved wife to health and strength. Before a week had passed he and Rachel and the child, accompanied by Prissy, were travelling to a milder clime.

CHAPTER XXV

AFTER MANY YEARS

A man upon whose face all that is noble and steadfast seems to have set its seal, to give the world assurance that here was one who, had his lot been so cast, would have ruled over men with justice, truth, and honour. He is of a goodly height, and his features are large and clearly defined. A sensitive, resolute mouth; calm, well-proportioned lips, which close without restraint and are eloquent even when the tongue is silent; a nose gently arched, with curved indented nostrils; a massive forehead, almost oval at the top, and with projecting lower arches, the eyebrows near to the large brown eyes; the chin and cheeks clothed in a handsome beard, in which grey hairs are making themselves manifest. Powerful, benignant, and self-possessed as is his appearance, there is an underlying sadness in his eyes which could be variously construed--as born of a large experience of human ways and of the errors into which mortals are liable to fall, or, maybe, of an ever-abiding remembrance of one moment in his own life when he also was tempted and fell. But no such thought as the latter ever entered the minds of those who knew him personally and those who judged him by the repute he bore, which could only have been earned by a man who walked unflinchingly and unerringly in the straight path and was just and merciful to all who came in contact with him. There were instances when mercy so predominated that persons who had wronged him were allowed to go free, and when a helping hand was held out to men who had sinned against him. This is Aaron Cohen, now close upon his fiftieth year.

A woman whose tranquil eyes never see the light of day, but in which, nevertheless, there is no sign of repining or regret. Purity and sweetness dwell in her face, and as she stands motionless in a listening attitude, her white hand resting on the table, no more exquisite representation of peace and universal love and sympathy could be found in living form or marble statue. She is fair almost to whiteness, and although her figure is slight and there is no colour in her cheeks, she is in good health, only that sometimes during the day she closes her eyes and sleeps in her armchair for a few minutes. In those intervals of unconsciousness, and when she seeks her couch, she sees fairer pictures, perhaps, than if the wonders of the visible world were an open book to her. Her dreams are inspired by a soul of goodness, and her husband's heart, as he gazes upon her in her unconscious hours, is always stirred to prayer and thankfulness that she is by his side to bless his days. Not only in the house is her influence felt. She is indefatigable in her efforts to seek out deserving cases of distress and relieve them; and she does not confine her charity to those of her faith. In this regard Jew and Christian are alike to her, and not a week passes that she does not plant in some poor home a seed which grows into a flower to gladden and cheer the hearts of the unfortunate and suffering. Grateful eyes follow her movements, and a blessing is shed upon her as she departs. A ministering

angel is she, whose words are balm, whose presence brings sweet life into dark spaces. So might an invisible herald of the Lord walk the earth, healing the sick, lifting up the fallen, laying his hand upon the wounded breast, and whispering to all, "Be comforted. God has heard your prayers, and has sent me to relieve you." This is Rachel Cohen, Aaron's wife, in her forty-fourth year.

A younger woman, in her springtime, with life's fairest pages spread before her. Darker than Rachel is she, with darker hair and eyes and complexion, slim, graceful, and beautiful. It is impossible that she should not have felt the influence of the home in which she has been reared, and that she should not be the better for it, for it is a home in which the domestic affections unceasingly display themselves in their tenderest aspect, in which the purest and most ennobling lessons of life are inculcated by precept and practice; but a profound student of human nature, whose keen insight would enable him to plumb the depths of passion, to detect what lay beneath the surface, to trace the probable course of the psychological inheritance which all parents transmit to their children, would have come to the conclusion that in this fair young creature were instincts and promptings which were likely one day to give forth a discordant note in this abode of peace and love, and to break into rebellion. There is no outward indication of such possible rebellion. To the friends and acquaintances of the household she is a lovely and gracious Jewish maiden, who shall in time become a mother in Judah. This is Ruth Cohen, in the eyes of all the world the daughter of Aaron and Rachel.

A young man, Ruth's junior by a year, with his father's strength of character and his mother's sweetness of disposition. He is as yet too young for the full development of this rare combination of qualities, the outcome of which is to be made manifest in the future, but he is not too young to win love and respect. His love for his parents is ardent, his faith in them indestructible. To him his mother is a saint, his father a man without blemish. Were he asked, to express his most earnest wishes, he would have answered, "When I am my father's age may I be honoured as he is: when I marry may my wife be as my mother is." This is Joseph Cohen, the one other child of Aaron and Rachel.

A tall, ungainly woman of thirty, working like a willing slave from morning to night, taking pride and pleasure in the home, and metaphorically prostrating herself before every one who lives beneath its roof. Esteemed and valued by her master and mistress, for whom she is ready to sacrifice herself and to undergo any privation; especially watchful of her mistress, and tender towards her; jealous of the good name of those whom she serves with devotion. Of Aaron Cohen she stands somewhat in awe, he is so far above her in wisdom. She does not trouble herself about religious matters; questions of theology come not within her domain, her waking hours being entirely filled and occupied with the performance of her domestic duties. She listens devoutly to the chanting of Hebrew prayers, not one word of which does she understand, and is none

the worse for them. Her master and mistress are the representatives of a race for which through them she entertains the profoundest respect; it is more than likely, if the choice had been hers and if she had deemed herself worthy of the distinction, that she would have elected to be born in the Jewish faith. She carries her allegiance even to the extent of fasting with the household on the Day of Atonement, and of not allowing bread to pass her lips during the Passover week. This is Prissy, the ever true, the ever faithful.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FOUNDATION OF AARON'S FORTUNE.

Eventful indeed to Aaron Cohen had been the twenty years since he left Gosport. In the South of France, where they remained for a much longer time than he intended, Rachel was restored to health, and Aaron had the joy of seeing her move happily about the house and garden, and of hearing her sing to her babe the songs and lullabies which, from a mother's lips, are so fraught with melodious and tender meaning. It almost seemed as if she had inward cause for thankfulness that blindness had fallen upon her, for Aaron had never known her to be so blithe and light-hearted as during those weeks of returning health. Prissy was invaluable to them, and proved to be a veritable treasure. The short time it took her to learn her duties, the swiftness and neatness with which they were performed, the delight she took in the babe, who soon replaced Victoria Regina in her affections, and the care and skill with which she guided her mistress's movements, amazed Aaron. He had divined from the first that she was a shrewd, clever girl, and he had the satisfaction of discovering that she was much cleverer than he would have ventured to give her credit for. She was tidier in her dress, too, and never presented herself unless she was clean and neat. She became, in a sense, her mistress's teacher, and Rachel was so apt a pupil that Aaron's apprehensions that she would meet with an accident if she moved too freely about were soon dispelled.

"Is it not wonderful, love?" she said. "I think I must have eyes at the tips of my fingers. But it is Prissy I have to thank for it."

She repaid the girl, be sure. Gradually Prissy's mode of expressing herself underwent improvement; she did not use so many negatives, she dropped fewer h's, she learned to distinguish between g's and k's; and Aaron himself laid the first stone in her education by teaching her the a b c. One thing Prissy would not learn; she obstinately refused to have anything to do with the French language. English was good enough for her, she declared, and to the English tongue she nailed her colours.

Fond as she was of babies, she would not countenance French babies, and said it was a shame to dress them so. "I'm a troo bloo, sir," she said to Aaron; "please don't force me." And with a hearty laugh he desisted.

He himself spoke French fluently, and to this may be ascribed the first change in his fortunes. Easy in his mind respecting Rachel, easy respecting money, he found himself at leisure to look about him and observe. He made friends, and among them a poor French engineer of great skill. In conversation one day this engineer mentioned that

tenders were invited for the construction of a local bridge. It was not a very important matter; the lake it was to span was of no great dimensions, and the bridge required was by no means formidable.

"There are only two contractors who will tender for it," said the engineer, "and they play into each other's hands. They will settle privately the amount of their separate tenders, and the lowest will obtain the contract. They will divide the profits between them. If I had a little money to commence with I would tender for the work, and my tender would be at least ten thousand francs below theirs. Then it would be I who would construct the bridge, and public money would be saved."

"What would be your profit?" asked Aaron.

"Twenty thousand francs," was the reply; "perhaps more."

"And the amount of your tender?"

"Eighty thousand francs. I have the plans and specifications, and every detail of expense for material and labour in my house. Will you come and look over them?"

Aaron examined them, and submitting them to the test of inquiry as to the cost of labour and material, found them to be correct. A simple-minded man might have been taken in by a schemer who had prepared complicated figures for the purpose of trading with another person's money, and standing the chance of winning if the venture resulted in a profit, and of losing nothing if it resulted in a loss; but Aaron was not simple-minded, the poor engineer was not a schemer, and the figures were honestly set down.

"It would not need a great amount of money," said the engineer. "If a certain sum were deposited in the bank, a further sum could be raised by depositing the contract as security; and, moreover, as the work proceeds, specified payments will be made by the local authorities."

"How much would be required to commence operations, and to make everything safe?"

"Ten thousand francs."

Roughly, that was four hundred pounds. The five hundred pounds he had received from the lawyers was as yet untouched, for they lived very economically and were in a part of the world where thrift was part of the people's education. Aaron believed the project to be safe.

"If I advanced it," he asked, "what proposition do you make?"

"We would make it a partnership affair," replied the poor engineer, eagerly.

Upon that understanding the bridge was tendered for, and the tender accepted. In four months the work was executed and passed by the inspectors; the contractors received the balance due to them, and a division of the profits was made. After paying all his expenses Aaron was the richer by three hundred pounds. He gave fifty pounds to the poor, which raised him in the estimation of the people among whom he was temporarily sojourning. He had not been idle during the four months occupied by the building of the bridge; under the guidance of his partner he had superintended the workmen and undertaken the correspondence and management of the accounts; and new as these duties were to him he had shown great intelligence and aptitude.

"We met on a fortunate day," said the engineer.

At about this time a new engineering project presented itself. It was on a larger scale than the first, and the two men, emboldened by success, tendered for it. Again did fortune favour them; everybody, with the exception of rival contractors, was on their side. In the carrying out of their first contract there had not been a hitch; they had paid their workmen better wages, they had behaved honestly and liberally all round, and they had already achieved a reputation for liberal dealing with the working man. Moreover, people were talking of Rachel's kindness and of Aaron's benevolence. Hats were lifted to them, women and children left flowers at their door; rich was the harvest they gathered for their charity.

When it was known that they had obtained another contract, the best workmen came to them for employment, and they learned what all employers of labour may learn, that it is wise policy to pay generously for bone and muscle. The hateful political economy of Ricardo, which trades upon the necessities of the poor, and would grind labour down to starvation pittance, could never find lodgment in the mind of such a man as Aaron Cohen. The new venture was entirely successful, and being of greater magnitude than the first, the profits were larger. Aaron was the possessor of two thousand pounds. He gave two hundred pounds to the poor. He did more than this. The doctor who had attended Rachel in Gosport had declined to accept a fee, and Aaron now wrote him a grateful letter, enclosing in it a draft for five hundred pounds, which he asked the doctor to distribute among the local charities. This five hundred pounds he regarded as a return of the sum he had received from the London lawyers. That the receipt of this money afforded gratification to the doctor was evidenced by his reply. "Every one here," he said, "has kind words for you and your estimable wife, and the general feeling is that if you had continued to reside in Gosport it would have been a source of pleasure to all

of us. When I speak of your good fortune all the townsfolk say, 'We are glad to hear it.'" Thus did good spring out of evil.

Aaron felt that his foot was on the ladder. He entered into a regular partnership with his friend the engineer, and they executed many public works and never had a failure. The justness of their trading, their consideration for the toilers who were helping to build up a fortune for them, the honest wages they paid, earned for them an exceptional reputation for rectitude and fair dealing. In these matters and in this direction Aaron was the guiding spirit. He left to his partner the technical working out of their operations, and took upon himself the control of wages and finance. Occasionally there were arguments between him and his partner, the latter hinting perhaps that there was a cheaper market, and that money could be saved by employing middlemen who offered to supply labour and material at prices that were not equitable from the point of view of the toilers and producers. Aaron would not entertain propositions of this kind. "We are doing well," he said, "we are making money, we are harvesting. Be satisfied." His partner gave way. Aaron's character was too strong for resistance. "Clean and comfortable homes," said Aaron, "a good education for their children, a modest enjoyment of the world's pleasures--these are the labourers' due." Hearing of this some large employers called him quixotic, and said he was ruining trade; but he pursued the just and even tenor of his way, satisfied that he was a saviour and not a spoiler. Upon the conclusion of each transaction, when the accounts were balanced, he devoted a portion of his profits to benevolent purposes, and he became renowned as a public benefactor. The thanks that were showered upon him did not please him, but tended rather to humiliate and humble him; he would not listen to expressions of gratitude; and it will be presently seen that when he returned to England he took steps to avoid the publicity which was distasteful to him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FEAST OF PASSOVER.

A point of friendly contention between Aaron Cohen and the engineer was the observance of the Sabbath day. From sunset on Friday till sunset on Saturday Aaron would do no work and attend to no business. He paid the workmen their wages on Friday, and made up the accounts on that day. They hailed the new arrangement with satisfaction, but the engineer was rather fretful over this departure from the usual custom.

"What is your objection?" asked Aaron.

"It must confuse affairs," replied the engineer.

"Are not the accounts faithfully kept," said Aaron, "and does not the work go on regularly?"

"Oh, I am not complaining," said the engineer, "only----"

"Only what?" said Aaron, with a smile.

The engineer could not explain; he was a skilful engineer, but a weak controversialist. The only answer he could make was,--

"You are living in a Christian land, among Christians."

"I am none the less a Jew. All over the world we live in Christian lands, among Christians; we are a nation without a country. You observe your Sunday Sabbath as a day of rest."

"Certainly I do."

"Allow me, also, to observe my Sabbath on the day appointed by my faith."

"What difference can it make to you," persisted the engineer, "Saturday or Sunday?"

"If that is your view," said Aaron, his eyes twinkling with amusement, "let us both keep our Sabbath on the Saturday."

Aaron conducted the argument with such perfect good temper that the engineer could not help laughing at the rebuff, and the subject was allowed to drop. Nor was it revived on the subsequent occasions of the Jewish holydays, which were zealously observed by Aaron and his wife. They were both orthodox Jews, and nothing could tempt them to neglect their religious obligations; neither of them had ever tasted shell-fish or touched fire on the Sabbath. The festival of the New Year in the autumn, with its penitential Day of Atonement and its joyful Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Lights (Chanukah) in the winter, the Festivals of Purim and Passover in the spring, the Feast of Pentecost in the early summer--not one of these days of memorial was disregarded. The m'zuzah was fastened on the doorposts, and regularly every morning did Aaron put on his garment of fringes and phylacteries and say his morning prayers. Thus was he ever in communion with his Maker.

He experienced at first great difficulty in conforming to Jewish precepts. There was no synagogue in the village, and no killer of meat, according to the formula prescribed by the Mosaic law. For several days his family lived upon fish and vegetables and eggs; then he succeeded in arranging with a Jewish butcher in a town some fifty miles distant for a regular supply of meat and poultry. The only co-religionist with whom he came into close personal association was a man of the name of Levi, who had no such scruples as he in regard to food. This man was married, and had three sons, the eldest of whom was approaching his thirteenth year, the age at which all Jewish lads should be confirmed. In conversation with M. Levi Aaron learned that he had no intention of carrying out the ceremony of confirmation. Yearning to bring the stray sheep back into the fold, Aaron invited M. Levi and his family to celebrate the Passover with him, and there upon the table the Levis saw the white napkins with the special Passover cakes between the folds, the shankbone of a shoulder of lamb, the roasted egg, the lettuce, the chevril and parsley, the cup of salt and water, the savoury balls of almond, apple, and spice, and the raisin wine--all of which are symbols of the Passover, the most joyous of the Jewish festivals. In this year the first night of the holydays fell upon the Sabbath, and the apartment presented a beautiful appearance, with the lighted candles, the bright glass, and the spotless purity of the linen. The house had been cleaned from top to bottom, all leaven had been removed, and every utensil and article that was used for the cooking and partaking of food was new. M. Levi's eyes glistened as he entered the apartment and looked around; his wife's also, for she had been brought up in an orthodox Jewish home. Old memories were revived, and as they sat down at the table it was to them as if they had suddenly gone back to the days of their youth. Love and self-reproach shone in their faces as they gazed upon their children, to whom this picture of home happiness was a delightful revelation. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God!" said Aaron, in the ancient tongue, after the filling of the first glasses of wine. "King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hath chosen us from among all people, and exalted us above all languages, and sanctified us

with His commandments; and with love hast Thou given us, O Lord, our God, Sabbaths for rest, and solemn days for joy, festivals and seasons of gladness, this day of rest, and this day of the feast of unleavened cakes, the season of our freedom; a holy convocation in love, a memorial of the departure from Egypt. For Thou hast chosen us and sanctified us above all people; and Thy holy Sabbaths and festivals hast Thou caused us to inherit with love and favour, joy and gladness. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who sanctifiest the Sabbath, and Israel, and the seasons." After this prayer the first glass of wine was drank, and the children smacked their lips. Rachel's blindness did not prevent her from superintending the kitchen, and under her direction everything was prepared for the table almost as skilfully and tastefully as if her own hands had done the work. Her raisin wine was perfect, and Aaron smacked his lips as well as the children: the finest vintage of champagne would not have been so palatable to him. Rachel's face was turned towards him as he raised the glass to his lips; she was anxious for his approval of the wine, which he had always praised extravagantly, and when she heard him smack his lips she was satisfied. Aaron proceeded with the ceremonies and prayers; he had purchased books of the "Hagadah," the Hebrew on the right-hand, and a translation in French on the left-hand pages, so that his guests, young and old, could understand what was being said and done. In silence they laved their hands, chevril was dipped into salt water and distributed around, and the middle cake in the napkins broken. Then Aaron held aloft the dish containing the roasted egg and the shankbone, and intoned, "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all that are hungry enter and eat; let all that are in want come hither and observe the Passover." The prayers were not uttered in a sing-song drawl; there was a joyous note in the chanting, which proclaimed that the hearts of the worshippers were glad. They heard from Aaron's lips what was said by the wise son, the wicked son, and the simple son; how a handful of the children of Israel went into Egypt, and how they increased and multiplied till they became a mighty nation; how they were oppressed by the Egyptians, and forced to build stone cities for Pharaoh, Pithom, and Raamses; how they prayed unto the Eternal, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and punished the oppressors with the ten plagues; how, under Divine protection, Israel went forth from Egypt, and walked through the Red Sea. "The sea beheld, and fled; Jordan was driven backward. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambkins. What ailed thee, O sea, that thou fledst--thou, Jordan, that thou wast driven backward--ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams--ye hills, like lambkins? Tremble, O earth! in the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flinty rock into a fountain of water." The first portion of the service ended, the books were laid aside, and the table spread for supper. While the preparations for the meal were being made by Prissy, who wore a new frock for the holydays and was as clean as a new pin, an animated conversation went on. Aaron was in the merriest of moods, and his witty sayings and jokes kept the company in a ripple of laughter. It is a special feature in the home worship of the Jew that it promotes good fellowship, breeds good feeling, and draws

closer the domestic ties which so strongly distinguish the race. Innocent jest is encouraged, it is really as if it were a duty that every one shall be in a holiday humour. The subjects of conversation are of a cheerful nature, scandal is avoided, the tenderer feelings are brought into play. Scrupulous attention is paid to cleanliness, young and old attire themselves in their best. When we appear before the Sovereign we make ourselves resplendent; so does the Jew when he appears before the King of heaven and earth. On such occasions slovenliness would be a crime. It is not only the outer man that is attended to; the choicest special Jewish dishes are prepared; there is no stint, plenty abounds, and friends are gladly welcomed, and invited to partake; everything is done that can contribute to harmony and content. Young people bill and coo, and their elders look on with approving eyes. These are the golden hours of love's young dream.

"It does my heart good," said Madame Levi, laughing heartily at one of Aaron's jokes, "to be among our own people again."

"Come often, come often," said Aaron Cohen. "You and yours will always be welcome."

The meal consisted of coffee, Passover cakes, fresh butter, and fried and stewed fish. Nothing could be more tempting to the eye than the large dish of stewed fish, with its thick yellow sauce of egg and lemon, and nothing more tempting to the palate, unless it were the fried fish, with its skin nicely browned, and cooked in such a way as to bring out the full sweetness of the flesh.

"We have the advantage of the Gentile," chuckled Aaron, who always took fried fish for his first course, and stewed for his second. "We know how to fry fish. It is strange that in all these thousands of years he has not discovered the simple secret."

"I have not tasted such stewed fish for I don't know how many years," observed Madame Levi, who had just been assisted to a second helping.

"Mrs. Cohen fries fish beautifully," said Aaron, "but her stewed fish is a marvel."

"That is the way my husband always speaks of me," said Rachel, with an affectionate smile. "He does not believe I have a fault."

"A woman who cooks fish as she does," said Aaron, oracularly, "cannot have a fault; she is a perfect woman. She is a glory and an honour to her sex. Again I assert, her stewed fish is a marvel."

"He forgets," said Rachel sweetly, to her guests, "that I have to trust others."

"My dear," persisted Aaron, "you stand by and direct. A victorious general does not rush into the battle; he stands aside, and gives his orders. With my own eyes I saw you squeeze the lemons; with my own eyes I saw you mix the batter; each slice of fish passed through your hands before it was put into the pan and saucepan. You know, Madame Levi, how important it is that the fish should be properly dried before it goes through the ordeal of fire."

"You bring it to my mind," said Madame Levi, speaking in a pensive tone; "my mother could fry and stew fish beautifully."

"But not like Rachel," rejoined Aaron. "I will give way on every other point, but not on this. If I were a plaice or a halibut I should be proud to be treated so; it would be a worthy ending of me, and I should bless the hand that cut me up. I should feel that I had not lived in vain. There is a spiritual touch," he continued, waiting until the laughter had subsided, "in these things. Half a lemon more or less makes all the difference in stewed fish; an egg more or less, the consistency of the batter, and the quality of the oil, make all the difference when you are frying. In England the poor and middle-class Christians are shocking cooks; the moment they touch it half the goodness of the food is gone. It is a melancholy fact, and it is the cause of innumerable domestic grievances. It drives away cheerfulness, it breeds sulks and bad temper, and yet the women will not learn--no, they will not learn. When you see a well-ordered household and a peaceful home, the children happy and contented, the husband and wife affectionate to each other, you know at once that the mistress is a good cook. You laugh; but it is really a very serious matter. It goes straight to the root of things."

Grace was said after supper, and the reading of the Passover prayers continued. Aaron had a fine baritone voice, and he did full justice to the ancient psalmody, which has been transmitted through long ages, from generation to generation. "Were our mouths filled with sacred song as the sea is with water, our tongue shouting loudly as its roaring billows, and our lips extended with praise like the widely spread firmament, and our eyes sparkling like the sun and the moon, and our hands extended like the eagle's wings in the skies, and our feet swift as the hind's, we should yet be deficient to render sufficient thanks unto Thee, O Lord our God, and the God of our fathers, or to bless Thy name for even one of the innumerable benefits which Thou hast conferred upon us and our ancestors." Then followed "It was at midnight." "When the blaspheming Sennacherib purposed to assail Thine habitation, Thou didst frustrate him through the dread carcasses of his host in the night. Bel and its image were hurled down in the darkness of the night. To Daniel, the much beloved man, was the mysterious vision revealed in the night.... Thou wilt tread the wine-press for them who anxiously ask, Watchman, what of the night? Let the Eternal, the Watchman of Israel, cry out and say, The morning hath come as well as the night." Nearly at the end of the service there was a

merry chant, "Oh, may He who is most mighty soon rebuild His house; speedily, speedily, soon, in our days." And the prayers ended with the curious poem, "One only kid, one only kid," supposed to be a parable illustrating the written and unwritten history of the Jewish race.

So conducive of cheerfulness and amiability had been the dedication of the Passover that smiles were on every lip and good feeling in every eye; amiability and good nature shone on their countenances. An hour was devoted to a chat upon general subjects, and after accepting an invitation to come again upon the following night, the Levis took their departure. On their way home they spoke freely of the hospitality and geniality of their host, of the sweet disposition of Rachel, with whom they had all fallen in love, of the order and cleanliness of the house, of the salutary effects of an evening so spent. Never had they been so deeply impressed with the beauty of the religion into which they had been born, the obligations of which they had thrust aside and neglected, principally, as M. Levi would have advanced, on the score of convenience. Had Aaron Cohen argued with M. Levi upon this neglect it is likely he would have contributed to the defeat of the object he had in view; but he was far too astute to argue with a man who, being in the wrong, would have obstinately defended himself when thus attacked. He knew the value of the lesson the Levis had received, and he was content to wait for the result. He would have been greatly gratified had he heard the whispered words addressed to her husband by Madame Levi.

"Cannot we do the same? Cannot we live as they do?"

M. Levi, deep in thought, did not answer the question, but it was nevertheless treasured in his memory. Treasured also in his memory were some words that passed between his eldest son and his wife.

"Mother, I am a Jew?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I am glad."

"Why, my child?"

"Because M. Cohen is a Jew. I want to be like him."

M. Levi looked at his son, a handsome lad, whose face was flushed with the pleasures of the most memorable evening in his young life. To deprive him of his confirmation would be robbing him of God's heritage. The father was at heart a Jew, but, like many of his

brethren residing in Christian communities, had found it easier to neglect his religion than to conform to its precepts. Putting it another way, he thought it would be to his worldly disadvantage. He had made his will, and therein was written his desire to be "buried among his people"--that controlling wish which, in their last moments, animates so many Jews who through all their days have lived as Christians. "Let me be buried among my people," they groan; "let me be buried among my people!" That is their expiation, that is their charm for salvation, for though all their years have been passed in attending to their worldly pleasures and temporal interests, they believe in a future life. These men have been guided by no motives of sincerity, by no conscientious inquiry as to how far the tenets of an ancient creed--the principal parts of which were formulated while the race was in tribulation--are necessary and obligatory in the present age; they are palterers and cowards, and grossly deceive themselves if they believe that burial in Jewish ground will atone for their backsliding. M. Levi was not a coward, and now that his error was brought home to him he was strongly moved to take up the broken threads of a faith which, in its purity, offers so much of Divine consolation. He himself broached the subject to Aaron, and his resolve was strengthened by the subsequent conversations between them.

"That man is to be honoured, not despised," said Aaron, "who changes his opinions through conviction. He may be mistaken, but he is sincere, and sincerity is the test of faith. You believe in God, you acknowledge His works, you live in the hope of redemption. In religion you must be something or nothing. You deny that you are a Christian. What, then, are you? A Jew. What race can boast of a heritage so glorious? We have yet to work out our future. Take your place in the ranks--ranks more illustrious than that which any general has ever led to victory--be once more a soldier of God."

These words fired M. Levi. The following Saturday his place of business was closed; from a box in which it may be said they were hidden, he took out his garment of fringes, his prayer-books, his phylacteries, and worshipped as of yore. Two vacancies occurring in his business, he filled them up with Jews; Aaron also induced a few Jews to settle there, and in a short time they could reckon upon ten adults, the established number necessary for public worship. In the rear of his house Aaron built a large room, which was used as a synagogue, and there M. Levi's eldest son was confirmed. In the autumn, when the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated, the little band of Jews found a booth erected in Aaron's garden; there was a roof of vines through which they saw the light of heaven. It was beautified with flowers, and numbers of persons came to see this pretty remembrance of a time when the Children of Israel dwelt in tents in the wilderness. The prayers in the synagogue over, the worshippers assembled in the booth, and ate and drank with Aaron and his family. Aaron had provided palms, citrons, myrtle, and willows for his co-religionists, and in an address he gave in the course of the service he told them how the citron was a symbol of innocent childhood, the myrtle a symbol of

youth and of the purity that dwells on the brow of the bride and bridegroom, the firm and stately palm a symbol of upright manhood, and the drooping willow a symbol of old age. His discourses had always in them something new and attractive which had a special bearing upon the ancient faith in which he took so much pride.

"We have you to thank for our happiness," said Madame Levi to him.

"It is a good work done, my love," said Aaron to his wife, rubbing his hands with satisfaction; "a good work done."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RACHEL'S LIFE IN THE NEW LAND.

Meanwhile Rachel throve. She walked with an elastic spring in her feet, as though in response to nature's greeting, and joy and happiness accompanied her everywhere. She was profoundly and devoutly grateful for her husband's better fortune, and daily rendered up thanks for it to the Giver of all good. She took pleasure in everything; blind as she was, she enjoyed nature's gifts to the full. In winter it was extraordinary to hear her describe the aspect of woods and fields in their white feathery mantle; with deep-drawn breath she inhaled the fresh cold air, and a glory rested on her face as she trod the snow-clad paths. When she visited the poor on those cold days Prissy accompanied her, carrying a well-filled basket on her arm. Her sympathy with the sick and suffering was Divine, and in the bleakest hours, when the sky was overcast and the light was hidden from shivering mortals, she was the herald of sunshine. A priest met her on one of these journeys, and gave her good-day.

"Good-day, father," she said.

"You know me!" he exclaimed, surprised; for though his priestly calling was apparent from his attire, Rachel could not see it.

"I heard your voice a fortnight ago," she replied, "in the cottage I am going to now, and I never forget a voice. After you were gone the poor woman told me you were her priest. I heard so much of you that was beautiful."

She put forth her hand; he hesitated a moment, then took it and pressed it.

"How sad, how sad, my daughter, that you are a Jewess!"

"I am happily a Jewess, father."

"Let me come and talk to you."

"Yes, father, come and talk to me of your poor, to whom you are so good. You do so much; I, being blind, can do so little. If you will allow me----" She offered him some gold pieces, and he accepted them.

"The Holy Mother have you in her keeping," he said; and went his way.

Dogs and horses were her friends, and were instinctively conscious of her presence. She scattered food for the birds, and they soon grew to know her; some would even pick crumbs from her hand. "I do not think," she said, "they would trust me so if I were not blind. They know I cannot see, and cannot harm them." Aaron thought differently; not a creature that drew breath could fail to trust and love this sweet woman whom God had spared to him.

Whom God had spared to him! When the thought thus expressed itself, he raised his eyes to Heaven in supplication.

She was the first to taste the sweet breath of spring. "Spring is coming," she said; "the birds are trilling the joyful news. How busy they are over their nests, the little chatterers, telling one another the news as they work! In a little while we shall see the flowers." She invariably spoke of things as if she could see them, as doubtless she did with spiritual sight, investing them with a beauty which was not of this world. It was her delight in summer to sit beneath the branches of a favourite cherry tree, and to follow with her ears the gambols of her children. For she had two now. A year after they left Gosport another child was born to them, Joseph, to whom Aaron clave with intense and passionate love. It was not that he was cold to Ruth, that he was not unremitting in showing her affection, but in his love for his son there was a finer quality, of which no one but himself was conscious. He had prayed for another child, and his prayer was answered. In the first flush of his happiness he was tempted to regard this gift of God as a token that his sin was forgiven, but he soon thrust this reflection aside, refusing to accept his own interpretation of his sin as an atonement for its committal. It was presumptuous in man to set lines and boundaries to the judgment of the Eternal. It was to Rachel that this blessing was vouchsafed, for a time might come when she would find in it a consolation for a revelation that would embitter the sweet waters of life. Both the children were pretty and engaging, and had winning and endearing ways, which, in the mother's sightless eyes, were magnified a thousandfold. In the following year a picture by a famous painter was exhibited in the Paris salon; it was entitled "A Jewish Mother," and represented a woman sitting beneath a cherry tree in flower, with two young children gambolling on the turf at her feet. In the background were two men, the curé of the village and a Jew, the latter being the woman's husband, and looking like a modern Moses. The faces of the men--one full-fleshed, with massive features and a grand beard, the other spare and lean, with thin, clear-cut features and a close-shaven face--formed a fine contrast. But although the points of this contrast were brought out in masterly fashion, and although the rustic scene was full of beauty, the supreme attraction of the picture lay in the woman. In her sightless eyes dwelt the spirit of peace and purity, and there was an angelic sweetness and resignation in her face as, with head slightly inclined, she listened to the prattle of her children. You could almost hear a sigh of happiness issue from her lips. The woman's face photographed itself upon the minds of

all who beheld it, and it is not too much to say that it carried with it an influence for good. Years afterwards, when their visit to the salon was forgotten, it made itself visible to their mind's eye, and always with beneficial suggestion. So it is also with a pure poem or story; the impression it leaves is an incentive to kindly act and tolerant judgment; it softens, it ameliorates, it brings into play the higher attributes of human nature, and in its practical results a benefit is conferred equally upon the sufferer by the wayside and the Samaritan who pours oil upon his wounds. The critics were unanimous in their praises of the picture. "Who is the woman?" they asked, and no one could answer the question except the painter, and he held his tongue.

The secret was this. The famous painter, passing through the village with the subject of his next great picture in his mind, saw Rachel, and was spellbound by the purity and grace of her face and figure. Travelling under an assumed name, in order that he should not be disturbed by the trumpet blasts of fame--a proof (clear to few men) that there is pleasure in obscurity--he cast aside the subject of the great picture he had intended to paint, and determined to take his inspiration from Rachel. He was assured from what he heard of her that he was in the presence of a good woman, and he was deeply impressed by her gentleness and grace. He did not find it difficult to obtain an introduction to Aaron, who invited him home, where he made himself welcome--no difficult matter, for Aaron was ever ready to appreciate intellect. Many an evening did the painter pass with them, sometimes in company with the curé, and many a friendly argument did they have. The priest and the artist were surprised at the wide range of subjects with which Aaron was familiar, and upon which he could converse with fluent ease. Upon great themes he spoke with so much force and clearness that even when they differed from him he generally succeeded in weakening their convictions. It was not his early schooling that made him so comprehensive and clear-sighted; a man's education depends chiefly upon himself--teachers and masters play but a subsidiary part, and all the coaching in the world will not make a weak intellect strong. Superficial knowledge may be gained; but it is as transient as a shadow, and in its effect is valueless in the business of life. Aaron was not a classical scholar; he was something better--a painstaking student, who extracted from his extensive reading the essence of a subject, and took no heed of the husk and shell in which it was embedded. Firm, perhaps to some extent dogmatic, in matters of religion, he was gifted with a large-hearted toleration which led him to look with a kindly eye upon men who did not think as he did; but his final judgment was the judgment of a well-balanced mind.

The artist did not ask Rachel and Aaron to be his models, but he made innumerable sketches of them, and remained in the village long enough to accumulate all the principal points and accessories for his picture. Then he departed and painted his masterpiece elsewhere. Some time afterwards he revisited the village with the intention

of making acknowledgment for the inspiration, but Aaron and his family had departed, and the painter's secret was undivulged.

As it was with Rachel in winter and spring, so was it in summer and autumn. The flowers, the butterflies, the fragrant perfume of garden and hedgerow, all appealed powerfully to her, and all were in kinship with her. The village children would follow her in the gloaming, singing their simple songs; brawlers, ashamed, would cease contending when she came in sight; women would stand at their cottage doors and gaze reverently upon her as she passed. Not a harsh thought was harboured against her and hers; her gentle spirit was an incentive to gentleness; she was a living, tender embodiment of peace on earth and goodwill to all. The whisper of the corn in the autumn, when the golden stalks bowed their heads to the passing breeze, conveyed a Divine message to her soul; and, indeed, she said seriously to Aaron that she sometimes fancied she heard voices in the air, and that they brought a sense of ineffable pleasure to her heart.

In the ordinary course of events the partnership came to an end. The engineer was invited to Russia to undertake an important work for the Government, and Aaron would not accompany him.

"In the first place," he said, "I will not expose my wife and children to the rigours of such a climate. In the second place, I will not go because I am a Jew, and because, being one, I should meet with no justice in that land. In the annals of history no greater infamy can be found than the persecution to which my brethren are subjected in that horrible country. In former ages, when the masses lived and died ignorant and unlettered, like the beasts of the field, one can understand how it was that the iron hand ruled and crushed common human rights out of existence; but in these days, when light is spreading all over the world except in such a den of hideous corruption and monstrous tyranny as Russia, it is almost incredible that these cruelties are allowed to be practised."

"How would you put a stop to them?" asked the engineer.

"I will suppose a case," Aaron answered. "You are the ruler of an estate, upon which reside a number of families, who respect the laws you make for them, who pay you tribute, and who lead reputable lives. You know that these families are not all of one opinion upon religious matters. Some pray in churches, some in synagogues, some do not pray at all. You do not show favour to those with whose views you agree, and you do not oppress those from whom you differ. You say to them, 'You are all my subjects; so long as you obey my laws, so long as you conduct yourselves as good citizens, you shall live upon an equality, and shall have my protection. Thought is free. Worship God according to the dictates of your conscience, and be happy. For you the synagogue, for

me the church. I am content.' What is the consequence? Between you and your people exists a bond of allegiance and affection. They are true and loyal to you, and you really look upon them as children of one family. In times of national distress, when a cry for help is heard in any part of your estate, the bishop of your Established Church, the Pope's cardinal, and the Chief Rabbi of the Jews meet upon common ground, free one and all to act as priests of humanity, and eager to alleviate the suffering which has arisen among them. In your government councils all creeds are represented, and the voice that is heard in decisions of national importance is truly the national voice. You have your reward. Order is preserved, property is safe, and you are respected everywhere. There are other estates in your neighbourhood which more or less resemble yours, and in which men of all creeds have equal rights. But there is one from which shrieks of agony issue daily and nightly, terrible cries of suffering, imploring appeals for help and mercy. They strike upon your ears; you cannot help hearing them. The brutal ruler of this estate has for his subjects a vast number of families, all of whom have been born on his land, all of whom recognise him as their king, and are ready and anxious to pay him respect, all of whom have a natural claim upon him for protection, all of whom work for him and contribute to the expenses of his household. To those whose religious views agree with his own he shows favour and gives protection; those who are born in a different faith he hates and tortures. From them proceed these shrieks of agony, these cries of suffering, these appeals for help. You see them torn and bleeding, their faces convulsed with anguish, their hearts racked with woe; they have no other home, and there is no escape for them. Every step they take is dogged and watched; whichever way they turn the lash awaits them, and torture chambers to drive them to the last stage of despair. And their shrieks and supplications eternally pierce the air you breathe, while the oppressed ones stretch forth their hands for mercy to the monster who makes their lives a hell upon earth. What do they ask? That they should be allowed to live in peace. But this reasonable and natural request infuriates the tyrant. He flings them to the ground and grinds his iron heel into their bleeding flesh; he spits in their faces, and orders his torturers to draw the cords tighter around them. It is not for a day, it is not for a week, it is not for a year, it is for ever. They die, and leave children behind them, who are treated in the same fashion; and for them, as it was with their fathers, there is no hope. No attempt is made to hide these infamies, these cruelties, which would disgrace the lowest order of beasts; they are perpetrated in the light of day, and the monster who is responsible for them sneers at you, and says, 'If you were in their place, I would treat you the same.' He laughs at your remonstrances, and draws the cords still tighter, and tortures the quivering flesh still more mercilessly, and cries, 'It is my estate, they are my subjects, and I will do as I please with them. Let them abjure their God, and I may show them mercy. Their bodies are mine, they have no souls!' To argue with him is presumption; in his arrogant estimation of himself the 'divinity that doth hedge a king' places him above human conditions--this man, who comes of a family with a social history so degrading that, were it attached to one of low degree, he would not be

admitted into decent society. Talk to him of humanity, and he derides and defies you. You burn with indignation; but what action do you take?"

"It is a strong illustration," said the engineer; "but it is not with nations as with families."

"It is," said Aaron, with passionate fervour. "There is no distinction in the eyes of God. We are all members of one family, and the world is our heritage. The world is divided into nations, nations into cities, towns, and villages, and these are subdivided into houses, each having its separate rulers; and, though physically and geographically wide apart, all are linked by the one common tie of our common humanity. The same emotions, the same passions, the same aspirations, run through all alike. Does it make an innocent babe a malefactor because he is born in Russia instead of France or England? But it is so considered, and his life is made a misery to him by monsters who, when they give bloody work to their armies to do, blasphemously declare that the Lord of hosts is on their side, and call upon Him to bless their infamous banners."

It was seldom that Aaron expressed himself so passionately, and, as the engineer made no reply, they did not pursue the discussion.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FAREWELL

When it became known that Aaron was about to leave the quiet resting-place in which the last few years had been passed, and in which he had enjoyed peace and prosperity, a general feeling of regret was expressed, and efforts were made to induce him to change his resolution. Coming among them a stranger, a foreigner, and an alien in religion, he had won for himself the lasting esteem of all classes of the community. The village was now an important centre, its trade was in a flourishing condition, and its population had largely increased; as a natural consequence, property had risen in value, and the old residents were growing rich. It was ungrudgingly acknowledged that all this was due to Aaron Cohen's enterprise and to the integrity of his character. The well-to-do and the poor alike deplored the impending loss, and united in their appeals to him to remain; but they were unsuccessful. There was in Aaron a latent ambition, of which he himself was scarcely aware, to move in a larger sphere, and to play his part in life among his own people. His intention had been at first to remain in the pretty French village only long enough to benefit Rachel's health, and had it not been for the chance that threw him and the engineer together, and which opened up enterprises which had led to such fortunate results, he would have fulfilled this intention and have selected some populous city in England to pursue his career. One venture had led to another, and the success which had attended them was a sufficient inducement to tarry. But now that the partnership was at an end the incentive was gone, and he was not sorry that he was in a certain sense compelled to return to his native land. One thing in his life in the village had weighed heavily upon him. There was no established synagogue in which he and his family could worship, and, as we have seen, it was in his own home that he carried out all the ceremonials of his religion. Much as Aaron had reason to be grateful for, he yearned to follow the practices of his religion among a larger body of his co-religionists, to have the honour of taking the sacred scroll from the ark, to hear the chazan's voice from the pulpit and the melodious chant of the choir, followed by the deep responses of the congregation. He had an instinctive leaning to movement and colour. He loved the peace of his home; it was his ark of rest; but he loved also the bustle and turmoil of life. He was essentially an administrator, and fitted by nature for the control and direction of large bodies of men. Had he been single he would doubtless have migrated to one of the new colonies which perennially spring up under British rule, and have taken a prominent part in its growth and development. It is greatly due to Jewish spirit and enterprise that these new countries thrive and flourish so rapidly.

There was another consideration. Aaron wished his son Joseph to grow up amid his co-religionists, to mix with them, to become familiar with their ways, so that he might be fixed firmly in the faith of his forefathers. There was no Jewish school in the village in

which the lad could be educated. He looked forward to the future. Joseph would become a man, and in this village there were limitations and restrictions which were not favourable to the formation of strong character. Here was a young mind to be trained; the more comprehensive the surroundings the better the chance of worldly advancement. He discussed these matters with Rachel.

"Yes," she said, "let us go. But I shall never forget the happy years we have passed here."

"Nor I," said Aaron. "Honour and good fortune have attended us. May a blessing rest upon the village and all the dwellers therein!"

Then Rachel spoke of her poor and of her regret at leaving them.

"We will bear them in remembrance," said Aaron, "and before we bid them, farewell something can be done to place them in permanent comfort."

Much was done by Rachel and himself. For some time past he had bestowed a great part of his benefactions in such a manner that those whom he befriended were ignorant of the source from which the good flowed. In order that this should be carried out as he wished he had to seek an agent; looking around he made his selection, and asked the curé of the village to be his almoner, explaining that he did not wish it to be known that the money came from him. The curé, much surprised, accepted the office; Aaron was grievously disturbing his opinion of the heretic. After the meeting with Rachel, which has been described in the previous chapter, he had visited her home with the laudable desire of converting the family to the true faith, and had found himself confronted with peculiar difficulties. He strove to draw them into argument, but in a theological sense they slipped through his fingers. Aaron's course in this respect was premeditated, Rachel's was unconsciously pursued. She listened to all he said, and smilingly acquiesced in his declaration that there was only one road open to heaven's gates.

"It is the road of right-doing, father," she said, "the road of kindness, of doing unto others as you would they should do unto you, of dispensing out of your store, whether it be abundant or not, what you can spare to relieve the unfortunate. You are right, father; there is only one road."

By her sweetness and charity, by her practical sympathy with the suffering, she cut the ground from under his feet. He spoke of the saints, and she said they were good men and women, and were receiving their reward. In a word, she took the strength and subtlety out of him, and he yielded with sighs of regret and admiration. With Aaron he was more trenchant, and quite as unsuccessful. Many of Aaron's humorous observations made the good priest laugh in spite of himself, and the pearls of wisdom which fell from

the Jew's lips crumbled his arguments to dust. There was no scoffing or irreverence on Aaron's part; he simply parried the thrusts with a wisdom and humanity deeper and truer than those of which his antagonist could boast.

"My son," said the curé, "would you not make me a Jew if it were in your power?"

"No," replied Aaron, "we do not proselytise, and even if we did you are too good a Christian for me to wish to make you a Jew."

This was one of the puzzling remarks which caused the curé to ponder, and which dwelt long in his mind; sometimes he thought that Aaron was a man of deep subtlety, sometimes that he was a man of great simplicity, but whether subtle or simple he felt it impossible to withhold a full measure of respect from one whose eternal lot he sighed to think was perdition and everlasting torment. That sincerity was the true test of faith, as Aaron declared, he would not admit; there could be no sincerity in a faith that was false, there could be no sincerity if you did not believe as he believed. Nevertheless, he had an uncomfortable impression that he was being continually worsted in the peaceful war of words in which they invariably engaged when they came together.

As Aaron was not to be turned from his resolution to leave the country, the villagers took steps to show their respect for him. Public meetings were held, which were attended by many persons from surrounding districts, and there was a banquet, of which Aaron did not partake, the food not being cooked according to the Jewish formula. He contented himself with fruit and bread, and made a good and sufficient meal. Speeches were made in his honour, and he was held up as an example to old and young. His response was in admirable taste. He said that the years he had spent among them were the happiest in his life, and that it was with true regret he found himself compelled to leave the village. He spoke of his first coming among them with a beloved wife in a delicate state of health, who had grown well and strong in the beautiful spot. It was not alone the sweet air, he said, which had brought the blessing of health to her; the bond of sympathy which had been established between her and her neighbours had been as a spiritual medicine to her, which had given life a value of which it would otherwise have been deprived. It was not so much the material reward of our labours that conferred happiness upon us as the feeling that we were passing our days among friends who always had a smile and a pleasant greeting for us. Riches were perishable, kindly remembrances immortal. The lessons of life were to be learned from the performance of simple acts of duty; for he regarded it as a duty to so conduct ourselves as to make our presence welcome, and agreeable to those with whom we were in daily association. As to the kind things that had been said of him, he felt that he was scarcely worthy of them. "There is," he said, "a leaven of human selfishness in all that we do; and the little I have, with the blessing of God, been enabled to do has conferred upon me a much greater

pleasure than it could possibly have conferred upon others. To you and to my residence among you I owe all my good fortune, to you and to my residence among you I owe my dear wife's restoration to health; and it would be ingratitude indeed did I not endeavour to make some return for the good you have showered upon me. I shall never forget you, nor will my wife forget you; in our native land we shall constantly recall the happy years we spent in this pleasant village, and we shall constantly pray that peace and prosperity may never desert you." The earnestness and feeling with which these sentiments were uttered were unmistakable and convincing, and when Aaron resumed his seat the eyes of all who had assembled to do him honour were turned upon him approvingly and sympathisingly. "Ah," groaned the good curé, "were he not a Jew he would be a perfect man!" The flowers which graced the banqueting table were sent by special messenger to Rachel, and the following day she pressed a few and kept them ever afterwards among her precious relics. Aaron did not come home till late in the night, and he found Rachel waiting up for him. He delighted her by describing the incidents and speeches of the memorable evening. Aaron was a great smoker, and while they talked he smoked the silver-mounted pipe for which he had so great an affection.

There are in the possession of many men dumb memorials of insignificant value which they would not part with for untold gold, and this silver-mounted pipe of Aaron's was one of these. Before Rachel was blind she had been in the habit of filling it for him, and when she was deprived of sight he sorely missed the affectionate service. Tears started to his eyes one night when, with a loving smile, she handed it to him, filled; and now she did it for him regularly. Rachel had indulged in a piece of extravagance. She had a special case made for the pipe, adorned with the letters A. and R. outlined in brilliants, and Aaron handled his treasure almost with the care and affection he bestowed upon his children.

"Your health was proposed," said Aaron, "and the health of our little ones. What was said about you, my life, gave me much more pleasure than what was said about myself. It abashes one to have to sit and listen to extravagant praises far beyond one's merits, but it is the habit of men to run into extravagance."

"They could say nothing, dear husband, that you do not deserve."

"You too!" exclaimed Aaron, gaily. "It is well for me that you were not there, for you might have been called upon to give your testimony."

"I should not have had the courage." She fondly pressed his hand. "I am glad they spoke of me kindly."

"They spoke of you truly, and my heart leaped up within me at what the good curé said of you, for it was he who proposed the toast. I appreciated it more from him than I should have done from any one else, and he was quite sincere for the moment in all the sentiments he expressed, whatever he may have thought of himself afterwards for asking his flock to drink the health of a Jewess. Well, well, it takes all sorts to make a world."

"How much we have to be grateful for!" said Rachel, with a happy sigh.

"Indeed, indeed, for boundless gratitude. Think of what we passed through in Gosport"-he paused suddenly; the one experience which weighed upon his conscience brought a dark and troubled shadow into his face.

"Why do you pause, dear? Has not my blindness proved a blessing to us? Do I miss my sight? Nay, I think it has made life sweeter. But for that we should not have come to this place, but for that we should not have had the means to do something towards the relief of a few suffering and deserving people. Nothing but good has sprung from it. Our Lord God be praised."

Aaron recovered himself. "There was Mr. Whimpole's visit to us before I commenced business, there were those stupid boys who distressed you so with their revilings, which I managed to turn against themselves. It was this pipe of yours, my life, that gave me the inspiration how to disarm them. It sharpens my faculties, it brings out my best points; it is really to me a friend and counsellor. And now I have smoked enough, and it is time to go to bed. I will join you presently."

In solitude the one troubled memory of the past forced itself painfully upon him. Did he deserve what had been said in his honour on this night? He valued men's good opinion, and of all the men he knew he valued most the good opinion of the curé. What would this single-minded, conscientious priest think of him if he were acquainted with the sin of which he had been guilty, the sin of bringing up an alien child in a religion in which she had not been born? He would look upon him with horror. And it was a bitter punishment that he was compelled to keep this secret locked in his own breast, that he dared not reveal it to a single human creature, that he dared not say openly, "I have sinned, I have sinned. Have mercy upon me!" To his own beloved wife, dearer to him than life itself, he had behaved treacherously; even in her he dared not confide. It was not with Rachel as it was with him; there was no difference in the love she bore her children; they were both equally precious to her. To fall upon his knees before her and make confession would be like striking a dagger into her heart; it almost drove him mad to think of the shock such a revelation would be to her. No, he must guard his secret and his sin jealously to the last hour of his life. So far as human discovery went he believed

himself to be safe; the betrayal, if it ever came, lay with himself. True, he had in his possession testimony which might damn him were it to fall into other hands, the little iron safe which Mr. Moss had received from Dr. Spenlove, and at the mother's request had conveyed to him. In his reflections upon the matter lately the question had intruded itself, What did this little box contain? It was impossible for him to say, but he felt instinctively that there was evidence in it which would bring his sin home to him. He allowed his thoughts now to dwell upon the mother. From the day on which he received the five hundred pounds from Mr. Gordon's lawyers he had heard nothing from them, nothing from Mr. Moss or from anybody relating to the matter. Between himself and Mr. Moss there had been a regular though not very frequent correspondence, but his friend had never written one word concerning it, and Aaron, of course, had not referred to it. Thus far, therefore, it was buried in a deep grave.

But would this grave never be opened? If other hands were not responsible for the act would it not be his duty to cause the light of truth to shine upon it? The mother had stipulated that, in the event of her husband's death, she should be free to seek her child, should be free to claim the box. Upon this contingency seemed to hang his fate; but there were arguments in his favour. Mr. Gordon might live, and the mother could do nothing. Arguing that the man died, it was more than probable that his wife had borne other children who had a claim upon her love which she acknowledged. To seek then her child of shame would be the means of bringing disgrace upon these children of her marriage. Would she deliberately do this? He answered the question immediately, No. In the consideration of these phases of the matter he bore in mind that, although the false news of the child's death must of necessity have been communicated to Mr. Gordon by his lawyers, it was likely that it had been kept from the knowledge of the mother. Aaron had been made to understand that Mr. Gordon was a man of inflexible resolution, and that he had pledged himself never under any circumstances to make mention of the child to the woman he had married. Even setting this aside, even going to the length of arguing that, hearing of the child's death, Mr. Gordon departed from the strict letter of his resolution, and said to his wife, "Your child is dead," was it not likely that she would reply, "I do not believe it; you tell me so only to deceive me"? In that case, her husband dead and herself childless, would she not search the world over for her offspring?

Setting this all aside, however, the onus still devolved upon him to open the grave. One of the stipulations attached to his receipt of the box was that when Ruth was twenty-one years of age it should be handed over to her. Would he dare to violate this condition? Would he so far tamper with his conscience as to neglect an obligation which might be deemed sacred? The question tortured him; he could not answer it.

He heard Rachel moving in the room above, and with a troubled heart he went up to her. Thus this night, the events of which were intended to shed honour and glory upon

him, ended in sadness, and thus was it proved that the burden of a new deceit may be as a feather-weight to the solemn and heavy consequences which follow in its train.

Everything was ready for the departure of the Cohens, which was to take place at the end of the week. Before the day arrived they received other tokens in proof of the appreciation in which they were held. A deputation of working men waited on Aaron, and presented him with an address. The employers of labour themselves--secretly glad, perhaps, that he was going from among them--paid him a special honour. Rachel's heart throbbed with gratitude and with pride in her husband. But her greatest pleasure, in which were mingled touches of deep sorrow, was derived from the affecting testimony of the poor she had befriended. Old men and women witnessed their departure, and bidding farewell to Rachel, prayed God's blessing upon her. Children gave her flowers, and their childish voices were full of affection. The tears ran from her eyes; she could hardly tear herself away. At length it was over; they were gone; but it was long before her sweet face faded from their memory.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT THE GRAVE OF HIS CHILD.

The years that followed until Ruth was grown to womanhood and Joseph was a young man were eventful years for Aaron and his family. He returned to England the possessor of a few thousands of pounds, and was received with open arms by the Jewish community. He found to his surprise that the story of his life in a foreign land was known to his co-religionists, who are ever eager to acknowledge the success of their brethren. With Jews, as with Christians, success is a power, an "open sesame;" they are proud of it as reflecting honour upon the race, and, as is the human fashion, are willing to overlook a retrograde step or two in matters of religious observance on the parts of those who have won their way into the front ranks. It is also human, perhaps, that they are less tolerant to those who have not been so successful. Aaron Cohen, as we know, had no need of such indulgence; by poor and rich, by the heterodox and the orthodox, he was hailed as a worthy upholder of the old faith which has survived the persecutions of thousands of years. Before he went to Gosport he had resided in the East End of London, and he derived pleasure from his visits to the old familiar ground and from the renewal of acquaintance with old friends who had not prospered in life's battle. That he should be asked to assist these was natural, and the practical aid he tendered brought its reward. In a certain sense he became suddenly famous. "That's Aaron Cohen," said the East End Jews, pointing him out as he passed; "he used to live here, and he has made an enormous fortune"--multiplying his riches, of course, a hundredfold. But a man may be famous without being popular; Aaron was both, and he was not allowed to remain in ignorance of the fact. He was offered an honourable office in his synagogue, and he gladly accepted it. He was asked to serve on the board of several of the Jewish charities with which London abounds, and he did not refuse one of these requests. It was his earnest wish to make himself practically useful to the community, and also to do something towards the stemming of the tide of loose religious observance which was steadily rising among his brethren. Upon this subject he had many conversations with the clerical leaders of the chosen people, who saw the inroads that were being made and seemed powerless to provide a remedy. It did not occur to them that by a bold grasp of the nettle danger they might pluck from it the flower safety. Aaron Cohen believed in the thirteen articles of the Creed framed by Maimonides, which are accepted as the fundamental articles of the Jewish faith. He believed in following--so far as was practicable in the present age--the precepts which Moses transmitted to his race, with which all faithful Jews should be familiar. Some, he knew, were obsolete; such as those affecting the Nazarites, of whom not one disciple exists to-day among English-speaking communities: others were impracticable; such, for instance, as those relating to the burnt sacrifices, the redeeming of the male firstling of an ass, and the punishment of

criminals by stoning and the sword. But in this code of six hundred and thirteen precepts are to be found many which breathe the pure essence of the faith in which he was born, and these he believed it incumbent upon him to obey. His lectures and addresses to Jewish audiences in the East End of London were listened to with breathless interest; the halls were not large enough to accommodate those who thronged to hear him. He drew from history illustrations of their past grandeur which fired and thrilled them. Sensible of the impression he made upon them, Aaron Cohen had reason to be proud of the part he was playing, but there was more room in his heart for humbleness than pride; the shadow of a committed sin for ever attended him.

Apart from these communal matters he had much to do. In business hours business claimed him, and he answered zealously to the call. To such a man idleness would have been little less than a living death, and, taking up his residence in London, he embarked very soon in enterprises of magnitude. The knowledge he had gained during his partnership in France was of immense value to him, and in conjunction with other men of technical resource, he contracted for public works in various parts of the country. His fortune grew, and he gradually became wealthy. He moved from one house to another, and each move was a step up the ladder. A house in Prince's Gate came into the market, and Aaron purchased it, and furnished it with taste and elegance. There he entertained liberally but not lavishly, for his judgment led him always to the happy mean, and his house became the resort of men and women of intellect and culture. Mr. Moss, who was wedded to Portsmouth, and continued to flourish there, paid periodical visits to London, and was always welcome in Aaron's home. He was as musically inclined as ever; and opportunities were afforded him of hearing the finest singers and players at Prince's Gate. On occasions, Aaron readily consented to give an introduction, through concerts held in his house, to young aspirants in whom Mr. Moss took an interest; and to other budding talent in the same direction Aaron's rooms were always open. In relation to their intimacy in Gosport a conversation took place between Mr. Moss and Aaron some three years after the latter was settled in London. Aaron had just completed a successful contract, and business had called Mr. Moss to the metropolis.

"I heard to-day," said Mr. Moss, "that you had cleared six or seven thousand pounds by the contract."

"The balance on the right side," replied Aaron, "is a little over seven thousand."

"I congratulate you. The gentleman I spoke with said that if he had had the contract he would have made a profit of three times as much."

"It is likely."

"Then, why didn't you do it, Cohen?"

Aaron smiled and shook his head. "Let us speak of another subject."

"But I want to get at the bottom of this. I should like you to know what the gentleman said about it."

"Very well. What did he say?"

"That you are ruining the labour market."

"Ruin to some men may mean salvation to others. He doubtless gives an explanation. How am I ruining the labour market?"

"By high wages and short hours."

"That is a new view."

"You do pay high wages, Cohen, according to what everybody says."

"Oh, it's everybody now, as well as your gentleman friend. Yes, I pay good wages, and I don't consider them high."

"And the hours are not as long as they might be."

"Quite true. They might be twelve, fourteen, sixteen, out of the twenty-four. We read of such unfair strains upon human labour. My hours are reasonably long enough. If I am satisfied and my workmen are satisfied, I give offence to no man."

"You are wrong, Cohen; you give offence to the capitalist."

"I regret to hear it."

"He says you are ruining the capitalist."

"Oh, I am ruining the capitalist now. But if that is the case, he is no longer a capitalist."

"You know what I mean. I don't pretend to understand these things as you do, because I have not studied political economy."

"I have, and believe me it is a horse that has been ridden too hard. Mischief will come of it. Apply your common sense. In what way would your friend have made twenty-one thousand pounds out of the contract instead of seven thousand?"

"By getting his labour cheaper and by making his men work longer hours."

"Exactly. And the difference of fourteen thousand pounds would have gone into his pocket instead of the pockets of his workmen."

"Yes, of course."

"Ask yourself if that is fair. The wages I pay my men are sufficient to enable them to maintain a home decently, to bring up their families decently, and perhaps, if they are wise and thrifty--only, mind you, if they are wise and thrifty--to make a small provision for old age, when they are no longer able to work. Their hours are long enough to give them just a little leisure, which they can employ partly in reasonable amusement and partly in intellectual improvement. I have gone thoroughly into these matters, and I know what I am talking about. Men who do their work honestly--and I employ and will keep no others--have a right to fair wages and a little leisure, and I decline to grind my men down after the fashion of the extreme political economist. The contract I have just completed was tendered for in an open market. My tender was the lowest, and was accepted. I make a considerable sum of money out of it, and each of my men contributes a mickle towards it. They believe I have treated them fairly, and I am certain they have treated me fairly. Upon those lines I intend to make my way. Your sweater is a political economist. I am not a sweater. It is the course I pursued in France, and by it I laid the foundation of what may prove to be a great fortune. I am tendering now for other contracts, and I shall obtain my share, and shall pursue precisely the same course. Mr. Moss, you and I are Jews. At a great disadvantage because of the nature of your business, which I myself once intended to follow, you have made yourself respected in the town in which you reside. Why? Because you are a fair-dealing man. I, on my part, wish to make myself respected in whatever part of the world I live. To this end the conditions are somewhat harder for us than for our Christian neighbours. They drive as hard bargains as we do, they are equally guilty of malpractices. When one is found out--a terrible crime, as we know--it is not said of him, 'What could you expect? He is a Christian.' It is not so with us. When one of us is proved to be guilty of sharp dealing, it is said, 'What could you expect? He is a Jew.' I will not go into the question whether we have justly earned the reproach; but it certainly lays upon us the obligation of being more careful than perhaps we might otherwise be, of even giving way a little, of being a trifle more liberal. It is a duty we owe to ourselves. Surely there is no race to which it is a greater honour, and should be the greatest pride to belong, than the Jewish race; and by my conduct through life I trust I shall do nothing to tarnish that honour or lower that

pride. Moreover, what I can do to weaken a prejudice shall be done to the last hour of my life. It may or may not be for that reason that I decline to follow the political economist to the depths into which he has fallen."

Mr. Moss's eyes gleamed. Aaron had touched a sympathetic cord; the men shook hands and smiled cordially at each other.

"When you were in Gosport," said Mr. Moss, "I ought to have asked you to go into partnership with me."

"If you had made the offer," responded Aaron, "I should have accepted it."

"Lucky for you that I missed my opportunity. It is a fortunate thing that you went to France when you did."

"Very fortunate. It opened up a new career for me; it restored my dear wife to health; my son was born there."

"About the poor child I brought to you in Gosport, Cohen. We have never spoken of it."

"That is true," said Aaron, outwardly calm; but his heart beat more quickly.

"Did the lawyers ever write to you again?"

"Never."

"And I have heard nothing. The iron box I gave you--you have it still, I suppose?"

"I have it still."

"I have often wondered what it contains, and whether the mother will ever call for it."

"If she does it shall be handed to her in the same condition as you handed it to me. But she does not know in whose possession it is."

"No, she does not know, and she can only obtain the information from Mr. Gordon's lawyers. My lips are sealed."

Aaron considered a moment. This opening up of the dreaded subject made him keenly sensible of the sword that was hanging over his head; but his sense of justice impelled him to say, "It may happen that the mother will wish to have the box restored to her,

and that the lawyers may refuse to give her the information that it is in my possession. She may seek elsewhere for a clue, and may be directed to you."

"Who will direct her? Nothing is more unlikely."

"It is at least probable," said Aaron.

"Well," Mr. Moss rejoined, "if she does apply to me, I shall not enlighten her. It is none of my business."

"My desire is that you do enlighten her. The box is her property, and I have no right to retain it."

"Very well, Cohen, if you wish it; but it is my opinion that you will never see her again. She has forgotten all about it long ago."

"You are mistaken. A mother never forgets."

"And now, Cohen, I have a message for you from Mrs. Moss. She is burning to see you, and cannot come to London. We are about to have an addition to our family; that will be the sixteenth. Upon my word, I don't know when we are going to stop. Is it too much to ask you to pay us a visit?"

"Not at all; it will give me great pleasure. When?"

"It will give Mrs. Moss greater pleasure," said Mr. Moss, rubbing his hands joyously at this answer. "She will be delighted, and so will all our friends in Portsmouth. You have no idea how anxious she has been about it. She was afraid you would refuse because----"

He paused rather awkwardly.

"Finish the sentence," urged Aaron, in a kind tone.

"To tell you the truth," said Mr. Moss, with a frank laugh, "she thought you might be too grand now to visit us. I told her she was mistaken. 'Cohen is not the kind of man to forget the past,' I said to her."

"No," said Aaron; "I do not forget the past."

The sad tone in which these words were spoken escaped Mr. Moss. With a beaming face, he continued,--

"'Once a friend,' I said to Mrs. Moss, 'always a friend. It does not matter to him whether a man is up or down in the world, so long as he is honest and straightforward.' Why, if business went wrong, and I was in trouble, I should come straight to you."

Aaron pressed the hand of this warm-hearted friend.

"You would do right. I hope you may never need my services in that way; but if unhappily you should, do not hesitate to come to me."

"I promise you, Cohen, I promise you. Not that there is any likelihood of it. To bring up such a family as ours is no light matter, keeps one's nose to the grindstone, as the saying is; but we're not at all badly off. I return to Portsmouth on Thursday. Will that time suit you for the visit?"

"Yes; I will accompany you."

And away went Mr. Moss, overjoyed, to write to his wife to make all needful preparations. Not being acquainted with the secret which had become the torture of Aaron Cohen's life, he could have had no idea that the ready acceptance of the invitation sprang from a father's burning desire to stand by the grave of his child.

Aaron's visit lasted a week, and he spent one day and night in Gosport. Nothing was changed in the ancient town. The house he had occupied had been rebuilt; the streets were the same; the names over the shops were unaltered. His wish was to pass in and out of the town without being recognised; but the wish was not gratified. The Portsmouth newspapers circulated in Gosport, and Aaron Cohen's visit "to our esteemed neighbour, Mr. Moss," found its way into the local columns. It may be that Mr. Moss himself was the harbinger of this piece of news and that he was also responsible for certain creditable episodes in Aaron's career which were duly recorded in print; but if the reporters were indebted to him for the particulars he made no mention of the fact. He was certainly proud of the paragraphs, and sent copies of the papers to all his friends. The Gosport folk were therefore prepared for Aaron's visit; old friends came forward to greet him; and the kind physician who had attended to Rachel during her illness pressed him to be his guest, but Aaron excused himself. When he left the doctor his road lay past Mr. Whimpole's shop, at the door of which the proprietor was standing. Their eyes meeting, Aaron courteously inclined his head. The corn-chandler, very red in the face, returned the salute, and, after a momentary hesitation, advanced towards Aaron with outstretched hand. Aaron stopped, and took the hand of his old enemy.

"Mr. Cohen," said Mr. Whimpole, "I hope you do not bear animosity."

"I do not, sir," replied Aaron. "Life is too full of anxieties for needless enmity."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Cohen. I have often reproached myself for misjudging you; but the best of men may be mistaken."

"They may, sir. I trust you have changed your opinion of those whose religious views differ from your own."

"We speak as we find," said Mr. Whimpole; "and you have proved yourself to be a gentleman."

"It is never too late to admit an error," said Aaron; and, bowing again, he passed on, leaving Mr. Whimpole with an uncomfortable impression that he had once more been worsted by the man he despised.

It was night when Aaron stood by the grave of his child. Light clouds floated before the moon, and the shifting shadows played upon the graves of those who lay in peace in that solemn sanctuary. For a long time he stood in silence, musing upon the sin he had committed, the full measure of which had not yet come home to him. He held a high place among men; his name was honoured; he had been spoken of as Aaron Cohen the upright Jew; he had made himself a leader, and had but to speak to be obeyed; he had brought back strayed sheep to the fold. The Chief Rabbi had said to him, "The example of such a man as yourself is invaluable. Inroads are being made in our ancient faith, and you stand like a valiant soldier in the breach. You exercise an influence for incalculable good." And then he had blessed the man who was hugging an awful secret close, and veiling it from the eyes of men. How would it be if his sin were laid bare?

The spirit of his child seemed to rise from the grave.

"Why am I here?" it asked reproachfully. "Why am I cut off from my race?"

He beat his breast; the tears flowed down his beard.

"Forgive me, Lord of hosts," he sobbed, "for laying my child to rest in a Christian churchyard! It was to save my beloved! Pardon my transgression! Have mercy upon me!"

CHAPTER XXXI

AARON IS ASKED FOR A SUBSCRIPTION, AND RELATES THE STORY OF A CONVERT.

The highest point in Aaron Cohen's prosperity was reached in 1893. From the day of his return to England there had been no break in the onward march of his fortunes; every enterprise he undertook flourished, and the old saying was applied to him, "Everything he touches turns to gold." A kind of superstition is associated with such men; people regard them as under the spell of some beneficent enchantment. Aaron's reputation, however, was not due solely to the fact that he was uniformly fortunate in his ventures, but that he was a just and charitable man. No appeal for assistance in any worthy movement was made to him in vain; his purse was ever open, and he was ever ready to respond. Among his co-religionists he was a power for good, and his advice was sought by high and low. The poorest Jew, in a time of difficulty, did not hesitate to go to him for counsel, and only those held back whose conduct would not stand the searching light he threw upon all matters submitted to him. By the oppressor he was held in awe, by the oppressed he was worshipped. One of the former, who had grown rich by usury, came to him for advice. Aaron listened in silence, and spoke no word of counsel to assist him out of his difficulty. "Reform your life," he said; "give back to the poor what you have stolen from them; then come to me again."

He did not confine his labours and charities to the Jewish community; his name was to be found among the administrators of all their benevolent funds, and it was also to be found on the lists of numberless Christian charities. In so generous a spirit did he meet the appeals that were made to him, and so devoid of narrowness were his benefactions, that he grew into the esteem of all classes of society. Early in the year a public indignation meeting was held at the Mansion House under the auspices of the Lord Mayor, to protest against the barbarous treatment of the Jews in Russia. Church and synagogue joined hands in the common cause of human brotherhood. It was not a question of theology but of humanity, and Catholic Cardinal, Protestant Bishop, and Jewish Chief Rabbi stood shoulder to shoulder in the indignant protest. Aaron was requested to speak on the occasion, and his words went forth to the world, and were quoted far and wide. In the course of his speech he said: "We do not ask for favour, we scarcely dare ask for justice, though it is to be hoped that this will come by-and-by, when the eyes of the rulers of Russia are open to the fact that in their oppression of the Jew they are not only violating the laws of God and man, but are retarding their own prosperity. We ask merely for toleration, for permission to follow the faith in which we were born, to worship God according to our ancient usage. The history of nations furnishes the proof that the Jew, fairly treated, is a good citizen, that he is obedient to

the law, and loyal to the head of the State and in his support of lawful authority. In his love of family life, in the orderly regulation of his household, in the performance of his duty to wife and children, he is surely entitled to rank with his Christian brother. He is, moreover, industrious and enterprising, he excites emulation and stimulates the commercial activity of his neighbour, by which the wealth of the general community is increased. These are distinct virtues, private and national, but Russian rulers seem to account them crimes. When a tale of bodily slavery reaches a civilised country a thrill of horror runs through the land, and it is not the least of the glorious records of England that wherever the English-speaking race holds sway the shackles of the slave are removed, and he hears the blessed words, 'You are free!' But in Russia they are not content to chain the body; they hold man's soul in bondage. Not only do they say to the Jew, 'Your presence is a contamination; you shall not live in this or that town or city; you shall not engage in such or such pursuits; you shall wear badges of disgrace;' but they add, 'You shall not think; you shall not pray.' Incredible are the instances of cruelty which are brought before us: of families torn asunder; of the deliberate wrecking of cherished hopes and worthy aspirations; of steady and honourable lives brought to ruin; of shameful robbery and pillage, and even of worse doings which I should blush to name. It is indeed time that the voice of humanity should be forced upon the ears of the oppressors who are making life horrible for millions of helpless human beings; and we, the Jewish residents in this honoured land, render our grateful homage to this distinguished assembly, and our sincere thanks for its powerful assistance in the endeavour we are making to rescue our brethren from misery and despair."

He was congratulated on all sides for these stirring words, which were recognised and acknowledged as a fitting tribute to the Jewish character. Some called it a vindication; he would not have it so. "We need no vindication now in this happy land," he said. "We have proved ourselves; the old prejudice is dying away."

When the speech was read to Rachel her eyes overflowed with tears of joy. Aaron, coming in shortly afterwards, found her holding the newspaper to her heart. She took his hand, and raised it to her lips.

"No, no," he said; "you humble me."

He folded her in his arms, where she lay, contented and happy.

As a matter of course he was sometimes beguiled into bestowing money upon unworthy objects or persons, but it did not affect him. "Where lives the man who does not make mistakes?" he said. "If there is one deserving case in ten I am satisfied." In the wide scope of his charities he had some curious experiences, and one of these, becoming known, was the theme of much comment, both serious and humorous. A gentleman

called upon him and solicited a contribution to an old-established society, the name of which he did not mention. He contented himself with saying that it was known all the world over, and that its objects were universally approved of.

"You do not, I suppose," said Aaron, "expect me to give in the dark. Favour me with the name of the society."

"You have doubtless heard of it," replied the gentleman. "It is the Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews."

Aaron smiled as he said, "Yes, I have heard of it. But, my dear sir, I am myself a Jew."

"I am aware of it," said the gentleman, "and the reason I make the appeal is that you have been described to me as a man who has no narrow prejudices, and who is in no sense dogmatic or bigoted."

"It is, then, a compliment you are paying me when you ask me to contribute to a fund which is antagonistic to my race."

"In your view antagonistic," observed the gentleman. "There are generally two sides to a question."

"I see. Meaning that my view is not necessarily the correct view."

The gentleman nodded courteously. He was not a collector for the society, nor a paid officer, but a man of means who was also noted for his benevolence.

"I have myself occasionally," he remarked, "given a donation to an object with which I was not in entire sympathy."

"When you decided to pay me a visit had you any hope of converting me?"

"Your conversion would give our society an immense impetus, but I had no hope of it. But there are men whose views are not so firmly fixed as your own, and I thought you would not object to assist them in the praiseworthy task of examining their consciences."

"Through a lens made of gold. In other words, giving them mercenary assistance to a spiritual conclusion."

"It is an original way of putting it," said the gentleman, greatly interested in the turn the conversation was taking.

"I cannot but consider the matter seriously," said Aaron, thoughtfully, "for there can be no doubt of your sincerity. Still, it occurs to me that if we were both equally sincere in our advocacy of objects of a similar nature, it would be as well that we should pause and ask ourselves this question. Instead of endeavouring to convert Jews or Christians to a faith in which they were not born, would it not be better to employ ourselves in the effort to make those who call themselves Christians true Christians, and those who call themselves Jews true Jews?"

"There is force in your argument, but it is no answer to my appeal for a contribution to the objects of my society."

"You can probably," Aaron then said, "furnish me with particulars of the working of your society."

"Anticipating your request I have brought the papers with me."

Aaron looked through the printed books and papers handed to him, and made certain calculations.

"I perceive," he said, "that you take credit to yourselves for making a stated number of conversions during the past five years, and that you have spent a stated sum of money during that period. The number of conversions is very small, the amount of money expended very large. I have worked out the sum, and according to my figures each convert has cost you nearly eleven thousand pounds. You find these wavering Jews very expensive."

"Very expensive," assented the gentleman, with a half humorous sigh.

"I cannot say I sympathise with you, but I will make a proposition to you. You are zealous in the furtherance of an object which you believe to be worthy, and I am zealous in the furtherance of an object which I know to be worthy. I will give you a cheque as a donation to your object if you will give me a cheque for half the amount as a donation to mine. Do not be afraid; it is not for the promotion of Judaism among the Christians."

The gentleman, who was rich and liberal-minded, laughed good-humouredly as he said, "I consent, on the further understanding that your cheque is for a reasonable amount."

"Will this do?" asked Aaron, filling in a cheque for one hundred pounds.

The gentleman made a wry face, but, without remark, he wrote a cheque for fifty pounds, and they exchanged documents.

"My contribution," said Aaron, "represents the one hundred and tenth part of a convert-the one hundred and tenth part of one transitory and, in all probability, worldly and insincere conversion. Your contribution represents a sick bed for two years in a hospital for poor children. During those two years you will be engaged in converting the one hundred and tenth part of an apostate Jew, and my hospital beds will be occupied by two poor Christian children, who, by God's mercy, will, I trust, be restored to health. You will pardon me for saying that I think I have the best of the transaction."

"You are a singular man," said the gentleman, "and I will not dispute with you. But I should like a few words with you upon what you say as to our converts being worldly and insincere. Is that really your opinion?"

"It is something more than an opinion. It is a conviction."

"Based upon some kind of proof, I presume?"

"Based upon proof and observation. Once a Jew, always a Jew, whether he follows the Mosaic laws or disregards them. So powerful is the seed of Judaism that it can never be entirely destroyed in the heart of one born in the ancient faith. We who are Jews know this to be incontrovertible; you who are Christians may not be able to understand it. So much for observation; now for the proof. I observe on your list of converts the name of Borlinski."

"You know the name?" the gentleman interrupted, eagerly.

"It is very familiar to me," replied Aaron.

"There are two Borlinskis on the list," said the gentleman. "Josef and Izak."

"I am acquainted with them both."

"We are very proud of the Borlinskis," said the gentleman, speaking with enthusiasm, "as the most important converts on our books. They are under engagement with us."

"On a salary?"

"Yes, an insignificant salary; twenty-five shillings a week each."

"Employed by you to make other converts."

"Yes."

"Have they been successful?"

"They have been with us for a few months only," said the gentleman. "These things take time."

"Truly, they take time--and money. Would you mind relating to me how the Borlinskis became associated with your society?"

"Not at all. It was a matter of conscience, purely a matter of conscience. That is why we are so proud of them. Josef Borlinski came first. He presented himself at our office; he had doubts; he had had doubts since childhood. In his country--Poland--no such society as ours exists, where a man can obtain monition and teaching to confirm or dispel those doubts. There are in that country converted Jews, but the conversion is sudden and effected by a kind of terrorism. Josef Borlinski is a reasonable being, and wished to be convinced through his reason. We cheerfully took up the task of convincing him of the error of his ways; we argued with him, we gave him books, he attended our meetings, we expounded the Gospel to him. At length he was satisfied, and became a zealous and happy convert to Christianity."

"How many months or years did it take to convince Josef Borlinski of his error?" asked Aaron.

"Nearly two years."

"During which time you supported him."

"We could do no less. He was desperately poor, almost starving when he came to us. Then, he was a foreigner, and the only trade--if it can be called one--to which he could turn his hand was that of an itinerant glazier, at which he could not earn more than three or four shillings a week, sometimes not so much. In any circumstances, it would have been a dangerous occupation for him to follow; he would have had to be out the whole of the day exposed to the weather, and the poor fellow is consumptive."

"So that you first adopted, and then converted him. How did you get hold of Izak Borlinski?"

"He is Josef's cousin, and Josef brought him to us."

"Zealous Josef! Izak also had doubts, and wished to be convinced through his reason?"

"That is so."

"And you adopted and converted him as well as Josef?"

"Yes."

"Clever Josef! Poor, consumptive Josef! It would not surprise me if he presently introduces another of his countrymen to you who has had doubts since childhood, and wishes to be convinced--through his reason and your pocket. Him, also, you can adopt and convert. Ah, what a loss to the stage is Josef Borlinski! Only that he lacks industry, for in him are united a fox's cunning and a sloth's love of idleness. The rogue! He imposed upon me for months, until at length, my suspicions aroused, I unmasked the rascal."

"Do you mean to say that we have been imposed upon?" asked the gentleman, in an excited tone.

"Judge for yourself. Six years ago Josef Borlinski came to this country, and lived for some time upon charity. I am on the committees of several of our benevolent institutions, and at every meeting I attended, the name of Josef Borlinski cropped up. It was always Josef Borlinski, Josef Borlinski, destitute and starving. The continual recurrence of the name irritated me, and I went to see this Josef Borlinski, destitute and starving. I found him down Whitechapel way playing draughts with his cousin, Izak. I saw before me a young man with black eyes, black hair, and a general appearance of belonging to the lymphatic order of being. I questioned him. How long had he been in England? Eighteen months. Why had he lived upon charity all that time? He was unfortunate; he could not obtain work. Was he willing to work? Oh yes, yes, yes, several times repeated, his little cunning eyes watching me as we conversed. Was he married? No. Had he a trade? Unfortunately no, he had no trade. Then, what could he do, what did he feel himself fitted for? Anything, everything. He is a man of professions this Josef Borlinski, glib of tongue, quick at response, supple as a reed, slippery as an eel. I reflected. He spoke English fairly well; he looked strong and healthy, not a symptom of consumption visible. How much a week could he, a single man, live upon? Upon anything, nothing--a few shillings, a few pence. Thus spoke Josef Borlinski, humbly and smoothly, interlarding his speech with Hebrew exclamations and pious adjurations. I offered him a situation at twenty shillings a week, to be increased if he gave satisfaction, which required no special knowledge of a trade, and in which he would have to work five

days out of the seven. Boundless were his professions of gratitude. I was his benefactor; he would bless me all his life. He commenced work on the following Monday, and on the Tuesday he presented himself to me, with his coat rent, and black cloth round his hat. He had received a letter from Poland; his father was dead; a week of mourning was incumbent upon him; could he be spared to fulfil this religious obligation? Grief was in his countenance, tears in his eyes, his voice trembled. I sympathised with him; he could have his week's mourning. But he was destitute; he was starving; how was he to support himself during this week of enforced idleness? I gave him something more than a week's wages, and he departed, blessing me. His week of mourning over, it was reported to me that he had not returned to work. I sought him out, and found him playing draughts with his cousin Izak. He made a thousand excuses; he was ill; he was overwhelmed with sorrow at the loss he had sustained; he did not understand English customs; he did not think it was lawful to resume work in the middle of the week; moreover, he was in rags. He obtained money from me for a new suit of clothes, and a further extension of leave till the end of the week. On the Monday he duly presented himself, and in the afternoon fell down in a swoon, and had to be conveyed home in a cab, where he remained for three weeks, supported, as usual, by charity. My wife sent him wine and jelly, and the rascal was in clover. I visited him, and found him playing draughts with his cousin Izak. 'The game requires no exertion,' he said languidly; 'it is my only amusement; it diverts my mind from the sorrow by which I am oppressed.' I thought it extremely curious. The effects of his swoon having passed away, he commenced work again, and on the second day I received a letter from him. He had been compelled, he wrote, to take to his bed; he had spasms; he was doubled up with pain; he hoped to be better soon; meanwhile, could I send him a few shillings for medicine and food? He obtained what he asked for, and I called to see how he was progressing. I found him playing draughts with his cousin Izak. I was now thoroughly interested in Josef Borlinski. Such a chapter of accidents--such a plausible speaker and writer--so regularly unfortunate when he went to work, and so fond of playing draughts with his cousin Izak. I He was weeks getting rid of his spasms, but at length he recommenced work. Would you believe it? On the evening of the first day I found him waiting for me in this house. His left hand was in bandages, and the linen was besmeared with blood. In Heaven's name what had happened? He told me a lugubrious tale of having cut three of his fingers to the bone. The accident happening in my service made me responsible, and I felt myself bound to support him, especially as I discovered that he had related his woes to my wife, who was filled with pity for the rascal. 'You will look after the poor man,' she said to me; 'I promised him that you would.' 'I will look after him,' I replied. I did, and at every visit I paid him I found him playing draughts with his cousin Izak. He was, however, so long getting well this time, that I sent my own doctor to him. I also employed an agent to make inquiries into the history of the Borlinskis. My doctor reported that it was with great difficulty he had succeeded in obtaining a sight of Josefs wounded fingers. He had him held fast while he took off the bandages, and then he discovered that the fingers were without a scar, no

wound of any kind had been received. My agent reported that the Borlinskis were well known in the village in Poland from which they had emigrated. They had lived the lives of idle scamps there, and had never been known to do one day's honest work. They preferred to hang about the drinking shops, to beg, to pilfer on the sly, to impose on charitable strangers, to do anything but work. As liars they were pre-eminent. Josef lost his father fourteen years before he came to England, therefore his statement that he had just received a letter from Poland informing him of his father's death was an invention, a trick. His swoon was a trick; his spasms a trick; his cutting his fingers to the bone a trick. From the hairs of his head to the soles of his feet he is a knave and a trickster; through his blood runs the incorrigible vice of indolence, and rather than work he will resort to any subterfuge. Only on one day in the whole year does his conscience disturb him, on the day of the White Fast. To-day a Jew, to-morrow a Christian, the next day a Mohammedan, the next a Pagan--it matters not to him so long as he can make money out of it, and eat the bread of idleness. My dear sir, I wish you joy of your Borlinskis."

The gentleman rose to take his leave, his belief in the genuineness of the conversion of the Borlinskis visibly shaken. He put but one question to Aaron Cohen.

"Josef Borlinski being what you describe him to be, what becomes of your assertion, 'Once a Jew, always a Jew'?"

"I have spoken of the White Fast," replied Aaron, "as the only day upon which Josef's conscience is awake. He believes, as we all do, in a future state, in the immortality of the soul. The White Fast is the great Day of Atonement, when Jews pray to be forgiven the sins they have committed during the past year. The most ignorant of them believe that if they pray and fast on the Day of Atonement their transgressions are atoned for. We have our black sheep, as you have; but the blackest of them observes this day with superstitious fear, and Josef Borlinski is not an exception. This year, on the Day of Atonement, I myself saw Josef in synagogue, enveloped in the white shroud he brought from Poland, beating his breast, and praying for forgiveness for his sins. From sunset to sunset food did not pass his lips; from sunset to sunset he prayed, and grovelled, and trembled. Come to our synagogue next year, and you shall see him there, if before that time he is not called to his account. Though he be converted to twenty different religions, and baptized twenty times over, Josef Borlinski is a Jew, and will remain a Jew to the last hour of his life."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AARON COHEN ADDRESSES A JEWISH AUDIENCE.

The world gave Aaron Cohen credit for being exceedingly wealthy, and fabulous tales of the success of his ventures obtained credence with the people. Instead of the age of romance being over, there was never a time in the world's history which afforded so much material for romance as the present, and in which it was so eagerly sought after and believed in. Imagination is more powerful than science, and this is the age of both. Small wonder, therefore, for the current report that Aaron Cohen was a millionaire; but such was not the case. He had money and to spare, and his private establishment was conducted on a liberal scale. Had he retired at this period he might have done so on an income of some five thousand pounds, which people's imagination would have multiplied by ten; and he might have justified this flight as to his means were it not that in addition to the charities to which he openly subscribed, a considerable portion of the profits of his enterprises was given anonymously to every public movement for the good of the people and for the relief of the poor. For several years past great curiosity had been evinced to learn the name of the anonymous donor of considerable sums of money sent through the post in bank-notes in response to every benevolent appeal to the public purse. A colliery disaster, a flood, an earthquake in a distant country, a case of national destitution--to one and all came large contributions from a singularly generous donor, who, in the place of his signature, accompanied the gift with the simple words, "In Atonement." Several well-known benefactors were credited with these liberal subscriptions, but so careful was the giver in the means he adopted to preserve his anonymity that they were not traced to the right source. They were strange words to use to such an end. In atonement of what? Of an undiscovered crime, the committal of which had enriched the man who would not sign his name? A few ingenious writers argued the matter out in the lesser journals, and although specifically they were very far from the truth, they were in a general sense more often nearer to it than they suspected.

These charitable donations were Aaron's constant appeal to the Divine Throne for mercy and forgiveness for the one sin of his life, and thus did he effectually guard against becoming a millionaire.

He was, indeed, unceasing in his secret charities to individuals as well as to public bodies. Many a struggling man never discovered to whom he was indebted for the timely assistance which lifted him out of his troubles, and started him on the high road to prosperity; many a widow had cause to bless this mysterious dispenser of good. If upon his deathbed a life-long sinner, repenting, may be forgiven his numberless transgressions, surely a life-long record of noble deeds may atone for an error prompted

by the purest feelings of love. Such a thought did not enter Aaron's mind; the flattering unction was not for him. He walked in sorrow and humility, wronging no man, doing good to many, and faithfully performing his duty to all. At the Judgment Seat he would know.

Perhaps of all the institutions in which he took a part, those which most deeply interested him were the Jewish working men's clubs in the East End. He was one of their most liberal patrons; their library shelves were lined with the books he had presented, and he frequently took the chair at their Sunday evening gatherings. The announcement of his name was sufficient to crowd the hall; to shake hands with Aaron Cohen was one of the ambitions of the younger members. When he made his appearance at these gatherings he felt that he was among friends; there was a freemasonry among them, as indeed there is among Jews all the world over. Aaron devoted particular attention to the young people. He knew that the hope of Judaism lay in the new generation, and it was his aim to encourage in the minds of the young the pride of race which engenders self-respect and strengthens racial character. He regarded old customs as something more than landmarks in his religion; they were essentials, the keystones of the arch which kept the fabric together, and he was anxious that they should be preserved. Symbols are unmeaning to the materialist; to those who have faith they convey a pregnant message, the origin of which can be traced back to the first days of creation, when God made man in His own image. They are the links which unite the past, full of glorious traditions, and the future, full of Divine hope. Of this past Aaron spoke in words which stirred the sluggish fires in the hearts of the old, and made them leap into flame in the hearts of the young. "I have heard," he said, "of Jews who were ashamed that it should be known that they were Jews; of Jews who, when Jews were spoken of slightly in Christian society, have held their tongues in order that they might perchance escape from the implied disparagement. I will not stop to inquire whether this springs from cowardice or sensitiveness, for in either case it is both wrong and foolish. Lives there any member of an old historic family who is not proud of the past which has been transmitted to him as a heritage, who is not conscious that his lineage sheds a lustre upon the name he bears? Not one. He pores over the annals of his race, and, pausing at the record of a noble deed performed, thinks proudly, 'This deed was performed by my ancestor, and it lives in history.' He takes up a novel or a poem, and reads it with exultant feelings, as having been inspired by another ancestor who, mayhap, shed his blood in defence of king and country. Let me remind you, if you have lost sight of the fact, that there is no historic family in England or elsewhere the record of whose deeds can vie in splendour with the record of the Jew. His history is at once a triumph of brain power and spiritual vitality, and the proudest boast a Jew can make is that he is a Jew. It is not he who holds the lower ground; he stands on the heights, a noble among the men who presume to despise him. Be true to yourselves, and it will not be long before this is made manifest and universally acknowledged. In personal as well

as in racial history you stand pre-eminent. What greater schoolman than Maimonides? What greater master of philosophy than Spinoza? What poets more sublime than Isaiah and Ezekiel? In infamous Russia Jews who practised their religion in secret have been among its most eminent ministers of finance, and the glory of Spain departed when it persecuted our brethren and drove them from the country. The Disraelis, father and son, were Jews; Benary was a Jew; Neander, the founder of spiritual Christianity, was a Jew; in Germany the most celebrated professors of divinity were Jews; Wehl, a Jew, the famous Arabic scholar, wrote the 'History of Christianity'; the first Jesuits were Jews; Soult and Messina were Jews; Count Arnim was a Jew; Auerbach, Pasta, Grisi, Rachel, Sara Bernhardt, Baron Hirsch, the philanthropist, Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn--all Jews. These are but a few of the names which occur to me; are you ashamed to be associated with them? In war, in politics, in philosophy, in finance, in philanthropy, in exploration and colonisation, in all the arts and professions, you stand in the front rank. I see in this audience many young men, some of whom, I believe, are by their talents destined to become famous, and some to grow rich by their shrewdness and industry. To them I say, Work and prosper, and work in the right way. Whatever be the channel they have chosen to the goal they wish to reach, let them work honestly towards it, and when they stand upon the fairer shore let them not forget their religion, let them not forget that they owe their advancement to the intelligent and intellectual forces which have been transmitted to them by their great ancestors through all the generations."

This address was received with enthusiasm, and Aaron's hearers went to their homes that night stirred to their inmost hearts, and proud of the faith of their forefathers.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT SHALL BE DONE TO THE MAN WHOM THE KING DELIGHTETH TO HONOUR?

On a bright morning in the autumn of the year 1893 a number of influential persons wended their way to Aaron Cohen's house to take part in a function of a peculiarly interesting nature. They comprised representatives of literature and the arts, of politics, science, and commerce, and among them were delegates of the press, who were deputed to report the proceedings for their respective journals. That the pen is mightier than the sword was open to dispute at an earlier period of the world's history, but the contention exists no longer, and though the day is far distant when the lion shall lie down with the lamb, the press is now a powerful factor in peace and war, and can effectually hasten or retard the conflict of nations. It is an open question whether its invasion of the arena of private life is a desirable feature in the power it wields; but it is useless to resist its march in this direction, and earnest as may be a man's desire to hide his light (or the reverse) under a bushel, he does not live to see it gratified. The up-to-date journalist, argus-eyed, overruns the earth; it is to be deplored that his quill is sometimes poison-tipped, but as a rule he sets about his work with good-humoured zest, and it is not to be denied that he prepares many a piquant dish for his omnivorous public.

When a movement was set afoot to make some sort of semi-private, semi-public recognition of the remarkable position attained by the hero of this story, he made an effort to discourage it. The idea of any kind of publicity was distasteful to him, and he expressed an opinion to this effect. It was not heeded by the organisers of the testimonial, and he was thinking of remonstrating in stronger terms, when the matter was settled for him by a few simple words spoken by Rachel.

"Why do you object?" she asked. "You did not seek the honour, and it will reflect honour upon us."

"Do you wish it, Rachel?"

"It will give me pleasure, dear," she replied.

He did not argue with her, but yielded immediately, and allowed himself to be carried with the stream. Never in the course of their happy married life had he failed to comply with her lightest wish; never had there been the least conflict between them; to each of them the word of the other was law, and it was love's cheerful duty to obey.

The esteem in which he was held was to be demonstrated by two presentations, one a portrait of himself by a famous English artist, the other a picture also, the subject being withheld from his knowledge. This second painting was no other than the picture of Rachel sitting beneath the cherry tree, which had created so much interest in the Paris salon more than a dozen years ago. It had originally been purchased by a collector, who had lately died. After his death his collection had been brought to the hammer, and this particular picture was purchased by a London dealer, who exhibited it in his shop. The first intention was to present a silver memorial with Aaron's portrait, but a friend of his happened to see the French picture in London, and was struck by the wonderful resemblance of the principal figure to Rachel. He made inquiries privately of Aaron respecting his sojourn in the south of France, and learned that there was a picturesque cherry tree in the grounds at the back of the house, in the shadow of which Rachel was in the habit of sitting in sunny weather, that he had a friend, the curé of the village, and that one summer a French painter had visited the village and had made a number of sketches of Rachel and the garden. Following up his inquiries, Aaron's friend obtained from the London dealer some information of the history of the picture and of the year in which it was exhibited, and, putting this and that together, he came to the conclusion that Rachel had unconsciously sat for the picture. It was an interesting discovery, and the first idea of a silver presentation was put aside, and the picture substituted in its place.

Mr. Moss, of course, came from Portsmouth to attend the function. Our old friend was frequently in London now, to attend to certain complicated business matters. Sad to say, of late years fortune had not smiled upon him; he had met with losses, but that did not prevent him from humming his operatic airs at every possible opportunity. He had himself to blame for this reverse of fortune; certainly he had a tremendously large family, sixteen children to rear and provide for, and eight of them girls--he used to say jocularly that it was difficult to find names for them; but he had a comfortable business, and should have been content. Unhappily, one day he had a bright idea; he made a plunge in stocks, with disastrous results. Had he consulted Aaron Cohen, as he afterwards confessed, it would never have happened; Aaron would have shown him the folly of expecting to grow rich in a week. The consequence was that he found himself involved, and his frequent visits to London were necessitated by his personal endeavours to reduce his losses. It made no difference in Aaron's friendship for him; it may be said, indeed, to have strengthened it. In a time of more than ordinary difficulty Aaron came forward voluntarily, and afforded practical assistance to his old friend. "If you want to know the kind of metal Aaron Cohen is made of," he said to his wife, "go to him when you are in misfortune. That is the time to prove a man." Another strengthening tie was to be forged in the firm friendship of these men. One at least of Mr. Moss's numerous daughters was always in London on a visit to Rachel, and it was quite in the natural order of things that Joseph Cohen should fall in love with Esther

Moss, the prettiest and sweetest of all the girls. Rachel and her husband were very fond of Esther, and regarded the attachment with favour. Joseph was too young yet to marry, but with the consent of his parents an engagement was entered into between the young people, and there was joy in Mr. Moss's estimable family.

It was a natural consequence of this family arrangement that Esther was frequently invited to make her home for a time with the Cohens in London, and she was in their house on the day of the presentations. Her lover was absent, and had been out of England for some months past. Young as he was, he already held a position of responsibility in an extensive firm, and had been sent to Australia to attend to business of an important nature. He was expected home at the end of the week, but was then to remain in England only a few days, his passage to India being taken, his mission being to establish agencies in that land for the gentleman by whom he was employed. Years ago the choice of a classical education had been offered him by his father; but his inclination was for commerce, and Aaron Cohen did not believe in forcing a lad into a career which was distasteful to him. Upon his return from India eight or nine months hence the marriage between him and Esther was to take place. Needless to say how proud and happy the young maid was in the contemplation of the approaching union.

Neither was Ruth Cohen a witness of the honour which was paid to the man she believed to be her father. She had invited herself to Portsmouth, to spend a week or two with Mrs. Moss. When she expressed the wish to go Rachel Cohen had remonstrated with her, and hinted that she should remain in London to attend the presentations; but Ruth was restless and rebellious, and said she did not care to be present. Rachel, inwardly grieved, did not press it upon her.

"Are you not happy at home?" she asked gently. Ruth did not speak, and Rachel continued, "You do not take pleasure in the society of our friends?"

"I am not very fond of them," Ruth replied.

Rachel said no more. Ruth's dislike of Jewish society was not new to her; it had caused her great pain, and she had striven in vain to combat it. The strength of Rachel's character lay in her moral and sympathetic affections: with those who recognised the sweetness and unselfishness of these attributes her power was great; with those who failed to appreciate them she was powerless. This was the case with Ruth, in whom, as she grew to womanhood, was gradually developed a stubbornness which boded ill for peace. Frequently and anxiously did Rachel ask herself, From whom could a daughter of her blood have inherited views and ideas so antagonistic and rebellious?

Aaron could have answered this question, had it been put to him, and had he dared to answer. Ruth's instincts were in her blood, transmitted by parents whom he had never known, and of whose characters he was ignorant. Heredity lay at the root of this domestic misery. As a rule, vices, virtues, and all classes of the affections are hereditary, and the religious sentiments are not an exception. Aaron had studied the subject, and was conscious of the solemn issues dependent upon it.

He had obtained possession of Ruth's body, but not of her mind, and even of the former his guardianship would soon be at an end. Although he could not fix the exact day of her birth, she would soon be twenty-one years of age, when the duty would devolve upon him of delivering to her the iron casket of which he had been made the custodian, and he was in an agony how he should act. Every day that passed deepened his agony; he saw shadows gathering over his house which might wreck the happiness of his beloved wife. Again and again had he debated the matter without being able to arrive at any comforting conclusion. Undoubtedly the casket contained the secret of Ruth's parentage; when that was revealed the sword would fall.

However, he could not on this day give himself up to these disturbing reflections; he had consented to accept an honour of which he deemed himself unworthy, and it was incumbent upon him that he should not betray himself. There was still a little time left to him to decide upon his course of action. The man of upright mind was at this period laying himself open to dangerous casuistical temptations. Even from such unselfish love as he entertained for the wife who was deserving of love in its sweetest and purest aspects may spring an upas tree to poison the air we breathe.

Among the company was an old friend of ours--Dr. Spenlove, who had attained an eminent position in London. His career from the time he left Portsmouth had been a remarkable one. In the larger field of labour to which he had migrated his talents were soon recognised, and he began almost at once to mount the ladder of renown. Success in the medical profession is seldom gained upon an insecure foundation; there must be some solid justification for it, and once secured it lasts a lifetime. Dr. Spenlove was no exception to the rule, and was not spoilt by prosperity. He was still distinguished by that kindness of nature which had made his name a household word in the humble neighbourhood in Portsmouth in which he had struggled and suffered. The poor never appealed to him in vain, and he was as attentive to those who could not afford to pay him as to those from whom he drew heavy fees. Many a time did he step from his carriage to a garret in which lay a poor sufferer whose fortunes were at the lowest ebb, and many a trembling hand which held a few poor coins was gently put aside with tender and cheerful words which were never forgotten by those to whom they were spoken.

A man so kindly-hearted was of necessity associated with the benevolent and public movements of the passing hour. Aaron Cohen, whom till this day he had not met, had subscribed to some of the charities in which he was interested, and he gladly availed himself of the opportunity of becoming acquainted with him. When the company were assembled in the reception room in Aaron's house, Dr. Spenlove happened to be standing next to Mr. Moss, whom he had not seen since he left Portsmouth. Except for the wear and tear of time, which, however, did not sit heavily upon him, there was little alteration in Mr. Moss; his worldly anxieties had not dimmed the brightness of his eyes, nor robbed his countenance of its natural cheerful aspect. There was a greater alteration in Dr. Spenlove; the thoughtful lines in his face had deepened, there was an introspection in his eyes. Mr. Moss seemed to be for ever looking upon the outer world, Dr. Spenlove for ever looking upon his inner self. As an observer of character Mr. Moss was Dr. Spenlove's superior; as a student and searcher after truth Dr. Spenlove towered above Mr. Moss. The man of business never forgot a face; the man of science often did. The first sign of recognition, therefore, came from Mr. Moss.

"Good day, Dr. Spenlove."

The physician looked up, and said, abstractedly, "Good day." He frequently acknowledged a salute from persons whose names he could not at the moment recall.

"You do not remember me," said Mr. Moss, with a smile.

"You will pardon me," said Dr. Spenlove, searching his memory; "I have an unfortunate failing----"

"Of forgetting faces," said Mr. Moss, with a smile. "It is very stupid of me."

"Not at all; one can't help it. Besides, it is so long since we met--over twenty years."

"In London?"

"No; in Portsmouth, the night before you left. We had an adventure together----"

"You quicken my memory. How do you do, Mr. Moss?"

They shook hands.

"Very well, thank you, and happy to see you again. I have heard a great deal of you, doctor; you are at the top of the ladder now. It is strange, after the lapse of years, that we should meet in this house."

"Why is our meeting in this house strange?" inquired Dr. Spenlove.

The question recalled Mr. Moss to himself. The one incident which formed a link between them was that connected with a wretched woman and her babe whom they had rescued from impending death on a snowy night long ago in the past. But he had not made Dr. Spenlove acquainted with the name of the man to whom he had entrusted the child, and upon this point his lips were sealed.

"I mean," he said, "that the circumstances of our meeting here and in Portsmouth are so different."

"Widely different. Varied as have been my experiences, I have met with none more thrilling than that in which we were both engaged on that eventful night. I have not forgotten your kindness, Mr. Moss. I trust the world has prospered with you."

"So-so. We all have our ups and downs. Health is the main thing, and that we enjoy. Doctors have a bad time with us."

"I am glad to hear it. By the way, Mr. Moss, my part of the adventure came to an end on the day I left Portsmouth; you had still something to do. Did you succeed in finding a comfortable home for the child?"

"Yes."

"Did you lose sight of her after that?"

"Very soon. Before she had been in her new home twenty-four hours the poor thing died."

"Dear, dear! But I am not surprised. It was hardly to be expected that the child would live long after the exposure on such a bitter night. She was almost buried in the snow. It was, most likely, a happy release. And the mother, Mr. Moss?"

"I have heard nothing of her whatever."

The conversation ceased here. The proceedings had commenced, and a gentleman was speaking. He was a man of discretion, which all orators are not. He touched lightly and pertinently upon the reputation which Mr. Aaron Cohen had earned by his unremitting acts of benevolence and by the worthiness of his career. Such a man deserved the good fortune which had attended him, and such a man's career could not fail to be an

incentive to worthy endeavour. Rachel, seated by her husband, turned her sightless eyes upon the audience and listened to the speaker with gratitude and delight. It was not that she had waited for this moment to learn that she was wedded to an upright and noble man, but it was an unspeakable happiness to her to hear from the lips of others that he was appreciated as he deserved, that he was understood as she understood him. It was natural, said the speaker, that the gentleman in whose honour they had that day assembled should be held in the highest esteem by his co-religionists, but it was a glory that in a Christian country a Jew should have won from all classes of a mixed community a name which would be enrolled upon those pages of our social history which most fitly represent the march of true civilisation and humanity. They were not there to glorify Money; they were not there to glorify worldly prosperity; they were there to pay tribute to one whose example Christians well might follow, to a man without stain, without reproach. The influence of such a man in removing--no, not in removing, but obliterating--the prejudices of caste was lasting and all-powerful. He regarded it as a privilege that he had been deputed to express the general sentiment with respect to Mr. Aaron Cohen. This sentiment, he begged to add, was not confined to Mr. Cohen, but included his wife, whose charities and benevolence were perhaps even more widely known and recognised than those of the partner of her joys and sorrows. In the presence of this estimable couple it was difficult to speak as freely as he would wish, but he was sure they would understand that in wishing them long life and happiness he was wishing them much more than he dared to express in their hearing, and that there was but one feeling entertained towards them, a feeling not of mere respect and esteem, but of affection and love. In the name of the subscribers he offered for their acceptance two paintings, one a portrait of Mr. Cohen by an artist of renown, for which he had been good enough to sit, the other a painting which probably they would look upon now for the first time. The latter picture was an accidental discovery, but Mr. Cohen would tell them whether they were right in seizing the opportunity to obtain it, and whether they were right in their belief that his esteemed wife had unconsciously inspired the artist who had availed himself of a happy chance to immortalise himself.

The pictures were then unveiled amid general acclamation, and if ever Rachel wished for the blessing of sight to be restored to her it was at that moment; but it was only for a moment. The dependence she placed upon her husband, the trust she had in him, the pleasure she derived from his eloquent and sympathetic descriptions of what was hidden from her, were of such a nature that she sometimes said inly, "I am thankful I can see only through the eyes of my dear husband."

The portrait of himself, from his frequent sittings, was familiar to Aaron Cohen, but the picture of his beloved sitting beneath the cherry tree was a delightful surprise to him. It was an exquisitely painted scene, and Rachel's portrait was as faithful as if she had given months of her time towards its successful accomplishment.

Aaron's response was happy up to a certain point. Except to pay a deserved compliment to the artist and to express his gratitude to the subscribers, he said little about the portrait of himself. The presentation of the second picture supplied the theme for the principal part of his speech. He said there was no doubt that it was a portrait of his dear wife, and he recalled the time they had passed in the south of France, and described all the circumstances of the intimacy with the artist which had led to the painting of the picture. He was grateful for that intimacy because of its result, which he saw before him, and because of the pleasure it would afford his beloved wife, who, until to-day, had been as ignorant as himself that such a painting was in existence. "I went to the south of France," he said, "in the hope that my wife, who was in a delicate state of health, would be benefited by a short stay there. My hope was more than realised; she grew strong there; my son, whose absence from England deprives him of the pleasure of being present on this interesting occasion, was born there, and there the foundation of my prosperity was laid. It might be inferred from this that I believe all the events of a man's life are ruled by chance, but such is not my belief. There is an all-seeing Providence who shows us the right path; He speaks through our reason and our consciences, and except for the accident of birth, which lays a heavy burden upon many unfortunate beings, and which should render them not fully responsible for the evil they do, we ourselves are responsible for the consequences of our actions. We must accept the responsibility and the consequences." He paused a few moments before he continued. "When men of fair intelligence err they err consciously; it is idle for them to say that they erred in ignorance of the consequences. They must know, if they write with black ink, that their writing must be black." He paused again. "But it may be that a man commits a conscious error through his affections, and if that error inflicts injury upon no living being--if it even confer a benefit upon one or more--there may be some palliation of his error. In stating that you set for me a standard too high I am stating my firm belief. No man is stainless, no man is without reproach; the doctrine of infallibility applied to human affairs is monstrous and wicked; it is an arrogation of Divine power. I am, as all men are, open to error; in my life, as in the lives of all men, there have been mistakes; but I may still take the credit to myself that if I have committed a conscious error it has harmed no living soul, and that it has sprung from those affections which sweeten and bless our lives. A reference has been made to my being a Jew. I glory that I am one. The traditions and history of the race to which I am proud to belong have been of invaluable service to me, and to the circumstance of my being a Jew I owe the incidents of this day, which will be ever a proud memory to me and to my family. In the name of my dear wife and my own I thank you cordially, sincerely and gratefully for the honour you have paid to us--an honour not beyond my wife's merits, but far beyond my own."

Other speeches followed, and when the proceedings were at an end Dr. Spenlove asked Mr. Moss to introduce him to Mr. Cohen.

"Cohen," said Mr. Moss, "Dr. Spenlove wishes to be introduced to you. He practised in Portsmouth twenty years ago."

Aaron started. He never forgot a name or a face, and he recollected the mention of Dr. Spenlove's name when Mr. Moss came to him in Gosport with the child.

"Without exactly knowing it, perhaps," said Dr. Spenlove, "you have been most kind in movements in which I have taken an interest. I am glad of the opportunity of making your acquaintance."

Nothing more; no reference to the private matter. Aaron breathed more freely. He responded to Dr. Spenlove's advances, and the gentlemen parted friends.

Mr. Moss had been somewhat puzzled by Aaron's speech. It seemed to him that his friend did not place sufficient value on himself. "People are always ready to take you at your own price, so don't be too modest," was a favourite saying of his. Then what did Aaron mean by letting people suppose that he had done something wrong in his life? He spoke about it to Aaron.

"Look back," said Aaron, laying his hand kindly on Mr. Moss's shoulder, "and tell me if you do not recollect some action which you would gladly recall."

"I daresay, I daresay," said Mr. Moss, restlessly, "but what's the use of confessing it when there's no occasion? It's letting yourself down."

Aaron turned to greet another friend, and the subject was dropped; but it remained, nevertheless, in Mr. Moss's mind.

His daughter Esther was in the room during the proceedings, and her fair young face beamed with pride; it was her lover's father who was thus honoured, and she felt that she had, through Aaron Cohen's son, a share in that honour. When the gratifying but fatiguing labours of the day were at an end, and Aaron, Rachel, and Esther were alone, Rachel said,--

"I am sorry, dear Esther, that Joseph was not here to hear what was said about his father."

"It would not have made him love and honour him more," said Esther.

Rachel pressed her hand and kissed her; she had grown to love this sweet and simple girl, who seemed to have but one thought in life--her lover. Then the sightless woman asked them to describe the pictures to her, and she listened in an ecstasy of happiness to their words.

"Is it not wonderful?" she said to Aaron. "A famous picture, they said, and I the principal figure. What can the painter have seen in me?"

"What all men see, my life," replied Aaron; "but what no one knows as I know."

"It has been a happy day," sighed Rachel; she sat between them, each holding a hand. "You did not hear from our dear Ruth this morning?"

"No, dear mother." For thus was Esther already permitted to address Rachel.

"She will be home in two days, and our dear lad as well. I wish he were back from India, even before he has started, and so do you, my dear. But time soon passes. Just now it seems but yesterday that we were in France."

The day waned. Rachel and Esther were together; Aaron was in his study writing, and preparing for an important meeting he had to attend that night. A servant entered.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

Aaron looked at the card, which bore the name of Mr. Richard Dillworthy.

"I am busy," said Aaron. "Does he wish to see me particularly? Ask him if he can call again."

"He said his business was pressing, sir."

"Show him in."

The servant ushered the visitor into the room, a slightly-built, middle-aged man, with iron-grey hair and whiskers. Aaron motioned him to a chair, and he placed a card on the table, bearing the name and address of a firm of lawyers.

"I am Mr. Dillworthy, of Dillworthy, Maryx, and Co.," he said.

"Yes?"

"I have come to speak to you upon a family matter----"

"A family matter!" exclaimed Aaron, interrupting him. "Does it concern me?"

"It concerns you closely, and the client on whose behalf I am here."

"What is its nature?"

"Allow me to disclose it in my own way. I shall take it as a favour if you will regard this interview as private."

"Certainly."

"Briefly, I may say, as an introduction, that it refers to your daughter, Miss Ruth Cohen."