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RACHEL'S SECRET.

VOL. I.



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H. C. Benson

RACHEL'S SECRET.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"THE MASTER OF MARTON."

"Post tenebras lux."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND.

IT was a bad fire, certainly, to which Dunstan Dayne had just come home—if, indeed, that dingy room in the court of St. Clement's Inn might deserve the sweet name of home. And when the young man had hung up his damp coat on the peg behind the door, and flung his boots into a corner, and had sat down, with his feet on the fender and his head in his hands, the smouldering heap in the high narrow grate formed anything but an agreeable companion.

It makes a wonderful difference, as everybody knows, in the feelings of a man—especially if he be poor, and young, and struggling on through the world alone—to be greeted when he comes in at night by a rollicking, blazing fire, with a ruddy

core of heat glowing at its centre, and the flames flashing and dancing and leaping merrily up the chimney. It is like opening the door upon the bright face of a friend, and meeting the grasp of his ready hand. But, as I said, this was a dull fire—a very dull fire—and on this particular evening was burning in a listless, indifferent fashion, as if it had hardly energy enough to keep itself alive, to say nothing of getting up an occasional sparkle, by way of relief to the thin cloud of smoke that was creeping lazily up the dark, yawning chasm above. Indeed, when, by-and-by, Dunstan raised his head and looked around him into the sickly twilight, it seemed as if the whole atmosphere of the room had been infected by it, for everything looked dreary, dull, and desolate alike.

Not a pleasant aspect of affairs, by any means, though, doubtless, it was in part the hue of his own spirit that gloomed over them so dismally. For hitherto life had been a hard thing for Dunstan Dayne, as, indeed, it must be at first to most young

men, who, with small means and few friends, are yet resolved to struggle upward to a position which their ambition and ability alone make it likely they will ever reach. And so far, Dunstan's efforts to secure for himself a firm footing in the world had been doomed to disappointment; and disappointment, too often repeated, takes a great deal of stuff out of a man. It empties him of courage, pluck, and hope. It lessens that feeling of self-help which is the backbone of success. It frets his brain, and unstrings his nerves, and relaxes his whole mental and muscular fibre, until, instead of a brave heart, ready to do battle with everything that opposes it, there is a limp dejection, which obstacles may chafe into irritation, but have no power to rouse to action.

And to this unpleasant pass had Dunstan Dayne been brought on this particular evening from which our history begins.

For the last four years, ever since he had found himself, at one-and-twenty, his own master, with a slender purse, a proud spirit, and a tolerable

acquaintance with the mysteries of engineering as his only capital, he had been trying with might and main "to get on in the world," and with all his efforts had not as yet made a single step in the race for riches. Possibly, had he been a little less fastidious as to the kind of work that he was willing to undertake, or a little less independent in his way of seeking it, he might have succeeded better. As it was, he found himself now with nothing to do, and no more prospect of obtaining anything than he had when, two months ago, he had let a capital chance slip through his fingers, just because he was too proud to put himself under obligation to a gentleman, who, not long before, had touched his dignity by passing him in the street without a recognition.

It would have been such a first-rate opening for him, just the thing that he had always been longing to obtain—an appointment to superintend the formation of a line of railway about to be laid down in a northern county. A work which he knew he could have carried out successfully, and which would

have called into play all those talents which he was conscious of possessing. And, as he said to himself, with the reputation for ability, which he would thus have earned, what should hinder him henceforth from rising rapidly in his profession ?

There was stern stuff in the young man. He had borne up bravely as long as he could, but this last blow had been too heavy for him. For he had been so near obtaining the appointment, so sure that it would be his; and then to fail by just one or two votes had been a disappointment almost too great for him to bear. No wonder if just now he saw everything through a fog.

It was growing late. The misty drizzle which had been falling while he was out had settled into a steady rain, that beat against the window-panes, and dripped upon the sill with a dull, monotonous plash. The smoky daylight was dying out, the twilight thickening fast, the dark outlines of the furniture in the room were fading into an indistinguishable gloom, and still Dunstan sat brooding moodily over his failure. For the more

the thought of it vexed and worried him, so much the more with perverse persistency he continued to suck out of it all the misery that it was capable of affording. Each aggravating detail he rolled over and over like a sweet morsel under his tongue, until at last he almost began to feel as if the whole world had set itself in league against him.

Other people, as he said to himself, had been successful—why must he be doomed to perpetual defeat, left to struggle single-handed with his fate, alone there in that dreary London lodging, while others had friends to give them a helping hand, and homes with mothers and sisters—ay, and wives too, of their own? And with that Dunstan's thoughts glanced aside to a certain Fanny Dale, a tall, bright-eyed girl, daughter of the curate in his native village, who had just achieved a splendid match with a wealthy mill-owner in the neighbourhood. For Dunstan had always intended that if ever he did fall in love it should be with Fanny Dale, and now, by marrying another, it seemed to his vexed imagination as if she had actually inflicted a personal injury on himself.

It was unreasonable, no doubt, to feel himself aggrieved, seeing that the young lady in question had been quite unconscious of the contingency alluded to. None the less Dunstan felt just then as if he would have liked to have had her before him, that he might upbraid her to his heart's content. For now that she was fairly out of his reach, he had quite persuaded himself that she was the only girl he should ever care to have. But she was just like the rest of them. No one had a thought for him; people just kicked him out of their way, and if he died like a dog it would be all the same to them.

He was working himself up into a state of sullen antagonism to himself and all the world beside—foolish, doubtless, but, poor fellow, he was weary just then, and bitter, and down-hearted. Look which way he would, he saw his path hedged up, every avenue closed that might lead him out into the broad sunshine of prosperity. It was of no use trying any longer. He might as well give in at once, and let the tide of ill-luck drift him on whither it would. And here the one live ember

in the grate winked at him maliciously with its dull red eye, as if it would say, "I think you might as well."

And yet, at five-and-twenty, the life is still strong in a young man's breast. Hope may be crushed, but it cannot quite be killed. The clock of St. Clement's was striking eight. Dunstan roused himself from his reverie, got up, stretched himself, and then took up the poker, and gave a random stroke at the great block of coal that was choking up the fire. It was a kind of satisfaction to attack something, if it were only a lump of coal. It formed an outlet to the defiant feeling that had been gathering in his breast. But he had better have been quiet, for the blow only drove out a cloud of grey ashes from the bottom of the grate, and quite smothered the sickly gleam that had been struggling to keep itself alight.

Dunstan drew back with an impatient gesture ; even the fire set him at defiance. He flung down the poker, and gave a violent jerk to the bell.

There, at least, he had provoked opposition, for it answered by a long resounding peal, that startled Mrs. Drew, the woman who in a general way "did for" the gentlemen of the house, into dropping a stitch in the stocking she was knitting, and roused her husband out of the comfortable nap in which he was indulging as he sat before her in his elbow-chair. But Mrs. Drew was too well accustomed to these hasty peals to be permanently affected by them. There were so many briefless barristers and struggling disappointed men inhabiting the chambers of which she had the charge, that she had ceased long ago to attach any special importance to even an unusually violent summons, and had learned to make charitable allowance for these little ebullitions of temper.

"It's yon Mr. Dayne," she said, as she quietly picked up the dropped stitch and glanced at the bell which was still clinking angrily in the midst of the long row that hung just under the kitchen ceiling. "It's yon Mr. Dayne. There's summut wrong with that young man, as sure as I'm alive. He's

been getting as twisty and as kranky this month past as ever he knows how to be. An off his victuals, too, he is. Not a bite did he eat, I do believe, this morning to his breakfast; and his tea like brandy, it was so strong. An that's a sure sign with me. I always says when a young man isn't equal to his breakfast of a morning, either he's been a-sitting up over night with his grog and his cigars, or he's got something on his mind as he's a-worrying hisself about. And it's my opinion that's just where it is with Mr. Dayne."

And having made her knitting straight again, Mrs. Drew laid it down, and waddled upstairs to see what it was that Mr. Dayne might please to want.

"Some sticks here directly to this fire," cried Dunstan, testily, as soon as she appeared. "It is a strange thing that I can never leave the house, but when I come back I find the fire has gone out too."

Mrs. Drew prudently said nothing in reply. She knew very well that she had intended to go

and look after it, as soon as she had finished her tea. But that meal to-day had lasted longer than usual, for she and her husband had had the claws of a lobster to pick together, and before they had done she had heard Mr. Dayne come in and slam his door behind him.

She went downstairs, and returned a moment after, bringing a box of matches in her hand, and a basket with some sticks and shavings. In five minutes the sticks were crackling in the grate, the sparks flying up the chimney, and the coals beginning to glow in the flame. The hearth was swept clean, and the dull fireplace became at last a centre of cheerful life in the chill and dreary room.

And now by the ruddy light that is dancing fitfully over the walls and ceiling, casting fantastic shadows on the floor, and throwing into sharp relief each knob and promontory on the shabby, old-fashioned furniture, we may look a little at the outer man of Dunstan Dayne, who has just pushed aside a china shepherdess of somewhat unprepos-

sessing appearance, and is leaning with his elbow on the mantelpiece, watching the progress of the fire.

A tall, tawny-haired young fellow, deep-chested and fine limbed, who looks as if nature had never meant that sinewy right arm of his to hang idly by his side. With an honest, impetuous face, clear grey eyes, set rather deeply under very level brows, and a mouth too full and firm perhaps for one of his years, yet with a certain sweetness in the line that marked the junction of the lips, which hinted at many pleasant possibilities in a character that hitherto had been modified by but few of the gentler influences of life.

For Dunstan had never known a father's care, and he had but few remembrances of the mother who had died while he was still too young to understand his loss. She had left her son in the charge of her half-brother, who had fulfilled his duty in so far as seeing that the boy received an education as good as his little patrimony would permit, and was afterwards instructed duly in the profession

which he was bent on following. Then, having seen him fairly started in the world, he had given him to understand that for any further advancement he must look solely to his own resources, which Dunstan accordingly had done, so long as he had any resources left. But now, unless something speedily turned up, there would be nothing for it but either to run into debt, or raise money on the crumbling old manor-house and garden, which, with its heavy mortgages, was all that remained of the once handsome property that during his father's life-time had melted away in the successive losses attendant on an unlucky speculation in Cornish mines.

Neither of which courses commended itself to Dunstan. And as he stood now, watching the play of the dancing flames, his thoughts by degrees came crowding back to their old vexatious theme.

He was fast relapsing into the moody fit from which he had been for a moment roused, when there came a tap at the door, and Mrs. Drew appeared again, this time with a bundle of letters in her hand, one of which she brought to him.

Dunstan took it.

“That will do—that will do,” he said gruffly, as he broke the seal, for Mrs. Drew was lingering a moment in the room, drawing down the blind, lighting the gas, straightening the old red table-cover which was all awry upon the table, and giving various little comfortable touches to the room. Mrs. Drew was a motherly old soul, and kind-hearted in her way, though she did fail perhaps, sometimes, to observe as strictly as she might the law of *meum* and *tuum* with respect to the contents of the several cupboards to which she had access.

“He’s uncommon awkward to-night,” she said to herself, with an imperceptible shake of her head as she went out of the room, closing the door very softly after her. “For,” as she often observed, “when gents was a bit cantankerous, they might slam a door as hard as they liked themselves, and be all the better for it; it let off the steam, as you might say, but they could never a-bear to have other folks do the same.”

Dunstan had heard the clink of the bell, and the

sharp tramp of the postman's foot as he came into the courtyard, but it was so seldom now that anything arrived for him, that he had looked up half surprised when Mrs. Drew came in with a letter. He glanced at the direction. It was in a strange hand. Then he opened the envelope with a sort of vague expectation that something of importance might be contained within it.

It was not a very long communication. He read it over hastily; then a second time more slowly, passing his hand absently across his brow, as if hardly yet comprehending the meaning of the intelligence conveyed. Yet there it was plain enough before his eyes. His fortune had come to him at last, unsought. The engineer who had been appointed in preference to him had been obliged to resign, and being the next in order, the post was offered to Dunstan, if he were still in a position to accept it.

Yet somehow his heart did not seem to leap up, as might have been supposed, to meet this unexpected change in his affairs. To lose the ap-

pointment had been a sore vexation, but his spirits had been too long sodden in apathy and chagrin for him to feel a corresponding elevation now that fortune had thrown it at his feet. Still the news had stirred, not unpleasantly, the stagnant waters of his life. There was something now to look forward to, a change at any rate, if it were only leaving this dingy room in which he had vegetated for so long.

He went to a little painted cupboard that filled a recess beside the window, unlocked it, and took thence a bottle of bitter beer. He drew the cork, poured himself out a glassful; then he lit a cigar—an unwonted indulgence now—and sat down a second time before the fire, to meditate on the prospect that within the last ten minutes had opened out before him.

CHAPTER II.

DUNSTAN DAYNE MAKES A START IN LIFE.

IT was just a fortnight after the events narrated in the previous chapter, that Dunstan Dayne was standing, with his leather travelling-case in his hand, in the deep bay window of one of the parlours in the old George Inn at Bedesby. The appointment had been confirmed which had been so unexpectedly offered to him, and he was on his way now to Glington, a village some seven miles distant, where the operations connected with the formation of the line in question were to commence, and where for the present he was to take up his abode.

He stood now gazing listlessly out of the window, and waiting somewhat impatiently for the dinner which he had ordered as he came in.

“A fine old place, but uncommonly dull,” he said to himself, as he looked down the wide, still street, with its quaint houses, many-gabled and steep-roofed, their overhanging stories looking almost ready to topple down upon the passengers below; and then across the Cathedral Square, where the great west front of the Minster rose greyly before him, its towers and fretted pinnacles traced out sharply against the clear afternoon sky.

It was nearly four o'clock. The bell for prayers had just ceased ringing, and a group of white-frilled chorister boys were scampering helter-skelter up the broad flight of steps, in haste to don their little white surplices, before it should be time to take their places in the rear of the ecclesiastical procession, which in a few minutes would be filing slowly through the great brazen gates into the choir. One or two maiden ladies, with their prayer-books in their hands, were pacing demurely across the Close; and here and there a stray passenger might be seen dotting the footway, or a tradesman standing with his hands in his pockets

in the doorway of his shop. But with these exceptions, the street was as silent and deserted as if the little city had been laid under some magician's spell, and its inhabitants plunged in an enchanted sleep.

But the cathedral front might be very grand. No doubt it was, for everybody said so, and of course what everybody said must be true. And the Cathedral Square, into which Tower Street opened, might also be very fine—at least, so the inhabitants of Bedesby considered; and they expected everyone else to be of the same opinion with themselves. Still, when a man has breakfasted before eight in the morning, and has been travelling pretty nearly ever since, he may be excused for allowing certain other interests to assert their pre-eminence over even the triumphs of architectural art.

Dunstan turned quickly round as the door behind him opened, and a whiff of fragrance announced the arrival of the hot mutton chops and potatoes which the waiter was just bringing in.

“Wine, sir?” asked the man, as he set down the dishes on the table.

“No,” said Dunstan, who, though he would have liked a glass or two of good sherry well enough, abstained out of consideration to his pocket. “And here, waiter, you’ve forgotten the bread, and look sharp about it, for I’m desperately hungry.”

As indeed he was just then, though when he had seated himself and begun to eat, he was very soon satisfied. The truth was, he was too restless and excited to make a hearty meal. For the last fortnight his brain had been in a perpetual ferment. He had been hurrying hither and thither on business connected with the office in which he had been so suddenly installed, having interviews more or less satisfactory with committees and directors; sometimes elated by his prospects, at others worrying himself by groundless fears of his own efficiency. And then, poor fellow! he had but half realized the fact of his good fortune, from having no one to share it with him; for among the few casual acquaintances whom he had picked

up during his residence in London, none had tendered him very hearty congratulations on an event which did not concern themselves.

It must have been the long journey that had tired him, or perhaps the strong ale that had made him drowsy, for though he had disposed of only a solitary chop, yet he found himself still sitting before his empty plate when the Minster bell boomed out the hour of five. He rubbed his eyes, pushed back his chair, rang for the waiter, and then lounged again towards the window, where he stood with his hands in his pockets, examining with somewhat more interest than before the carved front of the Cathedral, and watching the people, who, service over, were just coming out from prayers.

There was not a very large assemblage. Some half-dozen old ladies, as many old men and women, and a score or so of choristers and singing boys. Then came the old Dean, tottering down the steps, three or four clergymen, and a few stragglers, who, from the cloaks or bags they carried with them, and the way in which they stared curiously

around them, were evidently strangers in the place. Apparently these had constituted the whole of the congregation, for after them came an ancient verger with his keys in his hand, who carefully locked the door behind him, and then set off home, glancing round first to see that no stray half-crowns were likely to be picked up from some one anxious to obtain admission after the usual hours.

In a few minutes they were all dispersed, and then again Dunstan remarked the blank, deserted aspect of the street.

“This town of yours seems a sleepy sort of place. Is it always as dull as this?” he said, addressing the waiter, who had just come in.

“Oh! dear, no, sir,” returned the man, a little nettled at Dunstan’s disparaging remark. “Not by no means. There’s company enough in the town, I can assure you, sir. But it’s the races to-day, and everybody’s on the course. We shall have stir enough here in another hour. There’s been better nor three thousand people comed in to-day

with trips alone, beside the quality, an' them as drives theirselves. Flying Dutchman and Voltigeur, sir—wonder you haven't heard of it. It's making a tremendous excitement—but perhaps you're not in the racing line, sir? The town hasn't been so full for years. Our beds is all took up, and as many out of the house as we could get; an' two or three parties we've had to refuse. Couldn't do nothink for them, sir."

Dunstan looked round rather blankly at this last announcement. He had meant to stay at the inn all night, and go forward on the morrow to Glington, where he had secured lodgings in a farm-house to which he had been recommended.

"Your beds all full," he echoed, in some dismay. "Why, I want to stay all night here. Could you not get me one somewhere?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," replied the waiter. "We've got as many beds out as ever we could meet with. All the houses is the same," he added, not without a touch of malicious satisfaction that the gentleman who had spoken so slightly of the place

should find himself in so awkward a predicament.

It was provoking enough, for, as Dunstan soon discovered, the man was quite correct. There would be no sleeping that night in Bedesby; and, worse still, when he began to make inquiries, he found that if there were no accommodation for spending the night in the town, neither was there any facility for getting out of it. Every horse and gig and cab in the place was on the race-ground, and would not be back for an hour or more, and then there would be but small chance of getting a driver to take a tired beast a journey of seven or eight miles and back that night.

There was an omnibus, it was true, that would start for Glington at seven o'clock, only the places, unfortunately, were all taken up, both inside and out. And there was a carrier's cart, which would leave at six.

"The Glington Express we calls it, sir," said the ostler, a sly grin twisting the corners of his mouth.

But even if the Glington Express had been a

comfortable means of conveyance, it went at the rate of only two miles an hour, besides, in all probability, it, like the omnibus, would be more than full to-night.

“It’s a good step to walk,” said the ostler, meditatively, “or else that ’ud be the handiest way o’ getting there. But, lor! sir,” he added, with a glance at the young man’s lithe, well-knit limbs, “you’d do it, I’ll be bound, easy enough. An’ then you needn’t be beholden to nobody.”

It was a “good step,” certainly. However, there seemed nothing else for it but to adopt the suggestion of the ostler. And seeing that it was a soft, sunshiny May evening, and that he had been cooped up all day in a second-class railway carriage, half-stifled by smoke and dust, Dunstan thought that it might not be amiss upon the whole to refresh himself by a long country walk. So he paid his bill, gave directions for having his luggage sent after him, and having inquired the way, he once more shouldered his valise, and in ten minutes’ time was on his way to Glinton.

Down the crooked old streets, along which the commissioner's water-cart was making a leisurely progress, past two or three dingy churches, under the abbey gateway, and then he was outside the city walls and among the tall suburban residences, occupied by the upper-ten-dom of the place. Dark, severe-looking houses, that seemed as if they were perpetually asserting their dignity, with long narrow windows, and heavy cornices, and each one guarded by a fierce *chevaux de frise* of spiked palisades. By-and-by these gave way to more modern dwellings, chiefly in the gingerbread-Gothic style of architecture, standing back a little from the road, with stucco fronts, and bright green blinds, and presenting altogether a general air of mushroom opulence. These were the "villas" of the more prosperous of the Bedesby tradespeople, between whom and the respectable classes of the community there existed a tacit and perpetual feud. After these, Dunstan passed a few ancient mansions standing at ease among their

ancestral elms, and then he had left Bedesby behind him, and was fairly started on the broad dusty road that branched off to Glinton.

CHAPTER III.

THE GATE BEAUTIFUL.

HE walked for more than a mile, just enjoying the free, rapid motion, and the fresh air, scented now with the sweet breath of the May that lay like wreaths of snow on the tops of the tall thorn hedges. Presently he came to a little hamlet by the wayside, just a few scattered cottages, from whose chimneys a thin blue smoke was curling upwards above the rosy drifts of apple-blossom that tossed themselves over the brown thatched roofs.

For it was nigh upon six o'clock, and as Dunstan glanced through the open doors, he could see in every little kitchen busy wives preparing supper for the husbands who would soon be home from work, while the children crowded round the hearth with hungry, expectant eyes. There was some-

thing in the bright gleam of the cottage firesides that, like the touch of a kindly hand, warmed the young man's heart, and woke within him a vague unaccustomed feeling of comfort and content. Perhaps it might be a dim sense of kindred with his fellows which this glimpse into the midst of these cottage homes inspired, loosening the bands of isolation and self-seeking, that had been tightened around him during those dreary years that he had passed in that populous London solitude, where day by day he had gone in and out of his dingy lodging, with none to care for or to welcome him, none to think for, none to live for but himself.

At the gate of one of the gardens stood a comely, good-tempered-looking woman, dancing a baby in her arms, and looking up the road, as if watching for her husband. Dunstan could not resist having a word with her as he passed.

“This is the road to Glinton?” he inquired; not that he wanted information, but obeying a blind instinct, that just then was feeling out for some companionship, however slight.

The woman ceased dancing her child, and turned upon him a sunburnt, beaming face.

“Ay, it's t'way, hard enough,” she answered in a cheery tone; “but you're a good bit off o' Glinton yet, without you go by t' fields, an' down by t' river. It's gainer a deal that way, an' it isn't bad to find. You've nobbut got to follow t' path over yon stile, an' it'll bring you right out into t' road, about a mile this side o' Glinton.”

Dunstan thanked her, and set off again. It was pleasant getting out of the dusty road into the green pasture-land, and he strode along over the springy turf, on which the sunshine lay poured out like molten gold, lifting his head into the blythe, free air, and half-wondering at the sense of bounding life which just now made him feel as if every pulse was beating in unison with those mysterious forces that once again were thrilling the great heart of nature.

For all around was the sweet riot of spring. On every tree the fresh foliage was dancing in the breeze; the birch and sycamore were hanging out

their green tassels among the scarce unfolded leaves. Here a laburnum shook out its golden tresses to the sun, and there a giant oak flung its twisted arms aloft. And all the scented air was filled with the song of birds, and soft with the blended perfume of myriads of opening flowers, and quivering with that strange vitality that was working like a thought from God in all around, weaving from the dead elements for the wakening earth its living, myriad-tinted robe.

Everything so glorious, so beautiful, and so busy too, and without knowing it, he quickened his pace as he went lightly on. Nature was winning him to sympathy with this glad toil of hers, rousing in him already a feeling of vague impatience to be at his own work also. Only that morning he had left London, worried, anxious, half afraid of what he was about to undertake, and already, bathing his spirit in this tide of spring, he felt the life leaping up with a strange new force within him. Come what might, it seemed as if now he could go on and conquer all. Those long

empty days of waiting were over now. He had left behind him the petty worries, the small economies, the chafing sense of forced inaction. They had slipped from him like a withered sheath from the bursting bud. He was free at last, and his life lay before him, to make the best thing he could out of it, which just now was what Dunstan Dayne meant to do.

For more than two miles the path led him over the breezy uplands. Then it sloped down into a sort of wooded glen, and wound along beside a broad and shallow stream, that babbled on musically over its pebbly bed, beneath the shadow of the alders and grey willows that bent over it from the opposite bank.

The trees here grew thickly overhead, twining their branches together into a roof of matted verdure, through which fell a tender light of sunshine filtering through green leaves. Only here and there, where the foliage was thinner, it streamed brightly down, filling with a mellow radiance the cups of the pale primulas and anemones, that

covered with their pearly blossoms the slopes below.

And all around him, as *Dunstan* went on, was that hush of sanctity and repose that breathes through the woods at eventide. He felt it like an unseen hand laid gently on his heart, changing its gladness into reverence. For just now, alone with himself, the young man's spirit was open to receive those pure and living influences that were streaming in upon him. It seemed to him as if, entering those green solitudes, he had passed through a true Gate Beautiful, into a temple wherein now he walked with bowed head, awed by the sweet glory around. Far down in the depths of his soul he heard a voice calling him ; one to which, in those dreary London lodgings, deafened as he had been by the din of the great Babel around, he had never listened before, even the voice of God, walking, as of old, in the cool of the evening among the trees.

For God is not in these days silent, as some would tell us, to his creature man. When the last apostle, in the lonely isle, laid down his pen and

closed the record of his vision, the Great Father did not cry to his children, "Henceforth attend no longer, the oracles are dumb." Nay, this very longing which most men have in the spring-time, when the year is young, to escape, if but for a single day, from their dusty offices, their shops and work-rooms, into the fields and woods, is but one of those innumerable ways in which He summons us through this Gate Beautiful, this porch which men call Nature, to worship in the temple of His presence.

And there is no beauty like that of the woods in spring, just when the full-leafed May is nearing the balmy-breathing June, and the trees, in their vivid robe of changing green, are as rich in their variety of tone and tint, as when October clothes them in their gorgeous garb of russet, gold, and purple.

As Dunstan walked along, it seemed to him as if everything had been created anew, so fresh and clean, so pure and joyous was all he saw. The trees were all new-clad. The larch dropped

its long plumelets like a shower of falling foliage to the ground, the Scotch firs stood erect and tall, their red boughs gleaming through the spiky leaves. Here and there the stem of a birch gleamed out with a silver sheen among the trees, while hoary oaks and beeches made a thick covert of shade, beneath which Dunstan strayed on, unmindful now of his journey's end, gazing with eyes that could never see enough, on this mysterious pomp of nature, and with a vague feeling within him of joining in this universal psalm that was rising from all created things.

At length, wearied somewhat by the unaccustomed length of his walk, he threw himself down upon a bed of dried leaves that lay heaped around the roots of a spreading beech, and suffered the tide of thought that was sweeping through him to sway him as it would.

For awhile he lay gazing idly up into the waving vault above him, through which, as from time to time the boughs rocked themselves in the wind, little rifts were opening into the blue heights

beyond. Through the silence he could hear the cooing of the wood-pigeons, the cawing of rooks in some distant elms, the soft whisper of the wind among the tree tops, the silver lapse of the water as it streamed over the stones, all blending into one continuous murmur, as if Nature were crooning over him, as he lay there in her lap, some old lullaby, which soothed him though he could not tell the words.

And then there came creeping back to him half-forgotten memories of the time when he used to kneel, a little child beside his mother's lap, and with hands folded in hers, repeat his evening prayer. He recalled her grave, fair face, her soft caress, the long looks of love that rested on him as she bent over his little crib to give him her good-night kiss. And an infinite tenderness and regret came over him, a vague longing after that inward harmony, that childlike sense of innocence and trust which, amid the wrong-doing and self-reproach, the strife and bitterness and cares of later life, had long since passed away.

How long he lay beneath the old beech tree upon his bed of leaves, Dunstan hardly knew, but it must have been nearly an hour, for when the brushing of a squirrel's tail across his face roused him from his reverie, the varied hues of the trees were blending into one uniform tint of sober green, the flowers were closing up their petals, the thick embroidery of sunlight had faded from the turf, the busy hum of insect life had ceased, and only the clear rippling of the stream was to be heard amid the deepening hush.

He rose hastily, surprised to see already the red gleam of the setting sun through the boughs of an old yew which stood before him at a little distance, each twig and spray sharply outlined against the glowing sky. Refreshed by his long rest, he went on now at a more rapid pace, and soon reached a footbridge, which, as the woman had told him, led across the river, and brought him out into the Glinton road.

The dews were falling now, and a purple mist gathering over the distant fields, and toning down

the dark outlines of the woods that rode upon the shoulders of the eastern hills. Above them the round red moon hung, opposite the sun setting, and just before him, nestling greyly among the trees, he caught sight of the tower of the village church, its brazen vane gleaming in the last light of day, and seeming to him just then like a friendly hand, which, his long day's journey ended, was beckoning him to his home.

CHAPTER IV.

POPPY AND RUE.

THE Brook Farm, whither our traveller was bound, lay, as an old man whom he overtook hobbling towards the village told him, "a piece further on," down a lane that turned out of the road just past the church. He walked on till he reached the low stone wall that surrounded the churchyard, a boundary, but scarcely a fence, for even a child might easily climb over; and there for a moment he sat down again, and lifted his hat to enjoy the coolness of the breeze, which was whispering overhead among the outstretched branches of a belt of yews that rose just behind on the other side of the wall.

Ponderous old trees they were, that for the last five hundred years had stood there, presenting the

same dense front of grim unchanging gloom to the winds that in winter swept up keenly from the valley, as to the western sunlight that on summer afternoons touched, but did not gild, the darkness of their foliage. At Christmas time, perhaps, when the new-fallen snow lay in myriads of feathery crystals upon their outspread boughs, turning each tuft of black spines into a branch of gleaming coral, the old yews might show to more advantage. But now, as they gathered the shadows beneath them, and lifted themselves sullenly against the soft evening sky, they looked like a frown upon the face of the smiling earth, so little sympathy did they seem to have with the spring gladness of everything around.

They grew so close together that the church itself, with the exception of a bit of grey buttress on the northern side, was quite concealed; but as Dunstan looked around him, he could see between their trunks patches of grass dotted over with gravestones, many of them mossed with age, and half-fallen over the green mounds by which they

stood. There is always something about a country churchyard which seems to invite a stranger to wander for a while within its quiet precincts. Dunstan thought that as he was there he might as well go through it, and out into the lane on the other side, as walk round by the road. He set down his travelling-bag upon the mossy coping, and strode across to the other side.

And then he discovered to his regret, that he had done mischief by this irregular mode of entrance, for he had stepped upon a mound of soft earth, and crushed with his feet some of the flowers that were growing on it.

It was a grave that some one had evidently tended carefully, for the long rank grass was clipped close, so as to form a neat border round the little enclosure, which was sown over with poppies, just now pushing into bud. There were no other flowers, none of the clove-pinks, gilliflowers, and pansies, that were blooming in gay patches here and there in other parts of the churchyard. Only at one end was a large straggling bush, which, as

Dunstan stooped to efface the footmarks he had made, he knew, by its sad odour and dull leafage, to be rue.

Whoever had planted this little plot must have had an eye for the deep symbolism of nature. No laboured epitaph could have told with a finer pathos its tale of some long sorrow, that now slept quiet in the grave. Dunstan felt at once the touch of true poetry in this unwritten language. But though he saw the meaning of the symbols, he wondered in vain whose history it might be that had thus been shadowed forth. For there was no headstone to tell who lay below, not even the little wooden cross, marked with the initials of the dead, that was placed at the foot of many of the graves.

Some poor person, doubtless, it had been, whose memory was still embalmed in one heart at least. A husband, perhaps, or a mother, who was resting there. And it must also have been some time since the grave had been disturbed, for Dunstan noticed that the plant of rue was old and woody,

as if it had been growing there certainly for several years.

He stood for a moment, speculating curiously on the quiet tragedy of which, possibly, these six feet of earth had seen the close, and then turned away to saunter down the churchyard path towards a wicket-gate which he saw at the further end.

A quiet nook was that old churchyard, with its girdling yews and shadowing elms, and its gray tower, around which lay the dead beneath their green and flowery pall. A pleasant place, surely, to rest in, for it seemed as if, under that daisied sod, there could not but be quiet sleep.

And Ginton was proud of its churchyard, as well it might be, and liked to hear it said that there was not such another anywhere about. But its chief boast, that which raised it most in its own estimation, and which strangers had even been known to come from Bedesby on purpose to see, was the great porch on the south side of the church. Nay, it was only a fortnight ago that some little urchins, who were going out bird-nesting on their Saturday

half-holiday, had been horrified, though it was broad daylight, by the apparition of a black "bogie," moving about in a mysterious way beneath the churchyard yews. Which "bogie" turned out afterwards to be neither more nor less than a travelling photographer, who, with his head under the flap of his machine, was "focussing" for this very porch, and who had informed Mr. Grainger, the landlord of the "Glinton Arms," that he had actually been engaged by the Archæological Society at Bedesby to take a view of it, as being among the noteworthy objects in the neighbourhood.

And indeed it was a quaint piece of workmanship, so rich in carven imagery and grotesque device, that it might have served as a minor entrance to even the Cathedral itself. With wealth of leaves and flowers twining in sweet restraint along the mouldings of the arches, yet with a careless grace that nature herself could scarcely have surpassed, while, peering out among them, were strange heads and figures, in which the sculptor, whoever he

had been, seemed to have given the reins to his fancy, and indulged in a perfect revelry of mirth and humour.

“Queer fancies those old monks must have had,” thought Dunstan, laughing to himself at the drollery of a face which he had just espied ogling him from behind a cluster of oak-leaves that wreathed the deeply-cut capital of one of the columns. “There must have been some fun lurking in a corner of their shaven pates, and this was the way, I suppose, in which it found its way out.”

At this moment the big iron-bossed door of the church opened from within, and as it creaked back upon its hinges, there appeared in the opening a figure comical enough to have served as model to some of those facetious monks. A small, wiry old man, clad in a threadbare suit of rusty brown, with grizzled hair and beard, bushy eyebrows that hung like a pent-house over a pair of keen grey eyes, and a mouth which either habit or nature had twisted to one side, so as to produce a

whimsical resemblance to some of the stone oddities overhead.

This antiquated individual was Job Dolson, the village clerk and sexton, who had just finished ringing the eight o'clock bell, which had been sounding in Dunstan's ears all the time that he had been in the churchyard. Not an amiable-looking person, by any means, as he stood eyeing Dunstan askance, while he closed the door again behind him, and proceeded to insert into the lock the largest key on the bunch which he was carrying.

But Dunstan had a mind, seeing that the opportunity was thus afforded him, of taking a look round the church into which he had just obtained a glimpse.

"This is a fine porch of yours," he began, in a propitiatory tone.

"An' who says it isn't?" snapped the old man, turning upon him a glance of crabbed curiosity; but the next moment, seeing that Dunstan's hand was travelling suggestively in the direction of his pocket, he added, dropping his voice a little,

“You can come in, if you’ve a mind. It’s a fine church an’ all.”

Dunstan nodded his head, and slipped a shilling into the old man’s hand. Job took the coin, putting it *pro tempore* into his mouth, that being a convenient receptacle, and more accessible at the time than his breeches pocket; then pushing the door open again, he stood by to let Dunstan pass in.

It was a fine church, as the sexton had said, a very fine church, rich in quaint carving in wood and stone, with stained glass in the windows, among which were various heraldic devices; and faded hatchments here and there, and one or two monumental brasses let into the wall, and several crumbling monuments, which showed that in Glington church it was not to the poor only that, in times gone by, the Gospel had been preached.

The old man followed Dunstan up the aisle, volunteering now and then a gruff remark, though he seemed to consider that the office of *cicerone* was one decidedly beneath his dignity.

“Here’s something here—I don’t rightly know what it is,” he said, as they came to a little recess beside the altar; “but I believe it’s where the monks had used to wash their hands. There used to be a deal on ’em here when t’ abbey was standing.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Dunstan, politely; “is it not the vessel into which the consecrated wine was poured after mass?”

Job screwed up his face, and glanced round with a look of comical bewilderment.

“Mebby it is, sir,” he said, in a respectful tone. “Mebby it is. Ah! I see you belong to t’ Romish Church. You’ve comed from foreign parts, I reckon. There’s been a deal o’ strangers one time and another for to see Glinton church.”

Dunstan smiled as he confessed that he had travelled no further than from London. However, after this the old man opened out wonderfully, and finding that he had an appreciating auditor, was at considerable pains to point out whatever was worthy of notice.

“Here’s a tomb here, now,” he said, and he paused before a monumental effigy that bore date nearly two centuries ago. “Here’s a tomb here, now, an’ there’s a queer tale belonging it.”

Dunstan stopped to read the inscription on the brazen band that ran around it. But it was growing dusk now, and being in Latin, he could not easily decipher the crabbed, unaccustomed characters. There was the name however,

Laurentius Gilmour.

And further on, the date—

A. D. MDCXXXIII.

“Now this here tomb, sir,” said the sexton, “belongs one of the Gilmours of Rooklands. You’ll have heard tell of the Gilmours of Rooklands?”

Dunstan shook his head.

“I am a stranger,” he said; “I have never been in this neighbourhood before.”

“Why, it isn’t much of a place to be sure, isn’t Rooklands,” said Job, as if he would make some little apology for his companion’s ignorance, “nor

never was ; and they're poor enough, is the Gilmours, to say that they're to call gentlefolks ; but they're a good family for all that. Leastways they've lived there for as far back as any one can tell, though there's been some of 'em as hasn't took the best of karacters with them to their grave, an' him as lies there was one on 'em."

"Well," said Dunstan, looking down with a touch of curiosity on the ruffled and doubletted figure before him, "it is to be hoped his ill-deeds, whatever they may have been, lie buried with his bones."

"Ay, sir, it would ha' been a good thing if they had," said the sexton, who was polishing with the cuff of his coat a corner of the tarnished brass upon the monument. "But they haven't, more's the pity. You see there was a lady as he took in with fair words, while she lost her fair fame through 'em, an' they say she walks at Rooklands to this very day. Anyhow, when she found that he'd deceived her, she went mad, an' afore she died she cursed him and his house. That's how

the tale goes. There's a bit of a rhyme as everybody hereabouts knows—

‘When a Gilmour of Rooklands dies in his bed,
His lands from his line shall be sundered.’”

“ Well, and has the curse fallen ?” asked Dunstan.

The old man edged a little nearer, and dropped his voice mysteriously.

“ That's the queerest part of it, sir. It's down in Scriptur' that the curse causeless shall not come, and to my mind that's as much as to say that if there is a cause it shall. But, however, the White Lady didn't curse him for nothing. Whether her ghost walks or not, I won't take upon me to say. *I've* never seen it, though there's them that says they have. But one thing's sure, sir—there's never been a Gilmour died at Rooklands like a Christian in his bed, that ever anybody's heard tell of. They allays comes to their end promiscus. They get drowned, or they drop down suddent, same as t' last Mr. Gilmour did, or they're killed in a duel,

or somethink. It's queer. But there's a deal o' queer things i' this world."

Dunstan shrugged his shoulders, and stepped down into the aisle. It was a gruesome story to be listening to there in the dusk beside the dead man's grave. There was an odd glitter, too, he fancied, in the old man's eyes, as he peered up at him from beneath his grizzled brows, that somehow made him feel uncomfortable. He paused, however, for a moment, as he walked towards the door, to read an inscription that had caught his eye in passing.

It was the shortness of this inscription that had attracted his attention ; for though the tablet itself was large and massive, and the richness of its carving set off by a ponderous slab of polished marble, there were upon it these words only—

IN MEMORY OF

C A R O L I N E,

Wife of Laurence Gilmour.

Who died December 25th, 18—, aged 22.

"She was t' squire's wife," said the sexton, jerking his elbow towards the monument, as he noticed

Dunstan reading it. "That's the Rooklands pew. It'll be twenty year come next Christmas since she died."

"He had not much to say about her, apparently," said Dunstan.

"Why, no," returned the sexton drily; "least-ways, if he had he kept it to hisself. Though I can't say myself, but what I think it's better for folk to say overlittle than overmuch about them that's gone, particklar if they hadn't done as well as they might by them while they was alive."

"He did not behave ill to her, surely?" said Dunstan, glancing again at the inscription. "So young, too, and to have been married so short a time. He could hardly have had time, one would think, to have grown tired of her."

"Why, no," replied the sexton, giving a knowing twist to the corner of his mouth. "I won't say but what they agreed as well as most folk that's shut up together from week end to week end. An' he might take on when she died more nor what folk thought. There's no telling, for

he's awful close. I believe if he was a-dying, he'd never let on about it to no one, while he'd strength to hold his tongue. But you see, sir, it's just here—he's a bit queer, is t' squire, an' has been ever since his father were took. You see, they'd been having words, him an' his son, an' he dropped right down while they was agate of it, did the old squire, and never spoke again."

The old man has quite a collection of horrors, thought Dunstan to himself.

"There's some will have it," continued Job, "that Mr. Gilmour was that scared, while he's never got over it since, an' it may be that; but it lies strong on my mind as he's got something on his conscience that he'd be the better for making a clean breast on, though I wouldn't go for to say as much as that to everybody; only I can tell by t' looks o' you, being a gentleman, that it won't go no further than yourself."

"You are quite safe," said Dunstan, with a smile.

"You see, sir, folks in this place has such a way

of saying back what they hear, while there's no such a thing as speaking out your mind comfortable. It's a terrible place, is Glinton, for talk. I may say freely, there isn't half-a-dozen people in it as knows rightly how to hold their tongues, without it be some of t' men that's hard at work all day, an' has no time to let 'em wag."

They had reached the door by this time, and the sexton, with a good deal of humouring of the rusty lock, had turned the key, and stood now in the porch, settling his battered hat upon his head, and looking as if he had nothing more to stay for; yet, as though having an intelligent auditor, and one, too, who seemed able to hold his tongue, he would not require much encouragement to carry on the conversation, so inauspiciously begun.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEXTON'S TALE.

IT was not late yet. The twilight was falling softly, and Dunstan was in the mood, after the hints which the old man had just thrown out, to let him unfold his tale a little further, the more so as there was a touch of dry humour in his talk, which tickled his fancy, as a spiced dish might please his palate.

“So the squire has never married again,” he began, sitting down as he spoke, on the stone bench inside the porch; while Job, with a twinkle of satisfaction in his eye, settled himself on the other side, and drawing a wooden snuff-box from his waistcoat pocket, took a pinch of its contents, by way of priming himself for the story that he was about to tell.

“Married again!—not he,” said the sexton, jerking out the words as if he would imply that such an event was hardly within the bounds of possibility; “though I daresay, for the matter o’ that, there’s plenty hereabouts that wouldn’t take a deal o’ persuading to have him. *She’d* a rough carrying on with him, I reckon, afore *she’d* done.”

And Job nodded his head towards the church, where lay the remains of Caroline Gilmour in the vault beneath the Rooklands pew.

“How came she to marry him, then?” asked Dunstan.

“Why, it was just here,” replied the sexton, and spreading his snuffy handkerchief across his knee, he fixed his elbow upon it, and leaned a little forward towards his auditor. “You see, there was a deal o’ debt on the property in his father’s time. The old squire was a man that had played hard when he’d been young, and the estate was mortgaged up for very near as much as it was worth, and that wasn’t a deal, for it’s nobbut a bit of a place now, isn’t Rooklands; it’s been nibbled

here and nibbled there this good bit back, while there isn't much left to speak of.

“However, things had come to such a pass at last, that there seemed nothing for it but selling a piece of the land, an' the old man couldn't bring hisself to that. He thought a deal about keeping it together if he could, what there was left on it. So then he set on at his son about marrying this young lady on account of her fortin, for her father had been what they call a cotton lord, and she'd just comed in to a mint o' money, that nobody could touch but herself.

“It was an equal match, as you may say. She'd the money and he'd the blood, an' folks did say her mother had come to live at Bedesby o' purpose to get her married into a good family. I can't speak for that, but, you see, them that's riz their-selves from nothing, and don't as much as know who their own grandfather was, allays thinks a deal about position an' that, an' the only chance they have o' getting their foot in among real

quality is to marry some one that's got a long pedigree and a short purse."

And Job twisted up his face, and looked as if he felt that he had made a knowing observation.

"However," he continued, "Mr. Laurence didn't seem as if he'd much notion of paying off the debts that way. He hung off, and he hung off, though he kept on going to see her, and her mother and her used to be staying for weeks at Rooklands, while at last he put the old man clean past his patience, and he threatened him if he didn't make up to her, and marry her right away, that he'd sell the property out an' out, and cut him off with a shilling. So he begun to think better of it then, for he knew, if his father broke his heart over it, he would keep his word; it was say and do always with him, so he went and got hisself engaged there an' then. That was in the summer, and the young lady's mother, she stuck to him like a burr, and never rested while they got the day fixed for his marrying of her.

"But it was a queer sort of wedding, I never see'd

such a one afore or since. For all t' time they was in church he was like a man in a swownd, an' when t' parson says to him, 'Will thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?' he had to ax at him twice afore ever a word he got out on him; an' then he mumbled something between his teeth, while nobody could tell whether it was 'I will,' or 'I won't.' But, Lor' bless you! she made up for him when it come to her turn. '*I will!*' says she, right up, an' as clear, though she'd a soft voice too, while you might have heard her to t' far end of t' church. And she said it as if she meant it, too. And she didn't say it for nothing neither, for if ever there was a woman had her will in this world, it was her. He just give in to her in everything, and whatever she set her mind on, that she had.

"You see they was all to live together, so he brought her to the Hall when they was wed, an' rare doings there was for a bit—such dinners an' party-ings, while you wouldn't ha' known Rooklands for the same place as it was!

"She was a pleasant young lady, too. The

folks hereabouts liked her well enough, though you could tell by her tongue an' by her manners, that she wasn't quality-bred. I've known her come into my house an' sit her down, without as much as knocking at the door, or saying 'by your leave.' But she meant no ill by it. It was just her bringing up. An' there's a deal in bringing up. It's just everything is bringing up, particlular with women."

Dunstan nodded, as Job seemed to expect some expression of agreement. He was becoming more interested than he had supposed likely in the sexton's tale.

"But for all the squire let her do as she pleased," continued Job, "it was easy to see as he cared nothing for her. I've heard the servants say he'd be for days and never say a word to her. Not as they didn't agree, but just he was queer. But, Lor' bless you! it made no odds to her. It was to be Lady o' Rooklands as she'd set her mind on all along. She'd gotten what she wanted, an' that served her. She was like a deal more on 'em. She

married the house, an' took the husband into the bargain.

“However, it didn't last long, for nobbut a bit after he'd brought her home, t' old squire dropped down suddent, as I was a-telling you, an' that stopped my lady's doings for awhile. An' by the time another Christmas had comed round, Rooklands was without a Missis again, and Glinton had got enough to talk about for many a day.”

Job paused here, and helped himself to another pinch of snuff. He took it deliberately, with the air of a man who knows that, having matters of importance to communicate, he can afford to keep his auditor waiting his pleasure.

When he had treated his nostrils to a leisurely sniff or two, and had shaken himself up by a hearty sneeze, he settled himself again to proceed with his story, leaning forward with his chin upon his hands, and peering up into Dunstan's face with a look of mysterious confidence on his shrivelled features, as if what he had to tell was a thing not lightly to be dealt with.

“She died?” said Dunstan, as the sexton still paused on the threshold of his revelation. And he wondered, though he did not ask, whether it could have been in some unquiet way that the poor lady had come to her end. For he recalled the hint which the sexton had thrown out, of there being some dark secret connected with the strange, unsocial life that for so many years had been led by the owner of Rooklands.

“Ay, she died,” said the old man, in a tone that seemed to hint at much more that lay behind. “She died, an’ I helped to let her down into her grave. New Year’s Day morning it was, as she died o’ Christmas Day. And the snow drifting on to the pall all the time they was acarrying of her to the church, while it was as white as the parson’s surplice, that you might have thought it was a maid instead of a wife was being buried. Ay, an’ a mother she was an’ all, poor thing! though she never looked into the bairns’ faces to know they was her own, for she died the same day as they was born. There was twins, a boy an’ a girl,

so, as you may say, the squire got double for what he lost.

“There was to have been rare doings in Glington, for he’d been reckoning a deal on having an heir. His wife he cared nothing about, but it was all his thought to have a son to heir Rooklands after him. There was to have been sheep roasted whole, an’ a dinner in t’ barn, and bonfires on Carlsby Hill and Glington Moor, so as folks might know all round that there was an heir to Rooklands. They’d gotten them all ready for lighting, but, however, all they did was to start ringing the bells, and they wasn’t agate long of that, afore they had to stop ’em and ring the dead bell instead.”

“It must have been a strange Christmas for them all,” said Dunstan.

“Ay, you may say that,” replied the sexton, nodding his head significantly. “A strange day it was, but you haven’t heard the half yet. There was a double death that day at Rooklands—a young woman, as the squire found hisself, sitting stark and stiff, with a child sleeping in her arms,

again' the Hall door, when he opened it in the grey of the morning to look out for the doctor that a man had rode off to Bedesby to fetch."

Dunstan gave an involuntary start.

"What a horrible thing!" he exclaimed. "Surely she was not sitting there dead?"

"Ay, but she was," said the sexton, peering still into Dunstan's face, "an' had been for a good bit, for when the servants in the house heard the master cry, and run to see what was to do, she was as cold as any stone. It was a gruesome sight, I reckon, for him to set his eyes on. You see, she was reared up right again' the door, an' when he opened it, she fell back'ards right across him over the threshold.

"There was a deal of talk in Glinton about her, an' some folk thought one thing, an' some another, but nobody could tell where she came from or who she was, only that there was her name, Rachel Dallas, marked on her clothes; an' there was a young man, a grocer from Bedesby, that had comed over to Glinton to spend Christmas, said

he'd passed her on the road about ten o'clock the night afore, an' given her a lift in his gig. But he knew nothing about her, only he thought she looked as if she was partly daft, an' she telled him she'd had a long journey that day, for she'd travelled from as far as Edinburgh since morning."

"Then she was Scotch?" said Dunstan, who felt the blood prick and tingle in his veins as he listened to the sexton's tale.

"I can't say rightly. Mark Grayson—that was him as gave her the lift in his gig—said he thought by her tongue she was. An' she'd a Scotch tartan cloak on that she'd got the little girl wrapped up in warm again' her breast. But they never made out no more about her. They had a crowner's inquest, an' they just brought it in, 'Found Dead.' The doctor said she'd been perished with cold, for it was a terrible keen night; or else she didn't seem to have been any-ways weakly or ailing. He said she'd most likely just set herself down on the doorstep, an' fallen asleep with the child in her arms, an' when folks

does that, they mostly don't wake up again."

"But what was she doing there?" said Dunstan. "One would have thought, getting in at that time of night, with a child, too, that she would have stopped at some place in the village."

"Ay, that's what you may ask," replied the sexton, nodding his head slowly up and down; "but you won't get any one to tell you. Dead folk keeps their own secrets, and living ones too, sometimes, for the matter of that. I've my own thoughts about it, though I don't say nothing to nobody. Least said is soonest mended."

And the old man's voice dropped to a whisper, and his face puckered up, as if he would say that there *were* things which he could tell if he chose.

"You see the house at Rooklands lies back, an' the road past it doesn't lead nowhere but into t' planting, and down by t' waterside, as far as t' mill, without it be the cottage by the pool, where Andrew Gillespie lives. Anyhow, that's where

they took her, for it was just a piece past the Hall, and the squire wouldn't have her brought in there on no account. There was a deal o' folks cried shame on him for it, but he was afraid, mebbly, of the corpse bringing bad luck with it. However, he needn't have turned away the dead from his door, for he'd one of his own afore night."

Dunstan shivered.

"And the child?" he asked.

"Why," replied the sexton, "I wouldn't say but what it was a good thing for it as it happened. For, you see, Andrew Gilléspeie, being Scotch, and living with hissself, him and his housekeeper, and never a child of his own, and neither kith nor kin, it come over him as he'd keep it. So, when there was talk of taking it away to Bedesby to the workhouse, he offered to do for it, and bring it up hissself; and there was no one to say him nay. The parish was overglad to shift the burden of the bairn on to some one else's shoulders, and he was a respectable man, was Mr. Gillespie. He'd been in the Customs, and he'd a pension, let alone

a good bit of money that he'd saved; so, as you may say, it was a lucky thing for Rachel."

"Then she is living still?" said Dunstan.

"Ay," replied the sexton, "and a tall, well-grown young woman she is an' all, though she's overdark and pale to be what some folks call good-looking. You'd have seen her if you'd been here a bit sooner. She was down doing up her mother's grave. Yon's it set over with poppies by the wall there, under yon big yew-tree. It's a queer fancy to plant nought but a lot o' rubbishing poppies, but she has it like that every year. An' you won't persuade her to do it different. Or else I set her a rose once unbeknown to her, but she had it took up as soon as ever she see'd it. It's just a maggot she's got in her head."

And the sexton turned stiffly round, and pointed Dunstan to the same little plot by whose mute symbolism he had been arrested as he entered the churchyard.

So, then, he had been listening all the time to the story of that quiet sleeper, by whose nameless

grave he had lingered awhile ago, wondering what tale of sorrow it was that had been thus recorded.

“She doesn’t favour her mother much,” continued Job, “that is, if she was her mother. I see her myself when she was streaked out in Mr. Gillespie’s house, and a fairer corpse I never had to bury. As clear and as fine her face was, as if it had been cut out of ivory, and her hair as bright as yon bit of saffron sky between the yews yonder. She’d been a beauty, I’ll wager, when she’d been at her best, though it made no odds to her, once she’d gotten her coffin lid afore her face.”

And Job shook his head, and took another pinch of snuff.

“But Rachel Dallas, now, is cut out of different stuff altogether. There’s a summut about her, I can’t rightly tell what it is, but she isn’t like other girls, neither in her looks nor in nowt else. And she never gathers with them, neither, nor never has. Her and the old man lives pretty near as still a life all to theirselves in yon cottage down by the Rookland’s pool, as t’ squire does hisself.

You see he's bedfast, is old Mr. Gillespie, and has been this twelvemonth past, and she just stops up in the house with him and does for him, and hardly stirs out sometimes from week's end to week's end, without it be to come to church of a Sunday, an' she doesn't oftens do that now he's so bad."

But the sexton's last words were drowned by the sharp clang of the clock.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, as the sound smote on his ear, "if yon isn't half after eight—how time slips by, to be sure, when a man's talking with them as has intellecks like himself! I allays says, there isn't a sociabler man in Glinton nor me, nobbut I come across my ekals in mental abilities, but there isn't a man in this place as is. The society that's to be gotten here is nobbut poor, so I shuts up mostly, and keeps my tongue within my teeth."

Dunstan smiled, but it was too dusk in the shadow of the porch for Job to see the twinkle in his companion's eye.

“You see,” he went on, “the folks hereabouts don’t make much count o’ mental abilities, without it be Dr. Kennedy, that’s him that lives up at the Lodge yonder. Why, when him an’ me gets agate together, I’ve known him ax me questions as I’ve had to put on my studying-cap to answer, and it isn’t a many as ’ll do that. He’s uncommon fond o’ nat’ral history, is the Doctor, so we’re brothers in science, as you may say, for I’ve a klection of my own as I’ve gathered myself, an’ he comes down to my place oftens to have a look at it. He’s a sensible man, is Dr. Kennedy—him an’ me has a deal o’ points in common; but if you’re a stranger in Ginton, you mebbly won’t know him, or else him an’ you would get on together, I don’t doubt.”

But Dunstan knew nothing about Dr. Kennedy, whose society was so superior, that even Job Dolson himself could find satisfaction in it.

“You wouldn’t be long without knowing the looks of him, if you was to be stopping in Ginton,” said Job. “He’s good enough to tell. A

well-set man he is, with warmish coloured hair, an' broad shoulders he has, an' stoops his head forrard rather when he walks. That's with writing so much—he's wrote a sight o' books. But you'd tell in a minute he was something out o' the common. It's neither here nor there, as you may say, but just a way he has, that sets on him like a crown."

"Surely I saw him, then, pass the churchyard this evening," said Dunstan; "and a great hound with him, the size of a pony."

"Ay! that's him," said Job; "an' old Byke with him. He makes a deal of that beast, does the Doctor—as much as if it was a Christian; and I wouldn't say myself but what it has more sense than amany of its betters. But I must be off now, sir, axing your pardon. She'll have got t' supper ready, will Rebecca; I've larned her to be partick'lar, an' she allays has it set, an' a sup o' beer put on to warm, when she hears t' half-hour bell go. It's nob-but a step off, isn't my place," and Job pointed to a low, brown thatched cottage on the other side of the churchyard wall; and then getting on his legs, he

stretched himself, put his handkerchief into the crown of his hat, put his hat upon his head, and taking up the bunch of keys that lay on the bench, made a move to go.

Dunstan, too, arose. It was getting quite dusk now, and the moonlight was beginning to shimmer whitely on the gravestones that dotted the churchyard grass. Internal admonitions also began to warn him that supper would not be unacceptable to himself also, so he bade the sexton good evening, expressed a suitable sense of his obligations, and the interest with which he had listened to his communications, and turned down the lane beside Job's cottage, which would bring him, as the old man said, in ten minutes' time, to Gideon Doyle's farm.

CHAPTER VI.

SUPPER.

IT was a narrow winding lane, with a high thorn hedge, and a row of huge beeches on either side, whose branches, meeting overhead, formed a pretty dense avenue, beneath which Dunstan walked on, till he saw, twinkling among the trees, a ruddy glow, as of firelight in some uncurtained room. It shone out more clearly by-and-by, and a moment after he reached a low stone wall, beyond which rose the yellow front of the farmhouse. Two tall yews, clipped into the form of a pyramid, flanked a gate from which a grass-grown path led up to a trellised porch. It was plain, however, that no visitors were expected, for when Dunstan attempted to lift the latch, he found it effectually secured by a piece of rusty chain,

which, in default of a lock, had been wound round and round the pillar against which the gate was hung.

Everything looked shadowy, precise, and still. Dunstan could see that though the roof was thatched, and the rooms must certainly be rather low, yet the house was substantial and well kept. The lower story was of brick; the upper one projected a little, and was washed of a deep buff colour that in the moonlight brought out into strong relief the deep carving of its oaken timbers.

He stood for a moment inspecting his future home, then made his way round to the back of the house, where, doubtless, he would be able to find admission. There was no difficulty here. The gate of the great paved yard that surrounded this part of the house was swinging on its hinges, and the door of the kitchen that opened into it, was standing open, perhaps to admit the cool evening air, for as Dunstan passed the unshuttered window, he saw that the light which he had observed proceeded

from a blazing log fire which was shining full upon a large-made, ruddy-looking man, who was sitting beside a table that seemed to be set ready for supper.

Dunstan stepped across the threshold, and knocked at the open door.

“Wha’s there?” cried a voice from within, in a broad rich accent; and then, as Dunstan came in sight, Gideon Doyle, for he it was, rose from his three-cornered chair, exclaiming, with a look of surprise,

“Why, it’ll be Mr. Dayne, I do believe! Come in, sir—come in, an’ sit you down. Missis! Missis!” he added, going to an inner door, and shouting to some one out of sight, “here’s t’ gentleman comed.”

Gideon was answered by the appearance of his wife, a slight, neat little woman, who came in looking somewhat disconcerted at this unexpected arrival of her lodger, yet prepared, seeing that he was there, to make him welcome.

“You did not expect me quite so soon?” said

Dunstan, who had already unstrapped his travelling case from his shoulder, and thrown himself down, glad of the rest, on a chintz-covered settle that stood in a corner beside the fire. "The fact is, when I got to Bedesby, I found there were no beds to be had there, so I just walked over at once."

"Why, no, sir," she replied; "we wasn't looking for you while to-morrow, to be sure; but, however, it makes no matter, so long as you're comfortable. You'll be glad of a bit of supper, I reckon, if you've walked out from Bedesby. I'd have had something hot for you if I'd known you'd been coming, but I'll do you a slice of ham in a minute, if you'd like it. We've a beauty just now on the cut."

"Don't trouble yourself, pray," said Dunstan; "I can make an excellent supper off this bread and cheese that you have got on the table. You were just going to sit down, I daresay, when I came in?"

But this went quite against Mrs. Doyle's notions of propriety.

“I couldn’t think of such a thing, sir,” she said, “to set a gentleman like you down to a bite of bread and cheese, an’ come off a journey, too.”

And as she spoke, without more ado, she reached down a half ham that hung from one of the rafters, and proceeded to cut off some slices.

“I daresay you’d as lief stop here awhile, sir,” she went on; “or else the best parlour’s all ready for you, if you’d like to go in. I’ll put a match to the fire directly, an’ it’ll burn up by the time supper’s ready.”

But Dunstan was too comfortable in his present quarters to have any wish to change them for Mrs. Doyle’s best parlour, whatever that might be.

“I will just stay here, if you will allow me,” he said, “and have supper with you.”

And, as if taking for granted that his proposal would be agreeable, he drew off his boots, and opening his valise, took out a pair of slippers, which, having put on, he stretched himself again at full length upon the settle.

“Ay! ay, sir, that’s right,” said the farmer, a

broad smile spreading itself over his face, "make yourself at home. I allays likes to see folks comfortable. When Mr. Deakin were with us—that's him as we had last back-end—he'd come here of a night oftens, an' streek hisself out on that there settle, just as you're a-doing now, sir, an' put his arms aback of his head, an' says he to me, times an' times again, 'Mr. Doyle,' says he, 'there isn't a drawing-room in the kingdom can beat the looks o' this here kitchen o' yours of an evening.' An' I daresay there isn't, though I've never been but in one myself, an' that's up at Rooklands yonder; but I know this, I'd a sight sooner sit down here to my supper nor what I would in it."

"We mostly has our suppers here, sir," put in Mrs. Doyle, wishing probably to explain that the farm kitchen was not their only sitting-room. "The fire allays seems to draw you like o' nights when there isn't one going in the parlour, an' our master allays enjoys his pipe better in the chimney-corner than any other place in the house."

No wonder, thought Dunstan, as he lay at ease,

and watched the good woman busying herself in her preparations. And in truth the kitchen at the Brook Farm was one of which any farmer's wife might well be proud. It was large and low, the walls spotlessly clean, and stained of a pale buff colour which threw back a pleasant glow from the firelight that was playing over it. A great pine log was burning up the open chimney, sending out from time to time sputtering jets of flame that illumined every corner of the room, and rendered almost superfluous the light from the small oil lamp that was burning on the table.

The ceiling was whitewashed and crossed by huge oaken rafters, from one of which hung a long row of home-cured hams and sides of bacon. Opposite to the fireplace was a snowy deal dresser, surmounted by an oaken delf-rack filled with willow-pattern crockery, and garnished by a number of china pitchers and pewter mugs, that hung, suspended by their handles, from brass hooks in the rails.

Everything showed signs of thrift and plenty,

of use and comfort, too ; for it was plain that Mrs. Doyle was a woman who managed well in her house. Not a speck of dust was to be seen on all the shining furniture, nor a spot of grease on the bright red tiles with which the floor was paved. Yet with all this nicety and order, there was also such a look of homelike ease and comfort, that Dunstan felt as if, whatever life hitherto had been, it would be a tolerably pleasant thing to him here.

It was something new to find himself amidst such pleasant surroundings, where everything, from the round painted face of the clock that stood ticking loudly in the corner, to the tin dish-covers and bright pewter mugs that hung against the wall, seemed to blink at him in a cheerful, companionable sort of way, as if already they had established themselves on a friendly footing with the new comer. A strange contrast, truly, to that gloomy room in St. Clement's Inn, where if a stray sunbeam ever by chance wandered in through the smoky windows, it did but serve to

betray the threadbare patches on the carpet, or to show more clearly the dust and cracks upon the shabby painted mantelshelf.

Meanwhile the ham which Mrs. Doyle was broiling began to diffuse a most delicious fragrance through the kitchen, that blended delightfully with the delicate scent of the burning pinewood, and made Dunstan secretly congratulate himself on not having succeeded in persuading her to let him sup off bread and cheese alone.

He found a new interest, moreover, in watching the progress of the cookery over which Mrs. Doyle seemed to be bestowing special pains. The whole thing had about it a savour of primitive simplicity that was positively refreshing. And when all was ready and set upon the table, and when Mrs. Doyle had put down another plate and knife and fork, and had brought in a large jug of foaming ale, and had given a final glance over things in general to see that nothing had been omitted, Dunstan took the chair she had drawn up, in such a courteous way, and began to fall to upon the good things provided with

such evident good will, that any lingering scruples which she might have entertained as to setting him down to supper in the kitchen, were entirely removed.

She could not refrain, however, from expressing her regret at there being such a scant bill of fare on the occasion.

“I’m very sorry, sir, I’m sure, to have such a poor supper as this. If only I’d known a bit sooner that you was coming, I’d have had a chicken or something done. A bit of broiled ham’s like nothing. It isn’t often that we’re without a bit of cold meat in the house, or a pigeon pie or so at night, only we’ve had two men extra at work to-day, and we’ve had them to meat; an’ being Friday, they’ve cleared out everything.”

“Now, Missis,” said the farmer, setting down his glass after a long draught of the home-brewed, and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, “don’t be worrying yourself. You couldn’t have had anything better. If a man’s hungry he may make a good meal enough off a ham like this; an’

if he isn't, why he'll be the better o' fasting while he *is*."

"You are right there," said Dunstan, laughing. "However, I am not disposed just now to fast, I can assure you."

And certainly he was not. Where the charm was he hardly knew ; whether it really was in the superior quality of Mrs. Doyle's ham, or in the fine flavour of the brown ale, or the sweetness of the home-made bread, or whether it was the hearty good humour of the farmer, or the anxious hospitality of his wife, or whether it was the novelty of sitting down to eat with others besides himself, or that his long walk had given him an appetite, or perhaps all of these combined, but he did quite win the heart of his hostess by the ample justice which he did to his repast. For be it known to all whom it may concern, that no sweeter incense can be offered to the wife of a North-country farmer than to evince a practical appreciation of her skill in the culinary art, seeing that thereby her pet vanity, and everybody has one,

is flattered in the most effectual manner possible.

They had just finished supper, when some one came into the kitchen by the door that was still standing open to the yard.

“Here’s Martha,” said Mrs. Doyle, rising and pushing back her chair from the table. “You can take away, Martha, we’ve done. How many eggs have you got?”

“Better nor six score,” replied the damsel, in a gruff, sonorous voice ; and turning about, Dunstan saw a large ungainly woman, with high shoulder bones and a hard weather-beaten face that gave but little clue, however, to her probable age. She might be not more than six or seven and twenty, for hard work and exposure to sun, wet and cold, soon take away the bloom of youth from a farm-house servant ; or she might be nearly forty, though she had still a fresh, rather a high colour, and an abundance of rough brown hair, which was pushed back behind her ears, and twisted up at the back of her head into a protuberance, bearing in form and colour a not

inconsiderable resemblance to a good sized potato.

She was dressed in a gown of blue spotted cotton, tucked up round her waist, a linsey petticoat, and a large checked apron that covered nearly half her dress. She had in her hand two flat market baskets, one, which she lifted on to the dresser, being filled with eggs; while in the other were ranged, side by side, several couples of fowls, ready plucked and trussed.

“Let me see them, Martha,” said Mrs. Doyle. “They’re nice an’ plump,” she added, feeling them with an experienced hand as Martha brought the to her.

“Ay, they are that. I lay them’ll fetch five shillings a couple to-morrow,” said Martha, eyeing them with stern complacency as she packed them down again into the basket; “an’ I shan’t need to stand long behind ’em, neither. They’re as fine a lot as ever we’ve had.”

And then, setting down the basket beside the other, she unpinned her gown, and shaking it

down, began to clear away the supper things, giving in the meanwhile a look of leisurely inspection at the stranger.

“Must I side ’em all?” she asked. “There’s David isn’t back. He’ll mebbly be wanting a bit o’ summut when he comes in.”

“You’d better set them away,” replied her mistress. “He’ll get himself a bit when he comes in. We’re late to-night, an’ to-morrow’s Saturday.”

“He’s late, is David,” said the farmer. “He’s hardly been staying at Mallinson’s while this time o’ night.”

“He said he’d mebbly go round by Rooklands as he come home,” answered Mrs. Doyle.

“What! he’s gone to see Rachel, then, has he?” said the farmer. “He’d better ha’ comed in and gotten his supper.”

Dunstan fancied there was a shade of uneasiness in the farmer’s voice, and that he saw a passing cloud on Mrs. Doyle’s quiet brow. Perhaps, however, it was only fancy, for she was just going

out of the kitchen, and when, a moment after, she returned, she looked just as placid as before. She had brought with her a pair of fine linen sheets and pillow-cases, which diffused a sweet odour of lavender around, as she proceeded to open them out and hang them before the fire over two of the high-backed chairs, which she adjusted for the purpose.

While this was going on the farmer had reached his pipe from the corner behind the chair, and was filling it out of a tobacco-box which stood upon a shelf beside the fireplace.

“Mebby you wouldn’t care to join me with a pipe?” he said, looking across to Dunstan. “Gentlemen like you mostly likes a cigar, I reckon, an’ I’m sorry that’s a thing as I haven’t got to offer you.”

“No, no,” said Dunstan; “I shall be glad to have a pipe with you. But it’s a shame, Mrs. Doyle, to be smoking by the side of this sweet-scented linen of yours. It smells like a garden.”

“Why, sir,” replied Mrs. Doyle, with a quiet

little laugh, "I must say, for my part, I think it's pleasanter to lie in lavender than in tobacco. However, if you don't mind it, I needn't, for it's your own bed I'm going to put them on. Everything's ready but just that."

She paused suddenly; her quick ear had caught the sound of a step in the yard, and the next moment a young man entered by the outer door, which he shut and bolted as he came in.

"Is that you, David?" she exclaimed; "we was beginning to think long of you. This is the gentleman," she added, as he crossed the kitchen and came nearer to the group around the hearth. And then, with a glance of motherly pride in her eye, she introduced him to Dunstan.

"It's my son David, Mr. Dayne."

And a fine specimen of a young English yeoman he was, as he stood in the farm kitchen with the warm firelight playing over his figure. One that his mother might well be proud to call her son. Ruddy and robust, like his father, with a large, well-filled frame, that conveyed an im-

pression, however, of mere physical force, rather than of energy or address. He had an abundance of light hair growing low over his forehead, and a pair of mild blue eyes, that in a woman would have been a beauty, but which in him, so soft and sleepy were they, lent a somewhat effeminate expression to an otherwise manly countenance. Altogether, there was a quiet slowness about his looks and manner, as if the soul within were encumbered with a body almost too large for it to manage; or perhaps it only needed some great impulse to rouse it up, in order more vigorously to discharge its duties.

“Won’t you have a bit of supper, David?” said his mother after awhile; “the things is only just sided. I thought you’d likely be late if you was gone to Rooklands. How’s Mr. Gillespie an’ Rachel?”

“Rachel’s very well, but Mr. Gillespie’s not much to speak on; but I didn’t stay long.” And as he spoke David walked to the dresser, and took up a small tin lamp, which, with two or three

others, was standing there. "I think I'll be going to bed, mother; I don't care about supper."

"But you're like to have a bit of something," urged his mother. "There's a corner of berry pie in the pantry I had put by at dinner on purpose for you. Have that, an' a drop o' cream to it; or there's some ham, though it's neither cold nor hot now, I doubt."

But David was not to be persuaded. Perhaps the corner of "berry pie" did not possess sufficient attractions, or perhaps he might not like sitting down to his supper before a stranger. Anyhow, he lit his lamp at once, and nodding goodnight to all round, he took his departure.

"There's something wrong with David," said Mrs. Doyle, as she turned the linen with a pre-occupied air. "It isn't often he's past his meat."

The farmer made no remark. He went on smoking his pipe in silence, though his face had lost its former genial aspect. Something evidently had disturbed him, which he preferred just now keeping to himself. He puffed on slowly at regu-

lar intervals, gazing abstractedly into the fire, which shone over him now with a warm steady glow, reflecting itself in the metal buttons of his red plush waistcoat, and just touching with gold the grey hair that grew somewhat thinly now upon his temples. Neither was Dunstan much disposed now for further conversation. The fatigues of the day, added, perhaps, to the effects of Mrs. Doyle's strong ale, and the warmth and ease of his position on the chintz settle, were gradually inducing a sense of drowsiness, which he hardly cared to overcome. He certainly caught himself nodding, when Mrs. Doyle's voice broke again upon his ear, telling him that his room was ready now, whenever he liked to go to it.

Just then the clock in the corner struck eleven, in a spasmodic, jerking fashion, as if its internal arrangements were such as to render the effort distressing to it. It was only half-past ten, however, in reality, for Mrs. Doyle's clock, like most others in farm-house kitchens, was always beforehand in the race with time. It gave her plenty of warning,

she used to say, besides making her feel as if she had always half an hour on hand.

The farmer, who had been nodding too, rose and stretched himself with a resounding yawn.

“Missis!” he exclaimed, “if yon isn’t eleven o’clock! Fine hours for folks to be keeping that has to be stirring afore five in the morning. An’ here’s Mr. Dayne looks summut like me, as if he’d be glad of a easier place for his head nor the back of that settle. I doubt we’ve been poorish company this bit back.”

“It has been my fault, I am afraid,” said Dunstan, “that you are all up so late. I will follow you, Mrs. Doyle, if you will be good enough to show me to my room. Good night, Mr. Doyle.”

“The same to you, sir,” said the farmer, as he grasped in his horny palm the hand held out to him and gave it a hearty shake. “I don’t doubt but what you’ll sleep sound. An’ now, Missis, give us a light, an’ I’ll be going an’ all.”

Mrs. Doyle gave him the flat oil lamp which she held in her hand, first lighting a long mould

candle, which was fixed in a gay japanned candlestick appropriated to the use of her lodgers alone. Then going before Dunstan, she ushered him upstairs into his room.

“I’m sure I hope you’ll be comfortable, sir,” she said, as she set down the candlestick on the white dimity covered dressing-table. “And if there’s anything else as you want, if you’d be so kind as mention it, I shall have the greatest of pleasure in getting it for you.”

Then glancing around once more to see that all was right, she bade him good night, and groped her way downstairs, to make sure that the kitchen fire was stirred together, and might safely be left to burn out by itself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BROOK FARM.

THE stir of farmhouse life had long begun when Dunstan awoke next morning. The men were at work in the fields and fold-yard; the cows had been milked and driven to the pasture. Breakfast was over in the great kitchen, and Mr. Doyle had finished his and was already some distance on the road to Bedesby, jogging steadily along in his green spring cart, with his samples of wheat tied up in little canvas bags in his side-coat pocket, and Martha by his side, sitting stiffly upright, clad in her second best gown and bonnet, her green coloury shawl pinned across her high square shoulders, and her three market baskets of eggs, butter, and poultry, carefully deposited at the back of the cart.

The sun was shining full upon the window, casting a trellis-work of shadow from the latticed casement on the blind, and filling the room with a cool bright light, that enabled Dunstan to see clearly all that he had been too tired the night before to take much notice of. It was pleasant to open his eyes in that fresh clean chamber after having been used so long to those dingy close apartments in St. Clement's Inn. For this room was light and spacious, as were all the others at the farm, though the ceiling was low, so low, that, standing up, Dunstan could easily touch it with his hand. The walls were covered with an old-fashioned paper adorned with a running pattern of roses and green leaves; the doors and woodwork were painted white; the floor was of dark oak, brightly polished, and carpeted only in the middle. The window-curtains and the hangings of the bed were white dimity, trimmed with a curious fringe of little hanging balls of soft cotton. Everything was wonderfully neat. As it had been in the kitchen, so here, not a speck or stain was

anywhere to be descried ; and about the whole room was that indescribable air of simplicity and repose which gave a charm of its own to this old-fashioned chamber, such as one often misses in apartments more sumptuously appointed.

For a moment, as Dunstan opened his eyes, he hardly remembered where he was. Then the mists of sleep cleared themselves away. This was a room in the Brook farm-house, and he had done with that miserable, cramped-up London life, and had got leave now to work. And a new world lay around him, fresh scenes, and fresh faces ; the house, and the village, and spring-time in the country, and the green fields, through which, presently, that railway-line of his would run. And as the thought of these things flashed through his mind, he felt as if in haste to go forth and meet it all.

A little flaxen-haired girl was sitting at the foot of the stairs as he went down, playing with an old sheep dog, whose shaggy ears she was amusing herself by tying beneath his chin. She started up

at the sound of a footstep above her head, then, seeing Dunstan, she started off like a frightened deer, and took refuge in the kitchen.

“Mother,” he heard her cry, “here’s the gentleman!” And the next moment Mrs. Doyle herself appeared, and, throwing open a door at the foot of the stairs, revealed a pleasant snug room, with green panelled walls, and two deep windows looking out into the garden.

A table with a white cloth upon it, stood spread ready for breakfast. Everything looked bright and cheerful, as did Mrs. Doyle’s face, when Dunstan assured her that he had slept uncommonly well in his new quarters, and that she might bring him his coffee and eggs as soon as she liked.

“So far, things seem as if they mean to turn out pretty well,” thought Dunstan, as he walked to the window and looked out into the gay garden before it, and over the low fence to the richly-wooded, undulating country beyond. “I couldn’t have had things more to my liking if I had chosen

them myself. There will be rare shooting among those woods by-and-by, if only I can contrive to get a day of it. And there ought to be trout in that stream that I came along by yesterday. Bless me! to think that I have hardly had a rod in my hands since I was twenty, nor fired a shot either. What in the world should I have turned into by-and-by? A precious old foggy I should have been by the time I was thirty! For what is a man good for, I should like to know, who has forgotten how to enjoy himself? And I was in a fair way for that, if ever a poor wretch was. It is a wonder I didn't knock under altogether, or turn rogue and cheat, or something worse, when I found honesty didn't pay. However, here goes for the good time coming! You may make a decent thing yet out of this world, old boy, if you go the right way about it, and needn't lose your chance of another, either!"

For just then, as Dunstan looked through the open casement into the sunny garden, and across to the orchard that ran down beside it, where the

apple-trees were full in blossom, their rosy tufts set off by a background of rich moist foliage, and beyond all the quivering blue of the cloudless sky, a train of association, like some old melody, or a waft of remembered perfume, brought back to him the feeling with which last night he had walked through the woods at sunset. He had forgotten it till now, but there it was, still sleeping in his breast. For it had not died with the hour that called it forth. Nothing ever does that is really good within us. It lives on, though none may know of it but the good God from whom it came, in the change that it has wrought within us, just as the summer sunshine that falls upon the crude green fruit is not lost, but works unceasingly within, a living force, through nights of darkness and long days of cloud and storm.

Dunstan's work at his office would not begin before the ensuing week, so that he had the whole of this, his first day at Glinton, to look about him and make acquaintance with the place. The farmhouse itself was worth a leisurely inspection. It

was a fine old building, erected, as the date on a stone over the porch declared, nearly two hundred years ago, and looking as if it might weather the storms of as many more. A quaint, home-like, inconvenient old place, for there were hardly two rooms in it that were on the same level. Either you had to go up a step or two, or you went down one into each ; and the architect, whoever he might have been, seemed to have contrived, as far as possible, that they should open one into another, causing thereby no little embarrassment at times to Mrs. Doyle.

The best bedroom, which was set apart for Dunstan, had a staircase all to itself, and so had the lumber-room and store-room ; while the attics, which, however, were used chiefly as a convenient place for spreading out upon the plaster floors the winter stores of apples, pears, dried herbs and onions, were to be reached only by one leading out of that occupied by the farmer and his wife. But there was a delightful flavour of originality and old-world simplicity about all these little arrange-

ments which sorted well with the easy-hearted ways of the inhabitants, and made Dunstan feel from the first as if even the old house itself were minded that he should feel himself at home within it.

But Mrs. Doyle's kitchen was the real heart of the house, a centre of warm life whose influence reached from attic to cellar, and extended even to the remotest field on her husband's farm where in hay-time or harvest the sweating labourers lay down in the shadow of the "stooks" and hedges, and enjoyed their blink of rest while they took their afternoon "drinkings"—long draughts of the home-brewed beer which Mrs. Doyle sent down to them in great stone jugs, together with baskets filled with huge hunches of cheese, and flat cakes of home-made bread.

For at the Brook Farm everything was either home-made or home-raised. "Indeed," as Mrs. Doyle used to say, "there was no end of the tew and worry in a farm-house. Start work when you would, it seemed as if you was never done; but

she was free to own there was one beauty about it, you had everything within yourself."

And so they had. They sent their own corn to be ground at the mill, they killed their own pigs and poultry, cured their own hams and bacon, and brewed their own beer. Their apples, pears, and plums grew in their own orchard. They needed no market-gardener, for their kitchen-garden supplied them with everything they wanted. Milk and cream, butter and cheese, were always at hand in the dairy. Eggs were brought in every day by dozens from the nests about the steading. Rabbits were to be had for the shooting, mushrooms for gathering from the meadows. Even the wine cellar—at least, the great closet under the stairs, which served as such—Mrs. Doyle furnished from her own resources. Elder-flower, currant, and cowslip wine were there, with bottles of gooseberry champagne, which Mrs. Green, the housekeeper at Sir John Denham's, who often looked in and had a glass of it, with a slice of seed cake, declared was not to be surpassed by the real thing.

This kitchen was Mrs. Doyle's peculiar domain ; for Martha, when not busy sweeping and scrubbing about the house, or milking, or feeding the calves, or giving a hand at hay time or harvest, carried on her washing and scouring and general superintendence of Bessy, the "girl," in what was called the back-house, a sort of large kitchen built out from the end of the house, where in summer time the farm labourers ate their meals, and where was also the brewing vat and tubs, the gig harness, and the best saddle, which Mr. Doyle and David always used when they rode to Bedesby.

It was always warm by that great fireside, even in the coldest days of winter. No wonder the farmer thought its chimney corner the most comfortable place in the house. There was a brick oven built at the side, in which, twice a week, Mrs. Doyle's "baking" was done. And her bakings were serious affairs, and no mistake ; for besides their own family, there were the five men whom they had to "meat." And the consumption of food by a north-country farm labourer is some-

thing fabulous. Besides the beef, and boiled pork, the potatoes, bread, and beer on which they dulled the keener edge of their appetites, there were "berry" pies in summer, and apple pies in winter, custards baked in crusts on deep plates, beef-steak pies, egg and bacon pies, lard cakes, and immense cheese-cakes made in round flat tins. And all these Mrs. Doyle prepared with her own hands, besides more delicate pastry for the parlour table; so that to look into her larder about three o'clock in the afternoon of baking-days, when everything was out of the oven and duly marshalled on the shelves, one might suppose that she had been provisioning for a siege.

In front of the house was the garden, opening into the lane, and alongside of this ran an orchard, whose blossoming tress made it just now one vast posy. Around the back was the paved yard before mentioned, the farm buildings, and kitchen garden; and beyond these again was a thick planting of larch and beech trees, girdling in a ten-acre lot, which formed a sort of summer parlour for Mrs.

Doyle's five milch cows, and where they spent their days alternately grazing on the sweet, clover-mingled grass, and lying at ease, peacefully ruminating over their repast.

Truly, as Dunstan thought to himself when he had made a leisurely survey of the whole, the lines had fallen to him in a pleasant place, so far at least as his abode was concerned. The next thing was to go and see the railway yard, a large piece of ground which had been fenced off near the end of the village, and where already sheds for the workmen, and a little brick office for himself, had been erected.

He staid some time here, talking to the people about the place, and examining everything with the keenest interest. It looked something like work. Immense piles of wood were heaped up ready to form the "sleepers" on which the rails were to be laid. There was the blacksmith's forge, quiet enough now, though plenty of stir there would be by-and-by, when the clinking of the hammers, and the sound of axe and mallet, were heard from

morning till night, waking the echoes far and near.

Dunstan lingered in the railway yard till long past noon. Then he went home to dinner; and after he had lounged away an hour or two on the chintz-covered couch in the bay window at the end of his parlour, drowsily drinking in the scent of the purple clusters of the *Westeria* that trailed over the wall outside, he set off again to explore a little further around his new abode.

First, however, he went upstairs to turn over his portmanteau, which, with a large packing-case, in which were bestowed the rest of his worldly goods, had been sent on after him from Bedesby.

He had an impression that somewhere in it there was a solitary cigar, if only he could lay his hands upon it, which, however, was no easy matter. He turned out the things upon the floor of his room, where they lay piled around him in promiscuous confusion. Not a bad index, for a shrewd observer, to the character of their owner.

There were no lavender kids, or fancy ties, or

patent-enamelled boots, or "sweet things in waist-coats," among the young man's possessions. Whatever pet weakness he might have, and most young men have one of some sort or other, it evidently did not blossom out in this direction.

There was a good stock of fine linen, clean and white, notwithstanding that it must have been for some time past "got up" by a London laundress. There were two or three sober-looking suits, and a blue flannel cricketing cap which seemed to have done duty of late as a smoking-cap. There were a pair of fencing-foils and gloves, a leathern knapsack, a pair of tall fishing-boots, some tackle, and an empty fly-book. A case of mathematical instruments, a thumbed copy of Shakespeare, some books on engineering, and one or two railway novels. Finally, Dunstan lighted on the missing cigar-case. Then he pushed back the things into the portmanteau, dragged the lid over them, and went out to see a little more of the country about Ginton.

He went through the kitchen, that being the usual mode of entrance and of exit for everyone

in the house. To be sure, the front door could be used, but it never was in a general way, for, in common with most front doors in old country-houses, it had peculiar freaks and fancies of its own. It creaked terribly on its hinges, and stuck at the top, where the drip from a spout had warped the woodwork, so that only by a tremendous wrench could it be opened, and then it objected as decidedly to being properly closed again. So that even when she had gentlemen in the house, Mrs. Doyle yielded the point and allowed them to pass in and out through the kitchen, unless they chose, as they often did, to get out by the best parlour window, which opened down nearly to the ground.

She was standing by the dresser when Dunstan went through, her sleeves rolled up, and a white apron tied over her gown, busy making tea-cakes.

Mrs. Doyle spent fully one-half of her time either in dairy work or in some description or other of cookery. She liked it. It gave her an opportunity of exercising what she felt to be her

peculiar gift, besides which, it formed an outlet for that diffusive goodwill which delighted to expend itself, no matter how, on the gratification of those about her.

“You’re off again, Mr. Dayne?” she said, as she went on rubbing her currants into the flour.

Mrs. Doyle was fond of having a little chat now and then with her lodgers, when she could enjoy it without interruption to what she was about.

“It’s a nice day for walking,” she went on, “and Glinton’s a pretty place for them that hasn’t seen it before.”

“Is there not some good fishing in that stream?” interrupted Dunstan. “It looked to me as if there might be, as I came along it yesterday.”

“Why, yes, sir, I believe there is, pretty fair. Leastways, if there isn’t, there ought to be, by the trouble that people give themselves about it. You’d hardly credit it, sir, but we’d a gentleman last winter, three days he was here, an’ bad weather it was all the time, an’ if he wasn’t out in it from morning to night, and called it enjoying his-

self. I'm sure I used to say, if he'd had to work as hard for his living as he did for his pleasure, how he'd have grumbled."

Dunstan smiled at the practical view which Mrs. Doyle took of the subject.

"I reckon one evening in particklar," she went on. "He came in wet through, an' very near perished with the cold, for he'd been standing good part of the day up to his middle in water, an' such deed as he made with his wet boots on the kitchen floor. And he puts down his rod an' basket upon this table, an' he says to our master, 'Mr. Doyle,' says he, 'I never enjoyed a day's sport so much in all my life.' An' to be sure he had got his basket as full of fish as ever it would hold. But, then, as I said, where was the good of it all. For there was more than we could eat, all of us put together, an' I had to do near half of it next day for the men's dinners, an' they'd have relished a bit of boiled pork just as well, an' better, perhaps, for there isn't a deal of taste in fish to my way of thinking. It's the sauce as does it."

And Mrs. Doyle shook some cinnamon into her bowl, as if by way of practical commentary on her assertion.

“I daresay,” said Dunstan, who was mentally regretting that his fishing-tackle, from long disuse, was in such bad condition, and speculating on the probability of a little place like Glington supplying him with the means of putting it into working order. “I must go some evening and try my luck——”

But Mrs. Doyle interrupted him.

“I doubt you won’t get leave, sir, anywhere near-hand Glington, without you know some of the gentlemen as the streams belongs to. The fishing hereabouts is all preserved; but there’s a beck about three mile away, up at Etton, as our David oftens goes to, an’ if you’d a mind, you’d be welcome, I’m sure, to the use of his tackle any time you was so disposed.”

Dunstan was disappointed. He thanked her, however, for, to a lover of the sport, three miles is not an insurmountable obstacle in the way of his

seeking it. And in days gone by, angling had been one of Dunstan's hobbies. Not one of the lads at the Sutton Grammar School was there who could have beaten him in the dexterous use of rod and line. And then, too, Mrs. Doyle made her offer so readily that he felt he would be really gratifying her by accepting it.

It was but a trifle, to be sure, yet it seemed to draw him out to this good woman, who treated him as one of her own household, and not as a mere waif or stray who belonged to no one but himself. It strengthened the pleasant feeling that since yesterday had sprung up within him, as if suddenly some door beside him had been opened, and he had been drawn unawares into the warm heart of a home. For it was something so new to Dunstan to have anyone to care for him, or do him a service that was not expected to be paid for.

He thought, as he stood chatting with Mrs. Doyle, watching her as she went on deftly with her cake, never pausing for a moment as she

talked, in what she was about, that he had never seen a face which pleased him so much in his life before. It was just the kindness which looked out, and that makes any woman pleasant to behold.

But Gideon Doyle's wife had a comely face, too, though it was nearly five-and-twenty years now since her husband had been so bewitched by it in the days of their courtship. Good-tempered women keep their looks so much longer than others do. And though it is true there were silver threads mixed here and there in the soft fair hair, yet the bloom had not quite faded from the cheeks that used to colour up when Gideon had looked a little too hard upon them; nor had a single wrinkle come yet to spoil the smooth forehead by its tell-tale lines; and if the blue eyes were not quite so bright as once they were, yet the sweet womanhood that looked out of them gave them a charm now greater perhaps than even that which they had lost.

There are many such women in the world—

thank God for them—gentle, faithful souls, busy and bright withal, the course of whose life flows on within the narrow boundaries of home silently as that of the brooklet hidden in the grass, which we trace only by the greenness on its banks. Little they know of “Woman’s Mission,” yet they do in truth fulfil it. For their daily life, full of gracious deeds and willing service, is itself a perpetual evangel, subduing by the strong gentleness of love the rugged hearts around them, winning and keeping in the ways of household purity and peace those who else might wander far on the dark mountains of misery and sin.

And such a woman was Mrs. Doyle. No wonder if that wholesome kindly nature had written itself upon her face; and as Dunstan stood talking to her, he found himself instinctively reading it, as one would a book of wise and homely thought. How it was, he hardly knew, but when he turned away at last, and went through the paved yard and into the lane, he felt as if for a long time past he had been labouring under some preposterous delu-

sion, and had just found out that really the world was a very friendly place, and that the people in it were not so bad, after all, as he used once to think.

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE TROUT STREAM.

HE sauntered down the lane towards the hollow by the church through which the trout stream flowed. True, there was not the prospect now of fishing in it, still he thought he would just walk along it for a mile or two, if only to satisfy himself of what it was that he had missed.

It was nearly four o'clock now, a breezy, sunshiny afternoon, and a light wind was ruffling the tender foliage on the tops of the beech-trees in the lane, and shaking down every now and then upon him a shower of falling petals from the apple-trees in the cottage-gardens by which he passed.

He had not far to go before he reached the path leading down to the river. It was just a straight, steep road, that looked as if it were used chiefly

for leading cattle and horses down to water. But the hedges on each side were white with May and bramble-blossoms, with here and there a bunch of honeysuckle hanging out, and long festoons of briony clasping themselves among the thorns by their curious elastic tendrils. And then, below, the banks were all laced over with cunning broidery work of flowers, those wayside wildlings, many-tinted, many-scented, wherewith the lavish-handed Spring loves to decorate such waste places of her domains as man has left untouched. Daisies held up their little cups to be filled with light, and the blue speedwell, and the tiny hedge-geranium were nestling half hidden among the long grass, where the young fronds of the fern were beginning to uncurl themselves, and to spread out their delicate sprays to the sun which was glinting in and out between the waving stems, and drawing over the mossy tree trunks a living tracery of green and gold.

No need, surely, for Nature to be amusing herself thus with all this useless fancy-work, fringing even

the ditch at the bottom of the bank with that starry border of forget-me-nots. Plenty for her to do, one would imagine, in those fields on the other side of the hedge. Acres upon acres of young wheat bending before the wind, fields of oats and barley that had not long begun to hide the brown clods with their springing blades; great patches of turnips covering the furrows with their grey-purple bloom; meadows, where already you might wade knee-deep through the scented grass, green pastures, where full-fleeced sheep were browsing among their lambs. With all this to attend to, she might have spared, one would think, that useless trifling in the lane.

But no. There is a wise playfulness about Dame Nature. The Glinton farmers might trust her to look after their crops, none the less that, with a sort of sportive recklessness, she would amuse herself by planting out these mossy banks with all this useless beauty.

And yet it was not quite useless, for as Dunstan passed along, something of this gay luxuriance,

this overflow of life, repeated itself within him. He was glad, he knew not why. The young blood was dancing in his veins. The very feeling of life and health and youth, was itself a luxury, as enjoyment came pouring in through every avenue of sense. And when he reached the end of the lane where it widened out towards the river, and saw the broad, shallow pools, in which long tufts of weeds were swaying to and fro, and the sheltered coves beneath the bank, where doubtless, dozens of plumping trout were hiding away from the hot sunbeams, he could have clapped his hands like a child, as the old passion for the sport returned upon him.

For more than a mile he tracked the stream, lured on partly by curiosity, partly by the beauty of the wooded glen through which it led him. For all was so bright and fresh. The wind was careering merrily among the trees, tossing to and fro the light branches of the silver-stemmed birches, and sweeping down the willow boughs until they dipped their long grey tresses in the

stream. And the sunlight was flashing down in floods of golden rain, sparkling among the moss and fern, glinting over the gnarled trunks of the old beech-trees, and dancing upon the rippled surface of the water. And myriads of leafy voices were whispering overhead, and birds were trilling out a musical reply, and through all the air was a sound of life and frolic, as if the old earth had grown young again, and was disporting itself among the woods on this Saturday half-holiday.

Dunstan had just finished his cigar, and flung the end away, when he found his further progress checked by a high paling stretching across the whole breadth of the dell. It ran down to the water's edge, and was continued on the other side of the stream, where it was hidden presently among the thick underwood. Evidently it formed the boundary of some private grounds, and the spiked fence hinted to him plainly enough the propriety of retracing his steps.

But as Dunstan looked over the envious barrier into the green sunlit glade that stretched before

him, he felt tempted to explore a little further. It could not, he thought, be near to any gentleman's house, for it was wilder here than in the part of the wood through which he had already passed. The stream, too, was wilder and shallower and more full of those delicious pools suggestive of lurking trout. He would risk it. There could be no harm in going just a little further, as far at least as that bend, a stone's throw distant, where a huge willow, that some long past storm had overthrown, lay stretched across the stream, with its mossy trunk almost dipping into the water. What a delightful place there would be among those twisting branches, to sit and drop a line into the stream! If only such a pleasure were for him!

There was a wicket-gate in the fence. Dunstan tried it. It was open. There was nothing to hinder him from going through, except of course that although he saw no warning to trespassers posted up, he felt quite aware that, as school-boys say, he was getting out of bounds.

But then he did not mean to go far, only to that

willow trunk. And in all probability he would meet no one on the way. If he did, why he could but turn back, pleading the beauty of the place as an extenuation of his fault.

He unlatched the gate and went in. He thrust down his hands into his pockets and sauntered on till he got nearly to the willow trunk. A sound of falling waters was in his ears, a rush and gurgle mingling with the rustle of the wind among the leaves, as though the stream were pent in higher up, and were forcing its way violently over some obstructing rocks. There were flakes of yellow foam, too, hurrying down the current, and the water splashed and eddied amongst the loose stones that lay in its bed, as though it were being urged on by some impetuous force behind. There was a cascade most likely higher up, that was vexing the water into this pretty rage. And as he had gone so far, Dunstan thought it would be a pity not to see what there was; and then he would certainly return. For though everything was still as rugged and careless as if no hand but that of nature had meddled with the scene, yet

one or two little signs convinced him that there was a house not very far away.

Most likely the path he was in was one leading to some pleasure-grounds, for there were choice varieties of pine mingling with the common kinds that clothed the slopes, and drooping cedars and purple beeches here and there. And in the trunk of one hollow tree, there had been fitted a rustic seat, on which lay a lovely little cluster of spring flowers, purple and white violets with a spray of the brilliant leaves of the young sycamore, all tied together with a blade of grass, and all as fresh as if they had only just been gathered.

Some one must have been here not long ago, that was certain. Dunstan resolved to turn back as soon as he had satisfied himself of what lay beyond this clump of beeches that grew just before him. He went on a step or two further, and then he stopped, arrested, in admiration and dismay, by a picture from which he could not for the moment withdraw his eyes.

For on the other side of the water, standing

quite down among the loose stones on the brink, and framed round by the over-arching foliage of a drooping ash, was a young girl, whom Dunstan at once divined to be at home in the grounds. She was gathering her fluttering dress closely round her, and was just setting a little foot, with a perplexed and hesitating air, upon one of a ridge of stones that rose here and there above the water, as though she were anxious to get to the other side, yet hardly dared to trust herself on so slippery a standing.

Dunstan felt provoked beyond measure with himself. He would have given anything to have been able to beat an effectual retreat. But it was too late. Already the young lady had perceived him, and had stepped hastily back, shaking down her dress around her, and looking somewhat disconcerted at this sudden apparition of a stranger. For a moment, too, Dunstan felt himself embarrassed. He was ashamed to turn round and run away, yet it was equally difficult to make any satisfactory apology for his intrusion.

But in the midst of his perplexity he caught sight, to his infinite relief, of a little flossy spaniel that was struggling in the stream just amongst the branches of the prostrate willow tree. It was all plain enough now. The young lady's pet had got itself into difficulties by some means or other, and she had been on the point of wading out into the stream to its rescue, when she had been startled by perceiving Dunstan. It was a happy chance surely which put it thus into his power to make some atonement for his fault. In a moment he had clambered down the bank, and striding out into the stream, had picked up the dripping dog, and borne it triumphantly across.

It was easily accomplished, for the water was nowhere more than a foot in depth; indeed, with a little care he might almost have stepped dry shod from one to another of the scattered stones. But if the water had been up to his middle, and so enabled him to give a proof still stronger of his gallantry, Dunstan would have been all the better pleased. Though, indeed, a young man might have

been excused doing almost any foolish thing for the sake of winning such a brilliant smile as greeted Dunstan, when with dripping feet he reached the other side of the bank, bearing his trophy with him. .

For a more charming little creature than the one who stood before him, could hardly be imagined. Everything about her, from the blue dress fluttering in the breeze, to the chestnut curls which the wind had blown about her face, was so fresh and crisp, so full of light and colour. The stream that was flowing at her feet, each water-break and ripple glancing in the sun, could hardly seem more bright and sparkling than she, as she stood with the ash tree dropping its green branches around her, and looking almost as clear and pure as the bit of blue sky that was peeping in between the boughs.

“ Ah! how kind of you!—how very kind!” she exclaimed, as she stretched out her hands to receive her unlucky pet. “ My poor little Punch, what trouble you have been in!” And she took the little creature, all wet and shivering, into her

arms, to the terrible detriment of the blue muslin dress.

“But you must have got sadly wet,” she continued; “I am so sorry.” And as she spoke, she turned a look of pretty concern on Dunstan, who stood before her with his boots full of water, and his clothes all splashed by the wet that had run over them from the dripping dog.

Now, on ordinary occasions, our friend Dunstan was blessed with a comfortable amount of non-chalance and self-possession; but just at this crisis, unluckily, from some cause or other, his customary composure altogether failed him.

“Do not mention it,” he stammered out. “It is not of the slightest consequence. I am glad I happened to be at hand to render you assistance, but indeed it was the only apology I could offer for being here at all.”

And then, instead of waiting like a sensible young man and improving the occasion—for though certainly he was in fault, there did not seem much fear of his delinquency being visited very heavily

upon him—he splashed back into the water, utterly ignoring the stepping-stones, and trampled over to the other side.

But this time fortune seemed to have taken a spite against him, for just as he reached the bank, his foot slipped on a bit of treacherous weed that was trailing its slippery length over a boulder in the stream, so that instead of making a dignified retreat, he found himself thrown tilt among the weeds upon the brink. It would not have been particularly pleasant under any circumstances. As it was, Dunstan felt keenly the humiliation of his position. For certainly it was rather humiliating to be scrambling up the bank on all fours with those bright eyes upon him. He picked himself up as quickly as he could, and without pausing to look behind him, hurried back, his ears tingling with vexation, to the wicket-gate, which just now he was wishing most devoutly he had never entered.

But by-and-by, as he strode along, he found his annoyance lessening. There is nothing like sharp walking for driving little worries away, and

it is these after all which make up the greater part of the sum-total of human misery. Those Peripatetic philosophers were wise men in their way. They knew—the cunning rogues—that it was vastly easier to make Stoics of their disciples while they kept them constantly engaged in a sort of mild pedestrian tour in the groves of Academus, than if they had been trying to prove that the ills of life were mere chimeras, to hearers who were engaged in kicking their heels on the benches of a crowded lecture-hall.

By the time Dunstan had got back to the farm, he had pretty well walked down his discomfiture, nay, his thoughts, if the truth must be confessed, were running now rather on the prospect of getting something to eat, no matter what, than on his late adventure. For it was such hungry air at Glington. Even when he had dispatched a most unreasonable quantity of provision, Dunstan rose from table now with a better appetite than in London he had ever sat down with to his dreary meals. And among the luxuries of life, and the things which go far towards

putting a man on good terms with himself and all the world beside, let none despise that of feeling three times a day as if he could make an excellent repast on bread and cheese alone, while, at the same time, he has spread before him all the dainties of farm-house fare, such as Mrs. Doyle—good woman—had marshalled on our hero's table against his return, and on which he fell to at once in a manner edifying to behold.

She informed him that those were the Rooklands grounds into which, as he confessed, he had been straying; also that the young lady he had seen must be Miss Winifred herself—a piece of intelligence which rather astonished Dunstan, for never, he thought, had he seen a face and figure that seemed so to belong to sunshine and flowers and fresh air and everything that was bright and joyous, as did the one he had seen this afternoon. He could hardly believe that she was indeed the daughter of this same moody man whose history he had heard from the old sexton's lips.

But Mrs. Doyle had no time now to linger

chatting with her lodger. It was Saturday evening, and she had her market money to reckon up, besides numberless little matters to attend to that required clearing out of the way against Sunday. Dunstan was obliged to restrain his curiosity for the present, and content himself with the means she had provided for satisfying the very excellent appetite which he had brought in from his ramble.

CHAPTER IX.

RACHEL DALLAS.

A GOOD many bonnetted and other heads were turned towards Gideon Doyle's pew the next morning in Glinton church, for already the news of Dunstan's arrival had been buzzed about the village; and though, during his progress the day before to and from the railway yard, nearly everyone had had the chance of catching at least a glimpse of him, yet church was naturally considered as being the place for making a more leisurely and satisfactory inspection of the stranger than could otherwise be obtained.

And Gideon Doyle's pew was conveniently placed for observation, being situated at the chancel end of the church, and commanding almost as good a view of the congregation as was to be ob-

tained from the pulpit itself. But though, on the present occasion, the congregation generally availed themselves to the full extent of the opportunity afforded them, the object of their regards did not seem by any means disposed to return the compliment.

The truth was, that just before him, so close indeed that he could hardly lift his eyes without encountering hers—pews in country churches are generally so ingeniously contrived in this respect—he saw the brown-haired beauty, who, the day before, had been the spectator of that disastrous exploit of his.

There she stood, as radiant and fresh as when, played over by the dancing sunbeams, and with the breeze tossing her brown curls about her face, she had witnessed that unlucky stumble which had caused poor Dunstan such distress. But now the brown curls were tucked out of sight somewhere beneath a little straw bonnet, and the long eyelashes veiled those sparkling eyes, which, nevertheless, Dunstan felt quite sure, from the

uncomfortable sensation he experienced, were more than once directed towards himself.

And certainly one cannot help sympathizing with him, for Dunstan was quite aware, and who will blame him for it, that he was a stalwart handsome young fellow; and the knowledge that a pair of bright eyes were falling now and then upon him, would have been rather agreeable than otherwise, if he could only have divested himself of that uncomfortable consciousness of his mishap.

It is to be feared that the state of his mind on this, his first Sunday in Glinton church, was hardly such as to fit him for entering with any great degree of profit on the devotional exercises in which he was apparently, at least, engaged. And this is the more to be regretted, inasmuch as he was actually conveying a very favourable impression of himself to those who were criticising his appearance and deportment, an impression based to a considerable extent on the exemplary manner in which throughout the greater part of the service he con-

fixed his attention to the prayer-book which he held in his hand.

He did get an opportunity, however, when the sermon had commenced, of studying at his leisure the bright face before him, for the young lady had changed her position a little then, so that he could without fear lift his eyes for the view, which, despite his vexation, he had all the time been longing to obtain.

And there were such lovely lines in that delicate profile, such delicious curves of cheek and chin, such soft sweep of rippling hair, that Dunstan might almost be pardoned if, for awhile, he paid but a slight and intermittent attention to the very excellent and soporific discourse which the worthy rector was delivering.

There were two other occupants of the Rooklands pew—one, a pale, slender youth, who, from what the sexton had told him the day before, must be the twin brother of the young girl. A more perfect contrast, however, could hardly be imagined than existed between the two; for while she seemed

the very embodiment of life and happiness, there was about the lad the querulous, restless look of habitual ill-health, as if in his case a sickly body had produced its effect in a fretful and enfeebled state of mind. The only thing in which they resembled each other was a certain sweetness in the mouth, and the large lustrous eyes, which in him were of singular brilliancy and beauty, strangely at variance, indeed, with the drawn appearance of the rest of the face.

The remaining occupant of the pew was a man of fifty or thereabouts, whom Dunstan conjectured rightly to be Mr. Gilmour himself, and whose appearance accorded well with the impression conveyed by the sexton's story.

For the whole attitude and aspect of the man were those of a passionate and powerful nature, borne down by the weight of some invisible but crushing load. There was that in the stoop of the broad shoulders, in the bowed head with its tanglement of iron-grey hair, in the bound face trenched by deep lines of unrest and care, which told plainly

of a soul in bondage, and a bondage, too, from which it was scarcely even struggling to release itself.

So at least Dunstan fancied, as, recalling the story to which he had listened the day before, his eye wandered from the fresh pure outlines of the daughter's face, to fasten on the hard, unquiet features of the father. Or it might be only that in his early days some great sorrow or perhaps remorse had seized the man's heart in its angry grip, crushing out all the sweet, warm life, and leaving it now but a shrivelled, sapless thing, no longer able to infuse strength and energy into his breast. Once only Dunstan saw its expression of dreary gloom relax. It was when a sharp dry cough drew the father's attention to the sickly youth beside him, and then he turned for an instant on the lad a look of anxious wistfulness, which showed that, however he might shut himself out from the world, there were some feelings still that he possessed in common with his kind.

An oddly-assorted group, it must be owned, as they sat scattered round the great square pew,

with its dingy green baize lining, and with the marble tablet and the faded hatchment on the wall above them, and the soft May sunshine falling on them every now and then through the flapping curtains of an open window, in patches of rainbow-tinted light. It could be only, one would think, in some unaccountable freak that Nature had bound up in one household bundle three beings apparently so dissimilar, for there was not even between them that vague resemblance, which, underlying great difference of features, may usually be traced between those who are united by the ties of blood.

At least, if there was, Dunstan could not detect it, and he said as much to Mrs. Doyle that same afternoon, when he had joined the farmer and his wife as they were having a turn in the garden before tea. For already he was beginning to feel as if he were quite a part of the little household; and seeing Gideon in his Sunday suit, pacing soberly up and down the walks, and his wife beside him, dressed to correspond, enjoying to-

gether their blink of leisure, he stepped across the low window-sill where he was sitting smoking his cigar, and gave them his company, much to Mrs. Doyle's gratification. For, as she said, it looked as if he were making himself at home with them, and she was sure it must have been lonesome for him, sitting up in the parlour with never a one to speak to, like a sparrow without a mate.

Accordingly, there being no domestic impediment this afternoon in the way of a little friendly intercourse with her lodger, Mrs. Doyle was quite open to follow up any track of conversation on which he might be disposed to travel; and, as we have seen, Dunstan improved the opportunity to bring up the subject of the family at Rooklands, that being the one which, since morning church, had been floating like oil upon the surface of his thoughts.

“Ay, she doesn't much favour her father, doesn't Miss Winifred,” said Mrs. Doyle, in reply to Dunstan's observation, “nor her brother neither, for the matter of that, for all they're

twins. But it's been the same since ever they were born. He's allays been a sort of rickling, has Mr. Lewis. The wonder is that he's lasted as long as he has, poor young gentleman."

"Well, Miss Winny's gotten life enough to serve all three on 'em," said Gideon. "She clean runs over with it, like a bottle of our Missis's ale when the cork's drawn. I allays says she's sucked all t' goodness out of t' Rooklands air while there's none left for t' others, though how she does to get any at all it passes me to tell. It's a queer place, is Rooklands. There's some folks has it the house is haunted, though I can't say myself for certain that it is. Anyhow, it's gotten a bad name, an' well it may, for there's been queer things happened there. An' then t' Squire being so kranky in his ways, it makes folks talk. It was a wonder to see him at church this morning. I've known him be for months, an' never show his face in the village."

"Ay," said Mrs. Doyle, "but that's been when Mr. Lewis has been badly. He mostly comes

with him when he's well enough to be out. He thinks a terrible deal of that lad. They do say he's that wrapped up in him that it would be his death if aught was to happen him. An' Miss Winny, that anyone might think would be like the apple of his eye, he makes no more count of than if she didn't belong to him."

"Why, it's just of a piece with all he does," put in the farmer. "He seems as if he had it laid upon him to take up with the bad, and cast out with the good."

"Well, I pities for him," said his wife, shaking her head compassionately. "He can't have a deal of good out of his life, one would think. An' such a fine, likely-looking young gentleman as he used to be afore the old squire died, an' as pleasant an' as free-spoken as you are yourself, Mr. Dayne, if you'll excuse me saying so, though, mebbly, he was proud-spirited rather, an' over-easy huffed if anyone went again' him."

"And so as folks used to reckon," said the farmer, "of his father dropping off, an' him com-

ing into t' property. He was a queer one, was old Mr. Gilmour; broke his wife's heart, he did, and gamed away the estate very near, while he was a young man hisself, an' then forced his son to marry for money, so as to bring things round again. An' he was sweir to do it an' all, poor young man, if what folks said was true, though I never heer'd myself for certain that there was any other lady as he'd set his mind on having. But he was a deal away from Rooklands. You see him an' t'old squire didn't agree very well together."

"So I have heard," said Dunstan. "The old sexton was telling me the whole story yesterday. A sad affair, altogether."

Dunstan started backwards as he spoke. A great spray of the lilac tree under which they were passing swayed down before him, and dashed its scented bosses in his face. At the same moment a merry laugh issued from among the trees which made a blossoming fence around the garden, and looking up, he spied Susy, Mrs. Doyle's little daughter,

who was sitting perched upon a crooked branch, and wild with delight at the success of her little bit of mischief.

“Father,” she cried, as she pushed aside the boughs with her little fat hands, and peeped upon them from her leafy hiding-place—“father, see here is my nest. Didn’t you ever find it out? and I’ve been sitting here since ever you an’ mother came into the garden !”

“Hullo, little un !” cried Gideon, looking up to where Susy’s face was laughing out from among the trees ; “ so that’s where you’ve putten yourself all this while. I thought you was up to summut, you was so still. You can stop where you are. There’s nobody a-wanting of you down here. Little birds must stay on their nests, an’ mind their eggs.”

But Mrs. Doyle, more regardful of propriety, cast a glance of disapproval upon Susy in her retreat.

“For shame, Susy!—for shame, you naughty girl!” she exclaimed in a tone of mild rebuke.

“Is that pretty manners to go an’ shake the laylac boughs in the gentleman’s face? And to think of a little girl climbing trees, as if she was a boy! An’ your Sunday frock an’ all. Come down this minute! You’ll make yourself not fit to be seen.”

But Susy was too well pleased with her nest to be minded to leave it just yet.

“Mayn’t I stop just a little longer—ever such a little longer,” she pleaded, in the tone of coaxing entreaty, which, as she knew by experience, generally had the effect of gaining her point with her mother.

But the Sunday frock was a serious consideration with Mrs. Doyle.

“Come down, Susy. Come down, now, there’s a good girl,” she urged. “Your frock ’ull be such a sight as never was, an’ clean on this morning, too.”

Susy looked down, and shifted irresolutely on her perch; but while the balance of victory was still unturned, a click was heard at the little white

gate which led through the quickset hedge into the garden.

Mrs. Doyle looked up hastily.

“Bless me!” she exclaimed, “if yon isn’t David in the yard, an’ Rachel Dallas with him. Where’s ever he fallen in with her this time of day. An’ now I think of it, she wasn’t at church this morning. Surely the old man isn’t worse.”

She hastened towards the gate to meet them, Susy, who had scrambled down at the announcement of a visitor, running on before as fast as her little legs would carry her, and the farmer coming on at a more leisurely pace behind. Dunstan, too, looked eagerly towards the gate, curious to obtain a glimpse of Andrew Gillespie’s adopted daughter.

But at first sight he was disappointed. There was nothing remarkable in the appearance of the tall, pale girl who was quietly shaking hands with Mrs. Doyle. A stranger would have passed almost without notice that dreamy, yet anxious, countenance, though, lured as by some unaccountable fascination, he would probably have returned

to study it again more carefully. For there was a strange attraction in that twilight face, which, as Dunstan drew nearer to the little group, he could not help perceiving. Not that it was beautiful—for though the features were regular, and the complexion delicately clear and pure, yet it possessed none of that subtle charm which makes the faces of some women, who are but passably fair, like a lovely poem, which we long to read and read again.

Perhaps this attraction in the girl's face lay as much as anything in the sort of quiet compassion which it aroused. For looking upon it, you saw, as through a transparent veil, what a sensitive sad nature lay beneath. The full tremulous lips, the finely cut nostril, the drooping eyelids, the deep-set restless eyes, all seemed to tell, that on this girl, old beyond her years—for though she could not be more than one or two and twenty, she might have passed for thirty—the burden of life sat heavily already. There were no little coquettish graces about her, none of those tricks of dress, or voice, or manner, none of those innocent vanities which sit

so charmingly on a young lighthearted girl, and which, however we may make a grave show of disapproval, we are not seldom won, spite of ourselves, to admire.

But in the appearance of Rachel Dallas there was nothing to show that she cared in any way to court attention. She was dressed very plainly in a shawl and gown of some dark soft material, that fell in heavy folds about a figure almost as perfect in its symmetry as a Grecian statue. Indeed, there was something Greek in the whole aspect of the girl, in the level brows, the finely moulded chin, and the somewhat heavy cast of countenance, which nevertheless showed signs of fine perceptive powers, and of a susceptibility intense and keen to influences unfelt by ordinary natures.

“Father!” exclaimed Mrs. Doyle, turning round as her husband came within hearing, “here’s Mr. Gillespie’s been taken bad, an’ Jean can’t stir yet with her lame foot, an’ Rachel’s come to see if there’s anyone we could tell them of to help to sit up with him at nights.”

Gideon looked grave.

"I misdoubted," said he, "there was something wrong when I see'd you coming up. What, has David gotten his rheumatics worse again?"

"No," answered Rachel, in a dull, pained voice. "It is worse than that, I am afraid, though it is not so bad to bear. He was taken with a fit on Friday night. I've never known him to be so bad before."

"But I wouldn't take on about it so, Rachel," said Mrs. Doyle in a consolatory tone. "He's had a good few bad bouts, has old Mr. Gillespie, an' comed round again. You mustn't meet a trouble afore it's here."

"Ay," said the farmer, putting in his word. "You must cheer up and look on t' bright side o' things. It's allays a bad plan for folks to saddle theirselves with to-morrow's trouble, as well as to-day's. It weakens the sperrits while they can't bear up under what's laid upon 'em. But what does the doctor say about him?"

"He won't say much," answered Rachel, "only

that we must hope for the best ; but it seems to me that is only another way of saying that we must fear the worst. I was sitting up with him all last night. He was asleep when I came away, or I should not have liked to have left him. And he does sleep a deal, but I am afraid, from what the doctor says, that is not a good sign in his case."

"Dear, dear !" said Mrs. Doyle, in a tone of grave concern, "to think of his having been taken in that way, and us never to have heard of it. But you're so out of the way yonder at Rooklands. He might have died, and we should none of us have known to have come down to you. But I've been thinking, Rachel, there's the widow Greaves would be most thankful to come in and help you a bit, while Jean gets about again. A nice respectable woman, an' quiet to go into a house, an' a person that you might trust to do for Mr. Gillespie when you was laid down, for she had her husband bedfast over two year before he died, an' so comfortable as she kept him, an' did all for him herself, I'll see her myself before church ; it's a good piece

out of your way to go to her, and I can tell her to come, if you like."

"It would be a great comfort to have her," said Rachel, looking immensely relieved, "if you think she could come."

"Oh! I make no doubt of that," answered Mrs. Doyle, "and glad to do it, too. But come into the house, and sit you down a bit. You'll stop and have your tea, now you're here."

"I must not do that," said Rachel. "I should like to get back as soon as possible."

"But you're like to come in an' rest?" said David, who had stood silent until now. "It's a good step from the cottage, an' to have been sitting up all night, an' all. You'd better step in."

"Ay, do, and have a bit of cake, and a glass of wine," said Mrs. Doyle, with friendly urgency; for she was not a woman who would ever willingly let a guest depart until the rites of hospitality had been duly administered.

"No, no, you are very kind," answered Rachel, nervously, "but I would rather not, if you will

excuse me. I am not tired at all, and I should only feel uneasy."

"Well, I won't press you," returned Mrs. Doyle, "if you think you really must be going, or else five minutes wouldn't have made a deal of difference, and you'd have got back all the sooner, meebby, for having had a bit of rest before you started. I'll see Mrs. Greaves, then, Rachel, and if there's anything hinders her that she can't come to-night, I'll just step down myself."

"You are very kind," said Rachel, and the girl's lip trembled as she spoke. "There was no one else I knew that I could come to, and I don't know what we should have done if I had got knocked up myself. Poor Jean is almost helpless just now. She makes a greater trouble of it than I do."

"I daresay," replied Mrs. Doyle; "but it's a sad let down to you just now, having her so lame, and Mr. Gillespie so badly."

And then they said good-bye all round, for Mrs. Doyle saw that it would be no kindness to detain her visitor any longer.

But David did not give her his hand with the rest.

“I’ll set you a piece of the way down the lane, Rachel,” he said. “It’s a long walk by yourself.”

Rachel looked distressed.

“Pray don’t,” she said; “I shall keep you from your tea, and I’d rather go alone.”

But David had opened the gate already, and was standing outside in the lane as if he had made up his mind to go.

“There’s plenty of time,” he said. “Tea won’t be fit yet a bit, and I’ll only go a piece of the way!”

Rachel saw, perhaps, that there was not much chance of escaping her proffered escort. She said “good-bye” again to the farmer and his wife, just moved to Dunstan who had been standing by them all the while; and stooping down to kiss the rosy mouth that Susy was holding up, she went through the gate to David, who was waiting for her with an uneasy, anxious look, as if he felt that

he was performing an unwelcome service, yet could not persuade himself to refrain.

The little group stood for awhile watching the pair, as they walked quickly down the lane, Susy being mounted upon the palings, where she was balancing herself somewhat unsteadily on one of the upper rails.

“Good-bye, David! Good-bye, Rachel!” she cried, clapping her hands, as the two disappeared behind a bend in the road; and then, jumping down, she put her hand in Dunstan’s, with whom she had already tossed up quite a friendship, and turned back with him into the garden.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. DOYLE'S TROUBLES.

GIDEON and his wife went slowly into the house together, neither of them seeming to care much about going back into the garden to finish their inspection of the tulips and pansy beds, or to mark the growth during the week of the young peas and cauliflowers, the Windsor beans, asparagus, and spinach, that flourished in close proximity to the well-filled borders.

“It’ll be a bad job for Rachel,” said the farmer at last, breaking the silence that had fallen between them. “It’ll be a bad job for Rachel, if aught happens to old Mr. Gillespie. It’s all the home she has.”

“It’s all she has now,” returned his wife; “but my mind misgives me, Gideon, that our David will

be giving her the chance of another before long. He's set his heart on Rachel, as sure as I'm here to say it. I've had my doubts this while back that he's been hankering after her, though he's never let on to me about it. But this afternoon it come over me as clear as daylight. I see it in the look he cast upon her as he stood waiting for her at the gate. An' he's a lad, is David, that when he gets set on a thing, he is none so easy turned off it."

"I've thought as much myself," said Gideon, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, and seating himself with an abstracted air in his three-cornered chair.

They had come in now, but the bright roomy kitchen, always clean and still on a Sunday afternoon, looked too inviting for him to care to go through into the parlour, where he could hear Martha already clinking the cups and saucers as she set the table for tea. For it was more than half-past three by the day, and on Sundays they always had tea a little before four, so as to allow

time for getting all cleared away and the milking over before church went in at six o'clock.

And this afternoon it looked particularly pleasant, for the spring cleaning having been accomplished, everything that could shine was doing so with renewed effect, and twinkling merrily in the sunshine which had crept round now to the side of the house and was pouring in a broadside of beams through the long low window, that almost put out the fire, over which a kettle was droning its sleepy song to an accompaniment from a great tortoise-shell cat, who was sitting upright in the middle of the hearth, purring as if she felt that the lines had fallen to her in pleasant places, and that it behoved her to express her satisfaction with her lot.

There was an appetising odour also diffusing itself through the air, suggestive of the crisp lard cakes which were being made hot in the oven, and whose fragrance was quite overpowering that of the great posy of red and white lilacs which Mrs. Doyle had gathered the day before and put into

the blue and gold china jug that stood on the table underneath the window.

It might perhaps have been this agreeable combination of outward circumstances which disposed Gideon to take a more favourable view of matters than his wife.

“I’ve thought as much myself,” he repeated, as if he felt it a relief to have the subject fairly broached, even if it was not in all respects a pleasant one. “It’s a bad job, but, however, it might be worse. She’s a steady girl, is Rachel Dallas, an’s had a good bringing up, and she’s not so bad-looking, for them that fancies that sort of face, though I can’t say that I much matter it myself. It’s overlittle life an’ colour in it to suit my taste.”

But it was a question of far greater moment than that of mere looks, well-favoured or the reverse, that just now was agitating Mrs. Doyle’s maternal bosom, causing therein a painful distraction between her native kindness of heart and the prejudices which made David’s suspected choice a matter of real distress to the worthy woman.

“It isn’t that as troubles me,” she said. “I should have nothing again’ Rachel if it wasn’t on account of David. There’s something about her which makes you that you can’t help being drawn to her, though she’s no more like other girls than a vilet’s like a buttercup. But it would be such a let-down for David if he was to take up with her, an’ him come of a good stock on both sides, and his forbears people that’s been respected and looked up to in all the country side for this two hundred years an’ more. I couldn’t abide for his children to have it cast up at them as their mother was brought up on charity, an’ didn’t as much as know who her own father was. Not as it’s any fault of hers, either,” she added, as if, gentle soul, she could not bear to cast even the shadow of reproach, without adding some saving clause.

“To be sure not,” responded the farmer, briskly. “She didn’t have the choosing of her kin, I reckon, no more than any of the rest of us. Rachel Dallas ’ud be no disgrace to any father,

whoever he might be. But for all that, I'd as lief David hadn't taken a fancy to have her. She's made of t' right sort of stuff for a lady, but she isn't cut out for a farmer's wife, no more than I was cut out to sell ribbons an' stay-laces behind a counter. Her hands is overjimp an' white to serve her at farm-work. An' she's got just the trick o' the tongue an' all, that the quality has. She speaks very near as pretty as Miss Winifred herself; but then, what good will that do her when she hasn't to live among them? It won't help her to manage a dairy, I reckon, nor to brew good beer."

And Gideon shook his head. He liked Rachel Dallas well enough, but not enough to wish to have her for his daughter-in-law.

"I doubt David's made nobbut a badpick," he went on to say, "an' so many nice girls as there is about here that he might have chose out of. However, it's his own look-out, an' I won't go again' him, if so be as he's bent on having her. It's a thing that he's a right to please himself about, I

know I thought as much when I went courting, an' I wasn't so far wrong neither. But as like as not we're worretting werselves for naught. A young man will often try it on with two or three afore he lights on the one as fits. Mebby it's no more than that with Rachel, an' we'll see him take up with Lizzie Raimes after all. She's a likely lass is Lizzie."

But Mrs. Doyle was not disposed to take such a cheerful view of things, and all the time she was in church she was meditating in her own mind how best she might approach the subject with David himself, so that if, as she feared, her suspicions were correct, she might endeavour by argument or entreaty to turn him from his purpose.

She had not long to wait for the coveted opportunity. That same evening, when supper was over and the things cleared away, and when the farmer had had his pipe, and the household was moving off upstairs to bed, David lingered for a moment behind the rest, and remained standing before the fire with his arms folded upon his breast,

as if he were waiting there till every one was gone.

His mother's heart beat fast. Now was the time, she thought, as she moved nervously about the kitchen, setting back the chairs against the wall, and putting into their places the few things that had been left standing about. But David spared her the trouble of being the first to speak.

"Mother," he said, without moving his position before the fire, "I thought I might as well tell you. I've made up my mind—I mean to marry Rachel Dallas."

Poor Mrs. Doyle! The words sank like lead into her heart.

"Rachel Dallas!" she echoed, all the mother rising in her breast and uttering itself in the tone of anxious, pained remonstrance with which she repeated Rachel's name.

But David made no response. He stood looking down into the fire, which, now that the candles were taken away, shone out with a warm still glow through the kitchen, glistening here and there upon

the polished surface of the well-rubbed furniture, or on the tins and covers that hung against the wall.

"I'd think better of it, David," she began again; "I doubt Rachel Dallas isn't the wife for you. You might as good take a cambric handkerchief to make a sack as put her to the work of a farm-house. It 'ud just wear her clean out if she had it laid upon her constant. She knows no more about dairy work and poultry and that, than the babe in the creddle."

"She'd soon learn. She isn't daft, I reckon," said David, "and she could work an' all, if she had it to do. An' if she can't, I'm strong enough to work both for her an' for myself."

He spoke in a moody determined voice, very different from his usual easy, good-natured accents. Mrs. Doyle felt that for once her arguments had failed to move him. But she was not to be baffled yet. She came near him and laid her hand upon his shoulder with a gesture of fond entreaty, just as she had done before over and over again, when

she had wanted to persuade him into taking her way instead of his own in any matter that he had set his mind on.

“But there’s other things, David,” she continued in a pleading tone. “Not as I’d say aught again’ Rachel, for it is no doing of hers, poor thing; but to take a girl as belongs to nobody, an’ hasn’t so much as a name of her own! I’d think better of it, David, I would indeed.”

Think better of it! as well try to put out a blazing stack by throwing over it a bucketfull of water, as to quench by her motherly advice the flame that was burning in the young man’s breast. He shook off impatiently the hand that rested on his shoulder,

“Mother,” he said, in a husky voice, and turning full upon her now, “it’s to no use trying to put me off o’ marrying Rachel Dallas. Neither you nor nobody else shall keep me from her. There’s not a hair on her head that isn’t worth more to me than all the world beside. An’ as to her belonging to nobody, you’d better not say that

again. I'd like to see the man, or woman either, that 'ud dare cast that in her face, an' me to the fore. She'll belong to me when I get her, an' have her I will, if I die for it. It'll be no matter whose daughter she is, I reckon, when she's my wife."

Mrs. Doyle was silent, half frightened by this unaccustomed vehemence. She had never seen David so moved as this. It was the first time, too, that he had spoken so carelessly, even rudely to her. Indeed, David was usually of too phlegmatic a disposition to be easily warmed into a display of temper towards anyone, much less his mother, who had always retained her place in the affections of her first-born, from the time when he used to toddle after her, a little urchin in petticoats, following her assiduously wherever she might be, from the pantry to the brewhouse, and from the brewhouse to the dairy, and receiving the reward of his devotion in a frequent largesse of any stray comestible that chanced to be at hand.

A dull pain stole round her heart as she drew

away her hand. It shut out for the time even her regret at the choice which David had thus defiantly declared. She must stand aside now, and let another take her place. A mightier than his mother's love was sweeping now across the young man's breast, driving out before it all save the passionate resolve to compass his determined end. Yet she longed to say something that might bridge, even now, the gulf that had opened thus suddenly between them. But nothing came, only a troubled tear that gathered in her eye, and which David did not perceive; for without another word he strode past her, and the next moment, as she stood alone, only the heavy sound of his step, as he mounted the stair, broke the silence of the house.

She sat down on her husband's chair, wounded and heart-sick, and, covering her face with her apron, had a quiet cry by herself. Then she fastened the kitchen door, and crept up to bed.

But things looked better the next day, as they generally do by morning light. Mrs. Doyle had told her husband what she had learned from David

the night before, keeping back, of course, all that she thought would be best left unrepeatd, and she felt the easier for it. For though Gideon was concerned to know for certain that things stood as they did, yet he had not made such a trouble of the matter as she had feared.

The girl was well enough, he said, and for his part he had rather David took up with her as he at a loose end and up to all sorts of tricks, like a deal of young men before they got settled with a house of their own. If they stood out against his having her, and he was to go wrong, as there was no telling but what he might, for there was nothing made a lad so desperate as being crossed in these matters, they would feel it laid upon them that the fault was at their own door, and that would be worse to bide than having him bring Rachel to them for a daughter.

And Mrs. Doyle had confessed, with a sigh, that such would be the case; and like a wise woman and a good mother, resolved forthwith to bring her mind to her circumstances, and since she could

not alter David's choice, at any rate to make the best of it.

But peace returned, if not quite content, when a day or two after, David stopped in the kitchen for a moment, as he was following his father out after breakfast to the field.

"Mother," he said, "I was a bit sharp, I doubt, o' Sunday night, but you mustn't think no more about it. I'd got angered on account o' Rachel, so as I'd no thought o' what I was saying."

"Nay, nay, my lad—say no more; let bygones be bygones. I daresay we was both of us partly in the wrong, an' so as Rachel makes you a good wife, neither me nor your father'll go again' your having her. We've no wish but to do for the best for our children, an' I daresay, whoever you might choose, there'd have been something as we could have wished different. It's ill marrying without love; there's nought but misery ever comes of it, an' so as you and Rachel's as happy together as me an' your father's been before you, I wouldn't wish anything better for you."

There was a tear trembling again in Mrs. Doyle's eye when she had finished, but this time it dried up before it fell, for with an unwonted impulse, David stooped down and kissed the lips that were trembling a little with motherly emotion. Just as he used to do years ago, when, after mis-behaving in some childish fashion, he would creep up to make peace in this way before venturing again on preferring his requests.

And the last tinge of bitterness passed out of her heart as she thought that, after all, her boy's heart might be large enough to hold a wife, and yet leave room within it for his mother too.

CHAPTER XI.

DUNSTAN FINDS HIMSELF AT HOME.

DUNSTAN had not been long in Glinton before he began to feel as much at home in the place as if he had lived in it all his life. The secret, no doubt, of this comfortable mood was that at last he was heartily at work and giving his mind thoroughly to what he was about. No fear now of his being compelled to rust in idleness; and day by day, and all day long, he flung himself with might and main upon his welcome task.

Each morning found him at his post, directing and controlling the progress of affairs, keeping a keen eye on all that was going forward, letting the men see that, young as he was, he was master of

the situation, and yet with a bright glance and a hearty word for all, that made him popular among even the rough "navvies" who were "banking" a few rods further up the line, and who, with their flannel blouses and red caps, their huge limbs, and swarthy, unshorn faces, might have passed for bandits in disguise.

There was tough work to be got through, the tougher the better, for with each emergency Dunstan's spirits rose to meet it; indeed, he rather liked to grapple with a difficulty, and show to others that he was man enough to master it. For it was quite true that the young man had got into the right groove at last. The very faults of his character, his overplus of energy and resistance, his too resolute will, his eagerness to stand well in the opinion of others, were all in his favour here. They lent him force; they spurred him on to do his best; they gave him a certain sway over those about him, which made it easy for him to carry out his purposes. And when a strong will is firmly bent in one direction, it is amazing how

even difficulties themselves do but seem to pave the way to success.

And as life began to rush more freely through him, and as he learned to lift his head with the pleasant consciousness that each day as it passed left behind it a definite residuum of something done, so also Dunstan found himself going forth more freely to those around him. Every man, woman, and child he met, seemed to him to wear a friendly aspect. If even a little girl going to school dropped him a smiling curtsy, or a labourer said "good day" as he met him on the road, he would nod back and say "good day" again with such unmistakeable good will, that he had soon won for himself the suffrages of all the village people.

It was a hearty, natural, wholesome life that he was leading during these first weeks of his sojourn in Glinton—a life that was good for soul and body both. And Dunstan expanded under its influence, and spread himself forth to the light and warmth, and went in and out with such a

firm free tread, such a blythe face and ringing voice, that any one who had seen him only, fretted and careworn in those London lodgings, would hardly have recognised him for the same. For there was nothing now in his way of life that jarred upon him, nothing that offended his taste, nothing, as it seemed to him just then, that was lacking. His days were rounded and complete, filled up just as he would have them filled up, with work enough to satisfy his restless hands and busy brain, yet with not so much as to become a toil.

Everything pleased him. He liked the farmhouse life, the simple household ways, the homely kindness that he received. For it was pleasant, certainly, to know that he was thought about and cared for, and in every way made so much of as he was by the good people at the Brook farmhouse. Indeed, Mrs. Doyle, on one occasion, expressed with such emphasis to her husband her opinion that there never was a young gentleman had so few airs, or made himself so agreeable as

Mr. Dayne, that Gideon, who was fond of a sly joke now and then, could not resist the opportunity of having one.

“Why, Polly,” he exclaimed, bringing down his broad palm with a thump upon her shoulder, “if things goes on this gate, I shall be having thee fall in love with him thyself. I mun look a bit sharper after thee, I doubt. There’s mebbly others beside me that’s thinking thou hasn’t lost all thy good looks yet.”

But Mrs. Doyle went on quietly clicking her needles over the grey ribbed stocking that she was “footing” for David. She was accustomed to these little pleasantries of her husband’s, as well as to the compliments that he generally contrived to edge in with them. For though Gideon’s courting days were over, he knew well enough that his wife was as fond as any woman of a word or two of praise; nor was he above humouring her now and then himself by a little sugared nonsense.

As he said one day to his neighbour, Mark

Bray, who was inclined to remonstrate with him on the folly of being "sweet" upon his wife,

"There's naught pays better than that sort of thing, nobbut a man's picked the right sort o' woman for his wife." Mark winced a little, for it was well known that Mrs. Bray was a bit of a termagant. "Why, if I was to start an' be contrary with my Missis, like some as I could name, I should knock all the sperrit out of her in no time. She'd go squash, like a pricked bladder, if I was to give her a sharp word. But nobbut strokè her down a bit, and make her believe as I think all the world of her—an' it wouldn't be so far from true neither—an' she'll work herself to death sooner nor I shall find out as I've been wrong. So you see, if owt goes again' me, an' I get a bit riled, as you may say, why, I goes and lets off at some one else, but I allays keeps a fair tongue for her. You may take my word for it, it's a thing as pays. Anyways, that's my experience, an' I've tried it now this twenty year and more."

The only person in the house who still kept Dunstan at arm's length was Martha, who, though a jewel of a servant, and a perfect marvel of cleanliness and despatch, was still, as Gideon used to say, "a bit cantankerous in her temper—something like yon red waggon as David bought at Bedesby Fair, that would creak in the wheels, whether they was oiled or no."

Dunstan had made several attempts to dislodge her from her entrenchments; but Martha was not to be won over by any amount of fair speeches, or consideration even in such matters as abstaining from leaving a wet footprint on her freshly-sanded flags.

The extra work was a thing she cared nothing about, but she did not approve, and never had, of her mistress "demeaning" herself by keeping lodgers. It was what no other farmer's wife did anywhere about, and in Martha's opinion was a great "let-down" to the respectability of the family.

So Mr. Dayne might admire as much as he

pleased that black Spanish hen with her brood of chickens, and praise the splendour of the green drake's head, and inquire whether she or her mistress had the chief hand in the brewing of that capital ale of theirs—Martha let him see all the same that she looked upon him as an intruder in the house, and a person whose presence might be put up with, but was by no means to be regarded with anything like complacency.

But though, with this exception, Dunstan had established himself thus firmly in the good graces of the family at the Brook Farm, and was both liked and looked up to by the men at the railway yard, and never missed a friendly salute when he encountered any of the village folk, yet he had not as yet either gained or sought admittance into the little world of Glington society—by which term must, of course, be understood either such members of the community as got their living by doing nothing, which, in Glington, as elsewhere, was looked upon as being decidedly the most genteel method of obtaining it, or those who earned it in some re-

spectable, that is professional way, of which section the rector, the curate, Dr. Kennedy, and perhaps Mr. Strangways, the surgeon, were the sole representatives.

There was no doubt, however, that Glinton society, such as it was, would have been only too happy to have held out to Dunstan the right hand of fellowship, if only he had been properly introduced—that process being unfortunately indispensable in order to obtain admission to its various privileges.

For, independently of his position, which, so far as it went, was perfectly unexceptionable, he had been subjected to a severe scrutiny on two successive Sundays during his attendance at church, the result of which had been that everyone, with the exception, perhaps, of Mrs. MacWirther, whose conversation was always slightly depreciating, pronounced him to be a young man of decidedly prepossessing appearance, and one who seemed likely to be quite an addition to the place.

It was observed by those who were skilled in

such matters, and knew what conclusions might legitimately be drawn therefrom, that his linen was admirably fine and white, his pocket-handkerchiefs unexceptionable, his coat well-cut and well-brushed, and his necktie modestly unobtrusive in size and colour. Also that he stood straight up, instead of lolling with his arm on the side of the pew, during those portions of the service in which the congregation are instructed to stand, and that he kept his eyes discreetly at home during sermon time and the reading of the lessons, instead of allowing them to wander perpetually towards the front seat in the gallery, where sat the two Miss Hillyards, the belles of Glinton, blonde beauties, with languishing eyes and complexions like a ripe peach, who were not only quite conscious of their good looks, but generally succeeded in attracting to themselves a degree of attention that not a little scandalized the less favoured portion of the feminine half of the congregation; though it would be more correct, perhaps, to say the feminine three-quarters, for there was the same pre-

ponderance of the female element in Glinton that may be noticed by even the most superficial observers to prevail in most other places.

This preponderance might possibly be even more marked in Glinton than elsewhere, owing to the multitude of maiden ladies, of certain or uncertain age, who singly, in pairs, or even triplets, occupied the group of Gothic cottages which some few years ago had been erected by an enterprising builder in Bedesby, who having in his possession a strip of land just at the end of the village, had built thereon a number of elegant little tenements which formed almost a suburb in themselves. These cottages being, as the advertisements set forth, at once genteel in their appearance, and of unusually moderate rent, had been immediately swarmed into by tenants, chiefly widows and spinsters, whose means and requirements corresponded with these advantages, their limited incomes and superior family connexions, compelling them to keep up an "appearance" at the smallest possible outlay.

Of course such an influx had sadly disturbed the

balance that had previously existed in at least a respectable degree between the two elements of society. It was no longer possible at a Glinton entertainment for the hostess to pair off her guests to the dinner or the supper-table, a silk dress and a dress-coat, a silk dress and a dress-coat, until the procession was complete. Indeed, the ladies were fast becoming such an overwhelming majority, that Dr. Kennedy, who was troubled with facetiousness, and who was apt sometimes to trouble others with it too, had been known on one occasion to have declared that it would be an unspeakable advantage to the place if some respectable Briareus were to settle there, whose hundred arms might afford accommodation to as many ladies, seeing that a gentleman with only two of those appendages found himself at times seriously at a loss in the midst of such a bevy of unappropriated damsels.

Not very gallant, certainly, though it must be owned that there were extenuating circumstances connected with this *lapsus lingue* of the worthy Doctor, seeing that he had only the evening before been

dragged from his study fire, and compelled to leave an uncut Quarterly containing a brilliant contribution of his own, in order to assist at a muffin struggle, where for four mortal hours he and the curate had had to do the agreeable or disagreeable, as the case might be, to no fewer than eleven of the weaker vessels who were assembled to receive him.

It will be obvious from these remarks that the advent in Glinton of an eligible single gentleman competent to go out to evening parties, and who might be bowed to by the most respectable inhabitants of the place without any serious compromise of their position, was an event of considerable importance to all whom it concerned.

It was, therefore, from no backwardness on the part of the inhabitants themselves that, after a fortnight's residence at the Brook Farm, Dunstan found himself still on the outside of the bristling fence of proprieties with which Glinton society made it a point of conscience to surround itself. The truth was, Dunstan did not care to put himself out of the

way in order to obtain what he had no special wish to possess. And though some of my readers may pronounce him to have been a young man of shockingly low tastes, and wonder how he could possibly find any pleasure in intercourse with people who were accustomed to take their meals in their kitchen, who spoke in such a broad north-country accent, talked of "heggs" and "honions," drank their tea out of their saucers, and ate their food with their knives—all which enormities truth compels this chronicler to admit were not unfrequently perpetrated in the Brook farm-house, yet Dunstan did nevertheless find himself quite content with such society as it afforded.

There was nothing he liked better than to stand for ten minutes chatting with Mrs. Doyle as he passed through the kitchen, or to listen to the racy talk of the farmer as he sat smoking his pipe of an evening in the chimney-corner or on the bench outside the house. And no wonder, for though these north-country farmers are uncouth and rugged in their words and ways, yet they are a shrewd, observ-

ant set of men ; and, living as they do next door to nature and to human nature, their speech acquires a fine flavour of mingled sense and humour, with sometimes a picturesque force of expression such as might be sought for in vain among those whose horizon is bounded for the most part by only bricks and mortar, and who seldom meet their fellows except upon the steps of the social treadmill.

But though Dunstan did not go forth himself to meet society, society came to him, and it presented itself in the person of Mrs. Kennedy, who appeared at the door of Mrs. Doyle's kitchen one evening when Dunstan was seated on the top of the long deal-table that stood under the window, engaged in turning over the contents of a box full of odds and ends which Susy had just brought him, in the hopes of finding therein a bit of green silk that might serve for the tail of a fly which he was making.

“Why, it's Mrs. Kennedy, I do declare!” said Mrs. Doyle, who was sitting at the further end of the table, picking green gooseberries into a collan-

der, against her great baking next day. And she stood up, shook out her apron, and hastened to the door to admit her visitor.

But Mrs. Kennedy's business with Mrs. Doyle herself was soon disposed of. It was only to inquire if she would save her a couple of cream cheeses that week, which Mrs. Doyle promised with a smile to do. No one about Glinton, everybody said, made such delicious cream cheeses as those which came from the dairy at the Brook Farm, and the good woman liked having them bespoken in good time—it looked as if they were properly appreciated.

“And this is Mr. Dayne, I am sure?” said Mrs. Kennedy, turning to Dunstan, and extending to him a well-turned, well-gloved hand with a sort of careless, queenly air that sat well upon her; for she was a tall, handsome woman, with a frank, animated countenance, and a voice which, though very clear and pleasant, had in it a certain ring as of one who was well accustomed to be obeyed.

Dunstan bowed, with a half-start of pleased surprise—he had descended from his perch upon

the table as soon as Mrs. Kennedy had entered, and took the hand thus smilingly accorded.

“We have been hoping to make your acquaintance,” she continued, “ever since we heard that you were coming to Glinton. You are not aware, perhaps, that Dr. Kennedy and your father were old college friends.”

Dunstan’s face kindled with delight. It was such an unexpected pleasure, and he expressed it very warmly, to meet thus with one who was associated in any way with the memory of either of his parents. There were so few things or people in the world that were links between him and them, and these words of Mrs. Kennedy’s seemed to throw down at once the barrier of strangerhood, and make him feel as if in the Doctor’s wife it was some old acquaintance that he had found again.

“We saw you in church,” she went on, “the Sunday after you arrived. Dr. Kennedy recognized you at once, by your resemblance to your father. Indeed, he had hoped to have called upon you before now, but he has been from home for the last ten days, as

you may be aware, perhaps. When he returns, I trust we shall have the pleasure of seeing you at the Lodge.”

Dunstan bowed again, and acknowledged her courtesy with such evident gratification, that Mrs. Kennedy was moved to enter into further conversation. And being in his happiest mood, and there being nothing just then to prevent him from appearing to the best advantage, he so commended himself to her good opinion, that before she went away she had renewed her invitation, and begged him to come up to the Lodge on the following Saturday to dine.

“For,” she said, “Dr. Kennedy is sure to have returned by then, and I should like to secure you as soon as possible. You will come, will you not?” she inquired, with a look that said plainly enough, “Of course you will—there can be not the slightest doubt about it;” and yet with a certain bright persuasive glance, which seemed to imply that by accepting her invitation, he would be as much conferring a favour as accepting one.

But Dunstan was in nowise minded to refuse her request, for there was a cordial grace in the lady's manner which was quite irresistible to the young man, and made the prospect of spending an evening at the Lodge too full of attraction for him to do other than accept it. Altogether, when Mrs. Kennedy took her leave at last, and Dunstan stood bareheaded at the gate and bowed to her as she turned to give him a bright parting glance, he felt as if he could not congratulate himself enough on the happy chance which had thrown in his way what seemed likely to be one of the pleasantest acquaintances he had ever made. Poor fellow! he had not made many during his life. Fortune seemed to have taken a kindness to him now, and to be showering all her favours down at once.

CHAPTER XII.

DR. KENNEDY'S WIFE.

A GREEN nest of a house, completely swathed in ivy, with a trellised porch covered by a tangled mass of honey-suckle and climbing roses, whose pale pink clusters were already full in bloom. Around it was a gay old-fashioned English garden, fenced in by a tall stone wall, on whose broad coping flourished a luxuriant crop of wall-flowers, snap-dragon, and golden moss. And beyond the whole rose a back-ground of magnificent elms, in whose branches there was going on just now a great cawing and general commotion amongst an extensive colony of rooks, whose ragged nests were built pretty thickly together in the topmost boughs.

A comfortable place to live in, quaint, quiet,

homelike, shut out as it was from the stir of even village life ; bright and cheerful nevertheless. Just the sort of house to make you feel as if certainly they must be pleasant people by whom it was inhabited ; people whose acquaintance, if you could, you would like to make.

This was the Old Lodge, to which, five-and-twenty years ago, Dr. Kennedy had brought his pretty girl-wife, and where they had lived on ever since, though fortune smiled more brightly on them now than it had done then, and they might, if they had cared to do so, have established themselves long ago in a more commodious and ambitious dwelling. But they loved the old spot where they had tasted together the bitters and the sweets of life, where their children had been born, where one, their little May, had died, and where every nook and corner was endeared to them by its association with the past ; loved it too well to leave it. And living in it through so many years, the whole place seemed to have drunk in something of the family life, and to have acquired a character of its

own, corresponding in some sort to that of its inhabitants, as if they had grown and fitted themselves together like a lobster and its shell.

And of all this Dunstan unconsciously took note as he passed through the gate in the tall laurel hedge, and walked up to the house on this his first visit to the Lodge. There was a curious medley in the furniture and appointments of the room into which he was shown on his arrival, for the place had been furnished by degrees, as the means had increased wherewith to add luxuries to necessaries. The hard stuffed couch, the faded carpet and the great leathern chair, in which, as Dunstan opined, the Doctor usually sat—for there was a worn place on one side of the cushion as if a tired head were wont to turn itself there for rest—hardly corresponded with the richness of the inlaid Indian cabinets, the beauty of the oak carving on the picture frames and brackets, and the profusion of choice treasures of art that were gathered together. And choice indeed they were—queer old etchings, whose fabulous value none but a connoisseur could ap-

preciate, proof-engravings of some of the great modern master-pieces, and statuettes of the most faultless workmanship and exquisite design.

And yet, incongruous as the various details were, there was that indescribable air of ease and harmony pervading the apartment which betrays infallibly the touch of some fine artistic hand, and which mere upholstery can never give. Books there were, too, littered on every table, and shining resplendent in gold and morocco from their shelves against the walls; and by the open French window there stood a large raised basket, which exhaled a delicious perfume from the wealth of wild hyacinths with which it was filled.

“Take care of my flowers, Geordie!”

But before Dunstan could turn to see whence the voice proceeded—for he was standing with his back to the window examining an engraving of Maclise's picture, “The Play-scene in Hamlet”—a small brown terrier had rushed out of the garden into the room, followed by a sturdy little fellow in a tartan frock; and then Mrs. Kennedy herself stepped

into the room, and with her the Doctor, who looked at the moment very much as if, which was really the case, he, the terrier, and the child, had all been having a game of romps together.

But there was a native dignity about the Doctor, which nothing could derange. He shot a keen glance at Dunstan as he entered, and then, his wife having introduced him to their visitor, came up and greeted him with an air of genial courtesy that made the young man feel himself at once a welcome guest.

But though Mrs. Kennedy merely pronounced her husband's name when she presented him to Dunstan, it would be altogether unbecoming in me to dismiss him with an equally curt introduction on this, his first appearance in person upon the stage of my history.

Dr. Kennedy, then, was a man of fine parts, and of goodly presence, a keen critic, and a genial companion; somewhat averse, perhaps, to thinking more highly of other men, or women either, than Scripture enjoins every man to think of himself, yet

withal of a nature so generous and kindly that he was not undeservedly popular with all the inhabitants of Glington, little boys and dogs included.

He had been senior wrangler at Oxford, and had left behind him at his college a name surrounded still by a halo of proud remembrance, and a reputation for scholarship which in after years had proved of no small service to him.

For Dr. Kennedy had had the misfortune to be brought up with expectations, instead of to a profession—the consequence of which was that he had found himself at the outset of life with expensive tastes, a penniless young wife, and nothing on which to maintain them, except his wits and a patrimony of some two or three hundred a year in place of as many thousands. He was too honourable to enter the Church only for a living, and it was too late to study for anything else. Accordingly, he had directed his steps into the thorny paths of literature, and by the sweat of his brain had succeeded at length in obtaining therein both name and fame, together with a somewhat larger

modicum than usual of that worldly pelf by which they are not invariably accompanied.

True, for a long time after their marriage, expenses had increased much faster than the means of meeting them, and it was not until two or three stout roly polies had emerged in jacket and trousers from the nursery, that the pair had arrived at a satisfactory solution of the great modern problem of making both ends to meet. They had succeeded, however, at last ; and now it would be hard anywhere to find a brighter home, or one into which fewer of the cares of this troublesome world seemed to find an entrance, than that of the Doctor and his wife.

One great trial they had had. Seven years ago they had laid their only daughter May in a little grave beneath the churchyard yews. The mother had mourned as only mothers can, and then had consoled herself in her three handsome boys, but the iron had entered into the father's soul ; the strong man had bowed himself, and had never risen again to quite his former stature. For though he

was proud, as well he might be, of his sons, yet all the passionate tenderness of his nature had been lavished on the fair frail child, in whose daisy-sodded grave his sweetest hopes lay buried.

Outwardly, however, little change had passed upon him, except that he was more gentle, peaceable, and easy to be entreated than of old, toiled less strenuously with his pen, and had fewer of those fitful moods which used to tax so severely the patience of his wife. But to-day he seemed bent on justifying to Dunstan the eulogium which the old sexton had been pleased to pass upon him, for right royally did he feast his guest with the choicest stores of his richly-furnished mind. He was in one of his happiest veins this evening, the result, perhaps, in part, of a certain critique which had appeared that morning in a column in the *Times*; and now he poured forth, with almost princely prodigality, such a mingled stream of wit, wisdom, pathos, and humour, that Dunstan, to whom this was altogether a novel experience, as different from the meagreness of

his London life as from the homely heartiness of that at the farm, found himself again and again fairly carried away by the excitement of the moment.

“And now, Mr. Dayne,” said the Doctor, as they rose from their wine, “I must hand you over, I am afraid, for half an hour, to the tender mercies of my wife. I have some letters to write, which must be ready by the time the postman passes on his way to Bedesby. Geordie, you stand sentinel at the gate, and the moment you see his red coat in the distance, signalize the same to me, and I shall be ready by the time he gets up to the house.”

Geordie rushed off at once, and the Doctor strode out through the French window on to the lawn below, and called to his wife, who was at the other end of the garden, giving directions, apparently, about some arrangements in her flower-beds, to an old man who stood in his shirt sleeves, wiping down his forehead with the back of his hand, and listening in respectful

silence to her instructions. She looked round at the sound of her husband's voice,

"That is right," she exclaimed, advancing towards them. "Now, Mr. Dayne, I shall carry you off and have you all to myself. I feel quite indignant at the way in which the Doctor has been monopolising you ever since you came. He ought to have considered, you know, that this time you are my guest rather than his."

"Such nonsense, Hester!" said the Doctor, with a deprecatory wave of his hand, "as if a woman could have property in anything apart from her husband."

"So like one of your crotchets!" laughed the lady, with a glance of gay resistance. "And why not, may I ask?"

"My dear, because the law forbids her," returned the Doctor, with triumphant gravity. "That is, with one exception."

"And pray what is that?" demanded his wife.

“Her own way,” replied the Doctor, with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

“Well,” said Dunstan, venturing into the discussion, “I suppose she may be content to surrender everything else, so long as she is allowed to have that.”

“If she did but get it,” sighed Mrs. Kennedy. “But, Mr. Dayne, I shall not allow you to talk any longer to the Doctor now. You may possibly have a wife of your own some day, and I should be sorry, you know, if he were to teach you to tyrannise over her—”

“As you do over me,” interrupted the Doctor, lifting his eyebrows with a gesture of mock distress. “My young friend, be warned in time, only I fear you won’t. You know, don’t you, what Chaucer says about matrimony?”

“No,” replied Dunstan, inquiringly, for he saw that the Doctor was in a frolicsome mood.

“Why, this—‘Marriage is such a rabble rout, that those who are out are fain to get in, and

those who are in are fain to get out.' Now, what do you think of that? And Chaucer, I suppose, is an authority not to be despised."

"Why, I think," replied Dunstan, "that there are some sayings, even of great men, which are more honoured by being forgotten than repeated."

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders, and as an apt retort did not at the moment present itself, he stepped back, and retreating over the window-sill into the dining-room, took refuge in his letters, leaving his wife and guest to stroll round the garden at their leisure."

So for the second time Dunstan was left to a *tête-à-tête* with the Doctor's wife; and when Mrs. Kennedy was minded to make herself agreeable, she could succeed as well as her husband in doing so. Indeed, there were few women who had more subtle tact than herself in drawing others, as by some irresistible attraction, into close and intimate relations with herself. As the two walked and chatted together,

Dunstan began to find something strangely piquant to his mental palate in her conversation, so sparkling, flowing, full of that indefinable charm wherewith some women manage to invest even the slightest gossip, but captivating him, above all, by its graceful interest in himself. And it was so new to Dunstan to meet with anyone who showed any sort of friendly solicitude in what concerned himself alone, that before he was aware, she had drawn him out to speak quite freely to her of his affairs, his position in life, his hopes and prospects, his vexations and disappointments, with the exception, indeed, of that little episode of the curate's daughter, and that was a subject which he carefully avoided.

So that by the time they had rambled together for half an hour through the quiet, old-fashioned garden and shrubbery, Mrs. Kennedy had quite won the confidence of her companion, and made herself acquainted with the main facts, at least, of the young man's previous history.

Not that Dunstan would have been equally communicative under any other circumstances ; his mind not being constructed on the principle of an American clock, whose interior mechanism is so arranged as to be open to indiscriminate inspection. It was just the effect of that species of fascination which a clever, fine-toned, sunny-hearted woman is pretty sure to exert where she is disposed to please, especially upon those who, like our friend Dunstan, are perhaps the more susceptible to female influence, from having been hitherto exposed but little to its power.

And on her part, also, Mrs. Kennedy, it must be owned, was not ill-pleased to note in the young man's kindling eye and frank discourse, the evidence of that sway which she was quite aware she had it in her power to wield. For there was no mistake about the fact that wherever she went, the Doctor's wife was the centre of any circle that she might be in. And this not because of any strong-mindedness

or domineering force of will, but just by virtue of her bountiful overflow of life, her keen, bright sympathy with everything and everyone around her, and perhaps also of a certain love of distinction and ambitiousness of disposition, which more than most women she possessed.

And Mrs. Kennedy was one able to make the most of whatever faculties she possessed. She was blessed with a fine flow of spirits, was never down-cast or desponding, never troubled with nervousness or headaches or any of those multitudinous minor maladies which would seem to have been exclusively appropriated by the feebler sex. Helpful, even-tempered, always buoyant and bright, those only who knew her well could detect, now and then, amid the glad ring of that musical nature, the soft undertone of tenderness which just hinted and no more of the depths of genuine feeling which lay beneath. Just the wife, people said, for the Doctor, who was one of those large-brained, humorous, but withal often heavy-hearted men, who live too intensely for either

mind or body to be able always to bear the strain imposed upon them, and who are therefore dependent more than most for peace and comfort upon the ministrations of women, whose yielding and elastic natures adapt themselves with ease to the varying moods of those with whom they have to deal.

“And now, Mr. Dayne,” said the lady, as they took a final turn up and down the green beechen alley at the end of the garden, “before we go into the house to tea, I hope you will remember that while you stay in Glington, you may always be sure of a welcome at the Lodge; or if ever you find yourself in a particularly friendless mood, pray come up here and let us try to dispel it. You know, if it were only for your father’s sake, I should like you to feel at home with us; his friendship was a great boon to my husband in his younger days, and it would be a pleasure to me to be able to repay to his son what we both of us owe to him.”

There was a good deal of perception of character as well as kindness of disposition about the Doc-

tor's wife, and, during her brief intercourse with Dunstan, she had been casting in her sounding line, and had found already that he was a young man well worth cultivating.

For there was a freshness about him altogether, a sort of infectious gladness now in his honest sunny face, a certain gusto in even the outspoken *brusquerie* with which he would occasionally oppose anything that did not chime in exactly with his way of thinking, that was not without its attraction to one, who, like Mrs. Kennedy, found the humdrum society of a stagnant little village at times oppressively dull.

“Come any evening,” she added, for she could see that Dunstan was somewhat doubtful as to how far he might avail himself of the privilege which she had thus largely accorded; “come any evening. The Doctor seldom goes into his study after dinner, and after such taskwork as his, a little society is positively a relief to him, and Ginton, I am sorry to say, has not very much to offer in that direction. Besides,” she

continued with a smile, and perhaps just a *souçon* of patronage in her tone, "I can see that you have made already quite a favourable impression on him."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ENGLISH GIRL.

BUT Mrs. Kennedy's last words were lost on an unlistening ear, for even while she spoke there was heard behind the hedge a peal of low light laughter, and the tones of a soft ringing voice mingling with the Doctor's deeper accents; and then for a second or two the young man was conscious of nothing except that there stood before him the same radiant girlish figure which he had seen for the first time beside the stream, the day after his arrival at Glington, with the same blue floating dress, and wide-brimmed straw hat, from beneath which fell a shower of sunny curls around the fair bright face.

That was all. The green, flowery garden, the Doctor's broad figure, Mrs. Kennedy, every-

thing was blotted out except this shining vision that had just appeared before him. It was but for an instant, though. Through the buzz of greeting that succeeded this interruption of their *tête-à-tête*, Dunstan heard Mrs. Kennedy's voice pronouncing the words,

“Mr. Dayne—Miss Gilmour.”

And then he felt a little gloved hand within his own, and heard its owner saying,

“This is not the first time we have met, I think.”

And then all at once he was himself again, bowing low over the hand which he was just relinquishing, with the Doctor and Mrs. Kennedy standing beside him, and a young lady, who was neither a dream nor a vision, but just Miss Gilmour of Rooklands, to whom it was necessary to say something in reply to the words which she had just addressed to him.

But she spared him the trouble, for already, in reply to Mrs. Kennedy's inquiring looks, she was explaining how very kind Mr. Dayne

had been the other day, for that she was sure her poor little Punch must have been drowned if he had not come to his assistance.

“And I am so glad to be able to thank you properly,” she went on, turning to Dunstan; “for I was afraid afterwards that you would think I was so rude and ungrateful, when you had taken so much trouble to save him. But he was so wet and cold, poor little fellow, that just at first I was quite taken up with him; and then, when I would have thanked you, you were gone. But indeed I was very vexed with myself; and you must have got sadly wet, too, I am sure, for the water is deep there, just against the willow trunk.”

“Do not speak of it,” said Dunstan, quite at his ease now, for the frank way in which the girl had expressed her thanks had been already like balm to his wounded pride, dispersing any feelings of mortification that might

have lingered from the remembrance of his little misadventure. "Do not speak of it, pray. It is I who ought to make an apology, for indeed I suspected from the first that I was intruding upon private grounds. But that stream was so suggestive of trout fishing that I was tempted to follow it a little further up."

"You are fond of fishing, then?" said the Doctor.

"I daresay the taste survives," replied Dunstan, laughing; "but to tell the truth, I have not handled a rod for years, so that I can hardly speak positively on the subject. I have so seldom had the opportunity lately of indulging myself in that direction."

"That is a pity," said the Doctor, "for it is an art that is lost, like most others, by want of practice. It does not require a man to be much of an adept, though, in order to catch trout in the Skilbeck."

"Indeed, it does not," said Winny. "You might think they had been trained to let them-

selves be caught, they come up so foolishly to take the bait. However, Mr. Dayne, if you are fond of the sport, I am sure papa would be pleased for you to fish up the Skilbeck as far as it lies in our grounds, whenever you are so disposed."

The very thing that Dunstan had been longing for so much.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," he answered, while the bright look that crossed his face showed plainly enough that his words were truth. "But I should be sorry to intrude on Mr. Gilmour's kindness."

"Oh! you need not be afraid of that," she answered. "Lewis was telling him only the other day that the stream was getting overstocked. It ought to be fished in more frequently than it is."

"Then why not practise a little yourself?" asked the Doctor. "The gentle craft ought not, one would think, to be without its charms for ladies."

“I did try once,” said Winny, laughing, “to please Lewis. He said he did not care to go fishing by himself, although he is so fond of it. It was so dull,” he said, “going alone, and he persuaded me to learn, just to be company for him, you know. But I was so stupid over it. I tangled the line, and got the hook fast in the bushes, and all sorts of disasters, and then he got out of patience, and said it was not worth the trouble of teaching me.”

“I don’t suppose it would be,” returned the Doctor gravely. “You were always a dull child, Winny.”

“I know it,” she answered, dropping her eyes with a demure pretence of humility. “But it is not kind of you to remind me of the fact. I never tell you disagreeable things. For instance, how grey your hair is getting just over your temples, like snow in fire, you know. It would hurt your feelings, and I should be so sorry to do that.”

“Yes, yes. Well, we won’t quarrel, little

lady," said the Doctor. "We might not make it up again, and that would be unfortunate. And now come into the house, and let me see whether you have practised your part well in that duet of Mendelssohn's. You sang it very badly the last time I heard you."

"Oh! yes, I wanted to have done it better, but it was not my fault, exactly. You see Lewis had not been in the mood for singing, and it is such wretched work hobbling through a duet alone. However, I know it quite perfectly now—I do, indeed! I could sing it all through without my notes or anything. Rachel Dallas came up to the Hall on Thursday, and she tried it over and over with me until I knew it by heart. And that reminds me of something I had meant to tell you, only I am so careless I might have gone away and said nothing about it. She says old Mr. Gillespie is very ill. He had a sort of fit, or something, not long since, and they don't think he will get over it."

“Poor old man!” said the Doctor. “I had not heard of it. So they think he is dying, do they? Well, one might almost be thankful for it. Life must have been a sore burden to him for a long time past. I have wondered, sometimes, why he has been allowed to linger as he has, unless it were to try the patience of both himself and others. Rachel must have had a hard task with him.”

“She must, indeed,” said Mrs. Kennedy, who, with Dunstan, had been listening apart to what was going on. “There are very few daughters who would have behaved as admirably as she has done. The very sight of such incessant suffering must itself have been almost unendurable, at times. But there always seems such an immovable passivity about that girl. She is a perfect mystery to me. Nothing ever seems to take the slightest effect upon her, either in one way or another. And yet I can hardly think it is because she is destitute of feeling.”

“I am sure it is not,” said the Doctor, “only there is not spring enough in her to cast off the weight of circumstances. Hers is a nature which needs a more than common share of happiness in order to develop it, and, instead of that, she has always led a singularly cheerless, saddened life.”

“Rachel Dallas!” said Dunstan, who had been listening with interest to the conversation. “That is surely the young person who came the other Sunday to the farm. She has a rather romantic history, has she not?”

“Very,” replied the Doctor. And there he seemed disposed to let the subject drop, for he turned again to Winny, bidding her come into the house.

“It begins to be rather chill,” he said, “standing about out of doors, and yon great fire that I see shining through the parlour-window, looks decidedly inviting. Come along, Winny, and the others will follow.”

But Winny drew back reluctantly.

“I should like to stay,” she said; “but I must go home. I must, indeed!”

“Why ‘*must*’?” said Mrs. Kennedy, with a smile. “Is there anything going on at Rooklands to make your presence such a matter of necessity that you cannot spare us so much as half an hour?”

“Oh! no,” answered Winny; “only, if I don’t go back directly it will be quite dusk before I get home. Don’t ask me, please,” she went on, in a tone of pretty entreaty; “I would so much rather go, if you will allow me!”

“If we will allow you!—of course we will allow you, if you have made up your mind to go. You would be disagreeable otherwise, probably, and spoil our evening,” said the Doctor; “but I don’t see why you need be in such a hurry to get away. It will be light for an hour or two yet.”

“I know what it is!” burst in Geordie, who had been careering about the garden with Ponto, Winny’s dog. “She doesn’t like going

down the Cedar Walk after sunset. They have seen the ghost there again, and everybody is talking about it. Fred Stacey told me that old Stead, the tailor up at Edge-end, saw it one night last week when he had been taking home a coat for Michael, and it gave him such a turn that he had to go into the 'Chequers' for a glass of something to bring him round."

"I am afraid old Stead would find as bad spirits at the 'Chequers' as any he would meet with in the Cedar Walk," said Mrs. Kennedy. "But you need not try to frighten Miss Gilmour, Geordie, with all the ghost-tales you hear in the village."

"Oh! but I don't frighten her, mamma, she was frightened before. Nobody likes to go down the Cedar Walk now. Fred Stacey says so. Not unless they have some one with them."

"Nonsense, Geordie," said Winny. "There is no ghost, and I don't suppose I should meet it if there were."

But though she tried to laugh away Geordie's insinuation, a tell-tale blush, that rose unbidden to her face, seemed to imply that Winny was not quite proof against the fears inspired by the weird frequenter of the Cedar Walk.

"Nonsense, Geordie," echoed his mother. "Little boys believe anything that is told them."

"It isn't nonsense, though," persisted Geordie, who was seldom to be dispossessed, except by main force, of an idea that he had once acquired. "You can ask anybody you like, and they will tell you there is a ghost at Rooklands, and has been for hundreds of years."

"That will do, Geordie, that will do," said his father. "We don't want to hear anything more about the ghost at present. Take Ponto and have a race with him in the paddock. Miss Gilmour won't want him just yet."

Geordie went off in silence with the dog. No one ever disobeyed the Doctor.

"And now, Winny, come away into the house,

and let us find something livelier to talk about than this ghost of Geordie's. Why, child, you are looking almost as scared as if you had seen it yourself."

And so she did. For the sudden flush had died away, and there was a dubious quiver on the curved under-lip which might resolve itself into a smile, but was just as likely to end in something quite the reverse. For Winny's was one of those guileless, transparent natures, too innocent to hide by art anything by which she was either distressed or pleased. And it was evident just now that this passing cloud had overcast the little soul, a moment ago so bright.

"Don't send Ponto away," she pleaded; "I want him to go back with me. I am sure it will be dark in the plantation before I get home."

"In the Cedar Walk you mean," said the Doctor. "Now, Winny, listen to reason. You come into the house with us, and take off your hat and cloak, and behave yourself like a sen-

sible girl, as you are, and Mr. Dayne shall take you home after awhile; and then if you should chance to meet with anything on the way, you can run away in company. That will be much better than you and Ponto trotting off by yourselves. Mr. Dayne will oblige me, I am sure."

Of course Mr. Dayne would be only too happy to render such a pleasant service both to Dr. Kennedy and to Miss Gilmour also, if the young lady would do him the honour to accept him as an escort. Indeed, though he did not say so much as this, Dunstan thought that nothing in the world could have been more agreeable to him just then than this proposal of the Doctor's. For he had great confidence in his powers of pleasing, and even while the little colloquy was going on, had resolved within himself to make a better use of this opportunity than of his former one, and, if possible, to commend himself as effectually to her good graces, as she had already commended herself to his. A consideration which made him reply so readily to

Dr. Kennedy's proposal, that Winny smilingly withdrew her hesitating protest against troubling him with so long a walk on her account; and the matter being settled to everybody's satisfaction, the little party went indoors, where there was a blazing fire rollicking in the parlour grate, and all the means and appliances for spending a choice and cozy hour.

"Now, Winny," said the Doctor, when the tea urn had been sent out, and all were settled down again, "look out your music from that portfolio, and let us hear what you have been doing."

"No, no," said Winny, shaking her head, "please don't! I would much rather not. Let us sit down here and talk; it would be so much nicer. And it has been so dull at Rooklands; I have had hardly anyone all day long to talk to except Punch."

"And what have you been talking about?" asked Mrs. Kennedy with a laugh.

"Are you sure you don't tell him any

secrets?" said the Doctor. "He might not keep them perhaps, and then he would get you into trouble."

"He can't, for I haven't any to tell him," said Winny; "but if I had, I would trust him with them as soon as anybody else. Punch is a very good dog. You don't know him so well as I do. And he is not at all bad company. I am quite sure he understands what I say to him; indeed he does almost everything but talk himself."

"Well, well, we won't depreciate Punch. No doubt he is a dog of good average abilities—but where is this music? We have got company to-night, and Mr. Dayne expects, no doubt, to be entertained. Come, we are waiting."

"I can't to-night, I am not in the mood," answered Winny, with a look of entreaty, half piteous, half perverse. "And, besides, I don't like singing before——"

"Finish your sentence, Miss Gilmour," said

Dunstan, smiling in spite of himself. "You were going to say, you don't like singing before strangers; and I am afraid at present I must plead guilty to being one, though I hope I shall not continue so very long. But it would be too cruel to punish me for what is no fault of mine."

"Oh no," said Winny in some confusion. "I did not mean that exactly; but I really don't feel like singing to-night. Pray ask Doctor Kennedy not to make me. He is so tyrannical over me," and she glanced archly at the Doctor, "perhaps he will attend to you."

"Because I am a stranger?" asked Dunstan.

"I suppose so. But would it not be much nicer for us all to sit and talk round this charming fire than to drag you away to the piano to admire my bad singing?"

"Very much better," answered Dunstan, bowing profoundly, and thinking in his heart

that nothing could be more pleasant than listening to the merry badinage that was going around him. Not that Winny ever said anything specially striking or original, for she was not at all what people would call a "superior" girl, indeed, if anything, she was rather the reverse, her faculties, what she had, lying at present at least, much more in the region of the heart than of the head. But everyone knows what a charm there often is about the pretty nothings that fall from such a pair of rosy lips as Winny's, especially when accompanied by all the attendant witchery of dimpling smiles, and bewildering little gestures, and sweet, stray glances from laughter-loving eyes.

"Very much better," he repeated. And Winny, having gained her point at last, clapped her little hands, and darted a triumphant glance across the fireplace at the Doctor, who returned it by a gesture of mock submission, and then threw himself back resignedly

into the cushioned recesses of his chair, as if he might as well, perhaps, make up his mind to endure the infliction of small talk, which he saw to be inevitable.

The Doctor was still a noble-looking man, though he was on the verge of fifty, and as Winny had said, was getting decidedly grey upon the temples. He had the broad cogitative nose of a man who thinks much, and to the point; the sensitive mouth and finely moulded chin of one in whom the strength of manhood is tempered with something of a woman's tenderness and fineness; the even brow and luminous, deep-set eyes, which, when found together, usually indicate a mind possessing equally the power of self-control, and the faculty of bringing others into relation with itself. And now, as the firelight shone upon his head, thrown out as it was into relief by the crimson cushion behind it, its aspect of contentment and repose seemed to bring out into more vivid contrast the expression of abound-

ing untried life that looked forth from the faces of his young companions. Winny, so full of buoyant grace, sparkling and changing at every instant, and the other with that proud tawny head, and the bright, somewhat defiant face, which told plainly enough of a spirit not yet broken in to obey reason rather than impulse, one which would need some bruising and fallings in the mire before it had learned that it is at times infinitely harder for a man to get the mastery over himself than to overcome any amount of adverse circumstances.

But this evening everything seemed just fitted to bring into play all that was most bright and kindly in the young man's disposition. For certainly there was something in the very atmosphere of the Lodge that caused the fairest self of everyone gathered there to blossom out. Dull people found there that they had something to say; shy ones felt themselves at ease; stiff ones found the backbone of self-assertion begin to bend; in short, by some

happy infection, the Doctor's guests usually became oblivious of themselves, and proportionately alive to all that was pleasant in those around them.

And to-night the Doctor was in one of his most genial moods, and Mrs. Kennedy even more gracious and bountiful than usual, and Winny—but nothing, Dunstan thought, could possibly be more delightful than to look at her as she sat on a low seat by the side of Mrs. Kennedy's chair, to watch that pretty girlish face with its changing play of quietness and mirth, and to listen for the dimpling laugh that greeted each quaint sally of the Doctor's.

Some one has said, I do not know how truly, that England is the only country in the world where, on a summer's day, a man may enjoy the luxury of lying out of doors in the sunshine. Everywhere else it is so hot that you are nearly broiled, or so damp and cold that you must do it at the risk of rheumatism or catarrh. It may be so, I cannot tell, but this

may be received as an undoubted fact, that in no other land can there be found anything equivalent to a genuine English girl—such a girl, for instance, as was Winifred Gilmour. There are charming women, no doubt, and lovely children elsewhere, but only here do we meet with that delicious blending of womanhood and childhood, the dewy freshness of the one lingering into the bloom and ripeness of the other, which belongs to the maidens of this sea-girt isle alone.

Winifred Gilmour was more than nineteen, so that she could not by any accommodation of the term be called a child. I have seen sober matrons, wearing with dignity and discretion the meek crown of wifehood and motherhood, who had not counted more summers than Winny. And yet there was really very little of the woman about her beyond the sweet rounded form, moulded as it was after the most perfect pattern of feminine grace, and her voice, which was singularly rich and soft, full

of cadences and vibrations that gave to even her lightest chatter a certain air of sweetness and repose; a voice which, when she spoke, seemed to touch and surround you like a fragrant floating vapour; one, indeed, that seemed hardly in keeping with everything else about her, for tones like these are usually the index to a nature at once intense and sensitive, capable of profound and passionate emotion; and looking into Winny's sunny face, it seemed hardly possible to imagine that even a passing cloud should ever have leave to cast its shadow over it.

For a sunny face it was, with a pair of the merriest blue eyes, through which the happy little soul seemed to be always looking gladly out, and a cunning dimple that appeared in each rosy cheek every time she laughed, which she did very often, showing all her white teeth, so that her mouth became then almost as bright as her eyes.

So Dunstan sat there, and looked and

listened, and took his part in all that was going on, with a zest that showed how keenly he was relishing this blink of society; and felt, on the whole, much as a tropical plant might be supposed to feel, which has been raised in some bleak unkindly atmosphere, and then is suddenly transported to its own native land, where a richer life thrills through the balmy air, and the lavish sunshine warms each pinched blossom into beauty.

But while the fun was still flowing thick and fast—for to-night the Doctor was in one of his maddest, merriest moods, and, as was always the case, brought everyone else into the same humour as himself—the bronze timepiece on the mantelshelf tinkled out the hour of nine, and Winny started up, exclaiming that really she must not stay any longer; they would be getting uneasy at home about her, for she had not even told them where she was going. It was of no use trying now to persuade her to remain. The little lady could be decided when she

pleased, only when Mrs. Kennedy said that it would be taking Mr. Dayne away so very early, she looked perplexed, as if this was a thought that had not occurred to her before.

“Let her go—let her go,” said the Doctor. “They will be sending some one, perhaps, to seek her;” and with that he rose and stretched and shook himself, as if he had just escaped from some tedious infliction. “She had better go, if Mr. Dayne will excuse our dismissing him so early.”

So Winny got leave to depart, and then Dunstan took her under his protection and set off towards Rooklands, feeling, if the truth were told, not altogether dissatisfied with the way in which his evening at the Lodge had been cut short.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOUR FEET ON THE FENDER.

“**I** LIKE that young man exceedingly,” said the Doctor, when they had settled down again, after seeing their guests depart. “There is the right sort of stuff in him, if I am not mistaken. Plenty of grit, and yet you can see at a glance that his mother has been a woman to be loved. Poor girl! How Dayne used to hold forth to me at College about her, and I daresay she was all he thought her, too. We will have him down here pretty often, Hetty. It will do us good to import a little young life among us, I was feeling the other day as if I were beginning to get into years. There is nothing so good for a middle-aged man like me as having young

folks about him. It keeps the youth in him better than anything else that I know of."

"We have Winny Gilmour here often enough," observed Mrs. Kennedy, somewhat absently for her.

"Ah, yes! Winny, poor child!" said the Doctor. "She is a good little thing as far as she goes. But she is but a girl, and besides there is too much of the saccharine element about her at present. She wants just a little mixture of the acid and the bitter. There is no such thing as stirring her up to anything like having a will or a way of her own. It spoils her completely. A girl is good for nothing unless she has a little resistance in her composition; there is nothing to lay hold of if she hasn't. You may as well try to make a meal of the pink froth on the top of a trifle. Pretty to look at, and nothing more."

"It is very true," said his wife, who was still seated gazing into the fire, as if she were seeking something among the glowing coals.

“I don’t feel at all satisfied, about it,” pursued the Doctor. “It is a bad thing for her, I am sure it is, living shut up so constantly in that gloomy old place. She never gets the least glimpse of society anywhere but here. We must try to bring her out a little more, Hester, and give her more confidence in herself. She really wants it. She is as much of a child now in her ways, as most girls are at fifteen.”

“So she is,” answered Mrs. Kennedy. And there the conversation dropped. The Doctor reached himself a pamphlet that he had half finished reading, and the lady relapsed into the reverie which his remark had hardly interrupted.

Yes, as the Doctor had said, Winny was a dear little thing, though there was almost too much simplicity about her. No one could help loving her. And as Mrs. Kennedy mused on, the woman’s heart within her went out tenderly after the motherless girl. But yet—Cyril was her eldest born, the very joy and glory of her life, and a young man’s success in life depended

so much upon the sort of wife he got. Winny would never have dignity enough to assist him in maintaining anything like a position in society. And portionless as well!

And Mrs. Kennedy's thoughts ran back to her own early married life, with its privations and many cares, and she remembered how anxiety and overwork and strife with poverty, had furrowed her husband's brow, and bowed his head, and fretted his nerves before he had even reached his prime. Her brave bright Cyril! No, it could not be; and yet she trembled lest what she hoped was fancy only might ripen into love. Of one thing she was certain. Winny had not lost her heart, at all events. But then she was such a gentle little thing, she never could bear to give pain to anything, not even to a dog, and if Cyril were to urge his suit, she would be sure not to deny it.

So Mrs. Kennedy felt assured. What mother of a son like Cyril ever imagined it possible that her boy should choose in vain?

And in August he was coming home. She sighed, and the Doctor looked up and glanced inquiringly at her for an instant; then turned to his book again.

But Mrs. Kennedy did not always tell her husband what was passing in her mind. Women seldom do. Perhaps too, after this stage, her thoughts, if such they could be called, were too vague and shadowy to be able exactly to shape themselves in words.

Yes, it was better for Cyril that he should bear the momentary pain of losing Winny than be trammelled all his life by the results of an imprudent marriage. And this Mr. Dayne was all that could be wished for in a young man, except of course that at present he was poor. But then his prospects were good, and he was one who would be sure to make his way in time. And Winny was young, only nineteen. Four or five years' time would still be soon enough for her to marry.

But at this point in her meditations, Mrs.

Kennedy rose hastily, as if half-ashamed of the direction in which her thoughts had wandered, took the pamphlet out of her husband's half-reluctant hands, and sat down beside him to finish aloud the last chapters of a new novel that they had been reading together the evening before.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SQUIRE OF ROOKLANDS.

OF course everyone knows, or if they do not, they are hereby advised of the fact, that a moonlight walk on a soft May evening, with such a charming little companion as Winny Gilmour, is a thing that may fairly be reckoned among the luxuries of life.

So Dunstan thought, at all events, when they had looked back to the open door where Mrs. Kennedy and the Doctor stood nodding them a bright farewell, and were fairly started, side by side, on the road which led to Rooklands.

“Did you know Doctor Kennedy before you came here?” said Winny, after a little scattered talk had passed between them.

“No,” said Dunstan; “I never even spoke to him until to-day, though he was an old friend of my father’s. They were at college together.”

“Ah! that must be a long time ago,” said Winny, softly. “Then is your father dead, Mr. Dayne?”

“Yes, he died not long after I was born. I don’t remember him at all.”

Winny was silent for an instant.

“And your mother?” she asked, in a half-hesitating tone.

“She died too, not long after. I can only just remember her.”

“And have you no brothers or sisters?”

“No one,” replied Dunstan; “nor aunt nor cousin, nor anyone belonging to me, except an old half-uncle, who, I daresay, hardly knows whether I am alive or dead.”

“That must feel very strange,” said Winny gravely, as if she were trying to realise the situation, “to have no relations at all. What

should you do if you were to be ill? I mean, very ill indeed?"

"I don't know," answered Dunstan, smiling at the girl's simplicity; "I never thought about it. I suppose I should die, or perhaps get better."

It was not a particularly bright subject that they had contrived to hit upon.

"But suppose you didn't get better," she said, in a musing voice; "there would be no one to be sorry for you if you died. That must be very bad. I should not like it myself at all."

"But what difference could it make to you?" said Dunstan. "You would not be here to know anything about it."

"No, to be sure," she answered; "still, I should not like it."

And then for awhile both were silent, and only the sound of Winny's tripping steps and of her companion's firmer tread were to be heard.

But by-and-by the soft voice began again.

“Don't you like Doctor Kennedy very much?”

“Very much,” answered Dunstan, “what little I have seen of him. He is a fine man. One does not often meet with his equal.”

“And Mrs. Kennedy too,” said Winny; “she is so bright and so kind. She always makes you feel as if the sun were shining. I don't think anything in the world could make her dull or still like some people. She is always just the same as she was to-night. And I have known her for a great many years—ever since I was quite a little girl. Before Lewis had his tutor, he and I used to go to the Lodge to have our lessons with Bertie—that is their second boy; he is at Eton now; and afterwards Mrs. Kennedy was so kind as to teach me to play and sing. You know, there is not anyone in Glinton who teaches music; and she said it would be such a pity for me not to learn. Was it not good of her to take so much trouble? And she

sings so beautifully. Did you hear her sing to-day?"

"No," said Dunstan; "I had no opportunity. We were only just going into the house when you came to us."

"Ah! that is a pity. The next time you go, you must ask her to let you hear her. It was so nice when Cyril was at home. We used all three to sing together."

"Cyril—who is he?" asked Dunstan.

"Oh! don't you know? He is their eldest son. But he is not at home now. He is in London; he is going to be a barrister, and everybody thinks so much about him, he is so very clever. Why, he got the Clifford medal when there were nearly two hundred candidates trying for it besides himself."

"Indeed!" said Dunstan, who did not know exactly what the Clifford medal was, though he felt at the moment as if he had rather it had been any other of the two hundred candidates who had succeeded in obtaining it.

“But you know,” she went on, “you would never tell that he was so clever, for he is not proud in the least, he is just as nice as if he were only like other people. And when he is at home he makes such fun for us. He is always thinking of something to amuse us. We acted a play last Christmas when he was here; we had it in the oak dining-room at home, and we had proper dresses and everything. It was so nice, you can't imagine!”

“And did you perform too?” asked Dunstan.

“Oh! yes, only I could not help laughing, and spoiled my part. But Cyril was very good. He said it was not as if it had been real acting, for we were only doing it for our own amusement, and if we did but enjoy ourselves, it was just the same as if we played ever so well.”

“But you had an audience, surely?” said Dunstan.

“Ah! that was the worst of it. We had papa and Lewis, and we let old Michael and Phipps and Mrs. Bray come in—they are the servants; but, you see, we never do have company at home, papa does not like it, and there was nobody we knew in the village that we could invite, except two or three whom we wanted for actors. But we did just as well without an audience, only that there was no clapping. I suppose the servants did not exactly like to clap, and papa and Lewis scarcely ever do care for anything. It was very good of them to look on.”

This father of hers must be an uncomfortable sort of man, said Dunstan to himself, and as he looked round in the dusk at Winny's soft, bright face, and listened to her innocent talk, he half wondered how so fair a flower could have sprung up at all on such an unkindly soil as that Rooklands home of hers.

“You know,” she went on, “Lewis can't

enjoy himself like other people, because he is not strong, and Doctor Ransford says that exertion, perhaps, might injure him. The only thing that he is really fond of is fishing; it does not fatigue him at all; but then he says it is so dull going out by himself, and there is no one that he can ask to join him, except Cyril, when he is at home. That made me so glad when you said you liked it too, because I thought if you could get to know each other, you would be such nice company for him."

"What an innocent little thing it is, to be sure," thought Dunstan, with an inward smile, though he was glad enough to hear her renew the subject, which, in truth, he had almost forgotten till thus reminded of it.

For certainly it was a great piece of good-fortune to have entered thus easily on a privilege which he could hardly have ventured awhile ago to have even hoped for. And though possibly the young heir of Rooklands

might not be quite so pleasant a companion as his sister, they might have some very good sport together nevertheless.

But by this time they had reached the tall spiked fence which marked the boundary of the grounds around the Hall.

“This is the gate,” said Winny, when they had gone on a little further.

It opened with a rusty groan, as Dunstan pushed it back upon its hinges, and then they found themselves in the Cedar Walk. And certainly, any one given to superstitious fears might have been almost pardoned for indulging them in this *ærie* solitude. Winny hushed her chatter as the shadows of the tall sepulchral trees closed over them. Even Dunstan felt oppressed by the unquiet silence that reigned around, and chilled through by the influence that seemed to distil from the gaunt black trunks, and the fibrous foliage through which the moonbeams were trickling sparsely with a wan, cold light.

Involuntarily they quickened their steps, till, in a few moments, they emerged into the open space, half lawn, half shrubbery, that lay before the house.

The moon shone down here so sharp and bright, that Dunstan could perceive distinctly even the details of the building. It was a rambling, ragged-looking place, with that indefinable air about it which one may observe in houses as in persons, of having once known better days, but as if it had reached at last that state of apathy in which it had ceased to be any longer mindful of keeping up appearances. The stonework was damp, decayed, and stained in places with a greenish moss; untidy creepers straggled over the walls, and at one end several of the windows had been rudely boarded up, while the overgrown shrubbery, the shaggy lawn, and the untended borders, seem to have been long abandoned to neglect, though here and there, amid the rank luxuriance of unpruned roses, honeysuckles and flowering shrubs, a patch,

less untidy than the rest, seems to hint at some feeble effort to subdue the prevalent disorder.

Winny passed by the front of the house, where a broad weedy road led up to a large recessed door surmounted by a crumbling coat of arms, and went round by a more frequented path to a smaller side entrance. A belt of immense Portugal laurels, which must have been a hundred years at least in attaining their present unwieldy growth, flanked this side of the house; and on the gravel path beneath them, half hidden in the shadow that they cast, a dark figure was pacing slowly up and down.

“There is papa!” cried Winny, and leaving Dunstan to follow, she ran up to him.

“I have been at the Lodge, papa. I was so afraid you would be wondering where I was.”

He stood still, and looked up at the sound of her voice.

“Is that you, Winifred?” he said. “I judged where you would be; but you should not have staid away so long without letting us know. I

have just sent Michael there to seek you.”

“I am very sorry, but I could not help it,” said Winny. “They would make me stay, and Dr. Kennedy said I should not come back alone.”

She turned to Dunstan, as if for the moment she had forgotten him, and introduced him to her father.

“This is Mr. Dayne, papa. It is the gentleman who saved poor little Punch from drowning. He has been so kind as to bring me home.”

Mr. Gilmour bowed and gave his hand to Dunstan, as he acknowledged, though without the slightest touch of cordiality, the services of his daughter's escort.

“We are much obliged to you,” he said; “but I am afraid you have been brought some distance out of your way.”

“I am not sure,” said Dunstan, “for I am a stranger in the neighbourhood and scarcely know as yet how the roads lie; but if I have,

it is of no consequence. I am happy to have had it in my power to render Miss Gilmour any service."

And as he had now accomplished his appointed task of bringing the young lady safely home, Dunstan was preparing, with these words, to take his leave. But Winny interrupted him, for drawing her father a little aside, she said something to him in an undertone.

"Certainly," he replied aloud; "if Mr. Dayne is fond of fishing, he is perfectly welcome to any sport which he may find in the stream here; and if he will do Lewis the favour now and then to accompany him, it will be a great kindness, I am sure."

There was a stately indifference altogether in the way in which the desired permission was accorded, that jarred slightly on Dunstan, though he was not disposed on that account to refuse the proffered courtesy.

"I shall be glad to avail myself of your permission," he said. "There is nothing which I

enjoy more than an hour's fishing now and then, but I must not trespass too often on your kindness."

"You will not do that," replied Mr. Gilmour. "I believe the stream is overstocked already. Lewis was saying so this morning."

As he spoke, a casement in the mullioned window behind them opened, and the same slight, fair-haired lad looked out, whom Dunstan had seen the other morning in the church.

"So you have come home at last, Win," he said, in a thin, boyish voice. "Where have you been hiding yourself all this time—we thought you were lost?"

"I have only been at the Lodge," she answered; "I could not get away sooner. But come out, Lewis, we have something to tell you."

"Stay where you are, Lewis," said his father. "What are you thinking of, Wini-fred, to bring him out into the night air. Mr. Dayne will, perhaps, go in with us."

Dunstan hesitated, pleading the lateness of the hour as an excuse for not intruding.

“You will not intrude,” said Mr. Gilmour; “we shall be glad if you will go in.”

And turning, he led the way into the house, followed, not unwillingly, by Dunstan.

They went in, and crossing a wide hall, entered what seemed to be a library, though it was not easy to distinguish anything in it, there being no light beyond that afforded by a dull red fire and the slant moonbeams which fell through the window across the floor.

“How gloomy it is in here,” cried Winny.

And going to the fire, she stirred it to a dancing blaze which gleamed merrily on the little group around it.

The lad’s face looked pleasanter, Dunstan fancied, than when he had seen it in the pew at church. The restless, querulous expres-

sion was gone, and as they began to talk of the fishing, which had brought about this unexpected introduction, it lit up with an eager delight that gave it at times a faint resemblance to the bright countenance of his sister.

Even the stern features of Mr. Gilmour seemed to relax, as he stood leaning with his elbow on the mantel-shelf, listening to the plans which already the two young men were making for going out together the very next evening; and a gleam of strange tenderness stole into his eye as it rested on the pale face of the lad.

Dunstan, glancing aside for an instant, was struck by that same expression of intense and yearning fondness which he had noticed in the church, as if, indeed, this passionate attachment to his son were the one living spot in the dead and frozen nature of the man. Which, in truth, it was; and the doors of Rooklands might have been barred for ever against Dunstan, had it

not been for the thought that by admitting him he might open the way to some gratification for the lad.

Whether it was the idea of the fishing excursion that excited Lewis, or whether, as Mrs. Doyle would say, that Mr. Dayne was such a gracious young man, and perhaps more so than usual to-night, but certainly during the ten minutes that Dunstan staid, Lewis seemed to have conceived already a liking for him, enough, at all events, to make Mr. Gilmour second, with something almost of warmth in his manner, the parting request that Dunstan would not forget the engagement, but appear as early as might be on the following evening; a promise which he was in no wise loath to make.

Another moment, and the door was closed behind him, and Dunstan was out again under the stars, hurrying on towards the Ghost's Avenue, too well pleased both with himself and his evening's adventures to cast more than a

passing glance towards the sombre front of the house, on which now the moonlight gleamed with a cold relentless stare, casting sharp shadows under the eaves and within the recess of the unused portico, towards which a tall elm that stood not far away thrust down a lank and leafless arm, as if for ever pointing mutely to the spot where twenty years ago the dead woman had sat through the winter night, leaning against the oaken panels of the door, which the master of Rooklands himself had opened in the pale morning light to receive his ghastly guest.

But of all this Dunstan thought nothing; as indeed, how should he, with the remembrance of such an evening as he had just spent to look back upon, and the prospect of others, brighter still, perhaps, which stretched in indefinite succession before him. Yes, it seemed as if life really was beginning now to be a very pleasant thing.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE IVORY GATES.

IT often happens that a common interest will rapidly bind quite opposite natures into very intimate relations with each other, and so it was, that after this somewhat odd and unexpected introduction to the family at Rooklands, Dunstan found himself a pretty constant visitor at the house. For now that he had met with a companion who pleased his fancy, Lewis Gilmour had taken to fishing with the wayward eagerness of a spoiled and petted lad, who has been brought up in the fixed idea that to please himself is the sole aim of life, and who not unfrequently finds the task more irksome than agreeable.

The mornings might still hang heavily upon

his hands as he lounged idly through the empty hours; but when with the slant sunbeams Dunstan came, and the two set off together to the stream with rod and creel, there was nothing wanting to his enjoyment. And there was really much that was very pleasant about the lad, when, as now, there was nothing to cross his humour; much too that was bright and intelligent, even beyond his years, so that despite the disparity between them, Dunstan found himself wonderfully content with his young companion.

Meanwhile, Mr. Gilmour looked on apart in silent satisfaction. Lewis had got something at last in which he took an actual interest. That was sufficient. So long as it lasted, Mr. Dayne might come as often as he pleased to Rooklands; he would be always sure of at least a tacit welcome from its austere master.

And pressed by Lewis, Dunstan did come often; indeed, almost every evening, except

when he went to the Lodge to spend it with the Doctor and his wife. And after being on the stretch all day—for though Dunstan enjoyed his work, it was none the less a strain at first upon him—he thoroughly enjoyed his evenings, and set off with Lewis to try his luck at angling, with as much zest as a school-boy just released from grammar and the rule of three, rushes off to taws or cricket.

And no wonder, for to a lover of the craft, what could be more delightful than to loll upon a sunny bank beneath some drooping ash or willow, and rod in hand, to watch the sleepy ripple of the stream as it slipped along over its pebbly bed, just rousing up from time to time, as a tug at his line warns him that some unlucky trout is nibbling at his bait.

Still it was not altogether for the pleasure of the sport, nor yet for the sake of Lewis's society, nor even to be honoured by the grim hospitality of the master of Rooklands, that

Dunstan bent his steps so often towards the Hall, when the labours of the day were ended. It was an attraction more subtle and more potent still that drew him there, for was there not always the secret hope that Winny might be somewhere near when he arrived? And ever, if he left without having had a smile or a word from her, or at least without having caught sight of her light figure and fluttering dress among the trees in the shrubbery or garden, there would be a vague sense of incompleteness in his mind, marring the remembrance of the evening he had passed.

But sometimes the sum of his enjoyment would be complete, for she would join them when they went down to the river, and then usually it was but little fish that found its way into the basket that Dunstan took back with him to empty upon Mrs. Doyles' kitchen table; for as they all sat chatting merrily together, he would so forget what he was about,

that his float would lie upon the water unnoticed for half an hour together.

Or if she left them, as she often did, to ramble down beside the stream, it would be just the same, for his eye would keep following her wherever she might go, alighting on her as a bee upon the flowers. He could not help it. It was so pleasant to watch her as she tripped up and down the green slopes, stooping now and then to gather the forget-me-nots and grasses that grew beside the water, or calling to them, her face all aglow, when she had found some blossom of unusual size and beauty, and then running up to show her treasures and enjoy their admiration.

For there was nothing timid or constrained in Winny's manner towards her brother's friend. There was in it all the sweet fearlessness of perfect innocence of heart and thought. And though, as Dr. Kennedy had said, she was perhaps, from the way in which she had been brought up, too childlike for her years, yet it would

have been hard for the most captious critic to find fault seriously with the graceful, wild *abandon* of her ways, or do other than smile at the wayward vanities which sat so prettily upon her. And surely, too, it must have been a lovely soul that had sought so fair a home in which to dwell. For Winny's was not the mere waxen prettiness of form and feature. There was something in every look and gesture which made you feel instinctively that the charming face belonged to a nature more charming still.

At all events, Dunstan felt quite sure about it, and one can hardly wonder either at his arriving at the conclusion, for as anyone may see, who has any experience in such matters, the young man was breathing just now a very dangerous atmosphere. For, as we have seen, his nature, long frozen up by that chill London life, had been warmed and softened by his recent prosperity, by the wholesome in-

fluence of work, still more by the homely kindness that had surrounded him at the farm-house, and by the friendliness of Dr. Kennedy and his wife. And now, like seed into a soil prepared for its reception, there fell these bright looks of Winny's, the merry laughter and the girlish talk, half shy, half gay, which every time he saw her seemed a thousand-fold more charming than before.

In short, he was admiring her too much not to be loving her a little, though this was what he no more thought of than he thought of the heart that was beating in his breast. But, indeed, a young man, if set down as Dunstan was now, where he has leave to put himself forth on every side, pleased with himself, and, as a matter of course, disposed also to be pleased with everybody else, is pretty sure, as the phrase goes, to fall in love with someone or other. He may keep his secret to himself, but always, through the lattice of his

thoughts, some woman's face will be looking in upon him. Not a fair one, perhaps; none the less will he see a beauty in it there for himself alone. He cannot help himself. He does not often try. His fate carries him forwards, almost without his will, to some end unknown. Nay, it seems indeed sometimes as if the will were passive altogether.

Winnie Gilmour was a dear little thing, and a good little thing, as Dunstan said to himself a hundred times a day; and well it was that he could say so. But if that fair face of hers had been like a draft on an empty bank, a mere promise to pay, and nothing more, it would have been all the same to him. He had felt its witchery; and there was nothing for him but to yield. And yield he did, as, indeed, under the circumstances, what better could he do?

There are, no doubt, sensible, practical, matter-of-fact individuals, who ignore completely any such weakness as that of "falling in

love," and who, if the estate of matrimony be one that commends itself to their approval, will walk soberly into the great modern woman-market of "society," and with a judicious regard to pecuniary and other considerations, select therefrom the article of which they are in quest. But this prospective prudence, which has an eye mainly to the wine-cellar and the money-bags, and which requires the aid of the lawyer as much as of the priest, to tie the marriage knot, is no more allied to the sweet madness of love than the odour of a barber's shop resembles the fragrance of a bank of violets. For what does the sensible, practical, matter-of-fact individual know of that divine visitation to the heart and soul which creates for him all things anew, which makes this dull old earth all radiant with purple light, which thrills him with such mysterious delight if the fluttering hem of the loved one's robe does but touch his feet?

Nothing at all. Indeed it may be questioned

if these things are even compatible with a due appreciation of the three-per-cent Consols and the rate of discount. Though, after all, since our whole life is said to be but a selection, and men must perforce, for the sake of some things, go without others that they fain would have, there is doubtless a wisdom of its own, even in the conduct of such philosophers as these.

But it was a wisdom to which our hero had not attained. All he knew was, that this life of his, which awhile ago had lain dead and barren as a November field, had now become all flushed with warmth and beauty. These leafy blossoming June days held no harsh realities for him. He walked through this troublesome world as through an enchanted land. Everything he set his hand to seemed to prosper. Difficulties smoothed themselves away before him. He went to and from his office at the railway-yard, feeling as if it were hardly possible for anything to go wrong. And

surely there was some charm that kept them from ever getting out of the right track, for so prosperously did the works advance, so steadily did each man plod on in his appointed groove, that but for his presence and his eye, as Dunstan said sometimes to Dr. Kennedy, he thought he hardly need be there at all, so little did there seem to be for him to arrange or interfere with.

There might be vexations connected with his work. No doubt there were. With a set of untutored "navvies" to be dealt with, not to speak of various under-clerks and overlookers, besides the Local Committee and London Board of Direction; and with occasional small bogs to fill up, and embankments to be made, and a plaguy stream that ran into the river just below Glinton, over which a bridge had to be carried, it was hardly to be expected that vexations of some kind should not at times occur.

But Dunstan was never disturbed by them.

They slipped from him without his perceiving them, like water off a duck's back. It was a time to which, in after years, when the cares of middle life had begun to repeat in themselves some of the troubles of his youth, Dunstan looked back, as we look back amid the heat and flush of summer, to some first glad burst of sunny days, when, after a bleak and clouded March, the sweet spring comes upon us at unawares, and, almost before the last grey streak of drifted snow is melted in the hollows, has slipped over the bare brown hedges her robe of tender green, and spangled every bank and meadow with primroses and daisies.

For around him and within him the winter was past and the rain was over and gone, the flowers had appeared on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds was come. And all day long, and even in his dreams, there sang on within his breast a low mysterious song, unheard before, with strange cadences

that blent in subtle unison with the manifold sweet sounds of nature. The whispering of the wind among the poplar leaves, the twittering of the swallows that had built under the eaves above his window, the low call of the cushat-dove, the clear carol of the lark, the splash of the river swirling round its stones, seemed now to him but as parts of a soft full chorus, of which the thought of Winny Gilmour supplied the constant theme.

For though as yet Dunstan was hardly conscious of the fact, yet this thought of Winifred was gradually creeping into his breast, a vague, impalpable presence, unfelt often and unseen, yet filling all the trembling air with a new strange secret of delight. Through his whole life there streamed a mild auroral light, not as yet dazzling enough to blind him to everything save its own exceeding splendour; but like the rosy flush of dawn stealing gently from out the dusk, and warming into beauty all it touched.

But of anything like "intentions" towards Winny, Dunstan was guiltless altogether. The idea of marrying and settling, the prose details of house-rent and furnishing, the vexed question of supplies, and the calculation of how little it may be possible for two people to keep body and soul together upon, had never entered his mind in connection with the thought of her. If they had, he would probably have at once dismissed them. For Dunstan was proud as well as poor, and though good blood and good prospects are very well in their way, still a young man cannot exactly make use of them to pay his tradesmen's bills; and to ask a woman to share his home until he had one to offer her, was a meanness of which Dunstan, for one, never would be guilty.

So he thought, or so at least he would have thought, though, as everyone knows, complications in the sequence of events do at times

arise, which make it not easy for a man to answer for the course which, under certain circumstances, he may pursue.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH MRS. MALLINSON ENTERTAINS
QUALITY.

IT was one evening towards the close of July, just late enough for the sunlight to lie in long golden streaks among the reeds and willows that fringed the bank of the river where Lewis and Dunstan sat with their fishing tackle. Lewis's little green float lay uselessly enough on the surface of the water, for the trout were either too idle or too discreet to venture on more than a passing nibble. His ill-success did not trouble the angler, though. He was in a lazy mood to-day, and to lie on that green bank amongst the fern and moss, watching the float quiver up and down with the gentle motion of the current, and listening to the cool

plash of the water round the boulders which here and there vexed its course, was enjoyment enough for him.

Neither did Dunstan care very much whether the basket by his side returned full or empty to the farm, for was not Winifred Gilmour sitting by them, amusing herself by pulling off little bits of bark from the old willow stump, and sending them down the stream? And did not her girlish voice keep breaking in like merry music upon their long spells of silence? And where Winifred's voice and Winifred's presence came, there for Dunstan, neither weariness nor dulness could ever be.

"Winifred," said Lewis; and there the lad stopped, for the float dipped beneath the water. It was only one of Winifred's bits of bark, though, that had hit it.

"Well?" inquired his sister, for having paused, it seemed as if Lewis were meaning not to go on again at all.

"I was thinking we might have that evening

at Strensall that we have been talking about so long. Mrs. Kennedy says the heather is just in its beauty now. Mr. Dayne, will you go, if we can manage it, next week? We always go for an evening every July. Doctor and Mrs. Kennedy will go with us, but I shall take Prince, I like riding so much better than walking, and so there will just be room for you, and Geordie can be packed in somewhere, though he does get bigger now than he used to be."

Dunstan looked for his invitation in Winny's face, and found it, too for she brightened up as she said,

"Yes, Lewis likes riding by himself, because then he is not obliged to talk unless he likes; and if you could enjoy it, Mr. Dayne, it would be very nice for us all to go together. Strensall is such a pleasant place to go to, and the kindest old woman in the world gives us our tea, or whatever else we choose to have. And then we go rambling over the moor, and try to fancy ourselves in Scotland. Some people say

it is rather like Scottish scenery, except the mountains and the lakes."

Dunstan thought that was rather an important exception, but he did not say so, for a day with Winny would be worth all the lakes and mountains in the British islands, and gladly enough he accepted the invitation she had so frankly seconded.

So it was all settled. Winny went next morning to the Lodge, and fixed a day for the expedition; a day when, as the Doctor said that he expected to be about knocked up by a tough article for the "Home and Foreign Quarterly," on which he was writing now from dawn to sunset, he would have no scruples about devoting to enjoyment time that could not be used for work. And Mrs. Burd, the house-keeper at Rooklands, was directed to make half a dozen little savoury pies such as the Doctor delighted in, and as many apoplectic puffs in Geordie's behalf, and Mrs. Kennedy came forward with a handsome contribution of

Winnie's favourite sweet biscuits; and Winnie had her braided pink gingham suit got up for the occasion, and finally a letter was sent to Nancy Mallinson, bidding her have the kettle boiling at five of the clock on Saturday afternoon, Dr. Kennedy's useless day.

Which epistle, written by Winnie's hand on the daintiest of cream-laid note, and sealed with a tiny seal bearing the crest of Rooklands, was read and inwardly digested by the worthy woman to whom it was addressed, with feelings in which it would be hard to say whether exultation or affection most largely mingled. For if there was one day in all the year whose record was inscribed in golden characters on the tablets of her honest old heart, it was this, on which the "quality from Ginton" came to pay her their annual visit. As her husband used to say, with a curious mixture of pity and fondness,

"She's nobbut a woman, isn't Nancy, bless her!"

And she had a woman's innocent love of distinction and admiration. No duchess, standing velvet-robed in her ancestral halls to welcome a visit from Royalty itself, could have felt her bosom swell with prouder emotion than that which caused Nancy Mallinson's lilac kerchief to tremble over the womanly heart which it covered, when Mr. Gilmour's four-wheel drew up before her cottage door, and Winny, who, in consideration of the old woman's little weakness, always came in a carefully-prepared costume, fluttered the pretty draperies in the flagged kitchen, or walked side by side with her delighted hostess over the six-acre farm, admiring the poultry, inquiring after the welfare of the pigs, or praising the brindled cow who stared so patiently at them from under the great elm-tree at the bottom of the willow pasture.

But Nancy's greatest triumph, the time at which her honest pride reached its culminating point, was towards the close of the evening, when the anxiety consequent on hospiti-

able cares having subsided, she used to put on her best bonnet and cloak, and take her company round the village, professedly to show them some remarkably resplendent garden belonging to one of the cottages, or to see some little alterations which had been made since their last visit, but in reality to exhibit to the awe-stricken gaze of the rustic population Mrs. Kennedy's real silk gown with trimming half-a-yard up the bottom, and Miss Winifred's Leghorn hat, "all the way from London, an' the beautifullest feather ever was see'd, hiding itself among her bonny brown curls."

Oh! how proud Nancy felt then. How the bow on her time-worn black bonnet quivered in triumph as the dirty children scampered off one after another to their mothers, with the intelligence that "old Mrs. Mallinson were bringing the quality from Glinton up the street." Which intelligence was always followed by much subdued peeping out of half-closed doors, and whispered exclamations of,

“Laws now! But don’t they look beautiful.”

Poor Nancy Mallinson! “Nobbut a woman,” truly, but one of the simplest, honestest of the sisterhood that was ever looked down upon from man’s superior attitude.

“Ye ought to ha’ comed to your dinners,” she said, as the Doctor and Mrs. Kennedy, with Winny, Lewis, and Dunstan, having sauntered over the farm, and duly admired the stock, had seated themselves round the table in Nancy’s clean little kitchen, where a nondescript meal, half-dinner, half-tea, was spread out on a table covered by a spotless “huckaback” cloth. “Ye ought to ha’ comed to your dinners, an’ me fettling up such a rare un’ as I’d done. A fowl as my master and me’s been feeding of this month back for Bedesby market, an’ a bit o’ salt beef, an’ a batter pudden as you never set eyes on such a one for lightness, and then to go an’ put one off wi’ naught but coming to your teas, an’ bring-

ing your own stuff with you, as if you wasn't sure of a welcome to the best my master and me could get."

"But, Nancy, we told you only to have the kettle boiling, you know. Nothing else but that," said Winny, who had noticed Nancy's grieved look as the savoury pies, the puffs, and the biscuits made their exit from the basket in which Mrs. Burd had packed them. "Just the kettle boiling, you know—we didn't mean to come to dinner, or we would have sent you word."

"Whisht, whisht, honey! Folks can't live on kettles of boiling water as I ever heerd tell on, and I looked for it as you'd be here by noon, and I'd gathered up all the knives as I could find, for you know, Miss Winifred, you never comed no more nor five of you afore, and I'd just knives enough to fix you then."

And Nancy, whose greatest earthly wish was to see her pet comfortably married, cast a scrutinizing glance towards Dunstan, balancing,

doubtless, in her own mind between him and Mr. Cyril Kennedy. For Mrs. Kennedy was not the only person in the world to whose mind certain contingencies respecting her son had suggested themselves. Dunstan, however, did not see Nancy's glance, for he was caressing a big sheep-dog who had just come in to pay his respects to the "quality from Glington," but Mrs. Kennedy did, and, with a woman's free-masonry, she no doubt comprehended it.

"And I borrowed two or three platters o' Mrs. Wiggins," continued Nancy; "not as I'd go for to tell her I hadn't plenty, an' her the proudest woman in all the parish o' Strensall, as I should never have heard the last on it, if she thought I hadn't as much of everything as herself. But I telled her I'd got some o' the Glington gentlefolks a-coming to see me, as I'd promised to let them see that old delf of hers she sets such store by. And law! she fetched it out as pleased as pleased, for if there's a woman more nor another in this parish as likes

to creep up quality's sleeve, it's Mrs. Wiggins."

And Nancy, who prided herself on never creeping up quality's sleeve, or, indeed, being in any way affected by their influence, looked disdainful.

"I didn't need to borrow for spoons, though," she said, after a little interval, during which she had been into the back kitchen to fetch the tea-pot. "Them spoons as you're a-supping with, Miss Winifred, is real silver, none of your 'lectry plate, as folks calls it, just a bit of summut good on t' outside, like folks' manners as hasn't good blood in their veins. I had them there spoons in a present, Miss Winifred, when I lived maid with your father's own aunt, forty year ago an' more. She give 'em me herself for house-keeping as soon as she knew I'd gotten a young man as was likely. They was old-fashioned even then, for she'd had 'em laid by a good bit, but they're the real thing, good through an' through. I allays feels myself sort o' respectable when I looks at them there spoons. It's a

fine thing is old plate, for giving a family a good look."

And then Nancy bustled away to fill the teapot, coming back again to the spoons, however, as soon as she returned.

"I cleans 'em reg'lar of a Saturday, though I don't never use 'em, let alone when the quality comes to see me once a year. And then, when they're polished up I lays 'em down in a row, an' I looks at 'em, an' sometimes, when I sees Mrs. Wiggins a-coming up the town, I nips 'em out and begins rubbing of 'em at the window, so as she can see 'em going by. For Mrs. Wiggins hasn't got no plate, for all she's as proud as there isn't another woman in the parish prouder. And I allays thinks it keeps her a bit humble to see other folk's things as she hasn't got so good. Folks had ought to be kep' humble, as our clergyman allays says."

"But what shall you do with them when you die?" asked Winny, as she listened to the

honest woman's discourse upon her spoons ; those quaint, old-fashioned spoons, which fingers long ago mouldered in the Rookland vault at Glington Church, had once played with, as hers played with them now.

“Ay, Miss!” and a somewhat perplexed look came over Nancy's face. “That's what's laid hard upon my mind this good bit past. There's a niece of mine lives out in place as I didn't know but what I should let her have them, seeing she's all the kin I have left, and a likely young woman too, and one as would pay a proper respect to having of 'em cleaned and waited on as old plate has a right to. An' I telled her last back-end as I'd about fixed 'em to her. But she's got a young man as isn't to my way o' thinking, an' I says to her last time she was here—you see, knowing as the spoons is to be left, she comes pretty oft—‘Bessy,’ says I, ‘if you get that there young man you don't get no spoons o' mine.’ Because you see, Miss Winny, though there was naught about him to take

hold on, yet it lay strong on my mind as he was the sort to take to liquor, and then the spoons 'ud be melted up in no time, for it's a terrible thing is drink for melting up plate, let alone the respectability as belongs to it. So says I to her, 'Bessy,' says I, 'the spoons goes, or the young man goes, which you like, but you don't get 'em both.'"

"And which did she keep, Nancy?" asked Dunstan with a smile.

"The young man, sir, an' more to blame she, for saving your presence, sir, men is plentiful enough for any young woman who bides her time an' behaves respectful; but it isn't everyone who has a chance of six real silver spoons to set themselves up with. And so there the spoons is, and I don't know, Miss Winifred, but what you've a chance to get 'em yourself."

At last Mrs. Kennedy said they must set off to the moor, or sunset would be over. Even now the queer old Dutch clock that

stood by the chimney-corner was upon the stroke of six, and it was a long way to the moor, not less than a mile, to take the nearest path across the fields.

Nancy looked disappointed as the little party began to prepare for setting out. She dearly loved to talk to the quality, to have them sitting in that comfortable front kitchen of hers, with the door just open that stray passers-by might see the sheen of silken raiment, and catch the dainty accents of high-born voices in speech so different from their rustic tongue.

“You’ll come back soon,” she said, as Winny tied on her hat. “You’ll come back soon, leddies. Mrs. Kennedy will none think of your going home without seeing the new cottages at the top of the village, and there’s Mrs. Wiggins has the beautifulest lot of young chickens come off night afore last, as she’d be proud to show ’em to Miss Winifred, an’ give her t’ pick of ’em if she fancied

one. You're like to see 'em, Miss, afore you go, an' it's a good step to Mrs. Wiggins'."

Certainly it was, and Nancy, innocent diplomatist, was in nowise disposed to lose the opportunity of walking with her "quality" down the village. So Mrs. Kennedy promised to be back in time, and then they all set off to the moor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUT ON THE MOOR.

STRENSALL MOOR was a rugged unclaimed tract of land, which stretched away northward of the village until it skirted the rugged sides of the Blackstone hills. It was not beautiful, save when, as now, the heather bloomed upon it, and the July sunset warmed into a purple glow those great sweeps of furzy common which in spring and winter looked so desolate and defiant. There were no leafy glens, or primrose-covered banks, or streams on whose quiet waters lilies swayed in rest, and blue forget-me-nots bloomed upon the brink. Instead, there was ridge after ridge of billowy hillocks covered with long wiry grass, or purpled, as now, by the hea-

ther; tall clumps of yellow gorse, and ferny hollows where you might lie for hours, hearing no sound of life beyond the plover's scream, or the drowsy humming of the bees.

This was what the little party saw as they wandered on and on, till at last Lewis threw himself down on a bed of fern, declaring himself too tired to go any further; and Mrs. Kennedy followed his example, saying that the others, if they liked, could ramble on together, leaving her and Lewis to return by themselves. So, with some little demur from Winny, they agreed to separate, and, with the understanding that by eight o'clock they were all to be at Nancy's cottage again, she and the Doctor, with Dunstan, set off to explore a little on their own account.

But they had not gone far before Winny began to wish that she had stayed behind with Mrs. Kennedy and her brother. The Doctor, as we have already hinted, was not without some little peculiarities of his own,

one of which was an innocent and perfectly natural aversion to finding himself, under any circumstances, a person of secondary consideration in whatever company he might chance to be. It disturbed his equanimity, if so much as a dog indicated a preference for being patted by any other hand than his. A gracious weakness, over which the mantle of charity may lovingly be cast, seeing that in his case it sprang, not from vanity or self-display, but from an almost womanly delight in sunning himself in the favour and goodwill of those about him. Still it was a weakness, and one which, on the present occasion, Dunstan unwittingly called into play.

For how could he be expected to be chiefly, not to say entirely, engrossed by the conversation of a middle-aged gentleman who was getting gray upon the temples, even if the middle-aged gentleman was Doctor Kennedy himself, when by the Doctor's side Winifred Gilmour was tripping along in that pretty

pink gingham which she had put on to please old Nancy Mallinson, dancing off every now and then to pluck some noble fox-glove spire, or to get such a dear little spray of heath, with the loveliest cluster of purple bells, that might do to ring for a fairy's wedding, or stepping cautiously down some ferny bank to reach a tuft of emerald-tinted moss, a stray breeze the while fluttering away the braided gingham, and discovering a foot so dainty that it seemed almost to caress the flowers it trod upon.

But the Doctor, having his head still full of the article on the Crimean war which was even then passing through the post on its way to the London editor, was a little put out at the intermitting attention paid by Dunstan to a somewhat detailed exposition of the views therein propounded, and perceiving its cause, was minded, with a touch of perversity, to visit his companion's absent mood on Winifred's unconscious head.

So the girl, finding that he said only "Pish!" and "Pshaw!" when she interrupted them with her little appeals for admiration of her treasures—Winnie was such a warm-hearted, sociable little thing that she never could properly enjoy anything, even the finding of a blue-bell, unless she could share her pleasure with some one else—began to subside a little from her joyous mood, and walked along more soberly beside the Doctor, carrying her bunch of heath and fox-glove in her hand.

But she did not understand at all the subject of their conversation. As I think I have said before, Winnie was not at all "superior," and "tactics" and "foreign policy" and the like, did not sound half so nice, she was sure, as even Nancy's discourse about her spoons. She almost wished she had stayed behind, for neither of them took any notice of her, and it felt even duller than if she had been quite alone.

It was the "article" about which the Doc-

tor was talking so confidentially to Dunstan; she knew that, and fancying from his subdued tone that she was not meant to hear what was going on, she took the hint—for Winny was very sensitive about intruding herself where her company was not desired—and fell a little in the rear. Dunstan would have liked to have fallen behind too, but the Doctor had got him, figuratively speaking, by the button-hole, so that there was no release. He could only submit to his fate with the best grace he could, and mentally wish the Doctor in his study at home, working still upon this unpalatable article.

But Winny soon consoled herself, for presently she spied, upon a spray of fern, a splendid blue butterfly, of a kind that was to be met with only on the moor. Such a beauty, with his wings outspread, and Lewis had been wanting so to see one of these blue butterflies. It would be so easy to catch it, for it seemed to be asleep upon the fern. She

took her little cambric handkerchief and dropped it lightly over the leaf. Her eyes sparkled with delight. She had it safe! And now, how to carry it away, for if she took it in the handkerchief, it would get its wings, poor thing, so crushed and spoiled? She remembered that she had Mrs. Kennedy's note in the pocket of her frock. She took it out, and sitting down upon the bank, in a moment or two she had a little paper box, such as the children call a "fly-cage," cleverly constructed. She could carry her prize safe enough in that, if she could but get it nicely in. Yes, there it was, so comfortably shut up inside, with a little bit of heath and fern as well. And now she must get up and follow her companions, who must be some way ahead of her by this time.

They were indeed ahead of her. She had sat longer than she had imagined, and when she looked up they were nowhere to be seen. They must be beyond some of those furzy

mounds, she thought. It was so easy to lose sight of one another among the hills and hollows on the moor, and, carrying her box very carefully, she ran on as fast as she could, hoping to find them soon again.

But she passed one after another of the tall clumps of heath and furze, and still no Doctor Kennedy or Mr. Dayne appeared in view. They could not be very far away, however, and seeing, a little further on, a bit of high craggy ground, whence she could command a prospect for some distance round, she made her way to it, sure that then she should discover them.

But the bit of crag was not so near as she supposed. It seemed almost to recede as she advanced, and even when, at last, she reached it, tired and out of breath, she was as far as ever from success. And now she began to feel a little perplexed. She stood still and called aloud. No answer came. She should have done that sooner; they were out of

hearing now, as well as out of sight. The only thing would be to go back alone; but then, doubtless, they also would be seeking her. She would go just a little further, and then, if she did not see them, she must return alone, or it would be too late to go down the village with Nancy, and it would be such a pity to disappoint the old woman of her walk.

But there was little chance now, in that furzy wilderness, of finding her companions. She walked on a little while, feeling rather uncomfortable. It was so careless of her to have let them get out of sight before she went after them. But then Lewis would be so pleased with the blue butterfly. And Winny opened her box a little, and peeped in very cautiously, and then, with one final look of survey, she turned and set off by herself again towards Nancy's cottage.

CHAPTER XIX.

EUPHRASY.

WINNY went back a few steps, and then came to a stand in some little perplexity. For, to reach that bit of crag, she had gone out of the narrow track that threaded the moor, and now she was not quite sure which way to turn in order to get into it again. She paused a moment, considering, and then, plunging through a sea of billowing fern, found herself presently in a path, though whether, after all, it was the right one or not, she could not quite determine. It seemed, however, to lead towards the sunsetting, and Nancy's cottage, she remembered, was somewhere in that direction. She would try it, at all events.

But as she went on it seemed unfamiliar to her, and by-and-by it took a bend, and then she came to a little pool that lay beside it, its banks feathered by bracken and fox-glove. Certainly she had not passed this pool before. She must be wrong somehow, and yet how to get right she could not tell. She wandered on awhile, but there seemed to be no other path leading out of it. And it was so long, much longer, she was sure, than that by which they had come. She began to feel uneasy. It must be growing late too, past eight o'clock, she was sure, for the red glow of sunset was fading from the western sky, and the distant clumps of gorse and heather had begun already to blacken in the twilight.

She grew more than uneasy now. Suppose she should lose her way! And with the thought she hurried on more rapidly, in the vague hope of meeting with something or some one that should guide her steps aright. But she

only seemed to get further and further wrong. The mists, too, began to rise, filling the hollows with a dense white vapour, above which rose the dark knolls of furze and heather. And every moment it grew more dusk and damp, though still she toiled on, trembling now with weariness and excitement, and not knowing whether each step she took might not in reality be leading her only further away from where she wished to be.

She sat down at last on a bit of stone, too spent to go on any further. And now she began to feel herself chill as well as tired, for the long grass was wet with dew, and the air damp with the mists that were fast thickening over the moor, and blotting out every landmark by which she might steer her doubtful way.

She rested for a moment or two, and then got up and pushed on desperately for awhile. But again her forces failed her. She had been wandering about now for nearly two hours

since the sun had gone down behind the distant hills, and both her strength and courage were exhausted. She sank down on a knoll of heath, wearied and footsore, but shrinking, above all, from the thought that she might have to spend the whole long night alone out on that desolate moor.

Where were they all? Surely some one would find her before it got quite dark! And if they did not? She set her face and listened. Perhaps they might be somewhere calling her. She felt too faint and frightened now to call out again very loudly herself. But she heard nothing, save the whistle of the night wind through the crisp heather stalks. Oh! what should she do? It was getting so cold, too, and her thin gingham frock was all limp with damp. She pulled her little cloak shudderingly over her shoulders, and crouching back against a rough furze bush that grew up behind her, she leaned down her face into her hands, and began to cry.

She thought nothing, poor child, of the actual danger of her position. All she was longing for was to be warm, just to be warm, and to have some one near her in this terrible gloom. For now eërie fancies came swarming round her like ghosts in the pale glimmering light. She thought of the story of the dead woman and her baby; of the White Lady that was said to walk the Cedar Avenue; and the tall black whins and creeping mists seemed to her excited imagination to change themselves into shadowy half-human forms, as she glanced fearfully around her.

She moaned aloud; but the sound of her own voice through the silence frightened her. She dare not move. Oh, for some one to be with her! even the dog; something living and familiar, that she should not be afraid to touch; anything, no matter what, to save her from this terrible sensation of being alone, yet not alone, on that dark desolate moor.

Look where she would, that spectral figure seemed to loom before her with the moonlight shimmering on its ghastly face. She shut her eyes, but the tormenting vision still was there. With a kind of wild longing, she thought of the blazing fire in Nancy's cottage, and of the warm seat within the chimney corner. But always opposite to her there sat the stark figure with the baby in its arms. She shrieked out, and then hushed herself, as again her voice sounded strangely amid the low hissing of the wind. She could feel the blood curdling round her heart—creeping coldly through her veins. Her forces left her, the life was shuddering within her, strange weird sounds seemed hissing round her through the dusk, and then suddenly a ruddy light gleamed across her eyes, a voice near at hand pronounced her name; she looked up, and Dunstan Dayne stood before her, with a lantern in his hand, whose light he had just cast full upon her face.

That dreadful shape was gone. Some one was near her—who it mattered not—but she was no longer alone there in the night. She closed her eyes, and with a sobbing sigh leaned back against the bush of furze. The spent forces could do no more. She was safe, and that was enough.

It was Dunstan who was frightened now. Close upon the quick thrill that ran through him as he caught sight of her sitting there upon the ground, was alarm at her pale and languid look. He sought hurriedly for the flask with which Mrs. Kennedy had provided him. But to his dismay the pocket he had put it in was empty! It must have fallen out as he was clambering some of those steep crags.

“Miss Gilmour!—Miss Gilmour!” he cried, for she looked as if she was just ready to faint.

But Winny seemed not to hear. Her eyes were closed, her head fallen back, her arms

dropped heavily by her side. But she was not fainting, however, though she looked as if she were. She was simply overcome by that sudden shock of relief, in which, for the moment, everything resolved itself into the one intense consciousness that she was safe at last.

Dunstan was rather perplexed. To the best of his knowledge, when ladies fainted, it was generally in church, and then they had to be carried out. That was about the extent of his experience. But though they were not much more than a mile from Nancy's cottage—for Winny had wandered, unconscious of the fact, almost to the edge of the moor—yet he could not very well take her up and carry her there himself. People seldom do that sort of thing except in story-books, and Dunstan was not in a story book, but standing out there among the whin bushes on the moor, with a lantern in his hand.

But while he stood looking doubtfully upon her, uncertain what he had better do, she opened

her eyes, and then slowly, recollection seemed to return.

“I was so frightened,” she said, in a sobbing, trembling voice, “I was so frightened, and it got so cold!”

There was something, at all events, to do. Dunstan pulled off his light overcoat, and wrapped it round her as well as he could. It hung rather awkwardly, to be sure, with the empty sleeves dangling outside, but it felt warm round the little starved shoulders, and it seemed to shake her back to life, for she smiled, and said in a tone more like herself,

“I had lost myself. Where are we? It must be very late.”

“Past ten, I should think,” said Dunstan; “but you are not far from home. We are just at the edge of the moor. Only I am afraid you are hardly able to walk just yet.”

“Oh! yes, I am,” she answered, rousing up now, as her spirits returned with the feeling of security; “let us go.”

And she rose, but not very steadily, and took a step or two as if anxious to be gone.

Dunstan offered her his arm.

"It will help you a little," he said; "you must be dreadfully tired."

Winnie took it. Indeed, she could not have gone many steps without assistance, for she was still faint and weary, and her little feet were sore with walking so long over the slippery heather. But Dunstan's strength was sufficient for them both. He did not talk to her, or inquire how it was that she had missed them. He saw she was too tired for that, and that the greatest kindness would be to let her be still; but he made her lean upon him, and when her footsteps flagged, he helped her on—and so, half-walking, half-carried, poor Winnie found herself at last safe at the door of Nancy's cottage, to the infinite relief of the old woman and of Mrs. Kennedy.

Dr. Kennedy was not there to welcome them.

He was out on the moor with Robin, Nancy's husband, and several people from the village who had gone to help them in their search. Lewis, too, had returned to Glington on his pony; for Mrs. Kennedy, who was a woman of great tact and presence of mind, and always knew exactly what to do on an emergency, had dispatched him for Mr. Strangways, the surgeon, so that, if need be, his services might be forthcoming.

Happily Winny did not require them, and when she had drunk the hot mulled wine which had been prepared in readiness for her, and had had something to eat, she brightened up and declared herself quite fresh again, and would by no means listen to Mrs. Kennedy's proposal that she should be put at once into Nancy's own bed, to sleep off there the effects of her nocturnal ramble.

So the phaeton, which had been standing ready to start for the last hour and a half, was brought round to the door. Mrs. Kennedy

said they had better not wait until Dr. Kennedy came in, but leave him to return with Mr. Strangways in his gig. And Winny, after much protestation on her part, was settled as comfortably as possible in the roomy front seat, and Mrs. Kennedy took her place behind, and with Dunstan to drive, they set off home, while old Nancy, with tears in her eyes, stood at her door, and watched her darling away.

They drove on quickly, but whether from the effects of the hot mulled wine, or from having been so thoroughly wearied out, Winny, long before they reached the gates of Rooklands, was leaning back with her head against the cushion of the carriage, fast asleep. Again and again Dunstan looked round at the fair young face so clear and still as it lay with the glow of the carriage lamp falling on it, and as he looked, there crept into his soul a feeling of yearning tenderness for the little helpless creature beside him, a feeling touched for the moment by no thought of her beauty, pure as that

of the mother for the infant sleeping on her breast ; one that he had felt for no other woman in his life before. It was just a great longing, unknown till now, to take that little fragile form once and for ever into his own safe keeping, and cover that fair head with the shield of a love strong enough to defend it from everything that might harm. For Dunstan knew now, what he had never known before, that if he ever married, it was Winifred Gilmour whom he would choose out of all the world to be his wife.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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