# DORIS BARUGH.

## A Yorkshire Story

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID,

AUTHOR OF

"PATTY," "DIANE," "THROUGH BBITTANY,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON: HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1878.

[NP]

LONDON:

PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.

BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

[NP]

# CONTENTS

## OF

## THE THIRD VOLUME

CHAPTER PAGE

### BOOK V—JEALOUSY

[NP]

## BOOK V.

## JEALOUSY

VOL. III.

[3]

# DORIS BARUGH.

## CHAPTER I.

## "LITTLE PHIL"

JUNE, "the sweetest and gentlest of months," was at its loveliest. The garden at Burneston Hall glowed with the purple and white and yellow of rhododendrons and azaleas—the last of every hue—orange, scarlet, purple, and primrose. Showing above these were groups of scarlet hawthorn and snowballs of guelder rose, shaded with golden showers of pendent laburnum—the luxuriant wealth of autumn, with the tender tints and coy delicacy of spring on the leaves and on the grass.

[4]

In the dark river nook made by the turn in the terrace wall was a plot of water-lilies. The white blossoms had opened widely, hiding their delicate green cups as they warmed their golden bosoms in the sunshine. They seemed to float the starred queens of the river on green silken barges, here and there spangled with gold, as yellow nymphœas showed between the close-clinging raft of leaves. In the terrace wall, beside one pier of the steps, a wild rose had niched itself, and flung down long sprays to the water's edge—sprays which, in the early morning, had been green, but on which the warm sunshine had opened the hidden white buds into exquisite golden-centred roses.

Towards these flowers, which grew so high in air, before their long arms flung themselves down to the river, that they were plainly to be seen from the garden, little Phil Burneston was dragging his nurse. He was a fine little fellow, nearly three years old now, with a lovely face, not much like that of either father or mother, like Doris perhaps in delicacy and

[5]

regularity of features, but with long fair silken hair and dark, sweet, brown eyes.

“I’se goin’ to get Faith a nosegay, an’ I will,” he said in a sweet, decided voice. “I yikes to, an’ gran’ma says I’se to do what I yikes, acos I’se a gentleman.”

Phil’s nurses had no great reverence for “gran’ma.” He was allowed, while his father and mother were in London, to pay a yearly visit to the Cairn under the conduct of his grandfather, who came over to Steersley to fetch him and bring him home, and for about a month after his return he was so spoiled and tiresome that only his mother could control him.

“No, indeed. Master Phil, an’ Missis Emmett wouldn’t approve of such goin’s on, I’m sure, an’ your ma,” added the London nurse with emphasis, “would be shocked.”

“No, she wouldn’t; oo’s silly.” Then he suddenly spied his mother at the glass door of the house. “Mamma!”—he ran away to her, and clasped his arms round her knees—“oo doesn’t mind me picking roses, does oo?”

[6]

“Don’t pick those near the water, my boy. Come with mamma to the flower-garden, and Phil shall gather himself a beautiful nosegay. Come.” She held out her hand.

But the little face still looked determined.

“Me wants roses. Faith yikes roses best; Ralph says so. Where is Ralph, mamma? Me wants him.”

“You shall have some roses, darling. Come.” She did not stoop to give the child one of the passionate kisses which she gave him when there was no one by to see; the child’s

words had stirred into movement the serpent that poisoned her life—her jealousy of Ralph Burneston.

He had been home only a few days, and little Phil clung to him with a love which hitherto the child had only shown to his mother and Ralph had petted and played with his little brother and seemed flattered by the child's passionate fondness for him. Phil was not much with Faith now. When he was about two years old the housekeeper had spoken her mind about his visits to the Cairn, and but for Mr. Burneston's

[7]

intercession she would have been dismissed.

"She may remain, as you wish it," Doris had said to her husband; "but she can only be housekeeper for the future. She has done her duty by our darling; I do her that justice; but I can see that her influence would be prejudicial now."

"As you like, though it is hard on an old servant like Faith." Mr. Burneston sometimes wished his wife would be less stern and unbending towards her servants. To the poor she was very kind and indulgent; but it seemed impossible to her now to forget, even for a moment, that she was Mrs. Burneston of Burneston; and her husband thought she was also stern and very hard in her judgment of Ralph.

Mr. Burneston had gone off to Eton with Gilbert Raine, and although Ralph's fault had been grave and disgraceful, still Raine's influence and the squire's own judgment had drawn him to be lenient towards the boy, who really seemed earnest in his promise of amendment. Mr. Burneston's idea was to keep Ralph at

[8]

Burneston for a year with a tutor, and then send him to Oxford; but when this was proposed Ralph begged to be placed abroad with a foreign tutor.

"He is right," Doris said; "he knows he cannot resist temptation, and he will have far less temptation to drink in France than he would have in England; besides, Philip, I could not bear to have him here, I really shrink from living under the same roof with a son who could disgrace his father's name as Ralph has done; and—and I cannot bear to think of his influence on little Phil."

Mr. Burneston was silent.

"I have vexed you," Doris said; "forgive me. I did not mean to do it. If it ever becomes possible to our little one to be as much in fault as Ralph is, be sure that I shall wish you to punish him severely."

She put her hand on her husband's shoulder; but there was no caress in the action: it was rather as if she strove to prove that she had no bias against Ralph.

Mr. Burneston looked up at her earnestly as

[9]

she stood before him, then he shook his head and smiled.

"We'll not discuss that, my love. God grant that you may never be put to such a trial! Ralph has made a fool of himself, but he'll come all right. I have told you before that you are apt to judge hardly of yourself as well as of others, and I don't believe you would be as unloving as all that."

"Unloving!" Doris withdrew her hand, and it fell by her side. "Surely justice and truth must come first; indeed, Philip, I shall always wish you to be much firmer with our boy than you seem to have been with Ralph."

"Poor Ralph!" Then as he rose from his chair—for this talk had taken place in his wife's room —"Ah, my darling, if you loved me better—and you will some day, I know—you would not always be so very hard on Ralph."

Her husband left the room as he spoke.

"So very hard on Ralph!"

Doris felt as she thought on the subject that it could not be again discussed between them; it touched them both too nearly on points

[10]

which they could not see with the same eyes. "If you loved me better!"... Her heart ached sorely at her husband's words. She could not accuse herself of any failure in wifely duty.

"Philip is exacting," she said proudly. "I do love him; I cannot always be telling him so. I like to be with him better than anyone except baby."

She was deeply wounded. When they next met, her husband tried by more than usual tenderness to efface the memory of his words, and Doris was too high-minded to show any rancour or coldness; but her reserve increased, and certainly her husband's appeal did not produce the effect he had hoped for.

After a few months Ralph announced himself so pleased with his French life—he was placed with a French savant close to Tours—that he entreated to be allowed to remain, choosing to spend his summer holidays in excursions to Switzerland, the Tyrol, &c., rather than at Burneston. He declined to return to England, even for Christmas, to the infinite relief of Doris.

[11]

But when the first summer holidays came she persuaded her husband to go over and spend a fortnight with his son, while she went to the Cairn to fetch home little Phil, who had been staying with his devoted grandmother.

Last year Gilbert Raine had volunteered to accompany Ralph to the Tyrol, and now in this bright fine weather the young man had returned without invitation to Burneston.

He had already shown so much affection for little Phil that Doris had softened towards him, and had even taken his part against his father. Mr. Burneston found his son greatly altered. On Sunday Ralph had yawned all church-time, and had made jokes about the sermon, and then he smoked from morning till night, and besides these "foreign habits," as his father called them, the young fellow had evidently coarsened both in manner and language.

Even Faith had said, "Eh, Maister Ralph, whisht, will ye noo?" more than once; but little Phil thought he was perfection; he could talk of nothing but his "big brother," and he worried to be with him all day long.

[12]

"Where's Ralph, mamma?" he said plaintively. "Me wants Ralph drefully."

Doris stopped and clasped the baby hand in hers.

"We'll go and find him, darling," she said. Her jealousy even was conquered for the moment by that compelling power—a child's entreaty.

But when they reached the rose-garden, a round plot surrounded by wire arches on which snowy clusters of blossoms with tassels of rosy buds contrasted with glorious creamy and with dark velvet-like crimson flowers, the child clapped his hands with delight.

"Me wants two—fee—four—five, all for Faith," he said. "Ralph says Faith yikes roses. Mamma, dho find Ralph; will'oo tell Ralph me wants him arectly?"

It was the first time the child had ever sent her away from him, and she felt pained that it should be for Ralph.

On her last visit to the Cairn, George had been absent, but John Barugh had urged her strongly to cherish affection between Ralph

[13]

Burneston and his little brother; this thought came back now and helped Phil's entreaty.

"Do you love brother Ralph so much?" She looked down sadly into the baby face, feeling as if it were no longer her special property.

"Welly, welly much! Me would yike to go to cool wiv Ralph," and the sweet dark eyes were lifted wisfully to the mother's face.

"Oh, Phil!"—there was such pain in her voice—"like to go to school away from mamma?"

"Dess—me would tum home adain;" then, with his little decided manner, which so perfectly imitated his mother's, he said, "Dho an' find Ralph arectly, will 'oo, mamma?"

Doris called the nurse, and turned towards the house. Her dark finely marked eyebrows were closely knit; the deep-set liquid eyes looked full of trouble, and the firm rosy lips were pressed together. All at once her troubled look turned into a smile.

"After all, it is natural; the child has never seen his brother before. The novelty of a brother is delightful to him, and I suppose

[14]

there is a natural feeling towards him. Phil is so good and sweet that he may be of use to Ralph; only I must see how Ralph behaves. I can't have my precious boy injured by bad example, and I am afraid Ralph will be often here now."

For the first time a chill doubt of the power of her own influence troubled Doris. She remembered that, yielding as her husband was, he always contradicted her about Ralph, and seemed to doubt her judgment in regard to him. Gilbert Raine, too, in his rare visits had shown the same distrust.

"But surely," she said, "if Ralph does not treat me better than he used to do, his father will not care to have him at Burneston. I will be as kind to him as possible; and, come what may, I will not speak against him to his father. Surely then Philip will believe in my justice towards his son."

As she went into the house she met Benjamin Hazelgrave.

"Where is Mr. Ralph?" she asked.

"Maister Ralph, ma'am? He's gone oop t'

[15]

village. I think maybe he's gone to Maister Sunley's about t' fishin'."

Since that memorable day Doris had not gone into either of the stone cottages opposite Church Farm. She had learned at the Cairn that Rose had twice left home to fill the situation of nursery governess. She believed that she was still away.

"I hope so," she said, as she mounted the hill; "though I suppose Ralph is too much of a fine gentleman now that he has been abroad and in society to care to flirt with a village girl like Rose."

She had reached the top of the hill; and, turning her head resolutely away from Church Farm, she looked on to Sunley's cottage. He was not sitting at the door; the door itself was closed, so was the window shutter. Evidently Joseph was away from home.

While Doris stood she wondered at herself. Was it likely that Ralph would come back with her just to please his little brother, if he had set his mind on sport?

"But still he would be pleased I took the trouble to seek him," she said.

[16]

All at once the door beside her opened, and Ralph came out of Mrs. Duncombe's cottage. Doris saw the door shut by some unseen hand, and she knew that it could not be that of Mrs. Duncombe, who for more than a year had been bedridden, and was tended in Rose's absence by Sukey Swaddles.

"It may be Sukey Swaddles now," Doris thought; but the next moment Ralph, who had not yet turned towards her, tapped at the door; he put in his head and said something, and then the door closed again. But Doris had seen Rose's flushed face, and had seen too that the girl perceived her.

Ralph was unconscious of Doris's presence, and he turned to go down hill, muttering to himself.

For a moment Doris stood undecided, then she hurried after her step-son.

"Ralph!" He turned; his bronzed bearded face looked quite unmoved by the sight of her. "You have been talking to Rose Duncombe," she said. "Ralph, indeed you must not go to see that girl; it is wrong."

[17]

Ralph looked first surprised, then insolent, then he laughed and sneered.

"Really," he said, "I think you had better not interfere with me, Mrs. Burneston. I can manage my own affairs."

Doris knew that she had spoken hastily and imperiously, but still she felt that she was right. She said, "I cannot see wrong done without trying to prevent it. It is not good for Rose Duncombe that you should visit her."

"Rose Duncombe!—nonsense! You had better mind your own business," he said, interrupting her roughly. "You will do more harm than good." He turned and went up-hill again, past the church along the high-road.

A bright flush rose on Mrs. Burneston's delicate face, but she checked her anger.

"I said I would not speak against him to his father," she thought; "I will not. I will show Philip the danger of keeping Rose here, and leave it all to him. *She* must be sent away this time."

[18]

## CHAPTER II. THE SQUIRE'S PERPLEXITY.

DORIS did not get a chance of speaking to her husband till they went down to dinner.

They only used the drawing-room when they had visitors. At other times Mrs. Burneston's sitting-room was the usual rendezvous before dinner, but sometimes she and her husband met in the gallery into which their dressing-rooms opened. They met there to-day, and as the gong had sounded they went downstairs arm-in-arm.

As they reached the bottom of the staircase, Ralph appeared above at the arched recess beside the bust of Clytie.

"Rose Buncombe is at home again just now,"

[19]

Doris said in a low voice; “it is not safe for Ralph, is it?”

The squire shrugged his shoulders; but the troubled look, which he had worn since Ralph’s return, deepened.

“Perhaps not,” he said; then Ralph joined them, and they went in to dinner.

Mr. Burneston was very silent, but he was too much occupied with his own perplexity to notice that something had happened between his wife and his son—though the forced politeness of their frigid reserve was evident.

Doris left the table as soon as dinner was over to seek the peace and soothing which her child had such power to give to her—though now a dread hovered over these meetings with her darling, the dread that he should speak of Ralph. She shrank from the strong overmastering dislike she felt for her step-son, but it pursued her. Hitherto she had found a refuge from it with little Phil, but now that the baby-voice made Ralph its constant theme, Doris almost writhed under the added torture.

[20]

“I fear I hate him,” she said as she went Tip-stairs, “he is so weak, so vain and shallow; and now there is a new manner, that of a confident coxcomb; all the freshness of boy-hood has left him, and he is only twenty. I cannot go on living with him in this way. Either I must conquer this hatred, or he must go.”

Ralph left the dining-room almost directly after Mrs. Burneston did; his father’s silence bored him, and besides he had to keep an appointment he had made with Rose. The squire’s face cleared when his son went away, but his eyes were still full of sadness. Although at different periods he had lived out of the world, he had always been full of

pursuits; his time and his thoughts too had been fully occupied; he had never indulged in self-communing, nor had he, except on rare occasions, troubled himself to think out his son's future. He was an optimist; all had hitherto gone right with him and his, and therefore all would go right to the end. This would have been his theory had he been questioned on it, till

[21]

Ralph came back from his self-imposed exile, and upset the theory.

The disgrace Ralph had incurred at Eton had pained and shocked his father; but Mr. Burneston shook trouble off easily, and disliked to be reminded of it. The evident change in his son's expression and manner had disturbed him on the youth's return from France, but even then at first Mr. Burneston had laughed at his own anxiety, and told himself he was growing a fidget. Away from Ralph, he shook off the uneasiness he felt; but each time this became more difficult. His attention was constantly roused by some look or word which showed how great the change was; Ralph's utter irreverence and his frequent oaths shocked his father, and so did the coarseness of some of his remarks.

To-day the squire sat thinking far more seriously than usual.

"Yes," he said, "Doris is right, as she always is. Ralph is just in a mood to make a fool of himself with Rose Duncombe; and though I really believe the girl is good and steady

[22]

enough, still his foolish notice of her may unsettle her; it is not fair to risk even the chance of it for the poor little girl."

He sighed, he disliked trouble, and yet he was strongly moved to go out at once into the village and speak to Rose. He knew that it was useless to ask his wife to interfere, for he

had silently comprehended the dislike Doris felt towards the pretty village girl. He had a good deal of fatherly liking for Rose; she had grown up under his eye, and he liked to look at her pretty face in the way he liked to look at anything that pleased him; but he had spoken to her very seldom since his marriage, lest it should vex Doris. Indeed the Burneston people said that marriage with the farmer's daughter had made the squire "much less free" than he had been when single.

"Yes," he said at last, "I'll see Rose now. It would be easy for her to go to the Cairn for a bit," he thought, as he went into the hall to get his hat. "If I wrote to Mrs. Barugh I am sure she would ask her at once; I know George would thank me for giving him the chance of

[23]

seeing her. Poor little girl, I should be sorry if she was made unhappy."

He looked uneasy, and then laughed.

"I am foolish about Doris" he said; "she would not be human if she was not wrong sometimes, and she is quite wrong about George and Rose. A marriage between them would do very well. The worthy fellow would make a good woman of her."

So he sauntered quietly up to the stone cottage—not through the steep village but round by the Vicarage, and then across the glebe-field—the secret pain and pleasure of his life. He loved to picture his beautiful wife as the child to whom he had at once given his love, and yet he felt that Doris always shrank from any reference to that first meeting.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Dear girl! Why should she not have whims as well as other people?" he said, looking at the gate. "I want her to be perfect, I suppose."

[24]

## CHAPTER III. IN THE HAZEL-COPPICE.

RALPH had said to Rose, “I’ll be in the copse behind the church at half-past eight.”

This copse was a little wood of hazel-trees that ran between the glebe-field and the highroad, and had the churchyard wall for boundary at one end, and the avenue, as the tree-shaded road above the Vicarage was called, at the other.

Among the hazel-trees were several oaks, a golden bronze as the evening light set their leaves aglow, and came flaming on their trunks with a radiance that was almost crimson. Broad lines of light fell on tiny glades where

[25]

pale pencilled orchis plants, with delicate frilled pyramids of blossom, were well-nigh smothered by tufts of flowering grass and pink panicles of ragged robin.

But Ralph Burneston had no eyes for any of these beauties of the wood. He held a stick, and, leaning against a young tree, he whiled away his impatience by slashing off the head of every flower within reach, from a delicate tiny green blossom at his feet to a rank hemlock that grew in deeper shadow.

“Curse her! Why doesn’t she come?” he muttered. “I was a fool not to think of this place before, and then that precious madam wouldn’t have caught me at the cottage this morning. I like her impudence, calling me to account. I shall do what I like in my own place. Ah, at last!” as his keen eyes saw a figure moving among the trees, and in a minute more Rose came slowly into view.

She was half ashamed of coming, but the glimpse she had caught of Mrs. Burneston had made her resolve not to receive Ralph again at the cottage; and she was still too fond of him

[26]

to deny herself the pleasure of a talk alone with him. Ralph was still a boy, she argued—a good two years younger than she was, and such a gentleman that there could be no real harm in meeting him for a gossip, though for all the world she would not have it known. So she came along shyly through the trees, the chequered sunlight flecking her pale gown with gold, and her face, half hidden by her sun-bonnet; but the deep shadow was very becoming, and showed her dimpled mouth and pretty, even teeth as she smiled.

"You're late, my lass." Ralph spoke roughly. "You should keep your time." He thought Rose ought to show more sense of the honour he was conferring on her.

Rose looked hard at him, and then laughed saucily.

"Eh, to be sure" she said. "We're none so easy to please as afore we went to France. But lads most always wait for lasses. Eh, but do go on telling me about France, Master Ralph. An' is there lots o' pretty lasses over there?"

[27]

"Come closer, Rose, and I'll tell you a secret," he said, his whole manner changing; he had not thought she could look so charming, and the meeting which he had asked for in mere idleness, to pass the time, seemed now worth having waited for. "Rose, honey!"—he put his arm round her and drew her close, in spite of her "Don't, Master Ralph, be quiet!"—"all the time I've been away I've seen nothing so pretty as you are. I've longed to see you again, my bonnie Rose! Come, give me a sweet kiss, won't you, for old acquaintance sake?"

"Oh! nonsense, sir." She twisted from his clasp, and gave her head a little toss. "I'll run away if you talk so." But she looked so bright and merry that it would have been

difficult to recognize the discontented face she usually wore in Burneston. “D’ye know, Master Ralph, I don’t think I ought to have come. If it was to get about ‘at I’d met you in t’ Church Coppice, we’d both get into trouble, you and me as well.”

Ralph laughed. “Why, where’s the harm of a talk in the wood?”

[28]

And Rose felt ashamed that she should have doubted his power to do as he liked.

“Don’t you trouble your pretty little head about right and wrong,” he said masterfully, and then, putting his hand under her soft round chin, he raised her eyes nearer his own. “I am your right just now, my sweet Rose, and you will try to make my holiday pleasant, won’t you, my little one, when I have come home all this way to see you? Burneston would be a pretty dull hole without you.”

“You may well say it’s dull. It’s just dead alive!” Rose sighed; then, changing into a pout, she twitched her chin from his hand. “But I don’t believe ‘at you’ve wanted to see me a bit. If you’d really cared,” she said reproachfully, “you’d ha’ come back sooner.”

“I don’t really care for you—you saucy little duck, don’t I?” And in an instant he was kissing her, not in the way in which one or two of Rose’s admirers had snatched a kiss at the village fetes, as if it were some immense privilege which they dared not make free with, but a whole succession of kisses on her cheeks

[29]

and lips too, which took away her breath, and frightened her.

“Let me go—let me go,” she cried, in a strangled, sobbing voice, struggling to get free. “How dare you, how dare you! Oh! I’ll never speak to you again, you good-for-nothing—oh!”

"Be quiet, you little fool!" Ralph was annoyed at such an outcry so near the high road. He let her go, but he held her arm tightly, lest she should run away. "What harm have I done you? Don't be silly, Rose," he said, more gently. "If you are so pretty, you must take the consequences. One would think you had never been kissed before. Do you really think I should climb the hill after dinner, and then not expect a kiss for my pains?"

Rose had recovered herself, after a little burst of sobs.

"A kiss, indeed, you took a dozen, or more, without leave—and so rough, too, it's too bad. It serves me right for trusting you. Let me go." She tried to go away. "I thought I was safe with a gentleman like you; but you're

[30]

changed, you're quite another from what you used to be. Let me go, sir."

But she could not twist her arm from his grasp. In her struggles her yellow hair had loosened, and fell down in golden ripples, and, with her flushed face, she made a picture that Ralph liked to gaze at.

"There, there, don't be angry, I'll not kiss you again, you little shy goose. Why, Rose, in France everybody kisses everybody else. You see I've forgotten English ways."

Rose shook her head. Her modesty and her dignity too had been sorely wounded. She stood silent, looking towards the entrance of the coppice.

I believe," said Ralph, skilfully choosing a subject which he knew would compel her attention, "that it is I who have the most right to complain, I heard, some time ago that you were engaged to that limping soft of a fellow, George Barugh."

Rose's blue eyes grew dark with anger.

"Whoever said that said a lie. But Ah'll not hear a word spoken again George neither.

[31]

He's been t' best friend to me ever Ah had, an' if Ah'd thought more on him, an' what he's telt me, maybe it 'ud hev been better for me." Then, remembering how bitterly she had quarrelled with her one true friend, for the sake of Ralph himself, she said vehemently, "An' you're t' very last 'at sud taunt me wiv carin' for t' poor lad."

"I'll not taunt you, my pretty rosebud, I'll say anything you like me to say, so long as you'll be friends and say you're not really vexed. Come, Rose"—he drew her towards him, keeping a firm clasp on her arm, for her tightly set lips warned him she was not appeased; but to Ralph, who considered that flattery, kisses, and presents were the only acceptable offerings in such a case, her resistance gave a charm which he had not mentally bestowed on this village maiden—"Come, Rose, say you forgive and forget."

"I can't say what's not true, Mr. Ralph," and her face flushed again as she remembered his rudeness.

"But if I beg your pardon—see, I kiss your

[32]

dear, plump little hand and I say,' Forgive me,'—and I'll never do so again till—"

Rose had begun to smile, but at this ending she tried to draw her hand away.

"No, no," she said gravely, "it must be out and out, or I can't have anything more to say to you. I know I was wrong to come at all, but 1 thought I'd like to have a little talk with you."

Her eyes filled with tears, and she turned her head away.

"Rose, my darling, what is it?—there, don't struggle—I'll not vex you, but I can't see you crying without trying to comfort you a little. What is it, my little one? tell me."

The tenderness of his voice sank into the girl's heart, and she let his arm go round her waist.

"I can't tell you," she sobbed, "for it's about you. Just now I thought I saw your true self, and it was as if my eyes opened sudden to the truth, an' I shrank from you as if you were a toad; an' now, when I hear your voice speaking so tender and soft, tenderer than even

[33]

George ever spoke, then I feel I can't give you up, it's like giving up Heaven."

For an instant he stood still, conscience-stricken; then, as she lifted tearful, love-fraught eyes to his, passion conquered.

"You sweet girl," he murmured, "give me one kiss my own Rose; why may not I be your best friend? why should you not trust me as you trust George?—I will not harm you, you little pet."

She put her hand behind her and freed herself from his clasp.

"I can't let you touch me," she said, "an' I'm not sure it's right to see you, but if you'll keep your promise there'll be no harm. Oh, Master Ralph, don't deceive me, for I've no one but you now."

"You little love"—he took both her hands in his, quieted by her appeal,—"but are you sure," he said doubtingly, "have you quite broken with George Barugh?"

Rose's eyes drooped, and she did not answer at once.

"It was along of you," she said sadly, the

[34]

truth of her love was making Rose strangely frank and direct, “he warned me before ever you came; an’ besides, I always thought ‘at it was George who told on us to Mrs. Burneston.”

Ralph looked scornful and unbelieving; he let go her hands.

“That’s nonsense; what could George know—unless his sister told him—meddling fool,” he murmured the last words to himself.

Rose shook her head.

“You see, Master Ralph”—she was shyer since he had loosened her hands,—“we village folk knows all ‘at passes, an’ it was a few days after you were at t’ cottage last time you were home that Mr. Sunley took on himself to scold me for letting you in. I was that angered that I told him to mind his own business, an’ he was vexed, an’ said I was a fond lass, an’ next day he went away, an’ I believe he went to t’ Barughs’ new place. More than once in talking since then he’s let me see he knows t’ Cairn, an’ that he’s seen George, an I believe he went and telt him then.”

“This is only your guess”—Ralph spoke impatiently,—“it’s quite possible the young fellow

[35]

low knows nothing about my visit to Burneston, or my acquaintance with you. I’m not in such favour with Mrs. Burneston”—his lip curled—“that she would care to talk of me to her brother.”

"I hate her, and she hates me," there was intense anger in Rose's voice, "but for her an' t' feelin' that she scorned me, I'd not, maybe, have said No to George, an' then I'd have been married an' safe long ago."

Ralph took her hand firmly in his own.

"What do you mean? How can you talk such folly? Look at me, Rose!" and instinctively the girl's eyes sought his; again her cheeks glowed, and her lips curved with happiness. "There!" he said triumphantly, "instead of being safe you'd have been miserable and mad; for you'd have loved me just the same, whether you had been married to George or not—but now, tell me," he went on, taking no notice of her faint protest, "have you never seen George, or heard of him, since I was last here."

"The Barughs nivvers come to Burneston,

[36]

none o' them. They come to Steersley, now an' again, an' yan time I saw George a few minutes, i' t' High Street there—that was all, indeed it was." She looked earnestly in his doubting face. "Onnybody might ha' heard all we said; but George hes wrote two letters, once each year, to tell me he's not changed, an'—an'—to ask me to give him hope."

"And you have given it him, you little witch," he said angrily, "yes, I see how it is: George is good enough for you while I'm away, and when I come back, you throw him over—now, he's but a poor limping lad, and a muff; but he's a good fellow too, and I liked him well enough; and I'm not going to help you to break his heart, Miss Rose. I don't doubt the poor fellow's mad with love for you, and it isn't fair. You must choose, once for all, between him and me—as friends, I mean."

Rose pulled her hands away.

"I'm wrong enough, God knows," she said, "but I'm not so bad as to trifle with a lad. I can't love, an' I never have loved George; tho' before you came maybe I should ha' wedded on

[37]

liking, knowing no other thing. I've answered both his letters, plain an' true, an' said 'at it couldn't be." She gave a sudden start. "See how dark it's getten, an' 'spose I meet anybody as I go home—ye'll never follow me. Master Ralph, dear," for he came after her as she turned away.

"Only to say good-bye, my own little rosebud. I'm thinking the wood across the river, or the moor on the Steersley road, is more out of the way than this; but to-morrow I'll meet you later; where shall it be?"

"Not to-morrow," she said, "I've a deal to do—an'—an' old Sunley's comin' home, an' it's best to keep him quiet—he's got a terrible tongue."

She let Ralph take a kiss as they parted, but she would not return it. She could not recover the trust he had so rudely shaken.

[38]

## CHAPTER IV. ROSE AND THE SQUIRE.

IT is a certain truth that true love has an elevating influence, and often rouses character in a being who without it would never have emerged from the mere monotony of common-place. The shade of disappointment which tinged Mr. Burneston's overmastering love for his wife served to keep it unselfish and purified. He was far more sympathetic and less careless in his feelings for others than he had been before his second marriage, and he now felt roused up to protect Rose from his son's folly.

As he drew near the hazel copse he heard a rustling; he turned his head inquiringly and

[39]

stood still, just within sight of the little gate that led from the nutwood into the glebe-field, with a corresponding entrance set at right angles into the churchyard. Though it had grown quite dusk within the wood, there was a lighter space round the gates, and, as he stood looking, Rose Duncombe came hurrying out of the wood; she pushed open the gate into the churchyard, and then closed it behind her. Having done this she stood still, leaning back on the gate, and clasped her hands over her eyes. It seemed to Mr. Burneston that she was either in pain or in grief.

He hesitated; then, finding that the girl stood still, quite heedless of any observation, he went close up to the gate leading into the field. It was so near the one against which she leaned that he could have touched Rose's shoulder.

She stood like a statue, utterly absorbed in her great grief. She saw her love for Ralph in all its strength, and she knew, with the sure insight which a true love sometimes gives, that

[40]

she was wasting it on a worthless object. A pit seemed to open at her feet, dividing her for ever from Ralph. If she stretched across it after him, there was no firm hand to steady her steps and guide her safely over the yawning rent.

"It's just play to him," she said passionately; "an' it's my very life; he cares nowt for me! Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

But the passion was soon wept away and her sadness deepened.

"Rose!"

She gave a little cry, and looking up saw the face she had loved so dearly all her life, and which she had grown to idolise in Ralph, but now with a pitying kindly look on it which seemed to Rose older and far kinder than the squire's. Her heart went out to him in an agony of love and remorse.

"Don't speak kind to me, sir; Ah cannot bear it. If you kenned what Ah'd been deeain', you'd be ower put aboot to speak a word to me."

She spoke in a wild shrill voice that startled Mr. Burneston, and made him look round at the

[41]

rick-yard to see if Shadrach or his wife were within hearing.

"Hush! hush! my poor child!" Then he said softly, "Come home now. I want to speak to you."

He stepped over the low wall of the church-yard and stood beside her. "Come!" He touched her arm and went on. Rose followed mechanically, past the grey head-stones gleaming in the dusk, past the screen of weird fir-trees, along two sides of the low granite wall, till he reached the entrance facing the church porch.

He held this gate open for his companion to pass through, and then followed her closely. She had spoken so desperately that he felt afraid she would run away from him.

But Rose went on to the cottage doggedly and heavily. The burst of passion had left her stupid and dazed with sorrow, for the sight of Mr. Burneston did not bring any comfort, it only strengthened the renunciation of Ralph, which she had plainly seen before her as she leaned against the gate.

[42]

"Rose, can I see your grandmother, or is it too late?"

The girl looked at him dreamily.

"It's ower late, sir," she said, "but gran'mother's maybe waking. I'll tell her you want to speak wi' her, but I doobt if she'll hear you."

She went upstairs slowly, as if she had suddenly grown old, but came down again in a minute.

"Gran'mother's sleepin', sir. Shall I waken her?"

"Oh, no, I'll see her to-morrow; and I'll see you too, you are tired now."

"No!" She roused herself and stood in his way to the door. She was very pale, and her lips trembled. "You'd best speak now; you'd best not trust me, as Ah doesn't trust myself. Oh, sir, Ah'll tell you all. Ah've been talkin' an' listenin' to Master Ralph, an' maybe if you don't forbid me Ah shall gan on listenin'. Ah love to hear him talk, an' Ah've nane so much pleasure i' my life 'at Ah can give him up all at yance—sae noo, that's it!"

[43]

The desperation in her voice shocked him.

"No, Rose," he said gently, "I am sure you won't try to see Ralph again, and I'll tell you why. If you care for him you will not try to get him into further disgrace with me, and I am already very angry with him. These meetings are harmful to you both."

"Ah told him you would be angry, but he didn't seem to think so. Bat it's all my fault, sir, indeed it is—he's not to blame!"

Mr. Burneston looked stern. He wanted to counsel Rose, and did not know how to begin. The acquaintance between these two could not have gone far, he thought, or she would be less suddenly frank. He stood looking at her.

"Sit down, my poor child, and listen to me quietly," he said presently. "It isn't right, you know. Rose, to meet young men like Master Ralph in the evening."

She looked wounded.

"Didn't Ah say Ah'd been deeain' wrang?" she wailed. "What mair can Ah say? Ah've telt him 'at Ah wadn't see him again."

"Rose, you must go away for a time." He

[44]

spoke very kindly. "I don't blame you so much, my poor lass. You will go away, Rose, to please me—won't you?"

She looked up passionately; then, as the yearning pity in his kind gentle face stole into her heart, she clasped her hands over her eyes and sobbed.

"Dunnot—Ah telt you not—dunnot speak kind nor look kind. Ah's not worth it; but, oh! Mr. Burneston, Ah'd try all ways to please you, but dunnot ask me t' go schoolin' again; it makes me feel 'at Ah'd like to drown myself."

He looked surprised and shocked.

"I never meant that, my child; but you shall go and stay with Mrs. Barugh at the Cairn. Listen!"—he raised his hand to check the fiery answer he read in her upraised face as her hands left her eyes—"they will all make you very welcome there, and you will be a great comfort to Mrs. Barugh. She's been ailing lately, and your kind nursing will cheer her up."

Rose looked eager.

[45]

“Did Mrs. Barugh say ‘at she would be fain to see me?” she asked; then she shook her head. “If she’d written to me, Ah’d ha’ credited it—but Ah cannot otherways.”

“You cannot expect her to write when she is ill, Rose.” Mr. Burneston hesitated, for in his heart he guessed Rose would be unwelcome to Mrs. Barugh. “But surely you will take my word. I will write to-morrow and tell them to expect you the day after. I will see that you reach Steersley in time for the coach. Now it is settled, is it not?”

Rose looked unwilling.

“Ah cannot say Ah want to go when Ah’d liefer stay,” she said sullenly keeping her eyes on the ground.

She looked so like her old childish self, with her flushed, tear-stained cheeks and pouting lips that Mr. Burneston felt inclined to manage her as he used to manage her ten years ago.

“Come, Rose,” he said, “your grandmother always said you would do anything to please me, and yet the first time I ask you to do the

[46]

thing I really wish you refuse. This is not kind, Rose.”

Rose grew very red, and her head drooped on her bosom.

“Will it really and truly please you, sir, or is it only to fret him?”

"He deserves punishment,"—Mr. Burneston frowned—"but it is for my sake and yours, Rose, that I wish you to go away quite as much as—as for any other reason. Come, you used to be a tractable girl, don't let me find you changed. You have no father to advise you, and you ought to listen to me as if I were your father."

He held out his hand and smiled so kindly at her that the girl's pride melted, and she took his hand in both hers and kissed it reverently, with all her heart going out to him.

"Ah'd lay down my life to please you, sir, you're so kind an' good," she sobbed. "Ah always said Ah would. Ah'll go whenever you please."

"That's right, that's a good little girl. Well, then, I'll send you some one the morning after

[47]

to-morrow, at five o'clock, to drive you to Steersley. You will breakfast at the inn and wait there for the coach, and some one from the Cairn will meet you at the village and drive you up to the Moor. You will have no trouble, everything will be settled for you. Now, good-bye,"—then looking suddenly grave, "Stay indoors to-morrow, Rose, and if my son should call, which is not likely, do not talk to him."

"Ah winnot, indeed Ah winnot."

"Go in," he said, as she opened the door for him, "and don't stand looking after me. Good-bye, God bless you, my poor child!"

Rose obeyed, then she went back into the little bare parlour and sat down.

"Oh, he is kind an' good. Ah could kiss the ground he stands on. Ah do love him. Ah believe if he telt me to walk to Lunnon Ah'd try to do it. Is it because he's Ralph's father, or is it that Ah loves Ralph becos he's like t' squire? Ah loved t' squire first.

Well, he's gitten his will o' mey. Ah've gien my word to do just t' very thing 'at Ah doesn't like, an' to put up with Mrs. Barugh's mincin' an' snubbin'

[48]

ways, an' wi' George's sermons—poor lad, Ah mun not be hard on George, for Ah's in his debt. Ah cannot give him what he's given me."

She turned as if from some hateful thought, and the look of sullen despair overspread her face again.

"Oh, my heart will breeak. Ah cannot gan away. Ah telt Ralph 'at Ah'd not meet him again, but even noo Ah langs to be with him. Nae yan ivver spake so sweet to me as he does; an' whiles he looks at me an' whiles Ah listens it's like heaven," she murmured. "What fer sud Ah give it up? it's ower hard, ower cruel."

[49]

## CHAPTER V. MRS. BARUGH'S UNWELCOME GUEST.

THE letter which Mr. Burneston wrote was to Mr. Barugh instead of to Dorothy. Without throwing any blame on Rose, or even, hinting that she had any special liking for his son, he said that for certain reasons he had decided it was better Rose should be kept away from Burneston for a couple of months or so, and that if it did not suit Mr. Barugh to receive her he should be grateful if he would find a temporary home for her in the village. "Poor little Rose looks ill and worried," he added, "and the change will, I think, be of real service to her. I have not said anything about it to Doris, so perhaps it may be better not to allude to my interference in the matter. I think

[50]

George's advice and influence would be very valuable to poor Rose just now."

It happened that John Barugh met the post-man on his way and took the letter from him. The farmer was sorely puzzled while he read—his mind was always slow in struggling to grasp facts—but as he walked with long striding steps across the moor he began to understand. He had not heard of Ralph's return but it seemed to him that there was some one in or near Burneston, perhaps staying at the Hall, who was paying more attention to Rose than the squire thought good for her.

"He's rare an' thoughtful an' kind, an' Ah's reeght fain tu help him."

A sly smile spread over the serious, weather-beaten face. "T' mistriss is touchous aboot Rose; Ah's dootful hoo shea'll tak' it."

He considered, but there was little time to spare; finally he turned back and went indoors, startling Dorothy by his unexpected return—startling her still more when he abruptly told her she might expect Rose as a visitor in the afternoon.

[51]

He made the announcement as briefly as possible, and he did not speak of his letter, then he retreated, leaving his wife too much surprised to ask questions.

Dorothy stood looking at the door he had closed after him, then she said three times in rapid succession, varying the accent with each explosion, "Well, I never!"

Her first thought was to get George out of the way, but there was no time for this, and as she stood thinking it seemed to her that the danger was less great than she had fancied it far off.

That curious mounting in ideas which comes to some people from the promotion of their friends and relations, had told strongly on Mrs. Barugh. She was still a farmer's wife, but since her daughter's marriage she had thought it necessary to keep two maids

instead of one, to use her silver forks every day instead of keeping them locked up; with various other small innovations tending, as she considered, to establish her position as the mother of a real lady. Her horizon had so mounted that,

[52]

although she could not drag John up with her, she tried to persuade herself that his rusticity was merely a way he had, and that he would "pass muster," as she expressed it, whenever the day should come—that day which shone like some bright particular star on the limits of Dorothy's horizon—when she should find herself installed as a visitor at Burneston Hall.

It seemed to her too that George's manners had benefited greatly by his visits to Mr. Hawnby, and she had hoped much from Rika's society. It had been a general disappointment that Miss Masham had not repeated her visit to the Cairn. Her mother's lingering illness and death had chained her at home, but Mrs. Barugh knew that she had at last promised to spend a short time at Burneston, and she hoped would also come to the Farm.

"If he cares for Miss Masham, it isn't in nature that he can care for Rose too, it 'ud be like choosing an apple when you might have a peach," said the anxious mother; "there's often more in fancy than in reality; not that he's lately breathed her name, but seeing her here

[53]

with her common ways, and thinking of the difference between her and that sweet young lady, must surely open his eyes to the foolishness of his fancy, even supposing he does still care for Rose."

She settled her cap, and threw both its long lavender strings with a jerk over her shoulders. She had been ill lately, and she felt weak and irritable.

"Anyway, it is a folly to have her here," she said pettishly; "but when John has that strong manner on him, you might as well try to reason with a rushlight for spluttering."

George had gone away very early on one of his long expeditions across the moors; he took his dinner with him on these occasions, and came in late. To-night though Dorothy had been eagerly expecting his arrival, she was too busy talking to Rose to notice it. George stopped at the parlour door, the strange but well-known voice thrilled through him, and set his heart beating and his pulse throbbing with mad excitement. Yes, there was Rose! This

[54]

moment, which he had so longed for, when he should see his one only love seated at his own hearth-stone between father and mother, had come at last.

The door was open, no one heard his approach, and he stood in the shadow of the door-way gazing his fill at Rose.

She looked pale and sad. He noticed that she scarcely answered his mother's flow of talk. A feeling that was half enjoyment, half shyness, held him back; he watched the light glistening on her golden hair, the pretty turn of her head with its small pink ears, and the exquisite crisped waves in which the shining hair rolled back from the fair temples. Her pensive, subdued look added a fresh charm—it gave the refinement to her he had sometimes missed. He could restrain himself no longer, his eyes were dancing with delight as he came forward.

Rose heard his step, but she would not look round. Mrs. Barugh felt suddenly tonguetied, the farmer only was easy and natural.

"See thee, mah lad, here's a stranger fra Burneston. Noo, mah lad, thoo's reeght doon fain tu see Rose?"

[55]

"That I am; ye're reeght eneeaf, fayther. How are yu. Rose, an' how's t' gran'mother?"

Rose flushed at George's warm welcome.

"She's no better nor no worse," she said fretfully; "there's no use me trying to make her hear, it hurts my throat to speak to her, she's deafer than deaf, she only hears Master Sunley, no one else."

"It's a sore affliction," John said seriously, while Dorothy glanced at George to see how he took Rose's grumbling.

Poor woman! her heart sank within her at what she saw. There he stood, his large tender brown eyes fixed strainingly on Rose, as if striving to get her face by heart, while she never once turned to glance at him.

"Rose," he said presently, "there's light enough still to see t' garden; that's not much, yu'll say, but beyond's t' glorious farstretching moor. Eh, my lass, you've nivvers seen such a sight; there's nowt i' Burneston can marrow 't."

Rose tossed her head. At that moment she felt sore and angry. How broad and rough

[56]

George's talk sounded after Ralph's soft voice and pleasant flattery; here he was taking the upper hand already.

"Burneston's not t' only place in t' world, lad," she said scornfully. "I've lived in a sight of places besides Burneston:" then recollecting her position as a visitor she turned smiling to Mr. Barugh.

"Do t' cows an' pigs thrive as well up here as they did at t' Church Farm, Mr. Barugh?" she asked.

"Weel, lass, t' feedin's maistly doon riverwards. Ah'll show ye ower t' Cairn t' morn, it's a'most fower tahmes as big as t' Church Farm; bud gan yer ways wi' George an' see t' sun set ower t' valley, it's a grand seeght, an' t' e'en's clear."

Rose went unwillingly to get her bonnet; no one seemed ever able to disobey John Barugh's express wish.

Mrs. Barugh shrugged her shoulders, but George's eyes thanked his father heartily.

"Now look you here, John"—Dorothy had scarcely patience to wait till the pair had left

[57]

the house—"if George takes up with that pert girl and disgraces us all, you've only yourself to thank for it, that you have."

The farmer went up to the mantelpiece and filled his pipe; then when he had puffed out a few whiffs he smiled kindly at her puckered face.

"Coom, mah lass, yu munnut be fractious. Yu've left that off lang whiles, an' Ah lahkes yu best wivoot a froon. Lahke will tak tu lahke, honey. Hevn't yu said monny a tahme 'at t' man sud be head, an' 'at a lass sud better hersel' when sheea weds. Noo then, Rose'll suit George better, nobbut Miss Masham 'ud suit him, thof tu mah thinkin' Rose has nae great lahking fer t' lad. Mebbe she's bespokken."

Mrs. Barugh's delicate face grew almost as red as her husband's broad hands.

"You're certainly not proud o' your own flesh and blood, John. To think of a girl like Rose refusing our George, and not feelin' she's honoured by him! No; my hopes are in quite another road. I think George may prefer Miss Masham."

[58]

"Posh!" John snapped his broad fingers. "Change is nut i' t' stuff 'at George is made on; that's where t' lad favvours his sister. Mebbe it's t' oanly bit o' lahkeness atween 'em."

Dorothy could only shake her head. He rarely spoke of Doris, but the mention of her at this disturbing crisis was overpowering. Yes, Doris—what would she say? What could she think of this folly of George's?

"Ah, she's got a will of her own," said the poor mother to herself. "If she'd been in my place, her man wouldn't have durst bring a visitor home without asking her leave."

[59]

## CHAPTER VI. ON THE MOOR.

NEXT morning the breakfast was a very quiet meal. George ate his porridge in silence, while Rose was so thoroughly wrapped up in her own thoughts that when Mr. Barugh spoke suddenly to her she nearly let the milk-jug, which she was passing back to Mrs. Barugh, fall on the floor.

"Hollaw!" said John, "a penny fer yer thowghts, lass; it's new fer ye to be musin'. Rose." Rose grew pink to the roots of her yellow hair, then she glanced timidly at Mrs. Barugh.

Dorothy was signalling and frowning severely

[60]

at her husband; it seemed to Rose that Mr. Burneston must have told the secret of her flight from Burneston, and the pink flush deepened to a burning red. Her hands trembled, so that she could hardly hold the knife and fork with which she was cutting some bacon.

George was angry and sheepish; he felt that something ought to be said, but did not know how to say it; he could only try to get Rose away from his mother's vexatious glances. He was too angry to reflect, or he might have been surprised at his own indignation.

"It's all mother's fault, every bit of it," he said to himself; "we s'ud all be happy an' comfortable but for her; she's a firebrand."

"Would you like to see t' farmyard, Rose?" he said, as the silence continued.

"Oh, yes, I should." She jumped up and ran away for her hat. John Barugh burst into a hearty laugh.

"Well, mah lad, an' it's plain ye're a chip o'

[61]

t' awd block, t' lass thinks wi' you; noo if Ah'd sehd that tu yer mudher when we war courtin', she wad hev cocked her neb at mey."

Dorothy's vexation overcame her prudence.

"You make mistakes, John; George and Rose are old friends, that's all, they're not thinkin' of courtin'."

This was the opportunity her son was waiting for.

"I'll not answer for Rose," he said. "I can only hope father's right. I dunnot know why yu sud think me changeable," he added stubbornly. "I've loved Rose all my life, an' shall love her let coom what will."

"Oh, George!" But Mrs. Barugh was stopped, the rustle of Rose's gown gave warning that she was coming down the creaking, uneven staircase close to the half-open kitchen door, for, except during Doris's visits, meals were not allowed to be served in the parlour at the Cairn.

George hurried to the door and met Rose in the passage; he was thankful to be spared, for ever so brief a space, the strife which he saw must come.

[62]

His father was on his side, and therefore he was in the right. 1 do not think that George, in the excitement of his joy and his love, remembered his sternness to his sister, who had her mother's good-will, though not her father's, in her choice, and yet George loved his mother much more truly than Doris had loved John Barugh; but then love blindfolds its victim completely, the soft witchery flings its veil over reason, natural affections, duty, even honour, dulling the eye to see, the ear to hear, and the heart to feel all save its own teachings.

George walked on silently beside Rose, watching the colour come and go on her bright face, and the eager interest with which she looked around her.

Yesterday George had put a great strain on his longing for open speech with Rose. He had felt as we all feel when a bird lights on the hand, or within a short distance—a word, a movement even, may fright the shy, wished-for creature away for ever.

It was such joy to be with Rose, to feel

[63]

the rustle of her garments as she walked beside him, to see her loved face and watch the changes of expression thereon, that, though his ardent love, kindled to intensity by her sudden presence, longed for a nearer, fuller communion, he still refrained from seeking this, lest he should lose the bliss he had.

Meanwhile his silence, the slight unconversational answers he made to her idle surface talk, drove Rose almost to frenzy. She could not choose but think; the overpowering events of these last days, days unmatched by any previous experience, filled her mind, and claimed to be dwelt on.

But the bliss of those moments spent with Ralph was so alloyed with the certainty that he was no longer the "Master Ralph" of her fancy, the boy whose image she had so fondly cherished, that there was as much misery as bliss in going back to them. The misery of this thought was alleviated as she remembered the squire. How good, how kind, how forbearing he had been to her! How thoughtfully he had

[64]

provided for her comfort on the journey!

She looked furtively at George as they walked. Good, amiable lad, she thought, but oh, how dull and tiresome after Ralph! Almost unconsciously her resentment rose against her companion, as recollection showed her how much he had taught her. He had really caused the misery of her life. But for his teaching she would perhaps not have noticed the change in Ralph.

"If he'd not tried so hard to make me good," she thought passionately, "I'd have given up everything for the other one. I'd have known no better. Oh! to have him all to myself, to listen to him all day, to look at him only!"

She gave a groan which made George start. His eyes met hers, and the agony in them set all his self-restraint loose.

"What ails you, lass?" he said very tenderly. "Is it aught 'at Ah can set straight for ye?"

The very contrast of his tone with the slighting insolence she felt in Ralph's manner to her

[65]

stung Rose. How could she answer his question, and tell him she groaned for the change that had come over Ralph Burneston? George would utterly despise her if she confessed that she cared for a man from whom she shrank at the same time with a kind of fear. Her good angel was striving hard with Rose, and at that moment she hated goodness, because she felt dimly that a protecting influence came between her and Ralph.

"D'ye mean preaching?" She spoke scoffingly. "No thank ye, George—ye mean kindly, but I've got beyond that."

Again their eyes met, and she shrank under the intense love and sympathy in his.

"Eh, now, tell me, lass, what's amiss," he said softly, and sadly too, for something warned him not to speak of his love; "nothing eases a trouble like the sharing o' it. When we were bairns, d'ee mind, I used to help ye to carry t' milk across t' road, because you said it was heavy for ye, eh, Rose?"

He bent down and looked into her troubled face.

[66]

"I daresay you're right," she said more quietly; "no doubt you're always right, George, but just now I hate right." She stamped her foot, her anger getting vent with her words. "I wish I couldn't see wrong, an' I hate you because you've taught me t' difference."

He grew very pale.

"Will you bide wiv yoursel' awhile?" he said at last; "you'll master yoursel' best alone. Pray, Rose, honey, pray hard; if you cannot say aught else, say' Good Lord deliver me!' It's the evil one's self 'at's got his hold on ye, an' only God an' your own will can set you free."

She put up both hands and turned her back on him.

"Yes, go, an' I'll thank you," she said; then mockingly, "I say, deliver me from cant."

She looked round after a minute—George was gone. There was a gate in the hedge leading to the fields below, and she thought he must have passed through it.

[67]

The moor rose steeply on her left, and she turned hurriedly to climb its heather-covered side; she longed to be free from the chance of observation, to be off the yellow high-road which, though rarely traversed, led from the village in the valley to a larger town far beyond the moor.

She tried to be angry with George, but instead she felt that his presence had soothed and quieted her, spite of herself.

"Did he say, pray?—ah! but prayer's not for such as me. How can I pray to be delivered from loving Ralph when I do love him so dearly?"

Above her rose a crag—a mass of black grit-stone, looking like the tower of some old castle. It was too steep to climb; but presently she saw a little path, a kind of winding stone stair-case cut in the rock, overgrown here and there with tufts of grass, and bent,

and heather. Up this she made her way to the top, a broad smooth platform of rock some eight hundred feet above the river, marked by the line of trees in the valley below. Facing her was a

[68]

whole range of lofty hills, and all around the far-reaching brown and crimson moor. Below, at some distance, was a small tarn, a cold sluggish-looking pool. Rose shivered, and turned her back on it. More than once during her journey she had wished vehemently for death as an escape from her misery, but the sight of this dark silent pool set her pulses beating in strong revulsion.

"I'm like a child," she said, "I don't know what I want. He's taken t' taste out o' my life for everything but being with him; why was I so weak-minded as to come here? why don't I go back an' say,' Ralph, take me; I'm yours?' "

She sat down on the broad stones. She would not go back to the Cairn; if they missed her they might come and seek her on the moor.

"They're kind—too kind for t' likes o' me," she said sadly, "for I brought it all about myself. Oh, why couldn't Ralph an' me keep as friends? Why, when I used to seek after seein' him I only thought of amusing myself, an' of listenin' to his voice, an' lookin' at his sweet

[69]

face, so like his father's, an' what harm could ever come to anyone from talkin' an' lookin' at t' squire? Ah!"

The deep sigh was like a groan—it seemed the breathing of despair.

“ ’Twas Doris did t’ mischief first. Maybe I’d never ha’ known I loved Ralph if she hadn’t come an’ taunted me. She opened my eyes. Maybe then I’d not have lived on t’ thought of him as I’ve done day an’ night these years he’s been away. I didn’t know how I’d got to love him till my heart shrank at t’ change when I saw him. Why, before it seemed to me that I was old beside him—he hadn’t a word or a thought that was amiss—an’ now he’s quite altered.” Then, with a burst of self-reproach, “But I don’t care what he is—I love him more than life!”

Then she sat silent, crouched on the stone.

“Yes, love him,” she said wildly. “What’s t’ use o’ lyin’ to myself? Love him! And loathe him too.”

She looked round in terror, as if she feared her own thoughts would take bodily shape;

[70]

then she covered her face with her hands, and fell forward on the stone.

“Good Lord, deliver me!” she gasped, “deliver me from temptation!”

Dinner was half over at the farmhouse when George came in.

He looked anxious and tired, but he turned white when he saw Rose’s place empty.

“Where is she?—where’s Rose? Hasn’t she come in?”

“I thought she was with you; and really, George, I think you might both try not to keep dinner waiting.”

Mrs. Barugh spoke peevishly; but the farmer was studying George’s face.

“Eat yer dinner, mah lad; yu need it,” he said kindly. “Ah’ll gang an’ leeak fer t’ lass.”

He thought that George had asked Rose to marry him and that she had refused him.

"No, no, father," George said abruptly; "Ah mun go myself. We parted an hour ago. Mebbe she's lost t' path."

[71]

He hurried along the yellow road to the spot where he left Rose. She was nowhere to be seen; but the moor rose so steeply that it was impossible from below to see any distance across it.

George was tired and exhausted, but he climbed the steep bank almost as quickly as Rose had climbed it, and he paused for breath when he reached the top.

On the top of the crag above him stood a woman; he felt sure it was Rose, and he began painfully to climb up the broken stone steps; but half way up he paused and flushed a deep red, then he put his hand to screen his eyes and gazed intently at a man hurrying away across the moor.

With a sudden exclamation George turned to look for Rose; it seemed to him that she was kneeling on the rock.

"Rose!" he said.

She started and cried out as she rose up.

"It's you," she said, and he thought she looked glad.

"Had you lost yer way?" he began; then fear

[72]

and anger found a vent. "Wasn't that Ralph Burneston goin' ovver t' moor? What's he doin' here? What can you have to do wiv him? Answer me, Rose. What has he been saying to yu?"

He held her arm roughly; his voice was harsh; his eyes, no longer tender and beseeching, flashed out the passion that was choking him. Rose looked at him coldly.

"He has nowt to do with me; I sent him away."

"Bless you, lass, for that word!" He clasped her hand in both his. "Don't be angered wiv me fer speakin' roughly, an' for thinkin' you wad love a man who meant no good to ye. Though he's i' squire's son, he's a false-hearted blackguard."

"Stop there—how dare you! I may send him away for my own reasons; but I'll not hear him blamed by you, an' I'll not tell ye a word he said, so there!"

"Listen here"—George was carried away by the excitement of his feelings and his joy at her quarrel with Ralph. "You need tell me nothing,

[73]

lass; I know it every word; your face tells me. Oh Rose, my darling! t' Lord is with yon, sure an' certain, or you'd not hev sent him away. How can you say 'at you loves one 'at hates t' Lord, who bought you for His own at t' price o' His own life?"

She listened, but she shuddered and turned away.

"I don't want to hate you, George," she said, "but I shall if you preach to me any more. It's your teachin' that's made me quarrel with him. Some day I may see it different; now I hate t' very sight of ye."

She darted off northwards, in a different direction from that by which George had approached or Ralph Burneston had left her. George ran after her as fast as he could, but his lame foot tripped against a block of grit bidden by the grass, and he fell heavily. When he got up, bruised and shaken, Rose was out of sight.

[74]

## CHAPTER VII. A FENCING MATCH.

FAITH EMMETT had a way of disdaining village news; but when the said news or gossip, for village tongues have marvellous power in creating facts, touched any one of the "family," she listened eagerly and brooded anxiously, making for herself an atmosphere of mystery, often wholly fallacious, while she was resolute against asking the simple question which would have thrown light on her dark suspicions, and thus have destroyed their existence. She saw the change in Ralph, and wept over it in secret, for Faith thought herself a good and pious woman, and swearing was to her as great a sin as drunkenness.

"Maybe it's worse," she said, "a drunkard

[75]

hurts himself most, but a swearer speaks t' divvil's words an' mocks his Maker."

But she had no blame for Ralph; she only registered a deep unspoken curse in her heart against the person she considered the cause of all this mischief. Her fierce temper and her pride had always made Faith's life a solitary one. Ralph had been her only friend and confidant, and now she wanted counsel about him. If Mr. Raine would come to the Hall, she thought she must speak to him, for though there was little real sympathy between her and her master's cousin, there was the common ground of love for Ralph.

Faith was now in great perplexity. Three days ago Ralph had gone away quite suddenly. Miss Masham had arrived the day he left, and it seemed to Faith's jealous eyes that both Mr. and Mrs. Burneston thought a great deal too much of their visitor, and made far more fuss in receiving her than had been made for Ralph on his return home.

The young squire had gone away while his father was out riding, and Mr. Burneston had

[76]

looked very angry when he heard of his son's absence.

"T' lad's no longer a bairn," Faith said to herself, though she longed to say it to the squire; "he'll not be guided like a lass wad."

And now to-day, just after the Hall dinner, while she sat in her cosy, exquisitely neat parlour, resting her long back against the carving of a tail quaint oak chair, she began to nod to the lullaby buzzed by the bees below the low open casement, for she was very tired after her long morning of jam-making, and the anxious night about her young master which had preceded it.

Faith had resented her deposition from little Phil's nursery, but she enjoyed the rest it had given her. Spite of her spareness and activity, she was beginning to feel the pressure of time on her limbs and joints, and this hour of quiet was much prized and rarely broken in upon by any of the household.

But to-day, before the bees had finished their soothing charm, the door opened, and the still-room maid put in her head.

[77]

In an instant Faith sat rigidly upright, her lips firmly pressed together, and her yellow eyes as open as their long, narrow shape would let them be.

"Please, m'm,"—the still-room maid was from the south, and consequently was a sort of Pariah in the opinion of her northern fellows—"here's Sukey Swaddles asking for you."

"Let her come in;" but a grunt of disapprobation followed, and there was no smile of welcome on the housekeeper's dark face when Mrs. Swaddles appeared.

It was Sukey's first visit, and her round blue eyes opened with awe at sight of Mrs. Emmett's orderly, well-appointed room. She looked first at the faded Turkey carpet, and then at the fresh chintz curtains, and made a second curtsey to the housekeeper, who condescended to smile grimly as she bent her head to the fair-haired sloven.

"Well, Sukey Swaddles, I don't see visitors at this time, but now ye're here, what can I do for you?"

Faith asked. Sukey stared, and pushed her soft fair hair off her flushed face with the palm of her left

[78]

hand, while the whites of her eyes grew larger and larger. Her ideas, like the rooms in her house, were always in too much confusion to be ready when wanted.

"It's fer Missis Duncombe," she said at last in a foolish voice, wondering whether this was the answer expected of her by the stately housekeeper.

Faith's brows knit, and her keen eyes searched the pretty vacant face.

"An' what call hev you to meddle wiv Mistriss Duncombe's affairs? Her gran'dowghter sud cum an' speak wiv me when aught's wanted. She's nowt to do—mair's t' pity, poor thing—but to wait on t' awd lass."

The corners of Sukey's eyes drooped and her mouth opened widely.

"What are ye hauvin' an' gauvin' at?" said Faith fiercely. "Cannot you speak, lass?"

"Please, Mistriss Emmett, Rase is nane 'at hoose; shu's gehn."

"Gone!" she struck the table with her hand. "You talk fond talk, lass. I saw Rose on Sunday, an' I spoke with her; she telt me she sud

[79]

bide all t' winter thro' wiv her gran'mother."

Sukey shook her fair untidy head; she had not much choice of words, but at last she made the housekeeper understand that Rose had gone away suddenly. One of the under-gardeners at the Hall had taken her away in the squire's own dog-cart in the early morning.

Faith questioned and questioned, but she could get no further information, except that, on the day but one before Rose's journey, the squire had paid her a visit late in the evening.

"Mercy on us!" she said to herself, "an' what's up noo? What wad Mrs. Burneston say if she kenned it? I mun speak wi' Joseph Sunley; he lies eyes atween his shoulders fer t' deeains o' his neeaghbers,"

"You can sit ye doon, Sukey Swaddles," she said with dignity, as she turned to go to the still-room. "I'll send ye what Mrs. Buncombe needs, an she can hev mair when that's ended. Sit ye doon,. I tell ye!" She gave a sudden stamp of the foot, which pulled Sukey into the nearest chair with the suddenness with which a string pulls a puppet.

[80]

"Lor'," said Sukey, as Faith walked away, "what a temper she hes o' her ain! It's lahke thunder an' leeghtning—it taks yal mey wits oot."

But Faith was not angry; she stamped her foot by way of enforcing obedience. Those who knew Faith Emmett better than Sukey did would have dreaded the yellow gleam of her half-closed eyes far more than any show of open anger.

She gave her orders to her Cockney subordinate, and then went up and dressed herself, so as to appear with due dignity in the village.

She went slowly up the hill. Sukey's news had startled her greatly, because, instantly in her mind, and without any preconceived suspicion, the two young creatures, Ralph and Rose, linked themselves together, and a possibility suggested itself which made Faith tremble and whiten. Only a momentary suggestion; she sneered at herself the next minute.

"Nae, nae, I'm a fool; he's not t' same as his faythe r," she said; "*he* hed a taint o' southern blood fra t' mother, an' one cannot

[81]

expect mail' through a pig then his grunt; but Ralph's mother com o' t' reeght breed. Nae fear o' mah lad lettin' hisself doon when he weds. Nae, nae, it came by a chance 'at he sud hev gone away t' day efter Rose did."

She passed the closed door of Mrs. Buncombe's cottage. "There was no use in screeching herself as hoarse as a raven in making the awd doited body hear." She went on and tapped at the sexton's door.

"Cum in," he said gruffly; and going in she found the sexton shivering and crouching over his fire, though the sun was hot and bright.

Joseph had had a severe rheumatic attack in the spring, which he said, had left a "lasty" chill behind it. He walked very lamely now, and his temper was soured by the consciousness of his own infirmity. He grunted as he rose and set a chair for Mrs. Emmett.

"Gude day, neeghber." Faith seated herself in the chair, which he placed just in front of the fire. "I'm fain to rest," she said; "but

[82]

wi' yer gude leave, I'll sit farther fra t' hearth. I'm hot wi' walkin'."

"Ay"—Joseph gave her a pitying look, while the corners of his mouth drooped expressively—"mebbe yu feels t' mairch o' tahme, Mistriss Emmett; yu're gettin' weel on i' years, lahke t' rest on us, Ah'm thinkin'."

"Never mind me." Faith smiled, but her eyelids fell unpleasantly. "I've come tu ask efter yer rheumatiks, Mr. Sunley, an I've brought ye a bottle o' ginger cordial—mah own brewin', so I knaws it's real gude."

Joseph's back had stifffened at the mention of a gift; he considered himself quite above the round of charities doled out by the housekeeper, for Doris rarely visited the cottages in person; but the end of Faith's sentence mollified his pride.

"Varry kahnd on ye, Mistriss Emmett; Ah'll tak it an' welcome, neeghber, nobbut yu mun taste a glass o' sherry wahne an' swallo' a mossel o' seed-caake;" he got up and limped to a three-cornered cupboard on one side of the window.

[83]

"Rase hes made t' caake afore she ganned," he said; "Ah'd nivvers ha' thowght 'at Rase wad turn oot sae handy, shu war bud a thriblous lass one while."

"Where is she gone?" Faith said in an everyday tone, though she looked at him keenly. It was some time since she had exchanged more than a chance Sunday greeting with Joseph Sunley, and she had forgotten his singular quickness. He returned her glance as searchingly as it had been given.

"What fer diz yu aks, neeghber? T' lass coms an' gehs; it's nut t' forst tahme by mair 'an yance 'at Rase Duncombe hes turned her back on Burneston. Sheea's nut ane tu bahde i' t' hoose; sheea's fluff aboot her still, nobbut sheea's steadied in a m'rac'lous way."

Faith was not listening; she sat holding counsel with herself whether there was a chance of finding out what she wanted without taking Sunley into her confidence; it was a struggle to give up her favourite method of gaining intelligence, and to be direct and open,

[84]

but as she looked into the hard acute little eyes fixed intently on her face, she felt powerless to baffle the sexton. Fencing with him now was waste of time.

"I'm fain to hear it," she said then with a little cough; "Maister Sunley, I b'lieve t' squire's sent t' lass away, an' I think yu ken t' reason o' her goin'."

The old man laughed, his eyes closed, and his network of wrinkles looked browner than ever as he pushed his lower lip up over his upper one.

"Ah kens mitch 'at Ah meaans tu keep fer mysel', Mistriss Emmett, bud Ah can tell yu sae mitch as this, donnut yu fash yersel' aboot t' squire's deeain's; he's reeght eneeaf tu send t' lass aways."

"While Master Ralph's at home, yes;" she would not move a muscle, but a gleam of triumph shot from her yellow eyes at the sexton's change of countenance; for an instant his discomfiture showed, but he soon recovered himself.

"Hes t' squire said sae, Mistriss Emmett?" he

[85]

looked incredulous, "then mebbe he's tellt yu wheer t' lass is gane tu?" He shut his eyes till they made thin lines.

"It's not fer me to tittle-tattle, Maister Sunley; as yu say, fooaks coms an' they goes; there's Maister Ralph was here o' Monday an' gone o' Tuesday, an' none o' ye kens where tiv."

Joseph shook his head. He keenly enjoyed the power of tormenting his fellow-creatures, more keenly perhaps since his rheumatism had interfered with his usual amusements by keeping him indoors.

"Ah kens nowt aboot t' yung squire's ways. Yance he was yalays coomin' oop here; t'waaz Joseph this an' Sunley thither, bud noo," he lost his watchful self-control as he got angry, "asteead o' fishin' ur rabbitin' he'll spend his tahme litter-latterin' efter t' lasses; hes anoder sort tuv his fayther, mahnd ye that, mistriss."

"Posh," she spoke angrily too, "he's all reeght; he may lanter away his tahme as ye say he does, but he'd nivver do as his father

[86]

did, set a lass fra t' village ower her betters—nae, nae. Ralph's a true Burneston, an' his mother war a lady, she war that," then she checked herself and laughed.

Joseph's face had gone back to its usual mocking expression.

"Sheea war nut sae bonny as t' new mistriss," he said, screwing his eyes so as to watch the anger he expected.

But Faith was on guard.

"Mistriss Burneston's looks are not t' be matched," she said loftily, "if they war, t' squire'd been clean fond, but beauty seems tu hev power even ower kings ever sin' t' tahme o' David an' Bathsheba; but come, Maister Sunley, nobbut I thought yu an awd frind, I'd not hev clahmbed t' hill iv sike a swelter; we baith wish well to t' lad an t' lass; tell me noo, hev yu seen Maister Ralph wiv t' lass?"

Joseph looked impenetrable.

“Ah cannut see through stone walls, mistriss, an’ nobbut ye’ll be guided ye’ll nut mak sae mony questions. Ah tellt yu t’ squire waaz reeght tu send Rase aways. T’ lass is reeght

[87]

an’ gude, nae doubt, bud it’s reeght tu keep presarves on a heigh shelf yu kens, when t’ lads is aboot t’ hoose.”

[88]

## CHAPTER VIII. A STRUGGLE.

ON her way across the court Mrs. Emmett learnt that the young squire had returned. This was a great relief to the troubled woman, and next morning, to her surprise, she saw Ralph on the lawn fronting the river with Rika Masham. The prayer-bell had not gone, it was only a little past eight o’clock, and as a rule Ralph was a very late riser.

Faith watched them from the window with a satisfied smile.

“I kenned I was reeght. Nobbut he’d cared fer Rose he’d not ha’ cared to be wi’ yan Miss, an’ he’s fair set on her,” she went on, craning her long neck out of window as the two

[89]

passed out of sight round the angle of the house.

If she could have listened to Ralph's talk, and seen his manner at breakfast, she would have been confirmed in this idea. Ralph seemed transformed; he had not been in such a bright pleasant mood since his return from France. He even spoke easily and pleasantly to Mrs. Burneston.

Last night he had felt grateful for Rika's mere presence. It saved him from embarrassing questions, and also from the restraint which he felt now with his father as well as with his step-mother. In his brief colloquy with Rose on the moor he had learned his father's interference. He returned home vowing to be revenged on Doris for her meddling, for it seemed to him that she only could have told the squire; but the novelty of finding a young visitor at the Hall and the piquancy ho found in Rika's charming face and quaint freshness soothed his facile temper and reconciled him for the time to the dulness of the house.

"It's so jolly to have you here, you must stay

[90]

as long as I do," he said; "that is to say, if you don't find us too dull."

Rika looked up with her bright amused smile. "It's I who have to fear that," she said; "I have nothing to talk about, because I've seen nothing and nobody but home and my people—we are a large family, you know, so jolly and happy, and I—but do I bore you? let us talk of something else." She stopped short and looked inquiringly at Ralph. Her face glowed with health, and her large round grey eyes were full of happiness—not sparkling, for Rika's eyes were pensive rather than bright; when she was excited or happy the pupils dilated and became liquid with intense expression. Ralph looked at her admiringly.

"Yes, very much," he laughed, "but I'm a remarkable person too. Do you know, I like being bored? But I say, Miss Masham, will you come into the garden now, and I'll show you which are the best gooseberry trees, as you say you care for gooseberries so much."

[91]

He made a grimace at her taste and opened the door for her.

"Won't you come with us, Doris?" Rika said to Mrs. Burneston, for they were in her sitting-room.

"No, dear, I'm busy," Doris said abruptly, and the two went.

Mrs. Burneston sat still after they left her; her straight dark brows had the stern look that Ralph's presence, and even the thought of Ralph, seemed always now to bring to them, and the blue veins showed more plainly than ever on her delicate temples. "How small-minded and contemptible I am growing. Why do I dislike him to be with Rika? She may do him good. She has a healthy influence, I can feel it myself; I am always brighter and happier for being with her, only"—she got up and began to walk slowly up and down—"she seemed very ready to go with Ralph—will she get to care for him really? Will she—shut up here with no one else? She *shall* not get to like him better than George," and the beautiful eyes lightened, with sudden anger.

[92]

The dressing-room between her bed-room and the little boudoir in which she sat was now given up to Phil for a play-room, and she heard him trying to open the door. The sudden joy she felt sent all her cares adrift.

"Why, Phil, darling," she bent down and kissed him, "I didn't know you were indoors. Come, my pet!"

He came forward slowly, not with his usual bound into her lap, as she seated herself to receive him.

"Why, Phil," she said, "what is it? Aren't you well, darling?"

But though she put her arm round him, Phil did not nestle fondly against her; he returned her kisses and then stood silent, very lovely, lovelier than ever, with his mother's pensive expression on his delicate face—usually it was so full of sunny mirth that it was difficult to say which parent the child resembled most, but in this quiet mood he was singularly like Doris—the small straight nose and the firmly moulded lips and chin were exactly his mother's

[93]

"Tell mamma," she said softly between her kisses, "why Phil doesn't laugh to-day."

It was a pity that George could not see his sister's loving solicitude; he could not have believed that Doris could so entirely project herself into the mind and feelings of any other. human being. She had taken so little notice of children in the days they were together that he had often wondered how she would endure to have a child of her own.

Phil pressed his rosy lips tighter, then all at once he raised his sweet dark eyes earnestly to his mother's face.

"Is oo anybody, mamma?"

"What do you mean, darling?" A sudden fear had darted into her mind; some one, Ralph possibly—yes, it must be Ralph, there was no one else—had been disturbing the child's baby mind. She stroked his forehead, puckered up with the frown that had gathered there.

"Don't frown; tell mamma all about it."

Phil gave her a quick uneasy glance, then he nestled his head against her.

"Faith says,"—Doris felt a hot glow rise in

[94]

her face at the name, the housekeeper's influence was an evil she had not dreaded; since Faith's removal from the nursery, his mother had more than once congratulated herself, as she watched Phil's rapid mental development, that the housekeeper had no longer a chance of making mischief—"she says I'se not to tell anybody; is oo anybody, mamma?"

A tempest of auger, one of the rare but strong risings of feeling which affected Doris, swept over her. She grew white, and her hands clenched as she pressed the child closely to her bosom.

"Phil!"—at the hoarse sound he looked up in sudden wonder, and Doris tried to clear and steady her voice. "You must always tell me everything, darling; it's very naughty to have secrets from mamma."

He drew himself away and stood upright, stiff and silent as a little statue.

His mother looked puzzled, and then she smiled.

"Tell me, Phil," she spoke gently, "tell mamma."

[95]

The child shook his head.

"I doesn't love oo," he said passionately; "oo said I was naughty, an' I wasn't. Oo's naughty to tell a tory."

She folded her arms round the little unyielding figure. "I made a mistake, darling; tell me what is it.' Anybody' can never mean mamma. Phil always tells me everything."

The little face cleared into a lovely smile. "It's gran'mamma," he said, the perplexed look creasing his forehead again. "Faith says that grandmamma's not a lady. Isn't she?"

Doris pressed her lips together.

“Faith is silly,” she said at last; then with an effort, “You love gran’mamma, don’t you, Phil?”

“Oh, yes; I love her like this” he put both arms round her neck and kissed her fondly; “an’ Faith says I must love this gran’mamma best,” he pointed to old Mrs. Burneston’s picture.

“You must love this gran’mamma too,” said Doris, “because she was papa’s mother, and she loved papa as I love you, darling.”

[96]

Phil shook his head discontentedly.

“But it’s not a gran’mamma, it’s a picture. I tarn’t love a picture,” he said; “it doesn’t kiss me, nor play with me, nor nothing; an’ my Cairn gran’mamma is a lady, isn’t she? Is you a lady or a woman, mamma? What is a lady?”

Doris had rarely felt so thankful as she felt now to see the door open.

Her husband came in, followed by George. But she was too much absorbed by her own annoyance at Phil’s disclosure to see that George looked strangely agitated, and that her husband also was troubled.

Phil ran forward eagerly to his uncle and stood clasping his knees and looking up in his face, even after George had bent down to kiss him.

Uncle George was to Phil a bit of the Cairn, and the Cairn, with its homely out-door life and absence of all nursery restrictions, was Paradise to the child, who loved to ramble on the moor with his grandfather’s big collie, or to feed his grandmother’s chickens, far better than to take

[97]

his restricted walks in the garden at Burneston.

“Come with me, Phil,” his father said; “Uncle George wants to talk to mamma.”

Phil shook his head and turned away, so as not to see his father’s outstretched hand.

“An’ I wants Uncle George;” he tightened his clasp and looked appealingly at his uncle.

Doris was going to speak, and then she checked herself. She looked at her husband; she thought this was a good opportunity for him to exercise the fatherly authority he had so neglected in Ralph’s education.

“Come along, Phil;” Mr. Burneston smiled, and patted the little fellow’s head. “There’s the donkey at the door waiting to take Phil a ride, the saddle has come at last.”

Phil gave a cry of delight, even Uncle George was forgotten in the thought of the donkey; he had ridden at the Cairn, but only in front of his grandfather, and he had been looking forward with much eager excitement to the arrival of the little saddle on which he had been promised a real ride by himself.

[98]

He put his little hand in his father’s and pulled him to the door.

“Come along, papa! Come along quick,” he said, then over his shoulder—“Mamma, come and see me ride.”

But Doris did not smile. She was vexed and disappointed.

"That is just the way he managed Ralph, I fancy," she thought. "He finds it is easier to bribe a child's obedience than to enforce it, and Ralph has never learned to obey; he knows no law but that of self-gratification."

"Doris!" there was so much pain in George's voice that she roused, and, looking at him, saw how pale he was, and how sunken and colourless his eyes had grown.

"Is anything wrong?" she said quickly. She put her hand to her heart; a sudden pang had come to her that George had brought bad news of her father.

"Yes, very wrong," then seeing how white she was, he put his hand on her arm, and his voice had a tender tone, "but not about father or mother, dear; it's about Rose. She was

[99]

with us at t' Cairn, an' now she's fled away—she's gone."

"Gone away!" Doris felt shocked. "Oh George, you don't mean to say Ralph came to the Cairn after her?"

George flushed to his hair, then he frowned.

"You're always ower hard on Ralph, Doris. Maybe, if you'd take to him more kindly, he'd not find t' house so dull, an' he'd not be driven to folly. You sud let by-gones be by-gones. If I can forgive him, you should."

"I'm not hard on Ralph—if you knew all you'd say so; are you sure he does not know where Rose is."

George shook his head.

"You're very hard on t' lad; though he hes acted a fool's part an' made misery for all, he's but a lad, mind you. Nobbut it's not 'at I should blame you, lass, for I thowght such harm on him mysel' that I went down to t' little Inn to see what had chanced; but you

may be at rest about him and Rose. When I got there I learned he'd started off on horse-back for Steersley before I got there; he must

[100]

ha' ridden pretty hard to get back here as soon as he did."

"And you do not know where Rose is?" she asked.

"I cannot tell you yet, lass. I came to t' village first on t' chance o' findin' if she'd gone home, and then I came on to see you all. Now I must go back to Steersley, t' squire thinks I may hear news there. I'll never leave seekin' after her till she's found, you may be sure of that, Doris."

Doris hesitated. Then she said coldly—

"Let her go, George, and try to forget her. She's not worth your thoughts. She'll never make you happy after this."

"I shall never forget her." There was a struggle how he should answer, and he flushed painfully. Then he said, with coldness, equal to his sister's, "Doris, I shall marry Rose, if she will have me."

He walked to the window and looked out: beneath was little Phil on his donkey, laughing with delight as Ralph and Rika fastened roses into the front of the creature's bridle.

George stood watching them for a few

[101]

minutes, and then he turned to Doris—

"You are very wise to have Miss Masham here," he said. "Look at them. They seem admirably suited to one another—maybe she'll do him good. She's a safe, wise friend for him."

"Oh, George! how can you say this, when you know what I wish about Rika!"

A mingling of pity and sorrow shone in his eyes; he felt the tenderest pity for this struggling soul, which must regulate things by its own will, and could trust nothing to a wiser, more loving hand; and deep sorrow, too, for the blindness in which his sister lived. Every time he had appealed to her, on any higher ground than that of mere human reason, she had either smiled or turned away in wearied silence. For some time he had left her in peace, only striving to help her by his prayers, but at this appeal he spoke:

"You are clever, and wise, too, Doris," he said; "but you lack one sort of wisdom; you forget we can't *make* things go as we wish. God settles it all." She put up her hand in

[102]

protest. "Do not be feared, lass," he said, "there's no sermon comin'; but I want to say one thing, an' let it end t' matter: if me an' your friend were the last man an' t' last woman living, I know we'd never wed. We're not matched—so there now. I may nivver wed Rose; but I'll nivver give up loving her."

There was a pause. Doris tried hard to keep in her feelings.

"I'll say good-bye," her brother said; he kissed her without waiting for a reply, but she recovered herself.

"Good-bye, George. I must tell you what I think, and that is, that about Rose you are very foolish."

He nodded and smiled, and left her, but the set look on his face quenched her hopes.

For some minutes she stood thinking, her hands clasped in front of her waist.

Presently she said, “That boy Ralph has no heart: he means to trifle with Rika as he has trifled with Rose; but I need not be afraid. I’m sure Rika will only laugh at him—still

[103]

there must be no chance of it. I will write to Mr. Raine and ask him here. Philip said he and Rika were just suited.”

[104]

## CHAPTER IX. PLOTTING.

DORIS despatched her letter, and then she sat in troubled thought.

It had been a severe wrench to yield her hopes about George and Rika, but she felt that they were groundless; and as she must give them up, she did it at once, without looking back, or spending time in regret.

This was not the cause of her trouble.

She was thinking of her child, and how baneful Faith’s influence would be as little Phil’s rapid development progressed. Would it not be safest and wisest at once to send the house-keeper away? and yet Doris shrank from proposing this to her husband. She believed that he would agree to her wish, but still she shrank

[105]

from making the request. Mr. Burneston had told her more than once that he was sure she disliked Faith because the housekeeper petted Ralph.

"If Ralph would only go away and never come back again!" burst from her impetuously. "He blights my life; he makes me unhappy, for he makes me wicked; he makes me feel hard to myself and everybody. Till he came home, I was as happy as I could wish, except"—she paused, as a vision of her mother, and a shrinking from her mother's hints that she would like to see Burneston Hall, rose in her mind—"except for one or two things, and now I always feel wrong and vexed. I am hurt if Philip even speaks about Ralph, and no wonder. I have never told of his conduct to Rose; if his father knew all, he would not be so lenient to him. But I only dislike him because he is bad and contemptible. No, I am not hard on him." She had begun to walk up and down as she argued with herself, and she stopped short now as if she were answering a suggestion. "If he were good—good as my Phil will be, I think I should like

[106]

him; if he were good he would like me—and—and—" She resumed her rapid walk. "It is useless to struggle," she said. "I've struggled till I am tired. I hate him! He always makes me feel that I am of a different class. I lose my self-possession when he is present. I seem not to believe in myself. I never disliked anyone before, unless it was Rose Buncombe. Yes, I hate Ralph. I am determined he shall not make Rika fond of him. She is very impulsive still, and he might turn her against me. I cannot give up Rika's friendship; it is more necessary to me than I thought it was. I can tell her things which I could not talk of to Philip, to anyone; besides, I want to tell her of my doubts about Ralph."

She went to the window and looked out. Ralph and Rika were walking up and down the terrace. She was talking eagerly, and his eyes were fixed admiringly on her flushed enthusiastic face.

A spasm of sudden jealousy brought the blood springing to Doris's cheeks. She leaned forward, and as she leaned she saw that she

[107]

was not the only gazer. Faith Emmett was also looking from Ralph's window at the young pair as they moved slowly along beside the flower and fern-wreathed wall that bordered the river. Faith was smiling in most unusual fashion, and Doris felt yet more irritated.

"That woman thwarts me at every turn," she said haughtily. "She *shall* go. I suppose she thinks Rika is an amusement brought here to occupy Ralph as long as he chooses—to be cast aside when he takes some new fancy—but how foolish I am! Faith's opinion can be of no consequence to me."

Just then, as if she read her friend's thoughts, Rika looked up and Doris beckoned to her with unwonted eagerness.

"There's something the matter, I think," said Rika; "Mrs. Burneston is beckoning to me; I must go to her."

"Never mind Mrs. Burneston; she can wait, she can have you any time, and I want you now." Ralph spoke imperiously, and Rika laughed.

"You—you are nobody beside Doris," she

[108]

said smilingly, and, nodding up at her friend's window, she ran indoors.

At the foot of the stairs she met Mr. Burneston.

"Are you going to Doris?" he said; "then will you tell her that I expect my cousin, Mr. Raine, this evening? I asked him some days ago, and, as there's no answer, he's sure to come." He looked at her, and it seemed to Rika that he wanted to see the effect of his

words; she tried so hard to keep an unmoved face that Mr. Burneston thought she was vexed.

"Dear me!" he went on to the library; "I fancied we should be more cheerful with Raine here, but it seems I am mistaken. Rika looked quite disconcerted at the idea. I must ask Doris why she dislikes him—what strange creatures women are!" and the amiable, kind-hearted squire sat down to finish his newspaper with a disappointed face.

Meantime Ralph had gone to his room, and had found Faith there. He sat down without speaking.

"She's a nice young lady is Miss Masham,

[109]

Master Ralph. She's a real lady." She looked at him keenly between her half-closed lids.

"Yes, she's nice, but never mind ladies now. Is there a good dinner? I shall have to give Mrs. Hazelgrave a few lessons in cooking if she sends up such a fricandeau as she did yesterday; it was so tough I could hardly set my teeth in it and I actually could taste the onions. She really must be less coarse in her notions of flavouring. She wants to go to France for a few months."

"Ah, well, I'll tell her what you say, my dear. Do you know Mr. and Mrs. Boothroyd an' Mr. Raine's coming to-night? then maybe we'll give you something else to think about besides cooking. Mr. Raine's got an eye in his head, tho' he is so crammed wi' nossions."

"To-night is it? I did not know he was coming; I can amuse myself without him, you old goose."

Faith looked mysterious. She bent over the drawers which she had been putting neat, but presently she closed them and turned round.

"Maybe two is better than three, Master

[110]

Ralph; an' Master Raine's ower masterful, yu kens."

Ralph stared. "I don't know what you mean, you dear old stupid," he said. "You know I hate hints. Faith; but Gilbert has too much sense to interfere with me. I should just like to see anyone master me in my own house."

He had been lighting a cigar while he spoke, and he seated himself with his back to the housekeeper, and began to smoke in silence.

Faith stood gazing—at first vacantly, with her unpleasant smile; then, as her yellow eyes rested on her darling's curly head, her straight lip softened, and her eyes grew dark and sweet.

"Bless him, he's nowt to fear," she said to herself. "Miss Masham'll not look twice at an awd stick like Mr. Raine wiv that bonny face beside her. Nae, nae, if my lad hes fair play it's all reeght; but it's t' missis I'm freeten'd on. She'll do any mortal thing to spite Ralph and tak t' lass from him. She didn't guess I saw her at yon window froonin' as she looked at t' two on 'em—just as I was gladdenin' my eyes

[111]

by t' sight o' sich a bonny pair; an' then to call her away when t' poor lass, maybe, nivver had t' chance afore o' speakin' to such a fine gentleman as my lad. She's not a match for t' likes o' him, is Miss Masham, but she'll serve to pass time, and she shannot be taken from him."

She went out of the room with her usual catlike tread, her eyes and cheeks glowing with the new interest brought into her daily life. Faith Emmett had missed her vocation, she

should have been an actress or a police agent, but as she had not legitimate scope for her talent for intrigue, she was always ready to snatch at and exaggerate every incident of domestic life which could be twisted out of a direct course. It is strange how sensitive such natures are to atmosphere. Doris had only been reawakened to a dread of Faith's mischief-making power by her child's appeal, but Faith knew intuitively that Doris disliked her, she had decided long before his first return from school that the young step-mother would hate Ralph, and her constant depreciation and inuendoes had strengthened and kept alive the strong

[112]

prejudice the lad had formed against his father's wife; but for this it is possible that the easy temperament inherited from his father (and before he went to France Ralph's chief characteristic was this easiness) would have softened his dislike and left him open to his step-mother's influence.

Doris's jealous dislike to the lad had been fostered by Ralph's coldness, and the barrier it raised against all her attempts at cordiality. To Doris government was a necessity. Spite of her father's strong will she had always had power to sway him, and her husband yielded implicitly to her judgment; perhaps the secret of her childish disputes with George was that his will had been as strong as her own, and that he would only yield to a principle which he did not find in his sister. She was large-minded enough to tolerate her brothers resistance, but although she seldom analyzed her dislike to Ralph, she felt keenly the mortification inflicted by his resistance to her influence, and on this last visit he never lost an opportunity of contradicting her.

[113]

"Why on earth," he said to himself as he sat smoking—a practice forbidden in any part of the house but the billiard-room, but connived at by the housekeeper—"why should

Gilbert come just now? He's well enough when there's no one else, but he has taken to lecturing lately. I expect Mrs. Burneston's had a hand in his coming; I owe her one, already, on another score. By Jove, she'd better let me alone in future!"

[114]

## CHAPTER X. "FIRST IMPRESSIONS"

DORIS never showed to so much advantage as when she was receiving her guests. Her natural self-possession so helped the sweetness and grace which education had developed that at such times her manner was enchanting. She had long ago conquered her old enemy Mrs. Boothroyd, who was now her slave. Perfection in a woman, according to Mrs. Boothroyd, lay in the possession of polished manners, some charming accomplishments—playing and singing, for instance, like Mrs. Burneston's—and also in the strict observance of all the duties inculcated by society. During Doris's first visit to London, Mrs. Boothroyd had watched her behaviour narrowly, and had been

[115]

so satisfied by the result that on the return of the squire and his wife to Yorkshire she had received her young neighbour with much increased cordiality, and when little Phil was born her attentions had become devoted.

She was a valuable friend to Doris, for being one of those women who announce opinion and insist on its adoption by others, utterly regardless whether offence is given or taken, Mrs. Boothroyd had far more influence in her part of the county than she really merited, so apt are people to be allowed the position they claim boldly for themselves. With all her assumption and hardness she had a certain measure of love of the beautiful, and she had an affectionate nature; and after a while she craved for the love of this beautiful bit of porcelain, as she called Mrs. Burneston, and came often to

see her. Perhaps if Doris had met her advances with any show of warmth there might have been an end of the friendship, but the complete absence of "gush" in the girl's nature increased Mrs. Boothroyd's attempts to overcome her coldness; and these seemed to

[116]

Doris only a part of the almost universal homage that she had met with in her school life, and also since her marriage.

She had grown to consider Mrs. Boothroyd a sort of motherly friend, to whom she could talk about little Phil, and also of household plans; and she was really glad to see her this evening.

"Ah, Mrs. Burneston"—Mr. Boothroyd puffed out his words as pompously as ever—"you look as blooming as a rose." The good gentleman's similes were always of the simplest nature.

Doris smiled. "Am I blooming?" she said. "I fancy I am too colourless to deserve the name."

"Yes, indeed, Reginald,"—his wife had long withdrawn her prohibition against compliments paid to the mistress of Burneston—"blooming is not refined enough for Mrs. Burneston. Blooming means a rosy colour, a dairymaid sort of beauty, a—"

"I beg your pardon, my dear, but youth and good health will sometimes give a high colour,

[117]

even to young ladies. You can't help it, you know, and what suits one doesn't suit another."

Rika's rosy cheeks were deep red by this time.

"I suppose not. I've always been rosy," she said with a sigh which set Gilbert Raine and Mr. Burneston off laughing.

Just then they paired off to go to dinner. Doris forced a smile as she spoke to Ralph.

"I am very sorry," she said, "that there is no one for you. I did not know till too late that your cousin was coming to-day."

Then she looked at Raine as he gave his arm to Rika.

Ralph looked savage, but he managed nevertheless to get next Rika at dinner, and to keep her from talking much to Raine.

Rika could not tell how it was. In the morning she had certainly thought Ralph flippant, but still very amusing; now he seemed to her pert and sarcastic. She wondered at Mr. Raine's patience with him, for more than once Ralph spoke rudely to his cousin. "However,"

[118]

she thought, as she looked at Raine's intellectual face, eager with interest now as he combated an argument of Mr. Boothroyd's, now as he uttered one of his dry quaint sayings, "I do not suppose he notices; he has no heart or much interest for anything but those horrible old blocks of stone. I believe he is half a stone himself." She turned her thoughts resolutely away from her unconscious *vis-à-vis*, and began to talk to Ralph with more vivacity than she had shown since the beginning of dinner.

At last these two laughed so heartily over one of Rika's stories that Mrs. Boothroyd turned round with a lofty rebuke on her face. Rika met the look, and although she braved it she felt very sick at heart lest Doris should also disapprove. She had observed the coldness between her friend and her stepson, but her hopeful nature attached little

importance to this. “It will all come right in time,” she thought, but for all that she wished to avoid any collision on the subject of Ralph Burneston. She loved Doris, and thought her almost perfect, but she hated injustice, and she knew that if she found her friend hard on Ralph she

[119]

should certainly take his part against his step-mother. She lowered her voice as she went on talking.

Raine was puzzled and vexed. He had not met Miss Masham for three years, and their intimacy had been ended abruptly by his sudden journey to Eton. In the interval Gilbert had learned that it was possible to think again about a woman, all the while despising himself for wasting his thoughts on such an unworthy object. When the squire’s letter of invitation reached him he had caught himself wondering whether he should meet Rika Masham at Burneston again, and when he found her sitting with Doris on his first arrival something very like delight came to him, a sensation of keener, warmer pleasure than any he had felt since his first romance ended.

But Rika’s manner wounded Mr. Raine. She seemed flurried and excited, vexed, he thought, to have her *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Burneston disturbed; and now, as he sat opposite her and caught glimpses of her bright face full of laughing enjoyment, he felt sure that he had been

[120]

wrong, and that Miss Masham had no more heart or ballast than any ordinary woman.

And yet as she rose from the table and followed Mrs. Boothroyd from the room, his eyes instantly followed the young girl with admiration. She had none of the statuesque grace of Mrs. Burneston; her words, and even her movements, were sometimes abrupt;

but there was a freshness and simplicity in Rika, an almost startling vivacity, that suited Raine's taste better than the finish and repose of her friend. She laughed saucily as she went out, and Raine followed the direction of her eyes to Ralph across the table. It seemed to him that these two young creatures exchanged a look of mischievous intelligence.

He frowned, not at them, but at his own folly.

"I wonder," he thought, "at what period of their lives men become safe—impervious to woman's will. I fancied it impossible I should ever risk being again deceived. That sudden summons to Eton came just in time, and yet, if I had seen more of her then, I should no doubt

[121]

have discovered imperfections. I should have found out her real self. This Rika Masham I have been dreaming about, when I have thought of such folly at all"—a flush of annoyance rose on his cheek—"was a creature of my own making, quite unlike the true woman."

"Come, Ralph," he said, as the two squires drew close together and began to talk agricultural matters, "shall we take a turn by the river? it's long since you and I were together at Burneston."

Ralph hesitated; he had been surprised and annoyed to hear of his cousin's arrival; he thought he had been sent for to lecture him about Rose.

"Very well, but we can have a smoke afterwards," he said; "I mean to go to the drawing-room now—that poor little girl will get bored to death with the dowagers."

For the first time in his life Gilbert Raine felt very angry with Ralph. He had always considered it a kind of duty to take the lad's part against his father, for he thought that even before his second marriage Philip Burneston

[122]

had neglected his son, but this speech of Ralph's was so puppy-like that Gilbert felt as if he had suddenly awakened and was taking a new reading of his protégé.

"Young coxcomb!" he said to himself, as he walked rather stiffly into the drawing-room and left Ralph to close the door, "but perhaps I should say, deluded young fool! Very likely he thinks, poor boy, that Miss Masham really cares to talk to him"

It seemed as if Ralph held this opinion, for he walked straight up to the bay window in which Rika was and sat down beside her. Gilbert fumed inwardly against Mrs. Boothroyd, who had stopped him as he came in.

"You care for art, I believe, Mr. Raine, and I want you so much to come over and see us. I can offer you quite a treat in Mr. Boothroyd's drawings; he copies things in pen and ink so beautifully you could not tell them from the originals—things from the *Penny Magazine*, you know, and other prints."

"I don't care for copies of things," said Gilbert almost savagely, "there's nothing original in copying; it is a waste of time."

[123]

Mrs. Boothroyd stared. "Ah, but you never saw anything like Mr. Boothroyd's drawings; he does them line for line. He gives up his winter evenings entirely to it, never has time to read a book, or hardly a newspaper; it is such important, all-absorbing work."

Raine shrugged his shoulders. "My dear madam, I'm sorry I can't agree with you; nothing, I think can be so important in the way of personal pursuit as reading, and it is especially necessary to us country residents—to all, in fact, who live in a small circle."

He said this, much as if he had added, “My dear madam, consider yourself in the wrong.”

Mrs. Boothroyd smiled loftily, but Doris looked so interested that for the moment Raine forgot Ralph and Rika.

“That may be for some people.”—Mrs. Boothroyd gave Gilbert a compassionate glance. “But you see Mr. Boothroyd’s mind is so large and comprehensive, and then he has such a store of past reading to go upon, that I don’t think he requires to read as some do; he did it all as a boy; no fiction

[124]

or poetry, or rubbish of that kind, you know, but good solid stuff—Gibbon’s ’Decline and Fall,’ Alison’s ’History of Europe,’ and so on; and as to Lardner’s ’Cyclopaedia,’—those puce-coloured calico books, you know—I fancy he has them by heart. Mr. Boothroyd is very solid; no froth about him, I assure you.”

Ralph had been annoyed to find that, instead of listening to him, Rika’s ears had been strained to follow this conversation; and now, as Doris sat silent, her eyes fixed on the opposite wall, Miss Masham broke in suddenly, with glowing eyes and cheeks—

“My father says it’s all nonsense not to read novels, and a. great mistake. He says people often get ideas and hints and things—in good ones, I mean—not in the way of lectures or advice, but unconsciously given. Oh! will it bore you if I explain myself?”—she looked imploringly at Mrs. Boothroyd, while Raine wondered whether she was acting, or whether her freshness was real. “He says even good people are apt to go on wrapt up in themselves and

[125]

their pursuits till they absorb their own sympathies, or rather neglect to cultivate their own powers of appreciation, and that often a character in a story will act like a fairy mirror, showing one the distortion one is aiming after, or else reminding one of the qualities one lacks by seeing those qualities in action—oh! I am so sorry, I've talked too much!" She flushed deeply as Ralph laughed. "You should have stopped me," she said to Doris.

Mrs. Boothroyd smiled benignly. "People's words carry them away, unless they think," she said; "but I like to hear young people's ideas; they are fresh, at any rate," she said compassionately.

At which remark Doris stiffened her neck.

"Rika's words are worth listening to," she said, and Gilbert Raine smiled gratefully at her, and took the first opportunity he could find of snubbing Mrs. Boothroyd.

Doris went to the piano and sang; but she was not in good voice; there was something oppressive in Ralph's presence that told even on

[126]

her singing. The two squires appeared, and her husband came up and spoke to her. Mr. Boothroyd began to talk to Ralph, and, to the young man's extreme annoyance, carried him off to the other end of the room, to question him minutely upon French shooting and French farming. Ralph looked over his shoulder as he followed his tormentor, and he saw Rain e take the seat he had left beside Rika.

She looked up shyly as Gilbert placed himself beside her.

"I am horriby ashamed of what I said just now," she said , "I did not mean to preach, but I am afraid it sounded like preaching."

"Of course it did," he. said mischievously, "only you forgot to give out the text." Then, seeing her disturbed face, "Yes, yes, it was all right," he said abruptly; "bat I don't agree with you. I think a man who lives much to himself, or who, at any rate, moves round in a small circle, gets entirely deadened by self-complacency; he is far too thick-skinned to believe that anything he meets with in a book, especially so trifling a book as a novel, can benefit

[127]

him; if you were even to describe him to the life, as he appears to you, he would not recognise his own portrait."

"I don't agree with you at all," she said, her eyes growing dark with excitement. "I'm sure you're wrong. People are not so hard-hearted as you think them. It will sound rude to say it, I know, but I sometimes wonder whether it is yourself that you judge from, for I suppose one gets into the way of judging other people by one's self."

Raine laughed.

"I hard-hearted! I am a perfect sucking dove. Indeed, Miss Masham, I thought you a better judge. I am so tender-hearted that I am constantly imposed on. What can make you think me hard-hearted?"

He laughed, but he looked uneasy and troubled.

"I don't know; you are cleverer than I am, Mr. Raine, and you ought to know better than I do what gives us our first impressions of people."

"But our' first impressions' are so often

[128]

wrong. How about 'second thoughts' being best?"

"A great many of those musty old proverbs are wrong. I believe in first everythings," said Rika decidedly. "First impressions, first love, first—first—well, the first sight of any beautiful thing; all these are quite different from any that come after. There is no rapture in second impressions or feelings." Then she looked up again alarmed at her own impulsiveness, but Raine's earnest listening, his dark face full of eager interest, reassured her; he sighed, but he did not speak. It seemed strange to Rika that she liked to sit beside him in silence.

"First love," he said presently, in a dreamy voice; "ah! I don't know whether that is best. I sometimes think it is not."

"Well, then, I do—it must be," said Rika; "there can be nothing so delightful. A man who disbelieves in first love must be a thorough sceptic."

Raine started, but he did not answer; he looked sadly at Rika, and then his eyes wandered

[129]

to the fireplace, where he knew Ralph was standing.

There was such a scowl on the lad's face that Raine looked surprised. He got up and went across to him.

"Shall I come to your room to-night for a smoke, old fellow," Gilbert said, "or will you come to mine?"

"I'm going to bed," Ralph muttered sullenly; "and if those cursed people don't take themselves off I shall go at once."

[130]

## CHAPTER XI. RALPH'S MISTAKE.

YOUNG people and impatient people are apt to confound rapidity with certain success. In some of their moods of mind half an hour's delay will suffice, such people think, to destroy the plans of a life; and so they force open the buds of promise and snatch at half-ripened fruit, metaphorically as well as actually. Ralph had watched Rika's face till he could no longer endure what seemed to him her preference for Raine. Certainly she had listened to his own talk at dinner, but then she had laughed and bandied words with him—"chaffed," as it would be called now-a-days—but he had not succeeded in getting her to listen with the earnest, half-reverent look she fixed on Raine; nor

[131]

had she, when talking to him, dropped her eyelids in that lovely pensive fashion, till the long dark lashes rested on the glowing cheek.

He was very angry and scornful too. "What could his old dried-up cousin find to say to a lively girl that did not bore her?" He had watched Rika so eagerly, ready at the first sign of weariness to release her from Gilbert's "prosy jaw," as in his present mood he called his cousin's talk, and she had only looked more and more interested. He lay awake half the night, tossing and kicking about, and he wakened early next morning with that despondent opinion of all things with which we are apt to review matters in the grey dawn, and in which we sometimes persuade ourselves that everything will go crooked.

Ralph was much too disturbed to go to sleep again. He rose, and determined that before the day was much older he would know the truth about Rika.

"If she prefers to me that crack-brained old stick, a man who doesn't even know how to dress, I shall, of course, have nothing more to

[132]

say to her. I was a fool to expect any discernment from a friend of Mrs. Burneston's—confound her!"

But as the sun rose higher and poured into his room, and the fresh morning air cooled his hot head, he saw things differently, especially before his looking-glass.

"By Jove! I'm not at all a bad-looking fellow"—he smiled and showed his white, even teeth—"and beside that brown shrivelled old Gilbert I'm an Adonis. He's got good eyes, and he's an inch or so taller than I am, but I fancy he has really no chance with a girl if I choose to go in for her. I know he's trying it on with little Rika. I never saw him look at a girl like that before."

He stopped and mused, staring at his own handsome face meanwhile.

"What a fool I am! Why don't I leave them alone? What on earth do I want with her? What do I want to tie myself by the leg for? I like her—better, perhaps—yes, certainly better than any girl I ever saw. She amuses me confoundedly, and if Gilbert had kept away we

[133]

should always have been excellent friends. It's a devil of a shame for him to cut in. But I'm not going to see her snapped up under my eyes. By Jove, I'll just spoil his manoeuvres and make sure of my little girl."

He looked at his watch. Rika was not likely to appear for an hour, and Ralph's impatience grew as the minutes passed slowly away. He went down to the terrace to wait for her, and little Phil spied him from the window.

"Ralphie, Ralphie! I want you. Phil wants you welly welly much."

Ralph waved his hand, and passed on whistling.

“Bother the brat!” he said. Then as he turned at the end of the terrace he caught a glimpse of the sweet little wistful face gazing down at him. “He’s not a bad little chap, though,” he said; “he’s just like a dog after me. I wonder my precious step-mother produced anything so like a Burneston. I should have thought any child of hers must have been born red-haired and high-shouldered, like that terrible old Barugh. I suppose the fellow is

[134]

not much older than my father, either. Confound Rika, why don’t she come?”

Coming to the terrace from the flower-garden was Slater the gardener.

“Ay, Maister Ralph,” he smiled genially at his young master, “bud yu begins t’ day betahmes. Ah expec’s it’s t’ French manners. Ah mahnds ‘at yu war a rare yan at lossin’ t’ mornin’ when yu wur a lahtle lad.”

Ralph had been staring up at Rika’s window while Slater spoke.

“Look here, Slater,” he said; “give me the key of the conservatory; I want to get a few flowers.”

Slater screwed up his eyes and put his head on one side.

“Flooers, Maister Ralph? Ther’s flooers an’ plenty i’ t’ hoose, an’ if theer’s mair needed Ah’ll gi’ ‘em. Nae need fer yu tu gan for ‘em yersel’.”

“Yes, yes, I want some special ones;” Ralph spoke emphatically, “let’s have the key. I know the door is locked; don’t you trouble your head about it; I’ll get my own flowers.”

[135]

Slater looked hard at him with one eye screwed up, but he did not attempt further remonstrance, Not one of the servants ever attempted to question Master Ralph's will; he had reigned absolutely among them ever since his babyhood. But still Slater prized his choice flowers.

"Ye'll mebbe nut be wantin' monny on 'em," he said deprecatingly, as he handed him the key.

"All right."

The gardener screwed up both his pale blue eyes as he stared after the young man till they were almost hidden under his red eyebrows.

"Woonkers!" he said, "that's t' fost tahme 'at ivver Maister Ralph hes aks'd mey fer flooers. I' t' neame uv Awd Soss, what can he be oop tiv, noo? Theer mun be a lass if he wants flooers, an' it's nobbut a week sin' Sukey Swaddles seyd 'at t' yung squire waaz littin an' lattin efter Rase Duncombe. Weel, mebbe he thinks yan bird i' t' hand is woth twae i' t' bush: eh, eh," he put his finger to his nose, "Ah kens hoo t' wind sits, an' he's rich, an' this lass is as bonny as Rase is, an'

[136]

sheea's a laady. Ah dizzent lahke tu see t' quality laendering aboot wiv sike as wersels."

He made a sudden wry face, and put his hand over his mouth.

"Zookerins! Ah mun tak' tent o' what Ah sehs. Ah forgits t' squire an' t' missis. Nobbut theer's nae sayin 'at t' Barughs waaz sike as wersels; mebbe t' farmer waaz, bud t' missis mun ha' been a born laady."

He turned away, muttering to himself, "A born laady." Just as he disappeared on his way to the fruit-garden, he murmured, "Nobbut sheea's ower fond o' meddlin' wiv t' flooer-beds. We's yalways at odds ower 'em."

Ralph came back with some exquisite flowers and sat down under the cedar-tree to arrange them; but it was a new experiment, and he was not skilful, and as he changed the delicate blossoms impatiently from hand to hand the ground at his feet was soon strown with bright geranium petals.

“Confound it!” he said.

A merry peal of laughter answered him.

“Those poor flowers are not used to be

[137]

so roughly handled,” said Rika mischievously, as she picked up a lovely spray of begonia and gave it to him.

Ralph bit his lips and made one more effort to group his flowers effectively.

“There, I can’t do it any better,” he said; “but it’s your fault, if you had not come and startled me it would have been first-rate; but you will have the flowers any way, if”—his tone grew graver—“you will make me happy by accepting them.”

Rika took the flowers. “Thank you so very much. I love flowers, and at home I hardly ever get rare ones. There is a special charm to me about wild flowers, and also about these sheltered ones which never breathe outside air—there is just the difference between these and ordinary garden flowers that one finds in people.”

Ralph felt inclined to gape; he wished Rika would not take such flights in her talk, and give him the trouble of thinking. “She’s too pretty for it; pretty women shouldn’t do it,” he said, looking at her as she bent over the flowers. “I hate to have to think while I’m looking at a

[138]

pretty girl;" he pulled his soft beard and looked and smiled mischievously at Rika.

"I don't quite understand," he said aloud, more for the sake of making her raise her eyes than because he cared to know what she meant.

As he expected, she looked up, her great grey eyes luminous.

"Well, as a rule, unless we live quite in open country, we see far more ordinary garden flowers than either delicate wild flowers or green-house plants. I don't mean buttercups and daisies, and so on, though they are full of beauty. It is just the same with people; for one rare or refined and cultivated person, you see fifty who are educated, perhaps sensible and comfortable in their ideas; but, oh how alike, and how common-place!—people with whom you can talk by the hour—just surface conversation, like a cat purring—if you are selfcontrolled. I put that in, because of—dear me, I beg your pardon, I bore you, I'm sure," she broke off abruptly and looked ashamed.

"You needn't mind me," Ralph was secretly getting impatient lest the prayer-bell should

[139]

ring before he had spoken. "I like to hear you talk, you know, you're so amusing. But I see what you mean, Mr. and Mrs. Boothroyd are purrers. Yes, I know they are a common-place pair, according to your ideas; but then they're rich and thought a good deal of, and a woman must be like other women; it don't do for her to be eccentric, you know."

"Oh, you would like us all one pattern, like a wall-paper, would you? I hardly see then what would become of likes and dislikes."

"I don't mean that at all," he said abruptly; "you are quite unlike anyone 1 ever saw, and I like you better than anyone."

Her eyes opened widely, but her colour did not deepen.

"You are very kind; must I make you a curtsey?" Then she said gravely, "Thank you for your good opinion. I should think you often want a sister, don't you? My brothers say they don't know what they should do without a sister."

Between his teeth Ralph cursed all sisters.

"No," he said impetuously, "I don't want a

[140]

sister, but I do want some one to care for me and think of me—I want you, Rika. Don't you understand?"

Still she did not understand. She thought he was in some sudden trouble which he could not tell his father of, and a sympathy for his loneliness shone in her eyes as she looked in his face, flushed just now with unusual earnestness.

"I am listening," she said sweetly; "what is your trouble. I should like to help you if I can."

"You can if you choose," he said. "Say you like me as much as I like you, and it will be all I want."

She raised her eyes to his in sudden doubt, and then she saw his meaning. While he spoke he had drawn nearer, bending almost over her. His ardent glance brought a burning flush to her face, and instinctively she drew away from him. He thought she was only shy.

"I love you, dearest Rika," he said, "and you love me too, don't you—don't you?" He

[141]

tried to take her hand, but she drew it away and rose up from the bench beneath the cedar-tree.

"Oh please don't, Mr. Burneston. I don't know what to say to you."

But her shyness only spurred Ralph's eagerness.

"You are surprised; I've been in a hurry, perhaps," he said; "but you do see how much I care for you—and I'm sure you love me, Rika, though you don't know it, you dear girl."

He certainly was not shy, he took her hand and held it while she stood confounded, wondering how she could make him leave her without being rude.

"I am very sorry," she began, "you are quite mistaken, Mr. Burneston."

But her fear of giving pain made her confused and deceived Ralph.

"No, oh no," he said fondly, "I am not mistaken. I love you with all my heart and soul." He pressed her hand tightly, but Rika drew it suddenly away; his last words had brought back her courage.

[142]

"I am still very sorry. I like you very much as a friend; but that is all. I could never think of anything else."

Every word made Ralph more determined. "Tell me," he said, "have you ever been in love?"

"No." Rika was carried away for a moment by his eager tone; then she flushed suddenly. "And if I had, I scarcely think you ought to ask me."

"My love gives me the right;" but he spoke less confidently. "If love is new to you, you may love me without knowing it. Trust me, it will be all right."

She did not turn away or look confused now, and Ralph felt deeply mortified. His assurance vexed Rika, and took away from her fear of wounding him.

"It is better to be quite plain with you," she said. "I think I am so much older than you that such a thought could not come to me; and listen, please"—for Ralph turned angrily away—"I think, too, that you mistake your own feelings. I had got to consider you as a new brother."

[143]

A smothered oath burst from Ralph, and she drew back, fear and disgust showing plainly in her face.

"You had better say you can't bear the sight of me, and be honest at once. I suppose you think that I don't see through all these shams. Just take care of yourself, that's all. Just see that long-tongued cousin of mine doesn't lead you on as you've led me, and leave you in the lurch—and it will serve you right—you've used me shamefully!"

He went away at once, while Rika stood looking after him, all her senses dazed by his words.

[144]

## CHAPTER XII. THE RISING OF THE STORM.

RALPH hurried away to the house in mad auger—for the auger of a vain man wounded in his supremest vanity is a sort of insanity—he had resolved that Rika should care for him, and that she should confess him irresistible, and he had never doubted his power till he saw her listening to his cousin, and even then the notion that Gilbert could prove a successful rival had seemed too absurd. Instead of confessing love, she had pitied him. His eyes blazed with angry light, his face was red with passion, and he carried his hands

tightly clenched on each side of him as he met Faith Emmett at the foot of the great staircase.

The sight of her boy always brought a rare

[145]

sweetness to the housekeeper's lips—her eyes opened widely without any of the yellow light that sometimes flashed between their dark lashes; but at the sight of his troubled face Faith's smile vanished, her forehead wrinkled, and her eyelids drooped.

"What ails ye, mah bairn?" she said, and she laid her brown hand on his arm.

He shook her off angrily.

"Confound you! don't stop me. Can't you see I'm in a hurry?" He pushed past her, and went on up the stairs and along the gallery.

But Faith was not disturbed by his rudeness, she knew her power over him. She followed quickly, and when she too reached the gallery—"Whisht, whisht, mah lad," she said softly, "ye've been crossed, an' mebbe if ye come along wi' me ye'll find t' reason why. Come, mah honey, ye'll not be going in to breakfast yonder; ye can have all yu wish fer in t' house-keeper's room."

Ralph shook his head, but his manner was irresolute.

[146]

"I don't want breakfast. I want to be left quiet."

Faith turned, looked at him resolutely over her shoulder, and said, "Come," and he followed her downstairs.

The housekeeper's breakfast was on the table untouched. She had been far too deeply interested in watching Ralph's interview with Rika, and then in trying to know the rights of her darling's discomfiture, to think about eating, though she had a great liking for dainty dishes. "Ye'll be quiet in here, honey." She opened the door of her den, she saw Ralph fling himself into a huge arm-chair, and then bustled off to the still-room in search of some hot coffee and toast for her darling.

When she came back with a tray laden with a fragrant and appetising breakfast, she looked still graver, for Ralph, instead of having attacked, as she expected he would, the cold partridge on the table, sat scowling in the easy-chair, looking far more ready for a fray than a feast.

"Come and take some breakfast, honey,"

[147]

said Faith; "there's cream cakes an' kidneys, an' an omelette I made o' purpose—ye sud nivver fast on trouble, Master Ralph."

Ralph looked round at the table, but he refused to be tempted.

"Give me a cup of coffee and a bit of bread," he said, "and if you've got anything to tell me, for heaven's sake tell it and have done with it, instead of winking and pursing up your lips and making an old fool of yourself."

Faith winced, but she did not look angry. She shook her head sorrowfully at Ralph.

"Eh, eh, it's been always t' same fra yer cradle up'ards; ye spoil all by wantin' it ower soon. How could ye think, honey, to ask a lass her mind afore she'd brokken her fast, an' mebbe if ye'd left her a week or mair she'd ha' smiled on ye?"

"Do mind your own business," Ralph broke in furiously, stamping his foot. "Say what you have to tell me and have done with it—that is," he rose and moved towards the door, "if you have anything to tell. I don't want to be jawed as if I was six."

[148]

Faith's hands clasped themselves tightly together. She had that wonderful power of forbearance so often linked with a strong, passionate nature. Ralph never guessed how deeply she felt his taunts.

"Master Ralph," she began in a deprecating voice, "many's t' time I've told ye that Mrs. Burneston 'ud do ye a bad turn, an' see, for all your scaum, she's done it now."

"What has she done? Make haste." He stamped on the floor in his impatience.

"Sit ye doon an' I'll tell ye. Nobbut ye're ower good fer t' likes o' a poor parson's lass."

He frowned angrily.

"You're talking nonsense. Faith, and you know it; if I want anything, it doesn't matter whether it's good enough for me, I must have it; and I should have thought," a slight flush spread over his face, "that you would prefer Miss Masham to Rose Duncombe."

"Rose!" Faith tossed her head, and the corners of her mouth went down into her chin; "it could nivver be seemly fer you to speak with such as Rose, nobbut in the way of kindness;

[149]

but, Master Ralph, you sud look higher than Miss Masham, you may wed wiv a duke's daughter fer t' asking."

"I shall wed, as you call it, whom I please;" then he flushed angrily at the remembrance of Rika's refusal. "But never mind all this; what has Mrs. Burneston done? say it, and do be quick."

"I sud ha' thought you might have guessed; it's clear as daylight—mickle wad ha'e muckle, an' muckle wad ha'e mair; t' mistress has getten mickle, but what's that sae long as her fooalks is not t' same as hersel'. lies not Miss Masham telt ye that she visits at t Cairn, takes up wi' such as t' Barughs I Nae, nae, Master Ralph, Mrs. Burneston's fain to wed her friend tiv her brother, an' she'd do it twice as much noo just fer to spite you."

Ralph stood still; he leant against the wall thinking and frowning, but at last a smile spread over his face.

"Do you know, Faith, you think you're deuced clever, but you're an extremely foolish old woman? To begin with: such a thing as

[150]

an attachment between Miss Masham and that lout George Barugh is impossible; and next, how can Mrs. Burneston know anything about me and Miss Masham?"

"Eh, lad, if ye'd always keep a smile on your bonny face like that! ye looks my ain bairn at seemed gone away, an' Satan's hoof 'at had just dinted yer forehead is smoothed out o' sight. Eh, lad," she went up to him and laid her hand pleadingly on his shoulder, "I'm not blamin' yu, honey." The soft tenderness that had made her eyes dark and liquid, changed into sudden hate. "It's not your fault if ye're changed, it's her 'at has driven ye fra yer ain home into wicked ways, an' noo that she sees a chance o' your comin' round she tries to step atween you an' ivvery pleasure yu fancy."

The last words renewed Ralph's anger. His resentment against Doris had slumbered in the amusement afforded by his pursuit of Rika, but now there came back suddenly his

meeting with his step-mother outside the stone cottage, and also Rose's sudden removal from Burneston.

[151]

"Curse her!" he said fiercely; "yes, you're right, Faith, there must be an end to this at once;" then as the thought came, "by Jove, she has set Rika against me. I'll stop this."

Faith nodded her head eagerly. This was just the mood she had been striving to evoke, and yet, knowing her boy's contradiction, she had begun to feel hopeless of success.

"What did I say to ye; an' did ye mind, when yu an' t' lass were talking beside t' river? I was takin' notice on yu, an' sae was Mrs. Burneston. I saw Miss turn her head to t' house, an' I looks, an' theer was t' mistriss a-frownin' an' a-beckonin', an' I kenned 'at she was oop to keepin' her fra yu. When I knows a thing. Master Ralph, I knows it, an' I reads Mrs. Burneston like a book for a' t' scaum in her face; she hates yu an' she hates mey, an' she'll nivver rest till she sees our backs turned on t' Hall."

There was real passion in Faith's voice, but there was not the fierce glance and violent manner she often used to overawe her inferiors' She looked calm and very pale, but

[152]

her hand trembled as it rested on Ralph's arm. He stood a moment musing.

"Look here," he said sternly; "I've been wrong all this time. I've never asserted myself, and she thinks she can over-ride me as she pleases. I have taken her insolence too quietly; but we'll see who's master here. My father—" he hesitated, a lingering touch of right feeling reminding him that he had a listener; then the remembrance of Rika's refusal came back with the new aspect of being caused by Doris, and he forgot all restraint.

"The low-born, presuming upstart!" he said; "she to dare to judge and control my conduct—she—does she think I'm as great a fool as my father, I wonder? If I'd been older when he was duped into that marriage, I should have been justified in shutting him up. He lost his senses then, and they've never come back."

By this time Faith had seen the danger of going too far.

"Whisht, whisht, you musn't blame t' squire, dear," she spoke soothingly, "he's nowt to do wiv such ways. I heard him tell Mrs. Burneston

[153]

that Miss Masham were not fer t' likes o' her brother George."

Ralph stared in utter surprise. Till now he had looked on Faith's assertion about George and Rika as a mere effort of imagination. It was too daring of Doris to dream of such a project.

"You heard!—how?"

"I was in Master Phil's room, and they war speaking out."

"And you listened?" he sneered, and Faith reddened. "Well, of course, that explains everything, and also explains what happened this morning. Well, I'm off."

He nodded and left the room, eager to find Rika; of course she cared nothing for George Barugh; but he was sure now that she had been prejudiced against him. If his step-mother was determined to marry Miss Masham to her brother George, he thought, she would stick at nothing. But if Rika knew Low Doris had upset his whole life he was quite sure she would not be guided by her. "After all, Rika's a lady," he said, "and she

[154]

must have some class prejudice; it is far more natural she should side with me than with a farmer's daughter. They must have finished breakfast by now."

[155]

## CHAPTER XIII. GEORGE'S QUEST.

WHEN George left his sister he rode away slowly tip the avenue; he had no heart to go through the village or to pass by the Farm and Rose Duncombe's cottage, and, as has been said, the road through the avenue curved round into the Steersley road above the church. As he passed the churchyard gate so many memories crowded on his mind that he gave his horse the whip and galloped on till Burneston was fairly left behind him.

"Mother says it hes been a grand thing for Doris to have married t' squire," he said sadly, "but I can't see it. She's not taken happiness to t' Hall, an' she looks worried

[156]

an' sore-hearted; except when I spoke of t' little lad she scarce smiled. Mebbe it's true that happiness is not so unequal as fooalks say. Mother's nivver tasted the sort o' pleasures that Doris lives among, but, for all that, mother's younger an' fresher in spirit than Doris'll ivver be now; it must be sad to hate, as I fear she hates Ralph Burneston, her own husband's son, too."

He sighed at this. He had spoken positively about Rose to Doris, but he felt that marriage was over for him, for it seemed as if his love had grown hopeless. He knew he never could love any other girl, and, therefore, however despairing her attachment might be to Ralph Burneston, he thought it must surely prove as undying as his own. But he was not sighing now for himself or for Rose Duncombe; he was only thinking how completely the practical experience offered by life contradicts the theories of youth and hope. The squire's love for Doris had seemed perfect, and although hers had not

equalled it, still George had hoped that her husband's great love would have sufficed for his

[157]

sister's happiness, would, at least, have drawn her love forth in return.

"But she cannot truly love her husband," he thought sadly; "her own self an' little Phil comes first, an' t' squire last of all. 'Twas plain to me whiles I talked to Mr. Burneston how he loves t' lad; tho' he sees Ralph's been to blame, yet he longs to keep him at home, an' how can Doris set herself against him? I don't like him, but then he's not t' flesh an' blood of one that's dear to me, I'm very sorry for him, an' fer her too. I thought she'd be so great-minded, so different to most step-mothers. I'm sadly feared it's her pride; she'd like to set him aside fer t' sake o' her ain bairn."

His thoughts went on to Ralph and Rika, and he felt a tender pity lest the girl should fix her affections on such a changeable, unstable character as Ralph Burneston's.

"She's worth a better than him, nobbut she may steady him an' lead him up to higher things—Ay, that's just it, I thought I should hit it at last. That's it; it's at the root of Doris's troubles; she tries to deal wi' 'em herself. She

[158]

Don't cast 'em on Him that careth for her. Why, if she did she'd rise up fresh an' bright as t' dew, instead of having her young face clouded and grave."

So much thought and sympathy for others had put his own trial aside; but as he drew near to the parsonage at Steersley his trouble came back, and he felt heavy-hearted again.

"Well," he smiled, "I'm not practising my own doctrine; I munnot trust to myself; I mun do what Mr. Hawnby says is best fer t' poor lass."

His mind turned slowly from one idea to another, and he had been so bent on finding Rose at Burneston that at first he had scarcely entertained the squire's idea that she would be found at Steersley; but when he came in sight of the low grey Parsonage a sudden glow of hope warmed his heart. Something told him that Rose was near at hand.

The Parsonage stood some way back from the road, screened very much from sight by clumps of Portugal laurel, the garden itself being

[159]

divided from the highway by a low wooden park paling, grey with the lovely opal tints of time, which had covered much of it with hoary lichen. Behind the house, far away, was the open country; to the right of the Parsonage were tall trees, and from these came the peaceful sound of rooks, as the huge black birds sailed solemnly forth from their nests to take their evening gossip overhead.

The grey wooden palings were continued up each side of the grounds to the low stone wall which shut in the back yard and out-buildings. George rode round to the back gate, and as he looked over the palings through the alley of apple-trees, which bordered this side of the garden, he saw a sight which brought the blood to his cheeks, and made his pulses quiver. Surely it was Rose who was pacing up and down this sequestered alley, quite out of sight, as she thought, for only a tall man on horseback could have seen over the fence into the walk below. She was unconscious of his presence; she walked past him down the alley, her hands clasped together, and it seemed to George,

[160]

in his hurried glance at her, with a sad, stricken look on her face.

He rode on fast, opened the gate for himself, and had put his horse under a shed, before the parson's lad, an old decrepit man with a hump on his back, found out there was some one in the yard.

George nodded and asked if the parson was at home.

The old man shook his head, "Nae, nae, mail lad, an' he'll nut cum yam mebbe till neeght. There's an awd lass atween lahfe an' deeath mebbe three mahles off, an' ye'll nut fin' t' passon leeavin' till his wark wiv her's deean. Fooalks tell hoo 'at sheea's been a witch, an' t' awd divvil's fearsome noo sheea's deein', she roars oot on Awd Soss, an' says he's waitin' fer her soul."

"Poor old creature!" Then George hesitated. "I'll go in an' wait awhile," he said, "I want t' speak wi' t' parson."

Bill stared after him.

"Passon he sehd Ah war nut tu let onnybody gan in, but yon lad's sae maisterful. Weel,

[161]

weel, Ah've telt him nowt, an' if t' lass keeps hersel' to hersel', mebbe he'll nut git a seeght o' her."

George went rapidly past the house, he scarcely felt his lameness now, the moorland air had so invigorated him. He was anxious to escape the observation of Mr. Hawnby's housekeeper.

Fortunately Rose was at the near end of the apple-tree walk as he reached it; his fear had been that she would escape at the first glimpse of him.

She looked stupefied as she saw him coming towards her; then, as he held out his hand, she tried to turn away; but it was too late. George caught first one hand and then the other, and held her fast

"Whisht, lass!" He saw the bright colour fly into her face, and he feared a sudden gust of passion. "Nobbut ye'll stand still, I'll loose you soon enough. Rose, honey, I'm so fain to see you safe, 'at I'm not iv a mind to flout ye fer t' fright you gave me yonder on t' moor. Tell me, lass"—he loosed one hand; but, spite of

[162]

her twitching fingers, he kept the other firmly grasped—"what are you doin' here?"

"I don't know." She looked sullen, and there was such despair in her voice that his heart ached for her.

"I mean, how did you get here, lass?"

He spoke in a soothing voice as he gazed at the girl; her scared, wan look, the hopeless misery in her face, wrung his heart. He saw, as he took in every bit of her tired drooping figure, that she wore the same gown she had worn that fatal day on the moor—soiled and draggled now—and George's heart was fall of fear as he waited for her answer.

Rose gave him a hasty look, then she turned her head away.

"On my legs, foolish lad; how else d'ye think?" She gave a short laugh.

"My poor lass," he said tenderly, "d'ye mean that you walked all the way from t' Cairn to Steersley?"

There was the old scornful light in her eyes as she turned round and looked in his face.

"Grace o' me! ye're not changed, lad; ye're

[163]

as fond as ivver ye war, nae doubt. I walked all t' way from t' Cairn; easy walking for such as me," she said bitterly. Then she saw tears in his loving brown eyes, and turned away.

"I'll not freeat ye, lass," he said. "I'm only thankful to find you here safe, an in such good keeping. Mr. Hawnby's reeght gude, Rose."

"Yes, he's very kind." She spoke carelessly and stopped for awhile; then, finding George did not break the silence, she resumed her walk under the apple-trees.

He paced silently beside her. Presently he saw first one tear and then another fall and leave its trace on the bosom of her travelstained gown. She did not sob or sigh; the tears started to his own eyes, and still he dared not speak; his love was too reverent in its nature to force itself on her sorrow. At last she spoke without looking at him.

"Ye're a kind, good lad, an' may ye nivver know t' bitterness of such a lot as mine. D'ye mind, lad, how ye read to me yance o' t' Slough o' Despond an' t' pilgrims flounderin' and

[164]

strugglin' i' t' mire an' foul water, till they couldn't sae much as see t' land on t' ither side? Well, lad, Ah was gone further still; Ah'd left strugglin' an' flounderin'—Ah was just sinkin'." She looked up sharply; the intense pity in his face irritated her, and roused the old defiant spirit. "An' why not, Ah'd like ta know? No one wad be a bogle t' warse if Ah had sunk an' gone out o' mind for ivver."

"Rose, Rose! whisht, honey! Ah tells you ye munnot speak what's wrong; ye knaw there's more than yan 'at wad ha' gone sorrowin' fer you their lives long."

"More than yan I Ah likes that, Ah diz." She laughed harshly, and George winced. "More than yan means two at t' outside, an' that's yersel' an' mebbe grandmother. Yance Ah'd hev made a bigger hole i' life when Ah left it, but now—" She looked

round wildly, then the sight of the house seemed to recall her straying wits. “God help me!” she said, “Many’s t’ tahme Ah’ve laughed at you, George, fer yer sermons, but God helped me on i’ moor, an’ Ah thinks mebbe He’ll have pity on such a

[165]

wretched thing as a girl that loves a man ‘at’s athoot a heart in his body.”

She dried her eyes and kept walking on beside her companion, but George did not speak. His lips moved as he prayed fervently for help and guidance, both for himself and for poor Rose but he could not find anything to say. He feared to comfort her; if he tried it would most likely set her contradiction in a blaze, for he saw that she was in too over-wrought a mood to endure any topic disconnected with her present trouble. He was conscious of some change in Rose. Formerly he had thought that only his exceeding love for her made him sometimes distrustful of his power to convince her, but now there was a dignity in her despair of self that kept him hushed. He felt that the nature he thought he knew so thoroughly had secrets beyond his ken.

All at once she began to speak again, in a quiet, calm voice—the long silence had soothed her—she looked straight before her, so as to avoid George’s eyes.

“Thank you, lad, fer all yer kindness. Ah minds

[166]

it, an’ Ah know more than you think. You came here last night, an’ t’ Rector was away, an’ t’ housekeeper’d been told to hau’d her tongue, an’ so ye went on to t’ inn tired an’ worn out. If ye’d not started sae early i’ t’ mornin’ fer Burneston, ye’d hev kenned t’ truth; but ye’d flitted by t’ time t’ Rector got to t’ Black Eagle.”

“But how came they not to say a word at f inn? They must know you’re here.”

Rose shook her head.

"Not they, lad. Ah was miles from Steersley when Mr. Hawnby saw me fost. Ah cannot tell ye how Ah'd getten so far. Ah can't mind how 'twas;" there was a pitiful sound in her voice. "Ah got lifts in carts; an' yance a lady—she mun be good, whoever she be—took me on a bit in her carriage. It was night-time, an' she was going post-haste to see a sick daughter. Ah was crying as Ah walked, an' she stopped an' she held a light to my face an' she axed me hoo Ah cam to be on t' road sae late; an' Ah telled her Ah would fain die, so as her daughter might live, life was nowt to me, Ah said; an' she cried, poor soul, an' patted me on t' shoulder,

[167]

an' bid me get in, an' sehd Ah was to live for the sake o' Him who died that Ah might live—not for myself. It's strange hoo t' words spoken in darkness sank into mah heart. Ah could scarce make out her face in t' glimmer, but Ah knew it must be sweet, an' it was sweet; her words had a crying sound, but they warmed me as a smile wad ha done. Ah, she war good. Maybe if Ah'd not travelled along wiv *her*. Ah sud not have come away so quiet wiv t' Parson."

"Where did you meet him?"

He saw at once he had better have kept silence. The interruption to her flow of recollections jarred the nerves of the unhappy girl. She tossed her head and gave George a derisive smile.

"Just t' same—same as ivver—poor doited lad!"

But as she found that he kept silence, the longing to tell her story to the end grew too strong to resist. She looked straight before her again, and went on—

"T' lady made me stay wiv her till i' daylight came; but then Ah would go. She persuaded me to go on wiv her to her journey's

[168]

end, but no, that was not fer t' likes o' me; it was enough fer me to see t' fine lady's-maid, as soon as it war light, toss her head at me. T' lady said t' next town was Steersley, so Ah said Ah'd friends in a village near, an' she was over kind to ask questions. Then t' Parson found me sittin' under a hedge. Ah was faint an' weary; t' lady gave me biscuits, but Ah'd no heart to eat—an' t' Parson bid me get up beside him, an' he took me to an awd lass in a cottage near an' left me all day; an' i' t' evenin', when Ah lay sleepin' on t' bed he came an' fetched me here."

"Thank God!" said George involuntarily.

Rose gave him a smile, but it made her face look old and dreary; it was but the ghost of the saucy happy smiles that used to be a part of her beauty. It faded into a look of deep sadness.

"Fare ye well, lad," she said gravely; "go back to yer ain fooalks, an' nivver trouble more about Rose Duncombe; she's not worthy fer you to think on. Ah dizn't say, forget me. Ah'd like to feel Ah had yan true friend to

[169]

count on; but you mun change yer way o' thinkin'. Yu mun always mind Ah's not t' Rose 'at you loved yance, but a misguided lass that hes cast herself away. Ah loves him still," she said wildly, "tho' Ah wad not go wiv him. An' donnut go fer to think 'at Ah's turned good like yer Pilgrim, lad, maybe to-morrow or sooner Ah'll be worse than ivver Ah waaz. Mah peace is gone. Your words hes come truer than ye thowt fer; George, lad, Ah've ventured ovver near t' flame, an' my wings is singed fer ivvermore"—her voice broke into a sob.

She waved her hand quickly, and darted from him as suddenly as she had left him at the Cairn.

With her went the weight which kept down his power of thinking, and a flood of questions rose to his lips, which the very sight of her woeful face, and the hearing of her sad story, had for the time stifled. He looked wistfully up the apple walk, and then shook his head.

“It’s mah ain fault, Ah’m unready,” he said, “but it’s useless to repine against one’s ownself for aught beside sin—it’s no

[170]

sin, Mr. Hawnby says, to be unready and awkward-like, so long as it doesn’t come from bein’ over full o’ wersels, an’ only God knows,” he said reverently, “how truly Ah was taken up wi’ t’ poor lass. Well, it would be selfish to cross her will, an’ Ah’ll not seek her for this time. Maybe He’ll order it differently one day.”

It was getting too late to return to the Cairn, and he so longed to see the Rector that he resolved to sleep at the Steersley Inn. As he led out his horse, Mr. Hawnby came hurriedly out of the parsonage. He looked much pleased to see George.

“I’m glad I’ve met you, my lad. You will find a letter from me when you reach home,” he said. “I met Rose as she left you just now. Poor child, she is not fit to talk yet; you must leave her alone. She will not take comfort from you in her present state.”

“What is to become of her, sir? It’s past bearing—”

The Rector put his hand kindly on George’s shoulder.

“Come, come, this is not like you; I thought

[171]

you would be quite cheered to find she was safe. Leave her alone with me. I think I can deal best with her. I am seeking a quiet home for her to go to after a while, for Mr. Burneston will of course agree with me that she cannot return to her grandmother. When she is more like herself I will write and tell you, but depend upon it she is far better among strangers just now. Now I shall send you away, and you had better not try to see Rose again for some time to come."

"You are very good, sir, I've no words to thank you" but George looked sadly down-cast.

"Cheer up, my lad," the Rector said. "Time is a wonderful healer, and you are both very young, you know, so be hopeful. Now, good-bye. God bless you!"

He squeezed the lad's hand warmly. "Poor lad, it is hard on him," he said, as he watched him trot out of the yard. "He will win her yet, I hope; he deserves to; and, please God, she'll come right in time."

[172]

## CHAPTER XIV. HATE.

DORIS had also seen the abrupt parting between Ralph and Rika, and she guessed they had quarrelled.

Mr. Burneston frowned and grumbled at his son's absence from the breakfast-table.

"Late rising is a very bad habit," he said to Rika; "I hope, my dear, you don't indulge in it."

"I? Oh! no. I'm always up early," she said abruptly; "but indeed, Mr. Burneston, your son is not late this morning, he was in—in the garden before I came down."

The squire had looked at her in his usual easy, careless fashion, but as she went on speaking his gaze became earnest, for she grew crimson,

[173]

hesitated, and ended by looking down into her plate, wishing she could get anywhere out of sight.

Gilbert Raine had been reading a letter, but the pause that followed made him conscious that something was happening. He looked up, and saw the squire's puzzled face, and Rika's guilty confusion. He had been very happy this morning, and his absorption had been caused by a resolve, spite of the letters, which urged his return home, to spend another week at Burneston. He had heard Ralph's name, and some instinct told him that his cousin was being discussed, and now Rika's face showed him that her interest in the young fellow was much warmer than he had supposed. He felt all at once irritable and cynical.

"Where is Ralph this morning?" he said impatiently. He looked first at Mr. Burneston, then at Rika, and ended with Doris.

"He will be here directly I daresay," Mrs. Burneston answered calmly. Then she looked on to Rika, "Have you finished breakfast, Rika?"

[174]

she said. "I want to show you some songs that have come up from London; we can try them presently, if you like."

"Very well, I'll come now," and Rika rose to follow her friend.

"What would ladies do in the country, I wonder, without parcels from London?" Raine said. "They are about the only outside help you have in getting through the day." He looked directly at Rika.

"I don't think educated women need outside help of that sort" she said, so seriously that Mr. Burneston looked astonished. "It seems to me that women as a rule waste fewer minutes than men do; they have so many small duties to fill up little corners of life with."

"Or they think so," Raine said, so bitterly that even the squire wondered at his tone. "One thing is certain, they can always flirt in any corner of life, and then they can talk—that is the inestimable advantage they possess over the slower, dumber animals. They have nimbler and better balanced tongues."

"Come, come, Gilbert, I thought love of dress

[175]

and tidiness used to be the chief feminine defects in your catalogue; you are growing spiteful, old fellow."

"I've no doubt," Rika said, "Mr. Raine would like our tongue tips to be burnt as they used to be by the Inquisition."

Doris laughed. "He is incorrigible; Philip, you had better read him a lecture." She moved to the door. "Come, Rika, are you ready?"

Mrs. Burneston had noticed Rika's confusion, and then Gilbert's vexed manner; but she did not look at him as she rose to open the door, or she would have seen that he was frowning at her.

"Rika cannot care for that unfledged boy," he thought. "I can't do her the injustice to think that she cares for him seriously—but why does she flirt? Why need she notice him

in the way she does? She's but an ordinary woman, after all. How right I've been all through these years; women cannot be trusted. That girl only encourages Ralph because she sees he must be a rich man some day, and she is a poor clergyman's daughter, so she keeps him in

[176]

tow. I believe it's half of it Mrs. Burneston's doing. She is charming to look at and pleasant to talk to, and so on, but she is thoroughly worldly and scheming, the worst possible adviser such a girl as Rika Masham could have, and yet"—he closed the door on the two ladies—"I thought Mrs. Burneston disliked her step-son too much to wish to marry him to her friend. I can't make her out, she is a sphinx. Women are all sphinxes. But what a fool I am to worry about it! I'll go back to Austin's End."

The sphinx led the way to her sitting-room, but when they reached the book landing facing the Clytie, Rika stopped.

"I will not come with you now, Doris; I'll come presently."

Her friend turned round and gave her a long searching glance, then she smiled.

"Shall I tell you what you mean, Rika?" Then seeing a vexed look in her friend's face, "I know you want to avoid me just now; but don't be afraid, dear, I am not going to tease you," she said gravely; "but I do earnestly wish to ask you a question at once."

[177]

"Very well; I'll come now. I don't pledge myself to answer your question, you know," she said saucily.

She said to herself as she followed Doris—

"I shall not tell her; she is not Ralph's own mother, and I don't think she judges him fairly. I should hate her if she had the stiff, polite manner with me she has with that boy; and she is so charming to everyone else. If I had not been a coward I might have told her how unkind she is, and so have helped the poor fellow."

Like all impulsive people, Rika was full of quick contrition, and her anger at Ralph's vehemence to her had soon melted into self-condemnation. Her manner must have deceived him, and led him on, she thought, or he would not have spoken as he had done. She gave a little sigh. Why had it been natural to feel at her ease with Ralph—almost a stranger—and yet with Mr. Raine, whom she had met before at Burneston, she had each day, so it seemed to her, to begin the acquaintance afresh? Life was a great puzzle.

"I am not going to stay long with you this

[178]

morning," she said to Doris. "I have to write to my father and tell him when to expect me."

Doris gave her one of the sweet rare smiles which little Phil had inherited.

"You may as well sit down and listen instead of standing," she said. "And Rika, dear, you must not talk of going home, I want you so much. I cannot part with you yet. Is it your quarrel this morning that makes you talk of going away? I think you have quarrelled with Ralph, have you not?"

"Doris!" said Rika, impetuously, "I told you I should not answer questions; there are several reasons why I must go home."

Doris fixed another of her long searching glances on her friend; at first Rika stood it bravely, but at Doris's next question her cheeks burned and her hands grew cold all at once.

"Do you like Mr. Raine, Rika?"

Rika struggled angrily with her confusion. She forced a laugh, and looked up at her friend saucily.

"I really don't know. What does it matter? Why do you ask me? Perhaps I do a little."

[179]

"A good deal, I think. Come, Rika, am I your friend, or am I not? Friends should have no secrets."

"I really do not know how to answer you. Sometimes I think I like him, and then, when we have parted quite good friends, next time we meet he says something so very rude, so horribly unkind about women, that I hate him. Did you hear what he said, just now? I could hardly keep the tears out of my eyes, I was so angry."

Doris smiled. "You are too sensitive, he is only teasing you. However, dear, you have answered my question. You would not care for the opinion of a man you dislike—it would not bring you to tears."

She bent down and gave her friend a warm kiss.

This was so unlike Doris that Rika felt puzzled. Very rosy she returned the kiss, but did not know what to say next.

"I mean this,"—Doris saw the question in her eyes—"I was beginning to be really afraid that you cared for Ralph, and this troubled me.

[180]

Mr. Raine is so much better suited to you than that boy—"

Rika coloured violently, and rose up to go away.

“Oh, please don’t!” she said, “I know I shall displease you some day, for all your love and goodness to me; but I can’t talk this kind of talk—only, yes—stop an instant; there is something I will say out to you.” Her eyes brightened with sudden energy, and she went hurriedly on. “I know I ought to have said it sooner. Doris, dear—I am going to vex you, I know—why are you always so unkind to Ralph Burneston?”

More than once at Pelican House, Rika, in her abrupt frank remonstrances, had taken her friend’s proud reserve by storm; but since Doris’s marriage a barrier had come between these two which even Rika’s playful fearlessness had shrunk from overleaping.

At this direct question Doris first flushed deeply; then, as the colour fled away, leaving her paler than before it came, she looked coldly and proudly at her friend.

[181]

“In what way am I unkind? A general charge is vague, and means really nothing.”

Rika started; a chill fell on her glowing mood. She could not have believed that Doris could have spoken to her so coldly. For a moment she hesitated. It seemed to her that any further urging must certainly produce a quarrel, and she could not bear to quarrel with Doris. Against this hesitation her independent spirit rose. She had a right as Doris’s chosen friend to tell her of her faults, she was quite willing to take advice about her own, and she resented the tone in which Doris had spoken; it stung her and set her temper on edge.

“It seems to me you never speak really kindly to him—your manner is forced. You treat him like a stranger. Why, I am much more intimate with him than you are.”

“I could justify my coldness towards Ralph by telling you of his misconduct; but that would really be unkind. He is a very unsatisfactory person. Do not let us talk of him.”

She turned away deeply wounded; she was utterly disappointed in Rika. Ralph must have

[182]

gained great influence to make the girl take his part against her own friend.

“Ah, but, Doris, look at me now, and don’t be angry” She took both her friend’s hands; but Mrs. Burneston did not smile. “Years ago, when I was first here, you always spoke of him in the same cold, severe way, as if he were a sort of criminal, when he was really only a boy, and he’s only a boy still—only a year older than our Egbert—and you can’t think how indulgent my father is to Egbert; he says it is the greatest mistake to be unloving to boys.”

“Your father doubtless knows how to manage his own son, but you do not know how he would behave in my place,” said Doris. She spoke very coldly, but so quietly that Rika had no idea of the storm she had raised.

It had come to this, then, Doris thought. The hateful tie of caste obliterated all memories of past affection and of present kindness—for to her practical mind, with its ever-increasing worldly and, therefore, coarsened views,

[183]

these visits to Burneston were for Rika steps in the social world not to be attained by other means—Rika considered Ralph her equal, and had towards him a fellow-feeling, a sympathy which could not exist between her and a farmer’s daughter.

“My own folly for taking her to the Cairn and asking her to my wedding!” She had said this to herself with whitening lips while she listened to Rika.

"Oh, Doris, you are angry still!" the girl , said eagerly, "and it's all my fault. Say you forgive me. Perhaps I should not interfere, indeed I do it in love, and of course I might have done it better; I am sure to blunder at things; I knew you would be vexed. If I could only be father for five minutes! I believe I mean this; you, who are so clever and so perfect in your ways, can get so much power over people—Oh, Doris! remember how you could make the girls love you, even without trying, at Pelican House, and how sweet you are to those you like; well, couldn't you, if you chose, still make this boy love you, and be guided by you

[184]

—worship you almost? Remember he's never had a mother to teach him, since he's been any age. When I saw him on your wedding-day I thought, ah, how he will improve! for, indeed it seemed to me you would be an angel in the house."

Doris's lips relaxed their unpleasant tension.

"Rika, you forget one thing," she said sadly. "I never was what you fancied me; I am not an angel, far from one. You are so very enthusiastic that you exaggerate both the bad and the good in me. If Ralph Burneston had been different to me I might have been different to him. Now it is too late."

"Oh, Doris, and he so loves your boy, and little Phil dotes on his brother."

A dark shadow, the darkest Rika had ever seen there, fell on the lovely face.

"I am very sorry for it, for as he grows older I cannot possibly allow them to associate. Ralph's example would ruin his brother. Rika, once for all, you do not know this young fellow as I do."

[185]

There was such intense bitterness in her voice that Rika recoiled. It seemed to her that some other woman had usurped the lovely form of her friend, Doris was so entirely transformed when she spoke of Ralph Burneston.

Should she cease speaking, and pray all the more earnestly that Doris's heart might soften? and yet that longing to finish our work which so often mars it, made Rika's tongue restless.

"Only just this," she said pleadingly, "and I will not return to the subject. You are such a loving, devoted mother that I can't help thinking, if you would try to look on Ralph as really your own son, you would end by loving him; and I firmly believe in the power of love, it is a transforming power, it unlocks all hearts; only love must be shown by acts, not kept within us as a theory."

"And you have been trying to win Ralph's love. You foolish girl! you have been making your own misery." Doris gave way to her anger at last. "Ralph is only amusing himself

[186]

with you, he will not marry you; and if he did he could not make you happy; I do not like to say it, but he is vicious and good-for-nothing, while Gilbert Raine is in every way a suitable match for you."

Rika's face was as red as fire.

"It is you who exaggerate now, Doris. What have I done to gain Ralph's love'. you misjudge me; and besides, I do not think it is nice to speak to me in that way of a man who seeks every opportunity to quarrel with me, as Mr. Raine does. Why should I look on men in the light of possible husbands? The very idea is a restraint, and, besides, it is quite uncalled for."

She was so deeply mortified that the tears filled her eyes, and she turned to go away, and Doris did not try to prevent her.

She was very much disappointed in Rika. It was absurd beyond belief that a young girl living in such seclusion should presume to judge her, and above all should refuse to be guided by her.

"It shows"—Mrs. Burneston drew herself up

[187]

proudly—"the extreme ignorance and narrow-mindedness of these people who live out of the world; just like all religious people," she sneered, "unless you agree with them you are wrong."

She was very forlorn in that moment. Only yesterday her husband had shown her a letter from George announcing Rose's safety; and while he urged that the news should for the present be kept from Ralph, he also said that it would be wise to keep the lad, if possible, for some months under home influence.

And Mr. Burneston had said to his wife—

"You will try to help me to make home as pleasant as we can for poor Ralph?"

Everybody on the side of Ralph, and now even Rika.

Doris asked herself how she could get through these months with her present feelings towards Ralph.

"He is so deceitful," she said. "If he were just to speak out his feelings for me, his father would never forgive him. I know he loathes and despises me."

[188]

She sat down and began to think. Somehow her power seemed to have lost its firm foundations. Her husband was as fond of her as ever, but on the subject of Ralph she saw he doubted her judgment, and in the first year of their marriage he had relied on her implicitly.

"He has been more with Ralph since then," she said, "and I know Philip thoroughly; he is very good, I suppose better than anyone else is, because he makes no profession of goodness; but he is weak, and those who see him daily gain a daily increasing influence. Who knows that Ralph will not gradually bring him to think less of me? It is not a question of whether I could bear it or not"—Doris looked strangely good and earnest, for she really thought she was right, "but it must be quite wrong to let any influence come between man and wife, and I know that Ralph's is a bad influence."

And then came the thought of little Phil; it would be a cruel wrong to expose her darling to his brother's teaching; and already the child was too fond of Ralph.

[189]

"And there is no weakness in Phil, baby as he is; it is easy to see that. He might, as he grows older, insist that Ralph should always stay here, and then what should I do?"

Such a writhe of uncontrollable hatred rose against the enforced calmness of these last minutes that she clenched her hands in a physical effort against it.

Then she stood still, holding her forehead with both hands, in deep thought.

"Why do I struggle so? I have tried not to hate him, and I can't help it; I will hate him, he is bad and hateful; and he shall not live here to spoil all my life, and to ruin my child."

[190]

# CHAPTER XV. AT LAST.

THE afternoon sun was shining on the river, a broad golden stretch spread from the stone bridge on the right to the frail wooden bridge of planks leading from the foot of the village to the meadows across the water, and besides this a golden radiance painted the trunks and branches of the trees, and came through the leaves in chequered patterns on the yellow road that led from the Hall to the wooden bridge—a radiance that was rather metallic than genial, for the nipping touch of autumn was in the air, so that it was but a worldly kind of sunshine, after all, dazzling to the eye, but bringing no heart-glow with it.

Doris and Rika Masham were coming back

[191]

from Mrs. Duncombe's cottage. The girl had expressed a wish to visit some of the villagers, and Mrs. Burneston had taken her up to the stone cottages, but as Mrs. Duncombe was fast asleep, and Joseph Sunley was rheumatic, cross, and averse to conversation, they were coming home at a brisk pace beside the river.

The previous day had worn away slowly and uncomfortably—as days do that hold in them the weight of a dispute—and to-day, except to Mr. Burneston, had been full of uneasy constraint. Ralph had been dogged and sullen towards his step-mother, and silent to Miss Masham, except that he had tried more than once to speak to her alone, and when he found she avoided this he had looked angry. Doris had been unusually silent and stately to all. While Gilbert Raine had been sometimes cynical and bitter in speech, and then ashamed of his own harshness, as he remarked Rika's avoidance of his young cousin; and then again, as he felt how stiff and cold her manner had become to himself, he lapsed into his old belief, and cursed the caprice of a woman.

[192]

Rika was sure she ought to go home. She longed to get away from the unspoken strife which existed between Doris and her step-son. When she met her friend at luncheon, after their quarrel, she had felt shy, and Mrs. Burneston had at first been very silent; but in the long afternoon's drive she had recovered herself, and joined in the talk between Rika and her husband. Miss Masham knew that it would be worse than useless to try for any decided spoken reconciliation with Doris, and besides, she felt that it would be difficult for her friend to excuse her own words about Gilbert Raine. The colour came rushing to the girl's face when she met Mr. Raine in her friend's presence; it was so very humbling to think that Doris had really intended to make up a match.

"To throw me, in fact, at the head of a man who already has a low opinion of a women; and I thought Doris so high-minded.—Oh, how could she do it?"

She had been busy with these thoughts as she walked up through the village with her friend; and Doris, too, walked on silently.

[193]

They had exchanged a few words with Mrs. Crewe standing at her gate, and now walking back to the Hall beside the sun-lit river, they were each again busy with their own thoughts.

Rika was seeking for the best way of saying she must go home without offending Doris. Ralph had spoken to her again in so marked a manner that she feared he meant to renew his proposal. She did not wish to betray him to Doris, and yet if she stayed on at Burneston it might be difficult to keep the matter from her. And in regard to her feelings towards Mr. Raine, Rika was puzzled. She knew that, for a time at least, she should be glad to part from Doris till the memory of so many years of love had swept away the new and painful impression she had lately received. She was sure she should be very glad to get away from Ralphs admiration, and yet she was not glad to leave Burneston,

the thought even of going was keenly painful. Her cheeks glowed as she walked beside her friend, and she hung her head a little. It began to dawn on her that after all she did

[194]

care for this rude cynic, who lost no chance of mortifying her; last night she had learned that his silence wounded her more than his words did, and she had found herself at breakfast-time this morning longing for and yet shrinking from his coming.

And yet, when after luncheon she had turned markedly away from Ralph, and had come up to Mr. Raine, who was examining an old picture at the other end of the room, though for a moment he had smiled, and seemed ready to speak, he suddenly turned his back upon her, and became absorbed in studying the picture.

Her colour grew yet deeper as she thought of these things, and there was anger mixed with it now against Gilbert Raine.

All at once a bright idea came to release Rika from this humiliation, for it was terribly humbling to find her thoughts engrossed by a man who was not only rude and contradictory, but who actually avoided her as much as he could.

“The truth is, I do not care for him as a man,”

[195]

she smiled at her own fear, “it is only his talk that interests me—it is so brilliant, so very different from any I have ever heard; there is nothing in it that sounds stereotyped or common-place; yes, it is only his talk I care for, and I have the chance of hearing so little good talk except my father’s.”

“Doris,” she said abruptly, as they walked side by side, “you won’t be vexed with me, will you, dear? but I must go home the day after to-morrow.”

Mrs. Burneston's delicate eyebrows rounded with surprise, but she looked very sad.

"So soon? I am sorry." She tried to speak very courteously. "You have quickly tired of Burneston this time, Rika."

"No, indeed I have not; I like Burneston very much; and I will come again if you will kindly give me a chance; but I believe, for several reasons, that I ought to go home now."

Doris did not answer; they had nearly reached the stone bridge, and there came bounding towards them Mr. Burneston's collie-dog.

[196]

Next moment Ralph Burneston appeared advancing to meet them.

"I should like to know, dear," Doris spoke very quietly, "whether this decision of yours has anything to do with Ralph; I don't think you really care for him, but your manner towards him puzzles me."

"Does it? Well, then, listen: I shrink from him so much that, unless you wish me to stay with you now, I shall hurry on to the Hall alone, directly he joins us."

Doris gave her such a grateful glance that Rika felt puzzled too.

"I do not think he will walk with us," Mrs. Burneston said calmly. "If you were alone it might be different."

But Ralph was hastening towards them; he was beside them in a moment, and he turned at once and walked by Rika, making some remark on the glow which the walk had given her.

"I must hurry on," she said to Doris. "I want to ask Jane to do something for me before dinner."

[197]

Ralph quickened his steps too, and walked on with her. Rika looked over her shoulder at Doris—it seemed to her that Mrs. Burneston could so easily make an excuse for keeping her step-son beside her.

But Doris never thought of seeking such an excuse; she rejoiced in this chance of showing Ralph that Miss Masham disliked his attentions.

“Ralph, you had better stay with me,” she said. “Rika does not want company.”

Ralph looked very angry.

“Confound her!” he muttered, “will she always treat me like a boy?” Then, aloud, he said insolently, “Miss Masham can speak for herself. Say I may come with you,” he whispered low to Rika.

His manner showed the girl that her fear was well founded.

“No, indeed,” she said kindly, “I will go alone. I prefer it. Good-bye,” she nodded, and went on hurriedly.

But Ralph kept close beside her.

“At least you will let me say three words?”

[198]

He was eager and determined, and Rika saw that she must speak out.

“No, indeed, Mr. Burneston, indeed I cannot; I will not listen to another word from you.” She had stopped as she began to speak, and stood facing him. She wished Doris

would come up and help her instead of standing a few yards off beside the colliedog, like a picture in the glowing golden sunshine.

"That is because you have been set against me," he said angrily, "because I have been slandered. You have been listening to Mrs. Burneston, you *shall* listen to me," and he snatched at Rika's wrist.

She was not taken by surprise, and she twisted herself free in an instant and went back to Mrs. Burneston—and before Ralph had recovered himself, the two ladies had come up with him, his step-mother looking very proud and pale. Rika kept her face turned away.

"You seem to forget yourself, sir, altogether," said Doris, "you forget what is due to a lady and my visitor."

[199]

She spoke with intense haughtiness; in her heart she triumphed that Ralph should have so far forgotten himself in her presence.

Ralph had grown white with anger.

"I wish you were a man,"—he said, and then he stopped, for Rika went on quickly to the Hall, and he found himself alone, free to say what he chose to his step-mother. He looked at her defiantly, then he said contemptuously, "I told you once before not to interfere with me, Mrs. Burneston. Miss Masham does not belong to you. What business is it of yours?"

Doris's face grew very set and hard.

"Miss Masham is my friend and my visitor, and she shall not be annoyed."

"Annoyed!" he laughed scornfully. "I like that! Pray, how do you know she is annoyed? I know rather more about women than yon do, Mrs. Burneston, though you do know

everything. Miss Masham listened to me fast enough till you tried to set her against me. It was bad enough before; I said nothing then, but I won't stand it any longer. I tell you plainly I wont have it, I am almost of age, and I won't be interfered

[200]

with. I'll not be treated like a boy by you."

Doris looked at him for a moment before she answered.

"You behave so like a man"—her lip curled with scorn—"and you consider yourself a gentleman, both in conduct and manner!"

Her contempt stung him out of all reticence.

"Look here!" he said fiercely. "So far I have treated you much better than you could have expected; but don't try any of your confounded airs on me; they don't impose on me. I will not be interfered with by you; I am my own master, and if I choose to talk to Miss Masham, nothing you can say shall prevent it. We'll see whom she will listen to."

Doris stood stupefied; the insult to her own pride effaced all thought of Rika, and her perfect blanched silence subdued Ralph spite of himself. "It's your own fault if I speak out. You had better go on," he said more quietly, "and overtake Miss Masham; tell her I was quite in earnest in my proposal yesterday

[201]

morning. She will listen to me all right; she was quite ready till you came between us."

Doris forced her white lips open; her surprise at this avowal roused her.

"Is it possible," she said coldly, "that you do not see? She will not listen to you at all! She considers you only a boy. If she loves anyone, it is Gilbert Raine."

She started at the furious oath that burst from him.

“And this is your work, too. Confound you and your low upstart ways! It may have been part of your breeding to go prying and interfering into other people’s affairs, but I tell you, once for all, to leave me alone. Because my father was weak enough to take you out of your proper station, do you imagine for one moment he has made you his equal, or that you can have the slightest influence with me? I tell you again, I’ll not submit to it. You have made mischief enough. Keep your proper place. I don’t interfere with you. Anyone will tell you that; and in return you try to

[202]

blacken my character and set my father and everyone else against me. I believe, if you could, you’d make my father disinherit me. You can’t do that, try as you will; but I tell you what you can do, you may make things very unpleasant for yourself in the future.”

He stopped from sheer want of breath, his face and voice alike full of passion.

Doris could not have interrupted, even if she had tried; his very words had stunned her; they had struck at her like a shower of stones or a blinding storm of hail.

Now that he paused, fully expecting a torrent of angry words in reply, there was a dead silence.

The collie-dog had grown impatient, and came bounding back to see what was happening, but the two figures stood motionless in the sunlight on the yellow road. At last Doris forced herself to speak.

“You are a coward!”

That was all she said, and she smiled; but Ralph felt as if he had been struck on the face.

[203]

"Coward or not," he said fiercely, "we'll see who's master yet at Burneston."

He hurried recklessly away, the dog bounding on in front, past the village, past the plank bridge; hurried on without taking any heed where he was going till he ran right up against Gilbert Raine.

"Hulloa, my lad! do you want to send me spinning into the river? You should look ahead."

Gilbert spoke irritably. He was standing taking a sketch of the bridge and the tree-shaded river bank, and the shock of Ralph's onset had almost upset him.

"Why the devil do you stand in the way? You'd better leave me alone"—Ralph spoke savagely—"I'm in a humour to quarrel with anyone—with you especially!"

"Ergo, you are in want of the doctor; you can have no possible reason to quarrel with me—you are simply bilious."

"Simply don't be a fool, Gilbert. But I recollect I do want to speak to you. Is it true or is it not true—it may be one of that

[204]

woman's lies—does Miss Masham care for you?"

The dark wrinkled face was bent down over his drawing.

"Who said this?" He did not look up.

Ralph was too full of passion to discriminate nicely, and, indeed, Raine's manner might have deceived a cooler observer. He was so afraid of believing that he seemed to be concealing his real thoughts.

"Then it's true—oh, curse you all! it's an infernal shame," he said. "I believe from first to last you're all against me, and that devil of a step-mother is at the bottom of it all. Faith says so, and Faith is cleverer than any of you."

Gilbert Raine had recovered himself. "Be quiet, my boy! You forget yourself," he said. "I have no right to think Miss Masham cares for me, but—"

Ralph stopped him angrily.

"You are going to say you care for her—for a girl half your age. I wonder you're not ashamed to think of her—you, a wrinkled,

[205]

middle-aged man, who've lived three parts of your life among musty old books I How dare you think of a bright, fresh young creature like Rika Masham, and what have you to offer her?" he said contemptuously, for he saw a change in Raine's face, and he resolved to make the most of his selfishness.

Raine's manner had changed; he was calm and cold as he answered.

"You don't know what you are talking about, you silly fellow! But I'll tell you one thing, my boy, I am sure that for five years at least you are not fit to be trusted with the happiness of any woman."

Ralph glared at him for an instant, muttered something, and then he turned sullenly back towards the Hall.

[206]

## CHAPTER XVI. A STEP-MOTHER.

IS time something abstract, something that can be measured? There may be souls to whom hours and minutes, weeks and days, may seem equal in length, there are, no doubt, happy mortals whose existence moves serenely and in measured paces along the level roads of common-place life. The roads turn sometimes to avoid a morass or a river, or even a hill that might expend breath in the climbing, though a boundless prospect is to be gazed on from its topmost height. Nothing that should not come there ever does come to alarm or even surprise the very ordinary and tranquil-pulsed wayfarers who journey along the level monotony.

[207]

It was very hard on Doris that, being placed by destiny in a position guaranteed to be common-place and uneventful by all the outward keys of such existences, life should have become for her as eventful as if she had lived on moderate means in a city, with a daily struggle to earn her daily bread there. And these excitements and heartburnings, and now this tremendous uprising of her whole nature, had all one origin—the presence, the existence even, of Ralph Burneston.

She had been alone by the clock, about an hour; her feelings would have told her that half a day had passed since she reached her own room. She had gone home mechanically, and then, having put off her things, she went to her sitting-room.

She had not rung for her maid; it seemed to her that the humbling she had received must be painted on her face; her mortification left no room for anger—a dull ache was over heart and brain.

Ralph had only said the truth. And now

[208]

came another thought: when little Phil knew the truth, would not he judge her as Ralph did?

"He will never tell me so in words," the pale proud lips quivered as this thought came, "but he will grow to look on me as—as—" She was walking up and down the little room, her brows drawn together; she stopped suddenly with a scared face. She saw a well-known form advancing towards her—all and broad, his red hair glowing as he reached the stream of light, so level now that it only lit the middle of the room. Her heart seemed to stand still, but in an instant the vision was gone, the place where it had stood was empty.

Doris shivered from head to foot. She felt herself suddenly brought to judgment. Phil might never look on her as she looked on her mother, that would be impossible, and for an instant her pride took comfort in this thought of her own superiority; but her father—no, Doris felt to the very bottom of her soul that her father was her superior. Spite of his

[209]

broad speech, his rough red hands, his homely unpolished ways, he had one noble quality for which she honoured him, honoured him all the more that she felt incapable of attaining it, and that quality was self-respect. He was neither ashamed of himself nor of his belongings. Yes, it was this that struck her dumb with sudden conviction. She could not expect that her own son would reverence her more than she reverenced her father, and a sudden rush of shame dyed her sweet face crimson. It was too true, she was ashamed of her father.

How well she remembered what had happened during her last visit to the' Cairn! Walking one day with her father on the moor, a carriage had passed near them in the road below, in which she thought she had recognized Mrs. Boothroyd. Even now she shrank at the remembrance of the shame that had seized on her at the dread of

recognition, and although some weeks later she had learned her mistake, Mrs. Boothroyd being at the time in London, she had never forgotten her terror.

[210]

But Doris knew that if her father had been well born, all these outward blemishes would not have troubled her. It was from his homely station, and, above all, his calling as a farmer, that she shrank; and although her child would never shrink from her personally, yet he had just the same right to be ashamed of her origin.

"Ashamed of me!" She stood like a statue. It seemed to her she could not live through such an agony as this. She tried to throw herself back a few years. When she left Pelican House she had come home resolved to be true to herself, and she had been true till she married. How she had sunk since then!

The thought of Ralph came back, and she rose from her despairing humiliation with desperate energy. "I was raw and ignorant then," she said. "After all, the world teaches us wisdom. Why should Phil ever know the truth, at least till he is old enough to be free from prejudice?"

When this precise period was to arrive Doris did not determine, but she believed firmly that

[211]

if her boy could only be kept free from low, corrupting influences, especially the influence of Ralph, he would grow to be a perfect man, godlike in his large and generous views of life. This was to be the outcome of his natural goodness, for Doris did not believe in the help afforded by religious training against human infirmity. Yes, her boy must be freed from Ralph! Well, the moment had come for her to crush out of her heart the foolish weakness which had hitherto spared her step-son. Why should

Ralph, for the doubtful chance of self-improvement, be allowed to cast his baneful shadow over his brother's young life? If Phil could have heard and understood Ralph's words beside the river, would he ever have reverenced his mother again?

"It is so all through life," she said bitterly. "However false the insult or accusation, the insult remains; it can never be washed out."

Yes, the time had come for decided action. She resolved that she would not see Ralph Burneston again, that as long as she was its mistress the Hall should be closed against him.

[212]

But still she hesitated as to the means. She could only obtain his banishment by an appeal to his father, and she shrank from making this appeal. She did not shrink from the sight of her husband's sorrow—her hatred to Ralph blinded her to the right he had to his father's love, a right, indeed, which, if remembered, would have sharpened her purpose—she only feared Mr. Burneston's weakness of will, for after all, he might not have courage to carry out her wishes.

"I have been a fool!" There was a new expression in her eyes, a dire vengeful look that drove womanhood from the delicate face, leaving it a mask of sharply cut features so pale that her long eyelashes looked intensely black as they touched the white cheeks. "Why did I interfere when I saw he had begun again with Rose? If he had really disgraced himself, Philip would then have banished him at once,. and I should have been held blameless. Well, that is over. It was an opportunity given me, and I let it pass. I must trust now to my power over Philip. If that fails—"

[213]

She stopped and put her hand to her forehead.

Her head ached sorely, she felt bruised all over; but she had no feeling for herself; her heart swelled almost to suffocation, for she had not shed one tear since she and Ralph parted. She dared not give way for a moment, for she had only herself to depend on. Even Rika was ready to take Ralph's part against her! Each time she had spoken of him to her husband, he had asked her to be less hard in her judgment. Doris hated strife, not because of its sin, but because her fastidious nature shrank from its pettiness and discourtesy, and she knew that she must have angry words with her husband before she should get him to see with her eyes.

"It used not to be so," she said. "Once he thought my judgment perfect—he never questioned my wishes—and so he will again when he is separated from Ralph; his daily influence destroys mine. Yes, he was right when he said I should see who was master at Burneston. I must see Philip at once, for"—she

[214]

hesitated—"I am not sure, but I must make sure."

She rang the bell. Now that she had decided she was eager to act. She must give no chance to Ralph to get a hearing before she did.

"Has Mr. Burneston come in?" she said to Benjamin.

"Yes, ma'am, t' master's in t' study."

He looked hard at her, for she was strangely pale, and there was a forced, unusual sound in her voice.

"Tell him I wish to speak to him, either here or in the study."

[215]

# CHAPTER XVII. DORIS SPEAKS.

MR. BURNESTON was very busy examining papers that had arrived from his agent at Steersley during his absence. He had nearly finished his work, and this unusual summons disturbed him.

“Tell your mistress I am very busy, and say I should like her to come here if she is in a hurry,” he said, “or say I will be with her in about half-an-hour.”

Doris thought this message a proof of her declining influence. She made no answer, but as soon as Benjamin had departed she went down to the study. Her heart beat so violently as she reached the door that a tinge of colour rose on her face.

[216]

“How can I be so foolish?” she said. “What can I be afraid of?”

“Come in.”

But Mr. Burneston went on writing, his back was to the door, so he did not see her face.

“If you really cannot spare me a few minutes, I will go,” she said, in a hard strained voice; “but I have something to say which requires your whole attention.”

Mr. Burneston frowned and bit his lips, then he cleared off his annoyance, and smiled as he turned round to his wife.

“Well, what is this wonderful something that will not wait? What is if? You look quite ill! Sit down here, darling. But I would have come up if you had only had a little patience.”

Plainly he had not seen Ralph since their quarrel; Doris felt relieved. Her husband took her hand, and made her sit beside him.

"Philip, I want to ask you first to listen patiently, and with all your attention. You do not always take my part now."

His fair serene face grew troubled. He guessed

[217]

that the "something" related either to Faith or Ralph.

"I think there is no need to have any question of the kind," he said sadly. "It seems to me that a husband and wife should take the same view of matters."

"I fear in this case it is quite impossible." He looked at her, and the set stiffness of her face annoyed him.

"You pique yourself on your justice," he said, "and yet, though I am always ready to care for all that you love, Doris, you refuse to share my feelings in this way."

"I must speak out, Philip. It may be hard for you to hear; but it is no question of feeling now. Ralph has insulted me; has spoken to me in a way which makes it impossible for us to live together any longer." She paused. "I have come to ask you to send him away from this house."

As she went on her courage came back; it seemed to her that he could not refuse her request.

Mr. Burneston's face was full of pain. He

[218]

jumped up impatiently, and began to walk up and down.

"My dear, you take offence so easily, just like all women; you make so much of words—" He stopped in surprise and some alarm too, for Doris rose from her chair and stood facing him like a Fate, her arms hanging stiffly beside her, her face fixed, but with a dark storm in her eyes. Mr. Burneston finished his sentence—"I thought you so much grander and nobler than any ordinary woman. I am afraid I have mistaken you."

"You can think so, of course; possibly you agree with your son, and consider that no insolence can be too great towards a person who is not born a lady; it is for you to decide. I must ask you to listen. Your son has told me to-day that I am an upstart; he has said—well," she went on proudly, "he has only said the truth about my origin, and the folly of my marriage; and he has asserted that his power over you is greater than mine is. Stay, Philip, I have not done. You must act as you choose; but

[219]

if Ralph is to stay here I go away at once, and I take Phil with me. He shall not be ruined by his brother's teaching, nor shall he learn to despise his mother by hearing her insulted."

Her eyes flashed, for once she let passion have its way; she looked a splendid picture of wrath, as she stood quivering before her astonished husband.

"You are mad to talk in this way," he said, and then he stopped; but Doris did not speak. She stood waiting his decision.

"Doris," he said, "I do not for a moment excuse Ralph's conduct, but I never saw you like this before. You know I can't bear exaggeration. Remember you are speaking of only a boy. It is—well, it is not at all like you to speak in such a manner."

It is singular how a crisis of feeling brings out the salient points of contrasted natures at their superlative degree. As in a photograph we frequently read the true nature, the

hidden self which in life is masked by the brightness of eyes and complexion, the wreathed smiles

[220]

or graceful winning manner; so now, as the rugged strength of the woman's character stood revealed like some granite rock, forcing its grey reality through the veils of clinging moss and heather, the man's, forced by emotion out of all the stays and supports of his condition, crumbled and yielded as a sand-hill yields before the breath of a mighty wind.

"I only say what I mean," she answered. Mr. Burneston shook his head, and a fretful look passed over his face.

"If you would only use your own good sense," he said, "you must see that what you propose would be, perhaps, the boy's ruin. Consider the great advantage Ralph gains by staying here. I don't take his part for a moment. I am grieved and surprised that he should so far forget himself and what is due to you, and to me also. I could not have believed it if anyone else had told me. You are quite sure, my dear, you have made no mistake?"

He looked at her with a feeling of relief; this new hope, feeble as it was, was something to ding to.

[221]

She moved her head disdainfully.

"If you had been present, even you would say I have been merciful in what I have told you. No, Philip, do not lessen my respect for you. For once assert your own authority, or I must do as I say, I must remove Phil from his brother's influence."

Mr. Burneston shook his head. There was a painful flush on his forehead.

"If you would sit down and keep yourself quiet it would be so much better. I am going to find Ralph. I shall speak to him as severely as even you," there was a sorrowful emphasis on the words, "can wish; and I am sure he will make you as humble an apology as you can desire. It may be," he said impressively, out of the longing of his heart, "that you will both go on together better after this, there will be no concealed bitterness between you."

There was a beseeching anxiety in his eyes as he looked at his wife; but Doris was not in a mood to bear this. She might have been quelled by a will stronger than her own. His weakness only increased her anger.

[222]

"There are some offences which cannot be pardoned," she said haughtily. "Cannot you see that this breach is beyond healing? I cannot live with a person I hate, and Ralph has made me hate him. Some day, Philip, your eyes will be open to your own injustice. You know your son's vices, and yet you expect me not only to tolerate his daily companionship, but to submit meekly to gross insult; and because I refuse you are angry. Well, you must choose between him and me, and I expect he will offer you the same choice."

Mr. Burneston stood fuming in the middle of the room his wife's rudeness wounded him sorely.

"You are as self-willed as he is, Doris. Why, even your brother George, who has more cause of quarrel with Ralph than any of us have says it will do wonders for the lad if we can only manage to keep him at home a year or so. If he goes away angry he will most likely go back to his old habits and companions and be utterly ruined."

[223]

Doris had stood thinking during these words.

“Do you mean to say that, let Ralph disgrace himself ever so much, you have no power to leave any of your land away from him?”

There was a keen eagerness in her voice and manner that jarred on her husband.

“Certainly not—” he stopped abruptly.

“Even if he brings himself within the penalties of the law; and a man may do this, may be a most infamous scoundrel, and yet escape punishment. Ralph is a scoundrel already, and he will have all, and Phil—”

Her husband’s eyes had opened in wide wonder. This was the first time she had really let him see the truth.

“Stop, Doris; your words pain me greatly.” He spoke very coldly. It seemed to her with disgust. “Phil is as well provided for as he can be—and now do not let us recur to this subject. I will try to forget it, and you, my dear, must, for my sake, receive Ralph’s apology. No, I really cannot hear any more.”

[224]

He retreated hastily, fearing another attack, while Doris sank exhausted on a chair, sight blurred and hearing deadened by the force she had been putting on herself.

Mr. Burneston, too, felt blinded. It seemed to him, as he crossed the hall on his way to Ralph’s room, that he had got a shock. His whole nature had revolted against his wife’s manner and, above all, against her last words. She who had seemed incapable of the slightest meanness or calculation—had she then cherished hatred against Ralph because he was the heir of Burneston? It was incredible, and spite of his grief the loyal gentleman strove against the thought as against a positive injury to Doris.

He had found his way mechanically to Ralph's room, and to his surprise his son's voice said "Come in" when he knocked.

Ralph sat moodily in a chair near one of the windows; his pipe lay beside him, though he had not been smoking. He nodded when his father came in, and pushed a chair towards him.

But Mr. Burneston stood still, looking at his son with real sternness on his gentle face.

[225]

"I am shocked at your behaviour, Ralph. I thought you were a gentleman," be said, "and I find I am mistaken. You will come with me at once, and apologise to Mrs. Burneston."

Ralph grew fiery red—he jumped up from his chair.

"I can't do that, father! I am sorry for you, but you must have known this sort of thing would happen some day. Why need you worry about it? Leave me to settle it with Mrs. Burneston."

The squire flew into a rage.

"By heaven, sir," he said, "you seem to forget that you are talking of my wife! I insist on an immediate apology."

His father's anger quieted Ralph.

"I can only say again I'm very sorry for you. I can't be sorry I've spoken out. If you knew how I've been used, you'd—"

"Hold your tongue, sir," said his father savagely.

"But you shall listen to me!" the boy said desperately. "I've no quarrel with you, father, and I never will have. You and I would have been

[226]

fast friends if no mischief had been stirred up between us. There, I'm not going to vex you any more! Remember I am your own son, and you owe me some love." His blue eyes looked so pleading that his father turned away. "I'd made up my mind, dull as this place is, to stay here with you a few months, but I see it can't be. If you like, I'll go away for a bit; it's just as unpleasant for me as it is for anyone."

"No!" Mr. Burneston tried to speak. "I do not wish to send you away. You have behaved very ill, and for my sake, as well as for your own, you must apologise. If you consider the matter, you will see there is no other way."

Ralph shook his head, and put his hands in his pockets.

"Can't do it! I wouldn't if I could." He muttered the last words.

Mr. Burneston took no notice. He was very worn and weary with all this strife.

"You are excited now," he said; "you will come to your senses presently, and then, Ralph, I shall be grievously disappointed if you don't see things differently. You owe a full apology,

[227]

you have insulted a lady and that lady your father's wife. You had better keep to your rooms till you are more reasonable; and understand distinctly, I forbid you to leave Burneston without my permission. Good night! Faith will bring you all you want."

[228]

## CHAPTER XVIII. AT CROSS-PURPOSES.

GILBERT RAINE tried to go on with his sketch; but it grew more and more difficult for him to draw, and he grew more and more impatient. He closed his sketch-book.

“Who on earth has been talking to Ralph about Miss Masham?”

If he had hazarded a guess he might have hit on the truth; but Mr. Raine’s mind was apt to be hazy on matters of real life, and he disdained hasty conjectures. The longer he thought the more certain he felt that Miss Masham liked Ralph Burneston better than she liked him.

“I don’t profess to understand women,” he said uneasily. “I have not had much to do with

[229]

them; but surely a girl would never snub and tease a man she cares for, and Rika has often snubbed me.”

He walked slowly towards the Hall, trying to recollect exactly what Ralph had said, and suddenly he got a clue to the young fellow’s meaning.

He stopped short in his walk.

“He meant Mrs. Burneston when he said ‘that woman.’ She certainly is in Miss Masham’s confidence; I might sound her.” He put both hands in his pockets and went on again very slowly, his head bent forward. “What has come to me?” he said. “More than fifteen years ago I swore I would never trust a woman again, and actually I am thinking of putting myself in the power of two of them—for of course Mrs. Burneston will go straight to her friend and tell her everything. Yes, I can fancy their jokes and laughter over the queer old bachelor’s love.”

The colour rose brightly in his face. He tried to think of something else. But it was of no use; in the midst of his calculations of time

[230]

and expense about some alterations at Austin's End, Rika's blooming face and merry laugh came unsummoned.

"Nonsense!" he said testily; "it's not true. 1 have not paid her marked attention nothing that anyone could notice. I have really avoided her lately. What could have made that mad boy talk in such a way?"

This time he smiled; a little lingering hope helped to curve his lips.

"I have not treated her well all day; I do snub her a good deal," he said ruefully. "I'll try another tack, and see if I can get her to smile at me as she smiles at Ralph—at least, as she did smile at him; she was cross to him at luncheon. I'll ask her if they have quarrelled."

Rika's favourite nook, when she was not with Doris, was in a low window of the library; but lately Raine had observed that she always got up and went out of the room when he entered it.

The library was a large room, rarely occupied except by Gilbert Raine and Miss Masham. It

[231]

looked empty to-day as he came into it; but going along to its farther end he saw Rika, as he expected, seated, curled up in a low chair, reading. She looked absorbed in her book, and Raine smiled.

"She is not taking anything very deeply to heart," he said; "I might have been sure of that. A girl who shows feelings so easily on the surface can have little depth within."

The Persian carpet only covered the centre of the room, and his footsteps on the oak floor roused her. She uncurled herself and sat upright.

"Pray don't let me disturb you." He thought she looked vexed. "You seem very much interested in that paper book. Is it a French novel?"

"No; I never read French novels." She looked saucy and satirical.

Raine bent down over the book. "May I look? Alfieri, 'The Filippo.' Well, yes, that is exciting—rather beyond Alfieri's usual mark, I think. Are you a great admirer of this poet?"

"No; he is so cold-blooded, so very uninteresting,

[232]

I think; but Gomez is a finely-drawn character."

"Ah, you like villains, do you?"

"No, I don't," Rika felt that she was being teazed, "but I like decided characters, really good people or really bad ones." She spoke with the irritation Raine now always seemed to create in her.

"Then you like very few people. Hardly anyone is wholly good or wholly bad."

"How wilful you are! I did not say that. I like people who have good qualities, I mean qualities out of which goodness may spring. I like people who are not cold and cynical."

"And yet you don't like my cousin Ralph; he is not cold."

Rika looked up startled. Raine had put more meaning into his words than he intended.

"When did I say I disliked Mr. Ralph Burneston?" she said hastily. "I do not dislike him."

Raine stood looking at her with a very puzzled face, then he went on recklessly.

“I have offended you somehow or other, I

[233]

am always offending yon, and I really did not mean to vex you.”

Rika laughed, but she was vexed too.

“I am glad to hear it” she said gravely, and then she took up her book, as much as to say, “Do not interrupt me any more,” and she wished Mr. Raine would go away.

“I must really set myself right with you. Miss Masham. I will not keep you a minute.” He was hurt, but he was determined there should be no more misunderstanding between them. “Perhaps I have no right to speak of it, but Ralph seemed to think I have had something to do with your—your—well, he certainly gave me the impression that you had quarrelled.”

“And if we had,” Rika grew crimson, “what could you have to do with it?”

She looked so scornful that Raine hesitated. “I beg your pardon,” he said, “I believe it was something Mrs. Burneston told him.”

He stopped; he had blundered on without considering that Ralph’s words might sound to Rika as he wished them to sound for himself,

[234]

and till he came to Doris’s name she had listened, but this was too much. She could not realise his meaning. She felt dazed and foolish; a feeling that Doris had spoken openly about her to Mr. Raine, and that she must leave him at once, was all she could grasp.

She got up hastily, but she could not raise her eyes; her face was scorched with shame and anger.

"You are entirely mistaken," she said. "Mrs. Burneston would not discuss me with your cousin, and certainly not with such a comparative stranger as you are to me."

Raine was surprised at her haughtiness.

"She has been copying Mrs. Burneston," he said, and then he put himself in Rika's way as she moved towards the door.

"What have I done now?" he said earnestly. "I have offended you again. I beg your pardon, do forgive me, and for Heaven's sake let me try to explain. I never was so far from wishing to vex you; perhaps I am incapable of pleasing you; won't you sit down again and let me try?" he said imploringly.

[235]

But Rika was so upset, so deeply mortified, that she read him all wrong. She only saw in this unusual wish to please her, an assurance founded on the belief that she really cared for him. Her eyes smarted with unshed tears, and her heart ached painfully, it was so full of righteous wrath against Doris. She shook her head.

"There are things best left unexplained, and this is one," she forced herself to smile, and then in her natural manner she said, "talking things over is often apt to show the worst side of them; let me pass, please."

Without waiting she walked round him and was out of the room before her disturbed listener had collected his wits.

"Good Heavens!" he said, when at last he could grasp the subject again, "I am an ass! I have made a precious fool of myself, too, just when there was something in her face;—by Jove, I'm an ass, a consummate ass."

He stood there overwhelmed with confusion.

He was by far the cleverest person at Burneston Hall; he had read more and seen more

[236]

than most men, and yet he felt so helpless, so thoroughly ignorant how to get out of this scrape in which he had plunged himself, that when the door opened and in came little Phil calling for Ralph, the tall, keen-witted man felt as if even that baby were wiser than he was.

The little fellow ran up to him, "Where is Ralphie?"

"Ralph's not here, my dear," he said. "Ralph never comes into the library, Phil."

The child shook his head and looked up; his little face was very sad.

"Me can't find him," he said; "me's been everywhere, in mamma's room, and Faith's room, and in study, me can't find Ralph."

There was a despairing sound in the sweet childish voice. Gilbert looked at him more attentively, and saw that Phil had been crying.

"Ralph's out, my boy," he said soothingly.

Phil shook his head.

"No, no! Me saw him come in."

Just then the door opened softly, and Phil's nurse appeared with a scared face.

[237]

She looked much relieved to see her charge.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she curtseyed to Raine, "but I couldn't tell what had happened to Master Phil; he's wild to find Mr. Ralph, and just now he slipped away from me and I couldn't think what could have become of him."

"Do you know where Mr. Ralph is?"

"I don't know, sir."

There was a confused look in the woman's eyes that puzzled Raine.

"Come along, old fellow." He stooped down and lifted Phil on to his shoulder. "We'll see if we can find papa."

"Me doesn't want papa—me wants Ralphie."

Not even the ride on a tall shoulder, usually one of the delights of his life, could chase the sadness from the child's voice and earnest dark eyes.

"Help me find Ralphie," he half sobbed.

"What is Ralph about?" Gilbert said to himself, and then, with his usual directness, he went straight to his cousin's study.

[238]

## CHAPTER XIX. BITTERNESS.

DIRECTLY his interview with Ralph was over, Mr. Burneston went to the housekeeper's room. He said a few words to Faith, and bade her keep the matter entirely to herself.

"You can say Mr. Ralph is not well," he said carelessly, and then he went out and across the meadows beyond the river—a sort of aimless wandering to get rid of the time, and to avoid the chance of another talk with his wife.

He would have been wiser if he had sought out Rika or Raine, and asked them to bear him company. His thoughts went with him, and they would be listened to. He could not tell

[239]

what had happened, or how it had been effected, but it seemed to him that all at once a gulf had come between him and Doris—a space that could not be bridged over. He could not specify the feeling, but it seemed suddenly possible that he had only been married for the position he could give his wife and her children, and also—and this was the thought he tried hardest to flee from—that nature had triumphed at last, and that, spite of all her training and seeming refinement, Doris was different from himself, and looked on things in a lower and coarser way than he did.

Well, and if she did? He had married her with his eyes open. He could not expect a miracle.

"But she has been a miracle," he said earnestly. "No other woman in such a position would have behaved so well. It is only this shock rousing me up rudely from my dream of perfection that has disgusted me. I must force myself to forget this afternoon."

Easier to say than to do. He could not close his eyes and ears to the memory of his wife's

[240]

flushed face and contemptuous looks, and her angry defiant words.

"How harshly she spoke! She was like a creature transformed," he said sadly.

Was this the true Doris—forced out of all the artificial restraints of her education and her position—a Doris likely to reappear whenever her will was set aside or her dislikes

thwarted? He could not lay this terrible doubt; and when he came down to dinner, so late that it had been announced before he reached the drawingroom, he found himself looking at his wife with new eyes, wondering at her coldness and silence. No one remarked on Ralphs absence, and Doris imagined he had left the Hall.

When dinner was over she went away to her room, leaving Rika to amuse herself alone.

Little Phil always came to help his mother to dress for dinner, but to-day he had not come, and Doris, busy with her own thoughts, had not sent for him.

She was very angry with her husband. It

[241]

seemed to her that he had put her claims and Ralph's on the same level. Her whole being dilated with immeasurable haughtiness.

What had she ever done to Ralph that could be weighed against the coarseness of his insults to her? and yet his father thought Ralph's conduct such a trifle that he asked her to remember the lad's age.

"If anyone had so spoken to mother, father would have horsewhipped him," she said bitterly. Her heart went out in a kind of longing anguish to the Cairn. If she could only have her father's sympathy just now, and could listen to his righteous indignation, she should be soothed. She never thought of asking his counsel. It would have seemed extraordinary to Doris to ask advice from anyone; that would have been a tacit acknowledgment that she herself was wrong.

"Ralph even sees it as I do," she said bitterly. "He sees that we cannot live in the same house."

She rang her bell as soon as she reached her room.

[242]

“Tell nurse if Master Phil is not in bed to bring him here.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The maid went, but the nurse did not bring little Phil. Doris waited and then she went up to the night nursery. She longed to ease her troubled heart by the sight of her darling.

The tiny bed was empty, and she went back to her own room; at the door she met the nurse.

“Where is Master Phil? he should be in bed,” she said rebukingly, for it was long past the child’s bedtime.

“I’m very sorry, ma’am.” The nurse’s confused, hurried manner frightened Doris. “He—he won’t come away, ma’am.”

“Come away from where? What do you mean, nurse?”

“He’s there, ma’am,” she jerked her head backwards, “sitting outside Mr. Ralph’s door, and he says he won’t come away; nor he won’t eat his bread and butter neither.”

[243]

“Won’t?—nonsense! Light me along the gallery.”

The nurse hurried on—her mistress’s imperious manner alarmed her.

[244]

## CHAPTER XX. RALPH S VIGIL.

THE storm that swept over Doris, rending away all self-control and gentleness, was raging yet more fiercely in the bosom of the housekeeper.

Mr. Burneston's announcement that Ralph would keep his room that evening had filled her with lofty contempt.

"He's a poor creature, t' squire is," she said; "he cannot guide his own bairn athoot shuttin' him up."

But there was a certain solace in feeling that she should have her boy all to herself; and when she carried up Ralph's dinner she was full of smiles. He took little notice of her, and

[245]

did not condescend in any way to satisfy her curiosity.

Later, when she came again, she brought in little Phil, and then, to her surprise, Ralph turned on her in fierce anger.

"Take away that brat," he said; "how dare you bring him into my room without leave? He and his cursed mother are the plagues of my life."

"Whisht, whisht," Faith frowned and shook her head. "How can an innocent bairn like yon plague ye? See, he wants to kiss ye, poor little lad."

"Where has you been, Ralphie? Me wants you." The child put his hand confidingly on his brother's knee, and looked up in his face.

Ralph jumped up abruptly, and went away to the window, turning his back completely on the room. The child did not cry, but looked frightened and appealingly at Faith.

Her spirit rose against Ralph's harshness.

"Poor wee bairn!" she said. "Mr. Ralph, you're not setting your brother much of an example as to manners."

[246]

He turned on her with an oath.

"Take that child away, I tell you, and keep him out of my sight. Get along, you little devil!" he said angrily, as Phil tried once more to clasp his hand with his tiny fingers. He pushed him away, and the child burst out crying.

The young fellow's heart was really softening towards the child, and if he had been alone he would probably have submitted to little Phil's coaxing ways, but the child's likeness to his mother had maddened him.

Phil shrank away, and clung to Faith's apron.

"For shame of yourself!" she said, as she raised the little fellow in her arms. "I couldn't hev thowt ye'd be so cowardly."

It was an unlucky word. It brought the memory of his discomfiture back keenly, and he turned round furiously on Faith.

"Hold your tongue, you old fool, and take that child away! I have had enough of your mistress's insolence to last me for some time to come, don't give me any of yours; don't show

[247]

your face here again unless you can hold your tongue—or, stay, you can bring me some brandy, and be quick, d'ye hear?"

His manner cowed Faith. There was a wild excitement in it that made her shrink from answering him. As she closed the door behind her she heard the key turn in the lock.

Phil struggled in her arms till she set him down, and then he began to cry. "Ralphie's angry with me," he sobbed, "an' me's not naughty."

The nurse was waiting in the gallery, and she tried to quiet and lead the child away.

But Phil would not be pacified. He left off sobbing, and seated himself on the mat outside his brother's door.

"Me stay here," he said decidedly. "Ralphie come out presently and say me's not naughty."

Faith stood still. Ralph's words had stupefied her. This was Mrs. Burneston's doing then. No one would have guessed at the tempest that had risen in the tall, slender

[248]

woman as she stood there rigid beside the closed door.

The nurse's voice entreating Phil to come away irritated her.

"You'll disturb Mr. Ralph next," she said. "Leave the child awhile, an' he'll tire of himself. I'll see he takes no harm."

And the nurse had left him till she heard that her mistress had gone upstairs.

Meanwhile Faith stood so wrapt in her own anger that she would scarcely have noticed the child's departure if little Phil had followed his nurse.

But there was no feebleness in her wrath—through it she went on forecasting what the end of this struggle might be.

It was, she saw plainly, a struggle for power between Mrs. Burneston and Ralph and herself, represented by the squire. In less than a year Ralph would be of age, and then he would have a home perhaps of his own, where she felt sure she could, if she chose, be mistress, but to wait for this would be yielding up a right. Both she and Ralph had lived at the Hall much longer

[249]

than Mrs. Burneston had, and if they left, there would be no one to check her pride.

"The squire'ud not dare say his soul was his own if he was left to that woman. She's ruined my boy body an' soul," Faith said sternly. "She's driven him to drink an wicked ways, an she'll do t' same wi' t' squire, poor fond hoit."

She looked down at the child; he was still sitting against the door, but his head had drooped on his chest; he was asleep.

"God help ye, poor ill-starred bairn!" she stooped and laid him down on the sheepskin rug. "Sleep while ye may; wiv such a mother ye've a fitful life afore ye."

She went off to do Ralph's bidding, leaving the sleeping child alone. She had not gone many minutes when Doris came along the gallery and saw little Phil lying like a faithful dog beside his brother's door.

A spasm of pain twisted her face. She silenced the nurse's exclamation by a hasty gesture, and then she stooped and tenderly raised the sleeping child.

[250]

His weight was almost beyond her strength, but she never paused till she reached her bedroom, then she sat down, and still holding little Phil in her arms, she undressed him and laid him in her own bed.

Then she walked into the outer room, and beckoned the nurse to follow her.

“How did this happen?” Mrs. Burneston said sternly.

“I’m sure I don’t know, ma’am; it’s really Mrs. Emmett’s fault, not mine at all.”

Doris’s eyes were full of anger, but she kept it out of her words.

“When I engaged you to take charge of Master Philip, I told you he was never to be left in Mrs. Emmett’s care.”

“Yes, ma’am,” there was a tearful sound as the nurse answered, “but Master Phil has been fretting for his brother all the afternoon; and at last Mrs. Emmett comes out sudden into the gallery from Mr. Ralph’s room, and she takes Master Phil by the hand away from me and into the room and shuts the door.”

[251]

“Well, what else?”

“He didn’t stay long with Mr. Ralph, but when he came out he wouldn’t stir from the door. I asked him to come and help you to dress, but nothing would move him. I stayed with him, ma’am, till I was tired out, and then Mrs. Emmett said she’d stay while I fetched his supper from the nursery; but it wasn’t a bit of good, ma’am, so I waited till I thought you had come up from dinner, and that’s just as it happened, ma’am.”

Doris stood still trying to think: it was very difficult to shape out any plan in the wild anger that mastered her. Her husband evidently refused to do what she asked; Ralph was to stay at the Hall to defy her, and to rob her of her child’s love.

“We will see who conquers,” she said contemptuously. Aloud she bade the nurse go away, and send her maid to her.

She sat down at her writing-table and wrote these words to her husband:—

"Little Phil is not well. I shall not leave him

[252]

this evening. Will you therefore sleep in your dressing-room! I do not wish to have any further discussion about your son. I hear he is still in the house.

"DORIS BURNESTON."

She went to the window and threw it open; she was almost stifled with the intensity of pent-up feeling.

She might conquer; her own heart told her that she would conquer, but at what a price! She could never forget that her husband had taken his son's part against her, and that if he yielded it would be for the sake of peace, not from conviction or love of her.

"I must always despise Philip. I must always feel—" Even to herself she could not say the words. A huge overleaping wave of pride stifled the thought, and tried to hide, even from her remote consciousness, that her husband did not consider her his equal. Her sitting-room windows looked westward, and the sky was full of yellow light this evening, though under the trees it had grown dusk. It was oppressively

[253]

warm, and as Doris leaned out the evening air brought no refreshment to her hot forehead. Presently, close beneath the window, came a murmur of voices, and then she saw figures disappear round the angle of the house.

She went back into her bedroom, which occupied the end of the opposite wing to Ralph's, and had windows on two sides. She looked out, watching the two figures.

Yes; she was right; it was Rika's white dress that she had seen. Her friend and her husband were walking slowly, side-by-side, along the terrace.

This was a relief; she had so feared Mr. Burneston would come to seek her.

She opened her note again and added a post-script:—

"Do not come to my room. Phil is now asleep."

And then she desired her maid to give the note to Mr. Burneston when he came in-doors.

"I shall not want you to-night, Burnell," she said; "I am anxious not to awaken the child."

A strange fascination drew her back to the

[254]

window. She looked across at Ralph's room; there were lights within, but the curtains were drawn, and the branches of the huge weeping beeches, already mentioned, surrounded this end of the house, and made it indistinct in the failing light. A breeze was rising, moving the branches gently to and fro.

Rika was still pacing up and down the terrace with Mr. Burneston; but while Doris watched, Gilbert Raine came out of the house from the garden entrance and joined them in their walk.

Doris had not been thinking of them while she looked, but now a new idea came to her in connection with Rika. She thought she would go home with her for a time till Ralph had left Burneston.

"She is vexed with me, but that is simply her own folly and prejudice. If she had heard Ralph Burneston's words to-day beside the river, she must have changed her opinion of him."

She thought Rika's vexation would quickly yield to delight when she told her her project

[255]

of paying her a visit; her schoolfellow owed her so very much, Doris argued, that she would surely be glad to discharge some part of the obligation. Just now, in the distorted state of her mind, she thought of this more than of the love that had been between them.

Doris had threatened her husband that if Ralph stayed at the Hall she would leave it, but she cared far too much for the opinion of the world to do this in a way likely to compromise herself and her husband. She would not go to the Cairn. Her father and George would ask questions, and her mother would fuss, and just now she could not endure interference of any sort. This quiet parsonage, where she would be treated as an honoured guest, was the retreat she longed for; and her visit there would show her husband that she was in earnest.

Little tenderness mingled with the stern sadness with which she looked from the window at Mr. Burneston. At last the sound of his laughter reached her, and she closed the window and turned away.

If she had stayed a moment longer, she

[256]

would have seen her husband come into the house in search of her.

Rika was following him, but Gilbert Raine stopped her.

"Miss Masham, will you listen to me for a minute?" he said. "I often find fault with you, but I have never accused you of being unjust."

In the half light Rika felt more at her ease with him; even if she did look foolish she knew he could not see it.

"I never said you did."

There was more of her old brightness in the tone, and Gilbert took courage.

"Ah, but I thought you very unjust—and not long ago, either."

"I suppose you want me to ask why, just to give you a chance of teasing."

"I am not in a teasing humour, and whether you ask or not I shall tell you; you refused to hear my excuse for having offended you. Now, this was more than unjust; it was ungenerous—it was putting me in the wrong without appeal."

[257]

Something—a deep undertone—in his voice quieted her pride. Her heart throbbed strangely, but not with the pain it had suffered in the library. What it was she did not know; but something made her half shrink from, and yet drew her on strongly, irresistibly, to trust in Gilbert Raine. She felt sure he would not misjudge her, and once more she spoke naturally.

"I am glad you allow me some generosity."

She looked up smiling, but the tender, serious look that met hers quenched her sprightliness, and made her shy again.

"I want you to listen to me seriously." He began to walk faster, as if the movement helped him. "I did not mean to speak so soon; I fear you are not prepared for what I

want to tell you. I have no choice. Did I not hear you tell my cousin just now that you are going to leave us?"

"Yes."

"Well, then," he went on hurriedly, "I must tell you something before you go. I had meant you to find it out for yourself, but it can't be

[258]

helped. Do you remember that talk on the staircase years ago?"

Her large round eyes opened widely.

"Yes, I remember—about Clytie, and some other things; but why do you want to know?"

"Ah!"—he drew a long breath—"it is something to me that you do remember. Well, ever since that day I have been trying to forget that talk."

There was a pause. Rika's heart was loosed of such a mighty restraint that her sauciness came back.

"You have been trying ever since? You have not tried very hard then."

She laughed, and he laughed too—hardly so naturally as Rika did, for his fear that she would not listen to what he wanted to say had made him strangely nervous.

"Yes; and besides that, I refused more than one invitation to Burneston lest I should meet you here. I thought you were like other women, and I did not want to be reminded of you. Are you angry at this confession?"

"Why should I be angry?—and yet I am.

[259]

Why do you speak always so scornfully of women?"

"I will tell you some day; I am not sure enough yet. You are, perhaps, after all only an ordinary woman."

"I am quite sure I am a very ordinary woman." She laughed, but not easily; his manner puzzled her. "But, Mr. Raine, tell me if I offend you so much as to make you avoid me, why do you tell me all this?"

He smiled, though he had grown very earnest. It seemed to him no girl who was merely trifling with him could be so frank.

"I want to know," he said hurriedly, "whether I have done wisely in coming here after all. Tell me truly whether I should not have spared myself a disappointment by staying away altogether?"

Rika was blushing deeply, but he could not see this in the dying light.

"I hardly know how to answer," she said at last.

"Shall I put a plainer question? When you go away from Burneston, will you forget me, or

[260]

will you feel, as 1 do, that there must be no question of parting between us two?" He waited impatiently. "Are you, or are you not, sorry to leave Burneston?" he said angrily, for he thought he was again deceived.

"I am glad for most things," she said frankly; then all at once she understood the pain his silence expressed, "but I am sorry for others."

"One question more—have I anything to do with your sorrow?"

"Well—yes!"

"Spite of your first impression?" he said so seriously that Rika laughed.

He took her hand in his, and drew her under the cedar-tree.

"I am not used to young ladies," he said, "and I am an awkward old bachelor; but I do love you as well as I can love. I can't help it. Rika, will you be my wife? Tell me at once."

Rika shook her head.

"You are making a mistake," she said earnestly. "If you knew more of me you would never ask me. You can't think how full of

[261]

faults I am. And then I never can help teasing; I should offend you altogether perhaps."

He drew her closer to him, and put his arm round her.

"My child," he said tenderly, "you have made me very happy. It is I who ought to fear for my worthiness; but I will not be satisfied, unless you can give me your whole heart. Do you think you can do this, Rika?"

She hesitated. "Yes, I think I can," she whispered, and in that moment father and mother and all the merry home party were completely forgotten; new and sudden as it was, it seemed to Rika that she had never known what the word love meant before. "Are you sure you really mean it?" she said archly. "You said just now 'I can't help it'—would you help it if you could?"

"Do you prefer to go back to first impressions, and your belief in them?" and the rest of his answer seemed to check any reply from Rika.

Presently they came out from under the cedar-tree, and walked up and down, sometimes

[262]

talking, but chiefly silent in that unspeakable newness of bliss which no words can render—the glimpse of perfection which is given us for a brief space on earth, for each seems to the other so perfect in those first unreal moments of union—a bliss that does not stray an inch beyond the lover and his beloved; they are so wrapped in it they have no thought but for each other—a bliss which is selfish to all the world besides, and yet unselfish to the being which shares it.

Gilbert Raine could rouse himself from this first taste of happiness to feel the wind blowing keenly across the river, and to take Rika indoors lest it should chill her; but he never roused to remember how he had stood holding Rika's hands in his, and listening to her simple confessions beneath his young cousin's window,

Ever since his meeting with Rika in the library he had been so bent on winning her that he had had no thought for aught else, and Ralph's absence during the evening had beet altogether unheeded by him.

And all this time, while these two hearts had been pouring joy into one another's lives,

[263]

Ralph had stood watching them, or rather divining their presence, betrayed even in the gloom by the white dress of Rika.

Faith had returned to his room with the brandy. He asked her where his father was; and she told him that the squire was walking up and down the terrace with Miss Masham.

Ralph went to the window and saw Gilbert join them. Then he watched his father's departure, and all that followed.

It was the bitter end of all. But for the hope of winning Rika, and thus triumphing over his step-mother, he would have defied his father, and left Burneston; as it had proved, he had only stayed to witness Gilbert's triumph. He could not see Raine and Rika distinctly, but he felt sure enough from their movements that no ordinary talk was passing between these two.

When they disappeared under the cedar-tree, he uttered a heart-felt curse.

"It is that woman's doing—all of it," he said. "She could not marry Rika to her brother, so she puts Gilbert in his place. I'll not stay here like a caged bird, to see their love-making.

[264]

No, my friends, when you come to look for me to-morrow, the cage will be empty."

He drank off some brandy, and then he went again to the window.

His cousin and Miss Masham stood beneath it, and even in the gloom he could see that Raine held the girl's hands in his.

"The old fool!" he said furiously, "but I'll spoil his game yet."

He set the door open between his rooms, and kept walking up and down, stopping now and then to drink, and then resuming his walk, his hands thrust deeply into his pockets. Sometimes he swore at Doris, and then, as his way-ward mood changed, he whistled scornfully.

It seemed as if he could not stop still for a moment. Twelve o'clock struck by the clock over the stables, and still he walked quickly up and down.

The wind had by this time become furious, and the huge branches of the beech-tree rattled against one of his windows, but he seemed unconscious of time or sound—he kept walking up and down.

[265]

## CHAPTER XXI. BESIDE THE GATE.

THE wind had risen to a gale during the night. Chimney-pots, slates, and branches of trees, scattered in every direction, showed the violence of the storm, and as Mr. Burneston went up the road past the Vicarage, there was still wind enough to make him pull his hat over his eyes and button his coat more closely.

Last night his own thoughts and the storm had helped to keep him awake, and now, long before his usual time for rising, he had come out to clear his brain.

But the bright morning did not cheer him; he was very sad and troubled; his wife's conduct grieved him bitterly. It was a revelation of her character he was not prepared for. He

[266]

considered the plea of little Phil's illness a mere subterfuge to screen her temper.

"I must be master in this case," he said, as he reached the Vicarage; but he heard no inward echo to this assurance; no effort of will rose up to say, "you shall be master by my aid."

He stopped before the Vicarage gate. "I wonder if Spencer is up," he said. He had no fixed intent of consulting the vicar, but he needed help so sorely that if he could have seen his old friend he would certainly have asked his advice.

Mrs. Riccall, the housekeeper, stood at the open door, and seeing the squire, she curtseyed and came forward to answer his question.

She did not think the vicar would be down for a good hour, and Mr. Burneston took his way across the glebe-field.

The geese were there, eating grass and squabbling as if they had been doing so ever since his last visit. The grunting of the pigs, the crowing of cocks and clucking of hens, showed that life was stirring at Church Farm; and all

[267]

at once Mr. Burneston heard the swing of the white gate and Shadrach's call, and he knew that the cows were passing out to the lower meadows.

He was not in a mood to speak to Shadrach or his wife, and he stopped at the gate leading to the rick-yard—the gate made so memorable in his life, and which still had power to stir his heart deeply.

Could it be only nine years since Doris had appeared to him a sudden vision of perfect beauty, as she swung there singing her "fond rhyme"? How long ago it seemed!

More than once during the first year of their marriage he had tried to take her back with him to that sweet memory, and she had shrunk from it—shrunk with such evident dislike that he felt it would be selfish even to let her see the store he set on it.

"Ah!" he said, "who knows! if I had been more masterful I might have gained her respect; I fear she has none for me now, or she would not be so careless of giving me pain."

Unknowingly he was judging his wife hardly in gifting her with a quality she lacked. For

[268]

her want of sympathy hid from Doris now, as it had in the early days with regard to George and her father, the pain she had given her husband. Her own affection for him was far too tepid to enable her to guess that, although he might blame her, his love was too deep to change. She thought he would shrink from her as she now did from him: it would have been impossible to her even to guess his sorrow when he learned that she could sleep without an exchange of forgiveness. The ache was in his heart still.

He stood leaning against the gate, very sad and desponding.

It seemed to him that he must yield; he must send Ralph away again among strangers, or Doris would fulfil her threat and take Phil out of his brother's reach.

"Such wilfulness, too," the poor, weary man said, fretfully. "The child need never be with Ralph. Poor Ralph, she is very hard on him."

There was another alternative; he could speak strongly to Doris and point out to her how much more dignified it would be to stay

[269]

at Burneston and compel Ralph's good behaviour in future; for Mr. Burneston believed that the young fellow would keep more restraint over himself if he were gently treated. But the squire shrank from this. He could not resolve to go through another scene with Doris; he had suffered too deeply yesterday.

"What a mockery life is!" he thought. "There is no one man or woman who can escape sorrow and disappointment. Gilbert was right when he told me to keep my freedom; he seems happy enough. Just now I would gladly change places with him."

And then, with the impatience of his hopeful temperament, he told himself that it was only a question of time. It was a quarrel between Doris and Ralph, which they would both grow to forget, and as wisdom and discretion came to Ralph—Mr. Burneston took it as a matter of course that they would come—the lad would learn to value and to love

his step-mother. As long as his thoughts centred on Ralph, hope was easy, but it was different when he came back to the real heart-wound

[270]

—Doris. They had had disagreements, but this was their first quarrel, and how cold and hard and unforgiving she had proved herself; and then he came back to the point from which he had started—"How utterly careless she is of giving me pain!"

Will Slater had also risen early this morning, to ascertain the damage done by the storm, and he walked about his domain growling ominously. Slates had been whirled from outhouses on to cucumber and melon-frames; carnations and dahlias lay prostrate on the flower-beds, a new plantation of standard roses was ruined, and a limb of the cherished cedar lay on the grass beneath its parent tree.

"Caps mah, 'at it diz, what fer t' wind coms i' sike a gait. Wind noo an' then theer's nae hairm in, it purifies things, bud sike a tearin', rampagin' bullock o' a wind Ah nivvers heeard on, ner wishes t' hear again. Ther ain't onny Pruvidence iv it, sae theer noo!"

He paused and listened as the wind sighed in a wailing gust round the house, as if its evil nature refused to submit willingly to the calm

[271]

that was pressing on its mischievous wings.

"It soughs still," Slater said.

He went slowly on to the other side of the cedar-tree to see the damage done, for it was from this side, farthest from the garden, that the branch had fallen.

"Woonkers!" He stopped in dismay, the ground here was strown with fragments of boughs from the beech-tree, branch heaped upon branch in such confusion that the amount of mischief could not be seen at once. A huge limb of the tree had been rent away. "Woonkers! there's nae ind o' mischief," he said again; and then he turned to go home, for he had come out without breakfast.

The hall door opened, and there stood Mr. Hazelgrave, in the act of letting out Mrs. Burneston's little King Charles' spaniel. The pretty little creature came frisking up to Slater, shaking his long ears, and gambolling with that indescribable outcry of welcome bestowed by small dogs on their favourites.

But Slater did not return the favour.

"Getten oot, ye snablin' cur," he pretended to kick the frolicsome little creature: "Ah finns

[272]

yer splay fut ovver all mah flower-beds. Gan in wi' ye, d' ye hear; that's wheer ye sud bide, ye larl limb o' Satan."

But the dog went sniffing along the terrace.

"Gan in wi' ye, d' ye hear?" Slater turned wrathfully on the intruder, whose large heavy paws made him at times an object of dislike to the gardener.

The dog crouched at the angry tone, but he would not follow Slater. He went on sniffing and sniffing till he reached the fallen branches, and then he began to whine and scratch violently.

"An empty bird's nest, or sum sike trumpery." The gardener was hungry; and just at that minute he wished he had a switch in his hand.

"Coom oot on't, ye tastril. Ye—" He ran after the dog, for the creature had plunged madly among the fallen branches, and only his black tail, wagging violently, and his furious barking, showed where he was.

"Drat t' imp! he'll break a leg or summat. Ah mun see 'im safe indoors; t' bairn Phil's fair set on 'im, an onything that t' bairn fancies, t' mistriss thinks a heap on. Sae coom oot o'

[273]

that, ye—what maks yu sae mad? Ye're as hotfutted nobbut ye'd fun yer breakfast. Coom oot I Dash mah, Ah'll fetch yer scruff oot o' 't."

He scrambled on to the heap of fallen branches, and thrust his hand down to drag the dog out; but the creature resisted violently. Its barking had changed to a moaning whine which puzzled Slater. The dog's struggles, small as he was, had brushed off the twigs and leaves, and made an opening through which he had forced his way to the lower branches, and he was now beyond the reach of the gardener's arm; but Slater was determined to capture him, and he struggled down among the branches, widening the opening, as he went, with one of his broad shoulders.

All at once he stopped, and for an instant lay motionless on the heap of branches—then slowly he raised himself on his feet.

His face was still red with the rough struggle among the branches, but his eyes stared wildly, and large drops stood on his forehead; and while he stood the red on his cheeks faded to a ghastly paleness, and his lower jaw fell.

"My God!" he said.

[274]

Then he stumbled on to the house as if his sight had failed him; a sort of instinct rather than any reasoning process—he was too frightened to think—made him go round to the front entrance instead of that which opened on to the lawn.

Till now, since he left the beech-tree, he had kept a dead silence. He had not even attempted to call the dog away; but just beyond the door, at the open gate, leading to the stable-yard, stood Lot Groves, Mr. Sunley's deputy, who had come upon a message from the sexton to the squire.

Then the full horror of what he had seen, half hidden among the beech-trees, thrilled through the dazed man's frame, and he shouted out with all his strength.

"Theer's murder yander—murder! Ah sehs. Theer's t' yung squire liggin' dead an' cauld 'atween t' beech boughs."

"Murder!" Lot flung both arms up at the word, and ran wildly out at the front gate. "Murder!" he shouted as he went; and then the steep ascent of the village street quieted him.

[275]

But when he came in sight of Sunley's cottage, and saw the sexton at his door, nodding across to Shadrach Swaddles at Church Farm Gate, Lot's panic terror found voice again.

"Murder!" he cried. "Murder doon at t' Hall; t' yung squire's liggin deead under t' windys among t' beech boughs. He's bin murdered i' t' night."

The squire had stood some time at the gate fighting his own thoughts, and at a strange confused murmur of voices, he roused as if from sleep; there were several speakers, so it seemed to him, and all at once came a woman's shrill scream of horror.

He roused and turned quickly; and while he tried to gather in the meaning of these sounds, he saw Joseph Sunley hobbling up to him, with a flushed face and excited gestures.

Behind him came Shadrach Swaddles trying to hold the old man back; and just in sight were several figures running. Sukey's face was white and scared, her blue eyes opened widely, and her fair hair floated in the wind.

[276]

"What's the matter with you all?"

That was all Mr. Burneston had time to say.

Joseph Sunley had got up to him; and as he opened his toothless mouth his tongue quivered with the awful message he had come to speak.

Shadrach's face, too, was full of awe; and he caught at Joseph's arm with his rough fingers.

"Hev a care, Maister Sunley. Donnut be tellin' it sudden."

The squire stood spelled. He grew pale and leant against the gate. He could not ask a question.

"Theer's murder been done at t' Hall."

Joseph's voice cracked as he screamed in the squire's ear. "T' yung squire's lying deead atween t' trees."

Mr. Burneston's face grew grey, his lips moved, and so did his right arm slightly, his stick fell from his hand. Then his whole figure swayed and rested heavily on the gate.

"It's t' Lord's will, Ah knawed—" Joseph began; but Shadrach's eyes were keener; he pushed the old man aside rudely, just in time to catch Mr. Burneston in his strong arras as he fell forward rigid, but with open eyes.

[277]

"Sukey," he called over his shoulder, "run doon tu t' Parsonage an' fetch help tu carry t' squire tu t' Hall, at yance. Tell t' parson he's fainted off dead."

The man's voice was hoarse with suppressed feeling; but Joseph Sunley felt aggrieved at this sudden loss of an audience.

"Bon it!" he said querulously, "Ah thowt t' squire was mair manful. Mebbe it's t' suddenness on it, an' a wee blood-letting wad bring him reeght eneeaf. Ah've gitten a blood-letter somewheres."

"Whisht, ye awd hoit." Shadrach spoke sternly. "Ye'll nut dare tu touch t' maister whiles Ah hands 'im. Gang yer ways; it's yu 'at hev worked t' mischief; help mey yan o' ye," and he began to loosen the squire's collar and stock. Timothy Tyzack hobbled forward and looked curiously in the silent face.

"Mah gran'fayther waaz takken t' same," he quavered in his treble voice, with that strange want of emotion one sees in the very old, "an' he nivvers spoke ageean."

Lot Groves stood stupid and silent, staring

[278]

first at Sunley, who had looked foolish since Shadrach's rebuke, and then at Mr. Burneston.

And all this while the squire lay grey and silent in the man's arms, so heavily inert that strong broad-shouldered Shadrach had to lean heavily on the gate to keep his footing.

[279]

## CHAPTER XXII. BESIDE THE DEAD.

DORIS had not slept better that night than any of the other inmates of the Hall. Little Phil, too, had been restless. But towards morning Doris had fallen into a deep sleep, with the child sleeping sweetly beside her.

She roused at last, and it seemed to her that the knocking she now heard had been going on for some time while she slept; then she remembered that she had fastened the doors of her room when the maid left her. She got up hastily and went to the door. The nurse was waiting there with a pale, troubled face, but her mistress was too much preoccupied to notice it.

"If you please, ma'am, I am come for Master

[280]

Philip, and—and please, ma'am, Mr. Raine wishes to see you as soon as you are ready."

Little Phil waked and sat up. "Mamma, me wants Ralphie," he said. "Will Ralphie kiss me now, mamma?"

Doris kissed him and hurried him away. She was vexed that his first thought should be of his brother. She felt puzzled by the message, but she did not choose to ask a question. "I will ring as soon as I am ready," she said. Had it really come to this? Had her husband asked his cousin to mediate between them?

Her lip curled, and she went on dressing without ringing for her maid.

But Mr. Raine seemed to be in an impatient mood. Just as she was dressed came another summons.

“Mr. Raine told me to say he is waiting in your sitting-room; he hopes you will come soon, ma’am.”

Doris felt haughty and ill at ease. Yesterday, for the first time in her life, she had sought a special interview with her husband, but it had jarred her to seek it—she so much disliked anything

[281]

out of the ordinary tenor of life, anything which roused emotion. The dispute that had followed rankled. She was angry with her own want of self-control, and now this thought that her husband had consulted Mr. Raine made her very angry; it would have been so much wiser if he had kept their dispute to himself.

She found Mr. Raine standing in the middle of her sitting-room. If she had not been so absorbed and self-centred she must have seen how agitated he was. He remained standing, even when she seated herself.

“You sent for me,” she said coldly.

“Something very sad, very terrible, has happened,” he said abruptly. The strange tone in his voice made Doris look at him fully, and then the change in his face struck her at once. He looked ten years older, and his hair was rough and disordered.

“What is it?” she said. She looked round with a sort of gasp; she had no room for any thought but her child, and Gilbert Raine guessed at her fear.

“It is about Ralph—an accident,” he said. “Poor dear fellow—he—he—we suppose that he

[282]

fell from his bedroom window in getting out during the storm last night. He is dead."

Her thoughts went more swiftly than his words did.

"Dead!" she repeated. Then a slight shiver passed over her and she sat silent.

Raine had already told the news to Rika, and she had burst into tears.

"How cold this woman is!" he thought; then he said, "Do you know where your husband is, Mrs. Burneston?—he is not in—he has not been told."

"Are you sure he is not in his dressing-room?"

Raine shook his head. "He is away somewhere." Then he broke out suddenly, "Oh, Mrs. Burneston, think what a blow this will be to him! he was so proud of Ralph."

Doris felt as if she were turning to stone, but she tried to rouse herself.

"Where is he?" she said mechanically, and then with a change of manner, as a sudden fear shot painfully through her brain, "Where is little Phil? Surely—surely they will not let the child—"

[283]

Raine was shocked by her seeming want of feeling for Ralph.

"The child is probably in his nursery. So far, Mrs. Burneston," he said formally, "I have done what seemed right to do, but now I must go in search of my cousin. Will you come down with me and see if all is done that he would wish done for the poor boy?"

He turned away abruptly; his voice was choked, and yet Doris sat still, apparently unmoved by this terrible blow.

"Thank you; I will come presently," she said. "Please do not lose a minute in going to seek for Mr. Burneston. You did not say where you had put—"

He interrupted her—"In the library; do go down as soon as you can." Then, carried away by his own feelings, he looked at her earnestly. "Indeed, Mrs. Burneston, I speak for your own sake; if you don't go down at once, your want of interest will be remarked on; I think you should show yourself as soon as possible."

Doris looked at him keenly.

"I am going down," she said; "but I beg

[284]

you to find my husband and break this sad news to him gently."

Something in her look startled Raine. It was reproachful, he fancied, but he had no thoughts to spend on Doris; his heart ached so sorely for the bereaved father, and he hurried away.

Doris felt deeply misunderstood; the sudden news had indeed terribly shocked her, but she had been too long accustomed to hide her feelings from observation to give way to them now in the presence of Gilbert Raine. And, while she had felt more horror than she could have been expected to feel for anything connected with Ralph Burneston, she had been misjudged. She rose up as soon as Gilbert had departed. She was thankful she had not to break the tidings to her husband. He too would probably have misjudged her, and thought her unfeeling.

"My sorrow would not have satisfied him," she said; "his will be such demonstrative grief. Poor Ralph! poor boy! It is very terrible." She stopped, and went on thinking—"We should never have agreed. He would have brought perpetual strife between

[285]

Philip and me; after all, it is the suddenness one regrets. If it could have come in a less painful way—poor Ralph!"

She shrank from going down, and yet the wisdom of Raines's suggestion struck her forcibly; for she had an intuitive knowledge that the household guessed at her dislike to her step-son. But as she went slowly down the broad staircase a strange feeling of guilt gathered and seemed to take complete possession of her. A flush rose on her cheeks and seemed to burn there.

Benjamin Hazelgrave stood at the library door very sad and downcast.

He did not speak when his mistress approached, but he deferentially unlocked the door and opened it for her to go in.

Doris had never seen death; she shuddered and trembled at the idea of seeing it alone; she wished she had asked Rika to bear her company, and she half turned back to seek her, but the butler was looking fixedly at her, then he shut the door, and she was alone. She made a strong effort to quiet her agitation, and went slowly forward into the room.

[286]

The shutters had all been closed, but some light came in through the round tops of the windows, and from two tall candles on a table.

Doris felt in a dream. She saw dimly that one of the large writing-tables was covered with a sheet; the white covering told out powerfully in the gloom of the room. A strong shuddering seized on her, she shrank from the awful presence dimly indicated beneath the shrouding linen, and for a moment she clung to one of the tall chairs for support. She was struggling against herself—not only against her fear, but against the horrible, unnatural joy that had suddenly wakened in her at the sight of that rigid form on the table. Her boy was heir now. Who could claim his inheritance? "No one! no one!" she

repeated. She hated herself for the thought even while it came; and how earnestly in this moment of sore temptation she strove to be good, to be what she considered noble, forgiving, and magnanimous, wholly without one mean thought to alloy her greatness—in vain, she could not conquer; the passion she had cherished and warmed so long in her bosom would have its triumph;

[287]

she would have given much to be able to shed a tear for the fair lad struck down in the pride of his youth and beauty, and instead there was a sense of joy and relief underlying other feelings; she found herself actually planning the future she had so long coveted for her child, even while she stood beside his dead brother.

All at once she started violently, and if she had not clung again to the chair she must have fallen on the floor in the ghastly terror that seized her; for something stirred on the white covering, and she forced herself by a great effort to look steadily—

"Ah!"—and then she darted forward and snatched her child to her bosom.

Little Phil cried out passionately, and struggled in her arms.

"Don't take me away, mamma; me wants to stay with Ralphie," he cried. "Ralphie wake soon."

Before she could speak, before she could even realise what was passing, a figure which till now she had not seen in the gloom, rose up from kneeling beside the body. It was Faith Emmett; her grey hair hung loosely about

[288]

her face, and her eyes were red and swollen.

"Whisht!" she raised her hand solemnly. "Ah'm shamed on ye, Mistriss Burneston, to come troublin' t' rest o' t' dead."

"Hush!" Doris spoke sternly; she had set Phil down, but she kept his hand tightly clasped in hers. "How could you bring the child to such a dreadful sight? It was frightfully wrong." Her voice shook with agitation.

"It's for yu to baud yer peace." Faith's anger rose, and her eyes gleamed malignantly. "Ah wonders yu can bear tu face yer cruel wark. Yes, Mistriss Burneston"—her voice rose with a wailing sound as if she were chanting a dirge—"yer wark—yu may not hev caused his death wi' yer ain hands, but fer all that yu hev caused it; yu took all t' pleasure an' all t' joy oot o' t' poor lad's life; yu bred strife atween him an' his father, where nane wad ha' bin athowt yu; nivver a word o' love, nivver a thoot o' kindness did yu gi' him fra first to last, an' noo yu can show skime nae langer, yu takes yer bairn fra him as if he war too gude fer t' likes o' his ain brother."

[289]

The words had stabbed deeply, but still Doris tried to maintain her self-possession.

"Silence!" she said; "you are in great grief, and you don't know what you say. Hush! you must not stay here unless you can control yourself; Mr. Burneston will be here soon."

"He may come," she said, "but Ah've getten maist reeght to him"—she pointed to the table as she spoke—"fer Ah've loved him through all—through bad an gude alike, it were all yan to me. Ah, God knows hoo Ah've loved him."

Then some memory came back, she raised her head, pushed her hair from her face, and pointed one finger at Doris.

"Yes, 'tis yer ain wark, ye've sent him tu meet his God wi' his sins on his head, but they'll lie at your door, not his; it was yu that druv him tu wild ways, yu that ruined his

peace; may God reward yu fer it! An' noo yu thinks yer way's clear, an' yer bairn is heir to Burneston; an' yu dares to come an' threaten me beside him 'at ye've wranged sae sorely."

Her words had come like a torrent, but now

[290]

Doris roused herself to check them. She spoke sternly.

"At such a time, and here too, beside him, how dare you use such words? Silence!" she said commandingly, for Faith's yellow eyes blazed with fury, and she came close up to her mistress and shook her finger menacingly in her face.

Doris turned to go away; the woman seemed to her a maniac. She had never fathomed the violence of Faith's nature, till now so sternly repressed in her presence.

The old woman glared as if she would spring upon her.

"Silence yu!" she screamed out. "What hev Ah to fear, Ah that hev loved him always? 'Tis yu that hev warked t' wrang that sud suffer."

Phil broke in with his sobbing, pitiful cry—

"Ralphie, me wants Ralphie."

"Ay!" Faith went on, her eyes full of scornful triumph; "all his cry, poor bairn, has bin fer Ralphie—ye'll nivver loose his love for his dead brother—ye are nothing beside him." She had

[291]

softened a little as she looked at the child, but now she spoke out again loudly and wildly, “Go, go; what fer are yer here skiming at mey? Ah wonnut hev ye stand here to freeat t’ spirit o’ him—him that ye’ve bin t’ rewin on”—she raised her hand solemnly. “No; Ah’ll not hush—Ah’ll speak oot mah heart. Ah calls on t’ Lord to curse yu, yu an’ yer bairn ‘at ye’ve sinned fer. May ye nivver know joy ner peace. May t’ bairn turn yer life into a long sorrow, an’ when yu comes to die may yer sperrit nivver rest, but wander moanin’ about lahke ye’ve made ithers moan their lives lang.”

She flung herself on her knees again beside the table. Doris might have been one of the chairs for any heed she took henceforth of her presence.

Mrs. Burneston was scarcely conscious of her own existence. She had snatched Phil and held him to her bosom as if to shield him from Faith Emmett’s frightful words, but her hands trembled so that she could hardly grasp the child. Little Phil clung to her, frightened—Faith’s violent words and gestures had terrified him into silence.

[292]

Doris turned and seemed to grope her way blindly to the door. She felt as if Faith’s words were weapons, and could strike the child even in her arms.

“God help me!” she murmured, but the words came mechanically. There was in them neither faith, nor trust, nor love. How could there be? She had loved self only all her life. She, who had so little love for God’s creatures, could not look lovingly to God for help, hers was only the cry of helpless humanity; God had made her—He was bound to help her in her need.

Her standard of right and wrong represented to Doris good and evil; as to any love of God or of prayer in the abstract, such ideas had seldom visited her busy brain, and when brought there temporarily by some chance remark made by. George or Rika, had been dismissed as unreal and visionary.

And now she was blind and helpless, and yet with an eager clutching, longing for help; a sense of wrong-doing oppressed her, and Faith's words sounded again and again in her ears.

[293]

She only felt that she must get away from this old mad woman.

She reached the door at last; her limbs trembled so that she could hardly carry the child, and yet she feared to loose him from her arms.

At last she was safe in the hall: it was empty, and her heart leaped with intense relief as she sank exhausted into a chair.

Little Phil struggled down out of her arms, and went back to the door of the library.

"Come here." She roused herself to speak. "Come here directly, Phil."

The child shook his head, and grasped the door handle.

"Me want to wake Ralphie," he said, in his little decided voice.

Doris rose and tried to get him away, but he cried out loudly. She turned the key and left him standing there. She was utterly crushed and too full of anguish to struggle with him; her confidence and self-possession were gone. It seemed to her horrible that the child should leave her for his dead brother.

[294]

She went on to the entrance-door, which stood open, and looked out; the chill air refreshed her throbbing head. She was so wrecked of human love that she felt an unusual longing for her husband's return. There would at least be peace between them now, she thought, and then she shuddered as Faith's awful words came back. She turned

towards the great gates. If her husband had gone to the village he would come in that way.

At the gate stood Benjamin Hazelgrave and his wife, and several of the servants and labourers grouped in a crowd, some pointing with their fingers and talking together.

What was happening? What were these people waiting for?

The gates stood open, and it seemed to Doris that it would distress her husband to have to pass through such an assemblage when he came in.

She called to Benjamin, but her voice did not reach him. He was as eager as the rest, craning his neck to see what was passing outside.

Doris went down the steps. She was resolved to spare her husband this trial.

[295]

As she reached Benjamin there was a movement in the group of gazers, they parted right and left, and Gilbert Raine came hurriedly towards her through the passage opened for him—his face was full of trouble and pain. He took her hand, and led her back quickly to the house.

"What is the matter? Have you found Philip?" His silence puzzled her. She could not see that the poor fellow was striving to find the kindest way to speak.

"Yes," he said; then he went on in an excited voice, "Oh, Mrs. Burneston, you must prepare yourself for more trouble, I hardly know how to tell you what has happened. Poor Phil is quite struck down by this terrible accident. I fear he is paralysed. They are bringing him in."

Doris started, pressed her hands tightly together, but her wits came back; she seemed steadied in a moment.

"Do not fear for me," she said firmly. "Have you sent for the doctor?"

"Yes—yes, I have sent."

Watching the sad procession as it came

[296]

slowly through the gates, mechanically her eyes rested on the bearers—Ephraim Crewe, Shadrach Swaddles, and two of Crewe's farm servants; Joseph Simley and old Tyzack; Mr. Spencer walking sadly last of all—but she could not nerve herself to look at her husband's face; she only saw that he lay there motionless, and she turned and led the way in silence to her own bedroom.

[297]

## CHAPTER XXIII. "SHE CAN TELL ME."

"HE must not be left an instant," the doctor sent for from York had said, after he had seen Mr. Burneston.

And Doris answered, "I shall not leave him."

She had watched for three days and nights beside her husband. He had recovered consciousness in a few hours, but he was very feeble; the attack seemed to have crushed all vigour out of mind and body—he had not attempted to speak.

It seemed to Doris, as she sat looking straight before her at vacancy, that her brain too had received a shock—she had so little power of thought.

She did not acknowledge the justice of

[298]

Faith's accusation, but a consciousness of wrong-doing—an entirely new consciousness to Doris—oppressed her. She strove to quiet it, by doing all that was repugnant to herself, not so much from loving feeling as from stern duty. It was not, she well knew, only from her devotion and love to her husband that she sat wasting, so it seemed to her, these hours in his room; his own man or Phil's nurse would perhaps have tended him just as well, but this would have left her free to think, and there was an actual relief in forcing herself to perform hard, unusual duties. She had rung to inquire for her child soon after her husband's consciousness returned, and the nurse had brought him to the bedroom door; but the instant the child saw his mother he began his cry for Ralphie. Doris sent him away, and sternly denied herself the luxury of gazing at her darling.

She rarely looked at her husband as he lay there; the likeness between his face and the face of that other one lying so still and silent in the gloom downstairs, made her shudder and shrink from him.

[299]

Doris was not imaginative; she had a strong-minded contempt for what she called superstition in any form; and yet this morning, when the cold, grey light came stealing into the room, and she drew aside the curtains to see if her husband still slept, she started and cried out, and then she clasped her bowed face between her trembling hands, and shook in mortal fear. Mr. Burneston was awake, his blue eyes were open, but as they fell on his wife's face, the brows contracted and he frowned.

It seemed to Doris that Ralph's spirit was gazing at her out of his father's eyes.

"Doris"—she started and uncovered her face, his voice sounded cold and changed, she thought—"you had better lie down and rest; you will be ill;" then he stopped, but he left off looking at her. Then after a few minutes, "Send Faith Emmett, she is used to nursing."

The blood that had left her face till it was ghastly in its whiteness, came back and dyed her cheeks and throat, her strong indignation at this injustice almost choked her, and yet she dared not try to utter it; had not the doctor

[300]

said the slightest agitation might prove fatal? And yet angry as she was that Faith should be preferred to her, she clung more in that moment to her husband than she had ever done before.

"I—I am not tired, Philip," she ventured to say in a low, pleading voice; "indeed I would rather stay. I want to nurse you. Let me stay."

He frowned again. He seemed to have some trouble in finding his words, for his lips moved, and he looked sad when no voice followed the movement.

"You had better go," he said at last. "Send Faith; she can tell me—"

And then Doris saw—the veil was rent suddenly from her eyes, and she saw with the painful clearness which attends the first vision of those who have been blind. Oh I why had she never seen before that her duty was to live her husband's life as well as her own? And instead she had so cut herself off from all sympathy with his natural feelings towards Ralph that now Faith's sympathy was more prized than hers was.

[301]

"She can tell me!" Doris shrank into herself; the name of Ralph could never more be spoken between her and her husband. He knew not only that she had hated his son, but that she had coveted his inheritance. "She can tell me." She! this woman who had cursed her and scorned her must be set in her place by her own order, and Philip must never know the insults she had endured from Faith. It was a bitter punishment. She had

thought never to see the housekeeper again, and now she felt with a kind of keen despair that a new link was forged between her husband and his old servant.

She looked imploringly at him; his eyes were fixed on her as if he were impatient for her to go, and she rose slowly.

“Send Faith,” he said, and then he closed his eyes without even a smile of farewell.

Doris was too utterly crushed to think of self as she crossed the room to obey him. She might well have started at her own reflection in the long mirror; it was difficult to believe that the sunken-eyed, care-worn woman, with her head bent forward as she walked, could be the graceful,

[302]

dignified girl who had carried herself so proudly only a week before, She rang for Mr. Burneston’s man, and then went to her room. It was still very early, and she waited some time before she summoned her maid—waited in a sort of dull stupor; then she rang, and desired her to tell the housekeeper to go to Mr. Burneston. Even for her husband’s sake she could not have met Faith Emmett face to face.

“You can tell nurse to bring Master Phil here, if he is awake,” she said.

The woman hesitated. She was in great awe of her mistress, who scarcely ever spoke to her except to give her orders; but Mrs. Burneston’s worn face and heavy eyes moved her pity.

“Oh! ma’am,” she said timidly, “won’t you lie down and rest? Sleep would do you good—you look so worn; and Master Phil would be ready against you woke.”

Doris stared in surprise.

“I am quite well,” she said coldly. “I wish Master Phil to come to me.”

"Yes, ma'am." But at the door the maid turned again. "Master Phil is not very well,

[303]

ma'am. Nurse asked the doctor to look at him yesterday."

"Not well!—why was I not told?" Then she recollected herself. "You are right, Burnell; go on and tell nurse I am coming to see him."

How long ago it seemed since she had last held her darling in her arms, when she had found him lying beside—she shuddered, and turned hastily into the nursery. Phil lay in his little cot; the nurse and Burnell were both looking at him earnestly. Neither of them spoke when Mrs. Burneston came in, but they drew aside that she might see her child.

He did not see her, though his dark eyes were wide open, strained on vacancy. His sweet little face was very pale, and round his eyes were large dark rings; his lips, too, looked purple and fevered, and his nose pinched and wasted.

Doris bent down and kissed his hot cheek, but he took no notice.

"How long has he been like this?"

"Not long, ma'am; he's been fretting ever since you took him from the library. He's eaten

[304]

nothing, ma'am. The doctor said he'd eat when he was hungry, but he's done nothing but fret and call for his brother, and now, ma'am, he won't rouse nor take notice."

Doris set her teeth hard. Come what mighty she would not yield up her darling.

"I should like to see Mr. Raine," she said; "will you ask him to come to me at once?" She clasped her hands tightly together. Never in her whole life had Doris felt so utterly alone—her husband had sent her from him, her child was ill, dying perhaps, and she must save him herself—there was no one to help her.

Gilbert Raine had a surprised look on his face when he came into the nursery.

Doris took his hand, and began to speak quickly. "Thank you for coming," she said. "You sent for the York doctor the other day. Will you send for him again at once?"

"Good heavens! Is Philip worse, and have you left him? Ah! Mrs. Burneston, why did you not let me nurse him?"

He spoke impetuously. He had not forgiven Doris's coldness about Ralph, and he thought

[305]

she had deserted her husband for the sake of her child.

It was more than she could bear. She made a great effort to suppress feeling, then she changed and broke down in a passion of tears.

Gilbert looked at the nurse, and pointed to the door, and when she had gone he stood feeling horribly ashamed of himself, till Doris checked her sobs and was able to speak.

"My husband is not alone," she said; "I came away by his wish. I came here and found Phil like this," she said, pointing to the little disfigured face. "He is very ill—that Steersley doctor has no skill to save him, but the doctor from York might, if you will send for him without delay"—then, clasping her hands fervently—"without the delay of a minute."

Raine's heart had reproached him keenly. He had never made a woman cry before, and when he saw the little wan, suffering face in the cot he felt like a criminal.

"I beg your pardon," he said humbly; "Rika said the little fellow was poorly, but I did not

[306]

know he was so ill. I will go to York myself at once and bring back the doctor."

He was bending over the cot, his face was on a level with hers. Doris put her lips suddenly to his forehead and kissed him.

"Thank you," she said, "you are a good man!"

He shook both her hands warmly. "My dear child, keep a good heart," he said, "I will be back soon with the doctor. Let Rika help you, and do take a little rest." And he went.

A faint smile stole over her tear-stained face. "They are friends at last, then!" she said.

[307]

## CHAPTER THE LAST. NORTHWARD.

THE north wind felt wintry in its keen crispness, and the sky had the lowering look which so often heralds snow.

The sharp air made John Barugh's eyes smart, and he sent his chin down among his wraps for shelter as he drove northward. He was in the last stage of his journey, but he was going round by a cross-road, so as to strike the Steersley road above the town itself—the direct high-way would have taken him through Steersley, and this would have caused a longer delay, and he knew George would expect him to call on Mr. Hawnby.

"Neeah, Neeah!" John squared his shoulders and bent his head before the pitiless

[308]

keenness of the wind. “Ah’ll nut leave the track for onnything or onnybody; Ah’ve coom to see mah Doris.”

There had been great consternation at the Cairn when Joseph Sunley wrote to George a full account of Ralph’s death and of the squire’s seizure.

George’s first impulse was to go over to Burneston Hall and see what was really happening. At so great a distance it was difficult to believe in such terrible misfortunes, especially as Mr. Sunley narrated them in a concise, cold-blooded manner, as if he were telling the story to strangers. But when John read the letter, he noticed at once that Mr. Raine was at Burneston, and he told George to stay where he was. In a few days came a letter from Miss Masham, but there was no word of wishing for George’s presence.

George wrote to Doris expressing the family sympathy, but no answer had been received from her.

At length came a few hurried lines.

[309]

> “Father, will you come to me? My darling is taken away, and I am left alone. My husband is still very ill. I cannot do without you.
>
> “DORIS BURNESTON.”

This was the first time they had heard of the child’s illness.

For some minutes there was dead silence, and then Dorothy flung her apron over her head and sank weeping into a chair.

John Barugh looked into his son’s eyes an instant, and then he said softly—

"God help her! my poor lass, Ah mun gan noo. Ah sehd Ah'd nivver set foot i' t' Hall, bud then Ah nivver thowt Ah sud be needed. Ah mun geh t' day. Coom, awd lass, coom, thoo mun think o' Doris, nut o' theesel'; think o' t' poor lass wi' her deead bairn."

But Dorothy rocked herself in her chair.

"What does the man think I'm thinking of? My poor girl—my blessed little Phil!" she said between her sobs; and then she rose up to prepare for her husband's departure.

"We'll never say so much to poor dear

[310]

Doris," she said to George as her husband drove away; "but if she'd sent for me to nurse the precious darling it might have ended differently. I've no faith in your fine stuck-up nurses."

"I don't suppose, mother"—George looked very sad at the thought of Doris's trouble,—"that she ever trusted him to a nurse; be just to our Doris; she was wrapt up in little Phil."

The name set poor Dorothy off again, and then she looked reproachfully and with streaming eyes at George.

"Of course she was, my dear, but not more than I was in you, lad. Ah, children are careful comforts. Oh, my darling, precious little boy!"

John Barugh had had a long journey; he had changed his horse, but even this one was beginning to flag when he came in sight of the square grey tower and weird fir-trees of Burneston.

His own spirits, too, which at first had risen with rapid driving through the keen air, had grown very depressed.

[311]

"Mah poor lass! the one thing her heart was fair set on was little Phil," he said tenderly; "an' noo 'at shu needs comfort t' husband cannot gi' it. Eh, bud it's hard on Doris."

He had resolved to go past the church gate and round by the Vicarage, so as to avoid the village, but as he passed the church a wheezy "hulloa!" stopped him. He looked over the gate; Joseph Sunley was hurrying away from his deputy, whose shock head showed above the edge of a half-made grave, and the sexton was waving his thin arms to attract notice.

John Barugh reined up his horse, and waited by the gate.

"Weel, neeghber, an' hoo's a' wi' ye at t' Cairn? It's lang syne ye cam fer tu tak' a look at us."

"Yes," the farmer said gravely. "Ah've coom to t' Hall; mah lass—Mrs. Burneston, that is," he corrected himself—"hes sent fer mey."

"Eh, it's a sair judgment, neeghber; nobbut yu tempt t' Lord He'll hev it oot wi' ye. Sheea couldn't bide t' ither lad, an' shu nivver shed a

[312]

tear to see him cut off in his prime, an' noo her ain bairn, 'at she set afore God Almighty, he's pined an' pined till he's pined his life oot, an' he's taken frev her an' laid besahde his brother."

"Ye're hard on her, Joseph Sunley," John spoke hastily; "wheea can say shu nivvers shed a tear? an' Doris nivvers was great at crying fra t' tahme sheea was a lahtle lass, bud"—his voice grew sad again—"d'ye meean 'at t' lahtle lad's laid besahde his brother already?"

Joseph nodded.

"Yis, yis, t' deea afore yesterda'; Ah seed it deean mysel'. It were sad an', lonesome to see her stan' theer"—he pointed over his shoulder—"as tall an' pale as a lily, an' no saul besahde; sheea had no tears even then, bud her eyes was swelled an' red wi' crying, so theer noo."

John Barugh drew his hand across his eyes, till now tearless.

"D'ye meean 'at t' squire's too sick yet tu seea his ain bairn put i' t' kirk-geate?"

"Ah meeans what Ah sehs, an' Ah sehs what Ah meeans," Joseph spoke snappishly. He was not accustomed now-a-days to contradiction or

[313]

cross-questioning. "T' squire's a brokken man, t' doctor hes tellt mey himsel'; sehs he, 'T' squire's deean fer; he's as awd as yu, Maister Sunley, an' lahkely tu be fer t' rest o' his deeas; he may be better noos an' thens, bud he'll nivvers be his ain lahke again; an' he mun nut be wearied.' Theer's nowt bud subversals at t' Hall, neeghber; Mrs. Emmett's gane naebody kens wheer."

John Barugh groaned. He nodded to Sunley and drove on to the Hall.

This news seemed to him worse than the loss of little Phil.

"An' he's nut mair then forty years awd," he said.

He did not ask to see Mr. Burneston when he reached the Hall, but he was shown at once to Doris's sitting-room.

George had been right about his sister; she had never left her child except now and then to see her husband; but no persuasion or force even could induce little Phil to take food

or to cease fretting for his brother. Ralph's repulse, and the sight of Ralph pale and motionless in

[314]

the gloomy library, had possessed him, and in his wandering—for his weakness induced fever, and then delirium—he cried incessantly, now to his brother to forgive him, and now to waken from his sleep.

Doris sat beside her child with a bursting heart, but tearless to the end, and then she went alone to the churchyard and saw him laid beside Ralph.

Mr. Raine had gone to London to transact some necessary business for his cousin, and Doris had asked Rika to leave her before the end came with little Phil. Rika was unwilling to go, but Doris found it easier to bear her burden unwatched even by her friend's loving eyes; she had scarcely given way to tears since she parted from her darling—the wound was too deep—it seemed to have burned out all feeling but that of pain.

Only when she came slowly back from the churchyard a great longing had seized on Doris, and, carried away by an impulse that overmastered her, she sat down and wrote the note which brought her father to the Hall—and then her tears came.

[315]

Now she heard the sound of wheels, and presently the heavy step that took her back so many years, coming along the passage, and she shrank, as she had been shrinking ever since she sent her letter, from meeting her father. She rose up, almost resolved to go away; her pride, which had seemed dead since her child had left her, struggled to be heard. How could she let her father see how utterly alone she was?

But though she still kept the same firm rule over her impulses, both of mind and body, her long watchings and bitter sorrows had told on her greatly; mind and body were alike enfeebled, and less prompt in obeying her will. While she stood hesitating the door opened, and there was her father.

He came forward, for Doris had no power to move, took her hand, and gently kissed her cheek. Her grief-stricken face, so pale against her plain black gown, her bowed head, moved him to the deep sorrowing reverence a worshipper feels towards a broken Madonna. But as his lips touched her they ended the struggle

[316]

within her. Like a little child she leaned her head till it rested on her father's shoulder, and then, as she felt the shelter and support of his strong arm come round her, fell sobbing on his heart.

"Mah lass, mah poor lass!" John said.

That was all. He did not know how to comfort her, and he let her be, just patting her shoulders and head with his broad hand.

He did not try to check her tears at first.

"They'll ease her sore heart," he said to himself; but when he found they did not cease, but seemed like to drown the closed eyes and slender quivering throat, he led her gently to a seat, and placed himself beside her. He wished for George or Mr. Hawnby; it seemed to him that they would know the right thing to say.

"Whisht, mah lass," he said softly, "yu mun not greet so sair, yu mun take comfort noo."

The old feeling of her childish days, that she must never be foolish "before father," came back to Doris, and helped her to check her sobs; but still as she spoke large hot tears fell silently on the fingers twisted together on her lap.

[317]

"I cannot take comfort," she said sadly. "Where can I get it from? Indeed, father, I am not grieving only for—for Phil"—she stopped to steady her voice—"there is so much to be sorry for."

"Ah knaws." John smoothed her hair tenderly with his fingers. "Ah've heeard, an' it maks me ower sad; bud we must hope, lass, t' squire's yung yet, an' t' doctors mistak' sometahmes."

Doris shook her head.

"Yes, father, but there is so much that can never be righted now; and think of Philip dragging on years and years of life, and feeling all the while old and helpless. Oh, I cannot bear it!"

She started up and walked to the other end of the room.

John looked after her, and again he wished for George's help to comfort her.

Doris came back to him again, her hands hanging down beside her, her whole figure drooping and despondent.

"Think how young I am, father; I may have to live fifty years of this life. I cannot live it.

[318]

I love Philip; yes, I know I love him dearly now, but he is as feeble as a child; I cannot bear it, and how can I help him?—I cannot give him back what he has lost. There is no help, no comfort in anything," she said wearily, and she clasped her hands in an anguish of despair.

John had left off wishing for George, his strong sympathy, spite of his slowness, was leading him to the truth; he took the clasped hands in his.

"Mah lass, my ain bairn, yu're reeght there," he said. "When sorrow comes, there's small help or comfort to be found in onny thing or onnybody i' t' earth, an' we cannot bear our burdens oursel's; bud Doris, lass, there's One 'at'll bear 'em fer us, ay, an' gi'e us comfort; nobbut we ask Him to help us to trust in Him."

She shook her head.

"That's not for me, father; I'm—" she hesitated, "I'm not good, you know—I mean not in that way. I did pray to God to spare my child," her lips trembled, "and what good did it do?"

John looked troubled—he sat silent awhile.

"Mah lass," he said very tenderly, and again

[319]

he put his broad hand caressingly on her bowed head, "when t' lahtle lad was wiv ye, deead ye gi' him yal he axed fer?"

She raised her head and looked at him.

"Weel," he said shyly, "yance He took a bairn fra mey, an' Ah wearied an' freeated, bud Ah've fun comfort—Ah've learned 'at Ah've got to deea t' Lord's will, nut mah ain, lass; Ah trusts Him noo, an' nobbut ye asks fer trust, He'll gi' yu that, Doris."

THE END.