Gladys, the Reaper eBook

Gladys, the Reaper

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

Contents

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Page 1

ANNE BEALE

Author of *Fay Arlington*, *Simplicity and Fascination*, *The Miller's Daughter*, *etc*. *etc*.

... standing like Ruth amid the alien corn

Griffith Farran Browne & Co. Limited
35 Bow Street, Covent Garden
London

1881

[Illustration: Frontispiece.]

CHAPTER I.

The farmer's wife.

It is an evening in June, and the skies that have been weeping of late, owing to some calamity best known to themselves, have suddenly dried their eyes, and called up a smile to enliven their gloomy countenances. The farmers, who have been shaking their heads at sight of the unmown grass, and predicting a bad hay-harvest, are beginning to brighten up with the weather, and to consult upon the propriety of mowing to-morrow. The barometer is gently tapped by many a sturdy hand, and the result is favourable; so that there are good prospects of a few weeks' sunshine to atone for the late clouds.

Sunshine: how gracious it is just now! Down yonder in the west, that ancient of days, the sun throws around him his evening glory, and right royally he does it. The rain-covered meadows glow beneath it, like so many lakes—the river looks up rejoicing, and the distant mountains are wrapped in garments dyed in the old king's own regal colours. The woods look as smooth and glossy as the braided locks of maidens prepared for conquests; and the roads and paths that wind here and there amongst the trees, are as gay as little streamlets in the sun's reflected light.

Suddenly a rainbow leaps, as it were, out of the river, and spans, with its mighty arch, the country scene before us.

> 'A rainbow at night
> Is the shepherd's delight;'

so the proverbially-grumbling farmers will have another prognostic to clear their countenances.

Perchance the worthy man who inhabits the farm we have just reached, may be congratulating himself upon it, as he jogs home from market this Saturday evening. If he could look upon his homestead with our eyes, I feel sure he would cease to despond. How cheerily the wide, slated roof gleams forth from amongst the trees, and returns the warm glance of the sun with one almost as warm, albeit proceeding from a very moist eyelid! How gladly the white smoke arises once more, spirally, from the large chimneys, after having been so long depressed by the heavy atmosphere! and how the massive ivy that covers the gable end, responds to the songs of the birds that warble their evening gladness amongst its gleaming leaves! The face of the dwelling is as cheerful as are the sun, river, mountains and meads, that it looks down upon from its slight elevation. Every leaf of the vine and pyrus-japonica that covers its front, is bedecked with a diamond; and the roses, laburnums, nasturtiums, and other gay flowers in the garden, drop jewels more freely than the maiden in the fairy tale, as they glisten beneath the rainbow.

Page 2

This is what we see from the hawthorn lane below the house; but walking up into the highroad at the back, the scene changes, and just as our sympathies with beautiful nature were called forth below, so are they instantaneously assailed by our fellow-creatures above.

We come to the substantial gate that is the entrance to the pretty farm, and a curious and a motley group is there. We see such groups almost daily, here in Carmarthenshire; but as all the counties of England and Wales are not thoroughfares for the Irish from their country to England, we will describe these poor people as graphically as we can. There is evidently a consultation going on amongst them, and the general attention is directed to one individual of their party.

This is a young girl of some seventeen or eighteen years of age. She is seated on the ground, and leans her back against the stone wall that flanks the substantial gate afore mentioned. To judge from her general appearance she can scarcely belong to the ragged set that surround her, for there is an attempt at neatness and cleanliness in her attire, though it is poor enough, that the rest cannot boast of. She wears a cotton gown, shawl, straw bonnet, and shoes and stockings, which were once respectable and seem to have been originally intended for her. True, they are all worn and shabby-looking. The gown is faded, the bonnet very brown, and the shoes have holes in them; but they indicate a mind, or station, at least a degree above those of her companions. Her head is so inclined upon her breast, that it is difficult to see more than a pale face underneath the bonnet; but a pair of thin white hands that rest listlessly upon her lap, still tend to induce the notion that the girl cannot quite belong to the wild-looking company with which she is mixed up.

Right in front of her, and looking alternately from her to a man to whom she is talking, stands a middle-aged woman of good-natured but terrified aspect. A checked and ragged handkerchief confines her black, rough hair—a torn red cloak covers a portion of her body, and a curious collection of rags and tatters makes a vain effort to shelter the rest. In the large hood of the red cloak a hardy-looking infant is tied up, its little head and hand being alone visible, which are engaged in munching and holding a crust of bread. At the feet of the woman are sundry articles, amongst which a bundle of rags, an iron pot, and a tin saucepan, are the most conspicuous. The man to whom she is talking is a tall, gaunt specimen of Irish poverty and famine. He holds a rake and pitchfork in his hand, and leans upon them for support. Gazing into his face is a rough, surly-looking youth, who seems cordially to agree with all that he says.

Page 3

Leaning against the wall that flanks the gate on the side opposite that which supports the girl, are another man and woman, who cast from time to time pitying glances at the pale face beneath the straw bonnet. These are as raggedly picturesque in their attire as the rest—a short red petticoat, a blanket substituted for a shawl, and a bundle on the back, distinguish the female; a long great coat and short trousers the male. They are deep in conversation upon the common theme. A young man of more stalwart figure stands beside the girl, and failing to attract her attention, kneels down on one knee and speaks low to her. A little boy is seated at her feet, alternately stroking her hands, and stirring up a small puddle of water with a short stick. Two other children are engaged at a little distance in making a lean cur beg for a mouthful of bread, which the generous urchins would evidently rather share with the dog than eat alone.

The one prevailing feature of the party is rags, and how they hold together no tongue can tell.

At last there is a general movement, as well as general clamour of voices and much gesticulation. All, old and young, with the exception of the girl, gather round the woman in the red cloak, and seem to be urging her to do something that she does not like to do. They point to the girl, and the appeal is not in vain.

The woman moves slowly and somewhat sulkily towards one of the boys, takes him by the hand, and returning to the gate, opens it, and walks down the good broad road that leads to the farm, the boy trotting by her side. We watch the bright red cloak till it disappears amongst the trees that surround the house; and turn again to wonder what can be the matter with the girl. She neither moves nor speaks, although her kindly companions in turn endeavour to attract her attention.

In the course of a few minutes the red cloak is again seen coming up the road, closely followed by another figure. We soon hear sounds of earnest pleading, in a broad Irish brogue, from our friend of the red cloak. As they approach the gate sound distinctly the words,—

’It’s all thrue, my leddy—as thrue as the blessed gospel. I’m afeered she’s dyin’ if yer honour’s glory won’t lend us a hand.’

’I don’t know how to believe you, my good woman, for some of you come every week and deceive me with all kinds of stories.’

‘An’ she’s Welsh, yer honour. She’s come to find out her friends, my leddy! God bless ye, ye’ve a kind eye and a gintle voice,’

Red cloak spoke the truth. The woman who is now added to the group has truly ‘a kind eye and a gintle voice.’ She is short and small of form, of middle age and matronly appearance; neatly and even handsomely dressed, as becomes the mistress of one of

the largest and wealthiest farms of a country where large farms are rare. She has a handsome, placid face, and looks as if the world had moved on quietly and happily ever since she had been on its surface. Her dark eyes, that must once have been bright and piercing, are softened down to gentleness by the quieting hand of time; and the black hair is slightly streaked with white by the same unsparing fingers. But for this, age would seem to have little to do with the comely dame who is now bending her neatly-attired head before the shabby-looking girl against the wall,

Page 4

‘What is the matter with you, my poor girl?’ says the ‘gintle voice,’

These kind words have a power that the equally kind ones of the rough friends around had not. The brown straw bonnet is raised from the breast, and we perceive that the girl is neither dead nor sleeping. We perceive something more—a pair of the most painfully melancholy, and beautiful violet eyes that we ever looked into, which are languidly uplifted to the farm-lady. With the words, ‘I am very tired, ma’am,’ the eyes reclose, and we see long black fringes of soft hair rest upon the pale, thin cheek. The ready tear of compassion springs to the matron’s eyes, as she stoops still lower to feel the pulse in the wan hand.

‘What is the matter with her?’ she inquires, turning to the bystanders.

’Tis tiert all out she is, my leddy. We come by say from Watherford to Milford, and thin, yer honour, we come on foot all trough Pembrokeshire, and County Carmarthin, and now she’s jist kilt.’

‘But what is she going to do? Why do you come away from Ireland at all?’

‘Och, my leddy, shure we’re starvin’ there. And we jist come to luk for the work in the harvest, an’ we’re goin’ to Herefordshire to git it. An’ plaase yer honour’s glory, she come wid us to this counthry to luk for her mother’s relations that’s Welsh, my leddy, small blame to thim, seein’ her mother married an Irishman, and come to live in our counthry.’

‘I will give you a night’s lodging, and that is all I can do for you,’ says the gentle mistress of the farm.

’The Lord bless ye, my leddy, the holy angels keep ye, the blessed Vargin and all the saints—’

‘Oh, hush! hush!’ exclaims the good woman, highly shocked. ’Help the poor girl, and come with me.’

The woman went towards the girl, and trying to assist her to rise, said,—

‘Now, Gladys, asthore! An’ shure, my leddy, she’s a thrue Welsh name. I’ll help ye, my darlin’, there! Och! an it’s betther she is already, as soon as she heerd of a night’s lodgin’.’

The young man who was kneeling by the girl just now, goes to her other side, and succeeds in supporting her by putting his arm round her waist, whilst the woman holds her by one arm; and thus they follow the good mistress of the farm, followed in their turn by the rest of the party.

They move slowly down the road, underneath the fine oak and ash trees that shelter the back of the farm, until they reach a large farm-yard, wherein some thirty fine cows, of Welsh, English, and Alderney breed, are yielding their rich milk at the hands of some three or four rough-looking men and women who are kneeling down to get it.

‘Come here, Tom,’ cries the mistress, authoritatively.

Tom gives a knowing wink to the nearest girl, mutters, ‘Irish again,’ and goes to his mistress.

’See if there is good clean straw spread in the barn, Tom, and make haste.’

Page 5

Tom goes to a large building outside the farm-yard, whither his mistress and the rest follow him.

‘Plenty of straw, ma’am, good enough for such folk,’ says Tom.

‘Spread some more, and shut the window in the loft.’

This is done in a slow grumbling way.

The barn is a large, clean, airy building, that must look like a palace to these ragged, way-worn people.

’Now you may sleep here to-night, provided you go off early and quietly to-morrow morning. There is a good pump down below, where you can get water to wash yourselves, and at eight o’clock I shall lock the barn door; my husband always insists upon that.’ Thus speaks the mistress.

’Heaven bless his honour, we’re all honest. We wouldn’t harm a hair of your blessed heads. We heerd o’ ye many a time, and o’ the good lodgin’ and supper—the sun shine upon ye—ye give to the poor Irish on their thravels.’ Thus answers the Irishwoman.

’You tell one another then! And this is why we have more calls than any one else!’

’The Lord love ye, and why wouldn’t we? ’Tis the good as always gets the blessin’.’

Whilst this little conversation is going on, the girl, Gladys, is laid upon the shawl-blanket of the woman who wears that singular attire, and a pillow, half rags, half straw, is contrived for her head. The bonnet is taken off to increase her comfort, and, as her head falls languidly back upon the rough pillow, a wan, thin face is disclosed, that, from the regular outline of the profile, must be pretty, under happier circumstances, and is interesting.

Whilst the guests prepare to make themselves comfortable in different ways, the kindly farm-lady leaves them, amid many and enthusiastic blessings, and returns to the house.

In less than half-an-hour she reappears, followed by a female servant, both carrying tokens of a true hospitality that expects no return. She goes towards the poor girl with a small basin of good broth and a plate of toasted bread, such as might tempt the palate of a more dainty invalid; whilst the servant places a can of real Welsh broth, smelling strongly of the country emblem, the leek, in the midst of the hungry crew who are scattered over the barn. To this she adds various scraps of coarse bread and hard cheese, which she draws from a capacious apron, and evidently considers too good for the luckless vagabonds before her. She is soon, however, as much interested as her mistress in the sick girl, to whom the latter is administering the warm restorative. Spoonful after spoonful is applied to her lips, and greedily swallowed though with

evident effort. The toasted bread is soaked in a portion of the broth, and is also devoured as speedily as offered, with an avidity made still more painful by the difficulty of swallowing, occasioned by some obstruction in the throat.

‘God help you, poor girl,’ says the good Samaritan, as she puts the last mouthful to the lips of the patient.

Page 6

The eyes unclose, and a tear falls upon the wan cheek, as a murmured, ‘Thank you, my lady,’ is faintly heard.

The ‘lady’ turns away with a heavy sigh, whilst the servant begins to arrange the blanket-shawl and rags more comfortably, and finally takes off her large linsey-woolsey apron to make a softer resting-place for the head and neck of the girl. The grateful friends that stand around now bless the servant as zealously as they blessed her mistress, and if she understood the language in which the warm Irish hearts express their gratitude, she would probably wonder who ’the Vargin and all the holy saints and angels’ are, that are invoked for her sake.

Again the farm-lady goes away, and returns bearing a small bottle of medicine, that she bids the red-cloaked woman give the sick girl in about an hour. She then leaves her patient and motley guests to their supper and night’s repose, followed by such prayers as the poor alone know how to utter, and perhaps how to feel.

CHAPTER II.

The farmer.

The rainbow was a true prophet; the sun that went down so gloriously last night amid the half-dried tears of a lately weeping earth, has arisen this morning with a resolution to dry up all the remaining tears, and to make the Sabbath as it should be—a day of rejoicing. Sunrise amongst the hills and valleys! I wish we all saw it oftener. Not only would the glorious spectacle make us wiser and better, but the early rising would be not only conducive to health and good spirits, but to the addition of a vast amount of time to the waking and working hours of our very short life.

All nature arouses herself by degrees, as the great source of light rises from his couch, curtained with rose and daffodil-coloured drapery. As these gorgeous curtains spread east and west, and he takes his morning bath in the clouds and vapours, rises up the proud monarch of the farm-yard, as if in bold rivalry, outspreads his fine plumage in emulation of the rose and daffodil curtains, and bids him welcome with a voice so loud and shrill, that he must almost hear it from his domed throne above. More arbitrary in his kingdom than the sun in his, this grand Turk insists on arousing all his subjects; and the sleepy inmates of his harem withdraw their heads from beneath their wings, and, one by one, begin to smooth their feathers, and to descend lazily from their dormitories. A faint twittering is heard amongst the ivy-leaves, in answer to ‘the cock’s shrill clarion,’ and in a few seconds, the little sleepers amongst the oak and ash trees take it up, and by the time the sun has come out of his bath, and the cock has ceased crowing, there is a full chorus of heart stirring minstrelsy round about the quiet farm. Down below in the meadow, the cattle begin to shake off the dew-drops from their hides, and to send forth a plaintive low as they slowly seek their early breakfast in the spangled grass, or by the

steaming river. Away among the hills, the faint bleat of the sheep echoes from heath to heath, whilst their white fleeces dot the plains. Over the face of happy nature creeps a glow that seems to come from the heart, and to make her look up, rejoicing, to the sun as part of herself, and yet a type of the Great Creator.

Page 7

But whilst this Sabbath morning hymn thus rises, betimes, to the throne of Him who sits beyond the sunbeams, tired man sleeps on. The farmer's household is still slumbering, and after a week of hard labour, taking an additional hour's repose on that day which was graciously appointed as a day of rest. Scarcely can the sun peep in through the drawn curtains and shutters of the windows, and no song of birds, or low of cows, seems as yet to have reached the closed ears of the sleepers. Master and men alike obtain the bounteous gift of sleep so often denied to the less laborious rich.

We are wrong in supposing that all are slumbering in the farm-house. Quietly the mistress steps out of the back door which she has noiselessly opened, as if afraid of disturbing her household. As the brisk little figure moves across the farm-yard, it is instantly surrounded by a flock of poultry that seem intuitively to expect an alms at her hand, as do the poor Irish who haunt her dwelling. But she has nothing to give them thus early in the morning, and scarcely heeds their cackling and crowing. The fierce house-dog, however, will be noticed as bounding through the poultry, and knocking down one luckless hen, he jumps upon his mistress, and almost oversets her also. The 'Down Lion, down,' of the 'gintle voice,' serves only to make him more demonstrative, as he gambols roughly on her path as she proceeds towards the barn.

Mrs Prothero—such is the name of our farm-lady—had been haunted all night long by visions of the poor Irish girl. She had not slept as soundly as the other members of her family, because there was a fellow-creature suffering within her little circle. Although she had lived nearly fifty years in the world, and had been variously cheated and imposed upon by beggars of all kinds, her heart was still open to 'melting charity,' and liable to be again and again deceived. As she stopped before the barn door with the key in her hand, Lion began a low growl. He could never get over his antipathy to Irish beggars, and all his mistress's influence was necessary to prevent the growl becoming a bark. She put her ear to the door and listened, but no sound disturbed the stillness within. She knocked gently, but there was no answer. At last she thought she heard a feeble voice say something which she interpreted into 'Come in,' and she turned the key in the lock of the door and opened the top half of it. She looked in, and saw all her mendicant guests in profound repose, excepting the girl Gladys, who endeavoured to rise as she perceived the kindly face, but fell back again immediately. She unclosed the other half of the door, and carefully excluding Lion, by shutting it after her, walked softly across the barn to the rough couch on which Gladys lay. She appeared to be in the same state of exhaustion as on the previous night; and if she had noticed Mrs Prothero at all, the transient effort was over, and she remained with closed eyes and listless form, whilst the good woman looked at her and felt her pulse. Then her lips moved slightly, as if wishing to say something, but emitted no sound. What was to be done for one in such a helpless state? Mrs Prothero's kind heart sank within her.

Page 8

As she did not like to disturb the weary wretches, who were sleeping so soundly in their rags amongst the hay and straw, she prepared to leave the barn; but as she moved away, the girl's eyes unclosed, and glanced dimly at her through a film of tears. Nourishment seemed the only remedy that presented itself to her mind. She smiled kindly at the girl, murmured 'I will come again,' and went through the sleepers towards the door, pausing, however, to look at the peaceful face of the baby, as it lay on its mother's arm, covered with the old red cloak.

She returned to the house, and went to the clean, large dairy, where she took a cup of the last night's milk, already covered with rich cream, from a pan and went with it to the back kitchen, where was a fire, kept up all night by means of the hard Welsh coal, and heat-diffusing balls. She warmed the milk, procured a piece of fine white bread, and once more returned to the barn.

She administered these remedies to her patient, who swallowed them with the same avidity and difficulty as she had done the broth. She fancied she again heard the words, 'God bless you, my lady,' but they were so faint that she was not sure.

Again she threaded her way amongst the sleepers, and left the barn. She went into her garden, and walked for a few moments amongst the flowers, as if for council. The bees were beginning to hum about the hives, and the butterflies to flit amongst the flowers. She stood and looked at the beautiful scene before her—the woods, hills, river, and above, the morning sun—and offered up a prayer and thanksgiving to the Giver of all good things. Her thoughtful face brightened into a smile, and her walk became more brisk as she left her garden, and went again into the farm-yard.

The cow-man was bringing up the cows to be milked, and he looked astonished as he greeted his mistress. So did the two ruddy, disheveled farm maidens, who had barely turned out of their beds to milk the cows, and had paid small attention either to their toilet or ablutions.

The house was perfectly quiet as she entered it, and she crept upstairs, and into her bedroom very softly, for fear of disturbing any one.

'Where in the world have you been, my dear?' greeted her, in a gruff voice from amongst the bed-clothes, that covered a large old-fashioned bed, hung with chintz curtains.

'Go to sleep and don't trouble, Davy, *bach'*, [Footnote A Welsh term of endearment, equivalent to 'dear,' pronounced like the German.] quietly replied the brisk little dame.

'Go to sleep, indeed! Easier said than done, when one wakes up in a fright, and finds you gone, nobody knows where. Now where *have* you been? You 'ont let one sleep, even of a Sunday morning.'

‘Well, now, don’t get into a passion, my dear—I mean, don’t be angry.’

’What have I to be angry about when I don’t know what you’ve been doing?’

Page 9

This was said in an injured tone, as if the heart under the bed-clothes were softer than the voice.

‘I didn’t mean to say you were angry, only I thought—’

‘You thought what?’

‘Well, my dear, I have only just been across to the barn.’ This was uttered timidly and pleadingly, and as if our good housewife knew she had been doing wrong.

Suddenly, a large red face started up from amongst the bed-clothes, ornamented with a peculiarly-shaped white cap and tassel.

‘Now you haven’t been after them Irishers again?’ exclaimed the owner of the red face. ’The idle vagabonds! I vow to goodness that all our money, and food and clothing, too, I believe, go to feed a set of good-for-nothing, ragged rascals.’

‘Hush, Davy! Remember they are God’s creatures, and this is Sunday.’

‘I don’t know that. And if it’s Sunday, why mayn’t I sleep in peace?’

‘Indeed, I am very sorry. But that poor girl I told you of is so ill!’

’Hang the poor girl! Then send her to the workhouse, and they’ll give her a lift home.’

‘But if she has no home?’

‘Then let her go to her parish.’

‘But they don’t seem to have any parishes in Ireland.’

’No parishes! I suppose that’s the geography the vagabonds teach you? Well you pay dear enough for your lessons. But I tell you what, Mary, you just go and tell ’em all to decamp this minute.’

‘But the girl is too weak and ill.’

‘Then send her to the Union, I say, and they are bound to forward her.’

’But a Sunday! and the House miles away! Oh, Davy, we really cannot do it to-day!’

’What with the Irish, and one charity and another, I declare there’s no peace in life! Name o’ goodness, ’oornan, why do you harbour such folk? If the girl’s too ill to go on with her gang, they must leave her at the Union, or else get the overseers to send for her.’

‘Will you just go and look at her?’

’No, I ‘ont, and that’s plain speaking!’

Here the red face, and white night-cap and tassel, suddenly, disappeared amongst the bed-clothes.

Mrs Prothero considered a few minutes, and again left the room, and went to the barn. Here, all was confusion and consultation. They had tried to help Gladys to rise, and the girl could not stand.

A clamour of voices assailed Mrs Prothero, who was bewildered by the noise, and terrified at the remembrance of her husband.

‘My good people, I don’t know what to advise,’ she said at last.

‘She don’t want to laive Carrmanthinshire, my leddy.’

‘We’ll be ruined intirely if we stop till she’s cured, yer leddyship!’

‘Niver a frind in the worrld, yer honour.’

’Her mother and father, sisthers and brothers, all dead of the faver and the famine.’

’Nobody left but her relations in Carrmarrthinshire, and, maybe, they’re all dead and buried, yer honour’s glory.’

Page 10

‘And what’ll we do wid her, poor sowl?’

Mrs Prothero was looking compassionately on the poor girl, whilst sentence upon sentence was poured into her ear; and as the death of her relation was mentioned, she fancied she perceived a movement in her seemingly impassive features. She opened her eyes, and looked at Mrs Prothero, who went to her, and seeing her lips move, knelt down by her side.

‘Let them go, and send me to the workhouse, if you please, my lady,’ she murmured.

Mrs Prothero once more left the barn, promising to return shortly, and, with trembling steps, again sought the apartment where her lord and master was reposing. A very decided snore met her ear. She stood by the bedside, and looked at the tassel, which was the only portion visible of her better half. She sat down on a chair; she got up again; she fussed about the room; she even opened the drawers and took out the Sunday attire of that Somnus before her. But nothing she could do would arouse him.

At last she gently touched the face. A louder snore was the only reply. She gave a nervous push to the shoulder, and whispered into the bed-clothes, ‘My dear.’

‘Well, what now?’ growled the justly irritated sleeper.

’My dear, I am very sorry, but the poor girl is too ill to move, and I really don’t know what is to be done.’

‘Upon my very deed, if you are not enough to provoke a saint!’ broke out Mr Prothero, now fairly sitting up in bed. ’If you will encourage vagrants, get rid of ’em, and don’t bother me. I’ll tell you what it is, Mrs Prothero, if all of ’em are not off the farm before I’m up, I’ll give ’em such a bit of my mind as ’ll keep ’em away for the future; see if I don’t.’

Mrs Prothero saw that her husband was redder in the face than usual, and she had a very great dread of putting him in a passion; still she ventured one word more very meekly.

‘But the girl, David?’

’What’s the girl to you or me! we’ve a girl of our own, and half-a-dozen servant girls. We don’t want any more. Send her to the Union.’

‘How can we send her?’

’Let the rascally Irish manage that, ’tis no affair of mine; but if you bother me any more, I vow I’ll take a whip and drive ’em, girl and all, off the premises.’

‘Very well, David,’ said Mrs Prothero, submissively, and with a heavy sigh: ‘but if the girl should die?’

She walked across to the door, paused on the threshold, and glanced back; but there was no change in the rubicund face. She went into the passage, and slowly closed the door, holding the handle in her hand for a few seconds as she did so. She walked deliberately down the passage, pausing at each step. Before she was at the end of it, a loud voice reached her ear. She joyfully turned back and re-entered the bedroom.

‘Yes, David?’ she said quietly.

’If the girl is really bad, send her in the cart, or let her have a horse, if you like,’ growled Mr Prothero. ’Only I do wish, mother, you would have nothing to do with them Irishers.’

Page 11

‘Thank you, my dear,’ said the quiet little woman. ’Then if the rest go away, I may manage about the girl?’

’Do what you like, only get rid of ’em somehow.’

‘Thank you.’

’Oh, you needn’t thank me! I’d as soon send every one of ’em to jail as not; but I can’t stand your puffing and sighing just as if they were all your own flesh and blood.’

‘We’re all the same flesh and blood, my dear.’

’I’d be uncommon sorry to think so. I’ve nothing but Welsh flesh and blood about me, and should be loath to have any other, Irish, Scotch, or English either.’

Mrs Prothero disappeared.

’That ’ooman ‘ould wheedle the stone out of a mill,’ continued the farmer, rubbing his eyes, and deliberately taking off his night-cap, ’and yet she don’t ever seem to have her own way, and is as meek as Moses. She has wheedled me out of my Sunday nap, so I suppose I may as well get up. Hang the Irish! There is no getting rid of ’em. She’s given ’em a night’s lodging, and a supper for so many years, that they come and ask as if it was their due. But I’ll put a stop to it, yet, in spite of her, or my name isn’t David Prothero.’

When Mr Prothero came forth from his dormitory, he was in his very best Sunday attire. As he walked across the farm-yard in search of his wife, there was an air about him that seemed to say, ’I am monarch of all I survey.’ Indeed, few monarchs are as independent, and proud of their independence, as David Prothero of Glanyravon.

He was a tall, muscular man, of some fifty years of age. He was well made, and of that easy, swinging gait, that is rather the teaching of Dame Nature, than of the dancing mistress or posture master. His face was full and ruddy, betokening health, spirits, and that choleric disposition to which his countrymen are said to incline, whether justly or unjustly is not for me to determine. His hair had a reddish tinge, and his whiskers were decidedly roseate, bearing still further testimony to a slight irrascibility of temperament. But he was a good-looking man, in spite of his hair and whiskers, which, as his wife admired them, are not to be despised.

‘Where’s your mistress, Sam?’ roared Mr Prothero across the farm-yard.

‘In the barn, master,’ answered a man, who was eating bread and cheese on the gate, and swinging his legs pleasantly about.

‘Tell her I want her,’

In answer to the summons, immediately appeared his worthy helpmate. She carried a very beautiful half-blown rose in her hand, which, as soon as she approached her husband, she placed carefully in his button-hole, standing on tiptoe to perform this graceful Sunday morning service.

‘Thank you, mother,’ said Mr Prothero, smiling, and looking down complacently on his little wife.

What went with all his lecture upon the profligacy of Irish beggars? I suppose it was silently delivered from his breast to the rose, for none of it came to his lips, though it was quite ready to be heard when the rose made her appearance.

Page 12

All the Irish are gone except the girl, Davy, *bach*' said quiet Mrs Prothero, 'and they are gone to the Overseer to tell him about her, and I will see that she is sent to the workhouse to-night, that is to say if I can.'

'I suppose you fed and clothed the ragged rascals?'

'I just gave them some scraps for breakfast, and indeed their blessings did me good,'

'I should think they must. People that left a dying girl behind 'em.'

'They promised to come back and see after her when the hay-harvest is over. They are going into Herefordshire to get work, and she, poor thing, is looking for her relations in this county, and meant to get work here.'

'Well, I want my breakfast. I promised brother Jonathan to go to church to-day. He is going to preach a charity sermon for the Church Building Society, and wants my shilling. He and Mrs Jonathan are to come to-morrow, you know, my dear. I hope in my heart everything is as fine as fippence, or my lady 'll turn up her nose.'

'I can't make things neater, Davy.'

This was said by Mrs Prothero, in a desponding tone, quite different from her former quiet cheerfulness, and she accompanied the words by rubbing her hands nervously one over the other.

'There now, don't look as if you were going to be smothered. Mrs Jonathan isn't so bad as all that. I wish to goodness Jonathan hadn't married a fine lady. But then she brought him a good fortune, and it's all the better for our children.'

'I don't want her money.'

'But if it wasn't for her, my dear, Rowland would never have had an Oxford edication.'

'I'd as soon he had gone to Lampeter, or been made a good Wesleyan minister, and then he might have been content to stay in Wales, instead of going off to England.'

'There, there! never mind! He'll be a bishop some day; and though you do still incline to the chapel, you'll be proud of that. Now, name o' goodness, let's have some breakfast.'

With this peculiarly Welsh interjection, Mr Prothero turned towards the farm, and, followed by his wife, went to the desired repast.

CHAPTER III.

The farmer's daughter.

'Nobody has come for that poor girl, Netta, and I have'n't the heart to send her away,' said Mrs Prothero to her only daughter Janetta, towards the close of the Sunday, the morning of which we noticed in the last chapter.

'I am sure, mother, you have been plagued quite enough with her already. You have neither been to church nor chapel, and scarcely eaten a morsel all the day. I can't imagine what pleasure you take in such people.'

'I wouldn't care if your father was at home; but I don't quite like to have her into the house without his leave, and she is not fit to be left in the barn.'

'Into the house, mother! That wild Irish beggar! Why, father would get into a fury, and I'm sure I should be afraid to sleep in the same place with such a creature.'

Page 13

’Oh, my dear child! when will it please the Lord to soften your heart, and teach you that all men and women are brothers and sisters.’

‘Never, I’m sure, in that kind of way.’

Whilst the mother and daughter continue their conversation about Gladys, of which the above is a specimen, we will glance at Janetta Prothero, the spoilt daughter of Glanyravon Farm.

She is decidedly a pretty girl? some might call her a beauty. She has dark eyes, black hair, a clear pink and white complexion, a round, dimpled cheek, a fair neck, a passable nose, and a very red-lipped, pouting mouth. She is small of stature—not much taller than her mother—but so well-formed, that her delicate little figure is quite the perfection of symmetry. Her movements are languid rather than brisk like her mother’s, and she either has, or is desirous of having, more of the fine lady in her manners and appearance. We discern, as she talks, more of obstinacy than reason, and more of pride than sense, in her conversation, and the face rather expresses self-will than intellect, although not deficient in the latter.

We are led to suppose, from the appearance of the room in which the mother and daughter are located, that Miss Janetta is somewhat accomplished; more so than young ladies in her position commonly were some thirty or forty years ago. This is a large parlour, with some pretensions to be called a drawing-room. True, the furniture is of old-fashioned mahogany, the sofa of hair, the curtains of chintz, and all that appertains to the master and mistress of the house, of solid but ancient make. But the square piano, the endless succession of baskets, card-racks, *etc*., the footstools with the worsted-work dog and cat thereon emblazoned, the album and other books, so neatly and regularly placed round the table, and above all, three heads in very bad water-colours that adorn the walls—all proclaim the superior education of the daughter of the house, and her aspirations after modern gentility.

We will just take up the thread of the conversation of the mother and daughter at the end of it, and see what conclusions they have arrived at. In a somewhat doggedly excited tone, Miss Janetta says,—

’Well, mother, I know that father would be very angry, and that she might give us all low Irish fever. I shouldn’t wonder if she brought a famine with her.’

’Remember, Netta, who said “and if ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."’

’If those people are one’s brethren, as father says, the sooner we disown our relations the better.’

Whilst Miss Janetta was uttering this unchristian speech, and greatly shocking her mother thereby, a young man entered with a book in his hand, and throwing himself on the sofa, began to read. It was soon, however, evident that he was listening to the conversation, although he professedly kept his eyes on his book. Poor Mrs Prothero continued her efforts to enlist her daughter on the side of charity, but did not greatly prevail. The young man did not interfere, probably being aware that it is better to let two women finish their own quarrel.

Page 14

Again, however, they were interrupted by the appearance of a fourth, and more animated personage.

‘Good evening, Mrs Prothero. How do you do, Netta?’ exclaimed the new comer, shaking Mrs Prothero’s hand, and pulling Netta’s curls. Hereupon the young man arose from the sofa, and bowing profoundly, said,—

‘Good evening, Miss Gwynne,’ with a tone as grave as his appearance.

‘I beg your pardon, Mr Rowland,’ said the young lady, who we now introduce in form as Miss Gwynne of Glanyravon Park.

With a very becoming grace, she advanced and held out her hand to Mr Rowland Prothero, eldest son of the good farmer and his wife, just returned from Oxford. Mr Rowland slightly touched the hand, bowed again gravely, and placed a chair for Miss Gwynne.

‘I thought I should never come here again,’ said that young lady, turning from Mr Rowland with a nod and a ‘thank you,’ and retreating towards the window where the mother and daughter were standing, ’what with the rain, and poor papa’s nervous complaints, and all the affairs, I declare I have been as busy as possible.’

‘Now, Miss Gwynne, I am sure you will agree with me,’ cried Netta, suddenly brightening up and getting animated ’Do you think it right to encourage those Irish beggars?’

‘Right! no, of course I don’t.’

’And do you think people ought to allow them to come into the house—to take them in, and to—to shelter them in short?’

‘Decidedly not. I hope you don’t do such things, Mrs Prothero?’

There was a wicked twinkle in a merry eye as this was said.

‘The truth is, Miss Gwynne,’ said Mrs Prothero, slowly rubbing her hands one over another, ’there is a poor Irish girl in the barn almost dying, and it is impossible to send her to the Union to-night, or to leave her where she is.’

’Oh, I’ll write an order for the Union in papa’s name. You can’t believe a word those Irish say. You had better get her sent off directly.’

This was said with the air of command and decision of one not accustomed to have her orders disputed.

‘But, Miss Gwynne, if you only knew—’ began the overwhelmed Mrs Prothero.

’I know quite well. We are obliged to commit dozens of them as vagrants, and I should not at all wonder if we should not be compelled to have you taken up some day for harbouring suspicious characters.’

The tears stood in Mrs Prothero’s kind eyes. She had not much authority amongst the young people apparently.

‘There, mother! I knew Miss Gwynne would agree with me.’

’And do you think the law of Christian charity would agree with you, Netta?’ here broke in a grave and stern voice from the sofa.

Both the young ladies coloured at this interruption? Miss Gwynne with mortified dignity, Netta with anger. Mrs Prothero cast an appealing glance at her son, who came forward.

‘She may have my bed, mother,’ said the young man, colouring in his turn, as he met Miss Gwynne’s defiant glance, that seemed to say, ’Who are you?’

Page 15

‘How very absurd, Mr Rowland,’ said that young lady, laughing scornfully. ’I suppose, according to your law of Christian charity, we must fill our houses with all the Irish beggars that come through Carmarthenshire! A goodly company!’

‘Have you seen this poor girl. Miss Gwynne?’

‘No, certainly not, but I know by heart all she has to say.’

‘If you would but just see her,’ said Mrs Prothero entreatingly not daring to contradict the heiress of Glanyravon Park, who had a will of her own, if Mrs Prothero had not.

’With the greatest pleasure; but I know all the “my leddy’s,” “yer honour’s,” and “the sweet face o’ ye,” that I shall hear.’

’Don’t go, Miss Gwynne, you may take the fever. I wouldn’t go for the world,’ cried Netta.

‘I am not afraid of fevers or anything else, I hope,’ said Miss Gwynne contemptuously. ’You will be afraid of catching a toothache from infection next,’ and herewith she left the room, followed by Mrs Prothero.

During their short absence, Mr Rowland Prothero read his sister a very proper lecture for a clergyman, on Christian charity and filial obedience, to which she listened with pouting lips and knitted brow, but with no answering speech, good or bad. She was not silent because she had nothing to say, but because she was afraid of her brother, who was the only person of whom she was afraid. Her feelings, however, found vent in the leaves of a rose that she was pulling to pieces and scattering ruthlessly.

The lecturer on Christian charity was a tall, gentlemanly-looking young man, whose apparently habitual gravity of deportment warmed into earnestness and animation as he talked to his sister. He looked and spoke as if his soul were in the words he uttered, and as if it had been choice and not compulsion that led him to become a minister in Christ’s family.

The entrance of Mrs Prothero and Miss Gwynne was a great relief to Netta. She looked up briskly at the latter, as if sure of sympathy, and if eyes full of tears could give it, she certainly was satisfied.

Mr Rowland Prothero perceived the tears, and retired to his sofa, taking up his book and pretending to read.

’Can I help you, Mrs Prothero? There does not seem a moment to lose. I will send for a doctor, or do anything I can,’ said Miss Gwynne.

‘Thank you, dear Miss Gwynne,’ replied Mrs Prothero, ’I will put her in Owen’s room.’

’Who can we get to bring her in? Shall I go and fetch one of the men? Netta, do get some one to help us.’

‘I will help you, if you will allow me,’ said Mr Rowland, rising from his sofa, and looking at Miss Gwynne with a glance of warm approval.

’Pray do; now; at once. I will go with you whilst your mother prepares the room. You could carry her quite well, for she is as thin as a ghost; I never saw such a wretched girl.’

Miss Gwynne hurried to the barn, followed by Rowland. They found Gladys with a farm-servant by her side, apparently either dead or asleep.

Page 16

Rowland Prothero knelt down, and took her up gently in his arms, Miss Gwynne assisting. The poor girl unclosed her eyes, and looked wistfully at the face that was bending over her.

’You are with friends, and in God’s hands,’said Rowland gently, as the eyes languidly reclosed.

He carried her upstairs to his brother’s room, and having placed her on the bed, left her to the care of his mother and Miss Gwynne.

Whilst they were employed in getting her into bed, a house-servant came to say that Miss Gwynne was wanted. She found a footman awaiting her, who told her that his master had sent him in search of her, and was in a state of great anxiety about her. She ran up to Mrs Prothero for a few minutes.

‘Really papa is too absurd, too provoking,’ she said with a vexed voice; ’he has sent after me again, and I am sure he must know I am here. Let me hear if I can be of any service, Mrs Prothero; I will send anything in the way of medicine or nourishment. Good-bye, I will come again to-morrow.’

‘Mr and Mrs Prothero, the Vicarage, come to-morrow,’ said Mrs Prothero.

’Yes, they are to dine with us on Wednesday, and told me they meant to sleep here. Good evening. Dear me, how wretched that poor girl looks.’

Miss Gwynne was soon hastening homewards, heedless of the splendid sky above, or the glowing fields beneath. She was making reflections on the excellence of Mrs Prothero, the silliness of Netta, the precision of Rowland, and the misery of the girl Gladys. Thence she turned her thoughts upon herself, and suddenly discovered that she had been too decided in at once ordering any person to the workhouse, without at first knowing the case.

’But it is no wonder that I am too decided sometimes, when my father is so dreadfully weak and vacillating,’ she said to herself; ’indeed I do not think, after all, that one can be too decided in this irresolute world.’

This very decided young lady is the only child and supposed heiress of Gwynne of Glanyravon, as her father is usually called. She is an aristocratic-looking personage, with a certain I-will-have-my-own-way air, that you cannot help recognising at once. She is rather taller than most tall women, and the tokens of decision in her carriage, eyes, voice, and general deportment would be disagreeable, but for the extreme grace of her figure, the unaffected ease of her manner, and the remarkable clearness and sweetness of her voice. She is handsome, too, with a noble forehead, sensible grey eyes, glossy chestnut hair, and a very fine complexion. The many of her nominal

friends and admirers who at heart dislike her, prophesy that in a few years she will be coarse, and say that she is already too masculine; but the few who love her, think that she will improve both in person and mind, as she rubs off the pride and self-opinionativeness of twenty years of country life against the wholesome iron of society and the world. But we shall see.

Page 17

At present she is fortunate enough to rule everybody she comes in contact with; her father, his servants, his tenants, the poor, the very mendicants that come to the door.

Certainly there is something very charming in her appearance, as she hurries up the fine old avenue that leads to her ancestral home. The ease of her port, the graceful dignity of her extreme haste, the heightened colour, and the glowing eye, are all very handsome, in spite of the coarseness in perspective. The poor footman can scarcely keep up with her; he has not found the last twenty years at Glanyravon productive of the same lightness of step to him, as to his young mistress, and wishes she were a little less agile.

A handsome country house in a good park has not often in itself much of the picturesque. Ruskin would not consider Glanyravon, with its heavy porch, massive square walls, and innumerable long windows, a good specimen of architectural beauty; still it is a most comfortable dwelling, beautifully situated; and the magnificent woods at the back, and grand view in front, would make the most unartistic building picturesque in appearance if not in reality.

Miss Gwynne ran up the broad stairs, through the large hall, and into a good library. Here a very tall, thin, sickly-looking man was seated in an easy-chair.

‘My dear Freda, I am so thankful you are come!’

’My dear father, how I wish you would not send for me the very moment I go out. I really cannot be pestered with servants. It fidgets me to death to have a man walking and puffing after me.’

‘But just consider, my love, the lateness of the hour.’

‘It is scarcely eight o’clock now, papa, and as light as possible.’

‘I am too nervous, my love, to bear your being out alone.’

Miss Gwynne rang the bell authoritatively, and the footman entered.

’Tell Mrs Davies to send some jelly, and whatever strengthening things there are in the house, to Glanyravon Farm immediately,’ she said; then turning to her father, added, ’do you know, papa, Mrs Prothero has taken in a sick Irish girl, and I have abetted it.’

‘You, child! I hope she has no infectious disease; it quite alarms me.’

’I really don’t know. But Mr and Mrs Jonathan Prothero are going to Glanyravon to-morrow, and remember you invited them to dinner on Wednesday.’

’I am very sorry! that man kills me with the antiquities of the Welsh language, and heaven knows what old things that happened before the flood. But you must entertain them. I suppose we had better ask young Rowland.’

’Oh, papa! He is so dreadfully quiet and stiff, and thinks there is only one man who ever went to Oxford, and he is that man; and I can’t endure him.’

‘Perhaps not, my dear—indeed, perhaps not.’

’If we ask him, we must ask Netta. She has come home quite accomplished from boarding school, and would do in a quiet way. Mrs Jonathan would be pleased, and you know she *is* a lady, though awfully particular. I can’t endure her either.’

Page 18

‘Perhaps you could invite Lady Mary, and Miss Nugent to meet them?’

’I don’t think they would like it. They would not object to the two clergymen, because, as Lady Mary says, ’You see, my dear, the cloth is a passport to all grades of society;’ but they would not approve of Netta. That is to say, Lady Mary would think herself insulted if we introduced her sweet Wilhelmina to a farmer’s daughter.’

’She is a very superior woman, my love, and understands etiquette, and all that sort of thing, better than any one I ever met.’

’She seems to me to understand her own interests, papa, as well as most people. But I will tell her that Sir Hugh and the Protheros are coming, and that we have asked Netta, so she can accept or decline as she likes.’

’Do you think it wise, my dear, to put yourself so much on a level with Miss Prothero, as to invite her?’

’Oh! she understands how we are very well. It will be a source of pride and satisfaction to her, without making her presume more than before; and the vicar and his lady will like the attention.’

‘I dread the vicar. His genealogies are too much for me.’

’Oh, I can put up with the vicar’s antiquities, but not with the young vicar’s pedantic Oxonianism. He does think so well of himself, and quite rules every one at home.’

‘Oh! that is very fatiguing, I should think.’

’I wish he would fall in love with Miss Nugent, and she with him, and carry off her forty-thousand pounds. She is silly enough for anything, and it would be such a downfall to her mother’s pride.’

’Her mother is much too careful, my dear, and by far too superior a woman. And Miss Wilhelmina is very accomplished and all that sort of thing, you know, and likely to make a fine match. She is very pretty, too.’

’Yes; she and Netta Prothero would run in harness. Pretty, silly, rather affected, and having drawn each four or five drawings, and learnt six tunes on the piano. Only the one is more fashionable than the other. Do you know, papa, Miss Nugent can play the Irish and Scotch quadrilles, and Netta ‘*Ar hydy Nos,*’ with small variations. We will have a concert; you know I have asked the Rice Rices?’

’Very well, my dear. Now I think I will read a sermon to the servants, so just ring the bell.’

CHAPTER IV.

The miser.

Whilst Mr Gwynne is reading his sermon, and Mrs Prothero is nursing the mendicant Gladys, an event is passing in the neighbouring country-town, involving matters of interest to her, and those belonging to her. In a small bedroom over a little huckster's shop, an old man lies dangerously ill. By his side is seated a middle-aged woman watching. In a dark corner, behind the bed, stands a man, who is so deep in shadow that you scarcely know whether he is young or old.

The room is small and shabby, and contains apparently few comforts for one nearly approaching his last hour.

Page 19

There is a tap at the door, upon which the man behind the bed goes out, and returns, almost immediately, followed by Rowland Prothero. He goes towards the bed, and stooping down, whispers to the sick man.

‘Father, you wished to see Rowland—he is here.’

Rowland advances, and takes the seat vacated for him by the woman.

The three inmates of the room are Mr and Mrs Griffith Jenkins, and their only son, Howel. They are cousins of the Protheros, Mrs Jenkins being Mr Prothero’s first cousin, and the members of the younger generation being consequently second cousins.

Griffith Jenkins motions to his wife and son to leave the room, which they do immediately. Rowland kneels beside his bed, the better to hear what he has to say. He appears, however to revive, and is distinct enough in his enunciation of the following words, though very slow.

‘My son Howel is come back, Mr Rowland, and do promise to be study.’

‘I am very glad to hear it; it must be a great comfort to you,’

’But I am not seure of him. He will be spending my money that I have been takking such pains to make.’

‘I hope he may do good with it, Uncle Griff.’

’Good! no such thing. Squander, squander! Spend the beauty gold! Will you promise me to see to it? tak’ care of it?’

’I, Uncle Griff! I have no power with Howel. Would it not be better to pray to God to guide Howel, and trust in a higher power than mine?’

Mr Jenkins put a long, thin, bony hand out of bed, and grasped Rowland’s hand tightly. He fixed two keen black eyes upon him, and, as he half raised himself in bed, displayed a withered face, the most remarkable feature of which was a very prominent, hooked nose, like the beak of a large bird.

’You wasn’t thinking I was going to die, was you, Rowland? I ’ont just awhile, see you. But tell you your father there’s more gold than he is thinking of; and Howel’ll be a husband for any one, much less for Miss Netta. Promise me to be lending him a hand, if he do keep constant to your sister.’

’I am sorry, Uncle Griff, that I cannot promise anything for Howel. If he grows steady as you say, there can be no objection; but he must prove it first. Would you like me to read to you, and pray to Almighty God, for Christ’s sake, to change his and all our hearts?’

’I didn’t be wanting a parson, but a relation, sir; and I don’t be going to die yet. Look you here. There’s money in the bank—there’s more in mortgages on Davies, Llansadwn, and Rees, Llanarthney—there’s more on loan to Griffiths, Pontardewe,—Jones, Glantewey,—Pugh the draper, Llansant—and others. And there’s a box beside. Mind you, I ’ont die yet, but I tell you, because I can trust you; and Howel don’t know nothing.’

‘May I write it down for you, Uncle Griff; or would you have a lawyer?’

’No, no. I’ve had enough of law in paying for Howel, and nothing come of it. But you may be writing down a little. Here, in that chest, there’s pen, ink and paper; tak’ you my keys, and open you it.’

Page 20

Griffith Jenkins took from under his pillow a bunch of keys, and fumbling amongst them, gave one to Rowland, with which he opened the chest, and procured the necessary writing apparatus.

‘Give you me my keys—quick, quick!’ cried the old man, again hiding them somewhere in his bed.’

At his dictation, Rowland wrote a list of the different moneys he possessed in various places, and was utterly astonished to find that he had soon written down between sixty and seventy thousand pounds. Everybody knew that Griffith Jenkins was rich, but nobody had guessed how rich he was.

’Now say, “I give and bequeath to my wife, ’Lizbeth Jenkins, ten thousand pound out of the aforesaid mortgage on Jacob Davies Llansadwn’s property."’

‘Is that all, Uncle Griff?’

‘Yes, I sha’n’t say no more.’

‘And the box of gold?’

Again the miser grasped Rowland’s hand, and fixed his keen eyes on his face.

’I ’ont be dying yet, and I ’ont be putting that down to-night. Tell you your father what there is, without the box, and without more mortgages and loans; but don’t you be talking to anybody about it. Mind you, not to Howel nor to ‘Lizbeth: promise me.’

Rowland promised.

The miser fell back exhausted.

’And now Uncle Griff, may I pray for you? Only think how soon you may be called to your account, to say exactly how you have employed your time, and the talents given—’

’I have done plenty—plenty—all out at interest, at five, six, even ten per cent.; none wrapped up in a napkin. I don’t be calling a box a napkin, Rowland Prothero.’

’May I call in Mrs Jenkins and Howel, and pray for you? Think; oh think, of the great Judge, and great Mediator. O God, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!’

As Rowland said this, he clasped his hands, and looked upwards, in unutterable supplication. The old man was alarmed.

’I don’t be going to die, but you may call ’em in.’

Rowland rose and obeyed. Mrs Jenkins appeared with a candle in her hand. The old man rose with an effort as she drew near the bed.

‘Put—out—the—candle,’ he muttered.

As the night was fast drawing in, Mrs Jenkins hesitated.

‘Put—out—the—candle,’ repeated the dying man, with a still stronger effort to rise and extinguish it himself. ’The ruling passion strong in death’ must be attended to, and the light was extinguished.

Rowland Prothero clasped his hands with a groan, and repeated aloud a prayer from the service for the dying. The terrified wife knelt down by the bed in the deep gloom, and in the still deeper gloom behind, the son buried his face in his arms, and leaned upon the little table.

Whilst Rowland Prothero was praying from the very depth of his heart for the soul that was thus awfully passing to its account, they were all aroused by the last fearful struggle between death and life of him who had made gold his god. For some time they feared to rekindle the light, but at last they ventured. It was but to witness the last dread pangs of one who had made wife and son secondary to the great absorbing passion of avarice; and now he was constrained to depart from the scene of his toil, and to leave all that he had grovelled for behind him, for ever!

Page 21

We will not dwell upon the awful hours that succeeded his final words. He neither spoke nor was conscious again. Light and dark were alike to him. Save that he grasped something in his right hand with an iron hold, reason and power had left him; death was still fighting with life, and gradually gaining the last great victory.

A few hours afterwards, and when that victory had been gained, the scene was changed in that small house. The chamber of death was deserted, and the wretched clay of the miser, decently covered with a white sheet, lay heavy and still, where the spirit that formerly animated it had been accustomed to brood over the miserable gains of its clays and years on earth.

In the small sitting-room below, behind the little shop where these gains had been begun and continued for half-a-century or more, sat the widow, surrounded by a score of gossips, who had left their beds and homes at daybreak to condole with her.

It would have been much more unnatural than natural if Mrs Jenkins had grieved at heart for the husband she had lost. Married, or rather sold to him, when he was fifty and she thirty, she had lived five or six and twenty years of pure misery with him. She had starved with him, when she could not pilfer from him, and had endured patiently all these years what seemed past endurance in expectation of the closing scene. She had married and lived upon the prospect of his death, and it was come at last; and now that it was come, the awfulness of that last struggle overpowered her, and she wept and lamented as copiously as if her husband had been the kindest and most liberal in the world. Still, she was free, with competence, she hoped, in perspective? and this thought, together with the ever all-pervading one of her idol, her treasure, her only son, and his expectations, more than counterbalanced that of the death she had witnessed.

‘Come you, don’t you be takking on so,’ said one old woman soothingly, as the widow rocked herself to and fro, and held her handkerchief to her eyes.

‘Tak’ you this drop o’ tea,’ said another, ‘it’ll be doing you good,’

‘The Lord will be having mercy on his soul,’ said a third, whose conscience was large when she was offering comfort.

‘There now, keep up your spirits, Mrs Jinkins, fach,’ said a fourth, entering with a comfortable glass of gin and water that did seem of an exhilarating nature.

‘There’s a comfort Howel will be to you now!’ said a fifth triumphantly.

’Deed to goodness, Griffey Jinkins was a saving man, and you have lost him, Mrs Jinkins, fach,’ began the friend with the gin and water; ’but I am seeing no use in takking on so. When John Jones died, he was leaving me with ten children, and they have all

come on somehow. And you have only wan son, and he is so ginteel! Drink you this, my dear, and don't be down-hearted.'

Mrs Jenkins turned from the tea to the gin and water with no apparent reluctance, and swallowed a portion of it. Revived by the beverage, she responded to the condolences of her friends by more rockings, sobs, and applications of the handkerchief and finally unburdened herself of her grief in the following manner.

Page 22

’My son Howel, oh yes, he’ll be a blessing to me, I know. Says I to my poor Griffey—oh, dear, only to be thinking of him now!—says I, “Let us be giving Howel a good eddication, and he so clever as never was, and able to be learning everything he do put his mind to, and never daunted at nothing—grammar, nor music, nor Latin, nor no heathen languages, and able to read so soon as he could speak, and knowing all the beasts in the ark one from another, when he was no bigger than that,” says I, to my poor Griffey; “oh, annwyl! we have only wan child, let him be a clargy, or a ’torney, or a doctor, or something smart,” and says he, “I can’t afford it.” He was rather near or so, you know, was my poor Griffey; but I never was letting him rest day or night, and the only thing he wasn’t liking was being much talked over. So says I, “Come you, Jinkins, bach,”—he liked to be called by his sirname—“if you do larn Howel well, he’ll be making his fortune some day,” for he do say so, he do be always saying, “I’ll be a great man, and get as much money as father.” I eused to put in the last words of myself, for Howel never was taking to making money, but ’ould as soon give it away as not. Only poor Griffey—oh dear! oh dear!—was never knowing that, because I did be hiding it from him as much as I could.’

Whilst the widow talks on in this strain to her sympathising friends, her son and Rowland Prothero are in another small room of the house, engaged in a very different style of conversation. The room in which they are is worth a few words of description, not for any beauty or desert of its own, but for its heterogeneous, contents. You would think a small music warehouse, a miniature tobacco shop, or branch depot of foreign grammars and dictionaries were before you. Every kind of musical instrument seems to have met with a companion in this tiny apartment. Here are a violin, violoncello, horn, and cornopean; there an old Welsh harp and unstrung guitar. On this shelf are pipes of all sorts and sizes, forms, and nations—the straight English, the short German, and the long Turkish; on that are cigar-boxes, snuff-boxes, and tobacco-boxes of various kinds and appearances. Scattered about the room are play-books without number, from Shakspeare to the dramatists of the present day; and, interspersed with these, collections of songs of all countries and of all grades of merit. Some few novels, mostly French, live with the plays and songs; and Latin, French, German, Italian, Welsh, Spanish, and English grammars and dictionaries take up their abode in every available corner. A quantity of fishing tackle and a gun are thrown upon the window seat, and an embroidered waistcoat, blue satin cravat, and a pair of yellow kid gloves lie on an unoccupied chair.

From the general appearance of this room, the imagination would conceive great things of its inmate. All we shall here say is that he is one who has the reputation of being a natural genius, and firmly believes that he is one.

Page 23

As all natural geniuses are supposed to have something very remarkable in their appearance, we will just take a sketch of the miser's son, as he alternately leans on the table or stalks about the room during his earnest conversation with his cousin. He has decidedly sentimental hair; long, black, shining, and with a tendency to curl; he has what might be termed poetical eyes, bright, piercing, and very restless; the sharp, aquiline nose of his father, slightly modified; and a mouth and brow which curl and knit in a manner that may be poetic, but might be disagreeable, under less soothing influences. That he is very handsome no one could dispute, and it is equally certain that he has an air much above the position in which he was born; but the expression of his face inspires distrust rather than confidence, and conveys the impression that there is more of passion than feeling beneath the fiery eyes and compressed mouth.

A great contrast to this family genius is presented in the person of his cousin Rowland, now addressing him earnestly and seriously upon the grave subjects naturally uppermost at such a time. He, too, is sufficiently good-looking, with an open, though grave, cast of countenance, fine, soft, hazel eyes, and a tall, manly figure. By 'sufficiently good-looking,' I mean that he is neither very handsome nor ugly, and when his lady friends debate upon his outer man they generally wind up by saying, 'Well, if he isn't handsome, he is very genteel.'

We are not going to repeat here the well-known fable of the 'Hare and the Tortoise,' but something of the character of those animals may be found in the cousins. At their first dame's school, as well as at the more advanced grammar school of their little town. Howel was always able to beat Rowland in swiftness, whilst Rowland effectually distanced Howel in the long run. It was Rowland who carried off the prizes, when study and prolonged endeavour were necessary to obtain them, whilst Howel eclipsed all his contemporaries, if a theme were to be written, or a poem learnt.

Such differences are so frequent, and have been so often discussed that it is scarcely necessary to pursue the contrast further; but the result at the present stands thus. Howel, the elder of the two, has dipped a little into everything; has gained a reputation for genius; has been articled to an attorney—but is in no apparent danger of becoming one—has written various articles for the county papers, and has had the pleasure of seeing them printed; has acquired a smattering of several languages, and various styles of music; and has proved himself an admired beau amongst the ladies, and a favourite boon companion amongst the gentlemen. He has been idolised and spoilt by his mother, and stinted and pinched by his father, and having no very great respect or admiration for the talents or conduct of either parent, has not tried much to please them, save when it suited him.

The result of all this, if not already apparent, will doubtless be seen hereafter, for, at four or five and twenty, conduct and principles begin to establish themselves.

Page 24

Rowland Prothero is very much the reverse of all this. From a child he had a desire to enter the Church, which desire was fostered by his uncle and aunt into a resolution, when he grew old enough to resolve. As they very nearly adopted and educated him, his parents made no objection, and as they were ambitious to raise their family in worldly position, they spared no expense.

Rowland was reckoned dull, but plodding, at Rugby, whither his uncle sent him. However, his dulness and plodding were more successful than the brightness of many, since they managed to gain a scholarship at school, which helped him at Oxford. He was called proud and obstinate, and he was both. Pride and obstinacy were the characteristics of his family, but in him they fortunately tended to good: inasmuch as his pride generally led him to do well, and his obstinacy kept up his pride.

At present, it would be difficult to say whether he is a young man likely to shine in the path he has chosen, or to walk quietly along it unnoticed. His friends do not anticipate anything remarkable, but they expect him to be slow and sure. He did very well at college, but gained no greater honours than the respect and goodwill of those he was known to. Query—Is not that worth as much, morally, as a first class?

At home, he is understood by few. He has not many associates, because, either from his own fault, or some mental peculiarity, he cannot fall in with those who are immediately about him; and consequently is rather feared by his acquaintances and reckoned proud, stiff, and conceited—above his birth, in short.

With him, as with Howel and every one else, the course of years will show the man. ‘Handsome is that handsome does.’

‘The fact is, Rowland,’ said Howel, as he suddenly stood still in one of his rapid walks across the room, ’you and I never could agree in anything, and never shall.’

‘I hope we may yet agree in many things,’ said Rowland gently. ’At present, all I wish you to do is to pay your debts, go to London, take out your stamps, and become an attorney.’

’I am the best judge of that, and shall be my own master now. At all events, I can make some people ashamed of themselves.’

’I only wish to advise you for your good, now that you are your own master. Your poor father begged me—’

’Oh, Rowland, I can’t stand any more about my father. Everybody knows what he was, and, I suppose, nobody expects me to live in the same line. I am emancipated, thank heaven! and the world shall soon know it.’

‘Still, he was your father.’

’No one knows that better than I do, I should imagine; but if you expect me to mourn as others do for a parent, you will be disappointed. He never showed me one token of love, or acted by me as a father from the day of my birth till his death.’

’At least he has left you and your mother handsomely provided for, and with his last words, hoped that you were now very steady.’

Page 25

’He did! I wonder who dares to say that I am not steady? But how do you know how we are provided for?’

’He begged me to write down what he was worth. I will give it you at some future period, but not now.’

‘Why not now?’

’Because I think it is scarcely yet a time to consider money matters. After the last duties are performed you shall have the paper. Part of his property is written down, but a box of gold and some other sums he did not name. After that last sad scene one can scarcely think of anything earthly. Oh, Howel! I wish you would consider the shortness and uncertainty of life, and what is its end.’

’So awful do I consider its end that I mean to enjoy it while it lasts. But don’t go off with the impression that I was not shocked and frightened with what we have just seen. It is one thing to read and write about a death-bed and another to witness it. But I cannot weep or pray as some people can.’

‘You might do both if you would only seek aright.’

’There, enough! I am past being preached to as a naughty boy, and can now look forward to some enjoyment without robbing my own father, or getting my mother to rob him, to procure it. But I shall never forget that last struggle? no, never.’

Here, with a face of horror, Howel began his restless walk again. Rowland sat in melancholy silence.

‘Rowland,’ suddenly broke in Howel, ‘how is Netta?’

‘Quite well, I thank you,’ answered Rowland gravely.

‘I have not seen her for a long time? will you remember me to her?’

‘I cannot promise to do so.’

’Do you think me a fiend, sir, that my name cannot be mentioned to my cousin? I will manage to convey my own remembrances.’

’Howel, you know how it is? I do not mean to be unkind. If only you would give up your old life, enter your profession, and begin another—’

’That is as I choose. I shall be glad of the paper you wrote for my father, and then you and I, Rowland, are best apart.’

’Good-bye then, Howel? perhaps some day you may know that I wish you well. I will bring the paper at the funeral.’

’For heaven’s sake stay, or send some one else! I cannot bear to be alone here? his ghost will haunt me.’

‘Then let me read to you.’

Howel assented gloomily and threw himself on the bed in the corner of the room. Rowland took a small Testament from his pocket and resolutely read several chapters.

During the reading Howel fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

The farmer’s son.

At about ten o’clock on Monday morning Miss Gwynne rode up to the door of Glanyravon Farm, and, dismounting, entered the house. She was attended by a groom, and told him that she should not be long.

‘How is that poor girl, Netta?’ were her first words on entering the house.

Page 26

‘Very ill indeed, I believe,’ said Netta, rather sulkily.

‘Where is your mother?’

’She has been with the Irish beggar all the morning, and all night too. I don’t know what father and uncle and aunt will think.’

‘Will you ask your mother whether I can see her for a few minutes?’

‘Certainly.’

’Netta, you must come and dine with us on Wednesday, with your uncle and aunt.’

‘Thank you,’ said Netta, brightening up as she left the room.

‘I’m sure I scarcely know whether she will behave rightly,’ muttered Miss Gwynne, tapping her hand with her riding-whip.

Mrs Prothero soon appeared.

‘You good, clear Mrs Prothero!’ exclaimed Miss Gwynne, running up to her and taking both her hands. ’You look quite worn out. How is that poor girl?’

‘Alive, Miss Gwynne, and that is almost all,’ was the reply very gravely uttered.

‘Can we do anything? Did Dr Richards come?’

‘Yes, Miss Gwynne, and was very kind. He has been again this morning.’

’I came to invite Mr Rowland and Netta to dinner on Wednesday, with Mr and Mrs Jonathan Prothero.’

’Thank you, Miss Gwynne, I will tell Rowland; but I really think Netta had better not go.’

‘I have just told her of the invitation.’

’Dear me! I am really very sorry. I beg your pardon, Miss Gwynne, but it will put ideas into her head above her station.’

‘We shall be very quiet.’

The conversation was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Rowland. He drew back on seeing Miss Gwynne, and bowed, as usual, profoundly. She also, as usual, advanced and held out her hand.

’My father begged me to ask if you would come and dine with us on Wednesday,’ said Miss Gwynne.

‘Thank you, I am much obliged,’ stammered Rowland, whilst a bright Hush overspread his face, ’I shall be very happy, if I am not obliged to be elsewhere. Mother, poor Griffith Jenkins is dead. I have been there all the night.’

‘Dead! I had no idea he was so ill! Oh, Rowland, how did he die?’

’Just as he lived, mother. With the key of his coffers so tightly clasped in one hand that it was impossible to take it from it after he was dead. And the said coffers hidden, nobody knows where. But poor Mrs Jenkins has no friend near who can be of any real comfort to her. I wish you could go to her for a few hours.’

’This poor girl, Rowland—what can I do with her? And your uncle and aunt coming.’

’I think I can manage my uncle and aunt till your return. As to the poor girl I really know not what to say.’

’Oh! if you will trust her to me, Mrs Prothero, I will nurse her till you come back!’ exclaimed Miss Gwynne eagerly. ’I assure you I can manage capitally, and will send back the horses, and a message to papa.’

’I am afraid it would not be right—I think the girl has low fever—Mr Gwynne would object.’

Page 27

’I assure you it would be quite right, and I don’t fear infection and papa would let me do just as I like. In short, I mean to stay, and you must go directly. Is young Jenkins at home, Mr Rowland?’

‘Yes, he returned a few hours before his father’s death.’

’I suppose that horrid old man died as rich as Croesus, and, according to custom in such cases, his son will spend the money.’

‘I wish he had not got it,’ said Mrs Prothero.

’That is scarcely a fair wish, mother. Let us hope that he will do well with it.’

’Never, never. He was not born or bred in a way to make him turn out well.’

‘Nothing is impossible, mother.’

’You must take care of Netta, Mrs Prothero. But now do go to that wretched Mrs Jenkins, and leave the poor girl to me, and Mr and Mrs Jonathan to Mr Rowland. I hope you have been studying the antiquities of Wales at Oxford, Mr Rowland?’

This was said as Mrs Prothero left the room; and Rowland was startled from a rather earnest gaze on Miss Gwynne’s very handsome and animated face, by this sudden appeal to him, and by meeting that young lady’s eyes as they turned towards him. A slight blush from the lady and a very deep one from the gentleman were the result. The lady was indignant with herself for allowing such a symptom of female weakness to appear, and said somewhat peremptorily,—

’Will you be so good as to tell Jones to take the horses home, and to let my father know that he must not wait luncheon, or even dinner for me?’

‘Excuse me, Miss Gwynne,’ said the young man, recovering his composure, ’but I do not think my mother would be justified in allowing you to attend upon that poor girl.’

’Allowing me! Really I do not mean to ask her. I choose to do it, thank you, and I will speak to the servant myself.’

It was now Miss Gwynne’s turn to grow very red, as, with haughty port, she swept past Rowland, leaving him muttering to himself.

’What a pity that one so noble should be so determined and absolute. Let her go, however. Nobody shall say that I lent a hand to her remaining here. In the first place she runs the risk of infection, in the second every one else thinks she degrades herself by coming here as she does. Still, her desire to take care of the girl is a fine, natural trait of character. I must just go and look over the *Guardian*. A curacy in England I am

resolved to get, away from all temptation. Yet I hate answering advertisements, or advertising. If my aunt's friends would only interest themselves in procuring me a London curacy, I think I should like to work there. That would be labouring in the vineyard, with a positive certainty of reaping some of the fruits.'

The soliloquy was interrupted by the reappearance of Mrs Prothero, dressed for her walk.

'Mother, you ought not to let Miss Gwynne stay.'

'I! my dear Rowland! Do you think she would mind what I say to her?'

Page 28

Miss Gwynne entered.

‘I have sent off the servant, and now let me go to the girl.’

This was said with the decision of an empress, and with equal grandeur and dignity was the bow made with which she honoured Rowland as she made her exit, followed meekly by Mrs Prothero.

A short time afterwards she was alone by the bedside of the sick girl. Every comfort had been provided for her by Mrs Prothero, and Miss Gwynne had little to do but to administer medicines and nourishment.

‘Is there anything I can do for you, my poor girl?’ she said, leaning over her bed. ‘Anything you have to say—any letter I can write—any—’

‘If—you—would—pray—my lady,’ was the slow, almost inarticulate reply.

Pray! This was what Miss Gwynne could not do. ‘Why,’ she asked herself, ’can I not say aloud what I feel at my heart for this unhappy creature? I never felt so before, and yet I know not how to pray.’

She went to the head of the stairs, and called Netta.

’Will you ask your brother whether he will come and read a prayer to the poor girl?’ she said.

A few seconds after there was a knock at the door. She opened it and admitted Rowland. He went to the bed, and began to whisper gently of the hope of salvation to those who believe. Gladys opened her eyes, and caught the hand extended to her.

‘More—more,’ she murmured. ‘Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.’

Rowland read the Office for the Sick, from the prayer book, and she responded inwardly, her lips moving. Miss Gwynne came to the bed, and kneeling down, joined in the prayers.

Again Rowland spoke soothingly to the girl of the need of looking to Christ, the Saviour, alone in the hour of her extremity; and she murmured, ‘He is my rock and my fortress.’

‘Do you trust wholly in Him?’

‘In whom else should I trust? All human friends are gone.’

‘Not all, you have friends around you.’

‘Have I? Thank you, sir? God bless you.’

‘I will come again and read to you when you are able to bear it.’

Rowland said this and withdrew, without speaking again to Miss Gwynne, or even bowing as he left the room.

‘He certainly reads most impressively,’ thought Miss Gwynne; ’I could scarcely believe he was not English born and bred; but still he is quite a Goth in manners, and I am sure he thinks no one in the country so clever as himself.’

Rowland met Netta at the foot of the stairs.

’Netta, I really am ashamed to think that you can allow Miss Gwynne to wait upon that girl in your own house.’

’I’m sure, Rowland, Miss Gwynne needn’t do it if she didn’t choose. I don’t want to catch the fever, and I never will run the risk by nursing such a girl as that.’

’Surely, Netta, you cannot be our mother’s daughter, or you could not use such unchristian expressions.’

Page 29

’I’m no more unchristian than other people, but you’re always finding fault with me.’

The conversation was interrupted by a loud knocking at the house door, and Farmer Prothero’s voice was heard without, calling,—

‘Mother, mother, where are you? Here we are, all come!’

Netta flew to open the door, and was soon industriously kissing a lady and gentleman, who had just alighted from a little four-wheeled carriage, and were waiting, with her father, for admission. Rowland, also, in his turn, duly embraced the lady, who seemed much pleased to see him. They brought in various packages, and proceeded to the parlour.

‘Where’s mother, Netta?’ exclaimed Mr Prothero.

Rowland answered for her.

’She is gone to Mrs Griffey Jenkins, father; perhaps you have not heard that Uncle Griff is dead.’

’Not I, indeed. Well! he’s as good out of the world as in, though I’m sorry for the old fellow. But what’ll we do without mother? She’s always nursing somebody or other, either alive or dead.’

Rowland turned to his aunt, and said that his mother begged him to apologise for her necessary absence for a few hours.

‘I shall do very well, I daresay,’ said the aunt, whose countenance wore a somewhat austere expression.

She was a lady of middle age, who prided herself upon having a first cousin a baronet. Her father, a clergyman, rector of a good English living, was the younger son of Sir Philip Payne Perry, and she an only child, was his heiress. Mr Jonathan Prothero had been, in years gone by, his curate, and had succeeded in gaining the affections, as well as fortune, of the daughter, and in bringing both into his native country. He had the living of Llanfach, in which parish Glanyravon was situated, and lived in very good style in a pretty house that he had built something in the style of an English vicarage.

Mrs Jonathan Prothero, or Mrs Prothero, the Vicarage, as she was usually called, was tall and thin, very fashionably dressed, with a very long face, a very long nose, very keen greenish grey eyes, a very elaborately curled front, a very long neck, very thin lips, and very dainty manners. She was proud of her feet and hands, which were always well shod, stockinged, gloved, and ringed, and as these were the only pretty points about her, we cannot wonder at her taking care of them. People used to say she would have been an old maid, had not a certain auspicious day taken the Rev. Jonathan

Prothero to her father's parish, who, having an eye after the fashion of servants of a lower grade, to 'bettering himself,' wisely made her a matron. Having no children of their own, they lavished their affections on their nephews and niece, and their money on their education.

'My dear Rowland,' said Mrs Jonathan, 'I think I have agreeable news for you. I wrote to my cousin, Sir Philip Payne Perry, whose wife's brother is, as you know, high in the church, and received this answer.'

Page 30

She put a letter into Rowland's hands, and watched his countenance as he read it.

'My dear aunt, how very good of you!' exclaimed Rowland; 'the very thing I wished for. Oh, if I can only get it, I shall be quite happy. A curacy in London, father! Just read this. Sir Philip thinks I might not like it in the heart of the city, but that is really what I wish. Plenty to do all the week long. Oh, aunt, how can I thank you enough?'

'By making every effort to advance yourself in life, and to rise in the world, my dear nephew,' said Mrs Jonathan.

'What do you think, uncle?' asked Rowland, turning to Mr Jonathan Prothero, who was seated in the window, with a large book before him, that he had brought from the carriage.

'He! what! what did you ask?'

'Only what you think of this London curacy that my aunt has been so kind as to write about.'

'Me! I! Oh, capital! just the thing in my humble opinion. If you get it, you will be able to go to the Museum, and look up the old genealogy we were talking about. Do you know I have made a remarkable discovery about Careg Cennin Castle. It was built—'

'Never mind, my dear, just now; we were talking of Rowland's curacy,' interrupted Mrs Jonathan, who generally managed all business matters.

'To be sure, my dear, to be sure, you know best,' said Mr Jonathan absently, resuming his book.

'For my part, sister,' said the farmer, 'I 'ould rather he had a curacy in his own country, and so 'ould his mother; but he's so confoundedly ambitious.'

'Aunt, won't you come upstairs and take off your things?' asked Netta, interposing, for once in her life, at the right time.

'Thank you, my dear, I should be very glad,' and they accordingly disappeared.

'Father,' began Rowland, as soon as they were gone, 'I think it right to tell you, that we were obliged, out of sheer charity, to take that poor Irish girl into the house. It was impossible to move her without risk of instant death.'

'And upon my very deed, Rowland, if this isn't too bad,' cried the farmer, stamping his foot on the floor, and instantaneously swelling with passion. 'As if it wasn't enough to have paupers, and poor-rates, and sick and dying, bothering one all day long, without your bringing an Irish beggar into the house. I never saw such an 'ooman as your

mother in my life; she's never quiet a minute. I 'ont stand it any longer; now 'tis a subscription for this, now a donation for that, then sixpence for Jack such a one, or a shilling for Sal the other, till I have neither peace nor money. Come you, sir, go and turn that vagabond out directly, or I'll do it before your mother comes home, hark'ee, sir.'

'I can't father, really.'

'Then I will.'

Off stalked the farmer in his passion, crying out in the passage, 'Shanno, come here!'

A servant girl quickly answered the summons.

Page 31

‘Where’s that Irish vagabond?’

‘In Mr Owen’s room, sir.’

Upstairs went the farmer, leaving Shanno grinning and saying, ’He, he, he’ll do be turning her out very soon, she will, he, he.’

Rowland ran upstairs after his father, calling out gently, ’Stop, father, Miss Gwynne—’ but the father was in the bedroom before he heard the words, and had made the house re-echo the noise of his opening the door.

He was instantaneously checked in his career by seeing Miss Gwynne advance towards him, with her finger in the air.

‘Hush, Mr Prothero,’ she whispered, ’she is asleep. Look here; gently, very gently.’

She led the enraged farmer by one of his large brass buttons to the bedside, where the white-faced Gladys lay. She looked so much like a corpse, that he started back affrighted. Then Miss Gwynne led him out into the passage, and seeing from his angry face the state of the case, instantly said,—

’It was I who had her brought here, Mr Prothero; and by-and-by I will get her sent back to her parish, but until she is better we must take care of her.’

At these words from the all-powerful Miss Gwynne, Mr Prothero was fain to put such check upon his rising choler as the shortness of the notice would allow. He could not, however, fully restrain the whole of the invective that had been upon his lips a short time before.

’No offence, Miss Gwynne? but ’pon my soul, I’m sick to death of my missus’s pensioners and paupers, and I’m determined to have no more of ’em. You may do as you please, miss, at your own house, and I’ll do as I please in mine.’

Here Rowland popped his head out of a neighbouring bedroom

’Father, Miss Gwynne is taking upon herself a risk and encumbrance that should be wholly my mother’s. She has nothing to do with the girl, beyond showing her great kindness.’

‘Really, Mr Rowland Prothero,’ began Miss Gwynne, drawing herself up to her fullest height, ’I wish you would allow me to manage my own affairs.’

‘Yes, yes, Rowland. What, name o’ goodness, have you to do with Miss Gwynne? I’m ashamed of the boy. I really beg your pardon, miss, but I believe he’s so set up by

having a chance of going to London, that he don't know whether he stands on his head or his heels. Go you away, Rowland, directly. I won't have you interfaring with me.'

Miss Gwynne could not help laughing as she saw Rowland's sense of duty struggle with his pride at this authoritative mandate; but she was very much surprised to see him bow politely to her and walk away. She wondered whether anything on earth could have induced her to obey a similar order.

She followed Mr Prothero downstairs and made herself so agreeable to him and Mrs Jonathan, that they quite forgot Mrs Prothero's absence, until the sudden return of that good woman set all matters right, and enabled Miss Gwynne to leave the farm.

Page 32

CHAPTER VI.

The miser's wife.

'I must have money,' said Howel Jenkins as he sat alone with his mother in their little parlour, the evening after Mrs Prothero had left them.

'My dear, there will be plenty when we can find it, be you sure of that. I do know well enough that your poor father was having a chest full, only he was keeping his door locked and barred so that I couldn't see him at it.'

'But surely, mother, you must have some idea where my father kept his gold. If I don't pay a man in London by tomorrow's post, I shall be in jail before a week is over my head.'

'Mercy! Howel, bach! Now don't you be spending the mint o' money that'll be coming to you, there's a good boy, before you do know what it is. Remember Netta! You'll be as grand as any of 'em now, if you do only begin right, and are being study and persevaring, and sticking to your business. I 'ouldn't wonder if you was to be a councillor some day. Only to think of me, mother of Councillor Jenkins! You may be looking higher than Netta, and be marrying a real lady, and be riding in your coach and four, and be dining with my Lord Single ton, and be in the London papers; and I 'ouldn't wonder if you was to be visiting the Queen and Prince Albert again, and behaving your picture taken to put into your own books and the "'Lustrated." I always was saying I 'ould be making a gentleman of you, and I have.'

'But, mother, before I can do anything like this I must pay my debts and make a new beginning. I will marry Netta, now, in spite of the whole tribe of Davids and Jonathans, and they shall see us as much above them as—as—money can make us. Now, mother, we must have a search for the money.'

'Not whilst your father is in the house, Howel; I should be afraid. Be you sure his spirit'll be looking after the money till the funeral's over.'

'Nonsense; where are the keys? We'll have a turn at the old bureau anyhow. Money I must have, at once, and Rowland is as obstinate as a pig about what the governor told him.'

'Indeet, and indeet, Howel, you had better don't. Suppose it 'ould bring him to life again?'

'I'll risk that. Give me the keys.'

Mrs Jenkins handed a bunch of keys to her son with trembling fingers.

’Tak you a drop of spirits first. It do show how rich they are thinking us now. There’s Jones, the Red Cow, and Lewis, draper, are letting us have as much credit as we like; and they ’ouldn’t let us have as much as a dobbin or a yard of tape before poor Griffey died.’

Page 33

Howel drank a wine-glass of raw brandy and went upstairs with the keys in his hand. He crept stealthily into that room where the miser breathed his last, as if fearful of arousing the body within the drawn curtains. He proceeded to the bureau and tried the various keys of the large bunch that he now grasped for the first time in his life. At last one key entered the lock and turned in it. Hush! there is a sound in the room. He turns very pale as he glances round. He sees no movement anywhere. The curtains are so still that he almost wishes the wind would stir them. He opens the bureau and again looks wistfully round. He is almost sure that the curtains move. 'Coward that I am,' he cries, 'what do I fear?'

He turns again, and, looking into the bureau, sees that all the open divisions are filled with papers, and imagines what must be the contents of the closed and secret compartments. As he touches one of these a tremor seizes him, and he fancies that a hand is on his shoulder. He starts and turns, but the curtains are motionless as ever. He goes into the passage and calls, 'Mother, come here. Quick! I want you directly.'

Mrs Jenkins comes upstairs, looking as pale as her son.

'Just help me out with this bureau, mother; I cannot examine it in this room, you have put such ridiculous notions into my head.'

'I'm afraid, Howel.'

'Nonsense, come directly, or I must get some one else.'

The pair went into the room and tried to move the bureau that had stood for nearly fifty years in that corner untouched, save by the husband and father, now lifeless near them. It was very heavy, and scarcely could their united strength move it from its resting-place. They finally succeeded, however, in dragging it towards the door, in doing which they had to pass the foot of the bed. Unconsciously they pushed the bed with the corner of the bureau and shook it. They nearly sank to the ground with terror, expecting, for the moment, to see the miser arise, and again take possession of his treasures. The mother rushed into the passage, the son again called himself a coward, and, with a great effort, pushed the bureau through the door and shut it after him.

'Now, mother, help to get it into my room. One would think we were breaking into another man's house, instead of taking possession of our own property.'

With the whole of their joint strength they succeeded in getting the heavy piece of furniture into Howel's room, where, having first locked the door, they proceeded to examine its contents. Disappointment awaited them; they could find nothing but papers. Deeds, mortgages, bills, letters, accounts, were arranged in every open and shut division. The drawers contained nothing else, and the little locked cupboard in the

centre, the key of which was found upon the bunch, also enshrined nothing but a few very particular documents.

‘These papers could not have made the bureau so heavy,’ said Howel, biting his nails. ‘There must be secret drawers.’

Page 34

He pulled out the drawers and papers, and threw them on his bed. He tried to move the bureau, and found it almost as heavy as ever.

’I am thinking, Howel, bach, that cupboard don’t go through to the back of the bureau,’ suggested Mrs Jenkins.

Howel seized the poker and aimed a blow at the cupboard; the mahogany did not give way, but they fancied they heard a chinking sound within.

‘I am thinking,’ said the mother, ’that it must be a double bureau. It is looking so much broader than it do seem.’

Howel examined it, and began to think so, too; he took some carpenter’s tools down from the shelf, and set to work to try to pierce the back of the bureau with a gimlet, in order to see if the gimlet would appear on the other side.

He worked the implement through a portion of the wood, and then found its course stopped by some still harder matter. He had recourse to his penknife, with which he hacked a hole in the wood, large enough to find that there was an inner back of iron, or some kind of metal. Each new obstacle served only to inflame his impatience, and to provoke his temper. He forgot the bed in the next room, and everything else in the world except the attainment of his object, and running downstairs, returned with a large sledge-hammer that he found in the coal-hole. With his strength concentrated in one blow, he swung it against the back of the bureau, and had the satisfaction of finding his wishes gratified. The concussion moved some secret spring somewhere, for as the piece of furniture tottered on its foundation, and fell forwards against the bed, out rolled such a profusion of gold, as led Howel to believe, the ’El dorado’ was found at last. Mother and son lifted up their hands in astonishment; gold pieces were in every corner of the room, scattered here and there like large yellow hail.

The noise of the blow, however, and the subsequent fall of the bureau had alarmed a neighbour, and before one piece of the tempting gold had been picked up, there was a loud knock at the door.

‘Say the house has fallen in; the inquisitive fools!’ exclaimed Howel, as his mother left the room.

Howel began to fill his pockets with gold pieces, and opening a box, pushed as many as he could hastily gather up into it also. There were thousands upon thousands of sovereigns upon the floor.

‘It was old Pal, the shop,’ said Mrs Jenkins, returning to her golden harvest, ’she was up nursing next door, and heard the noise. I tell her it was the table falling down.’

’Now, mother, as soon as all is over, I must go to London and clear off my debts with some of this money; but I must see Netta first.’

’Why don’t you be putting it in the bank, Howel, bach? It will make a gentleman of you.’

’There’s enough besides to make me a gentleman, if I am not one already; and I promise you, that when I am clear again I will come back and make all the rich men in the country hang their heads. But I want to see Netta.’

Page 35

‘Write you a bit of a note, and I will manage to send it.’

‘Pick up the money, mother, and I will write the note.’ Mrs Jenkins proceeded to obey her son, whilst he unlocked a desk, and wrote the following hasty lines:—

’I must be in London next Monday. I must see you before I leave. Meet me at the old place in the wood by the little Fall, Sunday evening, during church time.’

He folded the note without signing it, and gave it to his mother, without adding any address.

’Seal it mother, and deliver it, or rather send it by some one you can trust.’

’I’ll manage that. Now pick you up some of the money. Here’s a hundred pound in my apron now, and gracious me! the lots more!’

’If you will keep the hundred pounds in your apron, mother, and let me have the rest, I shall be satisfied.’

‘But what’ll you be doing with all this goold?’

’Preparing to make you the mother of Councillor Jenkins, or of a famous man of some sort or other. What do you say to a poet or a prime minister?’

’I ’ould rather you do be a councillor, than anything—like Councillor Rice, Llandore.’

’Well, I shall perhaps, be a judge with all this money, and I daresay my father—’

Here a vision of the bed in the next room stopped the young man’s speech, and shuddering slightly, he kicked a heap of sovereigns that lay near his foot, and sent them rolling into different corners of the room.

’Take away the ill-gotten gain, mother, it will never prosper; you had better go to bed, and I will do the same. I suppose it would be impossible to sleep with that yellow usury on the floor. I should have Plutus at the head of the imps of darkness about my bed, instead of “Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,” that I used to pray to “bless the bed that I lie on.'"

‘Don’t talk so fullish, Howel.’

‘Why it was you taught me all that Popery.’

’The Lord forgive you, Howel, I never did see the Pope, and ’ould sooner teach you the Methodist hymn book.’

‘Well, never mind, let us go to bed.’

’I’ll go down and sit by the fire. Lie you down here. God bless you, my boy, give your poor mother a kiss.’

‘Good-night, mother, or rather good morning,’ said the son, bending down carelessly to be embraced by the parent who would sacrifice her life for him.

When Mrs Jenkins had left the room, Howel hastily collected the gold that was scattered about, and tossed it, without counting it, into the box already mentioned, which he locked, and put the key in his pocket. He then lay down on the bed without undressing, and tried to sleep. In vain, no sleep would come to ‘steep his senses in forgetfulness.’ The bed in the next room, with its grim, gaunt inmate, was constantly before his eyes. If he dozed for a moment, the miser, his father, and the gold he had for years longed to obtain possession of, haunted him, and made him start like a thief, as if taken in the act of stealing the coin now by inheritance his own.

Page 36

‘Cursed gold!’ he exclaimed at last, jumping from the bed, ’what shall I do with it? Pay my debts, and turn a sober man? I will try. If ’Netta will have me, perhaps I may; indeed I am sure I could. We will come here and cut a dash first, however. I should like to humble some of our Welsh aristocrats by showing them how the son of Griffey Jenkins can eclipse their genealogies, by the magic power of the Golden God. I will stay over the funeral, then off to town and get rid of my pressing debts; then pay Levi and Moses, and all my debts of honour; then set myself up in clothes and jewels, and come home and carry off Netta; and, finally, have a year’s pleasure at least. Take Netta to the continent, and teach her to *parlez-vous* a little more fluently than she does now, and to assume more aristocratic manners; in short—in short—’

The soliloquy was interrupted by the sudden explosion of some substance under his feet, upon which he accidentally trod as he was pacing up and down the room. He swore an oath that emanated from his fear, and thought that the lower regions had actually opened to receive the gold he was meditating upon, since fire and smoke accompanied the noise, together with a smell of gunpowder. He rushed out of the room, just as his mother, alarmed by the sound, was running upstairs.

‘They will carry him off before the funeral,’ he cried, as his mother asked what was the matter.

Ashamed of his cowardice, he made an effort to return to the room, followed by his mother. There was such a strong smell of sulphur that both recoiled.

‘What fools we are!’ exclaimed Howel, forcing himself to enter. He stooped to examine the floor, and to his amusement and disgust, found the remains of a cracker, which had burst beneath his foot-tread. There were several others scattered about, that had been unnoticed, because they looked simply like bits of paper. These had evidently been placed by his father amongst the gold, in the hope of frightening any one who might wish to finger it, and had rolled out with the treasure they were intended to protect.

Mother and son again left the room, the latter locking the door as he did so, and putting the key in his pocket. They descended to the little parlour below stairs, where they finished the night, alternately dozing in their chairs, and talking, and occasionally supporting themselves by draughts of the different liquors that were spread upon the table near them. In spite of his best efforts to throw aside such thoughts, Howel could see nothing all that night but the gold, the father who had won it, and the poor wretches who had been ruined in paying usurious interest for it.

CHAPTER VII.

The squire.

The dinners at Glanyravon were always unexceptionable. Mr Gwynne was a bit of an epicure, and kept a capital cook, and his daughter liked to see everything done in good style. Even Mrs. Jonathan Prothero declared that the dinner-parties at her cousin's, Sir Philip Payne Perry's, were scarcely more agreeable or better managed.

Page 37

Still, at the dinner in question, all the elements were not quite well amalgamated. Although the dishes were so discreetly seasoned, and the *entremets* so exquisitely prepared, that the most fastidious critic of the gastronomic art would not have found a grain too much of any one ingredient, there was a less judicious mixture amongst the guests. Nothing could be more perfect than the bearing of the host and hostess. Mr Gywnne was a gentleman, even in his peculiarities—fastidiously a gentleman—and comported himself as such to every one. But he was too nervous, and had too low a voice to put his guests at ease: one half did not hear him at all, and the rest were slightly afraid of him on account of this extreme fastidiousness, his nervous complaints and his being very easily tired, or bored. Miss Gwynne was more successful at her end of the table, but she rather annoyed some of her guests by being too much bent on bringing out her friend Netta, and playing her off against Miss Nugent.

She was, however, very polite to all, and, for so young a woman, made a very agreeable and fascinating hostess. So, apparently, thought all the gentlemen, as they principally addressed their conversation to her, and had manoeuvred, particularly the young ones, to sit as near her as possible. The Rev Jonathan Prothero had the place of honour at her right, and did not take up much of her time. He appeared to be deep in the speculation concerning the ancient castle of which we have already heard, and was learnedly descanting upon it to Mrs Rice Rice, a lady on his other side. The said Mrs Rice Rice, having *un oeil aux champs, et l'autre a la ville,* was ostensibly listening to him, whilst she was really attending to her son, who was making visible efforts on the heart of the heiress, Miss Gwynne.

The Rice Rices were people of family and fortune, living in the neighbouring town. Mr Rice Rice was in the law, and was at that moment engaged in discussing the affairs of the deceased Mr. Griffith Jenkins and his quondam articled pupil, Howel, with Rowland Prothero across Miss Nugent. He was a portly well-to-do-looking man, with a bald head and good-humoured countenance. His wife was even more portly than himself, and sat, in black velvet and marabout feathers, as stately as a princess at a drawing-room. The task of keeping up the family reputation of the ancient house of Rice Rice devolved in a great measure on this lady, assisted by her daughter; and, it must be said, that if any one could have doubted the antiquity of this honourable race after an hour's conversation with this enthusiastic pair he must have been a sceptic indeed! Family pride is a common weakness, but one could almost call it the stronghold of Mrs. Rice Rice, just as the various archaeological and historical glories of Wales and the Welsh was the fortress of Mr. Jonathan Prothero.

It was into these towers of strength that these worthies retreated on all occasions. One saw the bulwark in Mrs. Rice Rice's ample, immoveable figure, and in the glance of the eyes that looked over the somewhat mountainous cheek; one saw it in a certain extension of the chin, turn of the mouth, and slightly *retrousse* nose. One saw it, above all, in her manner to the Protheros.

Page 38

But Mrs. Jonathan Prothero was quite as capable of sustaining the dignity of the Philip Payne Perrys as the Welsh lady that of the Rice Rices, and a satirist might have made a clever caricature of these patriotic dames—the one thin and stiff, the other stout and stiff—as they compared their family honours.

But the lady of undoubted rank and pretension of the party is Lady Mary Nugent, who can afford to patronise or throw over-board whomsoever she will. She is seated next to Mr Gwynne, and is lavishing a considerable share of good looks and eloquence on that gentleman. Still in the prime of life, elegant, refined, pretty, and a skilful tactician, she is a dangerous rival of the young ladies, and is not wholly innocent of a desire to eclipse them. She and her daughter are dressed very nearly alike, in some white and light material, and at a little distance she might pass for the fair Wilhelmina's elder sister. A profusion of ornaments, too well arranged to appear too numerous, alone distinguish mother and daughter. She has a handsome profile and a captivating manner, two dangerous things in woman; but therewith she has an occasionally malicious expression of eye and mouth, that somewhat impairs the effect of the captivation.

Her daughter is like her in profile, but has not her fascination of manner. She is, however, beautiful as a statue, with chiselled features and marble complexion. But she does not at present appear to have character enough to possess the clever malice of her mother. This may possibly come with suitors and rivals, who generally draw out all the evil, and sometimes much of the good, of woman's nature.

She is now simpering and blushing and saying pretty nothings between Rowland Prothero and a certain Sir Hugh Pryse, who, on their respective parts, think her a goose, being attracted elsewhere. Sir Hugh is exerting his lungs to their utmost, and much beyond the boundaries that etiquette would vainly try to impose upon them, in endeavouring to attract the attention of Miss Gwynne; whilst Rowland is, as we before said, discussing the death of Mr Jenkins and the prospects of his son.

Perhaps the most uncomfortable person at the table is Netta, who really does not quite understand how to behave herself in the new atmosphere in which she finds herself. She never was at a dinner-party before, never waited upon by grand servants, never surrounded by such gay people; and, in spite of her ambition to eclipse by her beauty the Misses Nugent and Rice Rice, she feels and looks rather awkward. Miss Gwynne does all in her power to reassure her, but she sits, looking very pretty—by far the prettiest person in the room—and very ill at ease, until the ladies adjourn to the drawing-room, and she takes refuge in the pictures of the drawing-room scrap-book and her aunt.

The gentlemen arrive in course of time, which they must do, linger as long as they will over the delights of port and politics, and then the various schemes and thoughts engendered at the dinner-table are brought to light over the coffee-cup.

Page 39

Miss Gwynne patronisingly singles out Rowland Prothero, who, reserved by nature, feels doubly so amongst the ill-assorted elements around him.

’Have you seen that poor girl since I was last at your house, Mr Prothero, and how is she to-day?’ inquires the heiress.

’She asked to see me yesterday, and I went to her. She seemed more composed, and liked being read to; but she is in a very precarious state.’

‘Is your father more reconciled to her being with you?’

’Not at all. And it certainly is very unfortunate. But he would not allow her to be neglected now she is thrown on his kindness.’

‘I wish she had never come,’ interposed Netta, who had ventured to cross the room to Miss Gwynne.

’Have you heard of the great catch you are all likely to have, Miss Gwynne?’ here broke in Sir Hugh Pryse, of stentorian reputation.

‘I do not know what you mean,’ said Miss Gwynne.

’Why, Mr Rice Rice tells me there is more than a hundred thousand pounds to be raffled for by all the young ladies in the country. They have simply to put themselves into the lottery, and only one can have the prize.’

‘I never knew you so figurative before. Sir Hugh.’ ’Don’t pay any attention to him, Miss Gwynne,’ said a fresh addition to the circle that stood round that young lady’s chair. ’He means that old Griffey Jenkins, the miser, is dead, and that Howel comes into all his immense wealth.’

Miss Gwynne gave her head such a magnificent toss that her neck looked quite strained.

’I do not imagine many *young ladies* will purchase tickets in that lottery,’ she said, with a stress upon the ‘young ladies.’

‘I have no doubt there are dozens who would, and will, do it at once,’ responded Sir Hugh. ’And quite right too. Such a fortune is not to be had every day.’

‘But it is gentlemen, and not ladies, who are fortune-hunters,’ said Miss Gwynne, changing her tone, when she suddenly perceived that Netta’s face and neck were crimson.

But the subject was become quite an interesting piece of local gossip, and, one after another, all the party joined in it.

’Howel Jenkins might make anything of himself if he would but be steady,’ said Mr Rice Rice.

‘Except a gentleman by birth,’ said his lady.

‘Or the least bit of an archaeologist,’ said Mr Jonathan Prothero. ’I tried one day—you will scarcely believe it, Mr Gwynne—to make him understand that Garn Goch was an old British encampment, but he would not take it in.’

’Ah, really; I do not very much wonder myself, for I cannot quite “take in” those heaps of stones and all that sort of thing,’ responded the host.

‘What can they find to interest them in that sort of person?’ asked Lady Mary in an aside to Mr Gwynne.

Miss Gwynne overheard it, and answered for her father.

’He is a young man of great talent, very rich, very handsome, and has had a miser for a father. Is not that the case Mr Rowland?’

Page 40

’I—I—really, it is scarcely fair to appeal to me, as he is a relation.’

‘And do you never say a good word in favour of your relations?’

‘I hope so, when they deserve it,’ said Rowland resolutely, glancing at his sister, who was biting her glove.

‘If I may be allowed an opinion,’ said Mrs Jonathan decidedly, also glancing at poor Netta, ’I should say that Howel Jenkins was a complete scapegrace. What he may yet turn out remains to be proved.’

‘Well, that is putting an end to him at once,’ said Miss Gwynne, ’and I think we had better play his funeral dirge. Lady Mary, will you give us ‘The Dead March in Saul,’ or something appropriate? Never mind, Netta; I daresay cousin Howel will turn out a great man by-and-by;’ this last clause was whispered to Netta, whilst the young hostess went towards a grand piano that stood invitingly open, and begged Lady Mary Nugent to give them some music.

That lady played some brilliant waltzes, after which, her daughter accompanied her in the small bass of a duet.

‘Pon my soul, that’s a pretty girl, that little Prothero!’ said Sir Hugh Pryse to young Rice Rice. ’I never saw such a complexion in my life. Roses and carnations are nothing to it.’

‘Rather a vulgar style of beauty, I think,’ said Mr Rice Rice, junior, taking up an eyeglass, and finding some difficulty in fixing it in his eye. He had lately discovered that he was nearsighted, to the great grief of his mother, who, however, sometimes spoke of the sad fact in the same tone that she used to speak of the Rice Rice, and Morgan of Glanwilliam families. She herself belonged to the latter.

‘I vow she’s lovely!’ cried the baronet, so emphatically that every one in the room might have heard him. Most of the ladies, doubtless, did, and appropriated the sentiment, but, by-and-by, Netta was triumphant, as he went and sat by her, and complimented her in very audible terms.

She blushed and coquetted very respectably for a country damsel, and wondered whether a poor baronet, or a wealthy miser’s son would best help her to humble the pride and condescension of the Nugents and the Rice Rices.

Whilst Lady Mary Nugent was playing, Mr Gwynne very nearly went to sleep, and Rowland Prothero, who liked nothing but chants, and a solemn kind of music that he chose to think befitting a clergyman, was, in his turn, looking over the drawing-room scrap book. Miss Gwynne gave her papa a sly push, and whispered, that she believed Mr Rowland Prothero played chess.

Mr Gwynne aroused himself, and challenged his young neighbour. Miss Gwyne, assisted by all the gentlemen, brought the chess-table, and the game soon began.

There is no doubt that there is nothing in the world more selfish, more absorbing, more disagreeable to every one excepting the players, than chess. Mr Gwynne began his game half asleep; Rowland began his in a very bad temper. The former was glad of anything that could keep him awake, the latter was disgusted at having been made the victim of Miss Gwynne's anxiety to preserve her father from falling fast asleep in the midst of his guests. But, by degrees, the one was thoroughly aroused, and the other forgot his annoyance. Both soon ignored the presence of any human being save himself and his opponent.

Page 41

Music and talking sounded on all sides, but they made no impression on the chess-players. Lady Mary performed all her most brilliant airs and variations in vain, as far as Mr Gwynne was concerned; and Rowland was even unconscious that Netta had resolutely played through all the small pieces she had learnt at school at the particular request of Sir Hugh Pryse.

‘That game will never finish,’ at last exclaimed Lady Mary, approaching Mr Gwynne. ‘How can any one like chess?’

Mr Gwynne kept his finger on a piece he was about to move, glanced up, but did not speak.

’They tell me you ought to have at least five or six moves in your eye whilst you are making one,’ said Sir Hugh. ’For my part, I always find one move at a time more than I can manage. It certainly is the dullest game ever invented.’

‘Chess is a game of great antiquity,’ said the Rev. Jonathan sententiously. ’It is supposed to have been invented in China or Hindustan, and was known in the latter place by the name *Chaturanga*, that is, four *angas*, or members of an army.’

‘The army must be proud to send such members to parliament,’ said young Rice Rice, with a consciousness of superior wit, in which the remainder of the party did not appear to participate.

‘True, young gentleman,’ said Mr Jonathan, ’and well she might, for they were elephants, horses, chariots, and foot-soldiers; but what such members of an army have to do with parliament, I should be glad to hear you explain. I do not remember mention being made of parliament till the twelfth century. It was first applied to general assemblies in France during the reign of Louis the Seventh; and the earliest mention of it in England is in the preamble to the statute of Westminster in 1272. It is derived from the French word *parler*, to speak.’

‘Then,’ said Miss Gwynne, ’there must be some truth in what I have heard, that the first parliament was composed of women.’

’Good, good, ‘pon my soul!’ roared Sir Hugh.

‘But Sir William Jones says of chess,’ continued Mr Jonathan, in the same unchanged tone and manner, ‘that the Hindus—’

’Oh, my dear, pray do not let us hear anything of Sir William Jones; I am sick to death of all the Jones’,’ interrupted Mrs Prothero, causing a diversion, and a suppressed laugh at her expense, instead of at young Rice Rice’s, who had made the last sally upon Mr Jonathan, and a somewhat mortifying retreat.

It was remarkable, that whoever made a sly attack upon that worthy, with a view to a joke, was sure to have the tables turned upon him, by the matter-of-fact way in which his joke was received, refuted, and cut to pieces.

‘I assure you, my dear, there have been many very celebrated Jones’, Sir William at the head of them. He was a great Oriental scholar. Then there was Inigo Jones, the architect; and John Paul Jones, the admiral; and Dr John Jones, the grammarian, born in this very county; and—and—’

Page 42

’That celebrated Mr David Jones, Mr Prothero, whose locker was so deep that I am sure he must have been a relation of the admiral,’ suggested Miss Gwynne.

‘Truly so, my dear—but I have read—’

‘I am afraid I must trouble you to order my carriage, Mr Gwynne,’ said Lady Mary, looking impatiently, first at the chess-table, secondly at her daughter, who was engaged in animated nonsense with Mr Rice Rice, junior; and thirdly at Sir Hugh, still occupied in making Netta blush.

‘I beg your pardon; one moment, Lady Mary; I must just castle my king.’

‘Perhaps you had better put an end to the game, papa,’ said Miss Gwynne.

‘Not for the world, my dear. What do you say, Mr Rowland?’

’I should certainly like to finish it, but perhaps we are inconveniencing others.’

’Ah, yes, to be sure. Then will you come and dine with me to-morrow, and we will finish it?’

‘Thank you, I shall be very happy,’

Mr Rice Rice, junior, and Sir Hugh wished that they were good chess players. It was quite an honour to be invited to a family party at Glanyravon.

‘Put the chess-table into the book-room, Winifred, and lock the door.’

Mr Gwynne actually rose in the excitement of the moment.

’If the servants come they will disturb the men, and—and—all that sort of thing, you know.’

Miss Gwynne and Rowland carried the chess-table into a small room, opening into the drawing-room, and duly locked the door after them.

‘I suppose you are fond of chess,’ said Miss Gwynne for want of something to say.

‘Very,’ said Rowland laconically, and she little knew what was passing in his mind.

Always the same thoughts when in her presence—thoughts of mingled approbation and dislike. But she cared little what he thought of her.

‘Dry and pedantic, and very disagreeable,’ was what she thought of him.

‘Your nephew is rather a sinking-looking young man,’ were Lady Mary’s words to Mrs Prothero, during his temporary absence.

’Yes, he is very clever and gentlemanlike. He gained high honours at Oxford, and my cousin. Sir Philip Payne Perry, is going to procure him a London curacy,’

Lady Mary looked still more favourably upon Rowland when he returned, with a flush on his face, from the book-room.

‘Do you know that young Prothero is a very handsome young man?’ she said to Miss Gwynne.

‘Very handsome,’ said Miss Gwynne, remembering her intentions for Wilhelmina. And the carriages were announced.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MISER’S SON.

Page 43

It was Sunday evening, and all the inmates of Glanyravon Farm were either at church or chapel, with the exception of Netta and one of the servants, who remained to watch the sick Gladys. Netta said she had a headache, and preferred staying at home. By way of curing it she put on her best bonnet and went for a walk. As soon as she was out of sight of the house she set off at a pace that did not bespeak pain of any kind. She soon struck out of the country road, with its hedges of hawthorn, into a field, and thence into a small wood or grove, almost flanking the road. The warm June sun sent his rays in upon her through the trees, and helped them to cast checkered shadows upon her path, lighting up, every here and there, a bunch of fern or flowers, and brightening the trunks of the interlacing trees. As she saw the lights and shadows dancing before her she became serious for a moment, and fancied they were like the will-o'-the-wisp, and portended no good; but she soon quickened her pace, and at the first opening went out again into the road, where the sun was uninterrupted in his gaze, and her few fanciful thoughts took flight.

She glanced furtively into one or two cottages as she passed them, and the absence of all inmates seemed to reproach her for her Sunday evening falsehood. At last she reached a small cross-road or lane, down which she turned, heedless of the profusion of wild roses that actually canopied the way. Another path, narrower still, and thickly bordered with blackberry bushes in full blossom, brought her to what seemed a large mass of brambles, low underwood, and occasional young oaks. There were, however, little patches of grass here and there amongst the thicket, and into one of these she got with some difficulty. This was the hall from which diverged one or two little passages, that looked so dark, narrow, and brambly, that they appeared inaccessible. But Netta managed to push aside some briars with her parasol and enter one. Almost at her first footstep she tore her pretty muslin dress, but folding it closer round her, she pushed her way. The smart pink bonnet was in great danger, but escaped uninjured.

At last she found herself on the brink of a deep ravine, almost precipitous, and heard the sound of rushing water beneath her. Large, gloomy trees outspread their brawny arms on each side of this gorge and lovingly embraced above it, so that the rays of the sun were again thwarted in their purpose, and turned and twisted about before they could glance upon the dark waters below.

Netta did not know all the tangles and tears she was to meet with when she set out on her walk. She had not visited this spot for some time, and then she had taken a more frequented path, on the other side of the ravine. She looked around, and down into the depth below, but she could see nothing but trees and brushwood. She was not strong-minded, so she began to be afraid. However, summoning up her courage, she pushed into a kind of broken stony path, down the side of the gully, and at the expense of a few more rents in the muslin dress, and some scratches on her hands, she succeeded in scrambling to the bottom.

Page 44

Here was a wild and beautiful scene. A waterfall rolled from a height, over rocks and brushwood, down into a foaming stream beneath, that rushed, in its turn, over huge stones through the dark ravine.

As Netta stood almost at the base of the waterfall, and on the edge of the rapid brook, something like reflection took possession of her volatile mind. There was a solemn gloom and grandeur about the scene that reminded her of the Sabbath she was desecrating, and therewith of her parents, and her duty to them. For a moment—only for a moment—she thought she would return, and strive to atone for the falsehood, by giving up the object of her evening wandering. But a bright gleam of sunshine darted through the trees—the stream foamed and leapt towards it—the waterfall sparkled beneath—the arrowy fern glittered like gold, and Netta's heart forgot her duty, and thought of her recreant lover. Her repentance must come in gloom, her sin in sunshine.

She plucked a bunch of the wild roses that hung around and above her, and dashed them petulantly into the stream. She watched them as their course was interrupted by the large masses of rock, and they were tossed here and there by the angry mischievous water. At last they hung trembling on a huge stone, stranded, as it were, on their impetuous course. Again, for a moment, a serious comparison arose in her mind, and she wondered whether her life might be like that of the flowers she had cast away from her? whether she might be carried, by the force of contending passions, and left to wither upon some hard shore that as yet she knew not of. Such ideas naturally present themselves to the mind of all who are not wholly devoid of imagination and when the rapid stream again bore, away the bunch of roses, and Netta saw them no more, she had quite believed that such would be her course upon the troubled waters of the world.

But she was not long left to speculate upon her future. Whilst her eyes were yet fixed upon the spot whence the roses had vanished, she felt a hand on her shoulder, heard a voice call her name, and starting round, saw her cousin Howel behind her. He had crept so softly down that she had not heard him, and she uttered a sharp cry that sounded like one of terror, as she suddenly felt his touch.

'A strange greeting, Netta,' were the first words, after they had shaken hands.

'You frightened me, and why were you not here sooner? I have been waiting an hour,' was the rejoinder, in a tone of voice that belied the radiant joy of the young face.

Suddenly Netta seemed to recollect something that brought a shadow over the sunshine.

'Cousin Howel, I—I am very sorry for you. Poor Uncle Griff! How is aunt?—and you—-you look ill, Howel; what is the matter?'

It was difficult for Netta to know what to say about the death of the miser. She was not sorry, and she could not tell how her cousin felt.

Page 45

’Oh, yes; my mother is pretty well. I have been ill, but shall soon be all right again. Netta, how long is it since we met?’

‘A twelvemonth next Friday.’

’You remember the day, dear Netta. Then you do not hate me, although they have done their best to make you do so, by calling me gambler, spendthrift, drunkard, and all the charming etceteras.’

‘Oh no, Howel.’

‘Take off that bonnet, and let me see if you are altered.’ He unfastened the strings, and let the long black curls fall over the girl’s neck. ’No, you are only prettier than ever, cousin Netta. How would you look in lace and pearls, and all the goodly array of a fine lady?’

’I don’t know, Howel; but tell me what you wanted me for.

’Just let me twist this bunch of roses into your hair first, to see how an evening toilette would become my pretty cousin Netta.’

Howel had torn a spray from the rose-bush at their back, and he inserted it carelessly amongst the curls.

’How well you look, Netta. I should like to see you in a ball-room. We will go together to plenty of balls, if you will only consent.’

‘I don’t like those roses, cousin,’ said Netta hastily, ’they are unlucky I think,’ and she tore them from her hair, and threw them, as she had done the previous ones, into the brook. ’Now let us see where they will go.’

’We have not time, Netta, and I do not know why I am fooling away the hours. You must answer all my questions truly and plainly. I am become a rich man, how rich I do not myself know; and I mean to let every one belonging to me see that I can spend my money like a gentleman, and be as grand as those who have hitherto lorded it over me.’

‘Particularly the Rice Rices and Lady Mary Nugent,’ interrupted Netta.

’Would you like to be grander than they, Netta? have a finer carriage, more beautiful clothes, a handsomer house, plate, jewels, servants, and all sorts of magnificence?’

‘Oh, yes, of all things in the world.’

’Then you shall be my wife, Netta, and we will soon see whether we cannot be as grand as the grandest.’

‘Oh, cousin!’

‘Well, dear Netta; tell me, are you changed?’

‘No, cousin.’

‘If I ask your father’s consent, and he gives it, will you marry me?’

’You know we settled that long ago, cousin Howel; but father will not consent, unless—-unless—’

’Pshaw, but if I ask his consent, and he refuses it, will you marry me then, dear Netta, dear, dear cousin?’

Howel fixed his large, piercing eyes upon Netta, who coloured and trembled, and murmured, ‘Oh, Howel, I don’t know—how can I?’

’How can you? Who is to prevent you? We can marry and go abroad, and return and ask pardon, and I will take a fine house, and they will be only too proud to own us?’

‘Not father, Howel, unless—’

’Unless I become a steady fellow, and settle down, as I mean to do, if you will marry me. But if you refuse me, I shall just go on as I am, or put an end to my wretched life perhaps.’

Page 46

‘Howel, don’t be so wicked,’ cried Netta, bursting into tears.

’Then, Netta, you must give me your promise to be mine, whether your father consents or not, whenever I write you word, through my mother, that I will have a carriage ready at the corner near the turnpike. But I can settle all particulars at the proper time, provided only you promise. Remember, you have told me hundreds of times that you will be my wife, and neither father nor mother should prevent it.’

‘I do not know—I cannot tell whether it would be right.’

’Not right to save me from destruction, to make me what I ought to be, to cleave to your husband as if he were yourself, in spite of parents or relations! I am sure, Netta, that you are taught to do all this; besides, you cannot help it, if you love me. You know that I would have married you when I had nothing, as readily as I will now that I have tens of thousands, and surely this deserves a return?’

Netta began to sob.

’You know how it is, Howel. I am afraid of father, and could not bear to annoy mother, but—’

’But you love me better still, Netta; so do not cry, and we will be as happy as the day is long. Will you promise me?’

Netta sobbed on and hesitated.

’I am going to London to-morrow, cousin Netta, to pay debts, and make myself clear of the world. If you will promise, in a few months I will return for you; we will travel, we will do anything in the world you like; I shall have plenty of money, I shall probably write a book when we are abroad, which will make me famous as well as rich; we will come home and astonish the world. If you do not promise, I shall never come here again, and shall probably live a gay, wretched life on the continent, or elsewhere, and be really the good-for-nothing fellow I am thought to be;—will you promise, dear cousin Netta?’

Howel knew well how to assume a manner that should add force to the feelings he expressed, and rarely did he employ his powers of persuasion in vain, particularly with the fair sex, never with his cousin, to whom he was really attached, and who was wholly devoted to him.

‘Netta,’ he added, in a low, sad voice, ’I fear, after all, you do not love me, and I have very few who care for me in this world.’

‘Do not say this, cousin,’ sobbed Netta, ’you know I always promised—I always said—I—I—will do anything in the world you wish me, cousin Howel.’

‘Even if your father refuses?’

‘Yes, I will not care for any one but you.’

’Thank you, dear Netta; now I know that we shall be happy, and you shall have everything you can desire.’

’Stop, cousin; I shall not marry you because you are rich, or great, or likely to be as grand as other people—though I should like to put them down, just as well as you—but because we have loved each other ever since we were little children, and I could not care for any one else—not even if Sir Hugh Pryse were to ask me.’

Page 47

Howel was both touched and amused.

’You are a good, kind, little cousin, Netta; but what can you mean about Sir Hugh?’

Netta tossed her head, and looked vain-glorious.

’Oh, I dined at Glanyravon on Thursday, and the Rice Rices, and Nugents, and Sir Hugh were there; and Sir Hugh was very attentive to me, and said a great many things to me. And he has been at our house since, and has met me in the road, and been as polite as possible.’

’But he is desperately in love with Miss Gwynne, or her fortune; so you need not alarm yourself, my little cousin.’

‘You need not alarm *yourself*, you ought to say,’ and Netta again tossed her head.

’Well, I am not jealous. Sir Hugh, with his loud voice, vulgar manners, and stupid fat face, could not light a candle to me, and as to his title, I will back my fortune against that.’

‘It sounds very grand to be called my lady.’ Netta said this to pique her cousin, and she succeeded; but she did not expect to provoke the storm that she raised. The dark brow lowered, and he said,—

’Netta, I am in no mood to be trifled with. If you wish to be ‘my lady,’ take Sir Hugh, if he will have you; but I go halves with nobody. Now is the time to resolve; I shall never ask you again; and whatever your opinion may be upon the subject, I consider that I do you as great honour in asking you to be my wife, as if there were fifty Sir Hughs at your feet.’

It was now Netta’s time to pout and look cross. She generally did before her private interviews with her cousin ended. Their quick tempers were sure to inflame each other.

’I am sure I don’t care whether you ask me again or not. It is not such a great favour on your part.’

’Very well; then “your ladyship” has probably decided in favour of this,’ and Howel made a face to represent Sir Hugh swelling his cheeks to their utmost extent. Netta tried to smother a laugh.

’I am sure he is quite as good looking as you are, with your cross face. You are enough to frighten one out of one’s wits.’

’If you had any, Miss Netta. But come, this is absurd. Is it to be Sir Hugh in perspective, or cousin Howel at once?’

Netta was still pouting, fidgeting with her parasol, and restlessly pushing her foot through the grass and flowers, when they were startled by a voice crying,—

‘Is that you, Netta?’

Both looked up in affright, and, to their extreme disgust, perceived their very sedate brother and cousin, Rowland, threading his way down the opposite side of the ravine. He was soon at the bottom, and in less than a minute had crossed from stone to stone over the brook, and stood by the side of his sister.

‘Netta, what can you be doing here?’ he asked abruptly.

‘I came for a walk,’ was the somewhat hesitating reply.

‘Then, perhaps, you will have no objection to walk home with me,’ said Rowland, looking reproachfully at Howel. He met a defiant glance in return.

Page 48

‘Howel,’ he said, ’I do not think my father would approve of Netta’s meeting you here, and, I therefore, must beg to break up an interview that had been better avoided.’

’Whatever right your father may have, sir, to prevent my seeing your sister, at any rate you have none,’ was Howel’s indignant reply.

’Then I shall take a brother’s right, and in the absence of my father, assume his place. Netta, you know you are doing wrong; come with me.’

Netta hesitated, but her brother’s manner was authoritative, and she felt that she dared not disobey.

’I tell you what it is, Rowland, you have always assumed a tone with me that I neither can nor will brook,’ passionately exclaimed Howel.’ I beg you to account for your conduct, and to understand that I will have either an apology or satisfaction for your ungentlemanly proceedings.’

’I never apologise when I have done no wrong; and as for satisfaction, as you understand it, I have not the power of making it. I will not desecrate the Sabbath by an unseemly quarrel amidst the most beautiful works of creation, nor offend my sister’s ear by recrimination. If you have any real regard for her, you will allow her to go home quietly with me, and remember that we are all relations, and ought to be friends.’

’Friends we can never be. The only friend I have in your family is Owen, except, perhaps, Netta, who is turned by one and the other of you, like a weathercock by the winds.’

‘I beg your pardon, cousin Howel,’ began Netta.

‘We have had enough of this,’ said Rowland calmly. ’If you choose to come and see us as a relation, in a straightforward manner, Howel, we should be glad to see you, but underhand ways are equally disagreeable to us all.’

‘How remarkably condescending!’ said Howel with a sneer. ’But I will not waste time with a canting, Methodist parson like you. I wish you as many converts as you desire, but not myself amongst them. Remember, Netta! Good bye. I suppose your most excellent brother will allow us to shake hands.’

Netta held out her hand, and as Howel shook it, he again repeated the word ‘remember.’ Rowland advanced a pace or two, and partly extended his hand. Howel turned abruptly away, and with a contemptuous glance, merely said, ‘Good day to you,’ The brother and sister took an opposite course to his, and had to cross the brook, whilst he pushed his way through the briers that had impeded Netta’s path. He turned and watched them as they stepped from stone to stone, and finally ascended the ravine.

Netta looked round, and he kissed his hand to her, to which she responded by nodding her head; but Rowland neither turned to the right nor left.

‘Meddling coxcomb!’ he exclaimed, ’what is there in him that commands the attention and respect that I fail to obtain with ten times his talents?’

He stood for a few minutes musing, whilst the music of the waterfall insensibly soothed his irritated mind.

Page 49

‘Why should I care for Netta, who could marry any one I like?’ were his thoughts. ’I suppose because she really loves me, and because they all oppose me. Well, supposing I do turn over a new leaf, and spend the gold my father got so usuriously, in doing good! That would be making a use of a miser’s money, rarely, if ever, made before? and might be worth the trial, if only to work a new problem, whether ill-gotten wealth could conduce to moral health. I should like to out-Herod that puppy Rowland, and make a saint of myself out of a sinner. That would be working out two problems at once. I wonder whether Netta will help me to solve them?’

Netta, meanwhile, was receiving a very severe lecture from her brother, to which she did not condescend to reply, until he spoke of what his father would say to her meeting Howel clandestinely,

‘I suppose you are not going to be cross enough to tell father,’ said Netta’

‘I shall certainly think it my duty to tell him,’ was the reply.

‘Then you are an unkind, unfeeling, unnatural brother,’ cried Netta, bursting into tears.

’Will you promise not to meet Howel again without my father or mother’s consent?’ asked Rowland, relenting,

’I won’t promise anything? and Howel is a thousand times nicer and kinder than you are. You have no feeling for any one. I wish Owen were at home.’

‘Netta, you are very unjust? you know I only wish your good.’

’And I suppose you wish Howel’s good, too. Just as his father is dead, and he meaning to be good, and only wishing to see me before he goes to London, and having plenty of money to do what he likes, and intending to pay his debts with it, and—and—’

Here sobs and tears came to the rescue of the voluble words that would soon have worn themselves out—for Netta had no great flow of language.

Rowland was perplexed. He was fond of his sister? he wished Howel well? he did not know whether it would be best to let them marry or not. If they were prevented, they would either take French leave, or hate all their relations? and if they married they would not be happy, he was sure. But he knew it was wrong to deceive his parents. In this uncertain state of mind they reached home, through, the little hawthorn lane before described. Mrs Prothero was on the look out for them, she having returned from chapel and missed them.

Netta ran past her mother into the house, without replying to her question concerning her headache, and Rowland at once related to his mother what he had seen of Howel and Netta’s private interview, which that good lady was very much distressed to hear.

CHAPTER IX.

THE IRISH BEGGAR.

Glanyravon farm was anything but a quiet home during the ensuing week. Mrs Prothero thought it right to inform her husband of what had passed; and he blustered and raged even more than he had ever done about the Irish beggars. Everybody thought proper to try to convert Netta, but none of them knew the indomitable obstinacy of her character, and all signally failed. Even Uncle and Aunt Jonathan had their turn, and drove over on purpose to canvass the matter; but as the elders disagreed upon the various points at issue, it was no wonder that all remained much as it was before the unfortunate meeting we have mentioned.

Page 50

‘For my part,’ said Mrs Jonathan Prothero, when all were assembled, except Netta, in family conclave, ’I cannot see so much against the young man after all. Such a fortune as his is not to be met with every day, and I must say he is very handsome and clever.’

Here we must remark that this lady’s sentiments had undergone a change, since it had been rumoured that Howel was worth more than a hundred thousand pounds.

‘I tell you what it is, ma’am,’ roared the farmer, ’if he were worth his weight in gold, he ’ouldn’t be a good match for any prudent ’ooman. To my certain knowledge he drinks and gambles, and he shall never have my consent to marry Netta so long as I live, and you may tell him so.’

’I do not know enough of him, sir, to have any communication of the kind with him,’ said Mrs Jonathan, stiffly.

‘My dear,’ interposed mild Mrs Prothero, ’if he gets steady, and settles down, it might be better to let them marry, than to make them miserable for life.’

’*Study*! miserable! mother, you’re a—I beg your pardon, but when Howel’s study, I’ll turn to smoking cigars. Why, the very night of his father’s funeral he was half drunk, instead of being decent for once.’

’He couldn’t care much for his father, my dear; you must make allowances.’

‘An odd man, that Griff, brother David,’ said Mr Jonathan Prothero, as if just awaking from a dream. ’Do you remember when we were lads together, and used to go up to Garn Goch looking for treasures? I knew, even then, that it was an old British encampment, and began to speculate upon its date, and so on; you used to hunt rabbits, and provoke me by overturning the walls, but Griff got it into his head that there was money buried somewhere, and never ceased digging for it. At last he found an old coin of very ancient date, and seeing that I wished to have it, he bargained with me, until he got all the money I had for it. Of course the coin was worth any money, and satisfactorily proves that Garn Goch was an old British encampment at the time of the invasion of the Romans.’

’Well, brother, you *are* by the head! That old coin is nothing but a well-used sixpence.’

’I have every reason to believe, and I am supported in my opinion by various antiquaries, that it bears the inscription either of Cunobelin or Caractacus. There is a decided C, and we are told that money was coined in Britain in the time of Cunobelin.’

‘And how on earth did he get up to Garn Goch?’

’Why, you know that Caractacus commanded the Silures, or people of South Wales, against the Romans, and that they held out bravely, I have no shadow of doubt that Garn Goch was one of their strongholds.’

’But what can Garn Goch have to do with Netta and Howel? Brother, I always shall say you are by the head with your antiquities.’

’Well, I think you had better let them marry, I really do. It’s no good opposing young people, when they will have their own way at last.’

Page 51

’I sha’n’t send for you to consult with again. Mother, go and bring Netta here, and let us see what she has to say for herself.’

‘My dear Davy, would it not be better to speak to her privately?’

’Not a bit. I can’t say a word when I am alone with her, but I could give her a bit of my mind when you are all present. Why don’t you go, and not stand looking as if you was as much by the head as brother Jo.’

Poor Mrs Prothero perceived that her husband was determined to have Netta publicly reprimanded, so, much against her will, she left the room. Rowland was preparing to follow, not liking the prospect of a scene, when his father peremptorily called him back.

’Stay you, sir. If you was the better for going to Oxford, you’d try to teach your sister how to behave, instead of cutting off the moment you’re wanted.’

’I really do not think, father, that a public reproof is likely to make Netta change her mind. You would do better to talk quietly to her.’

Here Mrs Prothero returned, followed by Netta, looking as sulky as she possibly could, and with the traces of tears on her face. There was an awkward silence for a few seconds, during which both Mr Prothero and Netta were getting redder and redder, and their inner man correspondingly choleric. At last the father began the strife.

‘Now, I say, Miss Netta,’ there was a pause for a few minutes. ’Do you hear, miss?’

‘Yes, father, I hear very well,’ said Netta, and muttered to herself in continuation, ‘who could help it?’

’You hear very well—I should think so. You hear a good deal you’ve no business to listen to. Do you mean to give up that scamp Howel?’

No reply.

’Now it’s no use for you to stand there and say nothing, for an answer I will have.’

‘I don’t think he’s a scamp,’ said Netta boldly.

Poor Mrs Prothero trembled, and looked imploringly at Netta.

‘My dear Netta, you should not contradict your father,’ said Mrs Jonathan, with a severe look.

‘You don’t think he’s a scamp. Then you mean to have him, I suppose?’ said Mr Prothero.

’I didn’t say that, father. But I don’t see why I may not speak to my own cousin.’

Every one was surprised at Netta’s answers. Like her father, she could talk better before numbers. She had done nothing but cry when her mother had reasoned with her.

’Very well, miss. All I can say is, that if you meet him again I’ll—I’ll—I’ll—’ the good farmer did not know what he would do. He was not prepared to say.

‘He is gone to London, father,’

’Will you promise not to meet him any more, you good-for-nothing girl, you? You most disobedient daughter!’

Again Netta was silent.

‘Will you promise your father, Netta,’ said Mrs Prothero, gently, ’not to meet Howel again, or have anything to say to him, without his consent?’

Page 52

Still Netta was silent.

‘He may reform, you know,’ suggested Mrs Jonathan, ’and then you may be allowed to marry,’

‘No chance of that,’ roared Mr Prothero, advancing towards Netta, taking her by the arm, and looking as if a few more of her rejoinders would bring her a good shaking. ‘Do you mean to promise, miss?’

‘Father, you’re hurting me,’ said Netta petulantly. ’You needn’t pinch me so.’

Mr Prothero relaxed his hold. He doated on this obstinate, pretty, wilful child of his—the only girl, and whose temper was the very facsimile of his own.

’It’s you’re hurting me most, Netta, by rushing into certain misery. Will you promise?’

Again he took hold of the arm.

‘One would think you were a Papist, father, and this the Inquisition,’ said Netta, growing learned under the torture of her father’s grasp,

‘Well said, Netta,’ broke in Mr Jonathan, aroused by any allusion to any subject out of the present. ’A cruel court that perhaps more properly called Jesuitical than Papistical.’

Mr Prothero gave Netta a slight shake, which shook more passion into both of them, and frightened Mrs Prothero.

’Once for all, Netta, will you promise to give up that scamp of a cousin of yours, Howel Jenkins?’ roared the father.

‘I won’t promise anything at all,’ replied Netta doggedly; and freeing herself from her father, she ran to her uncle as if for protection.

‘You won’t!’ said Mr Prothero, pursuing her, ’then I tell you what it is. The moment you are known to keep company with him, you may find some other home than this; and if you determine to marry him, you shall be no longer a daughter of mine. I’ll never, as long as I live—’

‘Hush, hush, David, hush, please,’ said Mrs Prothero, putting her hand on his arm. ’Netta will not disobey us, I am sure. But it is her obstinate temper; she never would say anything she was commanded to say.’

’Then you ought to have taught her better. She is a good-for-nothing girl, and I’ll—’

‘Netta, you had better leave the room,’ said Rowland, opening the door, through which Netta gladly escaped. ’"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath,"’ he added, turning to his father. ’You will do nothing with her at present. She is worked up to a spirit of resistance by too much argument, and the more you say the more obstinate she will become.’

‘You are all as obstinate as mules,’ said Mr Prothero; ’I can’t think who you turn after. And then to have the impudence to say I was a Papist! Why, I’d rather be a Methody preacher any day. And you to encourage her, brother Jonathan. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.’

Brother Jonathan started up from his dream of Garn Goch and the Inquisition, to repudiate the imputation of encouragement.

’I was merely glad to find that she knew anything about the Inquisition, and had any information at all in her head; generally speaking, women know so little. I assure you, David, it was far from me to wish to encourage her in disobedience, or to offend you; so give me your hand.’

Page 53

The brothers shook hands very warmly, and in so doing, the contrast between them was very great. The farmer I have already described. The clergyman was a remarkable specimen of the 'dry-as-dust' species. Very tall, very thin, with very loose joints, seemingly hung together on wires, and a very prominent nose. He had acquired the habit of poking his chin and looking on the ground, as if he were always in search for something, which he possibly was, as he never despaired of finding some antiquity or curiosity at any moment. It must not be augured from his devotion to antiquarian lore that he made a bad clergyman On the contrary, he was always ready at the call of the poorest parishioner, regular in his visits to the sick, charitable in no mean degree, and humble in his deportment to rich and poor. True, his sermons were somewhat dry, and occasionally too learned for the greater portion of his flock; but he made up for this by the simplicity of his conversation when he talked to them at their own houses.

He seldom was seen without a sort of school-boy satchel at his back, containing a small hammer and other useful tools, which, it was believed, had actually carried his lesson-books years ago. All the villagers knew his strong-and-weak point, and he rarely appeared amongst them without having various stones and imaginary curiosities presented to him, particularly by the young people. Many of these stones found their way into his bag, and it was not to be wondered at that he had a somewhat round back, as he frequently carried a load upon it, that a beast of burden would not have rejoiced in.

He and Mrs Jonathan were a remarkable pair; one of those ill-assorted couples that you wonder at. 'How in the world did they come together?' was the usual question, the philosophic reply to which would have been, that theirs was actually one of the 'Matches made in heaven.' The gentleman got money to enable him to follow the bent of his genius without anxiety for his daily bread, and therewith a stirring wife to take care of him and his house; the wife got her great desideratum, a husband, and therewith the desideratum of all women, her own way.

But we must return to Netta and the other belligerents. As nothing more was to be made of her at present, they let her alone, perhaps the wisest thing they could do, and sat down to dinner. Netta declined eating, and consequently was left to her own reflections. Mr Prothero inquired anxiously of his wife, when he had cooled a little, whether he had really hurt Netta when he took hold of her arm; to which Mrs Prothero replied with unusual severity, 'No, perhaps it had been better if you had; she wanted some trial or punishment to bring down her proud spirit.'

In the course of the evening, a little before Mr and Mrs Jonathan left Glanyravon to return home, Miss Gwynne came to inquire for the poor Irish girl. She joined the party in the parlour for a short time, and gave a message from her father to Rowland, to the effect that he was very anxious for another game of chess, and begged him to come and dine at the Park on the morrow. Of course Rowland was only too happy, and the rest of the party too proud.

Page 54

‘Papa is disgusted at your having beaten him the other night,’ said Miss Gwynne to Rowland.

‘I think Mr Gwynne got tired,’ said Rowland modestly.

‘What affectation,’ thought Miss Gwynne, as she said, ’oh, no! he says you are the best player.’

‘I disclaim that entirely,’ said Rowland. ’I merely beat two games out of three, and we had not time for another.’

Rowland had been, according to promise, to dine and play chess with Mr Gwynne; Miss Gwynne had dined with them, but had left them after dinner to follow their own devices, whilst she had followed hers, and did not reappear during the evening. Mr Gwynne had reproached her for her absence, and she had declared that she hated to be so long without talking, and that chess and young Prothero were perfect antidotes to conversation.

’That ancient, Saracenic game, as Mr Jonathan Prothero calls it, played by a Goth,’ she said, ‘is beyond my store of politeness.’

Mrs Prothero and Miss Gwynne went to see the poor Irish girl; they found her rather better, and able to speak to them with some degree of composure. The fever and its accompanying delirium had abated, and the danger was past; but, as is usual in such cases, extreme weakness was the result.

‘God bless you, my ladies,’ she murmured, as Miss Gwynne stooped over her to inquire how she did, and Mrs Prothero took her thin hand. ’I am better, thank ye; I can see and understand, and know now all that you have done for the wretched beggar.’

Here the poor girl’s tears began to flow.

‘We only wish to see you get well,’ said Miss Gwynne softly, ’and then we can help you to find your friends.’

’I have no friends in the world miss, asthore; my father died years ago, and my mother, brother, and sister all died of this horrible famine and pestilence! oh me! oh me!’

The tears flowed still faster, and Mrs Prothero begged her to be silent, and not to excite herself; but with restless eagerness she went on, as if anxious to pour forth her sorrows whilst she felt the strength to do so. It was remarkable that her English was very good, and that, with the exception of an occasional Irish epithet of endearment, you would scarcely have discovered her country. Indeed, the Welsh peculiarities of expression and accent sometimes appeared, so that it would have been difficult to say where she was born or brought up.

’I am going to look for my friends, if I live, and then, may be, I may be able to repay you for your kindness to me, a poor, wretched wanderer on the face of God’s earth. If you’ll be pleased to listen whilst I have the strength, I will tell you my story.

’My mother was a Welshwoman, born in some part of South Wales; she was the daughter of a clergyman, and respectably brought up. Her father taught her a great many things that we ignorant people in Ireland used to think a great deal of. Oh, she was a good and tender mother to me, ladies, avourneen.

Page 55

’My father was an Irishman, and a fine, handsome man. He was a soldier, a corporal in the Welsh Fusiliers, and used to be called Corporal O’Grady. He was going through this country to Ireland, to visit his friends, on leave, when he first saw mother, and fell in love with her, and she with him. She knew that her father would not be willing that they should marry, so she ran away with him to Ireland. They travelled about for some time with his regiment, but, after I was born, mother went to settle in Ireland with father’s family, and there she had three other children, two boys and a girl. After this my father was wounded in India, and got his discharge and his half-pay. He became a kind of under-agent for a gentleman that lived in England, so we were very well off as long as he lived; but he died when I was about twelve years old, and then mother did not well know what to do. I remember my father’s death, and all our trouble, as if it was yesterday.

’She set up a little school, and for some years did pretty well. She could teach all that the farmers’ daughters wanted to learn, and I helped her; so we managed to live. It was a hard struggle sometimes, but everybody was kind to widow O’Grady and her orphans; God reward them.

’But the bad time came for poor Ireland; the famine visited us, and then the pestilence! Ye have heard enough of the horrors, without doubt, but not half of what they really were. We were all starving, dying—I saw enough people die to make me wish myself dead hundreds of times, to be hidden from the sight; but I was fated to live. You, ladies, in your charity, have saved me again; but oh! if it were not wicked, I should wish myself with my mother, brothers, and sister in heaven.’

Here the poor girl’s sobs choked her speech, and Mrs Prothero entreated her not to proceed.

’Only one word more, my ladies, and I have done. When they were all gone—all—all—-and I only left, I did not care what became of me. I went about amongst those stricken down with the fever; but, woe is me, I never caught it. I fasted from morning to night, day after day, but I could not die of starvation; nothing would kill me. I was alone in the wide world, yet it would not please God to take me to another, much as I prayed to Him.

’Before mother died she told me to go into Wales, and try to find if she had any relations left. It was all she said, or had strength for; and before she got ill she seldom talked of her friends. All that I know of them I heard from my father when I was quite a child. He told me that mother had written to her father when she settled in Ireland, and that her letter had been returned with a note, saying that he was dead, and his only son gone away, no one knew where. This was her brother, and my uncle, but I do not know where to find him, only I am come to seek them, that I may do her bidding.’

‘And what was your mother’s name?’ asked Mrs Prothero.

Page 56

‘Margaret Jones, ma’am,’

’My poor girl, there are hundreds of that name in South Wales. But we will make inquiries for you, and when you are better—’

’I am better now, thank you, ma’am. To-morrow I think I may go on my way. I would not trouble you any more; a poor beggar like me is not fit—oh dear! oh dear!’

’Now I insist on your being quiet and going to sleep, and forgetting all those horrors,’ said Miss Gwynne, assuming her most decided voice to hide her emotion. ’You are not to go away to-morrow; but I daresay in a few days you will be able to do so, and we can help you a little. But your best plan now is to get as strong as you can whilst you have the opportunity,’ and herewith Miss Gwynne put a large spoonful of jelly into the girl’s mouth.

Mrs Prothero was wiping her eyes, and stifling a rising sob behind the curtain, which caused Miss Gwynne to become very severe, and to utter something about giving way to foolish weakness which aroused Mrs Prothero, and made the patient bury her head beneath the bed-clothes.

Miss Gwynne beckoned to Mrs Prothero, and they left the room together. Upon asking for Netta, Miss Gwynne was let into the secret of the family troubles and consultations, and greatly fearing to be made a party in the lecturings overhanging the luckless head of the offender, she took a hasty leave of Mr and Mrs Jonathan, and begging Mrs Prothero not to be too hard upon Netta, or to let her son Rowland preach too many sermons, went her very independent way.

CHAPTER X.

THE SQUIRE’S DAUGHTER.

‘You will oblige me by remaining at home this evening, my dear,’ said Mr Gwynne to his daughter.

‘That I assuredly shall, papa,’ was the reply, ’for dear Miss Hall is coming to-day, and that princess of bores, Miss Nugent, has invited herself to tea. I certainly do wish Rowland Prothero would fall in love with her. She is quite ready for the *premier venu*, be he prince or peasant.’

‘Does not Lady Mary come, my dear?’

’No; I am thankful to say she is gone to spend a few days with the Llanfawr family.’

’I am very glad Miss Hall is coming, Freda. I wish she would live with you; it would be very pleasant, and a protection for you, and all that sort of thing.’

’Oh, do ask her, dear papa. I have tried a thousand times to persuade her to come here and live with us for ever; but I think she will not come on my invitation.’

’I could not possibly ask her, my dear. I should break down at the first word; we never were very familiar. She is stiff, and I am nervous—and—and—I really could not summon courage.’

Miss Hall had been Miss Gwynne’s governess during a few years of her education era, and had succeeded in entirely gaining her affections, as well as a small portion of ascendancy over her determined will. She had left Glanyravon to reside with an aged father, who, having lately died, left her again under the necessity of seeking a situation. Miss Gwynne had invited her to pay her a visit, and she was to arrive almost immediately.

Page 57

She did arrive whilst they were talking about her, and as the carriage that had been sent to meet her drove up to the door out flew Freda in great excitement, and scarcely allowed her *ci-devant* governess to alight before she was overwhelming her with embraces. Mr Gwynne followed somewhat more leisurely, and received Miss Hall with his usual nervous reserve of manner, but great courtesy. She responded most warmly to the embraces of Freda, and quietly to the welcome of Mr Gwynne.

We will not give a minute description of the new comer, because she is not quite a person to be described. She is neither very good-looking nor very plain, neither very old nor very young, neither very tall nor very short, neither very talkative nor very reserved, neither very much over-dressed nor very much under-dressed, neither very merry nor very grave. Freda used to say that she was the personification of gentle dignity and serenity, and in the days of her Italian studies called her occasionally *La Dignita*, but more frequently *La Serenita*, which epithet would sometimes be abbreviated into Serena, or Sera, or Nita, or anything but Miss Hall, which the love of the impulsive pupil, so hard to obtain, and so great when obtained, thought much too formal.

When Freda took Miss Hall to the delightful apartment she had been adorning for her for a week past, the first impulse of the older lady was to throw herself upon the neck of the younger, and burst into tears.

‘Dearest Serena, I have been so very sorry for you,’ was all that Freda could say.

For a minute there was silence, when Miss Hall, recovering herself, said,—

’Dear Freda, this is all so kind of you. If anything could console me for the loss of my last earthly support, it is such affection as yours.’

We will pass over the long conversation of those two friends, its melancholy and its mirth, for there was much of both, and bring them to the dinner-table and Messrs Gwynne and Rowland Prothero.

They were rather a formal quartette, and at first conversation did not flow easily. Mr Gwynne’s nerves, Rowland’s embarrassment Miss Hall’s natural depression of spirits, and Freda’s resolution not to make herself agreeable to a person she was determined to consider conceited, were bad ingredients for a dish of good sociable converse. By degrees, however, they thawed a little. Mr Gwynne wished to say something that would set his young chess opponent at his ease, and said the very thing likely the most to confuse a shy man. He made a personal remark and paid a compliment.

’I am sure your uncle and—and your father, of course, must have been much gratified, and so forth, at your gaining that fellowship at Oxford.’

‘I think you labour under a mistake,’ said Rowland, looking more than usually confused when he saw Miss Gwynne’s eyes turned upon him; ’I merely gained a scholarship at Rugby, which is really nothing. I did not even try for a fellowship.’

Page 58

‘Conceited!’ thought Freda. ’I suppose he thinks if he had tried he would have got one.’

‘Were you not at Baliol?’ asked Mr Gwynne.

’Yes; I went there because my aunt had a fancy for the college, her father having been, there, otherwise I should have gone to Jesus College and tried for a Welsh fellowship, which is more easily obtained, because there are few competitors.’

‘Did you know anything of Mr Neville, Sir Thomas Neville’s son?’ asked Miss Hall.

’Yes; I was introduced to him through some friends of my aunt’s, and we became very intimate. He was very kind to me.’

‘Is he clever?’

’Very. I think he has very fine talents, and is likely to shine at the bar if he continues in his resolution to go to it. I have just had an invitation to spend a few days with him, but do not think I shall have time before I go to be ordained.’

‘Has your aunt settled the curacy?’ asked Freda, with a wicked laugh in the corner of her eye.

‘I think and hope so,’ replied Rowland, answering the visible smile by a blush; ‘she has done her utmost to obtain it for me.’

’Ah! she was well connected, and has some interest, and a—a great deal of energy, and all that sort of thing; I should think she was a clever, or I mean a—an enterprising woman.’

Mr Gwynne hesitated as he said this, not admiring the lady in question, yet thinking it incumbent upon him to pay her a compliment. His daughter glanced inquiringly at Rowland, as if wondering what he could say to so dubious a speech. He appeared equally at a loss, and, as he turned from Mr Gwynne for a moment, caught Miss Gwynne’s mirthful eye. He could not help smiling, but said with much spirit,—

’My aunt has been very good to me, Mr Gwynne, and I owe her a heavy debt of gratitude for giving me at least the opportunity of getting on in the world.’

‘Well, I like him for that,’ thought Freda; ’and are you going to London?’ she asked aloud, with a degree of interest.

‘I am to be ordained by the Bishop of London to a city curacy,’ was the reply.

‘Will you allow me to take wine with you and wish you success, sir?’ said Mr Gwynne. ’Who knows but we may see you Bishop of London some day? Miss Hall, Freda, will you join us?’

Mr Gwynne became quite animated. He felt proud that the son of his most respectable tenant should be going to take a London curacy.

Freda bent rather less stiffly than usual to Mr Rowland Prothero. She was annoyed with herself for feeling more inclined to be friendly with him since she had heard that he was intimate with young Neville, and was to be ordained by the Bishop of London.

There was more conversation, which it is unnecessary to repeat; but in due course of time the ladies retired to the drawing-room, where they found Miss Nugent awaiting them.

‘Whose *beaux yeux* do you think we have in the dining-room?’ asked Freda.

Page 59

‘I am thure I cannot gueth; perhapth Thir Hugh Prythe’s,’ Miss Nugent lisped.

’Do you call his *beaux yeux*? Little ferret eyes like his! No; guess again.’

‘Young Rithe Rithe?’

‘Wrong again.’

‘Not Captain Lewith?’

‘Some one much nearer home.’

’I do not know any one elthe, exthept that Mr Howel Jenkinth, who, they thay, will be quite a grand man.’

’I do not even know him. What do you think of his cousin, Mr Rowland Prothero?’

’I never thought about him; mamma thayth he ith very handthome, but I am thure he is very *gauche* and countrified.’

’Oh, I am sure he is not. You are greatly mistaken, he has been in excellent society, and is going at once to a London living—curacy I mean, but it is all the same.’

Miss Hall looked rather amazed at Freda. A few hours before she had been lamenting the necessity of entertaining that ‘stupid young Prothero.’

‘Ith he really?’ said Miss Nugent. ’The London curateth are tho interething. There ith one at Tht Jameth’th, with a pale face and black hair, and thuch a beautiful voice. Ith Mr Prothero going to Tht Jameth’th?’

’You shall ask him yourself; I daresay he will like you to seem interested.’

‘Are you going to Tht Jameth’th, Mr Prothero?’ inquired Miss Nugent, when that young man entered the room shortly after.

‘I beg your pardon, I do not quite understand what you mean.’

’Mith Gwynne thaid you were going to a London curacy; I thought it might be Tht Jameth’th.’

’I believe not. If I go to London I shall probably be in the city—a very different locality to St James’s.’

’Oh! when we are in town we alwayth go to Tht Jameth’th, it ith thuch a nice church.’

Freda perceived that Miss Nugent's interest fell as soon as she found that Rowland was going into the city. She also saw a smile lurking about Rowland's mouth when he said,—

'I have never been in London; but I suppose St James's is one of the fashionable parts.'

'Oh yeth, very. Numberth of grand people go to Tht Jameth'th; don't you with you were going to be curate there instead of the thity?'

Rowland was grave in a moment.

'I should wish to labour wherever there is the largest field to work in, Miss Nugent, whether in the city or St James's.'

'Yeth, to be sure, I believe there are loths of poor people in Tht Jameth'th. I onthe went by chance into thuch a nathty alley clothe by Tht Jameth'th Threet. Thuch dirty children!'

'Alas,' said Miss Hall, coming to the rescue of Rowland, who was looking quite distressed, 'we cannot go many steps in the London parishes, be they fashionable or unfashionable, without entering a "vineyard" amply wide enough for any one who wishes to work in it, whether priest or layman.'

Rowland looked round brightly and pleasantly at Miss Hall. Freda could not help noticing the sudden animation in a face that she had considered a minute ago almost heavy.

Page 60

‘When are we to have our game at chess?’ interrupted Mr Gwynne. ’The poor of London is a subject I quite dread to hear discussed, it is so hopeless. One can do no good, and what is the use of tormenting oneself about it here in Wales.’

’Oh, papa! they want very decided measures; plenty of police, active magistrates, and I don’t know what besides,’ said Freda.

‘Would you allow me to supply what you have omitted?’ asked Rowland; ’they want Christian sympathy, Christian teaching, brotherly kindness, and the aid of the rich and powerful.’

Freda considered Rowland’s finale to her sentence impertinent and was about to take up the defence of her magisterial system very warmly, when she met a glance so earnest and appealing, and withal so beautiful in its earnestness, that she could not find in her heart to answer it by a hard look or word; so, for want of better reply, she went to prepare the chess-table.

‘I wish you joy of that Saracenic game,’ she said ironically, as her father and Rowland sat down to chess, not perhaps quite by the wish of one of the pair.

‘I thought you liked chess, Freda?’ said Miss Hall.

’Oh, pretty well, when I can get any one who does not beat me. I hate so to lose a game that I think it is better not to play at all than to run the risk of feeling in a passion, and not being able to give vent to it.’

‘Perhaps the better plan would be to control the passion,’ said Miss Hall.

’Impossible! I am sure it must be just such a feeling as a good general would have if he lost a battle, after having done his best to win it.’

’I suppose the best general is always the calmest, both in victory and defeat,’ murmured Rowland, without taking his eyes from his men.

‘If you would oblige me by not talking,’ said Mr Gwynne nervously; ’I can never play if my opponent talks.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Rowland; ‘I know it is very disagreeable.’

‘Are you too tired to visit some of your old haunts, Serenita?’ said Freda. ’By the way that would be a good name for Mr Prothero’s ideal general.’

‘Not quite,’ began Rowland, but was silent in a moment.

’My dear Freda, are you going out? I really am sorry to stop your amusement, and so forth, but I cannot play,’ said Mr Gwynne.

‘Exactly, papa; we will go directly if Miss Hall likes.’

The three ladies left the room, and, as Rowland glanced after them, he very decidedly wished that he might be permitted to accompany them. One other great wish he also had at his heart, the conversion of Miss Gwynne to a purer and higher tone of mind. He did not, we grieve to say, bestow a similar pastoral thought on Miss Nugent.

’That position of your queen at such an early stage of the game must be an oversight, I think. Excuse me, but I could not take such an unfair advantage,’ said Mr Gwynne.

Rowland was roused at once. He gave himself up to his game, and an hour afterwards, when the ladies returned from their walk, and candles were ordered, it was still in progress, but he had the best of it.

Page 61

‘Will you sing for us, Serena?’ said Freda.

‘Will you sing a duet with me?’ was the reply.

The duet was sung, and another and another and another, and Rowland lost the game.

Mr Gwynne arose, very much elated and rubbing his hands gently, according to his wont.

‘How do you feel, general, defeated?’ asked Freda.

‘Very much like a subaltern,’ said Rowland.

‘Do you sing, Mr Prothero?’ asked Miss Hall; ’all the Welsh are so musical that I think there are few who have not voices.’

’I sometimes sing chants and sacred music; but I know very few songs, and those old ones.’

’Perhaps you will take the bass of some of these old glees. Here is “The Chough and Crow,” “When shall we three meet again,” “The Canadian Boat Song,” “The Sicilian Mariner,” and I know not how many more,’ said Miss Hall, turning over the leaves of a thick old book full of glees.

‘I will do my best,’ said Rowland, and the glees began in earnest.

All the Protheros were musical, and Rowland had a very fine clear voice. Miss Hall was right in saying that the Welsh are a musical people; Rowland was a happy example. He had been studying Church music a good deal, and learning to take different parts, so he acquitted himself very creditably in the glees, all of which he had either tried or heard sung. Freda was quite astonished. She had a great taste for music herself, and a good voice, but would never sing with any one but Miss Hall, a piece of wilfulness that her father occasionally reproached her with. The addition of Rowland was rather agreeable to her, as it enabled them to sing the glees that she was fond of. She no longer objected to the chess, and when her father proposed giving Rowland his revenge on the morrow, she added, ‘And then we can wind up with a few more glees.’

Rowland bowed his thanks and departed.

During the ensuing month there were frequent chess and glee clubs at Glanyravon. What the effect such associations had upon Rowland he never confided to any one, but when Miss Hall expressed her opinion that ’Mr Prothero was a sensible, unaffected young man, but shy,’ Freda condescended to say, ’Well, he is not quite such a Goth or half as affected as I fancied he was, but he has a very good opinion of himself, nevertheless.’

In due course Rowland went to London to be ordained, and so ended the chess and glee clubs.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SAILOR.

Argument and persuasion were alike thrown away upon Netta Prothero. She would make no promises, no concessions; she stood her ground with the obstinacy of a Cadwallader. Her father stormed for about a week, when he got tired of the subject and of Netta's resolute manner and cross face, and gave it up. He heard that Howel had started for London, having put his affairs in the hands of an attorney, and that

Page 62

it was not at all unlikely that he would marry some lady of rank. He laughed heartily at the notion. It was also rumoured that he meant to return and take a place in the neighbourhood, stand for the county, and be one of the greatest men in South Wales. In short, the enchanter, the merlin, the open sesame, the omnipotent sorcerer *gold* was to work the miracles to which Howel had been so long looking forward. And the gossips were not far wrong. Gold is truly a famous master-key to all hearts and to all companies.

But whilst the gossips—and who is not a gossip in a country neighbourhood?—whilst the gossips were settling Howel's future so comfortably and respectably for him, he was dispensing his gold amongst gamblers and the like—paying debts of honour as they are called.

However, Mr Prothero thought it not unlikely that what the gossips said might prove true, and was therefore tolerably comfortable about his spoilt pet, Netta. When his anger and her pouting had subsided, matters went on much as usual for a time at the farm. Even the blaze that was kindled at the incursion of the Irish girl, had well-nigh gone out, and Mr Prothero had nearly forgotten her existence.

She, meanwhile, was slowly recovering under Mrs Prothero's kind care. One day, that good woman was sitting with her in the little room that had been allotted to her, and said,—

'Is there anything you could think of that would amuse you, my dear?'

'If I might—' Gladys began and paused.

'Pray, go on, do not be afraid to ask.'

'If I might only make up that cap for you, ma'am, I should be so proud. I used to make caps at home.'

Mrs Prothero was manufacturing a cap for herself, and had a certain womanly fear as to how it would turn out, if transferred to other fingers; but she did not like to refuse the request, so she resigned it into the thin hands of Gladys. She was almost immediately called away, and did not return for some hours. When she again visited her invalid she found her quite excited with her work that she had just completed.

'Oh, what a pretty cap!' said Mrs Prothero, quite astonished at the taste displayed. 'I must just run and show it to Netta—I am so much obliged to you.'

Mrs Prothero left the room and soon returned, followed by her daughter.

‘Can you trim bonnets as well as make caps?’ asked Netta, forgetful of infection when her personal interest was involved.

‘Yes, miss, a little,’ replied Gladys modestly.

‘I wish you would trim mine for me to-morrow.’

’Oh, thank you, miss! If you will only let me try I shall be so grateful.’

‘She does not seem like a beggar after all,’ thought Netta. ’Who taught you to work so nicely?’ she said aloud.

’I was apprenticed to a mantua-maker and milliner for six months, miss, and after that I worked for the neighbours.’

Page 63

‘How could you work for them, when they are all rags and tatters?’

‘There were some farmers’ wives, miss,’ said Gladys, colouring slightly, ’and the clergyman’s family, and the steward’s—I used to work for them.’

‘Then how came you here?’

’People couldn’t work, or pay for work, miss, when every one was starvin’ around them.’

Mrs Prothero looked at Netta reproachfully. The girl was not really hard-hearted, so she changed the subject.

‘I daresay you can knit and mark samplers?’ she said.

‘Yes, miss, mother taught us to do that at school.’

‘I think, Netta,’ interrupted Mrs Prothero, ’that she must go to bed now. She looks tired, and has been up long enough.’

‘What a fuss mother makes about the girl,’ muttered Netta as she left the room.

The following day the bonnet was tastily trimmed under Netta’s superintendence, and work enough hunted up to employ Gladys for a month at least. Netta even found an old cotton gown, which she presented to her in return for her labours. It was not long enough, but Gladys thought she might be able to lengthen it.

Whilst her convalescence and Netta’s needlework were thus progressing, there was an arrival at the farm. One evening the family were assembled in the large hall, their usual sitting-room. Mr Prothero was reading the newspaper at a small round table, with an especial candle to himself. His worthy wife was mending or making shirts. At another round table, not very far off, Netta had some work in her hands, and one of Captain Marryat’s novels open before her.

’Why don’t you do your work instead of reading those trashy stories, Netta?’ suddenly exclaimed Mr Prothero.

‘I am working, father,’ said Netta.

‘Pretty working sure enough. What nonsense have you got reading now?’

‘Peter Simple, father, oh it is so funny.’

’Ah! it was that stupid stuff, and ‘The Pilot,’ and ‘The Spy,’ and I don’t know what else, that sent Owen off to sea. I suppose it’s there you learn all your nonsense. I wish you

would read the cookery book, and help your mother to take care of the house and dairy, instead of doing what's no good in the world.'

A loud knocking at the door interrupted a rather pert reply.

'Who on earth is that at this time of night?' exclaimed the farmer, throwing down his paper.

'Shanno,' called Mrs Prothero into the passage, 'ask who it is before you open the door.'

'It's no great things,' suggested Netta, 'for they're knocking with a stick, and not with the knocker.'

'Name o' goodness, what's the row?' said the farmer.

'Who's there?' demanded Shanno, in the passage.

The answer did not reach the hall, but Shanno came rushing in, 'It's them Irishers again, master, upon my deet, they do be here for ever.'

'Give me my stick!' exclaimed Mr Prothero, 'if I don't give them a lesson my name isn't David.'

Page 64

He seized a stick and went into the passage, followed by his wife, murmuring, ‘Oh, David, bach,’ and by Netta as far as the door, from which she peeped down the passage.

‘Who’s there?’ roared the farmer in a voice of thunder.

’May it please yer honour, I’m cowld and hungry. Long life to yer honour and her leddyship, if yell only give the loan o’ yer barn, or maybe yer loft, or—’

‘I’ll show you the way to my barn, you idle, good-for-nothing scamp,’ cried Mr Prothero, opening the door, and levelling a blow with his stick into the moonlight, that must infallibly have knocked down any one less agile than the man for whom it was intended. As it was, the unwelcome visitor jumped aside, whilst the portly farmer tripped himself up by his own impetuosity, and fell upon the threshold. Mrs Prothero and Netta screamed, and Shanno took hold of the beggar’s arm, to prevent his escape. But the beggar had pulled Mr Prothero up, and was beginning to sympathise with him in broad brogue, when that valiant anti-Irishman got hold of his stick again, and began to belabour the unoffending party’s back most manfully.

‘Enough’s as good as a faist, yer honour,’ cried the stranger, skipping from side to side, and evading the blows very skilfully; ’pon my sowl, yer honour ’ud do for a fair or a wake. ‘Tis madam as has the heart an’ the conscience for the poor Irish, an’ miss, too, asthore!’

The impudent fellow ran round to where Netta stood, who, in terror, went into the house, followed by the man, and after him, the rest in full hue and cry.

‘Tin thousand pardons, miss,’ said the man, taking off his hat and confronting Netta.

‘Owen! Owen!’ screamed Netta. ‘For shame upon you, you naughty boy,’ and therewith Netta and the unexpected guest were hugging one another, most lovingly.

‘’Tis the mother will give the poor Irisher a lodgin’ and a drop o’ the cratur,’ cried that mother’s well-beloved eldest born almost catching her up in his arms, and smothering her with kisses. ’And the masther isn’t so hard-hearted as he looks,’ he added, shaking the astonished farmer by the hand.

‘Owen! oughtn’t you to be ashamed of yourself?’ cried the farmer, laughing aloud, and rubbing his right leg.

‘Not kilt intirely, yer honour! didn’t I take you all in, that’s all!’

’Where did you come from? How did you come? When did you leave your ship?’ were the questions reiterated on all sides of the welcome guest.

’I’ll tell you all that to-morrow. At present I am dying of cowld and hunger, and haven’t broke me fast since morning. Let me show you how the locker stands.’

Owen emptied his pockets, and from a corner of one of them turned out a solitary halfpenny.

’I shouldn’t have had that if old Nanny Cwmgwyn hadn’t given it to me just now. But I’ll tell you my story to-morrow in character.’

‘Not an improved one anyhow,’ said Mr Prothero with a gathering frown.

Page 65

’Don’t lecture to-night, Datta, bach; you shall have an hour on purpose to-morrow, when I promise to listen to edification. ’Pon my word it is pleasant to be at home again. How I long to sleep in my comfortable bed once more.’

Poor Mrs Prothero’s countenance fell, and Netta looked malicious.

‘Not likely to sleep there to-night, boy,’ said the farmer; ’mother has got visitors.’

‘Visitors!’ exclaimed Owen, ’and gone to bed already! what sleepy people.’

‘Some of your friends of the cowld and hungry sort,’ said the farmer.

‘Not mother’s old friends, and my relations, the Irish beggars?’

‘Singular number, and a young lady!’ said the farmer with a sneer and a puff of the tobacco with which he was beginning to solace himself, at the sight of the bread and cheese that were appearing.

‘A poor girl, Owen, who was taken ill,’ said Mrs Prothero.

’I understand it all, mother; never mind, she’s welcome for once, provided I get a good bed, but to-morrow she must turn out.’

‘Very well, my dear,’ said Mrs Prothero submissively; for Owen, though a prodigal, was the eldest son, and generally had his own way.

‘Now don’t be frightened at my appetite,’ said Owen, sitting down to cold meat and strong ale.

‘Bless you and your appetite,’ said Mrs Prothero, kissing his forehead; upon which he jumped up again, and hugged her with all his heart.

‘Now, Netta, let us go and see about the sheets,’ said Mrs Prothero, smoothing her dress.

The mother and daughter left the room, and were not long in preparing the best bedroom for Owen. This done, they hastened back to the hall, where they found diminished ham and increased smoke, Owen having lighted a short pipe, and taken to smoking with his father, over a large jug of ale.

‘We must have your adventures to-night, Owen,’ cried Netta, as she entered, ’and you must tell us why you came home so very shabby. I suppose you have been wrecked on a desert island.’

‘To be sure,’ said Owen, laying down the pipe. ’But I must go out and find my wardrobe, and all my valuables, that my hospitable Daddy there caused me to throw down, when he gave me such a warm welcome.’

Owen disappeared, but soon returned with a box in his hands, apparently of some weight, and a bundle slung across his shoulder, suspended on a walking stick. Putting down the box he began to sing,—

‘A handkerchief held all the treasure I had.’

whilst he flourished his walking-stick and bundle over his mother’s head. When he had finished his song, he put down his bundle and went to the box.

’I have shown you the size of my wardrobe, now allow me to show off the rest of my fortune and stock in trade. Father, you shall have the first peep. Let me put my box on the table, and the light—so. Now, stoop, so—look through that glass, so—and—have you got the right focus? Yes!—To the right, you beholds the gallant ’ero, Lord Nelson, him as lost his harm, a just fallin’ in the harms of Capen ’Ardy and Victory.—To the left—but first his lordship is a singin’ “England expects every man to do his dooty.” To the left—’

Page 66

’Well, if that isn’t as pretty a picture and as much like life as anything I ever saw,’ said Mr Prothero, interrupting the showman. ’Come here, mother; Netta, look here.’

Mrs Prothero glanced into the box, which was nothing more nor less than a penny peep-show, and Owen began again.

‘To the right you beholds,’ when Netta, impatient, looked through a second glass, and exclaimed in ecstasy, ‘Where did you get this, Owen?’

In answer, the scene shifted, and Owen recommenced.

’Here you beholds Lisbon, that wast city, or rayther what wos Lisbon after the great earthquake. See the ruins all around, and the women and children a screamin’; and the priests a-prayin’—those men in robes is priests, papishers, like them Irish beggars.’

‘Hush, Owen,’ interrupted Mrs Prothero. ‘Look, father, do look here!’

While Mr Prothero and Netta gazed admiringly, Mrs Prothero was off and returned with Shanno, Mal, and Tom the boy, who were all in a broad grin of delight at the arrival of their prime favourite, Owen.

He, meanwhile, is in his element; begins with Lord Nelson again, and makes the whole party take turns. Then he goes to Lisbon; afterwards he has The Queen of the Cannibal Islands; The Great Fire of London; a portrait large as life of the immense fat man Daniel Lambert, at sight of which the servants all exclaim ‘Ach!’ and a variety of other splendid designs, which we decline to enumerate. Suffice it to say that they all draw forth the approving commendations of the spectators, from Mr Prothero, master, to Tom, serving-lad.

When the peep-show has been duly exhibited, Netta again demands her brother’s history, and a particular account of how he procured the show.

‘Oh! there is not much to tell,’ says Owen, ’and I won’t tell that unless father promises to keep his lecture till to-morrow. I hate a sermon late at night, but don’t so much mind it in the morning. Don’t look so serious, mother; I don’t mean a clerical preachment. Do you promise, father?’

‘Well, there, as you like,’ said Mr Prothero, laughing? ’but I wish you hadn’t made me break my shin.’

’Here’s a patch of diaculum, father. I hope you have not really hurt yourself?’

‘No, wild goose. Now, let’s have the story.’

’Well, here goes. Since this time twelvemonth I have been a voyage to Australia and back: seen Sydney and Botany Bay, and my brethren the convicts; done a little in the mercantile way: speculated in gin and ’baccy on my own account, and helped the captain. Came home as first mate of the ‘Fair Weather,’ and had enough of tailoring in the worst voyage I ever made. We were almost wrecked more than once, and almost starved for the last month, owing to the time the leaky old hulk took in the voyage. When we landed in Plymouth we had a spree, as you may suppose, and soon spent most of our money. I and a messmate were to travel together as far as Swansea,

Page 67

so we just saved money enough to pay our way, and enjoyed ourselves with the rest; but, as ill luck would have it, we fell in with a poor Welsh woman, who had come to Plymouth in the hope of meeting her husband, and being disappointed, and having spent all her money, she didn't know how to get back to her home again. Of course we couldn't leave a fellow-countrywoman in distress, so we gave her what we had: enough to pay her journey home, and a few shillings over. We then sold some of our clothes, and stumbling upon a man with this old box in his arms, we bargained with him, and bought it for twelve shillings. He wanted a pound, but we beat him down.

'Having thus a fortune in our possession we set out with our peep-show, and thought of getting interest for our money. We have been about three weeks journeying from place to place; and I assure you we have seen a good deal of life. We unfortunately spent the interest of our fortune as it came in; but, as you will perceive, I have brought the whole capital home with me. When we entered a town on a fair or market-day, we made a great deal of money, but then the temptations to spend were all the greater. I used to have all the labour of the imagination, for my friend Jack Jenkins had not the gift of eloquence; so we agreed that I should be showman, and he porter—a division of work that we thought quite fair. When we arrived at Swansea I gave him all the money we had in hand, and he resigned the peep-show to me, and so we parted company; he to go to his friends in Glamorganshire, I to come on here.

'I had a rare lark on my way home. I went to uncle's, and finding aunt in the garden, slouched my hat over my face, and began my story. She ordered me off the premises instantly as a vagrant. I went round to the back door and got a penny a-piece from the servants, who were quite delighted. Then I met uncle, and telling him that I had a wonderful box of antiques to exhibit, he gave me sixpence, and with great curiosity poked his proboscis against the glass. It was worth something to see him. I at once put a picture of Stonehenge, and afterwards one of Herculaneum into the box, that I had bought on purpose for his benefit. I went through the history of the Druids, and managed a touch of Garn Goch and the Welsh castles with a strong and masterly nasal, that so delighted the worthy vicar, that he actually invited me in to see his museum. I excused myself by saying that my wife was waiting for me—mother, that was my only fib, I assure you—and hastened away, lest in his delight at finding an itinerant archaeologist, he should ask my wife to see his museum as well. The rest of my adventures you had the honour and glory of sharing, so I must beg to say they are at an end. And now I am really and truly and soberly come to settle at home for the remainder of my days, and to become a farmer in good earnest if father will take me into partnership. The two things I like best in the world are, the rolling sea by moonlight and a field of golden corn in broad sunshine, of a fine day in autumn.'

Page 68

‘Oh, you naughty boy!’ cried Netta, as Owen ended his story.

‘A fine sturdy farmer you would make,’ said Mr Prothero, trying to stifle a very hearty fit of laughter, that burst out at last in spite of himself. ’I’m glad you took in brother Jonathan, or he’d have had the laugh against me.’

Mrs Prothero had a tear in her eye as she smiled sadly, and shook her head at the darling son who had caused her nothing but love and grief since he was born; but the tear was soon kissed away, and the smile turned into a cheerful one by that son’s merry lips.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEMPSTRESS.

Owen Prothero, like his sister Netta, had been very much spoilt by his father during his childhood and boyhood. Indeed it would have been difficult not to have spoilt him. Handsome in person, and frank in manners, he was a general favourite. His uncle, the vicar, quite idolised him, and would have lavished a fortune on his education had he been of a studious nature. His mother, alone, conscious of his many faults, strove to correct them, and to counterbalance the undue admiration he received on all sides, by impartial justice in her praises and reproofs.

But we have not much to do with his boyhood, which was wild and untameable; beyond the fact that, when sent by his good uncle to Rugby with a view to his becoming a clergyman, he resolutely declared his intention of going to sea, and ran away from school to effect his purpose. He was captured, however by the masters, and a sharp look-out kept upon him for the future, which prevented further escapades.

He did not make brilliant progress in his studies, though he was clever enough, and accordingly his aunt persuaded her vicar to adopt her favourite nephew, Rowland, in his stead, and to let Owen go a voyage or two in a merchant vessel, to cure him of his love for a seafaring life.

It was Mr Prothero’s wish to have one of his two sons a farmer, he did not much care which, so it was with some difficulty that Aunt Jonathan induced him to listen to her proposal of making a clergyman of Rowland. He yielded at last, however, in the hope that when Owen had had enough of the sea, he would come and settle at home, since, next to this, his favourite hobby, he professed to like farming.

Owen was about fifteen when he first went to sea—he was just seven-and-twenty when he came home with the peep-show. During the intermediate twelve years he had been all over the world: not merely as a sailor, but as an adventurer, traveller, speculator, merchant, and wandering Jack-of-all trades. As quickly as he made money, so he lost

it, spent it, or gave it away; and when he had no other resource, he worked as a common sailor, or labourer, until some lucky chance opened a passage for some fresh excitement. There is this to be said in his favour. During this long period he was never chargeable to his father

Page 69

in any way. If he got into difficulties, he got out of them pretty easily: if he was in want of bread, which had been frequently the case, his friends at home knew nothing of it. Beyond the regular new outfit, in the way of clothes, that his mother made for him each time that he returned home, he had never had anything from his parents, and resolutely refused it if offered. Always cheerful, hopeful, in high spirits, open as the day, affectionate, and attractive, he was a welcome guest wherever he went. Did he come home in rags, or as now, with a peep-show in his arms, or as once before, with a hurdy-gurdy and monkey, all his old friends made merry, and gave parties in his honour. And whatever the state of his wardrobe or exchequer, he was sure to be in the fields the following day, reaping, hay-making, ploughing, sowing, or even milking, as either of these, or similar avocations, came in his way. Nobody could be angry with him, and his father's lectures, and his brother's reasonings all melted away before the row of white teeth that he was for ever displaying in his joyous laughter.

Of middle height, athletic, sunburnt—with hands almost as brown as his merry brown eyes—with black, long, curly hair, a bushy beard, and plenty of whiskers, a bronze neck from which, in sailor fashion, the blue and white shirt-collar receded—and a broad forehead, showing all kinds of bumps, particularly those of locality over the bushy black eyebrows—Owen Prothero was as fine a type of an English sailor as could be found the broad seas over.

He was in the habit of falling desperately in love with at least one out of every five or six girls that came in his way, and of making frightful havoc in the hearts of females of all ranks and ages. Netta's general inquiry was,—'Well, Owen, who is the last new love?' to which Owen would gravely reply, by a recapitulation of the charms of some fair damsel on whom his affections would be for ever fixed, could he only afford to marry. All his beauties had bright eyes, bright complexions, mirthful smiles, and were very 'jolly,' which seemed to be the word including all that was necessary to make a woman charming in his eyes.

'So, Netta, Howel has come into a fine fortune!' he began one morning, when he and his sister were alone together. 'I suppose he won't think of little cousin Netta now?'

'Oh! indeed,' was Netta's reply with a toss of the head.

'I wish he was here now. He is a fine fellow in his way. I do like Howel.'

'I knew you would say so,' exclaimed Netta. 'You are a kind, dear brother. They are all turned against him, even mother, who can take in the scum of the earth, and make much of a wretched Irish beggar, and will not ask Howel here, who is a gentleman,'

'Oh! oh! that's the way the wind blows. So you do not forget cousin Howel, Miss Netta.'

‘No, I assure you; and I won’t forget him, that’s more.’

’Bravo! Netta. I admire a girl of spirit. But, perhaps now he is so rich he will not think of you.’

Page 70

’I suppose that depends upon whether I choose to think of him. They say he is coming down soon, and that he will be the grandest man in the county.’

What Netta had heard rumoured came to pass in due time, Mr Howel Jenkins did come from London, and established himself in the best hotel of his native town, throwing out hints as to the probability of his taking a certain beautiful park in the neighbourhood. He was soon supplied with the best horses, dogs, and general appointments of any man in the county; and being really clever, handsome, and sufficiently gentleman like, had made his way into society that had hitherto been closed to him. Like Prince Hal, he eschewed most of his former companions and appeared to be beginning life anew, in a new world. The country rang with rumours of his enormous wealth, which, considerable as it was, report nearly doubled. Indeed he himself scarcely knew what he was worth, as he was continually finding memorandums of moneys out at high interest, of which his father had not chosen to speak to Rowland, but which his carefully secreted books and papers proved, as well as the knowledge of Mr Rice Rice, who had been his attorney.

In the course of the autumn the Irish girl was quite convalescent and, although not strong, had recovered from the fever, and was regaining some degree of health. As she was such a clever sempstress, even Netta did not object to a proposal made by Mrs Prothero, that she should remain as a work-girl, at least until Owen’s wardrobe was in a decent condition; and she was accordingly installed in a small room, half lumber-room, half work-room, as shirt-maker in ordinary to the son and heir. He was restored to his own bedroom, and, together, with his father kept at a distance from the bone of contention.

However, adverse elements cannot always be kept apart, and one day when Mrs Prothero was sitting stitching wrist-bands with Gladys, her better half made his appearance suddenly in the room.

‘Mother, I have been hunting you out all over the house,’ he exclaimed? ’I have torn the sleeve of my coat from top to bottom in that confounded hedge.’

As he took off his coat and displayed the tear, he perceived Gladys, who had risen from her work, and curtseyed very timidly and profoundly. Mr Prothero had almost forgotten the Irish beggar, and certainly did not suppose the tidy-looking, pale, tall girl before him to be her.

’Oh, young ’ooman, I daresay you can do this job for me. You’ve got a new manty-maker, mother; where’s Jane Morris, name o’ goodness?’

‘We’re only making shirts for Owen, father,’ replied the wife meekly, dreading an outburst.

Gladys took up the coat and was instantly engaged in mending it, whilst Mr Prothero produced a letter just received from Rowland.

’There, my dear, now you ought to be satisfied, and I am sure Mrs Jonathan will be as proud as Punch. Rowland has been ordained by the Bishop of London himself, and “passed a very good examination,” or whatever they call it. He has taken lodgings up in London, and preached his first sermon in a great church that ’ould hold three of ours. He has dined with the rector, and been to call on Sir Philip Payne Perry,—the three green peas as Owen calls him—and I wonder what even Mrs Jonathan ‘ould desire more?’

Page 71

Mrs Prothero read, her dear son's letter with tears in her eyes, the sudden sight of which caused sympathetic tears to flow from the eyes of the poor work-girl, much to the surprise of Mr Prothero, who chanced to look round to see whether his coat was finished.

'Hang the 'oomen,' he muttered to himself, 'they can't read a bit of a letter without blubbing. How long will that take you to do?—what's your name?'

'Gladys, if you please, sir,' said Gladys, looking up from her work. 'I shall have finished it directly, sir.'

'Gladys? Gladys what?' asked Mr Prothero.

'Gladys O'Grady, sir,' was the reply whilst the mending was coming to a close.

'Where on earth did you pick up such names as that?'

'One was my mother's, and the other my father's, sir,' said Gladys, rising and presenting the coat with a deep curtsey.

Mrs Prothero was absorbed in her letter.

'Name o' goodness where did your father get such a name? and where do you live?'

The girl bent her head over the coat she held in her hand, and her tears fell upon it.

'There, never mind? give me my coat. Thank you. Why, Lewis the tailor 'ouldn't 'a mended it better. Why, girl, where did you learn tailoring?'

'Mother taught me to mend everything, sir.'

'There then, take you that old hat and see if you can make as good a job of sewing on the brim as you done of the coat. Mother, come you here, I want to speak to you.'

Mr Prothero left the room, and Mrs Prothero followed.

'Who's that girl, mother? I never saw her before,' were his first words in the passage, whilst pulling to the coat that he had begun to put on in the work-room.

'Why, David, you see—it is—there now, don't be angry.'

'Angry! what for? Hasn't she mended my coat capital, and isn't she as modest looking a young 'ooman as I ever saw?'

’She is very delicate, but she works night and day. Indeed, she does more in a day than most girls in a week Owen wanted some shirts, you see—she made that cap you admired so much, and that new gown of Netta’s; and has more than paid for—’

‘But who the deuce is she?’

’There now, don’t be angry, David. ’Tis that poor Irish girl that was so ill of the fever.’

’I’ll never believe she’s Irish as long as I live—she’s too pretty and tidy and delicate and fair. She’s no more Irish than I am, mother, and you’ve been taken in.’

‘She is Welsh on the mother’s side. But are you very angry, David?’

’No, I don’t mind her doing a little work in an honest way like that. I’m not such a fool. When she has done the work send her off, that’s all. Poor soul! she does look as if she had been dead and buried and come to life again. Mother, you’re a good ‘ooman, and God bless you!’

Mrs Prothero looked up into her husband’s face with an expression of such love and joy as must have delighted a much harder heart than that spouse possessed. Don’t laugh, gentle reader, at the conjugal embrace of that middle-aged pair, which seals the quarrel about the Irish girl; but believe me, there is more real sentiment in it than in most of the love-scenes you may have read about.

Page 72

Mrs Prothero took advantage of her husband's approval of Gladys's exterior to send her out into the garden in the evening to breathe the air, and afterwards into the fields. The girl's strength gradually returned, but with it there appeared to be no return of youth or hope. A settled melancholy was in her countenance and demeanour; and when Netta rallied her on being so sad and silent, her reply was, 'Oh, miss, there is no more joy or happiness for me in this world! all I love have left it, and I am but a lonely wanderer and an outcast!'

When the shirts were finished, it was time to think of her departure, for she had exhausted all the sewing-work of the house. Mrs Prothero could not bear to turn the friendless, homeless girl adrift on the world. She ventured upon the subject one day at dinner.

'What will become of her, David? And she so beautiful! I declare I think I never saw a prettier girl.'

'Well, mother, who will you call pretty next?' said Owen, who had seen her once or twice by chance. 'Why, she has no more colour in her face than this tablecloth, and I don't believe she has any eyes at all; at least, I never saw them; but I mean to try whether she has any some day, by making a frightful noise when she drops me that smart curtsey in passing.'

'I am sure we want hands badly enough in the wheat field, said Farmer Prothero. 'If the girl could pick up her crumbs a little by harvesting, you could keep her a while longer, and then send her off in search of her relations.'

'Thank you, David. I will ask her what she can do,' said Mrs Prothero.

'Not much in that way, I am pretty sure,' said Netta. 'How should those wretched Irish, who live on nothing but potatoes, know any thing about the wheat harvest?'

'Treue for you there, my girl,' said Mr Prothero, 'but I daresay mother will make believe that she knows something.

'Mother' found the object of their conversation that very evening in the wheat field, sitting under a tree, at work. She had sent her out for a walk, and this was her exercise. Owen and Netta were with their mother, and as they approached, Gladys rose, curtseyed, and was going away, when Owen made an unnatural kind of whistle, as if to frighten away some cows in the distance. Gladys started, and with a terrified face glanced at him. He found that she had very beautiful, violet eyes, with lashes so long and black, that when she looked to the earth again they made a strange contrast to her pale face.

‘What sad, uncomfortable eyes,’ thought Owen; ’I must have another glance at them by-and-by. If she had a colour she might be pretty, as mother says, but it makes one ill to look at her.’

‘Do you think,’ said Mrs Prothero, addressing Gladys, ’that you could manage to help in the harvest; My husband says he will employ you, if you can.’

’Oh, thank you, my lady! I would do my best, and if I could only stay here longer under any circumstances—I should—oh, be so thankful!’

Page 73

This was said with much hesitation.

’Very well, then; if you will try to-morrow we shall be able to judge what you can do.’

‘She don’t look strong enough to bind the sheaves,’ said Owen.

‘I will try, sir, if you please,’ said Gladys.

‘What is the name of the friends you are seeking?’ asked Owen with a glance at his sister.

‘Jones, sir,’ replied Gladys, again looking at Owen.

‘Perhaps there is a David in the family?’ asked Owen.

‘I believe that my grandfather’s name was David,’ was the reply.

’Now, if you walk through Carmarthenshire, and just ask every one you meet if they know David Jones, I am sure you would find him. It is astonishing what a powerful name David Jones is. I know a Rev. David Jones very well? a clergyman too—’

’Oh! if you could only tell me where to find him. I would go anywhere for my poor mother’s sake!’

The girl clasped her hands and looked imploringly at Owen. He was silenced by the appeal of the eyes he did not believe in. Mrs Prothero glanced at him reproachfully, and said,—

’It is such a common Welsh name that I am afraid it would be no guide to you, unless you would remember the place where he lived.’

‘I daresay it began with Llan,’ broke in Owen.

‘I am almost sure it did,’ said Gladys; ’but mother never liked to talk of the place,’

’What do you say, mother, to writing to the Rev. David Jones, Llan., *etc*., Carmarthenshire?’

Netta laughed aloud; she could not help it; whilst Gladys again looked upon the ground.

‘Owen,’ whispered Mrs Prothero, taking her son’s arm and leading him away, ‘what is a joke to you is death to her, remember that.’

’There, don’t be angry, mother; I will help her to do her work to-morrow.’

’He was as good as his word, and the following day resolutely kept near the poor, timid girl, aiding her to bind up the full-eared corn, and carrying it himself for her to the mows, into which they were hastily forming the sheaves for fear of rain. He could not resist occasionally alluding to Mr David Jones, but receiving no encouragement to carry out the jest, and finding her as silent and shy as a frightened child, he gave up the subject, and with it all attempt at conversation. He declared afterwards that she worked like a slave, and knew all about harvesting as well as anybody, only she was not strong, and that she was the dullest Irish woman he ever saw in his life, since even the beggars had a bit of fun in them. Indeed he didn’t believe her to be Irish, or credit a word of her story; but, as to beauty, he began to agree with his mother, for if she had only a colour she would be as pretty a girl, with as graceful a figure, as anybody need wish to see.

The farmer declared that she had well earned her supper; and that if mother thought she would do, she might keep her instead of Betty, after Hollantide; the said Betty having signified her intention of getting married at the matrimonial season of the year. Mrs Prothero said she would think it over, but she was afraid she was not strong enough for hard farm service. It was evident that Gladys had taken a step into the kind heart of the worthy farmer.

Page 74

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WIDOW.

‘Whose grand groom is that, half afraid to ride through the yard?’ asked Mr Prothero, as he and his son Owen were standing by the big wheat-mow, awaiting the arrival of a load of corn.

‘I’ll go and see what he wants,’ said Owen, and off he went.

He returned, bearing a note for his father.

’He says he is Mr Griffith Jenkins’s groom, and waits for an answer. Howel doesn’t do the thing by halves anyhow.’

‘Mr Griffith Jackanapes!’ said the farmer, breaking the seal of the note hastily, and reading it.

Owen watched his countenance assume an angry expression, and then heard him utter a very broad Welsh oath.

‘Tell that feller there’s no answer,’ said Mr Prothero.

‘What is it about father? you had better let mother see it first.’

’The impudent young ass! does he think I am to be taken in by all that gold and plush? He shall never have my consent, and you may tell him so, Owen.’

‘Come into the house a minute, father, and let us see the note.’

They went into the house, the farmer giving an indignant grunt at the groom as he passed.

‘Mother, come here!’ he roared as he entered the parlour, followed by Owen.

The obedient wife left her kitchen and went to her husband.

‘Read you it out loud, Owen.’

Owen read.

’SIR,—Being in a position to marry, and to marry any lady in the county, I think you need not be surprised at my now aspiring to the hand of your daughter, to whom I have been many years attached. I beg, therefore, to say that my object in writing to you is, to ask your permission to pay my addresses to her, and to make her my wife. My attorney will

see to any arrangements you may require as regards settlements, which are matters of no importance to me,—I remain, sir, your obedient servant,

‘HOWEL GRIFFITH JENKINS.’

‘The impudent scoundrel!’ said Mr Prothero.

‘Well, father, I don’t see—’ began Owen.

’You don’t see, sir, I daresay you don’t. Wasn’t he as near ruining you as possible! Didn’t he teach you to gamble, and fleece you, and lead you into all kinds of mischief? Didn’t I forbid him the house for it? Didn’t he rob his own father, and make his mother miserable? Didn’t he drink and keep company with the worst profligates of the country? Didn’t he as good as rob me, sir, out of a ten-pound note when he was a bit of a boy, and when I found it out, called it a lark? Do you think a great fortune will all of a sudden change such a chap as that into an honest man? No, what’s ill got is ill spent, and old Giffrey Jenkins’s money ’ill never turn to good account. He that grinds the poor, and goes against scripture as a usurer, ’ill never find his son do well. Howel shall never have my consent to marry Netta, and there’s an end of it.’

Page 75

‘But suppose they are determined,’ said Mrs Prothero.

’Then I’ll wash my hands of ’em for ever, and vow Netta’s no girl of mine. Go you, Owen, and send off that fine yellar-band, sent to astonish me, and tell him I’ll have nothing to do with his master nor him.’

‘But, father, you must write!’

’Write! not I: but stop, I’ll write. Bring the paper. Haven’t you got any with a fine gloss, and coloured?’

’Now, David, bach, if you would only consider a little. I am really afraid of the consequences.’

’Now, mother, my mind’s made up, and you won’t wheedle me in this matter. So, here’s the pen and ink,’

Mr Prothero sat down and wrote the following reply to Howel’s note:—

’HOWEL,—You have had my answer before now, and you may have it again. When I know you’re out-and-out a changed man, I may think differently; but I don’t know it yet, so you shall not have my consent to marry Netta. One hundred pounds of steadiness and honesty is worth a hundred thousand pounds of gold. I wish you well, but if you was king of England you shouldn’t have my girl as you are now.’—Yours to command, ‘DAVID PROTHERO,’

‘There, mother, there’s my mind,’ said Mr Prothero, giving the note to his wife.

‘Well, David, I believe you are right, only Netta is so determined!’

’Determined, is she! Then I’ll lock her up. Take that to yon yellar-band, Owen.’

Owen took the note to the servant

‘Tell your master that I am coming to see him this evening,’ he said, and soliloquised thus when the man was gone. ’Howel is a good fellow, I believe, only a little extravagant and gay. I must tell him not to be down-hearted about Netta. Why, the girl isn’t worth such a bother? I never saw one that was yet. It would take a great deal of time and trouble to work me up into that kind of thing—and at least a dozen girls. Netta’s very pretty, to be sure, but she has a will of her own, and so has Howel. I am sure they would soon fight. As to father, he is as obstinate as a mule. And Howel with such a mint of money! But I like father’s pride, and I must say I reel proud of him for it. I would never give in just because a man has suddenly got a fortune.’

When Owen had arrived at this conclusion, he perceived Netta coming towards him.

‘What did that servant want, Owen?’ she asked when she came quite near? ‘and what were those two notes about?’

’I dare say you know, Miss Netta. It is all over with you for this present. Howel has popped the question, and father has refused him.’

If Owen had ever been really in love, he would have spoken less abruptly on such a delicate subject, as he found, when he saw Netta turn pale, then red, then burst into tears and run away from him into the house.

He followed her, somewhat distressed, to the door of her bedroom. He knocked gently, but received no answer.

Page 76

‘Netta, let me in, I have something to say to you,’

No reply, but a passionate sobbing audible.

‘Netta, dear Netta, I am so sorry for you. Let me in.’

He tried the door, but it was locked.

’Netta, if you don’t let me in I’ll go and fetch mother directly. One, two, three, and, now, open the door, I’m going. One, two, three, and away!’

He walked down the passage, and heard the door opened behind him.

‘Owen, come here, I will let you in,’

‘There’s a good little sister.’

‘Don’t palaver me, sir,’ burst forth Netta, as soon as her door was closed. ’You are all unfeeling, unnatural, cruel, selfish, hard-hearted heathens! You don’t care for me or Howel any more than as if we were strangers. Father don’t mind what he drives me to, and mother cares more for that Irish beggar than for me—I know she does. I did think you would be our friend, and now you are as stiff and unfeeling as Rowland. Seure you are,’

‘Why, if I was a parson like Rowland, I’d marry you to-morrow.’

’Then, why don’t you try to bring father round. You know he thinks more of you than of anybody else.’

’It’s no use trying; nobody but mother has any influence with father, and she is not sure that ‘tis right or good for you and Howel to marry.’

‘She is cruel and unkind,’ sobbed Netta; ’I don’t believe any one really loves me but Howel,’

’Stick to that, Netta; ’I for one haven’t a spark of affection for you. All father wants is to get rid of you, and that is why he is in such a hurry for you to make such a grand match!’

’Oh! indeed! he and all the rest of you are as jealous of Howel’s good fortune as you can be,—you know you are. And you wouldn’t like to see me a grand lady, grander than Miss Rice or Miss Nugent even. Won’t I let them know I’m somebody, and not to be looked down upon any more, that’s all!’

Hereupon Netta wiped her eyes, and walked up and down the room grandly, whilst Owen burst out laughing,

‘I beg you to go out of, my room, Owen!’ said Netta, stamping her foot and getting into a passion. ’One can’t expect manners or sympathy from seafaring porcupines like you. Go away directly. Why, John James, the carter, is genteeler than a great coarse sailor such as you. Go you away, I say.’

’You ought to have said a seafaring dolphin or whale; they don’t pay twopence a week to learn manners, like you land-lubbers. When you want me you may send for me.’

Owen went off very much offended, leaving Netta to cogitate upon the cruelty of her relations.

In the course of that afternoon, a very well-dressed woman, in the deepest of sables, was seen going down the road to the farm. She went round through the garden to the glass-door, disdaining the yard, knocked a great many times, to the great astonishment, of Shanno, and was at last admitted, as Mrs Griffith Jenkins. Shanno, all reverence at sight of the crape bonnet, crape veil, and widow’s cap, ushered her into the parlour, feeling that a chasm now lay between her and the dame she had last seen in a high-crowned Welsh hat, striped flannel gown, and checked apron. Having duly dusted a chair with her skirts, Shanno glanced at Mrs Jenkins, and was about to leave the room, when Mrs Jenkins said,—

Page 77

’Tell you your missus that I am coming on particular business and wish to speak with her in private. Here, stop you, Shanno, where is Miss Netta? I ’ouldn’t mind giving you a shilling to tell her I was wanting to see her before I am seeing her mother.’

The shilling was offered, and received with much satisfaction and an intelligent grin, and in less than five minutes Netta was with Mrs Jenkins.

‘Deet to goodness, and you do look very poorly, Netta, fach!’ said that worthy, ’Howel was telling me to see you, and to be giving you this note. Give you another to Shanno before I will be going away, and I will give it to my Howel. Annwyl! you shall be seeing my Howel, now; how he do look a horseback. Beauty seure! he do say you will have a horse, too. There, go you? tell Shanno to tell your mother that I do be glad to see her, let her tak’ care how she do refuse you again.’

Netta escaped with her note, and was soon succeeded by Mrs Prothero, who shook hands in a trembling, frightened way with Mrs Jenkins, who, on the contrary, strong in the consciousness of fortune and new apparel, was perfectly self-possessed. She began at once.

’I am coming about my Howel and your Netta, Mrs Prothero Howel is in a fine temper, keeping noise enough, I can tell you; and I should like to be knowing why he isn’t good enough for your doater, Mrs Prothero; him as is worth hundreds of thousands, and is as like to be coming a member, and to be riding in his own carriage, and to be dining with the Queen for that much! and seurely, he don’t be good enough for Miss Prothero Glanyravon Farm! Ach a fi! some peoples do be setting themselves up! my Howel, too! So handsome, and genteel, so full of learning! Name o’ goodness what would you have, Mrs Prothero, Glanyravon Farm?’

Mrs Jenkins paused with a long emphasis on the farm.

‘I am very sorry, Mrs Jenkins,’ began trembling Mrs Prothero rubbing one hand nervously over the other, ’but my husband is afraid that Howel is not quite steady enough for such a giddy young thing as Netta.’

‘Study! why, tak’ your time and you’ll be seeing how study and pretty he do behave. On my deet, and I ’ouldn’t say that, if I wasn’t as seure as I’m alive, he haven’t took a drop too much, nor said a wicked word, nor keep no low company since his poor dear father was dying. Ah, Mrs Prothero! you was being very good to us when I was losing my poor Griffey. Who’d be thinking what a heap of money he’d be leaving, and Howel’ll be building a good house for me? and seure, I must be dressing in my best, and having servants to wait on me? and, bless you, nothing as my son Howel’s can be getting is too good for his poor old mother!’

‘I am very glad to hear he is so kind,’ said Mrs Prothero.

‘Then what do you say about Netta, Mrs Prothero, fach?’ sharply asked Mrs Jenkins.

’To tell you the truth, I have very little power; my husband made up his mind and wrote the note without consulting me.’

Page 78

‘Then maybe I could be seeing Mr Prothero?’

‘I am afraid it would only lead to something unpleasant between you.’

’Oh, you needn’t be taking the trouble to be afraid, ma’am! I am calling my Howel as good or better as your Netta. There was a time when you might been looking higher, but now I conceit it, it will be us as do condescend. There’s Miss Rice Rice, and the Miss Jamms’s, Plas Newydd, and Miss Lawis, Pontammon, and Miss Colonel Rees, and Miss Jones the ’Torney, and Miss Captain Thomas, and I ’ouldn’t say but Miss Gwynne, Glanyravon, do be all speaking, and talking, and walking, and dancing with my Howels! There’s for you: and yet he do like his cousin Netta best he do say.’

‘If you wish to see David, Mrs Griffey, I will call him,’ said timid Mrs Prothero, at her wits’ end for anything to say or do.

‘Seurely I am wishing to see him,’ said Mrs Jenkins majestically.

David had not come in from his farm, so there was nothing for it but to ask Mrs Jenkins to take off her bonnet and have some tea, to which that lady graciously consented. When the crape shawl and black kid gloves were removed Mrs Prothero perceived a large mourning brooch, containing a gloomy picture of a tomb, set in pearls and diamonds, and surrounded by the age, death, *etc*., of the lamented deceased; and a handsome mourning ring, displaying a portion of iron-grey hair, also set in pearls and diamonds, and surrounded with an appropriate epithalamium. Mrs Prothero sat ‘washing her hands in invisible soap,’ whilst she saw these ensigns of grandeur in the once mean, ill-dressed Mrs Jenkins, and heard of all that ‘her Howels’ was about to effect.

Owen came in, and with due gravity admired the mourning insignia, and examined the dates, age, *etc*., of the defunct Griffey. He went so far as to venture upon a distant allusion to the future.

‘I never thought those caps so becoming before, Aunt Jenkins,’ he said, eyeing her from head to foot, and wondering that he had never previously been aware of what a good-looking woman his Welsh aunt was.

A Welsh aunt, be it understood, is your father or mother’s cousin, and Mrs Jenkins and Mr Prothero were first cousins.

’Isn’t Davies, Pennycoed, that you used to tell us was once a lover of yours, a widower?’ continued Owen.

‘Well, Owen,’ said Mrs Jenkins, not displeased, ’you are always for jokes, but I do mean never to marry again.’

‘Don’t make any rash vows; a young woman like you!’

Here Netta having dried her eyes, joined the party, and shortly after Mr Prothero’s voice was heard.

‘After tea!’ whispered Mrs Prothero to Mrs Jenkins, as she went out to meet her husband. ’Here’s Elizabeth Jenkins, David, come over to see us, and she is going to stay to tea. I think she wants to speak to you afterwards.’

’Very glad to see her; but Howel sha’n’t have Netta a bit the more for that.’

Page 79

Mr Prothero put on a smart coat, brushed his hair, and came into the parlour, as became one about to meet a grand lady.

’How d’ye do, cousin ’Lizabeth? Glad to see you looking so well; welcome to Glanyravon.’

They shook hands, and as Mrs Jenkins made rather a grand attempt at a curtsey, Owen looked at Netta, and showed his white teeth; but Netta was as grave as a judge.

Mr Prothero was as much struck with the improvement in the widow’s appearance as his son.

’Why, I declare, cousin ’Lizabeth, you look ten years younger than you did when I saw you last. Do you mind when we two used to go nutting together? If ’twasn’t for my good ‘ooman there—’

‘I was just saying so, father,’ interrupted Owen; ’don’t you think Davies, Pennycoed—’

‘I am not having no intentions of marrying again,’ simpered the widow; ‘wanst is enough. My poor Griffey.’

’Quite right, cousin ’Lizabeth, wan Griffey is enough, in all conscience.’

The best tea things were duly arranged; cakes hot from the oven buttered; the best green tea put into the best teapot, and all proper honour done to Mrs Jenkins, from which she augured well for her Howels.

As Shanno was very busy and very dirty, Mrs Prothero, during her preparations in the kitchen, was at a loss to know who was to wait if anything was wanted. Gladys chanced to be there, and said modestly,—

’If I could do, ma’am, I would soon make myself neat in Miss Prothero’s gown; and if I might just take in the tray instead of you.’

‘Thank you, Gladys, I am sure you will do,’ and Gladys was installed.

‘There is nothing that girl cannot do,’ thought Mrs Prothero, as she arranged everything on the tea-table as neatly and properly as Mrs Prothero could have done herself.

‘What a tidy girl you have!’ said Mrs Jenkins. ’Do she mean to be staying over Hollantide? I am wanting a servant.’

All eyes were turned on Gladys as she came into the room again, but as hers were always fixed on what she was carrying, or on her mistress, she was not aware of the sudden attention she excited.

‘Irish beggars!’ muttered Netta.

‘One of mother’s godsends,’ said Mr Prothero.

‘What a beautiful piece of snow,’ thought Owen.

After tea Mr Prothero invited Mrs Jenkins to go and see his fine fat cattle. The pair went together, leaving an anxious trio behind them.

Farmer Prothero was a man of few words when his mind was made up, and was not long in beginning the subject each had at heart.

’I’m sorry, cousin ’Lizabeth, that I can’t let Netta marry just now. She’s too young, and Howel isn’t the lad to study her.’

’Oh! but you can’t be knowing, David Prothero, how study he is since his poor father’s death.’

’Then let him wait two years, and if he is downright well-conducted, then he may have Netta.’

Page 80

’Upon my deet! he as can be marrying Miss Rice Rice or any young lady in the country! Mighty condescent, Mr Prothero!’

’Let him marry ’em all, I don’t want him.’

‘Then you won’t let Netta marry my Howels?’

’If he’s study in two years, and they are both in the same mind, they may marry, and be hanged to ’em! I never was so bothered in my life. But, between ourselves, I think it’s just as likely your son Howel ’ould be study in two years as my son Owen.’

‘Oh, name o’ goodness, we don’t want Miss Netta! No ’casion to be waiting!’

’Then don’t wait, ‘ooman! Who wants you to wait?’

Mrs Jenkins hurried back into the house, and left Mr Prothero with his cattle.

’I must be going now, Mrs Prothero—my son Howels too! Thousands and thousands of pounds. Netta, come you upstairs, my dear, whilst I am putting on my bonnet.’

Mrs Prothero was not duenna enough to accompany them upstairs, and consequently Netta gave a note to Mrs Jenkins, cried a little, and helped her to abuse her parents.

‘Never you mind, Netta, fach,’ were the last words, ’Howels don’t be meaning to give you up.’

‘Good evening, ma’am; good evening, Mr Owen,’ said Mrs Jenkins, as she made the attempt at a curtsey, that caused Owen to show his white teeth again.

‘Oh dear, dear! what will be the end of it?’ said Mrs Prothero to Owen as Netta sulked upstairs. ‘I wish Rowland was at home.’

‘Very complimentary to your eldest son!’ said Owen, laughing.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MILLIONAIRE.

Nearly a twelvemonth passed, and an autumn morning again hovered over Glanyravon Farm. It would seem that all the inmates of the homestead were sleeping; but there was one already awake and moving furtively about. It was Netta, not usually such an early riser. The curtains of her trim little bed and window were drawn aside to admit all the light that a September twilight could cast upon the chamber in which she had slept since her childhood. A lovely bunch of monthly roses and some leaves of dark green ivy

alone looked in upon her in the uncertain gloaming, as if imaging her present and future. She was dressing herself hastily, but with care, in her very best attire. She stood before the glass braiding and arranging her dark glossy hair, that luxuriant ornament of her bright, rosy face; then she put on the blossom white lace habit-shirt and striped pink and drab silk dress, her kind father's last gift, and the smart shawl and pink bonnet were duly arranged afterwards. Whatever the early visit Netta was about to make, it was evidently a premeditated one. When the attire was quite complete, and she had surveyed herself in the glass, she suddenly paused and looked around her. In a moment she was putting her room to rights, and pushing stray articles of dress into drawers, until all was quite

Page 81

neat; then she paused again, and glanced at a letter that was lying on her little dressing-table. Turning hastily away from this she opened the window and looked out. The sun had not yet arisen, though there was a streak of light, forerunner of his advent, on the horizon. Mountains, rivers, fields, and woods were all wrapped in a cold, grey mist, but still it was not dark. Netta tore the bunch of roses from the bough and put them in her bosom, then re-closed the window. She took up a large shawl that was lying on a chair, and a small package from underneath and dexterously arranged the shawl so as to fall over the parcel, as she held both in her hand and on her arm. Again she paused a moment and glanced around her. Her face was flushed, and there was moisture in her dark eye.

Oh, pause a little longer and consider, poor Netta! But no. The sudden flash of sunlight into the room terrifies the thoughtless child, and she goes hastily into the passage. Quietly she closes her door; stealthily she creeps along. She makes no sound as she steals, like a thief, through the house where she was born some eighteen summers ago. Before one closed door she pauses again—listens. She can hear the breath of the sleepers within. She is on her knees, and represses with difficulty a rising sob, ‘Mother! mother! forgive me! God bless you!’ she whispers, as she once more rises and runs down the remainder of the passage—downstairs—through the hall—through the parlour, and out by the little glass door into the garden. In spite of her tears, haste, agitation she cannot pass that bed of carnations—her mother’s treasure—without stopping to gather one fresh and dripping with the air and dews of night. Innocent flowers! they will see her mother that very day; but what of the stray, wandering rose of Glanyravon? Through the garden, and out by the little wicket into the lane; across a field sparkling with dewdrops; over a stile; down another lane; over another stile, and into another field! Here she pauses and glances round. A dark figure at the opposite side of the field seems to assure her that all is well. She runs quickly across the meadow, and within it, under shelter of the hedge, near a half-open gate, stands Mrs Griffith Jenkins.

‘Where is Howel?’ asks Netta hastily.

’He did write yesterday to say he ’ould bring the carriage from Swansea to meet us at Tynewydd, and he was sure to be there by six o’clock,’

’Let us make haste then, Aunt ’Lisbeth. Why didn’t he come here himself? I have a great mind to turn back.’

‘Come you, Netta, fach! we’ll soon be there. See you the letter?’

‘Not now—not now,’ cries Netta impatiently, walking along the high road as fast as she possibly can. Mrs Jenkins keeps up with her, but is soon out of breath.

’There’s Jack Trefortyn; he’ll be sure to tell. Aunt ’Lisbeth, I will turn back. Father will be after me. It is too bad,’ sobs Netta.

Page 82

‘We are near by now, Netta, fach. Come you!’

The little woman quickened her pace into a short run to keep up with Netta.

’Here’s the turnpike; we’ll be at Tynewydd ‘rectly.’

‘I see Tynewydd,’ says Netta, straining her eyes to catch sight of some object far down the road; ’there is no carriage—I am sure there is none. Cousin Howel ought to be ashamed of himself.’

Netta runs on very fast, leaving Mrs Jenkins far behind, until she reaches the turning to a lane that leads to a little farm called ‘Tynewydd.’ She bursts out crying, and stamps her foot as she exclaims,—

’Does he think he’s going to do what he likes with me because he’s rich? I’ll tell him he shall wait for me, I will!’

Hereupon she turns back and runs faster than before towards Mrs Jenkins.

‘Come you, Netta, fach! He’ll be here by now. Read you the letter.’

Netta pauses a moment to read a letter held out to her by Mrs Jenkins. It runs thus:—

’I can’t be with you to-day. Meet Netta at the appointed place, and walk to Tynewydd. I will be there with a carriage by six o’clock.—Yours, H.J.’

‘See you, Netta, it isn’t six yet.’ Mrs Jenkins pulls out a large gold watch, which, while Netta was running on, she has managed to put back half-an-hour. ‘Five-and-twenty minutes to six, see you.’

Netta turns again and hurries on.

‘There is Jones Tynewydd. If he should see me,’ says Netta. ’Do make haste, Aunt ‘Lisbeth.’

They walk on for about a quarter of a mile, when carriage wheels are distinctly heard, and in a few moments a fly and pair is distinctly seen coming at great speed. The driver would have passed them, but Mrs Jenkins calls out,—

‘A gentleman for Tynewydd inside?’ Upon which he pulls up. Howel is out of the fly, and Netta lifted in before she knows what she is about. Mrs Jenkins is put in almost as quickly, and the fly turned and off again in less time than it takes to write it.

‘Howel, how could you? I was going back, and I wish I had,’ sobs Netta.

Howel kisses her and tells her to be a good little cousin, and she shall see London in no time. She clings close to him, and hides her face on his shoulder and sobs on. He draws her to him, and lets her grief have way. Few words are spoken for a time, but at last Netta dries her tears and says,—

’I was so frightened, cousin, and I didn’t think it would be so hard to leave mother without saying good-bye. Mother was always kind.’

‘Hide you, Howel! hide you, Netta! there’s Mr Jonathan Prothero,’ says Mrs Jenkins, shrinking back into the corner of the fly.

Howel peeps out and sees Netta’s worthy uncle, bag on back, setting forth on some archaeological search.

Howel and Netta lean back in the fly whilst he passes, little thinking whom the vehicle contains.

‘Uncle and aunt will be glad at least,’ says Netta. ’Aunt says you are very clever and handsome, Howel, and wonders why father won’t let us—’

Page 83

’Marry, Netta—say the word. I suppose Aunt Jonathan found out my talents and beauty after I acquired my fortune.’

After driving about ten miles they stop to change horses, and in the course of three or four hours arrive at the Swansea railway station, newly erected within the last few months. The scene is equally new to Netta and Mrs Jenkins, and whilst Howel goes to take their tickets they stand wondering and admiring. Neither of them has ever travelled by rail, and both are equally nervous at the prospect. They are just in time for the express, and soon find themselves seated in a first-class carriage. As it is a carriage of two compartments, Howel fastens the door between the two, draws down the blind, puts some coats on the fourth seat, and says they will now have it to themselves all the way to London.

Netta seizes his hand and screams when the steam whistle sounds, and his mother falls down upon him from the opposite seat He laughs aloud, and seems in such buoyant spirits that the women laugh too; and very soon Netta has quite forgotten her home, as with her hand clasped in Howel’s he unfolds to her his future plans and arranges hers.

’Deet, and this is like a sofa in a drawing-room. I shall be asleep if I don’t take care,’ says Mrs Jenkins.

’The best thing you can do, mother. I will awake you when we get to Reading, where the biscuits are made you used to sell, faugh! and be sure to show you Windsor Castle.’

Mrs Jenkins obeys her son’s wish, and is soon sleeping soundly.

Howel then gives Netta the following intelligence, which, as it interests her, we will hope may be interesting to her friends.

’The old gown you gave my mother, Netta, I sent to a celebrated house in town, and calling there the next day ordered a proper *trousseau* to be made for you.’

‘What’s a *trousseau*, Howel?’

’You little dunce. Why, what we call a *stafell* without the household furniture. So you will find a wedding dress and all kinds of dresses and garments without number awaiting you, for I gave the milliner *carte blanche*.’

‘What’s *carte blanche*, cousin? You are become so grand.’

’Never mind—white paper with two meanings. And here is a present to begin with.’

Howel takes a leather case from his pocket and puts it into Netta’s hand. She opens it, and sees a beautiful little gold watch and chain.

‘Oh, you dear, kind cousin, Howel!’ she cries; her eyes sparkling with delight. ‘I have longed for one all my life.’

‘Will you go back again, Netta dear?’ asks Howel archly.

The watch and chain are duly put on, and then Howel continues,—

Page 84

’To-morrow you will have a hard day’s work. You must purchase a great many things that will be necessary for travelling that I could not buy. The rest we can get in Paris. I have invited my friends, Sir John and Lady Simpson, and their son and daughter, to the wedding, which I have fixed for the day after to-morrow. One of the reasons for my not being able to come to you yesterday was that I must be a fortnight in the parish where we are to be married before we are married. I just ran down by the night train, took the fly, and met you; and shall make up my lost night by sleeping in town, for certainly I slept nowhere yesterday. Can’t sleep in a train like mother; always feel too excited.’

‘I don’t like those grand people,’ interrupted Netta, pouting.

’You will know them directly. But don’t let out anything about the farm, or father and mother; papa and mamma now, little coz. Miss Simpson guesses it is an elopement, I think, but I haven’t told her so. They are very great friends of mine; very grand people.’

‘Quite like Lady Nugent, I suppose,’ suggests Netta.

’Quite—grander indeed. Well, I have ordered the wedding-breakfast, carriages, everything. Never had such fun in my life. It was quite an excitement. You don’t know half my talents yet.’

‘Suppose brother Rowland were to hear of it?’ says Netta, frightened at the idea.

Howel laughs aloud, and awakes his mother.

’He is east, we are west, my dear cousin. He is amongst the plebeians, we the patricians; he is *canaille*, we are *noblesse*.’

‘What are they, Howel?’

‘’Tis a pleasure to be hearing you talk, Howel,’ says Mrs Jenkins, yawning and rubbing her eyes.

’I was saying, mother, that we are to have a grand wedding, and you must take care not to let anything come out about the shop, faugh! or, indeed, not talk much to the friends I have asked—Lady Simpson, for instance,’

’Oh, yes? you was telling me of her. Wasn’t it when you was dining with Prince Albert wanst, and was wanting that money of my Griffey?’

‘Do hold your tongue, mother,’ shouts Howel, shuddering; he always shivers when he hears his father’s name.

He sees a head trying to peep through the curtain, and thinks it best to hold his tongue for a time, then continues,—

’I mean, mother, don’t mention my dining with the prince, or any of these old stories, to the Simpsons. You must both be very careful of what you say. I shall show you as much as I can of London to-morrow, mother, as you will be obliged to return the day after.’

’Deet now, I did be thinking I should stay a week in London, now I am going there for the first time in my life? I’ll be staying after you, Howel, bach. I’ve plenty of money now.’

’You shall come up again to meet us when we return; but you must be at home to see to the house, and let us know what is said of our doings. You see we shall go direct to Paris, stay some time abroad, and then come and settle at home. Won’t we astonish the county! Mr and Mrs Howel Jenkins will be no longer the Howel and Netta of old days; we shall be the upon, not the fawners!’

Page 85

‘I’d scorn to fawn on any one, Howel,’ says Netta indignantly; ’I never did in my life. I always gave Miss Rice Rice as big a stare as she gave me.’

‘You will be able to give her a bigger now,’ laughs Howel. As they journeyed on, Howel pointed out all the different objects that were likely to interest his mother and Netta. Every one, or nearly every one, knows what an exciting event is a first journey to London, it matters not whether performed at eighteen or sixty-five. And if the first journey to London be also the first journey by rail, the wonder and excitement are doubled.

When Howel had finished all his instructions concerning the future, he thoroughly entered into the present, and enchanted his companions by his general knowledge of the passing scenes, and the amusing stories he had to tell. Netta was more in love with him than ever before they reached town, and wondered that such a grand and clever gentleman could have kept constant to a little country cousin like herself. She had seen nothing of Howel during the most stirring years of his life, and could not have supposed what a change the mere commerce with the world could effect. She considered him far more agreeable than her brother Rowland, handsomer and more polished than Sir Hugh Pryse, and much more fashionable than Mr Rice Rice.

At Swindon he treated them liberally, and loaded Netta with sweets to take with her to the carriage after she had swallowed her cold chicken and wine. As to his mother, knowing her peculiar tastes, he gave her a glass of brandy and water, upon plea of illness, which she took with evident pleasure; but fearing to attract the attention of the smart people around her, sipped so daintly, that it was not half finished when the signal to return to the carriages sounded, and Howel hurried her off.

’Just let me put this piece of chicken and ham into my bag, Howel, and finish this drop,’ she whispered.

‘Quick, mother, not a minute,’ was all the answer she received, accompanied by a pull of the sleeve so imperative, that she was obliged to leave her half filled glass behind her.

At the Oxford Station, Netta began to wonder what Rowland would think of her conduct.

‘Think!’ said Howel, with a scowling brow, ’the prig! what right has he to think? He will know that three or four thousand a-year are somewhat better than a London curacy—-ha! ha! and wish himself in my place, I fancy,’

As they neared London, Netta was haunted by visions of her brother, the only person she really feared.

’Suppose he should meet them! should find her out! Suppose the clergyman who married them should guess, from her name, she was his sister, and go and tell him?’

Howel laughed heartily at this, told her to look out of the window at London as they entered it, and see whether she thought one parson would be likely to be met by chance by another.

‘This London!’ exclaims Netta, ’I see nothing but the roofs of a lot of ugly black houses!’

Page 86

‘Carmarthen is as fine, and Swansea finer!’ says Mrs Jenkins, her face expressive of great disappointment.

‘Draw down your veils, and stand there whilst I get a cab,’ says Howel, after they have descended upon the platform.

Netta trembles all over, and fancies every tall man in black must be Rowland.

‘Name o’ goodness what are all the people about?’ says Mrs Jenkins. ’My deet, there do be a lot of carriages! And look you, Netta, at all the gentlemen’s servants in blue and silver! Here’s a place! big enough to hold our town. Look you at the glass—like a large hot-house. Seure all London isn’t covered up like this!’

‘Here you are! all right—come along quick!’ says Howel, taking them to a cab, and putting them in.

‘Half Moon Street, Piccadilly,’ and off they go, as fast as the poor cab-horse can take them.

‘Now, what do you think of it, Netta?’ asks Howel, as they drive through the magnificent streets and squares of the West End of London, where every house looks a palace.

Netta was so bewildered that she could not answer; but Mrs Jenkins talked for both.

’Look you! well to be seure! that’s grander than I ever see. There’s a church! Trees too! Who’d be thinking of trees in London? Well, name o’ goodness, where are all they people going? That church ’ont hold ’em all! There’s beauty! Is that St Paul’s, Howel, bach! or the Monument? My Griffey was talking of them! There’s houses! Seure that’s Prince Albert’s coach! There again! Where was all those carriages going? Ach a fi! that man was just driving into our horse. Howel, name o’ goodness tell the coachman to tak’ care. He’ll be upsetting us. Yes, indeet, Netta, there’s shops! One after another. Did you be buying Netta’s wedding clothes there, Howel! Is that a play-house? No! not a gentleman’s house? I ’ould like to see a play for wanst, if nobody ’ould tell our minister.’

‘If you are not too tired, I’ll take you to-night, mother,’ here broke in Howel. ’We may go, perhaps, after you have had some tea. What do you say, Netta?’

‘Anywhere you like, Howel,’ said Netta, ’I am no more ready than if I was just starting.’

‘Pic what, Howel, was you calling this?’ asked Jenkins.

‘Piccadilly, mother. One of the best parts of London.’

’Deet, and I should think so. ’Tis like a ’lumination lights. There’s no night here. Daylight all the year round. Trees again, like Glanyravon Park, and lights along by. There pretty—what a many carriages! Was they all going to the play? Soldiers, too, I am thinking! And more o’ them gentlemen’s servants in blue and white. Do all the servants in London be wearing the same livery, Howel?’

‘Those are the police, mother,’ said Howel, laughing.

’The pleece! Well, I do be calling them handsome men. When will the noise stop, Howel? I can’t hear myself speak, much less you and Netta. ’Tis more noise than Hollantide fair! But maybe ’tis fairday here to-day, only I wasn’t seeing no cattle. There for you! that man ’ll upset us, seure he will.’

Page 87

‘Here we are, mother,’ interrupted Howel, as the cab stopped in Half Moon Street. ’Now, you must remember that the landlady is not to be in all our secrets.’

’Seure, and this isn’t half as grand as Pic—what’s that long name, Howel?’

‘Will you walk upstairs, ma’am,’ said a well-dressed woman who stood in the passage of the house at which they stopped.

‘Thank you, ma’am,’ said Mrs Jenkins, making her very best curtsey to the landlady.

‘Is tea ready, Mrs Thompson?’ asked Howel, hastening into the passage.

‘Yes, sir!’ replied Mrs Thompson, trying to catch a glimpse of Netta’s face.

‘This way, mother,’ said Howel, striding upstairs. ’You can send the traps into the bedrooms, Mrs Thompson. William, take them up.’

This to a smart tiger, emblazoned in green and gold, belonging to Howel’s private menagerie.

‘What a lovely room! what a beautiful fire!’ cried Netta, as she followed Howel into a handsome first-floor drawing-room.

‘Treue for you there!’ said Mrs Jenkins, surveying herself in the glass.

Tea was ready, and a substantial repast besides, of which they all soon began to partake, and to which they did justice.

’I do wish I had that drop of brandy I left in those grand rooms, I am feeling a pain,’ began Mrs Jenkins.

Howel drew a flask from his pocket, and poured a little brandy into his mother’s tea.

‘This must be the first and last time mother,’ he said, as he did so.

When they had finished tea, Howel told them that their room was within the folding-doors, and that Netta would find a dress there for the play, and must make haste, if she meant to go. His mother, being in her very best black, wanted nothing but the widow’s cap to complete her attire as chaperon. Howel lighted his cigar, and finished the brandy in the flask whilst the women were dressing. They soon returned, Netta looking really beautiful, in a new and fashionable white dress, elaborately trimmed with ribbons and lace.

Howel went up to her and kissed her with infinite satisfaction.

‘Won’t we create a sensation at the Olympic,’ he said. ’There will not be such bright eyes and lilies and roses to be seen there as yours, cousin Netta!’

‘Mother don’t approve of plays, Howel!’

‘You must think of me, not mother now,’ said Howel, ringing the bell and ordering a cab, which as soon as it arrived received our trio, and was driven to the Olympic, where they arrived in due time, and where we will leave them for the present.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MILLIONAIRE’S WIFE.

’Don’t you be taking on so, Netta, fach! if you do be crying this way, your eyes ’ll be as red as carrots, and Howel ‘ont like it.’

’Oh! Aunt ’Lisbeth, I can’t help thinking of mother, and how she is vexing about me.’

Page 88

’Look you at yourself in the glass, Netta, fach! and you ’ont be vexing any more. I never was seeing such a glass as that before. Look you! you can see yourself from the beauty-flowers in the white bonnet—dear! there is a bonnet! and you was looking so well in it—down to them lovely white shoes on your foots, I never was thinking before you had such little foots.’

This conversation takes place whilst Mrs Jenkins is engaged in dressing Netta for her wedding, and in endeavouring at the same time to soothe various ebullitions of grief that burst out ever and anon, between the different acts of the attiring. The girl cannot quite forget the friends she left behind her, when she so suddenly ran away from home. The appeal to her personal appearance is not, however, in vain. She looks in the cheval-glass which draws forth Mrs Jenkins’ admiration, and thinks she has seldom seen anything so pretty as the reflection of her own person in her bridal dress. She hastily dries her eyes, and turns round and round several times to assure herself that all is right.

‘Ah! Howel is knowing everything!’ says Mrs Jenkins. ’Silks and laces, and flowers, and worked-handkerchiefs, and all as white as a lily! And your cheeks a deal redder than any I do see here along! My deet! but you do be looking genteel.’

‘Do I look as if I had been crying, aunt?’ asks Netta, wetting her eyes with lavender water. ’I’m afraid of Howel and those grand people. I wish he hadn’t asked them.’

’Oh, for sham! Netta. There they are, I shouldn’t wonder! Yes indeet! says Mrs Jenkins, ‘I hear them talking on the stairs.’

A knock at the bedroom door is followed by the entrance of two ladies, apparently mother and daughter; the former a portly and roseate dame, clad in the richest of brocades and white lace shawls—the latter a thin and somewhat yellow damsel, a tired in white and pink bonnet and mantle to match, evidently in bridesmaid’s gear.

’Ah I how charming! how beautiful! what a country-flower in London leaves!’ exclaim the ladies, rushing up to Netta and kissing her. ’Good morning, Mrs Jenkins, your son has chosen a bewitching young person indeed!’

‘Treue for your ladyship,’ says Mrs Jenkins, making her very best curtsey, as the ladies alternately shake hands with her.

‘Your ladyship’ is no less a person than Lady Simpson, the wife of Sir John Simpson, a gentleman who acquired that title on an occasion when William the Fourth, of blessed memory, was feted in the city. Sir John, having made a considerable fortune in trade, and being blessed with a helpmate of an aspiring mind, has removed from his old neighbourhood to that of Hyde Park, where he is spending the money he earned on the general advancement of his family. This family consists of a son and daughter, who

have been highly educated according to the general acceptation of the term. With the son Howel is very intimate,

Page 89

and through him he has long been known to the rest of the family; but it is only since his vast accession of wealth that he has had the distinguished honour of claiming Sir John and Lady Simpson as his particular friends. To them he confided his intended marriage with a beautiful cousin, who, for family reasons, was coming to London, he said, under his mother's protection, to be united to him. They had called on Mrs Jenkins and Netta the previous day, and were invited to the wedding in the various capacities of father, bridesman, and bridesmaid. Previously to their making his mother's acquaintance, Howel informed them that being Welsh, she naturally spoke the language of her country, and was so patriotic that she disliked any other; and said that they must not be surprised at her peculiar English, which was simply a translation of the Welsh idioms into what, to her, was a foreign tongue. He also gave his mother an hour's lecture upon her dress and deportment; and Netta a few hints as to her general behaviour, which, whilst it enchanted the elder, frightened the younger lady. Thus 'forewarned,' if not 'fore-armed' the forces of Simpson and Jenkins were thrown together.

Lady Simpson is an average specimen of a vulgar woman aping gentility; her daughter of a would-be fine lady.

After they have sufficiently admired Netta's dress, and put the finishing touches to it, Miss Simpson informs Netta of her duty as bride elect.

'Of course, my dear, papa will take you to the hymeneal altar, and our friend Captain Dancy will take me.'

'Oh! I hope there is no other stranger,' gasps Netta.

'Only a particular friend of my brother's and of Mr Jenkins'. Do not be alarmed, you shy little dove.'

'Netta, fach!' whispers Mrs Jenkins, 'the ladies was knowing what is right'

'Then my brother must take up Mrs Jenkins, and Mr Jenkins, mamma. I declare we shall be a charming party; and remember to take off your glove, dear, and give it to me.'

'We had better go downstairs now,' said Lady Simpson. 'Bridegrooms are very impatient at these times.'

Lady Simpson took the blushing, frightened Netta by the hand, and led her into the drawing-room. Truly the poor child did look like a lovely country rose, as Miss Simpson had not inaptly called her. Howel led her, proud of her beauty, to the portly Sir John, who patted her kindly on the cheeks, and reminded Netta so strongly of her father that the tears sprung into her eyes. Howel's frown soon checked them, and a thundering knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Mr Simpson, junior, and his friend,

Captain Dancy, turned her attention from the father to the son. The look of decided admiration that the new comers cast upon her, quite revived her drooping spirits, and she smiled, curtseyed, and blushed as becomingly and naively as Howel could have wished.

Page 90

Mr Horatio Simpson was a young man very much adorned with chains, rings, studs, and black curls. He had, moreover, a very fine waistcoat, and was altogether well fitted by his tailor. His face was not unlike that of an otter. He used grand words when he spoke, but did not tire his companions by quite as voluble a tongue as did his mother. He was one of those fine gentlemen who would, or could neither plod nor dash at his studies, and who was quite willing to take all his knowledge second hand from any one who would kindly impart it.

Captain Dancy was so entirely his devoted friend, that he gladly gave him the advantage of his superior parts, in return for various favours which Miss Simpson also aided in conferring.

Captain Dancy is a tall, fashionable-looking man, with what Miss Simpson and her mamma consider a splendid figure. 'And such a lovely moustache!' Miss Simpson usually adds with a sigh. The moustache and hair are, however, inclined to red, and the face within them is not unlike that of a fox. Perhaps some of his friends might be surprised if they found him in the present company; but he would do anything to oblige Simpson and Jenkins, who are, in turn, always at his service, in more ways than one.

After a little preliminary conversation, Mr Simpson offers Netta his arm; and followed by the rest of the bridal party, leads the way downstairs. A smart little liveried page is at the door, and two fine carriages are in the street, each with its horses and coachman ornamented with bridal favours.

'We cannot make all our arrangements' as I could wish, whispers Howel to Miss Simpson, 'owing to circumstances; or I should have met you at the church from another house.'

Netta, Mr Simpson, and the two ladies are in the first carriage, which soon arrives at St James's Church, followed by the other. How the bouquet in Netta's hand trembles, as she takes Mr Simpson's arm, and walks with him up the steps, and finally through the centre aisle to the altar! She has never been in a London church before, and the varied colours of that magnificent painted window strike her with wonder even now.

Netta turns very pale as she stands by the altar, and waits until Howel comes up. Sir John whispers some kindly words, which so forcibly remind her of her father, that she can scarcely repress her tears. She glances at Howel, as he stands opposite, gazing at her, and sees that his handsome face is calm and determined. He smiles as she looks at him, which reassures her. A prettier bride could never stand before an altar; Howel feels this and is satisfied. And Netta has loved her cousin all her life, and thinks him perfect. She can truly say that she leaves father, mother, all for him.

And these are the feelings with which they receive the first words of the earnest-spoken grey-haired priest, who tells them that they are assembled in the sight of God, to be joined indissolubly together.

Page 91

Netta once read through the marriage service years ago. She had forgotten it, and would have read it again, but she did not take away either her Bible or prayer book when she fled from her home, and did not like to ask Howel to buy her one. Now, as the clergyman continues his exhortation, the words sound to her as some solemn and wonderful address spoken for her alone. She listens in spite of a multitude of feelings that are struggling within her, and is struck with fear when she is adjured to confess, if there is any impediment to her being lawfully wedded. She knows that her father's anger and her mother's sorrow are broad impediments in her road to happiness.

Her hand trembles, as he who holds the office that offended father ought to hold, takes it and places it in that of the clergyman It trembles still more as she hears the question put to her concerning her future conduct to him, so soon to be her husband, and to think she must audibly respond. Howel has already answered firmly and boldly, and she strives to say the final, 'I will,' firmly too, but her voice falters; she is too much absorbed in her own emotions to notice how carelessly and thoughtlessly Howel repeats his solemn promise to her after the clergyman, but she feels him press her hand and is reassured. Tremblingly, but in all earnestness of purpose, she makes her vow to 'love, cherish, and obey' him whom she has resolutely chosen for her husband; and, as if touched by her manner, and by the searching glance of the clergyman, Howel becomes more serious as he places the ring on her finger and repeats the last words in those great and awful names, which it is sin to utter but with humility and prayer.

Truly, as they kneel before the altar to receive the final blessing of the clergyman, they are a sight for much joy or much grief. Who shall say what the end will be? Two human beings joined in one to all eternity!

As that prayer and blessing are being spoken, a bright flash of lightning darts through the church, followed by a heavy peal of thunder; suddenly a great gloom fills the sacred edifice, and a storm of hail and rain dashes against the windows.

Poor Netta is superstitious and as easily frightened as a child; she starts and gives an involuntary little cry as the lightning flashes before her eyes, and the thunder seems to shake her as she kneels. She turns paler and paler as the storm continues, and can scarcely hear the concluding psalms, prayers, and exhortation, for her fear of the lightning which fitfully and at intervals slants through the painted windows.

Stronger nerves than Netta's have been shaken by a thunderstorm on a wedding-day. Even Howel involuntarily quails at this evil omen, and Mrs Jenkins clasps her hands and mutters a Welsh proverb. She and Netta had been congratulating each other on the sunshine of the morning, and such a storm was bad indeed.

However, the service proceeds, and then he who addresses the newly-married pair in God's name, makes himself heard in spite of the pattering hail. He seems the more impressive as he cannot but remark Howel's frowning brow and Netta's agitation.

Page 92

It is a relief to all the wedding-party when the last words are spoken and Howel leads his bride into the vestry. By this time tears are running fast down her pale cheeks, and Howel's efforts at encouragement, and the warm kiss he gives her, fail to dry them; Sir John Simpson's fatherly embrace rather serves to increase than diminish the emotion, and poor Netta is conscious that Howel must be very displeased.

She mutters something about her great fear of lightning and thunder; signs her name even more stragglingly than usual, and is at last led by Howel through the church to the carriage.

'I don't wonder she is frightened and nervous,' says Miss Simpson? 'I am sure I should have fainted if such a storm had come on at my marriage. It is—'

'Nonsense!' exclaims Howel, somewhat rudely, as they drive quickly through Jermyn Street, up St James's Street, down Piccadilly, and into Half Moon Street, without much farther conversation, whilst the storm rolls on. Netta hurries upstairs and gives way to a burst of sobs and tears; Howel follows, and knowing the best way to console her, takes her in his arms, and having told her that she is his own little wife now, begs her to remember all the grand things they are going to do.

'You are a great lady now, Netta. We must astonish the little people down in Wales. Think of Paris, and that Lady Nugent and Miss Rice Rice, and all your old rivals will hear of your being there, and soon see you return smarter and richer than any one,'

'But the storm, cousin Howel! All those solemn words! I am frightened to death!'

'Silly little Netta! what has the storm to do with you and me? All our prosperity and happiness are beginning.'

'But they say, "Blessed is the bride the sun shines on," and that thunder and lightning are such a bad omen.'

'Don't be'—a fool, Howel was going to say, but he modified it into 'Don't be such a silly little puss, but dry your eyes, and come and make yourself agreeable to our first visitors. *Ours,* Netta dear.'

Netta did as she was bid, and in a short time was at the head of the table, on which a wedding-breakfast had been duly placed, according to the general rules laid down for such occasions. Howel had given *carte blanche* to a fashionable confectioner, and everything was as it should be for the quiet and private marriage of a man of large fortune. The cake was splendidly ornamented, the champagne iced, and the other viands and wines in keeping with them; the hired waiters vied with Sir John's servants in propriety of demeanour, and Howel's page was as pompous as pages generally are.

All Netta's pride and ambition returned when she saw herself mistress at a table more luxuriously spread than that of Mr Gwynne, and she soon began to enjoy her new dignity very much.

'I am to have a French maid when I get to Paris,' she said to Miss Simpson. 'Howel does not like to take one with us, and we shall form our establishment when we return.'

Page 93

Howel laughed in his sleeve when he heard this: he managed to hear every word that Netta uttered, and gave her an approving glance; he also saw that his friends, Captain Dancy and Mr Horatio Simpson, greatly admired his beautiful young wife, and little cousin Netta rose in his, estimation.

‘We shall soon meet in Paris, I hope,’ said Captain Dancy. ’Simpson and I are going to run over next week. I should like to assist in showing you some of the lions, Mrs Howel Jenkins,’

‘Lions! name o’ goodness don’t tak’ her to see them!’ exclaims Mrs Jenkins, now put off her guard by fear.

‘Ah! you have not that Welsh figure; it means—’ began Miss Simpson, but she was interrupted by Mr Simpson proposing the health of the bride and bridegroom.

The breakfast went off very well, and the champagne went round only too often; ladies as well as gentlemen were flushed by this exhilarating beverage, and Mrs Griffith Jenkins was beginning to be very voluble on the subject of ‘my son Howels,’ when that gentleman gave her a look that silenced her, and that reminded Netta that he had told her to look at Lady Simpson when it was time for her to put on her travelling-dress.

The ladies went to their retiring-room, whilst the gentlemen drank more champagne, and arranged various Parisian amusements.

It was understood that, as Howel had no friends to leave behind him for the final settlement of lodgings and the like, his guests were to depart before he and his bride left. They accordingly took their leave as soon as Netta reappeared in fashionable travelling costume. No sooner were they fairly gone than Howel set to work to pay and arrange; this done, he called Netta to look at their wedding cards. There were a great number directed to different friends, some to acquaintances in their old neighbourhood, and one to David Prothero, Esq., Glanyravon.

Netta quailed but said nothing.

’Now let me read you this, Netta? it is for the *Welshman,* and every one will see it:—“On the 16th instant, at St James’s Church, Piccadilly, London, Howel Jenkins, Esq., of our county, was married to Miss Prothero, daughter of D. Prothero, Esq., of Glanyravon. Sir John Simpson gave away the lovely bride, and the wedding-breakfast was attended by a select, but fashionable party of friends."’

‘Father will see that,’ said Netta; ‘he will be in such a passion.’

‘Serve him right,’ replied Howel, and called the page and sent the letters to the post.

The carriage was at the door, and the luggage in. Mrs Griffith Jenkins was busily engaged in packing up the cake and a spare bottle of champagne, together with a few other confections' in a stray hamper.

'Make haste, mother,' cried Howel.

'Stop you, Howel, bach! in a minute. We must be wishing you joy at home; and I should like to be sending cousin Prothero some of this grand cake.'

Page 94

At last Mrs Jenkins and her hamper were ready, and the trio started for the Paddington Station.

When they arrived there Howel took a second-class ticket for his mother as far as Swansea, telling her to take a first-class from that place home. She was to sleep with some friends at Swansea.

‘We mustn’t waste money, mother.’

‘Treue for you, Howel.’

‘Tell everybody at home of the grand wedding.’

‘Don’t be afraid of that.’

When Howel had seen his mother off, he and Netta drove to their station, and, per first-class carriage, with page in second, steamed off to Folkestone, which was to be the first stage of their life-journey.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SERVANT.

We must now leave Netta and her husband for a time, and return to the morning when Netta left her home to go forth in search of a new one.

The breakfast-table was spread at the farm, and all were assembled except Netta.

‘Owen, go and call Netta,’ said Mr Prothero, seating himself before some smoking rashers of bacon; ‘she’s always late, I’ll say that for her.’

Owen did his father’s bidding, but returned exclaiming,—

’She is up and out of her room. There must be something wonderful to make her go out before breakfast.’

‘Such a lovely morning,’ said Mrs Prothero, ’I daresay she is in the garden.’

‘Well, let her find her way in,’ said the farmer; ’she knows the hour, and we’ll fall to. Say grace, mother, if you please.’

Mrs Prothero said grace, and the trio sat down to breakfast.

‘I expect brother Jo and Mrs Jonathan to-day,’ said Mr Prothero; ’they are going to a clerical meeting, and are coming here on their way back.’

‘Dear me!’ said Mrs Prothero. ‘What can we have for dinner?’

‘Eggs and bacon. What better?’ said the farmer. ’But you needn’t be afraid, they ’ont come till tea. Owen, I wish you’d just look out and see after that idle slut Netta.’

Off started Owen with a piece of bread and butter in his hand.

‘Mother, why don’t you make that girl more regular?’ asked Mr Prothero.

‘Oh, David! you know she doesn’t mind me.’

‘Then you should make her.’

Mrs Prothero could have said, ’You should have helped me to make her all her life,’ but she refrained.

‘Can’t find her,’ cried Owen, returning.

‘Perhaps she is ill upstairs,’ suggested Mrs Prothero, rising, and running up to her room.

The room was empty, as we know, and Mrs Prothero was about to leave it again, when she went to the open window to see if she could espy Netta from it. She passed the dressing-table as she did so, and perceiving a letter, glanced at the direction. She was surprised to find it addressed to herself, and on a nearer examination saw that it was in Netta’s handwriting. It was with a trembling hand and foreboding heart that she took it up and broke the seal After she had done this, she was some time before she could summon courage to open it. When she did so, her brain swam as she read the following words, written with trembling fingers:—

Page 95

’DEAR MOTHER,—I am going to marry cousin Howel. Father won’t consent, so we are going to London to be married. I hope you will forgive me for not telling you, but I knew it was no good, as father is so much against it. I am sure I shall be very happy, only I should like to have been married properly at home; but it is not my fault that father would not hear of it, and that Howel would not wait. We are going to France and a great many other countries, and it grieves me to think how long it will be before I shall see you again. I hope you and father will forgive me? as Howel is a gentleman with plenty of money, and we have loved one another all our lives. I don’t see why we were not allowed to marry like anybody else, instead of being obliged to go so far away; I am sure it would have been better if father had let us. Dear mother, you were always very good to me, and I am sorry if I ever offended you; but father called me bad names, and was very cross; he will be vexed, perhaps, when he sees how grand and happy I am.

> ’Good-bye for a little time, my dear mother. Don’t be very angry
> with your dutiful, affectionate daughter, JANETTA.’

The word ‘dutiful’ was scratched through and affectionate added.

When Mrs Prothero had read this letter, she turned very pale, and stood like one in a dream; she could not realise the contents. That Netta was wilful and obstinate she knew, but she had never known her guilty of resolute disobedience; she felt very faint, and sat down on a chair opposite the open door—she tried to rise to go downstairs to her husband, but found that her head was too giddy, and she could not move; she put her hand before her eyes, and became unconscious.

At this moment Gladys passed down the passage, and seeing Mrs Prothero in this strange attitude, went into the room and asked if anything was the matter. Receiving no answer, she put her hand tenderly on Mrs Prothero’s, and removing it from before her face, saw that she was pale, and appeared to have fainted. She ran hastily downstairs, and finding Owen alone, told him that his mother was ill. He followed her upstairs, and soon perceived that Mrs Prothero was really in a kind of swoon. Whilst he supported her, Gladys brought water and such restoratives as she could procure; she begged him to go for his father, and whilst he was gone, succeeded in restoring Mrs Prothero. At the sight of the open letter, however, she sank again into a fainting fit.

Mr Prothero and Owen appeared.

‘Mother, what is the matter? Name o’ goodness what is the matter?’ said Mr Prothero in great alarm.

Gladys pointed out the letter to Owen, who glanced at it whilst his father took his wife into his arms.

Gladys put vinegar to her temples and nostrils, and begged Mr Prothero to take her to the open window; as he did so he saw Owen reading a letter.

‘How can you read now, you unnatural son?’ he said sternly.

Page 96

‘Oh, father! father, Netta!’ he exclaimed.

‘Never mind her; think of your mother, ten thousand times as precious.’

At last Gladys succeeded in restoring Mrs Prothero to consciousness and when she found herself in her husband’s arms, with Owen bending over her, she burst into a flood of hysterical tears, which partially relieved her.

‘Oh, Netta! Netta!’ was all she could say, when they asked her what was the matter.

‘Never mind her, mother, but get better,’ said Mr Prothero, his usually rosy face almost as pale as his wife’s.

‘If you please, sir, we will lay her on the bed,’ said Gladys.

‘Not here—not here,’ gasped Mrs Prothero.

They took her to her own room, and Gladys said,—’Perhaps, sir, if you would leave her to me a little I could get her into bed, I am used to illness.’

Mr Prothero looked at the girl, and saw her eyes full of tears, but her face was calm and pale, and seemed to indicate a self-possession that no one else present had.

‘I will come back again soon, mother,’ he said as he left the room, followed by Owen.

When they were gone, Mrs Prothero gave way to an uncontrollable grief, and threw herself upon the neck of the girl Gladys.

‘What will he say? what will he do when he knows it all?’ she sobbed.

’If you only hope and pray, ma’am, perhaps all will be right that troubles you now,’ faltered Gladys.

‘My only girl! to be so wilful, so disobedient!’

‘May I ask what has happened to Miss Netta?’

’She has run away with her cousin, and her father will never forgive her—never!’

’Ah! that was what my poor mother did; but she was happy with my father; and Mr Jenkins is rich and kind. Take comfort, ma’am, it may not be so very bad.’

Gladys managed to get Mrs Prothero into bed, who, happily, did not see the effect produced by Netta’s letter on her husband. Whilst she was shedding quiet tears on her pillow, he was raging with furious passion to his son. Over and over again did he

comment on every word of the letter, sometimes with keen irony, sometimes with a burst of rage, until Owen endeavoured to suggest pursuit.

’Go after her! the ungrateful, disobedient, good-for-nothing hussey! No, not if she were stopping a mile off instead of whirling away in her grand coach and four nobody knows where. Let her go, the impertinent baggage! “Father ’ont consent! father was very cross! father had better let us marry! he will be sorry when he sees how grand and happy I am! father called me bad names!” I wish I had called her worse! she deserves every name that was ever written!’

‘But, perhaps,’ suggests Owen, ’she will be happy, and Howel will be steady.’

’Steady! hold your tongue and don’t be a fool! Make a drunkard steady! make a bad son steady! make a gambler steady! make a horse-racer steady! make—make—make—hold your tongue, sir: don’t say a word for the ungrateful girl—never mention her name to me again—I never wish to see her face more as long as I live—I—I—I—’

Page 97

Mr Prothero's passion choked his words. Could Netta have suddenly returned and seen her father shaking with suppressed grief, his face crimson with rage, and his hands and teeth clenched, and her mother pale and weeping on her bed, she would, I think, have paused longer before she caused them this great grief.

Mr Prothero returned to his wife before his passion was calmed. He found her sitting up in bed wringing her hands, and crying as if her heart would break.

'Now, mother, there's no good in this,' began the farmer. 'That girl don't deserve tears and lamentations, and I 'ont have 'em. We 'ont have the house turned upside down because a bad, obstinate, ungrateful daughter has run away with a miser's son, and a good-for-nothing spendthrift. Let 'em go, I say! I 'ouldn't stir a step to bring 'em back—'

'Oh, David! dear, dear husband! if only you will find out that they are married; if only you would send some one to see that Howel marries her! This is all—all—all! I will never name her again! I will try to forget her—I will do all you wish! but for my sake, for yours, for all, for God's sake, see to this, or I shall die.'

Mr Prothero was cowed at once by this passionate burst of grief. He had never seen his submissive, patient little wife excited in this way before, for never before had she felt so deep a pain. Her only daughter!

'God help me! God help me!' she sobbed, when she had controlled her great emotion. 'I know I have indulged her—spoilt her perhaps. I know she is proud and wilful, and obstinate; but oh! to disobey us all—to go off, she doesn't know where—with Howel, too, who has no religion, nothing to keep him pure and honest—this is too much! too hard! No, David, bach! it is no good to be angry now—if you won't go after her I must.'

'Stop you, mother, stop you! we'll see the slut married anyhow; that is to say, Howel shall marry her—who ever doubted that? but I'll never set eyes on her again as long as I live, I 'ont.'

Whilst Mr Prothero was speaking, Gladys, who had been waiting upon Mrs Prothero until that moment, slipped out of the room, and ran in search of Owen. She found him amongst servants making inquiries.

'Mr Owen, may I speak with you if you please.'

Owen followed her into the hall.

'Oh! sir, if you would go after Miss Netta, now that the master is willing, at once; may be you will save your mother's life. If she goes on this way, she will surely be very ill.'

’What use would it be for me to go after her? The cow-boy saw her pass at about five this morning, and she is at Swansea by this time. My father ought to have let ’em marry, and get on together like other young couples.’

’But, Mr Owen, the mistress is afraid—she wants to be sure—she would be happier, sir, if some one could see them married!’

’Oh! that’s the way the wind blows! You may tell mother that I’ll try to track them—but it won’t be of any use. At any rate it will calm her to think we are making the attempt. You write to my brother Rowland, Gladys, and tell him of this affair; but the truth is, we must make the best of it. They are off to London to be married, and ’tis no good to try to look for ’em there.’

Page 98

Here Shanno entered.

’Mr Owen, Mr Jones, Tenewydd, did tell Mr Thomas, Trefortyn, who did tell John, blacksmith, who did tell Betto, that he saw Miss Netta and Mrs Jenkins, tallow-chandler, this morning about six o’clock, and they did get into a carriage by there.’

’Go and tell mother that Aunt Jenkins was with Netta, Gladys, and I’ll go and see whether Mr Jones really saw her or not.’

Gladys returned to her mistress, who had become more quiet, and was trying to persuade Mr Prothero to go after the fugitives.

‘Mr Owen is gone, ma’am,’ said Gladys, ’and Mr Jones, of Tynewydd, saw Miss Netta this morning with Mrs Griffith Jenkins, and they got into a carriage together.’

’Thank God that ‘Lizbeth was with her,’ said Mrs Prothero.

‘The deceitful, pompous old vagabond,’ thundered Mr Prothero. ’She to connive and contrive! fit mother for such a son. They ’ont come to no good end. No, mother, I can’t, nor I ’ont go after ’em; Netta has made her own bed, and she must lie on it.’

‘Mr Owen is gone, ma’am,’ whispered Gladys. ’Try to take comfort; there is One who can make all our rough ways straight, and will bring poor Miss Netta home again, if we pray for it.’

‘What’s the girl preaching about?’ said Mr Prothero, glancing sternly at Gladys, who was silenced at once. ’Now, mother, we mustn’t let that undutiful girl upset us. I must go to the wheat-field—you must—’ he looked at his wife, and changed what he was going to say to, ’lie in bed.’

‘No, Davy, I can’t lie in bed, I must go and look for Netta.’

’Now, wife, I ’ont have none of this nonsense. You must either lie in bed or go about your work. The whole house sha’n’t be turned topsey-turvey for a baggage like that.’

Mr Prothero left the room, and his wife insisted upon getting up.

’If you could pray for her, ma’am, you would be happier, and perhaps poor Miss Netta might be helped in a way we cannot see.’

’Pray for me, Gladys, I cannot think or pray for myself, I am so bewildered.’

The two earnest-minded women knelt down by the bedside, and Gladys offered up a simple prayer in her clear, strong language, for the ’poor lamb who had strayed from the fold;’ in which the mother joined in the midst of her sobs and tears. When they arose

from their knees, Mrs Prothero kissed Gladys, and said she would go downstairs, and try to work, and seek to keep her heart in prayer.

And the day wore through, until the evening brought Mr and Mrs Jonathan Prothero. For the first time, Mrs Jonathan comforted her sister-in-law.

‘Now, really, I do not see why you should be so very much distressed,’ she said. ’Howel is a fine, clever young man, with plenty of money. He is sure to make his way into good society, and to place Netta in a superior position. Of course, it was very wrong of her to elope, very; but your husband is so obstinate that they knew he would never consent, and what else were they to do? I confess I should have done the very same thing. As to his not marrying her after all, that is absurd. He is devotedly attached to her, and he knows that with her beauty and spirit, she will soon be fit for good society.’

Page 99

Mr Jonathan was not so successful with his brother. After saying that he had seen a carriage and pair pass at about six that morning, he proceeded to offer consolation.

'It is according to nature, brother. Since the creation, the man has cleaved to the woman and the woman to the man. You married according to your fancy, so did I; so have men and women ever since the world began. It may turn out better than you imagine.'

'Brother Jo!' thundered the farmer, 'hold your tongue. I know Howel better than you do, or anybody else, except Rowland. I 'ont hear any more about 'em, and the less you say the better. She's no daughter o' mine any more.'

With this Mr Prothero walked away, leaving his brother very much perplexed and distressed, but comforting himself with hoping that time would soften even his choleric relative.

Owen returned about ten o'clock. He had ridden to the inn where Howel had changed horses, and learnt the name of the house whence the fly came; had left his own horse and taken another, and gone on to Swansea, where he found from the drivers that the trio had gone direct to London. Thinking it useless to try to track them farther, he returned, fully impressed with the wisdom of Howel in running off with what he couldn't get by fair means.

'Such a row as father makes,' he soliloquised. 'Why, I should do the very same thing to-morrow. And Howel's a decent chap too; will be, at least, when he's sown a few more wild oats. But if Netta doesn't lead him a dance I'm mistaken. She's father all over. There's a difference between her and that Irish girl! My wig! if she isn't a quiet one. But I never saw such eyes as hers in all my life, or such a sweet temper. I wonder what father would say if I ran off with her, and took her a voyage or two to give her a little more colour. That's all she wants to make her a downright angel'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COLONEL.

The next day it was evident to every one that Mrs Prothero was very ill. She had never had any very extraordinary misfortunes or troubles, and the elopement of an only daughter was an event to her so dreadful and unexpected that it seemed as bad, or worse, than her death. As nothing more was to be gleaned concerning Netta, and further inquiries were literally useless—indeed, Mr Prothero would not hear of their being made—Mrs Prothero gave way to her grief, and her husband's most passionate demonstrations of displeasure failed to frighten her into her usual calm submission to him and his humours.

Owen paid a visit to Mrs Jenkins' abode, and heard from the servant left in charge that she was not expected home for some time. Owen bribed the woman to let him know when her mistress returned, and comforted his mother by assuring her that he would find out all about Netta from Aunt 'Lizbeth, whose tongue was too well oiled to stop going.

Page 100

Mr and Mrs Jonathan offered to remain at the farm, but as they rather irritated Mr Prothero by their evident inclination to take up the defence of the offenders, Owen told his aunt that she had better write to Lady Payne Perry about Netta, as there was always a chance of great people hearing the news. Owen was very well aware that his aunt could not possibly write to her aristocratic cousin with the pens, ink, and paper in general use at the farm, and that she would be obliged to go to her davenport at the vicarage, where he already saw her, in imagination, with the finest satin letter paper before her, mending her pen into the most delicate of points.

Accordingly they took their leave, with a promise to return on Monday, and were soon succeeded by Miss Gwynne, who, having heard of the elopement, came to see Mrs Prothero.

‘If you could prevail on the mistress to go to bed, ma’am,’ said Gladys when she opened the door to her, ’I would be for ever thankful to you; she is much too ill to be about, and she has done nothing but mope and fret all day.’

Miss Gwynne went straight into the dairy, where Mrs Prothero was making butter.

’So Netta has taken the law into her own hands, Mrs Prothero. So much the better; I shouldn’t grieve about it if I were you. It is a grand thing for her.’

’Not to disobey us and run away, Miss Gwynne? she would be better doing her father’s bidding than marrying a lord, much less Howel.’

’But you are not going to make yourself ill and miserable about it. Since it is done, you may as well make the best of it; but you must go to bed and keep quiet, to-day at least. You are not fit to see all the people who are already on their way to condole or congratulate. You will have half the parish here before night; I passed old Nancy, Cwmriddle, hobbling down the lane, and she will be here shortly.’

‘Oh, I couldn’t see them, Miss Gwynne.’

‘Then you must go to bed to avoid it. Do be advised, you look so ill.’

’When Miss Gwynne so far forgot herself as to be persuasive instead of commanding, she was irresistible. She put her hand so gently on Mrs Prothero’s shoulder, and looked so kindly into her tearful eyes, that the poor woman began to cry afresh. The sound of a stick knocking at the back door completed the victory, and Mrs Prothero went sobbing upstairs, whilst Gladys opened the door to admit Nancy, Cwmriddle, and another gossip who had overtaken her. Mr Prothero came into the yard at the same time.

‘Well, sir, to be sure; only to think of Miss Netta,’ began the old woman in Welsh.

’If you’re come here to talk about her, I’ll thank you to go away again, and tell everybody you meet that they may have their nine days’ wonder about us anywhere but here,’ roared Mr Prothero into Nancy’s ear, who was very deaf.

The old crones, knowing Mr. Prothero well, turned away quicker than they came, and soon began to do his bidding, perceiving that he was in an ‘awful way.’

Page 101

‘Mr Prothero, do you know I have sent Mrs Prothero to bed,’ began Miss Gwynne, advancing towards him; ’she looks so very ill and unlike herself that I am sure you must be careful of her for a time.’

’All that ungrateful, good-for-nothing daughter of ours, Miss Gwynne. What would she care if she were to kill her mother? I know you are a true lady and a kind friend, miss, and have more sense than all the rest of the country put together, so I don’t mind telling you what I think. Those that disobey their parents’ll be seure to come to a bad end.’

’We will hope the best, Mr Prothero; and you must remember that you have your sons to comfort you.’

’Fine comfort to be seure. There’s Owen as wild as an untrained colt, and Rowland such a grand man up in London that he ’ont know his own father by-and-by. Dining with bishops and rectors, and as fine as my lord. I always told my wife that all Mrs Jonathan’s eddication was too much for us, and so it is turning out. We shall be left in our old age to shift for ourselves; one son at sea, without a shirt to his back; another preaching upon a hundred a-year—gentleman Rowland I call him; and the third in a workhouse, maybe. And all this because brother Jo must needs bring a fine lady amongst us, and with her nothing but grammar-schools, boarding-schools, and colleges. My wife always spoilt that girl.’

‘Perhaps you helped a little bit, Mr Prothero,’ said Miss Gwynne, smiling, to stop the farmer’s flow of words. ’But one couldn’t help spoiling poor—’

‘There, don’t you go for to take her part, miss. Name o’ goodness, let alone the girl. Beg pardon for being so rude.’

Here Gladys appeared, who had followed her mistress upstairs.

’Sir, the mistress is very ill. I think she would like to see you. Perhaps you had better have a doctor.’

’Never had a doctor in my house since Netta was born, that’s the trouble she brought with her; I’d as soon have an undertaker. Send you for a doctor, and everybody in the house is seure to be ill. He’s infectious. Excuse me, Miss Gwynne, whilst I go and see what’s the matter.’

Miss Gwynne waited until she heard Mr Prothero come down from his wife’s room, calling busily for Owen, who was in the wheat-field, and telling him to go and fetch Dr Richards. She then called Gladys, and said she should have whatever her mistress could fancy from the Park, and that she would come again in the afternoon and see how she was.

This done, Miss Gwynne went her own erratic way, which led her over stiles, and through fields, and into various cottages, where she alternately scolded, lectured, and condoled, accordingly as she thought their inmates deserved the one or the other. She rarely left them, however, without giving some substantial proof of the interest she felt in their wants and trials, either by promises of food or clothing, or by money given then and there. She finally anchored in a pretty school-house that she had lately prevailed on her father to build, close by the Park, where she found Miss Hall patiently superintending the needlework of the girls. She gave two or three quick nods to the children, and they curtseyed and bowed on her entrance, and then told Miss Hall it was twelve o'clock, and she had had quite enough teaching for one morning.

Page 102

’I don’t see what use it is having a school, if half the children are to stay away,’ she said to the mistress.

’It is the harvest, ma’am; they stay at home to take care of the younger children; that is why we have so few.’

’Yes, and half go to the Dissenting schools; I see them creeping out. Now, children,’ turning to the terrified urchins, who were just about to leave the room, if I see any of you going to any other school but this, or going away from church to the meeting-houses, you shall neither have new frocks, hats, nor shawls, nor shall you come to the tea-party I am going to give you soon; do you hear?’

‘Yes, ma’am—yes, ma’am,’ muttered the children as they curtseyed and bowed and slipped away.

As Freda and Miss Hall walked through the park to the house, the former grew very excited in her manner.

‘I tell you what it is, Nita,’ she said, ’Lady Nugent is doing everything in her power to win papa, and as soon as Miss Nugent marries, or rather as soon as somebody marries her fortune, she will get papa to marry her, I am sure of it. She must propose for him herself, for he will never have the courage to do so; I see through her, and I am sure you must do the same. He is flattered by the constant attentions, and little notes, and insinuating manners of a very handsome, fashionable, agreeable woman; and she thinks Glanyravon Park and a man of fortune that she will be able to turn round her fingers, better than the jointure she will have to live upon when her daughter leaves her. I was actually disgusted with her yesterday; it was what I call a dead set; if he marries her I shall hang myself, for live with her I never will; I positively detest her.’

’Oh! Freda; those are the old expressions of years gone by. But you are jumping at a conclusion.’

’Not at all; papa always stands up for Lady Nugent and her insipid daughter. You know he is a thorough gentleman himself and does not understand such a maneuvering woman. I told him so the other day, and he was quite angry; and I am sure she sets him against me. Why will you not try to marry papa, if he must marry again? and you are the only person I could tolerate for a step-mother.’

‘My dear Freda,’ said Miss Hall, laughing, ’your papa would as soon think of Miss Rice Rice as of me.’

’You are quite mistaken, he has always admired you very much, only you are so dreadfully reserved with him. You won’t see that he wants some one who can talk to and for him, to save him the trouble. This Lady Nugent does with the most contemptible

tact; and does it so cleverly that nobody sees through her. If you will only try, and just propose at the right moment, I am convinced papa would have you. If he marries her, I say good-bye to Glanyravon for ever.'

'You are so impetuous, Freda; I am sure your papa has never thought of it.'

'Not exactly in a downright way, nor will he till Lady Nugent makes the proposal; then he will be rather frightened at first, and finally think that she will head his table more gracefully than I shall, and be less dictatorial—and I shall go into a convent.'

Page 103

‘Better marry yourself, my dear.’

’Marry who? The only person who would really care to have me, whether I had a fortune or not, is Sir Hugh Pryse, and I could no more marry him than—than—Mr Rice Rice, or Major Madox, who thinks only of the heiress of Glanyravon.’

’But you have refused half-a-dozen more, and have not even taken the trouble to try to like any one of them!’

’They were all in love with the Park, not with me; and I certainly never mean to try to like any one. It must be true love with me, or none at all. I shall die an old maid, and unless you will, just for my sake, try to cut out Lady Nugent, I daresay you and I will nurse the black cat together.’

Freda’s conversation was checked by the sound of horses’ hoofs behind; she turned sound and saw a gentleman riding slowly up the drive. He soon overtook them, and raising his hat, said,—

‘Miss Gwynne! I am sure it must be Miss Gwynne; am I right?’

Freda bowed.

’You do not remember me! twelve years make a great difference! and you were a child when I left.’

‘Colonel Vaughan! Oh! I am so glad to see you!’ claimed Freda. ’And papa will be charmed; we heard you were in England, but did not know you were in this county.’

Colonel Vaughan dismounted, and shook hands with Freda, evidently with all his heart, then glancing at Miss Hall, started, and said,—

‘Yes—no—I beg your pardon, surely not Miss Hall.’

‘Yes,’ said Miss Hall, colouring slightly, and holding out her hand, I am very glad to welcome you home again, but can well imagine you did not expect to see me here.’

By this time they were at the house, and Freda was planning introducing Colonel Vaughan to her father as a stranger, and seeing whether he would recognise him or not.

She accordingly preceded him to the study, and said to Mr Gwynne, ’A gentleman wishes to see you, papa.’

Mr Gwynne rose and made his bow, and motioned to a seat in his usually nervous manner.

‘How do you do, Mr Gwynne? Don’t you know me?’ said the colonel, standing up before him.

’I beg your pardon—no—I do not think I have ever—impossible! It cannot be my godson, Gwynne Vaughan?’

‘The very same!’ said the colonel. ’I only came down last night, and this is the first place I have visited.’

‘I am very glad to see you, my dear fellow,’ said Mr Gwynne, absolutely rising from his chair.

‘And this was what the bells were ringing for last night?’ said Freda, looking flushed and handsome.

‘In spite of my poverty they did me that honour,’ said the colonel. ’I heard the old place was likely to be let again, and so ran down to have a look at it first, and beat up my old friends. It was years ago that I went, a youth of nineteen, into the army, and twelve since I have been here, and I have been all the world over since then; but I come back and find everything much as I left it.’

Page 104

‘But surely you will not go away again?’ said Mr Gwynne.

’I am not rich enough to keep up the old place as it ought to be kept, and the debts are not half wiped off yet, so I don’t mean to settle down at present.’

’But a little economy and that sort of thing would soon clear the property. You had better settle down.’

’I don’t think I should like it; besides, I hear there are negotiations going on between my attorneys and some other persons for a fresh tenant.’

The luncheon-bell rang, and the party went into the dining-room; and whilst they are eating and talking we will examine the new comer.

He is decidedly a handsome man. The most fastidious judge of masculine beauty could scarcely deny this fact. Tall, well made, of commanding figure and aristocratic appearance, black hair, a high rather than a broad forehead, well marked eyebrows, and black lashes so long that they half conceal the grey eyes beneath; an aquiline nose, and a well-defined mouth, with an expression slightly sarcastic; a chin so deeply indented with a dimple that, if the old saw be true, he must be a flirt or a deceiver; and withal, a manner so perfectly easy and self-possessed that you say at once court, camp, or cottage must be equally accessible to that man.

There is a certain power in him that even a reader of character would scarcely understand for some time. Is it intellect? There is decidedly intelligence in the face, yet it is not highly intellectual; there are no disfiguring lines and cross lines, the furrows of study or thought. Is it mere health and animal spirits? He is neither particularly rosy nor overpoweringly cheerful. Does he read your mind at a glance? His eyes are penetrating, but not uncomfortably so. It is, we are inclined to think, that general and instinctive knowledge of the characters and tendencies of those with whom he converses, which commerce with the world, and a keen observation of men and manners, alone can give. He is, in short, a man of the world.

When he first entered the army his father and an elder brother were alive. They, dying about three years after, left him in possession of a large but greatly encumbered property. It was estimated that it would take twenty years at least to clear the estate, and that only by letting it and never drawing upon the proceeds.

The young heir was wise enough to retain his post as officer in Her Majesty’s service, though not to sequester all his income for the payment of his father’s, grandfather’s, and great-grandfather’s debts or mortgages. He spent about a fourth of it annually, and consequently the property was still greatly encumbered and he knew that to reside on it and clear it he would be obliged to live in a very humdrum style, or else add to the burden of debt already incurred. He preferred, remaining in the army, and being a

general favourite in society, and having no near relations in Wales, it never occurred to him to spend his furloughs in his native county. He had always some distant land to visit, and either with his regiment or on leave had travelled nearly all over the world.

Page 105

His return was therefore an event of considerable interest to the neighbourhood in which his place and property lay; and, doubtless, Mr Gwynne was not the only person who wished Colonel Vaughan to settle at Plas Abertewey.

When he was last at Glanyravon Park Mrs Gwynne was alive, Freda was a child of eight, and Miss Hall a very elegant and pretty young woman. Mr Gwynne Vaughan was then one of her numerous admirers; but there was apparently no remnant of his early passion left, if you can judge of the heart of a man, or his character at least, by his face or manner. Miss Hall was much more confused when she suddenly met him than he was when he first recognised her.

Freda had always had a pleasant recollection of him. He had been very kind to her when she was a child, and an occasional letter to her father, or the intelligence, through the papers, of his distinguishing himself in India, or his gradual rise in the army, had kept alive a certain amount of interest in her mind for this old friend.

She showed it at once, and delighted Colonel Vaughan by the perfectly natural manner with which she welcomed him, and the frank heartiness of her expressed wish that he should remain in the country now he had returned to it.

‘We have never had any one we cared for at Abertewey,’ she said. ’Sometimes it was an English family who came to ruin themselves in mining speculations; sometimes a sporting man who came for the hunting, shooting, and fishing; and now, if you don’t stay, I daresay it will be a Manchester mill owner or some such person.’

’Much nearer home, I fancy; but I believe it is a kind of secret, only I am so much like a woman that I cannot keep a secret. To my utter astonishment I find it is to be a son of old Jenkins, the miser! I remember the father, but the son was some years my junior. You need not mention this, however, as it may fall to the ground. He wanted to buy the place, but I am too patriotic still to wish to sell.’

‘Howel Jenkins! little Netta! at Abertewey!’ exclaimed the trio in concert.

‘True it is that mountains fall and mushrooms rise,’ said the colonel laughing. ’But he has money, and as far as negotiations have gone, seems willing to pay, so I am content.’

‘And I am not,’ said Freda. ’It will be odious, and I shall be so sorry for poor Mrs Prothero. You must settle there yourself, Colonel Vaughan.’

‘A poor lonely bachelor with no money!’

‘Hem—hem, you might find a wife, I should think,’ suggested Mr Gwynne. ’There is a beautiful girl in this neighbourhood with thirty thousand pounds at her disposal.’

‘Oh, papa!’ said Freda frowning perceptibly, ’such an empty-headed, insipid idiot would be dear at a hundred thousand.’

Colonel Vaughan looked at Freda to see whether she was jealous, but could not quite understand the frown.

Soon after luncheon he took his leave, with promises to make Glanyravon his head-quarters if he remained any time in the country.

Page 106

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NURSE.

Mrs Prothero continued very ill, and the doctor said there was no chance of her amendment until her mind was more at ease. Four days had passed, and no intelligence of Netta. Each day found her worse than the preceding, and brain fever was apprehended. Gladys nursed her day and night. Mr Prothero stormed and lamented by turns. Owen did what he could to assist and comfort all, and Miss Gwynne and Miss Hall sent every kind of nourishing food from the Park.

On the fifth morning, Owen rode into the town in the vague hope that he should hear something of his sister, either through Mrs Jenkins's servant or the post. Mrs Jenkins had not returned, but there was a neat, smooth letter for his father, directed by Howel, with which he rode off homewards at full gallop. He longed to open it, but he dared not. He was fearful that his father would put it into the fire unread, so he formed twenty plans for securing it, which he knew he could not carry out; however, when he returned home and sought his father in the harvest field, he said,—

'Father, I have a letter directed by Howel. Will you let me open it for mother's sake?'

'If it is yours, do what you will with it? if it is mine, burn it unread.'

'But, father, surely you would do something to save mother's life. Any news of Netta—'

'Don't name that girl to me, sir, or I'll horsewhip you!'

'May I open the letter, father?'

'Do as you will, but don't let me see it. The deceitful up-start! the pompous fool! the—-the—'

Owen waited for no more epithets but ran into the house, and stumbling upon Gladys in the passage, told her to come and see what the letter contained. When he opened the outer envelope and took out the beautiful little glossy note with its silver border and white seal, stamped with a small crest of an eagle, he burst out laughing.

'Cards, by jingo!' he exclaimed.

'Oh, Mr Owen, just let me cut round the neat little seal. I am sure your mother would like to see it,' said Gladys, joining involuntarily in the laugh, and taking a pair of scissors out of her pocket.

The seal was cut, and two cards were taken out, silver-lettered and silver-bordered, showing that Netta was now Mrs Howel Jenkins.

Gladys ran off with them without asking any questions, followed by Owen. They found Mrs Prothero crying, as she usually was when left alone.

‘I hope we have good news, ma’am,’ said Gladys.

‘All right, mother. Cheer up! Netta is married at any rate,’ cried Owen.

‘Thank God!’ said Mrs Prothero, taking the cards and pressing them to her lips. ‘But not a line—not a word from Netta!’

‘She would not dare to write, ma’am,’ suggested Gladys.

’I suppose not? but why did she go away? Why did she leave me never to see me again?’

Page 107

The following day brought the *Welshman*, Mr Prothero's weekly treat, which it generally took him the week thoroughly to read and enjoy.

Owen chanced to open it first, and, as is usually the case, stumbled at once upon the marriage of his sister. When his father came in he was in uncontrollable fits of laughter.

'Don't be angry, father, but I can't help it. Ha, ha, ha! D. Prothero, Esq. of Glanyravon! Oh, I shall die of it! Now, really, father, you ought to be proud.'

'What are you making such a row about?' said Mr Prothero looking over Owen's shoulder.

His eye caught the words, 'Howel Jenkins, Esq., and Miss Prothero, Glanyravon, and Sir John Simpson. This was quite enough. He seized the paper with an oath, crumpled it up, and thrust it into the fire, and gave Owen such a violent blow on the back with his fist, that the young man's first impulse was to start up and clench his in return; however, his flush of passion cooled in a moment, and he said,—

'Come, father! remember it isn't I that ran away. Time enough to give me a licking when I do. I'm much obliged to you for letting me know what a strong father I've got.'

'Once for all, Owen, take you care how you laugh upon that subject or name it to me. I can give and take a joke as well as most people, but not about that, sir, and from you. Name o' goodness, what d'ye think I'm made of!'

The farmer walked out of the hall, and left Owen heartily sorry for having hurt his father's feelings, but chuckling over the fashionable marriage.

The following morning he managed to procure another paper, and read his mother and Gladys the announcement, knowing full well that maternal pride must rejoice in the exaltation, whilst it wept over the disobedience of an only daughter.

To the astonishment of every one, the following morning brought Mrs Griffith Jenkins to Glanyravon, attended by her maid-servant. Gladys answered the door to the thundering double-knock that resounded through the house, and was quite taken aback when she saw who the visitor was.

'Is Mrs Prothero at home, young 'ooman?' asked Mrs Jenkins in a grand tone of voice.

'My mistress is very ill, ma'am,' said Gladys.

'Ill! Since when?'

'Ever since Miss Netta left, ma'am.'

‘Do Mr Prothero be in the house, or Mr Owen?’

‘They are out harvesting, ma’am.’

’Tell you Mrs Prothero that I do bring message from Mrs Howel Jenkins for her, and that I was promising to give it myself.’

Gladys did not know what to do. She felt sure that Mr Prothero would not admit Mrs Jenkins under his roof, and that her mistress would be afraid to do so; however, she ventured to ask her to come in and wait a little time whilst she sent for Mr Owen. Fortunately, Owen was not far from the house, and Mr Prothero was riding to some distant part of his farm, so Gladys left Mrs Jenkins to Owen, and went upstairs to tell Mrs Prothero that she was in the house. Mrs Prothero was greatly agitated, but declared that she would see her at all risks, and tell her husband that she had done so. She begged Gladys to remain in the room during the visit, and to prevent a meeting between Mrs Jenkins and Mr Prothero.

Page 108

Gladys went downstairs again, and found Owen telling Mrs Jenkins what he thought of Howel's and her own conduct.

'My mistress would like to see you, ma'am,' said Gladys.

'I'm thinking I 'ont go near her now, you, Owen, have been so reude.'

'Oh, for that much, you may do as you please, Aunt 'Lizbeth. I shall have the pleasure of going with you to my mother. You've pretty nearly killed her amongst you, and I don't mean to let her be quite put an end to.'

'Will you be showing the way, young 'ooman,' said Mrs Jenkins, rising majestically and smoothing down a very handsome silk dress, which she had carefully taken up before she sat down.

Owen's wrath was turned to amusement

'Did you think we hadn't a duster in the house, aunt? I can tell you you've pretty well dirtied that white petticoat.'

Gladys led the way to Mrs Prothero's room, and Mrs Jenkins and Owen followed.

'I'm sorry to see you so poorly, cousin,' said Mrs Jenkins, approaching the bed on which Mrs Prothero lay, looking flushed and excited.

'What did you expect, 'Lizabeth Jenkins? when you have carried off my daughter—my child—my Netta! And caused misery in our house never to be mended.'

'Well, seure! One 'ould think we'd murdered Netta, 'stead of making her as grand as a queen, with a lord and a lady to be giving her away, and a captain to be at the wedding, and a gentleman in a waistcoat and chains and rings that do be worth a hundred pounds at least, and a young lady for bridesmaid in a shoall of lace, handsomer than your Miss Gwynne of the Park, and a wedding-cake covered with sugar, and silver, and little angels, and all sorts of things which I was bringing with me for you; and a clergy like a bishop to marry her, and a coach and horses to be taking her back and fore, and she looking as beauty and happy as ever I was seeing! And my Howel's as rich and fine as anybody in London, Prince Albert nothing to him, and might be marrying Miss Simpson, my ladyship's doter, if he wasn't so fullish as to be marrying your Netta!'

'Now, aunt, it is our turn, if you please,' said Owen, as soon as Mrs Jenkins gave him time to speak. 'Will you tell my mother Netta's message?'

'I am taking it very unkind that you should all turn upon me. David Prothero I 'spected 'ould be in a passion, but, stim odds! Netta said, cousin, that I wos to tell you she was sorry to be leaving you in a hurry, but that she had everything she could be wishing,

gowns, and white shoes, and lace veils—seure you never wos seeing such a beauty—-and a *stafell—trosy* they do call it in London—good enough for my Lady Nugent, and a goold watch and chains, and rings and bracelets, ach un wry! there's grand!'

'But what did Netta say to me, cousin 'Lizbeth? I don't care if she was all gold from head to foot. I would rather have her here in rags,' said Mrs Prothero, bursting afresh into tears.

Page 109

‘She’s more likely to be here in satins and velvets, cousin,’ said Mrs Jenkins, rising from her seat, and walking up and down, apparently in great wrath. ’What you think of my Howels and your Netta at Abertewey: And you to be all toalking as if we wos ail dirt. And they in France, over the sea, where I ’ould be going with them only I am so ’fraid of the water.’

’There’s a loss it would be, Aunt ’Lizbeth, if anything had happened to you! Suppose a shark had swallowed you up! gold watch, mourning ring, silk gown, brooch, and all? Those creatures aren’t particular. But we haven’t had all Netta’s message yet.’

’She was sending her kind love and duty to you, cousin, and was saying she was sorry to be leaving you, but my Howels was so kind as you, and she was as happy as could be.’

‘Did she cry, cousin? did she shed one tear?’ asked Mrs Prothero, sitting up in bed, and looking at Mrs Jenkins with a quick, wild eye, quite unlike her usual quiet glance.

’You needn’t be looking at me so fierce, cousin, I didn’t be killing Netta. Is seure—she did cry enough, if that’s a pleasure to you. She was crying when she was meeting my Howels; she was crying when she was putting on her wedding gown; she was crying when the parson was preaching that sermon, and when the thunder and lightning did frighten her, seure, and no wonder—’

’Did it thunder and lighten when they were married? ’asked Mrs Prothero, through her sobs.

’Yes, indeet! I thoate I should be struck myself; but she was soon forgetting it at breakfast; they do call it breakfast, you see, but I never was seeing a grander dinner. Chickens, and tongue, and ham, and meats, and cakes, and jellies, and fruit, and wines, all froathing up like new milk, some sort of *pain* they was calling it; but I never did be seeing such good *pain* or tasting it before, he! he!’

’I don’t care about the dress or the dinner, or the grand people, cousin,’ said Mrs Prothero, ’I pray God to forgive Howel for making our only girl run away from us like a thief in the night; and I would rather hear she cried for us whom she treated so badly, than that she was dressed in velvet and jewels. All those fine people and fine things won’t make her happy, and her father will never forgive her, never. Oh dear! oh dear!’

‘What will I tell her, Mrs Prothero, when I do write to my son Howels?’

’Tell her—tell her that my heart is breaking; but I forgive her. Beg her not to forget her parents, and, above all, not to forget her God. Poor child! poor silly, thoughtless child, she will never be happy again.’

’Indeet to goodness, this is fullish! I shall go, Mrs Prothero. Good morning.’

Just as Mrs Jenkins was making a kind of curtsey by the bedside Gladys said that she saw Mr Prothero riding up to the house.

’Perhaps you had better make haste, Aunt ‘Lizbeth,’ said Owen, ’it would not very well do for you and my father to meet.’

Page 110

’I ’ont be running away from any man’s house, Mr Owen. I do hope I’m as good as your father any day.’

‘Oh, pray make haste,’ said Mrs Prothero, very much frightened. ‘Good-bye, cousin. Forgive me if I have been rude? I beg your pardon.’

‘This way, ma’am, if you please,’ said Gladys, opening the door; but Mrs Jenkins was smoothing down her silk dress, and arranging her bonnet in the looking glass.

’Quite ready for another husband, aunt; but you had better make haste, you don’t know what you may come in for if you meet my father.’

‘I am not caring neither,’ said the little woman, sweeping across the room and out at the door. At the top of the stair she met Mr Prothero, face to face. The effect of her appearance upon that worthy man is not to be described. She made a kind of curtsey and began to speak, but no sooner did she see his face than she held her tongue. Neither did words appear to come at the farmer’s bidding, but very decided deeds did. He took the alarmed Mrs Jenkins by the two shoulders, literally lifted her from the ground, carried her downstairs a great deal faster than she came up, helped her along the passage much in the same way, and with something very nearly approaching a kick and an oath, turned her out of doors, and shut the door behind her with so violent a bang that it echoed through the house.

Owen ran down stairs to receive the first brunt of his passion, and to prevent his going up to his mother. He allowed the words that came at last to have way, and then took all the fault on himself; said that he had admitted Mrs Jenkins to try to soothe his mother, and that she had done so, he thought.

’Take you care, sir, how you let that ’ooman darken my doors again, or any one belonging to her. It’ll be worse for you than for them,’ said Mr Prothero, with a brow like a thunder cloud.

His wrath was interrupted by the sound of wheels, and to Owen’s great relief, he saw the head of his uncle’s well known grey mare through the window. He ran out to admit him and his aunt.

‘We have just seen Mrs Jenkins, Owen,’ began his aunt.

‘Not a word to father, aunt.’

’Very well. But she stopped us and began telling us that she had been turned out of these doors, and would have the law on your father. She was furious; talked of Netta and Howel, and your mother, and Paris, and the wedding, all in the same breath, and would not let us go on until we had heard all. Neither of us spoke to her, but she stood at the horse’s head and frightened me to death.’

When they all went into the hall, they found that Mr Prothero was not there. Gladys came in and said he was with her mistress, but had not mentioned Mrs Jenkins.

‘I am afraid she has made my mistress worse, sir,’ she said to Owen. ‘She has been very faint ever since she left,’

Page 111

In truth she had made her worse, and when Dr Richards came to see her that afternoon, she was quite delirious. He shook his head, and declared that she had brain fever, and that the utmost quiet and freedom from all excitement were necessary for her. Poor Mr Prothero was beside himself, and the whole household was in great consternation. Serious illness had never visited either the farm or the vicarage before, and none of the Prothero family knew what it was. Not so Gladys, however. She did not wait to be directed or ordered, but took her post as nurse by her dear mistress's bedside. To her the doctor gave his directions, to her Mr Prothero turned for information, to her Owen came for comfort; and even Mrs Jonathan, who had scarcely ever spoken to her before, looked to her as the only hope in this time of uncertainty.

'I have seen all kind of fevers,' she would say to one and another as they questioned her, 'worse than this, and with God's grace the dear mistress will recover. I am not afraid to sit up alone with her, oh, no! It is better not to have too many in the room at once. Do not be uneasy, master, the delirium is not very bad. Yes, Mr Owen, you can do better than any one else, because you are calmer. No, ma'am, it is not an infectious fever—you need not be afraid,' and so from one to another at intervals she went, giving hope and comfort.

During all that night and several successive ones, Gladys sat up with her beloved mistress. It was she who listened to her disturbed, delirious talk about Netta, and tried to console her; she who read the Bible to her, and prayed with and for her during the intervals of reason, and she who gave her all her medicines and nourishment.

Poor Mr Prothero could do nothing but wander from the fields to the house, and the house back again to the fields, followed by his brother like his shadow, who strove to comfort him in vain. Mrs Jonathan made jellies, and did her best. Owen was gentle and tender as a girl, and helped to nurse his mother with a love and care that Gladys could scarcely understand in the lighthearted, wild sailor.

Before the end of the week, they wrote to summon Rowland, for Mrs Prothero's life was despaired of, and great was the anxiety and terror of all, lest he should come too late.

'Pray for her, Mr Owen, pray for her. There is nothing else of any avail at such a time as this,' would Gladys say in answer to the young man's entreating glance.

'If I were as good as you I could, Gladys. Oh, God! spare my beloved mother!' he would reply.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CURATE.

Page 112

Although it was a bright autumn morning, the stillness of death hovered over Glanyravon Farm. There was scarcely a sound to be heard within or without. The men in the yard moved about like spectres, and work was suspended in the harvest fields; whispers circulated from bedroom to kitchen, and from kitchen to outhouse, that the good and kind mistress whom every body loved, was on her deathbed; and how should they labour? All the talk of the farm-servants was upon subjects ominous of death. One said that he had heard Lion, the big watch-dog, howl long and loud before daylight; another that he had seen a corpse candle as he went homewards the previous evening; a third that she had seen her mistress all in white at her bedside, looking beautiful; a fourth that she had heard a raven croak; in short, if sighs and wonders could kill poor Mrs Prothero, there was little chance for her life. Where every one was usually so busy, so full of energy and spirit, there was more than a Sabbath calm. They were expecting some one, too, for Tom and Bill were looking down the road about every five minutes, whilst Shanno appeared now and again at the back door, and whispered ‘Is he coming?’ to which a shake of the head was a constant reply.

The doctor had just gone into the house, and knots of men and women stood about with sorrowful faces; kind neighbours who came one after another to hear the last report as soon as he should again reappear. Mrs Prothero was greatly beloved, and no one could afford to lose her.

’She was so bad last night that she was not expected to see the morning,’ whispered one.

‘Couldn’t take a drop of anything,’ said another.

‘Is talking of Miss Netta for ever,’ said a third.

’There’ll be a loss to every one. Mr Jonathan prayed for her in church last Sunday; if prayers’ll save her she ‘ont die, no seure.’

‘She gave me a jug of milk only Friday week.’

’And was coming to see my John in the measles Wednesday before Miss Netta ran away.’

‘She’s the death of her mother I always say.’

‘Poor master is nearly mad.’

‘And Mr Owen crying like a baby.’

’And they do say that the Irish girl is better than a daughter to ’em all.’

’Hush! I do hear wheels. Oh! if he do come, perhaps he may rouse her up a bit.’

The gates were open, and before the last whisper was over Mr Gwynne's carriage was driving down to the farm. The bystanders drew back as it rolled through a part of the yard and stopped at the door. Rowland got out, and was in the house almost before any one could see him. He went into the hall, and there he saw Miss Gwynne, Miss Hall, and Dr Richards. Miss Gwynne held out her hand, and said at once,—'Your mother is still alive.'

'Thank God I!' exclaimed Rowland, giving a sort of convulsive gasp, and wringing the hand that pressed his.

'Is there any hope?' he asked of Dr Richards.

Page 113

’The crisis is at hand, and she is insensible; it is impossible to say—if we could rouse her?’

‘I may go upstairs?’

’Yes, but you had better let your father know you are come; he is in the outer room.’

Rowland went at once to what had been his own bedroom in former times; he opened the door gently, and there alone on his knees by the bedside, groaning audibly, was his poor stricken father. He went up softly to him and whispered, ‘Father, it is I, Rowland!’ and Mr Prothero rose, and in a few seconds went with him into the room where the beloved wife and mother lay.

Rowland went up to the bedside, and took the place which Gladys silently vacated for him. He gazed upon what appeared to him to be death, but was really the prostration and insensibility that followed the delirium and fever of the past week. He bent down and kissed the cold forehead of his mother, then turned away, covered his face with his hands, and wept silently. Gladys whispered to him that there was still hope, and resumed her occupation of bathing the temples with vinegar, wetting the lips with wine, and administering tea spoonfuls of wine, which still continued to find a passage down the throat. Mrs Jonathan Prothero crept softly up to Rowland, and put her hand in his —Owen came to him—his uncle—all were there.

But as soon as he had recovered from his temporary emotion, he went to his father’s side, who had seated himself on a chair behind the curtain of the bed, and tried to comfort him. The presence of his second son was in itself a consolation to poor Mr Prothero; but he could not listen to his words.

‘Pray for your mother, Rowland,’ was all he could say.

Rowland knelt down with all those present, except Gladys, who joined in spirit and prayed. Never before had he known what it was to use the prayers of his church for one so dear to him; never before had he felt the great difficulty of reading them when his emotion nearly choked his utterance. But as priest and son he prayed fervently for his mother.

Mr Prothero seemed calmer after he rose from his knees, and ventured to lean over his wife to assure himself that she still breathed. There was an occasional slight pulsation scarcely to be called breath.

The doctor came in and felt her pulse. It was not quite gone, and whilst there was life there was hope.

They stood round her bed watching the calm, pale face with a love and anxiety so intense that they could neither speak nor breathe. Gladys looked almost as pale as her

mistress, and as the light fell upon her when she was leaning over her, she might have been the angel of death herself.

Mrs Jonathan Prothero drew Rowland from the room and insisted upon his taking some refreshment. He had travelled all night, and Mr Gwynne, at his daughter's request, had sent his carriage to meet him.

Miss Gwynne and Miss Hall were still waiting downstairs. They asked Mrs Jonathan if they could be of any use in taking Gladys's place whilst the poor girl got some rest; Mrs Jonathan said it was useless to urge her to leave her mistress for a moment.

Page 114

Rowland thanked Miss Gwynne for her kindness, and she said she would do anything in the world for Mrs Prothero.

She and Miss Hall went away in the carriage that brought Rowland, promising to return again in the afternoon.

When Rowland had swallowed some coffee, he went back to his mother's room. As he walked from the door to the foot of the bed, she opened her eyes, and seemed for a moment to look at him; a thrill of hope shot through him. He went round and took her hand, and whispered, 'Mother!' Did she smile? He thought she did.

Shortly afterwards her lips moved, and Gladys heard the name ever on them, 'Netta.' This was better, far better, than that death-like trance.

'Mother, dear mother,' again whispered Rowland, and once more her eyes opened and fixed on him, with something like consciousness.

At last an opiate which the doctor had given took effect, and she slept; her pulse was so weak, and her breathing so faint, that at first the watchers thought she was passing away into that sleep from which there is no awakening; but it was not so. It was a weak troubled sleep; still it was a sleep.

By degrees all left the room but Rowland and Gladys. Mrs Prothero's hand seemed to be clasping that of her son, as if it would not let go; and Gladys never moved from the bedside.

She saw that there must be hope if real sleep came. As she sat down in a kind of easy chair that Owen had placed for her by the bedside, she thanked God for this amount of hope,

'Sleep, Gladys, I will watch,' whispered Rowland.

And truly the poor girl had need of rest. Scarce had she closed her eyes during that anxious week, and she knew well how necessary rest was to her. But she felt as if she could not sleep whilst this uncertainty lasted. All the anxious faces of the household flitted before her when she tried to compose herself. Her poor master, his brother, Mrs Jonathan, Rowland, but mostly Owen. He who had said the least, had shown the greatest self-command and done the most. His large kind eyes seemed to be looking at his mother or at her, and trying to anticipate their wants. His hands so brown and sinewy, yet so very gentle, seemed to be touching hers, as they had done when moving his mother or otherwise helping in the sick-room. His cheery voice seemed to be telling her not to weary herself so much, or to be thanking her for the care she bestowed upon his dear parent. In vain she tried to put aside this kind of haunting vision. Her mistress and Owen were painted on the over-strained retina, and she could not efface the

picture. She prayed for them, for all. Then, as the afternoon sunlight faded away, and a twilight hue crept over the room, with just a flickering streak of light playing on the wall opposite to her, the death-beds of her father, mother, sister, and brothers rose up before her with a vivid reality that made her tremble, and forced tears from her weary eyes. The tears seemed a relief, and as they flowed quietly down her cheeks, and the coming shadows dispersed the visions of the living, dying, and dead faded away, a mist fell on her eyes and she slept.

Page 115

Rowland, meanwhile, watched his mother. During the twelve months that he had been a curate in a parish in one of the worst parts of London, he had seen much of the sick and the dying. He had seen poverty, wretchedness, and sin in their most dreadful aspects, and the peace and comfort of his mother's present condition were a great contrast to the riot and squalor of many a death room into which he had sought to carry the gospel message of mercy. Truly he felt thankful in his inmost soul that she, over whom he was watching with filial love, was ready at any moment to appear before the great Tribunal, because she 'believed and knew in whom she believed.' It was for Netta, his beloved and wayward sister, the cause of this first great family trouble, that he grieved the most, because he feared that she had entered upon that downward path that would lead her far astray from the one in which her mother had so long and happily trod. But he, too, knew where to apply in all his times of doubt and misgiving, and thither he went for comfort as the shadows fell around and night crept on.

Mrs Jonathan Prothero came noiselessly into the room, bringing in a shaded night light, and anxious to bear some intelligence to the watchers downstairs. Her step, light as it was, awoke Gladys. She started up, and looking on her mistress, clasped her hands, and fervently thanked God.

'She is sleeping as calmly as a child,' she said. 'I am sure the worst is past.'

Mrs Jonathan went out to tell the good news, and to beg the brothers to go to bed, which they did, after some demur. Gladys and Rowland watched on for about an hour longer, when Mrs Prothero opened her eyes and fixed them upon Rowland. She smiled as if she knew him, and when he bent over her and kissed her, murmured some faint words which he could not understand.

Gladys gave her some jelly which she swallowed, and soon afterwards she slept again.

'The crisis is over, she will recover, I hope, Mr Rowland,' said Gladys. 'You can go to bed, sir—you had better. The mistress will want you to-morrow, and you can be of no use to-night.'

Rowland felt the force of this, and again kissing his mother's forehead, and shaking Gladys by the hand, he went downstairs to Owen, who he found asleep on the sofa in the parlour. Supper was awaiting him, and Owen and he were soon seated over the fire, discussing their mother's illness and Netta's conduct.

They had not met for three or four years, and there was much to say. Few brothers loved one another more tenderly than they did, despite the dissimilarity of habits, tastes, and occupations, and when they were together, all the secrets of their hearts were usually unfolded. Although Owen's wild roving nature had caused Rowland much anxiety, still he had perfect confidence in his honest, open character. Owing to early

education Owen was not deficient in general acquirements. He knew a little Latin and Greek,

Page 116

and could read, write, and cypher well. Added to this, his knowledge of foreign lands was great, and of men and manners greater. Under a careless exterior, he had a considerable portion of talent and information, and Rowland was delighted to find in his sea-faring, roystering brother, a much more cultivated and sensible mind than he had expected. Rowland was beginning to be conscious of wishing to see all his family superior to what they were. Placed by his own profession amongst gentle-folks, and feeling in himself all the refinement of the class so called, he was often annoyed and pained to be differently situated from those who were nearest and dearest to him. He knew that in London he was received as an equal by men and women of rank and position, as well as by those of talent and learning; whereas, in the country, even Miss Gwynne, at whose house he visited, considered it a condescension to speak to him, whilst she looked upon those who belonged to him as people of another sphere. In spite of all his prayers for humility, and his striving after pure Christianity, Rowland was, and knew that he was a proud man, and all the prouder because his original station was beneath his present one. He felt that he must be humbled before he could be the pastor and disciple of One whose whole life was a lesson of humility. But the world knew nothing of this. He walked before it, and through it as a bright example of a young clergyman devoted to his work. Neither was he less devoted to his mother, dutiful to his father, or loving to his brother, because they were good, honest, plain farmers, and he a clergyman; or which was, perhaps, more to the point, because Miss Gwynne could not, or would not separate him from his family.

When he and his brother and sister were children, they were constantly at the vicarage with their uncle and aunt, and Miss Gwynne was their playmate there, and had not known their inferiority. Now that he really was a man of education and a gentleman, in spite of all her kindness to his mother, she knew it full well. Why did he never consider what any one else in his own neighbourhood thought of him or his family? It was only Miss Gwynne—always Miss Gwynne.

Early the following morning that young lady came to inquire for Mrs Prothero, accompanied by Miss Hall. It was Rowland who gave them the joyful intelligence that his mother had had a good night, and was much more quiet. The real pleasure that shone from Miss Gwynne's intelligent and intelligible eyes, showed Rowland how fond she was of his mother.

'And now,' she said, 'Miss Hall and I are come, resolutely bent on remaining with your mother, whilst your aunt and Gladys go to bed. We are quite determined, and you know I always have my way.'

Rowland bowed, smiled, and called his aunt, who, after some hesitation consented, and went upstairs to request Gladys to do the same, but Gladys was inexorable until Mr Prothero came in, and in his most decided manner insisted on her taking some rest.

Mrs Prothero also murmured a ‘Go, Gladys fach!’ and she kissed the dear cheek and went at once.

Page 117

Mr Prothero took her place. He was alone with his wife, and the rough, loud man became gentle as one of his own lambs, as he bent over her and thanked God that she was better. A big tear fell from his eyes on her face, and he made an inward vow, that if her life were spared, he would never again say a cross word to her as long as he lived.

She felt the tear, heard the kind words, and seemed to understand the vow, for she looked at him tenderly, and said in her low, weak voice, ‘God bless you, David!’

From that moment he went out to his work with a lightened heart; the labourers read the good news that their mistress was better in his face, and heard it in his voice. Even Netta’s disobedience was forgotten, if not forgiven, in the joy of feeling that the partner of more than half his life was likely to recover. And by degrees she did recover. That is to say, before Rowland was obliged again to leave her, she was able to go down into the parlour and sit at her work, ‘quite like a lady,’ as she expressed it. And even out of the evil of such an illness good had sprung. It had aroused all the sympathy and kind feeling of relatives, friends, and neighbours; but especially had it been beneficial in bringing out the womanly kindness that lay hid under the stiffness of pride in Mrs Jonathan Prothero, and in opening the hearts of the sisters-in-law towards each other. Mrs Jonathan forgot her cousin, Sir Philip Payne Perry, and helped to nurse, and learned to love her humbler connection, whilst the ever-ready tenderness of the simple farmer’s wife, sprung up to respond to it like a stream leaping in the sunlight. Gladys, too, reaped the reward of her devotion, in the increased kindness of Mr Prothero, who began to forget the Irish beggar in the gentle girl whose care, under God, had saved his wife’s life; and so, as is usually the case, affliction had not come from the ground, but had fallen like a softening dew upon the irritated feelings of the afflicted, and bound heart still nearer to heart.

Perhaps in the younger and more impetuous natures it had done almost too much. Thoughtless of consequences, they had all worked to save a life, valuable to so many. Rowland, Owen, Miss Gwynne, Miss Hall, Gladys, had been thrown together at a time when the formalities of the world and the distinctions of rank are forgotten, and the tear of sympathy, the word of friendly comfort, or the pressure of the hand of kindly feeling are given and taken, without a thought of giver or receiver. But they are remembered, and dwelt upon in after years as passages in life’s history never to be obliterated—-never to be forgotten.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HEIRESS.

Page 118

Glanyravon Park lay, as we have said, in the parish of which Mr Jonathan Prothero was vicar, but as the parish and park were large, the house was three or four miles from the church; and it was on account of this distance of Glanyravon and its dependencies from church and school, that Miss Gwynne had induced her father to build the school-house, of which mention has been already made, since there was a large school in the village for such children as were within its reach. She would have had him build a small church also, and endow it, to remove all excuse, as she said, from the chapel-goers; but this was an undertaking too mighty for him. However, the school flourished wonderfully, both on week days and Sundays, and Miss Gwynne always filled every corner of an omnibus in which the servants went to church with such of the children as could not walk so far. Miss Hall was an admirable assistant to the school-mistress during the week; and Gladys, with Mrs Prothero's permission, undertook the Sunday duty for the mistress, in order that she might have a holiday on that day. Miss Gwynne also attended, but she was too impatient and imperious to be a good teacher, much as she wished to be one.

Miss Gwynne had great ideas of doing good; grand schemes that she tried to carry out, but in which she often failed. Nevertheless, she did a great deal of good in her own peculiar way.

She had been reading of the 'harvest homes' that they were endeavouring to revive in England, and had induced her father to have one in the park. Happily, the day fixed for this general rejoicing was during Mrs Prothero's convalescence, and before Rowland's return to London, so that most of the members of the Prothero family could be present. They also yielded to Miss Gwynne's ready assistance in such preparations as she made, and were the instruments in surprising her and her father by some tasteful decorations in their honour, unknown to them. Owen and Gladys worked very hard at floral and evergreen mottoes for the tent, whilst Rowland gave his advice as he sat with his mother, and tried to amuse her during the tedium of her recovery.

A few hours before the general gathering, a messenger arrived at the Park in great haste, bearing a note to Miss Gwynne, containing the information that the vicar had sprained his ankle just as he was going to set out for Glanyravon, and was unable to move. There was another note for Rowland, which was to be carried on to the farm, requesting him to supply his uncle's place.

Miss Gwynne was greatly annoyed; wished that the vicar would not go wandering about after old stones, as she was sure he had done; knew that Rowland would never be able to manage and was very sorry she had attempted the treat at all.

Whilst she was still grumbling, and Miss Hall laughing and consoling, Rowland arrived. This was his first visit to the Park since he had been in the country, and Mr Gwynne was delighted to see him. He perceived at once that Miss Gwynne's equanimity was disturbed; and said that he was very sorry to come as a substitute for his uncle, but that

he would do his best. His manner was so quiet and composed, and he seemed so little alarmed by the honours thrust upon him, that Miss Gwynne gradually became reassured.

Page 119

In less than half-an-hour she told Miss Hall that he was worth a hundred of the vicar, and that after all the sprained ankle was rather a fortunate accident.

At about two o'clock the guests began to assemble at the school-house, over the door of which was the motto in dahlias on a ground of evergreens, 'Welcome for all,' which had been arranged by Miss Hall. The school-room was very tastefully decorated by the mistress, Gladys, and the children; and the motto, 'Long Live Miss Gwynne,' was very apparent in scarlet letters amongst a crown of laurels.

All the children and their teachers were assembled here, and a great many of their relations, also most of the farmers and their families. In addition, there were Mr and Miss Gwynne, Miss Hall, Lady Mary and Miss Nugent, Colonel Vaughan, who was staying at the Park, Sir Hugh Pryse, Mrs Jonathan Prothero, who left her husband at his particular request, and Rowland. No one out of the precincts of the Park had been invited, and as it was, there was a goodly number.

As there was no church near enough for them to go to, Rowland read the evening service in the school-room; after this he gave out one of the hymns for harvest, and led the youthful band in singing it. His fine clear voice seemed to give the children courage, especially when a beautiful full treble joined, to which they were evidently accustomed. It was impossible not to try to discover from whom those sweet notes proceeded, and one by one everybody looked at Gladys, who had a magnificent voice; she, however, was unconscious of observation, for her eyes were fixed on her hymn-book that she was sharing with a small child.

It must be acknowledged that she not unfrequently distracted the attention of many a young man from his hymn-book on Sunday, when at church; and on the present occasion, what with the face and the voice, more than one pair of eyes were fixed on her. Owen, I am sorry to say, looked more attentively at her than at his book; and, as to Colonel Vaughan, he never took his eyes off her face, and was heard to whisper the question of 'Who is that girl?' to Lady Mary Nugent.

When the hymn was sung, Rowland stood behind the high desk of the mistress, and gave a short lecture on the words, 'Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.' Rowland was not ungifted with the talent for extempore preaching, common to so many of his countrymen, and therewith possessed, in general, much self-possession; on the present occasion, it must be confessed that he felt unusually nervous, still he commanded himself and his feelings, and by degrees, forgetting them and his hearers, in his subject, warmed into a natural flow of eloquence that somewhat astonished his congregation, and entirely gained their attention.

Beneath a quiet exterior Rowland hid a romantic and poetic mind, which few, if any of his friends knew anything about; for he had never shown his poetry to them, and never

attempted to publish it. But it sometimes appeared, in spite of his efforts to repress it, in his sermons; and now it made a desperate effort to burst forth, and conquered.

Page 120

There was so much to excite the enthusiasm of a young preacher in that harvest-home gathering—in the mows of golden corn heaped up against the future—in the splendid autumn weather they were then enjoying—in the bright sunshine and many-hued leaves of the changing trees—and the goodness of God crowning the whole!

I am not going through his sermon, for I should only mar what his feelings made powerful. Suffice it to say that some of his friends had tears in their eyes as he preached; others, according to the custom of their country, uttered occasional exclamations of approval as he went on, and some were glad to own him as their near and dear relation.

Perhaps the proudest moment of the farmer's life was when Mr Gwynne went up to him after that short discourse, and shook him by the hand, with the words—emphatic words for him—

'Well, Prothero, I congratulate you upon your son. You have reason to be proud of him. He managed his sermon well at a short notice, clear, poetical, *etc*., and all that sort of thing.'

The abrupt termination to the speech was occasioned by the approach of Lady Mary Nugent, who also congratulated Mr Prothero.

'Thank you, sir; thank your ladyship; glad you approve,' was all the proud father could say, with the tears in his eyes all the while.

As to Rowland, he was undergoing an ovation of hand-shakings and praises from everybody present, which he was fain to put an end to, by beginning to organise the procession to the tent. One simple sentence, however, rang in his ears for the remainder of that day.

'Thank you, Mr Rowland, for your sermon. I hope you have done us all good,' said Miss Gwynne.

She began to think more highly of him than she had ever thought before, and owned to Miss Hall that he had words at command, and that at a short notice.

The procession was very pretty. The school-children walked two and two, and looked like so many large scarlet poppies, as they wended their way through the avenue. Miss Gwynne gave them all their outer garments, and it was her picturesque and pleasing fancy to keep to the national costume; so they had high-crowned black beaver hats, scarlet cloaks with hoods, striped linsey frocks, and woollen aprons. They carried a due amount of little flags with appropriate mottoes, and some few of the Glanyravon musicians formed a band for the occasion, and played cheerily, 'The March of the Men of Harlech.'

Mr Prothero and his son Owen headed the tenantry, and carried between them a magnificent banner, fashioned at the farm, bearing as motto, ‘Prosperity to Glanyravon.’ Others followed with appropriate Welsh mottoes. And one was conspicuous as containing the sentiment, ’Long live our Vicar and his Lady.’

Page 121

A large tent was erected in front of the house, ornamented with flowers, wreaths of evergreens, devices, and mottoes. The most conspicuous of these was in Welsh, and above Mr Gwynne's seat at the head of the long table. It was composed of wheat-ears and oak-leaves, and contained the words, 'May God bless Gwynne of Glanyravon and his daughter.' Mr Gwynne felt almost uncomfortable in seating himself beneath such a sentence, but having consented for the first time in his life, and, he earnestly hoped, for the last, to become a hero, he knew he must go through with it. Accordingly, with Colonel Vaughan on his left, and Lady Mary Nugent on his right hand he prepared to do the honours of a most substantial feast to his tenantry, their wives and children. When every one was seated Rowland said grace, and they began the feast *con amore*. They were as merry and happy a party as could be assembled on a fine autumn day. Every one was in good humour, and thoroughly enjoyed the treat. As soon as they had feasted enough, they proceeded to give toasts, which were enthusiastically drunk in good Welsh ale.

Mr Gwynne proposed the health of the Queen and royal family. Sir Hugh proposed Mr Gwynne and his daughter, the kind and liberal donors of the feast, in a hearty speech, which all understood. Mr Gwynne did his best to return thanks, but found that he could not get much beyond,—'I feel most grateful for the honour you have done me, but—my feelings—been—and—and—all that sort of thing,' at which point the cheers grew so deafening that he sat down quite overwhelmed, and wished himself in his library.

'So very exciting, so complimentary, so touching,' whispered Lady Mary Nugent to Mr Gwynne.

Rowland was again called upon to exert his eloquence in responding for the Church, which he did in a short, apt speech, duly applauded.

He, in return, proposed the army, coupled with Colonel Vaughan, who—and, he said, he knew he was expressing the thoughts of all present—was heartily welcomed home, and earnestly entreated to remain in his native country.

Colonel Vaughan delighted every one by a most eloquent response. 'Such a grand gentleman, but so humble,' was the general opinion of him. As for the ladies, they were all in love with him. Lady Mary Nugent, Freda, Miss Nugent—they had never seen so charming a man. And he was so universally gallant that he might have been in love with them all in return. He gave the 'Welsh Yeomanry,' for whom Mr Prothero returned thanks, and right well he did it; giving the colonel to understand in something more than a hint, that if he wished the farmers and farming to improve, he, and other absent landlords, must come and live on their property as Mr Gwynne did, and then there would be more wealth and prosperity, and more 'harvest homes.'

And so, with various other toasts, including the vicar and his lady, for whom Owen had to return thanks, the afternoon wore on. The children were playing at games in the Park, and by degrees the elders joined them.

Page 122

Here Gladys was foremost. It was wonderful to see how she had gained the affections of the young. One and all were round her, and when the gentlemen and ladies came to look on, and join in the revels, the first thing that attracted them was the flushed face and graceful figure of this really beautiful girl, as she led the boisterous youngsters in a game of 'French and English.'

In a moment Colonel Vaughan was in the ring heading the boys; but Gladys immediately retired, abashed, as he stood opposite to her, as captain on the French side. But Owen came to the rescue, and the gallant officer and equally gallant sailor headed the ranks, as commanders of the bands of French and English. They had a hard fight on both sides, but at last the English conquered, and Owen and his party won the day amidst great cheering.

Sir Hugh and Rowland joined in the succeeding games; and sixpences, sweetmeats, apples, and every available prize was given to the boys and girls for racing, jumping, singing, and the like, until the shades of evening fell over the scene.

Lady Mary Nugent and her daughter were the first to wish good-night; as they were to walk home, Colonel Vaughan proposed accompanying them.

'You will return at once?' asked Freda, rather peremptorily, for she disliked that the Nugents should carry off the all-fascinating colonel.

He bowed and said 'yes,' and Rowland, who was near, saw Freda's cheek flush as he looked at her.

It chanced that Rowland and Miss Gwynne were left together at a distance from the revel. They stood awhile, looking on, and talking over the day. Rowland said it had been most successful. Indeed he felt that all had been pleased; none more than himself, for had not everyone congratulated him, and above all, had not Miss Gwynne been even kinder and more friendly, than when by his mother's bed side she had seemed to him as a sister?

'If it has been successful, Mr Rowland, it is in a great measure due to you,' said Miss Gwynne, looking up into his face with a smile of real satisfaction. 'I should never have managed the children so well, and I must say, much as I like your uncle, I don't think he would have managed the services so well as you have done.'

Reader! were you ever praised by a very handsome woman, whom you have loved all your life, when standing with her alone under a wide-spreading oak, in a noble park, with mountains bathed in the red and yellow of the sunset before you, and a broad harvest-moon rising above your heads? If so, you will not wonder at the end of this chapter.

Rowland suddenly fixed his fine, dark eyes upon Freda's face, and looked into it, as if he would read her soul. For a moment she was abashed at the gaze, and coloured deeply, whilst her eye-lids drooped over the eyes he sought. Was there ever a woman who was not flattered and excited by such a look?

'Miss Gwynne,' at last said Rowland tremulously, 'if in any way I can have served and pleased you I am happy. For this, in part, I have laboured, and still would labour. You do not, you cannot know how I have loved you all my life.'

Page 123

Poor Rowland almost whispered these few words, and as he did so, wished he could recall them, but now the deed was done, and she knew the secret of his childhood, boyhood, and manhood. He said no more, but stood looking down upon her with his heart beating as it had never beaten before.

Higher and higher rose the colour on her cheek. What were the feelings that deepened it so? Alas! poor Rowland! Pride, only pride. For a moment she stood as if hesitating what to say, then, suddenly drawing herself up to her full height, she looked haughtily at him, and said words that he never forgot to his dying day.

'Mr Rowland Prothero, have you quite forgotten who I am, and who you are?'

With these words she made a stately bow, and turned towards the house. Proudly and hastily she walked up the avenue; once she had turned round, and seeing Rowland standing exactly where she had left him, hurried on until she found herself in her own room, indulging in a very decided flood of indignant tears.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BROTHERS.

During this short conversation between Rowland and Miss Gwynne, Gladys was still playing with the children at no great distance from them. With all a woman's penetration, she had guessed Rowland's secret during his mother's illness, and had perceived no symptoms of attachment on the part of Miss Gwynne; and now, with all a woman's pity, she was watching him from afar. She had seen them standing together, had marked the hasty bow and retreat of the lady, and the immoveable attitude of the gentleman; she saw that he continued to stand where Miss Gwynne had left him, as if he were a statue; she guessed something must have passed between them.

As twilight was fairly come on, she told the schoolmistress that she must go home, and begged her to see that the children dispersed when she thought best. Owen, who was in the midst of a game of cricket with the boys, was as well aware of all Gladys's movements as if he had been by her side. He saw that she was shaking hands with the mistress, and that the children were imploring her to stay a little longer. He went to her and asked her to remain until he had finished his game, in order that he might see her home.

She thanked him, but said, rather abruptly for her, that she must go at once, and, heedless of what he or others might think, went hastily across the park to Rowland.

'That's the way the wind blows, is it?' said Owen to himself, whilst a frown gathered on his open forehead.

Rowland was unconscious of the approach of Gladys, and was startled from his trance by the words,—

‘Mr Rowland, sir, I think the mistress will be expecting you home.’

He looked at her half unconsciously for a moment, and then rousing himself, said,—

’Oh! Gladys, is it you? Yes, I will go directly. Where? Home? Of course it is time. I will walk with you.’

Page 124

These were the only words spoken between the pair. Rapidly he strode down the avenue, inwardly resolving never to enter it again; as rapidly along the road that led to the farm, until he reached the house, with Gladys breathless by his side.

’I am afraid I have walked too quickly, Gladys, I am very sorry. I was anxious to get home, I do not feel very well.’

With these words he hurried through the passage, and was going to his room, when his father met him and called him into the parlour. He felt so bewildered that he scarcely knew what his mother said, when she told him how proud and happy he had made her by his conduct that day.

’All, my dear son, church-people and dissenters were pleased with your sermon, and the way you managed everything. Your aunt repeated it word for word to me, and it was just what I like. This is the first comfort I have felt since—’

Mrs Prothero pressed her son’s hand, and her eyes filled with tears.

‘Thank you, mother, I am glad,’ was all Rowland could say.

’Mind you, Row, my boy, you must write a good sermon for Sunday. You’ve got a character to lose now,’ said Mr Prothero, giving him a slap on the back.

‘Yes, father. I will go and write it.’

‘Not to-night, Rowland,’ said Mrs Prothero, anxiously; ’you look pale and tired. What is the matter?’

’Nothing, mother; but I must think of this sermon, I have only one clear day. We will talk to-morrow. Good-night, dear mother.’

Rowland stooped to kiss his mother, and she felt that his face was very cold, and that his hand trembled.

‘You are ill, Rowland?’

‘No, only tired. I will come and see you again by-and-by.’

Rowland went to his room and bolted himself in. He threw himself on a chair, covered his face with his hands, and wept like a child. He was seated by a little writing-table near the window, through which the moon looked down pitifully upon him in his great anguish. Yes, great. Perhaps the greatest anguish of a life. His arms on the table, his head on his arms, he thought, in the misery of that moment, that he must die, and he wished to die. The illusion of a life was destroyed, and how? So rudely, so cruelly, so heartlessly broken! He could have borne it if there had been one kind word, only a look

of interest or pity; but that pride and haughtiness were like the stabs of a dagger in his heart.

‘Womanly weakness! unmanly folly!’ you say, some one who has never felt keenly and suddenly the pangs of such a passion unrequited. Perhaps so. But out of our great weakness sometimes grows our strength; out of our bitterest disappointments our sternest resolution. By-and-by such weakness will strengthen; such folly will breed wisdom.

Thus Rowland remained for some time, with unkind and unholy thoughts and feelings rushing through his mind, like the howling winds through the air in a great storm. Afterwards, he prayed humbly to be forgiven those devilish feelings of anger, pride, hatred of life and mistrust of God’s goodness that assailed him in that hour of misery. But for the time, they were darting to and fro, and casting out every good thought, and hopeful purpose from his soul, like demons as they were.

Page 125

But strength came at last, and like one arising out of a horrid dream, Rowland got up from his anguish, and looked out into the night. The moon was too tender and beautiful for his mood at that time; he roughly drew down the blind, took a box of matches from the table, and lighted a candle. Then he paced up and down the room, and suddenly thought of Howel and Netta. He knew not how the transition took place, but he immediately accused himself of having been hard to them. Does any one ever fully sympathise with another, until he has felt as he does? No, we should not judge our weak fellow mortals so harshly, if we knew all their temptations and trials.

Then, again, Miss Gwynne returned to him, with her pride and coldness. How could he love such a woman? he, whose beau ideal of feminine perfection was a creature of gentleness, love, and pity? but he would think of her no more. She, at least, should discover that he was as proud as herself.

Yes, he was proud, he knew it, and now, he would glory in his pride instead of trample it down, as he had been of late trying to do, as an arch tempter; he should be justified in showing pride for her pride.

Again a gentler and better mood came. Was he not vain, ambitious, ridiculous in her eyes, for venturing to speak to her as he had done? Doubtless he had been wrong, but she needed not to spurn him as she had done; she might have told him so as a friend. Friend! she thought him beneath her friendship.

But we will not pursue these musings further; every kind and degree of feeling alternated for nearly two hours, when, as if by some sudden impulse or resolution, Rowland sat down and determined to write his sermon. It should be upon pride, and should touch her as well as himself. He found pleasure in thinking of all the texts in which the word occurs, in looking for them, and considering which was the most biting.

A hasty knock at his door interrupted this study. It was Owen, who insisted upon coming in, and would take no excuse.

Owen, too, had been ruminating upon the nature of woman, and was not in a very good humour; he, however, had been cheerfully talking to his mother of the events of the day, and duly lauding their own particular hero, Rowland.

When he entered, he looked surprised at seeing Rowland with his Bible in his hand; he took a chair, and, turning his seat towards him, sat down astride upon it, leaning his chin upon the back and facing Rowland.

’Now, Rowland, I’m going to ask you a very plain question. There ought to be no secrets between brothers: I’ve told you all mine, nearly? you must tell me yours. Are you in love?’

Poor Rowland coloured to the temples, but did not answer.

’You won’t tell me? There was a time, Rowland, when you and I knew one another’s hearts as well as if they were two open books, in which we could read when we like, but I suppose London and fine people—’

Page 126

’Stop, Owen, do not disgrace yourself or me by going on. Why do you wish to probe me in a wounded place, where every stab is death?’

Owen looked at his brother, and saw the conflict that was going on in his mind in the working of his features.

’Rowland, I only want your confidence; by Jove you shall have mine, even though you are my successful rival; and I love you so well that I would give her up to you, if it cost me—let me see—a voyage to the North Pole.’

’Owen, this is no jesting matter. I have been a fool, I am ashamed of myself, I am trying to conquer my feelings; leave me until I have succeeded, and then—’

’But, Rowland, if she loves you, I don’t see why you should try to overcome your feelings. It would not be quite the right match, certainly; but she would make a better parson’s wife than a sailor’s wife after all; and my father might consent in time, and—’

‘Owen, is it kind of you to make a jest of me?’ asked Rowland, rising from his chair, and resuming his walk up and down his room. ’If you had ever really loved either of the many girls you have fancied you adored, you would understand me better; but I deserve it all for my presumption—my folly.’

’For that much, Rowland, perhaps I love her a trifle better than you do at this very moment; still I am not selfish enough to come between you, and would rather try absence and the northern latitudes; only just be honest. I’m not quite such a piece of blubber as not to be capable of constancy, though I may have been a rover until now; but when I see a girl walk right away from me, and refuse to wait for me to go home with her, and go straight off to another man, never mind if he was my father, instead of my brother, I don’t mean to break my heart about her. Besides, I’m disappointed in her, and that’s the truth. I thought she was as modest as the moon; but I never saw the moon walk out of her straight path to go after another planet, and no girl that I have anything to say to, shall go after another man. So you’re welcome to her, though I’ll say this, that I never saw the woman yet I loved so well, and believe she’s as good as gold, as pure as that same moon, but as cold as ice itself; at least, so I’ve found her, perhaps you’ve a warmer experience.’

As soon as Owen paused in his rapid speech, Rowland paused in his walk, and putting his hand on Owen’s shoulder, said,—

’This is a misapprehension, my dear Owen; you and I are thinking of a different person.’

‘I am thinking of Gladys,’ said Owen bluntly, ’and repeat that I love you both too well to come between you and happiness.’

’I am sure of that, Owen, you have no selfishness about you; but I do not love Gladys. I never thought of her except as a beautiful and superior girl, thrown by Providence amongst us, and to be treated with kindness and consideration. I only hope my manner to her has never indicated anything else.’

Page 127

‘Do you mean what you say?’ said Owen, jumping up from his chair, and cutting a caper, ’then shake hands, and tell me you forgive me for being so hasty.’

They shook hands heartily, and Rowland said,—

’Thank you, Owen, you have done me good; now go away, and I will write my sermon.’

’Not before I know what is the matter with you, and why Gladys went across on purpose to walk home with you.’

After much hesitation, and some pressing on the part of Owen, Rowland told his brother what had passed between him and Miss Gwynne. When he had made a clean breast of it, he felt as if relieved of half his load—especially when Owen assured him that women were all alike, and that when you asked them the first time, they were as proud as Lucifer.

’It is first and last with me, Owen. I have forgotten my position, my profession, my own dignity in giving way to a passion that I had no right to suppose could be returned. I will crush it, and nobody but you shall ever know of its existence. This struggle over, and I shall hope henceforth to have but one Master and to serve Him.’

’Well, I never should have thought you would have fancied Miss Gwynne; not but that she is handsome and clever and very agreeable and kind, too, when she pleases; but so proud, so domineering, and then—’

’Neither should I have supposed Gladys to be your choice, Owen; and I am sorry it should be so. What would my father say? so soon upon Netta, too; and you must confess that her uncertain history, her present condition, the way she came to us, would be utter barriers to anything serious.’

’Bravo, Rowland; now I must put the application to your lecture. I suppose everything is by comparison in this world—the squire and the squire’s daughter look down upon the farmer and the farmer’s son, and beg to decline the honour of an alliance. The farmer and the farmer’s son look down upon the corporal and corporal’s daughter, and beg to do the same, especially as she is their servant. Tom, the carpenter, thinks his daughter too good for Joseph the labourer, and Matthew the shoeblack wouldn’t let his son marry Sal the crossing-sweeper for all the world. Oh, Rowland!, is this what you have learnt from your profession, and the book before you? Why, I’ve found a better philosophy on board ship, with no teachers but the moon and stars.’

’Owen, I am ashamed of myself. My pride deserves to be thus pulled down.’

’I don’t want to seem unkind, Rowland, but my notion is, that an honest gentleman, such as you, educated, and a clergyman is good enough for any lady; and that a good, religious girl, who has saved my mother’s life, is a great deal too good for a ne’er-do-

well fellow like me. But I won't fall before I'm pushed, since I'm pretty sure she thinks so too. So, now, cheer up, old boy! and show the heiress what a sermon you can preach; and let her see you don't care a fig for her; and then, by jingo, she'll be over head and ears in love with you, and propose herself next leap-year.'

Page 128

Rowland laughed, in spite of himself, at this notion.

‘I will go and wish my mother good night,’ he said, ’and then set to work.’

The brothers went together to their mother, who was in bed, and together received her ‘God bless you, my children!’ Then they separated for the night, and Rowland returned to his room a wiser, if still a sadder, man, than when Owen visited it. Owen’s plain common sense had often got the better of Rowland’s romance; and although he could not approve his roving and seemingly useless life, he always acknowledged that he gathered some wisdom by his experience.

Again Rowland sat down, but this time he drew up the blind, and let the moonlight in upon his chamber like a silver flood. He took himself to task for his pride, ambition, and conceit, in a way that did him good, doubtless, but was not palatable; still he made many excuses for himself, and none for Miss Gwynne. He was not to recover the effects of that disappointment in a few hours! Days and even years were necessary for that. But he asked for strength where it is never asked in vain, and then resolutely wrote a sermon on the words, ’Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’

He wrote as he felt, and under the influence of those strong, half-curbed feelings, wrote so easily, that he was astonished to find how quickly he composed, and how soon a sufficient number of sheets were written, to occupy his customary half-hour when preached. He did not read them over, but promised to do so on the morrow, which was Saturday. He was already far into the small hours, and knew that he ought to be in bed.

When he was there he could not sleep. That love of his was too deeply-rooted to be torn up by a few proud words that haunted him all the night, and to which he was constantly adding ’Yes, you are the heiress of Glanyravon, and I am only a farmer’s son and a poor curate.’

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GOVERNESS.

‘Only a curate!’ exclaimed Miss Gwynne, as she and Miss Hall were discussing Rowland’s presumption the following morning.

‘Still, a gentleman,’ replied Miss Hall quietly.

‘The son of one of my father’s tenants; a farmer’s son!’

‘Still, a gentleman!’

’The ninety-ninth attempt on Glanyravon, and, happily, an unsuccessful one.’

’Perhaps the first sincere attempt to gain the heiress’s heart, without any thought of her park and its broad acres.’

’I declare, Serena, *vous m’impatientez*. I verily believe you are in his interest and confidence, and trying to plead his cause.’

This was said with great excitement; the answer, however, was calm.

’Scarcely possible, if probable, because I was never alone with him in my life, and have rarely seen him except in your presence.’

’Then, why do you take up his defence? You would not have me marry him, would you?’

Page 129

’Certainly not, for many reasons. In the first place, you do not love him; in the second, your father would not approve of such a match; in the third, you are not suited to him.’

’I understand. Not good enough. But why do you defend him? Do you think it was right of him to say what he did to me?’

’Well, perhaps not. But I think he has been nursing these feelings for you so long, that he began to forget whether they were right or wrong, sensible or foolish; and last night, carried away by the excitement of the day and his own success, and finding himself alone with you—you, probably, more friendly than usual—he forgot his customary prudence, and overstepped the bounds of conventionality.’

’Very well said, Nita. Then it was wrong of me to be friendly, and right of him to make a dunce of himself.’

’Perhaps if you had ever felt as he does, Freda, you might make some excuse for him.’

’I am sure you must have been in love a hundred times, you are so sentimental, and would like to see him run away with me.’

‘Quite wrong again.’

’Then what would you like, for I am sure you don’t approve of my conduct?’

’Simply, that you should have treated a clergyman and a gentleman as such, and at least felt grateful that a good and honest heart was offered to you, even though you would not accept it.’

’But I don’t believe in the heart, you see, Serena. There is not a more mercenary race under the sun than the clergy. They all marry for money. I can mention quite a dozen; his own uncle at the head of them. Now, you cannot suppose that he married Mrs Jonathan Prothero for anything but her fortune and her family.’

’I think he is too simple-minded a man to have considered either the one or the other.’

’Then why didn’t he marry some simple-minded girl, his equal? No, you are quite out of your depth now, Serena. Depend upon it, that Rowland Prothero will soon find some English lady just as rich as *I am to be*—always provided that Lady Mary Nugent doesn’t carry off papa, and get him to leave her the property. These men don’t seem to know that it is not entailed; and that, after all, I may be cut off with a shilling. I think I may venture to affirm that were such the case, there is not one of my ninety-nine adorers who would have me, except, perhaps poor Sir Hugh.’

’Perhaps, Freda, I may have been imprudent, situated as I am here, in even saying what I have in favour of Rowland Prothero. The fact is, that not only do I particularly like

what I know of him, but there is a little passage in my early history that makes me have a great pity for young men who venture to fall in love with young ladies who consider themselves their superiors.'

'If you will tell me your story, Nita, I will forgive you all the rest, and finish this sketch of Abertewey for Colonel Vaughan, meanwhile.'

Page 130

Freda drew well in water-colours, and had before her, as she sat in the embrasure of one of the windows of that charming morning-room, a half-finished sketch of Colonel Vaughan's place, which he had begged her to take for him. Hitherto it had been untouched; now she began to work at it with pretended vigour, whilst Miss Hall took up the little frock she was making for a poor child, which had been laid down during the discussion, and also made believe to stitch and sew industriously.

But there was a flush on her cheek, and a tremor in her voice, as she began to tell Freda the little passage in her life to which she had alluded. Freda was conscious of this, and accordingly devoted herself more energetically to her drawing.

'It was when I was just eighteen, Freda, and during my *beaux jours*, before my father had lost his fortune, or been obliged to retire from the army on half-pay on account of that dreadful paralytic stroke—before my sister's imprudent marriage, and consequent emigration to Australia—before my dear mother's death. We were a happy and gay family, and I had then more pride and higher spirits than you would probably give me credit for now.

'I was visiting a friend who had married the head-master of one of our principal grammar schools. Amongst his tutors there was a young man of whom he was very fond, and who used to be a good deal with his family after the duties of the day were over. It is just possible that he was a countryman of yours, for his name was Jones.'

'Oh, Serena! you don't mean to say that you fell in love with a Jones in England, and then came into Wales to be in the midst of that very ancient and numerous family.'

'I have not come to the love part yet, Freda. He was a very quiet and unobtrusive person, but, my friends said, very amiable and sufficiently clever. I know that I used to take an unkind delight in teasing him, and that he was rather clever in repartee, and never spared me in return. I liked him as an amusing companion, and had no objection to his getting me books or flowers, or whatever lay within his reach that might be agreeable to me. Moreover, I pitied him, because I was told that both his parents were dead, and that he was working hard to pay for his own course at college, whither he intended to go as soon as he could get the means.

'As my father was with his regiment abroad at this time, and my mother and sister were making a round of visits amongst our Scotch friends, I stayed a long time with the Merryweathers. They were very pleasant people, and had an agreeable circle of acquaintance.

'But that has nothing to do with my story. The evening before I left them to return home, my friend, Mr Jones, managed to be alone with me; how, I never found out, for he ought to have been with the boys—and committed a similar misdemeanour to that of poor Rowland Prothero. He had unfortunately lost his heart to me—so he said, and was

constrained to tell me so. Would I think of him, if, in the course of time, he could enter the church and marry me?

Page 131

’Now I had the world before me, a happy home, a prospect of a certain independence, and, I suppose, a sufficient share of personal attractions. I had never considered whether I could like this young man or not; but I had well considered that when I married, I must have talent, position, personal beauty, and a hundred other visionary attributes in my husband. I was of a most imaginative, and at the same time, ambitious temperament; and on the one hand, thought a great poet or warrior would fall to my lot, and on the other, that a prince of the blood royal was not too good for me.

’Your pride, my dear Freda, is too matter-of-fact, as is your general character, thoroughly to understand me. At that time I was touched and flattered by the devotion of this young man, and felt, that had he been differently placed, and had he more of the attributes either of station or romance about him, I might have taken him under my august consideration; but as I had never even looked upon him in the light of a lover, or supposed it possible that he could be one, I at once, and decidedly refused him.

’I shall never forget the pained and melancholy expression of his features when I did so, or the few words he uttered. He said that he had not ventured to hope for a different answer, though he had dared to speak, and that his one slight prospect of happiness had vanished. He had now nothing but a life of labour before him, without a gleam of hope to cheer his way, but that he should think of me always, and of the happy hours we had passed together. I felt so sorry for him that I could really say nothing, either to cheer or discourage him. He simply asked me to allow him to remain my friend, and to forgive his presumption; and so we shook hands and parted. He did not join the family that evening, and the next day I left the Merryweathers.

’I do not know how it was, but when I returned home, I thought more of this young man than of any one else. Although my sister and myself were surrounded by men of a very different, and I may say, superior class, still he haunted me very much, for a time at least.

’Then came my sister’s marriage, which proved, as you know, unfortunate in a pecuniary point of view, and her and her husband’s emigration to Australia in search of fortune. Then followed our own ruin, and my father’s paralytic seizure. To help my parents and support myself, I came to you as governess. You know, dearest Freda, how happy your dear mother made me as long as she lived, and how ardently I desired to fulfil her dying wish that I should finish your education. Most thankful I am that I was permitted to do so.

’I need not tell you, over and over again, the sad story of my mother’s death, and my return home to live with my father, and become a daily instead of a resident governess. All the happiness I have known—at least the greatest—since our troubles, has been in this house.

Page 132

’But this has nothing to do with Mr Jones. I heard, casually from my friend, Mrs Merryweather, that he had left them and gone to college; what college, she did not say. For some years I had quite enough of painful duty to perform to make me forget the weeks passed in his society, and their termination; or to think of a person of whom I had quite lost sight. About six or seven years ago, however, I heard of him, strange to say, through my sister. I had, of course, told her of his proposal and my refusal.

’She and her husband were among the early settlers at Melbourne, and in the course of time became tolerably prosperous. He, you know, was obliged to leave his regiment for drunkenness, and contrary to the usual course of things, became steadier, though not steady, in Australia. My sister lost two children in one week from fever, and during her great sorrow, was constantly visited by the clergyman of her parish, who turned out to be my early friend, Mr Jones. I do not think he knew she was my sister for some time; but she described his untiring kindness and gentleness as her greatest comfort during her troubles. He was also of great benefit to her husband, by taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the loss of his children, to press upon him the necessity of a reformation in his own course of life, which, I am thankful to say, has been gradually effected. They became very intimate, and, I suppose by mutually comparing notes concerning Old England, found one another out, so to say. But he seldom spoke of me. If my sister tried to draw him into the subject of his acquaintance with me, he changed it as soon as possible, as if it were disagreeable to him. And no wonder.

’However, my sister looks upon this man as her greatest benefactor—him, whom I, in my pride and ignorance, considered beneath me in every respect; and when he left Melbourne a year or two ago, she said they had lost their best and dearest earthly friend, and that the children cried when he wished them good-bye, as if they were parting from a father.’

Whilst Miss Hall was telling this simple narrative, Freda was very attentive. As it drew to a close, she rose from her drawing, and kneeling, as she sometimes would do, by Miss Hall’s side, put her arm affectionately round her. There was something in the action at that moment which drew tears from Miss Hall’s eyes.

‘But he is not married, Serena, I know he is not married,’ she exclaimed. ‘Who knows!’

‘My dear child,’ said Miss Hall, smiling, and stroking Freda’s shining hair, ’I have long given up all thoughts of matrimony. But the recollection of old times always affects me, and your love affects me still more. I have not told you this because I regret not being married to Mr Jones—it was mercifully ordained that I should not marry any one. What would my dear father have done if I had? but simply to show you how the very people we think the least of frequently become our best friends; the “weak things of the earth confounding those that are mighty,” in scripture phrase.’

Page 133

‘Oh, Serena! do you hear?’ interrupted Freda, ’there is Miss Nugent in the hall. Of all the bores! we never can be free from those people. Yes it is; I hear her *lithp*;’ and Miss Nugent was announced.

She had walked over, she said, to ask how they all were after the delightful Harvest Home, and to bring an invitation from her mamma to dinner the following Tuesday.

’I do hope you will come, Freda, and you, Mith Hall, and bring that charming Colonel Vaughan with you. He ith tho nithe. Don’t you think tho.’

‘Very,’ said Freda, drily.

’But, do you know, I don’t admire him half ath much ath Mr Rowland Prothero. Mamma thaith he ith tho gentlemanlike and that the meanth to athk him Tuethday.’

‘Really!’ again said Freda, not daring to look at Miss Hall.

’We are going to Llanfach to-morrow to hear him preach. Hith thermon wath beautiful in the school-room. Don’t you think he ith like the picture at the beginning of “Evangeline.” Dear me, who wath he, Freda?’

‘Longfellow, you mean, I suppose.’

’Of courth. And hith language ith tho poetical. Mamma thaith the thouldn’t wonder if he turned out a great author by-and-by. Thould you, Mith Hall?’

’It takes so much to make a great author, dear; but it is just possible.’

‘But not probable,’ whispered Freda.

’Oh, Freda! don’t you like him? I am thure you ought; he managed everything tho nithely for you yethterday. Mamma thaith—Ah! there is Colonel Vaughan coming up the drive.’

Miss Hall looked across at Freda, and remarked that she began to draw most industriously, and did not glance out of the window as Miss Nugent did.

‘Mamma thaith,’ began that young lady, ’that the colonel ith the motht accomplithed and agreeable man in Waleth.’

‘How can she tell that?’ asked Freda, with feigned surprise. ’There are so many clever men in Wales. I assure you we are a talented race.’

’I am thure of that, Freda; but I think the Englith are more thinthere; mamma thaith tho.’

‘Ah, she must be a good judge,’ said Freda, somewhat ironically.

‘Yeth; mamma ath theen a great deal of the world,’ replied the unsuspecting Miss Nugent.

Here Colonel Vaughan made his appearance, and that young lady gave him her mamma’s invitation, which he said he should be delighted to accept, if his friends did; so Freda said her papa was out, but she would send Lady Mary Nugent an answer when he came in.

‘Ah! this *is* a sketch, Freda,’ said Colonel Vaughan, who had somehow returned to the old familiarity of earlier days. ’How can I thank you sufficiently? who could think that the child I left twelve years ago would be such a good artist when I returned? But that was the cleverest bit of life-like drawing I ever saw, that sketch of your old pony. By the way, do you know who this is?’

The colonel opened a sketch-book that he had in his hand, and put it into Freda’s.

Page 134

’Why, this is Gladys, Mrs Prothero’s Gladys. How could you prevail on her to stand for her picture? Look, Serena, how well Colonel Vaughan has hit off her expression and general effect in those few touches!’

’I went to see Prothero, who used to be a good friend of mine in old times, and whilst I was waiting for him and looking out of the window, I saw this Gladys in the garden, and made the attempt you are pleased to praise. Certainly she is about the loveliest specimen of country beauty I ever saw in my life.’

’Do you admire her, Colonel Vaughan? I think the ith tho very pale and thupid.’

’I never contradict a young lady, and suppose you must be right; but in the present company, one cannot think of other belles. It would be a case of looking for stars in the presence of the sun.’

Colonel Vaughan glanced from one to the other of the ladies. Freda bent more closely over her sketch, but coloured perceptibly. Miss Nugent simpered and looked very handsome withal.

Miss Hall was struck with her beauty as she then appeared; a perfect profile, perfect complexion, perfect features, beneath a most becoming straw hat and feathers. Such a colour and complexion, but no expression, not even the sarcastic turn of the lip of the mother.

‘Perfectly child-like, amiable, and silly,’ thought Miss Hall, ’and yet Colonel Vaughan admires that statue more than the noble face and grand expression of my Freda.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PREACHER.

As Mr Jonathan Prothero’s sprain proved to be a very bad one, Rowland was obliged to undertake his weekly as well as his Sunday duty, and being summoned to the vicarage early on Saturday morning for a wedding, and finding other clerical duty in the afternoon, he had no time to revise his sermon until the morning on which he was to preach it. His mind was still in a state of so much excitement, that he found, on reading it over, that he had no power to amend what he had written hastily, but feeling that it was what he earnestly desired to act up to himself, and to bring his own mind down to, he hoped the words would not be without effect on his hearers. If Miss Gwynne took them as intended personally to touch her, why, he could not help it, and besides, she probably would be at Llanfawr church, to avoid seeing him.

But this was not the case. Gwynnes, Nugents, Protheros, and many others of Rowland’s neighbours, helped to fill the little church that Sunday, all anxious to hear him

preach; this made him feel nervous in spite of himself. In vain he reasoned with himself, prayed to forget himself, and those present—he could not get rid of those haunting words of Miss Gwynne's, or of the consciousness that she was listening to him. However, he read the service clearly and impressively, in the manly tone, and simply religious manner of one who knows that he is leading

Page 135

the prayers and praises of a congregation who cannot express their wants too humbly and naturally, to One who knows what they desire, even before they ask. No one in that church prayed more earnestly to be delivered from 'all blindness of heart, from pride, vain-glory and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness,' than he did. And as he proceeded with the litany, his mind grew calmer, and he gradually received strength to overcome the great inward struggle that he was suffering from.

Before reading the thanksgiving, he gave out in a tremulous voice, that a 'member of that congregation was desirous of returning thanks to Almighty God for her recovery from dangerous, illness.' When he thanked God for all His mercies to all men, 'particularly to her who desires now to offer up her praises and thanksgivings for late mercies vouchsafed unto her,' every one felt that he was returning thanks for his own mother's recovery, and joined him in so doing. His father was seen to put his handkerchief to his eyes, as he lifted up his heart in praise.

His earnest manner evidently impressed his congregation, who were usually accustomed to the somewhat monotonous reading of his uncle, and to his rather learned discourses.

It is generally the case, that words spoken from the overflowings of the speaker's own heart and feelings, make the greatest impression on the hearts and feelings of his hearers; so it was now. When Rowland, in simple and forcible language, told his listeners that the first words of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount were to bless the poor in spirit, and to promise them the kingdom of heaven; and went on to contrast such poverty of spirit with the pride and vain glory inherent in man, and to call up the various scriptural examples and texts that bore upon the subject of humility; he gained the attention of all. Then he enlarged more particularly on the necessity of curbing and bridling and keeping down the spirit, until it attained that lowliness to which Our Saviour alludes in the very first of the beatitudes; and finally went through that Saviour's life, as the great example for all men, of meekness, gentleness, and humility—the interest in his words increased.

Rowland preached from the heart to the heart, and so his sermon that day was not in vain, albeit not perhaps written in the very best of moods. There was no poetry, no overheated enthusiasm no display of eloquence, but the plain, straightforward announcement to rich and poor alike, that to enter God's kingdom the spirit must become even as that of a little child.

Perhaps this is the least understood, and least palatable of all subjects, and when brought before a congregation, and well discussed for half-an-hour, must make many of its members pause to consider whether, on such terms, 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Miss Gwynne was one of those who paused so to consider, and acknowledged to herself that she had never looked upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, as so practically and so particularly addressed to herself before. She did not for a moment believe that the sermon was intended for her, more than for the rest of the congregation, but she felt, for the first time, that she had been proud and overbearing in her conduct to the preacher, as well as to many others whom she chose to think her inferiors.

Page 136

She left the church, resolved to make such amends as were in her power, for the hasty and haughty way of her rejection of Rowland, and to strive to be less proud for the future.

When she was without, her father said to her, that he must go into the vicarage to congratulate the vicar on his nephew's preaching, and to ask Rowland to dinner. Miss Gwynne endeavoured to dissuade him from doing so, but Lady Mary Nugent expressed her intention of performing similar civilities; consequently the whole party, Colonel Vaughan and Miss Hall inclusive, walked across the churchyard to the vicarage, which lay just the other side of it.

The vicarage was a snug little cottage, with a rustic porch, adorned with the Virginian creeper, which, together with the massive ivy, also nearly covered the house. Red and cheerful looked the tiny dwelling beneath the autumn sun; and very pretty was the garden which surrounded it, still bright with dahlias, fuchsias, red geraniums, and monthly roses. It was here, years ago, that Rowland, Miss Gwynne, and Netta had often played together; and it was here that Rowland had passed the principal part of his holidays when at home from Rugby or college. It was here that Mrs Jonathan had done her utmost to make a gentleman of him, and had succeeded to her heart's content. Rowland had been very happy with his uncle and aunt, and loved them almost as well as his parents.

In the pretty garden were innumerable wonderful stones heaped into all sorts of masses, which he had helped his uncle to bring from various parts in the neighbourhood, and all of which were curiosities in their way; and there, also, was a fernery which he himself had made, and which contained all the remarkable ferns of a country rich in those beautiful productions of nature. The vicarage and its garden were neatness itself. Mrs Jonathan prided herself on them, and took great pains to prove that there could be, in a Welsh country village, a clergyman's abode something akin to the far-famed dwellings of the English ecclesiastic.

The party from the church quite filled the little drawing-room. Mr Jonathan Prothero was in an easy-chair, with his foot on a cushion, and looking very much like a caged stork.

Every one began by congratulating him on the success of his nephew in the pulpit.

'He must become a popular preacher,' said Lady Mary Nugent.

'I must say I have seldom heard more simple yet forcible language,' said Mr Gwynne.

'He touched us all upon our besetting sin of pride,' said Colonel Vaughan, glancing at Miss Gwynne, who said nothing.

'And thuch a beautiful voice!' remarked Miss Nugent.

Mrs Jonathan looked delighted.

‘But where is he all this time, my dear?’ asked the vicar.

We must answer the question by informing the reader that, having watched his congregation leave the church, he went into the vestry and sat down there, in order to avoid meeting any of the Gwynne party; when a messenger from his aunt came to inform him that he was wanted at once. He inquired by whom, and on hearing, tried to arm himself for an unavoidable encounter with Miss Gwynne.

Page 137

When he entered the room she was talking to his uncle, and had her back turned to the door. He was at once greeted by Mr Gwynne and Lady Mary Nugent, so that he did not find it necessary to shake hands with every one, and made a kind of general bow, which he addressed to Miss Hall particularly, and was therefore unconscious of the half-attempt of Freda to rise from her seat as he entered. Miss Hall, alone, saw the flush on her cheek, as she relapsed into her position by Mr Jonathan Prothero and professed to be listening to the cause of his accident. His adventurous search after trinobites in a celebrated quarry, the slipping of a stone, and consequent spraining of his right ankle, sounded into one of her ears, whilst the following conversation, entered the other:—

‘I hope you will give us the pleasure of your company on Tuesday,’ said Lady Mary Nugent. ‘We shall not be a large party.’

‘And will come to us on Wednesday,’ said Mr Gwynne. ’We must have some more chess. I have never met with a fair opponent since—hem—I beg your pardon, Lady Mary—Ah—yes—or, on Thursday. You see we did not like to ask you whilst your mother was so ill; my daughter thought it would be useless.’

Rowland coloured at the allusion to Freda, but did not even glance at her.

’Thank you, Lady Mary; thank you, Mr Gwynne, very much indeed, but I intend being in London on Tuesday. I have already outstayed my prescribed fortnight.’

‘My dear Rowland!’ exclaimed his aunt, ‘you do not mean this?’

’Yes, aunt; my fellow curate has been fortunate enough to get a living given to him, and is to read himself in next Sunday, and I have promised to take double duty.’

‘But one day more or less,’ suggested Lady Nugent, who did not imagine it possible that Rowland Prothero *could* refuse an invitation from her, which was, in her opinion, quite a royal command. She, so exclusive!

’I am very much obliged to your ladyship, but I have promised to be in London on Tuesday; and as my mother is really better, there is no longer any necessity for my staying in the country.’

‘Your uncleth foot?’ suggested Miss Nugent.

’Two good dinners, and more agreeable company than you will meet with in your East End parish!’ said Colonel Vaughan.

‘My uncle will easily find help,’ said Rowland, turning to Miss Nugent, ‘although I am sorry not to be able to give him more; and,’ to Colonel Vaughan, with a smile, ’had you ever tried the far East, you would know that there is very good company there, as well

as in the West. I should be very glad to introduce you to some, if you would come and see me in town.'

'That I certainly will,' said the colonel, heartily; 'and I shall be able to tell you all about your sister, as I heard yesterday that her husband has finally taken my place, and will be down here as soon as it is put in first-rate order, furnished, *etc*.'

Page 138

‘You are not likely to leave us yet I hope, Colonel Vaughan?’ said Lady Mary Nugent.

’For a time, I must; but having found how pleasant you all are down here, I shall hope to come again frequently, if Miss Gwynne will second her papa’s invitation.’

Freda just turned round, bowed, and smiled, and then resolutely resumed her conversation with, or rather act of listening to, the vicar.

‘How interested you appear to be,’ whispered the colonel, sitting down behind her.

Rowland saw this little bit of by-play, and wished himself in London; whilst Colonel Vaughan joined in the vicar’s archaeological description of the quarry in which he had met with his accident. Freda heard all that Rowland said more distinctly than what passed close at her side.

She heard her father and Lady Mary’s repeated entreaties that he would remain until the end of the week, and the decided, but polite refusal of Rowland. She heard her father prophecy that he would soon have a good living, and Rowland’s reply, ’that without interest or any particular talent for what is called “popular preaching,” there was little chance of church preferment. ‘But,’ he added, ’I am well content to be only a curate. There is enough to do in my parish to keep one from morning to night employed, and that in real, active, heart-stirring work, that will not let one flag if one would wish it.’

‘I thould like to thee the Eatht End, mamma,’ said Miss Nugent. ’People in the Wetht theem to think all the inhabitanths barbarians.’

‘It is a pity they don’t come and try to civilise us, then,’ said Rowland. ‘We should be very glad of their help.’

‘I will go if mamma will let me,’ said Miss Nugent.

Lady Mary smiled somewhat superciliously, and observed that she did not think she would be of much use.

’All who have a desire to do good will make a path of usefulness, Lady Mary, I think,’ said Rowland. ’In these days the enlightened must not hide their light under a bushel. We live in stirring, striving times, when good and evil seem at terrible issue.’

‘And which will conquer?’ broke in Colonel Vaughan suddenly. ’I don’t see that all the meetings and tracts have done much, as yet, towards their part in the fight.’

‘Good must conquer eventually,’ said Rowland, ’and is conquering daily and hourly.’

‘In your East End parish?’

’We hope so. If our progress is slow we are not without encouragement even there, in the very thick of the battle, and where the armies of evil are ten to one against good.’

’I know something of fighting, Mr Rowland, and I fear the odds are too great. You may as well give up the conflict.’

’Remember, Colonel Vaughan, that in all the great battles of antiquity, and not a few of modern times—the Swiss for example—those who fought for freedom and right have always found their arms nerved to resist multitudes—hundreds have conquered tens of thousands. So is it with our warfare. We have strength given us that makes the single champion of the cross, powerful against the legion of his adversaries.’

Page 139

‘Very well said, nephew,’ broke in the vicar, ’Marathon, Thermopylae, Platea—’

‘I am afraid we are keeping you from your dinner, Mrs Prothero,’ interrupted Mr Gwynne, who had a nervous dread of the vicar’s antiquities, whether in war or peace. ‘Freda, I think we must go.’

Freda rose from her seat, and shook hands very warmly with Mr and Mrs Prothero. She had made up her mind to do the same with Rowland; but just as she approached the door near which he had been standing, he said he would go out and see whether the carriages were ready, and did so accordingly. They followed him as soon as the leave-takings were over, and found him waiting at the gate. He immediately assisted Lady Mary and Miss Nugent into their carriage, leaving Colonel Vaughan to perform the same office for Miss Gwynne and Miss Hall. Mr Gwynne stayed to shake hands with him, and tell him that he should always be glad to see him; and Colonel Vaughan promised to pay him a visit as soon as he went to town. The former got into the carriage, the latter upon the box to drive. Rowland stood by the door a moment irresolute.

‘Good-bye, Mr Rowland,’ said Miss Hall, ’I shall hope often to see your mother.’

‘Thank you, Miss Hall,’ said Rowland, pressing the hand she held out to him with an iron pressure.

Freda was just going to put out her hand across Miss Hall, when Colonel Vaughan touched the horses, and the carriage drove off. Rowland raised his hat, and as he glanced at Freda saw that she was looking at him not altogether unkindly. After those words of hers, he never could have shaken hands with her, unless she made the advance; and so they parted, he believing her too proud to acknowledge him after what he had said to her; she admiring what she considered his pride and resentment a great deal more than she had ever done his humility.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LOVER.

Spring came round again, and Owen and Gladys were still at the farm. The following conversation will show how they went on together.

‘Let me carry that bucket for you, Gladys,’ said Owen, one evening when she was proceeding across the farm-yard, to carry a warm mesh to a sick cow.

‘It is not heavy, sir,’ said Gladys, gently.

’It is too heavy for you, *ma’am*, said Owen, emphasising the ‘ma’am.’

He took the bucket from her, and carried it to the shed, where Gladys dosed and fed her sick cow so very tenderly, that Owen was impelled to say,—

‘I wish I were that cow.’

‘Oh, sir! she is but a poor, sick, witless animal.’

’But she has you to nurse and be kind to her; so I wish I were that cow.’

‘Sure, sir, I would be glad to nurse you if you were sick,’

‘Would you, Gladys? Then I will be sick to-morrow.’

‘I hope not, Mr Owen. Come, poor Mally. Drink it up.’

Page 140

’Never mind, Mally, but attend to me. Will you not be so cold and stiff, and respectful to me? I hate a girl who “sir’s” me as if I were a lord, and makes me curtseys, and never looks at me, and seems as if she hated me—’

‘Oh, no, indeed no, sir—’

’And lives all day long in the same house, and scarcely speaks to me.
You will drive me off to sea again, *ma’am*, if you don’t take care.
Look into my face, and say why you hate me so!’

‘I hate no one in the world, sir; much less any one of your name.’

Here the girl looked up from the poor cow who was licking her hand, and round whose neck her arm was flung, into the face of the young man. Owen put his hand on the arm that rested on the cow, and said earnestly,—

‘Then treat me as your brother.’

’I have lost my brothers and sisters, and father and mother, and kith and kin. I have seen them all die—all that ever loved me. Oh! Mr Owen! you are too kind—too kind; but do not talk to me so, or it will break my heart.’

Here was even more of Irish feeling than Owen either expected or desired. But he took Gladys’s hand in his, and, looking kindly from his large honest dark eyes into hers, said,—

’Forgive me, Gladys, for making you think of your sorrows. But you know my dear sister Netta is as good as lost to me, and I want some one who will be like her, or at least, who will not be quite as cold as clay.’

’Gladys withdrew her eyes and her hand. There was even more than brotherly warmth in that kind glance and winning manner.

‘Thank you, sir, I will try; indeed I will,’ said Gladys, as she took up the bucket, and turned to leave the shed.

’Thank you, ma’am, you are very obliging, but you are not going to carry my bucket.’

‘Oh,’ sir! if you please do not speak so to a poor servant girl like me. I would rather not hear it.’

’You will not see, or hear, or believe what I do, and say and think all day long; so now, here, where nobody else can listen, you must hear me. You must learn to be happy with us, you must love us, you must—’

‘Oh! I do, sir, I do. Let me go, sir, if you please.’

’Not until you hear that you must love me, even me whom you cannot bear.’

’Oh! I do, sir—I do. I thank you, I pray for you, I love you all, always; indeed, indeed, I do.’

’But better than all the others, as I love you, so as to be my wife when—when—’

’Let me go, Mr Owen, if you please. You must not talk to me so, sir; me, just now a beggar at your gate.’

’But I must, I will, and you must listen. In spite of myself, and of your cold manners and pale face, and all the trouble you take to avoid me, I love you, Gladys, and will marry you if you will have me. I will give up the sea, and become a steady fellow, and live at home, and make you and my parents happy, and—’

Page 141

’Oh! Mr Owen, if your parents were to hear you talking like this to me, what would they say to you? what would they think of me? You should not make a joke of my poverty and friendless state, sir. Anything else, but not this! oh! not this! and from you.’

’I was never more in earnest in all my life, and ask for only one word of encouragement from you to go and tell my and mother directly,’

’Oh! if you please, Mr Owen, do not do this. If are in earnest, sir, and I hope you are not, you must forget that you ever said this to me.’

’I do not mean to forget it, Gladys, or to let you forget it. Will you say the word? only give me hope and all will be right. Will you marry me, and be the daughter of your adopted mother?’

’I can never marry any one, sir; I have nothing to live for in this world, but to try to do my duty to you and yours, and to think of those I have lost.’

’Gladys, your cold manner maddens me. Say you hate me, and would rather marry some one else; say anything that has some heart in it. We sailors are made of warmer stuff than such icebergs as you.’

’I cannot say that, sir, because I do not hate you; and I never mean to marry, and I would sooner die than cause trouble in your family.’

’Then you won’t have me, Gladys? and you mean to send me back to sea again, and to make me return to my wild ways, and to make my mother miserable?’

’Och hone! what will I do? Why do you say such things to me, Mr Owen, who have never done you any harm? I cannot marry—I cannot do what would be wicked and ungrateful—I will go away again back to old Ireland, and not cause trouble to those who have been so good to me.’

’No, you will not do anything of the kind, unless you wish me to go after you. I shall tell my father that I will be off to sea again, and then I need not trouble you any more.’

’I will not stay, Mr Owen, to make mischief; so if you will only please to stop at home with your parents I will go away.’

’I shall not please to do anything of the kind, for I only stayed so long on your account, and this is the reward I get.’

Owen was in a passion, and vainly striving to keep it down. His face was flushed, he looked angrily and moodily upon the drooping head of Gladys as it bent lower and lower over the poor cow upon which she was leaning. He suddenly seized her hand, and exclaimed,—

’I am not used to be refused in this cool sort of way, and I don’t believe there ever was a woman in the world who doesn’t wish to get married to some one or other. Now whether you mean to have me or not is not the question I am going to ask; but whether you have any other lover, or ever had one that you prefer to me?—Tell me this, and I shall be satisfied.’

Gladys tried to draw away her hand from the impetuous young man, but he held it fast.

’You needn’t be afraid; I would not hurt a hair of your head. And if you knew what I am feeling now at this moment you will tell me the truth. Will you answer me a few questions?’

Page 142

‘Yes, Mr Owen, if I can without doing or saying what is wrong.’

Owen looked Gladys again in the face, as she slightly raised her head to answer his question. Why that burning blush? Why those bright, expressive eyes, if she did not care for him? For a moment he had hope, and pressed the hand he held. Again she bent over the cow that divided them, and tried to withdraw her hand.

At any other time Owen would have laughed at the notion of making an offer, divided from his beloved by a fine Alderney cow, but now he was too much in earnest for laughing.

‘Gladys, do you love my brother Rowland?’ he asked.

Gladys now looked at him in unfeigned astonishment as she answered,—

’No, Mr Owen; surely I have never given you reason to suppose so. A grand gentleman like him!’

‘But there is a still grander of whom I am jealous,’ continued Owen. ’Colonel Vaughan, I have often seen him here upon every excuse—and always to look at you. I have seen him, and know it well. Do you care for this great gentleman?’

‘Oh! no sir,’ said Gladys, sadly. ’How can you suspect me of such a thing? Are my manners so forward, or am I so foolish as to let any one suppose I could think of people so far above me? This is not kind, Mr Owen.’

’One more, Gladys. Those beneath you, then. You cannot, I feel you cannot, think of that gardener or footman at the Park, or of young Gwillim, the Half Moon, or—there are so many who admire you, Gladys.’

’Oh! no, sir, I do not think so; no one says so to me, and I care for none of them. Now, I had better go, if you please, Mr Owen—my mistress will be wanting me.’

’I should think she ‘ould, seure enough,’ said a stentorian voice, as Mr Prothero entered the cow-house, having just heard the last words, and seen the clasped hands.

Gladys looked entreatingly at Owen, who at once said, ’It was my fault that she stayed here, I kept her against her will.’

Gladys glanced gratefully at Owen, and left him with his father; but before she was out of hearing, the farmer’s loud voice was audible, informing Owen that he ’didn’t want another ’lopement from his house; and that that Irish beggar should leave the place.’

‘It was all chance, father, and my fault,’ said Owen.

’It’s always chance and your fault then. Where Gladys is, you’re seure to be pretty near. She’s a good sort of young ’ooman enough, but you have no call to be for ever hunting after her.’

’I don’t see why I shouldn’t if I like. It doesn’t hurt anybody, and is only kind to her.’

’But I don’t cheuse her to be thinking you’re going to make love to her, and by-and-by, perhaps, expecting to—there’s no knowing what young ‘oomen may expect.’

’She isn’t one to expect very much, and I am sure she doesn’t take any liberties with any one, or go beyond her place.’

’Treue for you there; but that’s no fault of yours. You don’t take notice of any other female that I see, and seure you eused to make love to them all in turns.’

Page 143

’I don’t see any girl half as good as Gladys, or worthy to light a candle to her, that’s why I have given them all up.’

‘Name o’ goodness what for? If you are going to make a fool of yourself about her, I’ll soon send her away, and stop that anyhow.’

’You may save yourself the trouble, father, for I am going away myself. I can’t be a land-lubber any longer, and I won’t, so I shall look out for a ship, pretty soon.’

’All because that girl came here to bother us. Deet to goodness, them Irishers have been the plagues of my life ever since I married.’

‘But she’s Welsh, father, and you said so yourself.’

‘She’s a mongrel, and no good ever came out of them.’

‘She saved mother’s life, anyhow.’

This reflection posed the worthy farmer. He softened somewhat in his reply.

’Treue for you again there. But that’s no reason for your going to sea, just when you’re getting euseful here.’

’Well, father, thank you for saying for once in my life that I’m useful. You never said that before.’

’And it don’t seem out of any great favour to us that you are euseful now; but only to please an Irish beggar.’

’I tell you what, father, if you were anybody else, you shouldn’t call her an Irish beggar.’

As Gladys went on her way, she heard the voices, ever louder and louder; she hurried into the house, and then to her own little bedroom, where she still seemed to hear the words, ‘Irish beggar,’ and a little spark of the pride of poor human nature kindled in her heart.

’They shall not quarrel about me—they shall not throw my misery after me—they shall not think I want to marry him—I will go away,’ were her muttered expressions. ’Why have I lived—why have I been kindly treated? if I am to be the sport and the by-word of my friends? A poor outcast—an Irish beggar—a lone girl, friendless, homeless, heartless, wretched, miserable! Och hone! what will I do? what will I do?’

She threw herself on her bed and sobbed.

’And I only want to do my duty—to show my gratitude—to die for the mistress, if needs be, and they will think me forward and vain. Why was I born to cause trouble and to bear such misery? Oh! mother, mother, if you were here to comfort your poor child! If I could but go after you! if I could but go away to my mother and all the lost ones!’

This thought of her mother and the lost ones seemed to overpower her for a few seconds, and then to calm her. She rose from her bed, and fell upon her knees and prayed.

’I can go to them, if they cannot come to me. I can fill my place of sorrow, as is best for me. I need not bring trouble on this blessed home! I will not. I need not send away that kind Mr Owen from his family. I will not. Why does he think of a poor, wretched being like me? Why has he been so good to me; so tender to me—as if he were my brother? If I go away, he will

Page 144

think of some one else, and make them all happy here, and live with them, and be good and steady. And I shall be only one sufferer instead of many. May God bless them all! I will go away, but never to see him more!—never, never!' Thus thought Gladys. For half-an-hour, whilst she was striving to calm herself, such thoughts and thousands of others flitted through her mind; but she did not murmur again at the sad lot which had been assigned to her by Providence; she had gathered strength in that prayer which she had offered up out of her trouble of heart. Still she felt aggrieved by her master's hard words, knowing as she did that she did not deserve them; but she struggled hard to conquer that pride which she knew ill became one in her dependent and friendless state.

When she had sufficiently recovered herself, she went down to prepare the supper, according to her custom. She found the hall empty, and wondered what had become of her master and mistress. She glanced into the garden, and saw them walking up and down engaged in earnest conversation, although the hour was late and it was getting dark and chill. She felt that they were talking about her. She would not listen, and returned to spread the table for their evening meal; whilst doing so, Owen made his appearance.

'Gladys,' he said, 'shake hands with me, and forgive me for causing you pain. I hope it will be the first and last time.'

Gladys held out her hand, saying 'Oh, Mr Owen, I have nothing to forgive, I am only very sorry''

As Owen held her hand, in stalked Mr Prothero, followed by his wife. He was not looking very well pleased when he entered, but finding them together, his dark frowning brow became still darker.

'Good-night, mother,' said Owen, 'I don't want any supper. Good-night, father,' he added with a strong effort, but receiving no response, he left the room.

Gladys longed to follow his example, but feared it would not be right.

'Gladys, I fear you are not well,' said Mrs Prothero gravely, but kindly, 'perhaps you would like to go to bed.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said Gladys, glancing furtively at her mistress, whose gentle face looked perplexed and anxious.

'Good-night, then,' said Mrs Prothero.

Gladys could not speak, for there was something constrained in the manners of her dear mistress, that she could not bear to see. She did not venture to speak to Mr Prothero, but dropping him a silent curtsey, as she left the room, went to bed, but not to sleep.

That night, Mrs Prothero went to her son, Owen's room, and heard the history of the evening. He told her that he loved Gladys, but that she did not care for him; and that his father would not believe him when he said so. Mrs Prothero gave him a maternal lecture on his conduct, and the impossibility of his marrying Gladys, particularly whilst his father was so irritated against his sister. She rallied him, in a quiet way, on his various previous loves, and said that she had no doubt he would forget his present one in the same manner.

Page 145

She was struck with the unusually grave tone of his reply, as he simply said, that if Gladys were like his other loves, he might forget her in the same way; but as she was quite different from any one he had ever liked before, so he should remember her as he had never before remembered any one. She was also struck with his manner of wishing her good night, and of recommending Gladys to her care, entreating her not to be less kind to her than she had always been, because he had the misfortune to love her.

Mrs Prothero promised all he desired, scarcely believing, as she did so, in the depth of his affection.

‘And, mother, fach,’ he said, ’you must not be vexed if I run away again to cure myself. There is nothing like sea air for my disease; and if I do, I promise to write regularly, and to come home at the end of my voyage. Only be kind to Gladys, and don’t let her go away.’

Owen had a presentiment, that if he did not leave Glanyravon, Gladys would.

’And you must try to bring father round by degrees. I don’t want to annoy him; and I know you are as fond of Gladys as if she were your own daughter, and father likes her, too. Will you try, mother?’

‘Anything to keep you at home, and steady, my son,’ said Mrs Prothero with tears in her eyes, ’but you must not go away again, we cannot do without you.’

‘Only this once, for change of air; I assure you it is best’

‘Well, we will talk of this again, Owen; good night, and God bless you.’

’Just tell father not to be angry with me or Gladys, and that I can’t run away with her, because she won’t have me. Good night, mother dear.’

Again Owen kissed his mother, more lovingly than usual, and so they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FUGITIVE.

Gladys did not go to bed all that night. If her mistress could have watched her occupations, seen her tears, and listened to her prayers, she would, at least, have known that she was grateful. The first thing she did was to finish a cap that she had been making for her, the next to complete a large piece of ornamental netting, that had been long in secret progress, and had been intended as a present for that dear

mistress's birthday on the morrow. The third, last and most difficult, was to write a letter. Gladys usually wrote easily and well. She had been accustomed to assist her father at an early age, and had been carefully taught by her mother, but on the present occasion she considered every sentence with a too painful thoughtfulness, and literally blotted her writing with her tears.

Morning was beginning to dawn before she had finished these tasks, and then she washed her face and hands, took off the pretty cotton gown she had on, and put on the one Netta gave her when first she came to Glanyravon. An old straw hat that she had been in the habit of wearing in the fields, and a tidy, but plain shawl, completed her attire. She had a few shillings which Mr Prothero had given her, and these she put into her pocket, together with a pincushion, and a curious foreign shell, gifts of Owen.

Page 146

She thought of Netta, and of her very different flight from the same house; she fancied that if she had been in her place, no lover, however dear, could have prevailed upon her to leave so good a mother; but she was different. An orphan and a beggar, she had no right to remain to cause dissension between father and son.

And so she fell upon her knees, and prayed for blessings on every member of that family; she forgot no one, not even poor Owen, whose suit she had rejected. Most especially she prayed that he might be a comfort to his parents, and turn from his wild, wandering ways, to those of rest and sobriety; she particularly used that latter word, which would have sounded formal in less earnest lips.

With tearful eyes, and throbbing heart, but with a resigned spirit, she rose from her knees, took her little bundle in her hand, and went quickly out into the passage. She did not trust herself to pass the doors of her slumbering friends, but went by the back-staircase into the kitchen, and thence into the yard. There was a thick mist over the face of nature, falling like a heavy veil on the rising sun, and making the early day but a lengthened night; not a sound was heard, not an animal had yet been aroused from sleep, save Lion, the large watch-dog, whose duty it was to wake when others slept, and he bounded towards Gladys, and her suppressed, 'Down, Lion, down,' failed to quiet him. As she hurried up the road, he ran after her, and it was not until she reached the gate, that she had courage to command him with heightened voice, and threatening manner, to go home. The dog crouched, and then licked the hand, upraised to send him back. Poor Gladys fell upon his neck, and burst into tears. He licked off the tears with a wistful, canine earnestness and love, and again prepared to follow her.

'Back, good dog! Home, Lion!' said Gladys.

The dog turned away with his tail between his legs, and walked half-way down the road. Gladys hurried through the gate, and along the public road, shutting the gate behind her upon Lion. No sooner was she out of sight than the tail was again in motion, the head turned, and Lion was peering over the hedge after her. As she swiftly pursued her way, turning neither to the right nor to the left, she did not perceive the faithful friend that was literally dogging her steps; but still Lion followed; and thoughtless of master and mistress at home, kept in view the poor beggar-girl who had managed to win his love, together with that of all the animal kind around and about Glanyravon.

Thus pursuing her unknown way, and thus pursued by Lion, we must leave Gladys and return to the farm.

Page 147

At the usual hour, Mrs Prothero came down to breakfast; no Gladys was visible, and no neat table was laid for the early meal. Mrs Prothero asked the servants if they had seen Gladys, and they said she had not yet come down; not altogether ill-pleased to find the favourite, for once, in fault. Mrs Prothero thought that the events of the past night had probably made her ill; and relenting from her somewhat severe feelings towards her, she went upstairs to see what was the matter. Receiving no answer to her tap at the door, and call of 'Gladys,' she went into her little room. She saw all neat as usual, and the bed unruffled. Her heart misgave her, and she painfully remembered the morning of Netta's flight. As if by instinct she went to the small dressing-table, and at once had her fears confirmed. Very sadly she took up the pretty cap that was left there, and looked at the large piece of netting to which was appended a paper. She unpinned the paper, and read the following words:—'For my dear mistress, with respectful wishes, and best prayers for many happy returns of the day.'

Mrs Prothero unfolded the work slowly, and saw two handsome, long, netted window curtains, with a fancy border, that must have taken hours from the donor's sleep to accomplish. As she unfolded them, a letter fell upon the floor.

Poor, nervous Mrs Prothero, rubbed her hands over one another several times before she had the courage to pick it up, and then she scarcely dared to open it. As she made the attempt, however, a cry of 'Mother! mother! why isn't my breakfast ready?' was heard from the foot of the stairs, proceeding from Mr Prothero's lusty voice, who was too proud and too angry to call for Gladys.

Mrs Prothero ran downstairs with the letter in her hand.

'My dear David, I am afraid Gladys is gone,' she said tremblingly.

'Well, let her go,' said the farmer. 'A good riddance. But what do you mean?'

Mrs Prothero told of the empty room, unused bed, cap, curtains, and letter.

'This house is bewitched!' said Mr Prothero. 'What's in the letter?'

'Indeed, I don't know, Davy bach!' said the wife, giving him the document.

Mr Prothero took out his glasses, wiped them deliberately, and put them on, whilst his wife stood before him rubbing her poor little hands as usual.

'What a good hand the girl writes,' said Mr Prothero, as he carefully unfolded the letter, and then began to read aloud as follows:—

'DEAR AND HONOURED MISTRESS,—Before leaving for ever your blessed home, I beg you will allow me to write you a few lines, and I hope you will not think me too bold in so doing. I am going away, because I would not cause trouble to you, or my good,

kind master. May it please God to bless you both for ever and ever! As long as I live I shall pray for you and love you! If I am too bold, forgive me, but my heart is full. I can only thank you for all you have done for me, by my prayers! Farewell! my dear, kind, honoured mistress and master. You will be rewarded in this world for your care of the poor orphan, who prays to meet you in the next.—GLADYS.'

It was evident that the writer had been obliged to conclude hastily, because her paper was so wet with tears that she could write no more.

Page 148

When Mr Prothero finished reading, he hemmed two or three times and cleared his throat, and took off his spectacles and wiped them; then perceiving that his wife was crying like a child, he said,—

‘Don’t be so fullish!’ Suddenly recollecting himself, he exclaimed, ’Where’s Owen? Go you, mother, and see if we haven’t had another ‘lopement,’

‘No fear of that,’ said Mrs Prothero, leaving the room to do her husband’s bidding.

She stayed so long that Mr Prothero, out of patience, bustled after her. He found her standing before an open, half-empty chest of drawers. The room was very untidy, and here, also, the bed had not been slept in the past night.

Mrs Prothero was rubbing her hands and crying pitifully; more from fear of her husband’s wrath than from sorrow for Owen, because she had anticipated a sudden flight.

Mr Prothero began to stamp with rage. It was a long time before he could speak, and his wife had a certain fear that he would choke. At last words found vent.

’The impudent, lying, hypocritical, young baggage! The ungrateful, disobedient, good-for-nothing brute! Ach a fi! upon ’em both. That’s what you get by harbouring Irish beggars!—that’s the return they make! A pale-faced, deceitful hussy!’

‘Davy, bach! they are not gone together,’ said Mrs Prothero, half-believing at the same time that they were.

‘Shall I lay breakfast, ma’am?’ interrupted Shanno, putting her head in at the door and grinning suspiciously.

‘Go your way, and mind your own business,’ said Mr Prothero.

Shanno disappeared.

’I’ll go out and see whether either of the horses is gone. Go you and make breakfast—-the good-for-nothing—’

‘Just let me tell you first what Owen said to me last night,’ said Mrs Prothero. ’I don’t think he ever deceived us, Davy; and if he did wrong, he was never the one to hide it.’

’Treue for you! Well, what did the young scamp say? I don’t blame him half as much as that meek, pale-faced, still-water thing, who’s as deep as the north star, I’ll be bound.’

’But Owen told me, seriously, that she refused to have anything to say to him, and begged me to be kind to her when he was gone away, for his sake.’

’Nothing but a trap to take you in—the deceitful young puppies—the—the—’

‘Go and look about the horses and I’ll make breakfast.’

He went accordingly. All the horses were safe. Nothing was missing anywhere but Lion.

’I ‘ouldn’t take twenty pounds for that dog,’ said Mr Prothero when he returned to the house, and sat down to breakfast.

‘Hadn’t we better send to look for them?’ asked Mrs Prothero timidly.

’I’ll see ’em hanged first. What! go and make another hullabaloo all through the country, as if one wasn’t enough in one house. No, not I. Let ’em go to sea, or where they will; but don’t tell anybody anything about ’em. Let people think what they will; I only wish I was at the world’s end. But it’s all your fault. Do you remember that morning when you bothered me into letting the girl stay? Fine things have come of it, seure enough.’

Page 149

‘But we don’t know that they’re together.’

’But we do, I say, Mrs Prothero; or why should they go off together? Fine things, indeed, for the gossips! Two ’lopements from one house. The young hussy.’

Mrs Prothero could not help crying. To lose them both at once—a son and one who had been better than a daughter to her—it was too sad—and to feel so uncertain as to what would become of them!

Mr Prothero was resolved to take no notice of her tears, but hastily swallowed his breakfast and went out. The servants did not need to be asked about the fugitives. They were all sure that they had run away together. Gladys, good and quiet as she seemed, was deep enough; and they had managed so well that nobody had seen them! Not like Miss Netta, who was so open! Many had seen her when she ran away!

Mrs Prothero sent one of the men off in a search for Lion, feeling sure that if he were found, Gladys would be discovered.

At about eleven o’clock, to Mrs Prothero’s great delight, Miss Gwynne and Miss Hall called to see if the report about Owen and Gladys were true, and to hear what Mrs Prothero thought of it. Miss Gwynne was highly indignant.

’You cannot believe it, Mrs Prothero. That girl Gladys would no more run away with any man living than I would. If Mr Prothero won’t send after her I will. Where is he?’

‘Shall I send and tell him you want to speak to him?’

‘By all means—directly.’

Mr Prothero was soon in the house again, at Miss Gwynne’s bidding. He looked more than usually red and excited.

’Mr Prothero, I would stake my life upon it, that girl has not gone off with your son. I don’t like the Irish, or their beggars more than you do; but I am very fond of Gladys, and she shall not lose her character, or die of starvation whilst I have a horse to send after her, or a shilling to help her.’

’That’s very well for you, Miss Gwynne, but Owen is no relation of yours; and I don’t cheuse him to marry an Irish beggar. This house is bewitched, and my children are bewitched, all except Rowland.’

Miss Gwynne wondered what Mr Prothero would think of *him* if he knew all.

’Well, Mr Prothero, will you send after Gladys, or shall I? You needn’t have her back here. There is a situation of schoolmistress or lady’s maid for her at once. I will take her in either capacity.’

‘Indeed, Mr Prothero,’ said Miss Hall, ’I think you may trust Gladys; that letter is sincere if ever anything was.’

‘Who is to search, for there is no time to lose?’ asked Miss Gwynne.

She was the only person in Wales who would have moved Mr Prothero, but he never could refuse her anything.

’What you say, Miss, is seure to have sense in it. I never knew you take to any one yet who wasn’t worth something, so I’ll just ride myself and look after ’em both. I shouldn’t like people to fancy we were in a fuss and fright. But remember, Miss Gwynne, it is to oblige you; and if I find that she has run away with my son—’

Page 150

’You may do what you like, Mr Prothero, for then I will have nothing to say to her. But go at once, and thank you very much.’

’I’ll go Swansea way, for I am sure they’ll take to the sea. Ach a fi! what’s gone to the young people.’

In less than a quarter of a hour Mr Prothero had mounted his best mare, and muttering a great many Welsh oaths, was soon riding in search of the fugitives. When he got out of his own immediate neighbourhood, he began to ask whether ’a tall, dark, young man, and a tall, pale, young ‘ooman’ had been seen.

‘Is it a couple of gipsies, Mr Prothero?’ asked a farmer, who lived about seven miles from Glanyravon. ’I did see a dark man, and a sallow ‘ooman go up the lane by now.’

‘Was the man like my son Owen?’

‘Well, I didn’t be seeing his face, but I shouldn’t wonder.’

Up the lane Mr Prothero went for a good half mile, and at last reached a gipsy encampment, where there were plenty of dark men, and sallow women, but not Owen and Gladys.

A shrewd old gipsy, seeing him evidently on the search for some one, assured him before he had asked any questions, that she had seen those whom he was looking for.

‘Where?’ asked the farmer.

‘Cross my hand with a silver coin, and I’ll tell ye,’ she said.

He gave her a shilling.

‘Young couple, my lord?’ asked the woman.

Mr Prothero nodded assent.

‘Dark and fair, yer honour?’

Another nod.

’I never tell secrets under a half-a-crown, but I have seen them, sir. Young man something like you, and handsome.’

‘Make haste and tell, you cheat and vagabond,’ said Mr Prothero, throwing her eighteenpence.

‘Up the first turning to the right, off the road, over the hill,’ said the woman.

‘When?’

‘An hour ago.’

Mr Prothero rode quickly down the lane, along the turnpike, up the first turning to the right, and then up a long and tedious hill.

It will be unnecessary to describe how Mr Prothero wandered over this hill for hours, without finding those he sought. As the said hill was a short cut to the road to Swansea, whither he was persuaded they were gone, it is not much to be wondered at that he was taken in, and that he went on as fast as his good horse would go for many a long mile; but he found neither Owen nor Gladys, and all his inquiries after them were fruitless.

Towards evening he returned home, tired and very cross, and found his good wife looking anxious and unhappy, and ready to say at any moment, ‘Dear, dear, how I do miss Gladys.’

A messenger from the Park was awaiting him, with a note from Miss Gwynne, inquiring whether he had found the poor girl or not. He was obliged to write a few respectful lines in reply, to inform her of the failure of his search.

‘I wish we had never set eyes on the girl,’ he muttered, as he was writing the note with much pains and some difficulty. ’To take off Owen, too, just as he was getting euseful, and he such a good writer and accountant.’

Page 151

Still more heartily did he repeat that wish several times during the night. Mrs Prothero could not sleep, and what with her anxiety about Gladys, sorrow for the departure of Owen, and longing to see her own daughter, her mind was excited beyond its wont. As is often the case under such circumstances, she fancied she heard all kinds of noises in the house; once she was sure some one was coming upstairs, and another time that there was a tapping at the front door. She crept softly out of bed, and half fancying she should find Gladys without, went downstairs, and opened it. Nothing was visible but the flickering moonbeams amongst the trees, or audible save the tinkling of the brook through the farm-yard.

‘Name o’ goodness, what’s the matter now?’ ejaculated the farmer, as the creaking of the bedroom door awoke him.

’Don’t be angry, Davy, bach, but I can’t sleep for thinking of that poor girl; maybe she’s without a roof to cover her.’

’Owen’ll see to that. ’Tis a hard case a man mayn’t sleep in his bed because of a good-for-nothing wench like her.’

The next morning, after breakfast, when Mrs Prothero was urging him once more to look for Gladys, and he was vehemently refusing, Miss Gwynne and Miss Hall again made their appearance.

Mr Prothero had to swallow a very broad expression of disgust, as well as to listen politely to that young lady, who persisted in saying she would continue the search for Gladys if he would not.

‘I am sorry to annoy you, Mr Prothero,’ she said, ’but it is due to Gladys to clear her character; there are plenty of jealous people about us, quite ready to take it away. I do not wish you to have any more trouble in this matter, but I cannot let it rest until I find the poor girl. She shall come to me direct, and need not be an eyesore to you. I will send off in every direction until I find her.’

’I beg your pardon, Miss Gwynne. If she is to be found, I must do it. I ’ont have a talk made about our turning her out of doors, and such like. As she isn’t gone Glamorganshire way, I suppose she must be gone towards Ireland, and I had best follow that scent. I’ll give her one more turn, and then have done with her. Mother, if I don’t come home to-night, don’t be frightened, as she may have gone a good step.’

Mr Prothero was leaving the room, when Miss Hall stopped him, saying,—

’I thought, Mr Prothero, that you might not have seen this notice of a meeting in your son’s parish, and as he is mentioned, I brought over the paper for you.’

Mr Prothero thanked Miss Hall, and took out his spectacles. Whilst he was wiping them, however, Miss Hall read from the *Times* the report of a meeting for forming a ragged school in Rowland's parish, in which was the following paragraph:—'The Reverend Rowland Prothero, curate of the parish, made a very clear and able speech upon the subject, and brought forward a well-digested plan for the school, which will probably be adopted. The thanks of the meeting were offered to him.'

Page 152

‘There is always a pleasure with every pain,’ said Mrs Prothero, wiping her eyes. ‘Thank you, Miss Hall.’

’And the Bishop of London was in the chair. So, mother, if he isn’t a bishop himself, you see he’s been very near one,’ said Mr Prothero, looking very much gratified. ’Well, I’ll go now, Miss Gwynne, and look after that confounded—I beg your pardon, Miss—after that Irish jade,’ and he went accordingly, leaving the ladies to talk it over with his wife.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FRIEND.

Mr Prothero started as soon as his horse was ready, and, it must be confessed, in a very bad temper. As soon as he got out of the precincts of Glanyravon, he began to make inquiries of every one he met, and at every cottage he passed, concerning Gladys. It was evident, from the replies that he received, that if she had gone that road, it was so early in the morning that no one had seen her.

At last he fell in with a farmer’s wife whom he knew, who was jogging along on horseback, with a little boy behind her. After the usual greetings, he said,—

’You never come to Glanyravon now, Mrs Davies. I daresay you haven’t seen any of our folk for a year?’

’Well, not exactly. But I almost fancied I saw that pretty young ’ooman that lives with you yesterday morning. She was too shabby, or I should have been seure of the face. Only when she saw me she turned away and went on.’

‘Which way?’

‘Oh, down the Carmarthen road, seure.’

’You’ll excuse my hurrying on, Mrs Davies; I want to call at Lewis, Dryslwyn.’

‘To be seure. Good morning, Mr Prothero.’

The worthy farmer rode off at a gallop, till he was more than out of sight of Mrs Davies. He stopped at a tidy cottage to speak to an old woman who was washing at the door.

’Did you chance to see a strange young ’ooman go by here yesterday, early?’ he asked.

’What young ‘ooman?’ was the rejoinder.

‘Rather shabbily dressed, with blue eyes, and a very pale face?’

‘Had she a big black dog along, sir?’ asked a boy who came from within the house.

‘I think she had.’

’Then granny gave her a cup of tea when she asked for some water, and I gave the dog a piece of my bread and cheese,’ said the boy.

‘There’s sixpence for you, my lad,’ said Mr Prothero. ’Was there a young man with the girl?’

‘Nobody was along, sir.’

‘Which way did she go?’

‘By there, to Dryslwyn, sir.’

Mr Prothero rode on to the picturesque village bearing this name. The old ruined castle looked down upon him from its curiously formed, tumulus-looking elevation, as he stopped before a neat farm-house.

‘Good morning, Mrs Lewis.’

’Walk in, Mr Prothero. We were talking of you by now. There was a young ’ooman by here yesterday, and John Lewis said he was seure she had your dog with her. She went away so fast, that I hadn’t time to ask about the dog.’

Page 153

‘Which way did she go?’

‘Down the Carmarthen road.’

‘Good morning, Mrs Lewis, thank you. I must look after my dog.’

Mr Prothero found it easiest to ask for the girl with a large black dog, and traced them to within a mile of Carmarthen.

He stopped at a small roadside inn to have a glass of *cwrw da*.[Footnote: Good ale] Here he asked the landlady of Gladys.

’See her and the dog! Is seure. They come here in the evening, and she asked for a slice of bread and a drink of water, and took out sixpence to pay for it. She gave all the bread to the dog, and my master, who is fond of dogs, told me to give ’em both a good supper. Poor dear! she couldn’t help crying; and my master, who is tender-hearted when he sees a girl do be crying, tell me to give her and the dog a good supper and a bed in the barn, which I did, is seure.’

Mr Prothero paid handsomely for his ale, and having learnt that Gladys and Lion went straight to Carmarthen, went thither also. He made some few inquiries at the small inns that he passed, but gained no information. He accordingly rode through the town, and took the direct route to Hob’s Point, whence, he knew, she would probably sail for Ireland.

The afternoon was far advanced, still he rode on. He began to feel as anxious as he was angry and annoyed, and declared to himself that he wouldn’t turn back until he had found her. He soon began to track her again. All the little boys on the way had noticed the big dog, and could point out the route he and Gladys had pursued.

He stopped at one cottage where the mistress told him that she had made the girl sit down in the porch, because she looked so tired; and at another where she had asked how far it was to Pembrokeshire.

He had ridden about thirty miles, and twilight was creeping on. He began to think of the necessity of finding a night’s lodging, and once more consigned Gladys and the Irish generally to any distant region where he should never see them again.

‘If she hadn’t nursed mother so tenderly,’ he muttered to himself, ’I’d turn back now; but as she does seem to be running away from Owen, and not with him, it ‘ould be creuel.’

The moon, the young May moon, arose in the heavens, and the farmer quickened his pace, for he knew the road, and that he was a good way from an inn, or, indeed, from any habitation where he could ask a night’s lodging. Lights peeped out, one by one, from the cottages as he passed, and when he glanced into them, and saw the cheerful

little fires, he thought more compassionately of Gladys, and wondered whether she had found food and lodging for the night.

He was within a mile of a small village that he knew very well, when it was about ten o'clock. The wind blew rather keenly, and he buttoned up his great-coat, and began to whistle, by way of keeping himself warm.

'Come, old girl! we shall soon have something to eat! come along,' he said to his mare, as he gave her a slight touch with his whip.

Page 154

He was passing by a very lonely quarry in a field by the road-side, about which he had heard some ugly stories of robbers and ghosts years ago. Although he was a courageous, he was a superstitious man, and gave his mare another stroke as he encouraged her to proceed. She started, however, suddenly, and made a kind of halt. The moon was shining so brightly that Mr Prothero could see into the quarry across the hedge, and he fancied he perceived somebody moving about. He urged his horse on by whip and voice, but as he did so, some one jumped over the gate that led into the quarry, and made towards him. He was so much alarmed that he spurred the mare vigorously. He was sure it was a robber. He turned his whip, and held the heavy handle ready for a blow, which fell, in effect on the robber or ghost, or whatever it was, that leapt upon his leg, and seemed, to his imagination, to lay hold of it.

A loud howl, and then a sharp, joyous bark, however, soon told him who the intruder was, and gave him courage to encounter the jumpings and gambols of his own good dog, Lion.

The mare kicked, and Mr Prothero exclaimed, ’Lion! Lion! down, good dog, down! Don’t upset me, Lion, bach. Let me get off, Lion! Name o’ goodness, be quiet, dog! There; now you may jump as you will. Where is she? Where’s Gladys?’

Mr Prothero was off his horse, and Lion was over the hedge in a moment. The former climbed the gate somewhat less speedily—and both were, in a few seconds, in the quarry, where, either dead or asleep, lay Gladys, beneath and upon the hard stones.

As the rays of the moon fell upon her pale face, Mr Prothero almost thought it was death and not sleep; but when Lion began to bark joyously, and to lick the cold hands and cheek, and when Mr Prothero ventured to stoop down and whisper, ‘Gladys! Gladys!’ and to take one of the damp, clammy hands in his, the white eyelids unclosed, and with a little scream of terror, the poor girl started up.

There, beneath the moonlight, she recognised her master, and falling down on her knees before him, clasped her hands, but uttered no word.

Where was Mr Prothero’s ready-prepared lecture on ingratitude? Where were the questions about Owen? Where was the passion of the previous day? He could not tell. He only knew that he raised the poor kneeling girl kindly, almost tenderly. She threw her arms round him, and for the first time kissed him as if he were her father. Then, suddenly, recollecting herself, she exclaimed,—’Oh! Master! Oh, sir! forgive me.’

Her master did not speak, but lifted her in his strong arms, and carried her to the gate; lifted her over, lifted her on his horse, and, amidst the joyous caperings of Lion, mounted himself.

‘Put you your arms round me, and hold fast,’ he said to Gladys.

‘Come you, Lion, good dog! we’ll have a supper by now!’ And so they all went, as fast as they could, to the neighbouring village.

Page 155

Mr Prothero, with no small noise and bluster, knocked up the inmates of the little inn of that little place, and succeeded in getting Gladys ensconced by a cheerful fire in the kitchen. The poor girl was benumbed with cold and overpowered with fatigue. The landlady rubbed her feet and hands, administered hot brandy and water, and finally got her to bed.

Mr Prothero kept out of her way lest he should say something that he might afterwards repent of in the warmth of his delight at finding her again. After she was in bed, and he had heard from the landlady that she seemed better and more comfortable, he and Lion had a good supper—a meal the dog appeared thoroughly to enjoy, and which he ate with a ravenous appetite.

Mr Prothero told the landlady to leave Gladys in bed the next morning until nine o'clock, by which hour he supposed she would be sufficiently refreshed, and then retired himself, feeling thankful to Miss Gwynne for having made him do a good action, but still believing that Owen must have been in the secret of Gladys' sudden flight.

Gladys slept soundly until the landlady took her a good breakfast at nine o'clock. She then awoke, refreshed but frightened, and uncertain as to her present state or future proceedings. She was told that Mr Prothero wished to see her as soon as she was dressed, and accordingly when she had eaten her breakfast, she got up. She felt very stiff and weak, and her hands trembled so much that she could scarcely dress herself.

Lion found her out, however, and gained admittance into her bedroom. He was in such very boisterous spirits that he quite cheered her, as pale and frightened she tried to gain courage to meet her master. Before she left the bedroom, she sought for guidance where she was always in the habit of going for help and comfort, and found strength 'according to her day.'

Mr Prothero was waiting for her in the little parlour of the inn. During the morning, having nothing to do, he had employed himself by getting up his temper, and persuading himself that he ought to be very angry with Gladys. He had quite slept off his softer feelings, and whilst at his lonely breakfast had gone through an imaginary quarrel with Owen, and a dispute with his wife, which had so raised his choler, that when Gladys entered he was as red as he usually was when in a passion at home.

Gladys saw that he was angry and trembled very much; but she knew that she had done no wrong, and tried to reassure herself.

Mr Prothero began at once. It must be remarked, however, that he had previously learnt from the landlady that Gladys was pretty well, and had eaten a good breakfast.

‘Name o’ goodness, young ’ooman, what did you run away from our house for in such a sly, underhand way, and give us all this trouble and bother? Don’t suppose I ’ould a run after you, if it wasn’t for Miss Gwynne and your mistress.’

’Oh, sir, I am very thankful to ye and to them. I know I don’t deserve such kindness.’

Page 156

’Treue for you there. I should have thought you’d have known that one ’lopement was quite enough from one house. Pray, what have you done with my son Owen?’

‘I, sir? Nothing, sir!’ said Gladys, trembling at this abrupt question.

Lion licked her hand as if to reassure her.

’You needn’t tell no lies about it, because I shall be seure to find out. Where is he gone?’

’Indeed—indeed, I don’t know, sir. I thought he was at home at Glanyravon.’

‘But he isn’t at home. He went off with you.’

’Oh, not with me, sir—not with me, I assure you. I went away that he might stay, and that I might not cause anger between you. I am speaking the truth, sir, indeed I am.’

Mr Prothero looked at the agitated girl, and felt inclined to believe her.

‘Tell me why you went away at all, then?’

’Because Mr Owen said to me words that I knew he would be sorry for, and because I saw that you, sir, were displeased at what he said about me.’

‘What did he say to you? Tell me the truth.’

’He said, sir—oh! I cannot tell. Perhaps you would be more angry with him if you knew.’

Gladys’ head drooped low, and a burning blush overspread her pale face.

’I can’t be much more angry with him than I am, but tell you the treuth. Did he want to marry you?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And you—what did you say?’

‘That I couldn’t marry any one in this world, sir.’

‘What do you mean to wait for, then?’

‘Nothing, sir, nobody.’

‘And what did Owen say to that?’

’I don’t think anything more particular passed between us. He was very kind, sir.’

‘I daresay. But what made him go away?’

‘I think it must have been because he thought you would send me away.’

‘And you don’t want to marry my son Owen?’

‘No, sir.’

Gladys’ voice wavered slightly as she said this.

‘Ha, ha! He’s a fine young man, however.’

‘Yes, sir, and very kind.’

‘I daresay. Will you promise never to marry him?’

As Mr Prothero asked this question, he looked Gladys full in the face.

She blushed again, but returned his gaze with a quiet, grave look that seemed to wonder at the question. She did not reply at once, and Mr Prothero repeated it, louder than before, with the additional one of ’Do you hear, girl?’

‘Sir, I don’t like to make promises,’ said Gladys; ’suppose the temptation to break it ever came, and proved too strong for me. I might perjure myself.’

‘Then you mean to marry my son Owen?’

’No, sir, I don’t think I shall ever marry him. As far as I can see now, I am sure I never shall.’

‘Name o’ goodness, what does the girl mean? You don’t mean to marry him, and yet you ‘ont promise—what do you mean?’

’I scarcely know myself, sir. But I cannot tell what God may appoint for me in the future, and so I cannot make a solemn promise.’

Page 157

’Then I ‘spose you’re going to run off like Netta?’

‘No, sir, never.’

’Why, “no, sir,” if you ‘ont promise?’

‘Because I could never do what you and my mistress would dislike.’

’Then you can promise, perhaps, never to marry my son Owen without my consent.’

‘Yes, sir, I can—do—that—’

Gladys said these words very slowly, and turned very pale as she said them. She clasped her hands firmly together with a visible effort.

’Well, you’re an odd girl; you ’ont promise one thing, and yet you as good as promise it in another way. What’s the difference?’

Again the colour came and went.

’It would be wrong, sir, in me to make a son disobey a father, and I wouldn’t like to do it; so I can promise that; and maybe you may change.’

‘Then you love the boy? Tell me the treuth.’

Gladys began to cry, and was a few moments before she could say, somewhat more resolutely than usual,—

’Sir, my feelings are my own. Mr Owen has been like a brother to me, and the mistress like a mother—and you—oh, sir! should I not love his mother’s son?’

Mr Prothero was touched; he could ask no more questions.

’There, there—go you and get ready directly. I promised Miss Gwynne to bring you back to Glanyravon, where she means to make you schoolmistress and lady’s maid, and all the rest. I suppose you don’t want to go to Ireland?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Have you any relations there?’

‘No, sir.’

‘You don’t want to leave Glanyravon parish?’

’No, sir. I would rather live and die there than anywhere else in the world.’

’Then go you and get ready; and, mind you, have some ale before you start. I must keep my promise to Miss Gwynne; mind you yours to me. You ‘ont encourage my son Owen without my consent’

’No, sir—never. And I do not wish or mean ever to marry any one, if you will only believe me.’

’I don’t believe any young ’ooman who says that. You may as well go into a nunnery. But I believe the rest till I find you out to the contrary. Now, go you and get ready.’

‘Thank you, sir—thank you.’

Soon after this conversation the farmer had mounted his good mare, who was as much refreshed as her master by a night’s rest, and with Gladys, *en croupe*, and Lion running by his side, he jogged back to his home.

‘We shall have a fine long journey, and a tiresome one enough,’ he muttered. ’Thirty mile and carrying double is too much for my mare.—take the ’oomen! they’ll be the death ’o me, one way and another. There’s mother, and Netta, and Miss Gwynne, and now this Gladys! This is the last time I’ll put myself out for any of ’em, or my name isn’t David Prothero.’

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MISSIONARY.

Page 158

It was about half-past ten o'clock when Mr Prothero and Gladys started on their homeward journey. When they had gone about half way, they stopped for an hour to bait the mare, which brought them to nearly two o'clock, and reduced Mr Prothero to a state of great ill humour. Poor Gladys had to bear many reproachful speeches, which reached her between a very animated conversation which he kept up with the mare and Lion alternately. He did not talk much to her, but contented himself with making her eat and drink a great deal more than was pleasant for her, because, as he phrased it, 'People shouldn't think she was starved at Glanyravon.'

In truth, there was a great contrast between the farmer's rosy, broad, good-humoured countenance, which not even his present angry feelings could make morose, and Gladys' pale, wearied face, rendered more palid than usual by her late fatigue and anxiety. It was with some difficulty that she could keep her seat behind Mr. Prothero, as the mare trotted on at an equal but somewhat rough pace, and made her long for rest.

However, all things come to an end, and within about five miles of Glanyravon, Mr Prothero muttered,—'Confound the 'ooman! Shall we ever get home; 'tis enough to kill the mare. Come along, old girl! Good dog! Lion, old boy!'—which sentences were interrupted by the address of a stranger on horseback, who asked if he were right for Glanyravon Park.

'Quite right, sir,' said Mr Prothero, pleased at any break in a ride that had been peculiarly devoid of adventure. 'I am going half a mile beyond the Park myself, and shall be proud to show you the way if you aren't in a hurry.'

'By no means. I am too tired to ride very fast myself, for I have been a great traveller of late. I came down from London to Glamorganshire two days ago, and have come across country in coaches and dogcarts to the "Coach and Horses." I daresay you know the inn?'

'Oh yes, sir. That's the "Coach and Horses" mare you're upon now?'

'Yes; I borrowed her to come to Glanyravon, and have promised to ride her back to-night, but I am sure I shall not be able. How far are we from Glanyravon?'

'About four mile and a half.'

'You live in the village?'

'There is no village, sir. I live at Glanyravon Farm.'

'Is there any inn nearer than the "Coach and Horses" where I might get a night's lodging, and a man to ride the mare back?'

’No, sir; but I shall be glad to offer a bed to any friend of Mr Gwynne’s, though I am sure you’ll find one at the Park.’

’Thank you kindly. I am not known to Mr Gwynne; but I am going to see Miss Hall, who, I believe, resides with him.’

’To be seure she does; and a better lady never lived. If you’re a friend of Miss Hall’s, you’re as welcome to our house as if you were born and bred at Glanyravon.’

’You are very kind. It does one good to meet with true Welsh hospitality once more.’

Page 159

‘You’re not Welsh, sir, I should say?’

’I was Welsh originally; but it would be difficult to make out my parish, as I have been wandering about for many years.’

‘A clergyman, sir?’

‘Yes, sir.’

The gentleman smiled, and thought the question savoured of American curiosity.

’I have a son a clergyman. Perhaps you may have fallen in with him. They tell me he’s a very promising young man.’

‘What is his name?’

‘Prothero, sir—Rowland Prothero.’

’I do not know him personally, but I know him by reputation; he is curate of an old friend of mine, Mr Stephenson.’

’To be seure—Rowly’s rector! Allow me to shake hands with you, sir. You’ll sleep at Glanyravon.’

’Certainly, if I shall not inconvenience you and your family. Your daughter looks very ill and tired; perhaps it may—’

’Not a bit, sir. She’s not my daughter; she always looks as pale as moonlight, ’scept when she blushes up; she’ll see to a bed for a strange gentleman, and so’ll my missus. To think of your knowing Mr Stephenson!’

’Yes, I saw him during my short stay in town, and he told me he had a capital curate, a countryman of mine. A regular hard-working, useful parish priest, he called him; a good preacher besides!’

‘Well, mother will be pleased, won’t she, Gladys?’

This was said in the old good-humoured way, and Gladys brightened up as she answered,—

‘Yes, sir, very.’

‘Are you ill?’ said the stranger, looking at Gladys with sudden interest.

‘No, sir, thank you; I am only rather tired,’ was the reply.

’Tired! I should think so! Why, she’s walked more than thirty miles, and ridden thirty in the last two days,’ said the farmer gruffly.

The stranger glanced again compassionately at Gladys, but merely said,—

’She looks so pale that I fancied she was suddenly faint. How long has Miss Hall been at Glanyravon?’

’Somewhere about two or three years now, I should say; but when she was teaching Miss Gwynne she was there a great many years.’

‘Is she in good health? How does she look? Is she happy?’

’If she was ill, sir, I don’t think any one ’ould know it, she’s so quiet and patient; but I think she’s pretty well, and she can’t help being happy, for she’s just the same as if she was at home with her father and sister. Now she is a nice lady! If all ’oomen were like her there ’ouldn’t be half the plague with ’em there is. She’s quite content without having a lot of lovers after her, and running away, and making everybody in a fever. Deet to goodness, my opinion is that the world ’ould go on a sight better without ’em. What do you think, sir? You must have plenty of experience as a clergyman, for all the ladies are pretty sharp after the cloth.’

The stranger laughed, and said he thought the world would be very disagreeable without the fair sex, and that he had no doubt Mr Prothero would find it so if they became suddenly extinct.

Page 160

The farmer was so pleased with his new acquaintance that when they reached the Park gate, he said very heartily,—

’Now, mind you, sir, there’s a warm welcome, and a well-aired bed, and fine, white, home-spun linen at the farm. The squire may give you a better dinner, may be, but not a hotter, I’ll answer for it; Gladys’ll see to that; she’s capital for that. And mother ’ould be so glad to hear what the rector said about our Rowly.’

‘You may depend upon my coming,’ said the stranger. ’What time does Mr Gwynne dine? I suppose I shall escape his dinner hour? It is now about five o’clock.’

’Oh! they don’t dine till Christian folks are going to bed—seven or eight o’clock, or some such heathen hour. You’ll be able to see them all before dinner; but I don’t believe Mr Gwynne’ll let you come away.’

‘I shall not see him probably. Good day for the present.’

The stranger rode slowly up the drive from the lodge to the house, and Mr Prothero quickened his pace homeward. The mare, nothing loath, trotted off hard and fast, and Gladys looked paler than ever.

When they reached the farm gate they were greeted by a loud shout from the ‘boys,’ Tom and Bill, who were right glad to see pretty Gladys back again. They both ran as fast as they could to the house, to tell their mistress the good news, and Lion after them. Mrs Prothero was at the door to receive the travellers, and as Gladys slipped off the mare, took her round the neck, and gave her a hearty kiss.

‘My dear David, I am so thankful! so much obliged!’ she said, as her more portly husband dismounted. ’Come in quick; Miss Gwynne and Miss Hall are here. They were just going, but they will be relieved of all their anxiety when they see Gladys. Come in, Gladys, fach! don’t be afraid; they must see you.’

Poor Gladys was crying with all her heart—good, comfortable, refreshing tears of joy at her mistress’s kind welcome.

Miss Gwynne appeared at the parlour door.

’Well, Gladys! you have had your long walk for nothing. What a foolish girl you were to go away. Mr Prothero, how do you do? I am so glad you have brought us back Gladys. We couldn’t do without her in these parts.’

‘Do you still stand to your text, Miss Gwynne?’ said Mr Prothero. ’We may as well settle the matter at once. It will be a great thing for the girl.’

’Oh, certainly; only she looks too tired to settle anything. Gladys, I will give you a day or two to consider whether you will come and live with me, as my maid, or be Miss Hall’s pattern school-mistress.’

Gladys looked from Miss Gwynne to Miss Hall, and then from her master to her mistress, through the tears that were gathering faster and faster. She answered in a voice half choked by them,—

’Thank you, ma’am, thank you over and over and over again. If I must go away—if I must—whichever—you—like—I—’ Here she finally gave way, and, sitting down on a chair, sobbed aloud. Mrs Prothero went to her, and put her arm round her neck. Miss Gwynne looked on compassionately, and Miss Hall turned to Mr Prothero.

Page 161

‘She does not like to leave you, Mr Prothero,’ she said gently.

’I don’t want to turn the girl out of the house. But if Miss Gwynne wants her, I think it is better for all parties for her to go.’

‘If you please—certainly,’ said Gladys, recovering herself with an effort. ’I would much rather go to Miss Gwynne in any capacity, and if I can be of use—it is best, my dear mistress.’

‘Then go you, Gladys, and stop crying,’ said Mr Prothero. ’Why, your eyes’ll be as red as ferrets when the gentleman comes, and he’ll think we’ve been giving you an appetite by making you cry. I was near forgetting, Miss Hall, that we left a strange gentleman at the Park gate, who said he was going to call on you; he’s going to take a bed here, because there’s no inn nearer than the “Coach and Horses."’

‘Who can that be?’ said Miss Hall.

‘We had better make haste home, or we shall miss him,’ said Freda.

‘Good-bye, Mrs Prothero; I will come again and settle about Gladys.’

It was nearly dusk when the ladies left the farm, and they walked very fast. They had not gone far when they saw some one on horseback coming towards them.

’I daresay this is your friend, and that stupid Morgan hasn’t let him in,’ said Freda.

‘It cannot be; I do not know this gentleman at all,’ said Miss Hall, as the stranger advanced.

He looked at them, and they looked at him; but as there was no symptom of recognition on either side, they passed without speaking.

‘I hope we shall have a good night’s rest, now that Gladys is found,’ said Miss Gwynne. ’What is there in the girl that interests one so much? Even Mr Prothero, in spite of his son, was glad to find her, and to have her at the farm again. Colonel Vaughan admires her very much.’

‘I hope not too much,’ said Miss Hall quietly.

‘What an absurd idea!’ said Miss Gwynne, colouring from beneath her broad hat. ’He is a man that admires beauty and talent, wherever it is to be found. I do like that sort of person; free from vulgar prejudice.’

’Not quite, I think, my dearest Freda. He is not so easily read, perhaps, as you in your straightforward nature fancy.’

‘If he isn’t prejudiced, you are, at any rate,’ said Freda.

When they reached the house, Freda went into the drawing-room first, and Miss Hall heard her exclaiming, as she rushed out of it with a card in her hand,—

’Serena! Nita! only think! Mr Jones, Melbourne, South Australia! Hurrah! I never thought I should be so glad to see a card bearing that name. Morgan! why didn’t you ask the gentleman who called on Miss Hall to come in and wait?’

‘I did not know, ma’am,’ said the man who was at the door. ’My master does not always like strangers, and I did not know the gentleman.’

Miss Hall had vanished upstairs during this little interlude with Morgan, so Freda did not see the agitation of her manner when she took the card and read the name. Freda went straight into the library, where she found her father half asleep over a letter.

Page 162

’Papa! papa! Do you know an old friend of Miss Hall’s has called, that she has not seen for twenty years, and Morgan let him go away?’

’Wasn’t she glad, my dear? It is so exciting to see people whose very faces you have forgotten.’

’Glad, papa? Of course not. He must just have come from Australia, where her sister is living, and I daresay has brought letters. By the way, there was a packet near the card.’

‘I don’t understand people going so far away from their own country.’

’But, papa, Mr Jones—this gentleman—has gone to sleep at Mr Prothero’s, and I daresay they are not prepared for him.’

‘Really—well, my dear?’

’Don’t you think you had better write and ask him here to dinner, and I will order a bed to be prepared?’

’Me! My dear!—a perfect stranger!—a bore! Some one full of tiresome adventures and travellers’ stories, and all that sort of thing.’

’He is a clergyman, papa, and a Welshman, I believe. It would only be hospitable. We must not belie our country. Do write, papa. Think how anxious Miss Hall must be to hear of her sister.’

‘But you say she has a packet of letters.’

’There is nothing like seeing a friend who has seen one’s sister, I should think. Just one line of invitation! We will amuse him. He is very quiet, Miss Hall says. Here is the paper and a new pen. There’s a good pappy, and—yes, “Presents his compliments”—-yes—don’t forget the bed. That’s right! Now, just add, “that if he prefers not coming to-night, you hope he will make a point of spending the day here to-morrow."’

‘But I don’t hope it, my dear.’

‘We will amuse him. Drive him out—anything. And perhaps he won’t come.’

‘Very well. Remember that I am not expected to—to—’

’Nothing, but just to drive with him. Thanks! you are a capital *pater*, and I will send this off immediately. Just direct it, “—— Jones, Esq., Glanyravon Farm.” I wonder whether his name is David? I hope not. I don’t like David.’

’Freda carried the note to the butler herself, and told him to get it sent immediately, and to tell the messenger to wait for an answer; then she went with the parcel of letters to Miss Hall.

The note found Mr Jones, Mr Prothero, and Gladys comfortably established near a snug fire in the hall, at a well-spread tea-table. Mr Jones asked for tea in preference to *cwrw da*, and he and Gladys were enjoying it, whilst Mr Prothero chose the good home-brewed. Eggs and bacon, cold meat, and most tempting butter were upon the table, and Mrs Prothero was acting waitress and hostess at the same time.

Shanno appeared with the note, delicately held by the corner between her finger and thumb.

‘From the Park, missus, for the gentleman.’

‘Promise you me, before you open it, not to go there to-night,’ said Mr Prothero, taking the note.

Page 163

‘That I can safely do,’ said Mr Jones.

When he had read the note he looked pleased, and his manner was rather flurried, as he said,—

’Perhaps I can manage to stay over to-morrow, but I will not go to-night. Will you oblige me with a pen and ink?’

Gladys was off in a moment, and returned with writing materials.

Mr Jones wrote a polite note, declining the invitation for that evening upon plea of the lateness of the hour and fatigue, but promising to call on the morrow early, and to remain the day, if he possibly could.

After he had despatched his note he seemed more thoughtful than he was before, and, for a short time, absent when spoken to; but rousing himself he made good return for the kindness and hospitality of his host and hostess by his agreeable and instructive conversation.

He told them that he had been a missionary ever since his ordination, and had travelled over the principal parts of the continent of Australia. Gladys forgot her fatigue in her great interest in his subject; and when he saw her deep attention, he frequently addressed her and drew forth questions from her which surprised Mr Prothero quite as much, or more than it did Mr Jones. Mrs Prothero knew the girl’s turn of mind too well to be astonished at the amount of missionary and geographical knowledge that she possessed. Gladys was naturally very timid and modest, but when subjects of interest were introduced she forgot her timidity in a desire for information.

Owen had discovered her bent, and in their frequent meetings, accidental or designed, had often chained her to him by descriptions of the countries he had visited and the wonders he had seen. He, too, had found out that there was a deep vein of romance running beneath the stratum of reserve that, at first, had formed the outward feature of her character, but which was wearing away as she became accustomed to her new friends, and had been treated as a friend by them.

It was evident that Mr Jones was greatly interested in Gladys. He addressed her, looked at her, called her ‘my dear,’ somewhat to the scandal of Mr Prothero, who thought him too young a man for such a familiar address. But Gladys only turned on him two beautiful eyes beaming with a kind of wondering gratitude, and thought the white and grey hairs that were mingled with the brown, and the deep lines in his forehead, quite passport enough for the two kind words.

In addition to a great deal of missionary adventure, Mr Jones told his new friends that he had come home partly in search of health and rest, and partly to stir up friends at

home in the cause of religion abroad. He said that he might or might not return himself to Australia,—it would depend on circumstances; but that he could not be idle in England, and was likely to become either a fellow-curate of Rowland's, or a neighbouring one. He liked a city curacy, because, having taught the heathen in another land for many years, he thought he might do some good amongst them at home. He told them, also, that it was during a year's residence in Melbourne that he had known Miss Hall's sister. He had been obliged to undertake clerical duty there, because his health was failing in his attempts to convert the aborigines.

Page 164

Mr Jones was a man of grave and quiet manner, one who seemed to think much and deeply. He habitually led the conversation, without pedantry, to religious or instructive subjects, and when lighter matter was introduced, was given rather to withdraw his mind from it to his own thoughts.

He had been little in society for many years, during which his time had been passed in the highest, weightiest, gravest, grandest of all labours,—that of studying to turn the human soul from darkness to light. Now that he found himself in his own country again, he felt far behind most men in worldly conversation though very far beyond them, not only in religious, but in practical, useful, and general knowledge; such knowledge, I mean, as would be suited to the improvement, not merely of savages, but of the wild, lawless bushmen, gold diggers, and convicts of the Australian world. His manners were gentlemanlike but slightly old-fashioned, and, doubtless, many a young Englander would have found matter for ridicule in some of his doings and sayings. Not so, however, the good and cultivated Englishman of the nineteenth century. He would have found abundance to love and respect in the man who left the luxury, science, learning and refinement of England, in that most wonderful of all ages, to labour amongst the refuse of her people in the largest of her colonies. For Mr Jones had seen but little, during his twenty years of Australian life, of the better portion of Australian settlers, or the grandeur of her cities. He had devoted himself to those who had no means of gaining religious teaching elsewhere and he thanked God that the years of his ministry had not been without abundance of those fruits in which the heart of the laborious worker in Christ's vineyard rejoices.

When Mr Jones left the farm the following morning, it was with a promise to pay it another visit at no very distant period. He took away with him a letter to Rowland, which was to introduce the brother, clergymen to each other. As he shook Mr Prothero by the hand, he thanked him warmly for his hospitality, and then abruptly added, 'Take care of that young girl Gladys. She will surely prove a blessing to you, and repay you for any kindness you may bestow upon her,'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LADY'S MAID.

Miss HALL and Freda were sitting alone in the morning-room that has before been alluded to. The former was much more nervous than Freda had ever seen her. First she took up her work, then her book, then she began to copy some music. Freda had great pleasure in watching her, and in remarking that the calm Serena could be excited by the expected appearance of a lover of twenty years ago; also in observing that she had a most becoming colour on her cheeks, and looked quite young; also that she was dressed even with more care than usual, and her hair was smooth as brush could make it. Freda longed to laugh at her, but she forbore; she felt that there was something very

touching in this meeting between two people who had parted under such uncomfortable circumstances so many years ago.

Page 165

When the door bell rang Freda rose to leave the room.

‘If you please, Freda, remain where you are, I would very much rather.’

Freda resumed her seat, and shortly after Mr Jones was announced.

‘Quite an old man; twice as old as Nita,’ was Freda’s first thought as she looked at him.

Miss Hall rose and advanced to meet Mr Jones. They shook hands, Freda thought, very much like other people, and then Miss Hall introduced her, and Mr Jones bowed.

’I promised your sister to come and see you, Miss Hall, when I came down into Wales,’ he said after he was duly seated.

‘I am very much obliged to you, it was very kind,’ was the reply.

Freda saw that they were both as nervous and shy as a couple of children, and came to the rescue by apologising for her father’s unavoidable absence, he having gone to a neighbouring tenant’s, and by saying that he would be at home at luncheon.

By degrees they all three got into conversation, and Mr Jones gave Miss Hall an account of her sister and her family. One little girl was very like Miss Hall, and she was the general favourite.’

‘I am sure she must be very pretty,’ suggested Freda.

‘Very,’ said Mr Jones, with a smile at Freda, of greater archness than she gave him credit for.

‘Don’t you think Miss Hall very little altered?’ she asked again.

’I think I should have known her anywhere, though I passed her in the twilight, uncertain who she was.’

A long conversation followed upon various general topics, until the luncheon bell rang. As no Mr Gwynne appeared, Freda was obliged to make another excuse for him; but Mr Jones seemed perfectly satisfied without him, if not relieved by his non-appearance.

Freda proposed a walk as soon as luncheon was over, and she and Miss Hall took their guest to see the school, which Freda was careful to say was under Miss Hall’s superintendence. Then they pioneered him to various points of view, which he seemed to look upon with the eye of a real lover of the beauties of nature; and finally they rested on a rustic seat at the top of a wooded hill, whence they looked down on the magnificent valley beneath, with its green meadows, winding river, and boundary of distant mountains.

Alter Freda had remained here a few minutes, she suddenly said,—

’Would you mind my just running down to Mrs Prothero’s to settle with her about Gladys? I am sure we shall none of us be happy until that matter is arranged. If you will go down through the wood, Nita, I will join you at the waterfall, or somewhere else, in less than a quarter of an hour. Will you excuse me, Mr Jones?’

‘Certainly,’ was the reply.

‘But had we not better all go?’ asked Miss Hall, casting an entreating glance upon Freda, who, however, would not see it.

’I think not. Mrs Prothero is so nervous that we should frighten her to death. It will take me five minutes to run down the hill, five minutes to say my say, and five to get to the waterfall. But you need not hurry away, as I can wait for you; or, if you are not there, I will find you. Come, Frisk, come with me.’

Page 166

Frisk was a fine, little Scotch terrier, his mistress's especial favourite, and he bounded after her with great satisfaction. The pair were soon half-way down the hill, near the bottom of which Glanyravon Farm lay.

'I think I managed that capitally,' said Freda to Frisk? 'didn't I, Frisk? Now, if he doesn't take advantage of the opportunity, he is very foolish. Don't you think so, Frisk?'

Frisk jumped, and barked, and twirled about in a very affirmative way.

'I should like to make up a match, it would be such fun. And I think he is a very worthy, gentlemanly sort of man, though I shouldn't like him for myself, and he is not quite the sort of person that I could have supposed would have made such an impression on Serena. But she would be such a capital clergyman's wife, and he would be so fond of her! But what should I do without her? Get married myself? The only man that I ever saw that I could marry won't marry; and then he doesn't care for me. Heigho! this is an odd world. All of us at cross-purposes. But I don't mean to break my heart,—do I, Frisk?'

The 'do I, Frisk?' brought Freda and her dog to the gate that led into the road, and the road soon led them to the farm, where Frisk began at once to run after all the poultry, to the no small annoyance of Shanno. But Freda succeeded in catching him, and carrying him off with her into the parlour, whither she went, and whither Mrs Prothero followed her.

'I have just come to ask what you have settled about Gladys,' said Miss Gwynne. 'I cannot stay long, and am anxious to know.'

'My husband thinks it better that she should go to you, as you kindly wish to take her,' replied Mrs Prothero, with tears in her eyes. 'He says that he has no ill-will to the poor girl; on the contrary, he is very fond of her; but he don't think her a good match for our eldest son, Owen, who might marry very well. For my own part, I think he would never meet with such another as Gladys; but that is in the hands of Providence, and if it is to be it will be. He says that he is sure Owen will never come home as long as she is with us, for fear of sending her away; but that when he knows that she is so well off with you, he will perhaps come back again. And, indeed, we want him sadly, Miss Gwynne. It is a great trial to us, to have three children, and neither of them at home to help us. My husband is much altered since Netta married, though he don't show it; and Netta won't write, or do anything to prove she's sorry, and though he don't say so, I think this makes him more angry.'

'Then you really wish Gladys to come to me?'

’I do indeed, Miss Gwynne. I am quite sure it will be for her good; and you cannot help liking her. But she will not make any choice between the two situations you offer, but says you must do with her whatever you think best.’

‘Is she very unhappy at the idea of coming to us?’

Page 167

’Not at all. She is very sad to leave us, but she says she would rather do so, and would rather serve you than any other lady in the world.’

’Well, perhaps it may be best for all parties. I think she is too young and too pretty to live alone at the school-house, and besides, I don’t particularly want to change mistresses: so I mean to have her as my maid, and then I can take care of her myself. You know I have not had a regular maid since that disagreeable affair of Evans; one of the housemaids has waited on me, and I don’t like maids, they are so in one’s way. But I shall like Gladys. And she can help Miss Hall in the school, and go and see you every evening if she likes, when we are at dinner. In short, I am sure it is a capital plan for us all, and will make matters easy for you.’

’You are so very kind, Miss Gwynne, I do not know what we should have done without you. Gladys would have begged her way back to Ireland, and died there.’

’I mustn’t stay any longer; I have outstayed my five minutes over and over again. You can send Gladys when you like. I have heaps of dresses, and clothes, of all kinds for her, so don’t you think of giving her anything new. I will give her the same wages that I gave Evans, so she will feel quite independent; and I will put her under the particular charge of the housekeeper, until she gets into the ways of the house. Now I must go; what will Miss Hall say?’

Well might Freda ask, ‘What will Miss Hall say?’ She walked as quickly as possible to the waterfall, she was not there; up the hill again, not there; home through the wood, not there; into the house, not there. She waited a little while with her hat on, but as no Mr Jones or Miss Hall arrived, she took off her walking things, and went about her usual avocations, saying to herself, with a smile on her lips the while,—

’I never thought I was a manoeuvrer before. It is evident they don’t want me, or they would have waited for me, and I have no doubt they are much happier without me. I must go and look, after my father.’

Freda found Mr Gwynne in his library.

‘Where is your guest, Freda? What is he like? Is he a bore?’ were his queries.

’He is walking with Miss Hall, and my impression is they are very good company. He is very quiet, very grave, has no wonderful travellers’ stories, and none of the ologies, and can play chess, for I asked him. I don’t think him a bore, and I am sure Miss Hall doesn’t.’

‘Very well, then I will go into the drawing-room against he comes in.’

’Thanks; and I will whisper a little secret into your ear; he is an old lover of Serena’s, and I cannot help hoping he is come to propose for her.’

Mr Gwynne was alive and interested in a moment. It is curious how on the alert people are when they hear of a love affair.

'I will go and dress at once; he must be nice if Miss Hall likes him, for she is certainly the least intrusive, and all that sort of thing. Is he like Rowland Prothero?'

Page 168

Freda coloured at this sudden question.

‘No, not at all; besides, he is a middle-aged man.’

’To be sure; I suppose so. Miss Hall must be—I don’t know—nearly forty I suppose. I wish Rowland Prothero lived at the farm; he was so obliging and pleasant; even Lady Mary Nugent admires him.’

’She is no great criterion of what is agreeable; I shouldn’t think it any compliment to be liked by her. There is the dressing bell. Now, papa, do be ready for dinner, if you please.’

Freda went to her room in a sudden fit of ill-temper. The mention of Lady Mary always put her out of humour. In a few moments there was a tap at the door, and Miss Hall made her appearance.

‘I might have waited a long time at the waterfall, Serena,’ she began maliciously.

For answer, Miss Hall went to her and kissed her, and when Freda looked up, she saw that there was an unusually bright colour in her cheeks, and something very like tears in her eyes.

Freda threw her arms round her friend, exclaiming,—

’I know, Nita dear! It is all signed, sealed, and settled *n’est-ce pas*?’

And so it proved; during that long walk the old love had become new, and two people as deserving of happiness as most of the poor sinful mortals who are for ever seeking her, were made perfectly happy for that day at least.

Freda’s reflections, whilst she sat alone, listlessly brushing her hair and dressing herself, were as follows:—

’How happy she seems; she looks twenty years younger; and he, an elderly, iron-grey clergyman; it would be ridiculous, only it is all so true and good. I suppose, after all, there is something grand, as the poet says, in constancy, and love, and the like; and I ought to pity Rowland Prothero, if he really cares for me. And yet I don’t; on the contrary, I could be over head and ears in love with another man to-morrow if he would only ask me; and he is gone away without telling me that he cares for me, if he does, as I cannot help hoping. But nothing shall induce me to give my heart to any one, unless I am asked for it, of that I am resolved; no, not if I were to die in the struggle to keep it.’

With this prudent and womanly resolution, Freda got up from her seat, hastily put on her dress, and went to Miss Hall, to insist on dressing her on that particular day.

’You must put on the pink and white muslin that you look so well in. I insist on it, and will have my way to-night,’ she said, and had her way accordingly, and the satisfaction of hearing her father remark afterwards, that he had ’not seen Miss Hall look so well for years. She really was a very pretty ladylike person, and Mr Jones ought to think himself very fortunate, and all that sort of thing.’

Page 169

To judge from Mr Jones' manner and countenance, he did think himself very happy and fortunate; and his happiness and good fortune had the effect of making him so very agreeable, that Mr Gwynne was quite pleased with him, and strongly urged his remaining some days at Glanyravon. But this could not be, as he was engaged to be present at a meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel the next day but one. To Freda's indignation, her father engaged him in a game of chess, which lasted the greater part of the evening; but as he seemed quite patient under the infliction, and Miss Hall glad that he should be agreeable to her kind friend, Mr Gwynne, Freda was obliged to give up her plan of leaving them alone for the remainder of the evening, and to be content with resolving that they should at least have the following morning to themselves. This she effected, and was rewarded by a lusty squeeze of the hand from the gentleman, when he took his leave, which she afterwards declared to Miss Hall, would have made an Australian native scream. Mr Gwynne sent Mr Jones to meet the train in his carriage, and invited him to return as soon as he possibly could.

It may, perhaps, be as well to anticipate some of the events of this story, and to say that in the course of three or four months, Mr Jones and Miss Hall were married.

Soon after his return to London, Mr Jones was appointed brother curate to Rowland Prothero, recommended by his friend, the rector. He undertook this as temporary duty, because he was in expectation either of obtaining a living or of returning to Australia; Miss Hall was quite ready for either kind of work, feeling that, whether as the wife of a clergyman at home or abroad, she would be most thankful to be permitted to devote herself to her woman's part of missionary labour. Mr Jones had a small income as secretary to one of the London and Colonial religious societies, and was also engaged in work for the S.P.G., which, together with his curacy, and the small savings of twenty years abroad, enabled him to take and furnish a home for his wife, and gave them the prospect of comfort, if not of ease and riches. Their desires were very moderate, and their hopes fixed on objects beyond the general scope of vision; so that they were content to 'live by the day,' and trust for the rest. The world called them romantic and foolish for people of their ages; they 'knew in whom they believed,' and, 'having food and raiment, were therewith content.'

Gladys had been installed in her offices of parcel lady's-maid, parcel school-mistress at the Park, nearly three months, when the wedding took place. She had largely contributed towards making Miss Hall's simple wardrobe and wedding gear, and was rewarded by being allowed to marshal the school children on the happy-day, as they lined the drive at the Park gates, on the going forth and return of the bridal party. She was, moreover, the one selected by the children to present Miss Hall with a handsome

Page 170

Bible in Welsh and English, in token of their gratitude and love for her. Mr Jones had been too much engaged in London to allow of his visiting Wales until two or three days before his marriage, during which time he had occasionally met, and spoken kindly to Gladys, and given her a book on Missionary subjects, which he had brought purposely for her, expecting to find her at the farm. He had also carried pleasant news of Rowland to Mrs Prothero, and frequently spoken of him to Mr Gwynne and Freda—of his earnestness in his profession, and of the love and esteem in which he was held by his rector and his flock.

Freda felt very lonely when her dear Serena was gone. She had no one amongst her immediate neighbours for whom she cared much. The general round of country dinner-parties she had always found very dull, and the annual hunt week and assize balls she had never liked; so she found herself again thrown quite upon her own resources. As long as Colonel Vaughan had been in the country, she had taken an interest in everything; when he left, her ordinary pursuits—her riding, painting, music, garden—in all of which he had aided her, suddenly lost their charm. Her friend's marriage came about just when she wanted an object of interest, and when that was over she was thrown back upon herself.

By degrees, however, a healthier tone returned to her mind, and she forgot the fascinating Colonel Vaughan, and recovered her interest in her house, school, dogs, birds, garden, and the thousand and one small objects that serve to make time pass cheerfully and happily in a country home. Above all, she became more and more interested in Gladys, and anxious to shelter her from the many dangers and temptations which she saw her peculiar beauty and position subjected her to. She soon found out that all the men-servants paid their devotions to her shrine, and that even the ancient and portly butler was not indifferent to her charms; but the simplicity and modesty of Gladys kept them all at a respectful distance, and the housekeeper told Miss Gwynne, that 'Reelly, she was quite a pattern in the servants' 'all, and it was a treat to see a young 'oman who knew how to keep the men off—not but the girls were as jealous of her as could be; but that wasn't to be wondered at, for none of 'em was made anything of when Gladys was near.' Even Mr Gwynne roused himself to make inquiries concerning Freda's pretty maid, which was quite the crowning feather in Gladys' cap.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

Plas Abertewey was a fine old country seat, that had been in Colonel Vaughan's family for generations. Miss Gwynne was not the only scion of the good old county gentry who was disgusted at seeing it in the possession of a son of old Griffey Jenkins, the miser.

But so it was to be. Howel took the place, nominally for a term, but with the avowed intention of purchasing it, or the first place of any note that should be for sale in the county.

Page 171

He made liberal proposals to Colonel Vaughan's agents as regarded improvements and repairs, the house having been much neglected for some years; and in the course of a few months after his marriage with Netta, workmen of all kinds were employed in adorning Plas Abertewey for his expected arrival with his bride.

This did not take place, however, until the following spring, by which time the house and grounds were in as fine order as money could make them. Howel sent down a person from London to superintend the work, and remained with Netta in Paris until it was nearly completed; then he brought her over to England, left her in London with his friends the Simpsons, and ran down into Wales, accompanied by Captain Dancy, who had been his companion during a great portion of his Paris trip.

They remained only a few days, and then returned to town to superintend the purchase of furniture, plate, and the various appurtenances of a country establishment, which were duly despatched to the *charge d'affaires* in the country, and vigilantly guarded by Mrs Griffith Jenkins, who took up her abode at Abertewey for the time being.

As bell-ringers do not pause to consider the cause and effect of the events they are ordered to commemorate, but rather think of the amount of money and liquid they are likely to receive for their labour, the chime of Llanfawr rang a merry peal when the future master and mistress of Plas Abertewey drove through the town. There was, moreover, a small show of fireworks on the occasion. Blue balls, crackers, rockets and the like blazed and hissed about to the no small danger of the thatched roofs of some of the houses. Mrs Griffith Jenkins undrew her purse strings on that day, and the cheering and shouting were great as the bride and bridegroom appeared. Howel bowed and smiled as all great men do on such occasions, and Netta laughed, and was proud. One of the blue balls made the fine pair of horses that drew Howel's new carriage take fright, but the London coachman showed the superiority of his driving by pulling them in' and the crowd shouted amain.

Captain Dancy and Miss Simpson, who accompanied the pair, were duly impressed with the loyalty of Howel's subjects, and were not particularly shown the little shop to which he owed their sudden devotion. 'Jenkins, the miser,' was quite swallowed up in 'Howel Jenkins, Esq.,' and 'Netta Prothero, Glanyravon,' was engulphed in his wife. So goes the world. Shout on, little boys, for so will it be when you are in your turn big men, and 'adore the rising, rather than the setting sun,' as the French proverb hath it.

Fortunately, Abertewey was in the parish of Llanfawr, and some seven or eight miles from Glanyravon, therefore Mr and Mrs Prothero knew nothing of the demonstrations in honour of their children.

Mrs Griffith Jenkins received them, dressed in a new *moire antique*, quite in baronial style, under the portico of their dwelling, and the proper complement of retainers was in the background. More shouts were heard from some of the immediate neighbours, who

had gathered round the door to see the arrival; and as Netta alighted from her carriage, attired like a Paris doll, she felt that she was now a grand lady, and could conscientiously look down on Miss Rice Rice, and be on an equality with Miss Nugent.

Page 172

Howel gave some orders in a very commanding tone to the various lords-in-waiting, and then the door closed upon their majesties, and the admiring crowds saw them no more.

It is no wonder that the world without Plas Abertewey was much engaged in talking of, and speculating on, the world within. Howel's horses, Netta's dress, Miss Simpson's father's baronetcy, Captain Dancy's regiment, Plas Abertewey's appointments, the footmen's liveries, the reputed wealth of the miser, even Mrs Griffith Jenkins' *moire antique*, mourning ornaments and gold watch were variously remarked upon, and doubtless with great good nature and deserving approbation. We all know how we rejoice when our neighbours rise to wealth or eminence. There was not one breakfast-table within twenty miles of Abertewey, from that of my lord and my lady to Jim Davies and his wife, shoemakers, over which the arrival of Howel Jenkins, the miser, as he was called, according to his father before him, was not pulled to pieces, from the first sound of the bells to the last shout at his hall door.

'Shall we call?' were the words on the lips of all heads of families, generally settled by the said 'heads' driving in their very best equipages and gayest clothes, to pay the wedding visit to the reputed millionnaire and his pretty, elegantly attired wife.

Money, as I have somewhat commonplacedly remarked elsewhere, is the master-key to most hearts, and Howel found that nearly all the hearts in his native county were opened by his wealth. The exceptions were principally those of his wife's family, and even in some of these he managed to turn the key.

It was shortly after the arrival at Plas Abertewey that Owen and Gladys simultaneously left the farm, and we find the former on that same morning, standing at a little distance from this residence of his sister and Howel, surveying it, and ruminating on the family fortunes.

'Well done, Howel,' he said to himself; 'if money hasn't done something for you, I don't know for whom it has done anything. I declare I will try and make some myself, and come back and marry Gladys in spite of the world.'

Then he began to ask himself, whether it was kind and brotherly to pass by his only sister's door without saying good-bye to her, and whether his father had any right to expect all her relations to give her up, because he chose to do so? His reflections were suddenly cut short by the appearance of Howel and another gentleman, bound, apparently, on a fishing expedition.

'Owen, come at last!' cried Howel, hastening up to him with great good will. 'Better late than never. I am very glad to see you, so will be Netta. Travelled early to hide your carpet bag, or whatever it is?'

'Knapsack,' said Owen, shaking his cousin's offered hand; 'I'm off to sea again.'

’A queer road to take; but you come to see us on your way, of course. Let me introduce you to Mr Simpson, Sir John Simpson’s son. My cousin, Mr Simpson, my wife’s brother.

Page 173

Owen nodded, and Mr Simpson bowed.

’We’re going out fishing, but you’ll find Netta—in bed, I’m afraid, but she’ll be glad to see you anywhere. Go up the avenue, and let Netta know you’ve come. We shall be home to dinner at seven. Good-bye for the present.’

Owen did not stay to consider, but walked past the handsome lodge, and up the drive, according to Howel’s direction.

‘Mighty condescending and very patronising, cousin Howel!’ he soliloquised; ’but I will go and see how Netta gets on, and how your highness treats her.’

He reached the house, and rang stoutly at the bell. A servant answered it, who was adjusting his coat just put on, he not having expected such early visitors.

‘The back entrance is round the corner there, young man,’ were his words on perceiving Owen, whose pride was greatly roused thereby.

‘Tell Mrs Howel Jenkins that her brother, Mr Owen Prothero, is here,’ said Owen, intending to electrify the man.

But he did not succeed. The servants knew very well that their mistress’s family was not of ‘county rank,’ and that its members were not upon terms with the Aberteweys, therefore had no very high opinion of them. He turned on his heel, and told a female servant to tell Lucette, the French maid, to tell her mistress that Mr Owen Prothero was at the door.

In a few minutes the man reappeared, and, with a great increase of civility, asked Mr Prothero to walk into the breakfast-room, and said his mistress would be down as soon as possible. Whilst he was admiring the room and its costly furniture, and considering the tea service, a smart little French-woman came to him and asked him in French, whether he would stay to breakfast; as he knew something of the language he replied in the affirmative. Then appeared an equally smart and fascinating French valet, who begged to be allowed the honour of conducting Monsieur to a bedroom, to arrange his toilet.

Owen laughed heartily and followed the man, who took up his knapsack daintily, and led him to a very handsome bedroom, where Owen brushed his hair as becomingly as he could, arranged his beard, and made himself as smart as his wardrobe would allow of his doing. He was, as we have before said, a very handsome young man, and sufficiently well mannered to pass muster anywhere.

‘What is the next act, I wonder?’ said he, as he found his way into the breakfast-room. He was quite taken aback as he entered, when he saw a pale young lady sitting in one of the windows, reading. He made his bow, she curtseyed, and said,—

‘Mrs Howel Jenkins’ brother, I believe? My name is Simpson.’

Owen bowed again, and not being of a shy turn, and having seen ladies of various degrees during his travels, began to make himself agreeable.

In a few minutes, a little French fairy flitted into the room, with her hair off her face to display such eyes and complexion as are rare in all times; and muslins, laces, and ribbons so blended, as to set off a petite figure to the very best advantage. Owen was going to bow again, when a little affected laugh, and a ’Ma foi! he doesn’t know me, Miss Simpson,’ proclaimed the fairy to be his sister Netta.

Page 174

‘Owen, you naughty boy, not to know me,’ the little thing continued, more naturally, running up to her brother, who took her, despite muslins, laces, and ribbons, almost up in his big arms, and kissed her.

’How you have rumpled me, Owen? did you ever see such a thing, Miss Simpson?’ she cried, half laughing, half in tears, as she smoothed down the point-lace sleeves and collar.

Just then a tall man entered, and Netta disengaging herself from Owen, who was on the point of kissing her again, and asking her what she had done to herself, simpered out an introduction between ’Captain Dancy and my brother, Captain Prothero.’

‘Not quite that yet,’ began Owen, anxious to disclaim the captaincy, when he was interrupted by the entrance of one or two other men, who were, in their turn, named to him as Sir Samuel Spendall and Mr Deep. Owen did not like their appearance and looked towards his really lovely little sister, to see how she received them. Her manners had a mixture of affectation and simplicity that was rather taking than otherwise. And Owen wondered how Howel could leave one so young and pretty amongst three men of the world, which he soon discovered his new acquaintances to be. True, Miss Simpson was with her, and in the middle of breakfast, to which, in due time, they sat down, another lady came upon the scene, by name Madame Duvet, who turned out to be the English widow of a Frenchman. She was young, handsome, but over-bold for the taste of a man who was in love with Gladys.

She was at once taken with Owen’s handsome face, and talked to him incessantly, whilst Captain Dancy seated himself near Netta, and devoted himself to her much more closely than Owen liked. However, he was very hungry, and managed to make a good breakfast.

He heard Netta telling Captain Dancy that her brother had been at sea all his life, and knew nothing of the fashionable world; at which he thought the ham he was eating would have choked him, in his effort to repress a laugh. He longed very much to knock down one of the ‘Jeames’s,’ who would stand gazing at him, and did so far betray his indignation, as to ask him, when he came behind his chair, whether he saw anything remarkable in his appearance, which so amused Madame Duvet, that she exclaimed ‘*Charmant! brava!* you make me *crever de rire*.’

Owen was astonished at everything, but at nothing so much as at his sister. Netta had always aped the fine lady, and made the most of her few accomplishments; but now it was all like a fairy-tale, and the heroine was Netta, transformed by some fairy into a princess. By turns coquettish, affected, simple, languishing, accordingly as she feared she was too like her natural self—the Netta of the Farm was no more, and her representative was, to Owen at least, an anomaly. How she could have acquired such an amount of small talk, and such a mincing speech in nine months, was an enigma to

him. London, Paris, the opera, the fashions, even the picture galleries, were alternately in her mouth; and she poured out tea and coffee, and laughed a silly laugh, much to her own satisfaction, and Owen's disgust, whilst all the men were looking at her; for assuredly she was very pretty.

Page 175

‘Owen,’ she said, during a sudden pause in rather a noisy conversation, ’I hear Rowland is quite a fashionable preacher. Howel means to ask him down here, I believe. Miss Simpson went to hear him—didn’t you, Miss Simpson?’

This was drawled out, and Owen felt very much disposed to get up and shake his sister, as he had often done when she came from school with any new airs and graces. But he contented himself with saying,——

’Rowly’s a capital fellow, Netta, fach, and doing his best. Whether he’s a fashionable preacher or not I don’t know, but he kept us all awake at Llanfach one Sunday for half-an-hour, which is something.’

‘Your brother is so amusing! so *naif*! I die of him!’ said Madame Duvet.

‘Very original!’ remarked Miss Simpson; ‘I do like originality—’

‘Then you must like Netta,’ said Owen; ’for there was never any one of our family the least like her.’

‘Oh yes! you are, about the eyes. *Malin!*’ said Madame Duvet.

After breakfast, Owen tried to get Netta a little to himself, but there were distant calls to make, and drives and rides to be arranged, which caused him to be unsuccessful in his efforts. So he fell to the lot of Mr Deep, who took him to see Howel’s hunters and dogs, and all the other wonders of Abertewey.

‘Deep by name, and deep by nature,’ was Owen’s reflection, after his morning with his new acquaintance. ’He has managed to get all my secrets out of me, one excepted; but he has not confided any to me in return. One thing I suspect, however, that he has a turn for horse-racing and betting.’

Howel and Mr Simpson came home about six o’clock; and the whole party, with the addition of Mr Rice Rice, assembled at dinner. Howel had ordered his valet to see that ‘Captain Prothero’ was properly dressed; and, accordingly, Owen was obliged to put on a smart waistcoat and tie belonging to Howel, which greatly embellished his outer man, and gave him increased favour in the eyes of Madame Duvet and Miss Simpson.

He was more astounded than ever when he saw his sister in her evening costume.

‘What do you think of her, Owen?’ whispered Howel, as he stood literally gazing at her before dinner.

‘I can’t exactly say,’ was the reply; ’but she is no longer Netta Prothero of the Farm.’

‘I should imagine not!’ said Howel. ’Pray don’t let us talk of farms here, Owen. I don’t like conversation that smells of the shop.’

‘Not even of the old place where we used to steal lollilops?’ asked Owen, maliciously.

Howel turned away for fear of being overheard, and devoted himself quite as much to Madame Duvet, as Captain Dancy still did to Netta; and Owen wondered on.

Again he looked at Netta, as she sat curled up on a sofa, a mere child in appearance, but so pretty, in white, with some sort of cherry-coloured ornaments for dress and head, that no one could possibly have recognised her as the country belle of twelve months ago. ’Her own mother would not know her!’ thought Howel. ’Poor mother, she would scarcely care for all this grandeur, though one can’t help envying it a little. I will be off to California, and come home and buy a place, and see whether Gladys would not be as good a fine lady as Netta.’

Page 176

The dinner was grand; the servants were grand; all was grand to Owen's bewildered imagination. Madame Duvet made such very decided attempts to talk to him, however, that he was obliged to cease wondering, and to bring his usually versatile genius into play, in the light of all the grandeur. He got on so well with the lady, that Howel wondered in his turn, and after dinner told Owen that he verily believed if he played his cards well, he might make an impression on the pretty widow.

'One can do that, I should say, without any cards at all,' said Owen, showing his white teeth from amidst his big black beard.

When the ladies had left the dinner-table, Owen began to gain some insight into the characters and pursuits of Howel's guests. He had not spent thirteen or fourteen years amongst men of all ranks and all nations, without having acquired a shrewd judgment, and a tolerable knowledge of mankind.

The conversation turned at once upon hunting, racing, steeple-chasing, billiards, bets, and the like. It was evident that Howel, too, was well initiated into such matters. Mr Rice Rice asked him when the question of the hounds was to be decided, and Howel said that kennels were in preparation, and that he hoped to have a first-rate pack by the winter. There arose a dispute about a celebrated racer that Howel appeared to possess in London, and that was expected daily at Abertewey. Howel declared his intention of letting her run at the Carmarthen races. Captain Dancy, having heavy stakes on the mare, vowed it might disable her for the Derby, and words ran high; but Mr Deep interposed, and changed the subject to that of *rouge et noir*.

They sat over the dinner-table till nearly eleven o'clock, by which time they were all more or less exhilarated. Howel's wines were good, his cellar was well stocked, and he was lavish of everything that might give him a reputation amongst the Welsh squires that surrounded him, many of whom still worshipped at the shrine of Bacchus.

When they joined the ladies, Owen thought the conversation was rather too loud and boisterous. Captain Dancy alone was quite himself, and made Netta sing some little French songs to Owen's great amusement. After tea and coffee had been carried round, a card table appeared, and *vingt-et-un* was proposed. The stakes were so high that Owen trembled for his small stock of wealth? but to his astonishment again, he found himself, at the end of the evening, a gainer of nearly five pounds, although he had been most moderate in his own stakes. He was struck with the eagerness of Madame Duvet and Netta, who entered into the game with all the avidity of accomplished gamblers.

It was very late when they finished the game, and nominally retired for the night, but not late enough to prevent Howel, Captain Dancy, Mr Deep, and Sir Samuel Spendall from sitting down again to whist. Owen left them at it, not altogether satisfied with himself or his companions.

Page 177

The following day, Owen again tried to get some private conversation with Howel or Netta, but in vain. The breakfast was even later than the previous morning, as Howel did not go out fishing, and afterwards there were more distant calls to make, and Netta was engaged in preparing her dress with her maid for a dinner-party at Mr Rice Rice's, at which she desired to appear particularly grand. The gentlemen were playing billiards part of the day, and riding the rest, in neither of which amusement Owen joined. Madame Duvet did her best to amuse him, and succeeded very well, for Owen was far from insensible to the charms of beauty, and, in spite of Gladys, could not resist flirting a little, in his own matter-of-fact way, with a pretty woman.

The three ladies, Captain Dancy and Howel, were the dinner guests at Mr Rice Rice's, the other gentlemen were invited for the dance in the evening. Young Rice Rice had given Owen a lame invitation the previous day, which he had declined; never having been in the habit of visiting him when at home, he did not choose to do so under Howel's countenance.

Owen's astonishment was brought to a climax that evening when his sister appeared dressed for this, her first public appearance on the small stage of a country-neighbourhood, or, to speak more respectfully, county visiting. It was Howel's pleasure that she should make it in point lace and diamonds. Not even to Owen was it whispered that the lace was a wonderfully good imitation, or that the diamonds, instead of being of the first water, were first-rate paste; and no one suspected the deception. The great millionnaire, Howel Jenkins, could well afford to give his pretty wife the real jewels and lace, and had the credit of so doing; and as no one, save himself and the jeweller, knew that they were false, he thought himself a very clever fellow for gaining the reputation of unbounded liberality upon very small means. Be it said, however, that his own studs, pin and ring, were real.

The French maid had eclipsed herself in Netta's toilet, and Owen felt that if she were not his sister, he must have fallen in love with her himself. The black roguish eyes sparkled like the brilliants she wore, and the complexion was scarcely rivalled by the roses she had in her bouquet.

Howel looked really proud of her, and it is not surprising that he felt greatly elevated as he took the reins from the coachman and drove off in his fine new carriage, drawn by capital horses, and attended by liveried servants.

His last whisper to Netta, before they entered Mr Rice Rice's drawing-room was, 'Keep up your consequence, and don't say, "Yes, indeed!" every minute.'

Page 178

He was determined to keep up his own consequence, and began at once by patronising everybody present. There were some of the county gentry who had demurred as to calling on the old miser's son, and who were astonished at the kind of tone he assumed. They, who had been gravely considering whether they could possibly shake hands with him, found themselves on a level with, if not beneath him, at once, by mere effrontery. There is some truth in the saying that, 'Accordingly as you think of yourself, others will think of you;' and impudence and riches combined, together with a certain amount of talent and personal appearance, can overcome vast worldly obstacles. Besides did he not bring an unmarried baronet with him—one of the very ancient family of Spendalls—and the son and daughter of a man of title, and a captain of the dragoon guards? to say nothing of that fashionable widow, reputed a fortune. And were there not plenty of young ladies, poor if proud, in the county, wanting partners, either for dancing or life, or both?

After that evening, people sneered at home perhaps, but they called and invited and made much of the master and mistress of Plas Abertewey, forgetting or ignoring their origin.

Netta, too, obeyed Howel's last injunction to the best of her ability. Her youth and beauty were greatly in her favour, and her affectation covered the shyness and awkwardness that she felt in being suddenly thrown amongst people upon whom she had formerly looked with awe. The Nugents were there, but the Gwynnes were absent, and she had the pleasure of feeling that she had as many, if not more, partners than the heiress, Miss Nugent, and was much more grandly dressed. As for Miss Rice Rice, she fell quite into the shade before her.

Her old friend, Sir Hugh Pryse, was particularly attentive, and talked to her of Miss Gwynne; and Captain Dancy was as much devoted to her abroad as at home. Her head was quite turned, and nothing but the consciousness that Howel was present kept it on her shoulders at all; but the fear of a lecture for some mistake in manners kept her so much on her guard, that she got through the evening wonderfully, and achieved what *Mme*. Duvet called *un grand succes*.

And Howel danced, and talked, and introduced his friends, and patronised everybody, much as if he had been a feudal monarch amongst his barons. Here and there might have been seen a suppressed smile, as one of the company whispered to another, 'Where is Mrs Griffey Jenkins to-night? What would old Griff, the miser, say to those diamonds? I wonder his very ghost doesn't appear?' but still money won its usual way. And when Howel's chariot came to the door, there were more surprised and admiring eyes fixed upon it from the bystanders without, than on that of any other of the assembled party. As Mrs Griffey Jenkins said when she heard of the evening gaieties, —

’Deet to goodness, and my Howel’s was grander than any one. I do answer for that. Now his is a beauty carriage and horses, and servants as grand as Queen Victoria’s or Prince Albert’s, for I did be seeing them in London myself.’

Page 179

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PATRON.

Tuesday and Wednesday had passed quickly away, and Thursday brought to Owen amusements similar to those of the previous days; but no private intercourse with his relations. In the evening of his third day at Abertewey, there was a concert at the neighbouring town, huge bills of which had been posted up on the walls and houses of the said town, purporting that the entertainment was under the immediate patronage of Howel Jenkins, Esq. of Plas Abertewey, and his friends. Elegant little pink and blue programmes were scattered over that patriotic gentleman's tables, and he had used his eloquent language, and made great efforts to get together a large party for the occasion.

It was principally a Welsh concert, he urged, and he considered it right to patronise native talent. There was the celebrated *Eos*, and the last representative of the ancient bards, and the best specimen of a Welsh harper, besides several respectable English singers, and he, for one, should muster as many supporters as he possibly could.

He did so, accordingly, and with that spirit of liberality which characterised him when any popularity was to be acquired thereby purchased a great number of tickets, and distributed them amongst his servants and neighbours with majestic grace. He had managed to enlist a large party at Mr Rice Rice's the previous evening, some of whom were to dine at Abertewey, and to go thence to the concert; others to meet him and his friends there.

Owen felt lost in the grandeur of that evening, and would have been quite forgotten but for *Mme*. Duvet, who was constant in her admiration of him. But it was amusement and wonder enough for him to watch Howel and Netta, quite *en prince et princesse*, receiving their guests, who, if not as yet of the aristocracy of the county, were of high respectability and good position in it. If the host and hostess were rather desirous of showing how grand they were, their dinner and wines were so good as to cover their efforts.

What if their guests remarked, as guests will, gentle reader, when our backs are turned, that Howel was insufferably purse-proud and conceited, and his wife as affected and provincial as possible; they did not hear the friendly notices, and were well content to fill the concert room with their party, all in full dress, to the admiration of the townsfolk, and of Mrs Griffey Jenkins in particular.

Howel had quite forgotten his mother in his general invitation and did not even see her for some time, seated in a prominent position, and making one of his own party, to all appearance. She had saved his character for filial duty by going where he would little

have thought of placing her, and awaiting his arrival, as her pride impelled her to do. Owen spied her at once, and took *Mme*. Duvet to the seat next her, on her left; whilst on her right sat Mr Deep, and nigh to him, of all people in the world, Mrs Rice Rice, that staunch supporter of family dignity.

Page 180

Owen shook hands with Aunt ’Lizbeth, and introduced her to Madame Duvet and Mr Deep, after having asked them first of all whether they had seen her previously.

‘I never had that honour,’ said Madame Duvet, curtseying.

‘I didn’t be going to Abertewey since you was coming there, ma’am,’ said Mrs Griffey, rising and curtseying, to the unspeakable diversion of Mrs Rice Rice and Mr Deep.

The reader may remember that Mrs Jenkins was at Abertewey when Howel made his triumphant entry there, but the following morning he gave her to understand, as delicately as he could, that the idiomatic translations of the Welsh language which had been so refreshing in London, would be better in her native town than at Abertewey, and she departed accordingly.

His ire may be imagined, when he suddenly heard the well-known idioms lavished upon Madame Duvet and Mr Deep, who were enjoying them a great deal more than the concert, which, being principally in the vernacular, was not so intelligible and far less amusing. Mrs Jenkins was in her glory. Never had Mrs Rice Rice been so condescending before. She and Mr Deep made themselves more agreeable than she had supposed it possible for such grand people to be, and she frequently glanced at Owen, as much as to say, ‘And I am the person that your father turned out of doors!’

Owen, on his side, was sorry that he had exposed her to the sarcasm that she so little understood, and talked to Madame Duvet to withdraw attention from her.

As to Howel, his rising sun was obscured—his blushing honours were dimmed—his majesty, patronage, grandeur were lowered by the propinquity of his nearest of kin. In the midst of his county friends himself, he still felt that his mother was making herself ridiculous near at hand; whilst complimented and thanked for his patriotic support of native *cos*,[Footnote: Nightingales.] the native idioms rang in his ears, and he longed to annihilate them altogether. This on his right hand. On his left, Netta, looking literally like ‘a rose in June,’ and receiving the very marked attentions of Captain Dancy, on one side, and of Mr Rice Rice, junior, on the other. He scarcely knew which was most irritating, ‘the idioms,’ or her affected giggle. Trite but true is the proverb, ‘There is no rose without its thorn;’ and Howel was pricked severely by the thorns surrounding the rose of his first step into popularity.

Between the acts, and between the songs, Mrs Griffey went on something in this sort,—

’Indeet yes, sir! treue for you there. The Welsh is a splendit language. My son Howels—there he is to be proving it—do always say so. Ah! that’s “The rising of the lark,” I was singing that myself years ago. London! to be seure! Now there was singing I was

hearing at the play. My son Howels did tak us to the play. I never was hearing or seeing the like in my life. Seure, the Queen Victoria or Prince

Page 181

Albert don't be dressing half as fine as the gentlemen and ladies I was seeing act. The Queen! Oh, Mrs Rice Rice, fach! Ma'am, I was disappointed! Just a bonnet no better than my doater-in-law's. What, sir! a crown? Not 'sactly a crown; but I was 'specting to see a queen different from other people. Hush! I do hear my son Howels cry, "Silence!" and they do be playing "Ap Shenkin." Not so bad that for Wales, Mrs Rice Rice. My son Howels do sing beautiful himself, and do play—Hush! look you at him. He don't like tolking in the music. He, he, he, sir! you do make me laugh. To be seure I don't mean to be marrying again, though men are so much for money. I am thinking you gentlemen 'ould be marrying your grandmothers for the beauty money! Not my son Howels, indeet! He don't be wanting money. He marry his cousin for love. Hush you! There's Pengoch beginning a Penyll! You don't be hearing anything like that in England. Ach a fi! my 'deet, I am sorry. "God save the Queen!" and it don't seem an hour since they began!'

Mrs Jenkins stood up with the rest, and beat time emphatically Scarcely was the last verse of 'God save the Queen' finished, when Howel came up to his mother, and biting his tongue to keep in his ire, said—

'Mother, I will see you safe first!' and without allowing her time to do more than make a curtsey to her companions, offered her his arm, and led her quickly down the room. He did not venture to speak to her, but nodding to one and another as he passed, said, 'I shall be back directly. I am just going to send my mother home first,' reached the door, and called for his carriage. It was close at hand, the hour for ordering the carriages being past; and he speedily put his mother into it. 'Drive Mrs Jenkins home, and return immediately,' he exclaimed.

'Which way, ma'am?' asked the servant.

'Go you down the street, then turn to the right, and the first house with a railing and steps, and a brass knocker,' said Mrs Jenkins, exulting as they drove off in her new dignity and importance. Howel, on the contrary, returned to the concert-room, cursing his folly for having settled in his native county, and wishing his mother anywhere else.

Nevertheless, he received the thanks of the conductor of the concert with bland humility, and expressed his intention of using all his best efforts in behalf of his country and countrymen. Finally he assisted in cloaking and shawling the ladies, seeing them to their carriages, and bidding them condescending good nights.

For himself, however, he had not a good night, being haunted with the demons of jealousy and discontent. As soon as Netta and he were alone, he addressed her in very different tones from those which he had called forth for the ladies of the concert-room.

‘Netta, why do you let Dancy pay you such attentions?’ he began, with a scowling brow and flashing eye.

‘Why does *Mme*. Duvet let you pay her such attention?’ was Netta’s instant reply.

Page 182

Now Netta was too well pleased with herself, and the effect of her beauty on others, to endure being snubbed, and was very angry that Howel was not pleased also.

’Don’t be a fool, Netta. You know Madame Duvet is doing all she can to catch Owen.’

’Oh! jealous are you? Well, there were plenty of other ladies who let you pay them attention; why was that I wonder?’

’I tell you what it is, Netta, I won’t allow Dancy to devote himself to you as he does.’

’Then you had better tell him so, I ain’t going to do it; he’s your friend, and if he admires me, I think you ought to be proud of it.’

’You did nothing but flirt and giggle with him all the evening. What with you on one side and my mother on the other, I thought I must have left the room.’

’Giggle, indeed; I don’t know what you mean, sir; you never eused to say I giggled.’

’Can’t you say *used*, and not *eused*, you will never cease to be provincial,’

’Other folks are provincial, I think, besides me. If you said your own mother was provincial, it ‘ould be true enough.’

’There again! if you are your own natural self, you leave out all your *w’s* directly; I wish you would be careful, Netta.’

’Well, so do the French. I declare I won’t speak again to-night, that I won’t, you cross, unnatural, unfeeling fellow; and all because you’re jealous of Owen. Madame Duvet says he’s the handsomest man she ever saw, and that his beard is enough to win any woman’s heart.’

‘You had better hold your tongue, I think,’ said Howel, stifling a laugh at the idea of Owen’s irresistible beard; ’you never say a word of sense.’

‘And you never say a kind word,’ said Netta, breaking down at that last attack, and beginning to cry.

‘Now don’t blubber, and let all the house hear you.’

’I wonder whether leaving out a *w* is half as vulgar as to tell one’s wife not to blubber. But I won’t speak to you again. I wish I hadn’t married you, I do.’

‘I wish to heaven you hadn’t.’

At this Netta began to sob very much, and Howel softened somewhat, but not sufficiently to make any excuse for his conduct; and Netta went to bed, proud, indignant, and unhappy, and wishing herself back again at Glanyravon.

The next morning, Owen remarked that Netta did not speak to Howel at all, and that she was very reserved and strange in her manner to Captain Dancy. The captain, however, took no notice of the change, but whilst he seemed to converse more than usual with Miss Simpson, anticipated all Netta's wants and wishes with most insinuating tact. Netta, with her changing colour, and half-pettish, half-shy manner, was still more attractive than Netta affected and silly. Owen thought that Howel felt this, for he went behind her chair, and put his hand on her shoulder, whilst he asked for some more sugar in his tea. Netta's lips pouted, but her eyes brightened as she said in a half whisper, 'You're sweeter than you were, Howel.'

Page 183

Howel excused the common-place allusion to the sugar, in consideration of the bright face that looked up at him, and so the storm lulled for the present.

This was Owen's fourth day at Abertewey, and it was a facsimile of the second, with the exception that Mr and Miss Simpson and Mr Deep did not go to the dinner-party to which the rest went, at a neighbouring country house, so Owen had company at dinner, and was ordered by Netta to do the honours.

Miss Simpson refused to play whist, and Owen declined billiards, so whilst Mr Deep got as much money as he could out of Mr Simpson, Owen devoted himself and his captivating beard to Miss Simpson.

In the course of conversation that young lady informed him that she and her brother intended leaving Abertewey the following week, and that she supposed the rest of the party would soon follow for the Ascot Races, and she hoped Owen would join them; she was sure her papa and mamma would be very glad to see him. She also let out that her brother, Captain Dancy, and Howel had heavy bets on the different horses that were to run, and that she expected there would be great excitement. As to Mr Deep, nobody quite knew what he did, he was so very reserved and quiet.

Owen stayed on at Abertewey day after day, he scarcely knew why. In the first place, he was very well amused, and liked his quarters. In the second, his new friends all liked him; the women for his good looks and open-hearted civility, the men, because he took his own course and did not interfere with them, and was a very amusing fellow besides. In the third place, he stayed on because he felt anxious about Howel and Netta and their way of beginning life. He had been a man careless of money himself all his days, but he had been, as the saying goes, no one's enemy but his own—he feared that Howel might turn out, not only his own foe but the foe of others, since he perceived that the propensities of his unmonied youth were strengthening and maturing in his monied manhood. He had no opinion of any man who would fleece another, and he saw that Howel and Mr Deep were preying upon the simple, conceited Mr Simpson, and the careless, lavish Sir Samuel Spendall. As to Mr Deep, he watched his opportunity of outwitting either of the four as it offered.

Saturday came and passed, as usual, in visiting and gambling. A good many of the sporting men of the country called to see Howel's famous race-horse, Campaigner, in training for the St Leger, and to indulge in a little of the sporting gossip of the day, whilst their womankind indulged in more general, and equally intellectual, country gossip. Some of the young men stayed to dinner, and when Miss Simpson had duly played her waltzes, and Netta had gone through her French songs, *vingt-et-un* was proposed.

Owen took his customary place by Madame Duvet, and played his usual game. But he had not the luck of the previous evening, and soon lost the five pounds he then won,

and very nearly the little he possessed besides. When he knew that he was within a few shillings of bankruptcy he said,—

Page 184

’I am very sorry to leave such agreeable society, but if I play any more I shall never get to sea. Look at my purse!’ holding it up and shaking it, ‘it is very nearly empty.’

‘Luck will change,’ said Madame Duvet. ‘You shall go partners with me,’ pointing to a large heap of money and counters.

’I should be only too happy if I could bring anything to the bank, said Owen; ‘but I am too proud to be a penniless partner.’

‘You need only bring yourself,’ said Madame Duvet, lowering her voice, and giving such a glance from a pair of fine black eyes as few men could have withstood.

Perhaps Owen would have yielded to it, for he was by no means a hero, had not a sudden vision of Gladys passed before his mind, followed by one of his mother, just as he had seen her when she bade him that last solemn good-night only the Tuesday in that very week. How the vision came he knew not, nor did he pause to ask; but it gave him strength to resist the temptation to begin regular gambling, a vice he had hitherto steadily avoided.

‘No,’ he said, with a merry laugh; ‘I cannot afford to run into debt.’

‘Mortgage those entailed farms of yours,’ said Howel. ’I wouldn’t mind lending you a trifle on them.’

‘And I will lend you five pounds without a mortgage,’ said Netta.

‘Can’t afford to borrow or mortgage,’ laughed Owen. ’Besides it is nearly Sunday morning, and we must all break up directly,’ so he slipped away from his seat, looked on for a few minutes, and when the party were again absorbed in their game, went to bed.

‘Well,’ he thought; ’I am not as particular as I ought to be, I know, myself; but to play cards into Sunday morning! I could not do this. What would my poor mother say of Netta if she knew it? I will have a serious conversation with her to-morrow, when I suppose she will have an hour to spare, and be off on Monday. I almost wish I had never come. That Madame Duvet, too! One cannot help paying her attention, and she is very handsome and agreeable; but even if there were no Gladys, she wouldn’t suit me; and here am I almost making her believe—Pashaw! She don’t care for me. What a vain fellow I am! But, I suppose, as Netta says, they admire my beard. All but Gladys, who won’t even look at it, or me. I wonder what she would think of me in the midst of all these fine people, dressed up in Howel’s London attire! At any rate I shouldn’t be half as worthy of her good opinion as when I carried that unfortunate mash to the Alderney, which caused the rumpus with my father. How beautiful the girl looked, leaning upon that fortunate animal; and what a fool I made of myself on the other side of her! Well, I was never so happy at home before; and I know it isn’t right to leave my father and

mother; and I have never done any good all my life; and I, the eldest son, and very nearly thirty years of age! Poor uncle and aunt gave me an education, to very little purpose I fear; and I shall have to answer for the use I have made of it, just as those Sabbath-breakers downstairs will have to answer for profaning this holy day. Half of it is the force of example. Here is Howel leading Netta to destruction, just as Gladys might lead me to—heaven, I verily believe. Rowland used to argue with me about individual responsibility, and I suppose he was in the right of it.'

Page 185

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PATRON'S WIFE.

The following morning, Netta was not well, and did not appear at the breakfast-table. Howel said she had a bad headache, and did not intend going to church.

Breakfast was hurried over to prepare for a six miles' drive to church, and the carriage conveyed the two ladies and three of the gentlemen thither, resplendent with fashion and emblazoned prayer-books. Mr Deep did not go, and Owen determined to remain at home, in order to secure the desired conversation with Netta.

Mr Deep, however, seized upon him first of all.

It had not escaped that keen observer, that Howel had hinted the previous evening that Owen possessed property in reversion; which, indeed, he did, inasmuch as his father was a small landed proprietor, and had several farms of his own, descended to him from his father, and entailed upon Owen.

Mr Deep was reading some racing calendar, and called Owen's attention to his brother-in-law's name in connection with the names of men of note on the turf. Also to his horse, Campaigner as being one of those entered for the Ascot races.

Then he went very cautiously to work to see whether he could not induce Owen to bet; but he, holding up again his nearly empty purse, laughed his merry laugh, and said,—

'I am not to be caught, Mr Deep. I hate horse-racing, and never laid a wager of any kind in my life. That is the only redeeming point in my character. Wild enough I have been, and roving all my life, but I never gambled. Excuse me now, as I must go and see my sister.'

He went accordingly to Netta's room, and after knocking at the door, and hearing that she was still in bed, entered unceremoniously. He was at once struck with the difference between the Netta of the farm, in her little muslin night-cap, that he had often fairly pulled off, to get her to promise to leave the pretty white-curtained bed, and the lady of Abertewey, in lace and fine linen, reclining beneath satin drapery, in a room furnished most luxuriously.

'Well, Netta, I have you alone at last; and now, if your head is not very bad, we will have a regular old-fashioned gossip,' said Owen, stooping to kiss the pretty flushed face of the little sister he dearly loved, despite her follies.

'Did you stop at home for me, Owen? How very kind! I don't think any one else would,' said Netta.

’Oh, yes, many others would if it were necessary; but I wanted to have you all to myself. Now I know you have been longing to ask me a hundred questions, but have never got beyond “How are they all at home?” yet.’

Netta blushed, and stammered out, as an apology, that she had never been at leisure one minute all the week.

By degrees she began to talk of home and her parents, and Owen was glad to find that as she did so she returned to her old, natural self. He told her everything that had happened at Glanyravon since she left it, save and except what related to Gladys. He never even mentioned her name.

Page 186

Netta had various ebullitions of temper during their conversation and declared herself greatly aggrieved by her father's conduct.

'But it is just as well,' she said, 'for our positions are so different that we should never have got on comfortably. Howel is determined never to make up with father.'

'I am afraid he is not likely to have the option,' said Owen, gravely. 'But you should write and beg his pardon, Netta; you know you acted directly contrary to his wishes.'

'I think I would write, Owen, but Howel won't hear of it; he gets furious if I even name Glanyravon, and can't bear any of 'em except you.'

'Netta, I think you must use your influence to keep Howel from so much horse-racing and betting and card-playing.'

'He don't care for what I say, and goes in a passion when I advise him.'

'But surely you needn't play yourself as you do, and so late! Only think what my mother __'

'Nonsense, Owen. That would be very fine for Rowland; but you needn't take to lecturing. You never were a pattern brother or son either.'

Owen felt his sister's words more keenly than she intended.

'You are right, Netta, but I hope to mend. I must go away to-morrow in order that I may begin. I mean to make some money this next voyage, and come home, and set up as a steady fellow and good son.'

'And marry Madame Duvet? Do you know she is regularly in love with you? and they say she has a large fortune in France.'

'There it may remain for me. But I wish you wouldn't play cards Sundays.'

'They all do it in Paris, Owen, and what's the harm? Besides, it was only Saturday night; and we never do play Sundays, as you will see to-day. By-the-bye, what's gone with that Methodistical, lack-a-daisical Gladys? Is mother as mad about her as ever?'

'She saved your mother's life when there was no one else to nurse her, and is an angel, if ever there was one!'

Netta opened her large black eyes very wide, and burst out laughing.

’*Ma foi*! is that the last? Well, indeed! I never should have suspected her of making an impression. But she’s deep enough for anything. How would father like that? Irish beggar against Abertewey! Come, Howel’s better than that any day.

‘Handsome is that handsome does,’ said Owen, getting very red. ’And Gladys has done well ever since she’s been at Glanyravon by every one belonging to us, not excepting yourself.’

‘Very much obliged to her, I am sure,’ said Netta, suddenly sitting up in bed, and forgetting her headache. ’She needn’t trouble herself about me. I fancy we are never likely to cross one another again, unless she chances to come a-begging to Abertewey, and then perhaps—’

’And then perhaps you would give her a penny and send her on to starve. Oh! Netta, Netta, how were you ever my mother’s daughter? But once for all, Netta, I will never hear one word spoken against Gladys. *I* at least am thankful that I still have a mother, and I owe it to her.’

Page 187

’Dear me! you needn’t be in such a huff directly, Owen. How was I to suppose you were in love with an Irish—I beg your pardon, with Miss Gladys O’Grady, County Kilkenny, Ireland? A very pretty name, to be sure! But if you don’t go away I shall never be dressed by the time they come from church. There, go like a good boy. I ’ont offend you any more.’

’I will go as soon as you have told me what you and Howel did in Paris. I seem to know nothing of your proceedings for ages past.’

’It was dreadfully dull there at first, and I thought I should have died of it. I quite longed to be at home again. Howel was a great deal out, and I was alone; but then he gave me a singing master, and a French and dancing mistress, and made me work as hard as if I was at school again. In about a month Captain Dancy and Mr Simpson came over, and it was much more pleasant. We used to go to the opera and the play nearly every night, and Captain Dancy introduced me to Madame Duvet, and she introduced me to a great many other ladies, English and French, and we had a good deal of fun. I went to balls and parties, and picture galleries, and the Champs Elysees, and all the fashionable places.’

‘But where did Howel meet with Mr Deep?’ interrupted Owen.

’Oh! he used to be with him from the first. They are very old friends, Howel says, and have known one another for years; he is a very fashionable man, an attorney by profession. Simpson says that the races couldn’t go on without him.’

‘I should think not,’ said Owen, smiling; ’at all events, Mr Simpson’s races would be at a stand still without him. Did you, did Howel play much abroad?’

’Yes, I learned from Madame Duvet? and I think Howel and Mr Deep and the other gentlemen used to play all day. You know they have nothing else to do in Paris. It would be very dull there without cards.’

‘Poor Netta! is that what you learned with your little bit of French?’

’I assure you, Owen, Monsieur Letellier and a dozen other Frenchmen said I had a beautiful accent, and that they would have thought I was born in Paris.’

Owen laughed heartily, and Netta was offended, and told him to go away. Just as he was in the act of obeying, Howel appeared.

’What! not up, Netta? How’s the head? Owen, there’s a letter for you. Llanfach post-mark, and from a lady? such a neat, pretty, ladylike hand! How sly you are to have lady correspondents, and not let us know who the charmer is!’

‘Let me see the direction,’ said Netta, trying to get the letter from her brother.

‘No, no,’ said Owen. ’I must keep my secret for the present when it is all settled you shall know.’

‘It makes you blush, however,’ laughed Howel.

’Is it Mary Jones, or Anne Jenkins, or Amelia Lewis, or Miss Richards, doctor, or Jemima Thomas—or—or—perhaps it is Gladys. Ha, ha! do you know, Howel, Owen’s last is mother’s Irish girl, Gladys?’

Page 188

‘Really?’ sneered Howel. ’My mother tells me that she ran away from Glanyravon, and report says with somebody we know of. But report was false as usual; and she turns up again as Miss Gwynne’s lady’s maid. Miss Gwynne is about as eccentric as the rest of the clique, and I wish her joy of her bargain. The girl is a beauty, certainly, but—’

‘Hush, Howel!’ cried Netta; ’Owen was nearly boxing my ears about her just now.’

‘Not exactly, Netta,’ said Owen, smothering rising anger, and looking very red; ’but I won’t hear a word said against her either by man or woman. I am going to read my letter now, and you are going to get up, so I won’t stop here any longer,’ and Owen left the room.

He went at once to his own bedroom, where he hastily broke open the letter Howel had given him, and read as follows:—

’GLANYRAVON PARK, *May*——.

’SIR,—I hope you will excuse my boldness in writing to you; but having heard that you are at Abertewey, I take the liberty of doing so, to tell you that your leaving home has made us all very unhappy. Oh! Mr Owen, if you would only go back and see your dear mother and honoured father, and learn how lonely they are without you, I think you would give up the sea, or at least remain with them for some time. If you would write to the master, or say a few gentle words to him, he would overlook your going to see your sister, I am almost sure; and, indeed, it breaks my heart to know that I was the cause of your going away so suddenly, after you had been so long at home, and so good to your parents.’Then, dear Mr Owen, you, who have been always so kind to me, a poor orphan wanderer, and beggar at your father’s gate, do, I pray you, add this one favour more to the many you have done me, and return to your parents, to take leave of them at least before you go away. Hoping you will forgive my writing to you on this subject, believe me to remain, Mr Owen, your obedient and grateful servant, GLADYS O’GRADY.’

When Owen had read this letter twice, he devoutly kissed it, and exclaimed,—

’This favour, Gladys! ay, and a thousand more, if you will only write to me, and let one little “*dear*” slip in unawares every time you ask one. I suppose I had better write to father to-day, and follow my letter to-morrow.’

Owen sat down at once, and wrote the following brief epistle:—

’MY DEAR FATHER,—If I have offended you in any way, I am very sorry. I didn’t mean to do so, and shall return to-morrow to ask pardon in person; but, remember, I am just as much in love with Gladys as ever, and don’t mean to curry favour about her. With best love to mother, I am, your affectionate son, OWEN.’

That day at luncheon Owen announced his intention of leaving Abertewey the following morning.

‘To see the fair lady who wrote that neat note?’ said Howel.

Page 189

‘Probably so,’ replied Owen.

‘Where are you going? We shall miss you dreadfully,’ said Madame Duvet, with an entreating glance.

‘I fear we must all leave on Tuesday or Wednesday,’ said Miss Simpson: ’at least if you still intend going to London with us, Madame Duvet. I have had a letter from home, positively refusing any further extension of leave, and my brother promises to return with me.’

‘We may as well all go together, then,’ said Captain Dancy, ’as I must be in town this week; and Deep goes up on Tuesday. When are you coming, Jenkins?’

’Only in time for Ascot. I cannot leave home until to-morrow week, and shall probably only remain the race week. Mrs Jenkins is not going up, and I shall not like to leave her long alone. Owen, you must come over and see her when I am away.’

’I think you had better stay at home, Howel. You will run less risk in taking care of Netta than you will at Ascot.’

‘Thanks for your advice, but I know my own business best.’

’I beg your pardon, Howel, I meant no offence. But although I am going home, I don’t know how long I may stay there. Perhaps shall be off to sea in a few days.’

‘I will use your own words,’ said Madame Duvet, ’and say better stay at home, and take care of—let me see—yourself, I suppose. You will run less risk than at sea.’

Owen laughed, and said he would not reply in Howel’s words, as he was not sure that he knew his own business best. But he did not add that he should like to take care of Madame Duvet as she wished him to do.

Neither did that afternoon and evening at Abertewey improve Owen’s opinion of its inmates. French novels and betting-books were their sermons, and he longed to take his poor little sister Netta away from the contamination of such society. But she came downstairs after luncheon was over, gay and bright in dress and person, and ready for any amount of frivolity. Her countenance clouded over, when she heard how soon the party was to be broken up; but when Howel assured her he should be only a week absent, and that he would take her to town in June, it cleared again.

Owen took his leave of Abertewey the following morning. Netta whispered ‘Give my love to mother,’ and had a very large tear in her black eye, as he walked away, the remembrance of which often haunted him in after days. Howel told him to come again whenever he liked, and accompanied him as far as the lodge on his homeward journey.

When he reached Glanyravon, he found his mother prepared to receive him with joyful love. His father came in soon after his return, and greeted him as he expected, with a very wrathful lecture, which he bore patiently, and to which he replied as follows:—

’Thank you, father; I am much obliged to you for all your abuse, but I don’t think I deserve it. As I am of age, and a few years past that period, you must let me have a will of my own.’

Page 190

‘I think you have always had one,’ roared the farmer.

’Yes, but not at home, father. I was obliged to run away to get it. But now I mean to stay at home if you will let me. Gladys is gone away, so I don’t stay on her account.’

‘I’m not seure of that. You never stayed on ours.’

’Well, I will now. But I can’t promise to give up Netta. I’ve had enough of Abertewey, and don’t mean to go there any more as far as I can see at present, and that’s all I can say about that matter. As for Gladys, I suppose I must get her consent and yours to marry her, and when I’ve got them you won’t object, I suppose?’

’I think you’d best go off to sea again. I don’t want any agreements made here.’

’I am not going to make any agreements, but as I am your eldest son, and the only one able and willing to stay at home and help you and mother, I do not see why you should wish to send me off to sea again, now that I really would be of use to you. I know that I have not been what I ought to have been to you hitherto, and my desire is to make up for the past as well as I can. So, father, you had better take me whilst I am in the humour, and see what you can make of me. Hit the nail while it is hot, and don’t discourage me at first starting, or I shall never get on. You know I’m very shy, and want some one to lend me a helping hand. If you’re not too hard upon me you may make something useful of me yet.’

Owen put his hand on his father’s shoulder, as he wound up his speech, in a coaxing, boyish way, that had always proved irresistible. The honest farmer pished and pshawed, and tried to get into a fresh passion, but meeting Owen’s saucy eyes, fairly broke down.

’I tell you what it is, Owen, you’re a regular scamp, and always were; but you know better than any of ’em to come over me, so—now, don’t be a fool, mother! Just because the good-for-nothing young scoundrel promises to stay at home you must begin to cry. Name o’ goodness hold your tongue, and don’t be coaxing and kissing me, and all that nonsense. He ‘out keep his promise a month, you shall see.’

’So she shall, father, and you and I will shake hands upon it, and I’ll be a good boy, and never be naughty any more.’

Father and son shook hands, and mother and son embraced, and future chapters will show whether Owen kept his word.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MAN OF THE WORLD.

Two or three months passed, and no particular event happened either at the park or farm, and summer came round again. Gladys was now established at the former, and Owen at the latter, but although they had seen one another frequently at church or at a distance, they had scarcely spoken since they parted on the evening of their remarkable meeting in the cow-house. Gladys scrupulously avoided Owen, and all his endeavours to fall in with her were fruitless.

Page 191

Colonel Vaughan was again at Glanyravon, and Freda was in buoyant spirits. So, indeed, were her neighbours, the Nugents,—Miss Nugent in particular. She was to be of age in a few days, and grand preparations were making to celebrate the event.

On the morning on which we take up our Glanyravon narrative Miss Nugent is inflicting herself upon Miss Gwynne, who longs to tell her to go away, but is too polite to do so.

‘You know, Freda,’ she says, ’I have been longing to be of age for yearth. Mamma ath been tho thrict, and kept me tho clothe, that I never dared to thpeak to a gentleman. Now I can do ath I like.’

‘And what will you have to say?’ asked Freda, bluntly. ’I never hear you venture upon many topics, when you have an opportunity.’

‘Oh, Freda! there are tho many thingth.’

‘Just tell me one or two.’

’Let me thee. Ballth and contherth, and the opera when I go to London, and—and—-muthic—’

‘Is that all?’

’You are tho tirethome, Freda; of courthe there are other thingth, but one cannot think of them all at onthe. Every one ithent tho clever ath you. Colonel Vaughan thaid I talked quite enough for any young lady. Gentlemen didn’t like ladieth who talked too much.’

‘Indeed! Where was your mamma when he said that?’

’Oh! the didn’t hear him. Do you know I think the liketh Colonel Vaughan, and ith jealouth of me. He thaid he would come down when I came of age, and tho he did, you see, Freda.’

‘To your mamma, or you?’

’To me quite alone. But you needn’t look tho croth and fierthe, Freda. I couldn’t help hith being polite to me, and paying me complimenth.’

‘What compliments?’

’Oh! I can’t tell you, he thaid so much about my lookth, that I am thure he made me bluth.’

‘Did you believe him?’

‘Yeth; and I think he liketh me better than mamma.’

’Do you think there is any one else in the world besides your mamma and yourself?’

‘Well, yeth, of courth.’

’Then why don’t you sometimes talk of some one else? Do you like Colonel Vaughan, for instance?’

’Oh! I never thaw any one in my life I like tho much, except Rowland Prothero. He ith younger. Mamma thaith—’

‘There again, Wilhelmina!’

‘I forgot—you are tho quick, Freda. Don’t you like Colonel Vaughan?’

‘Pretty well sometimes.’

’What a colour you have, Freda. You thouldn’t draw tho much. I with I had a tathte for drawing. Colonel Vaughan drawth tho well!’

‘What can his drawing well have to do with your drawing?’

’He would look over my drawing then ath he doth yourth, Freda. He thaith you are very clever. But you mutht be nearly five-and-twenty, Freda; and he thaith no woman ought ever to be more than twenty-one,’

’When did he favour you with that remark? I think I once heard him say twenty-five was the most charming age of all.’

Page 192

At this part of the conversation the subject of it entered the room, and whilst Freda's colour rose higher and higher, and she stooped more closely over her drawing, Miss Nugent got up and greeted him with great delight. Freda made up her mind not to speak, that she might listen to the conversation that ensued.

'Are all the preparations progressing, Miss Nugent? What are we to do to celebrate the great event?' asked the colonel.

'There ith to be an oxth roathed for the poor people, and tea on the lawn, and a ball in the evening, you know, colonel.'

'Oh, yes, I am looking forwards to that, and to the first dance. Remember you promised me.'

'Oh, yeth, I am thure of plenty of partnerth.'

'I should imagine so. We men must have very bad taste if we let you sit down. Did you walk here this morning?'

'No, I rode. The hortheth are taken round. I have been here a long time with Freda. It ith thuch a nice morning, ithn't it, Colonel Vaughan?'

'Delightful! What do you mean to do when you are your own mistress? I quite fancy how grand you will feel when you have struck the magic hour.'

'I darethay I thall be jutht the thame, unleth I get married.'

Freda glances up, and perceives a smile of amusement on Colonel Vaughan's lips, and the usual calm inanity on Miss Nugent's handsome features.

'That will depend on yourself, I am sure,' said the colonel.

Freda looks again, and sees the colonel's magnificent eyes fixed on the young lady, who returns his glance, and simpers out,—

'I darethay it will.'

Colonel Vaughan turns suddenly, and encounters Freda's glance.

'How does the drawing get on Freda? Capitally! What a sky! quite artistic.'

This is said whilst looking over Freda's shoulder, but she does not respond to the remark.

'I wath jutht thaying I with I could draw. It mutht be thuth a nithe amuthement.'

’Very. How is Lady Mary, to-day? I am ashamed to say I forgot to ask for her.’

’Very well, thank you. The thaid you promithed to come over and help to arrange the decorationth. I hope you will.’

’Thank you, yes. Perhaps Miss Gwynne will ride over with me to-morrow; will you, Freda?’

‘I am engaged to-morrow,’ said Freda shortly.

‘You will come at any rate, if Freda won’t?’ said Miss Nugent; ’the alwayth thayth the ith engaged when we athk her. Now, don’t be engaged on Thurthday. I muth go now; will you be tho kind ath to ring for the hortheth, Colonel Vaughan?’

The horses were ordered, and the colonel assisted the young heiress to mount. She looked remarkably well on horseback, and even Freda was obliged to allow that she and her grey mare would have made a fine equestrian statue. She saw Colonel Vaughan look at her, and even watch her down the drive. When he returned to the drawing-room, he said,—

Page 193

’What is the matter, Miss Freda? Have the domestic deities been adverse this morning? I am afraid you are very—cross,’

‘Thank you, Colonel Vaughan. I am not at all—cross.’

‘Have I had the misfortune to offend you?’

’You? by no means. But I do not wish to assist in any of the Nugent decorations. I am not so fond of the family as you may imagine; Lady Mary and Miss Nugent are less than indifferent to me. Lady Mary is a mere manoeuvrer, that no straightforward person could like; and Miss Nugent is a mere handsome wax figure, with such clever machinery inside, that she can literally say the words, “mamma thaith.” I have heard of a doll who could say “mamma,” but she is still cleverer.’

’Colonel Vaughan bit his lips, knit his forehead, but smiled. ’You are severe upon your neighbours, Freda.’

’Do you admire them, then? do you think Miss Nugent altogether charming? or will she be perfect in your eyes the day after to-morrow?’

’If perfection consists in being a beauty and an heiress, I need not go away from Glanyravon to seek one, Freda.’

’Do you stereotype your compliments? I hear that you pay them wherever you go, and I hate compliments, particularly from people whose good opinion I value. Besides, I am neither a beauty nor an heiress, and to be complimented in almost the same words as Miss Nugent is too contemptible.’

‘You do not suppose that I class you together, Freda?’

’I am thankful to say that you cannot do that, Colonel Vaughan, at least if I know myself at all; but, after all, I may be infinitely her inferior.’

Freda got up from her drawing with a very flushed face. She knew that she had said more than she meant to say, and that Colonel Vaughan was scrutinising her with his calm, collected mind and penetrating eyes.

‘I am going out now, and you promised to ride with papa, I think,’ she said abruptly.

‘But you must not go until you have told me how I have displeased you,’ said Colonel Vaughan, rising and detaining her. He had such a power over her that he always wormed her thoughts out of her.

’I did not like to hear you saying what you did not mean, to Miss Nugent,’ said Freda, as if she were obliged to make a confession; ’and I think it beneath a man like you to pay frivolous compliments to a girl you must despise.’

’Oh, is that all! I make a point of complimenting handsome girls, *pour passer le temps*; it is the only way of getting on with half of them. You must forgive me this once.’

Freda looked at him, and even he, clever as he was, could not tell whether her glance expressed pity, contempt, or love. She turned away, and left the room without speaking; he made another movement to detain her, but she was gone; his thoughts were as follows:—

Page 194

’Charming girl! yes, she is charming: of a truthful, noble, trusting nature; still too *prononcee* for a woman. I scarcely think I love, much as I must admire that sort of girl; and as a wife, I should be afraid of her. Yet she provokes me, interests me. She is jealous of those Nugents, and if she doesn’t take care, they will cut her out, mother and daughter, with their manoeuvres and wax; and she will be heiress of Glanyravon no longer. Better the waxen heiress, Miss Nugent, with thirty thousand pounds in possession in some thirty-six hours, than the iron heiress, Miss Gwynne, with Glanyravon *in futuro*.

’Moreover, the one may be moulded into any shape one pleases—the other must have her own opinion, and her own way, unless a man beat her into subjection. Certainly, few people were ever more fortunately, or perplexingly placed, than I am just now.

’Between two young women, handsome, rich, of good family; if I mistake not, in love with me, and to be had for the asking. But if I married Freda, Mr Gwynne would marry Lady Nugent directly; and then one could tell what would become of the property. If, on the other hand, I were to marry Miss Nugent, I should incur the utmost contempt of which Miss Gwynne is capable, and should not wholly esteem myself. But why am I thinking of marrying at all? Because I am forty years old, and found a grey hair in my whiskers yesterday; because I am tired of an unsettled life, and should like to clear off the old place, and end my days there; and because, after all, a married man has a better position than a single one. If that girl Gladys were in the place of either heiress, I would not hesitate a moment. I declare she would grace a coronet; no wonder all the young men round are in love with her. And yet, meet her when I will, I can scarcely get more than ‘yes,’ and ‘no,’ out of her.

’It is utterly impossible she can be what she seems, or is supposed to be. I never saw more thoroughly aristocratic beauty in our most aristocratic circles. Miss Nugent is as handsome as a woman can well be, in form and feature; but her eyes are like two frozen pools, whereas this Gladys, are literally two deep blue lakes with stars shining into them, or out of them, or something or other that a poet would describe better than I do. Well, what a fool I am! “A dream of fair women,” in my fortieth year, just as I dreamt of them in my sixteenth. The Fates must decide for me, only I wish they would clear up the mystery that hangs over that girl, and give her Miss Nugent’s thirty thousand pounds.’

Such were the thoughts that rushed through Colonel Vaughan’s mind, as he sat, apparently looking at Freda’s drawing in the place that she had vacated. We have unveiled a portion of his mind, because he is too good a tactician to unveil it himself. It is needless to say that this fascinating man, who has that nameless power which some men possess of making all women love him, has himself no heart to

Page 195

bestow on any one. Beyond the gratification of the moment, he is totally indifferent to all the consequences of his powers. He is not a bad man, he would not do anything that the world—his world, at least—would consider dishonourable; but as to reflecting upon the cruelty of inflicting wounds, never to be healed, upon the hearts of young ladies—-why, he would as soon reflect upon the wounds he gave an enemy in the battle-field. He considers Cupid as fair game as Mars, and thinks that if women will be weak, and if he is irresistible, it is no fault of his, but rather their and his misfortune.

Young ladies! the vulgar saying that a woman should never give her heart to a man until she is asked for it, is, like many vulgar sayings, a good one. Colonel Vaughan is the type of a class amongst which all are liable to be thrown; and although men of his talent, knowledge of the world, and apparent sincerity are rare, you may each of you meet with one such. If you do, beware of falling in love with him until he plainly tells you that he is in love with you, and asks if you are willing to marry him.

Colonel Vaughan leaves the drawing-room in search of Mr Gwynne, humming a little Scotch air, the *refrain* of which is ’and troth I’ll wed ye a,’ a thing he has often wished he could actually do.

He finds Mr Gwynne in his library, and reminds him of the promised ride. The horses are ordered, and they are soon trotting down the drive. As if by mutual consent, they take the turn that leads to Pentre, Lady Mary Nugent’s place. It is about a mile from Glanyravon, and beautifully situated on a hill that commands a fine prospect of dale, wood, and river.

The handsome mother and daughter are at home, and hail the arrivals with great glee. As Lady Mary is not at all certain that Colonel Vaughan’s attentions are not exclusively meant for her, she divides her civilities with a charming tact between the two gentlemen, and looks so captivating whilst she does so, that the colonel wishes that her statue-like daughter had a little of her animation.

Everything that art and taste can devise is collected to adorn the ladies and their abode, and if nature is lacking within doors, she is profuse in her gifts without.

There is nothing worth recording in the conversation; if Colonel Vaughan had thought it over afterwards, he would probably have laughed at the platitudes he had uttered, and wondered why people paid morning visits. The coming of age was a grand topic, and the colonel promised to go again the following day, and ‘help in the decorations.’

When the gentlemen took their leave, Mr Gwynne proposed a ride through his plantations, which he was improving and enlarging. They went accordingly. On their way they stopped at a small farm to inquire for one of Mr Gwynne’s tenants, who was

dangerously ill. Mr Gwynne dismounted, and as he entered the house, Gladys came out; she curtseyed as she passed Colonel Vaughan, who said,—

Page 196

’How is the invalid, Gladys? I take it for granted you have been to see him.’

‘Yes, sir, Miss Gwynne sent me with some jelly. He is better, I hope?’

‘And are you going home now?’

‘Yes, sir.’

’Stay one moment; will you give the poor man this half-crown when you see him again?’

Gladys approached, and took the half-crown, but with it there was half-a-sovereign.

‘The rest is for yourself, to do what you like with,’ added the colonel, in a low voice.

‘Thank you, sir, but I never take money,’ said Gladys, leaving the gold in his hand, ‘I do not need it.’

‘Give it to the poor, then,’ said the colonel, letting it drop, and looking annoyed.

’Certainly, sir, if you wish it; I will tell Miss Gwynne, and she will know to whom to give it.’

‘By no means—I mean it for you.’

‘Sir, you will excuse me, I would rather not,’ said Gladys, curtseying again, and hastening on.

Colonel Vaughan called to a boy who was near, and told him to pick up the money and give it to him.

‘How often does that young lady come here?’ he asked.

‘Almost every day, sir,’ was the reply.

‘At what time?’

‘In the afternoon, sir, from three to five, or thereabouts.’

‘Goes back in time to help Miss Gwynne dress for dinner,’ thought the colonel; ‘what a lovely face it is! And what grace of movement.’

He watched Gladys cross the farm-yard, and disappear in the plantations, through which there was a private path to the house.

Mr Gwynne and he passed her again as they rode on, and she curtseyed once more, Mr Gwynne nodding to her kindly as she looked at him.

‘Who *is* that girl, Mr Gwynne?’

’Oh! my daughter’s maid, I believe. A very pretty, modest young woman, and all that sort of thing. Freda is very fond of her.’

They struck into another path, and Colonel Vaughan saw no more of Gladys that day, though he peeped into various stray corners of the house in the hope of doing so. Moreover, he found Freda captious and cross, and particularly annoyed at his and her father’s visit to Pentre. He punished her by playing chess with her father nearly all the evening, and leaving her to a variety of reflections that were anything but satisfactory to her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TEMPTER.

’I particularly wish you to go, Gladys, and there will be plenty of time. He was worse when I saw him yesterday, and I promised to send you to-day to read to him, and take him some wine. I shall not want you till five, and my dress is quite ready. They dine at half-past six, and the evening party are invited for nine, I believe.’

This was said by Miss Gwynne to Gladys, at about half-past two o’clock, on the day of Miss Nugent’s festivities.

‘Very well, ma’am,’ said Gladys, ’I will make as much haste as possible.’

Page 197

‘Do you know where Colonel Vaughan is, Gladys?’ asked Miss Gwynne.

’I heard some one say, ma’am, that he and Mr Gwynne had walked to Pentre, to see the dinner on the lawn.’

’Oh! By the way, would you have liked to have gone to see these said diversions? If so, I can send some one else with the wine.’

‘Oh no, thank you, ma’am. I would much rather walk to see poor Lloyd.’

‘Then you had better make haste.’

Gladys was soon on her way, through the wood, to the farm mentioned in the last chapter. She thoroughly enjoyed her walk on that lovely July day, and thought she had never heard the birds sing so sweetly before.

In truth, Gladys had not been so happy since her sorrows as she was now. She felt independent, and placed in a position where she knew her exact duties. She devoted herself and her time wholly to Miss Gwynne, and was repaid, not only by regular wages, but by kindness, and even affection from her mistress.

There was increased colour on her cheek, brightness in her eyes, mirth in her smile, elasticity in her step, and life in her whole being as she entered the cottage whither she was sent.

She found her patient better, and having given him some wine, read to him, and helped his wife to make his bed. She was preparing to leave the farm, when Owen made his appearance. He came, ostensibly to see the sick man, but prefaced his visit to him by shaking hands with Gladys, and talking to her.

When she left the house, he followed her into the yard.

’I have caught you at last, Gladys. You always run away from me as if I were a monster.’

‘No, Mr Owen, you are mistaken.’

‘Then why don’t you come and see us oftener?’

’Because I have a great deal to do, sir; and I do not think Mr Prothero wishes to see me.’

’You thrive upon your absence, Gladys. I never saw any one look so much better.’

’How is the dear mistress, Mr Owen? and your father? and Lion? and the cows? and—-and—’

’Not so fast, Gladys. Come and see. They are all quite well. And the Alderney is my particular charge.’

Gladys blushed and smiled.

’You see I came home because you told me, and am as steady as old Time. Don’t I look so? I am going to shave off my beard—do you approve?’

‘No,’ said Gladys, laughing. She scarcely knew why she felt more at ease with Owen in her present than in her past position.

’Then I won’t do it. Did you hear that I was going to be married to Miss Richards, Dr Richards’ daughter?’

‘Yes, sir. I was told so.’

Why did Gladys blush so very much more than before, and say the ‘sir’ so stiffly?

’Then you may deny it, for it is not true. I have not changed, Gladys, since—do you remember the Alderney?’

Gladys’ smile said that she did.

’But I am on parole, both to you and my father. I am quite ready to break it with your leave.’

Page 198

’I must go, Mr Owen—Miss Gwynne will be waiting for me. Will you give my duty to the dear mistress?’

’I will take your love to her, Gladys, and keep half of it. May I walk with you?’

‘If you please not, Mr Owen. I would rather not.’

‘Are you happy? just tell me this.’

’Very—very. Miss Gwynne is so good. I can only be happy. Good-bye, Mr Owen.’

‘Good-bye, dear Gladys,’ said Owen, pressing her trembling hand that she held out to him, and opening the farm-yard gate for her to go out.

As Gladys hurried on with a light heart and light step, she little thought that those kind eyes which had looked so lovingly at her were clouded with the mists of jealousy in less than five minutes after she had left the farm. She could not guess that the boy who had picked up the half sovereign for Colonel Vaughan would give Owen the history of the same, and would tell him that Gladys had dropped it, but that he was pretty sure she had more money in her hand.

Unconscious of anything but sunshine above and within, she hastened on, thinking of Owen, in spite of her resolution not to think of him—a resolution she was making and breaking from morning till night. Her thoughts were turned into another channel, however, by the appearance of Colonel Vaughan, who suddenly came upon her from one of the many cross-paths in the wood.

She curtseyed slightly, and was about to pass him, but he turned and walked with her.

‘Gladys,’ he began, ’I wish to know why you refused the money I offered you yesterday.’

‘Because, sir, I did not think it right to take it,’ answered Gladys, promptly.

‘Why! what harm could there have been?’

Gladys quickened her steps, but did not answer.

’Not so fast, Gladys. I have you at last, in spite of yourself. You have avoided me hitherto, both when you were at Prothero’s and here, and purposely misunderstood me—now you must walk through the wood with me, and at my pace, for I must speak to you.’

‘Sir, Miss Gwynne expects me early,’ said Gladys, with wonderful dignity of manner, which was not lost upon the colonel—’*she* is my mistress, and I must obey her. I shall be obliged by your letting me go on.’

’We will both go on, but leisurely and together. I have much to say to you, and I may not have another opportunity.’

Gladys tried to pass on, but finding that Colonel Vaughan’s hand was on her arm, and that he was resolved to detain her, she endeavoured to summon up all her resolution and sense, and to answer his questions, whatever they might be, according to what she might think right.

‘You will be so good as to account to my mistress for this delay, sir,’ she said. ‘I am no longer a free agent.’

‘I shall do no such thing; neither will you, I hope?’

‘I most certainly shall, if necessary.’

‘Never mind; I must know, at all risks, who and what you are.’

Page 199

’I am Irish on my father’s side, and Welsh on my mother’s; my name is O’Grady.’

‘But you were not born in the position you now occupy?’

’My father was a corporal in the Welsh Fusiliers; I was brought up to work for my bread.’

‘And your mother?’

‘Was the daughter, I believe, of a clergyman.’

‘I was sure of that—and she educated you?’

‘She taught me what she herself knew.’

‘What brought you into Wales?’

‘Starvation.’

‘How did you get to Mr Prothero’s?’

‘I was a beggar and they took me in out of charity.’

‘Why did you leave them and come here?’

‘Because they wished it.’

‘Say because Owen Prothero was in love with you.’

No answer.

‘Do you love that rough sailor?’

No answer.

‘I must know all, Gladys. I must and will.’

’Colonel Vaughan, I shall only answer such questions as you, as a gentleman, may *think* you have a right to ask a friendless girl, whom you forcibly detain. You *know* you have no right to ask this.’

Colonel Vaughan looked at the usually shy girl, and saw a spirit and resolution in her bearing that he had not believed were in her.

’I beg your pardon, Gladys, I was wrong. Can you endure the state of dependence you are now in?’

‘I consider myself independent I work for my bread, and am paid for it.’

‘But you might be independent without working.’

‘Impossible, unless beggary is independence.’

’Quite possible; I am sure you must feel your dependence on such an imperious mistress as you now have.’

’My present mistress, sir, Miss Gwynne, is far too noble to let any one feel dependent, even those who are, like myself, wholly her servants.’

‘You like Miss Gwynne?’

‘I respect and love her. Perhaps you will now let me go to her.’

‘Not yet. This independence. I could make you independent.’

‘You! How? Impossible!’

‘I love you, Gladys.’

’Me! This to me! Is it to insult me that you have detained me? Let me go, sir—I insist—and my mistress! You, Colonel Vaughan, who have been paying her such attentions as no man has a right to pay a lady unless he loves her, to dare to say this to me, and I a servant in her house. You, sharing her father’s hospitality, to deceive her, and insult me. What have I done to encourage you to speak thus to me?’

Gladys stood still amidst the lights and shadows of the sun-crowned trees, and looked the colonel steadily in the face. That look, voice, manner, completed the conquest that had been maturing for weeks and months. The flushed cheek, the sparkling eyes, the tall, slight, erect figure, the voice, deportment—all were those of a lady in mind as well as person.

’Gladys, hear me calmly. I do not wish to insult you; I have never meant anything by my attentions to Miss Gwynne.’

Page 200

‘Then you are a—’

Gladys checked herself.

’A villain, you would say. Not at all. I merely pay Miss Gwynne the civilities due to her. I am not obliged to fall in love with every young lady in whose father’s house I am visiting. But I admired you the first moment I saw you; and now, at this moment, I vow that I love you as I never loved in my life before.’

They stood face to face, looking at each other. Gladys’ eyes drooped before the gaze of the colonel.

‘This to me!’ she exclaimed, ’and yet you say you do not insult me! Let me go, sir, I insist!’

She tried to hasten on, but the strong hand was again on her arm.

’I do not insult you, Gladys, I honour and respect you. If you will only say you love me, I will—yes, I will—I think, at least—I will marry you privately, and take you abroad at once. I vow this is more than I ever said to any woman in my life before.’

’And you will repent having said it to me before the night is out, Colonel Vaughan, and you do not mean it. Think of who I am; think of Miss Gwynne; think of yourself. Oh! this is cruel, cruel jesting to all!’

‘I was never more serious in my life.’

As Colonel Vaughan said this, he saw nothing, thought of nothing, but the peculiar beauty of the creature who stood, flushed and agitated, at his side. He forgot himself and his purposes, in his temporary blind admiration.

‘Now, Gladys, I await your answer,’ he said, not doubting what that answer would be.

’I have no answer to give, sir, because I know that, even if you now think yourself in earnest, you will be no longer so to-night.’

’Before we leave this wood, girl, I will and must have an answer, and beware how you irritate me.’

He seized her hand as he spoke, and held it tight.

’You will release me before I answer you, sir; I have gone through too many dangers and temptations to be frightened into speech.’

He released her hand, but kept his eyes fixed on her face. She did not quail, though she felt her heart beat violently.

’If you are serious, sir, I ought, I suppose, to be grateful for so strange an honour; but I do not believe you are so, and my answer is, that a servant such as I, can have nothing to say to a gentleman such as you.’

’A servant! You will be no longer a servant. You are not one at this moment.’

Again he seized her hand. She was frightened, but did not loose her self-command.

’Sir, you had now better let me return home. Miss Gwynne will wonder what has become of me. It is time that she should be ready—that you, sir, should be ready. What will she think and say?’

’I care not; nothing shall turn me from my purpose. You shall not leave this wood until you promise.’

’Then I shall never leave it, sir; and if you persist in detaining me, I will make known to every one, how a gentleman can demean himself to a poor, unprotected girl, who has no friend near her but her God. To Him I appeal for help in this hour, when you, sir, a gentleman and a Christian, so far forget yourself as to insult and persecute me.’

Page 201

As Gladys spoke, she lifted her eyes solemnly to heaven—both her hands were held by Colonel Vaughan.

As he gazed at her, he suddenly relaxed his hold, saying, ’You are a wonderful girl! I do not persecute you, but I will not give you up.’

No sooner did Gladys feel the grasp loosen, than she made a sudden bound, almost a leap, onwards, and ran with incredible swiftness through the path.

Colonel Vaughan pursued her, but soon found that she ran more swiftly than he did. However, he would not give up the chase, and in spite of the hot sun, ran on, in somewhat undignified haste and anger.

Every one knows that winding paths in plantations are not always perfectly smooth. So found our gallant colonel to his cost.

With his eyes fixed on the quickly vanishing form of Gladys, how was he to see the gnarled root of an oak, that sprung up through the ground, directly in his path? His foot caught in it, and he fell with considerable violence upon his face. He got up again as quickly as he could, cursing his carelessness and folly.

He felt that he had knocked his somewhat prominent nose rather severely, and to his great dismay, found that it was bleeding copiously.

All further pursuit was out of the question. He must staunch the blood of the much-offending member, and being rather giddy for the moment, sat down to do so.

It is said that any sudden and violent blow sobers a drunkard; so did this unforeseen fall sober the mental intoxication of the colonel. As his nose bled, so did his intellect clear. Bleeding, on the old system, was never more successful.

This was truly a descent, if not from the sublime, at least from the heroic, to the ridiculous. Panting with heat, bleeding, apostrophising, the lover came to his senses.

Partly aloud, at intervals, partly muttered between his teeth, he gave forth the following sentences; and when he became calm he thought the subsequent thoughts, which, although he did not rail them forth against the rooks and smaller birds, we will venture to repeat, for the further elucidating the mystery of his mind.

’Fool to let go her arm! No; fool to take it at all! What a girl! I never saw such—pho! How it bleeds! Will it never stop! They’ll think there’s been a murder here. What could possess me to run after her? A rustic coquette! Rustic! No; a most courtly one. She had me fairly in her power. But she has too much sense to tell. ’Pon my word, I never loved any one so much before. Disgusting! All over my cravat. If I were to meet any one? If Freda were to see me, what would she think or say? And I actually talked of

marriage. Let me see; what did I say? But nobody could believe her. Pshaw! what a fool I have been. Suppose she had taken me at my word, and accepted me, I wonder how I could have got out of it! There is such a power in her eyes, that as long as I am looking at them

Page 202

she could make me do anything. I wish she was the heiress, and not Miss Nugent. Yes; and I shall be too late for dinner. What will they think? I vow, I am so giddy I can scarcely walk; and this horrible bleeding won't stop. I must stuff this bunch of keys down my back, and see what that will do. Well! if that isn't enough to cool any one's courage, together with this disgusting—I must go on, and get into my room as quickly as possible. I vow, it is just six o'clock. If she tells Freda! But she won't do that—no woman ever does. She'll think it over, and manage to let me see her again—and then—and then—I shall not be able to resist her eyes, and she shall not be able to resist mine. The witch! A mere servant to do what no woman ever has done, or ever would do—positively refuse me. But she knows her power, I daresay. There it is bleeding again, and I thought I had stopped it. I am just at home though, and if I go round by the stables no one can make any remarks. Confound this—here's the coachman in full hue and cry after me. Yes, I will dress directly. Thomas! tell your master not to wait. The heat has made my nose bleed, and detained me. If he and Miss Gwynne will go on, you can drive back for me, and I shall be in time for the ball. Beg them to make my excuses to Lady Mary Nugent, and explain how it is. You are quite right. It has bled tremendously; but I shall stop it as soon as I get to my room.'

It need not be said that the concluding portion of Colonel Vaughan's speech was addressed to a servant, who came in search of him with the intelligence that the carriage was waiting, and his master ready. He managed to get to his room, however, unperceived, where we will leave him to dress and recover himself at his leisure.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RIVALS.

We will now return to Miss Gwynne, who pursued her usual avocations until about five o'clock, and then began to wonder what detained Gladys. However, as she was quite independent of maids in her toilette, she went to her room and began to dress herself at the usual hour. She found all her attire already spread upon the bed, as if Gladys anticipated being late; nothing was wanting, and she had nothing to do but to dress.

As it happened, however, she was particularly anxious to look her best that evening; why, she would not even ask herself; but she, who was usually careless of what she wore, provided she were properly attired, began to fidget over wreaths and ornaments as if she were going to her first ball.

'Miss Nugent will be all jewels,' she said, taking up a set of pearls that was on the dressing-table. 'At any rate, I will not be like her. And, of course, she will wear white, so

I shall change my mind and won't wear white. Where is Gladys? The only evening I ever really wanted her, she is out of the way.'

Miss Gwynne rang her bell violently, and the housemaid answered it.

Page 203

‘Send Gladys. Surely she is come back.’

’No, ma’am. I can’t think where she is. I went a little way to look for her, but she is not in sight. Can I do anything, ma’am?’

‘No, thank you; but send Gladys as soon as she comes. Provoking,’ continued Miss Gwynne, turning out two or three shelves of a large wardrobe. ’Where are the trimmings of that blue dress? He said I looked best in blue, and so, I think, I do. That wreath of blue forget-me-nots and lilies of the valley, where in the world is it? But forget-me-nots are so ridiculously sentimental; and the turquoise ornaments? I suppose I must wear the bracelets and locket. Oh! here they are; and here are the flowers and trimmings in a box, in the neatest possible order.’

Miss Gwynne began to arrange her hair.

’I declare I have forgotten how to do anything since Gladys has been with me. I cannot put up this braid neatly. I must wait, and it is nearly six o’clock, and dinner at half-past. What does it matter how I look? I daresay Miss Nugent will look twenty times as well, and her mother will dress her up to perfection. But he *cannot* care for such a girl as that. It is impossible; and he always looks at me with such interest, and has such a kind manner, and says things that convey so much. But if he really cares for me, why does he not say so? He knows papa would consent, and—but he does not know that; I never—Ah! here she is at last! Come in! Where have you been, Gladys? It really is too provoking that you should have stayed so long, when you knew that I particularly wanted you to-day.’ Gladys enters the room pale and breathless, just as Miss Gwynne is endeavouring to fasten in the wreath of forget-me-nots and lilies. She does not turn round, and is at the moment too much engrossed with her own appearance to think of Gladys.

’Come quickly and finish my hair, and put in this wreath. We ought to be starting now.’

Gladys obeys without speaking, and steadying her nerves and fingers as best she may, begins to arrange a most elegant and becoming wreath round her young mistress’s head. Whilst she does this, and afterwards dresses her and fastens on the turquoise ornaments, she endeavours to collect her thoughts, and to summon courage for what she has resolved to do and say.

Gladys has long known Miss Gwynne’s secret; as she discovered that she did not care for Rowland, so she has found out that she cares over much for Colonel Vaughan. She now knows that he is not worthy of her, and that if he should ever ask her to marry him, it would be that he might gain possession of Clanyravon, and not of the warm, sincere heart of its mistress. Gladys feels sure that a man who could say such words as Colonel Vaughan said to her, whether meant seriously or not, could not be worthy of

Miss Gwynne; and she determines to open that young lady's eyes to the real state of his mind, even if she loses her favour for ever by so doing.

Page 204

‘I shall save her,’ thinks Gladys, ‘if I ruin my own happiness.’

When the dressing is completed, Freda stands before a cheval glass to see that all is right. Gladys has never before seen her examine every portion of her attire so minutely, or look so satisfied with the survey. In truth she never before saw her look so handsome, or so perfectly well dressed. The full, light, many-skirted blue dress, with its bouquets of forget-me-nots and lilies, its fringes and ribbons, suits so well the fine complexion of the very distinguished-looking girl who wears it—whilst the wreath slightly crowns the well-shaped head, and falls gracefully down the neck and back in becoming simplicity and elegance.

Poor Freda! She has more colour than usual, more animation in her eyes, and more anxiety at her heart. Were she to analyse her feelings, she would thoroughly despise herself for the envy, vanity, and distrust she would find in them, and think herself unworthy of the name of woman for allowing herself to study to gain the attentions of any man who might feel disposed to give them to another. But her pride is for a time swamped in her weakness; and the hitherto haughty and unsuspectible Miss Gwynne is no better than the most sentimental of school girls.

Whilst Gladys is putting the last pin into the dress, and Freda is still watching her own shadow, there is a knock at the door.

‘Make haste, Gladys. The carriage, I suppose. Come in,’ says Freda.

’Mr Gwynne wishes to know, ma’am, whether you have seen Colonel Vaughan, or whether he intends dressing at Pentre?’ asks the servant who opens the door.

’I have not seen him since the morning, and do not know what he means to do,’ is the reply. ’Did you see anything of him when you were out, Gladys?’ continues Miss Gwynne, after the servant has left the room.

As she makes the inquiry, she, for the first time catches the reflection of Gladys’ face in the glass, and is struck with its unusual pallor. She turns quickly and looks at the girl.

’What is the matter, Gladys? Something must have happened? It must have something to do with Colonel Vaughan. Did you see him? Speak.’

‘Yes, ma’am, I saw him in the wood.’

’And is that the reason you are looking so frightened? What has happened to him? Speak, I say, or I must ring the bell and send some one in search of him.’

With her usual impetuosity, Freda’s hand was on the bell. Gladys exclaimed quickly,—

’Do not ring, Miss Gwynne. I can tell you all I know. Nothing has happened to injure Colonel Vaughan, bodily at least’

‘What do you mean, girl?’ said Miss Gwynne, turning round again and facing Gladys.

Gladys stood before her mistress with clasped hands, heaving breast, quivering lips, and downcast eyes. She tried to summon courage and words, but neither would come. How could she crush the love and hopes of one so dear to her? her benefactress, her all? But it must be done.

Page 205

With one great effort she began, and in as few words as possible, without comment or gloss, related what had passed between her and Colonel Vaughan. She told all, as nearly as she could remember, in his own words, merely omitting what he said about Miss Gwynne.

As she spoke, she felt like a culprit before a judge, who, though conscious of his innocence, has not courage to meet the glance of him on whom his fate depends. But not on her own account had she that throbbing fear at her heart; she felt for her mistress alone.

That mistress stood erect, towering above the drooping girl, like a queen above a slave or suppliant. Red and pale by turns, with compressed lips and flashing eyes, she listened to the tale.

When it was finished, she, too, strove for words, but none came; so she laughed a short, sarcastic laugh, and moved back a few paces. At last,—

’Why do you tell me this ridiculous tale? Have you no better confidante for such absurd imaginations? You have dreamt it, Gladys. I do not believe you. Go!’

Gladys gave one penetrating, truthful look at her mistress, before which the defiant glance fell: but the rigid features alarmed her, and she would fain have remained, had not another. ’Go! I do not want you any longer!’ sent her at once from the room.

When Gladys was gone, Miss Gwynne sat down upon the nearest chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Another knock at the door.

‘Come in! What do you want?’ she exclaimed in a suppressed voice.

’My master says the carriage is ready, and he thinks you had better go, ma’am. Colonel Vaughan has just come in. The heat has made his nose bleed so violently that he cannot be ready for dinner, but will be at Pentre for the ball, ma’am, my master says.’

‘Very well; I shall be ready in a few moments.’

Freda rose from her chair, and went to her dressing-table. There was a bottle of eau-de-cologne on it. She poured out nearly half a wine-glassful, added water, and drank the dose. Then she dashed a quantity over her forehead; wetted her handkerchief with more, and having nearly exhausted the bottle, prepared to leave the room. Suddenly she stopped, exclaiming,—

’I cannot go! I feel as if I must faint; yet I must see the farce played out.’

A bitter smile, almost ghastly, passed over her face, as she muttered these words. She took up a splendid bouquet of greenhouse flowers that had been prepared for her, and were placed on the table, almost mechanically, and looking like one in a dream, left the room.

‘It is half-past six, Freda,’ said Mr Gwynne in the loudest tone of which his voice was capable, as he descended the stairs.

The servants remarked to one another how very ill Miss Gwynne was looking, but her father did not perceive it. He was talking of Colonel Vaughan.

’So provoking of Vaughan, to go and tire himself in the heat, and make his nose bleed, and all that sort of thing.’

Page 206

Freda did not answer. Her thoughts were running wild—here, there, and everywhere. One moment, she believed that Gladys had been romancing for some purpose of her own; the next, that all she said was true. Then she felt sure that Colonel Vaughan must really love Gladys, and must mean all that he said; and a cold shudder crept over her, as she became aware how much she loved him. Again, she knew that a man of his position could only be trifling with a girl in her's, and was ready to hate and despise one who could be so vile. As she thought and thought, she grew paler and paler—colder and colder; and when she entered Lady Mary Nugent's drawing-room, that lady said,—

'My dear Freda, what is the matter? You look so ill, and feel so cold.'

'Nothing but the heat. It always has this enervating effect on me,' was the answer.

The absence of Colonel Vaughan set the shrewd Lady Mary guessing as to the real cause of the sudden indisposition; she felt sure that something must have passed between him and Freda more exciting than usual to occasion such paleness.

At dinner, Freda was fortunate in being placed next Sir Hugh Pryse, who knew her too well, and was far too fond of her, to make any personal remarks.

Miss Nugent's uncle, Lord Nugent, was the master of the ceremonies for the evening. He had come, as Miss Nugent's guardian, to resign his office, and to be present at her attaining her majority. Freda had once met him before, and liked him. He was now particularly friendly in his manner to her, but when he spoke to her across one intermediate person, she could only answer him in monosyllables. Every one silently remarked her absence of mind and unusual frigidity.

When the dinner was over, of which Freda only remembered that she had had certain viands placed before her, and when the ladies were leaving the dining-room, Colonel Vaughan's voice was heard in the hall. Lady Mary told a servant to show him into the dining-room; and as Freda was crossing the hall, she saw him at the opposite end of it. She hurried into the drawing-room, but was keenly alive to what passed in the hall after she had done so. She heard him, with his usual courtly manner, apologise to Lady Mary Nugent for his non-appearance at the dinner-table, and attribute his accident to his having stood so long on her lawn, in the heat, watching the poor people at their dinner. He added that he was glad to have arrived in time to drink Miss Nugent's health, and proceeded to the dining-room.

Freda did her best to talk to the few, and very select, ladies, who had been honoured by an invitation to dinner; and felt intense relief when, one after another, all the evening-party arrived.

Dancing soon began, and Freda saw Colonel Vaughan and Miss Nugent together in a quadrille. Sir Hugh had asked her to dance with him, but she begged him to let her sit down that first dance, and promised him the next.

Page 207

Of course she watched the pair in whom she was most interested. She was obliged to confess that Miss Nugent was the handsomest, most elegant, and best dressed girl in the room; as she talked to Colonel Vaughan, she looked almost animated; and he, on his part, seemed as gay and perfectly at his ease, as if there had never been a Gladys in the world. They were, unquestionably a fine, aristocratic couple; danced well, walked well, and to all appearance were well pleased with one another. Lady Mary Nugent watched them quite as narrowly as Freda.

Sick at heart, Freda danced the next dance with Sir Hugh, and managed to avoid coming in contact with Colonel Vaughan, who had secured Lady Mary as his partner. Once or twice, however, Freda caught his keen, searching glance fixed upon her, and knew that he was trying to read her mind, as he had often done before.

It was useless for her to try to avoid him, as he came direct to her to ask her for the next dance. She longed to say that she would never dance with him again, but even she had tact enough to know that it would not do to refuse, for the sake of the effect such a refusal might have both on him and the world. All she could do, however, was to bow her consent, take his arm, and walk, pale, silent, and stately, to the top of a quadrille. They had met Sir Hugh and Miss Nugent, and Colonel Vaughan had secured them as *vis-a-vis*; for once his tact had failed him, he could not have managed worse.

Freda tried to answer his questions, but in vain; she could not be hypocrite enough to treat him as she was accustomed to do. In him there was no perceptible change; she once fancied she perceived an uneasy expression in his face, as he looked at her, but his manner was friendly, lively, fascinating as ever; he even asked her what was the matter, and said she looked ill. Her answer was contained in the few sarcastic words,—

‘The heat. I hear you have suffered from it also.’

Although Freda could not, herself, enter into the conversation she could observe the by-play between the colonel and Miss Nugent; the bashful, simpering smiles of the young lady, the flattering glances of the gentleman. She would not have believed, when she awoke that morning, that it was possible to endure so much real suffering as she was enduring, in the short space of one quadrille.

It was over at last, and Colonel Vaughan led her to a seat amongst some ladies. She said she would go to her father, when she saw that he was going to sit down by her side. He offered her his arm again, and took her to the drawing-room; here she found her father, somewhat apart from the rest of the company, talking to Lady Mary, or more properly being talked to by her. She sat down on a sofa near her father, and bowing statelily to Colonel Vaughan, said,—

‘I will not detain you. I shall remain here for the present.’

He made some passing observation to Mr Gwynne, and returned to the drawing-room, followed shortly after by Lady Mary.

Page 208

Sir Hugh came up and began talking to Freda; he was so kind and so natural even in his loudness, that Freda felt as if she would rather trust him with every secret of her heart, than the polished worldling who had just left her.

‘And yet, perhaps,’ she thought, ’Gladys has really deceived me, and he is innocent; still, better Gladys than that statue-like Miss Nugent.’

Freda thought the night would never end; she exerted herself to talk and dance, because every one came to ask what was the matter with her, and by the time they went to supper, she was as flushed as she had previously been pale. Lord Nugent was particularly attentive to her, and evidently admired her very much; bitterly she thought that she could gain, unsought, the civilities of one man, whilst she was but too conscious that the one she cared the most for in the world, was devoting himself almost exclusively to the Nugents. But he was unworthy of the heart of any right-minded woman, so she would tear him from hers, and again make her father her first care.

But those despicable Nugents had got possession of him also. He was seated next to Lady Mary at supper, her profile and diamonds were directed at him, and she looked almost as young, and quite as handsome as her daughter. Alas! and again alas! poor Freda!

However, all things come to an end, and an heiress’s twenty-first birthday amongst them. Miss Nugent’s did not finish till three o’clock in the morning, at which hour, Mr and Miss Gwynne and Colonel Vaughan were driving home from the festivities at Pentre. The gentlemen were keeping up a rather lively conversation on the events of the evening, and the lady was sustaining a very strong conflict with her own pride.

As the carriage rolled past a certain large oak tree in the Park, Freda suddenly remembered Rowland Prothero. About a twelvemonth ago she had left him beneath that oak, humbled and deeply pained, doubtless, by her haughty words. Now she was similarly pained and humbled, and she was, for the first time, aware of the shock her proud refusal of his love must have been to him. Had she not been weak enough to yield her heart unasked, and was it not almost thrown back into her own bosom? She, who had believed herself above the silly romance of her sex, to have sunk below even Miss Nugent. But she would rouse herself from such a mania, and show Colonel Vaughan how thoroughly she despised him.

She did rouse herself, and the first words she heard were,—

‘Yes, certainly, very handsome, mother and daughter,’ from Colonel Vaughan’s lips.

‘And which is to be the happy object of your notice, Colonel Vaughan?’ she asked, suddenly joining in the conversation. ’I heard grand discussions on the subject on all sides.’

‘Really,’ replied the colonel, somewhat surprised by the sudden question, ‘I did not know I was of so much importance.’

‘What! you, about whom every one is speculating.’

Page 209

’Freda, my dear, I am so glad you are able to speak. I thought you so—ill, dull, unlike yourself, and all that sort of thing.’

’Thanks, papa, I was thoroughly overpowered by the heat; but this delightful breeze has refreshed me. I hope, Colonel Vaughan, you also have got over your weakness. I wonder you ever returned alive from India, if such a day as this was sufficient to upset you.’

Further sarcasm was cut short by their reaching the house, for which Freda was very thankful, at a later period, feeling that she lowered her dignity by allowing herself to allude, however covertly, to Gladys or Miss Nugent. But she was scarcely herself when she did so.

Colonel Vaughan was going to help her out of the carriage, but she passed quickly up the steps without touching his arm.

He had felt her lash, and now fully understood that she knew of his meeting with Gladys, and guessed that he had designs upon Miss Nugent or her fortune. For once in his life he felt somewhat abashed as he met the eye of the pale, haughty girl, whom he really admired twenty times as much as Miss Nugent, or any other young lady of his then devotees. And he admired her still more, as she kissed her father’s cheek, nodded a haughty ‘good-night’ to himself, and went upstairs to her room in the haste of strong excitement.

As soon as she was gone, Colonel Vaughan told Mr Gwynne that he had promised Sir Hugh Pryse to go and spend a week with him, and that he should leave Glanyravon for that purpose on the morrow.

‘You will come back again, of course?’ said Mr Gwynne.

’Oh yes, certainly! but I have only ten days more leave, and then I must bid you all good-bye again.’

’I am so sorry, and so will be Freda when she hears it. What could have been the matter with Freda to-night, I never saw her so odd? But I suppose it was the heat, and all that sort of thing; good-night. I am tired to death, though it was a charming party, certainly a charming party.’

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LADY IN HER OWN RIGHT.

When Freda reached her room, Gladys was awaiting her there.

’Why did you not go to bed, Gladys? you know I dislike your sitting up so late.’

’I could not go to bed, ma’am, feeling that I have offended you, without begging your pardon for having done so.’

‘Then all you said was an invention.’

’I said nothing but the truth, ma’am, but perhaps offended you in saying it to you, merely to excuse myself. I am very sorry.’

There were traces of tears on Gladys’ face and she looked pale and agitated.

’Gladys, you can go to bed, I have nothing to forgive. If you tell me the truth, I am very sorry for it, and that such words should have been said to you. Of course you did not believe them?’

‘No, ma’am, I certainly did not.’

Miss Gwynne was fidgeting with her dress, and Gladys went to assist her, uncalled for. When it was unfastened, Miss Gwynne again said, ’Thank you, that will do; I wish you to go to bed; good-night,’ and Gladys again obeyed in sorrow.

Page 210

Miss Gwynne had little sleep that night, and the next morning she felt very ill. Much as she longed to lie in bed, however, and to avoid meeting Colonel Vaughan again, she got up when Gladys called her, and was, as usual, first downstairs. Much to her satisfaction, her father appeared next, and the colonel soon afterwards. She exerted herself to talk and laugh as usual, and the only difference in her manner to Colonel Vaughan was, that instead of shaking hands with him, as was her custom every morning, she busied herself with the cups and saucers when he approached, and simply said good morning. Her father remarked that she was looking ill, and she said she had one of her old headaches.

When breakfast was over, she expressed her intention of visiting the school, and said that, as Colonel Vaughan was going to Sir Hugh's, she probably should not see him again before he left. She wished him good morning and a pleasant visit, stiffly, but courteously; felt compelled to shake hands with him, and went her way with a proud but aching heart. He also went his, wondering in his very selfish heart whether Freda really cared for him after all, and scheming to see Gladys, whose utter carelessness of him had roused his vanity.

When he had left Glanyravon, with a promise to Mr Gwynne of returning, Freda no longer strove to appear what she was not, and went to bed really ill. She was subject to occasional severe nervous headaches, and was obliged to be very quiet when so attacked, in order to prevent congestion of the brain, which the doctors had once threatened her with. Her father, therefore, insisted on her keeping her room until she was quite well, which she was only too thankful to do, and so great were her actual sufferings from her head, that they distracted her mind from brooding over her real or imaginary miseries.

Gladys waited on her quietly and patiently for about a week, at the end of which time she began to feel better. Her gratitude to Gladys for the perfectly unobtrusive nature of her attention was so great that she felt as if she could never do enough for her, and she frequently assured her that she knew she had been unjust towards her in accusing her of falsehood. She never, however, again mentioned Colonel Vaughan's name to her.

Mr Gwynne paid daily visits to his daughter's sick-room. In spite of her head, she could not help noticing something peculiar in his manner. He did not talk, because conversation was forbidden during these attacks, but there was an increased briskness in his eyes and step as he approached her, and, she fancied, more of anxious care in his tone when he spoke. She was sure he had something to communicate.

'Gladys, what makes you so calm and patient?' she suddenly asked, when she was getting better, and trying to reason herself out of her fancy for Colonel Vaughan.

'Perhaps, ma'am, trouble has made me calm, and I pray to be made patient; but I have a rebellious heart,' was the reply.

Page 211

’Have you? I am very glad to hear it. Then there is hope for me. Now I am going to get up.’

Freda had made some good resolutions during the intervals of her pain, the principal of which were, entirely to forget Colonel Vaughan, or to feel only intense contempt for him; to be more gentle with her father, and more considerate of his nerves and peculiarities; more patient with the servants, school children, and poor people generally; to do more good, and to be more useful to others; but she had not made these resolutions in Gladys’ spirit. They were not made with prayer for help, but in her own strength.

In the same way, she threw off the remains of her headache, and went downstairs again with a prouder step and a prouder heart than when she went up last.

In the library she found her father writing a letter and looking quite animated. He was so sprucely dressed that she asked him if he were going out.

‘Not at present,’ he said. ’I am so glad you are come down again. There is so much to tell you; I have scarcely been able to keep myself from letting you hear the news. Do you know it is all settled, and Gwynne Vaughan is actually engaged to Miss Nugent! Isn’t he a lucky fellow?’

Freda felt suddenly very sick; she sat down in an arm-chair near her father, but did not speak. He looked at her, and said,—

’My dear, you are very pale still. Coming downstairs has been too much, and dressing, and—and—all that sort of thing. Let me ring for Gladys.’

’No, I shall be better directly. Only the exertion—yes, you were telling me—’

Strange that Mr Gwynne never supposed that Freda could be in love with any one. She had refused so many, and was so different from other girls, that the thought never entered his mind, and he had left her alone with Colonel Vaughan, and would have done so with Cupid himself, quite thoughtless of results. Moreover, his own natural inactivity and love of ease, led him to allow her to take her own course, as long as she left him alone to take his.

’Yes; I was saying that it is now quite settled. I believe he proposed the very ball-night to Miss Nugent, at least, and the next day went in form, and after certain preliminaries, was duly accepted by all parties. Of course, he is quite unexceptionable, and she can do as she likes now she is of age. Lady Mary expected a title, and I don’t think she is quite satisfied. She told me—at least—they say—at least—of course, there are always objections, and—and—all that sort of thing, you know.’

Freda was too hard at work, trying to overcome a very strong desire to burst into tears, to observe that her father had not once used his favourite phrase, or lost the thread of

his words, until he came to ‘Lady Mary told me,’ so when he stopped, she simply said, ‘Really! Yes!’ and he went on again.

Page 212

’I must confess, Freda, I am rather disappointed. I thought Gwynne liked you, and, indeed, I think so still. But—ah! my dear—you are so proud, or cold, or—or—that you refuse every one. It has been suggested to me by—ah! I have remarked, I mean, that you must have a secret liking for some one, not quite what one considers—ah!—eligible—and that—but, I am sure, Freda, I would make any sacrifice for your happiness, and should wish to see you married.’

‘What do you mean, papa?’ said Freda, effectually roused.

’Well, my dear, it is thought—I mean, I have fancied—I mean Lady—I—I—the fact is, are you attached to Rowland Prothero? Now, I am not angry, Freda; he is one of the nicest young men, and the best—but I should have preferred Gwynne, or Sir Hugh, or—or—in fact, many others, in a worldly point of view. A tenant’s son, and only a curate!—and all that sort of thing. But then as Lady—as—as I—as your father, my dear, I should like to make you happy. You see, that day at the vicarage, we—that is to say, I—thought there was something peculiar in his manner and yours; and to be sure, he may be a bishop, he is so good and clever. A great favourite of mine. And if he lives in London, it doesn’t so much matter; and—and—in short—Freda—’

‘Papa, I understand,’ said Freda, rising from her seat with majestic pride, ’Lady Mary has been kind enough to suggest, doubtless for her own ends, what never could have entered your mind. I am very much obliged to you for forgetting, on my account, what I cannot forget on my own, that I am a Gwynne of Glanyravon! and I daresay you meant it kindly. But you may make my compliments to Lady Mary Nugent, and tell her, that if there was anything peculiar in Rowland Prothero’s manner on that particular Sunday, it was because he had been bold enough to propose for me, and I had rejected him. You may tell her also that if he had asked her daughter instead, she would have given him herself and her fortune quite as willingly, and, I believe, more willingly, than to Colonel Vaughan. With her it is a case of “first come first served.'"

When Freda had given her message to Lady Mary Nugent, she walked out of the room. But scarcely had she crossed the hall when she turned again and re-entered it.

’Papa, I must beg you *not* to tell Lady Mary Nugent that Rowland Prothero proposed for me. He is at least a gentleman, and a man of honour, and deserves to be treated as such with all due courtesy. The more I see of men, the more I begin to think him one of the few true gentlemen one meets with. I should not even have told you this had it not escaped me in reply to what you said, because I thought it would annoy you, and perhaps make you feel unkindly towards the Prothero family. But you may tell her, if you like, that were Rowland Prothero not the gentleman I begin to perceive he is, Miss Nugent and her money might be his.’

’But, Freda—after all—if you do like him. You see, his uncle married a Perry, one of the oldest families in Herefordshire, niece of the baronet, daughter of the dean, cousin of the present baronet.’

Page 213

’My dear father! I know all the Perrys by heart. Mrs Jonathan is not likely to have left me ignorant of their antiquity. But, pray, do you want to get rid of me, that you force me upon poor Rowland, or him upon me, whichever it may be?’

’Of course not, my dear. Only I am naturally anxious to see you settled. And if you really like him—’

’But I am settled, and I do not like him; that is to say, I like him well enough, fifty times better than I used to like him, but I have not the most remote intention of marrying him. And now, I should like to know what particular reason Lady Mary Nugent had for putting this absurd notion into your head. There must be something, my dear papa, under all this sudden anxiety to get me married. You used rather to rejoice when I declined settling Glanyravon on a suitor.’

’Yes, my dear—but—you see—it is not quite certain that Glanyravon—I mean that you —I mean that I—in short—the fact is—you are so impetuous, Freda.’

‘What can my impetuosity have to do with it?’

Freda saw that her father was more than usually nervous and fidgety, and became alarmed lest there should be some sudden money difficulty, as any threat, however slight, of debt or involvement always made him ill. She sat down beside him, and putting her hand in his, as it rested on a table nervously fidgeting with a pen, she said gently,—

‘Now, pappy, I hope we are not all going to jail?’

’By no means; the tenants are most prosperous. I could raise any sum if necessary, and give you a marriage portion suitable in every way.’

What was there in this marriage scheme? Freda grew impatient and indignant again.

’Now, really, papa, this is too absurd; If you have anything on your mind, will you say it?’

’Well—the fact is, Freda, that you—I mean that I, have made up my mind—you see you may marry, and leave me alone, and I should want a companion, and—and all that sort of thing, you know—so I have considered—for your—for our—for my, perhaps—-happiness, that it might be well for me to—to—to—in short, my dear—to marry again; in fact, Freda, I have resolved to do so.’

‘Lady Mary Nugent!’ screamed Freda; ’not her! not her! not settled! oh papa!’

Mr Gwynne had called Freda impetuous, but he was not prepared for the sudden burst of uncontrollable grief that followed his announcement. Often as Freda had jested over the proposal Lady Mary was to make her father, she had never believed that he would

marry her. It came upon her like the news of an unexpected death, or great family misfortune. She covered her face with her hands, and sobbed till her father thought she must burst some blood vessel then and there before him. He got up, sat down; went to the bell, touched the rope, let it go; opened the window, put his hand on Freda's bowed head, called her by name, and, in return, was greeted by—

Page 214

’Not Lady Mary! think of my mother! think of me! oh father! father! cruel! this is too much! Say it is not true; only a jest. What have I done? I will be better, kinder, gentler—I will nurse you, tend you—never marry. I would rather not—I never shall. Nobody loves you as well as I. Your only child. My mother’s only child. Say it is not true—oh, say it is not true?’

This was impossible, for Mr Gwynne knew full well that he was pledged beyond recall. But now, as he looked on his daughter, heard her words, thought of her mother, he began to repent of what he had done. He, who hated scenes, dreaded tears, would not annoy Freda for the world, to have raised such emotion! He did not understand it. Lady Mary had assured him Freda would be so glad to be allowed to marry Rowland. And she was so discerning and clever! But he could not bear those sobs.

’Freda! my dear, don’t, I beg, I entreat! You will make me so nervous. You know I cannot bear—in short, I feel quite ill. The fact is, you will make yourself ill, and after all, it need make no difference to you. You will be just the same. Freda, I must beg you to desist. I must insist—I will ring for the housekeeper.’

‘No, no, papa. Do not let us expose ourselves!’ cried Freda, rising suddenly; ’I will go upstairs. Neither you nor I will ever be happy again!’

Freda was about to leave the room, when Mr Gwynne suddenly went up to her, and putting his arm round her neck, whispered, whilst the tears sprang into his eyes,—

’Freda, Freda! my child, forgive me! I didn’t think it would vex you so. I scarcely know how it has all happened.’

Poor Freda threw both her arms around her father, and sobbed again. As she leaned on his shoulder, his white hairs touched the brown glossy braids of her head, and his lips kissed them. At that moment he knew that he did not love Lady Mary Nugent as well as he loved his child, and that child was conscious for the first time how very dear her father was to her.

Again she roused herself, and as if ashamed of her emotion, hastened out of the room. She went upstairs, and locking herself in her room, threw herself on her bed. Here she gave way to feelings that were as new as strange to her, unaccustomed as she was to what some one calls ’the luxury of tears.’ She scarcely knew whether sorrow or anger predominated, but she was wretched and indignant. Tumultuous thoughts rushed through her mind of the past, present, and probable future! thoughts too numerous and changeable to be transcribed, but which may well be imagined.

At last her pride, that one grand feature of her character, got the better of her grief and anger. She rose from her bed, dried her eyes, arranged her hair, and with a carriage as erect as her soul was haughty, once more entered her father’s library. The momentary

emotion and pathos of their last embrace had been overpowered in both by stronger sensations; in him by the remembrance of Lady Mary Nugent's fascinations, in her by the sense of that lady's tact and duplicity.

Page 215

Freda sat quietly down opposite her father, and said abruptly,—

’Papa, this odious subject must be begun and ended between us this day. If you will be good enough to answer me a few questions and to listen to me, I will never mention it again. Are you really engaged to Lady Mary Nugent, or is it a horrible dream?’

’I—yes—I certainly am, my dear—engaged to be married to her ladyship.’

‘And you mean to marry her? Impossible!’

’Do you consider me a man of honour? or am I one likely to break my word when pledged?’

’Oh! papa, when a woman proposes and makes love, and waits till the very moment when it suits her own convenience to marry, do you think she deserves consideration? You know that Lady Mary Nugent has done it all herself, and that you would never have taken the trouble, or had the courage to propose for any woman under the sun, if she had not asked you first. You know you do not want to marry. I would give the world to know how she managed to bring you to the point.’

’Really, Freda, this is too—too—personal, and rude, I may call it—and—’

’Forgive me, papa. Of course you are your own master, and are at liberty to be chosen by any woman, but she will not choose me, nor I her. I hate Lady Mary Nugent, despise her most intensely, and shall leave this house before she comes into it; never—’

It seemed as if an invisible hand checked the end of Freda’s determination, for she stopped short at the ‘never.’

’But what I came particularly to say, papa, is, that I believe I have some little private fortune of my own, my dear mother’s, in short, and I suppose I can have that when I like.’

‘Certainly—certainly—but—’

’Then I wish both you and Lady Mary Nugent to understand that I shall not live here. Not on your account, but on hers. I ask, as a particular favour, that I may not be informed of the day of your marriage; and I shall make it a point of going away in a month or so, so as to leave you free to act. I shall hope to hear from you, and to write to you. I am only sorry for you, because she cannot understand your tastes; but that is nothing. I don’t think either she or her daughter ever read any book but a fashionable novel in their lives. But what is the difference! Money and tact against the world! I cannot help speaking my mind for this first and last time. Forgive me. You will not have me long to speak it, and my successor never spoke her’s in her life, so she will not bore you by abruptness and sincerity, as I perhaps have done.’

Freda had spoken so fast that she paused to take breath, and during that necessary process her father wiped his face, as if he, too, were exhausted by her volubility. Freda could scarcely help smiling.

‘I am very sorry for everything I have ever done to displease you,’ she began again; ’and I only hope you will not be so unhappy, as I am afraid you will be.’

Page 216

‘This is too exhausting!’ muttered Mr Gwynne, sinking back in his chair. ’Freda, you really do talk too much. Will you ring for Perkins? I must take a dose of that cordial.’

When the cordial was mentioned, Freda knew that all conversation was at an end. She rang the bell, and when Perkins came, left the room.

She went at once to her writing desk, and wrote the following note:—

’MY DEAREST SERENA,—What you and I have sometimes feared is about to come to pass. My father is going to marry Lady Mary Nugent. Of course I can no longer live here; will you and Mr Jones give me shelter for a time whilst I arrange my thoughts and plans? I will give as little trouble as I can, but I know you will bear with me.—Your loving friend,

‘WINIFRED GWYNNE.’

Freda sealed and directed her letter, and then went to the open window, and stood there for some time. A slight shower of rain was falling and a few light clouds were struggling with the afternoon sunbeams. Strong shadows fell from the trees in the Park, equally strong lights were on the distant hills. The river looked hot and hazy, and the cattle had congregated under the arch of the bridge—the only cool spot—as if for shelter from the sun. A shrill, blithe, distant whistle sounded, and the bells of Llanfawr church pealed in the far-away town, just sending their faint echoes across the river.

‘What are those bells ringing for?’ said Freda, as she wiped away some large tears that were gathering in her eyes. ’They ring for everything; soon it will be for these odious marriages. Why was I ever born? Why, above all, was I born in such a place as this? And to leave it! Yes, Frisk’ (to her terrier, that was barking and jumping outside the window), ’you and I must go away. No more quarrels with Jerry; no more fights with Gelert?; no more hunts in the brook. Will you come with me to smoky London? Yes, and hate it as much as I shall. Sleep away your life by a city fire, and grow fat and old, instead of racing after me and Prince. But we shall not live long in a town, Frisk. We shall soon die of sheer laziness, and so much the better—for who will care for us? Lion and Jerry and even Gipsy will forget you; and every one has forgotten me already. Why am I so foolish as to cry so? I never knew how weak I could be until these last few days. But we must be strong, Frisk—we must be strong, and not care for this old place, and the beautiful park, and all the—oh, why will those bells ring? and what are they ringing for? And there is the dinner-bell, too, harsh as my lot. And I must try to be dutiful, and show a bold face and good courage to the world, who will pity me, or rejoice over me, and say that I wanted something to pull down my pride. And so, perhaps, I do; but this shall not be the something. No, no; it shall only make me prouder. Poor papa, too; he will be more wretched than I—I am sure he will. I cannot bear to think of him. Frisk! Frisk! don’t make such a noise. Don’t jump so, Frisk. There! I will take you in. Good dog! good Frisk! You love me if no one else does; you and Gladys.’

Page 217

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FIRST-BORN.

Those Llanfawr bells which, as Freda said, certainly did ring for everything, were sending forth their chimes to celebrate the birth of a daughter at Plas Abertewey. But whilst they were ringing, and Freda was abusing them, the mother of the little daughter was, apparently, about to depart for that other country where bells shall no longer 'ring out the old, and ring in the new,' welcome the babe, or speed the spirit of the dead.

Good Dr Richards and the nurse stood, one on either side of Netta's bed, pouring brandy and wine down her throat, whilst her infant was on its grandmother's, Mrs Jenkins's lap, in the next room. The doctor was in a state of intense anxiety. He had sent off one man and horse for another surgeon, and a second to Swansea, to telegraph for Howel, who had not yet returned from London, where he had been nearly three months. He felt the great responsibility of his situation, and that if Netta did not rally, she must die.

It was six o'clock in the evening; the baby had been born in the morning, and Netta's continual cry had been 'Howel! Howel! When will my husband come?' But she had not spoken for some hours, and seemed to be sinking out of the world.

As Dr Richards leaned over her, he thought she murmured something. Putting his ear close to her, he heard the words, 'Mother! oh, mother!'

'She shall come! you shall see her!' said Dr Richards. He went to a writing-table, and wrote as follows:—

'Mrs Howel Jenkins is dying. The only chance to save her is her mother's presence. Come, for God's sake.'

He went out of the room, and ordered the carriage and horses to be prepared at once, and sent them and the coachman to Glanyravon Farm. The man said it was as much as his place was worth to go; but Dr Richards insisted, and he went.

In about two hours the carriage returned. Dr Richards heard the distant sound of wheels, so did Netta. She opened her eyes, and with a painful, eager glance, again said, 'Mother!'

Dr Richards left the room, and, to his great joy, welcomed Mrs Prothero in the hall.

'Thank God, you are come! She is yet alive,' said he.

'I did not stop to ask David,' said Mrs Prothero, 'but came straight away.'

She followed Dr Richards to Netta's room, and the feelings of the mother and the daughter may well be imagined, as they thus met after such a separation. Mrs Prothero turned away and wept—then prepared to wait upon her child.

As the long absence of Howel, and his non-arrival day after day, according to promises almost daily made, had caused Netta's extreme prostration of mental as well as physical power; so the presence of her mother appeared to revive and cheer her. Again she had some one near her who loved her. Her mother, whom she had so grievously offended, had come to her in trouble, and she was roused and comforted. The mother-in-law, who had been so anxious to take her from her parents, did not fill their places.

Page 218

Whilst Mrs Prothero was tenderly nursing her daughter, and gently assuring her of her love and forgiveness, Mrs Griffey Jenkins was discussing her arrival with the various domestics and the nurse, who went into an adjoining room to have her supper, where Mrs Griffey also had hers.

Their conversation was carried on in an under voice, and between sips of gin and water, Mrs Griffey said,—

’You do see, Mrs Gwillim, that if Mrs Howel was to die, my Howels ’ould be seure to be marrying again. He could have anybody.’

‘Of course, ma’am—of course.’

’There don’t be a lady anywhere as ’ouldn’t be proud to be marrying my Howels. Up in London there’s my Lady Sinclairs, and a hundred others; and down here there’s Miss Nugent, or Miss Gwynne. You do see, Mrs Gwillim, that though Mrs Howels do be very respectable, she ’ouldn’t be Mrs Howel Jenkins, Abertewey, only my Howels was too honourable not to be marrying her. I ’ould be sorry after her, but if she was to be taken, why, she couldn’t go at a better time. What was you thinking of her by now?’

‘Very bad, ma’am, very bad,’ said Mrs Gwillim, ominously shaking her head.

And ‘very bad,’ Netta undoubtedly was all that night. Dr Richards did not leave the house, and in due course of time the other medical man arrived; still, the half-expressed and wholly felt wishes of her mother-in-law for her death were not realised. The dawn of morning found her sleeping peaceably with her infant in her arms, and her mother thanking God that she was better.

At ten o’clock in the morning, carriage wheels were again heard, and Mrs Prothero trembled as Howel entered the house, and there was a consultation of doctors as to the propriety of his seeing his wife at once.

Mrs Griffey anticipated every one else by going direct to Howel.

‘How is she, mother?’ were his first words.

‘Better they do say.’

’Then why on earth did they telegraph for me. It may be the loss of thousands.’

‘Mrs Prothero is with Netta, Howel, bach.’

‘Who dared to bring her into my house?’

’Netta, I ‘spose. They was turning *me* out of Glanyravon.’

‘And I’ll turn her out of Abertewey, the canting old humbug.’

Here Dr Richards came in.

’She is out of danger, I hope, Mr Jenkins; anxiety about you reduced her so low; and I took upon myself to send for her mother, who has roused her, and, I believe, saved her life. She knows you are come, and perhaps the sight of you for a moment may not injure her, as she is very anxious to see you; but we must not excite her.’

Howel looked paler and darker than usual, and Dr Richards attributed it, and his silence, to his emotion. They went together upstairs, and Howel stood by the bed where lay his young wife and his first-born child. As he looked upon the pale face of Netta, and saw her large black eyes gleam with joy, and her lips purse themselves up like a double cherry, to kiss him, he was touched. He bent over her, and kissed her warmly. When she uncovered a small portion of the bed-clothes, and displayed the infant that lay in her arms, a smile passed over his countenance, and he kissed his wife and child together.

Page 219

‘Dear Howel,’ murmured Netta, as the nurse covered up the mother and her babe, and the doctor touched Howel, and told him to come away. He caught sight of the trembling Mrs Prothero as he was leaving the room, and a terrible frown passed over his face. She followed him downstairs, and anticipated his abuse of her, by saying at once, gently, but firmly,—

‘Howel, I came here at Dr Richards’ summons to my dying child. My husband did not even know I was coming, but neither he nor you could have prevented me at such a time. You cannot turn me from your doors whilst she is still in danger. When she is out of danger I will go.’

‘You turned my mother from yours.’

’Not I, Howel; and I have never injured you. Leave me till to-morrow, and I will go.’

One of the few people in the world for whom Howel had a small amount of respect and affection, was Mrs Prothero. The simply good, and unaffectedly pious, will sometimes command the regard of the worldly and irreligious.

’If you remain in my house, Mrs Prothero, it is because you have been consistently kind to me, and received my mother. As to your husband, I would—’

’Not to me, Howel, if you please I can hear nothing against him. You must remember the provocation, and try to forgive and forget as I do. But thank you for letting me stay with Netta. I have so longed and prayed to see her again, and it has been brought about for me.’

Mrs Prothero remained one clear day and two nights longer at Abertewey. As Netta was quite out of danger before that time had expired, she thought it right to go home, both on Howel’s account and her own husband’s, whose anger she would have to allay. During her stay with Netta she lost no opportunity to work gently on the mind of her child, now opened and softened by her late trials. She found, with grief, what she had always feared, that Howel and Netta were not happy together; that he was frequently morose and unkind, and that she was passionate and revengeful. This eked out in Netta’s confessions to her mother, for Howel was attentive and affectionate during her illness. Mrs Prothero entreated her to be gentle and obedient. Earnestly did she speak to her of religion, trying to recall the lessons of her childhood; and with tears poor Netta promised everything. Particularly she promised to read her Bible. Her mother was shocked that the Book was not to be found in her bedroom. She put a little Testament, that she always carried in her pocket, under her child’s pillow. It was lined, and underlined by her own hand, and she fondly hoped she might read it for her sake.

Netta was so loving, gentle, and teachable with her mother—blamed herself so severely for having displeased her and her father—sent so many messages to him, and seemed so desirous of obtaining his forgiveness, that Mrs Prothero hoped everything.

It was a hard struggle to part again with that dear child, and to kiss the little grandchild for the last time, perhaps, for years—she would not believe for ever; but both she and Netta were obliged to put a brave face upon it, in order not to displease Howel, already suspicious of their conversations.

Page 220

‘You see Netta has all the grandest lady could desire,’ said Howel, before Mrs Prothero left.

‘Oh yes! I hope you will be happy,’ was the reply. Mrs Prothero had never given a thought to the grandeur by which she was surrounded.

‘Why not? Does Netta complain?’ said Howel.

’No, no; she says you are very good, and let her have all she wants; but, Howel, riches may not always bring happiness, and we must try to look beyond the perishable things of life for it.’

‘Pshaw!’ said Howel, impatiently; ’you know, aunt, I hate that sort of cant.’

Soon after she left Abertewey, Colonel Vaughan called Howel and he had a long conversation, the purport of which was, that the colonel wished to come himself to reside at Abertewey at the end of Howel’s term of two years; and Howel was quite ready and willing to give it up to him, saying that he meant to purchase a house in town—in Belgravia, of course—and to reside there until he could meet with a property that he could purchase.

Howel told Netta that he was tired of the neighbourhood already, it was so stupid; and that London, and a country house in some English county, would be far preferable to living in such a dull part of the world. She quite agreed with him, and had her own reasons for being glad to leave Wales. In the first place, she was not at home with the people she met in society, and liked the notion of living where no one would know that she was the daughter of the Protheros of Glanyravon. In the second, Howel would be always at home in London, and never again absent for three months, she knew not why. Moreover, she longed to be far away from the mother-in-law, who was a sort of spy over all she said or did; and she thought Howel would be kinder to her when he was at a distance from their kith and kin, whose propinquity seemed to irritate him.

Netta did not stop to consider Howel’s real reasons for leaving the country, or imagine for a moment that a man of his, to her, inexhaustible resources, could be induced to do so because he found those resources were not inexhaustible. Neither did she remember that in London he would be in the midst of the gamblers, horse-racers, and spendthrifts who had been helping him to diminish his father’s ill-gotten gains, before and since, he came into possession of them.

During the remainder of his stay in the county, his house was open to sportsmen of every grade. His racers, hunters, hounds, and good dinners were points of union to all the sporting men of the county; and Captain Dancy, Mr Deep, Sir Samuel Spendall, the Simpsons, Madame Duvet, and many others, again adorned Plas Abertewey. Races and race-balls, steeple-chases, and steeple-chase balls, hunts, and hunt-balls, took

Howel, Netta, and his friends from place to place, and he and his horses soon became celebrated. The latter ran at all the races. He was a good rider, and rode himself in several steeple-chases; in short, he was declared to be ‘a capital fellow!’ and one who, if he would only remain in the county, would raise the sporting interest throughout it. As ‘blessings brighten as they take their flight,’ so Howel’s popularity reached its zenith just as he resigned Abertewey to Colonel Vaughan, and went, with his wife and child, abroad for a few months.

Page 221

As Freda foretold, bells rang, bonfires blazed, and cannons fired, when the respective owners of Glanyravon and Abertewey brought home their respective brides, which took place in due course. If anybody thought of Miss Gwynne, it was to comment loudly on her conduct in leaving her home, because her father chose to marry again, and lowering herself and her position by going to reside with her former governess, the wife of a curate in the East End of London. Some few sympathised with her, but the greater number laughed at Mr Gwynne, admired Lady Nugent's tact, and blamed Freda.

Those, also, who discussed Colonel Vaughan, as everybody did, thought him a wise man to marry a woman who could at once clear his estate, and enable him to live upon it as his fathers had never lived before him, and welcomed him home with great ardour, and a regular volley of dinner parties.

Thus Lady Mary Nugent and her daughter, with their various worldly and external advantages, and Colonel Vaughan, with his *savoir faire*, had done more for themselves than Freda or Gladys, or Owen or Rowland could have done, with their honesty of purpose, beauty, and intelligence, in a worldly point of view, I would be understood to mean.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SPENDTHRIFT.

We must now run rapidly through the next six years of Howel and Netta's career.

After spending nearly a year abroad, where Howel amused himself, in addition, to his usual diversions, by speculating in some German mines, they came back to England. They went for a time to Spendall Lodge in Yorkshire, on a visit to Sir Samuel Spendall, in order to be in the vicinity of the Doncaster races. Thence they went to Scarborough, where Howel left Netta, her child and maid in a lodging, whilst he attended the various races in other parts of the country.

About this time, Sir John Simpson died, and his son came into his fortune. Howel immediately bought a handsome house in Belgravia, furnished it expensively, and began life as a London fine gentleman.

It is needless to describe how Howel's income and position in society gradually dwindled down; or more properly, how his means fluctuated according as his horses lost or won, or his various speculations succeeded or failed. Long before his father died, he had mortgaged that father's very mortgages; and had spent a large portion of his wealth in paying off debts of honour, and freeing himself from the Jews, into whose hands he had got before he went to live at Abertewey.

During his four years' residence in London, it was evident that his means fluctuated in some wonderful way. His house was the rendezvous of men of all ranks who were on the turf, and his life was passed in a state of perpetual excitement. Netta did not see much of him, except at their own table, or that of their acquaintances. When she was alone with him, he was either quite silent, or abusive;

Page 222

the career of such a man will be better understood by most of my readers, than described by me. The resorts of black-legs, and the betting-books of men on the turf, the dishonourable payment of so-called debts of honour, the trickery of horse-dealers, horse-trainers, and horse-racers, and the wretched madness of professed gamblers, are things we have all heard of, but of which, happily, comparatively few of us know much, practically.

Howel managed to maintain his reputation as a gentleman and man of large fortune, even when he was, from time to time, on the verge of ruin; and the purchase of Sir Samuel Spendall's property in Yorkshire, when that baronet was obliged to leave the country for debt, confirmed the opinion of his wealth. Every one did not know that Sir Samuel, like Mr Simpson, owed him an enormous sum of money, for various bets, loans, and even mortgages, of which Howel kept quite as usurious an account as his father would have done before him, and at which the lawyers of those gentlemen shook their heads, although they could not disprove any item of it. Howel had learnt enough of law to serve his purposes, and to teach him how far he might venture to go, in the matter of interest and compound interest, with impunity.

Howel's friend, Mr Deep, was a lawyer by profession. He had duly taken out his stamps, and had chambers in Lincoln's Inn, and did such business as fell in his way amongst his sporting friends.

It was he who had been Howel's attorney in all his dealings with Sir Samuel Spendall, Mr Simpson and others, and although his reputation was not very good amongst his professional brethren, nothing dishonourable had ever been proved against him.

We will now look into the chambers of this worthy in Lincoln's Inn, and listen to a conversation that is passing between him and Howel, over what appears to be their mid-day potation of brandy and water. Howel's manner is excited, and his face at its darkest; Mr Deep is calm, and his face smooth as usual.

'You see, we must have money!' says Howel, 'I, at least, must have six thousand five hundred pounds before this month is out. I owe that to Dancy, who, of all men in the world, I don't choose to make wait. If I lose at the Derby, I must have twenty thousand more.'

'But the chances are you will win. Alma is pretty safe, I think.'

'Yes, if we can manage to drug Magnificent. I think I have Little Bill in my power; he will do anything for us. But this six thousand five hundred is the first thing to think of. I have mortgaged Spendall Lodge almost to its value. By the way, are you quite sure that

Spendall has nothing against us? They say his mother is paying his debts, and that he will be able to come back.'

'Positive; besides, he never knows what money he has paid, or what receipts he has had, or what the amount of his mortgages was.'

'Simpson, again, I think he is sharper since his father's death. He was regularly frightened when he found what a sum he owed me; and if I hadn't got into a passion, and threatened to call him out for doubting my honour, I believe he would have checked our bill.'

Page 223

‘Can’t you get more money on your house in town?’

’No; I have tried Levi and Jacobs, and they won’t advance any more without better security.’

’Your mother; surely she would help you, if you were to make up a good story.’

’No; I ran down to see her the other day, and she had taken offence because she chose to think I had neglected her, and was as obstinate as an old mule. I believe she is getting stingy, too, and says she will keep her money as long as she lives, and then I may do what I like with it.’

‘What is she worth?’

’Well, I should say by this time, she must have as good as six or seven hundred a-year. She hasn’t lived up to her income, and what she has doled out to me now and then, hasn’t touched the principal. She must have from fifteen to twenty thousand pounds one way and another.’

’Ask her to come and visit you; take her about and make much of her, and then seize upon her in an unwary moment. Borrow the money, and say you will pay it back, which you know, you will be able to do, if you have any luck.’

’That’s a bright idea. The old soul has always been hankering to come to London. Give me a pen and ink directly. Let me see; I know how she likes me to begin. “Dear and honoured mother.” Faugh! shall we go on in the ancient style? “I hope this will find you well, as it leaves me at present.” I only wish it would find her—well—I think that will do. I have told her that Netta and I will be delighted to see her, *etc*., *etc*. And Netta hates her, too.’

’By the way, Jenkins, could not Mrs Howel Jenkins get Dancy to give in about that money? She is a prime favourite.’

’Mrs Jenkins knows nothing of my money transactions, and certainly would be the last person I should wish to interfere in such a matter. Let us go and post this letter, and then I want to go to Tattersalls. Will you dine with me at the club at six? and afterwards we will keep our appointment with Dancy and Lord Dupe; we may make something of the latter, if we can’t of the former.’

It was nearly two o’clock in the morning when Howel reached his home. His little girl was ill in the measles, and Netta, feeling anxious about her, had been sitting up with her. When Howel entered the bedroom in which the mother and child were, he began to talk in a loud voice.

‘Why on earth don’t you go to bed, Netta?’

Netta put her finger on her lips, and pointed to the little bed in which her child was sleeping, then hurried into the next room, a kind of nursery and play-room, and sent the maid, who was sitting there, into the bedroom. Howel followed her; Netta saw that he had been drinking, and was greatly excited; he never was absolutely intoxicated, but he constantly drank too much.

‘Why do you sit up I say, Netta?’

‘Because Minette is so feverish; I did not like to leave her.’

The child had been called Minette by a French *bonne*, and they had all somehow adopted it as a name; her real name was Victoria.

Page 224

‘You didn’t sit up for me, of course?’

’Certainly not; you are not so very agreeable when you come home, as to make me sit up for you.’

’I say, Netta, do you know I have written to invite my mother to come and pay us a visit.’

‘Your mother! then you must amuse her, for I certainly won’t.’

’I beg to say you will, and will do everything in your power to make her visit agreeable. It will be worse for you if you do not. What do you mean by always disobeying me?’

’You had better not strike me again, you coward, you! Justine will hear you. She can see and hear, if she can’t understand.’

’I tell you what, Netta, everything may depend on our reception of my mother—your very living, and mine, and Minette’s.’

’I don’t care about living; I’d rather starve than live the life I do, and if I have Aunt ‘Lizbeth, too, I shall run away, I am sure I shall.’

‘With whom, madam?’

’With anybody or nobody; I don’t care what becomes of me since you’re so unkind. Perhaps you’d like to see my shoulder that you hurt yesterday? I haven’t had the pleasure of seeing you since. Your shakes, and pinches ain’t very soft, sir, I assure you.’

Netta threw off a portion of the white dressing-gown she had on, and displayed her round white neck and shoulder disfigured by a black-and-blue mark.

‘I’ll do the same to the other if you aggravate me any more,’ said Howel, clenching his teeth, and moving towards Netta.

‘Not to-night, anyhow,’ said Netta, running through the door and short passage into her child’s bedroom. She knew that he was always sufficiently master of himself not to expose himself before the servants.

’Justine, I shall sleep with Minette to-night—that is to say, I shall lie down on this sofa by her side. You can go to bed as usual,’ said Netta.

And when Minette and Justine were fast asleep in their respective beds, poor Netta sat and cried the livelong night, with her feet upon the fender, and her eyes fixed upon the almost-extinguished fire.

The following morning, when she was watching her child, Howel came into the room. He went up to the bed on which Minette lay, and kissed her, and asked her how she did. The little girl looked pleased, and putting her arms round her father's neck, whispered,—

'Papa! do you know mamma has not been in bed all night? Will you tell her I am quite well, and ask her to go to bed?'

'I will, darling. I have a new picture-book for you downstairs Mamma will come and fetch it. Mamma, will you come and fetch a new book for Minette?'

Netta looked at Howel for the first time, and seeing that his face was tolerably pleasant, followed him out of the room, and down into the dining-room, where his breakfast was awaiting him.

'Netta! you must make my breakfast, and have some with me. Minette is better, and you needn't starve yourself to death,' said Howel, sitting down at the breakfast-table.

Page 225

‘Thank you,’ replied Netta sulkily. ’I can’t eat anything, I am a great deal too tired and wretched.’

’Netta, I am sorry I hurt you; but you do aggravate me so, and I have a great deal on my mind.’

Netta’s face brightened a little.

’Why don’t you tell me what you have on your mind, instead of bullying me from morning to night?’

’Because a woman cannot understand such matters. But if I do not get some money this month we shall be ruined. I have asked my mother up to see whether she will advance it, and that will depend on our treatment of her. Will you be kind to her?’

’I suppose you will give me some of the money, if you get it, to pay servants’ wages, and other bills? I am dunned for money from morning to night, and never have a farthing to pay.’

’I shall be able to pay everything next month. I am sure of plenty of money.’

’And I suppose you want to get money from your mother to pay bets, or something of the sort? Why won’t you tell me?’

’Yes; I owe it to *your* friend Dancy. Perhaps you will help me to pay *him*.’

’He is no friend of mine. I don’t like him; but he would do more for me than you would, and is kinder too. But I don’t want to be under any obligation to him.’

’If you wish to keep a house over your head, or me out of a prison, you must either ask him, as a personal favour, to let me off the debt, or you must help me to get the money out of my mother.’

’Howel, I don’t like underhand ways. I don’t mind trying to be civil to Aunt ’Lizbeth, provided you tell her exactly how you are situated, and promise me never to bet with Captain Dancy, or borrow money of him again.’

‘I promise most faithfully.’

’And if you can’t afford to live in this grand house, Howel, why don’t you give it up, and take to the law, or anything to get your living? Perhaps, if you did, we should be happy again. I would rather work like a slave, and not keep a servant, and live in a small lodging, or anything, than see you so altered.’

Here Netta began to cry.

’If I get this money from mother, and what I expect from other sources, we shall be all right again, and then—’

’And then, Howel, you will give up horse-racing and betting and gambling and bad company, and think more of Minette and me—your poor unhappy Netta—your wife—-your little cousin that you used to say you loved!—oh, Howel! Howel! that you hate so now, and treat so unkindly.’

Netta had been standing by the fire-place hitherto, but at this juncture she went towards Howel timidly, and kneeling down by his side as he sat at the table, put her hands on his arm, and fixed her tearful eyes on his face.

Howel was touched. We know that there are moments in the lives of the worst of men when better feelings overcome the evil ones; and Howel was not utterly bad; and now his guardian angel seemed to be making a great effort to reclaim him from his sins. He really loved Netta as much as he could love anything. Was she not the only creature in the world who had really loved him?

Page 226

‘Then you do not quite hate me, Netta?’ he said, putting his arm round her neck, ‘I thought all the old love was gone.’

’No, no, Howel! Dear, dear Howel! I love you in my heart! but you are so changed—so—so—you don’t care for my company now. You never come home and play and sing as you used to do. You never speak to Minette; you never speak to me except—’

Here Netta leant her head on Howel’s knees, and began to sob. He put his hand on her head, smoothed her hair, and finally raised her from the ground, and took her in his arms to his weak, wicked heart—a heart not wholly depraved, because there was still in it love for his wife.

For a long time she clung to him; her arms round his neck, her cheek to his cheek, her beating heart to his bosom, as if she was afraid that the spell would be broken if once she let go. Howel kissed her pale cheek, wiped those large black eyes, and comforted her as she had never hoped to be comforted again. Vague thoughts entered his mind of the possibility of beginning life afresh—of being a better husband and father—of giving up his wild, sinful courses. ’Shall the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots.’

‘I will do anything, Howel, darling—anything you wish,’ suddenly murmured Netta, returning his caresses, ’only you will promise never to be unkind again. I will beg, starve for you as long as you love me; but you know I am hot-tempered, and when you are cross I get angry; and then you are violent, and I am hard and sullen and wicked—-oh, so wicked! I think I must have lived fifty years in the last five years, Howel, I feel so old and altered. Don’t make me so hard-hearted again, Howel, bach, or I shall die, indeed I shall; I feel it now at my heart.’

Netta put her hand on her heart as she leant against Howel. He raised her, and saw that she was of a deathly paleness.

‘Don’t be—frightened—I have—it—often—only—a spasm,’ she gasped, as frightened he went to the sideboard, and poured out some brandy into one of the tea cups, and putting a little water to it, gave it her to drink.

She soon revived, and recovering a little of her old colour again, put her arms round Howel, and thanked him for being so kind. Howel was aware, for the first time for many years, that conscience is not a myth; his smote him.

‘Will you stay at home to-day, Howel?’ asked Netta. ’I will write myself to your mother, if you will.’

’Yes, Netta, dear, I will. Now, shall we carry the picture-book to Minette?’

’No; you must have your breakfast now, and I will make it. Oh! I am so happy.’

‘And you do not care for Dancy, Netta?’

‘No; I hate him.’

Howel kept his word, and stayed at home that one day with Netta and her child, and she wrote that day down on the tablets of her memory as the brightest spot in six years of trouble and distrust.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Page 227

THE FORGER.

In a few days Mrs Griffith Jenkins arrived in London, equally surprised and delighted by the invitation she had received from her son and daughter-in-law. Netta kept her word, and behaved to her with all the kindness and consideration she could assume. She took her to various places of amusement, and tried to find pleasure herself in scenes that a few years before would have given her great delight; but the forebodings of coming evil hung heavily over her, and she could not rouse herself into her old spirits. Howel was very kind to her when with her; but after that one white day he was not much at home. He went out once or twice with her and his mother in the evening, and was so very attentive to the latter that she began to think herself a person of consideration once more.

‘There’s kind Howels is, Netta, fach!’ she would say. ’There’s proud you ought to be to be having such a kind husband. But he don’t be looking well, nor you neither. You was looking as pale as those wox figures at Mrs Tuss’s; and seure won was as like you as could be. Ach a fi! I ’ouldn’t like to be going again into that little room with all the murderers. And Howel was looking quite pale. But such beauty music, and dresses, and all like life. I thought I should a-screeked out when that man turned and looked at me, and wogged his head, and was nodding, is seure as if he was alive, and he only wox!’

Mrs Jenkins had been in London about a week, when Howel began carelessly the subject nearest his heart.

’I say, mother, fach, how does your money hold out? I daresay you are rich as a Jew by this time.’

’Pretty well, Howel. I hope you do be well off now, and don’t be living so gay as you wos.’

’Well, mother, if I could just get a few thousands for a couple of weeks I should be as rich as Croesus, and out of all those difficulties I told you of in another month. Do you know of any one likely to have such a sum to lend?’

’Thousands, Howel! why hundreds wasn’t plenty with us, let alone thousands. You do know that there don’t be any wan so rich as you in our parts.’

’So I am, mother, or rather shall be by-and-by. I have lived beyond my income, but I am going to retrench, and if you could only lend me five or six thousands pounds, it would set me right, and I could pay you again in a month.’

’Five or six thousand! Why, Howel, I ’ouldn’t know how to get it; and I don’t cheuse to be reuining myself, and bringing myself down again for nobody.’

’Not even for me, mother? To save me from jail, perhaps! Ha! ha! I’m sure you wouldn’t like to see me in jail; and ’pon my honour I don’t know how I shall keep out of it unless you help me.’

’And where’s the thousands and hundreds of thousands your father was leaving you? Ten years ago come next Jeune he did die, my poor Griffey.’

’Now, mother, don’t humbug me about that. You know you were glad enough. Only let me have the money, unless you want me to leave the country, never to come back.’

Page 228

’Ach an wyr! How you be talking. You wos frightening me to death. I ‘ouldn’t mind lending you a few hundreds, but—’

’Hundreds won’t do, mother. I must have five thousand six hundred before this week is out, or else—It is impossible you could be cruel enough to see your only son in distress, and not help him out of it.’

’I have been helping you all your life, Howel. I could lend you wan thousand, and no more, and if you’ll promise to be paying me soon.’

‘One thousand six hundred, mother, I must have that at least.’

It would be waste of time to write the reasons urged by Howel to induce his mother to advance him this money; but after some hours of entreaty, and a promise from him that he would repay it shortly, she consented to write the necessary cheque for that sum. She insisted upon the business being managed through Mr Rice Rice, her attorney at home, and wrote to him to empower him to raise it as he best could for her son at once.

As she was a poor scribe, and a still worse orthographer, Howel superintended the letter, and when it was written said he would enclose and post it. He was most particular in telling her where and how to write the figures; and before the ink was dry begged her to go to a davenport, which stood at the other end of the room, for a stamp.

No sooner was her back turned towards him, than with the same pen and ink he made the straight figure *one* into a *four*, and in the cheque which she had written, as well as in the accompanying letter, four thousand six hundred pounds held the place that one thousand six hundred had held when Mrs Griffith Jenkins left the table to go to the davenport.

If Howel trembled, or if his conscience smote him when he did this dreadful deed, he did not let his mother see it.

‘Perhaps, after all, you had better direct the letter, mother,’ he said, as he finished sealing it. ’If I do it it will look as if I thought you couldn’t write, and you really write just as well as any other lady of your age. I am really very much obliged to you.’

When Howel carried the letter out of the room, and went for a few moments into another, he said to himself, ’I can pay the whole back after the races, and manage so as to prevent her knowing anything about it. And if the worst come to the worst, I must tell her what I did. She won’t expose me; it will be a furious quarrel, and then all will be over. We must keep her here for a long time, and I must get hold of her letters first and read them to her, and alter them if necessary. Now I must look about for another thousand pounds.’

In due course of time the money was procured for Mrs Jenkins, and paid into a London bank. Howel took possession of the letter of advice concerning it, and told his mother he had opened it because she was out when it arrived, and he had not a moment to lose in obtaining the money from the bank. He kissed her, and talked to her, and hurried her and Netta to dress for a drive in the park with him, until he made her forget to obtain possession of the letter, and so far his fraud prospered.

Page 229

A few mornings after he had received the money, he had a note from Mr Deep, containing the intelligence of the return from abroad of Sir Samuel Spendall, and that his attorneys were investigating his affairs. As soon as he received this note, he went by a succession of omnibuses to the east of London, and, as it chanced, into his brother-in-law's parish. In this parish there was a wretched-looking suburb, inhabited principally by Jews, whose houses were, unlike the whited sepulchres metaphorically used in scripture to describe the hearts of their race, most unclean without, but magnificent within. Into many of these dwellings Howel went in the hope of raising money, but without success. His credit was at zero.

In a desolate, but somewhat more respectable-looking house of the same parish, he hired a couple of rooms, giving his name as Mr Mills, and paying a week's rent in advance.

He was walking up this street, looking for a cab, when he was suddenly accosted by his brother-in-law, Rowland Prothero.

'You are coming to see me, Howel, I am so glad,' said Rowland, as they shook hands.

'Not to-day; I am here on a little business, and in a great hurry.'

Howel walked on, but Rowland accompanied him.

'You were all out when I called yesterday,' said Rowland, 'and I particularly wanted to see you, Howel. When will you be at home?'

'It is impossible to say.'

'It is on your own account; it is about Sir Samuel Spendall that I wish to speak.'

Howel turned pale, and stood still for a moment, looking round him as he did so to see that no one was listening.

'What of him?'

'Sir Philip told me that he had been heard to say he would dispute your right to his property, for you had acquired it by unfair means.'

'The scoundrel!' cried Howel, turning pale. 'You have always something agreeable to communicate when we do meet. It is well it is so seldom, Mr Rowland Prothero.'

'Oh, Howel! hear me whilst it is yet time, and clear yourself from the imputations to which I cannot shut my ears. My eyes, alas! have been long opened, and I would have helped you, but neither Netta nor you will listen.'

‘Cab!’ shouted Howel, and a cab drew up, and Howel jumped into it, with a ‘good morning,’ leaving Rowland looking mournfully after it.

The next morning Rowland was at Howel’s house very early. He found Netta alone, and heard from her that Howel had not been at home since the previous morning. She had had a line from him telling her that he was going with Mr Deep to Greenwich.

Netta looked ill and anxious. Rowland entreated her to tell him freely what made her so unhappy. He said he did not wish to interfere between her and her husband, only to advise her for her good.

Netta burst into tears, and said that Howel was very kind now, but that she feared there was something on his mind. She knew they were in debt, but that Howel told her all would soon be right.

Page 230

Rowland begged her to come to him if she were in any difficulty; assured her of his brotherly love and deep interest in her; pointed out her path of duty to her, and urged her to be patient with her husband whatever might happen, and to endeavour to win him to better courses; then left her with a heavy heart and a promise to return on the morrow. He was obliged to be at home that evening for a service in the church.

Late at night Howel returned, anxious and pale. Netta and Mrs Griffey had been to see Albert Smith's entertainment, and the latter was in a great state of descriptive excitement, when Howel interrupted her by saying,—

'Mother, I am very sorry to seem so unkind and inhospitable, but I am afraid I must ask you to return home to-morrow.'

'To-morrow! I am feeling too tired to be up in time to-morrow, and, seure! if you 'on't give your own mother a home for as long as she do like to stay, there's my Lady Simpson who is asking me there, and—'

'Impossible, mother, I must see you off for Wales. I am in great trouble about money, and I must leave to-morrow myself or shall be in jail.'

'Name o' goodness, Howel, what wos you doing with what I did give you?'

'Never mind; only, if anything is said to you about that money by any one, take care what you say in answer. Don't answer at all, indeed, or it may ruin you and me. Now you must pack up your things to be ready for the first train. Tell the servants—I will—-that you are summoned home by a telegraphic message.'

Howel impelled his mother upstairs, and then said to Netta, who was standing looking very pale, with her hand on her heart,—

'Netta, you must fill your pockets, and every corner of your dress that will contain them, with such jewels and plate as are of value. Money, I fear, there is none, unless my mother has any. Send the servants to bed, and do this when all is quiet. I am liable to be arrested for debt, and do not know when it may or may not take place. Have a cab to-morrow morning, and send my mother to the station; then take Minette, at your usual hour, through the park to Hyde Park Corner. Start about ten. I will meet you. I must not stay here to-night; indeed, I must not stay longer.'

Netta threw her arms round Howel's neck, and entreated him not to leave her.

'Netta, don't be a fool! You don't want to ruin me, do you?'

Netta withdrew her arms, and stood like a statue before Howel.

’You needn’t look so frightened? it will be all right in a few weeks. To-morrow at ten, remember.’

Howel kissed her, and again left the house.

Poor Netta set about the work that was appointed her mechanically. First of all, however, she went into her mother-in-law’s room, and assisted her to pack. Mrs Griffey was by turns indignant, alarmed, and sorrowful; but finding that she must depart, and that some real difficulty existed, she made no further resistance. Seeing that Netta had literally no money, she gave her a ten-pound note, under a faithful promise that she would not transfer it to Howel.

Page 231

’He do be very good-for-nothing, Netta, and have been spending money enough to buy half London. Tak’ you care of this, and write you to me. You was very good to me since I was come here.’

The kind word was too much for Netta, and she sat down and cried bitterly. Mrs Griffey tried to comfort her by crying too, and so the night waned away.

The following morning the cab was sent for, according to Howel’s order, and a man-servant ordered to accompany Mrs Griffith Jenkins to the station and see her off. Netta had never believed it possible that she could have cried at parting with her mother-in-law; but after she left the house she wrung her hands in despair, and wept as if she had lost her last earthly friend.

Still, she thought, Howel is kind, and loves me, so I will not mind what else happens.

She ordered Justine to dress Minette, whilst she hurriedly finished such preparations as she could make for her uncertain future. She found that all Howel’s jewels were already gone, so she had only to fill her pockets and a bag with the best of her own and some plate and lock her drawers. She took it for granted that Howel wanted the jewels for himself, and that she would be obliged, when she returned home, to secure other things.

As she took Minette by the hand, and led her along the handsome square in which they lived, she saw two men look at her very intently, and then exchange some words apparently about her. In former days, when her bright colour and pretty face attracted the notice of passers-by, this would only have pleased her; now it frightened her.

Before they reached Hyde Park Corner Howel hailed her from a cab.

‘Netta, would you rather go into Wales to my mother or come with me?’ said Howel.

‘With you, Howel, anywhere, not into Wales for the world.’

Howel leaned back into a corner of the cab, and did not speak again.

Netta did not know where they went, but they got into four cabs in succession, driving a certain distance in one, then paying the driver, then walking into another street and hailing a fresh vehicle.

At last they reached the far east of London, and found themselves in a dirty, wretched street, amongst a squalid population.

‘Give me the bag, and take care of your pocket,’ said Howel, as they walked along the pavement. ‘Keep close to me.’

They reached the house where Howel had taken a lodging the previous day. He walked through the passage, and bade his wife and child follow him; ascended two pair of stairs, and entered a large and tolerably respectable room.

There was a letter on the table, which he opened at once. It contained the following lines:—

’The double S are comparing notes, and various rumours are in circulation amongst that set.’

He put the letter in his pocket, and, turning to Netta, told her to go into the bedroom and take off her own and Minette’s bonnet, as they must stay for a little while where they were.

Page 232

‘Not here, papa,’ said Minette, beginning to cry. ’I don’t like this place.’

‘Hold your tongue!’ said her father sternly, as Netta led her out of the room.

‘Netta,’ whispered Howel, ’our name is Mills here—just for a time only.’

When Netta went into the close, dark bedroom at the back of the sitting-room, she took off her sobbing child’s things, set her on her lap, and by degrees soothed her to sleep. She laid her on such a bed as she had assuredly never slept on before, and then returned to Howel.

She stood before him pale and resolute. He was pacing the room rapidly, and muttering to himself.

‘Howel, I must know all! What is the matter? What is to become of us?’ she said.

’We must not be seen by our friends for a time, dear Netta, because I am liable to be arrested. Will you mind staying here a day or two alone? I must go away for a short time on business but will return and remove you when it is settled. You are better here than at home, as everything will be seized. You are in Rowland’s parish, if the worst should come to the worst; but I don’t want him to know anything about me, as it will be all right again by-and-by.’

‘Howel, I asked Captain Dancy not to insist upon that money.’

’You did! That is why he let me off with half for another month. What did he say?’

’He said, Howel, that if I would go to France with him he would forgive your debt.’

‘And you, Netta?’ Howel clenched his fist.

’And I, Howel? I left the room, and have never seen him since. He called after, but I could not speak to him again. How could I?’

’Netta, will you forgive and try to forget how jealous and unkind I have been? In spite of all, I have loved you, Netta. Oh! if I had not taken you away from your happy home!’

’I can bear anything if you love me, Howel. We will try to get through this difficulty, and then you will begin afresh as a clerk or anything; and we will be happy—oh, so happy again! Happier than ever!’

Netta smiled through her tears, whilst Howel groaned aloud.

’Think kindly of me, Netta; don’t let them make you hate me. I care for no one else in the world. If I send for you, will you come to me, supposing I cannot come myself?’

‘Anywhere! anywhere!’

Netta put her arms around her husband and sobbed aloud.

By-and-by some refreshments that Howel had ordered came up. The landlady appeared, who seemed a quiet, meek-looking woman.

’I shall be obliged to leave Mrs Mills and the little girl for a day or two,’ said Howel. ‘You will see they are attended to, I hope.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said the landlady looking, and, doubtless, feeling astonished at the sort of person Netta was, so pretty and well-dressed.

That evening another letter arrived from Mr Deep, which told Howel very plainly that writs were issued against him, and that his bills, cheques, betting debts, and affairs generally, were being questioned by his friends. There was also rather more than a hint of his being suspected of forgery.

Page 233

He went out as soon as he had received that letter, and did not return until past midnight. Netta awaited him in an agony of terror lest he should return no more.

He gave Netta ten pounds and told her on no account to disclose her real name, or give a clue to his having been with her in those lodgings, if she should see Rowland.

‘But you will be back soon?’ said poor Netta.

’In a few days I hope, or else I will send for you. I must leave to-morrow morning at daybreak.’

A few weeks ago and neither husband nor wife would have cared how long the separation might be, now it seemed death for each to part.

Howel kissed his child again and again as she lay sleeping in her dingy bed, and held Netta long in his arms. The only human being who really loved him! Him, weak, wild, sinful, godless! yet with one divine spark rekindling in his breast—the spark of human love.

He laid his wife, fainting, by the side of her child on the bed, bathed her temples with water until he saw that she would revive, and then rushed out into the dirty streets, under the misty, murky morning sky, a reckless and miserable man.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE ACCOUNTANT.

‘I never shall get through these accounts!’ is the soliloquy of Miss Gwynne, to whom we return with much pleasure, on my part, at least, after a separation of six years.

She is seated in a gloomy but comfortable dining-room, in a house situated in one of the squares at the East End of London. We left her in her large, airy, country home, looking out upon a beautiful view of hill and valley—we find her in a close, dark square, with nothing to enliven the scene without but a few dingy shrubs, a row of tall gaunt houses, and a smoke-discoloured, soot-filled atmosphere. We left her unhappy and discontented—we find her happy and contented. We left her with a mind harassed by uncertain plans, disappointed hopes, and humbled pride—we find her with a mind strengthened by good purposes, holy aspirations, and prayers for humility. Still, we left her and find her Winifred Gwynne. She has not lost her idiosyncrasy.

Reader, be not hasty to pronounce upon the suddenness of these changes. Six years spent principally amongst the earnest minded, laborious clergy of London and their families, in the heart of the most wretched, squalid parish, amongst the lowest, most depraved, most ignorant, most utterly miserable set of people in England, would sober

the most thoughtless woman in the world, provided she had a heart. And Freda has not only a heart, but one earnestly desirous of doing good.

She has found vent for her energy, occupation for her time, a bank for all the money she possesses; therefore we find her in the midst of papers covered with figures, containing accounts of ragged schools, which she is labouring to reckon up, in the simplest of morning dresses, without ornament or extraneous adornment. She is somewhat paler and thinner than she used to be amongst the breezy hills of Wales, but her eyes are brighter, and the expression of her countenance is gentler.

Page 234

‘How stupid I am!’ she exclaims. ’Gladys would reckon them up directly, but she is at the school, and I am ashamed to ask Nita, with all her accounts.’

She pauses a moment and lays down her pen. Her eyes fall upon an unopened letter.

‘And I declare I have not broken the seal of my own father’s letter,’ she mutters, performing this duty as she does so, and running through it with occasional comments.

’"We hope you will come and spend Christmas—” I suppose I must—“and see your little brother, who longs to see sister Freda again—” Humph! but who cut her out of Glanyravon Park and all thereto belonging, though he certainly is a dear little man. “Her ladyship quite well, and desires her love.” I suppose I ought to be glad and try to return the love. “Mrs Gwynne Vaughan and her children were here yesterday. She asked for you, and the little ones wished to know when you were coming home—” I am much obliged to her, and am afraid I am *not* too anxious to see either her or her husband, in spite of their civility. “Little Harold is really a wonderful child! He begins to spell already!” So like my good father. Well, I ought to be thankful he is happy, and that it all turned out so much better than I expected. But I can’t help feeling a kind of wicked disappointment when I think that Lady Mary should be quite as good a tactician as a second wife, as she was before she married again. But, I hope, I am happy that she makes poor papa comfortable and doesn’t worry him to death. I don’t think he loves her now half as well as he does me; still, perhaps she suits him better, because she manages him, and I never could. But the *tyfydd* [Footnote: Welsh for heir.] is a dear little fellow, and I am really fond of him.’

Miss Gwynne’s soliloquy is cut short by a rap at the door, followed by the entrance of Rowland Prothero, who says, as he bows and seems about to retreat,—

‘I beg your pardon—I was told Mr Jones was here.’

‘Oh, do come in!’ says Miss Gwynne, rising, and advancing to meet Rowland; ’I cannot get through these accounts. I have been reckoning and reckoning ever since breakfast, and they will not come right. I should be so much obliged to you if you would just look them over for me.’

Rowland seated himself at Freda’s desk, and began at once to do her bidding. The ragged school was the one in which he was so much interested, and that he had been instrumental in establishing.

Whilst Miss Gwynne had been living with her friend, Mrs Jones, she had seen a great deal of Rowland; they had, in fact, been thrown much together. At first, Rowland ceased to come to consult the Joneses, or to spend his few spare hours with them, when he heard that Freda was there; and, of course, they and she understood and

respected his reasons for absenting himself; but in the course of time, they met at Sir Philip Payne Perry's, at his rector's, and elsewhere, and his reserve slightly wore off.

Page 235

When Freda began to assist Mrs Jones in her parish work, and threw herself, heart and soul, into the ragged school, they met of necessity very frequently. Freda was so studiously polite in her manners to him, and so careful to avoid every subject that would recall their old relations at Glanyravon, that he gradually felt more at his ease with her, and it ended by his resuming his old, friendly intercourse with Mr and Mrs Jones. But Freda knew well that, in spite of her best efforts to propitiate him, he never forgot those words, 'Do you know who I am, and who you are?' He was always gentlemanlike, always kind, always ready to do anything she asked him, but he never relaxed the somewhat formal respect of his manner. In society, he was quite different with every one else to what he was with her. With the Perrys he was as much at ease as if he were their own son; and they seemed almost to consider him as such. At his rector's he was the life of their little circle, and might have been, Freda shrewdly suspected, united to it by a link closer than that of curate, had he so chosen; for there was a very pretty daughter who evidently looked upon him with favourable eyes. Amongst the respectable portion of his flock he was a general favourite, and all the young ladies, as young ladies will, worked with and for him; not only in the matter of schools, but in slippers and purses. What was still more clear and satisfactory to Freda was, that he made way amongst the miserable poor.

The ragged school children loved him, and through them, he got at the hearts of some of their degraded parents. His seemed a labour of love with every one but her. She received his marked politeness and nothing more. But he interested her daily. Some new trait of character would break out—some little touch of deep feeling—some symptom of a highly sensitive nature, which told her how much he must have felt her cutting words. He was proud, too, and she liked him for it, although she was striving to humble her own pride. What would she not have given to have recalled those words! The Rowland Prothero of London, esteemed and loved by the wise and good, for his unpretending but strenuous parochial labours, his clear, forcible, but very simple preaching—was to her quite a different person from him of Glanyravon Farm, the son of her father's tenant. In short they were no longer identical. As she was no longer the heiress of Glanyravon, but simply Miss Gwynne, Mrs. Jones' friend—so he was Mr. Rowland Prothero, a respectable and respected London clergyman.

And these are the relations under which they appear, sitting near one another over the accounts of the ragged school, which Freda has undertaken to keep.

'I think there is a slight fault here, Miss Gwynne,' he says, pointing out an error in calculation.

'Of course, I never had a head for figures, and Mrs. Jones could never get me to do my sums.'

’Still, the account is quite right in the main, the errors were in the adding up, and it is rightly balanced.’

Page 236

’Thank you, I am so very much obliged to you. I should never have got through them. And now, will you tell me of those wretched people that Mr. Jones would not let me go and see.’

’I gave them the money you kindly sent, or, at least, laid it out for them, as they would have spent it in gin, and they are already more comfortable; but the father is gone away, and the mother apparently dying.’

‘Is there no way of alleviating all this wretchedness?’

’I fear none. Sin is at the root, and as long as the present world lasts, there must be misery with it.’

Rowland spoke these words in an unusually melancholy and depressed tone of voice, which caused Miss Gwynne to look up from the papers, directly at him. He was paler than usual, and his lip quivered. He met her glance, and making an effort to rise, said hastily,—

’Can I have the honour of doing anything more for you, Miss Gwynne. I am sure I can return you the thanks of the committee, indeed of every one concerned for—’

’I want no thanks, I deserve no thanks from any one; are you ill, Mr. Rowland? You have been in some of those dreadful haunts, and they have upset you. May I get you something?’

‘Thank you, I am quite well.’ Rowland’s lip quivered still more and he grew still less calm, as he again met Miss Gwynne’s eye fixed on him with evident interest.

’I am sure you are ill; you must allow me the privilege of a parishioner, if not of an old friend, and let me ask what is the matter?’

Her manner was so kind, that Rowland’s reserve was for a moment overcome.

‘Thank you, Miss Gwynne—my poor sister.’

’Yes, what of her? I assure you I am truly interested for her; poor Netta!’

’I fear she is in serious trouble, I scarcely know what myself as yet; but she, her husband and child have left the house, and Howel’s creditors have taken possession of all his effects. No one knows where they are gone, or what is to become of them.’

Rowland had not the courage to tell Miss Gwynne that the police were searching for Howel right and left upon a charge of forgery.

‘Poor Netta! I am very, very sorry. What can have reduced him to this?’

’Gaming, horse-racing, speculating! These will waste the largest fortune and ruin the fairest hopes. But he deserves it all, only my poor sister is the victim, and the respectability of an honest name is impeached.’

’Oh no—poor Netta’s hasty marriage and wilful temper were the causes of her trouble, it can have nothing to do with your family; besides, many people of high family and position are obliged to fly for debt.’

’That is dishonour enough, Miss Gwynne, but this—this is worse; Howel is suspected of—of forgery.’

Rowland gave Miss Gwynne one quick, searching glance as he said that word, and then rose to go. She rose, too, but putting out her hands, and looking him full in the face, kindly and gently, she said,—

Page 237

’Mr. Prothero, I am very sorry for you; for Netta; for all. But if this is true, the sin and the shame will rest with him who caused them—it cannot fall on you or yours.’

Rowland shook the offered hand, and then left the room.

In the hall he met Gladys, who had just come in from the school. Frisk was barking and jumping about her with great animation, not having grown, as Freda foretold, a useless and fat London dog. When Rowland appeared, he transferred his attentions to him, and looked much disappointed at receiving none in return.

Rowland shook hands with Gladys, and asked her to come with him into Mr Jones’ little study, where he told her, more clearly than he had told Miss Gwynne, what he knew of Howel and Netta.

He said that he had been to their house the previous day in the afternoon, and had found it occupied by sheriffs’ officers and policemen, who were trying, in vain, to ascertain from the servants where their master and mistress were. All that they knew was that their master did not sleep in the house the previous night, and that their mistress left it that morning. Rowland had waited until late at night, but no further intelligence was gained.

He gleaned that Howel was accused of having forged cheques, at different times, to a very large amount, in the names both of Sir Samuel Spendall and Sir Horatio Simpson. The frauds had been discovered through a cheque on the latter’s bank, purporting to be written by him for five hundred pounds, received by Howel a few weeks before. Sir Horatio Simpson having gone himself to his bankers for some money, it was found that he had overdrawn his account, and, upon examining his late cheques, he utterly disclaimed that of Howel, and declared it forged. The result of this was a general examination of his banking accounts for the last four years, and the discovery of forgeries, by alteration of figures and forged signatures, to the amount of some five or six thousand pounds.

At the same time Sir Samuel Spendall’s attorneys found, from a rigid examination of that baronet’s affairs, that Howel’s claim on him did not amount to two-thirds of his demand, and that various signatures to betting debts, and loans of money, *etc*., were forgeries.

In addition to this, Howel’s own debts, both on the turf and to his tradesmen, were enormous, and ignominy surrounded him on all sides.

Rowland groaned aloud as he told Gladys these horrible truths, and Gladys had no words of comfort; all she could say was,—

’It is not poor Netta’s fault; it is not yours, Mr Rowland, or that of any one belonging to you.’

‘But the shame, Gladys; you know my father, it will be his death.’

’Oh no, sir, he always expected something of the kind. I have often heard him say so. If we could only find Mrs Jenkins and her child it would not be so bad.’

Mr Jones came in, and Gladys left the room and went to Miss Gwynne.

Page 238

Gladys has become the friend and confidential adviser of every member of that small household; no one but herself considers her as a servant. She acts as housekeeper for Mrs Jones, maid to Miss Gwynne, school teacher and district visitor to Mr Jones and Rowland, almoner and confidante to all. Gladys, within doors, Miss Gladys, without; no one knows that she has any other name. In spite of her beauty, her youth, her timidity, she goes amongst scenes and people, from whom most women, even the best, would shrink, and seems to bear about with her a charmed life and invisible strength that nothing can destroy.

Amongst the wretched Irish who inhabit a portion of that vast, depraved parish, she has an influence that even the clergy cannot boast, due to her Irish extraction and slight accent; and the sufferings she has herself undergone from gaunt famine and grim death, make her keenly alive to their wants and feelings. No one has such power over the poor untutored heathen children of the ragged school as she has, and no one loves them as she does. She, too, like her mistress, has found her vocation in their city home; who cannot find a vocation in any home, if they will only look around them for it?

Whilst Rowland and Mr Jones discuss the sad news Rowland has to tell, Miss Gwynne, Mrs Jones and Gladys discuss it also, for Mrs Jones has joined the pair in the dining room. There is but one feeling in that household—sorrow for Rowland and his family, anxiety about Netta. Tears are in the eyes of all those true-hearted women as they think of the probable fate of the once bright little belle of their country neighbourhood, deserted, perhaps amongst the wild wildernesses of London houses.

Mr Jones endeavours to console Rowland by suggesting that if Netta is left by her husband she will surely fall back upon her brother; and when he has exhausted what little portion of hope he can inspire, Rowland turns resolutely to subjects that must be attended to, even if his heart were breaking from sorrow.

The respected rector of that large parish was in very uncertain health, and had gone abroad with his family for three months, leaving all the parochial duties in the hands of his two curates. They were heavy enough for three clergymen, but Mr Jones and Rowland found them almost too weighty for them, unassisted by their chief; however, they fought manfully through them, Sundays and week days.

Rowland refused Mr and Mrs Jones' invitation to dinner, and, crossing the square, entered his solitary lodging in one of the opposite houses, and began to write to his brother Owen. He told him all that he knew of Howel and Netta, and begged him to break it to their parents as best he might.

Page 239

When he had finished his letter he prepared to go out again. His landlady brought him some luncheon, but he could not touch it. He went first to his ragged school, and there the sight of those children of crime and infamy recalled his little niece to his mind, and made his heart sink still lower with the fear of what she might become. Never had he spoken with such feeling to the motley throng that stood about him as he did that day. Then he had to thread some of the haunts whence those children came to seek out the miserable parents to whom they had been a sort of introduction, and never before had he experienced so forcibly that he was their brother, even theirs, as now that he knew that his sister's husband was 'a thief and a forger;' he could almost fancy that they already pointed to him as belonging, at least, to one as degraded as themselves.

That evening he read prayers and lectured in one of the churches. He lectured extempore, and it was noted by all his congregation that more than once his feelings nearly overcame him. They thought and talked of the fact, when, at a later period, they heard of his family sorrow. But they all said that his 'word was with power,' and there was many a moist eye amongst them as he warned them, in language made even more forcible than usual by the events of the day, against the pleasures and vices of the world.

After the service many of the school teachers and Scripture-readers met him in the vestry to have their work allotted, and their word of advice and encouragement. Again he pressed upon them the subject brought home to his heart, that of resisting in youth the 'temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.'

His youthful regiment of soldiers talked to one another afterwards of the earnestness and piety of Him who led them on in their battle against evil, and prayed to become more like one who was so devoted to 'fighting that good fight,' which they had enlisted to join in.

Tired and exhausted, Rowland returned to his lodging. He tried to review the events of the day, but in doing so, fairly broke down. He had been striving to keep his mind in subjection by beating down his monster enemy, pride, for the last six years; but he found that he was still rampant within him. It was not simply the grief for a sister's distress and a brother-in-law's sin that he felt, but strong personal mortification. How could he think of self, of the Perrys, of his rector, of his family, of his parishioners and their opinion, above all, how could he think of Miss Gwynne, who disdained him,—at a time when every personal feeling ought to be merged into sympathy with others? He prayed and struggled against the tempter; prayed for his sister; above all, for Howel; in words too fervent and holy for these pages; and went to bed and slept from mere exhaustion of mind and body. Little did Netta imagine, when she made that disobedient step into the dark future, what misery it would bring upon all who loved her!

Page 240

Pause, then, and think, all you young women who may be meditating a similar course, even whilst reading this story, or may be at issue with your parents, because their experience shows them a future which your inexperience cannot show you! Pause and think that Netta is no fictitious character, her story no mere creation of an author's brain, but the portrait and history of one out of hundreds of wilful daughters brought to shame and grief, and bringing all belonging to them to shame and grief by an unblessed and unholy marriage.

CHAPTER XL.

THE FORGER'S WIFE.

Days and weeks passed, and there was no intelligence of Netta. Rowland had heard from Owen of the domestic misery at home, and also that he had been to see Mrs Griffith Jenkins, who disclaimed all knowledge of her son's hiding place, or what had become of his wife and child. Her own grief was too real to allow even the sceptical Owen to doubt it; and when, in addition, she gave him to understand that she, too, was nearly ruined by Howel's forgeries, but that she would die rather than tell any one else of it, he could only pity the wretched mother who had, by her bad example and teaching, helped to train her son for the ruin into which he had fallen.

Rowland heard that Mr Deep had been arrested upon a charge of abetting Howel in his crimes, and that a search-warrant for the examination of his papers had brought to light other nefarious dealings, as well as an unsigned letter, supposed to be in Howel's writing, intimating his intention of going to America. This had caused inquiries to be made at the docks, and police emissaries to be despatched forthwith to America. A person answering his description had sailed for that continent from Southampton the day after Howel left his house, but unaccompanied by wife or child.

Strange to say that the Epsom races had come off, and that Howel's horse, Magnificent, had actually won the Derby stakes! Too late! save for his creditors and those he had defrauded. Still, doubtless, one more bitter drop in the cup of his despair, wherever he might chance to be drinking it.

All that he had left behind him was sold, hunters inclusive, and this Magnificent alone, particularly after the Derby, yielded a princely fortune. Too late, either for further crimes, or poor Netta's hoped-for reformation.

It was hard work for Rowland to go through his heavy parochial duties with this great misfortune hanging over his head. But if the sympathy and kindness of friends could help him in his work, and support him under the pressure of anxiety, he was helped and supported. Still it was evident to all that he fled from society, and in spite of the delicate tact of the Joneses and Freda, he had scarcely been near them since that first day.

Whether it was pride or susceptibility, he could scarcely tell himself, but he could not bring himself to thrust his sorrow and those of his family upon others. He caused every possible search to be made, through the police and otherwise for Netta, but in vain.

Page 241

But Providence answered his prayers, when his own efforts seemed fruitless, and that through the instrumentality of one of the poor children, for whose benefit he had exerted such talents as God had given him.

Some four years before, a miserable girl of eleven years old had become one of his ragged school children. I say *his*, because even his rector allowed him the merit of establishing the school. Through this child, Rowland became acquainted with her mother, a wretched, starving widow, living in squalor and iniquity. Miss Gwynne had helped her temporally, Rowland spiritually, and when she had died, about a year ago, he had strong hopes that much suffering had brought forth a sincere repentance.

Her little girl was one of the many examples of the blessed effects of a ragged school. At her mother's death she was fifteen years old, teachable and anxious to be taught. Rowland prevailed on a respectable woman, the lodging-house keeper, in whose house Netta had found a refuge, to try her as a servant, and she had turned out well.

So it was that this girl, having an idea that Rowland could effect wonders, waited for him one Sunday evening after service, and asked if she might speak with him. She told him, with a long preface of apologies, that she did not know if she was right in saying what she was going to say, but that there was a poor lady in her mistress's second floor, who was very ill, out of her mind she thought, and who hadn't a friend in the world. The lady had forbidden her mistress to speak to any doctor or clergyman about her, but she had not forbidden her. And indeed it seemed almost worse to see a lady in such trouble and sickness than it did those who were used to it, as she, and the like of her had been, and would be still, but for Mr Prothero.

'What is her name?' asked Rowland eagerly.

'Mrs Mills, sir.'

Rowland's sudden hope fell.

'And she has a little girl, sir, who isn't well either, and who does nothing but cry and moan.'

'What is her name?'

'Her mamma calls her Minette, or some such name, sir.'

'I will come with you now,' said Rowland, in great agitation. 'Make haste; I suppose she has been with you some time.'

'More than a month, sir, and she is always expecting some one to come—and no one comes.'

Rowland strode on, fast—faster than he had once before walked with Gladys—heedless of everything around him. In about a quarter of an hour he and the girl reached the lodging house.

’You will tell missus how it was, please, sir. I don’t think she can be angry, sir.’

’I am sure she will not be angry; tell her that I want to see her.

Mrs Saunders, the landlady, came at once.

Rowland inquired into the particulars of Netta’s arrival at her house, her illness, *etc*., and heard what we already know of Howel’s sudden departure; and the following account, in addition of the month Netta had spent since he left her.

Page 242

‘The morning after Mr Mills left, sir,’ said the landlady ’Mrs Mills did not ring for breakfast, or show any sign of being up. I waited for a long time, and then I went and listened at the bedroom door. I heard a kind of moaning, and was so frightened, I made so bold as to go in. I found the poor lady lying down on the bed, beside the little girl, who was still asleep. She seemed more dead than alive, and looked at me terrified-like, as if she didn’t know who was coming in. When she saw me, she tried to get up and look cheerful, and to give account of her never having undressed. I went and made her some tea, and got her to go into the sitting-room by the fire which the girl lighted, for she was as cold as death. Then I dressed the little girl, who awoke and began to cry when she saw how pale her mamma looked, and I told her to try to make her mamma eat and drink. And the little dear, like an angel as she is, began to comfort her mother, and to coax her, and when I saw the poor lady begin to shed tears over the child I went away.

’Ever since that morning, sir, she has been in a kind of a dream. She does nothing but look out of the window, up and down the street, as if she was expecting some one, and whenever there is a step on the stairs, she runs to the door and peeps out. And then, when the postman’s knock is heard, she starts, turns red, turns pale, and puts her hand on her heart. I am sure she has heart complaint, and I asked her to let me send for a doctor, but she wouldn’t hear of it. Sometimes I think she’s a little crazed. Once I mentioned the clergy, and asked if she wouldn’t like to see one, and said you and Mr Jones, sir, were very kind gentlemen. She started up, and said, “Hush! hush! not for worlds—not for worlds! Mr Mills will soon be back!” She gave me a ten-pound note to change twice—and I was obliged to buy everything for her and the little girl, for they hadn’t a rag with them, except what they stood up in. I was as careful as I could be, but the money went, and now she talks of selling some jewels and things she brought with her. Oh, sir! if you could find their friends!’

As may be supposed, Rowland had some difficulty in controlling his emotion during this recital. When Mrs Saunders paused, he said,—

’I have every reason to believe that I know this poor lady, and, if you will trust me to go to her, I am sure that I shall be of service. I must go quite alone. You may depend upon my having a right to do this.’

’Whatever you do, sir, is sure to be right and kind. If you will take it upon yourself I shall be only too glad. You know the room, sir? the one where you used to go and see my poor husband.’

Rowland was upstairs immediately. Almost before he reached the door, a pale, haggard face peered out of it.

‘It is—it is Howel!’ cried poor Netta, rushing into the gloomy passage, and throwing her arms round Rowland’s neck.

‘No, Netta—dearest Netta! it is I, Rowland—your brother,’ said Rowland, supporting his fainting sister back into the room.

Page 243

‘Uncle! Uncle Rowland! I am so glad!’ exclaimed a little voice, as Minette ran towards him and clasped his knees.

As, the glare of the gas by which the room was lighted fell upon Netta’s face, Rowland half believed that it was the corpse of his once blooming sister that he was placing on the sofa.

‘Fetch some water, Minette, darling,’ said Rowland, supporting Netta.

‘This is what mamma takes,’ said the child, bringing Rowland a small bottle labelled ‘Prussic acid’ from the bedroom.

‘I cannot give her this. Is there no wine?’

’The little girl went to an old chiffonier and brought a decanter with wine in it. Rowland poured some down Netta’s throat, and she recovered.

‘Rowland, is it you? Not—not—’ muttered Netta, as she strove to rise. ’I think you had better go. Perhaps, when he comes, he won’t like—oh, my heart.’

’Be calm, dear Netta; I will do nothing you dislike. If Howel comes back I will go away directly. I will be most careful of what I say. You need not fear me, Netta,—your brother who loves you so dearly’

‘You won’t go away again, uncle, will you?’ said the pale, little Minette, climbing on Rowland’s knee and nestling her head in his bosom; ‘or will you take mamma and me away from this nasty place?’

’No, dear, Uncle Rowland will not leave you, he is so very glad to find you.’

Tears, actual tears, filled Rowland’s eyes as he kissed the brow of the child, who was soon fast asleep in his arms, and as he held Netta’s thin hand and looked at her bewildered face.

‘Did you say you loved me, Rowland?’ asked Netta, looking at him with a strange, wandering glance, whilst large tears rolled down her cheeks. ’I don’t think I deserve any one’s love, do I? Is mother vexed that I have been away so long?’

’Yes, dear, and you must come home at once. You must come to me first to get strong, and then—’

’Hush! hush! No, I cannot leave this house,—I will not; never, never till Howel comes or sends for me. Isn’t that some one on the stairs?’

‘I will see, dear.’

‘No, not you,—not you.’

‘It is some one gone to the next floor. Lie still, dear Netta.’

‘It is nice having you, Rowland; but if he should come—’

’I would go away. You are ill, Netta. Tell me what is the matter with you.’

Rowland was feeling Netta’s pulse, and found that they were too rapid to be counted, whilst he could literally hear the pulsation of her heart.

’I don’t know; something at my heart. And—and—my head, just here,—at the top. It is so burning, like fire.’

‘We must nurse you, Netta. If you would only come to my lodgings.’

’Hush! hush! not for the world. I will stay here till—I am sure that is a step.’

’No dear. Try to be calm and sleep for half-an-hour, whilst I go and make some arrangements.’

Page 244

‘Do you think he will come to-night?’

’I scarcely think he can, Netta. You know he is obliged to hide, dear, do you not? for—’

’Yes, yes! he told me for a few days for debt, and then he would come back. But he didn’t murder Captain Dancy, did he?’

Netta started up and fixed her eyes wildly on her brother.

‘No,—I assure you, no! I saw some one who saw Captain Dancy yesterday.’

‘Thank God! thank God!’

’And, Netta, I do not think he can venture to come back just yet; so you must try to get well for all our sakes.’

’Yes, I will, that I may go to him. I will sleep now. Put Minette by my side. Poor Minette!’

Rowland laid the child’s head on her mother’s lap, and arranged the pillows for Netta, and then went, with a heart full to bursting, to Mrs Saunders.

‘Mrs Saunders,’ he said, ’I know that I can trust you. The poor lady to whom you have been so kind is my own sister, for whom we have been anxiously searching all this time. I don’t know how far secrecy may be necessary, but, at present at least, do no let this fact go beyond yourself. Her husband has reduced her to what you see. I must leave her for half-an-hour; meanwhile, will you prepare supper, make a cheerful fire, let off the gas, and give us a couple of candles? Make the room as home-like as you can, in short. After my sister and the little girl are gone to bed, put a couple of blankets on the sofa in the sitting-room for me. I cannot leave her to-night.’

‘Excuse me, sir,’ said Mrs Saunders, ’wouldn’t your sleeping here excite observation, if secrecy is necessary. You may depend on my care. Sarah has slept on the sofa for a fortnight, unknown to Mrs Mills, to be within call.’

’Perhaps you are right; but I want to make my sister fancy she is at home. It might recall her mind, which is evidently wandering. I shall be back soon.’

Rowland walked as fast as he could to Mr Jones’. He found him, his wife, and Freda together in his library.

‘I must apologise for coming so late,’ he began; ’but I know you are so kindly interested in my poor sister that you will excuse me. I have found her and her child, and cannot prevail on her to leave her rooms at Mrs Saunders’, where she is.’

Then Rowland told his friends shortly how he had found her, and that he feared her mind was in a most uncertain state.

’She evidently does not know her husband’s crimes, but thinks he is hiding on account of debt, and is expecting him to fetch her away every moment. I think if we could distract her thoughts from this one subject she might get better; but she is very ill, bodily as well as mentally.’

‘Would not the sight of old friends be the best restorative?’ suggested Miss Gwynne. ’Gladys and I could go to her, and as we are in the habit of visiting the sick in the parish, no suspicion could attach to our being with her; for it would never do, in poor Netta’s state, to expose her to inquisitive people connected with her husband’s flight.’

Page 245

‘Thank you—thank you, Miss Gwynne,’ said Rowland ’This is what I wished, but scarcely dared to ask.’

Miss Gwynne left the room, and returned accompanied by Gladys.

‘Gladys says she is ready to go at once, if necessary,’ said Freda; ’and we can do without her, cannot we, Serena?’

‘Quite well,’ said Mrs Jones; ’but it will not do to excite an invalid, and so sudden a visit may not be good for her.’

‘She must not be left another night without a friend at hand,’ said Freda decidedly.

Rowland looked his thanks.

’Could not Mr Rowland prepare her for my coming? And I could sleep in the sitting-room, and not even see her to-night, but be ready to wait upon her to-morrow morning,’ said Gladys.

‘Yes,’ said Freda. ’If you will go back and try to prepare her for Gladys, Mr Prothero, she shall follow you in a short time.’

‘I will bring her,’ said Mr Jones, ’and she can but return, if you cannot prevail on your sister to see her.’

Rowland could only press the hands of his kind friends, and hurry back to Netta.

He found her sitting in an old easy-chair, with Minette on a stool at her feet, fast asleep. The child refused to go to bed till ’Uncle Rowland’ came back. There was a bright fire in the grate, and a supper was spread on a table drawn close to it. Candles replaced the gas-lamp, and the room looked almost cheerful, in spite of its faded red curtains and dingy furniture.

Netta had a small book in her hand, which she gave Rowland to look at.

’Mother gave me that when I was ill years ago—how long ago? How old is Minette?’

‘She must be nearly eight, I think,’ said Rowland, turning over the small, well-read Testament that had once been his mother’s.

‘I like that book now, Rowland!’ said Netta. ’I am so glad you have come back. It seemed so lonesome when you were gone. Ha! ha! Howel used to say I must say *lonely* and not lonesome. Are you sure he won’t come and find you here?’

’Quite sure. And I am going to bring another old friend to see you?—you remember Gladys?’

’Gladys! No, I don’t remember her. What! The Irish beggar? I don’t like her, and she don’t like me. I think I was very unkind to her. Yes, I should like to see her once to ask her pardon.’

Minette awoke just at this moment, and Rowland took her on his knee, and gave her some supper, and tried to make Netta eat, but it was evident that she had neither appetite nor inclination for food, though she did her best to please her brother.

‘This is like old times, Rowland,’ she said. ’I like it better than grandeur. When will Gladys come? Owen told me she saved mother’s life. Is it true? Why doesn’t mother come?’

‘Would you like to see Gladys to-night, Netta?’

‘Yes. Will you go and fetch her?’

Rowland found Gladys and Mr Jones in Mrs Saunders’ parlour. Gladys said she would take her bonnet off, that she might meet Netta as she used to do at the farm.

Page 246

Rowland did not know that Gladys had put on the identical print gown that Netta had given her years ago, and which she had kept carefully, in remembrance of her. This and a plain cap transformed her into the Gladys of Netta's recollection, from the Gladys of Miss Gwynne's attiring.

Her heart beat almost as quickly as Netta's as she entered her room, but she steadied her nerves and voice as she went up to Netta, curtseyed, and said quite naturally,—

'How do you do, Miss Netta?'

Netta put her hand to her brow, as if to clear her memory, and fixed her large bewildered eyes on Gladys. Then she put out her hand, rather condescendingly, with something of the old attempt at superiority, and finally burst into tears.

The tears were so natural that Rowland and Gladys let them flow on; only the latter knelt down by poor Netta's side, and taking her hands in hers, pressed them tenderly. Netta threw her arms round Gladys' neck and kissed her, and called her, 'Gladys, Gladys, fach!' and said, 'You will not leave me.'

And thus the once proud little Netta and the always humble Gladys clave to one another, as Naomi and Ruth.

Minette got off her uncle's knee, and climbed up into the chair, and put her arms, too, round her mother's neck, and began to cry with her.

Rowland's emotion at this scene found vent in prayer. Inwardly he asked that Gladys might be a comfort and support to his dear, wandering, forsaken sister.

When Netta's emotion had worn itself out, Rowland prepared to go, promising to return early on the morrow.

He asked Netta if she would like him to offer up a few words of thanksgiving for their reunion before he left her, and when she assented they all knelt together in family prayer. Eight full years had passed since Netta had so knelt before.

When Rowland had departed, Gladys asked Minette if she might put her to bed. The child looked shyly at her at first, and then allowed her to undress her, and to take her to the close, gloomy bedroom. It was so late, and the child was so tired, that her little head drooped in sleep even before she was undressed, and when Gladys laid her pale cheek on the pillow she slept soundly at once. Then Gladys returned to the sitting-room, and found Netta at the door listening.

'Hush! you had better go. I think he is coming,' she said.

Gladys withdrew for a moment, till the steps were no longer heard. As long as Netta had been occupied with her brother and Gladys, she seemed to have forgotten the passing sounds, but when left alone she listened as before.

With some difficulty Gladys prevailed on her to go to bed. Mrs Jones had given her night-lights, and a slight sleeping potion before she left home, upon the chance of their being wanted; and she put one of the former in the bedroom, and gave Netta the latter. She sat by her side until she fell asleep, and then returned to the sitting-room, literally 'to watch and pray.'

Page 247

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SISTER OF CHARITY.

The following morning, soon after eight o'clock, there arrived a basket from Miss Gwynne, containing various meats and condiments that she thought might be good for Netta and her child, and, above all, a nosegay of Glanyravon flowers. Mr Gwynne had of late taken to send his daughter baskets of game, poultry, and other country cheer, to which her particular ally, the old gardener always added a tin of well-packed flowers. These Miss Gwynne was in the habit of tending and treasuring, as people in large cities alone can tend and treasure flowers, until their last odour and colour departed, and these she now gladly sacrificed to Netta.

It was an October morning, dull and misty. Gladys had kept up the fire, and when Rowland's friend, Sarah, came to clean the room, she found that her work had been done for her.

'Oh, Miss Gladys,' said the girl, 'why did you?'

'Never mind, Sarah, you get the breakfast things and boiling water, and I will do the rest.'

Netta and her child slept late, and so heavily, that Gladys thought they would never awake. She had arranged and rearranged the room, the breakfast, everything; and was employed in mending a rent in Minette's frock, when she heard the little girl say 'Mamma!' She went into the bedroom, and found Minette sitting up in bed, and her mother still sleeping. She washed and dressed the child, who seemed to take to her naturally, and then led her into the sitting-room. Her delight was so unbounded at the sight of the breakfast and the flowers on the table, that her exclamations pierced the thin partition, and awoke her mother.

'He is come! he is come!' cried Netta, jumping out of bed, and hastening into the sitting-room in her night-dress through the door that communicated with the bedroom.

When Gladys saw the wild excitement of Netta's manner, and the unusual gleam of her eyes, she understood what Rowland meant by saying that her mind was unsettled; when she saw Gladys, she started, and ran back again into the bedroom, whither Gladys followed her. A fit of depression and pain at the heart succeeded, as they always did, this new disappointment; and it was evident to Gladys that the only chance of restoring her to health of mind or body was by keeping her amused, and distracting her thoughts from her husband.

Minette brought in the flowers, and Gladys ventured to say that they came from Glanyravon, and that Miss Gwynne had sent them. The flowers, or their associations,

brought the tears, which were the best outlets for poor Netta's hysterical feelings, and when she had minutely examined each—chrysanthemums, verbenas, salvias, geraniums—she shook the one carnation from the vase, and kissing it, and pressing it to her heart, said,—

'This came from mother, how good of her to think of me.'

Then she let Gladys help her to dress, and went to the well-stored breakfast-table, sitting down on a chair Gladys placed for her. She seemed to take up the teapot mechanically, and began to pour out the tea; Gladys did not attempt to sit down, but waited upon her and Minette, as if she were, indeed, the servant she professed to be. Either Netta took this as a matter of course, or was too much absorbed in other thoughts to give it consideration.

Page 248

‘Mamma, I should like Gladys to have some breakfast with us,’ said Minette, ’she must be so hungry. I think she is a lady, mamma; I like her, she is so kind.’

‘Yes, Gladys, do,’ said Netta, ’you know this is not Abertewey. But where did you get this game?’

’Miss Gwynne sent it, ma’am, she will come and see you by-and-by. I am sure I hear Mr Rowland’s voice on the stairs,’

Gladys said this to avoid another start, and Rowland appeared. Having kissed his sister and niece, and shaken hands with Gladys, he sat down to the breakfast-table. Gladys was still standing, but he begged her to sit down, and she did so.

‘Miss Gwynne sent me all this, Rowland,’ said Netta, ’except the carnation, that was mother’s.’

Netta had placed it in her bosom.

‘Uncle must have a flower too, mamma,’ said Minette, jumping up, and taking him a red geranium. ’Let me put it into your button-hole, it smells so sweet.’

Rowland smiled and coloured as that sprig of red geranium from Glanyravon was placed in his coat by his little niece, and in spite of his better resolutions, when he went home, it was transferred to a glass, and treasured as long as imagination could fancy it a flower.

After breakfast, Gladys asked Netta if Minette might go with her to see Miss Gwynne, as she was obliged to leave for a short time.

’Gladys, you are going away, and would carry off my child, I know you are,’ said Netta, ’all, all! nobody cares what becomes of me. Why can I not die?’

Minette’s arms were round her mother’s neck in a moment.

‘I will stay till you return, Gladys,’ said Rowland.

‘She will not come back if once she goes,’ repeated Netta; ’none of them do, except you, Rowland. Owen never did—mother never did—Howel—oh! he will! he will!’

‘They will both return, dear Netta, only let Minette go.’

‘No, uncle, I won’t leave mamma, never—never!’

Gladys went away alone. Sarah came to clear the breakfast things, and when Netta was seated in her old armchair, Rowland again began to urge her to leave the lodgings

she was in, and either come to his, or accept an invitation that he brought her from Mrs Jones to go to her house.

‘I will never leave these rooms, Rowland,’ she said solemnly, ’until *he* fetches me, or sends for me, or bids me go. He loves me, Rowland, dearly; he said so. Do you know, I once fancied he did not, and tried not to care for him. But when he was in debt and trouble, it all came back again. And, you know, he is my husband, even if I did run away from home, and I must do as he bids me.’

Mrs Saunders came to say that Mr Wenlock wanted Rowland.

‘Perhaps it is he, Rowland,’ said Netta.

’No, dear Netta; it is a great friend of mine, a doctor. Will you see him to please me? We all want so much to get you better.’

’Yes, if you will not tell him about Howel. I must get well, for it may be a long, long journey. Do you know that I dreamt last night that he sent for me, and that I was to travel thousands of miles before I met him. I must get well, so I will see your friend, Rowland, only don’t tell him my name. Minette, go with Mrs Saunders, whilst mamma sees Uncle Rowland’s friend.’

Page 249

Mrs Saunders took Minette away, and Mr Wenlock, a gentle-looking, elderly medical man, a great friend of Rowland's, made his appearance.

Netta rose with a little attempt at her Parisian curtsey, and an effort to assume her Abertewey manners; but she soon forgot her grandeur when the doctor spoke to her in a soothing, fatherly way, and won her to confide her long-concealed illness to him. Rowland left them together, and went down to Mrs Saunders' parlour to amuse his little niece.

In something less-than half-an-hour he was joined by Mr Wenlock, who took Minette on his knee, and looked at her thin cheeks and hollow eyes, felt her weak pulse, and asked her many questions.

When she went upstairs to her mother, Mr Wenlock said,—

'The poor lady is very ill, dangerously, I fear. She must have had some heavy sorrows for years to have reduced her to her present state of nervousness, nearly amounting to insanity, but not quite. This may yet be warded off with great care, total freedom from all excitement, and change of air and scene. She has heart complaint of an alarming nature. This can never be cured; but if her strength can be restored, she may live for years—her natural life, in short—or she may be taken at any moment. Any sudden shock would probably be fatal.'

Rowland had not told Mr Wenlock that Netta was his sister. When he heard his opinion, so clearly and unreservedly expressed, he was greatly distressed.

'She will not be moved from these lodgings,' he said. 'She positively refuses. Will it do to oblige her to leave?'

'By no means. But I hear that admirable young woman, whom I call *our* Sister of Charity, Miss Gladys, has undertaken to nurse her. If any one can persuade her to submit to go elsewhere she will do it. It should be into the country. To her native air, if possible.'

Just at this juncture, Gladys returned, and Rowland called her into the consultation. Mr Wenlock continued,—

'Lead her to think of her child, who is also in a most delicate state. Tell her, that change of air, country air, is absolutely necessary for her—which it really is—but she must not be taken from her mother. Distract her mind as much as possible from the trouble, whatever it is, that oppresses it. Had she been left much longer to herself, she would have quite lost her reason. Let her see such friends as can be trusted to talk to her cheerfully and to amuse, without wearying her. If you undertake this office, Miss Gladys, you will require all your patience, and more than your natural health; and once

undertaken, you must not give it up, for she will get used to you, and depend upon you. Poor thing! poor thing! I have seen many such cases, and never need to inquire much into private history to know their origin. Wicked, morose, unfeeling, cruel husbands are generally at the root, and God only knows what their victims have to bear. There will be a pretty large account to make up at the Great Day, Mr Prothero, between man and wife, of marriage vows broken, and feelings outraged.'

Page 250

‘And my poor—and Mrs Mills,’ said Rowland, ’ought, you think, to be removed at once from London?’

’Decidedly, if she can be prevailed upon to go of her own free will, not otherwise. I will see her again to-morrow, and watch her case as long as she remains here. As regards the poor child, Miss Gladys, she, too, must be nursed and amused, and well fed. I suppose she has been neglected since the measles that her mother told me of, or else she never was a strong child. Poor little lamb! It would kill her mother if she were to be taken! But, really, I couldn’t say—however, we shall see. Good morning. I ought to be elsewhere by this time.’

Mr Wenlock took his departure.

‘Miss Gwynne is coming directly, Mr Rowland,’ said Gladys; ’I suppose I had better tell Mrs Jenkins so. She has been out all the morning, purchasing everything she thought Mrs Jenkins and Miss Minette could want, and is going to bring what she has bought, in a cab, herself,’

‘God bless her!’ murmured Rowland. ’Gladys, do say Minette, and not Miss. Why will you not consider yourself as a friend—a sister?’

Why did that quick, bright flush spread so suddenly over Gladys’ pale face?

’Thank you, Mr Rowland, I will. But I cannot forget what I really was, and am.’

’You are and have been everything to us all, and now all our hopes seem to centre in you. Can Miss Gwynne spare you?’

’She proposed my coming herself; but even if she had not, my first duty is to my dear mistress and her children.’

’You will receive Miss Gwynne, Gladys. It will be less awkward. I have a hundred things to do. Tell Netta that I will come again.’

Rowland went first of all to his lodgings, and wrote a long letter to his father. He told him boldly and plainly what Mr Wenlock had said; he had already written to his mother the good news of his having found Netta. He asked his father in a straightforward manner to receive Netta, and to forgive her. He made no comments, preached no sermon. He thought that a statement of facts would have more effect on his father than all his eloquence, or all the texts of the Bible, every one of which his father knew as well as he did. He also began to feel it was not for him to lecture and reprimand a parent, even though he knew that parent to be in the wrong. As he folded his manly and affectionate letter, he prayed for a blessing upon it, and went to preach and pray with many members of his flock, who, alas! knew not, like his father, those blessed texts, which teach us to ‘forgive as we hope to be forgiven.’

Later in the afternoon he went to Netta again; he found Miss Gwynne with her, cloak and bonnet thrown off, and Minette in full and eager talk on her lap. Netta was looking quite cheerful under the influence of Miss Gwynne's animated manners, and Minette's shouts of laughter. Toys and picture-books were on the table before the child, and all sorts of garments spread about the room. Miss Gwynne had sent Gladys home for a large dressing-gown for Netta, and had expressed her intention of remaining some time.

Page 251

Minette jumped off her lap when Rowland entered, and ran towards him, with a book in one hand, and a doll in the other.

’Look, uncle, what this kind lady has brought me; and she has made mamma quite well. She has been laughing like she used to laugh. Oh, uncle, I love her very much, don’t you?’

Rowland did not say ‘yes,’ but went up to Miss Gwynne, and with all his heart,—

’Oh, Miss Gwynne, how can we ever thank you enough for all this kindness?’

‘By not thanking me at all,’ replied Miss Gwynne, stooping to pick up a book, doubtless to conceal a very decided increase of colour.

These were the first genuine and natural words that Rowland had spoken to Miss Gwynne since those fatal sentences under the great oak in her father’s park.

‘It is all like a dream,’ said Netta, passing her hand over her eyes and forehead, as she did constantly, as if to clear away some cloud that obscured her memory. ’If mother were only here, it would be quite home-like.’

Truly Gladys had made the room almost a pleasant place. The books and work she had brought with her, were already on the tables, and the flowers filled all the old-fashioned vases, taken from the mantelpiece. The fire was bright, and the hearth swept, and poor Netta and Minette were neat and clean.

‘Uncle, what have you done with the geranium?’ suddenly asked Minette.

‘I left it at home, dear.’

‘How cross of you, uncle, to let the pretty flower die.’

’I put it in water, Minette, because it came from Glanyravon, where your mother and I were born, and where your grandfather and grandmother live.’

’I don’t like grandmamma, uncle, she was so fat, and talked so strangely.’

’You should not say that; but you have another grandmother whom you have never seen.’

’Shall we go to her, mammy dear? and will you come, Uncle Rowland? and shall the kind lady come, and Gladys? and then we can gather those pretty flowers. I saw them growing once at the Crystal Palace, and they would not let me pick them.’

Netta forgot her grief, Rowland his sermon, Miss Gwynne her dignity, in talking to Minette of Glanyravon and its inhabitants; and, by degrees, they fell into a conversation upon old friends and old times, that ended in the days when they played together as children in the garden at the vicarage, whilst the squire and his lady were paying their periodical visits to the vicar and his lady.

Unconsciously it oozed out how every incident of those childish games was remembered and treasured up by Rowland, as well as the meetings of a more advanced age, when, as a Rugby boy, he tried to make himself agreeable to the young heiress, who bestowed no thought on him.

But Rowland suddenly remembered that he was treading on dangerous ground, and must not forget who he was, and who Miss Gwynne was. Those words always came to haunt him, whenever he felt more than usually happy; and how could he feel happy for one moment, with Netta possibly dying, and Howel an exile for forgery. Poor fellow, it was only a passing gleam through the mists of a hard life; let him enjoy it.

Page 252

Gladys returned, and Rowland got a cab for Miss Gwynne, who went home to dinner. Rowland had some tea, and went to his evening service in the church.

After tea, Gladys read a story to Minette, which interested Netta, and so the day passed, with but a slight recurrence of Netta's nervous excitement.

Gladys asked Netta if she would like her to read a chapter in the Bible, and Netta said yes; so, with Minette on her lap, she read one of the lessons of the day, which she knew to be particularly applicable to her.

'I will read the other with you,' said Netta, when it was concluded taking her mother's little Testament out of her pocket.

'I wish you would teach me to read, Gladys?' said Minette. 'Justine taught me to read French, and to say French prayers, but I can't read English,'

'Perhaps mamma will teach you, darling!' said Gladys, 'and I will help when she is poorly.'

'We will begin to-morrow,' said Netta? 'I meant to get her a governess, but we were always moving about, and so I never did.'

They read the second lesson, and when it was finished, Netta asked Gladys to sing her a hymn. 'The Evening Hymn, Gladys. I could sing and play that once, before I learnt to sing French songs.'

Gladys' beautiful, clear voice soon began the 'Glory to Thee, my God, this night,' that has been the evening song of praise of so many thousands for so many years. Netta joined at intervals, and her wandering eyes seemed to be steadied, for the time, into a fixed attention, as she gazed at Gladys whilst she sung.

When she finished, Minette was crying. Gladys soothed her, and asked her what was the matter.

'It was so beautiful!' she said. 'Your voice was like the lady's I heard at the play, only the words were so solemn. I thought of my papa. I do not love him much, because he was cross to mamma, but I want to see him, that you may sing to him and make him good.'

Gladys saw Netta's countenance lose the expression of calm it had worn for a few moments, and regain the bewildered and painful one of the morning.

'We can pray for your papa, my love,' she said, gently.

'Will you, will you, Gladys!' almost screamed Netta. 'Your prayers will be heard, you are so good. Now, before Minette goes to bed, that she, too, may pray for her father.'

Gladys had long been in the habit of praying with and for people in great misery, as well as in great sin, so the request did not startle her as it might have startled many. She read, from the Prayer Book, the Confession, and then chose the concluding portion of the Litany, feeling sure that almost any part of that list of petitions was suitable both for Howel and themselves. When she read the words, 'That it may please Thee to have mercy upon all men,' she paused, and added earnestly, 'especially upon him for whom we now desire to pray,' and little Minette added to this, 'that is my poor papa.'

Page 253

It was with difficulty that Gladys could conclude, she was herself so affected by Netta's sobs, and Minette's innocent petition, but when they rose from their knees, Netta said, 'I have not really prayed before, Gladys, for a long time. Will God ever forgive me?' and Minette entreated Gladys 'to teach her prayers in English; she liked them so much better than in French.'

Gladys endeavoured to comfort the poor mother by passages from the Scripture, and promised the child 'to teach her to pray,' and so she helped to repay to her mother and grandmother the debt of gratitude she owed to her and her family.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE NIECE.

THE following day Mrs Jones came to see Netta, and to do her part in amusing her, and distracting her mind from Howel's promised return. Mr Jones also accompanied Rowland in the afternoon in his visit to his sister, and, the ice once broken, these kind and Christian people came, alternately with Miss Gwynne, daily, for about a week, during which period there had been no news of Howel, either public or private. Mr Wenlock visited Netta regularly, but said there could be no improvement in her health, and comparatively little strengthening of the mind, until she could be removed to country air; this, however, she would not hear of, although she cried very much, and was painfully excited, when Rowland gave her a letter from her mother, entreating her to come to Glanyravon, and made her acquainted with the contents of a letter he had received from his father, which we will transcribe.

GLANYRAVON FARM, *October 9, 18—.*

'MY DEAR SON,—Your letter came duly to hand, and I will not deny that it affected me very much. Netta, set up above her station at Abertewey, after disobeying her parents by running away, is very different from Netta, deserted by her scamp of a husband, and left in a poor London lodging. Bring her home, and we will take care of her and her child, though I would rather lose a thousand pounds than have to see her as she is. Mother wants to go up and nurse her, but as that would kill her, I don't choose to let her go. If you can't bring her down, Owen shall fetch her. I always said how it would all end. Netta will believe me now it's no good; but no need to tell her that. I wish Howel the—Well, I won't say more, but remain your affectionate father, DAVID PROTHERO.'

Miss Gwynne was very anxious to tell Netta that Howel was supposed to be in America, and that it was well known he could not return; and at last Rowland took Mr Wenlock into full confidence and asked him whether it would be advisable to do so. He said that he feared she would be frightened at first, and then consider it a *ruse* to get her away. However, something must be done. To tell her that her husband was a felon would kill

her; and she would die if she remained in that close air. He would think the matter over, and decide.

Page 254

It was, however, decided for them the following morning. Netta was the first to hear, as usual, the postman's rap. Manoeuvre as she would, Gladys could not prevent this, and it always brought on considerable excitement. This morning, however, there was actually a letter for Netta, and Sarah went upstairs with it to Gladys. Although she called Gladys out of the room to give it to her, Netta suspected something, ran into the passage, and seized the letter.

Gladys was obliged to support her back to the sofa, and give her some medicine, before she was sufficiently herself to open it When she recovered, she waited for Gladys to leave the room, which she thought it best to do, and then broke the seal. The letter contained the following words:—

> 'DEAREST,—You had better go to your mother or mine. Kiss our child for me. Believe that I love you. God bless you.'

When Gladys returned to the sitting-room, upon a cry from Minette, she found Netta in a swoon. The letter was tightly clasped in her hand, the envelope was on the floor. She ventured to look at the address and postmark. The former was to Mrs Mills, the latter some illegible place in America. She wanted no more information, and asked for none. She brought poor Netta to herself with difficulty, and let her put the letter in its envelope, and both in her bosom, without a question. Netta lay on the sofa, with her eyes closed, and said not a word. All that Gladys or Minette could do to attract her attention was unavailing. But when Rowland came, she roused herself sufficiently to say, 'I am ready to go home now, Rowland: I must go directly.' And then she relapsed into a state of passive inaction. Rowland went for Mr Wenlock, and was fortunate in finding him at home. He accompanied him to Netta, and said that she must be roused by a change of some kind. Rowland said that it was absolutely necessary to write to summon his brother to fetch Netta, and that by the time the letter reached home, and Owen reached London, three days must elapse. Fortunately, Miss Gwynne arrived, and with her usual promptitude, proposed that Netta should be taken for those three days to Mrs Jones'; and she returned home at once to expedite any arrangements Mrs Jones might have to make.

'I am afraid, my dear Serena,' she said, when she had begun the subject, 'that it will put you out. But the poor creature shall have my bedroom, and I can sleep anywhere for those few nights. The dressing-room, Gladys' workroom, will do beautifully for her to sit in if she shouldn't be able to come into the drawing-room.'

'Yes,' said Mrs Jones, 'we can put a sofa in it and easy-chair, and make a regular snuggery of it.'

Mr Jones came in and entered into consultation.

‘I shall be thankful if she can come here,’ he said, ’for poor Prothero is making himself quite ill with anxiety and overwork. I don’t think he has slept four hours a night since he found her. And then, Gladys! she is not strong, she will be laid up.’

Page 255

‘I believe you love Gladys better than me,’ laughed Mrs Jones.

’It was love at first sight, my dear. She was the first pretty girl that I saw after I came from Australia. And I have gone on loving her better and better ever since.’

‘The worst of it is, that it is mutual,’ said Miss Gwynne. ’I wonder whether it is on your account or Owen Prothero’s that she has refused all the London swains who are dying for her.’

Mrs Jones and Freda were soon hard at work arranging rooms. Every available comfort was put into Freda’s bedroom and dressing-room, and her own clothes and general possessions were turned out to find a home elsewhere. Gladys’ little workroom soon wore a most cheerful aspect, and the easiest chair and sofa the house afforded were put into it. Whilst these matters were being arranged, Mr Jones was despatched to tell Rowland to bring his sister as soon as possible, and in the course of a few hours they arrived, accompanied by Gladys and Minette. The shock of the morning had so weakened Netta’s nervous system, that Rowland was obliged to carry her upstairs. When she was put on the sofa in the little room, and saw so many kind friends about her once more, the bewildered, wandering eyes found relief in tears.

‘Gladys! you will not go away?’ she said, holding Gladys by the hand. ‘She may come home with me, Miss Gwynne?’

Gladys knelt down by the sofa, and tried to soothe her, by telling her that her brother was coming to fetch her.

‘I can’t go home without Gladys!’ persisted Netta, casting wild, beseeching glances from one to the other of the friends who stood round her.

‘She shall go with you, Netta, decidedly,’ said Miss Gwynne. ’It will be much the best plan.’

‘Gladys, you will come with us?’ said Minette, throwing her arm round her neck, as she knelt by her mother. ’You won’t go away from poor mamma, and your little Minette.’

Gladys felt, that in this, she was but an instrument. However it was settled that she was to accompany Netta home; and if the inmates of the farm did not receive her willingly, she was to go to the Park, whither Miss Gwynne was to follow shortly, for her long-promised Christmas visit.

When Netta and Rowland were left alone, Minette having been seduced by Miss Gwynne into another room, Netta said,—

’You see, Rowland, I must go away directly, because I don’t know when he may come. I am sure he will fetch me, and if I stay here he will not know where to find me.’

’Only two or three days, dear Netta. I have written to Owen. He will get the letter to-morrow, and be here the next day. You can start the day after to-morrow, if you will try to rouse yourself, and eat and drink.’

’Yes, I will; but I am afraid of father. It is nearly ten years since I saw him, and if he is cross now, I shall die.’

‘He will be kind, quite kind.’

‘Are you sure?’

Page 256

‘Yes, quite sure.’

’And will you come and see me, Rowland? I used to think you cross too, but now you are very good to me. Do you think it was wrong of me to run away with Howel? You know he loves me; he says so, Rowland.’

Here Netta pressed her hand upon the letter that was in her bosom, and Rowland kissed her tenderly.

At intervals, during that day and the next, Netta made fitful efforts to exert herself, but it was evident to all that her body was getting weaker, and every one dreaded the journey in prospect, and longed for its conclusion.

Netta had taken a sudden and violent interest in teaching her child to read and repeat hymns. The hymns that it pleased Minette best to learn were some that Gladys had sung at her mother’s request. These Netta did not know by heart, indeed, her failing memory prevented her retaining anything she had once known; so an old hymn book was produced from Gladys’ book-shelf, which contained these hymns that she had been taught in her childhood by her mother.

It was the second evening of Netta’s stay with the Joneses, and she had been prevailed upon to go into the drawing-room, where Rowland was added to the usual little party.

She was gradually sinking into a state of apparent forgetfulness of those around her, from which it had been so difficult to rouse her since Howel’s letter, when Miss Gwynne said,—

’I think Minette knows the hymn now, Mr Jones. Ask mamma if you may say it, dear.’

’Mamma, may I try to say the hymn now? Mr Jones will take me to see the little children to-morrow if I know it,’ asked the child.

Netta was roused.

’Where is the book? I don’t think I remember it, she said.

‘I will go to Gladys for the book. I know the way, mamma.’

Minette ran to the little room where Gladys was at work busily preparing for the journey. She got the hymn book, asked Gladys to find the place, and returning to the drawing-room triumphantly, gave the book to Mr Jones.

‘You must hear me, to see that I say it quite, quite right,’

The hymn was somewhat difficult for a child, but it had taken Netta's fancy, because the words were written for an old Welsh air that she knew well; indeed the book consisted principally of English and Welsh hymns that had been composed for some of the fine old Welsh tunes.

The words were as follow:—

MORNING, Y FOREU.

Great God, look on me,
From Thy throne eternal;
Make pure unto Thee
This my hymn diurnal.
I my grateful voice would blend,
With nature's loud thanksgiving;

Praises through the earth would send
For the bliss of living.
Then, God, look on me,
From Thy throne eternal,
Make pure unto Thee,
This my hymn diurnal.
On the wings of morning,
With songs of birds up-soaring,
I address Thee,
Praise and bless Thee,

Page 257

Joying and adoring.
O Lord! bless this day,
All my thoughts and doings,
And keep my heart away
From all vain pursuings.
Shield me with Thy fostering wings,
From every wild temptation.
Let the daily course of things,
Work for my salvation.
O Lord I bless this day,
All my thoughts and doings,
And keep my heart away
From all vain pursuings.
With the hymns of flowers,
And streams and fountains blending?
I adore Thee,
And implore Thee,
Prayer and praise upsending.

Minette was in a great state of excitement whilst saying her hymn, and repeated it so energetically, and withal so feelingly, that the attention of Mrs Jones, Miss Gwynne, and Rowland was quite drawn towards her. They did not, therefore, notice the still greater excitement of Mr Jones, as he was, professedly, looking at the hymn book to see whether the child repeated her task correctly.

‘Well done, my little niece,’ cried Rowland, catching her up in his arms, and giving her a hearty kiss.

‘Let me go, uncle. Mr Jones, Mr Jones,’ screamed Minette, ’may I go with you to see the poor children, Mr Jones?’

Mr Jones did not even hear the entreating appeal of the little girl. He was out of the drawing-room, book in hand, and in Gladys’ work-room, almost before the struggling Minette was released from her uncle’s arms, and forcibly caught by Miss Gwynne.

Gladys was sitting quietly at her work, humming low the air of the hymn Minette had been saying, when Mr Jones entered the room abruptly.

‘Gladys, tell me where you got this book?’ he said, putting the hymn book on the table before her.

He looked so nervous and excited that Gladys was almost frightened.

‘My mother gave it me, sir,’ was the reply.

‘And who wrote these names?’ he asked, pointing to the words written on the fly-leaf, which were, “Margaret Jones, from her affectionate brother, William Jones.”

‘My uncle, sir, I believe, who gave the book to my mother.’

‘And your mother—your mother, who was she?’

‘The daughter of a clergyman, sir.’

‘I know that. But where—what—who?’

‘That is what I don’t know, sir.’

‘Who did she marry? For God’s sake tell me all, Gladys.’

’She ran away with my father, sir, an Irish soldier, a corporal named O’Grady. She went abroad with him, and did not come back to Ireland for two years.’

‘And then—and her father—and—and her brother?’

‘Her father was dead, sir, and nobody knew where her brother was.’

‘Where did her father live?’

’Alas! sir, I cannot tell that either. We never talked to my poor mother about him, because it made her so unhappy, and as he was dead, I had no interest in asking for the address. All I know was, that she was Welsh; and when she was dying, she told me to go into Wales and find my uncle. I don’t think she quite knew what she was saying, but I came.’

Page 258

The tears gathered in Gladys' eyes, and hearing a strange heavy sigh from Mr Jones, she looked up at him through their mist, and saw that he was struggling to speak through some great emotion.

'Oh, sir! what is the matter?' said Gladys, rising and going towards him as he stood, trembling, on the other side of her work-table.

He could not speak, but opening his arms as she approached him, folded her in them, and kissed her, as she had not been kissed before, since her poor mother died.

Gladys could only yield to the embrace, she knew not wherefore. She loved Mr Jones as if he were her own father, he had been almost like a father to her ever since she had been in his house; she felt as if she were once more in a father's arms.

We will leave them thus for one moment, to return to the drawing-room.

Mrs Jones, in her turn, kissed Minette, and praised her for repeating her hymn so well.

'But where is Mr Jones?' asked the child. 'Will he take me to see the little boys and girls?'

'I think he must be gone to find a book for you, dear,' was the reply.

But as neither Mr Jones nor the book came, Mrs Jones got rather fidgety, and fancying her husband might be ill, left the room to see what had become of him. She went to the dining-room, study, and bedroom, and, not finding him, went to ask Gladys whether she knew where he was. She was not a little astonished at finding him with Gladys in his arms, and the door half open at his back.

Mrs Jones was not a jealous wife, but Gladys was a very pretty girl, Mr Jones was avowedly very fond of her, and Mr Jones was mortal.

She felt a strange pain at her heart, turned pale, and stood for a moment unobserved by either, on the threshold, irresolute, when she heard these words from her husband,—

'It must be so. Gladys—you are—you must be—my poor, dear, lost sister's child!'

Gladys and Mrs Jones uttered a simultaneous cry, and the latter entered the room.

'My dear William, what does this mean?' she said, approaching her husband and putting her hand on his shoulder.

'Serena!' (he, too called that gentle woman Serena) 'my love. For my sake! This is my sister's child—my niece—my—our Gladys!'

Mr Jones released the bewildered Gladys from his embrace, and almost placed her in the arms of his wife, who, scarcely comprehending what was passing, kissed her tenderly.

Then Gladys sat down, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed convulsively. It was all a dream to her, from which she must awake. It could not be true. Mr and Mrs Jones soothed her. The former, restraining his own emotion, endeavoured to calm hers, by telling her that it was he who had written the names in that fortunate hymn book; he who was the brother of her mother; he who was her uncle, and who would be, not only an uncle, but a father to her henceforth.

Page 259

At last, the agitated girl looked up at the kind and loving faces that were bending over her, and murmured,—

‘It cannot be—it is—too good—too great—too happy.’

‘It is true, Gladys, my niece, my child,’ said Mr Jones, stooping to kiss her forehead.

Mrs Jones sat down by her, and taking one of her hands in hers, said,—

’It all seems a dream, Gladys. But if it be true, remember, you are now my niece, my child as well; and, God knows, I love you, and value you dearly.’

Once more the lonely Gladys felt that she had kindred. Yielding to the feeling, she threw her arms round Mrs Jones’ neck, and gave vent to the emotion she had been striving to suppress.

At this juncture, Miss Gwynne appeared, who, wondering in her turn what could detain Mr and Mrs Jones so long from their guests, came to look for them.

Of course, she wondered still more when she found them both with their arms round one another and Gladys.

She was going away; but Mrs Jones, perceiving her, said,—

’Come in, dear Freda, Minette’s hymn has led to a wonderful discovery—has given us a niece—a child—in—in—our dear friend Gladys.’

Miss Gwynne knelt down at the feet of the sobbing Gladys, and taking one of her hands, said,—

’Gladys, if this be true, we cannot love you better than we do now, or esteem you more; but you now *feel* one of us, instead of the isolated Gladys of this little room, which you have resolutely been hitherto.’

As may be imagined, Gladys was a long time realising the fact, that she was suddenly, and in the most extraordinary manner, raised from the Irish beggar, lady’s maid, or whatever she had hitherto chosen to consider herself—for every one about her had long looked upon her as a friend—to the niece of the good and kind Mr Jones. When she was able to speak, her first words were,—

’I do not understand it—I cannot believe it. It is too good—too happy.’

‘I can scarcely believe it either,’ said Mr Jones, taking up the hymn book, and turning to his wife and Miss Gwynne, who had, thus far, taken the strange news upon Mr Jones’ word, which they never ventured to dispute.

‘This is my writing. Margaret Jones was my sister, and Gladys’ mother. I gave her this book when we were both young, and the date, also in my handwriting, marks the time, some two or three years after the gift, when I was at college, and she must have been about eighteen; she ran away with an Irish soldier, whose real name, even, we never learnt. My poor father doated on my sister, and spoilt her. She was high-spirited and wilful, but very loving, and very handsome. Not at all like Gladys. My sister’s was the Welsh, Gladys’ the Irish cast of countenance; yet I have seen an expression in Gladys’ face that has reminded me of her mother.’

’We discovered, after my sister ran away, that she had met the man she married when going to visit the landlady of a small inn, in my father’s parish, who was ill. It seems that this woman connived at their meeting; and when strictly questioned, said, that she had believed he was a gentleman, and that he had called himself Captain O’Brien.’

Page 260

‘My poor father!’ here broke in Gladys. ’He bitterly repented this, his only deception. He was of a good family, and his mother was an O’Brien; but no one belonging to him could afford to purchase him a commission, and so he went into the ranks. He once told me, that he persuaded my mother to marry him first, and then promised to let her write to his father. But I only know scraps of the story. I fancy my father was on his way home on leave, when he saw my mother and fell in love with her. He loved her very dearly, and as long as he lived she wanted nothing that he could get her. The regiment was suddenly ordered abroad, and my mother could not write to her father, or did not, before they sailed. And so she delayed, and delayed; but she wrote at last, and received no answer at all. I fancy she wrote several times from foreign parts, but never heard from any one. I know she wrote again from Ireland; but the letter was returned, with a note from some one, saying that her father had been dead some years, and no one knew anything of her brother.’

‘Too true! too true!’ said Mr Jones. ’My poor father, never very strong, was in his grave in less than six months after my sister left him. I returned from college to nurse, and bury him. I have told you all this, my dear Serena, little thinking that the young girl I first saw, after visiting his grave some twenty years after I had seen him laid in it, should be the child of the beloved daughter who had helped to hasten him thither.’

‘My poor, dear mother!’ said Gladys, sobbing as if her heart would break.

’Still less that you, my dear niece, would be five or six years in my house; I loving you as a daughter, and yet not knowing the relationship existing between us. But how could it have been discovered but for this book? I only knew of you, that you were an Irish girl escaping from poverty in Ireland, to find some Welsh friends, whose address even you did not know. But for your evident truthfulness, the very story must have been doubted. When I saw you at Mr Prothero’s, I took you for his daughter; since I have looked upon you as one of our family, an orphan to be pitied and loved. Let us thank God and kind Christian people, that you have been so pitied and loved.’

Mr Jones’ mild grey eyes, full of tears, turned upon Miss Gwynne, who said, hastily,—

’Ought not we to tell her first and best friends of this strange discovery?—Rowland, Mr Prothero, and Netta. What must they think of our long absence?’

‘Not for worlds, Miss Gwynne, if you please!’ cried Gladys, ’I could never be what I would like to be to Mrs Jenkins and her dear mother, if I were anything but the Gladys they have always known. They would be treating me as—as—they would not let me work and wait upon Mrs Jenkins. Until she is at home, at least, let me be as I am, as I was; it is all so strange. Until I have offered to remain and nurse her, and been refused—until, in short—’

Page 261

‘I understand, Gladys,’ said Miss Gwynne. ’You are quite right. Let them all value you for yourself, and then we will introduce you as—’

‘I didn’t mean that, indeed, indeed, Miss Gwynne,’ said Gladys, her pale face growing red. ’I only wanted to show my gratitude, as I am, to them all. Perhaps even Mr Prothero may excuse me then, and—’

Here Gladys broke down again. She could not explain her own bewildered thoughts; but her friends understood her, and respected the honest pride that would be known, welcomed and beloved for merit, and not for a bettered position and condition. Miss Gwynne saw a vision of Owen in the background, with his handsome, honest, black eyes, and white teeth; but she did not mention what she saw.

‘At any rate, I must go and make the best of lame excuses,’ she said, ’and leave you in your new relationship, to dry your eyes, and learn to say “Uncle.” Such a pleasant name! I always longed for an uncle.’

Miss Gwynne returned to the drawing-room, and told Rowland that Mr Jones had been quite upset by the Welsh hymn that Minette had repeated, having known it under peculiar circumstances when he was young. She apologised for his non-appearance, and Rowland, seeing that something unusual had occurred, took his departure. She promised Minette a visit to the school, and prevailed on the little girl to allow one of the servants to put her to bed, instead of Gladys. Minette begged Miss Gwynne to let her say her ‘English prayers’ to her first, which she, of course, did.

Then Freda did her best to amuse Netta until Mrs Jones appeared, and said Gladys was quite ready to assist Netta, if she liked to retire for the night.

When Netta was in bed, Gladys joined her friends, and they discussed, more calmly than before, their newly-found relationship.

Gladys brought with her her Bible, in which her mother had written her name, and Mr Jones recognised his sister’s hand writing. She had also a lock of her mother’s hair, and her wedding-ring, and one or two other trifles, that drew fresh tears from a brother’s eyes.

Gladys said that she should like, for her own satisfaction, that a certificate of her mother’s marriage, and of her birth, should be obtained. Her mother was married, she believed, during the short time she was in Ireland; and she was born, she knew, in the parish where her father’s parents lived, to whose care her father had confided her mother. Two children had been born, and died before her birth, during the period that her parents were abroad.

It may be as well to say here, that the certificates were duly procured, through the clergyman of the parish, to whom Mr Jones wrote a statement of the case. Also that letters, written for the gratification of Gladys, to the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy of her parent's last neighbourhood were duly answered, and confirmed all that Gladys had said of them and of herself from first to last. This, of course, took some time to effect; but I have so far anticipated the event, to avoid fanning to it again.

Page 262

Gladys now recapitulated, more minutely, the circumstances of her early history, a sketch of which she gave Miss Gwynne and Mrs Prothero when she was recovering from her fever.

There were a few points that she did not mention at that time, which, we will insert for the benefit of the reader, in Gladys' own words.

'My father left my mother in Ireland, and went with his regiment to India. My mother lived with my grandfather, who was old and infirm, but still managed a small farm, in which my mother assisted. He died, and then my mother kept a school, took in needlework, and did what she could to help out my father's remittances, which were small, but regular. He was severely wounded in the head, and got his discharge upon his corporal's pay. Being a clever man, he soon procured work, as a kind of under-agent, and we lived very happily together for some years. He was never a saving man, so what he earned he spent, and my poor mother spent it with him. I had two brothers and three sisters, and when my father died, rather suddenly, we had nothing but our own exertions to depend upon. My mother and I managed to live and keep the children—how, I scarcely know—till the famine from the failure of the potato crop, and consequent fever and starvation came upon us. God preserve me, and every one else, from witnessing such misery again! One child died after another, and then the darling mother! I had nothing to give her; literally nothing. Every one round us was in the same state. On her death-bed she was rambling and incoherent, but talked of Wales, and her father and brother.

'"Go to them, Gladys," she said, "when I am gone. Maybe they'll take to ye." "Where, mother dear!" I asked. But she did not hear me. Thank God! she clasped her hands and prayed for pardon of her sins through Jesus Christ; and so she died. I don't know how I lived after her—how I buried her—how I came into Wales. I scarcely remember anything, till I awoke from that illness in calm, clean, beautiful Glanyravon; with my mistress's blessed face looking down upon me, and Miss Gwynne waiting on me, and Mr Rowland praying for me.'

For some years past Gladys had succeeded in obtaining a calm and even spirit, by striving to banish these dreadful scenes from her mind, by active labours for others, and abnegation of self. Now, they opened once more the flood-gates of memory, and as the old recollections rushed through, like repressed waters, her strength of mind gave way, and she could do nothing but weep.

'Only to-night—forgive me!' she sobbed. 'I shall be better to-morrow. But it all comes back, all; even in the moment of my great happiness.'

Her kind friends soothed and comforted her—her uncle wept with her, and by degrees she once more grew calm.

Before they separated for the night, Mr Jones offered up a thanksgiving for the great mercy God had vouchsafed to them; and commending his newly-found niece to the further protection of that gracious Providence, who had led the orphan to her home; in His presence, and that of his wife and her friends, he solemnly blessed her, and adopted her as his own child.

Page 263

It need scarcely be added that his wife registered and signed the vow that her husband made.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD.

Most people know what it is to awake from sleep the morning after a great sorrow; some, also, know what it is to awake after a great and unexpected joy. Gladys opened her eyes upon a dark, thick, cheerless November fog in London, one of the most depressing of all the atmospheric influences. But she did not think of the fog. Although she did not at first fully realise the happiness that she had experienced, and was to experience, she felt, on awakening, a strange sensation of spirits so light, and a heart beating to such cheerful measure, that it all seemed too ethereal to be real. She thought it was the continuation of a blissful dream. For many a long year she had retired to rest, and arisen in the morning calm, resigned, nay, cheerful; but it was the calmness and resignation of a soul attuned by prayer and self-restraint to an equanimity that rarely was disturbed by mirth or pleasure. Now, that soul seemed to dance within her to exhilarating melodies. So happy had been her dreams, so joyous her sleep, that her eyes sparkled unwonted fires when she opened them; and as she jumped out of bed, there was an elasticity in her movements that surprised her very self.

Netta and Minette were still sleeping, and as she dressed herself carefully and neatly, she almost forgot that every one else was not as suddenly raised from sorrow to joy as herself.

‘He will come to-day,’ she thought, as she smoothed her dark hair, ’and I shall meet him as an equal, no longer a suspicion of my truth. He will not know it yet, but I know it, and oh! the difference of feeling that you can clear yourself by a word when you like. Not to him, for he never doubted—generous, kind Mr Owen! but to his father! to all. How can I be thankful enough! and such an uncle and aunt! It must be a dream; but will he care for me still? so long! and after all my coldness. He has asked me again and again, and each time have I refused him; but then I was an Irish beggar, and nothing more, and I would have died rather than have brought disgrace into his family. And still my promise to his father is binding, and without his consent I never could—but where am I wandering? Maybe he’ll not care for me now I am all this older—and he so handsome that he may have any one in and about Glanyravon.’

Gladys cast a shy look into her glass, and a delicate blush kindled her cheek as those dark violet eyes glanced from beneath their long black fringes. Gladys! you are but a weak woman after all.

When Gladys was dressed, she gently awoke Minette, and took her into the dressing-room to attire her also.

‘Gladys, dear, how pretty you look!’ exclaimed the child, ’you have a pink cheek, and your eyes are as bright as the sky; and you have such a pretty gown and collar, and everything. You are quite a lady, now you have left off that gown mamma gave you so long ago. Is Uncle Owen, who is coming to-day, as nice as Uncle Rowland? Do you love him as well, Gladys?’

Page 264

’He is very, very nice, dear, and as kind as any gentleman in the world.’

The little girl clapped her hands.

‘I shall like to go to Glanyravon and make mamma quite well.’

Soon after breakfast, Rowland arrived, accompanied by Owen, who had travelled all night.

Gladys was with Netta in her bedroom, but all the rest of the family welcomed Owen. Mr Jones shook him by the hand with peculiar warmth, because he was given to understand that he loved his newly-found niece.

Minette was soon on his knee, and in less than ten minutes had duly informed him that she loved him next to Uncle Rowland and that Gladys told her he ‘was the nicest gentleman in the world.’

Owen laughed heartily at this, to conceal his rising colour, and said,—

‘And how is Gladys?’

’Quite well; she is coming to Glanyravon with us, to take care of mamma and me.’

Here Mrs Jones interposed, and explained how matters stood.

In a few moments Gladys appeared to say that Netta was ready in her little sitting-room to see her brothers.

Owen was not shy, so he walked bravely across the room to meet Gladys, and to shake hands with her, so thoroughly *con amore* that if, as Minette expressed it, her cheek was pink when she entered the room, it was crimson when she quitted it.

Mr and Mrs Jones looked at one another with great satisfaction, and somehow or other Rowland’s eyes met Miss Gwynne’s, and both smiled involuntarily.

‘He is a fine young fellow,’ said Mrs Jones, when Owen and Rowland had gone upstairs to Netta, accompanied by Minette.

’I almost wonder how two such sons, with such a fine, sturdy, sensible father, should have had such a silly little sister as that poor child upstairs; but I must go out. Ask them to dinner, my dear, and don’t let Gladys tire herself to death before she starts for her journey. Did you ever see any one look prettier in your life than she did when she met that fine young man? What a couple they will make!’

‘What a romance you have worked up already, my dear,’ said Mrs Jones laughing, ’but certainly one may be proud of Gladys. How thoroughly ladylike she is, and looks. And she is so happy; she told me just now that she felt as if she had suddenly begun a new life.’

’God grant it may be a happy one, and may He bless you, my dear, for taking to the poor child so kindly.’

Miss Gwynne, who had left the party to put on her bonnet, here appeared, and Mr Jones and she set out on parochial business.

When Rowland and Owen had been some time with Netta, they returned to Mrs Jones, who pressed them to come to dinner. They declined, however, having much to talk of, that could not be discussed in public, even before the kindest of friends. Moreover, when Owen had been in London before, he told his brother that he would not dine in any house as guest where Gladys was considered as a servant. In vain his brother assured him that she was more friend than servant—she did not dine with her friends, and therefore he would not dine with them.

Page 265

When they had left the house, and reached Rowland's lodging, Owen said, his usually joyful face clouded by an expression of sorrow and pain,—

'Curse that fellow! I say, Rowland, I can't help it, it breaks my heart to see Netta as she is; and she will kill mother. As to father, there is no getting a civil word from him ever since the news came.'

'I suppose every one knows it?' said Rowland.

'Of course Aunt 'Lizbeth has employed Mr Rice Rice and a counsel for that scoundrel, to do what they can when the case is tried. You know they have indicted him, and, present or absent, it is to come on at the next assizes. Then, if they prove him guilty, or make out a case against him, or whatever they call it, he will be brought to trial as soon as they can catch him.'

'Sir Samuel Spendall and Sir Horatio Simpson are furious against him, I hear,' said Rowland.

'No wonder; I foresaw something bad when I was at Abertewey. But what of that rascal, Deep?'

'They can make nothing of him; he is already released, and if he knows anything of Howel he has not let it out.'

'I can't help liking poor Aunt 'Lizbeth; she says she will spend every farthing she has for Howel, and when I tell her to remember her old age and keep her money, all I get is, "What will I do if my Howel is ruined? What will I care for money if he is gone?" It is pretty well known that he has forged her name for thousands of pounds, but she won't own it, and swears to all his signatures as her own, I verily believe, with her eyes shut.'

'Does father hear all these things?'

'Nobody dares to speak to him. He opens out to me with a vengeance, and wants a little of your preaching to refine his language. But who can wonder? I am ashamed to show my nose myself. The first bit of pleasure I have had since it began was seeing Gladys look so well and happy this morning. What has happened to her? Is she going to be married? for nothing else have changed a girl's face from November to June. At the same time, she might have a little more feeling for us than to look her best when we are at our worst. Poor Netta! I'm sure she won't live. I've wished myself at sea nearly every day for the last six years, and I'm sure I wish myself there now.'

'My good fellow,' said Rowland, 'don't say that; what should any of us do without you? You are the only stay of our parents at home, and will be poor Netta's last comfort.'

’If I were sure I were of any use I wouldn’t mind; but when I see Gladys, or think of her, the truth is I get savage. Perhaps it is a proper punishment for pretending to stay at home on father and mother’s account, when it was really on hers. But never mind; I suppose one girl’s really as good as another. Will you come down at Christmas, Rowland?’

’I wish I could; but our rector is so ill that there is no chance of his being able to leave Nice this winter, and Jones and I have all the duty. The last account was so bad that Mr Wenlock fears, if he returns at all, it will be only to die.’

Page 266

We will not follow the brothers further in their conversation; they made the most of the few hours they were together, and after a short night's rest, arose early, breakfasted, and went to fetch Netta.

The sight of her favourite brother, and the prospect of returning home had roused her, and she seemed more herself than she had been since Howel's letter. Gladys was as bright and busy as a queen-bee, and Minette was all tears and smiles.

There were a great many 'last words' to be said, and as all the preparations had been made the previous day, there was plenty of time to say them.

'I don't know how to thank you,' said poor Netta to Mrs Jones and Miss Gwynne, as they were putting on her last warm cloak. The tears were streaming down her pale cheeks, and her hand, as usual, was on her heart.

Mrs Jones kissed her, and Miss Gwynne said cheerfully, 'I shall see you soon, Netta, and I want Mrs Jones to come to Glanyravon with me, so it will not be a long parting.'

'You have been very good to my child and me,—God will bless you!' sobbed Netta.

'I will come again, Mr Jones, and see you, and Mrs Jones, and the little children,' said Minette, who was hugging Mr Jones warmly.

He took her up in his arms, kissed her, and put her into the cab next her mother, who had been placed therein by Rowland.

Gladys' farewells were the last.

'That's what I call something like it, Rowly,' said Owen tapping his brother's shoulder, as he watched Mr and Mrs Jones alternately give Gladys a most affectionate embrace.

'But why does the old parson hug her so? He shouldn't do that if I were Mrs Jones, or if she were Mrs—'

The truth was, that at the last the uncle's feelings overcame Gladys' desire for secrecy, and exploded in a kiss long and fatherly.

When she was in the cab Mr Jones called Owen aside, and said in a whisper,—

'I know you will take care of Gladys, and remember, that although she is ready for everything that is good, she is not strong. If your father makes the least objection to her remaining with your sister, take her to the Park, whence she can return at once to us. As long as I live, no one will neglect her with impunity; but I am sure I can trust you and yours.'

‘That you certainly may,’ said Owen, nearly shaking Mr Jones’ hand off, but saying to himself a few minutes after, ’What could he mean by putting her into my care? If his wife had done it, or Miss Gwynne, well and good; but I declare parsons are no better than the rest of us, I daresay Rowly isn’t half as steady as he seems; he and Miss Gwynne are wonderfully polite to one another, and he’s as grand as any lord.’

Owen jumped upon the box, and Rowland by the side of Gladys inside the cab, and so they drove off through the thick fog, some five or six miles to the Paddington Station.

Owen took a second-class ticket for himself, but when Netta heard that he had done so she begged so hard to be allowed to travel second class with him, or that he would come with her, that he was obliged to change it, and become, as he expressed it, ’a grand gentleman for once in his life.’

Page 267

They had a compartment to themselves, into which Rowland went, to be with Netta until the whistle sounded.

‘Oh, brother!’ sobbed Netta, ’if I never see you again, promise to be kind to Howel; promise to give him whatever I leave for him. Perhaps I shall die,—I don’t know. Tell him all you have said to me; try to make him good, and give him the hope you have given me. Will you, brother? Say, will you?’

’I will do everything you wish, my darling sister, if I have the opportunity.’

‘And will you write to me about what you have been saying to me?’

’I will, dear, regularly. But you have only to believe and pray. God bless you, Netta, dear! God for ever bless you!’

The guard was at the door, Owen in the carriage. Rowland gave Netta one long, last kiss, and went out upon the platform.

‘Kiss me, uncle,’ said Minette, putting her little face out of the window.

When she drew it in again she wiped off a tear that Rowland had left upon her cheek.

‘Good-bye, Gladys,—good-bye, Owen,’ he said, stretching out his hand, which was clasping that of his brother as the train began to move, and separated him from the sister, brother, niece, and friend whom he loved so well.

Poor Netta cried long and quietly in the corner of the carriage in which she had been placed. Of course she had the side without an arm that she might put up her feet when she liked, so Owen and Gladys were placed, of necessity, side by side, and Minette jumped upon Gladys’ lap, and began talking of Glanyravon. Owen and Gladys were quite shy with one another. The former studied Bradshaw, the latter occupied herself with Minette.

When Netta ceased crying, Owen tried to engage her attention, and amused her for a time by accounts of home and country news. But by degrees she relapsed into her usual abstraction.

Owen hated railway travelling, and was a great fidget. Out at every station, of course, and alternately reading the newspaper and making remarks upon the confounded November weather when in the carriage. He scarcely addressed Gladys particularly, but talked to Netta or Minette; and Gladys thought him very cold and constrained, but did not know that he was thinking of what Colonel Vaughan had done years ago, and comparing it with Mr Jones’ embrace.

‘Do you know, Netta, that I am thinking of getting married?’ he said suddenly, and thoroughly rousing Gladys.

’Don’t be so foolish, Owen! You have been getting married or falling in love ever since you were twelve,’ said Netta. ‘Who is it now?’

‘Miss Richards,—Dr Richards’ daughter. It is the talk of the county. You know she has plenty of money.’

Owen cast a side glance towards Gladys and saw her turn quite pale, which was very satisfactory to him.

‘Is Miss Richards pretty, uncle?’ asked Minette. ’Is she as pretty as Gladys?’

‘That depends upon taste.’

Page 268

’But what do you think, uncle? She must be very pretty, if she is as pretty as my dear Gladys! Isn’t Gladys pretty, uncle?’

‘Gladys knows what I think on that subject,’ said Owen, ’but she doesn’t care what I think.’

This was said so that Netta, sitting opposite, did not hear.

‘Oh, Mr Owen!’ said Gladys, involuntarily.

‘Oh, Mrs Snow!’ said Owen.

’As the day went on, Netta got very weary, and, finally, slept. Minette, also, in spite of Gladys’ resolute efforts to keep her awake, fell fast asleep, curled up in the corner, with her mother’s feet in her lap. And so Owen and Gladys were *tete-a-tete*.

The November day was drawing to a close, and it was dull and dark. Gladys fancied Owen was asleep, and was thinking how very much more cheerful she felt in the morning than she did at that moment; and all because Owen said he was going to be married. She was trying to remember the great blessings she had lately experienced, and that she ought to be thinking of Netta instead of her brother.

At last, Owen started up, and said,—

‘Gladys, do you like coming back to Glanyravon?’

‘Dearly, sir, if you like to have me.’

’Now, Gladys, that is too absurd! You know I have wanted to have you all these years.’

‘I didn’t mean that, Mr Owen.’

‘Gladys, tell me why that old Jones kissed you.’

‘I—I—don’t know. Because—because he is fond of me, Mr Owen.’

’That is no reason, Miss Gladys. If it was, somebody else would kiss you, too. Now I have an opportunity, I must ask you a few more questions. I beg you to understand that old Jones, who is so fond of you, put you under my especial care.’

‘Oh, Mr Owen!’

’Oh, Mrs Snow! Now, tell me why you let that cunning man of the world, Colonel Vaughan, give you ten shillings? This has been on my mind for six or seven years, and

I have never had an opportunity of getting it off before. You know if you won't have me for a lover, you may for a brother.'

'Colonel Vaughan offered me the money, Mr Owen, and I returned it to him. Who could have told you of that?'

'The boy who saw him give you some money, and picked up the half-sovereign you dropped.'

'He gave me money for poor Mr Lloyd, who was ill, and offered me the half-sovereign for myself, which I refused.'

'Why did you refuse it.'

'Because I did not want it, and because he had no right to offer it me.'

'Bravo, Gladys! You are a capital girl!'

'And yet, Mr Owen, you think all sorts of unkind things of me when I am absent. For six years!'

'How can I help it, Gladys? You know that I love you better than my life, and yet you won't care one straw for me.'

'Oh! Mr Owen.'

'I can tell you it is no trifling mark of constancy, for a wandering fellow like me to stick to farming, and doing the dutiful son all these years. I should have been off to sea again long ago but for you, and—'

Page 269

‘And the father and mother, Mr Owen.’

’Well, yes, to a certain extent. But you always answer every question but one like a pure, straightforward young woman, as you are. Why won’t you tell me the reason you have for hating me so?’

‘I don’t hate you, Mr Owen.’

’It must be either love or hate. You don’t love me. Do you love any one else?’

‘No.’

‘Have you a heart to give?’

‘Ye—no.’

‘Which do you mean?’

‘I cannot tell you, indeed I cannot!’

’Oh! Gladys, if you knew the pain! Why will you not make me happy, or at least give me a sensible reason?’

‘I—I—promised—oh, Mr Owen.’

’Dear Gladys, what? I will never betray you, and will always be a friend, a brother. Who have you promised? Not to marry, not to love—’

‘Your father, Mr Owen. I—I—promised never—to—without his consent.’

Fortunately it was dusk, and the curtain between the double carriage was drawn, and Netta and Minette were, apparently at least, fast asleep, so no one saw Owen jump up from his seat with a kind of bound, seize Gladys’ hand, try to look into her face, and finally sit down again, retaining possession of the said hand across the elbow of the carriage.

’Do you mean, Gladys, that you promised never to marry me without my father’s consent?’

‘Yes.’

‘Never to love me without his consent?’

‘No.’

‘That you don’t hate me?’

‘No.’

’That if I got his consent you would make me the happiest man in the world?’

‘I would try, Mr Owen.’

’Nothing but his consent?

’Nothing, Mr Owen. If you do not change, I cannot.

’Gladys, do not trifle with me. But you could not trifle. Have you cared for me—may I say loved me—all these years?’

‘All these years.’

Gladys bowed her head as if in shame over those clasped hands, and a large tear fell upon Owen’s. He wanted no other confirmation of her words, and felt, as he had expressed it, the happiest man in the world.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

It was nine o’clock when the fly that took the travellers from Swansea to Glanyravon reached the door of the farm. The night was ’dark and dreary;’ very different was the weather, the aspect of external nature; very different were Netta’s feelings and all the circumstances, when she was at home ten years ago. She had been thinking again on all these things during that gloomy drive, when her companions thought she was asleep.

Bright lights are in the windows and passage as the travellers look out of the carriage. Mrs Prothero’s anxious face is visible in front, Mr and Mrs Jonathan’s tall forms above her from behind, the servants are without, Lion is barking joyously, but there is no Mr Prothero.

Page 270

‘Is this Glanyravon, mamma?’ asks Minette waking up and rubbing her eyes.

No answer.

Owen jumps out, and without stopping to greet his pale, trembling mother, turns to help Netta, who cannot help herself. He carries a dead weight into the parlour, and lays it on the sofa. Netta has fainted.

Gladys is at her side in a moment with every kind of restorative but no one notices or thinks of her. Mrs Prothero is on her knees rubbing her child’s cold hands, and looking as white as the corpse-like daughter thus restored to her. Mr and Mrs Jonathan look at one another, and then at Netta, with a glance of pity and grief.

There is another face for one moment bent over the sofa, and the next a loud heavy groan is heard in the corner of the room that comes from a heart in extreme agony; but no one, save Minette, seems conscious of it. She turns affrighted at the sound, and in the impulse of her quick, warm nature runs to comfort.

‘Mamma will be better soon,’ she says; ’she is often so. Don’t cry so loud, you will frighten her.’

Poor Mr Prothero removes his hand from his eyes to behold, for the first time, his grandchild. Another heavy groan, almost a cry, and he takes the child in his large arms, and presses her to his breast, weeping like an infant.

Netta uncloses her eyes on familiar objects for a moment, and shuts them again. Has she seen the cheerful, old-fashioned parlour, the bright fire, near which the sofa is wheeled, her father’s portrait over the mantelpiece, her mother at her feet?

‘She is getting better,’ whispers Gladys, who still holds her place at Netta’s head, with strong salts in her hand, and a bottle and glass by her side.

Again the eyes unclose, wander restlessly from one anxious face to another, settling on none; close again, once more unclose and look with some consciousness on the breathless group that surrounds the sofa.

‘Father! father!’ now murmurs Netta; ‘where is father?’

The feeble cry has reached that father’s ears and inmost heart. He puts down Minette and staggers, blinded by his grief, to the sofa. All withdrew but his wife. He is on his knees before his poor penitent daughter. Her arms are round his neck, and she strives to rise but cannot. Oh! the depth, agony, remorse of that long, silent, paternal, and filial embrace.

‘Do you forgive me, father?’ asks Netta.

‘All—all. God forgive us both!’ groans Mr Prothero.

Mrs Prothero lays her head on her hands on the sofa, by which she kneels, and gives way to a passionate burst of grief.

‘My poor, poor mistress,’ says Gladys, unable any longer to refrain from approaching her. ‘All is well; she will be better now.’

‘Mother!’ cries Netta. ‘Don’t cry so for me. Come and kiss me, mother.’

Father and mother surround with their arms that wandering, restored lamb, and take it into the fold again.

Page 271

A little voice from behind is heard.

‘Mamma! mamma! think of your poor Minette!’

And in another minute Minette is on the sofa, in the midst of her mother, grandfather, and grandmother.

Blessed are the warm, gushing tears that fall on the child’s head—tears of love and reconciliation.

Soon the worthy vicar and his wife, who have thus far been only spectators of the scene, draw near to bless and welcome their niece.

‘She will faint again,’ whispers Gladys to Owen.

‘She is happy now,’ replies Owen, looking into Gladys’ tearful eyes from his own, equally dimmed with tears. It is the first time he has seen that face since he has known that Gladys loves him.

But Gladys is right—happiness is too overpowering for Netta. She faints in the midst of all those dear ones, so kind and loving.

Again Gladys is at her side to revive her, which she is able to do more quickly than before. When she is better, Gladys raises her pillows, and places her in a more comfortable posture. By degrees every one is conscious that Gladys is present.

‘Dear Gladys!’ says Netta, ‘I am better now; quite—quite well, father!’

‘Drink this first,’ says Gladys, giving her some wine and water that Owen has brought.

She drinks the wine and water, and again calls her father

’I brought Gladys, father; I cannot do without her. She has saved my life, I think, and mother’s, so Owen told me—didn’t you, Owen? May she stay with me, father?’

Netta presses her hand to her head, and looks at her father with those bewildered eyes, which are only too sadly irresistible.

‘Gladys!’ he replies. ‘Oh, yes! I haven’t seen her yet.’

Gladys is by his side, and he turns and shakes her hand warmly, and says,—

’Thank you, Gladys, thank you, I have heard all; but we will talk of this another time.’

’Best now, father, whilst I remember. She may stay? You like to have her?’

‘Of course, of course, my dear.’

Mr Prothero glances rather uneasily at the very lady-like looking young woman, for whom he is thus humbly petitioned, and in doing so spies Owen close behind her.

His feelings are too much softened by Netta to allow him to feel angry; still he does not know what to make of if. Mrs Prothero kisses Gladys, and Mr and Mrs Jonathan shake hands with her.

‘Nothing like the present time,’ thinks Owen; but Gladys declares decidedly that Netta ought to go to her room, and everybody yields to her calm, assured voice.

‘Then you will stay with us?’ asks gentle Mrs Prothero, looking the while at her husband.

‘To be sure she will,’ says Mr Prothero.

‘Thank you, sir; thank you, ma’am. I shall be only too glad,’ replies Gladys, as humbly as if she were really the servant she professes to be. ‘Miss Gwynne will allow me to stay, if you wish it.’

Page 272

After they had been upstairs they returned to tea, and Mr Prothero could not quit Netta, but sat watching her with a painful anxiety.

She was greatly excited, and her mind and eyes appeared equally to wander on the objects of her childhood. She asked her father a variety of questions concerning scenes and people that she felt were particularly associated with him, and he was quite overcome.

When the meal was finished, Owen carried Netta at once to her room, and all the womankind accompanied her. It was then that poor Mr Prothero's wrath and grief exploded. Left alone with his brother he vented both in language which, as Owen had expressed it, needed clerical revision. But Mr Jonathan knew that it must have its course before exhortations could take effect. He paced up and down the room pouring curses loud and deep upon Howel, and bemoaning his unfortunate daughter. At last he sat down and cried bitterly.

It was then that his brother drew near to comfort, and that Owen returned to the room.

'So young, so pretty—our only girl! God only knows how I love her—to come to die! Driven mad by that heartless villain—curse him—a thousand—'

'Hush, brother! hush! You cannot alter the past. Home and a father's and mother's love will soon bring her round, poor dear.'

'Do you think so? why, she looks like a corpse. No rose was redder when she went away, when I kissed her the night before. And now! and now! I say again, curse the man! I can't help it, brother,—I won't help it.'

'Come, father, let us hope the best, now we have her home again.'

Owen put his hand on his father's shoulder as he spoke, but there was no comfort for that sorrowing parent. While he cursed Howel there, was much self-reproach within him for long-harboured feelings of anger and unforgiveness against his daughter. He even began, to think that if he had been gentle and kind he might have saved her. The proud hearts of parent and child were alike subdued by heavy sorrow.

The following day Netta was unable to leave her bed. Excitement and fatigue had been too much for her. Dr Richards was sent for, who shook his head, and ordered quiet and rest. Mrs Prothero and Gladys were with her, and as she was continually sleeping, no one else was admitted. Mr and Mrs Jonathan left early, after having made friends with Minette, who confided to them that she liked them better than grandpapa and grandmamma, because they were gentlefolks. She didn't know why there was no carpet in the hall, and didn't like stones to her feet. She promised to go and see them

when her mamma was better. The worthy couple took to her as they had done to her mother.

Page 273

In a day or two Netta was much better and able to be brought downstairs. Matters gradually settled into their regular course at the farm, and all went on as usual. Mr Prothero spent every spare moment with Netta and his grandchild, who soon forgot that 'grandfather,' as he insisted on her calling him, 'talked loud, and had large, rough hands.' Gladys slipped imperceptibly into her old place, and alternately nursed Netta and helped Mrs Prothero in the dairy. Owen found many opportunities of entreating Gladys to let him speak to his father, but she positively forbade him, as long as there was painful anxiety about Netta; and, at the same time, angered him by refusing to consider him as her accepted lover until his father's consent was obtained. Mrs Prothero schooled her aching heart into outward calm, but her white hair and paleface showed what she had gone through, and was still suffering. Howel's name was never mentioned, except between Netta and Gladys. It was to Gladys that poor Netta opened her mind, and poured out all her hopes and fears about Howel's return.

The state of that mind varied continually. Sometimes it was tolerably clear, at others sadly wandering, and the least excitement produced faintness and pain at the heart; still her friends fancied she gained strength.

She had the sofa placed so that she could look out of the parlour-window upon the distant hills. The weather cleared up brisk and bright. The red and yellow foliage that still remained to cover the huge trunks of the oaks shone in the sunlight, and the lights and shadows danced upon the mountains. A few white chrysanthemums, and one or two roses still looked in at the window, upon her who had once been the brightest flower of Glanyravon.

Netta had been at home a fortnight, and was really stronger and better. The sun was setting behind those distant hills, and casting glorious shades of red, purple, and gold upon them. She was gazing wistfully on the sky, and thinking of Howel, whilst Minette was sitting on a stool at her feet, turning over a book, out of which she had been reading to her mother, whose chief occupation was trying to teach her.

Mr Prothero came in, and took his customary seat at the head of her sofa. He was followed, almost instantly, by Gladys, who called Minette out to have her cup of warm milk fresh from the cow, ordered by her doctor.

'Father,' began Netta, abruptly, 'I have something to say to you.'

'Well, Netta, fach!' said her father, cheerfully. 'Say away. I'm all attention,'

'Do you like Gladys, father?'

'Of course I do, my dear. Who could help it? She's an excellent young 'ooman.'

'I wish you would promise me one thing, father, before I go away.'

‘But you are not going away ever again, my love?’

’Perhaps I may—far, far away; and perhaps I may go to heaven. I don’t know. But I should like, when I go away, to leave you a better daughter than I have ever been to you. One that will take care of you and mother, and my Minette, as long as you and she live; who will make Owen a good wife and a happy man, as he is now, a good son and brother. Father, will you take her for my sake?’

Page 274

‘My darling, I don’t know what you mean?’

‘I mean—You won’t be cross, father, bach?’

‘Never again with you, Netta, please God.’

’Will you promise to grant me this great favour, now that my head is clear, and I have no pain, and can ask it right?’

’There is little I ’ould refuse you, Netta; but I should rather hear it first.’

’It is about Owen and Gladys, father. They have loved one another ever since they were first together. I found it out in the train; and when Owen pressed Gladys very hard to tell him why she didn’t love him, she said it was because she had promised you something. I could not hear what; but I heard enough to know that she loved Owen dearly. And she is good and clever; and, oh! so kind and gentle to me. I never think now of what I used to think so much—how she was a beggar at our gate; and everybody in London looks up to her and loves her. Mr and Mrs Jones, Miss Gwynne, and Rowland, all treat her like a lady. I should die, I think I should, so much happier, or go away when I am fetched, so much happier, if I could know she was with you as a daughter. I have been very disobedient and wilful; but she has been obedient and grateful, though she was not your child. When I left mother to die of fever, she nursed her and saved her life. May God forgive me, for Christ’s sake, and bless her! She has made Owen steady. She has nursed the sick. She has taught in the poor, wretched London ragged-schools, as well as in the others. She has made clothes for the poor. What has she not done? Oh, that I were like her! And now she is waiting on me, and helping mother, and nursing my child, like a common servant. Oh, father! take to her instead of me. Indeed indeed, you will never repent—never!’

As Netta spoke, her wasted cheek flushed, her eyes sparkled, and her manner grew more and more animated. Her father listened attentively, without interrupting her, and when she paused, said,—

’Netta, fach, are you seure you didn’t dream or fancy this? Owen declared to me, Gladys ‘ouldn’t have him, and didn’t love him.’

’Because you would not let her, father. Think of her making him believe this, and yet loving him dearly all the time; and because she was too grateful to you and mother to do what you don’t like.’

’Yes; the girl’s a good girl, Netta, I don’t deny that; but I can’t bear the Irish, and don’t want Owen, who is a fine, sensible young man, who might have any respectable young ’ooman, to marry a girl nobody knows of, and there’s the treuth! If you let him alone, he’d marry Miss Richards.’

’Never, father! Only ask him; for my sake—though I don’t deserve you should do anything for me.’

’There—there; don’t you begin to cry, and excite yourself. I’ll ask the boy.’

’Now, father! He’s in the hall; I heard him whistling. Let him come here.’

Mr Prothero went out and called Owen, who came in forthwith He began the subject at once.

Page 275

’Owen, Netta has got into her head that you and Gladys are making fools of one another still, in spite of all I said. Is that treue?’

’Not exactly, father. You know I have been in love with Gladys nearly ever since I knew her, and made up my mind never to have anybody else. I don’t call that making a fool of her; perhaps it was of myself. She has refused me, without rhyme or reason, more than once; and it was only when we came home with Netta that I found out the cause of her refusal. It is just because she won’t marry me without your consent. I have been waiting for her permission to speak to you about this ever since I came home; but she wouldn’t let me, because Netta was ill. I must confess to you, honestly, that I would have married her any day these seven years, and worked for her, by sea of land, if she would have had me. But she wouldn’t, so there’s an end of that I find, now, that your consent is wanting alone, and I ask it boldly. If you let us marry, you make us happy; if you refuse, you make us miserable, and send me to sea again—for I don’t see that you can expect me to work at home, if you don’t try to contribute to my happiness. I am not angry, father, though I can’t see what right you had to extract a promise from a girl to whom you had done a service. That was not generous, or like Prothero, Glanyravon.’

‘Treue for you there, boy.’

Mr Prothero began to rub his ear; a trick he had when in doubt. Netta, seeing this, put her arms round his neck, and whispered,—

‘Oh, father! make us happy. He is a good son, father, bach.’

’Then go you and tell the girl, you may have her, as far as I am concerned,’ said Mr Prothero.

‘Indeed, father!’ said Owen doubtfully.

’Do you want me to swear, sir? Upon my deed, then, you may marry the girl. I have but one objection, and that’s the way she came here. The girl’s a good girl, and I like her well enough. Now, p’r’aps you ’ont go to sea.’

’Decidedly not; I’m a steady land-lubber for my life: thank you, father. Shake hands upon it! You won’t repent. Kiss me, Netta! You have done it, I know, and you shall dance at the wedding. Now, I’ll go and tell Gladys.’

Owen and his father shook hands until their arms ached. Then the brother and sister kissed one another, and, with a sort of greyhound leap, or caper, Owen started off in search of Gladys.

‘Father, you will never repent it. Thank you—a thousand times,’ said Netta, covering her face with her hands, and bursting into tears.

The worthy farmer cried with her, and thus the father and daughter's love returned and increased.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BETROTHED.

Owen found Gladys in the dairy with his mother and Minette. She had a candle in one hand, lighting Mrs Prothero, whilst she was looking at the fresh milk just put into the pans; Minette held the other.

Page 276

‘All right, Gladys! all right! Father has consented!’ cried Owen, literally tumbling down the passage between the milk-pans.

Down went a splendid tin of milk right over Minette. Owen didn’t mind. His arm was round Gladys’ waist, and the candle stowed away somewhere, before any one knew what he was about. Mother and niece saw the long, fervent embrace to which Gladys yielded; but Owen didn’t mind that. If all the servants, domestic and otherwise, had been there, he wouldn’t have cared.

‘Oh, Mr Owen!’ said Gladys.

‘Oh, Mrs. Owen,’ said he.

‘Mother, she is mine and yours now for ever!’ he continued, releasing Gladys somewhat from his firm clasp. ’Father has given her to me. I needn’t ask you. We will live all together. I will herd the cows, and she shall milk them.’

‘Come into the kitchen, Owen,’ said Mrs Prothero, utterly astonished.

‘Uncle, you have wet me all over,’ sighed Minette.

‘Never mind. Come by the fire and dry yourself.’

They all went into the kitchen, which was empty. There, by the blazing wood fire, Owen kissed Gladys and his mother and Minette, and Mrs Prothero kissed Gladys; and the women cried and Owen laughed. It was a long time before he could explain the real state of the case.

’You are quite sure you love me, Gladys? It is not *gratitude*, but love!’ said Owen, looking into the pure, lustrous ’violets dropping dew,’ that he had studied so long and so lovingly.

The answering glance and the quick blush were quite satisfactory.

’Then, will you come with me to father and Netta. We owe it all to her—poor dear Netta!’

‘Please to wipe my frock first,’ said Minette to her grandmother; ’and tell me if uncle is going to marry Gladys. I am so glad.’

The frock was wiped, and Owen took the child up in his arms, and told her to love her new aunt better than ever.

‘I can’t love her better, uncle,’ was the simple assurance of the little girl.

‘Nor can I, even as my daughter,’ said Mrs Prothero, pressing the hand she held with a mother’s love.

They all went to the parlour, where Mr Prothero and Netta were sitting, quite silent, by the fire-light.

Owen led Gladys to his father, who did not well know what to do on the occasion, not being quite satisfied with the respectability of the parentage of his future daughter-in-law.

Gladys summoned all her courage, and standing before Mr Prothero, said firmly,—

’You will be glad, sir, to know that I have found my friends, and that they acknowledge me as their relation. I could never have consented to bring disgrace upon you and yours. I do not think I could have accepted your present great kindness even, had I not been able to make my truth as clear as the noon-day. Mr Jones, with whom Miss Gwynne and I have been living so long, is my uncle—my mother’s own brother.’

Page 277

The general exclamations of surprise may be imagined.

‘The girl’s dreaming, like Netta,’ from Mr Prothero.

‘Why didn’t you tell me before?’ from Owen.

‘I knew she was true,’ from Mrs Prothero.

‘How can this be, Gladys?’ from Netta.

Gladys told her story simply. Every one was too much engrossed with it, to think of the pretty picture that wondering family group made; but as we know it already, we will look at the picture whilst she is telling her tale.

The large, old-fashioned sofa is placed at one side of the fire-place, its head against the wall, its foot towards the window, so as to give Netta warmth and the view of the distant hills at the same time. Between the head of the sofa and the fire-place is an arm-chair, also against the wall, Mr Prothero’s favourite seat; and Minette’s footstool is by the side of her mother, and at the feet of her grandfather.

Netta’s pale face is in shadow, but the large, bright black eyes beam upon Gladys, with preternatural lustre, and the raven hair shines against the white pillow that supports her head. The broad, massive figure of the father, in its rough work-a-day clothes, is also in shadow. One elbow rests upon the arm of Netta’s sofa, one hand smooths mechanically the head of his grandchild, resting against his knee. This large hand and that tender head come within the glow of the fire-light. His grey head is lifted towards Gladys, on whom his keen black eyes, so like Netta’s, are also fixed. Minette, too, sitting at his feet, gazes with child-like wonder on Gladys; her long black curls falling over her pale face. Grandsire, daughter, child, so like one another, and yet so far apart in age. Three types they are of the ancient Briton.

Opposite this trio, with her left hand clasped in that of Netta, and close to her sofa, stands the fair, blue-eyed, graceful Gladys; thoroughly Irish in beauty, if Welsh in heart. The red glare of the large bright fire brings out her sweet, earnest face, and slight form. Her eyes are cast down, as if they cannot support the gaze of so many other eyes, and her cheeks are flushed with a strange excitement. Towering a full head above her, his arm round her waist, the thick black beard touching her hair is the manly, handsome Owen. Love, joy, pride, in his honest black eyes, and health on his bronzed and ruddy cheeks. Seated on the sofa, her arms on Netta’s knees, her head, with its silver hair, and plain white lace cap, eagerly pressed forward, is the well-beloved mother. For the first time since Netta’s return, grief for the one child, has merged into joy for the other, and prayer and praise for all are in her heart even whilst she listens.

The story is told, Gladys raises her eyes and head somewhat proudly for her. Owen lowers his, and kisses the pure, white forehead. There is silence for a few moments, no one can speak for tears. Owen is the first.

Page 278

‘Well, father! all’s right now, at any rate.’

’Treue for you there, Owen, my boy. The only objection is removed; everybody will know now that Gladys was honest, God bless you both, and make you happy.’

At this moment there was a suppressed sob from Netta. Her mind had wandered from the open, straightforward betrothal of Owen and Gladys, crowned, after years of difficulty, with a father’s and mother’s blessing, to her own unhallowed marriage—to her lost husband.

Again poor Netta was the object of every one’s thoughts, Gladys forgot herself, and Owen his joy, to cheer and comfort her.

It was in private that Mrs Prothero poured out her feelings to Gladys, and assured her of her unbounded satisfaction in the prospect of such a daughter. It was also in private that Netta solemnly gave her child into Gladys’ care. She said,—

’If I die, Gladys, you are to be her mother. You are to bring her up; she is never to leave you. If Howel comes back, say to him this was my wish. But I will write it for him. You must teach her to love her father, and to pray for him; and when she is old enough to be firm in her duty, to go to him if he wishes it. But never let Aunt ’Lizbeth have her—-never. I *must* see Aunt ’Lizbeth, I must tell her my wishes myself; you must talk to her, Gladys; she must not have my child if I die.’

Owen and Minette went together to see poor Mrs Griffey. They found her much altered. Owen could scarcely recognise the brisk, handsomely-dressed Aunt ’Lizbeth who came to announce her son’s gay wedding to Mrs Prothero, in that son’s mother, as stricken by his crime. Moreover, there was a very strong smell of spirits in the room, and Owen perceived a bottle and glass, that had been hastily put aside, under a table in the corner.

Mrs Jenkins cried a great deal when she saw Minette, and Owen was soon very sorry that he had brought the child. However he told her to go to a small inner room, the window of which looked into the street, and her attention was soon quite absorbed. Her grandmother was in a maudlin condition, out of which, under any other circumstances, Owen would have extracted mirth, but now he only felt anger and sorrow.

’Have you heard anything of Howel, Aunt ‘Lizbeth?’ he asked.

’Oh, *annwyl*! No. Mr Rice Rice is telling me there is a ’ditement brought against him for forgery, and now they can be taking him anywhere, and bringing him to trial as soon as they do find him. Forgery! name o’ goodness, why ’ould he be forging, as I do say to every one, and his own mother as ’ould be giving him thousands of pounds. My

Howels! Ach a fi! for sham to them! But he ’ont be found guilty, if they do tak him. Owen, bach! it was killing me, ‘deet to goodness it was,’

’Don’t cry, Aunt ‘Lizbeth, I wanted to speak to you about Netta.’

’Oh seure! she ’ont come to see her husband’s mother! and I don’t be cheusing to be turned out of doors again.’

Page 279

’She is very ill, aunt. We don’t know whether she can ever recover. Her mind is wandering, and has been ever since that—Howel left her; she thinks he is gone for debt, and if she knew the real state of the case, it would probably be the death of her. If we could manage a meeting between you, could you speak only of Howel’s debts, and not of this terrible suspicion.’

’Seurely I could; but I ’ont go to Glanyravon; if your father was turning me out of doors then, what will he be doing now?’

’We must see, Aunt ’Lizbeth? poor Netta sends her love to you, and begs you to keep up; she says she is sure Howel will come back; I was to tell you this.’

‘Netta! Netta! poor dear, poor dear.’

Mrs Jenkins began to rock herself to and fro in her chair violently, and to cry hysterically.

’He was very fond of her, Owen; you don’t think she’ll be dying? I do be wishing all day long that she hadn’t gone off with him, and that my Griffey hadn’t left all that money—-and—and—tak you a glass of brandy and water, Owen, it will be warming you after your cold walk, and I do feel so poorly and wretched all over, that I’ll be having a drop along.’

‘No thank you, aunt, we must be going; what of the counsel for Howel?’

’Oh, I do be having the best in all London; Prince Albert or Queen Victoria ’ouldn’t be having a better; to think of him as was dining with them wanst.’

’Don’t believe such nonsense, Aunt ‘Lizbeth.’

’Was you thinking that my Howels is not telling the treuth? But I am seure they ’ont be finding him; they was telling me that America, where they do think he is gone, is bigger than all Wales, and England, and London put together. Oh, if I could be going to him, I ’ouldn’t be vexing shocking, as I was now. All that money that my Griffey was putting by in pence and sixpences and shillings all gone, and he no better, and Howels no better, and I no better, ’scept that I did be seeing London. Come you, Owen, tak you a drop of brandy and water. I do tak it very kind of you to be coming to see me.’

’What message shall I give Netta, Aunt ‘Lizbeth?’

’Give you her my love, and I’ll be seeing her whenever she do like. Tell you her that Howels shall be having every penny his poor old mother do own to set him right again; he’ll be seure to be proving himself right, come you. Them Simpsons and Spendalls were always living upon him, and now to be turning against him. Ach a fi! now do be taking a drop before you do go.’

’No thank you, Aunt ’Lizbeth; and I don’t think spirits good for you. You had better be careful.’

’I don’t be drinking a wine glass full in a week, but when I am having the spasms, and now I am vexing so, they was coming oftener than they was eused to.’

Owen left Mrs Jenkins with a heavy heart, foreseeing her end; Minette said she didn’t like her because she smelt so of wine, and wasn’t a lady.

Page 280

The next day but one Gladys went to see her, and did what she could to comfort and help her; she was used to all sorts of sorrow and sin, and was so gentle a consoler, and so Christian an adviser, that poor Mrs Jenkins asked her to come and stay with her always; but that could not be; she went, however, as often as she could leave Netta.

Netta's will and word was now law with her father; he refused her nothing; he even allowed her to see her mother-in-law, provided the meeting was managed when he was from home. It was so managed, and a melancholy meeting it proved; the old woman's tears and sobs were so irrepressible, that Gladys was obliged to shorten it as much as possible; Netta, however, was calmer than she expected.

'Mother,' she said, 'I want you to promise me one thing. If I die—'

'Oh, Netta, fach! why was you talking of dying? you 'ont be dying.'

'I said *if*, mother. I wish Gladys, who is going to marry Owen—'

'Gladys, Owen! name o' goodness! and your father! he 'ouldn't let you marry my Howels, and she—'

'Is very good, mother, whilst I am very bad. But I wish her and Owen to bring up my child; you must tell Howel so, when he comes back; and when she is grown up, she will be a comfort to you and him. My head is confused; I dreamt last night Howel was here, and he was going to take away Minette. Is he with you, mother? tell me! do you know where he is? Oh! if I could see him once more! once more!'

'He is being safe in America, Netta, fach, but is coming home soon I am thinking. Don't you be dying; he was doating upon you, and if he do come home, and don't be finding you, he'll be dying too.'

'Are you sure he will come back? Did he tell you so himself?'

'To be seure. He is coming back soon, only he must be paying his debts first. Come you!'

Mrs Jenkins' unmitigated falsehoods did Netta a great deal of good; they cheered her, and gave her hope for the time. Gladys doubted whether hopes so based, and to be so miserably crushed, were to be encouraged, but she had not the heart to undeceive her.

When Mr Prothero returned home that evening, he was surprised to see Netta looking so much more cheerful than she had done since her return.

'Better, much better,' was her answer to his eager look of inquiry. 'And now I am better, I have another favour to ask. I want to see Owen and Gladys married while I am here. I

think it would almost cure me to feel that I had helped to do one kind and right thing in my wrong life. Would you mind it, father?'

'I shall be very glad to see them married, my dear; the sooner the better. Owen's good-for-nothing now but sitting with his arm round Gladys' waist all day long, and I hate those sort of follies.'

'Oh! Davy,' said Mrs Prothero, 'young people will be young people, and I'm sure no one can be so modest as Gladys,'

Page 281

’Well, I’m of Netta’s opinion, and the sooner they’re married the better. I must confess, now I know who Gladys is, there isn’t a girl in all the country I like so well. And Mr and Mrs Jones have written as a gentleman and lady ought to write, owning her, and giving their free consent to her marrying our Owen. So, Netta, fach, if you can get the young folk’s consent you have mine.’

Owen and Gladys had accompanied Mrs Jenkins part of the way home. She had particularly asked Gladys to ‘send her,’ and as it was getting dusk, Owen had ‘sent her’ also. They returned during the conversation respecting their marriage and Mr Prothero who had forgotten, if he had ever experienced, the shyness of affianced lovers, began the subject at once.

’Netta wants you two young people to be married directly, so do I. I shall be glad when ‘tis all over. What do you say to it?’

They had nothing to say, Gladys blushed, and Owen felt awkward on her account, not his own.

‘There, I always said that lovers were fools,’ said Mr Prothero.

‘We will settle it another time,’ said Netta.

‘Go you and settle it directly,’ said Mr Prothero; ’what my little girl here says, is law in this house.’

Poor Netta always began to cry when her father said anything particularly kind. She did so now. There was a reaction on her spirits, and she suddenly became as depressed as she had previously been gay. The constantly recurring contrasts between herself and Gladys continually affected her, and her father’s readiness for the marriage reminded her of the scenes between him and herself previously to her own.

The topic was given up for that evening, but the following morning Netta renewed it with Owen, who declared himself ready to marry Gladys that very moment.

The upshot of it all was, that the wedding was settled for New Year’s Day, at Netta’s particular request. No one cared, or indeed thought what the world would say at a marriage taking place during a period of such heavy affliction. Netta willed it, and to give her pleasure, and an object for her poor wandering mind, every member of the family would have made any sacrifice; and this was not a sacrifice at all, but an event of importance to all.

Mr and Mrs Jones promised to come if only for one clear day, and sent a box of presents to their niece, which Netta had the pleasure of unpacking. Amongst them was a simple and pretty wedding dress and bonnet, that poor Netta wept over, thinking of her own.

On the whole, however, Netta was better and more cheerful, and even assisted in the preparations that were going forward. She helped to make that pretty dove-coloured silk dress that was manufactured at home, and tried to join in the happiness which her apparently improved health seemed to make allowable.

But Netta's heart was with Howel, and the certainty that she felt of his return and constant love, alone sustained her. Alas! that poor, fluttering, uncertain heart!

Page 282

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE HEIR.

Miss Gwynne returned to Glanyravon on Christmas Eve. She had not visited it before, since she left it when her father married. She had seen her father, his wife, and her little brother almost yearly in London, whither Lady Mary Nugent insisted on dragging her husband annually; but she had not hitherto had love, or courage, or Christian charity enough to visit them at home. When last in town, and repeatedly by letter, her father had urged her doing so, and she had at last complied with his request, more from a latent sense of duty than from inclination.

It was a bright, frosty night, when the carriage that had been sent to meet her drove up to the door. If poor Netta had fainted on returning to the farm, Freda was obliged to brush away gathering tears as she returned to the Park. Every branch of tree, as it glittered in the moonlight in its dress of hoar frost, was familiar to her, every pane of glass in the windows of the old place seemed a friend.

On the lowest step, bare-headed and expectant, were the old butler and footman she had left when she went away; she shook hands with each, and they almost rung her hand off. In the door-way stood her father, not bare-headed, but expectant, who received her with paternal warmth. Freda knew that he must for once have forgotten himself and his nervous debility to have thus exposed himself to the frosty air. In the hall was Lady Mary ready with smiles and embraces, with which Freda would gladly have dispensed; but she did her best to seem, if she could not feel, glad to see her.

Her ladyship preceded her to her own old bedroom, where a huge fire, and bright wax candles bade her welcome, and whither she was followed by Frisk, who was exuberant in his demonstrations of delight at his return home after his long absence.

‘I have ordered my maid to wait on you my dear,’ said Freda’s stepmother, ’because I find your’s does not return to you. But we can replace her. Dinner will be ready whenever you are; can I do anything for you?’

‘No, thank you, I shall not be long,’ said Freda mechanically.

Lady Mary left the room.

Freda felt that her tact was good after all; for no nice feeling could have been more successful than it was. She had received her just as if she had come home after a short absence. No demonstrations of any kind; her room was much as it had ever been. There were even some of her clothes in the wardrobe.

‘I won’t cry! I won’t give way!’ muttered Freda, beginning to take off her wrappings.

There was a tap at the door.

‘Come in!’ And Anne the old housemaid appeared.

’Oh, miss, I am so glad to see you home again, it do seem so natural. Please to let me unpack your things, miss. My lady thought you might like me better than Mrs Pink.’

‘Thank you, Anne, it does look like home to see you.’

Page 283

‘Shall I get your dress, miss?’

’I can’t dress to-night, I am too tired. There, that will do. Now I will go downstairs.’

She did so, and found her father alone in the library.

‘I won’t cry,’ again she said, as she kissed him affectionately.

’Thank you for coming, Freda, it will do me good, and my wife is delighted. Harold, too, is in ecstasies, and only went to bed with a promise that sister Freda—he calls you sister, you know, and—and all that sort of thing.’

The ‘my wife,’ grated strangely on Freda’s ear, but she promised to go and see her little brother.

Lady Mary came in, and they went to dinner.

It seemed strange to see her at the head of the table, and Freda felt as if she were in a dream. But nothing could be more perfect than her ladyship’s manner. She behaved as if nothing had ever happened to cause the least estrangement between them, and almost as if she were still Lady Mary Nugent. Handsome as ever, and perfectly well-bred, she almost made even Freda believe, after her long absence from her, that she really was what she seemed. However, Freda tried to take her as she was, and to feel thankful that she was no worse. It was she who principally kept up the conversation; Freda made great efforts, and signally failed, and Mr Gwynne never talked much.

After dinner, Freda proposed to go and see the little brother. As she looked at the magnificent boy who lay peacefully sleeping in his little crib, she was thankful to be able to kiss him, and say, ’God bless you, my brother,’ without feeling angered that he had deprived her of the inheritance she had once been so proud of. She knew that Lady Mary was watching her narrowly, but there was no hypocrisy in her affection, so she did not care.

They went down to the library, where were Mr Gwynne, tea and coffee.

‘Is he not a splendid fellow, my dear?’ said Mr Gwynne.

‘He certainly is, papa,’ replied Freda, aloud, saying inwardly, ’and everything with you now. I am quite second—third I ought to say.’

This was true; Mr Gwynne was proud of his wife and son. The former took care of him, and did not greatly interfere with his pursuits or peculiarities, the latter gave him new life and hopes. An heir in his old age was a gift that might well exceed that of the daughter who could not perpetuate his name.

Freda was glad when she went to bed, which she did as soon as tea was over. It was a great relief to sit down once more in the easy-chair which had helped to nurse so many crude fancies and humours in days gone by, and think over the past and present. There was an atmosphere of unreality about everything at Glanyravon, that she hoped to clear off on the morrow, so she resolved to try not to feel depressed under its influence; but having once known what it was to enjoy living with real, working men and women, with aims beyond the formalities of society, it seemed hard to be thrown back upon the cold worldliness of her stepmother, and the selfish nervousness of her father.

Page 284

She was, however, aroused on the blessed morning of Christmas Day by something that was very real.

‘A merry Kismas, sister Freda,’ shouted a sharp little voice into her ear, and before her eyes were half opened brisk little feet were stamping at her bedside, and the same voice authoritatively enouncing, ’Put me up, Dane, I ‘ull be put up.’

‘I beg your pardon, miss,’ said the nurse, who stood in the doorway, ‘but Master Harold would come, and my lady isn’t up, and—’

‘Never mind, let him in,’ said Freda, sitting up in bed, and opening her arms to receive the rosy, wilful, handsome child, who did not know how he had supplanted her.

‘A merry Kismas!’ he repeated, returning Freda’s kisses by pulling off her night-cap, and letting down her long hair before she knew what he was about. ’Now, I’ll dive ‘ou to Tewey.’

‘Master Harold! don’t, sir!’ said the nurse.

But Master Harold was jumping on the pillow behind his sister, making reins of her hair and horses of her head in no very gentle fashion.

‘I sha’n’t give you what I brought you from London if you pull my hair,’ said Freda, catching the bare, firm, sturdy leg of the small tyrant who called her sister.

‘Is it soldiers?’ asked the child, suddenly tumbling down before her.

She caught the little fellow in her arms, and told him that if he would go away whilst she dressed he should have the present. After some demur he consented, having first informed Freda that ’’ittle Minnie, and Winnie, and Dot, and baby’ were all coming to dinner.

‘A family party!’ groaned Freda, when the child was carried away by its nurse, ’myself the only rightful member of the family, and probably the only one who will feel as if she doesn’t belong to it.’

Freda got up and looked out upon the fine park and the hills beyond. She sighed involuntarily.

‘Why should I sigh,’ she said. ’I am happier than when it was my home,—happier, and, I hope, more useful. My father doesn’t want me,’—here she paused. Perhaps that father really did want her, for she, at least, loved him, and his wife did not; and she was beginning to be conscious, daily more and more conscious, of the exceeding preciousness of love.

Breakfast passed, with the same effort to feel at home on her part, and attempt to keep up a conversation on that of Lady Mary, as had the dinner of the previous day.

Harold made a diversion by bursting into the room to ask for his soldiers. He, at least, was quite natural, and entirely spoilt.

Immediately after breakfast they drove to church. It was delightful to Freda to see the good vicar in the reading-desk, and his wife in the pew beneath. She felt at home again for the first time. For the first time, also, she really listened to the worthy man's somewhat dry sermon, and strove to feel 'in charity with all men' on that blessed day. She thought once or twice of a sermon Rowland

Page 285

had preached that day twelvemonth, which riveted the attention of his large congregation, and made her wonder whence he had received the gift, by half-an-hour's plain eloquent preaching, of opening the heart to receive truths hitherto more understood than felt. Rowland had become to her, and many, the type of a preacher and minister of the Gospel, and to him she owed, under God, the fuller enlightenment and enlargement of her own mind.

After the service was over she went into the vicarage. Here, again, she was at home. She had much to tell Mrs Prothero of the kindness of Sir Philip Payne Perry and his wife to her, and many messages to deliver from them. She had also to hear Mr and Mrs Jonathan's opinion of Netta, and of the approaching wedding. She avoided any word that could recall Howel.

'I hope you are not displeased with the match?' said Freda.

'By no means,' was Mrs Jonathan's reply. 'I always thought Gladys very superior, and her turning out to be Mr Jones' niece removes our only objection. It is quite a romance!'

'She is a clever young woman,' said Mr Jonathan. 'I was surprised the other day to find how much history she knew. As to Wales, she has it by heart, and is not wholly unacquainted with the antiquities of the country. It was quite a pleasure for me, Miss Gwynne, I assure you, to meet with any one who took so much interest in ancient lore. And now she is to be one of the family she is so much more at her ease. Actually asked me, of her own accord, of the fossils in the Park quarry, and a very acute question concerning the lords of the marches. She even knew that her name, Gladys, meant Claudia, and that the original Gladys is, probably, the very Claudia mentioned by St Paul.'

'We shall all be thrown into the shade now, Mrs Prothero,' said Freda, laughing. 'Gladys will evidently be the favourite.'

'I am afraid I must break up your conversation, my love,' interrupted Lady Mary. 'You can drive or ride over to finish it when you like.'

On their way home her ladyship remarked,—

'I suppose this unfortunate discovery concerning Mr Howel Jenkins will quite ruin Mr. Rowland Prothero's position in London society?'

'He is scarcely in what is called "society;" but his friends are not likely to be changed by the conduct of his brother-in-in-law. He is far too highly esteemed and admired to be injured by such a man as Howel Jenkins.'

Freda felt the blood rush to her cheeks, and was convinced that Lady Mary noticed it.

‘I am glad to hear you say so, my dear,’ said Mr Gwynne. ’He is a great favourite of mine, and I should be sorry to think his prospects were injured. They are a rising family. His brother is very much thought of, and improving his own and my property amazingly. A most energetic young man, and so amusing, that he almost kills me whenever I see him. I am glad he is going to marry that pretty Gladys.’

Page 286

When they arrived at home they found the party from Abertewey ready to receive them,—at least, Mrs Gwynne Vaughan and her children. The colonel was to join them at dinner.

‘Oh, Freda, dear, I am tho glad you are come home again!’ lisped Mrs Gwynne Vaughan. ’Tho ith Gwynne. He thaith it will be delightful to have you. Thith ith little Gwynne, and thith ith Minnie, and we call thith one Dot, and baby ith in the nurthery. You thall thee her by-and-by. Kith Aunt Freda, Minnie,—they all call you Aunt Freda, you know.’

Freda, not at all rejoicing in the honour, stooped to kiss all the pretty little children by turns, and had soon made friends with them all. The children were the greatest possible relief to her; she turned to them as a sort of neutral ground between the war in her own heart and the tact and inanity of her stepmother and stepsister.

The latter was as unchanged as the former. Very handsome, very fashionably dressed, very good-tempered,—in short, Miss Nugent simply turned into Mrs Vaughan. Freda wondered how the really clever and agreeable Colonel Vaughan could live with so dull a companion.

Having got through luncheon and the afternoon somehow, thanks to the children, the dinner-hour arrived, and therewith the colonel. Freda always felt reserved with him, and his studied kindness and politeness to her when she had met him occasionally in London, irritated her. She had spoken to him before his marriage so unreservedly of his wife, and had given him to understand so unmistakably that she knew what had passed between him and Gladys, that she fancied he must at heart cordially dislike her. Moreover, she had loved him. Much as she despised herself now for having done so, she knew it, and she despised him all the more on that account.

There was, however, no mistaking the real warmth of his welcome, and for the moment—only for the moment—Freda’s heart beat quick.

’I am so glad to see you, Freda,—sister Freda, you know, now,—and looking so well.’

’Yeth, ith’nt the looking well. I think the lookth younger than when the went away.’

‘Handsomer, at any rate. I may pay you a compliment, now, Freda.’

Freda could not return it. Colonel Vaughan looked more than six years older since his marriage, and there was a dissatisfied expression on his countenance very different from the old suavity.

Freda was not long in discovering that if he had improved his fortune by marriage he had not improved his temper, or increased his happiness. Fortunately for his wife, her

imperturbable placidity and want of acute feeling prevented her from appropriating many hard hits from her husband that would have made Freda wretched.

Again, she admired the tact of the mother. By it she managed her husband admirably, and retained her power over him in precisely the same way as she did before she married him; while Wilhelmina wholly lost what little she had gained over hers prior to her marriage. Her silliness annoyed him continually, and her beauty, for want of expression, palled upon his fastidious taste.

Page 287

Freda's contempt very soon turned to pity. The handsome, fascinating, deceitful colonel was amply indemnified for all the hearts he had broken, and those broken hearts fully avenged by the tedium of his home life.

Of course, Freda did not discover all this during that one Christmas Day, but it developed itself during her subsequent stay at Glanyravon.

'We did not ask any one else to dinner to-day, Gwynne,' said Mr Gwynne, 'because we thought Freda would like to have us alone, you know, and see the children, and—and all that sort of thing.'

'I hope Freda enjoys a family-party better than I do,' said the colonel, looking at her as he spoke. 'Of all things on earth, it is the slowest.'

'Complimentary,' said Lady Mary.

'Oh! Gwynne ith alwayth tho fond of thaying what he dothn't mean. He often doth to me, don't you, my dear? But I don't mind, becauth I underthtand him now.'

Freda looked at Mrs Vaughan to see if she spoke ironically. Not at all. She fully believed what she said. Colonel Vaughan saw the glance, and smiling, said,—

'All in good faith, I assure you.'

Freda blushed, and to turn the conversation, began to talk to him of his children, and to praise their beauty. He smiled again, as perfectly understanding her ruse.

'People call them loves and angels!' he said, 'and even go into raptures over the baby. For my part, I never look at them when they are babies. Indeed, I don't like children, and all ours are so spoilt. Wilhelmina doesn't know how to manage them, and now their governess is away, the house is like a lunatic asylum.'

'Oh, Gwynne, how abthurd you are! He ith tho fond of them, Freda, you can't think, and they are thuch little dearth.'

'I was greatly amused,' said Freda, 'to hear Minnie call Harold "uncle," just now; and he seemed not a little proud of his dignity.'

'Surely, Freda, you haven't learnt to talk baby talk!' said Colonel Vaughan. 'You used to eschew such twaddle.'

'It was time for me to learn to like a great many things that I professed to hate. I hope I am improved since I was here last. But I always liked children.'

'Oh! Harold is so fond of her,' said Mr Gwynne. 'He is a wonderful boy.'

Here followed a history of various achievements of Harold, during which Colonel Vaughan vainly endeavoured to catch Freda's eye. She was only too well-disposed to smile at the infatuation of the doating father.

'Here are the children, I think,' said Lady Mary.

In bounded Harold, and jumped, unbidden, on Freda's lap.

'I ull have some of that—and that,' said Harold.

'And I will have—' began Minnie.

'You will have nothing if you ask for it,' said the colonel with a frown.

His little trio were quiet in a moment.

'Ganpapa, take me up,' said Dot, creeping round to Mr Gwynne.

Page 288

Freda felt her blood creep at that word ‘Grandpapa,’ and also felt the colonel’s glance. He seemed to take a pleasure in watching every expression of her countenance, and it did, unfortunately, always convey her feelings to the watcher.

Freda had never passed so uncomfortable a dinner since the day when the present Mrs Vaughan came of age. Probably she was the only one of the party who was conscious of Colonel Vaughan’s changed manner and temper, because it was new to her, and she could scarcely believe him to be himself. Her father was wrapped up in his boy—his wife’s attention was divided between him and the other children, and Mrs Vaughan smiled and lisped on all by turns.

Freda thought of old times, when her father and herself were so happy together; and then she thought of the last Christmas day in London, when Mr and Mrs Jones, Rowland, and herself dined late off a Glanyravon Park turkey, having first feasted as many poor people as the kitchen would hold, on geese from Glanyravon Farm. Certainly the comparison with her present companions was ‘odious’ to her.

Freda scarcely knew which was worst—the riotous, untameable spirits of Harold, who did and said what he liked, unchecked either by father or mother, or the cowed and altered manner of the other children in the presence of their father; they, too, had been noisy enough before he arrived.

‘It was very good of you to come to-day, Gwynne,’ said Lady Mary; ’I scarcely expected you, knowing how you dislike this frosty weather.’

’Freda is attraction enough to draw off the frost, though she has become so much better than her neighbours. Wilhelmina, my dear, why do you let Minnie stuff her mouth so full of orange? The child will choke.’

The dinner came to an end at last, and the children went to bed. Freda played and sung some sacred music at Colonel Vaughan’s request, and he complimented her on her improvement, and said he wished his wife played and sung as well, because music was such a resource in a dull country place.

’I suppose you have practised a great deal since you have been in London?’ he said.

’Mrs Jones and I play and sing whenever we have time, and I have had some lessons,’ replied Freda. ’Besides, one hears all the first musicians and singers, and they teach one.’

’Did you see much of that young parson, Prothero? I remember he was somewhere in your neighbourhood,’ asked the colonel.

Freda was sure this question was a feeler, and she answered carelessly,—

‘Yes, naturally. He is Mr Jones’ brother curate.’

’Now confess, you didn’t like those people, and that sort of life? You must have been *ennuyee* from morning to night.’

‘On the contrary, the days were not half long enough.’

‘Freda!’ exclaimed Mrs Vaughan, ’I get tho tired, and tho doth the colonel, before half the evening ith over.’

‘Some one else seems in the same condition,’ said Freda. ’Papa is fast asleep.’

Page 289

‘And mamma nearly,’ said Mrs Vaughan. ’And I am tho tired. I think Chrithmath dayth are very dull. One dothn’t know what to do.’

‘That isn’t peculiar to Christmas days in your year,’ said the colonel, sarcastically; ’but I suppose we had better go to bed. I hope we shall be more amusing to-morrow, Freda. All your old friends, the constant Sir Hugh amongst them, are invited to meet you. Let me light your candle. Remember, I always used to do that, when we had our snug evenings together such an age ago.’

’Yeth, he often talkth of you, Freda, and thayth you were thuch good company.’

Freda heard Colonel Vaughan sigh, and thought, as she said ‘good-night,’ and hastened upstairs, that she ought to be thankful that the imperturbable and dull Wilhelmina Nugent had been the choice of that discontented and irritable colonel, instead of the quick-tempered, independent Winifred Gwynne.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

New Year’s Day dawned under the influence of a bright sun, and a clear, frosty atmosphere. The old year was dead and buried with all his griefs and joys; his son and heir came forward smiling, to begin his career of times and seasons, clouds and sunbeams.

With him, Owen and Gladys were to commence their united lives. An auspicious morning ushered in this, their bridal day, and the year’s birthday. Nature had put on all her jewels in honour of the joint festivities. Her very tears were turned into diamonds that sparkled on her capacious breast, neck, and arms, more brilliantly than stomachers, necklaces and bracelets of gems, on the courtiers of an Indian monarch.

Truly, as the fair and gentle Gladys drove through the roads and lanes that led from the farm to the church, the hedge-rows sparkled with these brilliants, and her very pathway was strewn with them. Attired in that Quaker-like garb of dove-colour and white, her soft cheek tinged as from the sun, her eyes cast down in modest shyness, and her heart beating with quiet happiness, she seemed a fitting bride to wait upon that heir of so many by-gone generations.

And assuredly a happier never drove to a church to meet her expectant bridegroom, her hand clasped lovingly between the kindly palms of her future mother, sitting by her side; and the affectionate glances of her uncle and aunt cast upon her from the opposite seat. She felt as if it were all a dream. She, the Irish beggar—the friendless—the wanderer—the orphan!

And now so honoured! All whom she most cared for in the world, with the exception of Rowland, were assembled in that village church to meet her. There were Owen and his father—Miss Gwynne and Minette—Mr and Mrs Jonathan Prothero.

Gentleness, gratitude and simple merit, were, for once rewarded, even in this world.

The kind and worthy Uncle Jonathan—so soon to be *her* uncle—married her. Her own uncle gave her, with prayers and blessings, to him whom she had loved so long and truly—her former mistress, now her fast friend, and another mistress's grandchild, were her bridesmaids.

Page 290

If a tear gathered in her eye, it was a tear of joy; and there, at the altar, amongst all those to whom she was henceforth to be united by the ties of relationship, she inwardly vowed to devote herself to their happiness, and to the fulfilment of the promises she was making to him who would be one with her for ever.

The churchyard was full of spectators, as the proud and happy Owen led his bride through it to the vicarage, and the general opinion was, that there had never been married so handsome a couple in the church of Llanfach.

The bells and the sunbeams rang out and shone out together, and all the wedding-party forgot their private sorrows in the joy of the moment.

Even Netta, who had been taken to the vicarage for the occasion, received them with one of her old bright smiles. She threw her arms round Gladys, and called her ‘sister.’

‘*My* sister,’ she said more than once emphatically.

And if tears would, from time to time, spring into her eyes, as she contrasted herself with Gladys, she brushed them away, and did her best not to cast a shadow from her grief, on the brightness of a brother and sister’s joy. That little drawing-room at the vicarage contained as pretty and pleasant a group as could well be seen, of which Owen and Gladys formed the centre figures.

‘Now, my good girl, let me give you a real kiss,’ said honest Mr Prothero, ’and tell you that I am proud of my daughter. Mother, what do you say?’

‘I say, thank God for all His mercies,’ said quiet Mrs Prothero, shaking Gladys’ hand, which she seemed loath to part with.

If there is a great variety of character and feeling displayed in shaking hands, there assuredly is, also, in kissing. Gladys experienced it in that same little drawing-room, where she submitted her blushing cheeks to all sorts of impressions.

Mr Prothero gave her three very hearty smacks, which resounded through the room, and seemed to say at once, ’I am your father; his wife’s embrace was quieter, but more tender. Mrs Jonathan stooped majestically, and imprinted her lips patronisingly on the forehead, as much as to say, ’I receive you into the family of the Payne Perrys, since you are respectably connected.’ Mrs Jones kissed her on the lips, and said, ’God bless you, my dear.’ Miss Gwynne, who hated kissing, and did not consider herself one of the family, looked on, but took no active part. Was that pride? she asked herself afterwards, and the answer was, ‘Yes.’ As to Mr Jones, his embrace made Owen exclaim, ’It is well I know you are her uncle now. I was as jealous as could be when you kissed her in London.’ Minette’s embrace was a long hug, and when the vicar came in, he wound up

the scene by a salute as original as himself, which called forth the following reproof from his brother:—

’Why, man, you don’t know how to kiss. You stumbled upon the very tip of her nose, and almost put her eyes out with your spectacles.’

Page 291

Heedless of the interruption, Mr Jonathan addressed his niece as follows:—

’My dear Niece, Claudia,—I shall henceforth call you by that name, in memory of her of the Epistle, and I so registered it just now, Gladys or Claudia—I wish you and my good nephew, Owen, all happiness and prosperity, both spiritual and temporal. I pray that you may, according to the example of your illustrious namesake, devote yourself to works of piety and hospitality, making your husband’s home happy, and keeping a place therein for his and your friends.’

‘To be sure she will, uncle,’ said Owen, ’and we will have an especial corner for you, called “The Claudia,” where the little hypocrite shall talk to you of all the druidical remains, and fossil mammoths, that she pretends to be so interested in.’

‘You had better come and take off your bonnet now, my dear,’ said Mrs Jonathan to the flushed and shy Gladys.

‘I hope I shall never be married,’ whispered Freda to Mrs Jones, ’if I am to undergo that sort of ordeal. But I suppose all brides are not kissed in that way.’

Uncle and Aunt Jonathan had prepared a substantial early dinner—they did not dignify it by the name of *dejeuner*, or miscall it breakfast—to which, in the course of an hour or so, the family party sat down, much as they would have sat down to any ordinary dinner. The dining-table just accommodated ten comfortably, and Netta sat in her easy-chair by the fire, with a small table by her side, making the eleventh.

Miss Gwynne remained to luncheon only, being engaged to dine at Abertewey, and not considering herself quite as one of the guests. She had come uninvited and unexpected, to show due honour to Gladys and her dear friends, Mr and Mrs Jones, and the whole party were gratified by the attention.

The remarks upon her doing so made by her friends at home, were various.

‘Freda is certainly very eccentric,’ said Lady Mary to her husband. ’Her former maid—-your tenant’s son—the brother-in-law of that Howel Jenkins. Do you think it discreet, Mr Gwynne?’

’Why, really, Lady Mary, I didn’t think about it. She has always done what she likes; they are very worthy, respectable people, you know, and all that sort of thing.’

’Well, if you don’t object, of course it is no affair of mine. But it looks very much as if she still thought of Mr Rowland.’

’Oh, an excellent young man! It was only yesterday I saw his name mentioned in the *Times*, as having attended a large meeting in the place of his rector, who is ill. It was upon the general question of all sorts of improvements of the low parts of London. I

can’t exactly remember what they were, religious, and sanitary, and all that sort of thing you know. Well, the thanks of the meeting were awarded him, for his very clear and accurate information, or something of the sort. Very satisfactory, you know.’

‘Oh very! but that can have nothing to do with Freda.’

Page 292

’She is very good, is Freda, much improved! she never disputes and quarrels with me now. I hope she will live with us—indeed I cannot part with her again.’

At Abertewey, Mrs Vaughan asked the colonel whether ’he thought Freda would come away from that thupid wedding, in time for dinner.’

‘If she doesn’t, I will never ask her here again,’ was the reply. ’Now Freda really is a capital girl, unaffected and sensible; improving every year. I wish all women were more like her.’

’Tho do I, Gwynne; the ith very nice, tho kind to the children, and not tho thatirical to me as the uthed to be. I uthed to be afraid of her, but I am not now, at all. Don’t you think thatirical people very dithagreeable? I hope Winnie won’t be thatirical, don’t you? Mamma thaith—’

’Never mind what she says, my dear. I hope Freda will come. All the people will be so disgusted if she does not, particularly poor Sir Hugh. I wish she would marry him—but she is too good for him. Intellectual people ought not to marry those who have no brains.’

’No, thertainly not. Oh! here they are! Freda and all. I hear her voithe. I am tho glad.’

To Freda’s surprise, every one seemed really glad to see her, and to the surprise of every one, the more they saw of her, the more they liked her. The very people whom she had shunned as bores, and who had shunned her as ‘tho thatirical,’ now became friendly and pleasant to her, and she to them; how it was they could not tell, but various reasons were assigned for the change.

‘How altered Miss Gwynne is,’ said one; ’I suppose the birth of the brother has made her more humble.’

‘Nothing like London to pull the pride out of our country gentry,’ said a second. ’Lords at home, they are only one of a multitude there. Miss Gwynne has learnt her true position at last.’

‘How much more agreeable Miss Gwynne is,’ said a fourth. ’I suppose it is because she has been living in a clergyman’s family, where they are obliged to be pleasant to all the parishioners.’

‘How much less fastidious, satirical, and overbearing Freda Gwynne is,’ a fourth; ’her very countenance is altered; I am sure there has been some great change in her mind.’

And thus the neighbours rang the changes upon Freda’s change; but Mrs Gwynne Vaughan had been, perhaps, the nearest to the real cause. She was no longer satirical, no longer striving to find out vulnerable points in people’s characters to laugh at; she

had learnt to make allowances for others, who in turn made allowances for her. Satirical people are very amusing, but rarely welcome, companions; not that Freda was exactly satirical, but she had the gift of finding out every one's weak points—a good gift to those who will kindly cover the point, but a bad one to such as like to lay it bare.

The party at Abertewey went off very well; the colonel was in good humour, and devoted to Freda, who tried to treat him as her brother-in-law; and Sir Hugh was more gallant than ever, and long before the evening was over, had managed to tell Freda that he would rather have her without the Park than with it, which Freda pretended to take as a joke on the part of her old admirer.

Page 293

The following day, Mr and Mrs Jones spent at the Park, according to a special invitation from its master and mistress. Lady Mary's attention to Freda's friends did more towards reconciling her to her step-mother than anything else; and she even forgot to ask whether it was tact or not. Mr Jones was obliged to return to London the next day, but at Freda's earnest entreaty, he left his wife behind him for a week, which was spent by her between the Park and farm very agreeably.

Before she left, Mr Gwynne had a little private conference with her, to the following effect, and very nervous he was meanwhile:—

'I am very much obliged to you and Mr Jones, I am sure, for your kindness to Freda. I hope you understand how satisfied, and—and—all that sort of thing, you know, I am whilst she is with you.'

Mrs Jones saw that she must say something to help him on.

'We are only too glad to have her society and aid. I assure you she has been invaluable in the parish, and is beloved by every one.'

'Exactly; I perceive a wonderful change in her; she is gentler, and less excitable. I feel that you—that your husband—in short, I mean—that—hem—'

'Freda has such a fine natural character, Mr Gwynne.'

'Precisely; I would say that I am convinced you would not influence her, and so forth, in remaining away from—you understand—from me, in short.'

'Certainly not. I should be very glad to think that she would return and live happily at her natural home, sorry as I should be to lose her.'

'Thank you very much indeed; you have always been her true friend. I am very anxious—so we are all you see—Lady Mary would like a companion—Harold attends to her better than to any one else. I hope you like Harold; ah—yes—he is a fine boy, and so talented; and you know—to be sure. I should wish to have Freda to read with me again; I assure you I miss her in many ways. And the colonel and Mrs Vaughan—the children—in fact—in short—you understand?'

'Perfectly, and will not throw any obstacle in the way of Freda's remaining at home.'

'Thank you very much. You are a true friend, Mrs Jones; thank you.'

Mrs Jones made a point of repeating that conversation to Freda, whose look of blank dismay quite startled her.

’Oh! Serena, you want to get rid of me. I could never live this kind of life again. Lady Mary would kill me in another month; not an idea in common. Her daughter is fifty times more endurable, for she is innocent in her silliness. And then that cranky, exigeant colonel, longing to make love to me if I would let him; the stiff dinner parties, tiresome people, spoilt children—though I do delight in Harold and Winnie and Gwynne and Dot and baby, too, for that much—and—’

‘And your father,’ quietly suggested Mrs Jones.

’I never thought you would wish me to leave you, Serena. Those happy, useful days! The poor, the schools, the church!’

Page 294

‘They are everywhere, my love.’

’But so different. I never felt so happy or useful before I lived with you in London.’

‘The change is in yourself, not in the place.’

’Oh! Serena, this is cruel! I could live with my father anywhere, but the others—-impossible.’

’Think it over. You know that you have a home with us whenever you like; that it would be my pleasure as well as interest to have you always. That we shall miss you in every possible way; still duty is duty. As long as your father did not care, and Lady Mary was rather glad to have the Park to herself, the thing was, perhaps, different, at any rate Freda was not then the Freda she is now.

‘Serena, you are a bitter-sweet, and a horrible little apple that is.’

‘But they say it makes good cider.’

’At any rate you ought not to influence me. I will not decide whilst you are here, and that is all I will promise. If I do, it will be to go to you undoubtedly. But I will think it over.’

That very night before she went to bed, Freda did think it over, sitting by the fire in her delightful, warm, well-lighted, well-furnished bedroom; but she could not come to any determination. She made out a sort of debtor and creditor account in her own head, and cashed it according to her somewhat imperfect notions of book-keeping.

’My father—of course I owe him a great deal in the way of duty and love; but he owes me something for letting me have my own way all my life, bringing me up with the notion that I should be an heiress, and then disappointing me by marrying a woman whom I utterly despise. Lady Mary—I owe her nothing whatever, beyond the common proper treatment that one must give to every one; she, on the contrary, owes me compensation for marrying my father when I am sure he didn’t want her, and certainly I did not.

’Colonel Vaughan—I don’t owe him anything beyond a little improvement in my style of singing and drawing; yes, I owe him a heavy debt of gratitude for not proposing for me instead of Wilhelmina, for assuredly I should have married him, and he owes me something for making a fool of me. Wilhelmina—I owe her a good deal, firstly, for despising her, laughing at her, ridiculing her—and she all the time better than I was, for she never retaliated—and secondly, for trying to prejudice the colonel against her. Harold—I owe him the love of a sister, and he owes me nothing as yet; here I am decidedly debtor. The poor, of course, wherever one is, one owes them a great debt of Christian charity and love; and I must confess that they are not quite so well seen to as when Gladys was my almoner; but then she is here again to see to them, and that, on her own responsibility, and it is Lady Mary’s place to care for them now.

’On the other hand, Serena—I owe her everything; all my few good thoughts, words and works. She owes me nothing. Mr Jones, ditto; I am wholly creditor in London: the poor, the ragged schools, I owe them every farthing I can give, for they want it, and have few to help them. I feel almost sure I should be best in London. Rowland Prothero, I owe him compensation for my great, unpardonable rudeness and pride; I am more ashamed of that one action than of any other. He so superior to me in every way, but the mere accident of birth.’

Page 295

Thus far Freda got in her arithmetic. But Rowland seemed to open a new rule, farther on in Butler than addition and substraction. In short, she found herself lost in the maze of fractions, and could not extricate herself. When she jumped up from her easy-chair, she was trying to reduce the following complex fractions, into one simple one, and entirely failed.

’A curate, the son of my father’s tenant, the brother-in-law of my former maid, brother-in-law also of a man indicted for forgery. But, proud as myself; below me here, but above me in London; infinitely my superior in everything worth the consideration of a person travelling quickly through a world of silly distinctions, to one where we shall all begin life on very different principles. The fact is, Freda, that the tables are turned, and you now esteem this same Rowland Prothero much higher than he esteems you. Constant intercourse has brought out all his grand points, and all your weak ones. His mind has conquered your vulgar prejudices, but has also fully seen through them, and despises you accordingly. Well, I suppose duty and propriety concur in my remaining at Glanyravon Park, discretion being the better part of valour.’

And so ended Freda’s arithmetic.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PENITENT.

A week after the marriage of Owen and Gladys, the following conversation took place between Gladys and Netta. The latter had been much more wandering in mind since the wedding, and had been occupying herself by writing a variety of letters, all of which were addressed to Howel, with the exception of one, which was to her brother Rowland.

‘You see, dear sister,’ said Netta, ’that Howel cannot come to me, because he is in debt, so I must go to him. He is in America, I know. His letter was from America.’

‘But America is an immense continent, dear Netta,’ said Gladys; ’you would not know where to seek him.’

’Oh, yes! I should find him very soon. My love would point the way. I should track his steps like a dog, Gladys—like a dog.’

’But you cannot go till you are better and stronger. Then we can all consult upon the best way.’

’Hush not a word to any one. They would stop me. And you know now Howell is my husband, I must leave father and mother to follow him. I know I was wrong to leave them to marry him; though he loves me, Gladys! he loves me! Don’t you think he does?’

’I am sure he does. Still, it might not be well for you to go to him, if he is hiding for debt. He might prefer your remaining here?’

’Would you not go to Owen? Would he like you to be away from him in trouble? You, who have only been married a week, know better; and I have been married years.’

’Owen shall tell you, my dear love, whether he would wish me to go to him at such a time. Perhaps men know best what other men would like?’

Page 296

‘But I mean to go, Gladys. Neither Owen nor you can hinder me.’

‘And what of Minette? You would kill her, if you took her so far.’

’Ah! that is what I wanted to say to you. I knew there was something; but my head aches so, I forget. If I go away, will you take care of Minette till I come back. Will you love her as if she were your own?’

’Wherever you go I will be a mother to her; but she would not like to part from her own dear mother, any better than you will from yours. We will not think of the journey just yet, dear; we will be happy together, all of us, for a little longer. You cannot leave so soon, after you have made Owen and me so blest.’

’None of you want me now; father and mother have a new daughter, a better one than I have ever been; Owen a wife! What a word that is, Gladys! We don’t understand it till we are parted from our husband; and I give Minette a mother in my place. I must go very soon.’

Poor Netta laid her head on Gladys’ shoulder, and began to cry.

‘Well, dear,’ said Gladys soothingly, ’we will see about it, you and I. But you must not go till I think you strong enough, and till we are prepared with clothes and money.’

‘Oh! I can beg! I don’t want clothes or money to get to Howel.’

Gladys knew that it was of no use to try to combat Netta’s purpose. All she could do was to seem to yield.

‘We will see,’ she said, ’when the days are a little longer. But you have not told me about the letters yet.’

’No, I was forgetting them. If anything happens to me, or it I should miss Howel on my way, I want him to have this packet of letters. In them, I have told him that I wish Minette to remain here with you and mother; I have said a great deal to him, but mostly to beg him to forgive me, as I forgive him, all our unkindness to one another. Was that right, Gladys?’

‘Quite right, love. We must forgive, as we hope to be forgiven.’

’Father and mother have forgiven me. Do you think my heavenly Father has?’

’Yes, I do; because you have repented, and “come to your Father,” and asked forgiveness for His Son’s sake.’

‘I have, Gladys; so I can go on my journey cheerfully.’

Gladys could scarcely refrain from tears, when she thought of the journey she was really travelling.

’I know you have forgiven me, Gladys, for all I said of you when you came here first. Strange that I should have been willing to leave you in the barn, or anywhere, to die; you who have done so much for me! Oh, Gladys!’

‘Don’t think of those times, Netta, dear; they are past, thank God.’

Here the door opened, and Owen appeared, his face beaming with a happiness that it did all around him good to see.

‘What! tears! both of you! Only a week married!’ he said, half playfully, half reproachfully, as he kissed, alternately, his wife and sister, and finally, sat down by the side of the former.

Page 297

‘It was my fault, Owen,’ said Netta.

‘Is that true, Gladys—quite true?’ asked Owen, taking Gladys’ hands in his, and looking into her eyes.

‘Quite true, Owen,’ said Gladys, smiling lovingly on the open countenance of Owen, whilst a quiet tear rolled down her cheek.

Owen kissed off the tear.

‘You are happy, my love?’ again he asked, as if fearing that a shadow should pass over that fair, sweet face, to obscure the light of their spring of wedded life.

Gladys pressed his hands, assured him by a glance true as oaths, and looked at Netta. The hint was taken.

In a moment Netta’s were the thin hands that Owen clasped, her’s the face into which he gazed.

‘Owen,’ she said earnestly, ’if I go away, will you take my child, as if she were your own? Will you love her, and bring her up?’

’You are not going away, Netta! But you may be quite sure that I will love Minette, without any going away. We will all keep together now, we are too happy—so happy, my Gladys, are we not?’

There was a strange restlessness about Netta. This resolution to go away had taken such a hold upon her, that she reverted to it again and again. Gladys confided it to Owen and their mother, and they all decided that it would be necessary to watch her night and day, without letting her know that she was watched.

They resorted to every possible means of amusement, but in vain. She was quite preoccupied, and even her child failed to attract her attention. Again she became nervous at every sudden sound, and started at every footfall. She told Gladys that she knew that Howel would either come to her during the course of that week, or that she should go to him.

Her mother assisted her in going to bed that night, and before she laid down, she said,—

’Dear mother! do you remember that you used to come to this dear room when I was a child, the last thing at night, and, sleeping or waking, to kiss me before you went to sleep? and do you remember that I always said my prayers at your knee, in that very corner by the little table? Sometimes I feel as if I was a child, or quite a young girl again. It was so good of you to give me my own room, and my own bed, that I love so

well. If I go away, I should like Minette to have this room. It will make her think of me. I pray she may be a better child than I have been.'

'Will you not get into bed, dear, and try to sleep?' said Mrs Prothero.

'I think I should like to say my prayers again alone with you; so, at your feet. You shall pray for me, and I will join with you.'

Netta knelt, as if she were, indeed, once more a child, at her mother's knees, and clasped her thin white hands together.

'Will you pray for Howel, mother?' asked Netta.

Mrs Prothero laid her hand on her kneeling daughter's head, and uplifting her tearful eyes to heaven, prayed aloud for Netta, for Howel, for all. Netta repeated each sentence after her mother, and when the prayer was concluded, threw her arms around her, and thanked her for praying for Howel.

Page 298

‘I cannot deceive you again mother, fach,’ she said ’I am going away to seek Howel, because he cannot come to me. If I should never find him, mother—but I shall, I know I shall, if I should die on the road—tell him that I never loved any one but him all my life, and I am sure he loves me. And now I am at peace with all the world, and have repented of all my sins. Gladys thinks I shall go to heaven if I die. And I humbly believe I shall. I feel quite calm and happy in my own mind, only wishful to go to my poor Howel, who is alone and unhappy. Now, mother, I will go to bed.’

She went to bed accordingly.

‘Let Minette come and say good-night to me, mother,’ she said, when Mrs Prothero had made her comfortable.

Mrs Prothero called the child, and her grandfather brought her upstairs.

‘How does my girl feel to-night?’ asked Mr Prothero cheerfully.

’Better, father, thank you; quite well indeed. God bless you, darling. Be a good child to grandmother and Aunt Gladys, and all. God bless you, father. I think I should like to have Owen and Gladys to wish me good-night; it is so nice to see you all together.’

Owen and Gladys came, and Netta bade ‘God bless’ them all, and said she should now go to sleep quite happy.

Gladys went to put Minette to bed, and Mrs Prothero sat by Netta’s pillow.

‘Good-night, mother; God bless you,’ Netta said, more than once, before she fell asleep.

When Gladys returned, she was sleeping peacefully.

‘The excitement of the day seems to have passed away,’ whispered Gladys. ‘Let me watch by her, dear mother.’

The words ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ had come quite naturally to Mrs Prothero and Gladys.

‘No, Gladys, thank you; not to-night. I will be in the room to-night.’

‘Then you will go to bed soon?’

‘Yes, very shortly.’

The two women embraced one another tenderly.

‘We can only pray for her, poor lamb,’ said Mrs Prothero gently. ’I have given her to the Lord to do with her according to His good pleasure.’

‘He will not leave her nor forsake her,’ said Gladys.

Mrs Prothero sat a long time by her child’s side watching her, but she slept so calmly that at last she went to the little table by the fire, and read her Bible. It was late—very late for the farm—when she undressed herself and lay down on the little bed, placed near the larger bed of Netta. Even then, more than an hour passed before she slept. The last thing she heard before she closed her eyes was her daughter’s somewhat irregular breathing—the last words that rang in her ears were her ‘God bless you, mother.’

Gladys, uneasy, she knew not wherefore, was in the room at about three o’clock in the morning. She had learnt to move so gently that the sleepers were not conscious of her presence. She was most thankful to find them sleeping.

Page 299

Gladys was up and dressed by six o'clock. She was anxious to spare her mother all possible trouble, and to see that the household was astir before she arose. It was a cold, dark January morning. As she went down the passage, a candle in her hand, towards Netta's room, she felt the chill air press heavily around her. She put the candle on the floor, outside the room, and went in. The night-light had burnt out, and the fire was dim, though not extinguished. Gladys passes Mrs Prothero without awaking her, and stands at Netta's bedside.

She cannot see clearly the face of the sleeping Netta, but such a restless anxiety about her had haunted her all the night, that she stoops down to listen to her breathing. It is so faint that she kneels down, and puts her ear close to the face. So very faint it is, that she is not quite sure that she hears it at all. She goes into the passage for the candle, and meets Owen. She signs him to silence, and her pale face frightens him. He goes with her into Netta's room. Shading the candle with her hand, she again stoops over Netta, so does Owen.

Very calm, very pale, and most lovely is the face on which they gaze with an eager, throbbing anxiety. Gladys presses her hand on Owen's arm, as she puts the candle near that placid face. He, too, puts his ear close to the half-open mouth, touches the hand that lies on the white counterpane, feels for the pulse, so quick but yesterday. He is about to utter the fear that oppresses him, but Gladys points to his mother, still heavily sleeping.

'Perhaps it is a swoon,' she whispers, and goes for the draught ready for such an attack. The light of the candle awakes Mrs Prothero, and she is out of bed in a moment.

'Netta has fainted, mother; she has one of her spasms,' says Owen, turning his pale face to his mother.

'My God, it is death!' cries the stricken mother, falling on her knees by the bedside of her child.

And it is death. Without a groan the spirit has quitted its dwelling of clay to enter upon its eternal rest!

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE RECTOR.

Life and death! What are they? A soul in chains, and a soul set free. Darkness and light, uncertainty and certainty! Warfare and peace! A railway journey and the great terminus! A span of time and immeasurable eternity! A bounded horizon and illimitable space! Earth and heaven! Satan and Christ! Man and God!

Life! On New Year's morning Glanyravon Farm was gay with preparations for a wedding. All its inmates were hopeful and cheerful! Two human beings were made as happy as human beings can be in this world. Three generations witnessed the auspicious event, and blessings and congratulations mingled with the marriage bells!

One short week, and Glanyravon Farm was mournful with lamentations for the dead. All its inmates were weeping. Death's angel had glided in unawares and unexpected, and had borne away one of that loving family, leaving only her earthly tenement behind!

Page 300

Another short week, and Glanyravon Farm held no longer even that once beautiful tenement. Quiet forms moved about in black clothing, and melancholy faces looked sadly at one another, and spoke low of her from whom they were parted for an indefinite period.

Such is life!

Death! what know the living of death? Is it not 'swallowed up in victory?' Death, then, to the believer in Christ is victory.

Such is death!

These were thoughts that presented themselves to Rowland Prothero after he had followed his sister's body to the grave. It was with such thoughts, simplified when put into words, that he attempted to comfort his mother, and to raise his father's mind from a morbid ruminating upon the past, to the hope that his beloved child had found death victory. Whilst Gladys comforted Owen and Minette, Rowland seemed to be all in all to his parents, and devoted himself to them during the period that he was able to leave his duties in London. The news of the death of his rector abroad had reached him the day before the intelligence of that of Netta; and, had it not been for the kind exertions of Mr Jones, he could not have stayed with his family the Sunday that followed the funeral.

Mr Jones, however, managed everything for him in London, and procured help in the emergency. Thus Rowland was able to accompany his family to church, and to be with them a few days of the week succeeding that on which his dear sister was buried.

It was on the afternoon of one of these few and precious days that he was sitting alone with his mother. The rest of the family were about their necessary avocations. Gladys, followed by poor little Minette in her black frock, was managing the household. Owen and his father were out of doors, the former doing his best to cheer his poor father, who had been perhaps more entirely cast down by his loss than any other member of the family, Mrs Prothero not excepted. As he himself said, he had not known what an idol he had made of his girl until she was gone from him.

Rowland and his mother were talking of Netta. It was Mrs Prothero's one theme when alone with him or Gladys. They could comfort her aching heart by assuring her that they believed her child's repentance to have been sincere, and her faith, if at times troubled and confused by the wandering mind and puzzled brain, placed on the One sole and sure foundation.

It was in the midst of this conversation that Mrs Griffith Jenkins entered, unushered, into the parlour where they were sitting.

At the earnest request of his wife and all his children, backed by the feeling that Netta would have wished it, Mr Prothero had consented to ask Mrs Jenkins to the funeral, which she had attended, together with Mrs Prothero, Mrs Jonathan, and Gladys. Mr Prothero had shaken her by the hand on that sad day, but had not spoken to her. Sorrow had so far bowed his spirit as to teach him to forgive her, if not Howel.

Page 301

Mrs Jenkins scarcely gave herself time to say ‘How do you do?’ when she poured out the grief which had brought her to Glanyravon.

’Oh, Mrs Prothero, fach! Ach, Rowland! what will I do? They was finding him in America—the pleece was finding him, my Howels! And he do be in jail in London, ’dited for forgery. He, my beauty Howels—he forge! Why ’ould he be forging? Annwyl! Fie was innocent, Rowland—on my deet, he was innocent. Oh, bach gen anwyl!’[Footnote: Oh, darling boy!]

Mrs Jenkins wrung her hands and cried bitterly.

’How do you know this, Aunt ‘Lizbeth?’ said Rowland. ’Tell me calmly, and then we will see what can be done,’

’Read you that letter. By to-morrow he’ll be in all the papers. He—so clever, so genteel, so rich! And all my Griffey’s savings—hundreds of thousands of pound—nobody do be knowing where they was. Ach a fi! ach a fi!’

Rowland read a letter from a celebrated London counsel retained by Mr Rice Rice for Howel, to the effect that Howel had been taken in America on the very day that his poor wife was planning to wander away in search of him, and was a prisoner the day she died. He had arrived in London, and been lodged in Newgate the previous day, the one on which that letter was written.

Rowland gently told his mother the contents of it.

‘Thank God that my child did not live to see this day!’ exclaimed Mrs Prothero.

‘Better dead, cousin, than to be living as Howels is!’ sobbed Mrs Griffey. ’In a prison, too, my beauty Howels! But I was wanting to know, Mr Rowland, when you was going to London? Seure, I do think of going to-night, or to-morrow morning.’

‘Why must you go, aunt?’ asked Rowland.

’Why must I be going? Why ask such a question? ’Ould I be staying at home, and my Howels in gaol? I do go to tak care of him, to pay for him, to be seeing justice done him, to be near him. Night or morrow morning I do mean to go.’

‘Mother,’ said Rowland, ’I am sure you will not mind sacrificing one day to poor Aunt Griffey and Howel. I must be in London the day after to-morrow. I will go to-morrow instead, and take her up with me, and see what is to be done for Howel. He will not have too many friends near him at such a time.’

‘God bless you, Rowland, bach,’ said Mrs Griffey, springing up from her chair, and running to Rowland and kissing him vigorously—a compliment, it must be confessed, he

could have dispensed with. 'And you will be standing up for him, and be telling of his character—and of his living at Abertewey—and how he was so clever, and did never be doing anything wrong. You will be saving him, Rowland, seure!'

Rowland shook his head.

'I will go with you, Aunt 'Lizbeth, and take you to my lodgings till I have seen Howel, and told him you are in London. We shall then see what can be done.'

'But you will be speaking up for him, Rowland, bach?'

Page 302

’Cousin ‘Lizbeth,’ said Mrs Prothero, ’if Howel had been a good son, and a steady young man, you could scarcely ask Rowland to speak up for him, and his own sister in Llanfach churchyard! “As we have sown, so must we reap,” in this world.’

’It do be fine for you, cousin, to be preaching, who was having fortunate sons, but—’

’Hush, Aunt ‘Lizbeth, if you please,’ interrupted Rowland. ’I will take you to London to-morrow, if you are resolved to go. You must meet me at the omnibus.’

(There was now a railway within a few miles of Llanfawr.)

’Then I will be going home to get ready. You was seure to come, Mr Rowlands?’

‘Sure, if nothing unforeseen prevents me.’

At this point of the conversation, Mr Prothero entered the parlour, leading Minette, who had two letters in her hand.

‘Here are two letters for you, Uncle Rowland,’ said the child. ’Grandfather says one must be from a bishop. What’s a bishop, uncle? Oh, Grandma Jenkins!’

Minette gave the letters to Rowland, and then went to kiss her grandmother, who began to cry when she saw her. Mr Prothero suppressed a very equivocal question concerning the reason of her again appearing at Glanyravon, and said,—

‘How d’ye do, Mrs Griffey?’

Rowland opened his letters. One was from Mr Jones, the other, as Minette said, was from a bishop—the Bishop of London. He read Mr Jones’ first, and turned more than usually red as he did so. He uttered an exclamation of surprise when he finished reading it, and put it into his father’s hands.

He then read the second letter. It was short. He got up, sat down, got up again, gave the letter to his father, and said,—

’It is too much! I do not deserve it! I wish it were Jones instead of me. He is much better—more suited—married. I cannot believe it!’

Neither could Mr Prothero, to judge from the expression of his face. He read each letter twice over, and seemed struggling with some great emotion as he ejaculated, ‘Rowland, my boy!’ and burst into tears.

Mr Prothero had not cried before since Netta’s death, and those were, indeed, precious tears.

Minette, terrified at seeing her grandfather cry, ran off in search of Gladys, who had been every one's refuge since her marriage.

She and Owen were at the front door, receiving Mr and Mrs Jonathan Prothero, who had just arrived.

'Aunty, grandfather is crying,' said the child. 'You said you wished he would cry; but I don't like it. I think he is crying for poor mamma, who is in heaven, and can't come to him.'

All hurried into the parlour.

They found Mr Prothero holding one of his son's hands, and shaking it nervously, and Mrs Prothero holding the other, and vain attempts to speak.

'Brother Jo! sister-in-law! Just in time. If our Netta was but here!' said Mr Prothero. 'Mrs Jonathan shall read the letters. It was she who got him the curacy.'

Page 303

Mrs Jonathan was not a little surprised to be greeted by having two letters thrust into her hands, and being requested to read them.

‘This one first, sister-in-law.’

At any other time Mrs Jonathan would have resented the epithet of sister-in-law, but she now swallowed it, and began to read as follows:—

’MY DEAR ROWLAND,—I should have written to you earlier, but I could not do so until a question that has been pending ever since you left was decided. Deputations and round-robins have been issuing from this parish by unanimous consent, and tending to St James’. For once High Church and Low Church have united in paying you the greatest compliment you can have paid just at present, *viz*., in requesting the bishop to give you the living of which you have been more than ten years curate. I believe it is pretty nearly settled that you are to be our new rector, and that I shall have to knock under, and solicit you to continue me in the curacy. I congratulate you from my heart; so does my wife; so, I am sure, do rich and poor around us. There never was a more popular presentation. May God prosper your labours as a rector as He has as curate.

> ’Give our love to my niece, Gladys, and kind regards to all the rest of your family, with a kiss to Minette, and believe me, most faithfully yours,
>
> WILLIAM JONES.’

Mrs Jonathan Prothero had begun to read this letter with a firm voice. It faltered before she got half way through it, and nearly failed before she completed it.

‘Read the other before you say anything,’ said Mr Prothero.

She began accordingly, clearing her throat and eyes at the same time.

’MY DEAR SIR,—I have great pleasure in offering you the living of which you are now curate, vacant by the lamented death of Mr Stephenson. I assure you that the united request of your friends and parishioners was but the echo of my own will, as I have long known and appreciated your untiring labours for the good of the souls committed to your care, particularly during the long illness of the rector, when you were of necessity brought more prominently forward.

> ’Praying that God’s blessing may rest on you and your parishioners,—I remain, my dear sir, faithfully yours,
>
> ‘LONDON.’

‘Rowland! my dear nephew!’ exclaimed Mr Jonathan Prothero, ’this is incredible! Such a living, without interest, personal application, much acquaintance with his lordship—’

‘You forget, my dear,’ said Mrs Jonathan interrupting her husband in his speech, and herself in an embrace she was about to give Rowland; ’you forget that Rowland frequently met the bishop at Sir Philip Payne Perry’s, and was not without interest, I am proud to say.’

‘And I am proud that he has got on by honest merit,’ said Mr Jonathan.

‘And so am I, uncle, much obliged as we are to the “three green peas,"’ said Owen. ’Let us shake hands upon it, Rowly, and here’s Gladys waiting for a kiss; she’ll be running away from me again to be your district visitor, or Sister of Charity, or whatever you call it. Quite grand to have a near relation a London rector; I am half a foot taller already.’

Page 304

’Kiss me, Uncle Rowland; I am very glad the bishop has written you such a nice letter,’ said Minette. Rowland took the child up in his arms. ‘Grandma Jenkins is crying so in the corner,’ she whispered; ’is it for papa, or poor mamma?’

Rowland’s attention was instantly recalled to Mrs Jenkins, who was, indeed, crying and sobbing very much. He pointed her out to his mother, who at once went to her.

‘Oh! I am thinking of your Rowlands and my Howels, so different!’ said the wretched mother; ’he to be beginning life so rich, and your son with nothing; and now! oh, anwyl! oh, anwyl!’

’Come with me, cousin ‘Lizbeth,’ said Mrs Prothero kindly; ’come upstairs, and I will make you some tea, and then Owen shall send you home.’

Mrs Prothero and Mrs Jenkins left the room, followed by Gladys, who was soon making the required beverage.

Whilst congratulations were still going on in the parlour, Miss Gwynne’s voice was heard in the passage.

’Not a word to Miss Gwynne, or indeed to any one, of my having the living, to-day at least,’ said Rowland, leaving the room hastily, and repeating his request to Gladys in the hall.

‘I can only stay a few minutes,’ said Miss Gwynne, when she had shaken hands with the party in the parlour, ’I wished to ask how Mrs Prothero is, and to see you, Mrs Jonathan. I have been delayed at the school, and it is nearly dusk already.’

‘Oh, don’t go yet, Miss Gwynne,’ said Minette, creeping up to her, and getting on her lap, ’it is so nice with you. Poor mamma is gone to heaven, Miss Gwynne.’

‘Yes, love,’ whispered Miss Gwynne, kissing Minette, ’but we will not talk of it before your grandfather, you see it grieves him.’

’But you won’t go; it is moonlight now—a pretty moon—I see it. It will light you home.’

The ‘pretty moon’ rather frightened Miss Gwynne, who said that if she did not go, she would have the servants in search of her.

‘Will you allow me to walk with you, Miss Gwynne?’ said Rowland; ’it is too late for you to return alone.’

’Thank you, I shall be really obliged, if I am not taking you from your friends. I am a much greater coward than I used to be. London lamps spoil one for country roads. Tell your grandmother that I will come again to-morrow and see her, Minette.’

Miss Gwynne and Rowland left the house together. Mr Prothero saw them to the door, and watched them up the road.

‘Strange times!’ he said to his brother, when he returned to the parlour. ’Rowland walking with Miss Gwynne quite familiar. I hope he isn’t too forward; to be seure he don’t offer his arm, or go near her; but it seems out of place their going together in that way at all. Gwynne, Glanyravon is a proud man, perhaps he ’ouldnt like it; but Rowland is so grand and so good now, that I daren’t say a word.’

‘Oh!’ said Mrs Jonathan, drawing herself up to her fullest height, ’a Rugby boy, and an Oxford man is a companion for any lady—and a London rector is a match for any lady in the kingdom, allow me to assure you, Mr Prothero; and Rowland has been in quite as good, or better society in town, than you can meet with in this neighbourhood. Sir Philip is quite in the first circles.’

Page 305

‘And Rowland isn’t spoilt by it, brother,’ said Mr Jonathan. ’He is a son and nephew we have reason to be proud of.’

Thus, in the midst of heavy sorrow, a joy came to the inmates of Glanyravon Farm. A sunbeam through the shadows.

Such, too, is life!

CHAPTER L.

THE DISINHERITED.

Miss Gwynne and Rowland walked on quietly together for a little space. There was something in the heart of each, unknown to the other, that seemed to close up speech. It was nearly five o’clock, and a January evening; but for the ‘pretty moon’ and the white mist from the river, and the frost-bitten snow on the roads, it would have been dark; but it was really a fine, bright night. That river-mist rose from the meadows beneath like a large lake, and the moonlight pierced through it and mingled with it.

It was such a night as lovers of a healthy, natural tone of mind might rejoice in; frost and snow being no refrigerators of true, honest warmth, but rather tending to keep it alive, by exhilarating the spirits and clearing the atmosphere.

Rowland broke the silence, and so clear was the air, that his own voice startled him.

’I am going to London to-morrow, Miss Gwynne; may I give Mrs Jones some hope that you will soon be back again?’

‘I fear not,’ said Freda; ’my father wishes me to remain at home, and I have decided upon doing so.’

‘Not entirely?’ asked Rowland, in a voice that all his self-command could not render calm.

’I believe it is so settled. He makes a great point of it. Lady Mary is equally urgent, and I have promised. Do you not think it is right?’

‘I suppose so; but what shall we do without you?’

Rowland spoke as he felt, from his heart. Miss Gwynne was touched by the words and tone.

‘I shall be very sorry,’ she said, simply. ’I never was so happy as in that dingy old square.’

Rowland felt that his new living, with all its increased responsibilities, would be a heavy burden to him without Freda's ready energy to lighten it. He did not at that moment pause to think how closely even our highest duties are entwined with our affections, and thereby lowered to earth—but so it is. The conscientious man does them; but a helping hand, a friendly voice, a loving word, is a wonderful aid towards doing them with a cheerful spirit.

There was silence for a few minutes between Rowland and Freda, and their quick steps slackened. At last:

'I thank you from my heart, Miss Gwynne,' said Rowland, for all your kindness to my dear sister. It must cease, alas! but it will never be forgotten.'

'Poor Netta! my old playfellow! I was only too thankful to be of any service. I wish we could have saved her.'

'God knows best. Her husband is in Newgate gaol.'

Rowland said this with a great effort; Freda started, and there was again a brief silence.

Page 306

’Miss Gwynne, I have long wished to say to you, how much I have felt your devotion to the schools and poor of our parish. Now that we are about to lose you, perhaps, I may do so. Glanyravon will gain what our poor East End loses.’

’Thank you. If I leave London in a better spirit than I entered it, I am in great measure indebted to you for it.’

‘To me!’

’Yes. I do not wish to flatter, or to be religiously sentimental; but your practical, simple sermons, and your still more practical life have done me much good. Now we will not compliment one another any more.’

’Oh, Miss Gwynne! you do not know what you do when you say such words to me.’

‘I simply tell the truth.’

’I, too, have another truth to tell, which, if not told now, will never be told.’

Freda’s heart beat quick, and her face flushed. She was thankful that silence concealed the one, and night the other. But the truth was not what the heart whispered, and the pulsation slackened.

’Years ago—I know not how many years, the time seems so long, and yet so short—I insulted you by words that should never have been said. We were on this very drive, near this very spot—the same moon was looking down upon us. This very tree was over our heads. Do you remember? You do—alas! you must. Pride, most improper pride in one who should be a teacher of humility, has prevented my alluding to the subject ever since.’

Rowland paused, and he and Freda stood still beneath that old oak, so well remembered by both. She did not speak; she could not for the moment; and Rowland continued,—

’Those words, which called forth your severe and deserved reproof, should never have been said; but your kindness, the hour, the scene, my own excited feelings, my—in short, they were called forth involuntarily, but were wholly inexcusable. I forgot my birth and position, and was punished accordingly. Pride has kept me silent ever since. Pride has prevented my saying that I am sorry now that I so forgot myself then, and pride has made me cold and reserved to you, when I saw clearly that you wished to be my friend, and have since proved yourself such. Will you forgive me?’

Freda did not, as when they once before stood beneath that huge oak, draw herself up to her full height, and make an indignant answer. She trembled, and glanced very timidly into the face that looked down upon hers. There, in the cold moonlight, with the

icicles hanging from the old tree, and the frost-spirit hovering near, she read that face more truly than she had done in the genial summer moonshine, and wished those words had never been spoken. She said, gently but decidedly,—

’Mr Rowland, it is I, not you who ought to crave forgiveness. You did me an honour of which I was not deserving, and, therefore, I could not appreciate it. I have repented of those proud words almost ever since. I am heartily ashamed of them, and beg you to try to forget that they were ever uttered.’

Page 307

Once more there was a momentary silence, then Rowland said firmly,—

’Miss Gwynne, you must understand that I only regret the boldness of my conduct, and that I did not conceal my feelings from you as from the rest of the world. I do not regret the feelings; do not apologise for them. They were my own, engendered by nature and circumstances, given me by God, as part of my portion of trial in this world; they grew with me from childhood, ever since I used to play with you at the vicarage—they were fostered by your father’s kindness and my own self-esteem, as well as by your presence, which I ought to have fled; they are with me still, have never left me, will be my weakness and my strength so long as this earthly warfare lasts.’

‘And is it really so?’ said Freda, a large tear glittering in the eyes into which the moon, the frost-spirit, and Rowland were equally looking.

Two hands were tightly clasped that had hitherto scarcely dared to touch each other; two hearts were for ever united, that hitherto had been as far estranged as Vesuvius and the icebergs.

I know that many cynical and sentimental readers will ask if there is no danger of the pair of lovers taking cold on an evening in January, whilst thus mutually discovering the ‘eternal passion’ in the presence of the ‘Erl-king.’

Rowland and Freda seem to ask the same question, for, loosening that close grasp of hands, and without one word of love, they walk hastily towards the house. Rowland talks rapidly the whole way, interrupted by an occasional sentence from Freda. Readers, there is no proposal, no acceptance. The conversation is as follows:—

Rowland.—I have just received letters from the Bishop of London and Mr Jones offering me the living, and telling me that the parishioners wish me for their rector. I am most thankful now, for it puts me in a very different position—it allows me to hope, and with less presumption.

Freda.—It makes no difference to me, you are yourself whether rector or curate. But I rejoice for your sake, and to know that they appreciate you.

Rowland.—You will know and believe that it was Miss Gwynne, Freda, the woman, not the heiress, that I have loved so long and so well.

Freda.—I am no longer an heiress; you are far the best off.

Rowland.—I am most thankful. Had this wide park still been yours, I could never have said what I have dared to say to-day; but let me repeat once more your words that I may remember who I am—a farmer’s son, your father’s tenant.

Freda.—A clergyman, a gentleman, and a Christian.

Rowland.—My brother-in-law a—a—felon.

Freda.—Yourself not changed by your brother-in-law's crimes.

Rowland.—If then in the course of another year our present painful position should be forgotten, or at least, at rest, when I am established at the rectory as rector, when I can come forward on my own responsibility, when, in short, I can say without compunction all I now feel, may I hope?'

Page 308

Freda.—Then as now, you may be certain.

They were on the steps before the door of the house; again their hands were firmly clasped.

Rowland.—Till then, farewell, and God bless you.

Freda.—Will you not come in?

Rowland.—No, I would rather not now.

Freda.—Then God bless you, and be with you during your coming trial.

And thus they parted, happy, and having perfect faith in one another.

CHAPTER LI.

THE CONVICT.

Forgeries of all sorts are so much the taste of genteel rogues of the present age, that the reader will readily dispense with a detailed account of the trial and conviction of Howel Jenkins. Any one of the various cases that fill those columns of the *Times*, devoted to such criminalities, will give a very good general idea of his. All that his mother's remnant of his father's hoarded wealth could do, was done, to prove him guiltless, but in vain. Counsel pleaded, some of his turf friends, themselves of doubtful reputation, spoke to his character, and he sat through his trial as imperturbably as if he had been at a dinner-party. The prosecutors, Sir Samuel Spendall and Sir Horatio Simpson, met with deserved reproofs for allowing themselves to be swindled, almost before their faces, out of money and property to an enormous amount.

Long before his father's death, Howel had begun a system of betting-book cheating, and forgery on a small scale, which had ceased for a short time when he came into his enormous wealth, but recommenced as that wealth dwindled. Numerous instances came out from various sources whilst he was in America,—all his former associates being ready to leave his setting sun, for the rising one of his accusers.

Sir S. Spendall and Sir H. Simpson were sole prosecutors, and between forgeries on banks, and in betting-books, and the unjust acquisition of Spendall Lodge, Howel was found guilty of forgeries to the amount of some fifty or sixty thousand pounds, and sentenced to transportation for fourteen years. So much general villainy transpired amongst the set in which these crimes were committed, and the prosecutors themselves were so weak and dissipated, that the sentence was supposed to be less severe than it might have been under other circumstances.

The nefarious conduct of Mr Deep as Howel's attorney, and the enormous interest he was found to have received, caused him to be struck off the rolls, and very little evidence was wanting to prove him an accomplice in Howel's villainy. However, it was not forthcoming, and so Howel suffered alone.

It was generally rumoured that Howel had forged his mother's name, at various times, to a very large amount; but, as she vigorously denied the fact, and acknowledged every signature as her own, the case was, of course, not brought forward.

Page 309

In spite of her manifold exertions in his favour, in spite of all Rowland's efforts, Howel positively refused to see either of them before the trial took place. He declared to his mother, through his attorney, that if he saw her, she would take away some of that nerve and courage so necessary to establish his innocence; and to Rowland, he politely hinted that he did not wish to see him at all.

As the trial was almost immediate upon the imprisonment, they did not press the point. Rowland and Mr and Mrs Jones, pitying Mrs Jenkins in her evident misery, would have had her remain amongst them, but she insisted on taking a lodging near the gaol, that she might, at least, be in her son's neighbourhood, and hear from his attorney and others of his health daily.

He was always reported to be well, and in good spirits, and indeed was so, to all appearance. He ate, drank, and slept much as if he had never committed crimes that at one period would have brought him to the gallows; and to the last moment of his leaving the prison for his trial, jauntily talked of what he should do when he was out of 'that confounded hole.'

It was with great difficulty that Rowland persuaded Mrs Jenkins to remain in her lodging during the time of the trial, which he attended himself, more on her account than his own; for he was so fully convinced of Howel's guilt, that he knew he should only witness his degradation.

In the court he fell in with Captain Dancy, who told him that he had wished to say a good word for Howel on his wife's account, for whom he entertained a great respect; but that Howel had positively refused any aid whatever from him. He thought this strange, as he owed him a large sum of money, and he had not brought forward his claim. Rowland thought it strange too, not knowing then, that Howel had one soft part in his hard nature, and that was love for Netta.

Howel bore the summing up of the judge and his severe reprimand with indifference. He seemed slightly moved when the sentence was pronounced; but recovering perfect calmness, he said aloud, so that the whole court could hear,—'If I am guilty, my prosecutors are guilty, and all the speculators in the world are guilty.'

When Rowland went to Mrs Jenkins' lodging after all was over, he found Mrs Jones with her, her husband having been with him during the trial. Mrs Jones had been endeavouring to prepare the poor mother for the probable sentence, but nothing could persuade her that 'her Howels, so clever, so genteel, who dined with the Queen and Prince Albert, and was handsomer than the Prince, for she had seen him,' could be transported for forgery.

When Rowland told her the truth, as gently as he could, the effect it had upon her was quite different from what he had expected. She burst into a passion, not of grief, but of

rage. She had been drinking brandy before Mrs Jones went to her, and had been greatly excited the whole morning, as she had also been on the previous day, the trial having lasted two days. At the climax, the true nature of the woman showed itself, and the friends who surrounded her thought she was insane.

Page 310

Judge, jury, witnesses, prosecutors, and finally every member of the Prothero family came in for a share of abuse of the coarsest kind. Rowland felt thankful that the greatest part of it was uttered in Welsh, and that, therefore, Mrs Jones could not understand it, although the strong guttural, made stronger by uncontrolled passion, was enough, in itself, to frighten any one. Happily, she was surrounded by Christians who pitied her, and did not leave her in her sin and sorrow to the strange people who came, uncalled, to see what was the matter, and who would fain have remained; but Rowland told them, decidedly, to go away.

Mr and Mrs Jones, also, withdrew at Rowland's request when the outburst had somewhat subsided, and left him to reason with the wretched, maddened woman alone.

He let the fury wear itself out, and then stood by to hear his unfortunate sister and his father abused as the primary causes of Howel's downfall.

'If he didn't be marrying beneath him, he 'ould be holding up his head, and looking for a lady, who do be keeping him in his place. And Netta Prothero so 'stravagant! ach a fi! and Prothero, Glanyfavon, who was turning against him, and kicking me out of his house. Shame for you all, Rowland Prothero! your own cousin and brother-in-law! and no one to be saying a word to help him. Oh, anwyl! my boy! my Howels! What 'ould his poor father be saying if he was knowing all! and how his money was going and all mine too! I shall be going to the Eunion, and then you'll be feeling satisfied, Rowland Prothero! and your mother, and that Gladys, and all so grand! 'll be looking down upon me. And my Howels over the sea! 'sported for fourteen years, and I 'ont be living to see him come back again. Anwyl! anywyl!'

Here tears came, and Mrs Jenkins sank upon a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Rowland let them flow for a time, and then putting his hand kindly on her shoulder said, —

'Aunt 'Lizbeth! you must try to keep up for Howel's sake. He will like you to visit him now, perhaps,'

The kind tones touched a gentler chord in the poor woman's heart, and she looked up at Rowland, like one awaking from a dream.

'Seure! Mr Rowland Prothero! I'm thinking you're too fine for us now. A clergy and a rector! oh seure! you'll not be going to see my poor Howels!'

'Yes, I will, if you will try to be calm. I will see him first, and prepare him for your coming; I will not even ask his permission but go to him. I can gain admittance at once, I know, both as a clergyman and relation.'

‘Now! go you directly! tell you my Howels—’

’I don’t think I can go to-night. It is too late—but to-morrow I will go, on condition that you compose yourself, and return with me to my lodgings.’

’I ’ont be going to your lodgings, I ’ouldn’t be leaving my Howels for the world.’

’You cannot see him to-night, you must not stay with the people of this house after what you said to-day, or they will take advantage of your being alone, to make you say more. I cannot remain here to-night, and I am the only friend you have in town to whom you could go.’

Page 311

’Treue, for you, Rowland Prothero. There’s my Lady Simpson was asking me to stay with her, when my Howels and I was having money enough to buy her presents, and her son and doater did go to Abertewey when they did like—and now, not wan of all the fine folks do come and say, “How was you, Mrs Jenkins?"’

Rowland ventured to repeat a few verses from Scripture, and to beg her to turn her mind to better thoughts. Then he induced her to put on her bonnet and cloak and go home with him, promising to bring her back the following day, and retaining the lodging for another week.

They passed a miserable evening. It was in vain that Rowland strove to comfort or advise his guest. She did nothing but abuse justice, and lament her son’s past grandeur.

The following day, Rowland fulfilled his promise. He left her at her lodging and went to the gaol.

He had previously obtained full permission of the authorities, through the chaplain, who was well-known to him, to visit Howel when he liked, and to give him the letters left for him by his deceased wife. The chaplain had told him that the prisoner was quite indifferent to all that he said to him on religious subjects, and listened to them, if, indeed, he listened at all, with a scoffing, incredulous, hardness of manner, that was more painful than mere carelessness.

When Rowland entered the cell, Howel was sitting with his back to the door, and did not turn or take any notice of the incomers. He had a piece of paper before him, and a pencil in his hand, over which he seemed rather to be dreaming than writing. The gaoler closed the door, having orders to remain without, and left the cousins alone.

Rowland stood some time irresolute in the gloomy cell, but finding that Howel did not move, he went round in front of him, and said,—

‘Howel!’

The word was quite sufficient. He started up, and whilst the blood rushed to his face, said coolly,—

’To what am I indebted for the honour of a visit from Mr Prothero? I think I sent you a message to the effect that I am not now in a position to receive company. My chambers are anything but suited to convivial society, and I prefer solitude just at present. I have already had the benefit of clergy, and do not need any of your sermons, excellent as I am told they are. Indeed, divinity was always out of my line.’

’I come to fulfil the dying request of your wife and my sister, which that letter will explain,’ said Rowland, calmly and gravely, placing an open letter on the table.

Howel's countenance changed at once—the flush of passion passed away, and left a painful pallor, whilst the sarcastic mouth became compressed into a marble rigidity. He sat down again, and pushing aside the paper that had previously been before him, drew the letter towards him. He put his elbows on the table, and shrouded his face so that Rowland could not see him, and bending over the letter, gazed on the writing without attempting to read, as one might gaze on a spirit without daring to speak to it. The letter was, indeed, a voice from the dead, and dated the very day before that on which Netta died. Its contents were as follows:—

Page 312

’MY DEAR BROTHER,—I intend leaving Glanyravon, and all my dear relations, to go in search of Howel, who, you know, is my husband; and therefore to be loved and obeyed before any one else. If I die before I find him, as perhaps I may—my heart being so bad—I wish you to see him when he comes back, and to give him the accompanying sealed packet yourself. Nobody knows how I have loved him all my life, and perhaps if I had been better tempered and less jealous, he might have stayed at home, and not been obliged to go away for debt. But when I have found him, I will be very loving and patient, and then we shall be happy together again. If I don’t find him, however—if I die first—will you, dear brother, talk to him as you have talked and written to me, and then I may meet him again in a happier world, where I am praying and striving to go, through the atonement of Him who died for sinners—even for me and Howel, who are both great sinners—yet not too great to be saved. Thank you, my dear, dear brother, for showing me the way to heaven, and for all your goodness to me and Minette—(my poor Minette, I must leave her, but you will all take care of her better than I have done). Thank you, I am very sorry that I was such a wilful, perverse sister, when you tried to do me good.

> ’God bless you for ever and ever—you and all—Your loving but afflicted sister, NETTA JENKINS.’

Rowland sat down at one end of the cell, on the iron bedstead and that he might not seem to be watching Howel, took a small Testament from his pocket and began to read. This, too, he had brought for Howel. It was the one Netta had used, as long as she lived, and in it she had written, ‘To be given to my dear husband, if I die.—Netta.’ She had marked many passages, and appended her initials to each of the marks.

Rowland could not read long. It was impossible not to see the trembling of that iron man who sat before him; the heaving breast and the convulsed hands. And yet Howel did not read the letter. He saw the familiar handwriting once more of the only thing he had ever loved—loved and murdered—and he sat transfixed before it.

At last Rowland rose, and going to him, put his hand on his shoulder. He started as if Netta’s spirit had appeared, and looked up wildly. Seeing Rowland, he struggled for self-possession and again shrouding his face, began to read.

Rowland kept his hand on his shoulder, gently pressing it, as if to assure him of sympathy. He felt him trembling beneath his touch.

As he stood thus his eye fell on the paper that Howel had had before him when he entered the cell. He could not help seeing the words, ’From my cell in Newgate—my judge and jury.’ Underneath this heading appeared to be the commencement of a poem, and beneath that were caricatures of a man in a large wig, and of others, with every variety of nose and chin.

This had been Howel’s occupation within four-and-twenty hours of his conviction!

Page 313

Three times Howel turned the sheet of paper that he was reading, as if he had not understood the words that were written on it, and then he uttered a groan, so deep and loud, that Rowland could restrain himself no longer, but said,—

’Howel, for her sake, listen to me, her brother. Look on me as your friend, your brother.’

Howel looked up, and for one moment there was remorse and agony in his face; the next, no stone was harder and colder.

‘Brother!’ he said, with a voice of icy sarcasm, ’you have shown yourself my brother of late! I saw you in the court, cold and calculating; not a word for this, your *brother*! Bah!’

‘What would you have had me say?’ asked Rowland, recovering his composure, and glancing from Howel to Netta’s letter.

’I understand you; you mean that I murdered her. I did, virtually. Then why be hypocrite enough to call me brother?’

‘She forgave you, and called you husband.’

‘Because she—she loved me.’

There was another involuntary groan, and a brief silence.

‘Where are her papers? Give them me, and go,’ said Howel imperatively.

Rowland put a neatly-sealed packet on the table, on which was written,
’For my husband, Howel Jenkins;—to the care of my brother, Rowland
Prothero. Janetta Jenkins.’

‘This, too, she left for you,’ said Rowland, putting the small Testament, originally her mother’s, on the table. Again the stony lips trembled, the eyes softened. ‘Howel, Howel, for her sake!’ once more ventured Rowland.

There they lay—the letter, the packet, the Testament. All that was left to him of the once bright, loving, and lovely creature, who had been devoted to him all her life.

He turned the leaves of the Testament mechanically; touched the packet—shuddered; then leaning his head upon his folded arms on the table, burst into an uncontrollable agony of grief.

‘She is—she was—where?’ he said, after a short interval, rising from his seat, and beginning to pace the cell.

’Her soul is in heaven, I hope and believe; her body rests in Llanfach churchyard, under the large hawthorn bush near the vicarage gate.’

Often and often had Howel gathered Netta bunches of May from that very tree that now sheltered her remains.

‘Tell me—tell me all,’ he said, ’from the time I left her, till—how you found her—-everything.’

‘You must sit down, Howel, and hear me patiently if you can.’

Howel sat down on the bedstead, and again covering his face with both hands, listened; whilst Rowland took the seat he had left, and fulfilled his bidding.

Page 314

He told him everything that had happened to Netta, from the period of her being left in the lodgings in his parish, until her death at the farm. He felt that the one hope of softening Howel, or doing him any good, was through his love for his wife; he therefore narrated simply what she had suffered and said; he told how that she had been hourly expecting him back, until his one short note; how she had listened for his footsteps, and refused to leave the place where he had left her, until he came. All that her friends had done for her, was introduced incidentally; Howel understood that she had been taken to her relations again, as the prodigal son to his father, but he was not told so.

Rowland did not spare him, however, as regarded Netta. He knew him to be utterly callous as to the follies and crimes of his life; he must, therefore, be made conscious of their weight, through their effects upon others; he knew that they had been the cause of Netta's death, and this would show him the enormity of sin if nothing else would.

As he detailed the wanderings of poor Netta's mind, and then her anxious inquiries of him of the way of salvation for Howel, as well as herself, he was visibly affected. Not even his determination that Rowland should not see his emotion could conceal it; but he did not speak a word. He listened to the end, and then, without uncovering his face, he said in a voice tremulous from emotion,—

'Thank you; now go; and come back to-morrow; I would be alone with her.'

'And to-morrow I must bring your mother,' said Rowland

'No, no, let me see you alone,' was the hasty reply.

'God bless you, Howel, and grant you His help,' said Rowland, passing before the stooping figure.

There was no reply, so, with a heavy sigh and an inward prayer, Rowland left the cell.

CHAPTER LII.

THE PENITENT HUSBAND.

The following morning, Rowland again took Mrs Jenkins to her lodging and left her there. It was with very great difficulty that he persuaded Mrs Jenkins to remain behind, and only under a promise to prevail upon Howel to see her immediately after his interview with him.

As he expected, he found Howel almost as cold and impassive as on the previous day. But he fancied that this was an assumed manner, and that he could trace workings of more natural feelings underneath. He was at least civil to him, and instead of receiving him as before, said,—

’I thought you would never come; but I suppose prosperous people are never in a great hurry to visit the unfortunate. Ha! ha! Certainly my reception-rooms are not very inviting.’

’I came as soon as I could gain admittance. I wish you would believe, Howel, that I am very anxious to be of any use to you that I can. You know that you refused to see me before.’

Page 315

’And it is no great compliment now; this confounded place will kill me. I have been haunted by spectres all the night, five thousand times worse than a voyage to Australia. That will be amusing, ha! ha! But to have my father in one corner, and—and Netta in the other,—and that cursed money rolling about everywhere, just as it did—well, never mind that! but hanging outright would have been better. Don’t preach; it is no good; I am far beyond that, and I know you have your sermon ready; but your presence is some relief after such a night. I tell you what it is, Rowland, if you are a better and a happier man than I, it is because you had honest parents; it is no merit of yours, and no fault of mine.’

’Howel, I claim no merit; but we are all responsible for our own actions, God forgive those who set a bad example: they will have to answer for it.’

’Pshaw! Do you think I meant that? I mean that if my father hadn’t heaped up all that gold—bah! the word makes me sick,—and denied me a sixpence whilst he lived; and if I hadn’t seen my mother rob him whenever she could, and learnt from her to do the same, I shouldn’t be here now! No, I should be a plodding shopkeeper, or at least a country lawyer, or doctor, and should have been living in a house with three steps to it, and a portico, by this time, with—don’t suppose I regret such a house—but Netta! oh, God! Netta!’

Howel beat his forehead with his hand, and pointed to the corner of his cell.

’There she is! there she has been all the night. Pale as when I laid her on her bed that miserable day!’

‘Howel! you loved Netta, I see, and believe it now,’ said Rowland.

’You do! And why not before? Ah! I see. Because I have never done anything to prove it. But I did not know how I loved her until I knew how she loved me.’

‘Would you prove it now, if you could?’

‘Would I? Why do you mock me by such a question?’

’Because she, being dead, yet speaks. Her last wishes, thoughts, words, writing, were for you.’

’Do I not know it? Have I not read? All night have her words not haunted me?’

’And her prayers, Howel? Shall they be forgotten? And that Book in which she wrote last, will you not read it?’

’I don’t know. I tried last night, and I could not. I have never read the book since I wrote Greek at school.’

‘Netta begged you to read it.’

’What is that to you, Rowland Prothero? Who put you over me as judge and counsellor?’

’Netta. As spiritual counsellor, at least; and in her name, since you will not let me appeal to you in a Higher name, I command you to listen to me.’

Rowland saw that he had gained an advantage by appealing to Netta, and that Howel checked the irony that was on his tongue, out of reverence for her name. At once he spoke as an ambassador in that Higher name he had feared to use before.

Page 316

Rowland had had ten years' experience of men as bad and worse than Howel, and had learnt how to speak to them, and to seize the mood of the listener. He knew Howel well; and he, therefore, used the strong and powerful language of the Bible, as the priests, prophets, and apostles used it—as the word of God to man. Not diluted by their own reflections, but in its bare and grand simplicity. He had not made the Bible his study in vain. He knew how to bring it to the heart of men with a power that none 'could gainsay or resist,' Even Howel, sceptic, scoffer as he was, listened in spite of himself.

Rowland was a humbler man than he had been, when he used, years before, to argue with Howel, and endeavour to convert him to the truth. He was equally right in his views then, but he gave them forth more dogmatically, and allowed self to peep in; now self was wholly swallowed up in the Word itself; and so Howel gave heed as to God, and not to man.

He laid bare Howel's heart to himself, for the first time that it had ever been so exposed, and then showed him the denunciations of the law against sin. He did not spare him. He knew that the only way to save such a man was by bringing him to know himself first, and then to '' preach repentance and remission of sin.'

In his energy and longing to rescue him from destruction, he stood before him as one sent to tear up his unbelief by the roots not to dally with it.

'Flee from the wrath to come,' might have been the text of his discourse, as it was that of the Baptist.

When he paused, as if for breath, Howel exclaimed,—

'Enough! enough! Stop! I can hear no more; you have opened to me the gates of hell wide enough.'

'And now I would open those of heaven. Let us pray.'

Rowland's eyes flashed such a fire as Howel had never seen in them before; his voice and words had a command that he had never heard. Perforce he obeyed. And there, in that narrow cell, actuated by fear, rather than remorse, astonishment rather than contrition, bowed by a will yet stronger than his own, Howel fell on his knees beside his cousin, and listened to a prayer for pardon and help, that might have melted the heart of a Nero.

At first he heard as in a dream, then his ears were opened, then his heart. And at last Rowland's spirit breathed within him the blessed words, 'Behold he prayeth.'

It is not for us to look into the heart of the criminal, and decide how God works in it. Even Rowland could not tell the ultimate effect of his preaching and prayers. All he knew that from that day Howel welcomed him to his cell as the one hope of his life. He

was awakened to a sense of his condition, and Rowland thanked God, and took courage.

As the meetings and partings of parent and child—however wicked they both may be—-in the cell of a felon, simply harrow the feelings of the reader, I will pass over those of Howel and his mother. Some recrimination, and much grief on the one side—some remorse, and much misery on the other. Rowland did what he could for both until the last parting was over. And then he left the mother to the care of Mrs Jones to accompany the son on board the ship that was to convey him to his convict home.

Page 317

We are not to suppose that the ‘Ethiopian’s skin’ was changed because it was pierced. Howel continued outwardly proud, scornful, and hard to the last; but Rowland witnessed the struggle that went on within to maintain that bearing, and knew that some good might arise even out of the spendthrift and the forger.

‘You will take care of Minette amongst you, for her mother’s sake,’ he said to Rowland.

‘And for yours, and her own,’ was the reply.

’Tell her not to hate her father. You who never told her mother of my—I suppose I must use the word—crime, will be as gentle as you can in letting the child know who and what her father is. I thank you all, more for keeping *her* in ignorance till death, than for all the rest.’

’And for *her* sake, Howel, you will read that book, and pray to be kept from temptation.’

’What temptation shall I have? I shall be more inclined to pray to be thrown into temptation.’

‘Oh, Howel!’

’Well! This convict ship and the ocean, and chains and hard labour at the end, don’t seem very inviting. I know it has been my own fault and my father’s, but that doesn’t make it better; however, I will try. And if ever I get back to Old England again a reformed character, will you lend me a helping hand, or turn your back upon me?’

‘Give you the hand of friendship and brotherhood.’

’Thank you; and don’t let them quite desert my mother. Bad as she is, I am worse, and I have ruined her; a worse thing that than getting a little money out of those turf-dupes and idiots, though hers was ill-gotten wealth.’

’We will take care of your mother amongst us as well as we can. My mother never forsakes an old friend.’

’Give my love to her; she was kind to me and to my child. All the rest have deserted me, and wished me hanged. But I have to thank you, who always despised me, for being here now, and for your anxiety about me. Rowland, you are a better fellow than I thought you, and you have helped to rid me of some of those spectres that haunted me night and day. You must go! I know it. Alone! alone! with this crew! Is this Heaven’s law or man’s? and I was not made for this. I shall destroy myself—I must—I will. Good-bye! oh Rowland! cousin! brother! remember me, for God’s sake and for hers!’

The hands of the minister of the Gospel and the felon were clasped for a few seconds, as if they could never unlink, and then, with a heavy groan, Howel sank down upon

some timber that was near him, and covered his face with his hands. Thick tears filled Rowland's eyes as he stooped over his wretched cousin, and again whispered, 'God bless you, cousin Howel, God bless you.'

And so they parted.

CHAPTER LIII.

GLADYS REAPING HER FRUITS.

Our story began at Glanyravon, in the cheery month of June, and at Glanyravon, in the same cheery month, we will end it.

Page 318

I must beg my readers to pass over in their imaginations one twelvemonth, of which I do not mean to say anything, and to accompany me to the gate at Glanyravon Farm, where they first made acquaintance with Mrs Prothero and Gladys. A hasty glance will suffice to show that all is much the same at this said gate as it was ten years ago, save and except that the extraneous accompaniments are changed. Instead of a group of Irish beggars and a dying girl, it is surrounded by a party of well-dressed peasants in high, smooth hats and striped flannel gowns. Moreover, it is surrounded by an arch of evergreens and flowers, of most tasteful form and beautiful colour.

We will not linger here at present, but pursue our way along the road. We meet more peasants, in holiday costume, talking and laughing together, with Miss Gwynne's school children in their scarlet cloak and best frocks. They all seem to be lingering about, with nothing to do, and enjoying their idleness and June holiday as thoroughly as the greatest philanthropist in the world could desire. As we approach the entrance of the Park, we see another magnificent arch spanning the road. We turn to the large iron gates, and they, too, are circled with laurels and roses.

We walk through the gates, and to the right, far in amongst the trees, are long lines of tables covered with white, and bearing the remains of a huge feast, at which, we take it for granted, the people we have met have been regaled. Scattered here and there amongst the oaks, elms, and ashes are more peasants and school children amusing themselves variously.

We pursue our way up the drive until we come to the memorable oak, under which words were spoken greatly influencing the fates of two of the individuals in whom I have been endeavouring to interest my readers. From this venerable tree to another, almost as venerable, hangs another wreath, flanked with banners. We reach the house, and another garland entirely surrounds the door. White roses and lillies of the valley make the air heavy with their breath, drawn out by the attractive rays of the beaming afternoon sun.

We enter the hall, and peep into the different rooms. In the dining-room is the remains of an ample repast. At the head of the table is an enormous cake, covered with silver doves and ornaments of all kinds; servants are drinking the remains of champagne out of glasses and bottles with healths innumerable. In the library and hall, children in white frocks, with silver bows fastened to them, pattering to and fro in unchecked excitement. In the drawing-room we pause, and listen to the conversation that is passing between Mr Gwynne, Lady Mary, Colonel and Mrs Gwynne Vaughan, and Sir Hugh Pryse.

'I am so thankful it is over, and that it has all gone off so well,' says Lady Mary.

'Really, Lady Mary,' says Mr Gwynne, 'great thanks are due to you for the admirable manner in which you managed everything. I think it was wonderful that we amalgamated, and all that sort of thing, don't you, Gwynne?'

Page 319

Colonel Vaughan replies, yawning,—

’I don’t know what on earth we shall do without Freda! And she to throw herself away upon that stupid London parish, where all her charming manner and talent will be lavished upon ragged schools and missionary meetings. I wish she had never come back.’

’Oh, Gwynne, I’m thure Mr Prothero ith very nithe, and tho gentlemanlike and good and handthome. And, you know, clergymen are ath good ath any one in London.’

‘Prothero is better than most, I think,’ says Sir Hugh, ’because there is no humbug about him. And I’m sure, since Freda wouldn’t have me, I’m glad she had him, though I never guessed she liked him; I used to think she liked you best, Vaughan.’

The colonel sighs.

‘Oh! I never flattered myself so far, I wish—’

’Certainly, I could not have believed the Protheros were such superior people,’ says Lady Mary. ’As to Mr Owen and his wife, they might be introduced into any society.’

‘Thweetly pretty, Gladyth ith, I never thought tho much of her before,’ lisps Mrs Vaughan. ’Tho interethting the looked in that dreth, the one the wath married in, my maid thaith.’

’I was obliged to call at the farm myself, to induce old Prothero and his wife to come,’ says Mr Gwynne, ’Freda wished it so much; I cannot say I did: you see it was rather awkward. But he did not change his old manner towards me—or—in fact—you know, Sir Hugh he might have been—’

‘Bumptious,’ breaks in Sir Hugh; ’exactly, not a bit of it. They’re better behaved. Besides, there was Mrs Jonathan to support the honour of the family, and her husband the learning.’

‘Yes,’ says Lady Mary; ‘’ it is a comfort that they are really gentlefolks. And Mr and Mrs Jones too—in short, with the exception of the parents, after all, there is no great objection. Many girls make worse matches. Only they live so near.’

Here little Harold comes bouncing into the room, followed by the other children.

’Mamma! papa! do you know I am going to marry Minette, I told her so; her name is Victoria, after the Queen, she said. I shall go to see her to-morrow; she is bigger than Minnie, and looked prettier in her veil. Didn’t Dot look funny in a veil? Dot nearly cried, but Aunt Freda gave her some cake. Why did Mr Prothero come, papa? isn’t he a farmer?’

‘And isn’t your papa a farmer? and am not I a farmer, Master Harold?’ exclaims Sir Hugh, catching the boy up in his arms.

‘I am so sorry Aunt Freda is going away,’ says quiet little Minnie to her mother.

‘And tho am I, my dear.’

‘And tho am I, mamma,’ lisps Dot, exactly as lisps her mamma.

‘I hope she will be happy,’ says Mr Gwynne, aside to the colonel; ’do you think she will?’

’Yes, I am sure she will; she is evidently sincerely attached to Rowland Prothero, and he to her. He is a good man and a gentleman, one cannot deny that. Pshaw! why am I so sorry she is gone? we shall miss her dreadfully after this twelvemonth.’

Page 320

’Thank you, Gwynne; she has been very good and kind to us all; so much improved, and she told me she owed it all to Rowland. Well, I liked him from the first. You saw the Bible his school children gave him, and the presents from his parishioners and the letter from the bishop, so complimentary, you know, so flattering, and all that sort of thing. God bless them,’

Mr Gwynne very nearly begins to cry, and Colonel Vaughan feels inclined to join; but by way of consoling himself, says,—

’I shall go and see the Protheros sometimes now. I never saw anything in my life so lovely as that younger Mrs Prothero.’

‘Take care, my dear,’ cries Lady Mary to her daughter; ’the colonel is going to visit the fair Gladys.’

‘Oh! I thant allow that, Gwynne, the ith much too pretty.’

‘Let us go out and look at the people before dinner,’ says Colonel Vaughan; ’I must say it was cruel of Freda to refuse to have a party. This is fearfully dull; the vicar and his wife, or Mr and Mrs Jones would have been better than nobody.’

‘Much obliged!’ says Sir Hugh.

As all the party go into the Park, we will follow them, and leaving them there, retrace our steps to the farm.

There is high tea going on in the parlour, and a pleasant, cheerful party they are, assembled round the tea-table. Gladys in the wedding-gown, with a colour on her cheeks and a light in her eyes that were not there in former days, presides. Owen divides his attentions between her and some object in the corner of the room; first jumping up to peep into this curtained curiosity, and then returning to put cream into the tea-cups, hand the cakes and bread and butter, or do any and everything that his loving and lovely Gladys asks him, with whom he is just as much in love as ever.

Mr Jones and Mr Prothero sit on either side of Gladys, and seem to vie with one another in showing a father’s and uncle’s affection to her. Next to Mr Jones we have Mrs Prothero, looking more like what she looked when first we saw her, than she has done for years. Then Mr Jonathan and Mrs Jones; and between Mrs Jones and Owen we are glad to see poor Mrs Jenkins, very kindly treated by her neighbours, and dressed in the *moire* and a handsome shawl; then Mrs Jonathan, in the richest of silks, and the loveliest of caps; and, finally, Minette between her and her grandfather; completing a ‘round table’ more cheerful and natural than that of King Arthur.

Through the open window and white netted curtains—Gladys’ treasured work—the roses and sunbeams look in together, and the distant mountains are blue and hazy as

the sky. Flowers are on the mantel-piece and tables, bridal-favours are scattered here and there. Above all, there is a large white and silver bow, surmounting that ‘curiosity’ in the corner, towards which all eyes occasionally turn. Perhaps we may as well peep within the little white curtains.

Page 321

There lies a wee baby, fast asleep, with its tiny hand outside the coverlet, and its lace cap on the little pillow. 'Netta,' is the name of that small fragment of humanity. Owen and Gladys' first-born.

Having surveyed the company, we will listen to their conversation.

'Well, father, don't you feel vain-glorious to-day?' says Owen, stopping suddenly on his way to the cradle, and pulling his father's grey whisker.

'I feel very thankful that it is all over, and very unnatural.'

'Not unnatural, David, bach,' says his wife.

'Yes, unnatural. It was never intended for Miss Gwynne to be my daughter-in-law, and I breakfasting at the Park. I felt like a hog in armour, fidgeting inside and out.'

'Perhaps it was never intended for me to be your daughter, either,' says Gladys, looking archly at the farmer.

'Treue for you, my dear. That was a piece of luck that came without my seeking, and I like it all the better for that reason, I suppose.'

'I am sure you may rejoice in the present Mrs Rowland Prothero,' says Mrs Jonathan; 'and you certainly need not imagine, for one moment, that she is degrading herself by marrying your son. In London he is in the first society, and meets people constantly, on equal terms, who would quite throw your Lady Marys into the shade. Does he not, Mr Jones?'

'I cannot quite enter into these points, ma'am,' says Mr Jones; 'but he and his bride are as well suited to one another as any young people I ever saw, and will be a blessing to their parish and their friends.'

'Besides, if you come to family, brother David,' says Mr Jonathan, 'ours is of considerable antiquity, and I cannot think how it got Anglicised into Prothero. You know I have been enabled to trace it back to Rhyddrch, or Rhodri, a prince who fought with and frequently defeated Ethelbald. You may not be aware, Mrs Jones, that our name, properly Prydderch, means Ap Rhyddrch, and that we owe it to this illustrious source.'

'Now, aunt,' exclaims Owen, 'never mention the Payne Perrys again. Why, you cannot light a candle to us. I am sure your Herefordshire Perry can't date back to the conquest, and here are we long before it. What date, uncle?'

'720, Owen. And I wish you, as the eldest son, would begin to write your name in the proper way. I contemn, absolutely, this altering our fine old language into that jargon of Anglo-Saxon, Danish, Norman, and French, now yclept English.

’Very well, uncle, let us spell it R, H, Y, D, D, R, C, H,—eight consonants without the aid of one single vowel. I declare the very name is courage itself,—no auxiliary forces. Gladys, I beg you will always sign yourself so when you write to Mrs Jones; and be sure you spell your own name as it ought to be spelt,—G, W, L, A, D, Y, S. Even this shows the weakness of the female sex; you do require one little vowel to help along the consonants,’

Page 322

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ shouts Mr Prothero, ‘he has you now, brother Jo.’

’Not at all. Owen seems to have forgotten that w and y are vowels. But he never had a taste for study, Rowland is quite different; and our dear niece, Claudia, is much better suited to him than to Owen, for she appreciates the wisdom of a past age.’

‘The little hypocrite,’ cries Owen. ‘She doesn’t—’

‘I never could have supposed Lady Mary could be so affable,’ interrupts Gladys, fearing a dispute.

‘She can be anything she likes,’ says Mrs Jones. ’She pressed me and Mr Jones to stay there to-day, but I could not have done so without Freda. She was especially kind all last week, and resolved to go through everything properly. I told her that your uncle could only stay two clear days, and that we had promised to spend them here. It is such a relief to be here, Mr Gwynne and Mrs Gwynne Vaughan are very well; but her ladyship’s constant tact and effort to do exactly the right thing are wearying.’

’Do my Laddy Marry be very grand? Grander than Laddy Simpson, Mrs Jones?’ asked Mrs Jenkins, in an undertone, of her neighbour. She has an infinite awe of Mrs Jonathan.

‘I don’t think I ever saw Lady Simpson,’ says Mrs Jones,

’Not be seeing Laddy Simpson! Well, it is no loss for you. She was as ugly an ’ooman as I ever was seeing. I am hating the Simpsons, and no wonder. But Miss Gwynne is a lady,—Mrs Rowland Prothero, I am meaning. She was coming to see me the other day, and says she, “I know you have been unfortunate Mrs Jenkins, fach! and no fault of yours.” And she was giving me this new white shoal. And, seure, if it wasn’t for Rowland Prothero and she, I ’oudn’t be in that tidy cottage by there, with Mrs Owen and my grandoater coming to see me and reading to me; and Mrs Prothero too, is seure, and bringing me something nice, and my Griffey with hundreds of thousands, Mrs Jones, as you was knowing,’

Mrs Jenkins gradually gets excited, as she finds Mrs Jones listens, and by degrees she gains the ear of the rest of the party, who all, in spite of Gladys’ efforts to divert their attention, turn to her when they hear the words ‘Rowland and Miss Gwynne.’

‘I must be telling you now, Mrs Jones, ma’am,’ continues Mrs Jenkins, ’that I am not forgetting all your kindness to me up in London, when every one else was turning away. Ach a fi! and they ’joying themselves at Abertewey.’

Mrs Jones presses Mrs Griffey’s arm, and whispers ‘hush!’

’To be seure! I was forgetting. But, indeet, Rowland Prothero did be more than a son to me, and if Miss Gwynne was my own doater she couldn’t be kinder. She was buying up enough of my beauty furniture to fill the little cottage. I did be finding it out ’esterday, and seure it was their wedding present to a poor, childless widow, as ’ould be in the Eunion, and I with hundreds and thousands!’

‘Hold your tongue, name o’ goodness, ‘Lizbeth Jenkins!’ growls Mr Prothero.

Page 323

‘Hush, Davy, bach! we have all our troubles,’ says Mrs Prothero, brushing a tear from her eye.

‘Grandfather, I liked Harold so much!’ says Minette, to the great relief of the rest of the party.

‘Call him Master Gwynne, you forward little minx,’ says Mr Prothero, patting the child’s back gently.

’Oh! but he told me he should marry me, and that Colonel Vaughan said he was my uncle.’

’Children and ‘oomen all alike,’ says the farmer; ’thinking of marriage as soon as they can speak. Gladys, why don’t you teach the child better?’

‘It was the champagne, father,’ says Owen. ’My full impression is, that a few glasses more and you would have kissed Lady Mary. I wish we had brought a glass for you to drink the bride and bridegroom’s health, Aunt ‘Lizbeth.’

‘Oh, I have been drinking that pain!’

A sudden little cry in the corner prevents any allusion to the occasion on which Mrs Jenkins drank champagne.

Gladys has her baby in her arms in a few seconds. The infant is attired in her christening robe and cap, and seems to add a new beauty to the sweet and gentle Gladys. All eyes are directed towards them, all hearts warm towards them. Minette is instantly kissing her little cousin, even Mrs Jonathan takes its tiny hand, as Gladys carries it round in her mother’s pride and joy.

‘Your grandchild and my grandniece, Mr Prothero,’ says Mr Jones, ’may she grow up as good as her mother.’

‘Amen!’ replies Mr Prothero.

And with this word we end our story. The wedding wreath—the christening-robe—the shroud! Again the wreath and the robe! Such has been our tale, and ‘such is life!’

Printed by
Morrison and Gibb Limited
Edinburgh