

Grey's Old Court.

All at once, however, Mattie's quick step slackened, and she was shaking hands with young James Woodford, the wheelwright. And she had come back with a throb of pleasure to the present, to the actual life before her, and its possibilities. As it was yesterday so it is to-day; so it shall be to the end of all time. The old, old story, with tender light and shadows upon it, whose very heartaches are sweet and its clouds hopeful, because of the sun that anon shall shine out of them. So, old man, sink back now amongst the cobwebs, and be patient. Such as your life has been, you have lived it out and sit in its ashes; but for these children it is only beginning, and the sun shines upon it.

James Woodward walked on by Mattie's side, silent. He had taken her basket from her with a sort of pleading gesture which she did not resist. By-and-bye he said a few commonplace words, which she answered, but they did not talk much just at first. They were in a dream, these two, and it was very pleasant.

Presently Mattie stopped and pointed away over into the west. There was a break in the line of houses, and through it, like a framed picture, lay stretched the green meadows with the river Dyke below them; the faint hills beyond, and the glory of the setting sun tinging the waters of the silvery Dyke.

"Oh, I would like to be there," said Mattie. "I'd like to feel the buttercups and daisies under my feet, and hear the ripples once again."

"Let us go some day," he said. "Shall we? Townspeople often do, you know, and make it a sort of picnic. When the summer weather comes we'll take a holiday, you and I, and your mother, if she'll come. Shall we? But you're not listening. What are you thinking of?"

"They say," replied Mattie, turning absently to him, "that God made the country and man made the town."

"Ah," said James, a little disappointed. "But the town must be, you know. I dare say a poet wrote that, and poets see only one side of the thing. They don't stop to pick it to pieces always," said the young philosopher, with deeper truth than perhaps he was aware of. "As well say God made the stones and man built his house—in the country, you know. And if it comes to that, there's enough wickedness out amongst the green fields and lonely woods, only perhaps it can be kept quieter there. But about this holiday; should you like it?"

"Like it! I shall dream of it. Shall we go down there, where the willows are? And see the blue sky in the river, with the tiny white clouds on it; and fishes leaping—the dear little fishes?"

"Yes," said James, smiling, "we'll see it all."

"But oh," said Mattie, "I've been so long away. I ought not, for we are busy at home, and my mother isn't well. I must go."

James lingered a little.

"I haven't found it long. But there, I won't keep you, and I won't come to the end of the lane either, because—"

"Because what?"

"Oh, nothing. I had better not. Won't you shake hands?"

He had meant "Because people will talk," but he saw that this