

well as himself, but they were written with the shadow of the face in the room with him; and though he was hardly conscious of it, there was, faint and far-distant, an idea of intellectual appreciation or human sympathy breaking every now and then, like a spark, across the dreary waste of his work. He went out from the sermon which his intangible presence had presided over; he went out, into one of the bad parts of his parish, not far from the great piston, revolving in his mind an unhappy sentence which refused to fit into its place.

Again he stopped opposite that same cottage from which he had once drawn back in disgust. This time it was at the window he stopped, constrained to do so by a single passing glance. He saw there the sick woman, still propped up with pillows in her chair; but the fluted garments had disappeared. The fire was bright, and in front of it there was a slight figure, with folded hands and a pale, childish face. It was his one listener. As her lips moved, the peevish woman opposite to him brightened up into a smile; the slouching man had taken himself away, and the dirty child was dirty no longer. The fire flashed out upon those earnest eyes he knew so well, lighting them up, and once they turned suddenly to the window. Then Ralph drew back with a start of dismay as great as though he had actually felt a reproving glance rest upon himself.

And he went away about his business with the unlucky sentence gone forever. Who was she?

That was one question, but not the only one, which appealed to him for an answer as he walked back to his lodging.

She stood on the hearth like one who was at ease; oppressed by no awkwardness or constraint. She stood there like one who was welcome, and whose presence gave pleasure. Why could not he do this?

#### CHAPTER V.—WHO WAS SHE?

Who was she?

It flashed upon him suddenly one evening, as he sat at his work, that he knew all about her, that is to say, who she was and where she lived. The seat in the church was sufficient to tell him. He remembered a walk of his through Raventree Dell, past the Red Pool and the quarry, where he caught sight of the big, uncanny, black and white house, said to be haunted, on his way to the Red Grange. And, as in duty bound, he knew the man, helpless through infirmity, not age, who never left his bed but for a sofa, or to be wheeled about in a garden chair; and who was her father, Richard Dudley, Esq., gentleman.

He had a vision of a pair of keen grey eyes, looking at him from under bushy eyebrows; of a clear cut bony face, sharpened by suffering, but not patient, and of a voice answering to the keen eyes, which had brought him down, startled, out of his cloud, and forced him to attend to what it said.

He had also a dim recollection of brothers and sister; such names as Oswald and Reggie, and Caroline were mixed up oddly in memories of that short visit. And he remembered there was a harp in one corner of the room, concerning which, for want of something to say, he had addressed the usual query to the Miss Dudley then present, getting for answer—

“No; that belongs to my sister Hester. I do not play.”

Hester Dudley, then, was his one listener, the gem in all that dull setting of indifferent men and women; but how was it that he had not seen her at home?

“If you please, sir, you are wanted.”

The Curate started. He had been too much occupied to hear the prelimin-