

trifle more than I have myself. It is a great pleasure."

Mrs. Mason was bringing in a plate of hot toast at this juncture.

"Miss Williams don't eat enough to keep a sparrow some days," she said bluntly. "It's the first time I have seen a square meal on the table."

"But I eat as much as I can."

"And that wouldn't keep one of my children an hour."

Once assured that his hostess was not given to extravagance Mr. Simpson set to work with a will, and thoroughly enjoyed himself. There was very little left when the meal was concluded, and when he went away, after having, at Mary's request, smoked a pipe, he declared he had enjoyed himself greatly.

"How did the tea-party go off?" Ronald asked him the next morning, for when he could not speak to Mary he liked to speak of her.

"First rate, sir. She treated me as if I'd been a Dook. You should have seen her pretty ways at the table as she piled my plate up. She's a born lady, sir."

"Is she? Well, I'm glad you enjoyed yourself."

"You have made a friend of Simpson for life," he said later on to Mary.

"I am glad to make a friend of an honest man," she replied sadly. "I have not many friends now."

But though the invitation had been given from sheer kindness of heart it could not have been more successful from an ulterior point of view. Simpson was loud in her praises, and openly declared that it was only the stuck up pride of the gentlefolks which prevented them from inviting her to their houses. By gentlefolks generally, he meant Mr. and Mrs. Westlake particularly. Had he been told that she had declined their acquaintance he would not have believed it. "And how the master can be that cold about her, seeing her day after day, I don't know. Whenever I go to the office, there's his door tight shut between them."

This perhaps was easily accounted for, as whenever a knock was given Ronald repaired to the outer office.

#### CHAPTER X.

Henry Jackson.

THE weather now turned cold, the mornings were damp and misty. Ronald ordered blazing fires to be lit early in both offices, so that when Mary arrived from the dark and cheerless farm sitting room she found her pretty office the picture of comfort.

"How cold your hands are!" he exclaimed as he shook hands with her. "Surely you have breakfast by a fire?"

"I cannot go into any household details," she replied, and he was quite sure that she did not. He thought of the fires in his own house that were lit on the approach of cold weather in every room, for all of them greatly appreciated warmth. But in this respect he could do nothing; she was evidently studying economy in every form, and he could not send in a ton of coal.

"Don't you think," he said with some hesitation, "that you might sit here a little later of an evening and read. I assure you I would not interrupt you, indeed I should probably go home."

"My room here certainly is more comfortable than my room at the farm house I must admit, for being next the dairy, it has sometimes an unpleasant smell of damp and mouldy cheese, coupled with that of onions from the kitchen which adjoins, but I cannot spend my evenings here. You pamper me too much, Mr. Westlake; you do indeed."

"In what way?"

"It is not necessary, for instance, for you to make up my fire. I can put coals on for myself."

"And soil my papers with your dirty hands?" he asked laughingly. She had not seen him laugh for some time and she was glad.

"I would try not to soil them. Your own are quite clean although you stoke both for me and yourself."

"May they always remain clean. Talking of that reminds me that I have never told you of my ambitions, but you must not reveal the secret."

"What is the momentous secret?"

"I do not propose to spend my life only in making money, and in entertaining all kinds of people, who, as my father justly observes, probably eat our dinners and then go away and sneer at us as 'the paper men.' I want to go into Parliament and spend half my year in town among a wider circle."

His eyes were bright as he spoke, his manner energetic. He knew that he had certain gifts, and, with his great wealth to back him up, he did not think he should remain unnoticed, or play the part of a silent member.

"And I earnestly hope you may succeed. I can—" She checked herself suddenly. She had been about to say, "I can help you."

"Will you canvass for me if I ask you?"

"I will."

"Did any man ever refuse you anything?"

She considered a moment. "No," she replied at length. "I do not think I ever asked a man to do anything in vain."

"Then my election is sure, when the time comes."

"When it comes, I may be far away."

"Away?" he echoed blankly, for he had never thought of this contingency.

"Yes, far away; very far away. But not so far away that I can ever forget my friends."

He was silent.

"I forgot," she continued. "I should have made one exception when I said that no man had refused me anything. One did, although I begged and prayed and entreated him with tears, and he was my father."

DONALD looked at her; she read the deep compassion in his eyes.

He pictured a brutal father, and then thought of how he would rejoice to make her his wife and present her to London society as a beautiful bride. She would be received everywhere as a member's wife, and her charm would come on people as a surprise.

She saw that his thoughts had gone away and said in a different tone: "If this conversation goes on you will really have to keep me here to work overtime. I am not earning my salary. Please give me the papers at once. If you do not do so I shall remain until they are finished however late the hour may be."

"And yet you will not stay to read?"

"That is another matter. What are we worth if we cannot sometimes endure a little hardship, when hardship is necessary? And the farm is vastly superior to rooms in the village. My papers if you please."

He fetched them, but as he sat at work with the door shut between them he pictured her sitting in a damp, ugly room smelling of cheese and mould, while she shivered with cold. Her salary was sufficient to admit of a fire; why did she practise such severe economy?

"And I have never known a hardship in my life!" he exclaimed remorsefully. "I wish I could bear anything for her."

The morning had been raw and foggy, as the afternoon advanced the fog increased. It settled like a pall on everything around, black, heavy, motionless.

At five o'clock Ronald entered the office. "Time is up, Miss Williams. I cannot allow you to stay with those papers any longer. If I choose to gossip with you and detain you, that is my fault and it must not be visited on you."

"I have just finished them. I am afraid though they are not done as well as they ought to be. I could not keep my hand steady."

He looked at her. Her face was very white, her eyes large and rounder than usual. Had he not thought it impossible he would have said she was under the influence of deadly fear.

"You are ill!" he exclaimed.

"I am not. It is the fog. It affects me. I will stay here for a short time."

"I am sure that something is the matter with you."

"I am frightened."

She was the last girl to be afraid of weather, he thought, there must be some other cause for her alarm.

"What are you frightened about?"

"I am afraid for—for the people at

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