

## HIDDEN DEPTHS.

(BY PERMISSION.)

## CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

Once only Annie spoke again as they went on their way. She lifted up her head, and said to Ernestine: "Miss Courtenay, will you tell father that I have never been called by my own name, so at least I have not brought disgrace on his? Lois said, when I went there, I should never be called by it, for she had heard how mad it made father to have her spoken of as she was in our village; so when Mr. Brown asked her my name, for he had not heard it at the Hall, she said he might call me what he pleased, for she should never know my true name any more than hers. She called herself Mrs. George, so he said then he'd call me Rosie, for I was just like a rose; and I had on a brown dress, so he said I should be Rosie Brown, and he'd be Mr. Brown. I don't know now what his own name was, but he never knew mine.

"I will tell your father, dear Annie; I am sure he will be glad to know that you are going to a safe home now."

At length the painful journey was over, and Ernestine and her charge had reached the door of the refuge.

"Oh, Miss Courtenay, if only you were going to stay with me!" said Annie, clinging to her as they stood waiting. "I love you, and I'd do anything for you, but I'm afraid of being shut up here."

The door was opened by a lady, who locked it again as soon as they were inside; and as Ernestine gave her name she glanced at Annie, saying, "The penitent, I suppose?" Then she opened the door of a small room, and told Annie to wait there till she could attend to her. The girl did as she was told, and was locked in; and Ernestine was then conducted through various long and somewhat gloomy corridors to a large, comfortable sitting-room. Here her guide left her to call the lady who superintended the establishment; and this latter soon made her appearance. She was very courteous and kind to Ernestine herself, but she listened to her account of Annie Brook with a certain sternness, and did not seem to think there was so much excuse for her as Ernestine was disposed to find in the circumstances of her ruin. It was evident, too, that she gave not the slightest weight to Miss Courtenay's anxious explanations of Annie's impulsive and sensitive disposition, which would make her so easily led by any appeal to her affections, and so fatally repelled by harshness.

"We treat all our patients alike, of course," she said calmly; "I cannot undertake to show any special favor to this girl."

"I should not think of asking you to do so," said Ernestine; "only, individual temperament must surely be considered in the manner in which they are spoken to, and in their treatment in all that concerns themselves separately?"

"Our rules embrace the whole course of their management, and to them we adhere."

"But your object is to save individual souls. Surely you leave yourselves the power of such relaxation as may sometimes be required by special circumstances?"

"Our first consideration must be the general good of the penitents and the peace of the house, which can only be attained by strict conformity to rule; also," she added, with a smile which was gently disdainful, "from what you tell me of your wishes with regard to this penitent, I am not disposed to think that our views would be the same as to the most fitting mode of treatment for her."

"You have experience and I have none," said Ernestine courteously. "In any case, I am sure you will do your best for the poor child. Circumstances have caused me to take a deep interest in her, and I feel very anxious for

her future. I am afraid I must go now, however, leaving her in your safe-keeping, for I must travel to town by the express."

"I am sorry to detain you, but I must beg you to wait a few minutes. I have sent one of the ladies to read the rules to Annie Brook; and it must depend, of course, on her promising to abide by them whether I can retain her in the house."

"Oh, I trust they are not very formidable!" exclaimed Ernestine; she is so timid and excitable, that she is very likely to be dismayed at first by what might afterwards seem easy to her."

"No penitent is admitted who does not promise to comply with the rules," was the inflexible answer. Presently there came a light knock at the door, and the lady went out. In a few minutes she returned,—

"I am very sorry to distress you, Miss Courtenay, but I fear you must take this young woman back with you. She has refused to give the necessary promise that she will stay two years."

"It is our rule," was the lady's answer.

Ernestine was in despair. "Will you let me talk to her, and perhaps I can persuade her to say what you would wish?"

"Certainly," said the lady; and she was conducted back through the long corridors to the little room, where Annie was sitting in a corner, crying as if her heart would break. She flew to Ernestine the moment she saw her,—

O Miss Courtenay, take me away from here. I shall never be able to bear it. They say I must promise to stay two whole years, and that's just like a lifetime. I can't promise to let myself be shut up among strangers all that while; and there's such a many things I am to do and I am not to do, I am frightened to death at it all. Tell them to let me out. I must go away."

"But, Annie dear," said Ernestine soothingly, "to where would you go? I am sure you don't want to go back to your wickedness, and it is impossible for you to get an honest living anywhere without a character. I am sure you could not bring yourself to go to the workhouse if you went out from here, could you?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Annie, shuddering.

"Well, that is the only other place where you could be safe from the sin that is bringing you to destruction. Surely you will say that you will try and stay two years, rather than let yourself be drawn away again from the merciful God who is calling you to repentance?"

"I don't want to do wrong again," said Annie; "but I can't promise to stay in this place two years."

"Annie it would be better to die than to do wrong. Yes," she continued, as the girl looked up surprised, "it would be better to die in any torture than to sin against our Father in heaven, for our Saviour tells us Himself not to fear those who can only kill the body, and then have nothing more that they can do but to fear Him, who has power to cast both soul and body into hell. Annie think of Lois. Her body is lying in the grave, and her soul is gone to wait the dreadful judgment day. If she could come back to earth again, do you not think she would be only too thankful to have two years, or twenty, or a thousand given her in this house of repentance? O my dear child, what need it matter to any one of us what we have to bear, in our short lives, if only we find mercy with our dear Lord at the last? He died to save you; will you not suffer a little to go to Him?"

"Oh, Miss Courtenay, I could bear anything if you were going to stay with me."

"But I will come and see you often, Annie dear, and I will write to you. Now you will let me tell the ladies you will try and stay two years, will you not?"

"I would do anything to please you," said Annie, and Ernestine went at once for the lady, who was in the next room, and having returned with her to Annie, she told her the girl would try and stay two years.