

faculty which entails its being poured forth in the form of literature, and gains them a large congregation and wide influence."

"Well, certainly our literature owes a good deal to the clergy of lonely country places," said Mr. Gilman. "By-the-by, Mike, wasn't it in one of the churchyards near here that Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs* was conceived? He was a curate somewhere in Devonshire, I believe."

Mike, who had never read the *Meditations*, was obliged to confess to complete ignorance of the subject, but Norah, in whose memory were stored a great many out-of-the-way facts, crowned herself with honour and delighted her father by remembering that Hervey's curacy had been at Bideford, and that the churchyard was said to be that of Kilkhampton.

When on inquiry of the coachman it was found they could look in at Kilkhampton on their homeward drive, he was more satisfied still.

"I wonder how many girls of your age have read a book with such an unpromising and gloomy title?" said Mike.

Norah smiled. She did not mind Mike laughing at her now.

"It is very beautiful," she said quietly.

"Do you think my child is too serious for her age?" asked Mr. Gilman of Lady Anstruther, when they had left the two young people to inspect the building, and were walking together towards the side of the combe where they had elected to have luncheon. "I have heard Mike say things of that sort to her many times lately. It is true she has few amusements, and seems to prefer to touch the graver side of life, but I have had so little to do with young people that it has not struck me as unsuitable. Her mother was different, as you know she had always a joke ready, and laughed and made us laugh when she was ill and suffering; the boys are more like her. But Norah is not morbid; she is often cheerful under very depressing circumstances, and her mission seems to be to comfort others. Only she is undoubtedly grave. I have noticed that since she has been here, without responsibilities, and constantly in the society of someone near her own age, she has been gay than I have ever known her, and possibly she would be better if she were less alone."

"I don't think you need trouble yourself about her," said Lady Anstruther. "Norah will probably be livelier as a woman than she is in her girlhood. She certainly is not quite like ordinary girls, but that may be partly owing to the depth of her religious convictions. I do not see why gravity should be undesirable. Laughing is not always a sign of real happiness. I have rather changed my opinion about Norah lately, and am inclined not to force her into the ordinary groove. I used to fear she would become narrow; but if she does it will only be theoretically. She is too sympathetic to stand aside from any of her fellow-creatures who may have need of her.

After all, the only girl for whom she professes friendship is apparently entirely absorbed in pleasures and interests that Norah despises. As far as I can make out, Beattie Margetson is nothing but a beautiful and high-spirited girl who is, to use Norah's words, 'quite worldly.' As to Mike, no wonder Norah seems solemn to him; he is fresh from the society of a young woman who is full of curiosity about everything in the world, has endless theories, and insists upon being emancipated from all restrictions to her liberty. Norah's life is both beautiful and useful. I am sure even Sir John, who is not a person easily influenced, has seen that her unflinching goodness has a source which is beyond his understanding. Her light shines, you see."

"Sir John is changed," said Mr. Gilman. "He is, I think, less unhappy."

"He will never get over the loss of our children," said Lady Anstruther.

"Nor will you," thought Mr. Gilman, noticing the silvered hair and lines of endurance on her thin face. And then they changed the subject. Not even to so intimate a friend as Mr. Gilman would her loyalty permit her to discuss the character or the failings of the man she had vowed and striven to "love, honour and obey."

The mention of Geoffrey had saddened Lady Anstruther, but her eyes brightened again when she saw Michael and Norah coming towards them. She could not help trusting that even yet happiness was in store for her boy. She knew that if once he married Norah he could not fail to grow constantly fonder of her, and that Norah, who had been so loving a daughter and unselfish a sister, would make an ideal wife she had no doubt. She wanted Mike to marry one day. He was the only son now, and if he died and left no heir, Woodfield would pass away from Sir John's branch of the family to distant relatives, with whom he had long had a quarrel. She knew that her husband's feelings towards Norah were sufficiently changed for him to regard her, if not with gratification, yet with equanimity, in the light of a daughter. And he, like her son, would, she was convinced, grow fonder of her when once she was a member of his own family. There were not many things that Lady Anstruther now ventured to desire very earnestly, but this was one of them; and during the homeward drive she made up her mind to let Michael know that this was a cherished wish of hers. She would not urge him to take any step, but she knew that he would not turn away unthinkingly from any path which he knew would bring contentment to his mother.

"He must do as he likes," she thought, "but there can be no harm now in telling him the thought that lies near my heart."

As it chanced she had an opportunity that evening. On their return, Mr. Gilman found a packet awaiting him containing letters which had been forwarded from home, and he suggested that he and Norah should stroll out on to the cliffs and look at them together.

There was still an hour before *table d'hôte*. Lady Anstruther, who was tired, elected to stay at home and rest, and Michael went to sit with his father. But, as it happened, Sir John was in the middle of an interesting article he was reading, and did not apparently wish his solitude interrupted just yet. Michael therefore strolled into the drawing-room, where his mother lay on the sofa, and took up a book. After a minute or two, however, he grew restless; he was never a good hand at sitting still.

"I think I'll go out and find the Gilmans," he said to his mother.

"What—haven't you had enough of Norah's society?" said Lady Anstruther, smiling.

"Oh, it isn't Norah," said Michael, reddening. "I thought I would hear if there is any news from home, that is all."

"That can wait, can it not? There is not likely to be anything very exciting. Come and talk to me a little while. I hardly get a word with you now, Mike. But still, I am glad you care to be with Norah. It is of her I wish to speak to you."

Michael felt rather miserable. He was afraid his mother had noticed what he did not want to believe true. Apparently his face betrayed his feelings, for Lady Anstruther laughed as he came towards her.

"You look as you did when you were a little boy, and thought you were going to be scolded," she said.

"I haven't done anything wrong now, have I?" he asked.

"No; or if you have I haven't found you out, so you need not be afraid."

"The part I minded about scolding was that you used to say I had made you unhappy. The father's floggings were nothing to that. However, if I haven't done anything you mind, I am not particularly afraid. But what is it about Norah?"

"Oh, Mike, you are such a trying person to talk to. You want one to say things straight out. There are subjects that have to be approached gradually—led up to. Now you know I am afraid of you sometimes since you have grown up. We have changed places."

"You afraid of me! Why, mother, I thought you were the most fearless of women! And why ever should you mind such a harmless person as I am?"

"Because I love you, boy; and I can't bear to think you should fancy I misunderstand you or fail to sympathise with you in any way."

"I shan't do that, mother dear. But what has all this to do with Norah?"

"Only that Norah and you are very much connected in my thoughts. I am only less fond of her than I am of you; and the happiness of both of you is dearer to me than my own. It is my own. The time has gone by when I can look for much personal satisfaction. If I could see your children playing about the old place it would be all, and more than all, I could wish for."

Mike grew crimson. "Oh, mother," he stammered, "don't ask this of me. I can't change. I have